Historical thinking and family historians: Renovating the house of history?

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ABSTRACT

Family history research, as a multi-billion-dollar industry, is one of the most popular pastimes in the world with millions of enthusiasts worldwide. Anecdotally regarded by some in the academy as being non-traditional, family historians are changing the historiographic landscape through the proliferation and dissemination of their familial narratives across multiple media platforms. Learning to master the necessary research methodologies to undertake historical work is a pedagogic practice, but for many family historians this occurs on the fringe of formal education settings in an act of public pedagogy. As large producers of the past, there have been many important studies into the research practices of family historians, where family historians have been shown to draw upon the research methodologies of professional historians. Paradoxically, little attention has been paid to how these large producers of historical knowledge think historically. This paper reports on interview findings from a recent Australian study into the historical thinking of family historians. Drawing on Peter Seixas' (2011) historical thinking concepts as a heuristic lens, this research finds that some family historians, despite being largely untrained in historical research methodologies (Shaw, 2018), display the theoretical nuances of the history discipline in (re)constructing and disseminating their familial pasts.

KEYWORDS

Family historians, Historical thinking, Substantive history, Procedural history, Public pedagogy

CITATION

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The proliferation of micro and family histories

Metaphorically, history in the broadest sense might be thought of as a house with many rooms. Different groups inhabit the various quarters, including local and community historians, genealogists, specialist museum practitioners, makers of historical films and public historians. Some of these people inhabit more than one room while many make occasional visits to other parts of the house. And all of the rooms have internal divisions. Some residents, however - notably academic historians - see themselves as occupying the principal room. Indeed many from the academy insist they are in possession of the house. But several of the residents are a little restless... (Ashton & Hamilton, 2010, p. 8)

The shift from grand to micro history has been visible within history scholarship for many years, and recent historiographic trends suggest that some historians are "less interested in the great dramas of power that held the attention of earlier generations than in small evocative details that illuminate ordinary lives and common experience" (Phillips, 2004, p. 99). Micro history, or *history from below*, is the democratisation of historical interest "to include groups other than the historical elites" (Wilson, 2005, p. 85). It allows for an intensive investigation of historical "cases, persons and circumstances [providing] a completely different picture of the past from the investigations about nations, states, or social groupings" (Magnússon &Szijártó, 2013, p. 5) and considers the explorations of communities, families, or individual persons. Concerned with marginalised voices and the "finely textured details of everyday life" (Paul, 2018, p. 64), micro historical narratives present a perspective of the past that would not be possible within the confines of the grand narrative (Magnússon, 2017).

More recently, micro historical narratives have experienced a historiographic surge in accessibility, popularity and consumer interest (Torpey, 2004; Cannadine, 2004; Ashton & Hamilton, 2010; Marselis, 2008; de Groot, 2009; Kramer, 2011b). Arguably, this historiographic surge can be attributed to the proliferation of history within popular culture and public spaces, in addition to the increasing democratisation of historical records. Access to archival information has been buoyed by technological advances (de Groot, 2015) which is shifting the historical landscape as "the past is consumed on a grand scale" (Clark, 2016, p. 1). As Meg Foster (2014) notes, these technological advances "means that history is reaching and interacting with the public like never before" (p. 8). Consequentially, this has resulted in the non-academic, the non-trained, and the amateur to engage with history in unprecedented ways. To borrow Ashton and Hamilton's (2010) words, many individuals are "doing history for themselves" (p. 7), and nowhere is this more visible than within the family history industry.

Family history research is one of the most popular pastimes in the world and was declared an "epidemic" (Ashton & Hamilton, 2010, p. 29) more than a decade ago with no signs of abating. Touted as the second-most accessed website genre worldwide (Basu, 2007; Barnwell, 2019), the billion-dollar family history industry is a lucrative enterprise for large genealogical companies as millions of individuals seek to explore and recreate their ancestral pasts. Tanya Evans and Anna Clark (2017) describe the popularity of family history as a "historical paradox" emphasising that "the search into local and familial pasts is a decidedly international practice" (p. 167).

Another paradox surrounding family history research is that it is predominantly self-taught (Shaw, 2018). Learning to do family history research is a pedagogic enterprise whereby historical research skills are learned and mastered, but these skills are rarely learned and mastered within traditional education domains such as schools or universities. Indeed, this study found that 72% of individuals surveyed (n=1406) were initially self-taught through a process of trial and error. This underscores family history as an act of public pedagogy, where learning occurs across diverse sites such as homes, libraries, archives, and repositories using an array of different modalities, as history research methodologies are developed and honed mostly without the guidance of formal educators. Of significance, this research finds that more than sixty per cent of family historians surveyed (n=1406) intended to publish their personal family research findings for public consumption across multiple media platforms. Many already had (Shaw, 2018). This has obvious ramifications for the broader house of history, for it must be asked:

1. Do people consuming, repackaging, and producing the past think historically?
2. And what does this mean for history as a discipline?

This paper responds to these research questions and reports on findings of a recent Australian study into the historical thinking of family historians. It provides a significant contribution to the established international conversation around historical thinking and historical understanding. While much of this conversation borders the development of this in school students (see, in particular, Barton, 1996; Lee, 1983, 2004, 2005; Lee & Ashby, 2000, 2001; Levesque, 2005, 2008; Seixas, 2011; Seixas & Peck, 2004; Wineburg, 2001, 2005), there has been little attention paid to how adults, engaged in historical research and producing history in public spaces, think historically.

Disciplinary practices and historical understandings

In history education, to think historically can be understood as a fusion of both an ability to understand and identify how historical knowledge has been constructed, and the capacity to contextualise historical events, people and facts (Lévesque, 2008). Peter Lee (1983), in his seminal work, proposed an effective way in which disciplinary history can be conceptualised by outlining two interdependent types of historical knowledge: substantive history and procedural history. Substantive history refers to what he has labelled first-order historical concepts: historical data, places, events, and persons. Such concepts "are part of the substance or 'content' of history" (Lee & Shemilt, 2003, p. 14), effectively, the doing of history. There have been many important studies into the substantive research practices of family historians (Duff & Johnson, 2003; Lambert, 2002, 2006; Nash, 2002; Yakel, 2004; Kramer, 2011a; Darby & Clough, 2013), in which most family historians were found to be "records experts, and knowledgeable about the time periods and geographic areas of their study" (Duff & Johnson, 2003, p. 94). Yet to understand the history discipline as a whole, Lee (1983) stressed the importance of drawing on procedural history, or second-order historical concepts, in conjunction with substantive history when undertaking historical inquiry. As a point of difference to other studies in this field, the purpose of this research is to identify if family historians utilise second-order historical concepts in their research practices.

According to Lee and Shemilt (2003), second-order concepts "give shape to the discipline of history…they are higher-order organizing concepts that guide historian's work on the substance of history" (p.14). It is the second-order concepts that drive the construction of historical interpretations, and Lee (2006) has argued that "the main objective of historical thinking is to enable the individual to make meta-historical analyses of historical narratives" (p. 135). As such, a familiarity with these meta-historical or procedural concepts allows consumers and re-constructors of history, such as family historians,

> to understand the nature of historical accounts, the distinction between the past
> and history, the use of evidence, and the relationship between objectivity,
> interpretation and criteria to determine the validity of historical interpretations.
> (Gosselin, 2012, p. 32)

Indeed, procedural concepts are "central to the discipline of history itself" as they support and structure our ideas about "the nature and status of *historical accounts, evidence, understanding* and *explanation, time* and *change* frame the way in which we make sense of the past" (Lee, 2004, p. 131, emphasis in original). In his important work on historical thinking in school students, Canadian history education scholar Peter Seixas (2006) emphasised that second-order concepts "underlie all of our attempts at coming to terms with the past and its implications for decisions in the present" (p. 19). Represented as primary source evidence, historical significance, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspective, and the ethical dimension, these second-order concepts were drawn upon as the analytic frame of this research to identify the historical thinking of the family historians studied.

Research purpose and design

As a neglected area of scholarly investigation, the purpose of this research was to identify evidence of historical thinking in the sample population, and to provide baseline data about the historical thinking of family historians. To do this, Peter Sexias' (2011) historical thinking concepts were used as a heuristic to aid the interpretation of how these family historians, predominantly formally un-trained in historical research methodologies, demonstrated understanding of the cognitive nuances of the history discipline.

This study utilised a tri-phase research design. Recruitment of the sample population for the research was via four Facebook groups, and an email invitation to 280 family and local history societies in Australia. Initial data were collected from a large-scale survey (n=1406) which provided insights into the demographics, research practices, motivations, and historical activities of practicing family historians. The second phase of the study was 11 semi-structured interviews with volunteers recruited from the survey, which form the focus of this paper. As a large number of survey respondents indicated a willingness to be interviewed (n=941), it was decided that the selection of interview participants be purposive and representative of the demographic data collected in the survey (see Table 1). Of these 11 participants, eight were women, and three were men, which represented the gender disparity of the survey (76% to 24% respectively). The participants were highly educated, spent a varied amount of time on their family history research, and most belonged to a historical society, which also replicated the demographic data of the survey. Many had not studied history in formal contexts except high school (a temporal lapse of nearly forty years for many), and importantly, more than half indicated an intent to publish their research findings for popular consumption (61%). These last two criteria were especially considered, as they underscored some of the complexities of this research. Most interviewees had not been formally trained in historical research methodologies but were actively involved in (re)producing the past for public consumption. The only factor which was not closely representative of the demographic data collected in the survey was the age of the interviewees. Here, the average age is 59, where in the survey it was 54. The third phase of the study was the development of three case studies which analysed the published family histories of the interview participants. Table one below is a tabulated demographic overview of the interview participants.

Table 1. Demographic data of interview participants

Name* *pseudonym*	Gender	Age	Highest level of education	Contexts history has been studied	Year research was commenced	Hours per week?	Historical society?	Publish or distribute?
Jane	female	41	Postgraduate coursework	-school -university	2000	20	yes	yes
George	male	74	Postgraduate coursework	-never studied	1970s + 2002	30+	yes	yes
Claire	female	69	Postgraduate coursework	-school	1984	20+	yes	yes
Sue	female	44	Bachelor degree	-school	2011	6	yes	no
Matthew	male	76	TAFE certificate	-school	2000	5	yes	yes
Wendy	female	68	Postgraduate coursework	-school -university	2001	10+	yes	yes
Dianne	female	61	Postgraduate coursework	-school -university	1990	30	no	no
Lucy	female	25	Postgraduate coursework	-school	2005	5	no	no
Margaret	female	70	Diploma/ certificate	-school	2000	2-20	yes	no
Christine	female	71	PhD	-school -university	1995	0-40+	yes	yes
John	male	46	Bachelor degree	-school	1980s + 2013	1-40+	yes	yes

The interviews were semi-structured and informal, and an interview protocol (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was developed so each interviewee could be asked similar questions. These were based on motivations for the undertaking of research, attestations of research methodologies and practices, and personal impact/s and understandings of the research. Other questions were spontaneous and reactive to the revelation/s of the participant. As such, a fusion of structured questions and the unstructured narratives disclosed by the participant propelled the interview process (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The coding mechanisms followed those suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The interview data were transcribed, and each was initially read individually. Evidence of each historical thinking concept (Seixas, 2011) was noted, and then the evidence from all participants were then collated into separate word documents, one for each of the concepts. The interviews were coded thematically against the broad description of each historical thinking concept, and alignment to individual guideposts (Seixas & Morton, 2013) were noted where applicable.

Findings and discussion

Primary source evidence

Engaging with historical evidence as a procedural concept speaks to the location, selection, interpretation, and contextualisation of primary sources. As Seixas (2006) explains, "reading a source for *evidence* demands different strategies than reading a source for *information*" (p. 5), and as Barton (2005) reminds us, multiple sources must be consulted in any pursuit of historical knowledge. The interview data revealed a strong emphasis on primary source evidence, as each individual spoke of the importance of source verification and corroboration to substantiate their findings. When asked if they confirmed the accuracy of the sources they use, Jane spoke of initialising source verification with the development of a source profile. She stated that,

> you've got to look at when was it generated, who generated it, were there any agendas, are you looking at an original or a transcription, all those sorts of things, you've got to look at the context of how the document was created, why it was created, all that sort of stuff.

Others spoke of "the sort of triangulation idea that if you've got two sources which are fairly reputable, then that's the way you can generate some kind of confidence you've got the right answer" (George). Claire too spoke of triangulation as she explained that she tries "to build up a picture of the person's life and see how it fits together…and usually you can find where the discrepancy is". Matthew spoke of "cross-referencing" and argued that "even if you get a certificate from registries, there can be mistakes. You can find those by cross-referencing other things to confirm that the information that you've got, is in fact correct. In a lot of cases, this is just to make sure your records are as accurate as possible."

All interviewees emphasised the need for numerous sources in the substantiation of evidence, and all spoke of the need to verify the sources they used. This formed a large component of their epistemological beliefs about primary evidence, and as Jane claimed, "it actually hurts my soul a little bit when I read unreferenced stuff". Matthew argued that,

> it is important to not only double check this stuff, but also record exactly where you get the information from so that if somebody challenges you in the future, you can go back and say, 'no, no, that information's not right, this is the information I've got, and this is where I came from'.

All interview participants revealed flexibility in locating the sources they used, and as Jane rather strongly claimed, "there's a lot of experiential knowledge probably more than academic training for a lot of family historians". Whilst she admitted there is "not a lot of structure around record finding…not that sort of journal focus or that publication focus you get in professional

historiography," all interviewees nonetheless revealed they used a multitude of sources in their research practices.

Historical significance

Historical significance can be viewed as a "relationship between the events and people of the past, but also those events and people to us, in the present, who are doing the historical thinking" (Seixas & Peck, 2004, p. 111). It is recognised if an event, person, or development resulted in change and was consequential for many people over a long period of time. Historical significance is constructed, in that is has "to occupy a meaningful place in a narrative" (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 12), and it varies over time and between groups. Interestingly, historical significance was the most complexly manifested in the data, which was often more abstract and speculative than has been defined here. It was much more intrinsic and personalised in the family history context, and often blurred the lines between what can be considered an historically significant event and what was deemed significant by the interviewee.

Unsurprisingly, any reference to historical significance was strongly connected to micro-historical narratives. For example, Jane explained that "the guy that designed the Sydney Harbour Bridge was important, but it wouldn't have happened of it wasn't for the riggers and the riveters and the various people that actually put the bloody thing together." For Dianne, her family history research led to an understanding of significant historical events as she explained that she did not,

> have a full comprehension of how the convicts system works. So I do copious amounts of reading on NSW and The Convict Ships. Like it's all very well to say that someone received a ticket of leave but the rules changed in those years, and you have to work out now where does this slot in in the historical advancement or changing of the rules and regulations.

Christine, however, had a slightly different perspective. She sought to amplify social history with her familial narrative as she claimed that she "thought, really, this is more than one family, this should be made available to everybody because it's part of our social history." George, too, shared this view as he explained that "the more I found out about the [name] family, the more I realised that within the history of South Australia, he was virtually unknown, and I thought, hang on, he needs to be known." In this respect, both Christine and George bestowed significance on their familial histories as important contributions to social history more broadly.

Diverting from historical significance as it has been defined, many of the participants spoke of the significance of family history research itself. Sue argued that through family history research, significance is returned to "things that are normally lost." She continued by explaining that through the personalisation of historical events permitted through family history research, connection to, and meaning of, wider historical events ensued. She stated:

> So, I think as a student at school or if I'd have had some personal interaction or response to the history I was learning...like World War One, if I knew my great uncle was there...I'd learn so much more about World War One history than just sitting there reading it out of a textbook or listening to the teacher. You've got to make it personal.

While Sue's explanation of the significance of family history research does not strictly align to Seixas' (2011) description, it is clear that for Sue, this respective and intimate familial connection did occupy "a meaningful place in a narrative" (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 12), in this instance a World War. Indeed, for many interviewees, the significance of their family history research was larger than the family itself as they sought to contextualise their findings within the wider historical landscape. As George explained, "to find information and to have material which actually supports the notion of the family itself, and its place in society" was the significance of his research, and Wendy, describing her written publications for her local historical society, told that "I've been able to use family history to fill in a few of those blanks."

Cause and consequence

Seixas and Morton (2013), when writing of cause and consequence, ask: "Why do events happen, and what are their impacts?" (p. 102). When defining the concept of cause and consequence, historian Richard Evans (1997) explains that,

> it is obvious what a cause is; we can have necessary causes (if A had not happened, then B could not have happened) and sufficient causes (A was happening enough to make B happen). Within the first category at least we can have a hierarchy of causes, absolute causes (if A had not happened, then B could definitely not have happened) and relative causes (if A had not happened then B probably could not have happened). (p. 157)

Naturally, any change is multifaceted and driven by a diverse range of consequences that "create a complex web of interrelated short-term and long-term causes and consequences" (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 102). In this research, the concept of cause and consequence was well understood by the interviewees. They recognised the causes and consequences of events in the past, and many made reference to the consequences of their family history research in the present. Many participants spoke of the importance of context, that is, they sought to comprehend the impact/s of past events within their historical time-period. This is exemplified by Jane who said "then there was this cluster of deaths, so okay, was there some sort of disease outbreak? So trying to put it in context of not just they died, but why did they die?" Claire also revealed an understanding of cause and consequence as she explored migratory push-pull factors ("like in Germany, why did they leave Germany? They left because the conditions were very poor in that particular time"). Here, they communicated an understanding that certain events of significance in the past had repercussions which would ripple through subsequent generations.

For some participants, the act of family history research has consequentially changed them in some way. Dianne told of her altered outlook on life claiming: "I look at things differently now", and Christine explained "It's really opened my eyes, it's actually changed my view of myself as an Australian." For Wendy, her knowledge and understanding of historical accounts was altered, as she explained, "broadening my knowledge would be the one thing, as far as history goes, you know, general history, Australian history…it's taken me from a narrow view of history to a much broader view of history, and looking at individual stories."

For some, their family history research in the present led to an understanding of historical events and the motivations of historical actors in the past. As Margaret explained,

> There's certain little traits that come through. Stories that have come down where there's been hardness and hurt and not talking about it. It makes sense then as to why, what that pain was and why that pain was. Why those secrets, why the closed door, why that wasn't spoken about.

Here Margaret refers to uncovering familial silences and a realisation of knowing the cause of traumatic events in the past, and why they may have been concealed, resulted in the consequence of understanding in the present. For all participants, by understanding and contextualising the causes and consequences of events in the past, they were able to articulate the consequences of family history research in the present.

Historical perspective

Historical perspective is drawing inferences about the thoughts and actions of the people in the past. It acknowledges that they lived in different circumstances, interpreted the world through a different ideological lens, and that they had diverse experiences to people in the present. As such, the concept of historical perspective demands contextualisation, as this is the most effective manner in which historical actors can be understood (Seixas & Morton, 2013). Also present here is the notion of historical empathy (Ashby & Lee, 1987), in which individuals attempt to see and

understand the actions and motivations of people in the past, and Seixas and Peck (2004) warn that this must be supported with evidence. Devoid of evidence, historical empathy is unattainable, and presentism, in which current beliefs and values are fused to the actions and motivations of the people of the past, is likely to occur (Seixas & Peck, 2004; Seixas & Morton, 2013). Claiming historical empathy "lies at the core of historical inquiry" (Foster, 2001, p. 175), Yilmaz (2007) defines historical empathy as "the ability to see and judge the past in its own terms by trying to understand the mentality, frames of reference, beliefs, values, intentions, and actions of historical agents using a variety of historical evidence" (p. 331).

The concept of historical perspective was manifest in all participant interviews, and its representations were complex. Some participants revealed historical perspective as the necessary acquisition of historical knowledge and stressed the importance of context. As Jane explained, "You have to put them in the context of the bigger picture of the society in which they were living, and then obviously you need to have that broader historical knowledge." Margaret agreed, and said that "we've tried to put what's happened to the family in the context of the history that we know it. Australia's history." Dianne argued that "it means nothing without the context," and Claire agreed, stating that "you've gotta look at them in context, and you've gotta look at the bigger picture." Personal context was also important here and revealed how the past impacted directly on the participant as a result of their gaining an historical perspective. This was typified by Margaret who claimed "I think I've always had a strong sense of who I am. Because of knowing that history. The family history, it's given me an idea of placement in history. Like, my family's placement in history."

Historical perspective and context were further used as a means of explanation. In particular, the context of past events assisted in providing a perspective in the present of why ancestors behaved the way they did. Lucy revealed "…he was from a very poor Irish family and he used to walk to school barefoot and so it sort of gives you an impression of why he might have become a hardened person, because of his upbringing and the way he was treated." To Lucy, understanding the perspectives of the people of the past, helped to make sense of and explain their actions in both the past and the present. Claire and Margaret also contextualised the information they had uncovered to help explain the actions and motivations of their ancestors. As Claire explained, "I try to make sense of, for example, if they moved house, why did they move house? What were the motivations? What was the climate of the times in terms of the politics and financial situation, and so on and so on." Margaret agreed, and said, "so it's by knowing that, you know what was happening to your ancestors and why they move, and why they had to move. And why they were doing the things that they were doing. To make sense of their story".

This, then, speaks to historical perspective as a means for understanding the people of the past. Sue said that "I try to understand what their life was like. I try to find people that have got photographs of them or if not the copy of their signature, all that sort of, just little things." This illuminates the importance of micro-biographical details such as photographs in family history research, as it is through the combination of such details that a perception of the individual of the past is revealed. Margaret too took this view, but further explained that "I think, I guess it's like, it teaches you to walk in their shoes… you have a deeper appreciation of what people have gone through." Continuing, she underscored social class stratifications within Australian convict history as she explained,

> When the convicts came out, it was very rare, and even a lot of the certificates of their children, they wouldn't put their own father's or mother's names on the birth certificates, or marriages that they did themselves. Because of their convict past, they were hiding it. Look at the conditions people were living in. Look at what was actually happening, even politically. How people just really didn't have a voice. They were just, you know, they just belonged to people, even if they thought they were free, they still belonged to people in some way.

Margaret's example of historical perspective here is sophisticated in its understanding. She demonstrated knowledge of historical accounts and understood how some historical actors

reacted to their circumstances. In this quote, she articulates an awareness of the "convict stain" (see, in particular, Lambert, 2006, p. 115), and an understanding of the restrictions in the lives of the people of the past.

Continuing the complexities of how historical perspective was represented in the data was how the participants viewed the past itself. It is important to note that three of the participants attempted to repudiate contentious historical events of the past through their present-day perspectives, thus illuminating a sense of historical distance. It is significant that all examples of this historical distancing concerned the colonisation/invasion of Australia and expressed a rejection of established historical discourses of dispossession, class structures, and racism. This is typified by Christine who distanced her ancestor (and thus herself) from an act of dispossession by rationalising:

> And in terms of my great-grandfather's cattle property, that was a squatter's property that was subdivided and then people bought it from the government. So he wasn't involved in actually taking over, somebody had already. And there are records of him being quite generous to Aboriginal people. So I don't think that's an issue that I've had to face in nastiness in that side of things.

Continuity and change

Vella (2011) believes that to understand the concept of continuity and change, the notion of change must be understood "as a process rather than an event" (p. 16). Seixas and Morton (2013) agree and explain that, "turning points are moments when the process of change shifts in direction or pace" (p.74). Seixas and Peck (2004) argue that personal exposure to historical change is relevant to the understanding of the concept, as is one's historical time-period. Drawing on the notion of progress and decline, Seixas and Morton (2013) explain that "progress for one people may be decline for another" (p. 74) and argue that grouping events or developments into distinct historical periods can assist in understanding the complexities of the concept.

The participants' understanding of continuity and change was strong especially with regard to shifting historiographic discourses and historical representations more broadly. As Jane explained, "it's not so much that the history's changed, it's the way people *look* at the history that's changed". Lucy too spoke of historiographic discourse, but in a different way. She lamented the invisibility of women in older historical accounts claiming: "it does disappoint me when I can't find out anything about some of my female convicts, because they're as much of my history as the men". Speaking about public World War One memorials, Jane explained,

> When they were first being established in the first five to seven years after, say up until 1923, a lot of them weren't called war memorials, they were called soldiers memorials, and then you had this change to where they started to be called war memorials. And so I'm really interested in looking at that nexus of what prompted that change.

Participants also revealed evidence of continuity and change through their explanations of societal customs, tropes, and norms. John explained "a lot of bad things happened back then and you've got to realise that the values we have now, aren't the values that were around at the time". About marriage practices, Matthew said that "these days you don't bother to get married, you just have kids. Back in those days it was considered essential that you did marry your spouse, but a lot of them were so called premature babies, because they were born six months after the couple married."

For some, change and continuity was evidenced using examples of an intrinsic nature. That is, all examples related directly to the participant's perception of the past and their personal research practices. Sue reported a change in how she has learned about history, claiming "at school I never liked history or anything, but...I've learnt more about history in the last four years than the forty before that." Christine, too, spoke of a change in how she understood the historical past, and explained,

> I think the thing that's changed is my understanding of the value of history over time as I've watched things from different perspectives, and it's changed me, so I presume it changes other people, and certainly circumstances have changed; something that wasn't acceptable twenty years ago isn't anymore, possibly. Or something might become acceptable that wasn't before.

The ethical dimension

Sometimes referred to as moral judgement, ethical judgement is "understanding historical actors as agents who faced decisions, sometimes individually, sometimes collectively, which had ethical consequences" (Seixas & Peck, 2004, p.113). Stressing an empathetic necessity of understanding the "differences between our moral universe and theirs", Seixas and Peck (2004, p. 113) simultaneously acknowledge the imperative need to contextualise the actions and motivations of the people of the past as products of their historical time-period. Seixas and Morton (2013) warn of the importance of avoiding presentism, and that one must "be cautious about imposing contemporary standards of right and wrong on the past" (p. 184). As such, ethical judgement was well-represented in the data. All participants were asked if they had ever intentionally left anyone off their tree due to negative information, and all answered they had not. As Lucy explained,

> Never left anyone off my tree, no. You know, warts and all approach I think…I don't agree with excluding someone from your family tree because I disagree with them, because there's plenty of people in your life that you disagree with, even in day-to-day life. So I don't think that's a useful exercise because it's a selective view of your family history. Really, like silencing parts of the tree, I think.

Claire echoed this sentiment, as she said "I wouldn't leave anyone out, I don't think that's right" and Christine told that "I haven't found anybody who's committed a horrific murder or anything, and if I did I would put them on because it's part of the, well, part of the excitement of living in life and who you are and the turbulence of families and all that sort of thing." George also included everyone in his tree but admitted: "I have found no one that I really have not wished to put in." Here, ethical judgement of ancestors was absent due to a lack of negative ancestral information.

   In instances where familial transgressions had been unearthed, some participants were flippant. Wendy was openly gleeful about ancestral misdeeds as she said, "the more deviant they are, the more interesting as far as I'm concerned." Lucy explained that she did not "get emotionally attached" to her ancestors, and Jane trivialised her convict ancestors' crimes ("they were all sort of 'stole a lace handkerchief' or stuff like that"). Dianne emphasised her convict ancestors' positive qualities as she revealed, "he got a ticket of leave before he stepped almost, when he stepped off the boat. I mean his petitions had Sir Joseph Banks as one of his, you know, signatories". In this respect, a dismissive reaction can be interpreted as purposeful distancing from insalubrious ancestral narratives. However, most were accepting and did not impose judgement on their ancestors. As Margaret explained,

> I think it's vitally important not to make any judgement…Because if you try to re-write history, which I tell you a lot of people when they put up information on their tree in Ancestry, oh my goodness. I don't know why they want to guild their lily. Because it takes away from the person that they're telling lies about, you know, makes them inflated. You're taking away who the person actually was. You're not honouring them at all. What may it have been like living there? Putting yourself in their shoes. Would you have made those same decisions?

For Margaret, passing judgement on her ancestors by misrepresenting the past amounted to a fabrication. Dianne expressed a similar sentiment:

> you've got to put yourself in their shoes a bit, you know to…I don't think you can ever understand fully, but you can get a handle on what it was like. Because you can't look back at the past through today's eyes with their values and judgements and all the rest. You can't, you shouldn't do that.

Conclusion: What does this mean for the house of history?

This paper has made a new contribution to what we know about how family historians understand the disciplinary practices of history. While previous studies of family historians have shown them to have strong substantive or first-order skills in utilising historical research methodologies, this paper has examined the neglected second-order or procedural nuances of the history discipline, primarily manifest as historical thinking. By drawing on Seixas' (2011) historical thinking concepts to navigate and analyse the data, it is clear that historical thinking is present, albeit to varying degrees, among the sample population of this study. This research does not claim generalisability to all family historians, especially given the representative sample, but replicated with a larger sample may prove interesting.

Underpinning and permeating the evidence from the data was the notion of context. Through active research and (re)construction of their familial pasts, participants were able to understand that their ancestors were products of their time-periods and acted in accordance with their societal tropes, expectations, and norms. They were also able to contextualise historical records and anecdotes. As such, *primary source evidence* was strongly represented. All participants spoke of the necessity of source verification, and the importance of using numerous sources and cross-referencing. They revealed a flexibility in their research methods, and often spoke of source profiling to provide context to the source. *Historical significance* was often illuminated through micro-narratives and deviated slightly from how it is defined in the literature. It was more intrinsic and personal as participants illuminated a connection to the past as most sought to contextualise their family history within the broader historical landscape.

Cause and consequence, too, was more personalised in the family history context. Participants recognised that the causes of events in the past often rippled through subsequent generations, and again, the notion of context was important. Almost all provided familial or micro-historical examples of this concept, and of interest, many claimed that their family history researched had changed their understanding of history itself, and their place within it. A strong *historical perspective* was also evident as participants' understanding of historical events, or the experiences of historical actors in the past, helped to explain the impacts of the events/experiences in the present. Again, this only occurred through a process of contextualisation. An understanding of *change and continuity* was also well-represented in the data, and some participants showed sophistication in illuminating changes and continuities surrounding historiographic discourses more broadly. The *ethical dimension* manifested as a lack of judgement or prejudice about familial transgression/s by the participants, which revealed a distinct lack of presentism.

The significance of this research has broader implications for the house of history. That more than sixty per cent of individuals in this study intend to publish their family histories across a multitude of media platforms undoubtedly alters the historiographic landscape. Family historians, through the lens of the familial, reform and re-package social history narratives and thus provide new, robust, and lively perspectives of the past. Indeed, some participants in this study actively sought to do so. As shown in numerous other studies, many family historians are clearly experts in historical research methodologies, and as this study highlights, some are equally skilled in thinking historically. Perhaps it is time to renovate the house of history to include the unique and alternative perspectives of the past produced outside the walls of the academy.

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