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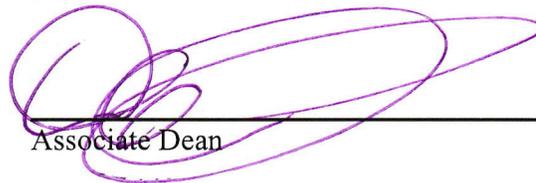
THE DARK SIDE OF GENEALOGICAL COMMUNICATION: ENGAGEMENT AND  
REFRAMING AS MEDIATORS OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DARK SIDE  
DIMENSIONS AND FAMILY IDENTITY

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THE DARK SIDE OF GENEALOGICAL COMMUNICATION: ENGAGEMENT AND  
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DIMENSIONS AND FAMILY IDENTITY

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Submitted to the Faculty  
Graduate Division  
Bob Schieffer College of Communication  
Texas Christian University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2017



The Dark Side of Genealogical Communication: Engagement and Reframing as Mediators of the  
Association Between Dark Side Dimensions and Family Identity

Texas Christian University, 2017

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This study explored the dark side of genealogical communication, and its association with frequent engagement, reframing, and family identity. The theoretical framework was built using communicated narrative sensemaking and narrative performance theory, and sought to extend recently-laid genealogical communication groundwork. Participants included 282 adults who completed an online survey in which they were asked to report on family stories, their family's storytelling behaviors, and family identification. Results revealed four dark side dimensions: painful, veracity, difference, and shameful. Three of these factors (painful, veracity, and shameful) predicted frequent engagement, which then predicted reframing, which, in turn, predicted family identity. Additionally, the full mediated path proved significant for these three dimensions; however, the direct effect between dark side and family identity proved insignificant. Overall, reframing emerged as the most significant mediator between dark side and family identity. The theoretical, methodical, and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

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The Dark Side of Genealogical Communication: Engagement and Reframing as Mediators of the Association Between Dark Side Dimensions and Family Identity

“Like me, people grow up and walk around with their stories under their skin, sometimes as weightless pleasures but sometimes painfully tattooed with them...” (Stone, 1988, p. 7). Indeed, although family stories are often considered to be positive, multiple scholars have acknowledged that family stories can also carry negative connotations (Stone, 1988; Koenig Kellas, 2005; Bishop, 2008; Lenz, 2011). Despite this acknowledgement, research into the characteristics and implications of such stories is lacking, prompting Koenig Kellas and Kranstuber Horstman (2015) to issue a call for more research into the dark side of family stories. Bolstering this call, Hendry and Ledbetter (2017), who built their empirical study on the theory of communicated narrative sensemaking, identified *dark side* as a genealogical communication behavior.

The dark side of communication has been a growing area of research for the past two decades, spearheaded by Cupach and Spitzberg (1994) with their inaugural book, *The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication*. In that time, dark side research has addressed many topics in the family communication realm, including family secrets (Afifi & Olson, 2005; Afifi, Caughlin, & Afifi, 2007), infidelity (Tsapelas, Fisher, & Aron, 2011; Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007), and abuse (Eckstein, 2007; Morgan & Wilson, 2007). Koenig Kellas, Willer, and Kranstuber (2011) added narrative research to this list, explaining how family stories and narratives can be dysfunctional, such as when imbedded cultural expectations do not support non-traditional family types, or when narrative inheritance dictates what stories will continue to be passed down or suppressed. However, extant research has yet to fully explain the mechanisms behind such issues as narrative

inheritance; in other words, what causes certain stories to be placed in the family canon and passed along, and others to be suppressed or discarded.

Furthermore, extant research—particularly in the areas of communicated narrative sensemaking (Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015) and narrative performance theory (Langellier & Peterson, 2006)—has established that family storytelling is a means of creating and perpetuating family identity. Family identity includes defining what it means to be a member of the family and providing rules for how family members should act in order to create a sense of belonging for the members (Stone, 1988; Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Moreover, Stone asserted that family identities are always considered positive by those adopting them. Thus, for families with negatively-valenced family stories, there may be a mechanism that allows them to create positive identities despite the presence of the dark side; Stone suggests that reframing may be such a mechanism. Therefore, the goal of the current study is to identify the dimensions that characterize the dark side, examine the dark side's effects on family identity, and evaluate frequent engagement and reframing as potential mediators of these effects.

## **Literature Review**

### **Genealogical Communication**

Research in the area of genealogical communication is currently in its infancy. Hendry and Ledbetter (2017) identified the dearth of extant research and thus sought to lay the basic groundwork by defining the concept and identifying the dimensions thereof. They conceptualized *genealogical communication* as “messages, often in the form of stories and narratives, that family members share about their family's history” (p. 118). Thus, genealogical communication encompasses a range of communicative behaviors, from sharing a vital statistic (e.g., Great-grandma's birth date) that would typically be found in a family tree, to sharing

stories or anecdotes of an event in the family's history (e.g., telling how Great-grandma was born in the back of a covered wagon).

Although some genealogical communication is characterized by small pieces of information, much family history is communicated via stories or narratives (Bishop, 2008). Thus, Hendry and Ledbetter (2017) built their research on the theory of communicated narrative sensemaking (CNSM), or the idea that humans make sense of their lives and experiences through narrative expression (i.e., storytelling) (Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015). Although previous CNSM research focused primarily on recent or shared family narratives (Koenig Kellas, 2005; Koenig Kellas, Willer, & Kranstuber, 2011), Hendry and Ledbetter demonstrated that genealogical communication is also appropriate to study through the CNSM lens; this is based on both CNSM and family genealogy research recognizing that family narratives serve to facilitate socialization and identification (e.g., Kranstuber & Koenig Kellas, 2011; Lenz, 2011).

With this connection established, Hendry and Ledbetter (2017) focused on the four central *interactional sense-making (ISM) behaviors* identified by Koenig Kellas and Trees (2006): engagement, perspective-taking, turn-taking, and coherence. These behaviors were originally identified in the context of observational research (e.g., a family triad relaying the story of a shared experience), so, informed by the retrospective survey research of Thompson and Schrodt (2015), Hendry and Ledbetter developed a genealogical communication survey measure to assess whether these behaviors are also present in the context of genealogical communication.

Consistent with Koenig Kellas and Trees (2006), Hendry and Ledbetter (2017) also identified the presence of four behaviors. These four behaviors were similar to those identified by Koenig Kellas and Trees, but not quite identical. The first behavior, *frequent engagement*, is

similar to the original engagement behavior in that it involves the degree to which the family is actively involved in the storytelling conversation, as well as their level of warmth. In addition to these characteristics, *frequent engagement* also includes how often family members engage in (versus avoid) such conversation. The second genealogical communication behavior, *coherent perspectives*, combines two of the original behaviors, *perspective-taking* and *coherence*.

According to Koenig Kellas and Trees (2006), *perspective-taking* is the ability of one family member to take the perspective of another, whereas *coherence* is the ability of family members to formulate shared meaning and interpretation. That these two combined to represent one behavior in the Hendry and Ledbetter study is not illogical, because in order for all family members to formulate a coherent interpretation, they often must first be able to understand each other's perspectives.

*Personal research*, the third genealogical communication behavior, refers to a family member conducting individual genealogical research (e.g., through online databases such as Ancestry.com, or through traditional methods such as accessing local records at a courthouse or library) (Hendry & Ledbetter, 2017). Although this behavior does not directly mirror any of the original four behaviors, it may be related to *turn-taking*. In the original context, turn-taking referred to the participants taking turns so that each person could contribute to the story (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). This was possible because, as previously mentioned, the family triads were telling a story about a shared experience; thus, each member had something to contribute. In a genealogical communication context, on the other hand, not all family members may possess the historical information needed to actively participate in the discussion (particularly newer or younger family members), thereby relegating them to passive listener. However, one way that

they could gain information that would enable them to become an active participant would be to conduct their own research.

Thus, each of the first three genealogical communication behaviors emerged with a clear definition and a connection to at least one of Koenig Kellas and Trees' (2006) original behaviors. In contrast, the fourth genealogical communication behavior, *dark side*, emerged with a vague definition and no clear connection to any original behavior (Hendry & Ledbetter, 2017).

### **Defining the Dark Side**

Hendry and Ledbetter labeled this fourth behavior *dark side* due to the seemingly negative nature of these items, and as a means of providing an initial interpretation of the factor's meaning; however, this label by no means indicates full understanding (Hendry & Ledbetter, 2017). The items loading onto this factor were diverse, including "When we talk about our family history, some family members seem bored and uninterested," "Some stories about my family's history are painful," and "I have heard different versions of our family history from different family members." To further compound the issue, this factor did not indicate a specific action as did the first three (i.e., participating in a conversation, understanding a different perspective, conducting research); thus, while the first three factors clearly presented as behaviors (as did the four original ISP behaviors; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006), it was unclear whether the dark side was a behavior, or rather a characteristic of genealogical communication. Indeed, the dark side factor seems to possess face validity as an *evaluation* of the narrative(s) rather than the *communication behavior* used to express it.

Hendry and Ledbetter (2017) are not alone in their struggle to conceptualize dark aspects of family histories. For example, Thompson et al. (2009) were unable to identify themes of negative family legacies, calling them "idiosyncratic," (p. 127), although themes of positive

family legacies were clearly identifiable. Additionally, Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) explained that the dark side has no singular meaning, is malleable, and that scholars struggle with finding the best label for the concept.

However, if this factor does conceptually align with dark side communication, then it is unlikely to be purely negative in nature. Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) asserted that the dark side not only encompasses concepts that are stereotypically negative, but those that are stereotypically positive, as well. They conceptualized the dark side as lying along two dimensions: (a) normatively productive versus normatively destructive, and (b) functionally productive versus functionally destructive. This then produces a typology with four quadrants: (a) the bright side (normatively and functionally productive), (b) what once was dark is now bright (normatively destructive/functionally productive), (c) what once was bright is now dark (normatively productive/functionally destructive), and (d) evil incarnate (normatively and functionally destructive). Of these, only the first quadrant—the bright side—does not fall under the purview of dark side research.

Of the remaining three quadrants, the idea behind the middle two (i.e., those that mismatch the functional and normative valences) is that the true valence of dark side concepts is less about societal perceptions and more about how the concept functions in a particular context. The once dark/now bright quadrant consists of those concepts that society would stereotypically deem to be negative, but serve a functional purpose (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). For example, society considers extramarital affairs to be morally destructive, but if it functions to expose problems in a marriage that the couple is then able to reconcile and build a stronger marriage, it is functionally productive, and thus, now bright. In contrast, concepts in the once bright/now dark quadrant would generally be considered positive, but ultimately cause destruction. For

example, a career promotion is generally met with happiness, but if the promotion is so demanding that it leads to the break-up of a marriage, then it is functionally destructive, and thus, now dark.

Additional typologies have been developed to help categorize and explain dark side characteristics (e.g, Duck, 1994; Perlman, 2000). However, these typologies are general in nature, meant to be applied across contexts, rather than identifying how the dark side manifests in specific contexts such as CNSM. As such, Duck (1994) called for researchers to incorporate the dark side into paradigms, theories, and human behavior models from the ground up. Hendry and Ledbetter's (2017) identification of the dark side factor in their initial genealogical communication study provides an opportunity to answer this call. Therefore, the first research question is aimed at extending the previous study and identifying specific dark side dimensions.

RQ1: What dimensions characterize the *dark side* genealogical communication behavior?

### **The Dark Side and Family Identity**

**The dark side and engagement.** One well-established function of family stories is to create and promote family identity. Indeed, Stone (1988) discussed this idea at length, describing how family stories define the family and provide instruction for how family members should conduct themselves. Moreover, she also explained that the purpose behind such definition and instruction is “meant less to fix family members in arbitrary or rigid roles than to provide cohesiveness and a sense of belonging” (Stone, 1988, p. 35). Additional scholars have also documented storytelling as a means for socializing new members into the family, creating belonging and teaching what it means to be a part of that family (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, & Rimmer, 1995; Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2012; Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015).

Langellier and Peterson (2006) moved beyond viewing storytelling as a means for merely creating family identity, and asserted that storytelling is in fact a way of performing family identity. In other words, storytelling both brings family identity into existence and then provides a vehicle through which to enact it. Therefore, based on this delineation between family identity existence and family identity performance, it stands to reason that family members can be aware of their identity without enacting it. Since storytelling is a mechanism for moving identity into performance, then the degree to which a family member engages in the storytelling act may be indicative of the degree to which they enact family identity, thus bringing the frequent engagement behavior to the forefront.

Frequent engagement, as previously mentioned, addresses family members' levels of involvement and degrees of warmth, as well as the frequency with which they engage in such conversation. In addition to identifying the dimensions of genealogical communication, Hendry and Ledbetter (2017) also examined the relationship between these dimensions and family communication patterns (FCP) (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002); frequent engagement was positively associated with both conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Thus, families high in both orientations (i.e., consensual families) would be the most likely to engage in genealogical communication, whereas families low in both orientations (i.e., laissez-faire families) would be the least likely. This is logical, because, as illustrated by Stone (1988), family stories cover many different topics, and families higher in conversation orientation are more open to discussing such broad range of topics than those low in conversation orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Correspondingly, families higher in conformity orientation have a greater expectation that family members will conform to family norms and values; since family

storytelling promotes family identity to create cohesion, it makes sense that this would be a vital tool for high-conformity families.

However, even in the most open families, one factor that could affect a family's willingness to discuss certain stories is the perceived valence of those stories. Indeed, Langellier and Peterson (2006) asserted that families use constraints to create boundaries around what stories can and cannot be told. Furthering this idea, Koenig Kellas et al. (2011) explained that while some family stories are supposed to be told, other stories—namely, those perceived as possessing a negative normative valenced—are expected to be silenced. The authors stated, “Dark acts and certain people are hidden or forgotten as families pass narratives through the generations” (p. 73). Galvin et al. (2012) also discussed the tendency of families to avoid sharing negative feelings, and to create rules surrounding taboo topics that are either discussed in veiled language, or more likely not discussed at all.

Norrick (2005) provides insight into how such rules are created through the concept of *tellability*. Tellability assesses whether a story is appropriate to tell in a given situation using both a lower-bounding side (i.e., the story must be interesting and noteworthy enough to be told), and an upper-bounding side (i.e., the story must not cross lines of impropriety). Koenig Kellas et al. (2011) addressed tellability in family stories, asserting that it is the upper-bounding side which causes some family stories to go untold. Indeed, stories cause embarrassment, humiliation, or pain to one or more family members, may cross the line into impropriety if told. Therefore, these types of family stories are likely to produce less frequent engagement. Moreover, both Norrick and Koenig Kellas et al. categorize this upper-bounding issue as residing in the dark side, which aligns with Hendry and Ledbetter's (2017) findings that their dark side construct includes families having stories that are identified as being embarrassing, painful, or shameful.

However, the upper-bounding side is only one part of tellability; the lower-bounding side must be considered as well. Since this side requires that a story be interesting enough to be told, certain levels or aspects of the dark side may be useful in order to create interest; this could also invoke the functionally productive aspect of the Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) typology, making what was dark now bright. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Individual dark side dimensions will predict frequent engagement with genealogical communication.

**Engagement, reframing, and family identity.** One potential outcome of frequent engagement is *reframing*. According to Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974), reframing is:

...to change the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the ‘facts’ of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changes its entire meaning. (p. 95)

Therefore, reframing is a form of sense-making and assigning meaning. Storytelling is a way that sense-making and assigned meaning occur (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Thus, it logically follows that frequent engagement leads to reframing. Indeed, Koenig Kellas and Trees found that families who rated high in engagement also demonstrated greater levels of sense-making. Furthermore, one such family story involved a painful situation (for one member specifically), but the family “collaboratively...developed the idea” (p.63) that the situation served to bring them closer together as a family. This is a prime example of reframing, with engagement as the mechanism.

In line with Watzlawick et al.’s (1974) definition, Stone (1988) asserted that “the facts of a family’s past can be selectively fashioned into a story that can mean almost anything, whatever

they most need it to mean” (p. 17). She provided several examples of such reframing, typically involving a shift in focus from the negative to the positive. For example, she discussed family stories about the Great Depression, an historical time that is associated with pain and suffering; yet she asserts that the reason these stories continue to be told in families is because they celebrate the family’s survival, rather than focusing on the negative details. Stone also related the story of an Austrian family that was nearly eradicated in World War II, save one lone survivor. Although the telling of this story includes the painful details, the focus and purpose seem to be on family loyalty, sacrifice, and motherly love. In each of these cases, the reframed story was then incorporated into the family identity.

Indeed, one tenet of NPT holds that family storytelling is a strategic means of creating and performing family identity (Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Langellier and Peterson claim that family storytelling is organized around familial interests and goals, which includes selecting which meanings to promote. As previously stated, reframing is one means of selecting and developing such meanings. For example, Thompson et al. (2009) explained that reframing is a way to handle negative family legacies that are a part of the family canon and are passed down from generation to generation. In their study, reframing occurred by identifying the positive function of the legacy (i.e., instruction for overcoming struggles or strengthening the family). Norrick (2005), in his discussion of tellability, identified additional methods of reframing. In that study, participants who elected to relate stories that were perceived as crossing the upper-bounding side used humor to reframe these stories, allowing the storyteller to mitigate the impropriety and place the story within acceptable levels of tellability.

However, it is important to note that reframing does not only occur in the direction of negative to positive; it can also occur in the opposite direction. Family legacies are passed down

to subsequent generations regardless of whether they want them or not (Stone, 1988; Thompson et al., 2009). If these younger family members do not want the legacy, then they may be likely to reframe into something more negative than it is. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Frequent engagement will positively predict reframing.

H3: Reframing will predict family identity.

**Mediated model of the dark side and family identity.** In this study, (a) H1 predicts that dark side dimensions will predict frequent engagement, (b) H2 predicts that frequent engagement will predict reframing, and (c) H3 predicts that reframing will predict family identity. This positions frequent engagement and reframing as mediators between dark side and family identity (see Figure 1). Koenig Kellas (2005) stated that interaction (e.g., frequent engagement) is a link between the stories themselves and the functions that they perform (e.g., family identity). Thus, the fourth hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Frequent engagement and reframing will mediate the association between dark side dimensions and family identity.

**The dark side and family identity.** Although the previous hypotheses predict a mediated path from dark side dimensions to family identity, there is likely to also be a direct effect. As previously mentioned, family stories function to create and perform family identity (Stone, 1988; Langellier & Peterson, 1996). Therefore, family storytelling behaviors, including those characterizing specific types of family storytelling such as genealogical communication, should be associated with family identity. Furthermore, considering this function in the context of Spitzberg and Cupach's (2011) dark side typology indicates that dark side can either be productive or destructive to family identity.

Indeed, Thompson et al. (2009) found that participants tended to embrace positive family legacies, but reject negative legacies. Rejection, whether the participant explicitly used this term or not, involved the participant choosing not to incorporate that legacy into their own identity; moreover, they often made a conscious attempt to act opposite the legacy (e.g., an individual with a family legacy of alcoholism choosing not to drink), thus enabling them to establish their own identity. Furthermore, in addition to rejecting negative legacies, participants had more difficulty recalling negative legacies than positive ones, reinforcing the idea of embracing the positive and rejecting the negative.

Stone (1988) also provided an example of rejection by enacting the opposite. An interviewee explained that previous generations of her family espoused the idea that sons could leave home to travel and pursue their dreams, but daughters were expected to remain in the family home and help run the family business. The interviewee indicated that, beginning with her mother, daughters were also encouraged to pursue their dreams, thus rejecting the original legacy. Additional evidence supports rejection of undesirable legacies: Koenig Kellas et al. (2011) asserted that families sometimes choose not to pass on negative events or certain individuals, and Lenz (2011) discussed how “particular aspects of the family history remain shrouded in shame-tainted silence” (p. 321).

Thus, because negative legacies tend to be rejected rather than accepted, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: The dark side of genealogical narratives will predict family identity.

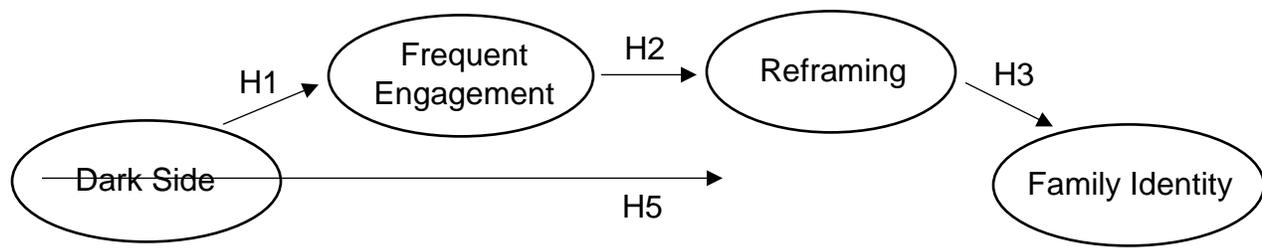


Figure 1. Model predicting the direct and indirect effects of the dark side on family identity with frequent engagement and reframing as mediators.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 282 participants (62.1% female) recruited from undergraduate communication courses at a mid-size, private university in the southwestern United States, and through a survey link posted on the social networking site Facebook. University students ( $n = 270$ ; 95.7%) received either course credit or extra credit for their participation. All participants were age 18 or over, and reported a mean age of 19.93 ( $SD = 3.34$ ), ranging from 18 to 40. The majority of participants identified as white ( $n = 221$ ; 78.4%).

### Procedure

University students received the survey link via course learning software to be completed on their own time. Facebook participants clicked on link included in a wall post. All survey responses were anonymous, and were preceded by an informed consent document. Participants began by providing basic demographic data (e.g. age, sex, ethnicity), then completed measures concerning genealogical communication within the participant's family and other family characteristics.

### Measures

**Family Identity.** Family identity was measured using the Family Identification Scale (Soliz, 2004; Soliz & Harwood, 2006). This measure consisted of 7 items, including "My attitudes, values, and beliefs are similar to those of my family," and "I feel as if we are members of one family." Responses utilized a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (7) *Strongly Agree*. Reliability and validity for this measure have been substantiated in previous studies (e.g., Beck & Ledbetter, 2013), and it achieved acceptable internal reliability in this study ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Family stories.** To assess potentially negative family stories and their impact, participants first received one of three prompts: “In your family, do you have a story about your family’s history that (a) you or a relative suspect may be untrue? (b) you or a relative believe is embarrassing? (c) you or a relative believe is painful?” The prompts were randomized with equal distribution. Participants responded with “Yes” or “No.” If the participant responded “No,” then they received a new prompt. If all three prompts were presented with no affirmative response, then the participant received a final prompt, asking, “In your family, do you have a story about your family’s history that you or a relative believe is negative in some way, even just a little bit?” If the participant again responded “No,” then the survey ended. If the participant responded “Yes” to any of the above prompts, including the fourth “catch-all” prompt, then they were asked to briefly describe this story using no more than 6 sentences. Additionally, they were instructed to keep this story in mind for the remainder of the survey.

Three measures assessed the participant’s personal beliefs and perceptions regarding this story. The first measure contained 10 items (e.g., “I personally believe this story to be true), and responses utilized a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (7) *Strongly Agree*. The second measure contained four items designed to assess the perceived negativity or positivity of the story. Responses utilized a 7-point semantic differential scale. For each item, the respondent selected a point along a continuum between two contrasting words (e.g., Unpleasant/Pleasant). Both of these measures were developed specifically for this study, and both achieved acceptable internal reliability ( $\alpha = .74$ , and  $\alpha = .94$ , respectively).

The next section was a revised version of the Genealogical Communication Measure (Hendry & Ledbetter, 2017), reworded to address the story-in-question specifically (e.g., “This story is a frequent topic of conversation in my family,” and “When talking about this story...”).

The measure was also revised to more fully capture the dark side dimension, with 25 items addressing various dark side aspects. As with the original measure, this measure consisted of 34 items, and responses utilized a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (7) *Strongly Agree*. This measure achieved less than ideal internal reliability ( $\alpha = .65$ ).

**Reframing.** Reframing was assessed using 7 items created for this study to supplement the Genealogical Communication Measure (Hendry & Ledbetter, 2017). These items included “My family looks for the good in this story,” and “My family reframes this story in order to provide advice for the family.” Responses utilized a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (7) *Strongly Agree*. Internal reliability ( $\alpha = .69$ ), though falling just short of traditional acceptability guidelines, was deemed acceptable for this study.

## Results

### Dark Side Dimensions

The first research question (RQ1) asked what dimensions make up the dark side genealogical communication behavior. To determine this, I subjected the revised Genealogical Communication Measure items from the family stories measure to exploratory factor analysis with principal components extraction and Varimax rotation. Then, using McCroskey and Young’s (1979) .60/.40 criterion, I eliminated 25 cross-loading and weakly loading items, resulting in a final count of 9 items measuring 4 dimensions of dark side genealogical communication behavior.

The first factor, *painful*, consisted of 3 items ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and explained 31.4% of the variance in the item pool. These items represented the existence of family stories that cause some extent of pain (e.g., “This family story is difficult to discuss.”). *Veracity*, the second factor, consisted of 2 items ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and explained an additional 20.7% of the variance. These items

addressed family stories that some family members may believe to be untrue, or at least question the veracity (e.g., “This story seems difficult to believe.”).

The third factor, *difference*, also consisted of 2 items ( $\alpha = .73$ ) and explained an additional 15.1% of the variance. These items represented differences in family members’ perceptions of the story (e.g., “This story is embarrassing to some family members, but not to others.”). *Shameful*, the final factor, consisted of 2 items ( $\alpha = .82$ ) and explained an additional 10.0% of the variance. These items represented family stories that represented some degree of embarrassment or shame (e.g., “This family story is embarrassing.”).

### **The Dark Side and Frequent Engagement**

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables of interest. The first hypothesis (H1) predicted that the dark side behavior will predict frequent engagement. This hypothesis was tested using a regression analysis in which the four dark side dimensions served as the predictor variables, as reported in Table 2. This regression produced a significant correlation coefficient ( $\Delta R^2 = .09$ ,  $F(4, 277) = 6.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ), with three dark side dimensions predicting frequent engagement: painful and shameful emerged as inverse predictors, whereas veracity emerged as a positive predictor.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables*

<b>Variables</b>	<b><i>M(SD)</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Painful</b>	4.32(1.66)	-					
<b>2. Veracity</b>	3.22(1.38)	-.12*	-				
<b>3. Difference</b>	3.79(1.58)	.03	.12*	-			
<b>4. Shameful</b>	3.59(1.89)	.46**	.11	.20**	-		
<b>5. Freq. Engage.</b>	3.50(1.19)	-.24**	.14*	-.01	-.22**	-	
<b>6. Reframing</b>	3.97(1.14)	-.21**	-.08	-.13*	-.26**	.31**	-
<b>7. Family ID</b>	5.75(1.23)	-.15*	-.15*	-.11	-.19**	.03	.22**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 2

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Frequent Engagement, Reframing, and Family Identity*

Predictors	Freq. Engagement B( $\beta$ )	Reframing B( $\beta$ )	Family Identity B( $\beta$ )
<b>Painful</b>	-.011(-.15)*	-0.10(-.09)	-0.08(-.10)
<b>Veracity</b>	0.12(.14)*	-0.11(-.13)*	-0.10(-.12)
<b>Difference</b>	0.01(.01)	0.14(.19)**	-0.09(-.11)
<b>Shameful</b>	-0.10(-.16)*	-0.11(-.19)**	-0.04(-.07)
<b>Freq. Engagement</b>	—	0.26(.27)**	-0.06(-.06)
<b>Reframing</b>	—	—	0.22(.20)**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

### **Frequent Engagement and Reframing**

The second hypothesis (H2) predicted that frequent engagement will predict reframing. This hypothesis was tested using a regression analysis, as reported in Table 2. This regression produced a significant correlation coefficient ( $\Delta R^2 = .19$ ,  $F(5, 276) = 12.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ), with frequent engagement emerging as a positive predictor of reframing. Additionally, three dark side dimensions predicted reframing: veracity and shameful emerged as inverse predictors, and difference emerged as a positive predictor.

### **Reframing and Family Identity**

The third hypothesis (H3) predicted that reframing will predict family identity. This hypothesis was tested using a regression analysis, as reported in Table 2. This regression produced a significant correlation coefficient ( $\Delta R^2 = .10$ ,  $F(6, 275) = 5.07$ ,  $p < .01$ ), with reframing emerging as a positive predictor of family identity.

### **Mediated Model of the Dark Side and Family Identity**

The fourth hypothesis (H4) stated that frequent engagement and reframing would mediate the association between the dark side behavior and family identity. I used nonparametric bootstrapping to test this hypothesis, as this method accounts for the typically non-normal distribution of indirect effects (Hayes, 2013). Each indirect path between frequent engagement, reframing, dark side, and family identity was tested utilizing a regression model in which (a) the four dimensions of the dark side behavior predicted (b) frequent engagement, which, in turn, predicted (c) reframing, which then predicted (d) family satisfaction. Results are reported in Table 3.

Indirect effects revealed that the proposed mediation model held for three of the dark side dimensions: painful, veracity, and shameful. Additionally, the indirect path from dark side to

family identity via reframing (bypassing frequent engagement) also achieved significance for three dark side dimensions: veracity, difference, and shameful.

Table 3

*Summary of Model of Indirect Effects—Frequent Engagement and Reframing as Mediators*

<b>Path</b>	<b><i>B</i>[95% CI]</b>	<b>SE</b>
<i>Indirect effects:</i>		
<b>1. Painful→Freq. Engage.→Family ID</b>	0.007 <sub>[-0.005:0.03]</sub>	0.008
<b>2. Painful→Freq. Engage.→Reframing→Family ID</b>	-0.006 <sub>[-0.02:-0.0007]*</sub>	0.004
<b>3. Painful→Reframing→Family ID</b>	-0.01 <sub>[-0.04:0.01]</sub>	0.01
<b>4. Veracity→Freq. Engage.→Family ID</b>	-0.01 <sub>[-0.03:0.004]</sub>	0.01
<b>5. Veracity→Freq. Engage.→Reframing→Family ID</b>	0.01 <sub>[0.001:0.02]*</sub>	0.004
<b>6. Veracity→Reframing→Family ID</b>	-0.02 <sub>[-0.06:-0.003]*</sub>	0.01
<b>7. Difference→Freq. Engage.→Family ID</b>	-0.0007 <sub>[-0.02:0.01]</sub>	0.004
<b>8. Difference→Freq. Engage.→Reframing→Family ID</b>	0.0006 <sub>[-0.004:0.01]</sub>	0.002
<b>9. Difference→Reframing→Family ID</b>	0.03 <sub>[0.01:0.07]*</sub>	0.01
<b>10. Shameful→Freq. Engage.→Family ID</b>	0.01 <sub>[-0.003:0.03]</sub>	0.01
<b>11. Shameful→Freq. Engage.→Reframing→Family ID</b>	-0.01 <sub>[-0.02:-0.001]*</sub>	0.004
<b>12. Shameful→Reframing→Family ID</b>	-0.02 <sub>[-0.06:-0.003]*</sub>	0.02

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

### **The Dark Side and Family Identity**

The final hypothesis (H5) predicted that dark side dimensions would directly predict family identity. This hypothesis was tested using a regression analysis, as reported in Table 2, and did not produce a significant correlation coefficient.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the dimensions of the dark side of genealogical communication and determine their effects on family identity. This study achieved these goals, identifying multiple dark side dimensions that, in turn, indirectly predict family identity. I will consider the theoretical and practical implications of these results in this section.

#### **Dark Side Dimensions**

Four dark side dimensions emerged from this analysis: (a) painful, (b) veracity, (c) difference, and (d) shameful. One thing that becomes clear from these dimensions is that dark side, unlike the other three genealogical communication behaviors, is not a behavior so much as a characteristic or quality. This is consistent with extant dark side typologies (e.g. Duck, 1994; Perlman, 2000; Spitzberg and Cupach, 2011) that categorize dark side as something that is, rather than something that is enacted. Although it may seem, then, that the sole non-behavioral genealogical communication construct is seemingly negative, it important to remember that the dark side is rarely, if ever, completely negative (Perlman & Carcedo, 2011). Rather, Perlman and Carcedo explained that positivity and negativity should not be considered as mutually exclusive polar opposites, but that both exist together as intrinsic parts of relationships.

Another observation of these dimensions is that while three of the four refer to story characteristics, the fourth, difference, focuses on family members and their perspective of the stories. In other words, the story may be embarrassing or painful to certain family members, but not to others. Such discrepancy becomes important when viewed in light of both Koenig Kellas

and Trees's (2006) and Hendry and Ledbetter's (2017) findings that perspective-taking or coherent perspectives (respectively) had the greatest impact on family satisfaction. Indeed, Hendry and Ledbetter found that coherent perspectives not only led to greater immediate family satisfaction, but greater extended family satisfaction as well. Moreover, Koenig Kellas et al. (2011) placed such disagreement in the dark side of storytelling, and indicated that it could ultimately threaten relational identities. Thus, family members experiencing difference may be unable to take one another's perspectives and reach coherent interpretation, thus lowering their overall family satisfaction.

A final observation of the dark side dimensions is that three of the four mirror the story conditions presented to the participants: painful, veracity, and shameful. The story conditions were selected based on the items making up the dark side factor in the Hendry and Ledbetter (2017) study. Although it stands to reason that these factors would be dark side dimensions, the fact that only these emerged may be an artifact due to the study design. Indeed, extant research points to other possible dimensions. For example, Stone (1988) asserted that family stories meant to define the family are sometimes used to exclude family members who do not adhere to those definitions and associated identities. Whereas this stands in direct opposition to the general belief that family stories are meant to promote belonging and cohesion, such repurposing could thus fall within the dark side quadrant of what once was bright is now dark.

Further evidence of additional dark side dimensions is found in Hendry and Ledbetter's (2017) original study, in which they reported low internal reliability for the dark side factor ( $\alpha = .59$ ), but noted that this could be indicative of a valid construct containing heterogeneous indicators. In other words, the items in the original dark side factor represent a complex construct comprised of multiple dimensions with differing characteristics. Although the dimensions

identified in the present study align with items from the original dark side factor, they do not comprehensively represent all items from the original factor. For example, one such item states, “When we talk about our family history, some family members seem bored and uninterested.” On its face, this item seems to be associated with frequent engagement; it is of interest, then, that it loaded onto the dark side factor instead. However, its counterpart from the storytelling measure in the present study failed to load onto any factor, meaning that although boredom and disinterest is a part of the dark side, its dimension is still unknown. Thus, it seems not only plausible, but probable, that the dark side may not yet be fully realized.

### **Associations Between the Dark Side and Family Identity**

With initial dark side dimensions identified, the first four hypotheses addressed the relationship between these dimensions and family identity, with frequent engagement and reframing as mediators. The first hypothesis stated that dark side dimensions would predict frequent engagement. This hypothesis was supported for all dimensions except difference. The painful and shameful dimensions were inversely associated with frequent engagement; therefore, the more painful or shameful a story, the less likely the family is to discuss it. This is consistent with Koenig Kellas et al. (2011) and Galvin et al.’s (2012) assertions that families tend to avoid discussing negatively-valanced stories, and with the premise that the upper-bounding side of tellability creates a boundary beyond which a story becomes too painful or shameful to tell. (Norrick, 2005). However, this finding does not account for the lower-bounding side of tellability, which holds that some degree of these characteristics is necessary for a story to be told. Thus, tellability is conceptualized as being curvilinear in nature. Taking this into account, I tested for curvilinear effects, but found none.

In contrast, veracity positively predicted frequent engagement, so that the more questionable the story's validity, the more likely family members will be to actively discuss it. Viewing this through the CNSM framework, this association may be due to the interpretation storytelling behavior, in which families strive to create cohesive meaning (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). If family members are unsure of a story's truthfulness, it would likely generate difficulty in creating such meaning. Social constructionism may shed additional light on this association, claiming that it is the interaction between individuals (e.g., family members) that brings constructs such as family into being (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2006). At times, these constructs require repair, as certain aspects are forgotten or changed. In the case of questionable family stories, these stories must have been accepted as truthful at some point to be included as part of the family construct. However, as future generations begin to question the story's veracity, this aspect of the family construct would be reevaluated and potentially altered. Thus, in order to repair the construct, the family members would have to interact (i.e. engage in conversation). This also aligns with Fisher's (1987) assertions that narratives must be cohesive and display fidelity (i.e., appear truthful) in order to be influential.

The second and third hypotheses stated that frequent engagement will positively predict reframing, and reframing would then lead to family identity. Both hypotheses were supported, consistent with CNSM and NPT's claims that engaging in the act of storytelling leads to sense-making and meaning assignment, which then leads to the creation of family identity (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006; Langellier & Peterson, 2006). This also provides support for Stone's (1988) assertion that families can interpret the facts of their past in any way to align with what they most need it to mean. This is consistent with the life story approach (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001), which holds that life stories are inherently neutral and that

meaning and valence are assigned by the individual. Therefore, it stands to reason that as families engage with family stories, they would use reframing to, as Stone says, craft the story to fit their desired meaning.

It is important to note that in this study, although I focused on seemingly negative stories being reframed into a more positive light, reframing can also move in the opposite direction to reframe a story as more negative; however, Stone (1988) asserted that “family definitions, whatever their content, are construed as positive by those who subscribe to them” (p. 34). Similarly, Thompson et al. (2009) not only found that participants had a hard time identifying negative family legacies, but that when they did, multiple participants framed them in a positive light; this often manifested as cautionary tales meant to instruct or advise. Moreover, Lenz (2011) discussed narrative inheritance in terms of pride versus shame in one’s ancestors, and how some families produce an “almost defiant counter-narrative” (p. 321) to put the story in a positive light. Thus, although reframing can move in either direction, it seems that stories that are adopted into the family identity are typically reframed as more positive rather than negative. A deeper investigation into family story reframing behaviors presents another possible avenue for future research.

The fourth hypothesis presented a mediated model of the dark side dimension’s effects on family identity. This hypothesis was supported for painful, veracity, and shameful. The lone outlier was difference, which was similarly not shown to predict frequent engagement in H1. Therefore, family members who differ in their appraisals of family stories do not frequently engage with those stories. However, difference still produced a significant indirect path to family identity with reframing as the lone mediator; this same path proved significant for veracity and shameful as well. This path may be a manifestation of Stone’s (1988) claim that family members

are often willing to dispense with their own perspective in favor of adopting the familial perspective; in other words, an individual may see or assign meaning to a family story one way, but if it differs from the accepted meaning perpetuated by the larger family group, they will forego their individual interpretation to align with that of the group. This scenario could then allow for reframing without engaging. It is important to note that no path was significant without reframing, indicating that reframing is an essential mechanism for the dark side to influence family identity. Admittedly, the effect sizes for these paths are small, which could give pause to imbuing it with such importance. These implications will be more fully discussed with those of the final hypothesis.

The final hypothesis stated that the dark side dimensions would predict family identity. This hypothesis was not supported, although it approached significance for veracity and difference. This finding may be explained by the aforementioned life stories approach (McAdams et al., 2001). If stories are indeed inherently neutral until meaning is assigned, then it stands to reason that the dark side dimensions are, as previously speculated, merely characteristics that are inherent in family stories, but have no influence on family identity until acted upon.

This lack of significant direct effects further bolsters reframing as a vital element in explaining the dark side's effects on family identity, despite the small effect sizes. This becomes evident when considering the initial correlations (see Table 1). Painful, veracity, and shameful were each significantly correlated with family identity; yet, in the regression analysis, no direct effects appeared for any dimension. Thus, frequent engagement and reframing are the only mechanisms found to account for any association between dark side and family identity. This is important for families who identify the presence of one or more dark side dimensions in their

family stories. In fact, these findings can be combined with Koenig Kellas' (2005) findings that the joint reframing of stories is related to family functioning, such that families who do so may be more functional and satisfied. Thus, the present study bolsters and extends previous findings regarding the benefits of family engagement and reframing.

This is not to say that frequent engagement and reframing are the only mechanisms that exist. In fact, it may be that as future research identifies additional dark side dimensions, additional mediators may manifest in conjunction with them. However, qualitative research, such as interviews, may be beneficial for initial identification. Indeed, much narrative research has utilized and benefitted from the use of interviews (e.g., Koenig Kellas, 2005; Thompson et al., 2009). Moreover, Hendry and Ledbetter's (2017) genealogical communication measure was created using information collected from focus group interviews. Thus, multiple methods may be most effective in identifying the full breadth of the dark side construct.

### **Limitations**

The results of this study must be interpreted in light of the limitations associated with the nature and scope of the research design. First, the sample was not diverse. Participants were largely recruited from an undergraduate communication course at a mid-sized private university in the southwest; thus, a more diverse sample is needed to determine generalizability. Second, the data is cross-sectional. Although dark side dimensions are clearly associated with family identity, it cannot be definitively said which one causes the other. Finally, data regarding each family was collected from only one family member, typically from the younger generation. Whereas family identity and the stories associated with that identity can change over time and across generations (Stone, 1988; Langellier & Peterson, 1996), future research should collect data from multiple family members across multiple generations.

Nonetheless, this study provides empirical support for the association between dark side dimensions and family identity, with frequent engagement and reframing as mediators. These findings extend preliminary genealogical communication research (e.g., Hendry & Ledbetter, 2017) and answer calls to extend dark side research (e.g. Duck, 1994) by identifying initial dark side dimensions in the genealogical communication context. Furthermore, it provides practical and beneficial information for families, affording them greater insight into how the presence of dark side in their family stories may be connected to family identity, and highlights the benefits of frequent engagement and reframing. This study also provided avenues for future research, such as identifying additional dark side dimensions and mediators, and studying family reframing behaviors. Overall, this study serves to reaffirm an overarching tenet of narrative theories from CNSM to NPT: family stories do shape our family identities.

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## Appendix

### Survey Measure

#### Family Communication Questionnaire

##### Demographic Information

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your biological sex?
  - 1 Male
  - 2 Female
3. What is your highest level of education?
 

1 Have not completed high school	5 Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)
2 High school diploma or equivalent	6 Master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.B.A., etc.)
3 Some college	7 Doctoral degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D., Ed.D., etc.):
4 Associate's degree (A.A., A.S., etc.)	8 Other (please specify): _____
4. Are you currently an undergraduate student at TCU?
  - 1 Yes
  - 2 No
4. What is your ethnicity or race? (Please check all that apply.)
 

1 White	4 Native American
2 Black/African/African American	5 Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander
3 Latino/a/Hispanic American	6 Other (please specify): _____
5. How did you hear about this survey?
 

1 A class instructor	5 Through another website
2 E-mail from the researchers	6 Other (please specify): _____
3 Through Facebook	
4 Through Twitter	
6. In the family in which you grew up, who was your primary male caregiver?
  - 1 Biological father
  - 2 Adoptive father
  - 3 Stepfather
  - 4 Grandfather
  - 5 I did not have a primary male caregiver
  - 6 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
7. Is this primary male caregiver still living?
  - 1 Yes
  - 2 No

8. In the family in which you grew up, who was your primary female caregiver?

- 1 Biological mother
- 2 Adoptive mother
- 3 Stepmother
- 4 Grandmother
- 5 I did not have a primary female caregiver
- 6 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

9. Is your primary female caregiver still living?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

10. What is the current relationship between your primary male caregiver and primary female caregiver?

- 1 They are married to each other.
- 2 They are divorced from each other.
- 3 They have never been married to each other.
- 4 At least one of them is deceased.
- 5 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

11. How many siblings do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

**Resiliency measure (Smith et al., 2008)**

**Directions:** For the next set of statements, please indicate how much you agree with each statement using the following scale:

	SD			N			SA
1. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**FAMILY IDENTIFICATION SCALE**

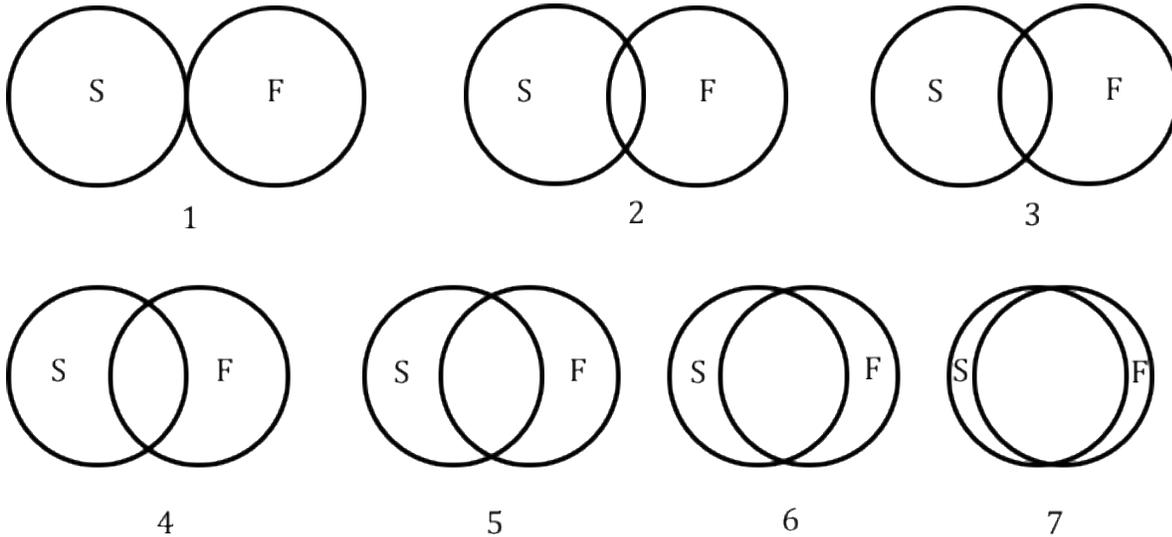
**Directions:** Please indicate to what extent you feel this way about your family. 1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly Agree

- 1. I am committed to my family 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 2. I do not feel a sense of belonging to my family (R) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 3. I feel a sense of pride in my family 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 4. My attitudes, values, and beliefs are similar to those of my family 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

- 5. I follow different customs from those of my family (R) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 6. I feel as if we are members of different groups (R) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 7. I feel as if we are members of one family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**INCLUSION OF THE OTHER IN THE SELF SCALE for Family Identity**

**Directions: Pick the set of circles that “you feel best represents your own level of identification with your family.” S=Self, F=Family**



**Measure of *Personal-Communal Identity Gaps*.**

Directions: “The following questions ask about your relationship with your family. Specifically, we are curious about how you compare your family to societal expectations and perceptions about families in general. Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement” [1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree]

- 1. There is a drastic difference between my role and responsibilities in the family and how society expectations about my role and responsibility in the family.
- 2. My closeness to my family is similar to how close people are to their family members.\*
- 3. The importance I place in family is the same level of importance most people place on their family relationships.\*
- 4. There are times when I feel like my relationship with family members is completely different most families.

**Measure of *Enacted-Communal Identity Gaps*.**

Directions: “The following questions ask about your communication with your family. Specifically, we are curious about how you compare your family to societal expectations and perceptions about families in general. Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement” [1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree]

- 1. The way I communicate in my family is much different from other families.
- 2. I would be embarrassed if others outside of the family saw how I communicate with my family members.
- 3. The manner in which I interact with my family members is typical of most other

- families.\*
4. Media (e.g., televisions, movies) portray family interactions in a much different way than how I interact with my family members.

### **Measure of *Relational-Communal Identity Gaps*.**

Directions: “The following questions ask about relationships in your family. Once again, we are curious about how you compare your family to societal expectations and perceptions about families in general. Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement” [1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree]

1. In general, my family interacts in ways that are similar to the ideal way a family should act.\*
2. If someone outside of the family observed the relationships in my family, they would think they were quite different than most families.
3. I would feel embarrassed if others outside of the family knew about the quality of relationships in my family.
4. The support we offer each other in our family is typical of most families.\*
5. Our family relationships are much less intimate than most other families.

### **Measure of Anticipated Relational Trajectory**

Directions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements in relation to your family-of-origin (i.e., the family you grew up with). [1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree]

1. I would provide emotional support to my family in the future.
2. I would provide financial support to my family in the future.
3. I would spend holidays with my family in the future.
4. I would accept financial support from my family in the future.
5. I would bring my romantic partner home for holidays.
6. I would rely on my family during an emergency.
7. I would be willing to miss work to help my family during an emergency.
8. I would be willing to move to be closer to my family.

### **Overall Measure of Family Storytelling**

Directions: Please respond to the following items.

Two or more members of my family get together to tell stories of things our family has experienced.

Never	Rarely	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Very Often	All the time
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

As a family, we tell stories.

Never	Rarely	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Very Often	All the time
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

My family is a storytelling family.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Family Strengths Inventory**

	SD	N			SA
1. Family members respect one another.	1	2	3	4	5
2. We share similar values and beliefs as a family	1	2	3	4	5
3. Things work out well for us as a family	1	2	3	4	5
4. We really do trust and confide in each other	1	2	3	4	5
5. Family members feel loyal to the family	1	2	3	4	5
6. We are proud of our family	1	2	3	4	5
7. Accomplishing what we want to do seems difficult for us	1	2	3	4	5
8. We have the same problems over and over	1	2	3	4	5
9. There are many conflicts in our family	1	2	3	4	5
10. We are critical of each other	1	2	3	4	5
11. We tend to worry about many things	1	2	3	4	5

**Measure of Genealogical Communication**

**Directions:** For each item, please indicate the number that best represents your level of agreement using the following scale:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	SD	N			SA		
1. My family often shares stories about our family background.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My family regularly shares stories about previous generations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. When we are together, my family often talks about our family history.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Our history and heritage is a frequent topic of conversation in our family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I know stories about my family history older than my grandparents' generation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I know stories about the history of many different parts of my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I enjoy reading stories about my family history through print media such as books.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. I enjoy reading stories about my family history online.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I have performed my own genealogy research using the Internet.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I have performed my own genealogy research using printed materials from a library or government archive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. When my family gets together and tells a story about our family history, everyone shows interest in the story being told.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. When we talk about our family history, some family members seem bored and uninterested.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Some stories about my family's history are painful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Some stories about my family's history are embarrassing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Some stories about my family's history are shameful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Some stories about my family's history are difficult to discuss.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. People in my family get uncomfortable if someone brings up negative aspects of our family history.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. My family is willing to discuss parts of our family history that are negative or difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. My family has secret stories that we are expected not to discuss.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. My family has stories that are embarrassing to some family members, but not to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My family has stories that are painful to some family members, but not to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Some of my family's stories seem difficult to believe.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Some of my family members have argued over family stories.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. I know about a family story that my older relatives do not want me to know.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. I have questioned the truthfulness of some of my family's stories.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. My family reframes negative stories in a positive light.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. I want to hear my family stories, even if they are embarrassing or painful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. There are parts of my family's history that we do not talk about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

29. My family openly discusses all parts of our family history, even though some stories are less positive than others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. When my family tells stories about our family history, we are courteous and respectful to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. When my family tells stories about our family history, we are able to “put ourselves in each other’s shoes” so we can understand where each person is coming from.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. When talking about our family history, my family makes an honest effort to understand the perspective of whoever is telling the story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. When we share stories about our family history, we are successful at understanding each other’s perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. I have heard different versions of our family history from different family members.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Information about Family Stories

[Participants will randomly see one of the conditions below. If they answer ‘no,’ they will be randomly presented with the two other conditions until they say ‘yes,’ at which point they will continue the survey with regard to that family story. If they answer ‘no’ to the first three conditions, they will be sent to the final catch-all condition. If they answer ‘no’ to that question, they will be thanked and will exit the survey.]

- In your family, do you have a story about your family’s history that...  
 [Condition 1: **you or a relative suspect may be untrue** (for example, relation to a famous individual, an ancestor from a different racial background, or something that sounds like it’s been exaggerated over the years)?]  
 [Condition 2: **you or a relative believe is embarrassing** (for example, a story of unethical or illegal behavior, or any story that might seem dishonorable or humiliating)?]  
 [Condition 3: **you or a relative believe is painful** (for example, a story that evokes emotions of hurt, anger, or fear)?]  
 [If participant answers no to Conditions 1, 2, and 3: **you or a relative believe is negative in some way, even just a little bit?**]  
 1 Yes  
 2 No
- In no more than 6 sentences, briefly describe this story. You will keep this story in mind while asking the remaining questions in the survey.

3. With this story in mind, for the following items, please rate your agreement using this scale:

	SD			N			SA
I personally believe this story to be true.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
This story is a large part of my family's identity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Objective physical evidence supports this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The truth of this story is well-documented.							
I am proud that this story is a part of my family's history.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I personally consider this story to be embarrassing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I personally consider this story to be painful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
At least one other family member does <b>not</b> believe this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
At least one other family member considers this story to be embarrassing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
At least one other family member considers this story to be painful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. How would you rate this story on the following scale?

Negative \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Positive  
 Dark \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Light  
 Good \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Bad  
 Unpleasant \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Pleasant

5. Approximately how old were you when you first remember hearing this story?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** For each item, please indicate the number that best represents your level of agreement using the following scale:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	SD			N			SA
1. My family often shares this story about our family background.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. This story is a frequent topic of conversation in my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My family rarely talks about this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I have performed my own research on this family story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. When my family gets together and tells this story about our family history, everyone shows an interest in the story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. When we talk about this story, some family members seem bored and uninterested.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. This family story is painful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. This family story is embarrassing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. This family story is shameful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. This family story is difficult to discuss.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. People in my family get uncomfortable if someone brings up this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. My family is willing to discuss parts of this story that are negative or difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. My family treats this story as a secret that we are expected not to discuss.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. This story is embarrassing to some family members, but not to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. This story is painful to some family members, but not to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. This story seems difficult to believe.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Some of my family members have argued over this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Older relatives do not want me to know about this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I have questioned the truthfulness of this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Although this story is negative, my family reframes this story in a positive light.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My family looks for the good in this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. My family says this story is a warning about what not to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Although this story is negative, older family members use it as an example to instill morals and values.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. My family puts a positive spin on this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. My family reframes this story in order to provide advice for the family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. This story reminds my family of how our family has improved over time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. I want to hear this story, even if it is embarrassing or painful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

28. We do not talk about parts of this story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. My family openly discusses all parts of this story, even though some parts are less positive than others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. When my family tells this story, we are courteous and respectful to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. When my family tells this story, we are able to “put ourselves in each other’s shoes” so we can understand where each person is coming from.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. When talking about this story, my family makes an honest effort to understand the perspective of whoever is telling the story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. When we share this story, we are successful at understanding each other’s perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. I have heard different versions of this story from different family members.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Now we would like for you to think of the family member who **most frequently tells this story.** If more than one family member tends to share this story frequently and you can’t decide who tells it the most, choose the relative who is most familiar to you.

1. What is your relationship to the relative who most frequently tells this story?

- 1 Mother
- 2 Father
- 3 Brother
- 4 Sister
- 5 Daughter
- 6 Son
- 7 Cousin
- 8 Aunt
- 9 Uncle
- 10 Niece
- 11 Nephew
- 12 Grandmother
- 13 Grandfather
- 14 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the sex of this person?

- 1 Male
- 2 Female

3. Approximately how old is this person?

- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Less than 18 years old | 5 45-54 years old        |
| 2 18-25 years old        | 6 55-64 years old        |
| 3 25-34 years old        | 7 65-75 years old        |
| 4 35-44 years old        | 8 More than 75 years old |

**Perceived Credibility Scale**

**Instructions:** We are interested in your perception of this relative (the one who most frequently tells this story). On the scales below, please indicate your perception of this relative.

Good-natured	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Irritable
Timid	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Bold
Expert	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Inexpert
Poised	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Nervous
Dishonest	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Honest
Cheerful	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Gloomy
Verbal	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Quiet
Unintelligent	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Intelligent
Tense	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Relaxed
Unsympathetic	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Sympathetic
Unfriendly	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Friendly
Talkative	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Silent
Intellectual	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Narrow
Calm	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Anxious
Good	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Bad

4. Have you heard other family members tell this story?

1 Yes

2 No