



Research Article

Considering Family Stories and Phenomena in Older Adult Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

Family relationships and systems are important in older adulthood. Families often provide social support and care for individuals in later life. Still, the effects of family phenomena on lifelong learning decisions, behaviors, and experiences require more research. This exploratory study looks at the importance of family phenomena to older adult lifelong learners and notes direct and indirect links to learning choices and behaviors. A semi-structured interview approach was undertaken. Content analysis was utilized to identify salient family codes. Eight core codes were elucidated: (1) family backgrounds; (2) family changes; (3) family distance; (4) family education; (5) perceptions of the family's future; (6) family history; (7) family influence; and, (8) family stories. Family stories were the most prevalent code across the 21 interviews analyzed. Insights for research and practice are shared, so that family phenomena are not overlooked in future lifelong learning endeavors.

Keywords: Family studies; Human development; Lifelong education; Storytelling; Third age learning

Abbreviations

Age-Friendly University Movement (AFU)
Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Introduction

Many substantial psychosocial and lifestyle shifts accompany older adulthood. For many, child-rearing responsibilities and full-time work responsibilities decrease [1,2]. Additionally, friendships and

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relationships with others change [3]. Throughout these transformations, family is a primary source of care and caregiving for many adults during later life [4,5]. However, phenomena related to family relationships are not often considered in the context of older adult lifelong learning. Family is a major social network, social support system and avenue for socialization for older adults [5-7]. Family-related social factors are built upon high levels of trust between family members; however, family social capital generally represents bonding social capital rather than bridging social capital [7]. Unfortunately, some older adults may only trust their relatives and not those outside of the family social network [7]. Still, family may be a “means for older adults to get involved in society” [5, p. 13].

Family, as a social phenomenon, varies across individuals, communities and countries. Family can be sources of personal hardships, but also sources of joy, which older adults may want to express publicly or privately to others [8,9]. Family can be sources of motivation and enthusiasm to take on new things, which can improve self-worth [5]. Unfortunately for some, family relations can be cold, unpleasant, or closed off [7]. Family structures can also be more hierarchal and often patriarchal for some individuals [7]. Also, family structures are changing, especially in Western societies, to be more dispersed and smaller in size [6]. Lifelong learning institutes desire to understand changes in learner demographics, such as family structures [10,11]; moreover, family insights can be gleaned to inform lifelong learning practice. This study stands in pursuit of this quest.

Family and lifelong learning

While still nascent, some researchers have explored connections between family phenomena and lifelong learning [7,12]. Participation in lifelong learning has been connected to improvements in family relations [13]. Strong small and close-knit family networks may be linked to decreased participation in formal lifelong learning and community programs, but also may be linked to greater participation in informal learning experiences [7]. Individuals may also take particular lifelong learning courses if family members are also taking those courses, but this claim needs further investigation [14]. Thus, family can be both a motivator and a barrier to engage in lifelong learning.

Family backgrounds (i.e., finances and educational levels) and previous family decisions regarding education can influence whether individuals engage in lifelong learning, but not necessarily which topics they pursue [12]. Still, some individuals' learning choices may be influenced by desires to show respect to their family members through imitating their family members' previous learning behaviors and choices [12]. For men specifically, family may be a primary consideration regarding decisions to return to education or fulfilling dreams related to learning [15]. Very few researchers have elucidated connections between family perceptions, stories, histories, and traditions and lifelong learning [12,16-18]. The lack of research is unfortunate because families can encourage individuals take up new learning tasks and challenges in meaningful ways [17].

Family has been connected to generativity - “an interest in establishing and guiding the next generation” [19, p. 267] - in older adulthood [18]. Maintaining family values and traditions can be important pieces of productive ageing and well-being for older adults; these family values and traditions are passed down through family practices [12]. For some, family objects are important, such as heirlooms, photographs, pictures, among others [18]. For others, family lineage is important [18]. Thus, lifelong learners may want to chronicle and share multiple family phenomena with future generations.

Family in lifelong learning

Lifelong learning practice has incorporated family phenomena into curricula in different ways. Investigating family histories and genealogy are popular topics in lifelong learning programs [20-22]. Autobiographies, storytelling, life histories, life-story writing and memoir writing are other popular topics [23]. These approaches have been linked to higher levels of cognitive and social well-being for older adults [24]. Among these topics, lifelong learners investigate, reflect, draw and write about their families. Again, these stories can be shared with family members and non-family members alike.

In the same light of sharing, intergenerational learning has been and can be an approach for examining family phenomena. Family histories and trees can be created and shared [20]. Intergenerational learning can unite families, strengthen family ties, and transmit values, traditions and cultures between older and younger generations [25]. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can help individuals stay connected with family members and re-tool, but still keep up, their family traditions [6]. ICT has been posited as a tool for decreasing barriers to lifelong learning and increasing age-friendliness [26]. Some researchers have suggested that caregivers for older adults in their later years (e.g., family members) could be welcomed into their loved ones’ lifelong learning experiences [27]. For lifelong learning institutes, intergenerational learning helps create more age-friendly universities [28]; however, age-friendly places for families or multiple generations of family members have not been considered much in the age-friendly university movement [11]. Additionally, intergenerational learning with family members must include an understanding of each learner’s role in and relationships with their family [29].

Towards the current study

Lifelong learning institutes should seek to better understand the importance of family to their lifelong learners in research and practice. This study aims to help both researchers and practitioners to better understand the importance of family phenomena to lifelong learners. The study explores family topics, such as: past, current, and perceived future family situations; family backgrounds and histories; family education levels; potential influences of family on lifelong learning choices and experiences; family stories; and, future perceptions of family.

Materials and Methods

Data collection

A series of 26 interviews with older adult lifelong learners (of ages 50+) were conducted between January and June 2017. All interviews were with members of an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at a major

southwestern United States university. Seventeen interviewees identified as women and nine interviewees identified as men. The original purpose of the study was to examine the big and beautiful questions lifelong learners pursue in older adulthood [30,31]. Interviewees were audio recorded during the interview after receiving their permission to be recorded and informed consent to be interviewed for the study. Interviews generally lasted between 20 and 80 minutes; the average audio record was 48 minutes in length.

The researchers selected the interviewees based on the interviewees’ high levels of involvement in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute’s offerings. The researchers solicited recommendations from the institute’s staff and its fundraising committee. One of the study researchers visited classes to meet and recruit potential interviewees for the study. The study was exploratory in nature, and a semi-structured interview format was used, which is common in qualitative research [32]. Interviewees throughout the interviews were prompted to discuss the major big and beautiful questions they held across various points in their lives (e.g., childhood, career, retirement, etc.). They were to consider lifelong learning as a concept and practice in their answers as well. They were also asked to share what legacy they might leave behind to future generations, which was often cast as giving a graduation address. This specific prompt usually came at the beginning of the interviews to help build rapport, and comfort between the interviewees and the interviewer. The informal and loose structure of the interview script allowed the interviews to vary across many topics and themes.

This exploratory study specifically speaks to the overarching theme of family and the lifelong learners’ diverse expressions and concepts regarding family that emerged during the interviews. The overarching study regarding big and beautiful questions did not intend to explore family phenomena and potential connections between such phenomena and lifelong learning. This particular study arose from the consistent observation of family themes and stories found across 21 out of the 26 interviews undertaken in the initial study [31]. What follows is an attempt to categorize and discuss family phenomena and their place in lifelong learning research and practice, so that more family-focused research can be undertaken in the future and current lifelong learning practice can be improved by considering family-related elements.

Data analysis

This study analyses the content of audio recordings from 21 of those interviews, because of the original 26, these interviewees specifically mentioned family-related themes during the course of their interviews. GoTranscript (<https://gotranscript.com>) was used to transcribe the interviews from audio-files to digital document files (*.docx). Coding of overarching themes and subthemes were done using Microsoft Word and MAXQDA (version 2018), a qualitative data analysis software program. Content analysis allowed qualitative data to be transformed into overarching categories, which then were depicted using descriptive quantitative statistics and methods [33].

The researchers employed strategies for rigor and trustworthiness in their analysis. These included research reflexivity and thick descriptions, which are appropriate strategies for rigor in qualitative research [34]. The research team engaged in peer debriefing [34] during the coding process via phone, email, or in-person. After multiple read-throughs of the identified comments related to

family, the researchers elucidated eight core codes: (1) Backgrounds; (2) Changes; (3) Distance; (4) Education; (5) Future; (6) History; (7) Influence; and, (8) Stories. These eight core codes were used to categorize interviewee comments and to identify any sub-codes within these eight areas. These comments, sub-codes, and their possible connections to lifelong learning are showcased in the results section, and their importance is highlighted in the discussion section.

Results

The aforementioned codes ranged in their prevalence across the 21 interviewees and within each transcribed interview. Table 1 shows the prevalence of the codes across and within the interviews. The codes were demonstrated between six to nine times across the 21 interviews (mean = 7.5; median = 8). Within each of the 21 interviews, interviewees showcased, on average (mean), 2.86 (35.75%) of the eight family codes. The median number of codes demonstrated per interviewee was two; however, one interviewee mentioned all eight codes, and ten interviewees demonstrated three or more codes during their interviews. The results hereafter are organized based on prevalence (high to low) of the eight core codes across interviews. They are ordered as such: (1) family stories (9 interviews); (2T) family backgrounds (8 interviews); (2T) family influence; (2T) perceptions of the family’s future (8 interviews); (2T) family history (8 interviews); (3) family changes (7 interviews); (4T) family distance (6 interviews); and, (4T) family education (6 interviews). Again, some codes tied (T) in prevalence. Furthermore, potential sub-codes are noted as well in the results, but they are highlighted further in the discussion section.

Family stories

Family stories were most prevalent across interviews and most

elaborated upon within the interviews. Interviewees shared nostalgic stories regarding their childhood home lives. Stories regarding parents were more frequent than stories concerning other family members. One interviewee shared, “When I was really little we lived on an acreage and had chickens. I’ve missed that for sure, that connection to the earth and growing things” (INT 3). A different interviewee reflected, “I was a neighborly guy as a boy, or any other times, living in a little town of 1,200 people. I was raised in that kind of a community, people cared for each other” (INT 9). Another stated: “I was excited especially in the summer about going swimming in the lake. That was my day, to go down to the lake, go swimming, go on the raft and then come home and have dinner that my mom cooked for me and the family. I had a good life as a youngster living in the suburbs of Chicago and in the 50s and 60s” (INT 4).

A different interviewee shared: “When I was young and growing up, I was probably in the most idyllic setting there could be. A small town...my mother continues to tell me how great a town it was but it suffocated me...Because it was so small. Probably at the time maybe 6,000 people, 7,000. In its heyday, probably 10,000. So we’re talking small. But everybody knew my family” (INT 7).

Interviewee stories reflected gratitude towards parents and up-bringsings, even if they did not enjoy everything about where they were from. One interviewee (INT 9) spoke about the resilience of their father during the Great Depression and how their father was able to make a viable living in farming and agriculture to support their family. The following comments further showcase such notions of gratitude.

Codes	Backgrounds	Changes	Distance	Education	Future	History	Influence	Stories	Total Prevalence	% of Codes
INT 9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8	100.00%
INT 21	X	X	X	X		X	X		6	75.00%
INT 3	X		X	X		X		X	5	62.50%
INT 10		X		X			X	X	4	50.00%
INT 15			X		X		X	X	4	50.00%
INT 5				X		X	X	X	4	50.00%
INT 4	X	X						X	3	37.50%
INT 7	X	X						X	3	37.50%
INT 11					X	X	X		3	37.50%
INT 24	X	X						X	3	37.50%
INT 13					X		X		2	25.00%
INT 18	X				X				2	25.00%
INT 19					X	X			2	25.00%
INT 22	X				X				2	25.00%
INT 23			X			X			2	25.00%
INT 8				X		X			2	25.00%
INT 6		X							1	12.50%
INT 12								X	1	12.50%
INT 14					X				1	12.50%
INT 16							X		1	12.50%
INT 20			X						1	12.50%
Total Prevalence	8	7	6	6	8	8	8	9		
% of Interviews	38.10%	33.33%	28.57%	28.57%	38.10%	38.10%	38.10%	42.86%		

Table 1: Prevalence of family codes across and within interviews.

“My parents- great role models...They’re both passed away but-- bless their hearts today because they got us-- all six of us on a great start?...They basically spent their time growing and building a family of six, which was very difficult time wise, financially, and everything else” (INT 5). “But I was finding no comfort in the smallness of people knowing me. I don’t know what it was. I have no idea why that happened. And it wasn’t that I had a bad childhood. My parents were very supportive. I had a Pollyanna upbringing. But there was more than that, and who knows how’d that happened” (INT 7).

Other interviews saw their parents as role models, but imperfect role models. Two interviewees shared: “My dad...cared for people. If he said he’d do something, he did it. The ethic of life. I think, that was him. My mother was very sensitive woman and she was reclusive, but she still cared for people. My dad was a gregarious kind of guy... He’d speak to everybody. You know everybody and you want to, partly, because he was a super salesman. That’s how he got things done” (INT 9). “My dad worked and he was a role model for me. He’d get up every day, trip down to Chicago or come on back, my mom and dad you’re growing up, depression in World War II set a good example for me and I think I learned a lot from that. I just kind of flowed with the flow” (INT 4).

One interviewee directly connected their family stories to their current interests, including lifelong learning interests. This interviewee shared how their younger experiences with their father linked to their current interests regarding technology. The interviewee noted that their father’s “capability and curiosity on the mechanical electromechanical side of things which allows me to stay somewhat up to date on the technology stuff today because I kept that up over time” (INT 5). The interviewee’s father dealt with electronics tech in World War II (WWII) and later was an engineer at Kodak. With their father, the interviewee took apart electronics, learned house wiring, repaired devices that seemed irreparable, and built a radio, all of which reinforced their intrigue with electronics. Fittingly, the interviewee noted, “I could go along and build my knowledge, which builds enthusiasm at the same time” (INT 5). The interviewee saw both their parents somewhat as teachers, not formal teachers, but informal teachers.

Not all stories were nostalgic. Some stories included interviewee’s reflections regarding the communities in which they were raised. One interviewee shared: “I lived in a little town that was very segregated. There weren’t many black folks in there, but there was no school for them. They had a colored school. If they wanted to go to high school, they had to go about 40 miles away to a high school...I was raised in there, but I never did understand it. Of course, immediately, I became wide-open to any and everybody, because I just did. I was at the University of Missouri in [the early 1950s] when the student body voted on whether black students could go to the gym and the showers at the gym...I was there. Now, the student voted [for], of course. They were way ahead of the politicians” (INT 9).

Aside from stories of parents and upbringings, some interviewees shared stories regarding children (e.g., INT 10; 15; 24) and grandchildren (e.g., INT 12). One interviewee shared a story of their child’s challenges with mental illness, specifically during their child’s teenage years (INT 15). Another parent reflected: “I stayed in the house and raised the kids. As I would tell my life story, certainly, my life was transformed by my parenthood and everything about it. I don’t regret one damn minute of it...either the parenting or the service, heavily involved with my daughter and son both” (INT 24).

One interviewee shared stories of competing with their siblings for their parent’s attention (INT 9). Other family stories included important life moments, such as the birth of a child, meeting a spouse, and the death of a spouse (INT 10). Despite the prevalence of family stories across the interviews, only one interviewee noted writing down their family stories (INT 9).

Family backgrounds

Family backgrounds were prevalent focal points across the interviews. Interviewees noted the locations of family members (distance is discussed later), sizes of their families, and their positions (e.g., oldest sibling or only child) in their families; however, these references did not contain much elaboration. Stories focusing on parents’ backgrounds generally discussed fathers more than mothers. Interviewees connected their family backgrounds to the persons they are today in both positive and negative ways. One interviewee noted, “I’ve always been an optimistic person...I’m getting a lot of that from my especially my sainted Irish mother; she was always optimistic in the face of troubles and travail” (INT 4). This individual felt great encouragement during their young life stating: “Young life had it, had a great home life, good role models, encouragement along the way with the things that I wanted to do or attempt to do, attempt to do and fail, start again do something else and I think that was pivotal in my outlook on the future” (INT 4).

Another highlighted, “EQ, emotional intelligence, and that kind of stuff, I am really bad. My dad was horrible. My mom is not good. I see it in them. I don’t think I learned that yet” (INT 18). This individual went on further: “I develop bad relationships and then I don’t know how to fix them. I’m pretty happy. I’m pretty used to people not liking me. I think I’m good at being in situations. I think people that grew up in families that aren’t going good, you have a high tolerance for bad situations...My parents separated, but didn’t divorce” (INT 18).

Another interviewee discussed divorce and re-marriage (INT 24). Both interviewees noted that divorce and re-marriage are not as accepted during the time and in the communities in which their parents lived.

Interviewees provided reflections on their parents’ backgrounds, often regarding the resilience of their families. One interviewee stated, “To this day, both [spouse] and I, we’d marvel at how my mother picked herself up and life goes on” (INT 7). This interviewee further reflected, “I think you have to accept that you don’t know what’s going to happen and be open enough to be prepared for it” (INT 7). Another interviewee noted: “[My dad] worked until he was 82 or 83?, then he died at 84. He’s that kind of guy, he wasn’t worried about retiring. He just kept going. That generation, generally, had to do that to survive. To get through the depression was a terrible test, the response, tenacity and work ethic and everything. His father was a well-known good man, a son of a Civil War veteran who shouldn’t even been in the war. He was a smart man and a good farmer. You watch those genes and you think, ‘What a stroke of luck.’ It’s hard to overcome that” (INT 9).

Another interviewee shared that the individual’s father’s military experience in WWII and views on the Korean War led their father to discourage military service and encourage them to go to college (INT 21). Another interviewee shared their father’s anxiety regarding trying to live beyond the age of their grandfather (INT 24). Another interviewee

shared that they wanted their family's work ethic to be passed on to their children (INT 22). Family backgrounds appeared to create benchmarks for success for some individuals. Again, the backgrounds shared also appeared related to the interviewees' current decisions and behaviors. Fittingly, one interviewee (INT 7) noted that they would like to study family dynamics to better understand their own family as they discussed the death of their father and their 90+-year-old mother.

Family influence

Particular influences of family members and family dynamics on learning were prevalent across the interviews. One interviewee shared that learning was an expectation in their family. "There was always an expectation that you would learn and do well. Didn't ever think about not doing that" (INT 9). For this individual, family helped them make meaning out of what they learned. One interviewee decided to study math to rebel against their father. They noted, "When I majored in math, that was my way of rebelling. I told my father, 'Well, I can be a math teacher.' I'm glad my daughters grew up later and didn't have those same restrictions" (INT 11). As already noted, another interviewee's father did not want him to go into the military, but to go to college. This individual stated that their father "was a dominant force in our family. He insisted that I go on to college" (INT 21).

One interviewee shared the influence of their brother on their decisions, including learning decisions. They shared: "My brother and I did a lot of things together. We're just a year apart, almost like twins. Other than completely different in a lot of ways, we didn't have to compete. He is more of a reader, artist kind of a kid, more like my mother. I'm more like my father, mowing grass, saving money. I'm doing all that, but we didn't compete. We help each other all the time, still do. He's a retired psychiatrist... Anyway, that brother and I, we were very close. I obviously followed him into medicine, but we never competed. We follow each other for helpful advice and some chips were down where we had each other. We still do" (INT 9).

Three interviewees shared that their spouse inspires their continued learning (INT 5; 15; 16). One shared: "Helps her [my wife] to see insects that she didn't see when she was on the East Coast. Anyway, she's made me aware of many of these problems, and we've tried a couple of very nice classes here on insect behavior through the Osher Program" (INT 15).

Another interviewee elaborated on their spouse's influence: "I don't know how much time we have left. I operate with this fear that I'm running out of time. We want to do stuff, go places. We travel really well together. We both love history. We go -- at any little town. We'll find the museums and art galleries. He's an artist, so we can go to the art galleries. He doesn't mind going to the shops. I don't mind going to the galleries. He [her spouse] brings out his paints, and I'll go hike or read... We have a good time. There are so many things we want to do together... We feel like we have a lot to do... Do it all do it now is our motto" (INT 16).

This individual highlighted that spouses do not need the same interests to encourage each other to learn. Children and grandchildren influenced continued curiosity and learning. Another interviewee shared that their daughter encouraged their continued curiosity and learning. They stated, "I do something, because I look for it and my daughter would say, 'Mom, look at this. Hey, you got to do this.'

She [my daughter] pushed me in doing a lot of things... She is good" (INT 10). Another interviewee shared that their grandchildren kept them curious and wanting to learn more. They said: "I've got a mess of grandkids... some are really interesting people. I've got a granddaughter who's got a full scholarship for five years graduate work at Northwestern... Yes, I just love to sit and talk to her [my granddaughter] because she fascinates me... more about what she's interested in and the things that are going on in her life. I don't care about her grades, she's just fascinating" (INT 13).

One individual shared that they found curiosity to be an additional quality they can add to the upbringing they received from their parents. "They were great role models of how to be good moral people and how to be hard workers and how to treat each other, but they weren't really teachers. They didn't sit down and explore new things with us explore the universe or anything with us. I'm not sure exactly where I'm going with that but I suppose today I'm very well grounded in those things that they taught us, that they role modeled for us, but the curiosity is something that I've added on to it I guess" (INT 5). In summary, family members demonstrated potential past and present influences on the curiosities and learning behaviors of the interviewees.

Perceptions of the family's future

Interviewees shared perceptions regarding the future for their families and family members. One interviewee summarized, "It's family. It's a village. I don't know it's everything, I mean, it's our future too" (INT 18). Both worries about the future and hopes for the future were present in the interviews. Worries for the future and future generations of their families were shared. One interviewee commented, "I'm worried about our society in the future. I worry for my grandchildren. I can't do anything about it, other than try to teach them. Luckily, my children are all excellent parents" (INT 9). This individual shared their passion for human rights, specifically LGBTQ rights, because they had a lesbian daughter. Another interviewee shared concerns regarding the mental health of their daughter (INT 15). A different interviewee noted concerns regarding student loan debt and debt in general that future generations will be burdened with (INT 19). Finally, one interviewee shared concerns regarding their daughter's struggle to balance work demands; they stated, "Just watching her [my daughter] struggle with the various pulls on her and remembering what that felt like and being glad I was out of it" (INT 11). This individual wanted to be able to advise their daughter on the best future courses of action.

Interviewees shared hope for the future referring to what they see demonstrated by their children and grandchildren. One interviewee shared, "In a way, children like mine have an obligation to pass along. They're all oriented toward the society" (INT 9). Pride and excitement was shown for children and grandchildren as exemplified in the following responses.

"My daughter graduated from the ASU School of Law... Yes, things have changed in that business. When I went to law school if you go into a courtroom, it's a public place. You go up to the bar; you're in deep trouble if you're not a lawyer. My daughter was trying cases when she was still studying as an intern; that's why she is with the Pentagon; she was winning the cases" (INT 14). "My grandson wants to go to CERN. That's what he wants to do. He spent a good part of the summer in some learning classes in France to get it. That time, he told

me, 'The best time I had was when I got into a 15-minute conversation with a cab driver and I didn't realize I was speaking French.'... He's taken a lot of French in school. He was pretty well into the summer before he could actually do that" (INT 13).

Another interviewee enjoyed seeing their parenting skills passed on to the next generation, but also critiqued how their children were raising their grandchildren. "Each of our three children has two children, so we have six grandchildren. We see how they were brought up, some of our parenting skills have been adopted by our three sons, but there are some things that we see that really would like them to do differently, but we have to bite our tongues because it is their life. We do not interfere with their child-rearing of our grandchildren. Having said that, when they are away and we are looking after them... We say, 'You may have certain rules that your mommy and daddy have, when we are responsible for you, you need to follow our rules,' and they may be the same, in some instances they may be different" (INT 22).

In addition to passing down parenting skills and care for others, legacy was noted in particular by this same interviewee. They stated the following: "I think about the legacy that I will be leaving my children and grandchildren. My children have great respect for my wife and myself...my wife and I are completely different [regarding parenting skills]. As a school teacher, she is more touchy-feely and always says you need to think about your words before you speak, because you cannot change something once it is said. I am more 'You better try your hardest at anything you do' I am more disciplined. I was a disciplinarian, she was the touchy-feely. It was a good combination for our children...It's the legacy that I think about a lot and what I'm leaving...how important certain values are that we have sort of inculcated not by telling him what to do, but by living our life. Children do not learn by what you tell them what to do, they learn by saying how you react in situations" (INT 22). While the interviewees, outside of interviewee 22, did not directly reference family legacy, it may be indirectly evident amongst the previous interviewee comments and the comments to follow.

Family history

Eight individuals specifically spoke about their family history. One interviewee did not see their family's circumstances apart from their family's history. Exemplifying and tying together both the family influence and family history categories, they commented, "We see the generations coming down. It's no accident that all this has happened" (INT 9). Three sub-codes were historical moments involving family members, cultural heritage, and genetic backgrounds.

Two historical moments were noted. One individual had a great grandfather who served in the U.S. Civil War (INT 9). Two individuals had fathers serve (INT 5; 21), and one had a brother serve in WWII (INT 8).

Three individuals elaborated on their cultural heritage. One commented on their Slavic heritage (INT 3). Another interviewee noted that their family had Finnish, Scottish, and French descent (INT 19). A different interviewee highlighted making meaning out of understanding culture and family history. "Every one of us lives in different cultures, a variety of different cultures. It's a familial culture, it's a work culture, and it's a social culture. There are different cultures, and they all have different unwritten rules. It's like the body language. Okay? I used to teach a class on that. People want to-- well, not

everybody, but I know that, at times, I want to reflect on my history. I want to understand it better. Understand it from a different point of view or context. I suspect that most people of my age have a rich history if given a chance to share it and/or reflect on it because we all have memories and those memories bring us joy and sorrow, but knowledge. It seems to me that at our age, we want to understand that history. They have to have meaning. I don't think any of us want to say we wasted our lives. How does it have meaning? In context. I think sometimes talking to other people can enrich your own history, your understanding of it" (INT 11).

Three comments specifically regarded family genes or DNA. "Finding your DNA. People may not realize that when they're investigating their own personal family story, they're looking into their family history. We are here because of things that happened in the past. We are the culmination of things that happened in the past" (INT 8). "I guess I just see that my parents and grandparents through us to them, I see it happen. That's very satisfying, probably the ultimate satisfaction for my life right now. Luckily, her uneducated smart father and lovely, not intellectually smart but life-smart mother passed it on to her genes. Mine and hers together had been quite successful" (INT 9). "My family had done a lot [genealogy research] on their own. I have been to the home in Virginia where the ancestors from England headed there, then traveled to Kentucky. Then my great grandfather was in the Union Army. He built a farm in Kentucky but he believed in Union and his neighbors, not so much. Well, he joined the Union Army. Well, eventually the neighbors were mad at him over that. He took a furlough and took his family and moved to Illinois... In a way. My grandfather was 12 years old and- in that wagon...They all were Kentuckians and they were proud of it. They'll have to get to Kentucky. We've been able to follow that without the ancestry.com" (INT 9).

Finally, one interviewee noted concerns regarding genes passed on related to health issues. They stated: "That's a worry of mine, my parents became very demented and they lived in a nursing home in very poor mental health for the last-- see my mother lived there 10 years, my dad lived there eight and it was bad, it was awful. That's a fear, so I wanted to get in my best strokes while I still have my brain, at least some of them" (INT 23).

In sum, these learners' curiosities regarding their family histories showcased processes of individual and family discovery, which sometimes accompanied desires to continue to learn more about their family history.

Family changes

Family changes were notable amongst a third of the interviews. Family changes included the death of a spouse (INT 4), divorce (INT 24), death of parent (INT 9), kids leaving home (INT 4), moving across the country (INT 6; 7; 10; 21), retirement (INT 4), having grandchildren (INT 4; 24) and having aging parents move into their homes or to their cities (INT 7; 9). These family changes were reflected in comments regarding the individuals' lives and the lives of their parents. These changes showcased sub-codes of achievement, resilience, expectations, and shifts in priorities.

These family changes provided notable reflective comments regarding feelings of achievement and resilience. "[A] lot of things happen that deflect or reflect back on you. I found a new a new lease in life, I'd say, now with my connection to another woman in my life.

That's made a big difference. Quite frankly, it's made a huge difference in my life. I see things differently, positively, so I'm encouraged about life and living and started my second childhood, so to say" (INT 4). "In retrospect, my daughter is one of my best achievements, if I can take credit for her. Phoenix has a place for her to grow up. Turned out to be really, really generous to her. It was a really great place for her to grow up. Had we stayed in Chicago, the opportunities that she had here, she would never have realized (INT 6). We moved...in '94. Again, I'm an only child. And there was never any point my mother would ever say, 'Don't do it.' Because first of all, she couldn't. She wasn't telling me what to do. But she recognized what an opportunity it was for us...But I learned a lot from that" (INT 7).

Another interviewee noted the importance of expecting changes as you age, which was evidenced through stories about their mother. They noted: "Especially in aging, you just plan on people moving in and out of your life all the time. When you meet somebody, you know they're going to be moving on...The bottom line is, at age 91, her [their mother's] set of friends now, include no one that she knew 10 years ago...Think beyond that because things change. In seeing all these 5 transitions that my mother has made, somewhat with our help, but nevertheless, she's the one that's making the transition. I think, 'You know what? If she can do it, I could do it too'" (INT 7).

Finally, one interviewee commented that their priorities shifted after their divorce and they noted that their priorities adjusted further after retirement. They stated: "You wake up one morning, and you just find out you're not worried about the same stuff, which is good. That's the good news of retirement, somewhat. People will talk about that. People love to talk about their grandchildren and so forth...They just express this great ecstasy involved with holding their infant grandchild and so forth. Then, if you stay with it, follow it for three minutes, 'Boy, I'm glad we could go home after four hours' and so forth. The ecstasy is what makes it ecstatic" (INT 24). They spoke of pride regarding their daughter having children, but also a sense of relief that they are not responsible for child-rearing responsibilities. Overall, the family changes noted by the interviewees were not marked by a great deal of negativity, but displayed optimism regarding moving forward from those changes.

Family distance

The interviewees shared comments regarding the distance of their families from them, which may be indicative of feelings of familial (social) support and isolation. One interviewee wanted to be close to their children and grandchildren and was willing to travel to them. "I would do it again because I wanted the children to know their grandparents and vice versa. That's what I did" (INT 9). A different interviewee shared anticipation for grandchildren, but was glad to have their youngest son closer as he completed an internship (INT 20).

One interviewee shared wanted to be close to their children, but also still wanted their own social life as well. They stated: "We'll be near one of our children, which is as you get older it's something you think about, and this particular family was the easiest one for us to be near of our three sons. We came out, looked around and decided to go to [their residential community] because it had...a clubhouse, a chance for social interaction" (INT 21).

Two interviewees (INT 3; 23) noted that they compensated for their distance from or poor relationships with family members by engaging more with friends and participating in activities. One interviewee noted: "I've had a lot of sadness in my life. My children aren't in my life at all, that's been incredibly sad for me. I just keep thinking of the children I've taught and the children I continue to read to and ways I can give with them. That's been a pretty good substitute. I'll never get over it really truly the sadness of that, but I compensate the best I can do every day" (INT 23). Another interviewee wanted to be close to their daughter, because their daughter dealt with mental illness and their relationship was currently strained (INT 15). Overall, the interviewees appeared to have come to terms with or enacted strategies to address any issues related to distance, but desires to be closer to family members was generally evident amongst the distance-related responses.

Family education

Six interviews had comments regarding family education. These comments generally concerned their fathers and mothers. The comments showcase connections between family education and learning attitudes and choices. Because there were only five notations, the abridged comments reflecting family education are highlighted below.

"My parents didn't get to high school even, basically. They're from Chicago and they were immigrant parents. They didn't necessarily appreciate an education. [My sister] wanted to go to school, she went to school. She paid her own way; she lived at home. My brother did not want to go to school, but they paid his way. Then I went to school. I paid my way, and I paid room and board. It's a culture. It's a Slavic culture kind of thing. There was not a lot of encouragement as far education was concerned when I was growing up. Maybe that's why it's so important to me now, why I appreciate it so much now even" (INT 3).

"But they weren't great teachers; neither had college education, but our church involvement and just their role modeling gave us a good start (INT 5). My father had had an education at University of Illinois as a young man. My mother was very education and reading-oriented" (INT 8).

"Then you see these kids that are born in terrible situations, but they did get a set of good genes, somehow. They're not from educated people. I'm intrigued by very smart uneducated people. The world was full of them during the Depression. They were smart. My wife's father got through the eighth, grade but he was a very acting smart farmer. His sons, one won his PhD and it's agriculture-related things. His second son now runs a big farm. He went to university and majored in Agriculture, then came back and ran his very big operation. He's a very smart uneducated man and I'm intrigued by that. It also made the intellect genes that make our country what it is now. It came across the oceans...I'm intrigued by those things" (INT 9).

"Yes [she encouraged me to go to college]. I think she [my mother] was at the age-- I'm 89 so when she went to school you never--very few of them even finished high school and I think she went a couple years or so. My father--his father didn't like it because he wasn't going and my grandfather apparently had some drug stores or something, I don't know what it was...My father wanted to be an engineer and so he went all by himself to Rochester, New York and studied and

graduated with the degree in engineering...He had about three jobs every day to keep him going. That's kind of guy he was" (INT 10).

"I came from a family of modest means and for various reasons I had a chance to go on to higher education. I had one brother. He was nine years older and he joined the Navy in World War II. He never finished the high school...When I was finishing high school, the Korean War was on. My father did not want me to go into the military and he was a dominant force in our family. He insisted that I go on to college" (INT 21).

Finally, one interviewee (INT 3) noted that shared the pride they had for their mother who went back to school. "My mom really appreciated it. I don't know it was girl thing I think, why it wasn't okay to support us in that regard although she did. She worked her whole life. We didn't have money either, but she worked until she retired. She retired early. Even though she didn't have her high school degree, she went back after she graduated, she got her GED. She went to LPN school at almost my age and got an LPN and started-- yes, they were very resourceful, and a lot of good things did happen...She wanted that for herself and I still have her LPN hat. She died at 93 and I still have the hat because that was so important to her" (INT 3).

Across all of the eight core codes, the interviewees noted pride in themselves and their families, despite any adversity their families may have faced in the past.

Discussion

The eight codes showcased across the interviews provide insights on where lifelong learning research and practice can further explore family influences as a mediator of learning disposition and the potential utility of drawing upon family themes in developing curricula for older adults. Linkages between these family codes and learning were directly and indirectly evident. In general, parents appear to be salient parts of individuals' stories and perceptions across the eight codes followed by children and grandchildren. The following discussion is organized by chunking together the eight codes with an intentional focus on integrating the codes and possible sub-codes into lifelong learning research and practice.

Considering family stories, backgrounds, education and influence in lifelong learning

Family phenomena influence the meaning learners make out of learning. The family stories found in this study showcase the importance of stories of family members, specifically parents, to older adult lifelong learners. The interviewees shared more stories and background information about their fathers than their mothers, which is worth investigating further and may be related to hierarchical or patriarchal family structures [7]. While both parents appeared influential on learning decisions, fathers were noted more regarding which topics to learn. At times, lifelong learners shared stories when they challenged their parents with their learning decisions and when their children challenged them. Interviewees noted a sense of pride regarding the learning and educational achievements of their parents given the eras in which their parents lived. These findings are consistent with prior research connecting family backgrounds and family experiences to learning decisions [12]. Furthermore, lifelong learners shared gratitude and appreciation for the achievements of their parents despite the challenges their families and parents faced growing up.

Lifelong learning can provide opportunities for older adult lifelong learners to write down and reflect on these stories. Such practice of writing and reflection can allow lifelong learners to express gratitude regarding their family members as well as experience and challenge nostalgic feelings. Through reflection, lifelong learners can explore the positive and negative behavior modeled to them by their parents. They can also reflect on how their family stories and family backgrounds connect with their current attitudes and behaviors, which include lifelong learning interests. Family size and birth order appear not as important to the lifelong learners interviewed; however, the communities from which the interviewees' families hailed appeared relevant. The interviewees could identify how their backgrounds influence which family aspects are passed on to future generations.

Regarding family background specifically, older adults (possibly through storytelling) can explore their family dynamics further. Lifelong learning institutes can put on courses on family dynamics, which may be of interest to older adult learners. Family dynamics are particularly interesting given that spouses are very influential regarding learning decisions. Other relatives, such as parents, siblings, children and grandchildren, were noted as influential, but spouses were noted more. All of these individuals might be engaged in intergenerational learning experiences; however, overcoming barriers to learning, such as distance (discussed later) must be considered. Furthermore, family dynamics, as a course topic, has been discussed in the literature regarding older adult volunteerism [35], but such a course topic is not readily apparent in the older adult lifelong learning literature.

Considering family changes, distances, and futures in lifelong learning

Lifelong learners have worries and hopes for the future of society and their family members. The comments made regarding their children and child-rearing of their grandchildren indicated a focus on hope. These comments showcased the transfer of family skills (e.g., parenting) and values (e.g., care for others and human rights). Lifelong learning programs can help individuals reflect on how these skills and values are passed on.

In order to address worries and leverage hopes, the comments made regarding family changes carry insights for lifelong learning programming. Lifelong learners shared stories of how their parents, as well as themselves, learned to: (1) expect change; (2) overcome challenges; (3) shift priorities; and, (4) build up resilience within themselves and in their families. Intergenerational learning experiences may provide meaningful ways to accomplish these four learning outcomes, but more research and practice insights are needed. The comments regarding distance show the importance of embracing ICT and other tools to overcome barriers to lifelong learning [1,26]. Innovative intergenerational programs can be built around family storytelling, which may help improve family relationships. These innovative programs will also require more research and testing in practice.

Considering family history in lifelong learning

Genealogy and family history research programs can be value-added programs to lifelong learners and lifelong learning institutes. Lifelong learners in this study showed affinity for historical moments involving family members, cultural heritage and genetic backgrounds. Courses on history and culture are common topics of interest in older adult lifelong learning [14,22]. Lifelong learners' genetic interests in

this study did not just concern historical lines, but health indicators as well. While lifelong learning courses have often explored family trees and genealogical discovery [21,22], courses focused on particular families' genealogies and health variables are likely scant. Courses that explore connections between family genetics and health may be interesting course offerings, and these courses could possibly lean more on making meaning out of the health aspects than only the family aspects as well.

Conclusion

Where is the place for family phenomena in lifelong learning research and practice? This study provides insights regarding the importance of family backgrounds, changes, distance, education, futures, history, influence and stories to lifelong learners. Family stories appeared especially important in this study. This study is shared in hopes that more research will be undertaken to explore family variables and their relations to lifelong learning and individual well-being in older adulthood. This study's authors hope that informed lifelong learning practices that integrate family aspects will be developed and tested as well.

This study was exploratory in nature. The study authors did not go looking for family phenomena, but they elucidated such phenomena anyways. Future researchers and practitioners would be wise not to overlook the importance of family to older adult lifelong learners in their future endeavors.

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Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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