NORTH CAROLINA GENEALOGISTS AND HISTORICAL NEWSPAPERS: USAGE, CONTEXTUALIZATION AND CRITICAL FAMILY HISTORY

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An undergraduate honors thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media.

Chapel Hill
2022

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Abstract

Sarah Bradley: North Carolina Genealogists and Historical Newspapers: Usage, Contextualization and Critical Family History
(Under the Direction of Dr. Trevy McDonald)

Historical newspapers are a valuable tool for modern genealogists. With the digitization of newspapers, more family researchers are using them in their practice than ever before. This thesis examines how active North Carolina genealogists access, authenticate, evaluate, interpret, and contextualize historical newspaper records produced from 1877 to 1918. Notably, this qualitative research study also explores if and how interviewed North Carolina genealogists practice critical family history in their newspaper research. Results explore participant's genealogy backgrounds, how they use and understand historical newspapers as sources, if and how they practice historical contextualization, how they align with five of Scodari's (2016) requirements for critical family historians, and how they practice, consider, and value power dynamics and critical family history in their genealogy research.

Keywords: Newspapers, critical family history, contextualization, genealogy, research methods

To my mom, for her endless support.

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Introduction

Genealogy is an innate human interest. Researching family histories can satisfy curiosities, strengthen cultural ties, construct new self-identities and connect us to living relatives. Genealogy can be time-consuming, frustrating, and painful, but it can produce gratifying results. Through genealogy research, history buffs can form new connections to the past and find their place in history. Investigators can solve unending family mysteries that have developed over generations. Avid readers and storytellers can learn of tales stranger and more captivating than fiction. Documenters can take pride in locating and preserving precious family photos and records. Children, siblings, and parents can find the people they've longed to meet. The possibilities are endless.

While family research has existed for centuries, it has gained widespread popularity in recent decades. In the late 1970s, Alex Haley's novel and miniseries *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* helped encourage the average American to explore their family history (Hudson). Additionally, the digital age revolutionized the accessibility of genealogy. Once records began to be digitized, anyone in the United States with a library card or internet-connected device could start their journey of family discoveries. Companies like Ancestry, 23andMe, FamilySearch, and MyHeritage have capitalized on the industry, which is expected to be valued at over $12 billion in 2027 ("Genealogy Products and Services Market").

In 2012, experts believed genealogy was the second most popular hobby in America, behind only gardening (Farnham). Genealogy is also a complex and interdisciplinary field that involves history, cultural studies, and library science. Even biological and health sciences are

relevant to genealogical research as DNA testing kits make it easier than ever before to trace generations of ancestry.

My first introduction to genealogy was an elementary school family tree project. I called my grandparents to ask them about their family histories and was emailed copies of family records to examine. I was captivated by the old photographs of ancestors I'd never met and the stories of cultures I'd never known. In the years since, I remember seeing ads for Ancestry.com on TV and wanting to sign up. I began looking at genealogy sites online in my teens and slowly developed my research practice. I've always been most interested in photos and stories. Historical newspapers grew to be one of my favorite research tools.

In my research, I've spent many hours reading historical North Carolina newspapers from the late 1800s and early 1900s. I noticed a myriad of disturbing trends. It seemed that Black men and women were named less frequently in stories than their white counterparts. When they were represented, references were often derogatory and used to reinforce stereotypes. While white women were frequently named, it was not uncommon for them to be mentioned by their husbands' names, erasing their identities. Gender stereotypes were written as facts. Heteronormativity was rampant, and I've yet to see any representation of LGBTQIA+ identities at all from that period. Prominence and wealth led to more frequent mentions in the newspaper, while people with lower socioeconomic backgrounds were mentioned less frequently. When I compared more rural newspapers like the *Marion Progress* to metropolitan newspapers like *The Charlotte Observer*, it became clear that more populated cities had a higher threshold for newsworthy content. While rural areas highlighted many everyday details about local residents, larger publications included more national and international news and primarily highlighted

major life events of individuals. City residents seemed less likely to be featured in the paper, based solely on their local population density. I'd uncovered so many gaps in representations and blatant misrepresentations of populations. These discoveries piqued my interest in the methods that other genealogists use to evaluate historical newspapers in their research.

My academic, social, and political interests predisposed me to be interested in examining power dynamics in genealogy. As an undergraduate at UNC-Chapel Hill, I've taken fascinating coursework in women and gender studies, Blackness and racialization, and labor and socioeconomic classes in the United States. These courses taught me to recognize and question how power is gained and kept in our society. As a Media and Journalism major, I've become especially interested in examining the ways media can be manipulated to serve those in power.

I gained this academic education against the backdrop of so many significant efforts to dismantle power systems. This included nationwide movements such as the #MeToo movement, Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate, #SayHerName, and many others. I've also witnessed impactful local events. On the night before my very first college class, protestors tore down Silent Sam, a Confederate monument that had plagued our campus for over 100 years. I'm part of what feels like an entire generation of people who are actively considering and fighting to dismantle hegemonic power systems. This drive spurred my interest in critical family history from the moment I first learned about it.

Problem Statement

Despite its popularity, genealogy is not yet recognized as its own field of academic study. Only one university in the United States offers a Bachelor of Arts in family history (St Denis et al.) Although several institutions offer training courses and certifications, most professional

genealogists are self-taught (Clifford et al. 218). Given the lack of standardized resources, interdisciplinary fields of study, and the increased popularity of genealogy in recent decades, it's necessary to study and evaluate current genealogical research methods.

Background

Genealogists use a variety of media to learn about their family histories. Many researchers start with documents passed down to them through the generations like photos, letters, or diaries. In addition, government records of births, marriages, military service, deaths, and decennial census records can provide basic information about ancestors' lives. Local institutions like churches and schools also keep valuable records.

Historical newspapers are fascinating sources. In addition to highlighting major life events, historical newspapers tell compelling stories of people and the events they participated in. Announcements, articles, and obituaries often provided richer and deeper characterizations of people and events than records alone. According to *The New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*, "in addition to birth, marriage and death notices, newspapers include biographical material (occasionally with surprising detail), descriptions of social functions, school announcements, missing relatives, and even scandals, gossip, and crime that most families work hard to suppress" (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society 115).

However, historical newspapers can be unreliable sources. Preserved and digitized historical newspapers in North Carolina often have missing issues, which creates gaps in knowledge for genealogists. Also, the quality and quantity of information available vary widely based on your ancestors' race, gender, socioeconomic status, and location. In North Carolina, white-run newspapers not only excluded Black and Brown people from features, they actively

promoted racist misinformation. One well-documented example is the Raleigh *News & Observer*, which spread vicious lies about Black men to bolster white supremacy and influence election results (Roberts Forde and Gustafson).

Purpose Statement

The objective of this qualitative research project was to explore how active North Carolina genealogists access, authenticate, evaluate, interpret, and contextualize historical newspaper records. For this project, North Carolina genealogists were defined as individuals who had an active and ongoing practice of tracing and studying their North Carolina lineages and self-identified as genealogists.

This study specifically looked at historical North Carolina newspapers published between 1877 and 1918 during the American Gilded and Progressive Eras. This period between the end of Reconstruction and the end of World War I was selected because of my familiarity with historical newspapers from the period. Additionally, I was interested in learning about how interviewed North Carolina genealogists considered racial biases during this period that scholars regard as the nadir of American race relations (Logan). As mentioned in the background of this proposal, historical newspapers in North Carolina from this period were used as a political tool by Southern Democrats, often containing inflammatory and fabricated information. These factors made it necessary to research the considerations and contextualization methods researchers use when examining newspapers published during this era.

Research Questions

This research attempted to answer three main research questions. The first research question provides necessary background information about how interviewed North Carolina genealogists use historical newspapers in their family history research. The second research question asks how interviewed North Carolina genealogists use historical contextualization when researching with historical newspapers. Finally, the third research question examines the degree to which interviewed North Carolina genealogists use critical family history when gleaning information from primary newspaper source material. Critical family history is a theoretical approach to family history research that draws from critical theory and the existing approaches of critical race and critical feminist theories (Sleeter). This approach is explained further in the literature review. The research questions are outlined below:

1. How do interviewed North Carolina genealogists use historical newspapers for their genealogy research?
2. To what extent and how do interviewed North Carolina genealogists historically contextualize information they read in historical newspapers?
3. To what extent and how do interviewed North Carolina genealogists practice critical family history when researching with historical newspapers?

Literature Review

Since genealogy is not yet recognized as a field of academic study, much of the existing literature about genealogical practices is not found in scholarly journals or databases. Instead, much of the modern literature about genealogy can be found in books about best practices,

presentations, and blogs from professional genealogists, and library science research about data collection methods and archival techniques. The lack of relevant scholarly source material provides the first substantial justification for this research study.

A few key academic sources outline information about critical family history, the framework through which this study will examine genealogists' contextualization methods. Broader research about the roles and methods of family historians also exists that provides valuable background information about why genealogist contextualization methods should be researched further. Similarly, research has also been done from the lens of critical family history on the common errors genealogists make when contextualizing their ancestors' lives. While these findings do not address our population of interest, they serve as a valuable framework for the practices that may need further study.

While literature exists about historical newspapers as a genealogical source, they primarily focus on the value of newspapers as genealogical sources, efficient research methods, available databases, or broadly discuss newspapers as one example of many available records. Similarly, there is limited scholarly research about this study's target population: North Carolina genealogists. Of the existing research about North Carolina genealogists, only some of it applies to the purpose of this study.

In summary, genealogist evaluation and interpretation of historical newspapers have not yet been examined in scholarly research, much less through the lens of critical family history, in the geographical region of North Carolina, or the specific period of 1877 to 1918.

Defining Family Historians and Genealogists

Researchers have formed a distinction between genealogists and family historians related to contextualization. While the terms are often used interchangeably, some researchers differentiate genealogists and family historians based on how much they contextualize and form narratives. While both genealogists and family historians can be professionals, Yakel (2005) argues that genealogists focus on simply finding and confirming the identity of ancestors while family historians concentrate on learning about and constructing the narratives of their ancestors' lives within historical context (Yakel 2). Other researchers argue that the term genealogist is all-encompassing. For example, Bishop (2005) does not divide family researchers into two distinct groups and argues that genealogists are a single group that collects information and connects it to the past through storytelling (Bishop).

For the purpose of this research paper, the terms genealogist, family historian, genealogical researcher, and family researcher will be used interchangeably because of their inconsistent use in existing literature. However, the inconsistent definitions of the terms family historians and genealogists reveal two key points.

First, the opposing definitions reveal that some family researchers contextualize and create family narratives, while others simply seek to find basic information about their relatives. Second, it's important to note that both schools of thought include contextualization as a key element in their definitions of family historians and genealogists. This inclusion highlights the importance of contextualization in the discipline of family research. Both of these takeaways bolster the need for further research into specific contextualization methods as they have been shown to be highly valued but inconsistent amongst family researchers.

Critical Family History

Historical context is valuable knowledge for genealogists. In a landmark study of genealogist information-seeking behavior, Duff and Johnson described how more experienced genealogists understand that knowledge of historical information can help them develop more effective research methods (Duff and Johnson, 84). Duff and Johnson also described how expert genealogists who are knowledgeable about the time and location they are researching are also highly skilled at connecting genealogical documents to specific events (Duff and Johnson, 94). This suggests that historical contextualization has many benefits for those who understand that and choose to do it. However, this does not provide adequate information about the prevalence of critical family history.

Beyond the increased effectiveness of research methods associated with thorough historical knowledge, proponents of critical family history argue that historical knowledge is necessary for genealogists to contextualize information they learn about their ancestors in terms of intersectional social, racial, ethnic, cultural, political, economic, and gender-based power dynamics (Sleeter). As previously outlined, critical family history is a theoretical approach that draws from critical theory and the existing approaches of critical race theory and critical feminist theories (Sleeter). Sleeter (2016) describes that these subsets of critical theory help explain specific historical and genealogical contexts related to race, gender, and colonialism. When family historians engage in critical family history, they not only research their family members and contextualize their lives; they also consider the historical power dynamics that may have directly impacted their lives.

Scholars cite multiple reasons why critical family history is necessary and valuable. Sleeter (2016) argues that critical family history helps disrupt mainstream hegemonic narratives and uncover silenced or suppressed narratives. She also describes nostalgia and amnesia within dominant narratives in the US, in which specific history is idealized, and other history is minimized (Sleeter). In American society, hegemonic narratives, which are only one interpretation of the past, have favored wealthy white men. Specifically, Sleeter (2016) describes how national narratives minimize white violence against indigenous American populations and enslaved Africans and firmly place it in the past. The more these harms are minimized, the easier it is for modern impacts to be similarly minimized if not outright denied. For example, those with early European American ancestry may view their ancestral wealth as legitimately acquired if they ignore the populations that their ancestors exploited to build wealth (Sleeter).

Simultaneously, these narratives idealize white European history. For example, Sleeter cites Freund (2013), who describes how hegemonic narratives describe historic European immigrants as industrious people who developed empty and unowned land. However, this narrative erases the history and perspective of Native American populations. Ultimately, Sleeter (2016) argues that as long as these narratives persist, they will continue to perpetuate hegemonic power structures such as racism and colonialism.

However, Sleeter (2016) argues that critical family history can be used to challenge and correct many of these biased national narratives. When a critical family historian considers and researches nondominant perspectives and groups, they may uncover impactful information that counters hegemonic narratives. For example, researchers may discover their ancestors engaged in problematic behavior that was minimized or covered up over time. When a critical family

historian finds these types of information, they can then produce tangible media that disrupts mainstream narratives.

Lastly, Scodari (2016) argues that critical family history can form new connections. She theorized that critical family history could be used to draw parallels between the histories and struggles of different diverse communities.

Existing literature suggests that most genealogists may not engage in critical family history, although the research does not directly address this framework. When analyzing the information-seeking behavior of family researchers, Darby and Clough (2013) found that the desire for contextual information increased as genealogists conducted more in-depth research on specific lines of their family tree (Darby and Clough 80). At the most intensive and penultimate phase of their family research, only 18% of the study participants wanted to research contextual historical information about their ancestors (Darby and Clough 80). Similarly, Bottero (2012) found that research participants had varying interest levels in researching non-ancestors. Some participants only researched historical context to learn about specific ancestors, though some found contextual information valuable even if it did not pertain to their ancestors (Bottero). Research indicates that white genealogists are particularly likely to have a decontextualized focus on their own families (Gardner; Parham).

Although these findings provide helpful information about the potential prevalence of contextualization, the desire for contextualization alone does not provide enough information about the prevalence of critical family history as critical history also considers and addresses power dynamics. Therefore, further research must be done about the prevalence of critical family history within genealogist populations.

Roles, Methods, and Common Pitfalls of Genealogists

While what constitutes pitfalls in genealogical research is highly subjective, researchers have outlined ways genealogists can fail to record and share accurate information or address key elements of critical family history.

The impact of these pitfalls is compounded when we consider the common roles and methods of family researchers. Genealogists do not just research and record information; they also produce and share information by creating new products or pathways to information (Fulton 97). Bishop compares genealogists to journalists, arguing that both provide a limited view of history because they tailor their work to their intended audiences (Bishop 1006). While journalists focus on newsworthiness when crafting stories for readers, family historians pick and choose which information to record and emphasize based on their interpretations of narrative power and their expectations of what their family members will appreciate (Bishop 1006). Thus, understanding how modern genealogists interpret and contextualize data will help us identify missing perspectives and, in turn, missing information that genealogists are not examining.

In the digital age, genealogical research has become highly collaborative (Hudson and Barratt, 20-21). Collaborative research can save individual genealogists time and resources. Collaborative genealogy also allows researchers to support and enrich their previous findings (Charpentier and Gallic). However, collaborative genealogy can cause issues as genealogical researchers tend to take on either a leader or follower role (Baggaley and James). Inexperienced researchers may blindly copy data that others have created, creating a potential for false information to spread. This incorrect information can be created when a researcher collects and records inaccurate data or when a researcher misinterprets data (Baggaley and James). Because

individual genealogists find and interpret data that others will then use, further research is needed to study modern genealogical interpretation and contextualization methods.

Shifting to the lens of critical family history, another common pitfall made by family historians is their tendency to interpret their family histories from the dominant culture's perspective (Sleeter). This phenomenon is often seen from genealogists who are members of dominant groups themselves (Sleeter).

"Me-too-ism" and "me-not-them-ism" are two other phenomena that contradict critical family history. First, white "me-too-ism" is a damaging practice in which whites equate the experiences of other racial and ethnic groups to their own group without understanding or accounting for distinguishing structural or ongoing discrimination (Aveling, 43; Scodari, 49). Building upon this, "me-not-them-ism" is a phenomenon in which whites exercise a post-racial point of view, accepting negativities and traumas that their ancestors faced while denying modern-day equivalencies (Scodari). Scodari (2016) explains these concepts by describing a white American whose Irish immigrant ancestors faced discrimination decades earlier. If this individual brought up these discriminations while comparing them to systemically more severe or ongoing discriminations faced by other groups, they would be exhibiting "me-too-ism" (Scodari). They would be exhibiting "me-not-them-ism" if they lamented the difficulties their immigrant ancestors faced generations ago while denying the plight of present-day, non-white immigrants (Scodari).

These outlined pitfalls in critical family history provided a valuable source for this research project. Researching and evaluating how North Carolina genealogists do and do not use

critical family history requires an adequate understanding of common behaviors that contradict critical family history.

Additionally, conducting this research required knowledge of the best practices in critical family history. These best practices guided the interview questions and thematic analysis of the qualitative research. In addition to other factors, Scodari (2016) discusses the importance of critical family historians who understand race as a social construct, examine their ancestors' migrations to better understand their circumstances and the modern impacts, not focus on DNA in a racial or ethnic context, embrace one's culture rather than romanticizing racial hybridity, and acknowledge but disavow problematic behavior of ancestors (Scodari). In this study, these statements will be referred to as Scodari's 5 requirements for critical family historians. However, it's important to note that Scodari has published additional best practices for critical family historians and that she does not refer to these as requirements (Scodari). Instead, she refers to them as either common pitfalls or recuperative strategies to address said pitfalls (Scodari). The term requirements will be used throughout this study for simplification and clarity.

Since only a few key publications exist about critical family history, the interview questions and research analysis also addressed considerations that may not have been outlined in existing works.

Given the lack of qualitative research about critical family history, any study that directly attempts to research the prevalence of critical family history provides valuable information to the existing body of literature.

Historical Newspapers

Historical newspapers are an under-researched but incredibly valuable genealogical research tool. Darby and Clough established the value of newspapers as contextual resources in their 2013 research on the information-seeking behavior of genealogists (Darby and Clough 83). Their study found that genealogists supplement purely genealogical resources with sources that provide more contextual information to create a fuller picture in their research (Darby and Clough 83). Specifically, wills, maps, and newspapers provided more contextual information than more simple and straightforward resources like birth, marriage, and death certificates (Darby and Clough 83). This confirms the importance of historical newspapers as rich contextual resources that should be examined further as an important tool for critical family history.

While this confirmation provides direction for this research paper, most existing literature about historical newspapers is not directly relevant. Many discussions of historical newspapers in a genealogical context explore search methods and databases. One recent example includes a master's thesis that outlined a new search function application that would improve the user experience and allow for better search results (Pettersson 61). This research is valuable to the genealogy and archival communities because newspaper databases are often difficult to use, and individual records are difficult to locate as they are typically spread across different databases (Pennavaria). However, it is unclear how the search experience may or may not impact genealogists' contextualization methods.

Outside of the context of genealogy, scholarly writing exists about historical media bias and the explicit political agendas of newspapers. There is also localized research about the history of North Carolina newspapers and North Carolina culture. This information would be

valuable for North Carolina genealogists attempting to contextualize newspaper references of their ancestors. However, these histories serve as only background information for this study because they fail to connect the newspapers to family history research and, more specifically, to critical family history.

North Carolina Family Historians

Given the overall lack of studies on modern family historians, it is unsurprising that few research studies have been done about North Carolina genealogists. One study from 2012 researched genealogists at the North Carolina State Archives (Skardon). While the research included background information like how long they had been researching their families, the focus of the study was the information-seeking behavior of genealogists and their satisfaction with and suggestions for the North Carolina State Archives (Skardon). This study failed to address the contextualization methods of these researchers.

Another study focused on the interests and motivations of North Carolina genealogists in comparison to the genealogical interests and motivations of master's students at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Patrick-Burns). The study found that North Carolina genealogists were far more engaged and active in genealogical research than the SILS students but nonetheless revealed interesting motivational distinctions between the two groups (Patrick-Burns 26). Participants for both groups expressed that one of their top reasons for liking genealogy was to learn their "family's historical context/ background" (Patrick-Burns 29). Of the surveyed genealogists, 23% expressed this view (tied for their most frequent response, with 23% of the genealogists also saying they liked genealogy because of the opportunity to learn "what life was like"), while 40% of the SILS students

reported this (their highest shared viewpoint which was reported twice as frequently as the next most common response) (Patrick-Burns 29). These results provide interesting information about a potential relationship between higher education in library science and historical contextualization. However, further research was needed to evaluate the specific newspaper contextualization prevalence and methods of North Carolina genealogists.

Conclusion

As shown throughout this literature review, there is a clear gap in the literature surrounding the topic at hand. While researchers have created helpful frameworks to consider contextualization methods and have conducted studies within the field of genealogy, no studies have examined how North Carolina genealogists use critical family history to evaluate historical newspapers published between 1877 to 1918.

Methodology

I conducted semi-structured interviews with North Carolina genealogists to address my research questions. This qualitative research was not generalizable to the broader population of North Carolina genealogists. However, the findings enhance the existing body of literature about genealogical methods and provide direction for future studies of North Carolina genealogists' use of critical family history.

Participants

Research participants included adults who actively researched North Carolina genealogy. The participants' research included the use of historical newspapers published between 1877 and 1918, as this was the study period.

Ten participants were interviewed for this study. Half of the research participants were professional genealogists who had earned income from their genealogy work. The other half of the research participants were nonprofessional genealogists who had never earned income from their genealogy practice.

Recruitment and Sampling

Participants were recruited based on convenience sampling, expert sampling, and snowball sampling. These non-probability sampling methods did not produce a representative sample of the population. However, the sampling methods did not otherwise impact the scope of the qualitative study, which attempted to identify themes in participant responses. To recruit participants, I contacted a local library in North Carolina to request the names and contact information of local genealogists who fit my research criteria. I also recruited individuals directly from online directories of genealogical organizations and sites where professional genealogists advertise their services. See Appendix 1.1 for the recruitment email sent to organizations and Appendix 1.2 for the recruitment email sent to potential individual participants.

Screening

A screening process was conducted to aid in the selection of research participants. This screening ensured that potential participants actively used historical newspapers in their genealogical research. Additionally, the screening helped me select a diverse, though not

representative, sample of participants. The screening was conducted as an anonymous Qualtrics survey. However, the survey did include a name and contact information question so that respondents could be contacted if they were selected for an interview. See Appendix 4 for the participant consent form that was embedded in the screening survey. Questions on the survey included skip logic to prevent potential participants from needing to fill out the entire survey if they did not have an ongoing practice of NC genealogy or did not indicate that they used historical newspapers in their genealogical practice. See Appendix 2 for the full list of survey questions.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured to allow for clarifying and probing questions. Individual interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted over Zoom or phone calls to maximize participant and researcher safety due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual format also prevented the need for travel by either the participant or researcher, maximizing the potential participant pool. Though all interviews were recorded on Zoom, participants could choose whether they wanted to join a Zoom call or have their phone call put on speaker and recorded on a single-participant Zoom call. Camera use on Zoom was optional, allowing individuals without webcams to participate. Interviews were recorded and saved to the researcher's encrypted Zoom cloud.

Before asking interview questions, I introduced myself, encouraged my participants to answer freely and honestly, and provided context to the time period and location I was asking about during the interview. In my introduction, I also shared that I identify as an amateur

genealogist. This disclosure was meant to help participants feel more comfortable when they understood we shared an interest in the topic. See Appendix 3.1 for my full pre-interview script.

My interview questions inquired about how participants analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated historical newspapers in their genealogical or family history research. Questions were asked through the lens of critical family history. However, this term was not mentioned to participants until the end of the interviews to prevent priming. The initial interview question was a broad question about why participants study genealogy. While motivations revealed relevant information, this question was also strategically asked to make participants feel comfortable by beginning the interview with a question they were likely familiar with. The second question served indirectly to find what information from historical newspapers interested them but again was used to make participants feel more comfortable by asking a positive question about a topic they were presumably passionate about. Further questions addressed historical newspapers as source material, historical contextualization, Scodari's 5 requirements for critical family historians, and power dynamics. See Appendix 3.2 for the full list of interview questions.

Following each interview, they were transcribed. During the transcription process, names and other identifying information were anonymized to ensure participant privacy. At this stage, the screening responses of each interviewee, except for their contact information, were attached to their transcribed interview. This ensured that each participant's screening responses and demographic data were anonymized but remained linked for analysis. After this process was complete, the Zoom recordings of the participants' interviews and the Qualtrics screening survey responses were deleted. All study data will be deleted by the time of publication.

Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews. I used inductive reasoning to develop themes from the data. After transcription, I coded interviews and then used the codes to establish common themes. I used the web-based qualitative coding software Dedoose to simplify and expedite the coding process. After coding and developing themes, I used themes, common responses, and relevant quotes to form the study results.

Results

The results of this study can be summarized in five key categories: Genealogy Background, Historical Newspapers as Sources, Historical Contextualization, Scodari's 5 Requirements for Critical Family Historians, and Power Dynamics and Critical Family History. The Genealogy Background section shows that the participants are experienced researchers who have been personally impacted by their genealogy practices. The Historical Newspapers as Sources section discusses the methodical research practices of participants and shows them to be highly knowledgeable about the characteristics, information, and demographic representations within historical newspapers. The Historical Contextualization section shows that the interview participants value and practice historical contextualization in their genealogical research. The next section on Scodari's 5 Requirements for Critical Family Historians shows that most interview participants did not meet all of Scodari's requirements for critical family historians. However, the final section on Power Dynamics and Critical Family History outlines how most interview participants consider power dynamics and find critical family history to be relevant to their research practice.

See Table 1 for the interview participants' aliases and demographic screening survey responses. Participants were given alphabetical aliases selected from the United States Social Security Administration website's popular baby names by decade.

Table 1: Participant Aliases and Demographic Responses

Alias	Professional or Nonprofessional	Years spent researching genealogy	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Highest Level of Education	Political Affiliation
Anthony	Nonprofessional	10-19	50-59	Male	White	Graduate degree or equivalent	Moderate
Bruce	Nonprofessional	30+	70-79	Male	White	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	Other: Classic Liberal
Cynthia	Nonprofessional	6-10	60-69	Female	White	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	Moderate
Donna	Professional	6-10	70-79	Female	White	Graduate degree or equivalent	Liberal
Evelyn	Nonprofessional	30+	80-89	Female	White	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	Moderate
Frances	Professional	30+	60-69	Female	White	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	Moderate
George	Professional	30+	60-69	Male	Prefer not to say	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	Conservative
Harriet	Professional	20-29	60-69	Female	Black or African American	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	Prefer not to say
Irene	Professional	20-29	60-69	Female	Black or African American	Graduate degree or equivalent	Liberal
Joyce	Nonprofessional	20-29	60-69	Female	White	High school or equivalent	Liberal

Genealogy Background

The results suggest that the interview participants were well-educated genealogical researchers who have been impacted by their practices.

The interview participants shared many common educational methods. Most described learning by doing as well as joining clubs and organizations to learn from other genealogists. Many also mentioned specific resources they use to learn about the field, such as books, articles, blogs, YouTube videos, and templates. Participants also emphasized continuing education through courses, seminars, conferences, and webinars. The professional genealogists particularly focused on higher education through institutes and certificate programs.

When asked why they study genealogy, most participants touched on two main motivations: to learn about family and because they enjoy the process of genealogy. Though most participants mentioned wanting to learn about family, learning as a whole was a significant motivation for these participants, such as learning about communities, history, and even themselves. Anthony shared, “As I’ve gotten older, I want to know more about my family and where they came from.”

Participants described their passion for genealogy as an innate interest and mentioned loving to solve genealogical puzzles. Frances said, “I feel like a detective when I’m doing this, and I get very wrapped up in the solving process, the detective work, the clues.”

All of the interview participants said that genealogy impacts how they view themselves or the world around them. Most said that genealogy had shaped their view of history. Bruce said, “I’ve always loved history, but when I study genealogy, it makes it personal. When I look at my ancestral tree, it allows me to go back and identify with the people that lived at that time.”

Most participants also said that their genealogy impacted how they viewed or understood their family, both their ancestors and modern-day relatives. For example, Harriet shared, “Family patterns are present. And certain things seem to repeat themselves over generations… Knowing about my ancestry has helped me to see how and why I became the way I am, as well as to explain some of the things about my upbringing and why my parents were the way they were.”

Historical Newspapers as Sources

The results also indicate that interview participants had defined research practices and were highly knowledgeable about the characteristics, information, and representations within historical newspapers.

When describing how they conduct research with historical newspapers, all participants said that they use online newspaper repositories, and some mentioned using archives for the information they can’t find online. When describing their search process, most participants said they use the information they’ve already found on the individual of interest to create and narrow their search terms. When searching, participants said they make sure to try various search terms, filters, and newspapers to maximize their chance of finding information about the right person.

The participants had many uses for newspapers as genealogical sources. They used them in their genealogical research to fill gaps in information, corroborate facts from other sources, and find genealogical clues. Cynthia said, “A lot of times when we're doing genealogy, it’s just

the facts, you know, somebody was born, someone got married, somebody died, they had kids, but with the newspaper, it kind of fills out the other stuff that you don't know about."

The participants were highly knowledgeable about historical newspapers as sources. Although participants described them as critical sources of news for people at the time, most mentioned that researchers need to confirm the information they find because it can be wrong. Joyce summarized, "It's great information, and it may not be accurate."

Participants also described similarities and differences in historic and modern newspapers. One commonly mentioned similarity was that both have political slants. Frances said, "They often had an editorial slant, so although we talk about fake news today and we castigate *Fox News* and *The Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, and say, 'Oh they're Democratic, or they're Right-leaning,' this is nothing new. Newspapers in the past definitely had a historical editorial slant… The editors had certain political leanings, and they weren't afraid to show that in those newspapers."

Describing differences, most participants mentioned that historical newspapers shared more private information and personal details. Irene said, "[There] are things that you wouldn't find in today's newspapers for privacy reasons, but as a genealogist, they're treasure troves."

Many participants also pointed out that newspapers were written differently than they are today. In addition to some of the language being politically incorrect today, they said journalists wrote with much more descriptive and flowery language. A few participants connected this descriptive language to the fact that papers had fewer visual elements. "They didn't have cameras back then; they had to create word pictures," said Bruce.

Participants were also very knowledgeable about the types of information present in historical newspapers. Interviewees said that their ancestors were featured in newspaper articles about major life events, unusual stories, and mundane tales of daily life that might not be newsworthy today. Most participants also discussed different focuses that historical newspapers had. For example, historical newspapers emphasized the gory details, with death, tragedies, and controversies receiving a lot of explicit coverage. Participants also said that historical newspapers focused on local and community news, though they also covered national stories.

Finally, the participants were very aware of the demographic representations in historical newspapers. All participants spoke to gender representation. Many said that overall, more was written about men. Donna said, "Many more men. Many, many, many, many, many more men." Some participants shared that when women were written about, it was often in specific and stereotypically feminine contexts, such as gossip and society pages. Many participants also said that it's far harder to find married women in historical newspapers because they were frequently addressed by their husbands' names. "First thing you do is forget about women as people with a real name. They only have their husbands' names," said Evelyn.

Most participants also spoke to race representations. None of the interviewees had experience researching and finding Native American individuals in historical newspapers, despite expressing some interest. When researching Black individuals, participants found them less frequently than whites and found them written about in more specific and stereotypical contexts. However, some participants stated that there were some positive or at least neutral representations of Black people during the Reconstruction Era in white-run newspapers. Some also described newspapers as an important genealogical source for Black ancestry because they

sometimes contain information not found in other records in which they're not represented as frequently as their white counterparts, such as property or tax records. Black newspapers were also described as a valuable alternative source to mainstream white-run papers.

Most participants also discussed how people of different socioeconomic statuses were represented in historical newspapers. Prominent and wealthy individuals were featured more frequently because they could afford to insert themselves in the paper through methods such as advertisements and obituaries. Additionally, prominent and wealthy individuals' activities were regarded as more newsworthy to the community. However, some participants pointed out that newspapers can still be a valuable source for people of lower socioeconomic statuses, again, when other genealogical records such as property or tax records may not exist.

When asked, some participants discussed sexuality representation in the newspaper but stated that nothing but heterosexuality would have been featured because their society did not acknowledge LGBTQIA+ identities. Anthony said, "That probably would never come out in the newspapers. In the time period you're investigating, I can't think of a single instance of a same-sex couple."

Historical Contextualization

The interview participants expressed that they both valued and practiced historical contextualization. Most also researched historical information to help them contextualize.

First, most participants shared that they believe historical contextualization is important. Frances shared, "We are always taught that if you're going to be a genealogist and, if you want to be a good genealogist, that you have to put your ancestors in context." However, Frances also shared that this can be difficult, particularly when researching many people. She said, "People

focus on collecting as many names in their family trees as possible. You can't put those people in context. If you've got 7,000 people in your family tree, I don't believe that you know anything about the context of those people's lives. That is merely data."

In addition to valuing historical contextualization, most participants also said they consider historical context as they read historical newspapers. Connecting context to content, Harriet said, "Well, I'm often amazed that something I'm reading is actually in the paper. That happens a lot. I have to remind myself of context of time and place because some things can make me angry. And then I just have to remember, that was a different time."

Finally, most interviewees also said they researched historical information about the periods they examined in their genealogical research. Participants mentioned researching information such as wars, recessions, pandemics, laws, religious groups, and geographic boundaries. Frances explained the importance of learning history by saying, "The political situation and the legal situation for women really determined how they were treated in the in the records that you find, so it's very important to understand those things."

Scodari's 5 Requirements for Critical Family Historians

Most interview participants met many but not all of Scodari's requirements for critical family historians. As previously mentioned, according to Scodari (2016), critical family historians must understand race as a social construct, examine their ancestors' migrations, not focus on DNA in a racial or ethnic context, embrace one's culture rather than romanticizing racial hybridity, and acknowledge but disavow problematic behavior of ancestors.

Most interviewees stated that race is a social construct. However, a few participants expressed uncertainty about their responses. Additionally, a few participants said they do not

believe race is a social construct. George shared, “I mean, there's differences between race, there's differences between genders, there's differences between sexual preference. And I think that's reality rather than any kind of arbitrary or unconscious social construction.”

All participants had researched or attempted to research their ancestors’ migrations. Though some described this process in terms of learning about genealogical data, others discussed migration in terms of contextualization. For example, Donna described considering people’s motivations for migration such as famine, religious pilgrimage, persecution, and more. Irene mentioned a specific instance of migration in which her mixed-race relatives moved from the South to New York, where they passed as white. Irene also discussed theories about how they presented themselves at work and in their local community. However, not all participants had researched migration extensively. For example, Cynthia shared that she’d done minimal migration research because her family had deep roots in one community: “I really haven't had much cause to look at migration because I can't get them out of North Carolina.”

All participants used DNA in their genealogy research. Overwhelmingly, they did not focus on race or ethnicity relating to their DNA results. Instead, participants used DNA to connect with relatives and used it alongside traditional genealogical research to corroborate information, find clues, or fill gaps in their existing research. Although all participants used DNA in their practice, Irene shared reasons why others might be hesitant to take DNA tests. “Some people feel like it's an invasion of privacy, some people are concerned about the fact that some genetic DNA companies have opened their databases to law enforcement, some people wrongly feel that they're being tracked if they give their DNA or they could get cloned… Personally, I think it's a wonderful tool, but you gotta respect those people who are hesitant,” Irene said.

When asked how they feel when discovering an ancestor from a different culture, no participants romanticized racial hybridity. Some participants could not speak to this phenomenon because they said their ancestors had a similar culture. However, most participants did state that they had ancestors from different cultures. Most expressed interest and a desire to learn more about the different cultures of their ancestors.

Most participants considered the similarities and differences between themselves and their ancestors with different cultures. Evelyn discussed thinking about differences, “You wonder what they went through, you wonder how much easier it is for you than it was for them. I've spent countless hours studying all these different cultures in Virginia and in Pennsylvania and wondering how different my life is from theirs.” Another participant described drawing similarities. “You look for parallels, very much like I did with the ancestor that died in the Spanish flu pandemic. [I think] about what happened to him and what might the parallels be for us in our family today going through this pandemic,” said Frances.

However, participants expressed varying levels of interest in their ancestors’ cultures. Most did not express a desire to adopt or incorporate that culture into their daily lives. Irene said, “It makes me want to learn about it, but does it make me want to move to Nigeria because I have Nigerian ancestors? No. Does it make me want to move to England because I have English or Scottish ancestors? No, but I do want to learn about those cultures.” Similarly, George shared that he was more impacted when learning about his ancestors' cultural differences when he was younger, but years of experience have made the information less shocking. “This might sound a little cliché, but I’ve pretty much seen everything and what I haven’t seen, when I do see it, I ain’t surprised,” George said.

Some did not feel personal connections to their ancestors' cultures. Harriet, a Black woman, shared that she was less interested in researching her European ancestry because so much information was already available on them. She also shared, "Well, I don't feel connected to them because they didn't plan on me. They probably hated [my ancestor] for having children with this Black woman."

Scodari argues that critical family historians must both acknowledge and disavow the problematic behavior of their ancestors. Interestingly, while most interviewees expressed statements that acknowledged and disavowed the problematic behavior, a slight majority of participants also said statements that did not disavow the behavior.

Most participants acknowledged the oppressive behaviors by stating that oppression happened that cannot be changed. However, participants did discuss ways they try to help those impacted by oppression. Half of the participants talked about the importance of being open about their ancestors enslaving others and sharing that information to help descendants of enslaved people find more about their ancestry. Frances said, "[When] we find documentation of enslaved people, how can we bring that to the light so that people who are descended from those enslaved people might be able to find those records and use them in their own family history? This is such a great thing to be able to do because it makes me feel like maybe my family's experience can help somebody else find their family." A couple of participants also specifically mentioned reparations.

A number of participants also described how they needed to unlearn false interpretations of their family history or the past to understand and acknowledge the oppressive behaviors. Anthony shared, "Perhaps I was naïve. I was brought up in the 1970s and 80s in North Carolina,

where, you know, it was the war of northern aggression. And as a young child, I never really critically thought going, 'Well, my family goes back that far, and there were slaves'. I never really questioned that until I started reviewing as an adult."

Most participants also disavowed oppressive behaviors, expressing statements ranging from how troubling and difficult it is for them to understand to empathizing with and feeling angry on behalf of the oppressed. Donna said, "When you find out, if you're any kind of feeling person at all, you can't say, 'Well, that was part of the time, and it was history.' No, you can't say that because there were plenty of people that said, 'This is not right. These are human beings, not property, you know they're not horses.' So slave-owning, it's very upsetting, very upsetting."

However, a smaller majority of participants also made statements that minimized their ancestors' oppressive behaviors. Most, though not all, of the white participants, made such statements, which may reflect Scodari's discussion of the tendency of genealogists who are a part of the dominant culture to interpret their family history from the dominant culture's perspective.

The most common statement of this kind was that their oppressive ancestors were a product of their time. When discussing an ancestor who was an enslaver, Cynthia said, "I thought, well, this was 1860, and everybody around him had slaves. I can't fault him for that because that was the period of time he lived in." Bruce added, "You know, in those days, the rules were different." Similarly, some people expressed that they abstain from disavowing ancestors for their oppressive behavior because they did not live in their ancestors' period. Frances said, "I can't go back and look at my [ancestor] and form an opinion about his actions because his actions were taking place in a time that I didn't live in." Bruce added, "To me, it's immoral to try to place our moral values on an earlier time period." Some participants shied

away from judging the morality of oppressive behaviors altogether and instead viewed them as just more information gathered in the research. For example, Irene shared, “It's not up to me to, to judge, it’s just what it is in the research. What I read is what I read. Now how I feel about it may be different, but that's what was going on at the time.”

When discussing morality, Bruce suggested that some enslavers were good people and treated the people that they enslaved well. When describing an ancestor that was an enslaver, Bruce said, “He also had six free blacks that were living with him, which meant it was their choice. Why did they live with him? Because he beat his slaves and mistreated them? Probably not. Probably because he was very fair with everybody he dealt with. He also had at least two imbeciles that he looked after, cared for, fed, housed, and clothed, even though they were not capable of production. So this guy owned slaves, yeah, but was he a bad guy? Not according to his Minister when he died. His Minister wrote his obituary.” Bruce continued, “You know, there were people that beat slaves, and there were people that mistreated them, and there were slave families that got separated, but it wasn’t all like that.”

One participant minimized oppressive behaviors by suggesting that both sides were culpable in certain acts of violence and oppression. When discussing how people became enslaved, Bruce said, “They never would have had the slaves to bring if the fellow Caribbeans or Africans hadn’t sold their own brothers into slavery; they were making slaves out of them. Don't blame the white people for taking advantage of the situation.” He also described violence and oppression committed against his white ancestors in the form of attacks by Native Americans and indentured servitude, statements that fit Scodari’s definition of me-too-ism. When discussing wars between white colonists and Native Americans, he said, “They talk about the innocent

savages and all that. They were savages, all right. They were killing. They were not innocent, and, of course, the settlers weren't innocent either. There's enough guilt to go around both sides, but neither one of them needs to be made martyrs of." He also mentioned an ancestor who was an indentured servant, saying, "I had some ancestors, the guy that I told you about who came over as an indentured servant. None of those people had any slaves. In fact, the indentured servants were like slaves… He was basically a slave for seven or eight years."

Power Dynamics and Critical Family History

Despite their alignment with Scodari's five requirements, most interview participants said that they considered power dynamics and found critical family history to be relevant to their genealogical research.

Most participants said that they consider power dynamics when they do genealogical research. Evelyn said, "Well, power dynamics are everywhere. The women having less power, the people who worked for the other people having less power. It's part of everything." Some participants provided specific examples of how limited power dynamics were. Anthony described how hard it would have been for a woman to escape an abusive partner. He said, "If you think of the power dynamic of not just social mobility, but geographical mobility, the farthest you're going to go is how far you can walk, or on a horse, the horse which you don't own." Harriet described the power dynamics that may have impacted interracial relationships, "Even if the Black person loved the white person or cared fondly for the white person, they could have been in a situation that they didn't feel at liberty to get out of."

However, some participants said they do not consider power dynamics in their genealogy research. Participants gave various reasons, including that they were more focused on finding

genealogical facts, that they chose not to judge their ancestors for the power dynamics in their lives, or that they simply let the research guide them. However, many of the participants who gave this response said that they understood the power dynamics at play, even if it wasn't a focus in their genealogy. For example, George discussed how power dynamics would impact the availability of records. Bruce disagreed with using the term power dynamics but said they're obvious. "It's obvious you know if you owned slaves, you were more powerful. You don't have to call it power dynamics," Bruce said.

All participants agreed that they believe power dynamics impacted how historical newspapers were written. Donna said, when reading historical newspapers, she always asks, "who wrote it, why did they write it, was there an attitude or a bias, were they influencing?" Frances explained that those in political power were able to control the newspapers. "If they were on the politically correct side, then they got to be the editor of that newspaper, and they got to determine what stories and what articles and who was featured and who appeared in that newspaper, and if they were not, then they didn't," Frances said. While Harriet agreed that power dynamics impacted mainstream white newspapers, she also offered a different perspective, mentioning that race would not be a factor in the Black newspapers that featured her ancestors.

Most participants also researched power dynamics. Of these, most described researching power dynamics alongside their other historical research, not separately. Irene said, "It's just simply a part of the research that I do. For example, if I'm researching the slave trade, there are certain power dynamics there that would come into play." Most of the participants who researched power dynamics described researching large-scale, structural power dynamics such as rights and laws.

A few participants had not researched power dynamics. The three participants who said this gave three distinct reasons. One said they knew power dynamics were important but had not researched them, one said they'd consider researching them in the future, and one stated that they had not researched them because power dynamics are not important to genealogy.

Finally, participants were asked whether critical family history was relevant to their genealogical research. None of the participants expressed familiarity with critical family history or critical genealogy before their interviews, though some were familiar with critical theory and critical race theory.

Most participants said that critical family history was relevant to their research practice. Harriet said, “I've never heard the term, but that's exactly what I do as I’m researching my family history, so now there's a label that I can put on it that I didn't realize existed.” A few other participants also expressed interest in learning more about it and incorporating it into their future research.

Despite affirming the importance of critical family history to their research, some participants clarified that it is an unconscious part of their genealogy research or is not the focus of their research. Referring to the elements of critical family history, George shared, “Those are important factors, yes, but you know genealogy and the study of genealogy… is not always based on those things.” He also said, “These topics are very important and the world that we live in now, particularly you know in the woke era or Black Lives Matter era, you know, these things are very sharp and in focus now. Who knows, in another generation, those things might not be as important.”

A couple of participants said that critical family history is irrelevant to their genealogy. In addition to saying it is irrelevant to their research, one participant also disparaged the concept, arguing that those who create these types of terms do so to inflict guilt.

Data Summary and Demographic Analysis

Below are tables and charts to summarize the aforementioned results about participants' statements related to historical contextualization, power dynamics, and critical family history. Table 2 summarizes each participant's statements about these categories and indicates the majority and minority results. Though multiple questions were asked about historical contextualization, as a whole, participants provided similar responses about valuing, conducting, and researching information for historical context. Therefore, these questions were consolidated into one results category on contextualization.

Table 2: Results on Contextualization, Power Dynamics, and Critical Family History

Alias	Contextualize	Scodari's 5 Requirements	Power Dynamics:	Power Dynamics: Impact	Power Dynamics:	Critical Family History
Anthon	Yes	Unmet	Yes	Yes	Yes	Relevant
Bruce	Yes	Unmet	No	Yes	No	Irrelevant
Cynthia	Yes	Unmet	Yes	Yes	No	Relevant
Donna	Yes	Met	Yes	Yes	Yes	Relevant
Evelyn	Yes	Unmet	Yes	Yes	Yes	Relevant
Frances	Yes	Unmet	Yes	Yes	Yes	Relevant
George	Yes	Unmet	Yes	Yes	Yes	Relevant
Harriet	Yes	Met	Yes	Yes	Yes	Relevant
Irene	Yes	Unmet	No	Yes	Yes	Relevant
Joyce	Yes	Unmet	No	Yes	No	Irrelevant

Key

Majority Result

Minority Result

Contextualization, Scodari's 5 Requirements, Power Dynamics, and Critical Family History are result categories that ultimately relate to critical family history itself. Therefore, the following table begins the process of quantifying these results. This allows for analysis of each participant's responses on a scale of 0 to 6, with one point being given for each answer that indicated the participant agrees with, practices, or values that element of critical family history. Point values of +1 were assigned to Contextualize (Yes), Scodari's 5 Requirements (Met), Power Dynamics: Consider (Yes), Power Dynamics: Impact Newspapers (Yes), Power Dynamics: Research (Yes), and Critical Family History (Relevant). The alternative responses, which indicated a disconnect from critical family history, received a score of 0. While Table 2 highlighted values based on whether they were the majority or minority result, Table 3 highlights values based on whether they received a point value of +1 or 0. Responses ranged from 2 to 6 points, with 4.4 being the mean value of all participants.

Table 3: Assigning Point Values to Responses that Indicate Agreement or Disagreement w/ Elements of Critical Family History

Alias	Contextualize	Scodari's 5 Requirements	Power Dynamics: Consider	Power Dynamics: Impact Newspapers	Power Dynamics: Research	Critical Family History	Total
Anthon	1	0	1	1	1	1	5
Bruce	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Cynthia	1	0	1	1	0	1	4
Donna	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Evelyn	1	0	1	1	1	1	5
Frances	1	0	1	1	1	1	5
George	1	0	1	1	1	1	5
Harriet	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Irene	1	0	0	1	1	1	4
Joyce	1	0	0	1	0	0	2

Key

+1 Point Value; Results that Indicate Agreement w/ that Element of Critical Family History

0 Point Value; Results that Indicate Disagreement w/ that Element of Critical Family History

Now that total point values have been established for each participant based on their responses, the mean values for each demographic can be examined. As outlined in Table 1, the seven demographic categories collected in the participant screening survey were whether they were a professional or nonprofessional genealogist, years spent researching genealogy, age, gender, race/ethnicity, their highest level of education, and political affiliation. Participants were given the option to write in "Other" responses to these demographic categories or select "Prefer Not to Say." Below, Table 4 shows all of the demographic categories and groups, the count of participants belonging to each group, and the mean value of each group's responses related to

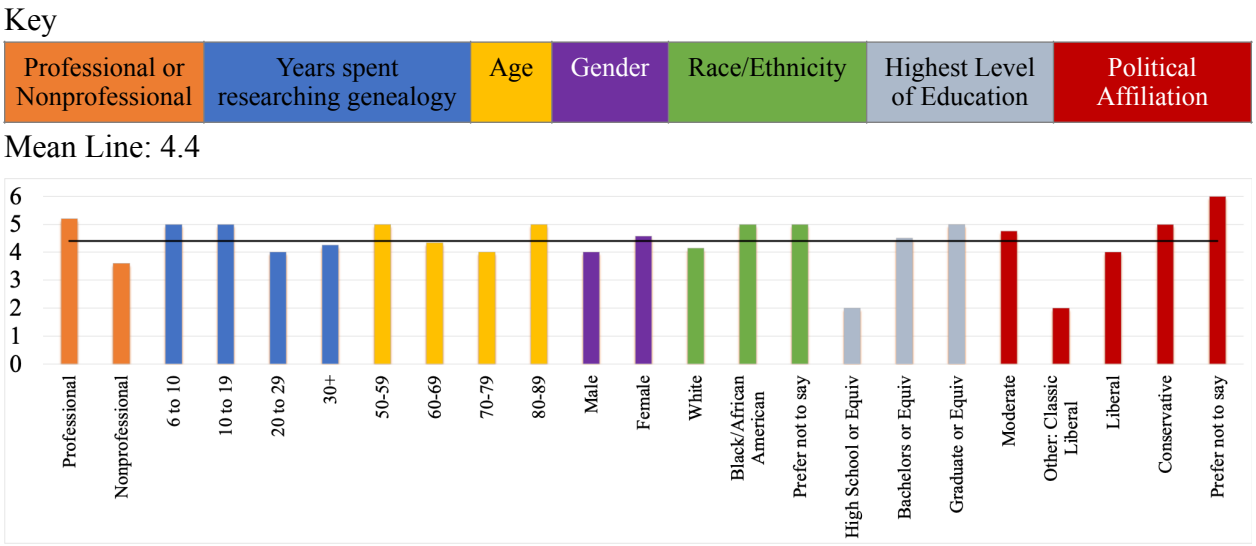
critical family history, as outlined above. Given the small sample size, some demographics only contain one or two participants.

Table 4: Agreement or Disagreement w/ Elements of Critical Family History by Demographics

Demographic	Count	Mean
Professional	5	5.2
Nonprofessional	5	3.6
Years spent researching genealogy: 6 to 10	2	5
Years spent researching genealogy: 10 to 19	1	5
Years spent researching genealogy: 20 to 29	3	4
Years spent researching genealogy: 30+	4	4.25
Age: 50-59	1	5
Age: 60-69	6	4.33
Age: 70-79	2	4
Age: 80-89	1	5
Gender: Female	7	4.57
Gender: Male	3	4
Race/Ethnicity: White	7	4.14
Race/Ethnicity: Black/African American	2	5
Race/Ethnicity: Prefer Not to Say	1	5
Education: High School or Equivalent	1	2
Education: Bachelor's degree or Equivalent	6	4.5
Education: Graduate degree or Equivalent	3	5
Political Affiliation: Moderate	4	4.75
Political Affiliation: Liberal	3	4
Political Affiliation: Conservative	1	5
Political Affiliation: Other: Classic Liberal	1	2
Political Affiliation: Prefer Not to Say	1	6

Chart 1 provides a visual representation of the demographic means presented in Table 4. The mean of 4.4 is shown as a horizontal line across the chart. Thus, demographic means below the mean line indicate that demographic, on average, provided fewer responses that supported or related to critical family history. On the other hand, demographic means above the mean line indicate that demographic, on average, provided more responses that supported or related to critical family history.

Chart 1: Agreement or Disagreement w/ Elements of Critical Family History by Demographics



Discussion

This study attempted to answer three key research questions:

1. How do interviewed North Carolina genealogists use historical newspapers for their genealogy research?

2. To what extent and how do interviewed North Carolina genealogists historically contextualize information they read in historical newspapers?
3. To what extent and how do interviewed North Carolina genealogists practice critical family history when researching with historical newspapers?

These three research questions were addressed by the five categories of study results: Genealogy Background, Historical Newspapers as Sources, Historical Contextualization, Scodari's 5 Requirements for Critical Family Historians, and Power Dynamics and Critical Family History.

The genealogy background section was not necessary to address the three research questions but provided relevant information about the participants. Though the participants were half professional and half nonprofessional genealogists, as a whole, their responses were similar about how they learned to conduct genealogy, why they study genealogy, and how genealogy personally impacted them. The primary difference between the professional and nonprofessional genealogists' responses was that the professionals focused more on higher education opportunities such as institutes and certificate programs. However, the overarching similarities between the two groups provide an early indication that the nonprofessional genealogists who participated in this study were highly engaged and experienced genealogists. Therefore, it is important to consider that their responses throughout the study reflect the perspectives of highly experienced and educated nonprofessional genealogists.

The following results section, Historical Newspapers as Sources, addresses the first research question of how interviewed North Carolina genealogists use historical newspapers for their genealogy research. These results show that participants were highly knowledgeable about

the characteristics, information, and demographic representations within historical newspapers and have defined research methods to conduct genealogy research with historical newspapers. Again, the level of expertise with the source indicates a high level of sophistication as genealogists, which must be considered when evaluating other results. Another significant result from this section was that all participants indicated knowledge of varied demographic representation in historical newspapers. All participants touched on the fact that women were written about less, only in specific contexts, or were harder to identify in the papers. Importantly, this shows that all participants have recognized the impacts of power dynamics in historical newspapers, even if they don't choose to frame it that way.

The next results section, Historical Contextualization, addressed the second research question about to what extent and how do interviewed North Carolina genealogists historically contextualize information they read in historical newspapers. Most participants indicated that they valued historical contextualization, considered it while reading historical newspapers, and researched historical information about the time period they were examining in their genealogy research. Most participants indicated that they did all three, while all participants stated that they did at least one of those methods. This shows that participants actively contextualize, one of the basic requirements for critical family historians.

The final two categories of study results address the last research question, to what extent and how do interviewed North Carolina genealogists practice critical family history when researching with historical newspapers. These categories include Scodari's 5 Requirements for Critical Family Historians and Power Dynamics and Critical Family History. According to the results, only a minority of participants would meet all of Scodari's criteria for critical family

historians because of the neutral and minimizing language that many used about their ancestors' oppression. By far, this stance on being unable to disavow their ancestors' oppressive behaviors because they cannot know what it was like to live in their time period was the most common reason why participants did not align with critical family history. Most participants met all of Scodari's other four requirements.

When discussing power dynamics, most participants stated that they considered power dynamics in their genealogy research, all believed they impacted how historical newspapers were written, and most also researched information about historical power dynamics. These results are significant because power dynamic consideration is such a core tenent of critical family history. Similarly noteworthy is that most participants said that critical family history was relevant to their research practice.

Clearly, these majority results about participants' views on power dynamics and critical family history contradict the results about Scodari's requirements. One possible explanation for this variation is one of my assumptions as a researcher. Most participants that fell into this category stated that they could not judge oppressive ancestors for their oppressive behaviors because they lived in a different time. My assumption that this opposes the idea of disavowing oppressive behaviors could face scrutiny. This is discussed further in the limitations section.

Another possible explanation for the difference between participants' responses about power dynamics and critical family history and their ability to meet Scodari's requirements would be that Scodari's requirements are too harsh and exclude genealogists who are engaging in critical family history. Or, it could be that Scodari's requirements require additional nuances and caveats. One example would be whether critical family history would have the same definition

for members of dominant and nondominant groups. For example, both of the participants in this study that identified as Black shared that they actively remind themselves of context and separate their own feelings and emotions about oppressive acts from their professional genealogy work. As quoted earlier, Harriet said she needed to do this to prevent herself from becoming angry. This begs the question as to whether these participants were deemphasizing or abstaining from personally judging oppressive behaviors for different reasons than their white counterparts, most of whom did not express similar sentiments about wanting to separate their feelings from the research.

The variation between how participants met Scodari's requirements and how they viewed power dynamics and critical family history may simply reflect the fact that participants were interested in but unfamiliar with and ultimately not focused on critical family history. Many participants believed critical family history is relevant to their research but is not their primary focus. This lack of a focus on critical family history may explain why more participants stated they believed it was relevant than met all of Scodari's requirements. Additionally, a few participants expressed that power dynamics and critical family history were irrelevant to their research practice, and they disagreed with the concepts. A disinterest or disdain for these topics would certainly explain why these participants did not meet Scodari's requirements.

Addressing the demographic results, some demographics did not show clear patterns. It is unclear whether this is because the sample size is too small, there are outliers, or if those demographics are unrelated to genealogists' thoughts on critical family history. For example, it was difficult to establish a pattern based on political affiliation. The highest value was from someone who preferred not to say their affiliation. Moderates and conservatives both averaged

above the mean line, and liberals and classic liberals averaged below. However, these results do not show a linear pattern across the political spectrum that one might expect. For example, if conservatives averaged above the mean line, why was the classic liberal response the lowest below the mean line? Similarly, the youngest and oldest participants averaged above the mean line while those with ages in the middle averaged below. While there might be an explanation for these results, they're more complex to interpret.

However, some demographic results seem to establish patterns within the dataset either because there were more responses for each category or because they showed a linear pattern. Professional genealogists averaged above the mean line and nonprofessionals below. Women averaged above the mean line while men averaged below. Based on their highest level of education, those with a high school education averaged below the mean line, those with a bachelor's degree averaged around the mean line, and those with a graduate degree averaged above the mean line. White participants averaged below the mean line while Black participants and one who selected "prefer not to say" averaged above. Those who had spent fewer years researching genealogy averaged above the mean line, while those who had researched for more time averaged below. One possible explanation for this is that elements of critical family history are becoming more common, and thus newer researchers would have more exposure to them, even if they weren't familiar with the term by name. However, this may not be a reasonable assumption since many participants, particularly the professional genealogists, said they're involved in continuing education.

Overall, these demographic patterns are interesting and could be evaluated further in future research. However, not enough information is available from this research to draw any

broader conclusions. Moreover, since this study is not representative, this data neither proves nor refutes the existence of demographic patterns in North Carolina genealogists' perspectives on critical family history.

Limitations

In addition to the previously mentioned issues with creating a representative sample and generalizing qualitative research, other limitations exist in this study.

First, it is important to note that the nonprofessional genealogists who participated in this study were highly experienced and engaged researchers. Thus, that perspective may be overrepresented, and the "average" nonprofessional genealogist's perspective may not be represented in these study results.

Another potential consideration is that the screening survey or interview questions could have influenced participants' responses if they realized the nature of the study. However, the survey contained information that was necessary for participant selection and comparative analysis. More direct questions about critical family history were asked towards the end of the interview to minimize the impact of participants realizing the purpose of the study.

Another limitation created to reduce priming is that participants were not told about Scodari's 5 requirements; they were asked each requirement as an individual question. It is certainly possible they would have reframed their responses if they understood the implication of their answer for the research project. For example, I suspect at least some participants who used minimizing language when discussing their ancestors' oppressive behaviors may have said that they acknowledge and disavow the behavior if asked directly. Additionally, some may argue that choosing not to place modern moral judgments on a previous time does not exclude one from

disavowing the specific oppressive behaviors. However, my interpretation as the researcher was that abstaining from judging ancestors for committing acts of oppression constitutes minimizing the behavior and a lack of a clear disavowal.

Similarly, the definitions and questions about power dynamics and critical family history were withheld until the end of the study to attempt to reduce priming. However, this may have prevented participants from forming their responses with the specific topics in mind. Therefore, since participants were not fully aware of the context in which their statements would be examined, it's possible I, as the researcher, could interpret them in a way they did not intend.

However, these methods were thoughtfully constructed in an attempt to elicit the most genuine and uninhibited responses on these topics.

Recommendations for Future Research

As shown throughout the literature review, little research has been done on critical family history, especially in specific regions or on specific types of genealogical sources, like historical newspapers. Thus, there are a multitude of potential avenues for future research, including many that arose from the results of this study.

As previously mentioned, how different demographics view and practice critical family history is a fascinating and valuable topic that needs further exploration.

Another topic for future research would be underrepresented groups in genealogy, including Native Americans and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. When asked about these communities, the participants did not have experience researching them or coming across them in their practices. However, multiple participants expressed interest in learning more about these communities genealogically and learning more about the types of records that could be

used to find information about them. Lacking records can make genealogy more time-consuming and challenging, and future research may provide valuable insights to help unlock hidden stories about these underrepresented communities and others.

While this study focused on North Carolina genealogists, very little research exists about regional differences between genealogists, particularly related to their attitudes about topics such as critical family history. In addition to the opportunity for similar regional research to be done in different areas, comparative research would also be incredibly valuable to help establish if regional differences exist and what they might be.

As discussed previously, many of the conclusions from this study connected to an assumption I made that abstaining from judging oppressive ancestors because they lived in a different time opposes the idea of disavowing oppressive behaviors of ancestors. However, far more research could be done on how genealogists judge the past based on their own moral views and modern standards.

Lastly, the topics explored in this study would benefit from follow-up research. As George shared, “These topics are very important and the world that we live in now… Who knows, in another generation, those things might not be as important.” George may be correct; critical family history may become less relevant. However, I believe it will only become more relevant and important to genealogy research. Future research could trace the development and rise of critical family history over time, examining how more and more researchers may soon incorporate it into their genealogy.

Appendices

Appendix 1.1: Recruitment Email to Organizations

Subject: Seeking Participants for Student Research Study about NC Genealogists

Hello (name of organization or representative),

My name is Sarah Bradley and I'm an undergraduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill studying Media and Journalism. I'm conducting a senior honors thesis on how North Carolina genealogists access, authenticate, evaluate and interpret historical newspaper records.

I'm reaching out to you to see if you'd be able to get me in contact with any potential interview participants. I'm interested in interviewing both amateur/nonprofessional and professional researchers who have an active and ongoing practice of tracing and studying North Carolina lineages. I'm looking for participants that have used historical newspapers published between 1877 and 1918 in their genealogical research. Participation in this study would require approximately 60 to 90 minutes for all communications, including a screening survey, interview, and any other time spent communicating about or scheduling participation.

Could you share the contact information of any individuals you believe may be a good fit for my project? Additionally, would you be willing to share my project and request for participants in any e-newsletter you publish?

Please reach out if I can answer any of your questions or clarify any information. Thank you for your help and consideration.

Appendix 1.2: Recruitment Email to Potential Participants or to e-newsletters/Listservs

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Student Research Study about NC Genealogists

Hello (name),

Hello (name of organization or representative),

My name is Sarah Bradley and I'm an undergraduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill studying Media and Journalism. I'm conducting a senior honors thesis on how North Carolina genealogists access, authenticate, evaluate and interpret historical newspaper records.

Are you interested in participating? I'm seeking both amateur/nonprofessional and professional researchers who have an active and ongoing practice of tracing and studying North Carolina lineages. I'm looking for participants that have used historical newspapers published between 1877 and 1918 in their genealogical research. Participation in this study would require approximately 60 to 90 minutes for all communications, including a screening survey, interview and any other time spent communicating about or scheduling participation.

Do you think you'd be a good fit for my project? Or do you know someone who might be? Please let me know! The first step is a screening survey to gather some basic information and ensure you're an ideal candidate for this project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Could you share the contact information of any individuals you believe may be a good fit for my project? Additionally, would you be willing to share my project and request for participants in any e-newsletter you publish?

Please reach out if I can answer any of your questions or clarify any information. Thank you for your help and consideration.

Appendix 2: Screening Survey Questions

*Responses will trigger skip logic and end survey
**Response will include a text box to fill an answer
***Respondents can select multiple categories

Adult Consent Form

1. Signature
2. Decline*

Contact Information

1. Name**
2. Email**
3. Phone Number**

Participant Screening

4. Personally or professionally, do you research North Carolina family history or genealogy?
    a. Yes
    b. No*
5. Do you use North Carolina historical newspapers in your study of family history or genealogy?
    a. Yes
    b. No*
6. Does your North Carolina family history or genealogy research include the time period of 1877 to 1918?
    a. Yes
    b. No*
7. Are you a professional genealogist or family historian who earns annual income from your practice?
    a. Yes
    b. No
8. How many years have you been involved in family history or genealogy research?
    a. <1 year
    b. 1 to 2 years
    c. 3 to 5 years
    d. 6 to 10 years
    e. 10 to 19 years
    f. 20 to 29 years
    g. 30+ years
9. Preferred Interview Method
    a. Zoom
    b. Phone Call

Demographics

10. Age Range
    a. Under 18*
    b. 18-29
    c. 30-39
    d. 40-49
    e. 50-59
    f. 60-69
    g. 70-79
    h. 80-89
    i. Above 89
    j. Prefer not to disclose
11. Gender
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Other**
    d. Prefer not to disclose
12. Race/Ethnicity***
    a. American Indian or Alaska Native
    b. Asian
    c. Black or African American
    d. Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
    e. Middle Eastern or North African
    f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    g. White
    h. Multiethnic
    i. Other**
    j. Prefer not to disclose
13. Education
    a. Some high school or equivalent
    b. High school or equivalent
    c. Bachelor's degree or equivalent
    d. Graduate degree or equivalent
    e. Other**
    f. Prefer not to disclose
14. Political Affiliation
    a. Democrat/Liberal
    b. Moderate

c. Republican/Conservative
d. Other**
e. Prefer not to disclose

Appendix 3.1: Pre-Interview Script

My name is Sarah Bradley, and I'm a student at UNC-Chapel Hill. I'm a senior studying Media and Journalism, Business, and Studio Art. I'm also an amateur genealogist who has been researching my family history for about six years.

During this interview, I'm going to ask you questions about your research practice. I'm asking you to please answer based on your existing research practice. Also, please know that I understand that everyone has different interests and motivations for genealogy research and there are no right or wrong answers to my interview questions. My thesis is about trying to learn about research methods, not argue whether some methods are the correct way to conduct genealogy.

During this interview, I'm going to ask you questions about historical newspapers. When I mention historical newspapers, I'm specifically asking about North Carolina newspapers published between 1877 and 1918. Please consider this location and time period when answering questions. Let me know if it would be helpful for me to remind you of these details throughout the interview.

Appendix 3.2: Interview Questions

Opening Questions

1. Why do you study genealogy?
2. What are some of the most interesting genealogy discoveries you have made from searching historical newspapers?
3. Does your genealogy research impact how you view yourself or the world around you?
4. How did you learn to conduct your genealogical research? Self-taught? Formally trained?

Historical Newspapers as Sources

5. How do historical newspapers compare to other genealogical sources?
6. Are there differences that you've noticed between historical newspapers and modern newspapers?
7. How do you research individuals in historical newspapers?
8. Have you researched multiple demographics in North Carolina newspapers, what was your experience with each? Demographic examples include age, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or sexuality.

General Historical Contextualization

9. What are things that you consider when reading historical newspapers?

10. Do you research historical information about North Carolina during the time period of 1877 to 1918 that may be relevant to your genealogy research?
11. What are some examples of historical events or historical information during the time period of 1877 to 1918 in North Carolina that you've researched that have been helpful to your genealogy research?
12. What does historical contextualization mean to you, and do you believe you practice it?

Scodari's 5 Requirements for Critical Family Historians

13. Have you researched your ancestors' migrations?
14. Do you use DNA in your genealogical practice? If so, how do you use it?
15. How are you personally impacted when you learn about the culture of your ancestors that isn't a part of your current culture?
16. Have you ever discovered information about your ancestors engaging in problematic or oppressive behavior? If so, how has this information impacted you? If not, have you ever discovered information about your ancestors being oppressed? If so, how has this information impacted you?
17. A social construct is defined as something that exists as a result of human social interactions, not because of objective reality (Bainbridge). Were you previously familiar with this term? Do you believe race is a social construct?

Power Dynamic Considerations

18. Do you consider power dynamics such as race, gender, class, or sexuality when you do genealogy research?
19. Do you research information about power dynamics such as race, gender, or class that existed during the time period of 1877 to 1918 in North Carolina when you do genealogy research? How?
20. Do you believe power dynamics such as race, gender, or class impacted the way historical newspapers were written?
21. Critical family history is a framework used to consider the impact of power systems and dynamics of race, class, and gender when conducting genealogy research. When family historians engage in critical family history, they not only research their family members and contextualize their lives, they also consider the power dynamics that may have directly impacted their lives. How is this framework relevant or irrelevant to your genealogy research?

Appendix 4: Text for the Online Consent Form

IRB Study # 22-0150
Title of Study: Hussman School of Journalism and Media Senior Honors Thesis: North Carolina Genealogists and Historical Newspapers: Usage, Contextualization and Critical Family History
Principal Investigator: Sarah Bradley

CONCISE SUMMARY

The purpose of this research study is to explore how active North Carolina genealogists access, authenticate, evaluate and interpret historical newspaper records.

Participation in this study will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will involve a screening survey and an interview.

There are no known major risks to participating in this study.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please continue reading below.

What are some general things you should know about research studies? You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

What is the purpose of this study? The purpose of this research study is to explore how active North Carolina genealogists access, authenticate, evaluate and interpret historical newspaper records.

How many people will take part in this study? If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 10 people in this research study.

What will happen if you take part in the study? Participation in this study will require a screening survey and interview.

- **Screening Survey**: You will complete a screening survey that will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. This survey will ask for contact information, demographic information, and research-related questions to ensure you are an ideal research participant.
- **Interview**: If you are selected to participate in interview you will be informed via the email address and phone number provided in the screening survey. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You may choose not to answer a question for any reason.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study? Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study? We anticipate few risks in this study.

How will your privacy be protected? All of the data you provide will be stored anonymously. This means that there will be no way for anybody to ever link your data or the results of the study to your identity.

What if you want to stop before your part in the study is complete? You can withdraw

from this study at any time, without penalty and skip any question for any reason. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation if you have an unexpected reaction, have failed to follow instructions, etc.

Will you receive anything for being in this study? Will it cost anything? You will receive no monetary reward for participating in this study. There are no costs associated with being in the study.

What if you have questions about this study? You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. Contact the principal investigator listed above with any questions, complaints, or concerns you may have.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant? All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, please contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Participants will be shown a link that says "I consent."

CONCISE SUMMARY

The purpose of this research study is to explore how active North Carolina genealogists access, authenticate, evaluate and interpret historical newspaper records.

Participation in this study will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will involve a screening survey and an interview.

There are no known major risks to participating in this study.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please continue reading below.

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