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**TRANSITIONS TO PARENTHOOD: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF
INTERGENERATIONAL ISSUES AND FAMILY IDENTITY**

By

Patricia Stow Bolea

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**School of Social Work
College of Social Science**

1996

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ABSTRACT

TRANSITIONS TO PARENTHOOD: A NARATIVE STUDY OF INTERGENERATIONAL ISSUES AND FAMILY IDENTITY

By

Patricia Stow Bolea

Although there has been considerable study of family life events and transitions over the last two decades, the primary emphasis of these investigations has been based on biological or social-psychological models of stress and family interaction. Traditionally, these studies are conducted by outsider observations, surveys, and questionnaires. These studies have largely failed to explore the subjective aspects of experience from phenomenological or hermeneutic perspectives, neglecting to inquire about subjective states of self from the perspective of the individual.

The qualitative research process is used to investigate the experience of couples who have transitioned from young adulthood to parenthood. A sample of parents were asked to "tell us the story of how you became a family." Within the analysis of the interview transcripts is a particular focus on individual and family identity and connections to others, including intergenerational issues. What do parents report regarding their own identity? How are these families defining a family heritage together for themselves? How is family identity formation communicated in their stories of "how did we become a family?" What if any is the influence or contribution of family of origin and kinship groups? What are the

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experiences of these parents as they describe their acclimation to these major transitions in their lives?

Ethnographic Content Analysis was used to examine three areas: Individual Identity, Family Identity, and Connections to Others. Individual identity, coded description of self, revealed parents' insights into their struggles with vocational issues. Family identity, or the ways families define themselves and communicate their shared character, was evidenced by responses in four codes: dating and marriage relationship; family beliefs; expectations, hopes, and plans; and critical events. The nature of parents' connections to others was described in data coded: extended family relationships, kinship groups, intergenerational themes, and cultural ties and traditions. The narrative method and the concept of family identity has the potential to assist both clinicians and researchers in efforts to understand family development.

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Dedicated to my mom, who would have loved this tremendous opportunity.

And to my grandma, whose encouragement always counted the most.

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I also wish to express my deepest thanks to Jo Ann McFall, who has provided me with unending strength and encouragement. Her patience and energy in assisting me during my educational efforts have been generous and absolutely essential to my success.

Thanks also go to Dr. Marilyn Flynn and the Michigan State University School of Social Work, who employed me throughout my efforts. Additionally John Herrick has been instrumental in launching my new career.

I wish to thank Troy and Kelly Paino, friends who celebrated the small steps along the way, and provided me with encouragement and humor. Special thanks to Kelly for her enthusiasm and steadfast friendship in our regular jogging outings and other times spent talking.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the love of my family. I know that without the support, emotional and physical, this would not have been imaginable. And to

By

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turn

Bryan, my husband, you have helped give our family story depth and meaning every step of the way. For loving me and helping me see the possibilities at every turn I thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

"People tell stories about everything, particularly about important life transitions such as birth and death, arrivings and leavings, and of the important rituals that mark these and other passages" (Laird, 1989, p. 435). Through stories and myths people define and punctuate their lives in particular ways, revealing interpretive systems for explaining themselves in relation to the world as they move through the life span (Laird, 1989).

The movement from young adulthood, through coupling and the transition to parenthood may be among the most universal adult developmental transitions. These passages hold interest for those studying psychological, sociocultural, and biological components of development, all of which interact and influence one another. From a theoretical standpoint, these transitions are important because of the unique position they hold at the interface of individual models and family systems models of behavior (Goldberg, 1988). A thorough examination of such transitions requires that each person be viewed both from an individual psychological perspective, and also viewed within their personal family system with all its powers to mold and influence behavior, values, and attitudes. Although there has been considerable study of life events and transitions over the last two decades, the primary emphasis of these investigations has been based on biological or social-psychological models of stress

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Progress in the use of the narrative method, as a tool for exploring the subjective nature of individuals and families moving through life transitions, has occurred within the context of the "new epistemology" and of the constructivist movement in family research. This signifies a movement away from the traditional positivistic approach and from standard notions of family structure and functioning, from the search for "truth" to a search for meaning (Laird, 1989), and toward new ways of comprehending how families construct their worlds. One of the richest sources of meaning lies in the narratives through which individuals and families explain themselves, their thinking, and their behavior. Within family narratives are indicators of individual and family identity, as well as descriptions of connections to others.

Statement of Questions

In this dissertation the qualitative research process is used to investigate the experience of couples who have transitioned from young adulthood to parenthood. A sample of parents were asked to tell "the story of how you became a family." Within the exploration and analysis of the interview transcripts is a particular focus on individual and family identity and connections to others, including intergenerational issues.

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The questions explored in this dissertation include:

- 1. What do parents report regarding their own identity?**
- 2. How are these families defining a family heritage together for themselves?**
- 3. How is family identity formation communicated in their stories of "how did we become a family?"**
- 4. What if any is the influence or contribution of family of origin and kinship groups?**
- 5. What are the experiences and reflections of these parents as they describe their acclimation to these major transitions in their lives?**

Individual identity, for the purposes of this study, is defined as a person's sense of "who am I?". Family identity is described as the ways in which families define themselves and communicate their shared character or personality. Both individual and family identity, while shaped by a variety of factors, are closely related to connections with others, including preceding generations of family members.

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several bodies of research have examined families in transition and highlighted the need for ways to address unfolding research questions with emergent research methods. Prior to a discussion of the details of this project, one must examine what the literature reports on family development and the transition to parenthood. Research relating to intergenerational influences on such transitions, as well as family identity is relevant as well.

Family Development

The family developmentalist perspective makes several important theoretical contributions to our knowledge of family life. First is the life cycle focus itself. Knowledge concerning normative themes and issues for families over time instruct both theory builders as well as practitioners interested in a longitudinal perspective of family process (Mattessich & Hill, 1987). For those studying individual development, making use of family developmental transitions enriches the assessment process to include the interactive effects between person and other ongoing levels of family development (Becvar & Becvar, 1988). Lastly, a family development perspective invites both the researcher and the practitioner to utilize multigenerational definitions of

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families, widening the focus of study (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980, 1988; Mattessich & Hill, 1987). While there exists numerous models of family development, this dissertation underscores aspects of two.

Duvall and Hill

The original Duvall and Hill (1948) family development model was based on the recognition of potential successive phases and patterns as they occur within the continuity of family living. The most recent revision of this model divides the family life cycle into eight stages, all of them addressing the nodal events related to the comings and goings of family members: marriage, the birth and raising of children, the departure of children from the household, retirement and death (Duvall & Miller, 1985). It opened the way for study of the particular problems and potentials, hazards and rewards, vulnerabilities and strengths of each phase of family experience from beginning to end. It represented a combination of factors used in determining family life cycle stages: (a) age of the oldest child, (b) school placement of the oldest child, and (c) functions and statuses of families before children come and after they leave (see Figure 1).

According to Duvall and Miller (1985), this combination has proven to be workable in the study of American families as well as of those in other countries. During the evolution of the family development model, Reuben Hill (1970) incorporated the extended family. He emphasized the generational aspects of the life cycle, describing parents of married children as forming a lineage bridge between the older and younger generations of the family. From

STAGE	STATUS OF COUPLE	AGE OF OLDEST CHILD
1	Married couple	without children
2	childbearing families	oldest child birth-30 months
3	Families of preschool children	oldest child 2½-6 years
4	Families with school children	oldest child 6-13 years
5	Families with teenagers	oldest child 13-20 years
6	Launching young adults	first gone to last leaving
7	Middle aged parents	empty nest to retirement
8	Aging family members	retirement to death of both spouses

Figure 1. Duvall and Miller's 8 Stage Family Life Cycle (1985).

his perspective, for each stage of the life cycle there is a distinctive role complex for family members with each other. Specifically his study established the validity and high frequency of "shared kinship activities" (Hill, 1970, p.60) in almost weekly interkin visiting among families. He noted that all three generations turned predominantly to kin when difficulties occurred. In addition he noted the high level of need among the married child generation, due to the pressures that their children created on the resource base of the family.

While Duvall and Miller's model enjoyed great popularity during the 1950's through the 1960's, its empirical and practical merit was met with challenges during the 1970's and 1980's when theorists began looking toward systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although Duvall, Hill, and Miller provided a helpful beginning point, the following summarizes general research difficulties in applying stage models of family development to actual families. First, in his evaluation of family development, Nock (1979) noted that the

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absence of children prevents the application of the family development model. In addition the first stage is marked by marriage, thereby also excluding those widowed, divorced, separated, not to mention those heterosexual and homosexual partners living together. Secondly, if a family is structured in a traditional way, allowing for application of the model, many of those families fail to fall into such a step-by-step progression of development, completing one stage before entering the next. Specifically those families in a re-married situation have far more complex family developmental issues to contend with (Mattessich & Hill, 1987). Lastly, while models of family development may acknowledge the husband-father career, and the educational career of the oldest child, they completely ignore other careers or family members' transactions with societal institutions (Mattessich & Hill, 1987).

Relatedly, there are problems specific to using such stage models in clinical practice. When developmental models are applied to family systems, systemic events are described in a linear way. While it may be useful to present events as linear and unidirectional when describing the path of an individual from birth to death, the description of movement in a family system in a similar, linear fashion may not be so effective (Combrinck-Graham, 1985). The following specifies the difficulties facing the systems therapist who attempts to utilize developmental stage models in clinical practice: (a) Stage models describe isolated moments, or arbitrary punctuation in what from the systems perspective is an ongoing and interactive process; (b) they are weak in their ability to capture the complexity or reflect the many levels of family

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interaction; (c) specific issues and tasks, as well as style of progress through the life cycle may vary a great deal from family to family and are not articulated clearly using stage models; and (d) like many theories that attempt to define living phenomena, periodic revisions are necessary in order for them to reflect the developmental processes of individuals and families relative to changes in the larger society (Becvar & Becvar, 1988).

Carter and McGoldrick

Two social workers, Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick, have edited popular books entitled The family life cycle: A framework for family therapy (1980), The changing family life cycle, second edition (1988), and Women in families: A framework for family therapy (McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1989), reflecting a contemporary approach to the intersection of family systems theory and family development models. Their model provides a framework for the analysis in this dissertation.

Among the many theoretical contributions of Carter and McGoldrick (1980, 1988; Carter, 1978) is their conceptualization of the nuclear family as a three-generational system that reacts to pressure from generational tensions as well as developmental transitions. They use both a vertical and horizontal axis in their model to describe this interactive process (see Figure 2).

In assessing families, they incorporate activities of the entire three or four generational system as it moves through time. Relationships with parents, siblings, and other family members go through stages as one moves along the life cycle, just as parent-child and spouse relationships do. They note the

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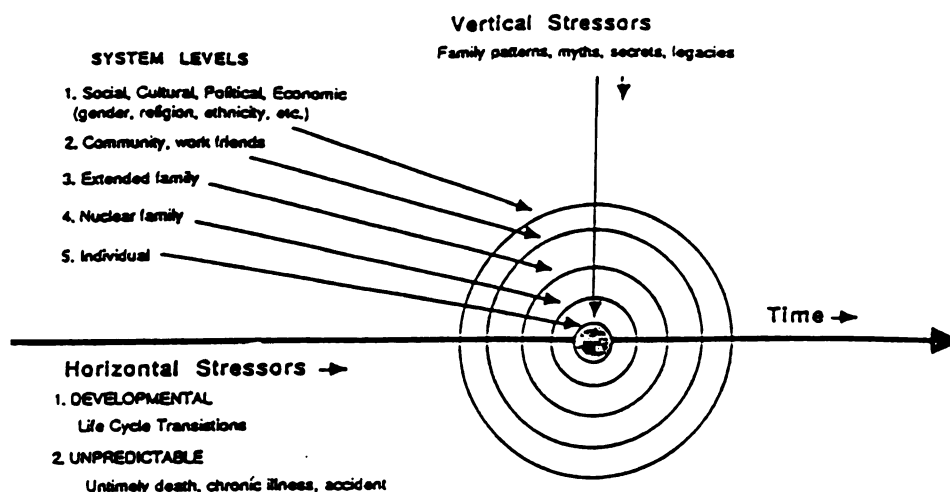


Figure 2. Carter and McGoldrick's Family Development Model.

difficulty of examination of the family as a whole, due to the complexity involved.

Carter and McGoldrick (1980, 1988) propose that some family problems are the result of an interruption in the family life cycle and that the goal of therapy is to assist the family in returning to its original path. Their model provides an overview of the family cycle and offers clinical suggestions for working with families at each developmental stage. Carter and McGoldrick (1988) do not consider the influence of the family to be restricted to the members of a particular household or to a given nuclear family branch of the system. Although they recognize the dominant American pattern of separately domiciled nuclear families, these are by their definition emotional subsystems within the larger family system which reacts to past, present, and anticipated future relationships.

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An important distinction of their model is that it begins with young adults rather than married couples. They posit that young adults' resolution of family of origin issues profoundly influences who, when, how, and whether they will marry/couple and how they will carry out all other succeeding phases of the life cycle. This life phase is viewed as a cornerstone, a time to formulate identity and goals before partnering or forming another new family subsystem. In their view, the more adequately a young adult is able to differentiate themselves from the emotional configurations of their family of origin experiences, the fewer vertical stressors they will encounter in the future. In addition, they address the issue of career preparation for young adults. Many of the provisions of the Carter and McGoldrick (1988) model of the family life cycle serve as a backdrop against which researchers may evaluate relevant studies of families in transition. For example, there is evidence that family stresses, which are likely to occur around life cycle transition points, frequently create disruptions of the life cycle and produce symptoms and dysfunction (Hadley, Jacob, Milliones, Caplan, & Spitz, 1974; Walsh, 1978). There is growing evidence demonstrating the continuing impact of life cycle events on family development over time (Thomas & Duszynski, 1974). Using this model as a framework, this dissertation includes an analysis of interview transcripts in a way that explores subjects' comments regarding their transition from young adulthood, through couplehood, and the transition to parenthood. Particular attention is given to their ideas about individual and family identity, as well as their connections to others. This research project, with its emphasis on

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subjective historical reports of major family transitions requires that the researcher attend to the subject's memory and subsequent incorporation of historical events. This attention is not directed toward any evaluation of historical accuracy or truthfulness. Rather the importance is placed on the way in which subjects define their own meaning in their family story. In addition, this project aims to address the issue of family definition by allowing each participant to define who is a member of their family, and discuss their interactions with extended family members, including members of kinship groups. Lastly, the way in which subjects were asked to tell their story incorporates the life stage of young adulthood, allowing for exploration of Carter & McGoldrick's emphasis on individuation from family of origin.

Family Transitions to Parenthood

Alongside theoretical models of family development, a body of literature has emerged documenting the psychological adjustment issues related specifically to the transition to parenthood. The transition to parenthood has been defined to include the brief period of time from the beginning of a pregnancy through the first months of having a child. Traditionally the transition is studied from either the time of conception or birth. From a psychological and sociocultural perspective, however, there is no requisite that the transition to parenthood be confined to this period. As we will see much has been noted about the ways in which the contextual family experience, expectations, and events that both precede and follow conception and delivery, also affect the transition experience (Goldberg, 1988).

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New parents' capacity to make a successful adjustment at this time may set a future course of effective, competent parenting. Critical difficulties during this adjustment may lead to, or exacerbate, marital discord and thereby create difficulty in providing for the child's needs. Both preventive and clinical interventions may be necessary to modify an unwanted trajectory and ensure the healthy psychological adjustment of the parent and child, the marital couple, and the family system (Goldberg, 1988).

Early studies of the transition to parenthood, which utilized cross-sectional and retrospective methods perpetuated a 'transition as crisis/catastrophe' ideology, focusing primarily on marital decline (LeMasters, 1978). Recent studies using longitudinal methodology have explored this premise, and in the process have raised more differentiated questions, examining the process of change for individuals, couples, and families. There are now a variety of models which propose to separate variables and define the path for individuals and couples immersed in the transition (Cowan & Cowan, 1988).

A sampling of elements examined in these models include: parental resources, child characteristics, and contextual sources of stress and supports (Belsky, 1984); parent characteristics, marital quality, parent-child relationship, and child characteristics (Heinicke, 1984); both formal and informal support systems, culture, and family relationship dyads (Tinsley & Parke, 1984, in Cowan & Cowan, 1988).

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General findings

A repeated finding in recent transition to parenthood research is that during the transition from being a couple to becoming parents comes a general decline in marital satisfaction, especially for women (Belsky & Penske, 1988; Heinicke & Guthrie, 1992). This phenomenon is recognized as quite complex. In addition, it is believed that the strongest predictor of the post-natal marital acclimation is the pre-birth status of the marital relationship (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Cowan, Cowan, Heming, & Miller, 1991; Heinicke & Guthrie, 1992).

While a variety of hypotheses have been offered to explain this occurrence, evidence points toward issues of division of labor and expectations in couples. Research consistently indicates that regardless of where couples rate themselves on scales measuring egalitarianism vs. traditionalism in their marital relationship, once the baby is born there is a shift toward a more traditional division of labor with regard to household chores (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Cowan & Cowan, 1990a & 1990b; Cowan et al., 1991; Hoffman, 1978). The division of labor issue is the most commonly cited reason for disagreement among couples (Cowan et al., 1991). This issue has a profound effect on couples whose expectations of 'who would do what' differed from the reality of caring for their child (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Belsky, Ward, & Rovine, 1991; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Cowan et al., 1991).

Clearly there is no "ideal" arrangement for new parents. When both parents in a heterosexual marriage work outside the home, their feelings about

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themselves and the marriage tend to be more positive, at the cost of increased overall stress and fatigue. Women who reduce outside work in exchange for more time at home have reported feeling underappreciated (Belsky, 1994), while fathers feel the pressure of financial burdens. While both of these alternatives have costs and benefits, research also tells us that when men are more involved in the direct care of their children, they feel better about themselves, as do their wives about themselves, and both report feeling better about their marriage (Belsky, 1994). Lastly, what is currently being reported as more important than actual division of labor outcome is how that arrangement is negotiated (Belsky, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1990b, 1992). This information speaks to the current transition in our culture regarding gender role expectations, the shift toward reducing authoritarianism in organizations and families, as well as economic conditions requiring two incomes in most families. Consequently, couples face the need for more negotiation on every front. As our culture makes such transitions, one may expect to see these changes reflected in the narratives included in this study. A more detailed discussion of these issues is included in Chapter 4.

Family identity issues, as evidenced by the ways in which families together define expectations, goals, and plans for their young are explicit during the transition to parenthood phase of family development. In addition the decisions that each parent makes about career, their philosophy of child-rearing, and commitment to the marital partnership are examples of themes that weigh heavily on their own identity formation as an adult, and as a family.

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As the volume of research seeking to incorporate the above variables has grown over the past decade, investigators have begun to conceptualize the findings into models. The Cowan, Cowan, Heming, and Miller (1991) model is offered as an example of a comprehensive approach which allows the prospective adjustment outcome to be determined by the unique characteristics possessed by each family.

Five Domain Model

Cowan et al. (1991) have devised a 5-domain model of family structure synthesizing information from earlier studies (e.g. Belsky, 1984; Heinicke, 1984). To gain an understanding of what happens to relationships and to individuals, it is necessary to examine the interconnections among all five of the following domains:

1. **Sense of Self**—individual characteristics including: self-concept, self-esteem, symptoms of depression, and emotional distress.
2. **Parents' Marriage**—with special emphasis on their division of labor and patterns of communication.
3. **Parent-Child Relationship**—the quality of relationship between each parent and the child.
4. **Intergenerational Relationships**—among grandparents, parents, and grandchildren.
5. **Life Stress/Social Support/Employment**—the relationship between nuclear family members and individuals or institutions outside the family.

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To test their own model, Cowan et. al. (1991) have compared changes in couples who became parents with those who remained childless over a similar period of time. They found that childless couples showed change in several domains, but that new parents showed change in all five of them. In addition, husbands' and wives' changes varied in both rate and direction across the domains. Use of pre- and post-birth measures has shown that the transition to parenthood widens already existing differences between partners, and that this is in part responsible for reports indicating decreases in marital satisfaction. The Cowan et. al. (1991) model has demonstrated that there is an underlying continuity of adaptation that exists for parents during a time of profound individual and relationship change. Negative and positive outcomes of the transition to parenthood appear to be predictable from parents' pre-baby levels of distress and adaptation. It is the additional stress involved in parenting and the way it manifests that contributes to their later feelings about themselves, their marriage, and their parenting style.

It is important to note the above information, obtained through quantitative measures has been integrated to form a longitudinal narrative for groups of new parents. This research project aims to focus on the same trajectory, but from a different perspective. Allowing parents to describe their own transition by telling their own story concentrates the focus onto the meaning of this transition over their lives. In the process, information is provided that portrays the essence of intergenerational issues, family identity, and kinship groups in their lives.

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Intergenerational Issues

In 1973 Troll wrote:

If all parent-child bonds are not cut when children reach adulthood, then we must start asking about the nature of those bonds that continue.

What happens to them before, during, and after the various transitions or crises of individual development? To what extent are changes in family relationships quantitative only, and to what extent qualitative? To what extent may there be ebbs and flows in connectedness and separateness, in fusion or individuation? Not only do we need new research, we also need new questions and a new theoretical framework for these questions. (p. 68)

This qualitative study aims to address Troll's questions concerning the nature of continued family bonds, with specific attention to individual and family identity, and connections to others. Recent studies have indicated that family of origin experiences may have a profound effect on subsequent marital adjustment during the transition to parenthood (Lane, Wilcoxon, & Cecil, 1988). An examination of intergenerational influences includes historical family of origin information, as well as information relating to the current evolution of adult children's relationships with their parents, and their new baby. Belsky and Isabella (1985) have noted, however, that the role of these developmental factors has received little attention with respect to the quality of marriage, except in cases of divorce. Indeed, few studies to date have pinpointed the family of origin and developmental antecedents of marital adjustment during

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the transition to parenthood as a target for study (Wallace & Gotlib, 1990).

Research has indicated, however, that the transition to parenthood is a stimulus for increased contact with origin families, as well as other social support systems (Belsky & Rovine, 1990; Fischer, 1988; Sollie & Miller, 1980). This knowledge pointing to increased contact with origin families highlights the need to gain more information surrounding the nature and meaning of this contact for parents and grandchildren.

Belsky and Isabella (1985) investigated the relationship between subjects' current marital functioning, and childrearing experiences within their family of origin. Specifically, subjects' perceptions of their own childhood and of their parents' marital functioning were used to predict the quality of their marital functioning during the transition to parenthood. The findings of this study indicated that subjects who experienced poor child rearing (defined as cold or hostile caregiving by parents) and/or a poor parental marital relationship are at risk for the likelihood of negative changes in their own marriage. These findings have been replicated by Lane, Wilcoxon, & Cecil (1988) who report a healthier transition to parenthood for husbands and wives with undamaged family of origin experiences. They additionally report that the family of origin issue is a more important consideration than many other variables in predicting marital change, especially for women.

Belsky, Youngblade, & Pensky (1989) explored the potential for marital quality to act as a protective factor for those who experienced poor child-rearing from their parents. They found that mothers who experienced high

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levels of rejection and low levels of support during their own childhood were more likely to have high negative affect in interactions with their children, but only in cases where negative/poor marital quality was also present. Women with similar childhoods who were in positive marital situations, did not exhibit negative parental behavior. This points to the protective potential for a good marriage to operate as a buffer with respect to the intergenerational transmission of maternal negative affect with their children. These results provide support for the contention that a person's degree of vulnerability to risk and stress is strongly influenced by the ability to develop and maintain current healthy intimate relationships (Bowlby, 1988).

Thus far we have examined research related to a new parents' childhood experiences and the effect of those experiences on their parenting. Given the geographic mobility within American culture, a true exploration of intergenerational issues on the transition to parenthood must be expanded to include the wider family context.

Power of Kinship Ties

Kinship structure has been defined as the combination of people, both family members and/or friends, who surround, encircle, and participate in the development of one individual or set of siblings. This group for example, surrounding a new baby, is one that changes as that child ages over the life course. Relationships between daughters and mothers (Fischer, 1981, 1991), sons and mothers (Fischer, 1983a), daughters and mothers-in-law (Fischer,

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1983b), and grandmothers (Fischer, 1983c) all shift in response to the birth of a child.

Most studies of kinship in American and British culture point toward a tendency for stronger ties with maternal than with paternal kin. This has been explained by noting gender roles and trends in family behavior. Women tend to act as "gatekeepers" monitoring family business, providing direct childcare, and determining relatives' access to children. Childbirth appears to stimulate increased interaction between grandmother and daughter, naturally drawing in the maternal family. It has also been noted that while the birth of a child stimulates increased contact with both sides of a family, paternal grandparents are reportedly less likely to "drop in" for informal visits in the home in comparison to maternal grandparents (Fischer, 1983a, 1983b, 1988).

Fischer (1988) notes the following distinctions in her discussion of kinship influences on new parents and their child. She asserts that kinship groups affect the developing child in three ways: (a) as audience, (b) through influence, and (c) through the allocation of resources. When discussing kin as audience, she notes reports in which mothers tell of the importance of maintaining face-to-face contact with their family and friends, and grandmothers describe the enjoyment of watching the child grow. The doting audience serves to support the child as "center of the universe" for the parents and family.

Kinship groups influencing family development also occurs via direct involvement in childrearing, as well as through role modeling of adult behavior.

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This transpires as grandparents and others offer advice and coaching to new parents, and direct childcare for grandchildren. Grandmothers specifically are called upon to assist with parenting issues as basic as feeding, toilet-training, and healthcare, and later more complicated and abstract challenges. Lastly, in their provision of resources to families, kinship circles have an impact on the development of children which may go unnoticed. Grandparents and other relatives may help to enrich a child's financial or physical environment, and alternately needy relatives may serve to siphon off resources otherwise intended for the child (Fischer, 1988).

In summary, a brief examination has been provided detailing examples of ways families and kinship groups groom and socialize new parents. Viewed practically, one sees how kinship groups have the potential to either complicate, or soften and absorb some of the major responsibilities new parents face. Within this study, subjects' stories were examined with regard to families' connections to others including the marital relationship, extended family, kinship groups, and intergenerational issues.

Childhood Issues Re-awakened

Having a baby reawakens issues from one's childhood. Cowan et al. (1991) report that both men's and women's relationships with their own parents undergo marked changes as they themselves entered parenthood. For some, the 'becoming a family' period seemed to be an intense period of reconciliation and reconnection with their parents, but others were faced with a reawakening of earlier tensions and family struggles (Fischer, 1991, 1988,

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1983b). The parental role is uniquely and emotionally evocative because old feelings and concerns about developmental issues such as control, dependence, autonomy, intimacy, sexuality, and aggression are reawakened in people as they experience pregnancy and early parenthood (Antonucci & Mikus, 1988; Colman & Colman, 1971; Cowan & Cowan, 1992). Reactivation of old issues may be accompanied by a strong regressive pull or by viewing the opportunity as one for change and growth. The opportunity to confront an issue again, as an adult with more psychological resources than one had as a child, may enable a parent to rework and resolve old issues. The re-experience can perhaps facilitate resolution. At the same time, repeated encounters with unresolved developmental and emotional issues can be distressing and unsettling. One's ability to address such arousal varies from individual to individual. The sensitivity and involvement of one's social and family network may be a powerful factor in the occurrence of the reactivation process and its outcome (Antonucci & Mikus, 1988).

Specifically, Fischer (1981) reports in her research with mothers and daughters who are transitioning into parenthood, that the daughters report wanting their mothers to come and "take care" of them. When daughters become mothers they understand simultaneously what it is to be both the subject of mothering (as their new baby is) and the object of the mothering (as the baby's mother). This results in the tendency for a new identification and understanding of their own mothers.

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Research documenting specific intergenerational issues in father-son adjustment to parenting is more scarce. The focus of available research was limited to new fathers' tendency to either model their skills after their own fathers or to compensate for perceived deficiencies in their childhood relationships with their fathers (Parke, 1994). For mothers and sons, Fischer (1983a) indicates that parenthood has the potential to create tension, perhaps reflecting strain between daughters and mothers-in-law. A review of the literature revealed nothing more specific regarding the mentoring process, or the psychological processes involved for a new generation where expectations of fatherhood have been revised and expanded.

Identity Issues

Individual Identity

Men and women differ qualitatively in their psychological response to childbirth. Their identities are altered in very different ways. Cowan and Cowan (1991, 1992) as well as Belsky and Kelly (1994) have utilized a tool called The Pie (Cowan & Cowan, 1990a) to better understand the ways in which the transition to parenthood affects a person's identity and self concept. The instrument requires that each person in their study divide a circle into pieces, using size to indicate salience, regarding adult roles both before and after the birth. Not surprisingly, the roles of mother and father become larger pieces for both men and women. What gets reduced in this process for both are the roles of husband/wife/lover. What makes this difficult for women however, is that women's sense of self as worker/student becomes a smaller

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piece, while men's tends to remain unchanged. A common pattern for couples in their adjustment to childcare is for women to reduce work/career energy, while their husbands often increase their work to compensate financially. This alteration in roles, along with all the other adjustments to parenthood results in major challenges for parents psychologically, as well as in their couple relationships.

Another perspective for examination of individual identity issues concerns the role implications related to adult development. Parenthood is often valued as a key to adulthood in that the birth of a child makes the parent not only a mother or a father but simultaneously an adult (Antonucci & Mikus, 1988). Within the tradition of psychological research focusing on the self and identity, investigators have begun discussing people's conceptualizations about their "possible selves." Markus and Nurius (1986, 1987) indicate that this concept is meant to represent what individuals conceive they might become, with both positive and negative implications.

Within the infant mental health literature, researchers are attending to maternal representations of the infant in the prospective parent's mind (Stern, 1991). The roots of the current work were developed by Bowlby (1969) on internal working models, by Fraiberg (Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975) on parental fantasies, and by Lebovici (1983) on the "imaginary" baby constructed by parents (cited in Stern, 1991).

Current research explores the variety of ways in which maternal representations of the 'self' and 'future baby' change during pregnancy, and the

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ways in which these changes potentially affect outcomes for the family (Ammaniti, 1991; Ammaniti, Baumgartner, Candelori, Perucchini, Pola, Tambelli, & Zampino, 1992; Fonagy, 1994; Stern, 1991). Stern (1989) asserts that a mother's representation of her infant incorporates both the representation of infant as well as the representation of self-as-mother. This research bridges the gap between individual and family identity issues, as the focus moves back and forth between how a mother sees herself, her infant, and the developing relationship that occurs within the family. Additionally, this research also examines the mother-infant relationship within the context of the previous generation of parenting.

Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) suggest that a mother's current maternal representations of 'self' and 'future baby,' as well as mother's memory of her own childhood mothering experience are good predictors of the pattern of attachment established between the mother and her infant, as measured by the Strange Situation. Main et al. (1985) and Main and Goldwin (in press) examined mother's narratives regarding their own experience with mother-as-mother. What is most predictive of the current pattern of attachment between mother and infant is the nature of the narrative that she tells of her own childhood experience, not the actual experience. Stated differently, mothers' attachment patterns with their own children that have been assessed as "secure" using the Strange Situation, are best predicted by coherent narratives about their own mothering experiences. The predictive power is not whether or not the mother's representation is true or distorted. It is instead the

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coherence, comprehensibility, and consistency of the narrative that is important. Van IJzendoorn's et al. (1992) meta-analysis of intergenerational studies, indicates that parental mental representations of childhood can account for nearly one fourth of the variance in infant behavior in the Strange Situation.

Family Identity

Wamboldt & Reiss (1989) suggest that couples who are transitioning into parenthood have before them two tasks: (a) They must define a family heritage together, that is they must resolve those questions of "Where have we come from?" and "What do we think of those experiences?"; and (b) they must address the task of defining a new relationship identity, or deciding who they are. Agreement concerning the ground rules of one's current relationship is interpretable as indicating the degree to which the new couple has articulated their relationship identity. How they define their heritage together has been shown to be more important than the actual experiences.

"A first child reorganizes generational boundaries, making grandparents of parents, uncles and aunts of siblings and parents of children" (Clulow, 1991, p.263). Like individuals, families and social institutions have self-perceptions. Couples and families have a sense of "we-ness," and a generally agreed upon conception or myth about the nature of their family unit. Individuals within the family may not share the same view completely, but decisions and collective actions are often based upon common perceptions. As with individual life changes, family transitions open the view of self/"we-ness" to questions, to re-definition, and/or re-organization. "The story of cumulative transitions in our

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view of ourselves becomes a narrative of our own personal, familial, or cultural history" (Cowan, 1991, p.14).

The discussion of **"possible selves"** relates to the conception of family identity as well. How have we imagined our family to be? Until the current research exploring maternal representations, investigators have used the concept of family myth to explain this. The family myth is part of "the inner image" of the family, to which all contribute and strive to preserve. It expresses shared convictions about the people and their relationship in the family (Ferreira, 1963). Family myths are defined as a set of role images which are accepted by the whole family together, giving each person an allotted pattern of interaction (Byng-Hall, 1988). Viewed in this way, one's family myth not only fulfills one's notion of who they are, but it also prescribes the ways in which they behave within their family group.

The concept of family scripts is similar to the idea of a blueprint. Family scripts prescribe the pattern of family interaction in particular contexts. According to Byng-Hall (1988), children learn how to be parents from their parents. One generation later this can lead to replicative scripts, or to corrective scripts in which an attempt is made to correct earlier mistakes.

The likelihood of recreating a negative family experience appears to hinge somewhat on the ability of the new parents to maintain a positive marital relationship (Belsky, Youngblade, and Pensky, 1989). Given the lack of long-term longitudinal research, available studies rely on recollections of family of origin experiences. Again this highlights the importance of the adult's memory

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In this dissertation, parents' memory and representation of experiences through narrative reports have been directly examined as a vehicle for understanding the nature of family development, the family's transition story, and their family identity. Continued research is needed that more specifically examines a variety of variables in facilitating family identity development. Relatedly, family identity as construct interacting with family context could become a predictor for those studying the process of the transition to parenthood. As a beginning step this study's utilization of qualitative methodology assists in the understanding of parents' meaning of family identity and connections to others.

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CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Family researchers have traditionally approached their subjects focusing on family structure, demographic trends, attitudes, observable behaviors, noting similarities and differences in groups, etc. Many dynamics of family interaction create great challenges to quantitative researchers including: privacy, a collective consciousness or belief system that is not available to non-family members, shared traditions, intense involvement, and a collage of individual experiences and meanings. Qualitative methodology is particularly well suited to the study of families, as the focus is on understanding meanings, interpretations, and the subjective experiences of members. It is a good match for examining the diversity of family forms and learning of the processes by which families create, sustain, and communicate about their own family realities. In addition, qualitative methods facilitate holistic studies of families. This involves exploration of interaction, dynamics, and contexts, rather than variables that isolate particular pieces of the family experience (Daly, 1992).

Epistemological Issues

Some scholars believe that we have leaned too long and too extensively on the physical sciences and mathematical metaphors for understanding

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human behavior. What is needed is a blurring of the genres (Geertz, 1980; Laird, 1989). The utilization of narrative and story enters the scene as one step in a larger movement within the social sciences in the quest for useful paradigms. Researchers are now looking beyond the positivist approach, toward the humanities and an interpretive or hermeneutic approach (Rosenau, 1992). The use of the term "story" marks a change in our "idiom of social explanation," as anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983) puts it, so that "explanation comes to be regarded as a matter of connecting action to its meaning, rather than behavior to its determinants" (Schnitzer, 1993, p.39).

One of the major tasks of family researchers is the development of family theory. Presently this research is executed utilizing predominately statistical, hypothesis testing methodology. Utilizing the grounded theory approach, qualitative methods possess the ability to propel the study of families into new arenas of theory development (Gilgun, 1992).

Grounded Theory

When exploring grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the researcher systematically develops theory through the interweaving of observations of phenomena of interest, of abstractions from these observations, with previous research and theory. The theory is continually modified with new findings, always tentative, challenged with new situations.

In the previous literature review, it has been noted that family developmental stage models have traditionally limited themselves through narrow definitions of family. This study meets the need for evaluations of families

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which incorporate the reality of family life, as members interact with others in extended family and kinship groups. In addition, the transition to parenthood research highlights a variety of key issues related to individual and family identity, as well as members' connections to others. The family narrative as a tool for studying a family's transition over time offers a valuable means with which to examine these concepts.

Grounded theory approaches lead to the generation of pattern theories versus hierarchical theories. The hypotheses of pattern theory are arranged horizontally, with the composing factors interacting. It is the variation in combinations of factors, their interactions, and situational factors that leads to diversity in phenomena of interest. Hierarchical theory (which includes producing general principles from which hypotheses are deduced, and tested against "facts") is characterized as a pyramid, with increasing parsimony as the theory moves toward higher levels of abstraction. Pattern theory has been found to be more compatible with those working in applied family studies, as the emphasis is on trying to understand individual settings with diversity (as in the variety of family forms). Hierarchical theory leads to "norming" families, and has the potential for overriding individuality (Gilgun, 1992).

It is important to note that a view in which qualitative research findings are seen as a prelude to hypothesis testing inherently obscures the importance of the kind of theory building that grounded theory provides. In grounded theory, interpretations are provided through "thick description" (Ryle, 1968 cited in Geertz, 1973). Here "thick description" is not referring to detail of

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description, but instead to description as a process of elucidating and clarifying complexities of meaning (Gilgun, 1992). "...the essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them" (Geertz, 1973, p. 26).

Moon, Dillon, and Sprenkle (1990) posit that qualitative methodology is a match for building family theory for many reasons including: (a) the congruence with systems theory and the need for knowledge about ways that systems operate; (b) its ability to assist in the discovery of grounded theory, based in observed and pragmatic data; and (c) its inherent emphasis on social context, recursiveness, and holism.

The sample in this study was asked to tell "the story of how we became a family." By analyzing the narrative interview transcripts, the investigator relied upon the family's subjective perception and recall of the transitions in their lives. The families have defined the experience for themselves. The themes and patterns which recursively emerged through the analysis of the transcripts satisfy the stated purpose of the study, which was to investigate the experience of couples who have transitioned from young adulthood, to couplehood, and to parenthood. Within this exploration is a particular focus on individual and family identity, and connections to others including the marital relationship, extended family, kinship groups, and intergenerational issues. What do parents report regarding their own identity? How is family identity formation evident in their stories of "How we became a family"? What if any is

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the influence or contribution of family of origin and kinship groups? What are the experiences and reflections of these parents as they describe their acclimation to this major transition in their lives?

History and Context of Narrative Study

Increasingly social workers are recognizing the significance of narrative as a core construct in human understanding and realizing the potential contributions of humanistic and interpretive human science perspectives in the development of theory, research, and practice. Narrative constructs have guided recent formulations of social work practice theory (Goldstein, 1990; Saari, 1991), gender issues and family therapy (Laird, 1989), and research methods in the study of social problems (Jung, 1983; Reissman, 1989) (cited in Borden, 1992).

Narrative can be understood as "natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to order, organize, and express meaning" (Mishler, 1986, p. 106). Personal narrative refers to unconscious, preconscious, and conscious reformulations of life history in efforts to organize experience and to make sense of events (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). Cohler (1982) defined the personal narrative as "the most internally consistent interpretation of presently understood past, experienced present, and anticipated future" (p. 207). Each person becomes an historian of the self, developing an internally consistent interpretation of the life cycle so that past, present, and future experiences are congruent (Borden, 1992).

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Narrative study in the social and behavioral science has been influenced by lines of inquiry in literature (Booth, 1979), philosophy (Ricoeur, 1981), history (White, 1973), and ethics (McIntyre, 1984). Narrative perspectives have provided important frames of reference in developmental psychology (Mandler, 1984), social psychology (Schotter & Gergen, 1989), personality studies (McAdams, 1988), psychoanalysis (Schafer, 1983) and anthropology (Geertz, 1988) (cited in Borden, 1992).

In understanding human behavior, narrative approaches are advocated not only by family therapists, but also by critics of psychoanalytic theory, such as Roy Schafer (1992) and Donald Spence (1982); cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986), who examined the "narrative mode" of mental activity; social psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1988), who applies narrative to the development of the self; anthropologists Clifford Geertz (1983), V.W. Turner and E.M. Bruner (1986); and medical researcher Elliot Mishler (1986), who proposes a review of clinical research practices in acknowledgment of the interview as discourse (cited in Schnitzer, 1993). Within the family therapy literature, the term story has appeared with increasing frequency, along with related terms like "narrative," "text," and "discourse" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Hoffman, 1990; Penn & Scheinberg, 1991; Sluzki, 1992; White & Epston, 1990). These terms convey a new appreciation of the social contextualization and, more specifically, the social construction of subjective ideas (Laird, 1989)

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Functions of Narrative Study

Family storytelling, mythmaking, and scripting are central mechanisms in the construction of self and meaning. Stories become ways of anchoring families to experience and explaining family transitions. Stories and myths help us to order the world and to integrate events in a striving for continuity and coherence. Family narratives play a crucial role in socializing family members, providing models for action, and telling family members how to master challenges as well as what should be feared or avoided. They send potent messages concerning admired behaviors and preferred solutions in times of crisis and during important transitions. They direct family members on how to operate, as parents, as children, as women, and as men, in their respective ethnic and cultural worlds (Laird, 1989). Storytelling and mythmaking are themselves definitional. It is only when an occurrence has been languaged that it is endowed with cognitive meaning (Laird, 1989).

Sample

The sample utilized in this study is a subset of a larger sample used in a study by Eccles and her colleagues (Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1984; Eccles, Blumenfeld, Harold, & Wigfeld, 1990) who have been interested in exploration of the origin of childhood self-perceptions and academic/activity choice. Their study incorporates a large-scale longitudinal research project conducted in twelve schools, in four primarily white, lower-middle to middle-class school districts in a midwestern urban community. The study was initiated with groups of children in kindergarten, first, and third grades, and followed them

for four years. Approximately 900 students, two-thirds of their parents, and their teachers have participated, completing interviews and questionnaires. The study has included an examination of numerous issues including children's self-perceptions of achievement in a variety of domains, how and why these beliefs are held, and the roles that parents and teachers play in socializing and encouraging these beliefs.

During the third year of the project, the decision was made to augment the sample with siblings of the participating children who were also in elementary school (Harold, Palmiter, Lynch, & Freedman-Doan, 1995). Approximately 75% of the families who had two children in study agreed to participate. The analyses discussed in this paper include story data from 98 interviews, or 60 families whose two children were in the first and second birth order positions. Of these families, there were stories from 38 sets of parents, 18 additional mothers, and 4 additional fathers. Of the 18 additional mothers, 14 were married but their spouses declined to participate, 3 were divorced and were custodial parents, and 1 was widowed. All four of the additional fathers were married with spouses who chose not to participate (Harold, et al. 1995).

Interview Process

The interview procedures utilized for this study grew from a method developed by Veroff and his colleagues in their investigation of newlywed narratives (Veroff, Chadiha, Leber, & Sutherland, 1993a; Veroff, Sutherland, Chadiha, & Ortega, 1993b). Each parent was interviewed separately and all interviews were tape recorded following receipt of consent, and later

transcribed verbatim. Parents were instructed that the purpose of the interview was to take a more in depth look at how the family develops and how children within the same family are both different and similar to one another. Parents were shown a story board (see Figure 3) that illustrated an outline they might follow in telling their story. They were asked to tell the story of the development of their family in approximately 20 minutes. Interviewers were instructed to encourage parents to comment on changes they had experienced in their family relationships, in their expectations of themselves as a parent, in their expectations for their children's development, as well as in the differential impact of critical life events on everyone in the family. Extensive training was provided to each interviewer, and once interviewing began regular meetings were held to offer an opportunity for feedback and discussion of questions. During the training, interviewers were encouraged to use appropriate clinical skills during the interview process (e.g. open-ended questions and active listening skills). All interviewers were given information about ways to obtain information of a qualitative nature, and directed on ways to probe appropriately (Harold, et al., 1995).

Analysis

Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) as a qualitative technique is used to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships (Altheide, 1987). Like all ethnographic research, the meaning of a message is assumed to be reflected in various modes of

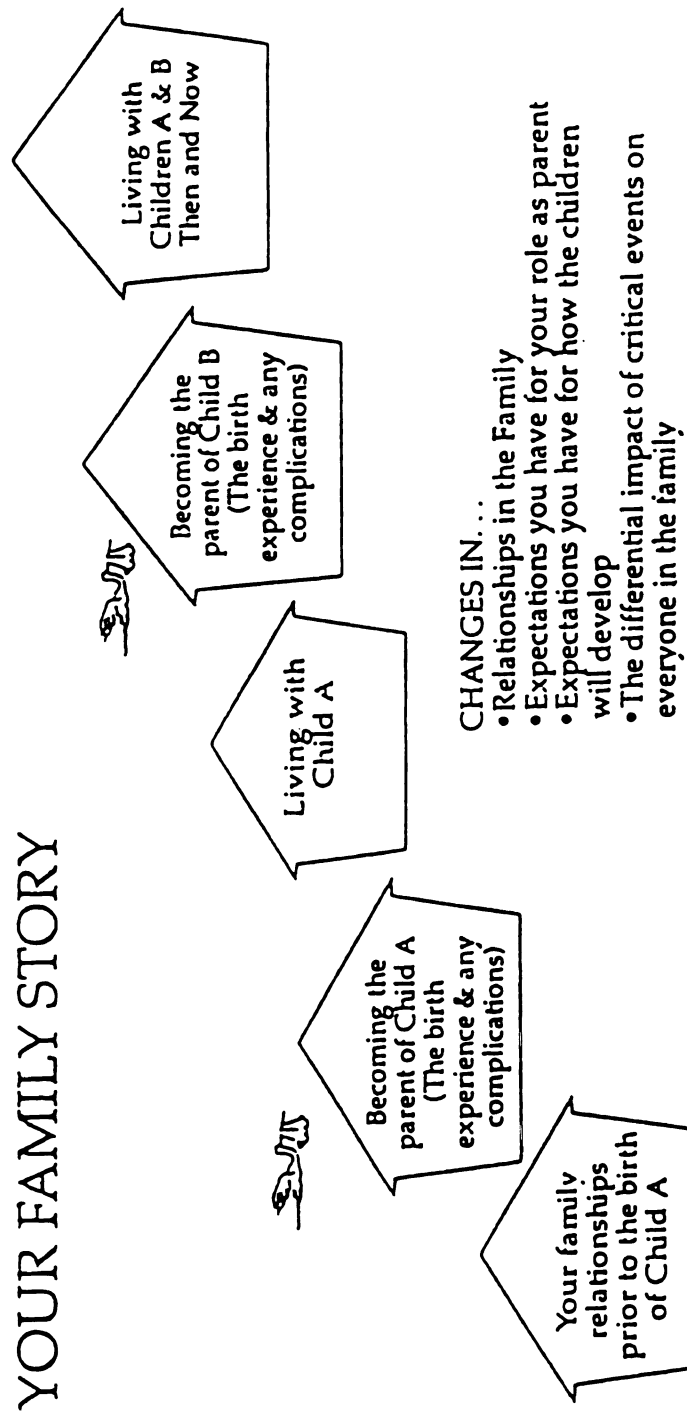


Figure 3. Storyboard.

information exchange, format, rhythm, and style, as well as in the context of the report itself.

ECA consists of reflexive movement between concept development, sampling data collection, data coding, data analysis, and interpretation. The aim is to be systematic and analytic, but not rigid. Although categories and variables initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study. Thus ECA is embedded in constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meaning and nuances (Altheide, 1987). The initial categories guiding this analysis include individual and family identity, and connections to others (see Figure 4).

Individual Identity	Descriptions of Self Goals, philosophies, plans
Family Identity	Descriptions of family Goals for children Expectations, hopes, plans Family rituals, traditions
Connections to Others	Marriage relationship Extended family description Intergenerational themes Kinship groups

Figure 4. Original Coding Frame.

Coding Process

The coding process began with the review of each of the 98 interview transcripts. Coding was conducted with the assistance of a computer software program called Hyperresearch (Hesse-Biber, 1991). This program is designed to aid in the management of qualitative data, allowing content to be

highlighted, identified, and copied into codes. One benefit of such a program, is that it allows the same data to be analyzed in a variety of ways, depending upon the focus of the study. It supports the flexibility necessary in qualitative research by providing an efficient way to maintain systematic organization and record keeping.

Upon completion of initial coding, data were available to be printed under each coded heading. Each file of coded material was then reviewed for any theme or issue common to more than one interview. Final tabulation of themes, issues or patterns were recorded, and representative examples were selected for presentation in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

This project began with grounded theory as a guide, in conceptualizing the psychosocial processes involved in the transition to parenthood. In the qualitative tradition, parents' responses were reviewed and analyzed to answer the following questions:

1. What do parents report regarding their own identity?
2. How are these families defining a family heritage together?
3. How is family identity formation communicated in their stories?
4. What if any is the influence or contribution of family of origin and kinship groups?
5. What are the experiences and reflections of these parents as they describe their acclimation to these major transitions in their lives?

General Findings

As previously above, the initial coding scheme included three classes: individual identity, family identity, and connections to others. During the analysis, some codes were added and others moved to different classes for purposes of clarity. The final coding frame is displayed in Figure 5.

Individual Identity	Family Identity	Connections to Others
Description of Self	Dating and Marriage Relationship	Extended family relationships
	Family Beliefs	Kinship Groups
	Expectations, Hopes, and Plans	Intergenerational Themes
	Critical Events	Cultural Ties and Traditions

Figure 5. Final Coding Frame.

Data in this chapter are presented using the following format. Classes, Individual Identity, Family Identity, and Connections to Others are described separately. Coded material within each class is reviewed by presentation of predominant themes and issues, as well as other interesting results. For each point, an example of a parents' quote is provided as evidence of the results. Names of subjects, their children, and employers have been substituted with initials to maintain and preserve the confidentiality of their stories.

Individual Identity

Individual identity for the purposes of this study is defined as any text that describes "Who am I?". In response to the first question, "What do parents report regarding their own identity?", data were coded Description of Self. It is important to note that the purpose of the interviews was never to obtain data regarding individual identity specifically. The reason for this question's inclusion in the study is to view individual identity in relationship to family identity

Code: Description of Self

Generally, data regarding parents' discussion of themselves integrated with data throughout their stories. More definitive remarks about themselves as individuals organized into a discussion of life history, career, and their reaction to childrearing. Within the family narratives, three major themes emerged within the Description of Self Code: (a) Chronology, (b) Individual Response to Birth, and most prominently (c) Attention to Vocational Issues (see Figure 6).

CLASS	CODE	THEMES
Individual Identity	Description of Self	Chronology Response to Birth Vocational Issues

Figure 6. Individual Identity

Theme: Chronology. Individual identity is evidenced in chronological reports of adult developmental milestones. Parents' stories included information related to their life course, preceding marriage and children. Much of this information described details around their own educational/career path. An example:

We were married in April of 1975 when I graduated college. At that time I decided to go to law school. After I graduated we came here because I was in school. And she was working, and I was working part time. I went through school and in between bought a house, and then decided about the time I was ready to finish up school that it was time to start a family.

An important note is that family narrative analysis indicated that getting married did not end a focus on career preparation. One husband notes, "I've always worked, and M. quit working after she had the first child, and I went to night school and just finished. And I've always been going to school since we've been married" Numerous parents noted the ways their educational training continued into the family formation stage, thus adding to the demands the new family faced. This information supports trends in family development theory which are systems oriented (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and eliminate the use of distinct/finite categories which preclude the reality of overlapping cycles and patterns of family members.

Theme: Individual Response to Parenthood. Distinct differences appeared when reviewing parents' responses to parenthood. For women, the narratives were noted to include excitement and happiness, but were characterized by tremendous distress adjusting to childrearing. Descriptions included adjectives like sadness, boredom, and isolation. For example, one woman reports:

Uh, everything was different. I had been working . . . and then I'm home with a baby. I found it a big adjustment, I really did. Mostly because we were new in the neighborhood, I didn't know anybody. So you're isolated with a baby, it's wintertime, you're in a house alone with a baby all day. It was . . . a lonely time, really. I found having a baby takes up so much of your time. I . . . didn't have much time for myself . . . and with each baby you have less and less.

The response for men in describing their reaction to the birth of their child included excitement, as well. However their narratives were characterized by an absence of the above noted isolation or boredom, and instead included remarks about their work life, pride, and identity as a father. Additionally, several men noted the value/importance of family time.

I travel quite a bit with business and I'm gone sometimes three, four nights a week, a couple weeks in a row. And so when I'm home with the family, the family time is important. And I like to see . . . like us to be a close knit family, where the kids enjoy being around each other. And I want that to grow in years to come. One of the things we try to do is to take family vacations, trips where everybody can go and do things. That's . . . important for them.

Family narratives in this study support the literature findings related to the complex demands parents face during the transition to parenthood (Cowan & Cowan, 1992), and tendencies for couples' reverting to a traditional division of labor when the baby is born (Belsky & Kelly, 1994). Additionally, this data set provides interesting evidence, describing in detail the experience of women who have been a part of the work force prior to giving birth.

Theme: Vocational Issues. Within this sample, women's vocational issues surrounding the transition to parenthood are characterized by conflict and adjustment difficulties. The struggle around work issues is central, and women's noted distress in response to the transition to parenthood cannot be

separated from women's adjustment to changes in their work life. One mother describes her vocational struggle during the transition to parenthood:

But a lot of the story for me with being a parent was whether I should go to work, should or shouldn't, what my sort of feelings were as a parent, what I should be doing. And again when C. came along . . . I stayed home for a while, but again I just couldn't stay home all the time. So about the time she was 2-3 months old, I started going back part time again to work.

In 56 stories of women in this study, at least 19 discuss quitting work when their children were born. An additional 7 report moving to part-time work. Given the narrative nature of these data, the contextual information surrounding the decision of returning to work is also provided. Women note the shared (and at times not so shared) nature of the decision-making process with their husbands, as well their subsequent response to the decision once the child has arrived. For example:

I was working at St. Joe's at the time, and I was able to . . . one thing we had decided that when we had a child that . . . I was going to try to work part time. At first my husband was even like, "M. I don't want you to work." He came from a very traditional family where mother stayed home, father went to work, they have a house full of kids and that was what mom was supposed to do. And I said, "Well, I think we need to compromise." I'm not willing to completely scrap . . . my, not really like a career, because I know that going part-time did hurt that in a respect

but--I wanted to still be active with adults too. So I think he said, "Well, yeah, okay, that sounds good." We just didn't want an outside person raising our child or children.

or

I wanted to stay home with my son pretty much . . . I thought I did . . . until I got home. When they are infants . . . I got bored . . . I wanted something else to do. So I went back to work a while but still wanted to be home mostly. After R. was born . . . the first month was wonderful to be home. It's fun to sit home and be mom and everything, but I wasn't used to it. . . . I like having adult conversation that is stimulating. . . .

or

Yeah, I felt isolated and I felt . . . sort of unimportant, you know, after working full time and working with adults and having responsibilities. And all of a sudden there I was . . . at home doing . . . what I think are important things but at the time didn't seem important.

While it was true that more women included the negative aspects of their adjustment to parenthood and change in work status, it was not true for all women. An example that was different from others:

When my first child was born I wasn't working, I was a home-mom, so it was great. It just added more to it . . . it was great. I loved it. I think it was one of the best times of my life--that first 6 months especially. I loved it. From that first minute that they are born--all of them--you fall in

love . . . it's love at first sight. I thought B. was so special that I thought "How could I ever love another kid?" But then you do--you fall in love with the next one and the next one . . . it's great.

For men, the vocational issues related to this period in their family life were different than that of their counterparts. Stress centered around the feeling of increased financial responsibility. As women struggled to determine whether or not their work was in the workplace or at home providing childcare, the men reported increasing numbers of hours spent at work, the need to secure a different job, and the subsequent value they felt regarding what they describe as "family time." An example:

I felt at that time that what I was earning at A. [company] was not going to be enough to support a full-fledged family. I moved to F. [company] and worked there for about four years. During that time S. was born. We started accumulating the various and sundry items, such as a house. We did not spend a lot of time planning financially for the different things. I was working, sometimes as much as double shifts, seven days in a row--eight days, nine days in a row. It was that type of work schedule. So, I did not spend a lot of time with the family because I was doing about 16, 17, 18 hours at work.

In summary, the contrasting pressures for women and men in this sample during the transition to parenthood appear to have a strong influence on reports of individual identity. Women taking on the primary responsibility for childcare, reported feeling boredom, isolation, and confusion related to the

forfeiture of work outside the home. Men, who subsequently take on more of the family's economic burdens then highlight the importance of time with the family. The findings support the transition to parenthood identity literature, with women's identity shifting alongside their changes in employment, and men feeling the stress related to expanded financial responsibility (Cowan & Cowan, 1991; 1992).

Family Identity

Family identity is defined within this study as the way(s) in which families describe themselves and communicate their shared character or personality. The related questions in this dissertation are:

1. How are these families defining a family heritage together?
2. How is family identity formation communicated in their stories?

The codes included in the Family Identity class were: Dating and Marriage Relationship; Family Beliefs; Family Expectations, Hopes, & Plans; and Critical Events. Data coded in the first code address the first question, and the last three codes provide an answer to the second question (see Figure 7).

CLASS	CODES
Family Identity	Dating and Marriage Relationship Family Beliefs Family Expectations, Hopes, and Plans

Figure 7. Family Identity.

Two codes, Dating and Marriage Relationship, were initially included in the class Connections to Others. Once coding began, it was clear that this information corresponded more closely to Family Identity, as the content addresses issues related to family formation.

Code: Dating and Marriage Relationship

Data coded Pre-Marital Era overlapped with story content regarding marriage. Only 29 parents included information related to the dating/pre-marital stage in their family story, while over 60 discussed something related to their marital relationship. Five themes emerged within these codes: (a) Chronology, (b) Transitional Adjustments, (c) Parental Preparation, (d) Emotional Tone, and (e) Relationship Building (see Figure 8).

CLASS	CODE	THEMES
Family Identity	Dating and Marriage Relationship	Chronology Transitional Adjustments Parental Preparation Emotional Tone Relationship Building

Figure 8. Code: Dating and Marriage Relationship.

Theme: Chronology. Chronological reports of life events incorporated dating and marriage as well. Fourteen parents noted the way in which they met their spouse, with work and school cited most frequently. This information was typically presented as part of a summary chronology that included meeting the spouse, getting married, a reference to work, and the number of years until children were born. In fact 40 parents noted the length of time from marriage

to conception/birth, making this information one of the central markers in the family stories in this sample. A representative quote is as follows:

Okay. My husband and I were married in 1971 . . . going on almost 18 years ago. It's hard to believe. We . . . had a very short courtship and we were married within 3 months. And we were married for 7 years before we had children . . . we both worked.

Theme: Transitional Adjustments. A second theme emerging within the Dating and Marriage Relationship code included comments regarding transitional adjustments. In particular, parents noted the carefree lifestyle they enjoyed prior to having children. For example:

I was married at 29. My wife was 24 at the time. So I was a little bit older than the average married person, I would, I would assume. Uh, the first 2 or 3 years we had a carefree type of existence . . . going to the plays in New York when we felt like it type of thing, kind of getting to know each other period, and also, like I say pretty much when we felt like going . . . anticipating that when the children came, that this would, uh, and rightfully so, this would end abruptly which it has.

Relatedly, parents were explicit regarding other adjustments corresponding to their marriage and childrearing experience:

Well, we got married in 1976 . . . in April . . . and we moved out here in November . . . and I was . . . pregnant with A. . . . He was not a planned baby. And I had a rough adjustment moving out to Michigan, away from the family, being pregnant, and all the feelings that you have when

you're pregnant for the first time. But everything went well . . . we had a good delivery and everything.

Theme: Emotional Tone. Corresponding to these descriptors of family chronology, and commentary regarding adjustments, the family stories in this sample contained evidence of the emotional tone, or un/happiness these parents experienced in their marriage relationship. An example of a particularly happy report:

. . . Meg and I have been best friends. I haven't had. . . We were noted for . . . I don't think we ever had a fight until probably about 8 years after we had been married. Things just jelled real well. We enjoyed doing things together. Similar interests. Getting up to J., our first child. We were just excited to beat the band.

or

We were married for 2 years before I got . . . I was pregnant with M. And, we have had a good marriage. We had it then; we do have a good one now.

While a few of the family stories detailed conflicts that ultimately resulted in divorce, this was not the norm. Rather, stories in the sample incorporated the complex interaction of effects the parents experienced as they dealt with multiple transitions within the context of their marriage relationship. An example of father's story with content communicating more typical stress and negative emotional tone is as follows:

. . . Because she was stuck at home sometimes during the day with two kids . . . I think, in that sense, it made me a lot more aware of some pressures she was under during the day. It made it tough for her at times, I know. And she'd get upset during the day more so than she did when she had one child. And sometimes I'd come home and she'd be on edge and she'd kinda' jump on me for something and I'd jump back at her. It made for . . . when the kids were real small, I'd say, situations were . . . on edge cause of the responsibilities and stuff.

A wife discusses the particular challenges in their family:

Okay, well, R. and I were married in '80 . . . oh, no we weren't, '79. . . . Prior to that we both lived at home. We were 20 when we got married so I guess that's okay. K. was born almost 2 years after we were married. . . . Yes. Yea, uh huh. We both were working full time and R. was going . . . is still going to school at night. So, we were very rarely home alone . . . I mean, together, so were very rarely home alone, if ever, and it just could be very stressful on the marriage, I guess, as well as everything else.

Theme: Parental Preparation. Another related theme, Parental Preparation, emerged within this code. Primary to this theme was the question of whether/not parents knew what to expect from parenting. Generally, the consensus was that parents described feeling prepared. However, narratives of both men and women also noted fear and anxiety, as well as difficulty adjusting. Women more often noted their lack of preparation for infant care specifically, and both

genders noted the increased feelings of responsibility and loss of freedom/personal time. For example, a father reports:

Yea, let's have children, and Yea, it's going to change our life and that's about as far as you go. And then, as soon as the child comes, then all of a sudden all of these other ramifications come into play. Life insurance. Deeds and wills. Schooling, oh gosh . . . jeans. My gosh. Oh, gosh. Whatever they are. You know. All of these things start hitting you all at once. You have to start thinking about them, and they do change your life.

A mother's thoughts:

Yeah, I'd always worked, and I really felt tied down . . . or I . . . I felt . . . I don't know if tied down is the word but I wasn't prepared for how much responsibility I had. And I had to adjust to that . . . and I did. But I . . . that was the part of it that I didn't really care for too much . . . was the being at home all the time and being with him, being with the baby. My husband was working afternoons at that time so I didn't see my friends real often. But you know, that's just the first maybe 3 months and after that as I became more adjusted and summertime came and I saw my friends more . . . and they all had children and we did a lot of things together with our children so . . . that was a real nice part of my life.

Theme: Relationship Building. Evidence was presented in the family narratives that pointed to the importance of time for relationship building as well as maintenance in the marriage. For example:

Well, my husband and I were married for 7 years before . . . the birth of R. . . . and we had a really good time. We were married when we were 21, so we were fairly young in today's standards I guess. But we had decided not to have a family right away because we wanted to build our relationship first. So we did that. . . .

For those couples who did not get time together before the children were born, they commented on their future plans to re-connect and enjoy activities together. For example:

. . . before the children were born we had just begun to know each other before we had the children, so we're still looking forward to...times a little bit later on in the future where it's just going to be the two of us . . . and the time to go hiking and camping and all those great things again so. . . .

or another example:

Right now, the relationship . . . I don't know, you're real busy with the kids but, you know, we find time to be alone too. Like we just took off for, you know, Friday night.

In summary, within the Dating and Marriage Relationship Code evidence was presented that highlighted themes in family formation. Couples discussed the ways they came together and the initial experience of adjusting to one

another in a marriage relationship. Additionally, the narratives of these families clearly demonstrate the pressures and struggles related to limited time, childrearing, and career on their marriage and family.

Code: Family Beliefs

A second code in the Family Identity Class relates to Family Beliefs. The literature review conducted prior to this analysis indicated that the family myth is part of "the inner image" of the family, to which all contribute and strive to preserve. It expresses shared convictions/beliefs about the people and their relationship in the family (Ferreira, 1963). An analysis of any particular family within the sample would focus on the beliefs within that family. Given the axial coding approach utilized in this study, the focus examines the beliefs expressed by parents across all families.

In examining the family stories for evidence of their convictions or beliefs, four themes emerged within this coded material: (a) Structure, which included beliefs or decisions regarding the structure of the current family; (b) Beliefs about Childrearing; and (c) Family Philosophies (see Figure 9).

CLASS	CODE	THEMES
Family Identity	Family Beliefs	Structure Childrearing Beliefs Philosophies/Values

Figure 9. Code: Family Beliefs.

Theme: Structure. The first theme that became apparent within the Family Belief code was a tendency toward description of family structure. Issues

present in description of family structure included: (a) the desire to have children early in marriage; (b) the number of children desired; (c) the number of years between children; and (d) the desire to delay childrearing. These remarks summarily describe family formation, with details regarding how parents visualized their family structure. Additionally, information is included that describes the negotiation process between couples involved in defining a family, supporting Wamboldt and Reiss (1989) in their discussion regarding the need for couples to define a family heritage together, forming a new relationship identity. For example, one husband explains:

Our philosophy with our children was that we wanted to have . . . C. [wife] wanted four and I wanted two, so, we said we would compromise at three. She ultimately won out. Umm, but, we wanted to have our children when we were relatively young . . . and, we also wanted to have our children fairly close together. . . .

Theme: Childrearing Beliefs. Once family structure has been established, a second front parents tackle together is determining the manner in which they will parent their young. A second theme in the family belief code includes parents' beliefs about childrearing.

Family beliefs regarding childcare prescribe vocational decisions. These decisions were inseparable from childrearing beliefs in some families. Many families in this sample were explicit in their belief that mothers need to be at home raising the children. For example, a father remarks:

D.'s relationship and mine hasn't changed at all. We pretty much agree on the upbringing of kids and [our] thoughts were pretty much the same as far as having traditionally having the woman home and man working, and it worked out financially. We didn't have any problems. Our upbringing, as far as raising the kids and what they should be doing, is pretty much similar.

A mother describes her belief:

In other words, if both parents are off working quite a bit I really think the daycare provider is going to have a significant influence, even up through V.'s age. When it comes to women's rights, I think a woman should be able to work if she wants to, but I feel that I want to raise my kids and be the primary influence in their lives. That is a decision I made. I went back to work when V. was young enough. I realized then that I wasn't the primary influence because I was away from her 10 hours every day. I didn't like that feeling. Even though I had a good daycare, it wasn't me. She did not come home with things that were bad or wrong, but they weren't me and they weren't my husband, and I didn't want that. . . .

While more men than women commented on family structure, statements regarding childrearing beliefs were evenly distributed between mothers and fathers. Other childrearing belief topics were: (a) the importance of discipline; (b) the importance of teaching values/morals; (c) the importance of

children learning responsibility; (d) discussion of specific parenting techniques; and (e) teaching children respect for others. For example:

You know, I wanted, not that I wanted perfect children, I wanted mannerly children, polite children, not perfect. You know, they wrote on the walls, and I'm like 'knock it off.' I never screamed or yelled, but I did want respect. I am from the old school when it comes to, you respect me, you say, "please," you say, "thank you," and you don't go to someone's house and take their knick knacks. I'm not from the generation where you go "They're just experiencing life"--that's bull. You know, you teach your children right and wrong and good and bad, and that was one of the key factors.

Theme: Family Philosophies. A third theme within the Family Belief code was family philosophies. While similar to beliefs about childrearing, the family philosophies were more general and less behavioral in focus. The most prominent philosophy expressed by parents in this sample included the **value of education** or the desire to instill in children a thirst for knowledge. An example is included:

We had the same philosophy with him, we wanted to read to him, and we wanted to instill in him a sense of curiosity and learning, knowing what's about him as early as possible. So we again, read to him as

early as possible. And we tried to get A. involved in the process, too. . . .

A second philosophy verbalized by parents was the importance placed on creating a **sense of family**, which included placing kids first. For example, one mother notes:

So our family may change a little just because I would be going to work.

But both for R. and I it's been a real priority for us to have a strong family. You know, just even. . . . We love to be with our friends, but if it's been a bad week or R. is gone three nights and I'm going to be gone two, if friends ask us to do something for the weekend, we wouldn't, we'd say, "No, we want to stay home with the kids." So, I . . .

They've been a big priority and I think that . . . that, I don't think will change.

One father comments:

One of the things we have tried to do and it's been helpful is to have a close family circle. Umm, dinner times are extremely important, especially when I'm. . . . I travel quite a bit with business and I'm gone sometimes three, four nights a week, a couple weeks in a row. And so when I'm at home with the family, the family time is important. . . .

A third area within the family philosophy theme includes the recognition of the **responsibility of the parent role** and the subsequent importance of role modeling for children. For example, one mother discusses her philosophy of parenting:

I think that's probably one of the most difficult jobs in the world. It really is, because what we're raising today is tomorrow's decision makers. Whether we're going to blow ourselves up or all make friends.

or

I don't know, the biggest, the biggest, the biggest change, I guess, was the realization that these kids were yours and that you. . . . It's not like babysitting where you could get rid of them at night and take them away. But that you had to become a role model for them. I believe, we've both done a pretty good job of that. I wouldn't trade them for the world. It's the greatest thing that ever happened to us.

The last area emphasized by parents within the Family Philosophy theme included frequent references to the debate of whether or not to allow children to watch television. While initially somewhat puzzling to the analysis, a more contextual view resulted in this being coded within the category of worries and **vulnerabilities to outside influences**. Included in discussion of the importance of instilling values in their children, many parents also discussed their concerns as children moved outside the realm of family influence.

For example:

. . . And I hope to be able to instill certain morals in them, because as I said before, what's going to happen when they're 16. And I don't want to have to sit here for the next 10 years and worry about what's going to happen when they're 16. I want to be able to instill certain things,

certain morals, certain fibers in them now, so when they're 16 I don't have to worry about them.

or

But it's . . . it's hard as far as, you know, raising the kids now because they've got so much going on out there . . . you've got to be so careful. Like when I was a kid I never had to worry about going down the street to play or anything like that and nowadays you can't let the kids out of your sight because there is all this stuff going on.

and

. . . And, so we went out and bought a television and a . . . that was a change in direction, I think for us, than what we originally wanted to go on. Then about '84, '85, both of us got totally fed up with the thing. The kids became walking TV guides-they knew when all the shows were on and it really was not a good influence for them. And so, we just simply instead of . . . trying to control the one that we had, we just got rid of it. That's the best way to control it. So, I think that it is a decision that we have made for the better.

In summary, family beliefs as a mechanism for defining family identity incorporated three themes: structure, childrearing beliefs, and philosophies. Narratives of parents' negotiation and view of their family's structure, as well as their values and beliefs offer clear indicators of family identity. Parents in this sample were similar in their collective wishes for their children that they grow to become respectful individuals, with educational aspirations. Parents

interviewed for this project were clear about the power of their parenting role, and the responsibility they shoulder as they create community within their family group.

Code: Family Expectations, Hopes, and Plans

Within the Family Identity class, a third code was called Family Expectations, Hopes, and Plans. Just as families envision their family structure, as described above, and outline guiding beliefs for their children, they also continue the process by imagining the future of their family life (see Figure 10).

CLASS	CODE	THEMES
Family Identity	Family Expectations, Hopes, and Plans	Goals/Hopes for Children Family Relationships

Figure 10. Code: Family Expectations, Hopes, and Plans.

Theme: Goals/Hopes for Children. The first emergent theme within this code was the way in which parents communicated their hopes and expectations both for and from their children. Similar to family beliefs, these goals/hopes fell generally into three categories including: education, citizenship, and family.

Not surprisingly based on earlier descriptions of espoused beliefs in the value of **education**, parents expressed goals for their children that included a college education. Parents also included comments regarding their belief that children were expected to do their best within their chosen interests. An example:

I'd like to see them graduate from college, you know . . . I have no high expectations. I believe that nowadays kids have to be in college. You know, its' sort of mandatory now. I just want them to grow up believing they're going to graduate from high school and go straight to college . . . Get that idea into their heads now. As far as what they want to be; whatever makes them happy. As long as they're happy doing what they're doing.

Closely related to parents' beliefs that children should behave and know right from wrong, they also expressed goals/hopes for their children to become **good citizens**, or caring people in the future. One father expressed this in a very general way:

My role as a parent . . . I don't know. I never had any expectations. I just play it daily. You know, I . . . I never set a goal as a parent. Just have good kids. Honest . . . honest good people. That's all I can ask of them.

or

I would just like to. I would just like my children to be, like I say, well-rounded individuals . . . I want them to respect life because they are human beings and I think if . . . I think if they can respect others and respect themselves and be responsible to themselves that will be . . . That will make me happy as a parent. It really will. If they can do those things.

Theme: Family Relationships. A third grouping of responses related to goals/hopes for children included **family relationships**. Several parents indicated their hope or expectation that their children would marry and have children. Additionally, several parents expressed the desire for their children to remain close with siblings in the future, resolving existing sibling rivalry. And lastly with regard to family relationships, parents expressed within their narratives hopes that children will be able to reflect back on their childhood with happy memories, valuing their family experience. For example:

Well, basically what my real intention is that they grow up liking themselves as adults or as people and if they feel good about . . . the family as a supporting unit. And I hope they take that with them. I think our strongest . . . probably our strongest value I think for them as people is to be thoughtful, caring individuals. And sometimes we feel like we've failed miserably,. But I mean, you know, that's a continuing process. . . .

or

I'm a single parent, so that's kind of different, too. I just talk to other adult friends, and a lot of them have good memories of their families, and I have others who have bad memories of their families. I just hope my kids have good memories, and I hope I can offer them help when they are adults.

In summary, Family Expectations, Hopes, and Plans as a mechanism for defining family identity incorporated two themes: Goals/Hopes for Children,

and Family Relationships, which outlined parents' image of the future for their children. Within the previous literature review, attention was given to the notion of "possible selves," representing what individuals conceive they might become (Markus & Nurius, 1986, 1987). Data in this sample support this notion, both with regard to family beliefs about structure of families, and with regard to future images of what their family, specifically what they imagine their children's futures to include.

Code: Critical Events

One last coded area in the Family Identity Class was called Critical Events. Data coded here related to happenings that were out of the planned/expected series of the life course, for example job losses or medical problems, including permanent disabilities. Also included in this code were descriptions of events interpreted by parents as particularly difficult. A full range of critical events were present across the sample. The most commonly reported kind of critical events were medical crises for family members. Next were deaths in the family (often a grandparent or great-grandparent), and lastly, accounts of miscarriages during the childbearing years. Other critical events noted in the family stories were divorces, pregnancy and birth complications, or a reference to a period of time with many stressful changes that the family experienced.

An interesting pattern was noted within the accounts of critical events. Regardless of the kind of adversity recounted by the family, it was usually

followed by a comment that suggested some type of resolution. An example of this can be seen in this father's narrative about his son:

. . . He's good in athletics, but he's not real naturally coordinated and that's due in part to his cerebral palsy. His right side is partially paralyzed so that he has . . . I think that has an impact on his ability to perform and to achieve things. . . . But he's very determined and . . . very stubborn, and if you will, very determined to accomplish things.

According to Borden (1992), "people revise accounts of life experience in the face of unexpected or adverse events so as to maintain a sense of coherence, continuity, and meaning" (p. 135). The resolution in these family stories supports this point, as parents often incorporated the way their family coped with a problem, or discussed pride at the way they handled a trying situation. For example, one mother discusses her divorce:

But one thing B. and I do is we really try to get along for the sake of the children. And that meant putting our hatred aside which is really hard to do. You know he resents me for pushing him into this, and I resented him for leaving. But we got over that and it was a hard thing to do. But that's one thing we're proud of, I think the most. Not so much that we had children, but what we're doing now with them. We're . . . that's something that we're just so proud of we can't. . . . We're like "Look at us! We get along!"

Critical event narratives that did not include some type of positively framed resolution were most often descriptions of miscarriages, or stillborn

children. This was the only category of critical events in which the number of unresolved accounts was larger than the resolved accounts. For example:

. . . Karen had two bad pregnancies prior to Rachel . . . where she miscarried, so I guess you'd call those complications. . . . The first one was about 2 years before [R.'s birth] and the second one was about a year before so that was pretty hard.

Interviewer: How did she deal with that or how did you deal with that?

Very badly . . . it wasn't one of the easiest things to go through in a relationship.

A common way to follow up on the report of a miscarriage was to report when the next child was born. It is possible that this is the family's way of positively resolving the loss. Among the more unusual and severe critical events noted within this sample were one death of a husband/father and one report of a child dying from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Inclusion of critical events in family narratives is important as it is another way in which the family defines itself, as having undergone a particular problem together. The coping and striving necessary for the family to survive all become part of that family story.

Connections to Others

What if any is the influence or contribution of family of origin and kinship groups?

These family stories contained details related to cultural family contexts, as well as information about relationships with friends and kinship groups. The families' connections to others were communicated in their stories through coded material in four areas: Extended Family Relationships, Kinship Groups, Intergenerational Themes, and Cultural Ties and Traditions (see Figure 11).

CLASS	CODES
Connections to Others	Extended Family Relationships Kinship Groups Intergenerational Themes Cultural Ties and Traditions

Figure 11. Connections to Others.

Code: Extended Family Relationships

Consistent with an emphasis on contextual relationships in family life (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980, 1988; Fischer, 1988), the interviews in this sample were analyzed with regard to this content. Interviews were coded for content referencing other family relationships. Within the narratives, three extended family themes emerged: structure, support, and stress (see Figure 12).

CLASS	CODE	THEMES
Connections to Others	Extended Family Relationships	Structure Support Stress

Figure 12. Code: Extended Family Relationships.

Theme: Structure. Consistent with other classes and codes reported thus far, within the Extended Family code, there was a strong element of structural reporting in the family stories. Parents took time to include an explanation of family of origin structure, as well as the birth order of their children in context with other nieces and nephews in the family. For example:

She was not a first grandchild. My sister married young and had her last child in 1969, so my parents youngest grandchild was 9 and their oldest was 16; and my in-laws had three grandchildren. I have only one sister, but my husband has 11 brothers and sisters. We come from very different backgrounds.

Theme: Support. A second theme within the Extended Family code concerned support parents received from family members. This support ranged from childcare, to information and advice, and housing, as several parents reported living with their parents for a period of time. Mothers, in particular, discussed **childcare assistance** they received from their mothers. For example:

And then we did have a bad experience with a babysitter when C. was a year old. It was a kind of an abuse thing . . . it certainly changed my feelings. Then I didn't work at all, I said, "Forget this" . . . and I stayed at home. Eventually, about 6 months later my mother said she would do it, and there was no way I would trust anybody else during the daytime.

However, fathers too noted family childcare support:

But we never did like leaving them with a babysitter. We never had, you know, a good babysitter so it was always one of my sisters or . . . well her dad didn't watch 'em back then . . . but, or my aunt . . . we lived two doors down from my aunt. . . .

Both mothers and fathers made reference to calling upon family members for **advice and suggestions**, especially when their children were infants. For example, one father notes:

The first time M. ever had a fever I called my folks and P. called her folks, it's like "Oh, what do we do, what do we do?" You know, it's like panicky you know, trying to get all this information."

or

". . . So we were only a few miles from them. So, it was nice being around there when the child was quite young. Plus I also think it helped with . . . J. had her Mom relatively close. When she had questions, it was always easy to call her Mom and ask her about things. That worked out real good.

Support took other forms as well, including the provision of **housing** in several circumstances. One mother who was divorced noted:

Well, okay there was a divorce. . . . I was divorced when M. was 4 years old and that was difficult. We lived in Rochester, and we had to move down to my parents. And we lived there for a year and a half.

Theme: Stress. While it was apparent that families with young children were clear in their recall of supportive efforts from their extended family, contact was not always experienced as positive. Family members at times presented needs for the young family to fulfill, as suggested by Fischer (1988) in her discussion regarding the allocation of family resources, and the potential for needy relatives to siphon off those means intended for young children. Stresses were noted in the same general arenas, as parents in the sample were called upon to provide eldercare, and housing, and at times received intrusive or unwanted advice. An example of one wife discussing the stress of **eldercare** for her husband:

I thought it was the right thing to do. Someone had to help with the grandparents. But the thing is that D. shouldered all the responsibility because his family is not like that. You know what I mean? He stepped in, he said, "Okay. Let's see now. Let's at least make sure . . . they won't leave the house. Let's make sure they have food and groceries and doctor visits and stuff like that. Well, his brothers could have cared less. You know. That's the way, I don't know, it was like there was a lot of animosity. I don't know. So anyways, so he did that for a long time, and they died 2 years ago.

Housing was provided for other relatives at times. For example:

. . . and relatives from back here in Michigan come out there and spend a month with us, while they got on their feet and got an apartment or

whatever. So M.'s brother lived with us for 3 months and broke his collar bone.

or

And we weren't here 2 months, and his mother happened to have a personal problem and wound up saying, could she stay for a few weeks, and she left last month. So, that has been probably the only change in how we had planned things to go.

And lastly within the stress theme, several parents commented on **unwanted advice**, or intrusiveness by their relatives. More than one mother noted the lack of support and criticism she felt around the issue of breastfeeding. For example:

I nursed both of them, I nursed her for 14 months. And I know my mother kept with, "Isn't it time to quit, isn't it time to quit that," you know, "blah blah blah blah blah." She couldn't stand it, that I was having a successful time. I guess, I don't know what to think, you know, she's been dead for 4 years so I can't ask her any more.

And at times, visits from family members that were intended as helpful were noted as intrusive by parents. For example, one mother expresses her ambivalence:

S. had a real normal delivery, natural delivery. We were in the hospital 3 days, and then I took him home, and I had some postpartum depression. I remember wondering what I was supposed to do, and. . . . My mother came for a while, and I felt she was an intrusion on my--I knew

she was there to help, but I really wanted her to go home so that I could be alone. So that we could just be a family and not have her there.

Alongside the support and stress related to extended families was a more general focus indicating overall gratification and enjoyment related to experiencing closeness with family members. For example, one husband discusses his view:

. . . and uh, I came to realize that . . . family is basically what it's all about and uh . . . I don't give her a hard time about going to the family gatherings or anything like that. I've come to enjoy them. Especially having the kids around too.

or

. . . We were . . . both of us have very, very close families and a . . . the families know each other so. . . Yea know, we grew up together.

or

. . . We would go up north. We have a place up north. Now we do; then we didn't. But his mom and dad did, so we would all camp over there. You know. Like on Memorial weekends or vacations, we would all go up north. . . .

For those couples who lived some distance away from extended family, they noted the loss of family closeness, as well as a variety of ways they coped with their circumstances. For example:

We try to, since our families are so far away in New Jersey, we try to do the best kind of bonding that we can. When they were smaller it was a

hello on the phone and the older they got the more accustomed they got to . . . their 'week' in a compacted visit with the family . . . and know who everyone was. And we had a picture on the wall, "This your grandma and this is your other grandma." So it was hard but a lot of other people. . . . It's nice out here because there's a lot of people who have been transported. We're not the only ones who are isolated from their families and stuff.

In summary, extended family relationships were consistently included in family descriptions in this sample. Some of the ways family members described support for one another included: providing care, advice and information, and housing. More often, parents with young children were on the receiving end of such support, but not always. Generally, families noted a value of family closeness, and enjoyment regarding time spent together. It was not possible to assess patterns of contact between maternal family of origin versus paternal families, as described by Fischer (1983a, 1983b, 1983c), given the more general nature of data in these family stories.

Code: Kinships Groups

The volume of content coded Kinship Groups was less than that of Extended Family Relationships, but the described functions of the two groups appeared similar in nature. Like extended families, kinship groups were defined for this study as combinations of people, both family members or friends, who surround, encircle, and participate in the development of one individual or set of siblings. To distinguish between extended family, kinship

groups were coded separately, and included data references to non-family members, usually identified as friends.

Women in this sample were more likely than men (22:14) to reference contact with kinship groups. Kinship groups in this sample were from four general groups: friends of both parents and children, neighbors, church relationships, and playgroups. The two functions of the contact appeared to be advice and information, particularly from parents of same-age children, and childcare. In those cases where family or friends were not available, parents noted the absence and need of this role in their lives. One father discusses his experience:

Here you are at age 24 and you don't know what to expect. You don't know what's good or bad, you don't have enough friends who have kids. Of the group we hang around with, which, believe it or not, I have been hanging around with since I was in grade school, we were the first ones to have kids, by 3 years. So had no method of comparison. We had no gauge by which to measure.

A mother discusses the way kinship groups helped her:

Probably when they were almost about one, we met some people; then we just started meeting some people with kids around the same age and we started trading off [childcare]. And that was good for me, and I knew that I was the kind of person that just needed space for myself and just away, you know, at times.

Or one father explains his wife's efforts:

I give a lot of credit to C. When the kids were younger, she invented a support group, they called Play Group. She had four or five peers—kids the same age. They'd rotate houses and they'd come over; the mothers would sit around and chit-chat for 3-4 hours and the kids would play in the basement. They structured activities for them. That went on for several years, which I thought was a real innovative idea. . . .

Another explanation of the role of a kinship group:

J. was exposed to a lot of different people. He had a lot of people who moved out from Michigan so we were surrounded by a lot of friends. . . so he wasn't by . . . family, but it was like a . . . Michigan family. But he had a lot of . . . a lot of male roles, female roles because we were constantly accompanied with other people who lived here.

Lastly, one divorced woman notes the powerful role of a particular person in her life:

. . . And, I . . . I had an interim sitter, D.G., who is now E.'s first grade teacher, for about a month and a half, until J. was certified for extra kids or whatever. And, since then J.'s pretty much raised the kids with me. She is my significant other as far as raising my kids. But it's been real stable for them. I mean, extremely stable. And, umm, that has been good. And, we had some tough times at the beginning. . . .

In summary, beyond the distinction of family relationship, kinship groups function in the same ways as extended families with parents in this sample, with the exception of providing housing. Parents note the circle of assistance

in managing the demands family life, particularly when their children were young.

Code: Intergenerational Issues

What if any is the influence or contribution of family of origin and kinship groups?

Thus far we have noted the role of extended family and kinship groups in supporting and equipping families during the transition to parenthood. Carter & McGoldrick (1980, 1988) suggest that the nuclear family is a three-generational system that reacts to pressure from generational tensions as well as developmental transitions. These family stories were analyzed for content referencing intergenerational influences, separate from operative, current relationships with families. Five different themes emerged from this analysis (see Figure 13).

CLASS	CODE	THEMES
Family Identity	Intergenerational Issues	Structure Direct Messages Heredity Recapitulation Repair

Figure 13. Code: Intergenerational Issues.

Theme: Structure. Intergenerational influences on family identity were noted, at a basic level, on individual choices regarding family structure. Parents, in the narratives examined here, reflected on their own childhood experiences in making determinations of whether or not they wished to construct a replication

of their own family constellation, or produce an amended composition. A common approach was to space the **years between children** in some pattern that related to their own childhood experience. For example:

The interesting thing there was . . . I guess that was kinda' a goal, too, to have two kids close in age. Why? So we can raise them at once. Secondly, so these two are able to become best pals, which was something that I really didn't have when I was a kid, because my sister and brother are 4½ and 6 years younger than me, respectively.

Likewise, parents addressed the issue of family **size**, based on their own family experience, either replicating or making adjustments. One mother noted the following:

I think the other thing that influenced me was that I was one of five children, and I was extremely aware of how busy my mother's life was for having. . . . And I didn't want to be the mother of that for a long time . . . because I knew what work it was. . . .

The creation of a new family based on intergenerational experiences also included the issue of **gender**.

Um, when she came along, it was another interesting story. I never wanted any girls, because my mother and I never were very close and I didn't want to have to submit my daughter to the same relationship that I had with my mother. And the only reason my mother and I don't get along is because we are so much alike. You know, we get along okay now. So, when she was born, I was disappointed, and my husband

was ecstatic. He was ecstatic the first one was a boy and he was ecstatic because the second one was a girl.

Theme: Direct Messages. Stories were also examined for explicit information related to the influences of previous generations. Only two parents quoted specific messages they had received from their origin families. One woman noted her husband's conviction to keep a job that was destructive to him:

I think what happened if you want our life story in a nutshell: we got together, we fell in love, we screwed a lot, we got married, the kids came and it was instant adult and time to grow up, and both of us bolted. My being a mother, God must do something to mothers to make them a little more hardened I guess. . . . But he bolted, I mean he stuck with a job that he hated, just to be a good provider, because I'm sure that's all he heard all his life, "You provide for your kids, no matter what. . . ."

In discussing her family's response to the excess attention given to first child one mother notes a family saying:

You know, his grandmother had a saying that there should be a rule against first babies. She died the year B. was born. That was kinda' sad, because I identified with her, she made me think of my own grandmother, the one I named her after.

Theme: Heredity. Separate from such messages being handed down generation to generation, eight parents noted family heredity as a way to explain a variety of phenomenon in their family, ranging from medical issues to personality styles. For example, one mother notes her daughter's similarity to her own sister:

It could be heredity. I have a sister that's 13 months older than me and she's exactly the same. My sister has no friends. When we—she's in Iowa now and I'm in Michigan—when we go back to Illinois . . . if we go out with friends, it's my friends because she doesn't have any. Umm, she just doesn't seem to need them, K.'s [daughter] kind of like that.

Another mother talks about her family history with pregnancies:

They took her too soon. She . . . because I carried 10 months—and that's history. My mother, my grandmother, my sister, my whole family carries 10 months.

Theme: Recapitulation. Beyond structure the recapitulation/repeat versus compensation/repair question was repeated in a variety of other family contexts. Several families noted their intent to replicate a generally **positive family experience**. For example:

We had known each other from before, and I think our families are alike . . . there are a lot of similarities. In fact, both parents had mothers and fathers from the old country. And we are all pretty close knit. We all had some pretty strong values about families and loving each other. I think that was a real connection between J. and I when we first met. I

think once we got married, a lot of what we had grown up with influenced the way we raise our kids now. There might be a few things we do differently than my parents did, but probably not a lot. I suspect that a lot of the guidelines I know I had when I was a kid, I still follow now. So far, it seems to have worked pretty good.

Another area in which parents strive to recapitulate their origin families related to **gender roles**. One father explains the perpetuation of the traditional female gender role in their family:

C. didn't work after she had the. . . . And she wanted to spend as much time as she could with her children. And I think it's paid off. The kids have commented that it's nice to have Mommy home when they come home from school. My mother never worked and her mother never worked either, so we always felt that it was nice to have Mommy home when you get home from school and we were fortunate that we were able to provide that for our kids.

or a mother notes her son's modelling of his father's temper:

You know . . . I think he's watched . . . of course being a boy he's going to look up to his dad . . . so his dad has a temper . . . when things don't go right his way . . . you know about it. You know if he's working on a car . . . you know things start flying and he gets mad and swears . . . well T. has picked that up too. So when he was working on his bike and it doesn't go . . . he's mad at everybody. You know, he'll have his tantrum out there.

One mother notes the way in which she replicated a **marital pattern**:

I was raised with a father who was a salesman. So he [husband] was gone, back and forth, in and out, so it didn't seem strange to me. And I'm pretty independent, too, so that didn't bother me. . . .

Theme: Compensation and Repair. Parents noted similarities between themselves and their children, both positive and negative. However, when a **negative similarity** was noted, parents also discussed the ways they were trying to change this trait in their child. For example, a father describes:

. . . But with him being the oldest I expect more out of him and see a lot of me in him. . . . When I was younger and I had a pet die . . . [I'd get] really emotional and so he's the same way. He's more emotional though than what I was. And his attitude is the same as mine . . . "Well I want to go out so I'm going to bug you until you let me out." And that's the way I was. He doesn't get into as much trouble as I did . . . that's one thing I'm glad about. But I think a lot of it is because I do see me in him . . . that's why I'm so tough on him though. . . .

or

J. is more like me, she's a loud mouth, and a talker and if you don't slap her or shut her up she just takes over the whole family situation.

Just as families handed down gender roles, families try to undo **gender roles** as well, as was the case with this mother:

One tantrum after another, and we never broke them up. And I felt I was raising him the way I had seen my father being treated, you know the male role model--get everything you want and you get it by having a tantrum, having a fit. And I felt that's how I was raising him. I see now that it's wrong. And it isn't working, but, um we're working on that one.

Parents noted perceived parental deficits in their own experience as children, and discussed their efforts to compensate in this generation as parents, as suggested by Parke (1994).

. . . but I hope they have good memories and that they always feel like they were loved. That is the most important thing to me . . . that they know they were wanted and loved, and that they are very special to me, and they're not a burden, and I'm really glad that they were born. I kind of feel like that with my parents--they really didn't make me feel loved enough, and I really want my kids to feel that self-confidence stuff.

In summary, intergenerational issues, as an extension of connections to others in family identity formation, is a powerful influence with solid representation in narratives. Viewing families as a three-generational system that reacts to beliefs and pressures (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980;,1988) that precede current generations under study is supported by the data in this sample. Families' inclusion of intergenerational material was reflexive and spontaneous, indicating the centrality of their presence during this transitional phase of family development.

Code: Cultural Ties and Traditions

Families must be studied within their unique cultural, religious, and ethnic context (Saleeby, 1992). Narrative material coded in Cultural Ties and Traditions included references to cultural, religious, or ethnic origin, as well as descriptions of unique family traditions. While it is known that parents in this sample are primarily European Americans, relatively few noted this or any reference to culture or country of origin. However, a few who were first or second generation in this country did include some descriptive information related to their particular family background. For example:

I grew up with a good set of parents that always took care of me and loved me. . . . My mother is a lot more cheerful and lot more optimistic. My Dad grew up in kinda' a strict, not strict, but somewhat strict, Italian home. His parents were born in Italy. So, his family was much more rigid than my Mom's was. And our house tended to be, when I grew up at least, a lot more like my Mother's, a lot more flexible than my Dad's.

Another example in which a mother notes both her cultural heritage, as well as related family traditions is as follows:

And we're real close with my parents, probably more than my husband's parents. So they spend a lot of time with those grandparents. I was born in Finland so . . . my family is bilingual in that respect. And . . . so that's maybe a little bit different in terms that . . . when R. was a baby I spoke nothing but Finnish to him. So his first word was mother in Finnish. . . . That, of course, when I went back to work, that became

harder when he was with . . . English-speaking people but . . . we've kept . . . that part we're . . . sort of ethnic. In that, we were in Finland last summer with our whole family. And . . . so some of the traditions . . . like Christmas Eve we have a big family tradition of going over to my mom and dad's. And we have a very traditional Finnish meal and stuff like that. So they've kind of kept . . . both kids have had that exposure that's maybe a little bit different than . . . some--a family that's completely . . . American.

References to American culture and religious traditions were not identified as such, although they were also included in the narratives. For example, several families noted Christian Christmas holiday traditions:

Um, I don't know, we were real active after he was born, as far as not hiding from the rest of the world. We always had chopped down our own Christmas tree and we put him in a little front pack under our winter coats when he was 6 weeks old and went out and cut a tree down. . . .

Additionally, several parents noted family-owned cottages "up north" and holiday visits. This tradition could be considered a geographically based norm that several families in this sample shared. Lastly, at least one family shared a description of a ritual or tradition established within their own family.

We . . . nothing . . . maybe nothing extravagant or anything like that, but like in the winter time we have . . . Friday night usually is family night where we'll either I'll make homemade pizza and they'll help me pile the junk on, or a taco or a nacho or something like that, and then we'll get

a movie, either rent a movie or have a movie. Or lots of times it ends up being that we'll watch a sporting event because they're really all into sports

In summary, parents note the effects of their own origin family experience, heredity, and culture in forming and sustaining their own family identity. By reflectively evaluating their own experience being parented, they include reparations in their narrative. Additionally, family beliefs and values assessed to have merit are preserved, by instilling them in their children. In this way family identity is consolidated and transferred to the next generation of members.

In Support of the Literature

Several points regarding the transition to parenthood literature have been included throughout the preceding report of results. Several other findings must also be included to form a comprehensive exploration. Family development theory, with its focus on the **life cycle** itself (Mattessich & Hill, 1987) is supported by these family narratives, as these parents have incorporated and defined for themselves developmental themes related to the challenges of building a career/economic base, marriage, and family. While other family theories provide useful models for exploration of family life, the dimension of time must remain an integral element. Layers of contextual history and prior experiences interact to influence parents' response and eventual adaptation to childrearing (Goldberg & Michaels, 1988).

Secondly, these stories highlight the need for **flexible and interactive systems models** of family development, such as Carter & McGoldrick (1980, 1988), as their stories are filled with examples of the overlapping complexities involved in raising children in contemporary society. These families are constantly interacting with culture, community, extended family, and kinship groups as they move through time.

Another dimension of the Carter and McGoldrick model (1980, 1988), the need for attention to the **young adult phase** of development with its focus on family individuation issues and career preparation, is supported by data in this sample. Parents constantly referenced career development as well as their connection to origin families, by describing their structure and discussing ongoing support, ambivalence, and conflict. More research is needed to specifically address particular patterns resulting from this juncture in development.

Relatedly, repeated themes of **recapitulation/repair** in the data supports the literature pointing to the psychological re-awakening of childhood issues (Antonucci & Mikus, 1988; Fischer, 1988). A number of parents reported such an experience--". . . you kind of sort of re-live part of your own childhood in terms of what they are going through . . ."--factoring their reflections into decision-making while creating a new family. Intergenerational themes and issues were readily apparent as parents re-created family patterns or re-ordered their new families.

More specific literature findings related to attachment and maternal representations of self were not able to be fully explored with this data set, given the more general nature of parents' comments. However support was noted for the development of coherent narratives in the face of adverse circumstances, as the mothers had done in studies predicting secure and insecure attachments through narrative exploration (Main et al., 1985). Parents developed coherent narratives as evidenced by their comments incorporating resolution in response to accounts of critical events.

The active role of **extended family and kinship groups** (Fischer, 1983a, 1983b, 1988; Hill, 1970) in providing support for families was clearly evidenced in the narratives. While the analysis of this study could not ascertain distinctive patterns in families, the collective need present in these family stories evidences the need for such support. In families where there was a noted absence of family contact, kinship groups provided similar functions. Where extended families were noted to be a source of stress in some situations, kinship groups were not. This points to the property in some families in which expectations and commitments to remain in contact with one another outweigh conflicts and tensions; a dynamic not always present with non-family relationships.

While data in this sample do not provide researchers with numbers of contacts with community and family members, they provide us with important information regarding the function and meaning of these contacts for parents. One parent noted the **meaning** of having her children:

Obviously we were . . . we didn't have any children for awhile and so were free to go out . . . to go on vacation or whatever. And then when you have kids, it's a different story. You give . . . a lot of giving, but that's just how it is. But I think a . . . having kids is more important than worldly things. You know, the experience of having them I would never trade it for. . . . And, living with a child . . . right, the same . . . it's a lot of giving. Definitely. It's...can be difficult at times, but you look at the good. There's more good than anything.

Another mother comments on her perception of the transition to parenthood:

And my relationship with my husband was a friendship; you know we were really good friends. And we had a lot of fun together. I remember telling B. that I was pregnant. It was so much fun. He brought flowers home and we were both really excited. Getting ready and preparing was a lot of fun. And the last day, walking out to go to the hospital, we both looked at the house and we both knew it was the last moment we would ever be alone together. We knew there was a change that was taking place.

Summary

An analysis of this group of family stories provides family theorists with insights into the meaning of family life. The use of ECA with qualitative interviews of parents who have transitioned into parenthood, and who use their own words to tell us the story of their family, provides researchers with a vastly

different perspective into the lives of families than is possible with a purely quantitative approach.

Evidence is provided in this analysis that suggests family identity is formed by integrating one's view of self, along with one's family group. Together couples formulate beliefs and hopes, which mix with the unfolding of everyday life and critical events over time. These things intertwine with layers of context including culture, extended family, kinship groups, and intergenerational relationships to create a new history of traditions and ways of being together that serve to solidify the group collective.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Prior to a discussion of research and practice implications, it is important to give attention the perspective of culture in the analysis of these stories.

Collective Narrative of Culture

Wider cultural and historical narrative provide the frames of reference within which individual narratives can be either constructed or understood (Laird, 1989). Historical and cultural events (e.g. political conflicts, economic recessions, popular culture) impinge upon the collective family story of a city or community (Cowan, 1991). An important perspective on the results detailed in Chapter 3 is to view them as a collective story for a small sample of families living in a large Midwestern suburban area in the late 1980's.

With that view, a different set of historical, economic, cultural markers emerge as influences in the transition to parenthood. Where initially, the researcher might examine how a family copes with a job layoff, the cultural/historical perspective focuses on the meaning of **layoffs** in the late 1980s in this automotive industrial-laden community. For example, one mother notes:

But with A., well, I worked full time for the next 4 years. My pregnancy with A. was easy healthwise, but as a family we underwent a lot of

stress because of our financial situation and my work situation was very stressful. It was during the time when all the auto companies were laying off and everything was falling [sic] in Michigan. I felt overworked at work and at home, as both a wife and a mother. . . . I was commuting 35 miles to work, my husband was taking a bus into downtown Detroit and there were nights when he'd call me and say the bus had trouble and once he got almost held up by someone on the bus, and I worried about him in different parts of town late at night trying to get the bus home. It was a stressful time.

An example of the effect of a major American historical event is also presented in the perspective of the **Vietnam** veteran who describes his reticence to have a child in a time of uncertainty.

I was one of the victims of the Vietnam era, where I was in college during that period, probably more for the purposes of student deferment rather than concentrating on the education. Anyway, for the time period from about 19-25, was a wild and exciting point in my life. I proceeded to get drafted when I was 21, and realized that I really didn't want to do the Vietnam war thing if I could help it. I ended up in the Marine reserve for 6 years. And during that time frame, it was a kind of uncertain world. There was a lot of anxiety and question about what was going on. Anyway, I met C. I had been in the reserves for a year or two. I think the first year I was back, doing one weekend a month, which I never really cared for when I was doing it. But, one of the assumptions

that I had made was that I wasn't really ready for a family at that point in time, because we weren't really sure where the world was. They didn't stop bombing Hanoi until '72 or '73. So, we kinda' both mutually agreed that we wanted to do some things for ourselves. And during the first years of marriage, we travelled quite a bit, socialized quite a bit with friends, and managed to hit Acapulco, Jamaica, and those kinds of places, which is really kind of nice. I was still in the reserves, so we had to schedule them around the Weekend Warrior things, and so forth.

That remains sort of, that was one of the stress factors in my life in that time frame. And I convinced myself that once I got out of the reserves, then we could start talking about kids, at least when I was certain I wasn't going to get activated and sent off to some far foreign land. . . .

In contrast, a popular culture issue related to the impact of **television** on family life. Numerous parents discussed their fears, beliefs, concerns around the role of television and their child's development. An indepth exploration of this historical period would examine mass media views on television in the late 1980s. Clearly these parents were struggling with the realization of the impact in their family. One father notes:

And there's a couple of things that really bother me about the marketing and commercials on television today . . . subverting the minds of kids and I just a . . . don't want my kids to be a party to that. . . .

or

I miss morning activities and there are some good educational programs on television, but for the most part there's not a lot really good on commercial television. . . .

Additionally, the narratives in this sample also include examples of the powerful impact of **literature** in popular culture on one father's transition to parenthood. This father describes his response to reading Roots (Haley, 1976):

While we were in Hawaii, I was reading Roots. [In the book] His father explains the custom of the tribe is that the woman would give birth, and the father would decide on a name for the child then come get the child and take the child out of the village and tell the child his/her name first. The explanation was that the baby had the right to be the first to hear his name. I was completely captivated by that idea, and that is what we did with V. After we decided on the name, we never told anybody until the child heard it first. It wasn't really intentional at the time, but I think what it did for me was to redirect my attitude into not thinking of her as a child but of her as a person with rights and deserving of all the courtesies that every other person would receive from me. We started treating her like a person right from the start. A small, helpless person, but still a person.

In summary, while these studies were analyzed from a developmental perspective to aid in the formation of family theory, it is clear that they tell a

wider story regarding family life in the American midwest. They must also be viewed within the influence of their history and culture.

Changes In Societal Demographics: The Scope of Diversity

The proportion of nuclear families in the United States is decreasing, and the proportion of what has been considered non-traditional families is on the rise. According to figures from the Current Population Reports (Saluter, 1994), children under the age of 18 are considerably more likely to be living with only one parent today than two decades ago. The number of single parents went from 3.8 million in 1970 to 9.7 million in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). As marital circumstances of the adult population change, so do the living arrangements of children. The rise in divorce and delay in first marriage are two of the major factors contributing to this situation.

As the proportion of "traditional" families decreases, the number of families with alternative structures increases including single parent, remarried, adoptive, foster, grandparent, and same-sex partners rearing children (Cope-land & White, 1991). The following is an abbreviated summary of changes contributing to the rising number of alternative family types.

The complexion of families with adopted children is changing as well. Traditionally these families were made up of infertile couples with their adopted healthy infants, or those intact families who wanted additional children. Now adoptive families include rising numbers of couples who adopt children with disabilities, intrafamily adoptions that occur within remarriages, or adoptions by

heterosexual and homosexual single individuals as well as unmarried couples who wish to have children (Hanson & Lynch, 1992).

The number of children residing in foster care has grown by approximately 50%, from 270,000 children in 1985 to 360,000 in January 1990 (Pelton, 1990). This is attributed to rising numbers of children who are born having been prenatally substance exposed. These children present with a wide variety of developmental difficulties that change the qualities previously sought in potential foster parents. Children who have suffered abuse/neglect while in the care of their biological family also reside in foster care for longer periods of time, despite recent efforts to intervene and reunite these families (Pelton, 1991).

Grandparents are far more likely now than in years past to become primary caretakers for their grandchildren, with numbers rising to 3.4 million in 1993 (Saluter, 1994). This is related to the rising number of teen pregnancies, drug or alcohol addicted mothers, or otherwise emotionally or disabled parents.

Social change has also permitted more opportunities for unmarried heterosexual and same sex partners to rear children (Hanson & Lynch, 1992). Often counted or registered as single parent households, these families are hidden from view. Other changes in family demography include the widening age range of childbearing, the reduction in family size, the increasing culture and language of origin identification, and an increased acknowledgement of spiritual and religious affiliations (Hanson & Lynch, 1992). Additionally, the

issue of economics and childcare options is common to all families, regardless of structure. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1995), there were 9.9 million children under the age of 5 who were in need of care while their mothers were at work. In 1993, the median income of married couple households was \$43,129. For female-headed households, the median income was only \$18,545. Obviously, the cost for childcare alone, often 20% of the family income (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995), for poor families constitutes a major financial challenge. These pressures are often omitted from family assessments conducted for the purposes of research or practice. These changes require that family researchers, practitioners, and policy makers broaden and expand their understanding and definition of contemporary families to be more accurate and inclusive, enabling them to make more relevant contributions in their respective arenas.

Family Definition

Given the above changes we must recognize that family definition, family identities, and family pressures are in the process of modification.

Hanson and Lynch (1992) propose the following definition:

Family is considered to be any unit that defines itself as a family including individuals who are related by blood or marriage as well as those who have made a commitment to share their lives. The definition includes the 'traditional' nuclear family but also embraces lifestyles that range from extended family and kinship networks to single parents and

to same-sex partners living together. The key elements are that the members of the unit see themselves as a family, are affiliated with one another, and are committed to caring for one another. (p. 285)

Adoption of and more conscious attention to such a definition can become a working tool in itself in efforts to respond sensitively to a wider range of people and experiences in our day-to-day work. With this in mind, one can see ways in which continued reliance upon historical, traditional, or mainstream definitions of family limits the scope of study and its generalizability.

Regardless of how the family is considered, individually, institutionally, or as an element of society, the issues and experiences for members are common personal, private concerns. These are not incidental or trivial experiences--they are highly salient. When asked about various aspects of their lives, Americans say that family life brings them greater feelings of satisfaction than any other dimension of life (Cowan, 1991). For these reasons as well as reasons related to increasing economic challenges and social pressures, we must continue to expand our search for knowledge in a manner that supports, guides, and directs us toward inclusive, comprehensive, and relevant conceptual and practice frameworks.

Bridging Research, Theory, and Practice

Moon, Dillon, and Sprenkle (1990) posit that qualitative research has the potential to reunite clinicians and researchers, as qualitative methods are close

to the world of the clinical. Qualitative researchers ask questions similar to those of clinicians, for example, "What is going on here and why?", and utilize adaptations of clinical skills to locate the answers to those questions.

As evidenced by the complexity of these family stories, and the inability to isolate any particular theme without considering its relationship to the previous information and the larger context, qualitative methods may be more effective than quantitative in grappling with the full complexity of systems theory. "Like systems theory, qualitative research emphasizes social context, multiple perspective, complexity, individual differences, circular causality, recursiveness, and holism" (Moon, Dillon, and Sprenkle, 1990, p. 354).

A methodological underpinning of qualitative family research is diversity. Qualitative researchers are part of a growing movement of people who understand that families appear in diverse forms in diverse settings, have diverse experiences, and appear differently in different times in history. It is true that the sample under study in this project lacks diversity of ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, structure, etc. However, it is possible to note the complexity of family experience present in this group. The results of this study with a homogenous group point directly toward the need for qualitative research as a method with more diverse groups of families. This project could be replicated with families of divergent forms: divorced and remarried families; parents and their adoptive, foster, biological or adult children; extended families in which many forms of families are embedded; families with committed homosexual relationships; elders and the generations born before them;

and heterosexual unmarried couples. Comparative results would yield interesting direction for those interested in the continued advancement of family development and particularly family identity.

Three classes of questions guided this inquiry into the transition to parenthood: Individual Identity, Family Identity, and Connections to Others. While the findings of these classes have been presented, it is important to consider each in the context social work research and practice.

Individual Identity

The focus on individual identity in this dissertation is important, as much research and subsequent practice filters back to conclusions and interventions with individuals themselves. The value in viewing individual development embedded in family development is critical when considering that the parent's adaptation to parenthood will bear heavily on the burgeoning parent-infant relationship, and subsequent infants' development (Goldberg, 1988). The unique needs of families during the transition to parenthood have stimulated a number of research and intervention strategies designed to assess maladaptive potentials and promote growth in families. Results in this study confirm the need for continued efforts in this vein, as stories detail the myriad pressures existing for parents in a contemporary society where gender roles and prescriptions for behavior are in flux, and economic demands are high.

Family Identity

Family myth, defined as a series of well-integrated beliefs which preserve homeostasis, was a concept created by Ferreira (1963). Byng-Hall (1973, 1979, 1988) expanded the use and discussion of the construct with his focus on family legends as central to family history. Today structural or transgenerational theorists, Boszormenyi-Nagy (1984) and others, more readily reference variations of myth in their family therapy work. Laird (1989) notes that family therapists have tended toward utilization of the destructiveness of myth in rigid or dysfunctional families, but have shown less appreciation for the central role of myth in all families, as a vehicle for richness and creativity in family folklore.

Social work research journals today are sprinkled with various articles explaining the value of narrative in therapy as an intervention tool (Borden, 1992) and particularly as a useful tool in multicultural practice (Holland & Kirkpatrick, 1993; Saleebey, 1994). The narrative method in social work research is more slowly gaining recognition, but advocates like Laird (1989) highlight the profession's need to embrace constructivist ideology.

The results of this dissertation are clear. Qualitative interviews of family stories provide a valuable method for understanding family identity. Family narratives provide rich information that clinicians and researchers can utilize in their separate endeavors. Well beyond family myths or beliefs, the parents in this sample detailed structure, struggles, and strengths they discovered in themselves as they worked to raise their children. Family identity, or the ways

in which families define themselves and communicate their shared personality, as an expanded construct separate from family myth, needs additional attention within the narrative movement in both research and practice.

Clinical research efforts should seek to evaluate shifts in narrative content and construction throughout the course of the therapeutic relationship. Research should also continue to acknowledge the meaning of events and impact of experience as perceived by the participant (Borden, 1992). By focusing such research on family identity, families, clinicians, and researchers could learn to attend to the core perceptions that families adhere to and employ in guiding behavior. The construct has relevance for both clinical samples as well as samples used for the purposes of normal developmental theory building.

Connections to Others

The Connections to Others class in this investigation is characterized most clearly by its inseparability with both Individual and Family Identity. Identity is formed in relation to relationships. An examination of identity development within the context of extended family relationships, kinship groups, intergenerational themes, and cultural ties and traditions yields support for what is already known. Families cannot be understood in a vacuum, as their form is contingent upon what creates and maintains them.

Research describing active relationships with extended family and kinship groups is more readily available than that exploring the nature and

meaning of families' connections to previous generations. This particular family context is difficult to access by its very nature. The results of this investigation highlight the value of the narrative method as an effective tool in better understanding intergenerational issues. Parents in this sample spontaneously referenced origin family experiences as a basis from which to construct their new family. Other parents noted the ways they aimed to preserve their own family's ways of doing things without specifying such activity as a family tradition.

Recent understanding regarding the importance of culture in conducting family therapy as well as family research brings us closer to the inclusion of intergenerational issues as a key variable. One way families gain entrance into their particular culture is through interactions, stories, and traditions of those from preceding generations. Both practitioners and researchers should attend to Carter and McGoldrick's (1980, 1988) effort to incorporate intergenerational issues as a primary variable influencing development. Narrative methodology is one vehicle with which to address past, present, and future perspectives with families.

In conclusion, given the vast array of changes in the world of families, as well as the necessary changes needed in the world of practice and research, family identity, coupled with continued efforts using qualitative methodology, have the potential to yield promising new answers for those interested in family theory.

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