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AN EXAMINATION OF THE MEANING OF FAMILY
RECREATIONAL STORYTELLING AMONG
PARENTS AND THEIR ADULT
CHILDREN

by

Kelly Gagalis-Hoffman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Recreation Management and Youth Leadership

Brigham Young University

August 2004

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF THE MEANING OF FAMILY RECREATIONAL STORYTELLING AMONG PARENTS AND THEIR ADULT CHILDREN

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Department of Recreation Management and Youth Leadership

Master of Science

The purpose of this study was to determine the role and function of family recreational storytelling across the lifespan from the perspective of parents and their adult children. Twelve adults, (six pairs of adult children and their parents) were interviewed. Questions focused on ascertaining the meaning of storytelling (including the role, purpose, and function) from the perspectives of the parents and children from the same family unit. Interviews were transcribed and themes were identified and reported. Participants reported that stories generated feelings of safety, comfort, and security, and often helped create a sense of importance and belonging for individual family members. Family bonding appeared to be the overarching theme under which all other noted themes were grouped. The high degree of enjoyment and fun during family recreational storytelling, reported by both parents and their adult children in this study,

suggested that fun was an impetus for family recreational storytelling. Storytelling appeared to facilitate teaching and learning, promote the transfer of values, inspire children to emulate their parents' beliefs and values. Participants reported that stories enabled them to see situations from another person's perspective. Adult children reported positive changes in attitudes toward their parents as a direct result of family recreational storytelling. Family history stories appeared to be related to the creation of a family identity. The role and purpose of storytelling in the family seemed to change consistently across the lifespan, therefore, a developmental model of storytelling in the family is suggested and recommendations for future research are given.

Key Words: storytelling, narrative therapy, families, stories, family recreation, family strength

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Five years ago I went searching for truth and happiness. I have found as much of both as I am currently ready to receive, and prepare daily to be able to receive more.

Part of the truth I have found is the knowledge of the divine and sacred nature of individuals, the power of families, and the importance of good parenting skills. It is dark indeed to walk without this knowledge, or to be born to parents that have neither the ability nor the desire to offer family members security, safety, comfort, acceptance, love, and problem solving skills. I also know that a great deal of pain can be experienced by both parents and children, when parents do not know how to promote these feelings in the hearts of their children. Through this research I have attempted to shed light on how parents and their families can promote such feelings, in order that they may know joy and rejoicing in their posterity, and that the hearts of the children may turn, joyfully, to the hearts of their fathers.

I offer this work to God; it represents my desire to serve him. I offer this work to all those who know that families are sacred, with the hope that the knowledge contained herein will be of benefit to them. Finally, I offer this work to any and all who doubt the power and importance of families. Let it stand as a witness of the immense influence and subsequent responsibilities parents have in caring for, and nurturing, their children.

I thank Joseph, for being my example in the flesh, of how to respect others and treat them according to their divine worth. Thanks also to my professors, for how and what they taught me, and to my classmates, who are good people and excellent friends.

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Running head: FAMILY RECREATIONAL STORYTELLING

An Examination of the Meaning of Family Recreational Storytelling among Parents and
their Adult Children

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the role and function of family recreational storytelling across the lifespan from the perspective of parents and their adult children. Twelve adults, (six pairs of adult children and their parents) were interviewed. Questions focused on ascertaining the meaning of storytelling (including the role, purpose, and function) from the perspectives of the parents and children from the same family unit. Interviews were transcribed and themes were identified and reported. Participants reported that stories generated feelings of safety, comfort, and security, and often helped create a sense of importance and belonging for individual family members. Family bonding appeared to be the overarching theme under which all other noted themes were grouped. The high degree of enjoyment and fun during family recreational storytelling, reported by both parents and their adult children in this study, suggested that fun was an impetus for family recreational storytelling. Storytelling appeared to facilitate teaching and learning, promote the transfer of values, inspire children to emulate their parents' beliefs and values. Participants reported that stories enabled them to see situations from another person's perspective. Adult children reported positive changes in attitudes toward their parents as a direct result of family recreational storytelling. Family history stories appeared to be related to the creation of a family identity. The role and purpose of storytelling in the family seemed to change consistently across the lifespan, therefore, a developmental model of storytelling in the family is suggested and recommendations for future research are given.

Key Words: storytelling, narrative therapy, families, stories, family recreation

Introduction

Storytelling is an historical leisure pastime that may be “one of the most powerful techniques that mankind has ever devised for molding human behavior” (Gardner, 1993, p. 246). Through storytelling, the psychological suffering of people who experience physical tragedy may be lessened (Bauby, 1997; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000). Storytelling is thought to facilitate learning (Gray, 1997; Scoresby, 1997; Vitz, 1990), and stories are believed to transmit wisdom, instruction and inspiration across time (Cheyney, 1990; Roberts & Holmes, 1999). Traditional stories provide people with a feeling of connection and purpose, as well as provide templates for problem solving (Gersie, 1997; Hermans, 1992; Sluzki, 1992). In oral storytelling, the relationship between the storyteller and the listener is a crucial part of storytelling that facilitates change (Gersie & King, 1990). Storytelling is often seen as a family recreational activity (Fulford, 1998; Stone, 1988) and, as such has the potential to promote family bonding, teach values, instruct and fortify families (Holman & Epperson, 1989). It has been inferred that when these vital functions are not performed within the family, therapeutic intervention often becomes necessary (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Gersie, 1997).

Narrative therapy is a specific type of storytelling used in therapeutic settings to facilitate psychological healing, and is described as imitating conversation in a relationship based in trust (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). It has been suggested that in narrative therapy, as in traditional storytelling, the relationship between storyteller and listener is intimate and inspires trust (Gersie & King, 1990). Trust in therapeutic relationships is crucial to facilitating changes in beliefs and behavior (Becvar & Becvar,

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1993). The relationship in narrative therapy between the individual and the therapist echoes the relationship developed by traditional storytellers, as well as the relationship parents cultivate with their children (Landreth, 1991; Marion, 1999; Scoresby, 1998). It seems that the application of storytelling and narrative techniques may help develop and maintain strong family relationships among families who engage in recreational storytelling. Zabriskie and McCormick (2003) state that families “need to adapt to new situations and challenges while maintaining a certain level of closeness and structure, in order to function and progress” (p.166). Family recreation has the potential to positively impact families (Shaw, 1997) and to provide a medium through which families can learn to adapt while maintaining closeness (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Storytelling itself is an historical recreational activity (Stone, 1988) that facilitates closeness and allows individuals and groups to learn how to interact, adapt, and change (Cheyney 1990; Gardner, 1993; Gersie, 1997; Scoresby, 2000).

Although the benefits of storytelling have been examined in a variety of settings, including narrative therapy, and have indicated similarities to the dynamics of optimal family relationships, there remains a lack of knowledge surrounding specific application of storytelling to the family in a non-therapeutic setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the meaning of family recreational storytelling by investigating the perception of parents and their adult children concerning the role and function of family recreational storytelling.

Review of Literature

Meaning and Storytelling

In semiotics, the study of language, words are considered signs that represent an actual object or event (Sheriff, 1989). People create structures of signs within their own minds, which then become the lens through which they interpret the world. This lens is called an interpretant, and represents the unique meaning personal experience gives to an individual's interpretation of events (Cunningham & Shank, 1984). Applying these concepts to storytelling, the meaning of family storytelling becomes unique to individual situations, experiences, and the interpretant (or filter) that a person has developed as a result of their life experiences (Sheriff, 1989). Therefore, interviews of parents and their adult children were conducted in order to document differing perspectives of family recreational storytelling; the intention was to more fully capture the meaning of the phenomenon for families.

Storytelling and Family Recreation

Leisure activities, or recreation, are activities classified by the meaning of the experience for the individual rather than by the activity engaged in (Holman & Epperson, 1989). An activity can be defined as family recreation when it is one in which mutual interests and expressions tie family members together (Shaw, 1997). Using these criteria, family storytelling can be considered a family leisure or recreational activity.

Family recreation has been found to be beneficial and is seen as integral part of family development (Shaw, 1997). Family leisure research indicates a positive relationship between involvement in family recreation and aspects of family strength

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(Holman & Epperson, 1989; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Holman and Epperson, (1989) found that family recreation facilitates enhanced family functioning. Shaw & Dawson (2001) reported that parents use family recreation to enhance family functioning and cohesion. Zabriskie and McCormick (2003) reported that family leisure involvement was a strong predictor of parental family life satisfaction. Given that recreation and leisure activities have the potential to positively impact families, it follows that family recreational storytelling may also positively impact families. In order to understand the phenomenon of family recreational storytelling better, however, it is necessary to look to the history and tradition of storytelling.

Historical Value and Function of Traditional Stories

Persistent patterns of storytelling, nurtured and kept alive within a society or within a family, have the ability to connect the feelings and thoughts of individuals through generations (Fulford, 1998; Stone, 1988). In cultures with oral traditions, such as Native American and Polynesian Islanders, storytellers and the stories they tell mold the lives of the children in their society by transmitting cultural rules and values (Cheyney, 1990). The level of rapport between the storyteller and listener facilitates the experience (Gersie & King, 1990, p. 32). When listening to traditional stories, Pueblo children are transfixed and listen raptly (Cheyney, 1990), indicating a level of attentiveness for young children unique to the storytelling situation (Brand & Donato, 2001).

Two functions of storytelling, instruction and inspiration, stand out consistently across culture and throughout time (Gersie & King, 1990; Levitt, Korman, & Angus, 2000). Instruction through storytelling provides knowledge, while inspiration provides

the motivation for listeners to make personal ideological and behavioral changes (Gersie, 1997). It follows that learning about the past through stories may have the power to guide actions and decisions in the present and future (Fulford, 1998). Through instruction and inspiration, individuals may change their perspectives and their way of interacting with the world as a direct result of listening to a story (Gersie, 1997). In the right context, changes in perspective can positively affect both physical and psychological well-being (Seligman, 1992).

The Necessity of Storytelling to Physical and Psychological Well-Being

When medical practitioners listen to the stories of people with illness or pain, they are often better able to understand and empathize with their patients and clients (Coles, 1989; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000; Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996). In their qualitative study, Mattingly and Lawler (2000) reported that giving medical professionals more information by allowing patients to tell personal stories led to improved outcomes for patients, (i.e. faster recovery times, less pain, and more adequate treatment). In his book, *The Call of Stories*, Coles (1989) related anecdotal evidence gathered during his teaching at Harvard medical school that suggests the use of doctor stories in literature improves the quality of doctor-patient relationships and results in improved patient care. These are examples of stories positively impacting the healing process of patients through an interaction between stories and the perception and behavior of others.

Stories may also have a healing effect on the teller, especially when healing is defined, in part, by a recovery of self. By telling their own story, individuals with serious illness or disability, who have been robbed of their sense of self, may be better able to

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recover their identity (Bauby, 1997). This in turn is thought to positively affect the psychological and possibly physical well being of such individuals (Etchison & Kliest, 2000; Parry & Doan, 1994). It has been theorized that illness often takes away from a person their ability to envision themselves in the world (Etchison & Kliest, 2000; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000). People tend to have a personal story about their role in the world. When this story changes, a loss of identity can occur if a new positive story is not developed (Parry & Doan, 1994). The story of stroke patient Jen-Dominique Bauby exemplifies this. After a stroke robbed him of his ability to control his body, the desire to communicate and re-establish his place in the world was so strong that Bauby laboriously communicated his story by using the only part of his body left to his control; letter by letter he blinked out the book *The Diving Bell and Butterfly*, which is an account of his personal experiences since becoming disabled.

Through his storytelling efforts, Bauby's place in the world was no longer defined by his unresponsive outer appearance and inability to interact. Instead, he was able to establish his identity and become a member of the larger world once again. The act of telling his personal story established him in his own mind, as well as in the minds of others, as a fully conscious human being. Storytelling helped Bauby create meaning for himself beyond the limited sphere of his physical influence (Bauby, 1997). Bauby exemplifies how the ability to create and use personal stories is useful in facilitating psychological healing in individuals with physical trauma. It may not be necessary however, to have a life changing physical injury in order for storytelling to positively affect psychological well-being. Indeed, many individuals lose their sense of self because

of psychological injury resulting from neglectful or abusive relationships (Gersie, 1997; Luskin, 2002; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). These types of psychological injuries are often addressed in the field of narrative therapy, which employs storytelling in ways that have been found to produce positive affects on psychological well-being (Androutsopoulou, 2001).

Narrative Therapy and Psychological Well-Being

People who seek therapy usually see themselves with limited options and powerless to affect their current problems (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Their personal stories are confined by such a mindset (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). As a result they are often unable to see themselves in charge of their own destiny and powerful enough to discover and engage in alternative solutions (Seligman, 1992). Androutsopoulou, (2001) said that a life is an individual attempt to create meaning and establish one's own place in the world. Seeing one's self as an actor with power and autonomy, yet responsibly interconnected to other human beings creates the context for an individual's personal life story (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). The premise of narrative therapy is to help individuals become authors of their own stories and create good options for interacting in the world (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Hunt & Sampson, 1988).

Narrative therapy uses storytelling to help individuals gain insight into their problems (Gersie, 1997), and employs techniques that lead to re-authoring of personal narrative (Androutsopoulou, 2001). A narrative therapist can lead or guide a person to make necessary changes in their story by telling new stories that offer alternative problem solving blueprints. In narrative therapy, the therapist works with the individual to create a

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positive way of viewing and narrating their life. This process is often a catalyst for resolution of the problems that caused the individual to seek therapy (Dwivedi, 1997; Gersie, 1997; Parry & Doan, 1994).

People's lives and relationships are shaped by the stories they develop to give meaning to experiences. Many circumstances under which individuals will feel a loss of voice can be influenced by family situations (Gersie, 1997; Parry & Doan, 1994; Roberts & Holmes, 1999; Seligman, 1992). For example, Androutsopoulou (2001) recounts how a young woman came to her for help. After their first few meetings, Androutsopoulou realized that the woman had no voice of her own. When asked what she wanted to do, the woman would reply "My mother says..." or "My father thinks..." Androutsopoulou worked with the young woman by encouraging her to make up fictional stories about herself where the main authorial (decision making) voice was her own. Once the woman was comfortable with her own voice in a fictional setting, Androutsopoulou coached the young woman to apply her authorial voice to real life decisions by having the woman write stories about her current life and future goals. The result of this narrative treatment is that this young woman was able to clearly describe her desires and ambitions. From this it appears that storytelling catalyzes healing in therapeutic situations. Given the benefits seen in this therapeutic setting, and the benefits of recreation for the family, as well as the ability of stories to instruct and inspire, it seems that family recreational storytelling may have therapeutic benefits for families who engage in storytelling.

Storytelling as the Narrative Therapy of the Family

Becvar and Becvar (1993) acknowledge that narrative therapy resembles conversation. Androutsopoulou (2001) suggests that for narrative therapy to be successful, a “basic level of trust must be developed” (p. 82). The elements of good storytelling and narrative therapy are the basic components and skills necessary to form and maintain a good marital, filial, or platonic relationship (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Scoresby, 1998). Narrative therapists engage in conversations with their clients and work to build a relationship based on trust, commitment, and listening, (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Etchison & Kliet, 2000). The nature of the therapeutic relationship as outlined here mirrors the type of relationship parents are recommended to build with their children (Landreth, 1991; Marion, 1999; Scoresby, 1998).

Mattingly and Lawler (2000) discovered that storytelling helps to mitigate the feelings of helplessness experienced in situations where there are power differentials, as has often been found to be the case in family situations (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Seligman (1992) claims that feelings of helplessness can negatively affect an individual’s physical and emotional well being across their lifetime. Becvar and Becvar (1993) point towards the importance of family members seeing themselves as powerful, important and influential in order for the family unit to function well. Just as modern day “self-help” authors use stories to promote their points and theories (Arbinger, 2000; Covey, 1989; Luskin, 2002; Zander & Zander, 2000), so do storytellers in the family

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have the power to tell stories in ways that allow their listener to learn, grow, heal and create problem solving blueprints (Hill, 1997; Seligman, 1992; Yolen, 2000).

Sluzki (1992) asserts that the stories families tell about problems in and of themselves contain both the problem and the solution. Sluzki advocates transforming the family's beliefs about the problem by helping the family to see alternative meaningful interpretations of their situation. He also claims that it is this altered perception of meaning that will lessen or even eliminate the effects of the perceived problem itself. As the family's attitude (Seligman, 1992), and lack of perceived alternate possibilities for their story (Doan & Parry, 1994; Seligman, 1992) may be the cause of the problem in the first place, storytelling provides a medium through which the family can be invited to change its perceptions (Gardner, 1993). Telling family history stories may provide family members alternate views around which to shape attitudes and bind families together (Stone, 1988). Family history stories as well as personal stories shared within the family can provide listeners with blueprints for problem solving (Stone, 1988; Vitz, 1990; Yolen, 2000).

It has been suggested that every person needs to find and express their own story in order for each person's life to qualify as their own differentiated existence (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Gersie & King, 1990). We first learn how to engage in this process within our individual family systems (Landreth, 1991; Seligman, 1992; Stone, 1988). Telling a story enables each of us to know ourselves as someone who has a voice that is worth listening to, someone who can be heard and understood; without a story of one's own, one does not have a life of one's own (Gersie & King, 1990). Dysfunction in

families can lead to individual dysfunction, and is often caused by a loss of voice (Androutsopoulou, 2001). Androutsopoulou reports that through the development of personal narrative, individuals are able to become more decisive and empowered.

Seligman (2002) asserts that in a society that is rapidly becoming more and more depressed and seeking out therapy, there is a need to have more people in our lives who are competent in listening and relationship oriented skills. Storytelling has been observed to teach these skills (Scoresby, 1998). Human beings also need to tell and listen to stories in a system that is committed to the well being of each individual member (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981; Parry & Doan, 1994; Simkinson, 1997; Yolen, 2000). Since most people enter the world within the confines of a specific family system, the use of storytelling in ways that promote the building of trust, strengthening of relationships, and personal empowerment through narration would appear to be beneficial to the individual as well as the family itself.

Families, and the ways they recreate, are uniquely powerful in shaping the development of their individual members (Doherty, 1997; Orthner & Mancini, 1991; Scoresby, 1998; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). These findings combined with evidence of the health benefits of personal narrative (Mattingly & Lawler, 2000; Seligman, 1992; Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996), the psychological benefits of narrative therapy (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Parry & Doan, 1994), and the potential for storytelling to positively impact families as a whole, make it evident that the phenomenon of family recreational storytelling is one worthy of investigation. The lack of inquiry specifically related to the role of storytelling in a family context indicated qualitative research was the most

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appropriate methodology to examine this phenomenon. Therefore, the guiding research question for this study was, “What is the meaning, in terms of role, purpose, and function, of family storytelling across the lifespan for parents and their adult children in this selected sample?”

Methods

Study Participants

This study was conducted with six pairs of parents and their adult children, and one family triad consisting of a grandfather, mother and child. All participants were Caucasian heterosexuals currently living in the Western United States. Of the six parents interviewed, three were female (ages 70, 76, 81), three were male (ages 48, 57, 62) and five of the six parents were also grandparents. Of the six adult children interviewed two were males (ages 28, 33); four were female (ages 23, 38, 43, 50) and two were parents, one of whom was also a grandparent. All selected participants were above the age of 18 in order to insure that participants were able to look back on storytelling memories and recount them for interviews. The families were selected through criterion based convenience sampling.

The interviews were conducted until saturation, or the point when the “researcher begins to hear the same thoughts, perspectives, and responses from most or all the participants” (Gay & Airasian, 2003) was reached. In this study, it was determined that saturation had been reached when refining questions failed to provide new themes. In total there were 12 transcribed interviews. An additional observational interview was

conducted with three generations of the same family, a grandfather (age 82), daughter, (age 50) and granddaughter (age 23).

The primary researcher conducted this observational interview in addition to, and separate from, the transcribed interviews in order to observe the phenomenon of family storytelling amongst participants who had not been biased by exposure to the interview questions. Only one family triad was used since the purpose of this interview was to allow the researcher to observe the family storytelling and triangulate researcher observations with participant reports. The additional interview, however, raised interesting questions about the family dynamics surrounding the storytelling of family elders. The respect and intimacy displayed by family members towards the grandfather was significant enough to warrant further investigation, but was not explored in the context of this study as it was outside the boundaries of this study's guiding research question.

Procedure

Participants were interviewed in family pairs. Each pair was selected for participation after in-person interviews and/or phone calls were made to assess (a) interest in participation and (b) the existence of storytelling as a family recreational activity. The questions used to ascertain willingness to participate and to measure family recreational storytelling are outlined in the interview schedule located in Table 1.

If answers to the questions in Table 1 indicated the family was an appropriate match for the purposes of this study, one parent and one adult child each family were invited to participate. This process was repeated on an ongoing basis in order that the

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number of pairs interviewed allowed the interviewer to achieve saturation. All study participants were interviewed individually. The researcher offered access to the transcripts and finished study report as incentive for participation in this project.

Upon confirmation of participation, the interviewer arranged more in-depth interviews. These interviews were designed to assess frequency, setting, participation, and triggers for their reported storytelling sessions in an effort to gain insight into the meaning of storytelling for the participants. Probing, follow up, and exploratory questions were used to pursue items of interest and to clarify ambiguities. Additionally, follow-up questions such as “Can you tell me more about that?” and “Would you mind describing that to me so it’s like I’m there?” were asked in order to give participants a chance to expand upon answers. Interviews were conducted based on the interview schedule outlined in Table 2.

All participants interviewed were given a consent form to sign before beginning the interview. This consent form outlined participants’ rights. The primary interviewer then reiterated the participants’ right to refuse to participate at any point in time and requested permission to tape the interview. Additionally, the primary interviewer described how anonymity would be maintained during transcribing and reporting so that participants would feel they could share their responses freely, without fear of identification for themselves and others.

Validity and Reliability

This specific selection of participants in family pairs provided triangulation of data, or the gathering of data from different sources, which in turn enhanced validity and

reduced bias (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Internal validity or the truthfulness of the interview was maintained by making sure that interviews were (a) lengthy enough to insure adequate contact with the phenomenon, (b) persistent enough to pursue obvious themes (c) cross checked by a professional peer to keep the investigator from inserting bias, (d) checked by participants to ensure that what is being reported is what they actually meant to say, and (e) searched for disconfirming evidence (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Riddick & Russell, 1999).

Interview narratives were developed and the phenomenon was thickly and richly described (Kvale, 1996; Riddick & Russell, 1999) in order to address external validity pertaining to applicability (how transferable the findings are) and consistency (reliability or dependability of findings) (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Riddick & Russell, 1999). First, the data and themes were crosschecked by an external auditor to insure consistency, while ongoing member checks were conducted specific to the data reported. After themes were developed, a search for disconfirming evidence was conducted by the primary interviewer as well as by the same external auditor.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were recorded on audiotape and transcribed using voice recognition software. The interviewer engaged in note taking during interview sessions in order to catalog participant affect and other observable points of significance. Note taking was also used to assist the interviewer in creating follow-up questions. Transcriptions with accompanying notes were read through multiple times before being organized into descriptive categories. Overarching themes were identified. Efforts were made to locate

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disconfirming evidence from interview transcription. Data gleaned from initial interviews was analyzed concurrently with subsequent interviews so that questions could be adapted and the process fine-tuned. Memoing was utilized throughout data analysis in order to help create an organized, traceable record of the interviewer's thought processes. The interviewer attempted to reach saturation of themes and meanings through the interview process. Finally, patterns, categories, and overarching themes were established, the phenomenon was described, and assertions were made and reported.

Results

The data collected during interviews offered differing perspectives of family storytelling across the lifespan. In order to clearly report results, participants were identified by their parent or adult child status. This allowed themes to be uniquely identified from the sometimes overlapping experiences of parents and their adult children surrounding the phenomenon of family recreational storytelling, and enabled all participants to contribute to all themes, regardless of the life stage they were reporting on. When life stage was pertinent to the data, that information was also included. Thus, all participants contributed data to the meaning of childhood and parental stories, regardless of their current age or position in the family pairing.

The most prominent theme identified from all interviews was that storytelling was considered, for both parents and adult children, a "time specifically for the family to bond together." The overarching theme of family bonding was supported by several sub-themes that appeared to contribute to family bonding in different ways. These sub-themes were organized into three different categories. The first category focused on the content

of stories, and included made-up stories as well as family history stories. The second category related to the context of storytelling, and included shared stories and one-on-one stories. The third category related to the function of stories and included fun, teaching and learning, perspective taking, initiating closeness, and emulation.

Family Bonding

Clearly, the overarching theme identified from all interviews was that storytelling was family bonding time. Many participants echoed this 28-year-old adult son who repeatedly reported that his childhood and present family storytelling experiences were a “time specifically for the family to bond together.” All participants reported that storytelling as a recreational activity created a “sense of unity” and “strengthened the connections” with family members. From a parental perspective, storytelling with young children was described as a time that “seemed to bring everybody together,” and by their adult children as opportunities for “good bonding moments . . . time just being together having fun with family.” Participants agreed that storytelling brought the family together because “we are all relating to the same story, and sharing good memories.” All but one participant (a parent whose childhood, but not her child-rearing, was bereft of family storytelling), described storytelling when they were children as a time when they felt “comfortable,” “safe,” and “secure” because they were “connecting” and physically close to their parents and other family members.

All participants from an adult and childhood perspective reported feeling that storytelling was a “special time,” a way to “connect with family members” in a “special and unique” way. Both parents and adult children reported feelings of “comfort,”

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“security,” and “just having fun” surrounding memories of family recreational storytelling. An 81-year-old parent speaking of her childhood recalled, “it [story time] was just delightful to me as a child. Those were happy times for me. My father died when I was young, but mother didn’t dwell on that, she kept us a family, and she kept us well-fed in storytelling, . . . It kind of brought us all together, all [of us] listening and cuddling, and we would crawl in bed together, all be there listening, it was nice. It made me love my mother so much. . . . I appreciate her and her sacrifices, and it’s just, (pauses, emotional), those bonds of love that I know are in place. It’s a good feeling.”

Those participants who had storytelling experiences as both children and parents reported a difference in motivation for engaging in recreational storytelling. As described above, when recounting childhood perspectives, participants recalled wanting stories because of the good feelings they had during the storytelling time, and because they found the stories themselves “fun” and “enjoyable.” Parent participants reported that their motivation for engaging in recreational storytelling was different. Parents reported using story times, and specifically made-up stories, to “help control the chaos,” “focus their children’s attention,” “settle them down,” “keep them entertained and occupied,” and bring concepts they were trying to teach “down to a level that the children could connect with.” One 70-year-old mother recalled, “I [told stories] whenever, dinnertime, bedtime, just to control the chaos. . . . I would create stories to get them all focused on something. . . . If they were upset, I would use stories to get their minds off it.” All participants whose parents told made-up stories said that they felt “good” and “safe” while the stories were being told.

Content of Stories

In analyzing the data from transcripts, it became apparent that participants in this study were reporting only two specific content areas in their family recreational stories. Stories were either made-up, or they were true stories from either an individual's personal history or from the family's history. Made-up stories were commonly told to young children, whereas participants reported that teenagers rarely would listen to such stories. Instead, teens were most interested in listening to parents or other family member's personal history stories, but mainly when these stories were related to the teenager's current situation and circumstances. In young adulthood, participants reported another shift, this one towards an interest in family history. Parents reported unconsciously using these two categories of stories while grandparents seemed to be very much aware of the different functions stories serve within the family.

Made-up stories. Parents and adult children reported that made-up stories were the most enjoyable during childhood. These stories seemed to serve a special role for parents and children in this study. All participants reporting on their childhood experiences with made-up stories said that made-up stories were comforting, and that listening to them created feelings of safety and security that they still treasured. Participants also reported that made-up stories helped them to understand better what their parents were trying to teach them; this in turn inspired participants to emulate the values that were presented in the stories.

Parent participants reported that telling make-believe stories helped them to calm their children. They also reported that the mental machinations of telling these stories

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were hard work, but that the results were rewarding emotionally and creatively. It is interesting to note that both parents and children enjoyed and were satisfied with childhood made-up story time, even though it was obvious that they had different reasons for participating in this particular kind of family recreational storytelling.

All parent participants mentioned using made-up stories with their children. Two fathers discussed in-depth the specific made-up stories they had created for their children. These men created an imaginary character and told their young children on-going stories built around the character. Both fathers reported using made-up stories to “entertain and help quiet [their children] down,” and to “use the character to [teach lessons] and talk about what was going on in the kids’ lives at the time.” One father reported that he intentionally made these stories about the positive things his children did “as a way to tell [my children] I loved them. . . . It was a positive thing. You love your kids so much, so you just brag about them, [and so with the kids as the main characters] you say these wonderful things about them, in the story. And they know you’re talking about them, sort of in an indirect way.” The son of one of these fathers reported in his interview that he planned to tell stories with the character his father had invented to his children, because “I enjoyed them so much, I want my kids to experience that. And those stories are fun, and uplifting. . . . They bring the whole family together, they strengthen the family.” Both parents and adult children reported that stories were fun and enjoyable when they were used to reinforce and build up relationships in positive ways. Their responses confirmed one adult daughter’s comment that, “they were good bonding moments, just being together with family, having a good time together. . . . It was fun.”

Family history stories and the creation of a family identity. Most participants, both parents and adult children, agreed with this daughter when she said that family history stories helped her to feel a “sense of belonging. . . . The stories are about just you and them. . . . Its like having a secret, something no one outside of your family can understand.” Another adult child, a grandmother herself, related that knowing a family history story makes you feel like you “have a secret, something important to tell that is worth sharing with others that sets you apart and makes you special.” Both parents and adult children also reported that hearing stories about their own childhood from their parents made them feel loved, like they were “accepted” by and “belonged” with their family. One adult daughter said that when she hears stories that are about her from her mom, she feels “special and important, like I must be really precious for my mom to remember these stories.”

Parents also reported that teenagers and young adults often bring their friends home to hear specific family stories. One father shook his head as he bemoaned being put on the spot to “produce the stories I told when the kids were small. . . . I feel so awkward, but the kids are totally okay with it. The kids will just bring their friends over to hear these stories.” One adult daughter related that having her parents or other family members tell stories about her childhood to others “is helping [her friends] to identify with what it is to be a part of the family. . . . My brothers and sisters and I had a strong positive identity growing up . . . a lot of shared memories, . . . and I think that has created a strong identity that we all share. Most of our stories [as siblings] are positive and it helped us to identify with each other.”

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Although shared identity was a concept mentioned by most participants, the strongest descriptions came from adult children. One such participant reported, “Our family stories [represent] our families values, our appreciation for families can continue to grow. . . . Its important for [my wife] to know them.” Another adult daughter recalled, “I gained a better understanding [from personal family stories], and they helped to shape my philosophy of life, [my philosophy] of gratitude.” Finally, many participants, both parents and adult children, reported that having family stories meant that they belonged to a group, which in turn gave them a feeling of personal and family identity. One parent remarked that “family history stories are the type of stories that stick with us, they are the stories that stay in the family, and having those stories makes me feel like I am privy to something special . . . a part of something special . . . stories that keep alive our family’s past history together . . . it

[storytelling] keeps us close.”

Family history and personal stories were also used to remind participants of connections with family members in the past; specifically, family members that died before participants had a chance to really know them. One parent who is also a grandmother remembers that in her childhood, “stories kept him [my father who died when I was 12] alive for me. . . . I loved to hear stories about him, from anyone who knew him.” Many participants, both parents and adult children, reported feeling close to relatives they barely or never knew, as a direct result of family history storytelling. One parent recounts; “my mother telling that story [about me with my grandma] has helped me maintain a connection with my grandmother [who] I never knew. The story connected

me with somebody that I grew up without, but I still felt a connection with her, even now.” Participants said that these stories have given them role models and additional people to connect with, and relate to, in times of trouble. This seems to be especially true when the family history stories reveal the struggles and difficulties their ancestors endured. One adult daughter confirmed this when she said, “these stories [about the difficult lives my ancestors had] they definitely had an impact on me. They are a window into someone’s life, and knowing what choices they made when things were really grim affects the decisions I make in my life. . . . But I didn’t get interested in these kinds of stories until I was in my teens.” It appears that hearing family history stories gave participants a sense of belonging, and connected them with deceased family members. Participants reported that knowing family history stories affects their present outlook on life.

Context of Storytelling

Stories were either told in the context of a group or a one-on-one setting. Context appeared to determine the nature of stories told. It was observed that the intimate nature of one-on-one situations often was associated with the telling of personal, private stories. Conversely, shared stories told to a group were said to promote laughter and fun. These shared stories were well known by family members, who then were actively involved in telling them. Participants identified this active family involvement as one of the main reasons shared stories were fun and enjoyable.

One-on-One Stories. Participants described storytelling as an intimate experience, “a sharing of your person”. One-on-one stories seemed to be more closely associated with

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intimacy and connection. One parent related a one-on-one storytelling experience he had with his own father. This parent related that when he was little, he and his siblings had questioned their father about his experiences during World War II, but his father “not talk about the war.” It was only during a camping trip when “there was nobody else there” that his father finally opened up and told those stories. “I try to learn more about my parents, who they are, . . . [it was] a sharing of your person, opening up and letting somebody else in.” One adult daughter reported that storytelling that promoted “healing and understanding” of her siblings was done in a one-on-one setting. Two different parent participants reported using stories in one-on-one settings; the first to facilitate perspective taking and the second to initiate closeness.

Shared stories. All participants expressed high levels of enjoyment during storytelling sessions where everyone was participating in the storytelling. One parent participant recalled, “That’s what makes it enjoyable . . . its an interactive thing, people can envision it, because lots of times we are talking about places and people we all know, and so we describe it and everyone knows what you are talking about. And pretty soon that story will spark related stories . . . it’s enjoyable.” His daughter also reported a high level of enjoyment during shared stories, “you start telling stories, and pretty soon, you are having a great time with your family just by reminiscing, remembering all the fun times that you had, and it becomes even more fun when we can all interact and tell the story together.”

Another adult daughter laughingly reported, “I just enjoy telling stories, I enjoy telling stories about my sisters or my life growing up, especially if they are in the room

. . . so they can add their perspective to the story and enhance it ". These stories appeared to give families a "common bond" to connect over, and were considered extremely "fun," "entertaining," and "enjoyable," precisely because family members had the opportunity to share the good feelings from a past memory, as well as the fun of the present telling, with other family members. One father, a parent participant, added to our understanding by saying, "Its an interactive thing. Lots of times we've been to the same places. And so we can describe it, and everybody knows where you're talking about and its like we're all there, and soon everyone is chiming in, telling related stories, or adding their two cents to the story you're telling."

Functions of Storytelling

For participants in this study, stories appeared have specific roles and functions. Again and again, participants reported how "fun" and "enjoyable" family recreational storytelling was. It also appeared that stories were often instruments for teaching and learning, though participants were frequently unaware of this outcome. Stories seemed to promote both the tellers' and the listeners' ability to see another point of view. Participants reported using stories to purposefully initiate closeness in a variety of situations. Finally, family recreational storytelling seemed to give listeners role models and templates for emulation.

Fun in storytelling. The association of fun and enjoyment with family recreational storytelling is a pervasive theme that deserves singular consideration. Time and time again, across all life-span perspectives participants use the terms "fun," "enjoyable," and "good times with family," in responding to interviewer questions. One son recounted,

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“Storytelling was about fun times, being with family.” A parent participant, now a grandmother, laughingly related, “when we get together as a family it is just a hoot! We tell stories and reminisce; it is just a fun time being with family.” Another parent, also a grandmother, concluded her interview by saying, “Storytelling is fun! I think it keeps people young, at least in their own minds!” One father, who was also a parent participant, repeated again and again throughout his interview that his family’s stories “are humorous, they are about funny past experiences.” His daughter, along with all other adult children, repeatedly emphasized the enjoyment and fun she experienced during family storytelling, “you get to re-live all those fun memories, and pretty soon, you are there, having fun with your family.” The same father summed up the relationship of fun and storytelling when he said, “It’s enjoyable, otherwise we wouldn’t do it!”

When storytelling wasn’t fun. Although participants emphasized that storytelling was enjoyable when it was fun, without an ulterior motive, and when it had positive effects on individuals, this did not mean that stories were not told about difficult times. Indeed, many participants echoed this adult child’s opinion that family recreational storytelling was “comforting, because we talk about good memories and bad . . . even when the good memories come with sad or painful ones.” Often times participants reported that the stories they told were enjoyable now, even though the event the story is about was unpleasant at the time. For example, a mother recalled, “we enjoy going back and remembering some of the pleasant, as well as the unpleasant, memories that formed our family. We all interact so well together, that its just fun to go back and reminisce about when [the children] were growing up.”

When asked about the negative effects of storytelling, one adult daughter remembered that in her family, stories were sometimes used to form negative “alliances” between family members, or to tease in ways that were not enjoyable. This participant went on to add that her family has since recognized that using storytelling to tease and form alliances is not beneficial. She emphasized that her family now “makes an effort not to participate in these [negative] forms of storytelling,” although they do occasionally slip back into old habits. In response to the same question, in a different family pair, both the mother and daughter mentioned the negative effect of teasing. Probing questions revealed that each did not think being teased was always fun. The adult daughter elaborated that even though she did not like it at the time, it made her feel important now, “At least my parents cared enough to remember [these events].” This participant reported that teasing is still an acceptable form of storytelling in her family. It is important to note that other study participants who did not report negative storytelling often emphasized that they made a conscious effort to only tell stories that “built up” the family or its individual members. One father emphasized that storytelling “always had to be positive, or it wasn’t fun.”

Teaching and learning: the transfer of beliefs and values through storytelling.

Many parent participants reported using stories to teach. However, the same participants adamantly stated that their stories had “no underlying motive,” and that they were not trying to make a point or teach a lesson. Parent participants reported using morals to help create an interesting plot, not to make a point. They firmly declared that the primary

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reason for telling make-believe stories was the “sheer enjoyment” and “fun” it created, for them and for their small children.

Given that parents did not report deliberately pushing lessons in stories, it is interesting that all adult children and most parent participants reported learning from the storytelling that their family engaged in. Although parents at times seemed unsure if their stories were little more than entertainment, their children recalled being highly motivated to emulate the values and principles they perceived in both the made-up and personal stories their parents told. One adult-daughter related, “I remember when I was a kid, and we’d hear stories. There was this pocket story [about being honest] and I remember wanting to be like the boy in the story. . . . When you’re a little kid, you don’t always know the right thing to do, and if you hear a story about a little boy who wanted to be honest, it kind of gives you an idea of how you want to be . . . because kids can’t understand how to be ‘honest,’ but they can understand how to be like that little boy.” In addition to being influenced by the values their parents related in stories, both adult children and parent participants reported that their ideas of marriage and who they date, as well as their career and recreational choices were influenced by the personal stories their parents told them as children.

Parent participants reported that when they became parents they used stories to bring lessons to the level of the learner. One parent participant reported that in doing this she was emulating her mother’s storytelling style. Additionally, parents reported that telling stories “captured the attention of their children,” and that children seem better able to “focus,” “listen,” and “pay attention” during family recreational storytelling. Adult

children's perspectives corroborate these findings. One adult son confirmed this when he said, "it was hard for me to pay attention when I was a kid, but with storytelling, paying attention wasn't a problem."

All participants, when recounting their childhood experiences with storytelling agreed with this adult child's perspective when he said listening to stories was "interesting," and it "kept me and my siblings on the edge of our seats." Three other adult children specifically reported being "enthralled" and "attentive" when stories were told. All participants, parents and their adult children, looking back on their childhood storytelling memories, not only remembered the moral, or lesson of these stories, they also remembered specific stories and the context the stories were told in. One son noted that storytelling times "were good times. I remember them fondly. I don't have one of those super-sharp memories for my childhood, I don't remember a lot. And that says something because I do remember certain circumstances, and . . . and storytelling is one of them. . . . I have a positive association with storytelling."

Parent participants who made up stories for their children reported that this activity was a learning experience for them; one in which they developed their creativity and imagination. These stories were described as "harder" to come up with than personal stories. It seems that their extra effort may have paid off. Made-up stories were the stories that adult children said they associated with feelings of comfort, safety, and security when looking back on their childhood. Responses indicated that the positive, predictable outcomes of these stories, combined with the intrigue of novel storylines, held children's interest while simultaneously fostering feelings of safety and comfort. Parent participants

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also related that telling these stories was an educational experience that allowed them to “connect meaningfully with their young children.” In the words of this parent, telling made-up stories “helped me to learn to use my imagination” and “see the world through my children’s eyes.”

Most participants reported that when they became teenagers their interest shifted from make-believe stories to factual stories. An adult son reported that he loved his father’s made-up stories when he was a child, but lost interest in them as he entered high school. This participant said that as he got older he wanted “to hear stories that were real, and about weighty stuff [related to my own life].” Other adult children reported that they also sought after stories that were relevant and applicable in their own lives when they became teenagers. Another adult daughter clearly stated, “my interest in history and personal stories really began when I was a teenager.” Parents in this study seemed to be aware and responsive to this shift in interest. One parent related that she “loves communicating with her children, . . . and they like to listen to her stories . . . [especially] when she connects her life stories with things that are going on in their lives.” Interestingly, it seemed that parents’ storytelling roles changed as their children’s story-needs changed. Participants’ responses seemed to indicate that one parent was primarily involved with made-up stories, while the other parent became more involved with storytelling as the children became teenagers.

A 23-year-old adult daughter confirmed this. She reported that when she became a teenager the focus of family recreational storytelling, for her, shifted from her dad’s made-up stories to her mom’s real life stories. She said she began wanting to hear those

stories because, “I can see through those stories the things they valued, and the kind of people they are. It makes me want to be different. It makes me understand what’s important. Like, I remember my mom; she tells me that when she first met my dad, she went to dinner [at his parents’ house] and my Grandpa helped with the dishes. And she’s told that story a million times, and you know, the story helped me to see what’s important to my mom, and that my grandpa is the kind of person that would do that kind of thing. And it shows me something that is important in people. It shows me that my grandpa cares about his wife and he doesn’t think that she has to do the dishes or be the only one to wash the dishes. And that tells me something.”

Perspective taking. Both parent participants and their adult children believed that stories helped people to “learn and understand,” and to “gain empathy” for another point of view. Parent participants reflecting on storytelling with their teenagers said that “listening to [their children’s version of a] story” helped them as parents to see the situation from their child’s “perspective.” They also said that they told personal history stories more frequently and purposefully to teenagers and young adults because they, “wanted to give a different perspective” and they wanted their children to understand them better, and to see them as more human. Their adult children confirmed that this actually was occurring.

This adult daughter said that hearing her parents’ stories “was kind of like seeing them as individuals, as kids, as teenagers . . . you know, a totally different version of who they are [now].” In the words of another adult-daughter, “It makes me feel like she [my mother] can identify with me, and it makes me feel like I can tell something that I’m

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having a hard time with. I feel more able to tell it. I feel more comfortable talking with her if I can feel like she can actually understand what I'm going through because she's been there and she has that story to tell me." Another adult daughter stated, "Storytelling has absolutely affected my relationship with my mother. [Our relationship] is built on trust, sheer trust . . . and storytelling builds trust."

Participants who were grandparents also used purposive storytelling to promote trust and open perspectives. A parent participant, who is now a grandmother, reported that she tells her teen-age grandchildren stories about their parents in order to allow her grandchildren the opportunity to see their parents as "more human, . . . more real" and to "help them understand a little more about growing up." Participants in general echo the sentiments of this son, who said that hearing personal stories is "a window into someone else's life that gives a totally different perspective on your own life. It [Storytelling] colors the way we understand life."

Participants also reported learning different perspectives on past events as they listened to their parents' and siblings' versions of family events. An adult daughter recounted: "When I started listening to my siblings' version of events from the past, . . . some of them have been like revelation to me, like, "oh my goodness! I had no idea! . . . That's the way you really saw me?" She continues by adding, "its kind of letting go of things from the past and kind of saying okay, that happened, and working through it." One son said, "You learn about your brothers' and sisters' personalities, you see what the family enjoys, where they are in their lives . . . just let [a family member] share a memory and you gain a new perspective."

Participants reported feeling “closer” to family members, and “understanding them better” when they heard stories about that family member’s past. In particular, hearing stories about parents seemed to evoke strong emotions and feelings. When asked how they felt when listening to either a father’s or a mother’s personal stories, participants echoed this parent’s sentiments: “It drew me closer to him [my father]. I loved it. I wish he would have done more of it, actually. Now that they [my parents] are gone, I wish they had told me more. I think it helped me to know them better, their childhood, and what it was like . . . that was important to me.” An adult son added to this when he said, “[listening to my parents’ personal stories], I felt attentive, focused, engaged, it was fascinating. I wanted to hear more about what I could identify with. I was probably trying to understand them, but I probably wasn’t aware of that when I was a teenager.”

Initiating closeness. Both parents and their children participants reported that shared stories were often helpful in initiating closeness with extended family or other family members that they had difficulty communicating with. One son reported that shared stories “give you something to talk about . . . with relatives you might not otherwise know.” He went on to say that knowing a shared story gave him a better degree of understanding of his relatives, which in turn gave him the “ability to communicate better with them, because I have a little more background, a little more common ground and things that I can touch on or use to begin or enter into conversation.” Another adult child said that in her family, “these [shared] stories seem to bring extended family together, because when I get together with my cousins, we don’t have a lot in common to

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talk about, but everyone knows [certain family stories], and we can connect and interact through telling that story together.”

One parent participant reported that during a period of time when it was difficult to communicate with a teen-age son, he was able to overcome his son’s reluctance to talk by telling stories about when his son was a child. During the interview this father recounted, “I’d say, “Remember when . . . ?”, and we would start talking about that. And so he would talk to me when maybe, if we hadn’t had that memory to talk about, he might not have talked to me. . . . I think it brought both of us together and helped us to communicate more. We were able to talk about other issues because we laid the groundwork, and were more comfortable together. We had wonderful times discussing things we did together, so it kind of opened the door for us [to communicate].”

Storytelling was also the means through which a father in this study was able to learn more about his own father’s experiences serving in World War II. This parent participant described storytelling as a “sharing of self, . . . an opening up of your person. . . . It’s a chance to open up yourself, and let somebody else in.” He went on to relate, “Sharing your stories is like a sharing of your person, who you are and what your life has been. When I was little my dad would not talk about the war. Years later when I was lots older, . . . I asked him again, and this time he talked about it. Hearing someone’s story helps you feel like you know people, that you are close to them.” It appeared that for most participants, storytelling was often a catalyst for creating a sense of intimacy, acceptance, and belonging amongst family members.

Emulation. Participants overwhelmingly reported that as they matured, they began to be interested in family history stories because they offered glimpses of people worthy of emulation. One son reported that this curiosity was born out of a desire to know more about what molded the character of his mother and grandmother because they were such strong people, and he wanted “to find out why they were the way they were so he could be more like them.”

It was striking how often participants said that stories had a direct influence on their personal choices and their personal development. Three adult children and one parent participant reported that they emulated the values and ideals in their parents’ stories when making decisions about career choices, mate selection, dating standards, personal ethics, and parenting styles. In the words of this adult child, “stories affected so many of my choices, what I studied in college, my ideas of marriage, even what I do now for a career.” One parent participant related that hearing his father’s stories about police work every evening around the dinner table was the reason he entertained going into the F.B.I., and may have influenced his decision to become a psychologist. Two other parent participants related that stories they heard as children affected their recreation decisions when they grew up. These participants said that those stories still influence what types of trips they want to go on and what kinds of recreation they engage in.

Perhaps instrumental in facilitating emulation in the listener is the unique ability of stories to become real for the listener. All participants reported that stories allowed them to re-live events, and “experience events vicariously.” In the words of one parent, “[listening to stories] is a vicarious experience. You can envision past events, it brings

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back visual images in your mind, and that's enjoyable. As someone tells a story about something I remember I just pull it out of my memory bank and watch it again, and that makes me want to go back to those places again and again." Other parents and adult children corroborate that listening to stories allows them to "re-live their own memories" or "participate vicariously in other people's stories." Regardless of the kind of stories told, participants reported wanting to emulate what they learned by listening to family stories.

Discussion

For families in this study, the overall meaning of family recreational storytelling was identified as family bonding. Findings indicated that purposeful cultivation and facilitation of family recreational storytelling created bonding experiences. Telling stories about memories and events that all family members can relate to in positive, interactive ways, created fun times that were enjoyed by all. Family recreational storytelling appeared to strengthen emotional bonds and feelings of connection between family members in ways that endured across time. It could be argued that strengthening emotional bonds between family members leads to increased investment in the well being of the family and its individual members, especially as the family ages. This in turn may create greater family unity and support during times of crisis or distress.

The findings also indicated that telling stories, particularly personal history stories, promoted trust and intimacy between family members. Trust and intimacy have been identified as necessary components of therapeutic relationships (Becvar & Becvar, 1993) and interpersonal relationships (Richardson et al., 1999; Scoresby, 1998). The

purposeful use of family recreational storytelling may be beneficial, therefore, in that it may help to promote trust and intimacy between family members. Findings also suggested that family recreational storytelling often has therapeutic, emotionally healing benefits for family members. Family recreational storytelling may in fact help to promote the interpersonal skills Seligman (2002) identifies as necessary and lacking in a society where people are depressed and seeking therapy in great numbers. In addition to promoting family bonding and performing therapeutic functions, it also appears that family recreational storytelling is an effective way to cultivating feelings of comfort, acceptance, and security in children, particularly when parents put forth the effort to tell made-up stories to their children. Children who feel confident, safe, and secure are less likely to experience feelings of depression (Seligman, 2002), and be more likely to have the resiliency necessary to face problems and deal with trauma and disappointment (Greenspan, 2002).

It could be argued that family recreational storytelling functions in ways similar to narrative therapy (Hill, 1997; Yolen, 2000), but occurs in a more natural and accessible environment (Scoresby, 1998). Participants reported that they were better able to understand and empathize with family members through storytelling, which in turn facilitated conflict resolution and healing. Additionally, as in narrative therapy, participants reported that family recreational storytelling provided them with problem solving templates which they were able to beneficially implement in their own lives.

For participants in this study, family recreational storytelling facilitated learning, teaching, and provided them with new perspectives and problem solving templates.

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Teaching and learning experiences in the data seem to correlate with Gersie & King's (1990) idea of inspiration and instruction. Just as in historical storytelling, like that still practiced in Native American and other oral cultures (Fulford, 1998), values and morals were clearly transferred through family recreational storytelling. Additionally, many participants reported making major life decisions and having "their life philosophy" based upon the stories they heard as children from their parents. Therefore, it appears that for parents who wish to continually shape and mold the character of their children throughout their lives, one possibility is to use family recreational storytelling to purposefully depict the values and beliefs they as parents wish to transfer.

In particular, participants reported being highly influenced by the values and beliefs depicted in the made-up stories their parents told. It is possible then that parents who wish to influence the character development of their children may be able to do so by using either of the following two methods of creating made-up stories reported by parents. Parents either told general made-up stories in which the plot depicted values and morals, or they made-up stories specifically to positively depict their children as characters in the story. Parents who employed the latter method reported purposefully portraying their children as characters who already possessed knowledge of right and wrong, and who were able to act virtuously in the made-up story. Both of these storytelling methods were reported as powerful and effective ways to promote character development amongst parents and adult children in this study.

Similarly, parents who wish to use storytelling to purposefully influence and connect with teenagers, under normal circumstances, may be able to do so by telling

relevant and applicable personal stories that offer teenagers problem solving templates. Participants in this study reported that telling these kinds of stories not only provided instruction and advice, they facilitated understanding, trust, and empathy between parents and their teenagers. Family recreational storytelling was also found to promote character development beyond the teenage years. Participants reported that as they became adults, family history stories provided them with a family identity, which in turn influenced the kind of person they tried to become. Kinship with story characters appeared to increase desire in both parents and their adult children to emulate the traits and characteristics ascribed to their ancestors in family stories.

Throughout this study, family recreational storytelling was found to have significant influence on family members. This is noted in light of the fact that there has been a tendency to denounce the role of parents in the formulation of their children's character in some childhood development literature. Harris (1998) argued that parents play an inconsequential role in the character development of their children, and that peers exert a more significant influence. From the data collected in this study, the opposite is apparent. In fact, we found that parents' beliefs and preferences were transmitted and emulated through family recreational storytelling. Participants reported having their ethics, perceptions of marriage, recreational choices, career pursuits and even their personal beliefs being directly influenced by the stories they heard their parents tell when they were growing up.

It is possible that storytelling fosters emulation because it increases individual efficacy. Participants reported that listening to family recreational stories made them feel

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as if they were living through the experiences in the story, and that they could clearly visualize events. These descriptions suggest that listening to stories is a vicarious experience, which according to Bandura (1986), increases a person's belief in their ability to accomplish tasks. Therefore, hearing family recreational stories may increase personal efficacy and inspire listeners to emulate the actions and beliefs depicted therein.

It is interesting to note that although the participants reported that when they were children they understood the values taught, and often wanted to emulate virtues depicted in stories, parents did not seem to be aware that this was going on. As has been mentioned, parental motivation in telling stories was often only to "calm the chaos." One father said, "When children are little, they don't understand the meaning of a lot of what you say ... what point you are really trying to get across." It seemed that parents were unaware of the role family recreational storytelling played in inspiring their children to emulate the beliefs and actions depicted through storytelling.

Personal awareness of meaning and function of family recreational storytelling varied across the lifespan. Participants appeared unaware of the function of family recreational storytelling during childhood and adolescence. Participants did report, however, being more, but not fully, aware of some of the benefits when they became parents and were raising their own children. Grandparents appeared to be the most aware of specific beneficial applications for family recreational storytelling. As a result, responses of participants who were grandparents indicated that they had the most purposeful application and awareness of the beneficial outcomes of family recreational storytelling. It appears then that parents are not always aware of how meaningful stories

are, particularly for their adult-children. It is therefore possible that becoming more fully aware of the application and benefits of storytelling as determined in this study may make family recreational storytelling even more meaningful and useful, especially when applied purposefully in child rearing.

Finally, the data collected indicated that at particular stages of development, different types of stories were sought after and appeared to serve different purposes. These findings may be the beginnings of a possible developmental model of the meaningfulness of storytelling across the lifespan (see Figure 1). For example, in childhood, the stories requested were those that were made-up by parents. Hearing parents tell made-up stories made them feel secure, and taught them what qualities their parents valued. Interest appeared to have been maintained by the adventure of the story, while feelings of comfort and security were linked to familiarity with the stories and characters as well as predictability of outcomes. There was strong indication that children in this study were very likely to emulate the values and activities they learned about in the made-up stories their parents told.

Participants further reported that as children entered their teen years, they tended to be more interested in listening to stories with problem solving applications related to their own lives. Although using made-up stories with teens can provide them with comfort in times of crisis, in general, participants reported that teens are most interested in pertinent personal history stories told by their parents or other important adult figures in their lives. These stories appeared to help teens connect with their parents and other family members, and to feel understood by them. Additionally, participants reported that

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hearing these stories made them more likely to trust their parents and take their advice. Although they did not appear to be consciously doing so, teens seemed to seek after stories in order to find solutions to personal problems, and to build connections with their parents.

The next stage noted for participants began sometime in young adulthood. In addition to stories related to parents' applicable personal history stories, young adults tend to seek out family history stories as well as the personal history stories of close family members. At this stage interest shifts from seeking stories in order to understand ones own personal circumstances better, to seeking stories to understand others better. In particular, participants sought out the stories of family members who had passed away, apparently in order to understand and identify with their family and its individual members better. From interviews, it appeared that in this stage individuals were trying to understand their family and its individual members, often with the specific purpose of emulating the admirable qualities possessed by relatives and depicted in the family history stories.

As individuals became parents, they reported using, rather than seeking, stories. Parents used stories to connect with their small children and calm them down. They also reported using stories differently when their children became teens. Parents offered stories that were directly related to their teens' experiences. As individuals assumed the parental role, their focus on storytelling appeared to shift from learning and gaining personal insight to imparting knowledge to their children. They seemed to be unaware of the specific outcomes of perspective taking and emulation, whereas responses from

participants who were grandparents indicated a higher level of awareness of the benefits and specific applications of family recreational storytelling. Based on the findings of this study, grandparents are therefore more likely to purposefully use stories to achieve specific goals related to family bonding. A possible developmental model such as this could provide clear direction for research into establishing a grounded theory of storytelling across the lifespan. Further research investigating the possibility of developing this possible model is recommended.

Examples of the Meaning of Family Recreational Storytelling

It is important to recognize that in analyzing the data the researcher found a great deal of overlap of themes, indicating that the themes and patterns identified were not mutually exclusive. A specific manifestation of this was that although teens had left made-up stories behind, this did not preclude their occasional seeking out of a made-up story. One mother related the following story, which illustrated the overlap of these themes perfectly. She said that a few nights before, her teenage daughter had spent the entire evening crying. About midnight the exhausted mother, out of sheer desperation (or inspiration) had her daughter come sleep on a couch in her parents' bedroom. The mother asked her husband to tell their daughter a made-up story. When the daughter was settled, the father proceeded to the story. The daughter was comforted, the crying ceased, the girl slept. Later, this parent related to the primary investigator, "As this was going on I said to myself, I need to tell [the primary investigator], because *this* is the meaning of family storytelling, [what's happening] right now, this is why we do it!" It seemed that the safety and security felt during the telling of made-up stories did become inaccessible after

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childhood. However, in the words of one adult child, “you have to lay the groundwork with your kids in order for stories to be meaningful later on.” This incident seemed to support the idea of a developmental model in which made-up stories provide children with comfort, safety, and security. Additionally, before calming down, this teen-age daughter was unable to connect with the real life related stories her parents had been using to help her. After re-connecting through made up stories the daughter felt safe and calm enough for the parents to offer stories that were more helpful and developmentally appropriate, according to the suggested model.

Perhaps the best illustration of the meaning of family recreational storytelling is found in a comparison of the lives of two mothers in this study. Both had the misfortune of losing a father when they were approximately four years old. These two women are from different families; one is 81-years-old, the other, 76. As each woman related their memories of childhood storytelling, both had strong emotions in their voices and on their faces. Tears often accompanied what they were saying. There was however, a major difference in the emotions being felt by each.

The 81-year-old mother became teary eyed because talking about the stories brought back such warm and loving memories. Her mother always made a special effort to spend time with all five of her children telling stories, “My mother’s storytelling was delightful to me as a child... I felt grounded, and loved... Thinking about that special time with my mother just makes me love her so much.”

The 76-year-old mother also had tears in her eyes as she described the loneliness that she had experienced as a child. This woman had no memory of ever being told

stories when she was a child or a teenager. In her own words, “I can’t imagine what I missed when I was younger, [not having the storytelling experiences my children have had]. I was so alone; I had no one to relate to... My mother tells stories to me now, and its *really* a blessing to hear her stories.” The pain she experienced during this time was obvious, even though more than half a century had passed. Interestingly, this same woman, (when speaking of the family she had with her children now) reported earlier in the interview that her children “love getting together and telling stories ... Really, I can’t imagine a family without storytelling.”

The contrast between these two experiences is stark and obvious. Both these women were poor, fatherless, and had mothers who were forced to work long hours to support them. One woman, however, experienced a childhood full of sweet memories of spending time with her mother listening to her stories. The other felt totally isolated; her early years were bereft of stories and meaningful connections with family. Both shed tears when reporting their experiences with family recreational storytelling in their childhood. The difference in the quality of those tears sums up the meaning family recreational storytelling appeared to have for the individuals who participated in this study.

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Table 1

Eligibility for Study Assessment Schedule:

1. (After explaining the purpose of this study and discussing the commitment involved, prospective participant will be asked if they are interested in participating). Are you willing to participate in this study? Do you have an adult (18 yr. old) child/parent that might be willing to participate in this study? If so, how can I contact them? (The child/parent will be contacted if the person being interviewed meets the remaining interview criteria.)
 2. Do you and one or more of your family members ever spend time together talking about past events?
 3. Are there times when you are sharing information in story form (i.e. with a beginning, middle, and end; one person mainly talking with the others present mainly listening)?
 4. When? How often? With whom?
-

Table 2

Interview Schedule

1. Have members of your family ever, or do they now spend time sharing stories and/or relating past or present events? What kinds of stories are told?
2. When does this normally happen?
3. For how long?*
4. Who is normally present?*
5. What are the stories about?
6. Who tells them?
7. Can you describe how they tell the stories? (voice, gestures, attitude, emotions exhibited)*
8. How do the listeners act (before, during and after)?
9. How do you feel looking back on storytelling memories?
10. How do you feel during the storytelling?
11. Did these events have meaning for you? If so what?
12. Do you think the storytelling you have described has influenced you? Can you tell me about it?
13. Looking back, do you believe there were any benefits or drawbacks to this event? If so, can you tell me about them?

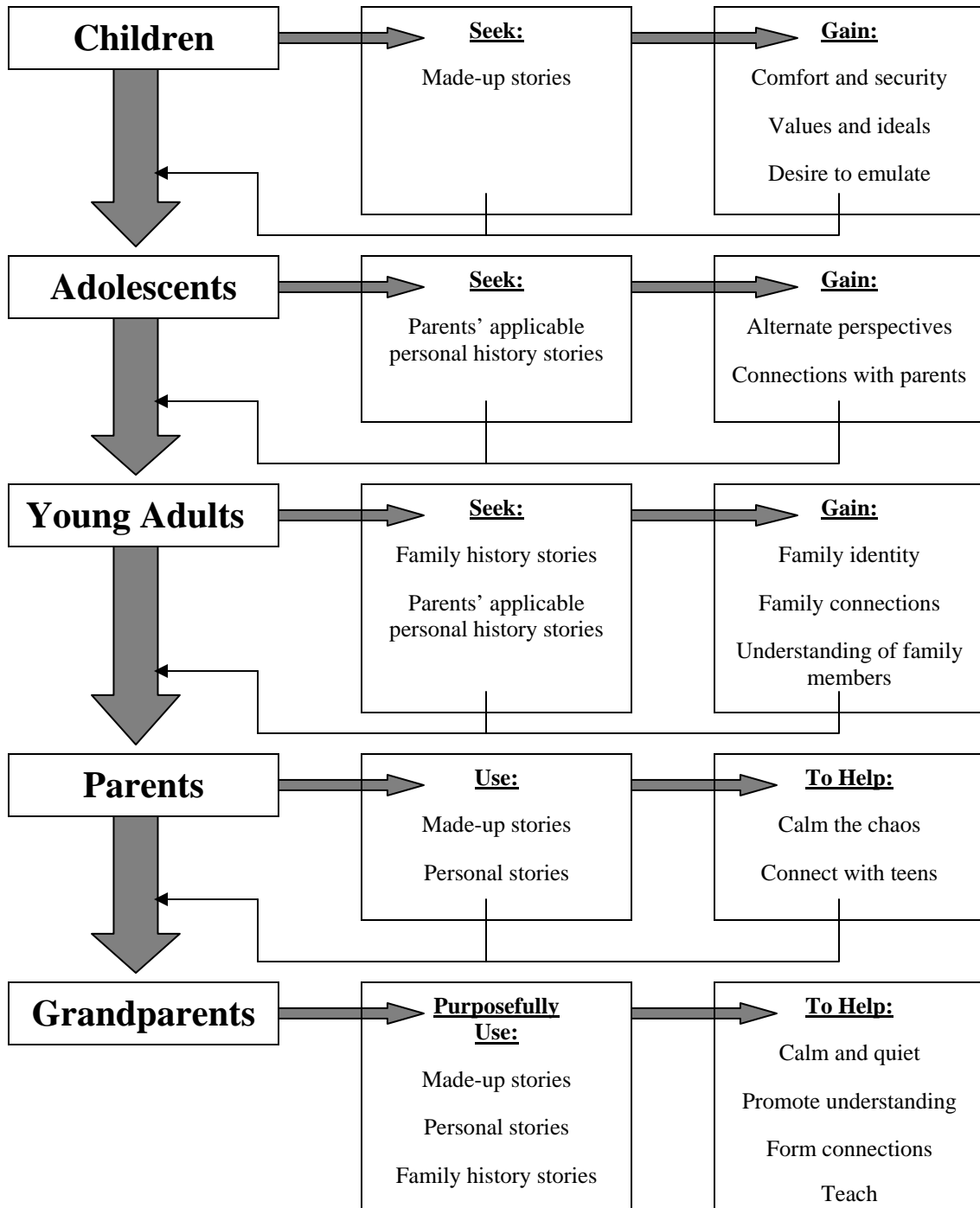
Table 2 Cont.

14. (To adult children) Did your Mom or Dad or both ever describe events from their childhood? Did they ever describe things from your childhood? What did it feel like to listen to these stories? To your parents? What meaning (if any) did this have for you? Have you ever learned anything from listening to stories? If so what? How did you know you had learned it? What kinds of stories do you like to listen to the most? Why?
15. (To parent participant) Did you ever sit down with your children and tell them stories about when they were younger? About when you were younger? Why did you tell those stories? How do you tell them? Any special voice, circumstance, etc.? What meaning if any did telling the stories have for you? Did your parents tell stories to you? What kind? Did the stories have any meaning for you? If so what? Have you ever learned anything from telling stories? From listening to them? If so, what? What kinds of stories do you like to tell the most? Why?
16. Is there anything you would like to add?
-

* These questions were dropped as a result of the dynamic nature of the qualitative process.

Figure 1

Suggested Lifespan Developmental Model for Storytelling



Appendix A Prospectus

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The family is the system in which individuals begin to learn how to interact with their world and to interpret meaning (Holmes, 1999; Seligman, 1992). It has been suggested that individual and family well being is increased through development of certain interpersonal skills such as empathy and problem solving, and that these skills can be taught through storytelling (Scoresby, 2000). Although storytelling is certainly not a prerequisite for a happy family, it is my intention to ascertain what kinds of meanings are associated with storytelling within family systems.

In order pursue this research question, meaning must first be defined for the context of this study. The semiotic tradition is drawn upon to define meaning, specifically the triadic relationship of sign (the representation of an object or event in an individual's mind), object (the actual object or event itself) and interpretant (the individual through whom the information about the object is interpreted to create one or more representative signs) (Sheriff, 1989) is used. The relationship between object, sign, and interpretant, as applied to word usage and acquisition, can similarly be applied to story usage and acquisition with the story becoming the sign representing specific meaning in the form of the interpretant. From this it follows that meaning, in the context of storytelling, is individual specific, the result of the interpretant's unique set of experiences, and can be communicated to others (Sherriff, 1989; Slife & Williams, 1995). Having thus defined meaning for the context of this study, it becomes necessary to define storytelling itself, and outline its significance for this study.

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Storytelling, or the oral tradition, is an historical phenomenon. While many theorize on the role and importance of storytelling to individuals and society (Cheyney, 1990; Coles, 1989), evidence for such claims is mainly anecdotal. Within recent years, the importance of storytelling has been investigated with more rigor within the fields of medicine (Mattingly & Lawler, 2000), education (Carroll, 1999), psychology (Gardner, 1993) and family therapy (Androutsopoulou, 2001).

Evidence gathered from these and other related studies has indicated that storytelling is physically, psychologically, and emotionally beneficial for both the storyteller and the listener. There is, however, no research investigating the meaning of storytelling within families. If storytelling has been found to benefit individuals in a variety of scenarios (Gardner, 1993; Holmes, 1999; Hunt & Sampson, 1998; Payne, 2000; Roberts & Mattingly & Lawler, 2000; Simich-Dudgeon, 1998), it stands to reason that storytelling may have similar benefits within the family system.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the meaning of family recreational storytelling for parents and their adult children.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the phenomenon of family recreational storytelling in order guide future research as well as provide valuable insight for strengthening families.

Need for the Study

Traditional storytelling is recognized as being a transmitter of cultural values and beliefs (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Cheyney, 1990). The fields of medicine, psychology, education and therapy are among the many disciplines which frequently cite anecdotal evidence for the benefits of storytelling for improving patient care (Coles, 1989; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000), increasing learning in the classroom (Abrahamson, 1998; Gray, 1997), and improving quality of life for people seeking therapy (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Luskin, 2002; Seligman, 1992). Each of these disciplines has recognized the benefits of storytelling as it relates to their field. One discipline, narrative therapy, has not been enhanced by, but rather, has grown out of recognition amongst the therapeutic community that certain applications of storytelling are beneficial to their clients.

Narrative therapy deals with storytelling in ways that allow listeners to be objective and gain insight into the consequences of their own actions, all without the listener feeling criticized or chastened (Dwivedi, 1997; Gersie & King, 1990). Narrative therapy also deals with helping people become authors of their own life story, which means that they become more empowered in their own lives (Payne, 2000; Roberts & Holmes, 1999). Storytelling seems somehow to bond people, particularly family members, together (Coles, 1989; Oring, 1986; Payne, 2000; Stone, 1988). Storytelling also has the ability to affect (positively or adversely) families and their members (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Luskin, 2002; Seligman, 1992). Additionally, storytelling is recognized as having the potential to stimulate moral thoughts about interpersonal

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situations (Vitz, 1990) and to guide and instruct people in their daily lives (Dwivedi, 1997; Gersie & King, 1990).

Stories are recognized for their ability to teach, instruct, and provide templates for learning to cope with positive and negative life events (Arbinger, 2000; Covey, 1989; Gersie & King, 1990; Roberts & Holmes, 1999). It is within the family unit that children (as well as other family members), give meaning to stories (Marion, 1999). Meaning develops through the creation of signs representing the event for the individual; each set of signs is unique to the individual and their experiences (Sherriff, 1989). It can therefore be said that

According to the meaning given, corresponding skills and templates for interacting with the world at large are acquired (Seligman, 1992). For illustration of this, let us look at a greatly simplified example. Two children of similar aptitude but with differing life experiences, receive a poor grade. One child's experiences, and the stories he is told, lead him to believe that poor performance is a result of personal flaw for which there is no remedy. For this child, the poor test score becomes a sign (Sheriff, 1989) that represents proof of an internal, invariable failing (Seligman, 1992). The other child has experiences and is told stories that highlight the ability of individuals to improve themselves through hard work and perseverance (Seligman, 1992). For this child, the poor test grade becomes a sign (Sheriff, 1989) representing a need to study harder. Each interpretant experiences the same event but comes up with different meaning because of the difference in their experiences (Sheriff, 1989). From this we see that the stories we

are told, and the stories we tell, whether about ourselves or others, greatly influence the way we interpret our world (Seligman, 1992; Sheriff, 1989; Slife & Williams, 1995).

It has been claimed that storytelling is capable of affecting families and individuals (Doherty, 1997; Luskin, 2002; Robert & Holmes, 1999; Seligman, 1992; Scoresby, 1998; Stone, 1988), yet there are no studies specifically investigating these claims. To date there has been no study investigating the phenomenon of storytelling itself, and none studying this phenomenon in the context of the family unit. This study seeks to provide insight into the meaning of storytelling within the family, as this insight can potentially be used to strengthen families.

Delimitations

This study will be delimited to the following:

1. Twenty participants over the age of 18 from ten families; one parent, one son per self-reported family unit.
2. Families in which recreational storytelling is determined to exist. The existence of recreational storytelling will be determined during an initial interview.
3. The use of tape recording and transcribing devices.
4. Time and Duration of the study: This study will begin in January 2004 and end in March 2004. Data will be collected over a 5-7 week period. Analysis will be ongoing.

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Limitations

This study will be limited by the following:

1. The sample may be homogeneous in religion, economic status, and race.
2. The sample will be gathered using purposive convenience sampling.
3. The interpretation and analysis of qualitative data is bound by the breadth of empathic understanding, theoretical awareness, and interpretive skills of the researcher.
4. Subjects who participate in this study will be volunteers who comply with the requirements of this investigation. The method of purposive sampling may introduce a content skewed by the limited breadth of the sample.
5. Data collected are expressions of the subject's perception and interpretation of events as well as the accuracy of their memories.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study are as follows:

1. Storytelling will have meaning for and affect the family system in which it is employed.
2. The setting for the interview will encourage the sharing of all pertinent information.
3. Storytelling is a phenomenon that, while manifested uniquely within individual families, has commonalities that are apparent across all families in this sample.

4. The participants will respond to the researcher's questions accurately and as requested.

Definition of Terms

Family. Any group of two or more people that consider themselves to be family: parents, children, siblings, foster parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and any others who consider themselves family (Bowen & McKechnie, 2002).

Object. An object is the reality for which humans create representation, (Sheriff, 1989), i.e., a horse is the object, the word horse is the sign humans use to represent the original object.

Sign. A sign represents an object or event (Sheriff, 1989).

Stories. Primarily narratives with definite beginnings, middles, and ends, but are not limited to this format (Gersie & King, 1990). In this paper, stories embody signs strung together in order to symbolize the interplay of objects and individuals in specific contexts.

Interpretant. The meaning or understanding given to a particular sign by and individual (Sheriff, 1989).

Meaning. Meaning is dependant upon the context within an individual that the sign relates to the interpretant; it is a dynamic relation of signs (in the context, of this paper, stories,) serving to relate humans to their environment. (Sheriff, 1989).

Intergenerational stories. Stories that are passed down from one generation to the next (Stone, 1988).

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Traditional stories. Stories which are part of a family or cultural heritage and describe historical and/or fictitious events.

Voice. Refers to an individual's ability to vocalize his or her own thoughts, feelings, and emotions, usually in a self-narrative (Androutsopoulou, 2001).

Re-authoring. Empowerment of an individual to dictate the "plot" of his or her own life (Lee, 1997).

Re-storying. The act of framing personal narrative so that events are perceived in a new light (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Parry & Doan, 1994; Payne 2000)

Narrative therapy. The field of therapeutic practice which focuses on assisting the client to form a self-narrative, and/or uses stories to facilitate psychological or emotional healing (Parry & Doan, 1994; Payne 2000).

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Storytelling is a phenomenon, which will be discussed historically in the context of this literature review. Additionally, meaning as it relates to storytelling will be described. The value and function of traditional storytelling will be discussed and attention to the reported benefits of storytelling will be given. These topics will then be related to the importance of storytelling for personal well-being. Narrative therapy will be introduced and related to recreational family storytelling. Finally, storytelling will be presented as the narrative therapy of the family.

Storytelling

Storytelling is an historical pastime, often regarded solely as a form of entertainment. Storytelling can exist as a structured, ritualized event, or it can simply be a normal everyday interaction (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Etchison & Kliet, 2000). Stories include the idea of plot; they have a beginning, middle, and end. Stories also concern action of characters in roles (Mattingly & Lawler, 2000).

Although few studies explore the societal value of the oral tradition, anecdotal evidence has shown that historically, stories and talented storytellers have served important social purposes like facilitating social cohesion, passing down traditions and cultural laws, and helping build feelings of connectedness and community (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Cheyney 1990; Gersie & King, 1990). Recently, the idea of narrative has crept into the world of psychology with the formation of the discipline of narrative therapy (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). Similarly, medical professionals have begun to realize

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the importance of personal stories in diagnosis and treatment (Coles, 1989; LeShan, 1990; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000), and educators are involving storytelling in their curricula (Carroll, 1999; Simich-Dudgeon, 1998).

In each of these disciplines, the use of storytelling has prompted powerful results. In the field of narrative therapy, much has been written about the effectiveness of narrative techniques in helping clients (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Gardner, 1993; Gersie, 1997; Parry & Doan, 1994; Roberts & Holmes, 1999). The benefits of narrative extend into a variety of fields and include faster and more complete medical recoveries when a patient's story is listened to and valued (Mattingly & Lawler, 2000; Coles, 1989), improved language and interpersonal skills for children who are exposed to storytelling (Abrahamson, 1998; Gray, 1997; Scoresby 2000; Scoresby & Price, 1998), and higher levels of confidence for students involved in school based storytelling programs (Major, 2002).

The irony of these findings is that as science explores and validates the usefulness and perhaps necessity of storytelling, westernized societies are becoming less likely to incorporate the act or attributes of storytelling into daily life (Cheyney, 1990). Storytelling is an activity which has the ability to increase empathic skills (Scoresby, 2000; Scoresby, 1998); teach language, interpersonal skills, morals and values (Gray, 1997; Major, 2002; Vitz, 1990); and help maintain interpersonal systems (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Roberts & Holmes, 1999), all of which are integral components of an intact family system (Minuchin & Fishman, 1990).

Meaning and Storytelling

In semiotics, signs are “things that stand for other things” (Cunningham & Shank, 1984, p. 414). People create structures of signs that then mediate their experience in the world. A sign stands for something called an object, by creating an interpretant, an additional sign that stands for some aspect of the object. The interpretant is generated in a person’s mind, and represents an individual’s interpretation of an object. Similarly, events in our lives are entities unto themselves (Cunningham & Shank, 1984; Sheriff, 1989).

Humans create a series of signs that stand together in the representation of the event illustrated in stories or by creating stories about these events, whether real or imaginary, (Sheriff, 1989). Applying isomorphism as described by Constantine (1986), the story itself has meaning unique to the context and experiences of the individual listener. In the instance of storytelling therefore, the event becomes the object, the story is a series of interconnected signs representing the event, but meaning itself is only possible when the story of the event is filtered through the interpretant in the mind of the individual listener. Meaning then becomes the dynamic relation of signs, which is unique to each individual’s experience (Sheriff, 1989).

Value and Function of Traditional Stories

In the Pueblo tradition, storytellers are commonly believed to serve an important societal function. They mold the lives of the children in their culture by transmitting cultural rules and values (Cheyney, 1990). When listening to their traditional stories, children are transfixed and listen raptly. Through stories, the storytellers are attempting to

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teach the children lessons of the past, which they hope will influence their children's action in the future (Fulford, 1998). There is a need to keep purposeful stories like these alive in order that children learn how to behave in the present and to plan for their future (Cheyney, 1990).

Persistent patterns of storytelling nurtured and kept alive within a society or within a family have the ability to connect the feelings and thoughts of community members to the thoughts and feelings of people who lived in the distant past (Stone, 1988). Stories serve to connect individuals through generations (Fulford, 1998). Additionally, "People who grow up without a sense of how yesterday has affected today are unlikely to have a strong sense of how today affects tomorrow" (Cheyney, 1990, p. 8). It follows that learning about the past through stories may have the power to guide our actions and decisions in the present and future.

Not only do stories link us to the past and imbue in us a respect and concern for our future, they also hold power to help us change our lives. Stories contain knowledge and experience of the world according to the teller and can be re-translated by the listener to be personally significant (Roberts & Holmes, 1999). Two functions of storytelling stand out consistently across culture and throughout time; they are instruction and inspiration. Instruction is given by the storyteller and absorbed according to the listeners' own level of understanding and needs at the time (Gersie & King, 1990; Levitt, Korman, & Angus, 2000). Inspiration can be felt through the telling of a story that touches the listener on a personal level. Once an individual is inspired, encouragement to continue in

the face of difficult life circumstances can be gleaned from recollection of the original story (Dwivedi, 1997; Gersie, 1997; Gersie & King, 1990).

Traditional stories are unique in their ability to inspire and instruct. Because they normally take place, “Once upon a time” or “In a galaxy far, far, away,” the listener feels removed from their reality. The listener, therefore, experiences the story with all its implications, with a certain amount of objectivity (Gersie, 1997; Roberts & Holmes, 1999). Removal from reality releases a person’s consciousness so that they may be inspired. They can become part of the story and actually live it while it is being told. The level of rapport between the storyteller and listener facilitates the experience. “Each story is re-created in the interaction between teller and listener. ... The relationship between teller and listener is always intimate. The closeness is generated by the interconnection between the one who tells and the one who listens” (Gersie & King, 1990, p. 32).

Because traditional stories are told live and in person, there is a dynamic which allows the storyteller to respond to the needs of the audience. The storyteller’s choice of story, as well as method of delivery will be determined by what he or she perceives the listener to be in need of hearing (Gersie, 1997). The storyteller can then “share images, emotions, experiences, and ideas which are given to the listener for reflection, knowledge and response” (Gersie & King, 1990, p. 31).

The teller is also capable of purposeful storytelling, perhaps to purge, console, guide, or instruct, creating an atmosphere of spiritual healing (Gersie, 1997; Heart & Larkin, 1996). In Native American cultures, storytelling is associated with physical as well as spiritual healing, (Heart & Larkin, 1996). Western medicine has recently begun to

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recognize the potential healing benefits of storytelling, and research connecting physical health with storytelling in a variety of settings has been conducted (Luskin, 2002; Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996).

The Importance of Narrative in the Medical Field

When medical practitioners listen to the stories of people with illness or pain, they are often better able to understand and empathize with their patients and clients (Coles, 1989; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000). This can lead to improved outcomes for patients, i.e. faster recovery times, less pain, more adequate treatment (Mattingly & Lawler, 2000).

Stories also may offer an avenue for healing where healing is defined, in part, by a recovery of self. Serious illness or disability may wound the person – robbing the individual of their sense of self – as much as it harms or impairs the body. It has been theorized that illness often takes away from a person their ability to envision themselves in the world (Etchison & Kliet, 2000; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000). People tend to have a personal story about their role in the world. When this story changes, a loss of identity can occur if a new positive story is not developed (Parry & Doan, 1994). Seriously injured or ill people may need to re-author their own life story in order to regain a sense of their place in the world (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000). Individuals may need help from others to accomplish this (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Gersie, 1997).

For those who have experienced what society would consider a negative life-changing event (e.g. life threatening illness, chronic pain, loss of bodily function), storytelling may offer its own kind of healing. Although storytelling may not cure, it can

provide a necessary emotional outlet for a person stricken with disease or illness. The efforts of stroke patient Jen-Dominique Bauby exemplify this idea. After a stroke robbed him of his ability to control his body, the desire to communicate and re-establish his place in the world was so strong that Bauby laboriously communicated his story. Bauby did this by using the only part of his body left to his control; letter by letter he blinked out the book “The Diving Bell and Butterfly” which became an account of his personal experiences since the stroke.

Through his storytelling efforts, Bauby’s place in the world was no longer defined by his unresponsive outer appearance and inability to interact. Instead, he was able to establish his identity and become a member of the larger world once again. The act of telling his personal story established him in his own mind as well as in the minds of others as a thinking feeling human being with perceptions and a fully functioning mental capacity. Storytelling helped Bauby create meaning for himself beyond the limited sphere of his physical influence (Bauby, 1997).

The Necessity of Storytelling to Personal Well-Being

It can be said that a life is an individual attempt to create value and meaning in the world we inhabit and establish our own place therein (Androutsopoulou, 2001). Seeing one’s self as an actor with power and autonomy, yet responsibly interconnected to other human beings creates the context for an individual’s personal life story. “A life becomes meaningful when one sees himself or herself as an actor within the context of a story – be it a cultural tale, a religious narrative, a family saga, the march of science, a political movement, and so forth” (Becvar & Becvar, 1993, p.196). There is power in how we tell

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our own story to ourselves and to others. There are times in our lives when we feel like masters of our own destiny, able to act independently and according to our own free will. There are others times in life when we may feel like puppets on a string dancing to another's tune and not acting independently. The stories we tell ourselves have the power to promote either of these two feelings (Hunt & Sampson, 1998; Luskin; 2002; Seligman, 1992).

The nature of the stories we tell to ourselves and to others helps to determine whether we feel ourselves to be acting as independent agents or voiceless victims of fate or circumstance (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Parry & Doan, 1994; Seligman, 1992). Seligman (1992) has identified two styles of storytelling, one that promotes success and happiness and the other that promotes depression. When people perceive themselves as puppets incapable of affecting any kind of influence or positive outcome on their environment, they can become trapped in a pattern of learned helplessness. This pattern has been proposed by Seligman (1992) to be the underlying cause of depression in our society today. The challenge is to find ways to help individuals promote their positive storytelling style while doing away with their depressive storytelling style.

Narrative Therapy

People who seek therapy usually see very limited options to their current problems. Their personal stories are confined by their current mindset. Because their minds are confined to limited options, they are unable to see positive outcomes to current difficulties (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Seligman, 1992). The premise of narrative therapy is to help individuals become authors of their own stories (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Hunt

& Sampson, 1988). Narrative therapy implements techniques that catalyze personal change (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Hunt & Sampson, 1998; Parry & Doan, 1994; Payne, 2000). Although the techniques are reported to be successful in practice, narrative therapists do not have an encompassing explanation as to why these techniques are effective.

In their literature review on narrative therapy, Etchison & Kliet (2000) report that “change occurs by exploring how language is used to construct and maintain problems” (p. 61), implying that if how we speak about ourselves and our lives is changed, a parallel change will occur within our lives. Learning how to change one’s own personal story, or how to help another change a personal story may be beneficial. The difficulty comes in recognizing how one’s story needs to be changed, and feeling empowered to make the necessary changes.

Narrative therapy can use stories to help individuals gain insight into their problems (Gersie, 1997) as well as employing techniques that lead to re-authoring of personal narrative (Androutsopoulou, 2001). A narrative therapist can lead or guide a person to make necessary changes in their story by telling new stories that offer problem solving blue prints. In narrative therapy, the therapist works with the individual to create a positive way of viewing and narrating their life. This is often the catalyst for resolution of the problems that caused them to seek therapy (Dwivedi, 1997; Gersie, 1997; Parry & Doan, 1994). Helping individuals to change their perspective can be accomplished by offering stories that are metaphors for the situation they are experiencing (Etchison & Kliet, 2000; Gersie, 1997; Roberts & Holmes, 1999; Rosenblatt, 1994).

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This technique is successfully applied and reported by Gersie (1997), who has found that children that are sent to her for behavioral problems will identify with stories that are metaphors for their own situation. Gersie reports that the children relate to the story and are able to problem solve within the story in ways that then transfer into real life. Androutsopoulou (2001) also reports that telling a story to adults can offer them insight that catalyzes their progress in therapy. Payne, (2000) posits that family systems benefits from these techniques in ways similar to individuals. Once stories are changed, an individual and/or family's beliefs may be changed; this in turn can, and often does become a precursor to behavioral change (Etchinson and Kliet, 2000; Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992; Payne, 2000).

People's lives and relationships are shaped by the stories they develop to give meaning to experiences, and there are many circumstances under which individuals will feel a loss of voice (Gersie, 1997; Parry & Doan, 1994; Roberts & Holmes, 1999; Seligman, 1992). For example, Androutsopoulou (2001) recounts how a young woman came to her for help. After their first few meetings, Androutsopoulou realized that the woman had no voice of her own. When asked what she wanted to do, the woman would reply "My mother says....," or "My Father thinks" Androutsopoulou worked with the young woman by encouraging her to make up stories about herself where the main authorial voice was her own. Once the woman was comfortable with her own voice, Androutsopoulou started encouraging her to apply her storytelling to her desires for the future. Now when asked what she wanted to do, the woman was able to clearly describe her desires and ambitions, without interference from other voices.

When people lose their personal voice, they may not see their problems as external events that affect and influence their lives. Instead, they may attribute the events of their lives to inherent inner failings that they are unable to change. The way in which we tell our stories and make causal attributions affects the way we live our lives (Seligman, 1992). Because of this, investigation into the meaning of storytelling in the family has the potential to provide insights beneficial for families and individuals (Hermans, 1992; Hunt & Sampson, 1998; Parry & Doan, 1994).

Storytelling as the Narrative Therapy of the Family

Becvar and Becvar (1993) acknowledge that narrative therapy is a model which resembles conversation. Androusoy (2001) suggests that for narrative therapy to be successful, a “basic level of trust must be developed” (p. 82). The elements of good storytelling and narrative therapy are the basic components and skills necessary to form and maintain a good marital, filial, or platonic relationship (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). Narrative therapists engage in conversations with their clients, and work to build a relationship based on trust, commitment, and listening, (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Etchison & Kliet, 2000). The nature of the therapeutic relationship as outlined here, mirrors the type of relationship parents are recommended to build with their children (Landreth, 1991; Marion, 1999; Scoresby, 2000; Scoresby, 1997).

Mattingly and Lawler (2000) discovered that storytelling helps to mitigate the feelings of helplessness experienced in situations where there are power differentials, as is often the case in family situations (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Seligman (1992) claims that feelings of helplessness can negatively affect an individual’s physical and

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emotional well being across their lifetime. Becvar and Becvar (1993) point towards the importance of family members seeing themselves as powerful, important and influential in order for the family unit to function well. Just as modern day “self-help” authors use stories to promote their points and theories (Arbinger, 2000; Covey, 1989; Luskin, 2002; Zander & Zander, 2000), so do storytellers in the family have the power to tell stories in ways which allow their listener to learn, grow, heal and create problem solving blueprints (Hill, 1997; Seligman, 1992; Yolen, 2000).

Sluzki (1992) asserts that the stories families tell about problems with each other and with the world, in and of themselves contain the problem or the solution. Sluzki advocates transforming the family’s beliefs about the problem by helping the family to see alternative meaningful interpretations of their situation. Sluzki claims that it is this altered perception of meaning that will in effect lessen or even eliminate the effects of the perceived problem itself. As attitude (Seligman, 1992), and lack of perceived alternate possibilities for their story (Parry & Doan, 1994; Seligman, 1992) may be the cause of the problem in the first place, storytelling provides a medium through which the family can be invited to change its perceptions (Gardner, 1993). Telling family history stories may provide family members alternate views around which to shape attitudes (Stone, 1988), while stories told within the family can provide blueprints for problem solving (Stone, 1988; Vitz, 1990; Yolen, 2000).

Within the family, the interconnectedness of family member’s stories can cause feelings of betrayal, especially when one member neglects or refuses to play the role assigned them (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Stone, 1988). The power to express one’s own

story has been, and continues to be, the cause of much personal conflict (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). The improper use of storytelling power often causes family members to play parts that are scripted for them (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981; Parry & Doan, 1994; Payne, 2000). In complying with such a system, individuals often lose their sense of self, or their own unique narrative voice (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Hunt & Sampson; 1998; Parry & Doan, 1994; Payne, 2000).

Every person needs to find and express their own story in order for each person's life to qualify as their own differentiated existence. "The act of storytelling then, is ... a process through which we give form to our experience of life and affirm our individuality by expressing our knowledge of the world" (Gersie & King, 1990, p. 38). We first learn how to engage in this process within our individual family systems (Landreth, 1991; Seligman, 1992; Stone, 1988).

When a person has their own authorial voice, they are capable of deciding how they wish to act in any given context. When a person's self-authorial voice is absent or usurped by another, an individual will often find themselves unable to make decisions or promote their own welfare (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Parry & Doan, 1994; Scoresby, 2000; Seligman, 1992). Telling a story enables each of us to know ourselves as someone who has a voice that is worth listening to, someone who can be heard and understood; without a story of one's own, one does not have a life of one's own (Gersie and King, 1990). Dysfunction in families can lead to individual dysfunction, and is often caused by a loss of voice (Androutsopoulou, 2001). Androutsopoulou reports that through the

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development of personal narrative, individuals are able to become more decisive and empowered.

Seligman (2002) asserts that in a society that is rapidly becoming more and more depressed and seeking out therapy, there is a need to have more people in our lives that are competent in listening and relationship oriented skills. Storytelling has been observed to teach these skills (Scoresby, 1998). Human beings also need to tell and listen to stories in a system that is committed to the well being of each individual member (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981; Parry & Doan, 1994; Simkinson, 1997; Yolen, 2000). Ideally, families should provide just such an environment.

Summary

Storytelling is an historical leisure pastime that may be “one of the most powerful techniques that mankind has ever devised for molding human behavior” (Gardner, p. 246). Quality of medical care is thought to improve when personal stories are honored (Coles, 1989; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000). Through storytelling, the psychological suffering of people who experience physical tragedy may be lessened (Bauby, 1997; Mattingly & Lawler, 2000). Storytelling is thought to facilitate learning in both the classroom and the home (Gray, 1997; Scoresby, 1998; Vitz, 1990). Stories are believed to transmit wisdom, instruction and inspiration across time (Cheyney, 1990; Roberts & Holmes, 1999). Traditional stories provide people with a feeling of connection and purpose, as well as provide templates for problem solving (Gersie, 1997; Hermans, 1992; Sluzki, 1992). In oral storytelling, the relationship between the storyteller and the listener

is a crucial part of storytelling that facilitates change (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). These benefits and attributes of storytelling appear transferable to a family context.

Narrative therapy is described as imitating conversation in a relationship based in trust (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). The relationship in narrative therapy between the individual and the therapist may echo the relationship developed by traditional storytellers, as well as the relationship parents are suggested to cultivate with their children (Landreth, 1991; Marion, 1999; Scoresby, 1998). It seems that application of storytelling and narrative techniques may help to develop strong relationships between individuals. Although the benefits of storytelling have been examined in a variety of settings, including narrative therapy, there remains a lack of knowledge surrounding specific application to the family in a non-therapeutic setting.

Stories impart important principles without imparting guilt, fear, or recrimination to the listener (Gardner, 1993). Imagine the quality of life for a family in which parents are able to teach their children without imparting guilt, fear, or recrimination. If narrative therapists bring healing by helping people re-author their lives, (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Parry & Doan, 1994) it stands to reason that a family that engages in the techniques of narrative therapy would experience similar healing. It is possible that families that engage in healthy storytelling are inoculating their members against the modern day maladies of depression, disconnection, and hopelessness (Seligman, 1992; Yolen, 2000).

Chapter 3

METHODS

Study Participants

This study will involve ten families. Participants per family will be limited to one parent figure (male or female) and one adult child. All selected participants will be above the age of 18. This criterion is to insure that participants have stories to look back on and recount for interviews. The families will be selected through convenience sampling which is criterion based.

Procedure

Participants will initially be selected through convenience sampling of the principal investigator's acquaintances. Face to face interviews and/or phone calls will be made to assess interest in participation; snowballing techniques may be used to gain access to the ten parent/child groups needed for this study. Participants will be interviewed either over the phone or in person to determine if they meet specific criteria. The initial interview will first assess the availability of a parent and child over the age of 18. If this criterion is met, the interview will determine whether candidates meet criteria for storytelling. This criterion is outlined in the following interview schedule. The interview questions will include but may not be limited to:

1. (After explaining the purpose of this study and discussing the commitment involved, prospective participant will be asked if they are interested in participating). Are you willing to participate in this study? Do you have an adult (18 yr. old) child/parent that might be willing to participate in this study? If so, how can I contact them? (The

child/parent will be contacted if the person being interviewed meets the remaining interview criteria.)

2. Do you and one or more of your family members ever spend time together talking about past events?
3. Are there times when you are sharing information in story form (i.e. with a beginning, middle, and end; one person mainly talking with the others present mainly listening)?
4. When? How often? With whom?

If answers to these questions indicate engagement by two eligible family members in recreational storytelling, the candidates will be asked to participate in this study. If prospective participants decline participation, the process will be repeated until 10 willing parent/child groups are obtained. All study participants will be interviewed individually. The researcher may offer access to the transcripts and finished study report as incentive for participation in this project.

Upon confirmation of participation, the interviewer will arrange a time for a more in-depth interview designed to assess frequency, setting, participation, and triggers for their reported storytelling sessions in an effort to gain insight into the meaning of storytelling for the participants. Probing, follow up, and exploratory questions will be used to pursue items of interest and to clarify ambiguities. Additionally, follow up questions such as “Can you tell me more about that?” and “Would you mind describing that to me so it’s like I’m there” will be asked to give participants a chance to expand upon answers. Interviews will be conducted based on the following interview schedule.

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Interview Schedule

1. Have members of your family ever, or do they now spend time sharing stories and/or relating past or present events? What kinds of stories are told?
2. When does this normally happen?
3. For how long?
4. Who is normally present?
5. What are the stories about?
6. Who tells them?
7. Can you describe how they tell the stories? (voice, gestures, attitude, emotions exhibited)
8. How do the listeners act (before, during and after)?
9. How do you feel looking back on storytelling memories?
10. How do you feel during the storytelling?
11. Did these events have meaning for you? If so what?
12. Do you think the storytelling you have described has influenced you? Can you tell me about it?
13. Looking back, do you believe there were any benefits or drawbacks to this event? If so, can you tell me about them?
14. I've defined storytelling in a very specific way, can you think of any other ways your family engages in storytelling that maybe seem different from the way I've defined it? Can you tell me about that? Why is this storytelling to you? Is it meaningful in any way? How?

15. What made telling these stories possible?

16. (To adult children) Did your Mom or Dad or both ever describe events from their childhood? Did they ever describe things from your childhood? What did it feel like to listen to these stories? To your parents? What meaning (if any) did this have for you? Have you ever learned anything from listening to stories? If so what? How did you know you had learned it? What kinds of stories do you like to listen to the most? Why?

17. (To parent participant) Did you ever sit down with your children and tell them stories about when they were younger? About when you were younger? Why did you tell those stories? How do you tell them? Any special voice, circumstance, etc.? What meaning if any did telling the stories have for you? Did your parents tell stories to you? What kind? Did the stories have any meaning for you? If so what? Have you ever learned anything from telling stories? From listening to them? If so what? What kinds of stories do you like to tell the most? Why?

18. Is there anything you would like to add?

Validity and Reliability

Internal validity or the truthfulness of the interview will be maintained by making sure that interviews are (a) lengthy enough to insure adequate contact with the phenomenon (b) persistent enough to pursue obvious themes (c) cross checked by a professional peer to keep the investigator from inserting bias (d) checked by participants to ensure that what is being reported is what they actually meant to say (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Riddick and Russell, 1999).

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External validity pertains to applicability (how transferable the findings are) and consistency (reliability or dependability of findings) (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Riddick and Russell, 1999). Interview narratives will be developed so that the phenomenon is thickly and richly described in order to obtain generalizability (Kvale, 1996; Riddick & Russell, 1999). Additionally, consistency of judgments and interpretations will be by an external auditor. The auditor will be a peer and have the responsibility of reviewing the investigator's interpretations in order to verify reported conclusions (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Riddick and Russell, 1999).

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, interviews will be recorded on audiotape and transcribed. The interviewer will take notes during interview sessions in order to catalog participant affect and other observable points of significance. Note taking will also be used to assist the interviewer in creating follow up questions. Sessions will be transcribed and grouped with corresponding interviewer notes.

Transcriptions with accompanying notes will be read through multiple times before being organized into categories and coded. The resulting codes will be recorded in a codebook. As data collection and analysis progress, codes may be refined to better categorize collected data. Coding may consist of the creation of meaning clusters, matrices, networks or any combination of the three. Data gleaned from initial interviews will be analyzed concurrent with subsequent interviews in order that questions can be adapted and the process fine-tuned. Memoing will be utilized throughout data analysis in

order to help create an organized, traceable record of the interviewer's thought processes.

An attempt will be made to reach saturation of themes and meanings.

The meaning of the experience for the researcher in the context of the interviews will be described, so that researcher bias can be documented. Finally, meanings will be listed for all individuals; patterns and categories will be established. Statements relevant to analytical criteria will be grouped in order that the data may undergo a final analysis before being reported.

The data analysis will be conducted as follows:

1. Preliminary identification and analysis of central themes will be conducted.

Memoing will begin, and continue, throughout the analysis.

2. Outcomes of preliminary analysis will be grouped.
3. Statements deemed to be significant will be logically linked to the criteria for significance and recorded.
4. The meaning of these statements will be assessed.
5. Cases with significant storytelling relevance will be described and assessed in terms of the family and the individual separately.
6. Themes will be determined and compiled.
7. A search for negative evidence to refute the themes will be conducted.
8. The phenomenon will be described.
9. Assertions will be made and reported.

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Appendix A-1

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction

This research is being conducted by Kelly Gagalis-Hoffman, a graduate student in Recreation management at BYU. This study will investigate the meaning of recreational storytelling in the family system.

Procedures

You will be interviewed about your family storytelling by Kelly Gagalis-Hoffman. There are approximately 30 research questions that you may be asked to answer to the best of your ability. You have the right to refuse to answer any question for any reason. The initial interview should take approximately one and one half hours, with the possibility of one or more follow up interviews. The initial interview will be conducted in one sitting.

Risks/Discomforts

Talking about family storytelling may bring forth unpleasant or uncomfortable memories. You may feel emotional discomfort while being interviewed.

Benefits

You may experience reminders of pleasant past experiences, while contributing to a body of research intended to provide information on strengthening families.

Confidentiality

All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. All data, including tapes/transcriptions and interviewers notes, will be kept in a secure location and only the primary interviewer, Kelly Gagalis-Hoffman will have access to the notes or the master list identifying data with participants.

Compensation

Upon request participants will receive transcriptions of their interviews and an electronic copy of Kelly Gagalis-Hoffman's thesis upon completion.

Participation

Participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without repercussion.

Questions about the Research

If you have any questions regarding this study you may contact Kelly Gagalis-Hoffman at 377-0861 or email kg1@email.byu.edu.

Questions about your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have any questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Shane Schulthies, IRB Chair, 422-5490, shane_schulthies@byu.edu.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will and volition to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____