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How Do Family Historians Work with Memory?

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Abstract

Drawing on survey data and oral history interviews undertaken with family historians in Australia,England, and Canada this article will explore how family historians construct memories using diverse sources in their research. It will show how they utilize oral history, archival documents, material culture, and explorations of space to construct and reconstruct family stories and to make meaning of the past, inserting their familial microhistories into global macrohistories. It will ask whether they undertake critical readings of these sources when piecing together their families' stories and reveal the impact of that work on individual subjectivities, the construction of historical consciousness, and the broader social value of family history scholarship. How might family historians join with social historians of the family to reshape our scholarly and "everyday" knowledge of the history of the family in the twenty-first century?

Keywords

family history, memory, genealogy, historical consciousness

Since writing about the radical potential of family history and the value of collaborative work with family historians, I am continuing to analyze the meanings and impact of family history on "ordinary" people around the world. In recent publications, I have suggested that globally family historians are using the lives of their ancestors to bring the history of "ordinary people" to our attention, challenging stories about the stability of nuclear family life, gender, class, race, and sexuality as well their respective "national" stories in the process. They are using intimate family histories, the construction and re-construction of family memories to better understand the history of themselves, their nations, and the world. As a result, family history has significant educative value and an enormous impact on identity formation as historical knowledge is accumulated and historical authority then claimed by people who are not trained as historians. This essay reveals the complex ways in which families construct, reconstruct, and disseminate family memories using diverse historical sources and methods found in public and private archives and how they share some of the same intellectual and political endeavors of social historians of the family.

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Family history has been understood by a range of sociologists and human geographers in Europe and Australia to have an important role in identity-formation.[1] As Nash has suggested, family history individualizes the past.[2] These scholars have established how important family history research is for memory work and the construction of identity. What is distinctive about my work here is the focus on how family history develops historical knowledge, linking the individual to the social, producing alternative accounts of the past that transform people's lives both personally and politically in the present. The process of individualizing history and using it to understand one's self is a deeply affective practice and one that allows family history researchers to claim crucial agency over their lives.

I have written elsewhere about the negative assumptions made about family historians and the derision of their practice which is described as uneducated and usually gendered female. As a group they are generally situated outside the academy, often marginalized by academics employed by tertiary institutions. They have been dismissed for their naiveté and amateurism and ridiculed for seeking emotional connections with the past lives of their forebears.[3] I have suggested that we need to embrace the positive political consequences of an emotional engagement with family historians' historical subjects and the broader social impact these engagements can produce. Using Bourdieu, I show how family historians are using their emotionally charged and motivated research, produced in collaboration with others as "socialized subjects," to challenge normative understandings of the family and to share that knowledge as widely as possible outside of their families.[4] The micro and macro historical knowledge that is produced through their research and collaboration with others can have a profound impact on their identities, encouraging them to challenge family storytelling and the structures of power within which they, their families, and communities are situated.[5]

Global family history that is practiced self-consciously and critically (which is not always the case) challenges the nation-focused/state-driven patriarchal history that populate the popular histories and older academic scholarship that family historians often understand to be "History." This brings them into conversation with contemporary social and cultural historians. If we revalue family history, we can privilege the history of intimate, everyday lives contextualized daily by family historians drawing on broader themes to reveal the power relations that privilege particular forms of knowledge and labor over others. As a feminist historian, I am interested especially in how family historians, many millions of whom are women, can trouble the gendered order of history making and our wider knowledge of the history of the family. As we have seen, the histories produced by genealogists were, and are often still, deemed trivial and of no consequence and little interest to people outside of their own family.[6] Many family historians around the world provide evidence of derisory responses to their work, especially from academics.[7] I want to show here how their stories, the memories that family historians produce, can be used for broader historical and political purposes. We have seen several excellent examples in recent years of successful collaborations between academic and other types of historians which have proliferated in a range of national contexts.[8] It is important that we build on the potential of those efforts. Academic and family historians need to work collaboratively on family memory-work sharing a commitment to a feminist social constructionist method, and continually reflect on the relationship between subjects and objects of research.[9] In the spirit of Haug's model of memory work, I suggest here (and elsewhere) that barriers between academic historians of the family and family historians be eliminated to create and enhance knowledge on the family for everyone.[10]

Method

Since 2016 I have undertaken focus groups, oral history interviews and collected survey responses from 131 family historians researching their family histories in Australia, England,

and Canada. These surveys have been followed up with 7 oral history interviews which have taken place in each country and three focus groups in England and Australia. Family history is a global practice, nationally distinctive to be sure, but this research has revealed how porous the boundaries are among this global community of researchers. Many family historians have moved between these different national contexts and undertake research and family history tourism globally. I began my project comparing family historians in England, Australia, and Canada with a call-out on Ancestry.au and .nz and the family history magazine *Inside History* (now folded and re-issued as *Traces)*.[11] I was quickly inundated with responses from family historians eager to share their motivations, discoveries, and the impact of these upon their lives. Such research says something significant about the strength of social media connections in the family history community and the ways in which the Internet is used to produce and consume historical knowledge.

Survey questions were sent out via email and answers received mostly via email. However some were handwritten and returned in the post. Since this research began toward the end of 2016, I have received 77 survey responses from Australian family historians, 25 English family historians, and 29 Canadian family historians. The survey consists of 37 questions. Many people have provided responses that are thousands of words long and they expressed how much they enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on their practice as a family historian. Several had never stopped, after many decades of research, to reflect on why they loved family history so much and what impact it had on them. Women make up the majority of respondents to the survey and subjects for the interviews, but men have also responded, especially in Canada, if not in the same numbers. Among the 77 Australian respondents, fifteen were male (19 percent); among the English respondents five (20 percent) were men and twenty (80 percent) were women; men made up a greater proportion of the Canadian respondents, eight (38 percent) were men, twenty-one (72 percent) were women.

The questions included:

1. When were you born and where did you grow up?
2. When did you become a family historian?
3. Why did you become a family historian?
4. What was your understanding of history at the time?
5. Has your understanding of history changed over time?
6. How do you understand the relationship between family history and the history of your nation/the globe?
7. How has your research and discoveries made you feel?
8. Has this depended upon the discovery being unearthed?
9. Does your research and findings make you feel proud/sad/ angry/shameful/happy? If so, why and in what ways? Have you had any other emotional responses to your research?

I use the terms family historian and genealogist interchangeably in this piece, and elsewhere, because many family historians and others who undertake research on family histories do so. These same researchers also debate the conflicting meanings of amateur and professional in this context. As should be obvious by now, my work is targeted at disrupting the boundaries and hierarchies set up between these different categories and labels, which is why I use them interchangeably here. [12] This is also why substantial space is given to the voices of family historians in this piece, so that their labor and perspectives are privileged rather than marginalized by mine. This is in line with my feminist practice of providing a platform for diverse and marginalized voices and experiences. I also hope it reveals the synergies between mine and their methods.

My research on the meanings and impact of family history was not originally designed to examine how family historians moved between different forms of historical sources and how they used them to construct family memories. For the purposes of this article I have re-read my evidence with these questions in mind and asked some of these family historians further questions about the material culture they have collected and what meanings they make of this evidence in the process of undertaking their research and piecing together their family stories.

"Humanizing the Past": Memory Work in Families and Research Communities

As indicated above, family historians humanize history by researching the lives of their ancestors. This is what gives history its emotive and intellectual power for them. An affective connection to their ancestors is key to the development of their passion for history and the foundation of their historical knowledge.[13] While some family historians have loved the subject of history all through their lives, first falling in love with the stories told by aged relatives, many family historians discovered their passion through family history. For researchers like Alison Madden, "school history held absolutely NO interest for me . . . now that I am so addicted to genealogy I have found that history has really come alive for me."[14] Canadian Lorri Busch became a family historian in 1989 when she took her elderly grandmother for long drives to Toronto to get her out of her nursing home for a few hours. Up until that point she had hated history and "that changed when grandmother started telling me stories."[15]

Their practice is targeted at "giving little people a voice" and rescuing past relatives from anonymity. They find this process empowering for their ancestors and themselves.[16] For Ken McKinlay "No longer is history just names, dates, and places, but it includes the lives of those that lived in the time."[17] Most like Barbara Barclay are passionate about social history, "making national history personal, gives a greater insight into the lives of Australians through different periods of its history."[18] This passion for family history leads to a focus on the historical lives of "ordinary people" and everyday life.

Oral historians have long identified women as the major "keepers" and disseminators of family stories.[19] My research has shown that family history shares many parallels with oral history in this regard. The construction and sharing of family stories is also a gendered practice. This can be a double-edged sword, giving women authority within their own families and communities but also used to disparage them as individuals within the family as well as the broader practice of family history outside the familial unit. This form of historical research and memory-making is often feminized, derided, trivialized, and marginalized and contrasted with "professional" knowledge production on the family that takes place in journals such as this. As Gloyn et al. suggest, "contemporary gendered practices of family archiving and memory processes have long historical roots . . . We also suggest that this strong gendered nature of different archival practices is part of the reason why informal and family archives tend to remain undervalued within the historical discipline."[20] The same is true of family history which usually begins with these private archives. Family historians reveal the benefits of bringing private and public sources together to combine micro and macro histories that impacts upon their own subjectivities but also makes contributions to our wider knowledge on the family. This enables them to challenge what is understood to be "normal" family life. Oral historians have revealed how important oral histories are for memory work.[21] Family history research depends upon, deepens, and consolidates a research process that often begins with oral accounts.

As we have seen, women make up the majority of respondents to my survey and as subjects for my interviews. Many of these predominantly female family historians state that female relatives encouraged and fostered their practice of family history by sharing familial

stories. One of my respondents, Australian-based Shane O'Neill was drawn to become a family historian "as a child, family artefacts in our home fascinated me as well as the stories my mother told me of her childhood and family life, and the special significance she attached to these things." She thinks she "was being groomed for the role by my mother but I was a willing acolyte."[22]

Many of these researchers (male and female) feel an obligation to continue their research to honor the efforts of the women in their family trees and to reveal the details of their lives in the present. Men have also been inspired by the women that began the research they continue to build upon. England-based David Keech explained that be became a family historian in 2005 because his "mother had been researching our family history and when she died I took over her papers and felt obliged to carry on her work."[23] While mature women predominate among these researchers, men are also clearly passionate about the practice and so are much younger women. While older family historians are retired and now more leisured than they used to be, younger researchers are juggling the demands of busy lives and multiple caring responsibilities with their family history labor. Kate Hurst is 32 and works as a freelance family history researcher in the North-East of England. She became a family historian gathering details from her grandmother when she was around 11 but became more active once the 1901 England/Wales census was released online in 2002 "I think people may feel more connected to family history and records related to themselves because of the huge changes in data available via the Internet now." The Internet, as Kate suggests, has clearly motivated many younger researchers like herself. For Kate her online searches revealed census images and once she learned to drive she visited record offices to fill in missing gaps using parish registers.[24] Lauren Brewer was born in 2000, reared in a ghost/gold mining town (which is where her love of history was fostered) and now lives in rural Victoria (Australia).

> From a young age, I was intrigued by the stories my parents would tell me about those who had once lived and worked on our land . . . There were many stories that I was told that ended abruptly, with missing information, and this was what captivated me when I was old enough, to fill in the blanks of our history. Over the past five years, I have helped my father, who also has a keen interest in genealogy, to uncover the stories of our family, and whilst doing so, learning how to do it myself.

She combines her oral history research with archival research and writing. She stated in her survey that her research had made her grow as an individual. It:

> makes me want to make something of myself, to leave an impact on the world. There are many people in my family that have dozens even hundreds of records etc on them. There is (sic) others where their life followed them to the grave, and they leave nothing. I don't want my life to mean nothing, and to be forgotten, I want to make change.[25]

Lauren is using her research to better understand herself and her contribution to society. It is important to use responses like hers to trouble people's assumptions about who family historians are with regard to gender and age and the significance of that work for them and others. It is not just the elderly who are keen on this form of memory work—teenagers and young people in their twenties are keen to participate in this labor and to show others its social utility. Family history research has significance, value, and meaning for society's younger citizens as well, helping them to better understand their lives and their contribution to the world.

This personal connection to the past, a past that is begun with oral testimonies and then fed by family history research, has had a significant impact on the social and self-confidence of family

historians. As they make memories and their historical knowledge increases, they develop pride in their skills as historians. They use empirical evidence to challenge normative accounts of the history of the family and the nation produced by previous generations. This makes them feel better about themselves and their place in the world.

From Micro-history to Macro History: Using Family History to Understand National and Global Histories

As we have seen above, Shane O'Neil was drawn to family history through her mother but this affective connection to the past led her to better understand the links between the historical, the personal, and political. Her passion for family history,

> came from a mixture of curiosity, empathy, desire for truth, a conviction that the ordinary was in itself extraordinary, a belief that in a life you could demonstrate social and economic change on a large scale (the microcosm and macrocosm), as well as a strong sense of wanting to give little people a voice.[26]

These family historians are explicitly using their family history research to connect their lives to broader historical narratives. When Barbara Barclay thinks about "'big' history—of the nation/the globe—I now think about how all of those big stories are made up of everyday, normal people."[27] Researchers like Barbara want consumers of history to recognize the contributions of "ordinary people" to our nations in the past as well as the present.

As Jeanette Tsoulos, a quietly-spoken but passionate and active member of the Australian Jewish historical community in Sydney and past president of the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society, told me: "[T]he written history of the nation or globe takes no account of family history unless it's that of kings and queens. It's invisible, like women's lives."[28] Researchers are reconstructing the lives of their working-class forebears to challenge how their and most people's popular knowledge of history has been constructed by often elite, white, and patriarchal sources. Helen Jenkins works as a PA and lives in St Albans in England. She became a family historian in 2003 and since then has learned that:

> History is made by people, not just leaders or characters but by bog-standard working class people- Ordinary people fueled the industrial revolution and went overseas to build an empire (whether you consider this to be good or bad).[29]

This focus on the ordinary is a common refrain in these responses, along with frustration regarding the historical documentation of "ordinary" lives and how little we know about them now. Barbara Hearn was born in North West Kent in 1953. She trained as a social worker in the 1970s before settling in North London. She found that family history had made her:

> aware now that the Royals and Military history is a very narrow view and that the way ordinary people lived adds up to a richer and truer story of our past. For example it has become clear that women and black and ethnic minorities have had a much greater part to play in UK history than I had been taught.
>
> I see that it is the majority of the population who make history but are too easily forgotten. I also realize that everything we all do is making history.

She is using family history to reframe her understanding of the past but this is also making her aware of how power relations structure our lives and lead us to value some forms of labor more highly than others. Historians like these are self-consciously using micro-history to better

understand macro-histories and they delight in the significance of this new-found knowledge and the connections between their families and the wider world. They are using their ancestors to seek out new knowledge of diverse historical contexts and to develop their historical knowledge. Some are also undertaking family history research within academic contexts and undertaking postgraduate degrees. Betty O'Neil used her family history to write a creative practice PhD at the University of Technology in Sydney but she is not alone among family historians in understanding that her "family history is a microhistory, an individual and family experience of a particular time in history and geography that reflects many of the larger national, transnational and global themes."[30]

Not only are these family historians becoming new social historians, using their family histories to understand social, cultural, economic, and political change over time, but they are also deepening their knowledge of the discipline of history in the process. They are accessing and using the language that scholars of history use. Canadian Gail Roger, informed by her husband, told me that "we're doing micro-history while academics are doing macro-history."[31] The evidence shows, however, that some clearly understand themselves as doing both.

Research makes Barry Cobb feel like "we are all just small cogs in a very large wheel."[32] In Donald Davis' words, "Family history is like a bristle in a brush. The small national brush is, in turn, an integral tuft in the broad global brush."[33] Now that Peggy Beckett is, "more able to link my family contextually to world events, [she is] therefore more interested in both."[34] All now better understand their families' contribution to the nations in which they settled and traveled through and these accounts challenge much of what they learned at school.[35] Lorri Busch states that "the history of a nation impacts a family history . . . A family history impacts a nation as well . . . Our national history is interesting. At times it is glorified and the wrong people are made into heroes."[36] Through their family histories many Canadian and Australian family historians understand how their countries are "largely a nation of immigrants."[37] Several are "proud" of the achievements of pioneer ancestors when settling far from home in difficult circumstances.[38] While these migrants are often English-speaking settlers, others are not, and these histories are becoming part of the rich multicultural history of these nations largely as a result of family history. The memory-making undertaken by family historians allows these researchers to use their personal histories to insert themselves and their families into wider historical narratives from which they felt previously excluded.

For family historians researching the lives of non-Anglo Australians and other underrepresented groups in our history books this can have a profound political effect.[39] Their research makes them realize how they have been excluded from national storytelling about the past. Justina Lui is a fourth generation Australian/Chinese woman whose great grandfather arrived in Melbourne, via San Francisco, in the 1890s. In an email discussion and interview she told me that her "family history has given me a personal insight into Australian history—I have personal connections to many key events in Australian history . . . Although at times it feels like a parallel narrative—we do not fit the typically depicted Anglo-Saxon profile of early 20th century Australia. It made me realize there are millions of stories like my family's hidden behind every sentence in the history we were taught at school."[40] She is a young woman in her 20 s who has become committed to sharing her family history with relatives in China and Australia, young and old. Through her developing knowledge, she has become conscious of how her family history has both familial and political purpose.

Other migrant groups in Australia and Canada are using their family histories to challenge predominant and misleading narratives about the foundations and growth of their nations. The Australian Jewish Genealogical society members I spoke with were using their research to flesh out the stories of ancestors destroyed by the Spanish expulsion and the Holocaust and to show that Australian Jewish family history is not just a footnote in the Anglo-Australian national story.[41] By understanding his family's journey to and settlement in Australia, Peter Keeda feels like he can "better understand issues such as prejudice, immigration, refugees and social integration . . . Having been

so central to Western thought and philosophy I believe that, as Jews, we DO have a mission. Understanding our history helps to clarify what we should be doing, or what we would like to do." Research on the impact of anti-Semitism, "is a major theme in my thinking, which in turn has shaped my political beliefs and has significantly influenced my life in general."[42] For John Shrimski, "Sometimes parents, grandparents gave the impression that their ancestors were almost aristocracy, and are quite demeaning about the 'lower classes'. A minor scratching of the surface can often reveal that they are actually from these 'lower classes'. This knowledge gives you better insight into your background i.e. knowledge is empowerment." John's love of family history and its broader impact upon his life led him to enroll as a continuing student at Macquarie University. Studying ancient and modern history as an external student and "reading, visiting actual locations, visiting galleries, museums and cemeteries has given me a fuller perspective on Australian history."[43]

Family historians are using their research to challenge national narratives about the past produced not just by their families but by governments, the media, and the education system. Their research has important personal as well as public and political effects. They are using this historical knowledge to understand how "I became the person I am today" and to question the history they learned as children and imbibed throughout their lives since.[44] When Lorri Busch reads history now she questions how accurate it is because she knows that "the truth is creatively told. If the true story was told we could move forward better as a nation." Research has taught her, and many family historians like her, that her past does not have to define her or us, "it can empower us."[45] It is for this reason that family history can have a powerful effect on researchers' subjectivities as well as their broader communities. Family history research enables these individuals to recognize and utilize their agency as individuals in the present.

Using History to Challenge "the Truth"

We have seen how family history is being used by researchers to challenge "the truth" about broader national narratives and now we will turn to how they are using research to piece together their micro histories, allowing them to better understand themselves and how the world has changed over time. These reconstituted histories are shared among some family members to expose intergenerational secret keeping with the intention to improve lives in the present and future. These researchers are compelled to read all sources, oral, written, and material, critically. Some family historians have masses of private archival evidence to work through, discovered in attics and cellars, gathered following the deaths of family members, but there are others who have very little material and memories to sift through. Family history research allows those individuals to construct memories when there is no oral or material evidence to work with at all. With no, little, or conflicting information some individuals use family history to create memories. This is certainly the case for people seeking to find out the details of familial adoptions, for the Stolen Generations, Forgotten children, and children in care in the Australian context, as well as elsewhere.[46]

Other researchers use family histories to discover secrets, lies, and to seek out the "truth" of family stories. In many historical and sociological accounts of family secrets it is assumed that most family members are deeply invested in the process of keeping secrets in the family. Ashley Barnwell's work on the ways in which family secrets impact upon Australian people's sense of national history is important here.[47] Keeping secrets allows these families to sustain kinship relations and fictive national identities that occlude the brutality of a settler colonial past.[48] However, as Jerome de Groot has suggested, family historians can work as both "truth seeker and secret keepers."[49] This is the double-edged sword and the power central to family memory-making. The family historians I have heard from are all "secret seekers" but some also recognize the need to continue to keep some family secrets to protect the sensitivities of older generations.

Dianne Johnstone heard me speak at a meeting of the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society and delighted in telling me her family story and the many years she spent seeking out her family secrets, describing the enormous impact of her research discoveries upon her. When she was fifty-five years old she found out that she was adopted. Her identity was a source of concern all through her childhood. Her birth mother was Jewish, her family migrated to Australia in the 1930s and hid their Jewish religion to avoid being persecuted. Dianne was adopted in 1944, when she was six weeks old, into a large Christian family that worked hard throughout their lives to keep her adoption secret from her. Her adoptive family told her stories about her roots being in Australian convict history and the trade unions. As she aged, she remained convinced that they were hiding "the truth" about her origins. After she survived breast cancer, she became determined to seek out some answers. When she discovered her adoption, it was "a shock to me but not a surprise." She eventually found her birth mother, half-sister, and cousin and "it was a happy reunion." She has traveled the world piecing her birth and adoptive families' histories together, through England, America, and Lithuania, and she has been welcomed into familial homes in all these places. When I last communicated with her, she was looking forward to traveling to Texas to visit her birth father's family. She had recently discovered that her father Jack had been raised on a ranch. She relished learning about his cowboy ways. Dianne used her research to write two books and to produce a DVD of her family's story *Secrets My Mothers Kept*; and *The Kalvarija Story*.[50] She has become committed to sharing her story with others to encourage them not to keep secrets like these. She thinks they wreak untold damage on families who spend their lives hiding them. She believes that her adoptive mother's lifelong ill health and stress were caused by this secret. According to Dianne's account, there is no doubt of the "slow violence" that Ashley Barnwell has recently written about, wreaked on this family due to the secret guarded for so long and by so many family members. The social stigma associated with illegitimacy and adoption is "an often unseen and accretive form of social violence" that has impacted families like Dianne's for hundreds of years.[51] Family historians are calling out this violence—reworking and publicizing these memories to bring an end to intergenerational trauma.[52]

The family historians, I have engaged with, are mostly keen on seeking out secrets but many are also aware of the ethical requirements of secret keeping. They hope their research will allow secrets into the open, making them public so that they can help to reconfigure kinship relations and remake their families with hopefully positive outcomes. The family historians I have corresponded with want to use their research to question what is meant by "the truth" and to trouble people's attachment to fictive "happy families" but they are also well aware of the tensions involved, especially the impact of these secrets on older relatives. Debra McAuslan has realized through her research that "history is taught rather black and white" while it is the gray that strikes her and others now.[53]

Northumberland-based Irene Blackburn became a family historian in 1981 and has enjoyed reconfiguring her families' stories through her research even when her efforts were resisted.

> My sister told me to stop tracing the family tree when I came across a branch with names like Isaac, Sarah, Ishmael, Ezekiel as she thought they were Jewish. I ignored her (they were Primitive Methodists but I wouldn't have cared anyway) . . . My father was disappointed to find that his Hugenot ancestress Barbara Murdelle was from Sussex and called Muddle (as were her ancestors back to 1598). My other grandmother asked me not to trace her family so I didn't until after she died aged 89 in 1988, I discovered that her eldest sister was illegitimate and so was her mother.[54]

These stories of secrecy and stigma are ten a penny in all family histories. Scholar Gillian Rose in her book *Doing Family Photography* suggests that it is women who usually order family photos with the explicit intent of constructing familial memories. She tells us that feminist critics can be hostile to the veneration of family photography arguing that many images of family life are oppressive to women and paint misleading pictures of how families work, concealing the fragility of relationships

and women's domestic labor and emotional work. While images of family life can clearly be deceptive, Rose wants us to interpret the use and presentation of these images as more complex than this.[55] I want to suggest something similar for family history memory making—family history reconstructs memories about family lives in the past and in that process reveals the "invisible" labor of secret keeping, emotional familial management, and its impact on people in the past and present.

Many of us recognize the proliferation of images representing key life-cycle moments—birth, death, and marriages—filling the walls, mantelpieces and bookshelves in the houses within which we live and visit. The representation and celebration of these moments might help create the familial "myths we live by" as suggested by John Gillis, who argued that family homes are mini-museums representing the imagined "nurturing and protective" family of myth and legend, the idealized family that we "live by," rather than the fragmented and challenging reality of the families that we live "with."[56] While it is often argued that family historians love seeking out "Golden Ages" and familiar motifs in the telling and retelling of family stories and memories,[57] the family historians I have worked with, as we have seen, are primarily keen to overturn assumptions and oft-told stories they remain suspicious of. For many "memories are reworked over time in light of subsequent experiences and the meanings attached to these." They relish the ambiguity revealed by the historical record. Erll, using Halbwachs's theory of collective memory, suggests that "Family memory is not a monolithic, stable entity, but an ongoing process shaped by the multidimensional *cadres sociaux* of family members. This produces a variety of "viewpoints" on mnemonic contents and meanings which, depending on the particular family structure, can lead to a continual renegotiation of the past."[58] To Halbwachs, "family memory is a type of collective memory which is characterized by the strength of its group allegiances and its powerful emotional dimension . . . . an exchange of 'living memory' takes place between eyewitnesses and descendants."[59] Examining how family historians work with memory reveals how memory-work is reshaped by different generations in varied historical contexts and why younger family historians work so hard to continue to obscure family secrets of illegitimacy and bigamy to protect the sensitivities of their older relatives. However, they want their work to reveal these secrets to future and younger generations. They are using their historical research to undermine and overturn ideal and fictive representations of family life, to make an impact on present and future lives.

Constructing Memories Critically and Collaboratively

Family memories are constructed by family historians collectively and collaboratively. This socialized construction of knowledge is what gives it its strength, power, and long-term potential. Through the channels of a global community, family historians learn how to question the data they collect and use to construct stories about the past, and they communicate and share their stories in diverse ways. They know how to maximize the Internet for their research and how to read the data they mine critically. They aim to share and reveal their skills and capacities with others.[60]

Many enjoy working in teams and recognize each other's research strengths and weaknesses. Kate Hurst enjoys researching with a friend who has a PhD in science, "What I particularly like about our relationship as friends is that we are willing to share useful techniques that will benefit each other's research—I have shown him how to search the Returns of Papists to locate Catholic ancestors and he has shown me how to search probate indexes to establish whether or not an ancestor left a will, and finding wills has the potential to add so much more detail about an ancestor beyond a name, and dates of birth and death."[61] Many cherish these fruitful collaborations and what impact it has on their research. Gillian Leitch had "a great email conversation with a person in Birmingham, England about where an ancestor lived, and we were able to identify a place where one of my greats lived, and place it on Google maps . . . Information is useless unless it is shared."[62]

Alan Campbell agrees: "It is foolish to work in a vacuum. I am also sixty-seven years old so I know I need to pass on my research for others to carry on." Other researchers sharing information is vital—they can "provide the background stories to the facts that I find such as learning about the family's reaction to a sibling who divorced his wife and married his secretary. I have learned about books that contained information about my family and have been provided with records not yet available to the public."[63]

Most of the family historians I surveyed took real pride in their research skills, and, as I have indicated above, challenging, constructing and reconstructing mnemonic communities and the global network in which they did this work. They experience visceral joy in knowledge acquisition and the sharing of skills, knowledge, and expertise. They also take real pleasure in using different sources and discuss their knowledge in a range of forums—within local and community societies, at huge family history conferences, on cruises, in family history magazines, on blogs and online forums (which are especially popular in Canada)—they take pride in the acquisition of historical skills and describe the critical readings they undertake. This is a key way in which they claim authority and expertise on their subjects. This authority is performed within families but also at a community level as positions of authority are claimed and long-held in local and family historical societies.

As we have seen from many of the previous responses, family historians are fueling a rise in family history related tourism and global travel undertaken to connect and reconnect different branches of newfound family trees.[64] Their discovery of family in historical places makes a significant impact on their understanding of past lives and contexts. Carole Whelan, based in Canada, adores traveling with her husband "to ancestral villages, churches and cemeteries" but the rest of her immediate family show little interest in her passion, "long-lost cousins are the most excited when we make contact and share."[65] Barbara Hearn lives in London but was reunited with her Australian family through her research. She lost all contact with them when she was fourteen, but when she turned fifty her Australian uncle visited, bringing stories and pictures she could use to flesh out her family tree.[66] Alison Madden, like millions of family historians, has been able to connect with kin through the Internet.

> Some years ago I made contact with a distant cousin via a posting she made on Ancestry and we found we lived fairly close to each other. We decided to meet up, she indicated another cousin was also interested in family history . . . We met up for the first time in 2010 and continue to meet about once every month or two to work on research and share our stories. We put together a 200 page cookbook of old family recipes as well as some of our own favourites.[67]

Travel and face-to-face meetings with long lost family members have a huge impact on these researchers. They take delight in new social interactions and engagements. This gives them the capacity to use written, oral, material, and embodied evidence to better piece together fragmented family stories, to contest particular forms of storytelling, and to reconstruct the meaning of families and nations so that they can live with equanimity in the present.

Conclusions

This article suggests that academic historians of the family need to think more creatively about bringing family historians' work with memory into the center of our scholarly and political endeavors because of its individual and social benefits. This research reveals how critical family history research, understanding the complexity of family life in the past, how these lives change over time and in different historical contexts, can result in many researchers achieving equanimity in the present. Social historians should work collaboratively with family historians not only because we share many of the same methods, research questions, and motivations for undertaking our research but also

this is how we might best reveal the potential of this form of memory work for identity formation, social inclusion, and citizenship to scholars and the wider public.

The evidence above reveals how the memory making undertaken by family historians occurs in complex ways and on multiple levels. Many link "private" knowledge on the family, with "public" and popular knowledge of national histories and in the process reshape their understanding of both. Their affective engagement with the past enables them to develop deep personal and cultural insight that has significant benefits for individuals, families and society more broadly.

As shown through several examples of family history memory work above, this research reveals the significance of historical knowledge for understanding the self and the social, and how these might change over time. The process enfranchises family historians and emboldens them to challenge family lore, the historical authority of others, and to assert their own expertise, giving them agency over many aspects of their lives. Some family historians have been prompted to use their research for political purposes challenging normative understandings of the family as well as national mythological storytelling. These "private" histories are working to challenge the "public," popular histories they were previously led to believe were hegemonic.[68] New-found knowledge is then disseminated in diverse ways in written, oral, and material form among family members across the world and shared with the broader family history community to challenge dominant narratives and to contribute to collective knowledge. However, for the most part, this labor sits apart from academic knowledge production on the family even though some family history researchers consume that work and are aiming to reach and engage with broader audiences. Moreover, as this article suggests, there are many links between the research undertaken by family historians and social historians. Academic historians need to engage with, inform and facilitate this process of memory work as "socialized subjects," and to share the work of formal and informal "memory-making" with family historians if we are committed to increasing everyone's knowledge of the history of the family. If historians can understand and explain people's affective engagements with the past, we will be better placed to impart the social value of historical knowledge for everyone.[69]

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