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Exploring Genealogical Roots and Family History and Their Influence on  
College Student Development:  
A Qualitative Study

Matthew L. Reiser

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Lane Fischer, Chair  
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August 2012

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## ABSTRACT

### Exploring Genealogical Roots and Family History and Their Influence on College Student Development: A Qualitative Study

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Family genealogy research has grown exponentially over the past decade, making it an area worthy of scholarly inquiry (Smith, 2010). Genealogy is now one of the world's most popular hobbies, with hundreds of millions of people worldwide actively engaged in some form of family research (Veale, 2004). In the United States, there has recently been a significant increase in the interest of searching out one's genealogical roots (Triseliotis, 1998). For most young people, the years from late teens to early twenties represent a period of profound change (Arnett, 2000). Many young adults search for and solidify their identity during the years they attend college (Muuss, 1996). Few research studies have examined the experience of searching one's genealogy and the impact it might have on college student development.

This study focused on the experiences of college students who were searching their own personal ancestry in an undergraduate class on family history/genealogy. Participants reported that researching their family history (a) ignited or intensified a strong interest in genealogical research, (b) developed connections, closeness, and bonds to ancestors which motivated them in their lives, (c) discovered shared physical and personality characteristics, (d) impacted their current relationships with living relatives, (e) stimulated spiritual experiences, and (f) influenced their identity development.

Keywords: genealogy, family history, identity development, college students

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### **Introduction**

For most young people, the years from late teens to early twenties represent a period of profound change (Arnett, 2000). Many youth search for and solidify their identity during the years they attend college (Muuss, 1996). Scarr, Weinberg, and Levine (1986) provided a very useful theory-neutral definition of identity:

An identity is an inner sense of uniqueness and continuity and an outer sociopolitical stance. It combines an awareness of oneself as a distinct person who has a special constellation of needs and abilities with an awareness of how one fits in the social world and where one is headed. It means feeling unique but not alone – connected to other people but not lost in the crowd. (p. 551)

The college experience plays a critical function in developing student identities (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Madison, 1969; Montgomery & Cote, 2003; Nakkula, 2003). Kroger (1997) opined that the first few years of college are the most facilitative, tolerant societal context for developing identity. College provides a unique setting that exposes students to a combination of relationships, skills, and experiences where they can explore their personal identity. As students transition from high school to college, they juggle several identity factors. Scarr et al. (1986) focused on several decisions related to identity development in this age group. These decisions include whether to go to college, which college to attend, whom to date, whether or not to have sexual intercourse, whether to maintain or break up a romantic relationship, whether to become politically active, and whether or not to take drugs. These decisions may have long-term, identity-forming consequences.

### **College-student Identity Development**

Researchers have studied various influences on college student identity development. They have discovered that the most important influences are family, personal history, and social context. Only a few have considered family functioning in identity development studies. George (1997) conducted a study of 300 college-age students and concluded that family functioning variables strongly influenced their identity development. George stated that the formation of a healthy identity is thought to be assisted by a well-functioning family, whereas a problematic functioning family is thought to impede identity formation. The family functioning variables included family health, attachment to parents, and separation-individuation, which formed the set of independent variables. Similarity of values, beliefs, and attitudes that an adolescent holds in common with parents emerged as a consistently salient variable influencing late adolescent identity development (George, 1997).

Family functioning may also hinder student development. From a sample of 662 college students, between the ages of 18 to 41, Kim (1992) discovered that gender, gender role, and family interaction style all influenced college student identity development. Kim found that students who perceived their families as emotionally unavailable tended to be more identity-diffused, were not sure about their future, and indicated undifferentiated gender role attitudes. Researchers discovered that identity-achieved students were more likely to foresee their future as optimistic and certain, and have an androgynous gender role attitude (Kim, 1992).

Verma (2007) studied community college students and found that role models and family influences were significant contributors to identity development. In a study of 129 college students who had completed at least one year of community college, researchers uncovered several influences on community college identity development. Those influences were (a)

experiencing family influences, (b) experiencing self-awakening, (c) teacher's style of teaching, (d) teacher as a role model, (e) teacher's attitude, (f) feedback, (g) course content, (h) counselor's interest and help, (i) participation in campus activities, (j) close personal friendships, (k) developing new friendships, and (l) handling emotions. Because the college years represent a time period of significant change and growth it is expected that many factors and influences are part of overall identity development for most young adults.

Research indicates that family influences during an individual's life are important factors in identity development. Scarr et al. (1986) emphasized that identity included a balance between the individual and the social world. They articulated that an adolescent's own history and the new experiences at college need to be integrated into a coherent sense of self. Hill (1980) postulated that the adolescents' own history influenced the nature and process of identity development.

Other research studies on college student identity development have focused on specific ethnic or cultural groups. For example, Harrington (2009) studied first-generation Latino college students and identified familial and cultural influences as significant contributors in identity development. Vigil (2008) researched the identity of Black gay male college students and discovered that positive gay role models and coming out to friends and family were important experiences.

In short, one's family, personal history, and social context are important considerations in identity formation. One wonders whether extending the historical, contextual, and familial influences beyond one's own lifetime through family history and genealogy might also have an influence on development.

### **Family History and Genealogy**

For the purposes of this study, the terms *family history* and *genealogy* will be used interchangeably throughout the text. There has been an increase in the interest to search out one's ancestry and personal genealogy. A national television network is currently airing a show called "Who Do You Think You Are" (Kudrow & Bucatinsky, 2010) where celebrities (e.g., Brooke Shields) trace their familial roots and make connections to their ancestors.

"These celebrities embark on personal journeys of self-discovery to trace their family trees. During each episode, a celebrity is taken on a deeply emotional quest into his or her family history, resulting in uncovered stories of heroism and tragedy, love and betrayal, secrets and intrigue that lie at the heart of their family history" (Kudrow & Bucatinsky, 2010, p. 1).

There are a number of possible motivations for seeking out one's family history. These include facilitating healing, fostering understanding of one's family, and one's past (Chance, 1988; Grosskopf, 1999; Humes, 1994); developing connectedness with ancestors after family loss (Champagne, 1990); increasing spirituality (Bednar, 2011; Brough, 1995, 1996; Hunter, 1967; Taylor, 2002); and creating closer ties with living family members (McGoldrick, 1995; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Taylor, 2002; Triseliotis, 1998). It seems that an important outcome resulting from searching out one's genealogy is that it creates a stronger sense of identity within the researcher (Chance, 1988; Champagne, 1990; Grosskopf, 1999; Humes, 1994; McGoldrick, 1995; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Taylor, 2002).

Grosskopf (1999), a psychiatrist who works with trauma patients, stated that an important part of his psychotherapeutic approach is to have his patients research their family history. He proposed that stories of ancestors' lives provide a framework that defines who one is and what

one perceives. Patients who know about where they came from alter how they see the world, and understanding their family history can help them understand who they are. Triseliotis (1998) and Sobol and Cardiff (1983) recommended the use of genealogy research to enhance the identity development of people who have been adopted. Taylor (2002) noted that many young people feel disconnected from their families and from the world. She proposed that many people discover searching out their ancestors fosters a connection to people in their family history. She stated that individuals can discover characteristics about themselves that they may have in common with an ancestor. Such a connection is salutary.

Researching one's family history can be helpful to students. Humes (1994) speaking about high school students stated,

What happens to the student during the genealogical search is the essence of the experience. The quest, itself, leads to a sense of identity, pride, and self esteem. One of the problems of modern youth is that they don't know who they are and from whence they came. Past is prologue. (p. 297)

He observed that the opportunity for role modeling is obvious and that it is rare to find a person in one's ancestral family that will not command the attention of the student. Students may find interest in the occupational patterns of past generations that influence their own possible career related choices. Humes (1994) concluded,

We live in a time when issues of self-identity, self-concept and self-worth, are of major interest to many students. Although there are many reasons why some individuals have self-identity problems, one of them is a feeling of rootlessness. This has been caused by manifold factors, but one has to be a lack of connection with the past. Genealogy can be

helpful to students and counselors over a wide range of issues but can be especially powerful in the areas of self-identity and self-concept (p. 298).

Genealogy and family history research is a growing field that incorporates a number of different reasons and factors as to why it is gaining interest worldwide. As no research studies have been done on how influential genealogy and family history can be on college student development, the current study seeks to illuminate possible motivations and discoveries of college student development related to family history research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of college students who were searching out their own personal ancestry in an undergraduate class on family history/genealogy. We used qualitative semi-structured interviews to grasp the richness and depth of students' personal experiences with family history. We were interested in exploring what students learned about themselves and their families through this class. We wanted to know what undergraduate students experience while engaging in genealogical research.

### **Method**

#### **Recruitment and Participants**

My faculty chair, Lane Fischer, initially conceived of this study. He approached the instructors of the family history courses at Brigham Young University (BYU) during fall 2005. Cynthia Doxey, a professor teaching family history, agreed to have Dr. Fischer sit in on two sections and recruit students at the end of the semester. Dr. Fischer recruited participants who would be willing to share their experiences while participating in the class and conducting genealogical research. Volunteers were given a consent form explaining the benefits and risks of

participating in the research study. They acknowledged that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue at any time with no penalty. Sixteen students participated in the study. There were ten female participants and six male participants. No other demographic information was collected on the participants.

### **Assumptions and Context**

Assumptions of this study were that studying genealogy and family history is a positive endeavor (Bednar, 2011). Prior literature seemed to indicate that engaging in genealogical research would have a positive influence on college students' development. We assumed that participants would find variety in the character of their ancestors' lives. We didn't know how students would metabolize that variety but assumed that they would try to make sense of their ancestors' lives.

I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at BYU and I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS). I have been able to participate in my own family history/genealogy research and have found it to be very rewarding. I am embedded in the LDS culture which has distinct doctrines regarding the durability of the human spirit beyond death, the connection between the living and the dead, the duty of the living to the dead, and the authority to perform proxy ordinances on behalf of the dead. We believe that finding the names of ancestors is an important process that brings blessings to those that sacrifice time and energy to do such work. The LDS church sponsors the largest single archive of genealogical resources in the world. It supports a family history major in the history department at BYU. It sponsors an introductory family history course in Religious Education.

## **Procedures**

Dr. Fischer obtained a grant to hire and train an undergraduate interviewer. He recruited students at the end of the semester. Dr. Fischer conducted two interviews as a model for the undergraduate interviewer who conducted the remaining interviews. The interviewers asked four questions to guide the interviewing process. Those questions were (a) What was your experience in the family history course or conducting your genealogy research? (b) What moments particularly stand out in your memory from your experience? (c) What did you learn about your family that was new or impressive to you? and (d) What do you understand about yourself now that you didn't understand before you began to do genealogy research? The interviewers asked follow-up questions in the course of a normal conversation. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for interpretation. The original audio tapes and transcriptions are currently kept in a secure filing cabinet.

## **Data Creation and Interpretation**

As the researcher of this current study, I inherited the interviews that were originally collected in 2005. Kvale (2009) discussed the seven stages of data creation from a set of interviews (a) thematizing, (b) designing, (c) interviewing, (d) transcribing, (e) analyzing, (f) verifying, and (g) reporting. As the first of the four steps of this process had already taken place, I focused on the last three steps. Kvale articulated five sub-processes in the analyzing process. Those processes include categorization of meaning, condensation of meaning, structuring of meaning through narratives, interpretation of meaning, and ad hoc methods for generating meaning.

Flick (2002) stated that in qualitative research, the goal is to capture the phenomenon as well as possible, realizing that the objective reality can never really be captured. My attempt to capture the phenomenon went through several stages. I categorized meaning in this study by creating an abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations. Kvale (2009) explained that this method “reduces and structures large interview texts into a few tables and figures” (p. 203). I condensed the meaning of the interviews by coding the statements in the interviews into categories. Kvale stated that “the categories can be developed in advance or they can arise *ad hoc* during the analysis; they may be taken from theory or from the vernacular, as well as from the interviewee’s own idioms” (p. 203). I also performed narrative analysis of the interviews which entailed the social and temporal organization of a text to bring out its meaning. Kvale explains that “Narrative analysis focuses on the stories told during an interview and works out their structures and their plots” (p. 222).

Kvale (2009) warned the prospective qualitative researcher to be thoughtful and mindful of how one will make sense and meaning of the data collected in qualitative research at conceptualization of the study. In the current study, previous researchers developed the original intent and procedures. This may be a liability in the overall endeavor. Dr. Fischer conceptualized the study and an undergraduate executed the interviews. To the degree that each of us understood the conceptualization and execution, there may be reasonable consistency in method. It is probably impossible to have perfect resonance among three researchers, but I did have extensive discussions with Dr. Fischer regarding the overall concept and approach. I believe that we acted in good faith to understand one another and the participants. Kvale stated that the “purpose of the analysis will be to uncover the meaning of the question, to make explicit its presuppositions, and thereby the implicit conceptions of qualitative research it implies” (p.

190). He also suggested that the purpose of any study should have the goal of obtaining knowledge and meaning, rather than focusing on a specific method with an undue emphasis on technique per se. I feel that I have reasonably intuited the original intent of the study and completed the final stage with fidelity to the lived experience of the participants.

I listened to all of the interviews and read each of the transcriptions of the interviews. I developed my initial categories and themes after categorizing several responses and quotes into different themes. I tried to not separate meaning from context, to view the interviews in a narrative form and understand that meaning comes from the whole story and not only from its parts, and to approach each interview and the entire set of interviews holistically rather than reductively.

As I developed themes, I sent my initial constructions to my auditor who was able to question and evaluate my findings. My auditor was a faculty member in the counseling psychology department at BYU. She reviewed transcriptions of the interviews. She watched for consistency between my themes and the raw material in the interviews. She questioned and probed my thinking. Through an iterative process, we were able to finalize our findings into six themes. My auditor verified the trustworthiness of my findings and their consistency with the experiences of the participants.

### **Contextual Vulnerabilities**

Vulnerabilities in this study were identified by the researchers. Using a semi-structured interview facilitated the gleaning of rich information regarding subjects' experiences in studying genealogy. However, a major vulnerability in this particular study was that I, as the interpreter of the interviews, did not conduct the interviews. It is possible that the richness of the overall

meaning to the participants was partially diluted by only listening to the audio tapes and reading the transcriptions that were produced before I engaged in this study. As Kvale (2009) warned, one cannot conceive of the interviews as transcripts; the interviews are living conversations. He continued,

The transcript is a hybrid between an oral discourse unfolding over time, face to face in a lived situation— where what is said is addressed to a specific listener present— and a written text created for a general, distant public. (p. 192)

As Kvale illustrated, both audio tape recording and transcriptions are only facsimiles of interviews which were living conversations between two people in a somewhat intimate context. I may not have captured the full depth of the living conversation.

Another vulnerability may be that these participants were Latter-day Saints with a particular cultural assumption about family history and genealogy research which may have colored their experience. It remained to be seen whether or not these subjects would show similar reactions to the celebrities that are profiled on current television productions such as *Who Do You Think You Are* on NBC and *Finding Your Roots* on PBS.

An additional vulnerability is related to the nature of the subjects that volunteered to be interviewed. Students who had less passion for the coursework or had negative experiences in the class may not have volunteered to be interviewed. The experiences of the volunteers may be typically positive and not represent the full range of experiences in the class.

## **Results**

The interviews revealed a strong feeling, tone, and passion for genealogy research. Participants shared ancestral stories, personal reactions, and experiences they encountered while

taking the family history/genealogy class. Seven participants found ancestors that originated from England and three participants had some Native American ancestry. Three participants mentioned ancestors from Denmark and two participants found ancestors from Ireland. An additional two participants discovered family ties to Norway. Other countries that were mentioned with familial ties were Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Prussia, Scotland, Slovenia and Wales.

### **Themes**

Several themes emerged as relevant to the participants' experiences with genealogy. These were (a) interest in genealogical research; (b) connections, closeness, and bonds to ancestors; (c) physical and personality characteristics of ancestors seen in posterity; (d) impact on current relationships from genealogical research; (e) spiritual experiences while researching genealogy; and (f) genealogy's influence on identity development while participating in genealogical research.

**Theme 1: Interest in genealogy.** Participants expounded on the passion and drive they discovered when beginning genealogy and studying their own family history. Some of them even described an interest in genealogy as early as the age of twelve. Others have decided to major in family history at Brigham Young University. One student said that "when you catch the contagion of genealogy, it spreads like wildfire." Another participant related his experience and said,

I found a book of family history that was about 300 pages long when I was 14 years old.

It dated all the way back to the 1500's and I became obsessed with the book. I was a not

a member of LDS church until the age of 16. I was amazed at what I found in this family history book.

Many participants discussed the process of getting started in researching genealogy and noted that once they began to find information, their research became easier and more exciting. Several of them said that they really enjoyed the family history class and felt that genealogy research was somehow very important to them. One participant said that both of his grandfathers passed away while he was serving an LDS mission in a foreign land. He said that because of the circumstances, he felt a strong desire to learn more about his ancestors. His grandmothers were able to send him some family history information and that is how he got interested in genealogy. He said he was not interested just in dates and temple work; he wanted to really know his ancestors on a deep personal level and to hear stories about them and their lives. Another student discussed her interest in genealogy and stated,

I enjoy it and I didn't think I would enjoy it as much as I do. I wanted to find new information and I get excited when I do. Knowing my heritage is nice and the fact that I did come from somewhere. It is good to know where you are from because that is your foundation.

Still, others had a hard time describing why family history work was interesting to them; they just knew it was important. Genealogy research had an intellectual and emotional valence that was palpable but hard to capture in words. Some said there was just something inside them that was interested in genealogy work. One participant explained,

The more I do genealogy, and the more I find out about ancestors, the more I have a desire to keep learning. There is a huge drive to do that - to find out about them, and as I do I feel closer and closer to them. Family history is extremely addicting.

Some participants talked about their genealogical interest and revealed that they had not thought that genealogy would apply so much to their lives. Upon reflection some subjects were surprised that they had been interested in genealogy at a young age. One student even received a grant to go and search out his ancestors in Maine. He said he wanted to know more about some of his ancestors who lived in Maine and the LDS church in Maine in its early days. He was excited about the opportunity and the history he might find because of his efforts. Other participants shared how sometimes they did family history research when they had breaks between their academic classes. They reported that they enjoyed it, got excited about it, and thought about it frequently. Many reflected on how they did not think they would enjoy it as much as they do. They talked about the excitement of finding new information, stories, and ancestors that form connections to families and generations.

**Theme 2: Connections, closeness, and bonds.** Many participants talked about the connections and closeness they felt towards their ancestors and the bonds that united them through their ancestry. One student commented, "I guess I've come to realize that I really care for my ancestors, grandparents, and people that I've never met." One student mentioned an experience she had while reading her grandmother's journal. She said that her grandmother's patriarchal blessing said if she kept a journal, her grandchildren would be reading it one day. (A patriarchal blessing is an individual revelation given by an LDS church leader called a patriarch that articulates one's mission in life as well as gifts, warnings, and promises from God.) This student had the awakening that her choice to read her grandmother's journal fulfilled a revelation from God. The student said this was a testimony to her of how everything is connected. She believed that she has to do her part because her future grandchildren will be like her one day and may want to read about her personal history. That student said studying genealogy helped her to

keep a journal and made her want to continue with that connection to her ancestors. She stated that she feels closer to that particular ancestor and connected to her in a special way.

Another participant discussed her perspective on feeling connected to her ancestors. She stated,

My great-grandfather was always poor, enjoyed fresh fruit, and the simple things in life. However, he worked hard and if it weren't for his sacrifice then I might not be here. I appreciate all of my ancestors' sacrifices, and because of their sacrifice I feel a connection to them and more reason to live up to my heritage. They worked so hard and now I can give the same kind of sacrifice because of their examples.

Another participant stated, "When you learn about your family, you understand your family's heritage better and that's what welds a family together." Other participants expressed how they developed a deep personal connection with their ancestors through reading about their trials and struggles. One student shared her thoughts about how she became connected with her ancestor. She reported,

I've talked a lot about Abigail Barns (all names changed). That's definitely an ancestor that I get to look up to as a hero. I relate to her because she's had to go through a lot more than I ever have, but in a way that does give me more of a personal connection with her because reading her journals, I could say, well I haven't gone through that but I am having challenges. She was able to get through it so I can get through it.

Others talked about how they loved hearing the unique stories about their ancestors, finding written stories on paper and actual names in census records. Through this process their ancestors became real people to them and it fostered a robust connection to them.

One student discussed how this connection influenced her at a young age. She recalled,

I really feel that I have a great connection with my great-grandmother who wrote a personal history. In studying her history I remember really connecting with her because she talked about being young and had a large birthmark on her chin. In middle school I thought my legs were fat; but she had this large thing on her chin and everyone loved her because of her personality.

That birthmark did not define her ancestor, and the student learned as a teen that her legs did not define her. This student was able to connect her own life experiences to those of an ancestor.

Another student talked about how she loves to cook. Many in her family told her that she is just like her grandma, who was a chef. She said that she was named after that grandma and has always felt a close connection to her because they shared both a name and a talent.

Another student discussed how he now understands how he can personally relate to the ancestral stories that he found. When asked about his experience with genealogy, he said the following:

I've been getting stories from them that I have never heard before. Stories of their youth when they messed up; it created a vision of how it has gone throughout the ages. They had different challenges but they learned and grew from them. I feel I can relate to them a whole lot more; before I used to think that they can't relate to me because they are old.

Participants reiterated that they felt closer to their ancestors now because they knew more about where they have come from. They talked about a link that binds them together. Some shared that they felt a greater sense of belonging because of their family history research. When one of the interviewers asked what they had learned from studying their ancestors' lives, he related the following: "Because of their sacrifice, I feel a connection to them; more reason to

live, and a lot to live up to because they worked so hard. Now I can give the same kind of sacrifice because of their examples.”

Some students felt that genealogy research was important because they had a belief or feeling of a responsibility in searching out the names and stories of their ancestors. An example of this was,

I found that the reason why I was so attracted to my family history was because I felt I had a responsibility to join together a couple of generations who had fallen off to the side because they were the only ones who had joined the LDS church.

As part of the family history class, each student chose from several options of family history projects to work on during the semester. One student unfolded her experiences while working on her family history project. She said,

So for my class project I decided to look into the personal histories of both of my grandmothers. I didn't have a personal connection to them and that's always eaten away at me. I've wanted to be closer to them and so I wanted to find excerpts from their journals, as well as an actual personal history regarding both of them; not only about my grandmothers, but their mothers as well. I've looked at this generational line of women, and I decided to compile different stories from their personal histories and journals. It has been so fascinating and I have felt so much closer to them because of this project. I can't tell you the difference it's made for me personally; I have loved it.

Another student shared this response while working on her personal genealogical ancestry:

I love reading my great-grandmother's journal entries. She writes a particular journal entry where she talks a lot about her testimony, the gospel, and her love for God. I feel

this close connection with her. It's more so just the feeling that they are with me, and the feeling that they care about me and are invested in my life. That is the strength that I draw from when I'm going through difficult trials.

Another student related the following experience when asked by one of the interviewers what moments really stood out to her while engaging in her research. She responded, "I felt alone in high school; sort of separated from my family. I would fight with my mom a lot. Family history is the opposite of that; it connects you to your immediate family and to everybody who has gone on before you." It seemed as though participants' connections to ancestors provided positive experiences that might not have otherwise been appreciated if it were not for their participation in genealogy.

**Theme 3: Physical and personal characteristics.** Many of the participants recognized physical characteristics in ancestral family lines that are apparent in them or their family members. Some of these characteristics were very prominent in their posterity, like the "Anderson chin" that many in the family had. Some participants identified a specific characteristic unique to themselves and one of their ancestors. Here was one example:

I get my big ears from my Romanian grandpa. He had big ears, and I remember as a little kid, my ears were huge, and everybody used to call me Dumbo. But I didn't care, because my parents said that I had Grandpa Harry's ears. I've always felt a real closeness to him, even though I don't remember him at all. I think that was what inspired me to do genealogy in the first place, is that there is a bond I feel with my great-grandpa who I've never met. I went to do genealogy for him, and so it was almost like a pride thing. People would make fun of my ears and instead of getting upset and crying to my mom as a kid, I would be like, yeah, they are my great-grandpa's ears.

Some participants talked about the physical characteristics that they see in themselves that they can trace to some of their ancestors. Examples of this were hair, face, ears, chin, height, and eyes. One student said she found a picture of her mom at a young age and it looked exactly like she did when she was a child.

Other participants talked more about the personality characteristics that they identified in themselves, their immediate family members, and ancestors. Some of these attributes were sense of humor, stubbornness, ambition, selflessness, a desire for further education, impulsivity, talents, temperament, perfectionism, and sarcastic humor. One student said, "I feel close to my great-grandmother on my mother's side and I feel like she and I are very similar. She is short, spunky, and positive."

Many of the participants reflected on how they have seen family personality characteristics enrich their lives. While chuckling, one student said,

I remember my granddad used to have a code or a riddle that we could try to solve.

Normally it would be something that he'd give for his boys when they came home, that would tell them where he was, or what they needed to do, and so they would always have these riddles, like every day. I thought that was funny, because I really like figuring out codes and those types of things. I love that, so I think that's probably where that came from. And that shows on my dad too, because he's a really good poem guy; he can rhyme stuff, and he's passed that on to me. Like we'd just be in the kitchen or something, and he'd start saying something, and I'd say something back, and then he'd do it, and then I'd do it back. We can just keep going. I don't think he does that with anyone else; I think that's only with me, I don't know why. We'll do songs together and

he'll take some tune that we know and change it to what we're doing, and I'll come back with another line of the song, relating to what we're doing.

Another participant identified how he and his grandfather had a similar personality trait of perseverance. He shared the following:

When we're determined to do something, we don't stop until it is done. Grandpa gardens and he keeps working on it until he kills himself. One time he fell off the roof because it was night-time and he broke his back. Me, I can think of several times that I start something and I just got to finish it. I just don't believe in calling it quits and that is something that runs in the family.

Another student mentioned some of her family characteristics that have been passed down from one generation to the next. She explained,

Well, I think that part of who I am, I want to say trickled down through generations. I can see how I've been raised and how come I'm like them. Doing research on them; I mean the only way I guess it affected me is it has helped me to realize their kindness and their attributes, and maybe that makes me want to be even more that way. But I think I just realized that the way that they were has trickled down to who I am.

**Theme 4: Impact on current relationships.** There were a few of the participants who talked about how studying genealogy has helped their current family situations. They talked about developing stronger relationships with their parents and siblings because of their investment in family history research. One participant shared,

Over time as I've done more research, as I've found more stuff, as I've learned more about my family, each time I find something new I want to call my mom and tell her about it. About two or three months ago, I called her up and I said, "Hey mom, I found

your dad.” My mom’s dad and mom got divorced when she was really young, and then my mom had a step-dad. I said, “Mom, I also found your grandfather.” She never knew her grandfather. She didn’t even know her grandfather’s name when I was trying to look for him. When I found him in a census record in Pennsylvania in 1890, and found all of my mom’s dad’s brothers and sisters listed with her grandmother and grandfather; I called her and told her. She was almost in tears. She was really emotional. She said, “I never knew I could know that about my family.” It was a really tender moment. It was really sweet. It was really great. It was the break that I was looking for to have that kind of, I guess in a weird way it was a spiritual connection with my mom, where she felt a little bit of what I’ve been feeling all along. It was a neat thing, and now we talk once or twice a week, and it has been “*the thing*” that I think has changed or helped our relationship. The fact that I’m doing our family history and I can call her and tell her about our family. She’s felt the things that I’ve felt. I know it and I know she has, just by the things that she’s said to me. It has been inspirational for me. It has given me a desire to work harder on my family history because not only do I learn more about my family history, but I learn more about my mom, and my mom opens up a little bit more.

Another participant had a similar experience. She explained how some of her family members belong to the LDS church, and some do not. Studying genealogy brought them together despite their differences in religion. These were her words:

My mom gets excited about it, and my dad, who’s not a member; he gets really excited by it too. He’s always asking me what I’ve found. I talk to my grandma, who is very anti-religion, but this family history thing she likes, and she wants me to bring copies of

everything I've found next time I come see her [laughter]. So it strengthens those relationships.

There were others who talked about how searching out family history information helps their immediate family to converse more. One student stated,

Yeah, we got a little bit more to talk about now. So I guess, because of that we've grown a bit closer in our relationships, and we both have a desire to do genealogy work and it gives us something both to work towards. I guess it makes you more unified when you're both working towards something.

Similarly, some participants said that studying genealogy helped them to understand their parents or siblings better. One student talked about the influence family history research had on her immediate family. She said, "I value our relationships more now and I want to be involved in their lives."

**Theme 5: Spiritual experiences.** A large number of the participants discussed experiences that they had and described as something "spiritual." Some talked about how they felt the presence of their ancestors who had passed on and influenced them to find names, dates, and information. Many students had these experiences as they were "doing the work," which in an LDS context means finding ancestors' records and performing vicarious temple ordinances by proxy on their behalf. These ordinances include baptism, endowment, and sealing. The endowment represents instruction and covenants designed to orient people in their journey through eternity. Sealing represents eternal marriage covenants that endure past death and into post-mortal experiences.

One participant talked about finding direction in her life through spiritual experiences while studying personal genealogy. She commented,

In some ways I feel like I've been prepared to do this work. I've been the only one that stayed active in the LDS faith. I feel that it is one of my purposes in life; to help out my ancestors. This has given me direction. Studying genealogy has given me the motivation to stay worthy so I can go to the temple and do the work for them. I want to do their work and I want to feel that feeling.

One student talked about her visit to Taiwan and how they really respect their ancestors in that culture. She said that she felt peaceful feelings when she visited various cemeteries.

Another participant discussed her experience while going through the temple for the first time.

She said,

I got my endowment and we were all together and others in my family got their endowments and then we did "sealings." I felt really strongly that day that my grandparents, who were dead, were there that day. That was a great day; a special day. I feel that they are very close all the time.

Others shared spiritual experiences and how those experiences have influenced them in becoming better. One student said,

Genealogy research has influenced me with the desire to be a better person, and more of a desire to help those people who have passed on. I guess that kind of goes along with it, because this is all about returning to live with God. Just having that perspective, and by helping other people, we help ourselves. It's a really awesome perspective, that's really impacted my life.

Another participant shared how a story about an ancestor increased her own faith in God. She said,

I've thought a lot about one ancestor, Hanna Davis, on my paternal line on my mother's side. She is from England and her husband did not want her to join the LDS church so she secretly got baptized. When her husband found out he asked for a divorce. She had one son with him and so she left and moved because of the rules of England said the son was under his father's jurisdiction. So she was separated from her oldest son, and immigrated to America and didn't see her son for probably thirty years. It was the son's missionary journal that I read. It is really neat to then read further on in his journal about his reunion with his mother, and how the hand of the Lord was in that. The son had been taught that his mother was dead, and had no connection to the LDS church, and then later on, found out that she was still alive and in Utah, and was a member of the LDS church. It was a beautiful story, and realizing how the Lord's hand is so intricately involved in my life by reading that and realizing that if God cared enough about bringing a mother and son together, he cares enough to direct my life.

Several participants commented that learning about their ancestors' spiritual experiences increased their own spirituality. For example, some participants talked about how their ancestors prayed for help and received powerful answers in their time of need. Those stories of faith inspired our participants and they sought similar answers to prayers in their difficult times. One woman shared as a spiritual experience doing her project that sustained her in her life. She explained,

For my family history project I found a missionary journal of my great-grandfather who had served an LDS mission in the Southern States of the United States. He wrote constantly about those that were trying to chase after him, and all the tough experiences that he had, where people were persecuting him for his religious beliefs. There was the

Klu Klux Klan that was after him at one point, and he talked about the struggles to get on a mission, and the struggles while he was on a mission. It was really sweet because, and I'm sorry if I get emotional just because this is something that is so really touching to me, and thinking about it. It's a miracle, because every time I would pick up that journal, I wouldn't have a whole lot of time to read it, maybe like 20 minutes. But inevitably, wherever I'd pick up reading it, it would be for me. He'd say something in his journal that would touch me and testify to me that the gospel is true and that Satan is there to try and deter us away from the truth.

So when I would read those things it would strengthen my testimony, and it would give me the strength to keep pushing forward despite Satan's buffetings. I remember distinctly, after going through that experience of about three months of really questioning and finally coming back and saying "yes, the gospel is true, I do know that this is something that is right for me." I remember getting up and bearing my testimony and stating in my testimony that it was largely because of this man's journal that I was able to not fall away, and become stronger. I remember feeling his presence as I stated that, and realizing that he was invested in my life. He cared about me not losing my faith in the gospel. That was a neat experience for me, and that was the initial experience that I had.

These students used their experiences doing family history work and learning about their ancestors' lives to gain spiritual fulfillment.

**Theme 6: Genealogy's influence on identity development.** One of the initial questions of this study was whether broadening the context of personal history to that which had occurred before students' own birth would influence their identity development. A theme that emerged was that participants felt that studying family history did have an influence on their identity

development. Two sub-themes emerged. The first sub-theme was development of their sense of identity or sense of self, meaning that they came to a better understanding of who they are. The second sub-theme was related to the choices that the participants made based on knowledge of their ancestors and how those choices shaped their current identity.

*Sense of identity.* Fifteen of the sixteen participants talked about the influence that exploring genealogy had on their identity or sense of self. Many expressed that they have a greater desire to improve themselves because of the great examples of selfless, hard-working ancestors who had strong values and overcame great adversity. One participant said that he attributes a lot of who he is today to his ancestors and is grateful for their sacrifices that have directly influenced him. Some expressed how searching out family history increased their self-confidence. Another student mentioned that she is learning a lot by the process of the research interview itself. The process of reflecting on the course helped her integrate a lot of her experiences even as she sat in the interview. She said,

Learning about my ancestors really does give you a sense of identity. Having their examples and knowing that they did certain things opens up those possibilities to me.

You realize the importance of families and family relationships make you who you are. I value our relationships more now and I want to be involved in their lives.

Another participant found royal bloodlines and Mayflower ancestors, and was asked how finding that knowledge and heritage has influenced her life. She responded,

I think it definitely makes me want to carry on the good name of our family. My parents didn't even know about a lot of this stuff that I've found, just looking on ancestral files, so it makes me really want to, somehow compile it for my children and for their children. So there's a base knowledge, a kernel, if they want to research it further then at least they

have a starting place. And I think it has helped my sense of identity. I've always had a strong self-esteem, but this I guess helps bolster my ego even more in a grateful and humble way. There really is a connection that can be made with your past and your future.

Another participant stated it this way when the interviewer asked if learning about who you're related to has an influence on how you see yourself. He said,

I'm sure it has in some way. I don't know that there's been any direct correlation with how I feel about myself, but I think it is cool that I actually know where I came from. I'm surprised, because it's always been an interesting thing for me. I'm surprised by how many people don't know where their families come from. It's always been cool for me to have that knowledge.

The interviewer then asked the following question: "How do you think that makes you different from people who don't know?" The student responded,

I think it gives me more of a sense of identity, because I know about my family and where they've come from. Instead of saying "Well, I have family a long time ago. I don't know anything about them," I can say I know this and this and this about my family. I've learned from them, so I think it helps with that.

One participant reflected on how he would be different if he didn't know his ancestors at all. He said,

As far as personality, and the things I do, I don't think I'd be much different. I think the difference comes in, not in how I would act, or anything like that, but just with the surety that I have of who I am, and why. I wouldn't have the questions. If I didn't know my grandparents or great-grandparents, I think I might have all these questions about why do

I do these things the way I do? This is who you are because this is the way it has been done and you can learn from those experiences. I think that I've just had more confidence in who I was and the way I did things because I do know about my ancestors. At the same time I've also realized that this might be weakness, and it's something that I can work with. I think it has just helped me to be more open to other people, and how they are, and be more accepting of them, and just more accepting of myself, also because I do know a lot about my heritage and ancestors.

Another student shared the following experience:

I think that family history benefits me as I gain more knowledge of my family, then I have a stronger identity of who I am, which sounds kind of strange at how that works out, but just knowing where you came from, it really helps you to realize who you are. I think that in continuing to do family history; that really helps with that.

Another participant said that his family history has made him who he is. The interviewer sought for more insight into this concept. The participant answered,

Well, I guess the only way I can think of it is, it is like a chain. If my great, great, great, great-grandfather was a certain way, and raised his kids a certain way, then they raised their kids a certain way, and it comes down to kind of how my parents, together, raised me, and is a lot of who I am. You know, if they were happy people, then that's probably why I'm a happy person, or whatever, you know? And getting to know that probably makes me realize more about why I am who I am.

There were a few participants that said their family personality characteristics have molded who they are. One student shared: "I understand myself differently than before because I have a whole bunch of varying personalities that make me who I am. Inheriting different personality

traits from different ancestors and helps me to understand myself better.” One of the best illustrations of identity development and the impact of searching out one’s ancestors came from the following student as she answered a question about who in her family she really connected with. She reported,

My grandfather was very much into speech and debate in high school and in college, very much involved in all that, and I was big into musicals and speech and productions, and all that kind of thing, so I connect well with that with my grandfather. Then with my Grandmother Brown and my mother, I would say a big part of me connects with the relationship aspect, with people, because they’re very much “people” people, and I am that way too. I’m sorry I don’t have just one person I relate to, but it’s something that I’ve thought about.

Identity is something that’s very interesting to me, and it’s something that I’ve felt drawn towards. I feel like this is really a time in life, where I’m trying to figure out who I am. It’s something that I’ve been aware about for a good portion of my life, and I’ve been searching out more who I am; what my purpose is here in this life. I’ve felt like the Lord’s directed me in many circumstances, to lead me, since that’s the desire of my heart. He also wants me to find out more about who I am, and how I can contribute to his work. I have a testimony that I’m here for a specific reason. It is a joy, uncovering that person, because I feel like a large part of who I am is because of my ancestors, but also a large part of who I am falls back to who I was before I was born.

I think those two are very closely connected, because they’re both within the spiritual realm. As I’m searching more out about my ancestors, I feel like I become closer to God and then further understand who I am. I’m really grateful for this opportunity because

this is exactly why I'm taking the class, to come back to it. ...I feel like there is such a connection between identity and family history.

Overall, the student reports indicate that studying family history increased their sense of identity. The effect manifested in a greater sense of self-confidence, an increase in self understanding, and a greater resolve to improve personally.

**Choices.** Many of the participants reflected on the thought that they probably wouldn't be who they were today if it were not for their ancestors' decisions. They gave examples of how ancestors' decisions had some influence on their posterity's choices from the participant's perspectives. Other participants shared that they have a desire to carry on the good family name because of their family history research and have a desire to make good choices in their lives. In one instance, the interviewer asked if there had been hard times as an adult or missionary when the student found himself drawing on family history information to help get him get through a difficult time. The participant responded,

I think, especially on my mission, I looked at my Grandpa Harry as an inspiration. I was having a really hard time, and I drew on the strength he had to come over, to immigrate to America when he was fifteen years old. It is quite an interesting story of how that happened. There was a lot of hardship, and I found myself saying, "You know, if Harry did this at fifteen years old, didn't know English, and came from Romania. It was almost like a model saying, 'I can do this.'" I said, "He did this and came over here not knowing a thing. Surely I can proceed forward and do this." So yeah, I feel I borrow their strength a lot. Even things like that, little stories, helps me with my ethics and things like that. I look to them as an example, and I say, "You know, if I was him, I probably would have done the same thing." Those little tidbits of history that seem insignificant to

everyone else, I say, "This man was a man of principle, and that's who I want to become." So most definitely I take what built them their character and personality and principles that they held strongly, I try and apply them to my life and learn from them as much as possible.

One student discussed her family history research experiences and the choices she has made in her own life. She said,

I don't know how genealogy has influenced my identity. I think I've thought about it a little, but I don't spend much time thinking about it to be honest. I think the choices, the bad choices, that my ancestors have made, have made me evaluate some of the choices I make, on a daily basis a lot more cautiously. That's one of the main things, just being cautious.

Another participant was asked what she understands about herself now better than she did before she started learning about her ancestors. She said,

Well, I understand that I am a unique individual, but I have had these influences in my life that have kind of shaped and guided me to go a certain way, even though I make my own decisions in my life. I still have had a guiding influence to the decisions that I've made. It makes me want to do what's right, for one thing. I think it's a perspective that made me want to work at the temple. I think it really has helped me to be a better person, in the long run.

Another student discussed how she made choices to participate in genealogical research whenever she could and that this process has influenced how she sees herself. She stated,

It makes me want to do it more, so whenever I do have a chance I try to. When I have time, I'll start doing some research. A lot of times when I just have a few minutes in

between classes, I'll work on the computer, or the internet. I'll just randomly go to Ancestry.com, and FamilySearch.org, and see if there's anything new. So yeah, I think about it a lot. It gives you a different perspective on life. I feel like before, I was just into this time right now, where I didn't really think about the past and the future. In doing family history, you learn a lot about your past as you think about it more, and what you can do to help them, and then also have an effect on your future. Just make sure your posterity is taken care of.

### **Summary**

Overall, it was apparent that studying genealogy and family history had an influence on college student development for the participants in this study. The impact seemed to be broad. It encompassed students' intra-psychic lives and sense of self and spirituality, but it also seemed to impact their relationships with others, especially family members. Not only did it enrich healthy relationships, but it also seemed to help repair strained or distant familial relationships.

### **Discussion**

Certainly, as Scarr, Weinberg, and Levine (1986) postulated, a sense of personal and family history is influential in student development. We wondered whether extending the context of personal history beyond one's own lifespan would be salient in participants' experience. In this discussion I will explore the insights gained as to the value of genealogy and also compare the findings to current literature. Then I will discuss my personal reflections on the role genealogy has played in my life and consider applications for future research.

**Insights Gained as to the Value of Genealogy**

Clearly participants began to understand themselves more deeply by expanding the context of who they were to include their ancestors' lives as a result of being exposed to genealogy. The overwhelming experience of our subjects was that genealogy research had a wide and profound effect on their lives. Considering that this was a single undergraduate course in family history research, it seems remarkable that students would report the depth and breadth of influence on their lives. For our volunteer subjects it was very meaningful. When one considers the full range of human experience, which may include intra-psychic processes, intellectual processes, interpersonal processes, and spiritual processes, many aspects of human experience seemed to be impacted by this single class. It is hard to imagine such breadth and depth of impact in other content courses.

We are not sure why these were the experiences of our participants, but because of current students' developmental stage, this particular kind of information is particularly salient. Many developmental researchers purpose human beings of this age are struggling to understand who they are (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). It is a very personal journey and the process of discovering ancestors indeed informs them about themselves. That particular information may be so relevant and precious that it is accompanied by intense affective experiences which are even described as spiritual. Certainly our subjects oriented their sense of self and course in life somewhat based on what they learned about their ancestors.

Although we were initially concerned that an LDS sample might be particularly colored by their religious and cultural beliefs, the intensity of subjects' reactions to their experience was quite similar to those of celebrities portrayed in current television productions, especially on *Who Do You Think You Are*. It is not uncommon for those non-LDS people profiled on that

show to have intense emotional reactions to both the process and content of discovery. For example, the celebrity, Reba McEntire, reported being very angry at one of her ancestors because she believed he had abandoned his child (Kudrow, & Bucatinsky, 2012). When she discovered the true sacrifice that was made by that ancestor to provide an opportunity for that child, she wept, looked to the heavens, and asked for forgiveness for misjudging her ancestor. She seemed to be asking for forgiveness from both the ancestor and her Deity. Clearly, the experience was profoundly moving to her.

Many of the celebrities profiled in that show cry and reflect deeply on the lives and courage of their ancestors. Our LDS subjects did not seem to be that different than the non-LDS subjects profiled on television. It is probable that the effect of family history research is not particularly based in religion, but may be based in broad human needs. It may be that the human psyche craves knowledge about its' source and history.

### **Comparisons of Findings to Literature**

One important finding of this study was that some of the participants in this study became interested in genealogy and family history research in their teenage years. There are only a few articles that even mention that genealogy and family history exploration can happen in the adolescent years (Bednar, 2011; Humes, 1994; Taylor 2002). The results from this study challenged the belief that genealogical research is only for older generations (Bednar, 2011).

Another theme showed that studying genealogy can result in the formation of connections, closeness, and bonds to ancestors. This is congruent with recent findings on connecting with kin through genealogy (Kramer, 2011). Kramer explained that “genealogy is a resource through which connections through blood are made, and re-made meaningful” (p. 384).

She stated that genealogy is a tool that can bring living kin closer by engaging in genealogical projects or sharing information found with close family by reuniting lost branches of the family. The findings from this sample suggest that many of our participants seemed to take some pride in discovering their roots and in developing strong connections and ties to people, places, and events in American and world history.

Participants in the sample enjoyed discussing the physical and personality characteristics of ancestors seen in themselves and in the posterity of their ancestors. Clinicians will sometimes construct a “genogram” while initially assessing an individual; often looking for traits, emotional patterns, and other factors that follow an intergenerational framework (Duba, Graham, Britzman, & Minatrea, 2009; Gilbert, 2006; Papero, 1990).

Other important findings in this study include the possibilities of influencing current relationships and healing strained relationships through the exploration and conversation of family history and genealogy. As McGoldrick (1995) has postulated, there may be applications for healing family relationships that have yet to have been developed with the application of searching out one's own family history. The results from this study were found to transcend different religious beliefs and multiple generations because participants connected with non-LDS family members interested in genealogy both young and old. If families have engaged in genealogical research, then stories and strengths of ancestors can be passed on from generation to generation for the benefit of future generations (McGoldrick, 1995). Young children even at early ages can feel more of a sense of where they came from. That can potentially prevent them from feeling disconnected from their family or the world.

Participants also shared many spiritual experiences while researching genealogy and these experiences seemed to have a significant impact on their lives. This is certainly consistent

with the research done by Richards and Bergin (2005), who found that spiritual interventions in psychotherapy can be very healing experiences. Although the participants in this study were not participating in psychotherapy, they did spontaneously report strong spiritual experiences similar to subjects participating in psychotherapy.

One of the most significant findings in this study is that the process and journey of searching out personal family history and genealogy can indeed influence one's current identity or sense of self. As Humes (1994) had stated, it is in the journey and the quest of searching out their own family history that the greater sense of identity is formulated. Arnett (2000) has discussed the concept of emerging adulthood, from late teens to early twenties, and emphasized that this period of time is rich with opportunities to develop one's identity in many different ways. Adding to the work of Chickering and Reisser (1993), it would seem that another component of identity development could include spending time with family history.

### **Personal Reflections on the Value of Genealogy**

As I listened to the interview transcripts, I wanted to get back into genealogy myself and have similar experiences to those that the participants described. It reminded me of a couple of years ago when I got interested in my own family history and I desired to find out more information on family names and ancestors. I was astonished at how exciting it was and how time flew by as I was enthralled in finding new things about my family history. Listening to the transcripts of our participants in our study reminded me of the spiritual experiences I had while searching out family names at that time and how it helped me to be a better person. I wanted to live up to the family name and honor their sacrifices they have made for me and my immediate family.

When my wife and I visited our grandparents and spent time talking to them, it was exciting to find out more about their lives. My wife pointed out that I am very similar to this grandpa or that grandpa in certain regards. My paternal grandfather is very organized and I probably take after him as I have a knack for organization. My maternal grandfather has big bushy eyebrows; my wife has tried to trim my “bushy” eyebrows that come from that side of the family. I am so grateful for my heritage and I did not expect to experience the emotions that I felt while listening to the transcripts of the participants in this study. It was a joy and a learning experience to do so. My wife and I hope to have children of our own one day and even if we adopt and cannot pass on any genetic traits, we hope that they will want to be like us in some ways because of the good examples we hope to be as parents and grandparents. I am also hoping to conduct future research and find out more about how adolescents, college students, and other sub-groups have been influenced by studying personal genealogy.

### **Applications for Future Research**

**Clinical applications.** Since family history seems to foster positive growth in young adults, it may be used as a tool to aid struggling adolescents and college students. For example, if individuals are struggling with some identity concerns, it may be helpful for clinicians to ask about family history and find out how “connected” the individual feels in their family relationships. Clinicians could use genograms and family history in their assessments and psychotherapy exploring familial traits and emotional patterns that could assist in the healing and growth of the individual (Duba, Graham, Britzman, & Minatrea, 2009; Gilbert, 2006; Papero, 1990). Maybe that piece of an initial assessment could be expanded to a few simple questions asking about their ancestors and how that might contribute to their individual identity.

As Humes (1994) suggested that genealogy and family history can be used as a counseling tool, it has the potential to benefit not just adolescents, and college students, but potentially individuals of any age where a counseling tool of genealogy could be used for their benefit and healing. The use of spiritual interventions and practices in psychotherapy assist in emotional and psychological healing (Kelly, 1995; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2005). Family history/genealogical research could be considered a spiritual practice and also an intervention in psychotherapy (and other forms of psychological treatment and prevention) to help clients grow spiritually, as well as psychologically and emotionally including identity development (Richards, Bartz, & O'Grady, 2009). Other types of research, including clinical therapeutic applications for family therapy and relationship healing have yet to be explored with the possibilities of genealogical research.

**Genealogical studies.** The present study was primarily concerned with the experiences of college students participating in genealogy and family history research. Very few studies have focused on the influence genealogical research has on college student identity development. Future research could examine the experiences of genealogical research for all age groups, but specifically for adolescents and college students. Based on the information and the results of this research, further research about how genealogy influences identity development, impacts relationships, and forms connections to ancestors could be of some benefit to future college students and their families. We wonder how much interest there could be in genealogy for adolescents who are in the Eriksonian "identity vs. role confusion" stage of their lives. If they could be introduced to some genealogical websites, would they spend time searching out their heritage? It would seem that finding out how much interest there is for adolescents and how that

may influence their identity development could be a fruitful endeavor for researchers and for developmental psychology.

As individuals and families continue to gain more interest in searching out their genealogical roots and family history, we will expect to see more benefits come from engaging in this process. Future research could focus on the growing interest of genealogy exploration among adolescents and college students and how this interest has an influence on their lives. Additional research could focus on just how influential these familial connections are for specific groups and how these connections are formed from studying genealogy. Other research could focus on spirituality among college students and researchers could look into the influence of genealogical research and other factors on college students' spiritual experiences.

With the accessibility of the vast amounts of information available to us through the internet and online resources, we may see more and more individuals having similar experiences to our participants in this study.

## **Conclusion**

Researchers found a wide range of experiences for participants who shared their journeys of conducting genealogical research. There were various motivations for individuals to engage in genealogical research, and many were able to have positive experiences from their endeavors. The possibilities for future research involving genealogy could include psychology, psychotherapy, and marriage and family therapy as part of an assessment or treatment.

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## Appendix A: Review of Literature

### Genealogy and Family History

In the United States, there has recently been a significant increase in the interest of searching out one's genealogical roots (Triseliotis, 1998). In 1995, 45% of Americans reported being "somewhat interested" in tracing their family history. Five years later, in a 2000 poll conducted by Maritz Research, 60% of Americans were at least "somewhat interested" in searching out their family history. The 2000 poll also reported that over 35 million Americans have "done" genealogy online (Maritz Research Inc., 2000). Smith (2010) stated that family genealogy research has grown exponentially over the past decade, making it an area worthy of scholarly inquiry.

Genealogy is now one of the world's most popular hobbies, with hundreds of millions of people around the world actively engaged in some form of family research (Veale, 2004). Currently websites like FamilySearch.com report as many as 10 million hits daily. The FamilySearch™ Internet Genealogy Service (<http://www.familysearch.org>) received its three billionth hit on May 13, 2000. The milestone was reached less than a year after the site was first launched on May 24, 1999. With more and more Americans interested in searching out family names and records, one wonders what personal changes might result.

**Research by the elderly.** Some scholarly research has been done on the effects of doing family genealogy research. One group of focus has been the elderly. Chance (1988) stated that genealogy promotes the mental health of the elderly by

- (a) assisting in the life review process,
- (b) permitting revivification of one's past with attendant opportunities for reworking old traumas and renegotiating developmental arrests,
- (c) putting one's own life and the lives of significant others in perspective,
- (d)

giving vent to immortality strivings, (e) allowing for a legacy and promoting intergenerational bonding, (f) clarifying and enhancing self-identity, and (g) enhancing cognitive functioning and the quality of life. (p. 113)

It seems that even at an advanced age, searching out one's ancestral records can influence one's identity.

**Identity of adopted and separated children.** Another area of focus has been the identity and genealogy of adopted persons and separated children. A general definition of adopted children is children whose parents' rights and responsibilities have been "legally terminated and transferred to others who will raise them." (Schwartz, Luyckx, & Vignoles, 2011, p. 586). Separated children are commonly defined as children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents or from their guardian(s) (Abunimah & Blower, 2010). Triseliotis (1998) found three important factors contributed to identity development among those who have been adopted. They are (a) the quality of a child's experiences within his natural or substitute family, (b) knowledge and understanding about his background and genealogy (particularly important for separated children), and (c) community perceptions and attitudes toward the adopted child. Triseliotis also commented in his studies with separated children, at least in Western cultures, people have a deep social and emotional need and curiosity to know about their families of origin and their ancestors. Such information "is vital to help complete one's self or complete the pattern of one's life" (p. 38). Others who may not have this knowledge and information, such as those in foster care or who have been adopted, may experience the lack as a deprivation which can be quite frustrating and stressful. Indeed many social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists now view the sharing of genealogical information in a positive way and as a step that encourages a sense of identity,

assists in personality development, and satisfies personal curiosity. In one of his studies a participant stated, "you have to know the roots you came from to understand yourself" (p. 40).

Sobol and Cardiff (1983) examined adult adoptees' as they searched for birth parents and indicated those who were active in searching out their birth parents and family history reported a poor self-concept. Active searchers expressed a desire to know their genealogical history, to increase their sense of identity, and to establish a relationship with their birth parents. Non-searchers stated one of their reasons for not actively searching out their birth parents was a satisfaction with identity as children of adoptive parents.

**Adjunct to therapy.** Family history/genealogical research could be considered a spiritual practice and also an intervention in psychotherapy (and other forms of psychological treatment and prevention) to help clients grow spiritually, as well as psychologically and emotionally (including identity development) (Richards, Bartz, & O'Grady, 2009). There is a growing body of literature that focuses on the use of spiritual interventions and practices in psychotherapy in assisting emotional and psychological healing (Kelly, 1995; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Shafranske, 1996). Richards & Bergin (2000) stated that "building trust and bridges of mutual respect and understanding with people from diverse religious backgrounds could have many benefits for the mental health professions" (p. 10).

One definition of the use of "spiritual" in psychotherapy was described as "thoughts, and feelings of enlightenment, vision, harmony with truth, transcendence, and oneness with God, nature, or the universe" (Richards & Bergin, 2005, p. 22). Similarly, spirituality may also include personal experiences, such as feeling compassion, hope, and love; receiving inspiration; feeling enlightened; being honest and congruent; and feeling a sense of meaning and purpose in life (Richards, Hardman, & Berrett, 2007). However, there is some controversy among

professionals about how the terms spiritual and religious are defined, operationalized, and measured (Cook, 2004; Moberg, 2002; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). There are additional findings in the literature that religious persons often seek professional therapy as a later choice, after first seeking help from family, friends, and their clergy (Sell & Goldsmith, 1988; Veroff, Kulka, & Douvan, 1981).

Clinicians will sometimes construct a “genogram” while initially assessing an individual; often looking for traits, emotional patterns, and other factors that follow an intergenerational framework (Duba, Graham, Britzman, & Minatrea, 2009; Gilbert, 2006; Papero, 1990). These genograms could assist in the healing and growth of the individual (Duba, Graham, Britzman, & Minatrea, 2009; Gilbert, 2006; Papero, 1990). Champagne (1990) stated that genealogical research can be used as an adjunct to conventional therapy and counseling. Champagne suggested twenty questions to guide one’s personal genealogical research. The questions were

- (a) “What countries did my family originate from?”
- (b) “How did they get their surnames?”
- (c) “How and when did my family come to the United States?”
- (d) “What were the circumstances surrounding their arrival?”
- (e) “What did my ancestors do for a living (here and abroad)?”
- (f) “How did my family deal with sex roles?”
- (g) “What personal information is known about my ancestors?”
- (h) “What were the struggles my ancestors had to face?”
- (i) “How did they survive in the face of adversity?”
- (j) “Who are the striking individuals in my past?”
- (k) “What made these individuals unique?”
- (l) “Who are the heroes in my past?”
- (m) “How do I feel about them?”
- (n) “Who are the skeletons in my family closet?”
- (o) “How do I feel about them?”
- (p) “How am I like some of my ancestors?”
- (q) “What are some of the family myths that proved false after my search?”

(r) "How do my living relatives "fit" with their ancestors?" (s) "Who would I like to meet with today after my search?" (t) "What does all of this say about me?"

Champagne postulated that searching out family history can provide a foundation for personal healing, personal growth, and promote family communication. This is certainly consistent with the research done by Richards and Bergin (2005), who found that spiritual interventions in psychotherapy can be very healing experiences.

Genealogical study can reconnect a dislocated family to its past and developed a cultural identity in the nuclear family of the researcher. Gibson (1994) examined her own personal genealogy. She worked back five generations to her Scandinavian and Polish ancestors who immigrated to Chicago, Illinois, in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Using a cross-cultural study, Gibson investigated the impact of a trans-oceanic move on the dislocated family members and present generations by traveling to Chicago and retracing the steps of ancestors when they arrived in America from Europe. Utilizing a Bowenian theoretical foundation, this type of research shows the effects that the dynamics of the family system can have on present generations (Gibson, 1994). Applications for family therapist practice were discussed as using the study of personal genealogy as a counseling tool (Gibson, 1994).

Grosskopf (1999) stated that without knowing our ancestors' stories, we limit our perspective to the remembered events of our own histories. Learning more about our ancestors' lives help us to achieve a greater perspective on our own life. An example of this is a grandson who may be aware that his paternal grandfather came to this country alone when he was sixteen. This is a simple fact that is either forgotten or remembered. But imagining how his grandfather felt the day he left home, picturing his parting with his parents, siblings, and friends, expands this one fact into the tumultuous emotional experience it probably was. If the grandson knew and

understood the meaning of his grandfather's story, his own father's interactions with him as a child might finally make sense in terms of the lonely ache in his grandfather's heart. We need to know and understand our ancestors' childhoods to understand them and ourselves.

McGoldrick (1995) explained that the notion of "family" is deeply tied to the sense of who we are in the world as we often resemble other family members and have similar gestures and quirks. McGoldrick postulated that the more we know about our family history, the more we can know about ourselves and the more freedom we have to determine how we want to live. By learning about family history and getting to know what made ancestors tick, how they related to each other, and where they had challenges, one can consider one's own role as an active player in interactions that repeat themselves in life. Learning about ancestors can influence choices and impact the future.

**Religious obligation.** The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) is one religion that has encouraged their members to invest time into searching out family history. Brough (1995) quoted Church President, Howard W. Hunter (1967) who stated, "The greatest search of our time is the search for personal identity and for human dignity" (p. 115). Brough (1996) echoed President Hunter's idea and suggested that young people can find better role models who are closer to them by conducting family history/genealogy research than by observing the typical role models of the day. Brough had an experience with an executive of a large entertainment corporation. The corporate leader was of Jewish ethnicity. At the end of a tour of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, and a demonstration of the Church's commitment to the gathering and preserving of vital records from all over the world, she asked, "Why is your church so interested in genealogy?" Elder Brough responded to her with the same question. "Why is your church so interested in genealogy?" She answered him with the

following: “Why? It is of ultimate and profound importance. It is how we obtain and maintain our identity. It is how I know who I am. The history and lives of our ancestors are the glue that holds the entire Jewish community together. *How else would you know who you are?*” (Italics added). Elder Brough commented that obtaining and maintaining our identity as LDS members is one of the reasons Latter-Day Saints engage in searching out family names and records. Many participate in this service because of their belief that it will bless the lives of others and helps them to become better people.

### **College Student Identity Development**

Identity development and identity formation are difficult concepts to define and operationalize. Scarr, Weinberg, and Levine (1986) stated

An identity is an inner sense of uniqueness and continuity and an outer sociopolitical stance. It combines an awareness of oneself as a distinct person who has a special constellation of needs and abilities with an awareness of how one fits in the social world and where one is headed. It means feeling unique but not alone – connected to other people but not lost in the crowd. (p. 551)

Erikson (1968) described positive identity as “a sense of psychological well-being; a feeling of being at home in one’s body; of knowing where one is going; an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count” (p. 165). Triseliotis (1998) defined identity as the result of multiple emotional, social, and cultural influences which contribute to the formation of an integrated self. Theorists debate many ideas regarding identity formation and development. The following section covers some of these theorists and their developmental theories focusing on the developmental stage of college-age young adults.

**Formation of Ego Identity.** Erikson (1950, 1968) stated that we all must pass through stages of life and successfully navigate through those stages as part of healthy identity development. Erikson believed that failure to appropriately develop personal identity can lead to many difficulties and struggle which he called "role confusion". Erikson emphasized the importance of forming identity through personal and internal experiences. Erikson theorized a developmental lifespan theory comprising eight stages beginning with birth and ending with death. Those stages are (a) Trust vs. Mistrust, (b) Autonomy vs. Shame, (c) Initiative vs. Guilt, (d) Industry vs. Inferiority, (e) Identity vs. Role Confusion, (f) Intimacy vs. Isolation, (g) Generativity vs. Self-Absorption (Stagnation), and (h) Ego integrity vs. Despair. Associated with each of these stages is a guiding principle. Those principles are hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom (Erikson, 1950). Throughout the lifespan one's identity is constantly adapting and molding based on the experiences and perceptions that influence each individual.

***Adolescent ego identity.*** During Erikson's stage five (adolescence), the individual embarks upon a tempestuous journey of discovering more deeply who they are and where they are going. Erikson (1968) believed it is the inability to settle upon an occupational identity which most disturbs late adolescents and early adults. To keep themselves composed they temporarily over-identify with the heroes of crowds and cliques to the point of an apparently complete loss of individuality. Erikson (1968) said, "adolescents not only help another temporarily through such discomfort by forming cliques and stereotyping themselves, their ideals, and their enemies; they also insistently test each other's capacity for sustaining loyalties in the midst of inevitable conflicts of values" (p. 133). The successful navigation through this stormy period of life results in a healthy well developed identity called ego identity. Individuals

understand more fully who they are, have some sense of how they fit into the world, and have an idea of where they are going in the future. The unsuccessful development of identity in this stage results in identity confusion.

***Identity confusion.*** Erikson (1968) delineated that, a state of acute identity confusion usually becomes manifest at a time when the young individual finds himself exposed to a combination of experiences which demand his simultaneous commitment to physical intimacy (not by any means always overtly sexual), to decisive occupational choice, to energetic competition, and to psychosocial self-definition (p. 166).

Erikson stated that an adolescent will experience a psychosocial crisis sometime during this adolescent stage. The adolescent may then enter a period of moratorium. Erikson (1968) theorized that, “a moratorium is a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time” (p. 157). This can be a psychosocial moratorium where there is a delay of adult commitments. Foreclosure refers to individuals who have not engaged in the exploration of alternatives, but have committed to their identity. However, if the individual can work through these periods and discover how they fit in the world around them, they will have established a foundation of ego identity and can move forward through the other Eriksonian stages. Traditional college age students, who are between the ages of 18-25, could find themselves in this identity stage of psychosocial development, solidifying who they are and where they want to go in the future.

Marcia (1965, 1966) is an Eriksonian who concurs with Erikson that the formation of an ego identity is a major event in the development of personality. Marcia (1993) writes, occurring in late adolescence, the consolidation of identity marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. Identity formation involves a synthesis of childhood skills, beliefs, and identifications, into a more or less coherent, unique whole that provides the young adult with both a sense of continuity with the past and a direction for the future (p. 3).

Marcia refers to identity diffusion and ego identity as polar outcomes of the psychosocial crisis in stage five that was postulated by Erikson. Erikson believed that this psychosocial crisis occurred in late adolescence. Marcia reasoned that ego identity status formation is a dynamic process that involves the resolution of two psychosocial tasks (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The first is the experience of "crisis," understood in the Eriksonian sense as the engagement of and choice among meaningful but competing alternatives. The second task involves the making of occupational, religious, and political commitments. Marcia defined commitment as referring to the level of the individual's personal investment in each of the three areas of occupation, religion, and politics. Marcia later added a fourth area related to sexual values. Marcia believed in movement in the two task areas of exploration and commitment simultaneously, which is contrary to Erikson's developmental model through hierarchical stages (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Crisis is supposed to lead to differentiation and individuation, while commitment is assumed to result in stability, continuity, and comfort (Prager, 1986).

***Identity continuum.*** Marcia's model includes four unique statuses along the identity continuum. The first status is called identity achievement which Marcia explained as individuals that have experienced a crisis period and are committed to an occupation or ideology. The

second status is moratorium, defined as individuals that are in a crisis period and are experiencing an active struggle. The third status is called foreclosure and defined as individuals that have not experienced a crisis, but express firm commitments. The last status is identity diffusion, defined as individuals that have no apparent commitments. In this framework, commitment and crisis in occupational, religious, political, and sexual decisions are the primary content of identity development.

Marcia (1966) conducted a study involving 86 college age male participants. A sample question in the occupational area was: "How willing do you think you'd be to give up going into \_\_\_\_\_ if something better came along?" (p. 553). Examples of typical answers for the four statuses were: [Identity achievement] "Well, I might, but I doubt it." "I can't see what something better would be for me." [Moratorium] "I guess if I knew for sure I could answer that better." "It would have to be something in the general area—something related." [Foreclosure] "Not very willing." "It's what I've always wanted to do." "The folks are happy with it and so am I." [Identity diffusion] "Oh sure." "If something better came along, I'd change just like that." (p. 553).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) cited fourteen studies based on Marcia's model, including short term longitudinal designs, long-term longitudinal designs, and cross-sectional designs. With one exception, research supports shifts toward identity resolution and achievement during varying periods of college attendance.

**Student Developmental Vectors.** The time of college attendance can be a period of important individual development. Chickering and Reisser (1993) postulated a theory of college student development that comprised seven developmental vectors. These developmental vectors are (a) achieving competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) developing autonomy, (d) establishing

identity, (e) freeing interpersonal relationships, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity. Chickering and Reisser believed that six of these developmental vectors could be characterized as aspects of the seventh vector, the establishing identity vector, because such establishment depends on all the other vectors. They further stated that movement in one vector could work together with movement along another vector, thus producing complex interaction effects.

The identity formation vector included seven distinct variables (a) comfort with gender and sexual orientation, (b) comfort with body and appearance, (c) sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, (d) clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style, (e) sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, (f) self-acceptance and self-esteem, and (g) personal stability and integration. This theory of identity formation is one of the only theories that included vocational, ideological values, and commitments in their definition of identity. Chickering and Reisser incorporated institutional attributes and functions in their theory that they state serve as key ingredients that can be designed to contribute positively to student development.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) extended their work to address the influences of educational environments on human development. They did not agree with the position that colleges should be structured as socializing institutions to assist students to “learn the attitudes, actions, and skills necessary for a satisfying and productive fit with society” (p. 208). They boldly affirmed that the institution should support the needs of the student, not mold the student to the needs of society or the needs of the institution. They formulated seven institutional key ingredients in addressing this concern: institutional objectives, institutional size, student faculty relationships, curriculum, teaching, friendships and student communities, and student programs

and services. With this understanding, the societal and institutional factors that have been identified may emerge as influences on identity development for college-age students.

**Emerging Adulthood.** Arnett (2000, 2004) coined the term “emerging adulthood” which is a distinct period of the life course, consisting of individuals aged 18 to 25. Arnett (2004) articulated that “there are five main features which make emerging adulthood distinct as a developmental period from the adolescence that precedes it or the young adulthood that follows it” (p. 7). Arnett further explains,

It is the age of identity explorations, especially in the areas of love and work; it is the age of instability; it is the most self-focused age of life; it is the age of feeling in-between, neither adolescent nor adult; and it is the age of possibilities, when optimism is high and people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. (p. 7)

Arnett postulated that for young people in industrialized societies, it is a period characterized by exploration and change as they examine the life possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in world views, work, and love. Arnett stated that for many emerging adults they do not see themselves as adolescents, and they also do not see themselves entirely as adults. Demographic shifts in our society have documented that in 1970, the typical 21 year old was married or about to be married, and had a newborn child or expecting a newborn soon. They were almost done with their education, and ready to settle into a long term job or the role of a full-time mother. Today, one may observe the typical 21 year old as viewing marriage at least five years off, as well as parenthood. Education may last several more years, with graduate school a possibility, and they are looking for well paying jobs that will also be personally fulfilling. The road to adulthood is now more of a winding road that is typically taking a little longer than in past decades.

Arnett cites that in 1999, 45% of the college-age cohort, ages 18-24, was enrolled in college (Barton, 2002). Currently, of the 2.9 million youth who graduated from high school in January through October of 2009, 2.1 million (70.1%) were enrolled in college by the following October (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Each year since 1988, young women have enrolled in college at a higher rate than did young men (63.6% of women, 59.8% of men). Most 2001 high school graduates (80.6%) who did not go on to college were in the labor force in the fall after graduation. However, 20% of those counted as in the labor force were unemployed. The average age at first sexual intercourse is 16 or 17 (Alan Guttmacher Institute [AGI], 1994); the average age at first marriage is almost 27 for males, and 25 for females (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Thus, emerging adulthood corresponds to the years that the majority of individuals are both unmarried and sexually active.

### **Impacts on College Student Identity Development**

Research has documented a number of different influences and impacts on college-age student identity development as evidenced by the following studies. Harrington (2009) studied first generation Latino college students' identity development and the sources of impact that influence their development. He included 89 Latino college undergraduates in his study and found thirteen factors that contributed and impacted Latino college-age student identity development. Those factors were (a) "joining an organization or activity committed to social justice," (b) "participating in a community service or outreach activity," (c) "finding community in a social club, sorority, or fraternity," (d) "having college experiences that broadened their understanding of Latino culture," (e) "receiving inspiration and support from their fathers," (f) "developing a network of college friends," (g) "making the transition from home to college," (h)

“receiving encouragement from university staff and faculty members,” (i) “having academic experiences that allowed them to know themselves,” (j) “dealing with situations involving alcohol,” (k) “feeling out of place or invisible because of their ethnicity,” (l) “learning about themselves by coping with unexpected adversity,” and (m) “confronting difficult academic experiences” (p. 45).

Luyckx, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, and Duriez (2009) analyzed the fulfillment of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to play an energizing role in identity formation, conceptualized as multiple dimensions of exploration and commitment. Two studies among 714 high school and college students were conducted to investigate (a) the cross-sectional relationships between the identity dimensions and need satisfaction and (b) the direction of effects using cross-lagged analyses. Three competing longitudinal models were tested (a) a need satisfaction main-effects model, (b) a reciprocal effects model, and (c) an identity main-effects model. All three needs had meaningful relationships with the identity dimensions, and, although there was a predominance of paths from the needs to the identity dimensions, the reciprocal effects model received most support. Further, identity statuses were meaningfully related to satisfaction of the three needs, with identity achievement scoring highest on all three indices of need satisfaction. For example, these results mean that, “a better developed identity structure allows individuals to be more aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses, which facilitates psychological well-being” (p. 276).

Some of the research on college identity development has focused on specific groups of students, like Black gay males. Vigil (2008) explored the formulation of student identity development among Black gay males at four-year institutions. He included 101 Black gay males in the study and based on their similar experiences, extrapolated important factors influencing

Black gay male college-age identity development. Those factors included (a) having a positive gay role model, (b) having sexual identity affirmed, (c) receiving support, (d) coming out to friends/family, (e) experiencing a romantic relationship, (f) challenging others' beliefs about homosexuality, (g) experiencing an unfriendly community, (h) having a sexual encounter, (i) coming out to self, (j) encountering unexpected adversity, (k) experiencing a challenge to masculinity, (l) deciding to remain closeted, and (m) experiencing discrimination. There seem to be identity developmental factors that are unique to this population as well as factors that are similar to other studies on college-age identity development. For example, coming out to self and others is quite unique to gay identity development. Both Harrington (2009) and Vigil have shown how influential peer groups can be in college-age student identity development.

**Family functioning and identity formation.** Many of the empirical studies on college-age identity development having included family variables and influences (George, 1997; Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999; Kim, 1992; Marom-Tal, 2007; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994; Verma, 2007).

George (1997) stated that the formation of a healthy identity is thought to be assisted by a well-functioning family, whereas a problematic functioning family is thought to impede identity formation. George conducted a study of 300 college-age students and concluded that family functioning variables strongly influenced their identity development. Participants were 150 male and 150 female college students, between the ages of 18 and 23 from intact families. The questionnaires measured family functioning and identity development. The family functioning variables included family health, attachment to parents, and separation-individuation, which formed the set of independent variables. Family health included the two constructs of family structure and family environment. Attachment to parents included the two constructs of quality

of affective bond and parental support. Separation-individuation included three constructs of general independence, lack of negative affect toward parents, and identification. The identity measures (ego identity status and identity process) made up the dependent variables. A hierarchical regression design was implemented. The proposed model was statistically supported for females as all domains predicted identity achievement and diffusion. However, for males, only family health predicted identity achievement, and only separation-individuation predicted identity diffusion.

Kim (1992) discovered that gender, gender role, and family interaction style all influenced college student identity development. A sample of 662 college students, between the ages of 18 to 41, participated in this study. Kim discovered that identity-achieved students were more likely to foresee their future as optimistic and certain, and have an androgynous gender role attitude. Kim also found that identity-diffused participants were not sure about their future, indicated undifferentiated gender role attitudes, and perceived their families as more emotionally unavailable.

Schultheiss and Blustein (1994) researched the contributions of family relationship factors to the identity formation process. They recruited 174 college age participants, with a mean sample age of 18.2, including 92 females and 82 males. Attitudinal independence was defined as having one's own set of beliefs, attitudes, and values that are unique from those of one's parents (Hoffman, 1984). Conflictual independence was defined as freedom from excessive guilt, anxiety, mistrust, resentment, and anger toward one's parents. Results indicated that females who experience greater parental attitudinal independence and attachment and a modest degree of conflictual independence from mother tend to evidence more identity foreclosure and identity achievement and less diffusion. Males who experience parental

attitudinal independence are likely to be in the diffusion or moratorium statuses and not in the identity-achieved and foreclosure statuses. Additionally, females who experience some degree of attachment to mother and attitudinal independence from mother are most likely to avoid diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium.

Marom-Tal (2007) explored the impact of psychological separation and parental attachment on college students' ego identity establishment and their adjustment to dyadic relationships. Marom-Tal used a sample of 281 college students, 93 men, 188 women, between the ages of 18-30, who were in a romantic relationship. Results showed that both connection and individuation during early adulthood years are important for healthy development of identity and relationship capacity. Psychological separation and parental attachment, independently, were not predictive of dyadic adjustment.

Guerra and Braungart-Rieker (1999) researched the roles of identity formation and parental relationship factors predicting career indecision in college students. Participants included a sample of 169 undergraduate students with a mean age of 19.7. Researchers analyzed students' identity formation and perceptions of parental acceptance and encouragement of independence as predictors of career indecision. A multiple regression analysis indicated that career indecision was predicted by a greater degree of identity moratorium and diffusion, less maternal acceptance and fewer years in college.

**Teachers and other role models.** In addition to family influences, teachers and other role models also can have a significant impact on identity development of young adults. Verma (2007) researched community college student identity development and organized several important influences. Those influences were (a) experiencing family influences, (b) experiencing self-awakening, (c) teacher's style of teaching, (d) teacher as a role model, (e)

teacher's attitude, (f) feedback, (g) course content, (h) counselor's interest and help, (i) participation in campus activities, (j) close personal friendships, (k) developing new friendships, and (l) handling emotions.

### **Summary**

From the research above it appears that parental influences, role models, gender roles, peer influences and influences unique to specific peer groups can all potentially influence college-age student identity development. Seven of the nine studies cited the importance of the family in identity development. Although many of the research studies have included variables of the family, very few have analyzed the influence of studying genealogy and family history on identity development, especially among college age students. With the growing interest in genealogy worldwide, and the easy access to genealogical records online, the up and coming generation may be influenced by family history research as no other "youthful" generation has ever been influenced before. Future studies on college student development may want to include how family history research is influential in identity development.

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## **Appendix B**

### **Genealogy and College Student Identity Development**

#### **Interview Guide**

1. Present the participants with the Informed Consent Document. Answer any questions they might have. If they agree to participate, have them sign the back side of the document and file that copy. Give them an unsigned copy for their files.
2. The interviews should follow an open-ended format. After the introduction, use any of the following questions to begin the process, but follow-up as needed to clarify the participants' experience. Remember that we are looking for anything in the genealogy research experience that might be associated with identity development.
3. Introduction: "Thanks for being willing to share your experience with me. We are curious about how students develop as they engage in genealogy research. Anything that you can tell us may help us better understand."
4. Questions:

What was your experience in the family history course or conducting your genealogy research?

What moments particularly stand out in your memory from your experience?

What did you learn about your family that was new or impressive to you?

What do you understand about yourself now that you didn't understand before you began to do genealogy research?

## **Appendix C**

### **Consent to Participate as a Research Subject**

#### **Introduction**

This research is being conducted by Dr. Lane Fischer and Joseph Woolstenhulme at Brigham Young University to explore student development associated with participation in family history/genealogy. You were selected to participate because you are currently enrolled in REL C 261 Introduction to LDS Family History.

#### **Procedures**

You will be asked to participate in an interview with the researchers. The interview will allow you to reflect on and report your experiences with family history/genealogy research. The interview will take no longer than 1 hour and will be audio taped and then transcribed.

#### **Risks/Discomforts**

There appear to be minimal risks involved in the participating in this study. You may feel emotional discomfort in answering questions about personal beliefs. There is a risk that audio tape or transcriptions of the interview could reveal your identity.

#### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. However it is hoped that your information will enhance our understanding of college student development.

#### **Confidentiality**

The audio tape and transcription of your interview will be kept confidential. Audio tapes will be destroyed immediately after transcription. Transcriptions will not record your name or other identifying information. All documents will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be available only to the researchers for the purposes of this study.

#### **Compensation**

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

#### **Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your class status, grade or standing with the university.

#### **Questions about the Research**

If you have questions regarding this research you may contact Dr. Lane Fischer at 422-4200, [lane\\_fischer@byu.edu](mailto:lane_fischer@byu.edu).

#### **Questions about your Rights as a Research Participant**

If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Renea Beckstrand, IRB Chair, 422-3873, 422 SWKT, [renea\\_beckstrand@byu.edu](mailto:renea_beckstrand@byu.edu).