JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
*School of Education and
Communication*

Doctoral Thesis

Ordinary People, Meaningful Pasts

 – Negotiating Narratives in Public Pedagogical Spaces of Family History Research

Karen Ann Blom

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Research

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Doctoral Thesis in Education

Ordinary People, Meaningful Pasts
– Negotiating Narratives in Public Pedagogical Spaces of Family History Research
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Abstract

This dissertation examines three family history research experiences as public pedagogical spaces, analysing the narratives presented and participants' negotiations with these. In the context of enhanced digitalisation and rapidly developing technologies, disturbances in the form of pandemics, hackers, and wars remind us of the instability of the present, raising existential questions and reinforcing the desire to anchor oneself in the past. Despite this growing interest, academic research focusing on family history is sparse. This dissertation project is unique in its focus on a Swedish context, the selection of three specific family history experiences as case studies, and its use of a public pedagogical perspective examining relational learning beyond formal institutions intrinsically woven within the fabric of society.

This dissertation uses three case studies as reflections of more extensive experiences of the phenomenon of interest in family history and the past. These include the Swedish family history television series *Allt för Sverige's* previous contestants' narratives, the results from four genetic ancestry testing companies, and participants' narratives from two Swedish non-formal family history research courses. Analysing these further within this compilation dissertation engages a conceptual framework consisting of Rüsen's historical narrative typology, Hall's decoding/encoding model, and Ellsworth's use of Public Pedagogy as relational and facilitating transitional spaces for knowledge in the making. An emphasis on the process of pedagogy, rather than the product of knowledge, is prominent in this hermeneutic phenomenological study and reflects the concept of *Bildung* as the cultivation of the whole person.

The findings reveal a more complex picture of family historians, history, and family history research experiences than what is often portrayed. Participants deem not only the effervescent or exceptional findings and activities valuable, but the everyday banal is perceived as significant and contributes to the development of understanding and meaning. Moreover, regardless of the physical site of the experience, the infused pedagogical intent is illustrated through participants' interactions and negotiations. In a field surrounded by

rock walls their ancestor built, discovering a relative had only five spoons in a testament, or examining a deep map to trace the movements of ancestors all provide opportunities to juxtapose, confirm, and/or challenge previous knowledge with new information and experiences, reiterating the extensive reach of public pedagogy.

Despite narratives presenting conflicting depictions of the past, participants of this study demonstrate agency in their negotiations, resulting in enhanced empathy and enriched historical consciousness. By exploring these family history research experiences as pedagogical spaces, this dissertation provides a more nuanced understanding of the broader field of public pedagogy and contributes new insights from Swedish and participants' perspectives to the growing body of research on family history. It highlights the potential and benefits of examining the small, seemingly insignificant, everyday items and events. Moreover, it contributes a more comprehensive illustration of the seepage/pervasiveness of public pedagogy as complex and relational.

Keywords: family history, public pedagogy, public history, historical consciousness, significance, narrative, banal, use of history, participant perspectives, Sweden

List of Original Papers

The following papers are included in "Part 2: Experiences" of this dissertation.

Article 1
Blom, K. A. (2023). "What is the Real Sweden?" Backstage Negotiations in the Process of Identity Authentication With(in) the Context of Family. *Culture Unbound*, 15(2), 22–44. https://doi.org/10/3384/cu.4113

Article 2
Blom, K. A. (2022). Navigating narratives of genetic categorization at the frayed edges of identity. *New Genetics and Society*, 41, 334–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/14636778.2022.2137121

Article 3
Blom, K. A. (2024). The banal significance of family history research: Experiences and narratives from participants of Swedish non-formal family history courses. *Historical Encounters*, 11(1), 18–29. https://doi.org/10.52289/hej11.102

I'm a map of the world and the ones before
One foot in the sea and one onshore
Every step, every hope flung high
I'm a map of them all with my [Chinese] eyes.

 (Betts, 2023)

Acknowledgements

> The annual migration of the Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) is a unique and amazing phenomenon. The monarch is the only butterfly known to make a two-way migration as birds do. … No individual butterfly completes the entire round trip. Female Monarchs lay eggs for the next generation during the northward migration and at least four generations are involved in the annual cycle. … The local people have long believed the Monarchs, with their mysterious arrival each year coinciding with the Day of the Dead, are the returning spirits of their ancestors. Aztec tradition holds that the souls of the departed will return as hummingbirds and butterflies. (From "Migration 2" Johnson, 2017)

Much like the monarch butterfly's migration, my journey began generations before I set my foot on this path. This dissertation is a story of collaboration, encouragement, endurance, and generosity.

The participants in this study have graciously shared their lives and experiences with me, for which I am deeply touched and grateful. Without you, this would be a very different project.

I have had the pleasure of working closely with and learning from my supervisors, Professor Tobias Samuelsson, Dr Carl-Johan Svensson and Dr Åsa Nilsson Dahlström. We have spent many hours of conversations over Fika and in more formal settings that have provided invaluable academic and personal support. Your supervision styles have complemented each other, with each providing your own expertise. I am so grateful that you were "my" team over these past years and through life's many ups and downs. Thank you so much for your mentorship and friendship.

Many individuals have supported and challenged me throughout this journey, including the HLKs Doktorand podcast crew Jens Alvén Sjöberg and Josefin Rostedt. This journey would not have been the same without you. To Otto Hedenmo, thank you for the collegial exchanges and for helping me with language checks. Thank you to the numerous doctoral colleagues and other colleagues who have contributed with ideas, discussions, and support through the years. To the Jane Austen ladies, I am so grateful for the good fortune to count you among my dear friends. Thank you to the librarians at Jönköping University who tirelessly answer my queries and have ordered books and articles whenever requested. To my lecturers and classmates from the space

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Part One: Beginnings

Figure 1. Migration 2 [mixed media, water colour, collage, pencil, silkscreen on paper]

Note. Reprinted with permission from the Artist. From Migration 2 by Tanya P. Johnson, 2017, https://www.tanyapjohnson.com/

Beginnings and a Beginner

Every story has a beginning. My narrative started early in the morning of September 17[1], when a daughter was born to a third-generation Chinese Canadian father and a third-generation Swedish-Polish Canadian mother.[1] That daughter, me, as Arendt (1998) says, was born both as a beginning and a beginner. Those who met me growing up asked, "Where did you come from?" "What are you?" With appearances that are difficult to categorise, I quickly realised that family history research and its relation to history and the past was essential to my understanding and perspectives of self, place, and identity.

Everyone and everything has a beginning from which they emerge and are impacted by, in other words, their roots. Narratives, or the stories we tell and retell ourselves and others of our beginnings and life experiences, do not necessarily have a clear beginning, middle and end but are confirmed, adapted, and modified through interactions with new information and experiences. These narrative retellings also depend on and adjust to the setting, target audience, and goal (Mishler, 2004) and are connected to the identity of the individual, others, and cultural, historical, and societal context. These socio-cultural structures and banal contexts "infused with pedagogical intent and demarcations" influence our understandings of ourselves and our relations with the world around us (Billig, 1995; Charman & Dixon, 2021). For this reason, my definition of pedagogy is broad and influenced by the discourse of public pedagogy. I focus on pedagogy as a process rather than focusing on an end product of knowledge.

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[1] According to the Canadian government "'First generation' includes persons who were born outside Canada. For the most part, these are persons who are now, or once were, immigrants to Canada. 'Second generation' includes persons who were born in Canada and had at least one parent born outside Canada. For the most part, these are the children of immigrants. 'Third generation or more' includes persons who were born in Canada with all parents born in Canada." (Statistics Canada, 2022)

The unprecedented interest in family history research constructs and is constructed by narratives told and retold by individuals and institutions impacted by existential questions such as "Who am I?" and "Why am I me?" Despite these questions arguably always existing and being asked as a part of human nature, the rapid development of technology in its various forms has magnified these questions on a larger scale–creating new nuances, new contexts, and new consequences. There is no consensus on answers to these questions. However, the attributed meaning and the attached narratives' intense psychological and emotional impact are more profound than perhaps the initial questions. Narratives of how to relate and how to learn or obtain answers to these questions affect children and adults alike (Zanetti, 2020). Globalisation and the coinciding digitalisation affect this learning, resulting in more effortless transitioning in time and space. "Visiting" the past and engaging with one's ancestors is more accessible than ever. Is this acceleration of society, as Rosa and Trejo-Mathys (2013) call it, positive? The spatial turn emphasises the interest but also the importance of understanding how space and place co-construct with temporal and sociocultural structures.

Exploring this intersection enhances our understanding of the past and history and its potential impact on society and individuals. What is taught/learnt through the (re)produced narratives constructed through and for family history research? Is the individual, personal interest in family history research always connected to existential meaning, and does it answer the mediated concern for instability evidenced in the perceived attacks on democracy, increasingly extreme neo-nationalist politics, and xenophobia? My aspiration with this dissertation project is to explore three selected family history research experiences as examples of public history offered in public pedagogical spaces and analyse narrative descriptions, exploring the spectrum of enticement and magnetism of the past found between the effervescent and the banal poles. Through these case studies, I can highlight the potential and power of public pedagogical spaces to construct and the concealed danger in its innate banality that research often misses.

While not a new activity, the interest in family history research, its possibilities, and its importance for society and the individual has only increased since Rhoads argued the importance of family history to society in 1979. It was the "Roots" television series in 1977 based on Alex Hayley's family narrative writings, Rhoads claims, that awakened a greater awareness

of millions of Americans "of their own lack of knowledge about their personal and communal histories" (Rhoads, 1979, p. 9). Far from an exclusive American-Eurocentric obsession, family history is part of the broader interest in consuming and constructing stories of the past and part of public history. Public history is defined as the history (or histories) of the public, for the public, the history in every day, whereas the academic discipline of History, [2] with a capital H, is what is promoted and taught in formal institutions such as schools and is considered official and attributed authority (Ashton & Hamilton, 2010; Clark, 2016a, 2016b). Initially, the field of public history was a "defiant intellectual project on 'an impossible to categorise' area ([including aspects of] sociology, history, anthropology) … essential to understanding the great interest and passion for history in many different forms within the broader population" (Ashton & Hamilton, 2010, p. 7). While public history has grown as an academic field and is increasingly included in graduate education history, its inclusion in undergraduate education and focus has shifted to emphasise mainly the research aspects at the detriment of the collaborative community and interactive learning attributes (Conard, 2006; Evans & Burkett, 2022). In Sweden, despite the professional historians engaging publics and the *historiebruk* movement (studying uses of the past and its transmission), there is a lack of "professional setting[s] for the academic examination of public history" (Cornu & Vorminder, 2023, p. 17). There are, however, many academics whose research could be defined and recognised as public history (even if they do not label or identify it as such).

Outside of academia, interacting and engaging in non-formal and informal spaces, the everyday learning process is identified as demonstrating the principles of public pedagogy. Family history research can contribute to understanding for those habitually excluded from the traditionally academically sanctioned History and can be "a route to [a] fuller historical

[2] In this dissertation, I use History with a capital H to represent the discipline of History in academia and differentiate it from history/ies that occur outside and/or are not traditionally included in the academic discipline.

understanding of oneself and membership of a community" (de Groot, 2016, p. 72). Family history research, which occurs in spaces of public pedagogy, challenges the concept of education to de-institutionalise and rethink its too often assumed association with formal learning spaces/schools (O'Malley, Sandlin, & Burdick, 2020). I do not intend to diminish nor argue for an either-or approach to learning and engaging with the past; instead, I seek to promote the examination of the intersection and complementary nature of academic and public pedagogy.

I understand and use the term "family history" in this dissertation as evolving and developing from the concept of "genealogy." While these terms are often used interchangeably by researchers, I choose to use the term "family history" and its reciprocal "family historians" to reflect the inclusion of the concept of "kinship" or the social and cultural dimensions in addition to those relations through blood, and marriage (Schneider, 1980). Furthermore, as the focus of the dissertation will be examining experiences in Sweden, the term family history reflects more closely the Swedish term *släktforskning*, which means "(extended) family research" in English. This study focuses on amateur family historians instead of professional family historians or formally educated/trained genealogists.

Family history research experiences include all experiences connected to family history. These experiences include the banal, seemingly mundane, speaking to relatives, touring family farms, labelling photographs, watching historically based films, and reading historical novels—to the extremes of reality television and sending DNA [3] samples for genetic ancestry testing.

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[3] While there are multiple genetic ancestry tests available the most common is the autosomal test which measures the 22 pairs of chromosomes that the majority have in common and is what this particular study has engaged with. Specific markers are identified and compared with a company specific database to match and categorise. The greater amount of shared DNA the closer the relationship. Depending on the company, the individual sends their DNA sample through either spitting into a tube or a swab from the inside of their mouth. This is sent to a laboratory for assessment and the results are returned in approximately eight weeks.

This inclusive definition avoids an impoverished or reductionist understanding of the term "family history research" and is demonstrative of the broader understanding of public history.

I examine the spectrum of family history research through case studies that provide perspectives and insights from three distinct experiences. While one can participate in many activities, I have chosen three common entry points to family history research. [4] Previous research focuses on one or another experience or provides a general overview of family history research. These experiences combined can provide reflexivity and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of family history research. Examining the context of Sweden for these learning experiences is unique in that most prior research focuses on (post)colonial contexts, perceiving these places as motivation for participation (Nash, 2015).

The first case study examines narratives from semi-structured interviews with previous contestants of a Swedish reality television programme that focuses on family history *Allt för Sverige.* For the second case study, I sent my DNA to four genetic ancestry testing companies and analysed the results received. To add a more "traditional" example to this dissertation, I conducted an ethnographic-inspired study for the third case study following two non-formal education courses offered for family history research in Sweden. I analysed the subsequent semi-structured interviews with participants from these courses as the data set for case study three. These case studies are combined and analysed within this dissertation as a unique opportunity to approach the interest in and experiences presented by family history research.

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[4] It should be emphasised that many individuals start participating in one family history research activity, leading to interest and participation in further activities. I.e., taking a DNA test often leads to the desire to know more and further participation in a course.

The dissertation is structured as follows. Part One: Beginnings includes the introductory chapter providing contextualisation, research focus and epistemological position. I present the current perspectives in research on family research experiences thematically. Following this, I describe the methodology, overarching theoretical, conceptual framework, and ethical considerations for the dissertation. Part Two: Experiences, introduces, and provides the original journal articles. In Part Three: Bringing it Home, I discuss the results engaging with the theoretical framework and research questions and end the dissertation with a conclusion.

Fascinating Rhythm

What is fascinating about family history and the past is how individuals and groups nonchalantly perpetually use and refer to it in everyday discourses and narratives. The past and family history are represented regularly in media films and television programmes, theme parks, re-enactments, family and local history societies, advertisements, tourism, and political references. While institutions use the past to defend ideologies and political actions, lay claim to identity, and construct belonging with its by-product construction of Others (de Saint-Laurent & Obradović, 2019), individuals also use it as evidence that "we have always been/done…" in the process of authentication and knowledge making.

Societies maintain and transmit culture and identity with the help of what Poirier (2013) terms "ancestrality." The dead are kept alive through historical knowledge, hermeneutics, and reenactments, and to pursue knowledge of the past is an attempt at existential reciprocity. Ruin (2018) argues that historical culture preserves and cultivates ancestors using rituals, inheritance, preservation, and written accounts to pay respect and keep the legacy alive. Despite earlier anthropological suppositions that this was primitive society's "ancestral worship," Ruin (2018) notes the transcultural nature of being with the dead. The human nature of seeking the past and the dead embedded in the present, inspired by the existential-ontological conditions of responsibilities to/for and rites of the dead, results in a public space of a collective history shared between the dead and the alive. It uses the memory of the living to preserve and extend life and identity over time. This is reflected in cultural memory studies, and as Ruin (2018) argues, "Indeed, in the contemporary landscape of cultural theory, it represents the wide-ranging attempt to

understand the possibility of history tradition, historical consciousness, precisely through the prism of how the living relate to and continue to be with the dead" (p. 184).

Tradition, dictated by socio-historical cultures and the dominant hierarchy, decides what is remembered and what should be forgotten and varies by individual and collective group. As Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) found for their American participants, "the past was clearly part of the rhythm of [their] everyday li[ves]" (p. 7). One-third of their 1500 participants were active in family history, perceiving the past as a connection and a place to seek patterns, inherited traits, and commonality with the present (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). Researchers have examined individuals' perceptions and engagement with the past through extensive surveys of general populations. These include the United States (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998), 25 European countries plus Israel (Angvik & Borries, 1997a, 1997b), Australia (Moore & Rosenthal, 2021; Shaw, 2017, 2020, 2021; Shaw & Donnelly, 2021b), Canada (Conrad, Létourneau, & Northrup, 2009), and Sweden (Börnfors, 2001; Edquist, 2009). [5] Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) and Hegardt (2021) discuss cultural heritage as intrinsically connected to identity, ethnicity, roots and (new)nationalism. While heritage, in Western Euro-American contexts, is argued as a construction of the present impending (e.g., Harrison, 2020), some researchers argue it can often be ahistorical and, as Said (2012) critiques, a narcissistic positioning in time.

Rodriguez (2014) reported that family history research was the second most popular hobby after gardening and the second most visited website category after pornography in the United States of America. While some predicted this fascination with the past and family history would diminish over time or during the COVID-19 pandemic, this is not apparent. In Sweden, viewers rallied to keep popular family history television programmes from

[5] Börnfors and Edquist's studies have significantly fewer participants than the other studies. Edquist has 222 respondents, while Börnfors uses data from 30 individuals. I have included them to show the interest in Sweden as well.

cancellation (Shimoda & Shimoda, 2022). There is a well-mediatised interest in the connections and use of genetics or DNA for illness (Brandt, 2022) and solving crimes (Radosevich, 2020). There are also over 162 active family history societies (Släktforskarförbund, 2023) and close to 400 000 members of local history museum associations acting to safeguard Swedish cultural heritage (Sveriges Hembygdsförbund, 2022).

Despite this tremendous interest in the past and family history research, academia is slow to reciprocate. A growing body of research examines related areas, including ancestral/heritage tourism, belonging and identity, motivations, genetic testing, media representations of ethnicity, and race. Little research explicitly addresses learning and the pedagogical aspects of family history practices. Those that do focus on the use of family history research for facilitating discussions of race that reflect existential questions (Foeman, Lawton, & Rieger, 2015; Foeman, 2012; Lawton & Foeman, 2017; Lawton, Foeman, & Surdel, 2018; Nash, 2017; Tyler, 2009). Some research shows that, despite the majority being amateurs and often self-taught, family historians are competent researchers (Shaw, 2017, 2020, 2021; Shaw & Donnelly, 2021b) and lifelong and collaborative learners (Hart, 2018; Hershkovitz & Hardof-Jaffe, 2017). If most family historians are, as noted, self-taught and lifelong learners, it is valuable to examine the experiences in non-formal, public pedagogical settings as this dissertation does.

Through selected case studies, I investigate different approaches to family history that I offer as examples of public history in spaces of public pedagogy (understood as relational learning accessible outside formal education institutions occurring in the interactions between the self, others (human and non-human), temporal and spatial context (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013; Charman & Dixon, 2021; Ellsworth, 2005; A. Shaw, 2017). Through examining these spaces, I offer three distinct yet interconnecting examples of the ongoing discourse of family history research, raising awareness of interactions the everyday amateur family historian has with narrative (re)presentations of the past and the prevalence of public pedagogy. By examining the unprecedented interest and participation in family history from three experiences, I seek to illuminate trends from the broad spectrum of experience and involvement.

Moreover, this study indirectly addresses the perceived accentuation of instability of identity impacted by globalism, modernity and ensuing fast-developing technologies, digital and analogue (e.g., social media, AI/AR). As van Manen states:

> To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretative description of *some* aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life *is always more complex* than any explication of meaning can reveal. (2016, p. 18 emphasis added)

In other words, examining specific family history research experiences can only reveal a portion of an individual's lived life, which is more complex, difficult to express and influenced by many aspects, including their situatedness in a globalised and digitalised context.

A Globalised and Digitalised Context

The past is a lucrative, valuable tool for the tourism, heritage, and media production markets to create a superficial, often nostalgic, chain of progression to the present (Bennett, 2018; Boym, 2001; Cross, 2015; Davis, 1977; Lowenthal, 2015; Salmose, 2019).

Media productions (such as television, film, and blogs), commemorations, ancestral tourism, memorials, museums, "live" re-enactments of historical events, and, more recently, genetic ancestry testing all demonstrate this interest in the past. These vehicles produce specific narratives driven by a desire for the past, nearly attainable but always slightly beyond the reach of the present and continuously tinted by the lens of the present collective historical and socio-cultural frame of reference. The past becomes a product for consumption, something, someone or somewhere to engage with, as consumption practices "form a nexus of historical meanings and experiences for each individual, what we might term a historical sensibility or historical imagination" (de Groot, 2016, pp. 8–9).

Contributing to greater accessibility to the past is the development of technology, digitalisation, and globalisation, defined here as a dynamic process of interconnecting lives and economic, political, and cultural entities "in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). Despite this greater accessibility, many researchers and public media outlets report anxiously the

perception of citizens not knowing their national pasts and forgetting the lessons from the past (Clark, 2016a; Meseth & Proske, 2015; Samuelsson, 2017). In response to this, debates have continued discussing what exactly should be included or removed from official curricula (Persson & Zander, 2022), the concern of disconnection between the national narratives and individual (Granatstein, 2007), and the moral importance of learning history (Löfström, Ammert, Sharp, & Edling, 2020). [6] While these debates highlight the past and the importance of history, what these debates are genuinely concerned about is how knowledge of the past impacts the future. These debates emphasise the desire to ensure historical consciousness, connecting this to the development of social cohesion, peace, and a feeling of connected belonging now and in the future.

The rapid development of technology and the digitalisation of context results in a wider variety of cultures and social categorisations that expose individuals to a broader range of individuals and cultures and social categorisations to relate to and compare themselves to. The broader range of comparison leads to an increased frequency and intensity of existential questions posed by themselves and others, "Who are you / am I?" and, equally important, "Where do you / I belong?" These questions imply they are not from / not at home/ do not belong 'here' (Ahmed, 2012), ensuing varying risks for immigrants or descendants of diasporic populations (whether by force or choice). [7] Thus, greater access also creates a necessity for individuals to position themselves, reflecting on their place, connections, and belonging within society, nations, and history.

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[6] Many countries including Sweden and Australia have called these debates "history wars."

[7] For example, a person who is "visible" due to the amount of melatonin in their skin the shape of a person's eyes or an audible accent is more likely to receive such questions. See Arbuckle (2010) for a discussion surrounding (in)voluntary ethnicity and Chandra (2012) stickiness of identity.

Presenting a narrative of implicit longing for what Nash (2008) explains as "nostalgia for an imagined time when place, identity, culture, and ancestry coincided" (p. 9) is a recurring theme emerging from research on family history. Börnfors (2001) found family historians to have feelings of "rootlessness" (*rotlöshet*), which Edquist (2009) identifies as a reaction to the perceived acceleration in society as too stressful, faster, and thus the reason for "sinking into olden times" (p. 164). Correspondingly, Lowenthal (1985, 2015) perceives the loss of tangible heritage due to mass migrations as contributing significantly to the interest in family history research.

According to Giddens (1990), this "use of history to make history" is a crucial element and product of modernity (p. 50), breaking down the past and nurturing what is judged valuable in the current cultural context rather than enshrining or reifying the whole. Likewise, Lowenthal (2015), identifies the use of the past as selective and influential in the shaping of identity and society: "To know is to care, to care is to use, to use is to transform the past. Continually refashioned, the remade past continuously remoulds us" (p. 1).

The fluidity of a digitalised and globalised context creates opportunities but also challenges. The flexibility of space and the overlapping of the public and private spheres can create a sense of isolation, marginalisation, and insecurity, causing psychological stress (Fong & Chuang, 2004; Owusu-Bempah, 2007). The speeding up of technology, communication, and transportation has negatively impacted climate change, the spread of infectious diseases, extreme populist politics and xenophobic scapegoating or fear of the Other (Helbrecht, Dobrusskin, Genz, & Pohl, 2021; López-Alves & Johnson, 2018) as evidenced by the recent events of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Trump-administration era in the United States. This results in a desire to fortify personal identification within a cultural community (Berry, 2008) and increased anxiety caused by ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1990; Helbrecht et al., 2021).

Consequently, increased knowledge of how individuals engage with knowledge and various narratives of the past is a crucial step in understanding the psychological and political outcomes. Analysing how family history research experiences present the past and individuals' interactions with these narratives reflects a more considerable interest in the past, contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the social and political climate, and encourages critical reflection.

Aims and Guiding Questions

This doctoral dissertation seeks to provide insight into the presentation and the negotiation of presented narratives of identity and the past in family history research as examples of public history in public pedagogical spaces. I explore the larger spectrum of family history by examining three case studies of family history research experiences offered in Sweden: 1) the family history reality television programme *Allt för Sverige*, 2) genetic ancestry testing companies' results, and 3) non-formal education courses in family history research. Adding a Swedish perspective and providing space to compare these experiences is significant as it explores experiences outside of the more commonly examined (post)colonial states such as Canada, the USA, or Australia. Moreover, while researchers have investigated family history research experiences from different perspectives, previous research does not compare or examine the similarities and differences between narratives of these experiences.

To facilitate a broader view of family history research experiences, I have chosen to examine narratives using complementary methods and approaches to collect and examine the study's findings. This combination of approaches and experiences contributes to a richness of information received and allows for greater nuance in analysis. Specifically, I explore participants' perspectives for case study one rather than the more common audience-focused research. In case study two, I use an autoethnographic method to analyse genetic ancestry companies' narratives of identity construction and history. In case study three, I engage in participant observation in addition to semi-structured interviews examining the significance of banal elements. By examining these case studies, I highlight the potential and power of public pedagogical spaces to attract individuals and communicate historical narratives.

Despite having different methods and approaches, a common underlying inductive, hermeneutic phenomenological approach grounded in social constructivism ties these case studies together. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach focuses on experiences an individual lives through from the individual participant's or subject's perspective (van Manen, 2016). It creates opportunities to "discover possibilities of being and becoming" (van Manen, 2016, p. xiv), merge cognitive and non-cognitive ways of knowing, and

explicate meanings from experiences. In the case of pedagogical research, this exploration and sensitivity to lived experience requires reflection and interpretation to illuminate the pedagogical influence of any phenomena and its corresponding relationship to participants (van Manen, 2016; van Manen & van Manen, 2021).

Therefore, I apply a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understand the interest and participation in family history research, emphasising the lived experiential understandings and interpreted perspectives presented through narratives. Participants engage in an individual process through the hermeneutic circle, negotiating self and others in a transitional space, reflecting Gadamer's (2004/1960) fusion of horizons. The process of experience questions and permeates boundaries "between ourselves and others and through the place of culture and the time of history" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 55). Aronsson (2004) argues that this process links "the social time between the individual memory and the mechanical time" (p. 26).

In this study, I investigate three case studies contributing to the knowledge and investigation of the common phenomenon of broad interest and participation in family history research. I analyse family history research narratives and participants' negotiations within these experiences, identified as pedagogical sites of learning. These learning sites comprise pivot points or hinges that juxtapose the inner self and external impetus (knowledge/experience), enabling a transitional space for knowledge in the making. Each of the three case studies has its own focus and research questions. I synthesise these studies in this compilation dissertation to answer the following research questions.

Dissertation Research Questions

1. How do the three selected family history experiences present narratives of identity and the past?

2. How do participants describe their negotiations with narratives presented by various agents (institutional, individual) of the selected family history experiences?

3. How do elements of family history experiences illustrate these spaces as public pedagogy?

Current Perspectives

The following two chapters present current perspectives and discussions relevant to family history research narratives of cultural identity, the past, and public pedagogy. Rather than reiterating the background discussions of each of the included case studies, I have chosen to explore common themes. By doing so, I provide a context and illustrate how the current dissertation work contributes to the ongoing discussion. This review is by no means a comprehensive overview of the entire body of research but is selective and purposeful to engage in the ongoing discussions surrounding the popularity and influence of family history experiences. I have taken a reflective approach to examining previous research, meaning I maintained throughout the dissertation project a continual updating of database searches (from ProQuest Central, Web of Science, to Google Scholar) and identifying relevant research in reference lists in readings. I continually (re)read and adapted to new relevant areas as the research project progressed and empirical data was analysed.

Inductive in nature, my interests in hermeneutics influenced the themes I identified and categorised from the data. While several narratives intersect in family history research, the three themes selected from the data for this dissertation are learning, identity, and the past. These are discussed from a hermeneutic perspective reflecting the circular "play" of parts and whole, the pre-understandings and knowledge of the individual in interaction with the introduced narratives and experiences through the lens of the projection of an (unattainable) whole or complete "truth."

The following chapter introduces previous studies of family history research. Despite this dissertation's focus on Swedish culture, there is comparably little research from or about family history research in Sweden. The over-representation of research from Australia, the United States of America, and Ireland resonates with Nash's (2015) and others' reasonings that family history research popularity is the product of (post)colonial occupation. Moreover, this presupposition ignores the interest beyond the West-Euro/American-centric, including the engagement of Indigenous and the global South and Asian peoples. However, despite the minimal research found in and about Sweden, Swedes are heavily involved in family history research,

evidenced by statistics, the prevalence of family history associations and local history associations *hembygdsföreningar* in almost every town. I have organised the literature included according to a common focus.

Previous Research

The adage "You cannot choose your family" is not entirely accurate. Narratives are constructed by and for individuals and groups who choose or disregard consciously or unconsciously to create a meaningful story. As Zerubavel (2012) highlighted, individuals use specific strategies to construct a seamless family history narrative, claim political entitlement or power, and remove unpalatable events or individuals. Whom individuals include and exclude, which line they follow, and what historical background they explore further are all (sub)conscious choices.

An Example of Public History

Rüsen emphasised that teaching and learning have always been a part of history but that with the increasing institutionalisation and professionalisation, this focus has diminished to the interest of a small select group. *Historia vitae magistra* or history is the teacher of life, goes beyond any sanctioned school curricula, but is "conceived in the broadest sense as being fundamental processes and phenomena in human culture" (Rüsen, 1987a, p. 276). Public history combines teaching, research, and community engagement to reach a more diverse and extensive population (Evans & Burkett, 2022). History, as Clark (2016b) so adeptly described, cannot be relegated to the school or university, but it:

> is what happened, and it's something we do. History is learned, studied and critiqued. It's also gossiped, chattered, whispered, imagined and laughed. We do it at home, at school and at university, as well as in the media, in libraries, in politics and public. (Clark, 2016b, pp. 3–4)

Public history, Ashton and Hamilton (2010) describe as initially a "defiant intellectual project on 'an impossible to categorise' area ([including characteristics from] sociology, history anthropology)" and used to understand the broader populations' interest in history (p.7). Despite becoming a more standard component of graduate education, public history in

academic institutions has often shifted to diminish the community and teaching aspects, prioritising research to meet the neo-liberal demands (Evans & Burkett, 2022). Evans and Burkett (2022) argue that including public history can potentially encourage employability, social awareness, inclusion, and active citizenship in and beyond the university.

Family history research is an example of public history and a "branch of history" (Durie, 2017). It can and is examined across several correlated disciplines, for example, law, genetics, biology, social/cultural geography, anthropology, and sociology. [8] This reflects the complexities of family history research and the multiplicity of perspectives or angles from which researchers can examine this interest. As a result, the research I present in the following sections is drawn from various disciplines but is all related to and valuable for understanding the phenomenal interest in family history research.

Family History Research as Spaces of Learning and Public Pedagogy

Family Historians

Examining archives, recording dates, names, and places are associated with genealogy. Family history research, in comparison, includes the social aspects, stories, and cultural heritage. This extensive interest means that family historians engage in a broader range of learning experiences. De Groot (2016) asserts that family history is "a more inclusive term suggesting a sense

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[8] The concept of "Genealogy" is also understood from Foucault's critical historical perspective derived mainly from his 1980 essay Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, applied in the Humanities and the Social Sciences (Foucault, 2021). According to Foucault's argument, Genealogy is the examination of everyday life that traces the influence of power and knowledge. Examples of this usage can be found in the subject of History Didactics, amongst others (Karlsson, 2014). This, however, is not the focus of this dissertation.

of identity rather than the more traditional proving of [the] (paternal) bloodline" (p. 74). Family history research exemplifies lifelong, self-directed, and collaborative learning (Hart, 2018; Hershkovitz & Hardof-Jaffe, 2017; E. Shaw, 2017). Hershkovitz and Hardof-Jaffe (2017) observed that family historians learned about their family, themselves, and various research techniques and skills. They observed many family historians actively engage in research beyond their ancestors, for example, assisting others to research or assisting in transcribing or indexing archives (Hershkovitz & Hardof-Jaffe, 2017, p. 536).

Similarly, Hart's (2018) study found that family history research promoted a more profound sense of belonging and connection to their ancestors and led to a broader interest and further studies. Lambert (2006) described three "pathways" that family historians use to engage and "get to know" their ancestors. He calls these descriptive (factual evidence), narrative (family stories), and experiential (interactions with tangible heritage). Lambert (2006) emphasises that family history is not "in a social vacuum" (p. 328) but done in context "within the family, the genealogical community, and the larger society" (p. 320) and therefore is subjective to contextual influences, norms, and constraints. In contrast, Swedish researcher Edquist (2009) found that while Swedish family historians are independent learners, they were primarily interested in their ancestors rather than the broader society and history in contrast to the studies mentioned above, and very few of his respondents sought identity (Edquist, 2009).

E. Shaw (2017) exemplifies family history research in her dissertation as an example of public pedagogy. According to E. Shaw (2017, 2021), family historians are skilled historical thinkers, developing deeper historical consciousness and empathy through their research and contributing to the discipline of History and an inclusive society. Likewise, Evans's (2023) research on family history from Australia, England, and Canada reveals that family historians collect and analyse various historical sources and critically engage with various versions of the past. She argues that individuals historically outside academia produce historical knowledge that can impact them and those around them and positions her work as a political statement for this purpose. Evans (2023) contends that as part of public history, family history work (practice, meanings, and impact) is vital to gain further understanding of the humanistic potential of historical research for its power

to connect individuals to the larger historical context of the familial and societal level construction of knowledge, and for the importance of historical consciousness for active citizenship. This dissertation builds on this knowledge of family historians as lifelong learners within a community and society of influence. [9] The three case studies are chosen specifically with the preconceived notion that they are experiences where learning occurs.

Family History Spaces

Family history research experiences occur not only in the classroom or the archives but can be engaged with various types of media, such as television, through participation or as an observer. Researchers describe the combination of biography, (family) history and reality television through the use of various terms such as "biogravision" (Lynch, 2011) and "histotainment" (Donnelly & Shaw, 2020). History television, Hunt (2006) notes, is "telling stories about ourselves to ourselves" (p. 90). These stories or narratives reveal specific temporal and culturally influenced social conventions and norms, enabling contrast "to present-day circumstances, values and expectations" (Donnelly & Shaw, 2020, p. 2). As Donnelly and Shaw's (2020) study demonstrates, these narratives expose tensions between macro- and micro-narratives, the present-day morals and ethics with the past, and the entertainment factor of discovery with historical information.

In exposing tensions, individuals can (re)act, and media can be an opportunity to educate and draw parallels between the past and present in societal controversies and challenges (Edge, 2017; Scodari, 2013). Family historians engage with intersecting narratives of gender, class, patriarchy (Scodari, 2013,

[9] In formal education settings, researchers Foeman, Lawton, and Tyler prescribe the use of genetic ancestry testing as an educational tool to assist student discussions of race, ethnicity, and identity (Foeman et al., 2015; Foeman, 2012; Lawton & Foeman, 2017; Lawton et al., 2018; Tyler, 2009). These studies, while interesting, focus on school settings and are beyond the scope of this dissertation and, therefore, will not be further discussed.

2017), racism and slavery (Edge, 2017), and national identity (Evans, 2023; Evans, de Groot, & Stallard, 2023; Hunt, 2006).

The popular family history television show *Who Do You Think You Are?* (*WDYTYA*) is a successful example of marketing and programming. Airing since 2003 in the UK, it has resulted in almost 20 international versions, spin-offs and even spoofs (Evans, 2015). De Groot (2016) associates this popularity with a "concern with personal narratives" (p. 80). Despite its popularity, *WDYTYA* has faced criticism for creating unrealistic expectations (Lynch, 2011) and prioritising identity over all else (Hunt, 2006). While Evans (2015) acknowledges the challenges with limited time and space for television production, she criticises the focus on celebrity and the false impression that doing family history research is quick and easy (everything within one hour!). Furthermore, Lynch (2011) observes that the show does not provide concrete answers about "who" a person is but rather presents an easy-to-consume "narrative in which the shaping and editing of memory are acknowledged" (p. 116).

Who Do You Think You Are? does have a Swedish version, but the reality television programme *Allt för Sverige* (direct translation to English *Everything for Sweden*) focusing on Swedish Americans, is arguably more popular. It has won multiple awards and was brought back from the brink of cancellation due to public demand (Meter-Television, 2020; Shimoda & Shimoda, 2022). *Allt för Sverige* offers audiences "ordinary" (non-celebrity) participants, unlike *WDYTYA* and other reality history television shows. The examination of Swedish Americans' ancestry tourism experiences explored by Mehtiyeva and Prince (2020) creates a bridge between reality television and reality. They found that their "ordinary" participants were more drawn to everyday places and people rather than significant monuments and that participants reinforced their identity through these interactions.

In *Allt för Sverige,* Swedish Americans, who have not travelled to Sweden before, participate in various challenges and historical socio-cultural activities. Klareld (2022) and Hjorthén (2017) examine the final production aired in their respective studies. Hjorthén's (2017) study of seasons one to five claims that the activities and information imparted to contestants present a primordial discourse engaging with nationalist nostalgia and exclude newly arrived and descendants of immigrants. In agreeance, Klareld's (2022) study

of season nine points out the exclusion of indigenous and present-day narratives. Klareld (2022) asserts that ancestry and heritage are socially constructed and have multiple meanings—varying for each person.

This dissertation builds upon these studies, recognising the types of family historians and their contributions as skilled historical thinkers and lifelong learners who contribute valuable knowledge and experience and are active agents of public pedagogy.

By examining the selected family history research experiences as sites of learning and public places of pedagogy, I specifically seek and reflect on what acts as a pedagogical hinge or pivotal point(s). These hinges open transitional spaces where individuals engage, compare, and negotiate new external input, experiences and knowledge with their known inner self, previous knowledge, and experiences (Ellsworth, 2005; Sojot, 2018). This friction, the known versus unknown, demonstrates the process of learning or knowledge in the making.

Identity and Belonging

Studies examining the popularity of family history research most commonly emphasise the connection to a perceived search for identity and belonging. This focus is despite the varied diverse and complex motivations found in previous studies results (Abel, 2018; Barnwell, 2013, 2015; Bottero, 2015; Durie, 2017; Mehtiyeva & Prince, 2020; Prince, 2021). Edquist (2009) asserts that the "family history research boom" is simultaneously a result of the democratisation of historical culture [10] and the privatisation or individualisation connected to one's roots. Other motivations found by researchers include a general interest in history, an interest in solving cognitive puzzles as a way to

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[10] Some researchers argue that while there are perhaps more people engaged in consuming history, it is not considered equal to that of traditional cultural institutions (universities, museums, and formal schooling) and, therefore cannot be considered truly democratised (Ashton & Hamilton, 2010).

connect to the past, an inheritance (e.g., of research, medical conditions, or tangible objects), for recreation or as a hobby (Börnfors, 2001; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998; E. Shaw, 2017, 2020). Durie (2017) compared the desire of some to collect names on their family tree to stamp-collecting, a hobby rather than a life-changing activity. Shaw (2017, 2020) agrees with Durie's findings, contrasting with other researchers' findings, noting that while participants did confirm and alter their thoughts surrounding identity through their research, they did not *actively* seek this identity and belonging from the beginning. Instead, the research process confirmed this identity and sense of belonging.

A search for a sense of self and collective ethnic identity, Nash (2002) noted, was propelled by individuals' "desire for connection" to where they came from and how/where they belong (p. 37, 2008). She observes that while family history research is connected to personal reasons and family, it also "always intersects with wider cultural processes, politics, and social concerns" (Nash, 2002, p. 30). In other words, the narratives presented and interacted within family history research are contextually, historically, geographically, and temporally situated and impacted. Likewise, Barnwell (2013) highlights family history research as strategic and purposeful for claiming identity and civil rights narratives. Researchers Evans (2011, 2023), Bottero (2015), and Nash (2002), among others, accentuate family history research's capacity to disrupt, change assumptions and challenge dominant discourses about the past. This assertion contrasts and problematises Edquist's (2009) findings of Swedish family historians' lack of engagement with collective or political purposes as family historians are engaged with the broader cultural, political, and social processes consciously or unconsciously, critically or passively. Evans (2021, 2023) argues that family history has the power to break divisions, challenge assumed narratives, norms, and power structures, and contribute to awareness of public history should individuals choose to approach narratives of identity and belonging critically.

Through stories of belonging in family history, themes of nostalgia and authenticity are produced (Bennett, 2018). These stories include material objects, places, and claims of resemblances. The authentic identity is perceived by individuals as confirmed through belonging to the larger collective group offering security in unstable contexts. The individual's placement or connection in these tellings of family stories constructs their identity (Bennett, 2018). Moreover, it is ultimately the individual who chooses

their "authentic identity," rejecting those ancestors or narratives that do not match their "ideal" (Bottero, 2015; Zerubavel, 2012). De Groot (2016) observed the "strange experience" of family historians following a person throughout the archives only to discard them as unimportant. Family history research, according to de Groot (2016), "reinscrib[es] the importance of the 'ordinary' person, but only if they are 'important' to the user" (p. 79). These choices reveal prior knowledge, commitments, and influences (social, political, historical). Likewise, Guelke and Timothy (2008) assert that the "new family history" is crafted and not fixed with individuals experiencing a more expansive range of ethnic identities through increased acceleration, media sources, and hybridity that is relational, political, and editable.

Barclay and Koefoed (2021) note that cultural heritage passed down through the generations contains knowledge and emotional attachment linked to stories and narratives that (re)enforce identity. They reflect that while much research has pointed to the influence of intergenerational transfers (Hirsch, 2012; Ruin, 2019), individuals and groups are influenced by and negotiate these within a broader culture and knowledge. Stating:

> Family histories are never made in isolation from the wider culture, but in relation to other narratives, whether that is culturally significant ideas about what 'normal families' are or national histories that provide context for the experiences of our ancestors. (Barclay & Koefoed, 2021, p. 5)

The intersection of collective (e.g., nationalist, ethnic) identities and family histories inform and influence each other as identity negotiations and are framed by narratives told to and by individuals/institutions. These negotiations are influenced by context and choice, as Stallard and de Groot (2020) observe that family historians have the agency and the ability to challenge narratives as "truth seekers" and simultaneously have the agency to be "secret keepers."

A more recent addition in the globalised context that adds and challenges the idea of the construction of identity versus innate, embedded identity and belonging is genetic ancestry testing (GAT). Ancient DNA (aDNA), specifically Viking DNA related to the Nordics and Sweden, is a budding research field connected to family history research (Halewood & Hannam, 2001; Halink, 2022; Scully, Brown, & King, 2016; Strand & Källén, 2021). Some individuals in their GAT specifically are motivated to find evidence of their "Vikingness" (Strand & Källén, 2021). This fascination with genetic or

biological material, while more accessible, is not new. Welinder (2003), in his study, connects previous research movements to the interest in collecting DNA for the Human Genome Project. He recalls the 1800s measuring of skulls by Retzius (1796-1869) at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm and the subsequent 1900s blood index collection, including Lars Beckman's sampling of 2179 people (or 3.7% of the population) from Gotland with the intention to show they had the same blood type. Welinder (2003) also highlights Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Francesco Cavalli-Sforza's research questioning whether human life patterns are cultural or genetic. He gives the example of the lactose-eating, calm and mild "Scandinavians" who descended from the colonising and "fearsome" Vikings as cultural evolution (Welinder, 2003, p. 49). This problematically makes broad generalisations and theories of entire group populations, assuming all individuals to be the same with no alternative variables or contexts. Welinder (2003) concludes that ethnicity is a construction and argues that presenting the history of genes as the history of people, languages, and ethnic groups is problematic, misleading, and unethical.

Summary

Family historians are lifelong learners who critically engage and contribute to the understanding of history. There is a multitude of family history research experiences, and with evolving technology, digitalisation, and subsequent accessibility, these have the power to perpetuate problematic generalisations but also open opportunities for a more nuanced understanding of a larger collective.

There are multiple reasons why individuals engage in family history research. There is a recurring desire for a sense of belonging, connecting to living and deceased individuals (relatives and others) through choices made. Choices and putting the past in relation to the present and future have the potential to challenge and create friction while also enabling opportunities for the promotion of empathy, equality, and equity. As Arendt (1998) asserts, the context in which we act is beyond our control, and as all actions are negotiations of *inter*actions, we cannot fully predict or determine an outcome. Therefore, identity and belonging are subject to multiple factors and negotiations with a dynamic context and others' expectations, assumptions, and previous knowledge.

Framing the Discussion

This chapter establishes a framework for the discussion. It lays a foundation for understanding selected concepts, including narrative and historical narrative, learning and public pedagogy, identity (collective and self-identity), the past, public histories, and history use.

Narrative and Historical Narrative

Narrative is central to understanding life's attributed meanings, according to Ricœur and Valdes (1991), who emphasise that the interpretation of narrative is subjective to the reader rather than solely the producer of the text. While academics and everyday individuals understand the concept of narrative in numerous ways, I emphasise in this dissertation the narrative's communicative power to create meaning and organise experiences and understanding. This functional narrative is active in the hermeneutic circle and Gadamer's (2004/1960) fusion of horizons. The individual interacting with the narrative from their position, their previous knowledge and perspectives engages with the presented narrative as a new "part" of the "whole" that expands or alters the "reader's" vision. However, it is the text's "failure to deliver" the presumed whole or "complete truth" that results in a continuation or a revisitation/restart of the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 2004/1960; Suddick, Cross, Vuoskoski, Galvin, & Stew, 2020, p. 3). [11] In continuing the cycle of revisiting and adapting new knowledge and experiences, the "reader" gains a greater understanding of the producer of the text(s) and the phenomenon manifested (Suddick et al., 2020).

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[11] This is why some theorists argue for the hermeneutic circle to be considered a spiral rather than a closed circle, as the process never ends but does gain information and alter that which is "known," thus never returning to the initial starting point of the circle but continuing the process in parallel (Osborne, 1991).

Family history research constructs and is constructed by narratives. The narratives that individuals and institutions repeat are subjective experiences embedded and related to a temporal timeline. It is important to remember that what the receiver has understood and gathered as meaning is not necessarily what the speaker intended. Thus, while the narrative "becomes public" in the telling, the "lived experience remains private," or in other words, how the individual interprets and understands is an internal experience (Ricœur & Valdes, 1991, p. 4). Family historians demonstrate this interplay between public and private and exemplify the power of personal narratives to bring "life" to historical events. As Tuan (1977) argues, the ordinary place suddenly becomes extraordinary through connection. Those historical events or periods that individuals previously perceived as abstract, such as famine or war, become closer and more personal to the family historian whose grandparents suffered and with whom they now empathise. This fusion of horizons is a reflective hermeneutical experience that asks the individuals engaged, "How has their perspective of the world changed because of this new knowledge?" (Ricœur & Valdes, 1991, p. 28). The fragmented past and its meaning become rehabilitated through the use and engagement of narratives.

The presented narratives of the three chosen family history research experiences offer what Rüsen (1987b) identifies as "a process of making sense of the experience of time" (p. 88). By examining the historical narratives and the negotiations by participants, I attempt to provide evidence of the dynamic processes of historical consciousness that is "more reasoning and arguing to practical life" (Rüsen, 1987b, p. 96). The discipline of History is traditionally closely tied to the idea of so-called facts, but this is problematic as it rejects the possibilities of alternative histories and perspectives. Family history, as part of the larger project of public history, allows for multiple voices and histories to emerge and connect to a broader historical context. Therefore, I have chosen to engage with Rüsen's typology of historical narratives that are not mutually exclusive and enable an examination of functions and possible ramifications, resulting in a greater understanding of how humans orientate and position themselves. Historical narration, according to Rüsen (1987b), has three qualities: it is tied to the medium of memory, allowing a comparison of the past and the present; it organises the unity of temporal past experiences, present intentions, and expectations for the future; and it serves to establish permanence and stability of identity of the authors and listeners to establish in the external and internal temporal changes (p. 89).

Rüsen's (1987b) four categories of historical narratives are relayed in Table 1 *Typology of historical narration* and are as follows: Traditional narratives affirm the status quo of cultural patterns, reminding the individual of origins and genealogy to provide legitimacy. There is a sense that what is, has always been, and always will be. Exemplary narratives suggest a regularity, a model to follow or avoid. Critical narratives emphasise deviations and rejections of traditions, rules, principles, and the given identity. Genetical narratives focus on transformation, with the only permanence being that there is change and a process of learning to become, a process of *Bildung*.

Table 1 Typology of Historical Narration

	memory of	continuity as	identity by	sense of time
traditional narrative	*origins* constituting present forms of life	*permanence* of originally constituted forms of life	*affirming* pre-given cultural patterns of self-understanding	time gains the sense of *eternity*
exemplary narrative	*cases* demonstrating applications of general rules of conduct	*validity of rules* covering temporally different of life	*generalizing* experiences of time to rules of conduct	time gains the sense of *spatial extension*
critical narrative	*deviations* problematizing present forms of life	*alteration* of given ideas of continuity	*denying* given patterns of identity	time gains the sense of being an object of *judgment*
genetical narrative	*transformations* of alien forms of life into proper ones	*development* in which forms of life change in order to establish their permanence dynamically	*mediating* permanence and change to a process of self-definition	time gains the sense of *temporalization*

Note. Reprinted from "Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason" by J. Rüsen 1987b, History and Theory, 26 (4), p.91.

Learning and Public Pedagogy

Public pedagogies view the everyday and public, informal spaces and discourses as "innately and pervasively pedagogical" (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010). Some criticise public pedagogy for not accounting for differentiated access and demonising public forms of education as opposing ideological forces (Savage, 2010). [12] The various case studies in this dissertation can be perceived as more or less public accessible spaces. Case study one, *Allt för Sverige,* is created for public consumption and the programme participants. Swedish Television SVT, the Swedish public service television company, broadcasts the programme and is thus accessible to anyone with a television or computer with an internet connection.

Companies often promote genetic ancestry tests (GAT) as an individual endeavour. However, the results connect the individual to "matches" or distant relatives, and often, to receive details, the individual must first agree to make their results available to others, in other words, not private. That said, it is accessible only to those who sign up and pay the initial fee for the test. Non-formal learning institutions and groups offer family history research courses. Their websites and newsletters advertise these courses as open to all. Everyone is allowed to participate; however, participants must pay a registration fee.

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[12] Questioning what "public" means in unequal access to social capital and differing socio-economic contexts, Savage (2010) states the importance of recognising the multiplicity of the "public" pedagogy concept. In this dissertation, "Public" is not viewed as exclusively the opposite of "private" but instead acknowledges it as the availability and existence of pedagogical space for those who have access and engage in it. As some have argued, the concept of the public is burdened with many meanings (see, for example, Habermas, 1991/1962). Roberts and Steiner (2010) give the example of the public square. It is defined as public as theoretically accessible to the broader public/all people, but it could also be argued it is "public" due to its financial upkeep and ownership by "the people"/public (or the relatively few who are elected/hired to be representative of the public). While public pedagogical studies highlight the complexity and continued debates of "public/s," this dissertation does not have the space to do this debate justice.

There are cost-free options for individual participation on specific days for extra family history research support. All three cases occur in social settings where individuals negotiate their personal endeavours within a broader public collective.

Where learning takes place is addressed by public pedagogy. In this dissertation, I understand and present learning as a process engaged and negotiated through experience. As Ellsworth (2005) describes, pedagogy is a process of learning, of knowledge in the making. Spencer, Offidani-Bertrand, Harris, and Velez (2020) depict learning as navigation by individuals of "diverse spaces and places" who then develop meaning about and engage through "culturally mediated interactional processes" (p. 45). Likewise, Tuan (1977) considers rational thought and human emotion, while often perceived as opposing states, as part of an "experiential continuum" that presents "two [complimentary] ways of knowing" (p. 10). This complimentary and comparative learning process echoes Gadamer's (2004/1960) presentation of the fusion of horizons and hermeneutic perspective of preconceptions and knowledge in negotiation with newly introduced narratives and experiences.

How we view the world is impacted by what we have previously learned through our experiences. Learning includes "the expression of intergenerationally determined patterns of development and social experience [that] may be cultural in nature" (Spencer et al., 2020, p. 44). What knowledge is considered "common sense" or essential for some people is entirely foreign to others. We are in a never-ending cycle of being taught and learning, which "maintains dominant practices and offers spaces for their critique and reimagination" (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010, p. 349). Public pedagogies or learning, which occurs in the spaces, places, and communication beyond formal schooling, is essential to constructing and learning self and socio-cultural structures.

Family history research as "a predominantly self-taught pedagogical practice" is an example of public pedagogy (Clark, 2016b; Evans, 2023; E. Shaw, 2017, p. 51). These scholars' findings asserted that family historians often seek further information and historical context to understand the actions of people in the past, thus showing historical consciousness, thinking and empathy (Clark, 2016b; Evans, 2020, 2023; Evans et al., 2023; E. Shaw, 2017). In other words, individuals' learning, and educational experiences took place within "multiple, shifting and overlapping sites of learning that exist within the organized social relations of everyday life" (Simon, 1995, p. 109), inclusive

of popular culture and media (E. Shaw, 2017, p. 50). This dissertation examines family history research experiences as public pedagogical spaces influencing participants, adapting, and modifying knowledge by negotiating presented narratives. Each family history research experience in this study presents participants (including myself) with experiences and knowledge that are then compared, measured, and either rejected, accepted, or modified. This process of traversing between the points of what is known and what is not is knowledge in the making.

In Blom (2012), I discussed the spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal/participatory educational forms, often described as a linear continuum. I argued instead for an overlapping and complimentary understanding of these forms interacting and creating opportunities for alternative learning, as seen in Figure 2's adapted model.
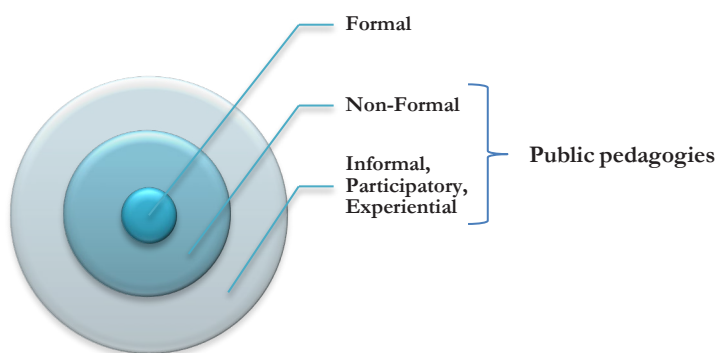
Figure 2. Embedded Perspectives of Educational Forms

Note. Adapted from "The transmission of indigenous culture: an analysis of policy implementation and reflection of non-formal education and Sami community perspectives in Sweden." (p.12) By K. Blom. 2012, Stockholm University.

Formal education, which takes place in schools with a set curriculum, can be understood as a focal point, a carefully curated set of knowledge, but does not comprise everything an individual learns. Non-formal education is any educational activity organised outside formal schooling, frequently at the grassroots levels reflecting community needs and desires, and perceived as more democratic, decentralised, and learner centred (Blom, 2012; Kidd & Colletta, 1980). This form of education in Sweden is often associated with the

folkbildning movement (education for the folk or general population) that emerged from the social women's rights, labour rights, temperance, and free church movements and is still prevalent today. Case study three is an example of courses developed through this *folkbildning* movement, emphasising its longevity, continued development, and popularity.

In their consolidative literature review of the term, Sandlin, O'Malley, and Burdick (2011) noted that public pedagogy, despite its initial use "to describe citizenship education within and beyond schools," is contemporarily used to address various sites of learning "including popular culture and everyday life, informal institutions, and dominant cultural discourses" (p. 339). Public pedagogy describes the spaces, places, languages, and actions of education and learning beyond the formal institutional school. This definition does not simply mean all activities outside the physical building, as often nonformal and informal education activities can occur within a formal school's physical plant.

Informal education can occur in all spaces and at any time. It is learning that occurs incidentally or unintentionally from the learner's perspective (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023). In other words, it is not explicitly planned as an educational activity but is experiential. As Dewey (1916/2018) emphasises, education is a means for social continuity and the continuation of shared understanding. Dewey (1916/2018) argues that "the process of living together," communication, and social life are educative by nature but cautions that the automatisation or becoming routine causes a loss of educative power (p. 8). Dewey differentiates between the broad educational process and formal schooling. He says, "There is the standing danger that the material of formal instruction will be merely the matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life-experience," thus, one of the gravest challenges for educational philosophy is to keep "a proper balance between the informal and formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education" (Dewey, 1916/2018, p. 11). Dewey's (1916/2018) assertion that "every social arrangement is educative in effect" (p. 12) reflects Tuan's (1977) interpretation of experience as learning and underscores the importance of examining the non-formal and informal spaces of learning.

One of the key features of public pedagogical spaces in Ellsworth's (2005) understanding is connected to Winnicott's (1982/2005) notion of transitional space as the time and place in which the internal self is compared, contrasted,

and negotiated with the presented "other" or "not me." It is also described as a "zone of historical indetermination that allows room for experimentation" (Rajchman, 200b, p.14 cited in Ellsworth page 11). Public pedagogical spaces present what Ellsworth (2005) calls a pedagogical hinge or pivot point that invites participants to engage, dispute, and converse with the presented information and stimulus, allowing space for interference, friction, and resonation. The pedagogical hinge contrasts the internal and external, making visible the complexity of permeable and fuzzy boundaries of binaries such as public and private, self and other, personal and political (Ellsworth, 2005).

Since the 1990s, public pedagogies, non/informal education, have increasingly emerged as a focus for educational studies, but the term originated in education research as early as 1894 (Sandlin et al., 2011). Its scholarship argues that teaching, learning, and curricula beyond formal restraints may have more influence and potential to produce critical and sociocultural learning (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2009).

Burdick and Sandlin (2013) identify three research streams emphasising transference, relationship, or rupture in public pedagogy. The first, arguably the most prolific, emphasises transferring knowledge and learning as a rational and humanistic property and aims to understand the production and emancipation of the individual and cultural identificatory processes. [13] Giroux (2004) is associated with this stream. The second stream, which this dissertation ascribes to, emphasises the phenomenological relationship between learning and the intersection of subject and object of pedagogy, where learning occurs as active and embodied. This stream is often associated with Ellsworth's (2005) and Springgay's (2011) work. They challenge the

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[13] While many use the concepts Critical Pedagogy and Public Pedagogy synonymously, they are not the same (Charman & Dixon, 2021). Critical pedagogy focuses on questions relating to the constitutions and workings of power and emancipation and argues the use of pedagogy as a means for agency (Giroux, 2000, 2004). Public pedagogy is a separate field and, while not focused on power specifically, does not dismiss it either; instead, it highlights the complexity of socio-cultural contexts and the agency of individuals (Charman & Dixon, 2021).

notion of a unitary meaning, asserting that pedagogy work is "always in process, always becoming, it generates new forms and understandings with each affective experience (thus in time and duration)" (Springgay, 2011, p. 653). The third stream emphasises the posthuman and understands public pedagogy as taking place in the rupturing of the "self" and understandings of previous knowledge with encounters with the radical "other." Wallin (2022a, 2022b) is an example of this stream of research. There are similarities and overlapping research between these three streams.

As this dissertation examines the relationship between presented narratives of family history research experiences and their participants, it is appropriate to follow Ellsworth and Springgay's theoretical thinking of the embodied and in-process learning experiences of public pedagogy.

Identity Negotiations

In this dissertation, I examine how individuals position and understand their identity in the context of their historical understanding of the past, in other words, their historical consciousness of their family history. It is not about who people think they are, but who they are related to their knowledge and awareness of history, and where they fit in the continual timeline and narrative of the past. As individuals engage and learn more in family history research, their perception of their own and their ancestors' identities, belonging, and actions can alter.

According to Eriksen (1996), identity is a personal choice, subjective to where you are, your experiences and connections juxtaposed to contexts and company. There is no old or new identity or myth; all are new transformations of raw material. Identity unites and splits as it creates boundaries for the Other. It is not about who one is but how and why one associates one's identity with something. Eriksen (1996) claims that the conditions for constructing one's identity today are not the same as in the past, pointing to globalisation and technological advancements as causes for increased mobility and quantity of people for comparison.

Identity is a complex concept exponentially multiplied and divided by social, political, and cultural influences. That said, while the individual's understanding and expression of identity are in focus, these identities are interwoven with(in)

other constructions of identities, such as place identity and collective/group identities. Individuals at any given time have a myriad of social identities, and ethnic identities are but one of these. As seen in the previous sections, globalisation has created not only a more connected interdependent world; it can increase existential questioning, lead to a deterritorialisation of identity (Rosenmann, Reese, & Cameron, 2016; Scholte, 2000), and a deterioration of the quality of interaction resulting in isolation (Hier, 2003). Individual identities are challenged by globalisation in the understanding of place and belonging, moving beyond communities of proximity to imagined and virtual communities influenced by diasporas and migration (Anderson, 2006; Buckler, 2017; Mavroudi, 2007). Reiterating the influence of globalisation and technological advancements increasing the sheer amount of interaction and individuals to compare themselves to Eriksen (1996) claims that insecurity at the foundation of the search for one's identity was not equally present in the past. The expansion and deterritorialisation of identity lead to increased awareness of happenings worldwide and cause us to reflect, compare, and assess whether these happenings matter to us as individuals.

Collective Identity

The concept of belonging to a collective identity is salient to this dissertation as family history research attempts to tie the individual to a broader group, familial, ethnical/racial, or national. Barth emphasises that group boundaries are constructed and maintained through interactions, comparisons, and contrasts with others (Barth, 1969, 1993). The contents within these groups, the cultural stuff, Barth notes, are carried over and have frequent commonality between groups. Others, such as Conzen (1991, 1992), Conzen, Gerber, Morawska, Pozzetta, and Vecoli (1992), and Blanck (2006), argue that cultural contents are interesting to examine even if there is overlap between different ethnic groups. These researchers agree that cultural contents (such as

language, flags, celebrations, and food) are key symbols in establishing, reinforcing, and performing identity. [14]

Personal understanding and usage of the past or history are tied to identity and belonging, creating an inclusive/exclusive "we." The stories or narratives of history are essential to maintaining and cultivating imagined communities inclusive of nation-states (Anderson, 2006; A. Eriksen, 1999; T. H. Eriksen, 2002; Karlsson, 2014). Through these stories, individuals are connected not only to their present place of existence but to the places of their ancestors (geographical, socio-economical, class structures, temporal, et cetera).

The imagined community of a nation is not only constructed through their shared use of culture. Many nations equate nationality to ethnicity, drawing on the idea of common blood, building the myth of the "fatherland" or "motherland," claiming indigenous rights, and asserting legitimacy through ancestral bloodlines (Anderson, 2006; T. H. Eriksen, 2002; Zerubavel, 2012). This assertion of ethnic-based nationality excludes immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Despite the official governed groupings, individuals have the agency to include themselves within the boundaries of an ethnic group identity, creating a connection to their personal and felt identities (the subjective sense of one's situation, continuality, and character) through their narratives (Barth, 1969; Goffman, 1963). Although, the whole group may not always accept this assertion. [15]

While certain behaviours and cultural expectations exclude specific identities, the concept of "identity shopping" reflects the myriad of possibilities and increased flexibility of a globalised society (Chriss, 2015; Mathews, 2002). Tracing one's roots to a "foggy ancient time" based upon myths perpetuated

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[14] See Ortner (1973) for further discussion on key symbols.
[15] While some may argue that the inclusion of multitudinous identities leads toward a new tolerant, inclusive society, a new postmodern psyche emerges through neofascism, and the myth of the nation, tribe and religion continues to lay claim to the psychological wholeness of individuals (Billig, 1995).

and transferred from a broader social context is described as the means to anchor personal and national identities (T. H. Eriksen, 2002). This is reflective of the idea that individuals use history so that "the contingencies of the past are made to fit into a narrative that provides its carrier with a sense of belonging and identity through which s/he *can act*" (Ruin, 2019, p. 807 emphasis added; Rüsen, 2005). In other words, individuals use their agency to construct identity by positioning themselves to the historical past. This interaction and negotiation of collective identity is indicative and intertwined with the individual or self-identity, as in the following section.

Individual or Self-identity

Individual identity or self-identity is what many argue family historians are seeking. Social identity, for Goffman (1990), is what a person draws from and refers to what knowledge they have culturally available. Hochschild (1997) refers to this knowledge as a cultural dictionary that is agreed upon by the dominant authorities/culture and dictates what is intuitive, acceptable, and available, often delivered through official narratives. These cultural dictionaries serve as a frame of analysis and measure for an individual's emotions and behaviours. While this frame may dictate cultural norms, the individual has the agency to use, deviate from, and actively utilise their knowledge to circumvent the prescribed behaviours and beliefs.

In defining self and other, what Winnicott (1982/2005) terms a transitional phenomenon traversing space and time, the interior of the mind, brain and body encounter the exterior other in interaction. Similar to Barth's (1969, 1993) understanding of the construction and maintenance of group ethnic boundaries, self-identity is constructed and adapted through comparison, interaction, and the negation of self (that which is not me).

Narrative Identity Theory differentiates between identity as "sameness" and "self," viewing identity as the point which fuses history and fiction:

> a) knowledge of the self is an interpretation; b) the interpretation of the self, in turn, finds narrative, among other signs and symbols, to be a privilege mediation; c) this mediation borrows from history as much as fiction, making the life story a fictive history or, if you prefer, an historical fiction, comparable to those biographies of great men where both history and fiction are found blended together. (Ricœur, 1991, p. 73)

"Sameness" implies the continuality of the individual moving through time may change in form, but the "essence," the DNA, remains the same throughout life. At the same time, the "self" described in Ricœur's quote becomes a fusion of the life story and the fictive history. It is this fusion that Winnicott (1982/2005) would call the transitional space, and Goffman (1990) would see as the active interaction to discover and answer the existential question of who am I? The negotiation of identity in the in-between interaction and point of fusion or blending of horizons reflects the public pedagogical research stream of interaction.

Individuals in this study engage with cultural dictionaries presented in narratives and contexts in which they are immersed. In case study two, the participant is me, who critically reflects on my genetic ancestry testing results. In the case of studies one and three, the participants describe their negotiations with identity, their experiences, and interpretations, and narrate a life story that engages with the transitional spaces of family history research experiences.

These negotiations are analysed through Hall's (1973, 2006) encoding/decoding model to visualise the mass communication process. Hall's (1973) model demonstrates that meanings and ideas, skills and knowledge frame the production process and that it is not a closed system but draws on various topics, events, images, and definitions from the broader socio-cultural and political system in which they exist. Hall (1973) emphasises that the message produced "must first be perceived as a meaningful discourse and meaningful de-coded" to have any effect or use such as to entertain, influence, instruct, or persuade (p. 3). These uses by the receiver or the participant in my studies frame their understandings in structures of understanding that are socially, historically, and culturally influenced. I have redrawn and adjusted Hall's model in Figure 3 to reflect the original of 1973 and the focus of this dissertation project. I have changed "Programme as meaningful discourse" to reflect the focus on the message as narrative and added "social, cultural and historical" to better define knowledge frameworks. Social frameworks are the interrelations of individuals and groups. The cultural frameworks, shared within a social context, dictate socio-cultural norms and (often silent) rules, influencing interrelations. Historical frameworks refer to past events and people and how these contribute to, influence, and inform these cultural frameworks and interrelations in the present. Moreover, I have changed Hall's

"Structures of production" and "technical infrastructure" to simply "structures and infrastructure (analogue and digital)" to reflect the diversification of contemporary times.
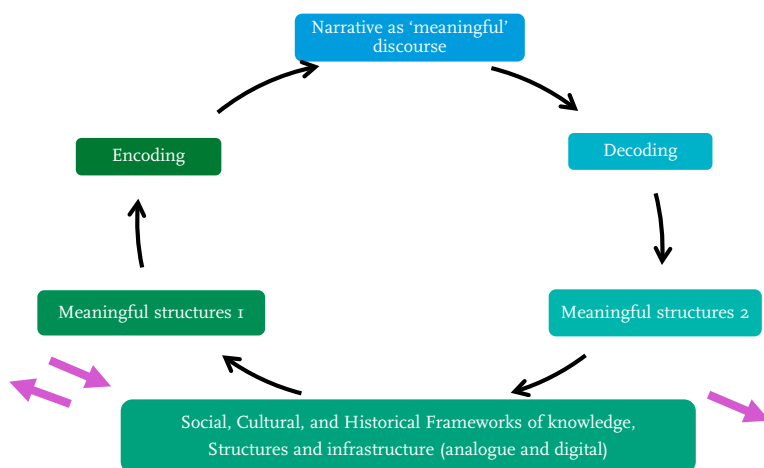
Figure 3. Model of Encoding and Decoding

Note. Adapted from "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" [Discussion Paper] by S. Hall 1973, CCCS Stencilled Occasional Papers, Birmingham. p.4

The Past, Public Histories, and History Use

Family history embodies the popularity of reimagining and searching for the past, which some perceive as a response to specific external events or political contexts (Benjamin, 2003; Boym, 2001; Wagner-Pacifici, 2017). Others claim it is introspective and reflects an awareness of one's mortality (T. H. Eriksen, 1996). There is a sense of obligation to fulfil and continue duties for the dead and the desire for one's legacy prosperity (Ruin, 2018). While the past is pluralistic and chaotic, History is traditionally depicted as specific, moralistic, and well-organised. Although revisionism has become more common, introducing various new voices and alternative narratives (e.g., women, minorities, postcolonial), these are often perceived as a side (not primary) narrative. In some cases, introducing an alternative primary narrative creates a new centre (or focus) and, as a result, creates new peripheries (Azoulay, 2019).

The past as a construction does not have value on its own, but only the meaning people attribute to it. This attribution, managing and treasuring some things as heritage while rejecting others, is in relation to the societal context of power relations. That relation, Harvey (2001) asserts, is a cultural process of "hand-in-hand transformation rather than one of straight cause and effect" (p. 335). It is this understanding of the past, history, and heritage that this present study takes. I have designed the following conceptual model in Figure 4 to visualise the chosen historical concepts used in this dissertation and how these relate to each other. The model moves from the temporally all-encompassing (and arguably often ambiguous) concept of the past to increasingly more specific and narrower content-embedded rectangles. By conceptualising these terms as embedded in the past, I attempt to visualise what Becker (1932) called the "two histories: the actual series of events that once occurred; and the ideal series that we affirm and hold in memory" (p. 222). The outermost box I have labelled as "the past" is unchanged, absolute but impossible to know in its entirety, and while we learn continually more about histories (as depicted in the conceptual model as the histories we know– alternative and otherwise), it is never the whole of the past. Participants in family history research experiences do not simply consume histories and representations of the past but are co-creators in the retelling and contribute to shaping historical consciousness, meaning, and understanding of themselves and others. Family history research is a reflective practice, negotiated and connected to the present context.

Public histories occur beyond academic walls, history for, of, and often by the general public. These include various adjacent histories such as cultural, social, local, community, and family histories. The academic discipline of History presents the narrowest point of this conceptual model. Institutions select and curate this History to create or construct a standard collective narrative for a nation. In this dissertation, I focus on public history representations in the form of family history and agree with Ashton and Hamilton (2010) that there is a need to connect the History taught with the histories that are a configuration of social knowledge and activity of publics.

The past A general term for everything and everyone that has occured, existed, remembered and forgotten (officially and unofficially), before the specific point in time that is now.

histories

-accounts of the past including events, people, places, and things. Connected and engaging with cultural heritage; tangible, and intangible official, and unofficially sanctioned.

Public histories

-history beyond the academic walls. Intrested in representations of the past in the present and how it is presented to publics. Includes several adjacent, emerging histories that contest and seek to complement and problematize hegemonic ideals and narratives of the past.

cultural history

local/community histories

social history

family history

History

-capitalised, refers to the academic discipline and contents (e.g., curriculum, textbooks) traditionally focused on larger global and national level events. Contested relevance as evidenced by the 'history wars' in various countries.

Figure 4. Historical Concepts

Teaching without understanding the preexisting historical consciousness and activities can result in misconceptions of the effect of education, the purpose of history, and a limited understanding of modes for understanding the past. The following model, Figure 5, reprinted from Cauvin (2021, p. 23), depicts how the various parts of what he calls the public history tree of knowledge are connected. The roots depict the various forms of historical collections, such as archives, physical sites and objects (tangible heritage), and oral histories. These are interpreted in the trunk and described by the individual who interprets them. Various media, such as schools, re-enactments, radio, television, videogames, and tours, convey this interpretation, which individuals and organisations use for various purposes, such as to educate, authenticate, create identity, empower, and political means. These uses and communicative mediums are not exclusive but are multiple and overlap despite the static depiction of the model.
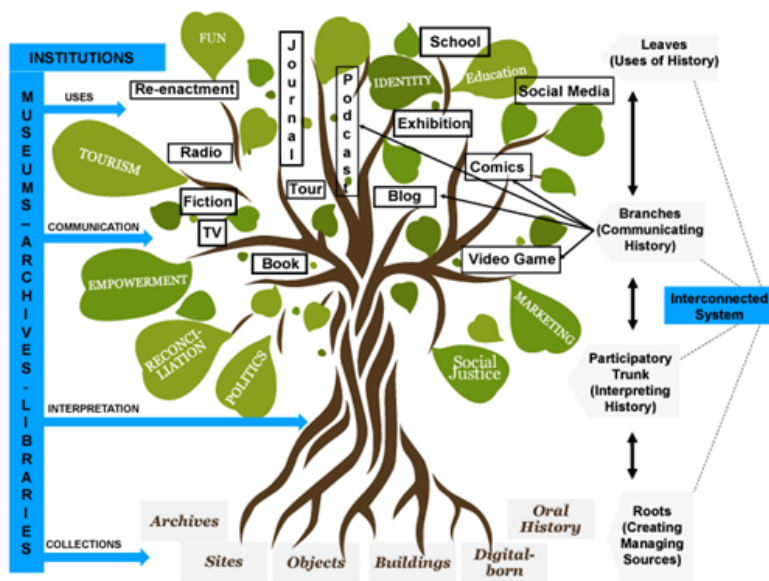
Figure 5. Public History Tree of Knowledge

Note. Reproduced from "New Field, Old Practices: Promises and Challenges of Public History" by T. Cauvin 2021, Magazén International Journal for Digital and Public Humanities 2(1). p.23.

According to Cauvin (2021), public history is built upon old historical practices while reflecting "a changing context in the ways we preserve, research, interpret, study, communicate, use and consume the past" (p. 14). The international nature of the field spanning across the globe creates complexity for a once-size-fits-all definition. Cauvin (2021) acknowledges the limitations of visualising the complexity of the historical process in his model (Figure 5) but argues for its practical use in visualising how these various parts of history interact and are dependent on each other.

I use this model to demonstrate, relatively simply, how individuals and institutions, through their interpretations/presentations, negotiations, and uses of history, create and are provided opportunities to impact and change perceptions of the past. As the model, Figure 5, demonstrates, historical knowledge and narratives influence family historians' perspectives, and in turn, their interpretations of these historical narratives influence the understanding and meanings of history forward. The trunk, representative of

the participant, illustrates the two-way communication and influence, demonstrating how historical consciousness and narratives develop and shape reciprocally.

Family historians commonly use trees to illustrate connections between ancestors, generations, kinship relations, and how the past connects to the present. Due to the simplicity of the family tree, it is challenging to represent one's ancestral past in its entirety, and its format lacks the space to include in-depth information. Therefore, family historians often have several family trees and supplementary information stored in other forms.

While academics commonly have defined historical consciousness as interpreting the past to understand the present and anticipate the future (Rüsen, 1987a, 2005, 2012), I ascribe to Thorp's (2016) extended definition focusing on the extent of individuals' awareness and understanding of these temporal (inter)relations. Thorp (2016) argues that the present context and knowledge impact our view of the past. Thus, reflecting the underlying epistemological and ontological understanding adopted by this dissertation in the fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2004/1960) and interactional knowledge in the making (Ellsworth, 2005). This choice of extended definition attempts to avoid what Seixas (2012) has warned of assuming historical consciousness as achieved through cultural development, interaction, and education, focusing on a problematic Eurocentric model of progress, and excluding non-Western ideals and modes of understanding.

Historical consciousness, Gadamer and Fantel (1975) emphasise, is reflexive and does not simply accept accounts of the past as finite truth but instead reflects and contextualises it through interpretation to observe "where it took root in order to see the significance and relative value" (p.9). Individuals (and institutions) construct the past through the lens of contemporary knowledge and sociocultural context in the present. The use of history (*historiebruk)* is this process of constructing historical consciousness or awareness manifested.

Research widely acknowledges the use of history in the present. The field of *historiebruk*—the use of history, while discussed elsewhere in the world became more widespread in Sweden after Karlsson's (1999) work on the use of history in post-communist Russia. The use of history or *historiebruk* can be understood as an analytical tool or approach to perceive how the past is used in various ways to "create meaning, orientate the present and influence the

future" (Thorp, 2016, p. 25). Researchers in Sweden, such as Aronsson (2004), have further developed Karlsson's (1999) work. Aronsson (2004) asserts that one could comprehend the use of history as a foundational concept similar to the concepts of "social" or "culture." Approaching the use of history as an underpinning concept provides a rich perspective lens to this dissertation to examine and lend to discussions of intersectionality. According to Aronsson (2004), the use of history is visible in everyday banal and formal activities, noting that individuals engage in a dynamic process connecting a space of experience with a horizon of expectation to construct meaning with a purpose. Research on family history often assumes this use of history is implicit rather than exploring historical use explicitly.

While history describes the past, the remaining traces in the present are known as heritage. Heritage studies are often associated with the authorised heritage discourse focusing on managing a heritage canon and charging the present generation to care for and preserve future generations' education and common identity based on the past (Smith, 2006). This view of heritage is challenged and criticised for using the rhetorical device of *the* past as a synonym for the heritage of a dominant or ruling elite. Thus, causing disengagement from what Smith argues is the real cultural work of what the past does as a heritage for individuals and communities. That is like history, fostering feelings of belonging and continuality (Lowenthal, 1985) but with the addition of a sense of material reality and a sense of physicality (Smith, 2006). Family history research combines heritage and history to construct a more comprehensive picture of the past. Examining family history research gives one better insight into how individuals relate to people, places, and things from the past.

For clarity of definitions, with the risk of oversimplifying, this dissertation comprehends history as a telling of stories or narratives of the past. While not all stories or narratives are histories, all histories are narratives. I identify the application of these narratives in the present through how individuals use history, for example, to authenticate an identity or social standing or to debate a previously held conception of the past. Culture is what individuals and groups use, do, and have; it includes cultural heritage—cultural remnants of the past passed down in the present. Heritage is what remains in the present from the past, including both material and immaterial, officially sanctioned (through legislation) and unofficial, that can be used conservatively or

critically with the power to (re)define the past, (re)create social relations, values, and meanings about the past, present (and arguably, the future) (Smith, 2006).

Most importantly, heritage is a process of creating and attributing value to activities, things, and places. Not created nor treated equally, one thing, place, or activity may have a high value for one individual or group, while another may dismiss the same as inconsequential. The officially sanctioned or conserved heritage is deemed meaningful by the institutional governing bodies, but these are not unquestioningly accepted, as seen through the recent tearing down of monuments. Thus, the value of heritage (tangible and intangible) is subjective and dynamic and changes through time and space.

Family historians use history to tell, consume, and process historical narratives. These narratives include various aspects of (cultural) heritage as it engages, values, uses, and collects remnants from the past in the present. Family history research uses archives and traditional forms of research but also includes oral histories and public/widespread knowledge and has an emotional and experiential quality that simply a "retelling of the past" does not. As Smith reflects on her study with Waanyi women, heritage is:

> being in place, renewing memories and associations, sharing experiences … to cement present and future social and familial relationships. Heritage wasn't only about the past—though it was that too—it also wasn't just about material things—though it was that as well–heritage was a process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present. (Smith, 2006, p. 1)

This act of communication, the discourse, the narrative of memories and knowledge that individuals and groups pass between them is how we "use, reshape, and recreate to help us make sense of and understand not only who we 'are' but also who we want to be" (Smith, 2006, p. 2). Discourse organises how knowledge is constructed and is reproduced through narratives. Examining the discourse and process (actions) of heritage and the use of history in family history can "simultaneously draw on and naturalise certain narratives and cultural and social experiences," highlighting the embedded "range of assumptions about [its] innate and immutable cultural values" (Smith, 2006, p. 4).

Harrison (2012) resonates with this proposition of examining the discourse and actions of heritage in his dialogical model. His model emphasises that heritage is less about the past and more about our relationship with the present and the future, as demonstrated by the active process of assembling objects, places and practices that (potentially) have value for the future. Thus, with the use of history and reflecting family history research, Harrison's dialogical model proposes heritage as:

> emerging from the relationship between people, objects, places and practices and that does not distinguish between or prioritise what is 'natural' and what is 'cultural' but is instead concerned with the various ways in which humans and non-humans are linked by chains of connectivity and work together to keep the past alive in the present for the future. (Harrison, 2012, pp. 4–5)

The model Harrison proposes takes the critical approach necessary to distinguish the meaning of the constantly evolving and slippery heritage concept by examining its evoked context. In doing so, he provides a valuable interpretation of the intersections of social, commercial, and political values and the balance of power and knowledge. In this dissertation, family history research is participated and experienced in varied contexts. The three case studies highlighted in this dissertation aspire to engage with this concept of heritage and the use of history as interconnecting and interdisciplinary. Accordingly, it allows for a complex, nuanced examination of the relationship between the past, present, and the desired future, as well as the interactions between humans, non-humans, and the environment. Heritage, specifically cultural heritage, and its role in the use of history is crucial to understanding and framing family history research.

Methods and Methodology

This chapter reflects on the research design and methods of the three case studies and how these relate to the overarching aim of this doctoral dissertation. I briefly present the data collection and analysis of the three case studies, followed by a description of the ethical considerations taken.

Research Design and Selection

This study examines the narratives presented and interacted within family history research experiences. The first case study examines participants' experiences of presented narratives from popular family history television, *Allt för Sverige*. The second case study examines and compares the narratives presented by genetic ancestry testing results (GAT). The third case study examines how participants of family history research courses in Sweden narrate their participation, learning, the past, and selves.

I explicitly chose the design of this research to explore and demonstrate the multitude of experiences and places of learning provided by family history research. While previous studies have examined some attributes or offerings, such as family history television programmes (e.g., Hunt, 2006) and historical consciousness and public pedagogy (e.g., E. Shaw, 2017), these focused on one family history experience. De Groot (2016) likewise examined the consumption of the historical and heritage in popular culture, providing numerous examples, including family history. However, I focus on three selected family history research experiences that provide a more detailed perspective of this specific interest and the variety of available learning activities. The methods I chose for each case study reflect my desire to acquire participant perspectives and examine recurring narratives. Table 2, "Case Studies' Methods," presents an overview of the case studies, and a more comprehensive description follows.

Table 2 Case Studies' Methods

Case	Sample	Data Collection	Theoretical framework	Analysis framework	Research Questions
One	16 in total prior contestants from *Allt för Sverige* (Eight female/ eight male) Ages ranging from 20s–70s. -Questionnaires 14: 7 F/ 7M -of which 1 M and 1 F did not do interviews -Interviews 13: 6 F/7 M of which 1M did not do the questionnaire)	An online questionnaire was followed by semi-structured interviews (online) using photo-elicitation.	Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical concepts of "frontstage," "backstage," and "script."	Hall's (2006) model of encoding/ decoding to organise narratives in three categories: confirmed, negotiated, or opposed (Hall, 2006, pp. 172–173)	How do participants negotiate the presented scripted identity of *Allt för Sverige?*
Two	Analyses received results from DNA tests (percentages explanations, deep maps) from Ancestry, MyHeritage, FamilyTree DNA, and 23andMe.	DNA samples were sent to four companies, and the results were received on respective web platforms.	Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov (2004) socio-cognitive categorization and the in-between, transitional spaces negotiation of identity and learning (Ellsworth, 2005; Grosz, 2001)	Thematic narrative analysis. (Clarke & Braun, 2017)	How do GAT results' narratives use the underlying social phenomena of ethnicity/race/nationality to categorize sameness/difference, and what do these narratives inform about group boundaries?
Three	Participants from two non-formal family history research courses. Seven female participants were aged in their 20s to 70s.	Participant observation was followed by semi-structured interviews online and in person.	Significance and banality (Martela & Steger, 2016) Historical Consciousness and Narrative (Gadamer, 2004/1960; Jarvis, 2019; Nordgren, 2021)	Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)	How do participants describe their experiences, motivations, learning, and the perceived significance of family history research?

Case Study One: Allt för Sverige

I chose the Swedish reality television programme *Allt för Sverige* (AFS) for its reflection of the international interest in history and genealogy, its widespread popularity within Sweden, and the unique blend of reality television with the educational factor of teaching Swedish Americans about Swedish culture, language, and history. Recognisably a smaller and unique sample, the show's selection process of contestants focuses on including a wide range of backgrounds, ages, and beliefs. Each season, producers select ten individuals through a detailed process including an internet-based questionnaire, video audition and photos sent in by the contestant, followed by telephone and in-person interviews. Participation is not guaranteed, as several participants relayed trying for several years before finally being selected, while others, as seen through the numerous YouTube audition tapes posted, never make it to the interview round.

Participants: 16 Swedish American (eight female (F)/ eight male (M)) previous contestants from a range of the first eight seasons of the Swedish family history reality television programme *Allt för Sverige.* Of these, 14 completed the semi-structured interview (seven F/ seven M), while 15 (eight F/ seven M) completed the questionnaire. I did not interview two participants who completed the questionnaire as they had to attend to a personal situation. Another participant whom I interviewed did not want to complete the questionnaire. Therefore, 13 completed both the questionnaire and the interview. I, however, have data from all 16 individuals.

As the participants on the show are selected to include a broad cross-section of individuals from all socio-economic backgrounds, jobs, beliefs/faiths, the sample included in this study also reflects this. I have explicitly chosen not to include these demographics as this would reveal participants' identities due to the sample being from a small population. I can reveal that the sampling included students, pensioners, office workers, academics, skilled workers, and individuals on extended sick leave. Ages range from individuals in their twenties to those in their seventies. They live in various locations spanning the entire United States from Coast to Coast. The places they visited in Sweden differ according to each individual. The minimum of episodes

participated in by an individual is three, and the maximum is eight. In the final eighth episode, the final four participants usually remain, except for season five, when five participants stayed and participated in the final episode.

Data Collection: Between the autumn of 2019 and the spring of 2020, I collected the questionnaires and conducted semi-structured interviews. I made initial contact through Facebook and Emails using a convenient snowball sampling through initially known contacts and spread through recommendations and searching of public Facebook profiles related to *Allt för Sverige*. The purpose of the search was my attempt to include a range of individuals from the first eight seasons of the program in the sample. The ninth season was in the broadcasting process, so I decided not to include it.

A total of 20 individuals responded to the initial contact, to whom I sent a more detailed information letter. The letter explained the study's purpose, targeted participants, length, and planned de-identification process (giving a pseudo-name and removing identifying features). I also explained how the data would be stored (encryption, restricted access, and subsequent storage in the university's archive) and the ability to withdraw their participation at any time. I informed participants that while they would be de-identified due to the popularity and public nature of broadcasting the show and a relatively small total of former contestants, there would remain a risk of individuals recognising who they were. I also clearly stated that if they had difficulty with the online questionnaire format, I could send a paper copy in the post (which I did for one individual who, in the end, completed the form online). Of the initial 20 interested, 16 individuals are included in the final data set, representing seven of the intended eight seasons. This number difference is due to some individuals not responding after the information letter.

Online questionnaire: Participants were requested to fill in a blend of open and closed questions and upload three to five photographs they felt represented themselves. The questionnaire used *Machform*, the university's recommended online form system at the time. Answers were downloaded and stored encrypted with access only for the researcher and supervisors on NAS and an external hard drive. The questionnaire again included information on the study's intent and what it meant to participate and requested consent to include photographs, audition videos, and written replies. Despite initial intents, I did not include the audition videos in the final data analysis due to

the amount of data collected and because many participants did not have their audition tapes. 15 individuals responded, two of whom did not complete the interviews for personal reasons.

Semi-structured interviews: 14 individuals participated; one did not fill in the questionnaire but preferred only to complete the interview, and two, as mentioned, could not participate due to personal reasons. Interviews ranged from an hour to three hours, with an average of one hour.

Depending on the participants' preference, I interviewed participants online through the video conference app Zoom or Facebook Messenger. Participants were requested again verbally at the beginning of every interview for permission to audio record, and I reminded them of their rights to withdraw.

Photo Elicitation: This method was utilised during the semi-structured interviews to contribute to a deeper conversation and a more balanced power relation between interviewee and interviewer. In utilising photos and the questionnaire answers as a springboard and foundation for the semi-structured interview, participants were relaxed and prepared, and the researcher was able to follow up on various answers and themes and ask for elaboration.

Data Analysis: Data analysis is an ongoing process, and from the initial first read, I identified repeating themes and connections between participants. Questionnaire information was printed and coded by hand and put into the software programme NVivo. Identified themes were narrowed and examined from various angles (learning, identity, use of family history, motivation). The semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and listened to several times. These I coded first by hand and then in NVivo to aid in comparing and compiling data. I combined the two data sets and codes to identify overarching themes. This study was unique compared to most studies of reality television programmes in that it focused specifically on the participants' perspectives rather than the audience or top-down studies.

Case Study Two: Genetic Ancestry Test Results

This case study examined the personally received result documentation, including percentages, historical-cultural information, and deep maps from four Genetic Ancestry Test (GAT) companies, AncestryDNA, MyHeritage, FamilyTreeDNA, and 23andMe. This experience has rapidly become one of

the more common family history research experiences due to increased availability and a wide range of companies offering (which also decreases prices due to demand).

Data Collection: I submitted my genetic DNA sample and received the Autosomal / Family Ancestry DNA test results from each company: Ancestry, MyHeritage, FamilyTreeDNA, and 23andMe between January and December of 2021, except for MyHeritage, which I had submitted and received before this project. The collection involves spitting into a tube or swabbing inside the cheek. Each Genetic Ancestry Testing (GAT) company has its own instructions and description of what happens to the test sample after it arrives at their lab. The company reports the results on their respective web platforms. Results arrived approximately eight weeks after the company received the genetic sample. GAT companies update their databases regularly, and the received results of genetic testing are adjusted accordingly. Therefore, I used the most updated version of the previously acquired MyHeritage test results for analysis purposes (although there was little difference from the original received).

Data Analysis: I used thematic narrative analysis to examine the results and coinciding information the four GAT companies provided regarding categorisations and depictions of identity construction. The text that was analysed included visuals, audio, and written presentations. Although the web platforms often included additional information, links, and tools, I focused on the primary documents commonly received: percentages, deep maps, and the accompanying histo-cultural information. The texts were examined as transitional spaces for negotiating identity and learning (Ellsworth, 2005; Grosz, 2001) and represented individuals' socio-cognitive categorisation to organise and create meaning (Brubaker et al., 2004). This study has an autoethnographic approach by using my DNA and results for analysis but attempts to engage with the data from a more objective perspective, examining narratives rather than focusing solely on my emotional responses.

Case Study Three: Family History Research Courses

This ethnographic-influenced study took place over five to six months combined with qualitative semi-structured interviews. As an active participant in the courses selected, I gained inside knowledge and understanding that allowed the interview participants to build relationships and trust. To select

the courses, I searched online for all non-formal education courses offered for family history research. As a result of the findings, I sent an initial letter describing the study's aims and data collection methods to the courses offered within a two-hour driving radius and all courses offered digitally/online. Two replied positively. I presented the project information to the local Family History Association board through a face-to-face presentation for approval. Before attending the courses, I contacted the course leaders and asked them to send an attached letter to participants that included the study's information and a permission form for interviews. I attended both courses as a participant to understand the content and the learning environment. In Sweden, participation in non-formal education courses is widespread and commonly perceived as a typical pastime for adults and children.

Participants: Seven female participants aged between their 20s and 70s agreed to participate in the interview. While there were male students, there were fewer, and they did not consent to be interviewed. This over-representation of women is common in Sweden's popular or non-formal education activities (Statistikdatabasen [SCB], 2023).

Data Collection: I participated in the courses and conducted semi-structured interviews between January and June 2022. Upon receiving the participants' approval, I sent a calendar with available dates and times for the participants to choose which best suited their schedules. I also asked if they preferred to be interviewed in person or online. I interviewed three in person, two at a café and one on the university campus. I interviewed the other four online through Zoom or Messenger. Due to technical difficulties, I interviewed one of the participants over the telephone. All semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. For case study one, I translated all the interviews myself. For case study three, I hired a transcriber to assist, saving considerable time. I listened and checked each interview transcript to ensure they were correct upon receiving them from the translator. The semi-structured interviews were, on average, forty minutes, and while eager to speak about their research, participants did not describe their life story in the same manner as the Swedish Americans in case study one. This shorter interview time and lack of life stories do not mean participants were less involved or excited but could be understood as a cultural difference or a result of the use of photo-elicitation and questionnaires in the first study compared

to this study, which used only an interview guide. The interview guide was organised similarly to case study one, including background questions and questions regarding place, identity, and learning.

Data Analysis: I analysed the transcribed interviews using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021, 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2017). This approach views knowledge as inherently context-based and subjective. The subjectivity of knowledge is perceived as a resource rather than a bias through its acknowledgement and critical reflection of its influence. While all analysis is influenced by the researcher's preconceived ideas, experiences, positioning, and beliefs, this is not always made apparent or acknowledged but assumed. Therefore, reflexivity is an ethically responsible approach to analysis.

Examining Parts to Understand the Whole

This dissertation can be perceived as a hermeneutic circle, as I take the (whole) phenomenon of interest in family history and the past and break it down into parts (case studies and recurring themes) to understand the larger picture. All three experiences promote the use of family history to understand the past better for use in the present despite the varying spatial contexts (e.g., television, websites, classroom/computer rooms and archives). In compiling these three case studies, I provide a general background of the interest in family history and its connection to the concepts of public history and public pedagogy. Additionally, I add perspectives explicitly related to Sweden with an educational focus and highlight the importance of critically engaging with the rapidly multiplying narrative representations of the past in various media and digitalised content. Highlighting learning and pedagogy as a process rather than a finished product is to embrace learning as a dynamic continuum of knowledge in the making, contextualised and negotiated in the in-between spaces (Ellsworth, 2005).

Ethical Considerations

This study has received ethical approval from the Swedish Ethics Board (*Etikprövningsmyndigheten* Dnr 2019-05944/JU 2020/454-51).

For case study one, collected data was personal, focusing on participants' experiences and perspectives. All participants were informed in writing and verbally of the intention, use of information gathered, and their right to withdraw at any time during the research process. Participants were also allowed to ask the researcher questions. I explicitly chose the method of photo-elicitation to empower participants by giving them information through the questionnaire and providing a more even knowledge base in the interview process. During the semi-structured interviews, participants were free to explore their thoughts and experiences in the manner they felt most comfortable. I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim and destroyed any video portions recorded if we used a video conferencing program.

All data, interviews, questionnaires, and photographs were stored according to the University guidelines in a Network Attached Storage (NAS) encrypted with limited access to only the researcher and supervisors. Initially, I stored these in the personal home catalogue following recommendations of the IT department surrounding sensitive data. However, the amount of data exceeded the restricted limits of this catalogue, so a personal, password-protected network-attached storage (NAS) account was explicitly created solely for this project's data.

For the genetic ancestry testing in case study two, I submitted my DNA and, as a result, needed to ensure that I reflected upon "protecting one's own privacy and confidentiality and protecting the confidentiality and privacy of non-active participants" as Toronto Metropolitan University's (2017) guide for autoethnographic research advises (p.3). While I did not conduct an autoethnographic study in a biographical sense, I did reveal aspects of my ancestry that could potentially affect my, or my relatives' emotional and psychological well-being. In this case, I discussed it with my family before submitting my DNA, who were supportive and aware of the possible implications. In the analysis, I focused on the narratives surrounding the

results. I reflected upon my interactions and reactions, but the narratives were the primary data source. The results online are password protected, and I, as the owner of the accounts, am the only one with access to these.

Case study three involved two non-formal courses, which required initial letters and contacts as described in the data collection. I informed participants and provided contact information. I reminded individuals that their participation was voluntary. I provided options for the individuals who signed the waiver for where and how they would be interviewed (online or in-person). I also requested permission to audio record our conversation. During the interview, I reminded them verbally of their rights to withdraw from the study in addition to the previously provided written description. At the end of the interview, I asked all participants if they wished to add anything or ask any questions. The majority wished to ask more about my ancestry and family history research. I reflected that this showed an interest in me as a person and their interest in family history and the past in general. I de-identified the interview recordings and acquired assistance in verbatim transcription from a professional translator. I double-checked the transcripts for accuracy. I stored the interview audio recordings and transcripts according to the University's guidelines in a Network Attached Storage (NAS) encrypted with limited access to only the researcher and supervisors.

In conducting a reflexive thematic analysis for case study three, I critically reflected upon my position as a researcher and an "ordinary" participant in the courses and the process and methods chosen. When critically reflected upon, subjectivity can be a resource rather than a bias. In the two previous studies, I also reflected upon my interest and participation in family history research and how this may have impacted my analysis and "reading" of texts. As a person of mixed heritage (inclusive of Swedish heritage), a visible minority, an immigrant to Sweden (even if now a citizen), female, et cetera, my perspectives and experiences construct and impact my thinking and behaviours. Through reflexivity, actively addressing my beliefs, and checking through comparison to the studies' participants and previous literature, I believe I have conducted a critical reflection that reflects a dialogue that challenges, critiques, and actively makes sense and meaning.

While all researchers have some subjectivity, awareness and critical reflection vary greatly. As Denzin and Lincon write, "All research [is] interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how

it should be understood and studied. Some beliefs may be taken for granted, invisible, only assumed" (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.22 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.13; Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). In other words, if all research is subjective, becoming aware and self-critical can minimise bias and affective subjectivity. Ignoring what guides the researcher's beliefs and feelings is not critically analysing all factors in a study. My reflexivity as a researcher is an ongoing process and never completed, and like Gadamer's (2004/1960) horizons and Ellsworth's (2005) knowledge in the making, I am constantly negotiating and interacting with new contexts and knowledge.

While many other family history research experiences exist, I have delimited the study to three that reflect the vast scope of practice. Case study one *Allt för Sverige*, is perhaps more unusual for individuals' participation, but the larger public can access this experience vicariously as an audience. The second case study, genetic ancestry testing, is increasingly drawing participants and is heavily reported on in the media in its connections to crime and celebrity. Meanwhile, the everyday, ordinary individual more traditionally attends the third case study's non-formal courses. I can critically reflect on and compare the information collected through the three case studies. I offered case study one and three participants the opportunity to receive the written analysis report in the form of a published article and dissertation, ensuring accountability and credibility.

Part Two: Experiences

Figure 6. Lake Roxen.

Note. Participant "Nelson's" photograph reproduced with permission.

One will never know the spot until they are there in the flesh and are able to consciously accept the fact that, that spot was indeed a part of them. I can't explain if it's a Mother Nature thing, or magic, or even Odin.

But I can tell you, that the spot in question does entrance you and embrace you. It hits you kinda like the wind.

Now I do believe that if someone isn't searching with an open mind and heart; they could wander over it thousands of times and never find it.

(Nelson, Case Study One)

Results

I have disseminated the results of the case studies through the corresponding articles in this section. [16] In this compilation dissertation, I analyse these results further according to the dissertation's aim and theoretical framework and answer the overarching research questions: how do family history research experiences present the past and identity, how do participants negotiate these narratives, and how do elements of these experiences illustrate these spaces as public pedagogy? I discuss these case studies as three different approaches and perspectives to understand the same phenomenal interest in family history research. The intention is to actively listen as Alfaro Altamirano (2023) challenges us to critically engage with the narratives presented by participants, institutions, and various forms of media.

Introduction to Case Study One Article

When I first started to watch *Allt för Sverige,* I was interested in the way participants interacted with each other and the individuals they encountered on the programme. I wondered whether the frontstage broadcasted emotional reactions and whether the information taught in "Swedish School" was accurate and authentic. While I realised *Allt för Sverige* is a production for consumption, I wondered what these participants took away or learned from this experience and whether it was as life-changing as the advertisements would lead us to believe.

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[16] The articles' contents are unaltered. The text layout and pagination are changed to match the dissertation template. Please use the original article for citations. You can find the links to the original articles in the reference list.

Inspired by these questions, the following article examines what narratives the frontstage production presents and explores the narratives of participants' backstage negotiations. In doing so, I provide an alternative perspective to previous studies, mainly focused on frontstage broadcasts and reality television audience studies. I spoke with previous contestants using semi-structured interviews and online questionnaires, asking for their thoughts, perspectives, and stories. I analysed these using Hall's encoding/decoding framework. The results revealed that participants do not unquestioningly accept the script(s) presented to them but negotiate to either affirm their previously held conceptions, modify, or adapt the script to match their perceptions, or reject the script, offering an alternative which they understood as more accurate or "true."

"What is the Real Sweden?"
Backstage Negotiations in the Process of Identity Authentication With(in) the Context of Family History Television

Karen Ann Blom

Abstract

Swedish-Americans' interest in Family History reflects a larger phenomenon of increased interest in history and the past in general. The Swedish reality Family History television programme *Allt för Sverige* is one example that advertises to potential Swedish-American contestants the ability to learn not only their family history, but about Sweden and Swedish culture through physical experiences in Sweden. *Allt för Sverige* presents a specific scripted Swedish identity, that earlier studies have examined from the Goffmanian frontstage, the broadcasted public presentation, marking the prevalence of a primordial discourse informing and delimiting national belonging. Participant studies of reality television programmes in general are few and those which do exist tend to have a top-down, patriarchal focus on the exploitation of contestants. From the theoretical perspective of Goffman's dramaturgical model and concepts of Front and Backstage this article looks behind the curtain to the backstage, examining participants' negotiations with the presented scripted identity of *Allt för Sverige.* Participant's negotiations as expressed through their narratives collected from semi-structured interviews are analysed through Hall's analytical framework of encoding/decoding and perceived   as part of a process of authentication of identity. Researchers have argued the potential for family history television to challenge norms and single authoritative depictions effectively democratizing historical knowledge. This article argues that to understand this potential, we need to observe a phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Hence, analysing backstage negotiations of participants, going beyond what is edited for television audiences, is essential to understanding *Allt för Sverige* as a whole and part of identity construction and authentication. The results reveal participants often reject narratives of nostalgia and question the authenticity of the presented identity script.

Keywords: Family History, Identity, Script, Swedish-Americans, *Allt för Sverige*

Introduction

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Was Sweden like you expected it to be?

Elias

The show helped [it to] be [what I expected], I think.

Of course, they tried to bring in things from modern Sweden,

but a lot of the show is that romanticised version of Sweden, you know? Like they try to show you how it was and the traditions.

And then I remember people commenting on social media, "they're not showing you the real Sweden." You know? I was like, "What is the real Sweden?" Are you meaning this ideal concept? In my mind, they showed me exactly what I wanted to see.

In the above excerpt, Elias describes his reaction to social media critique during his participation as a contestant on *Allt för Sverige* (official English title Great Swedish Adventure) an award winning Swedish family history reality television programme that recruits "ordinary" Americans with Swedish heritage to travel to Sweden for the first time, participate in activities to learn about Sweden and Swedish culture while competing for the ultimate prize: a family reunion with Swedish relatives (Meter-Television 2020). This format contrasts with other Family History programmes which focus on celebrities and reality television whose prize is of monetary value. Elias' rhetorical question and response to, "what is the real Sweden?" highlights more than his understanding of what Sweden "is" or the multiplicity of identity. It draws attention to the use of the television to portray a specific identity of Sweden and what it means to be "Swedish," as well as the questioning of this identity by the individuals with(in) this portrayal and the process of authentication which takes place behind the public/ised frontstage. Elias' quote suggests the broadcasted presentation is not the "whole picture" but one imbued with essentialist, political, and institutional objectives. It reveals that contestants do not blindly accept constructed scripted identities presented, but have the capability to contest, reject, renegotiate, the script. The backstage perspective provides an unusually explicit and therefore suitable example of how, when, and why an "ordinary" person escapes the control of the media production which originally has provided it with a voice. This is made possible through the

increased access and flow of information through various forms of media since they allow the contestants to know that there is a Sweden "beyond" the official script, and to express and renegotiate their own script-breaking geographic concepts to a large audience (through social media or other online exchanges). This examination of the backstage is not limited to *Allt för Sverige* and this case study but reflects a larger trend of the "ordinary" being made celebrity, increased freedom and flow of information threatening traditional media outlets control, and, for better or worse in the age of "fake news," medias' curating abilities. Consequently, this study and its examination of previous contestants' descriptions of experiences backstage in relation to the presented scripted identity of *Allt för Sverige* is relevant and an appropriate example for the present day.

The concepts of frontstage and backstage originate in Goffman's (1990) social theory that life could be understood in theatrical terms. Frontstage behaviour is what is public, on display and in the case of *Allt för Sverige*, the product or broadcasted presentation. Previous research specifically about *Allt för Sverige* have provided valuable insights into the mediatised presentation of Family History. These studies provide a valuable look at the expression of the popular interest in Family History in consumable mass entertainment. Hjorthén's (2017) cultural-historical analysis of *Allt för Sverige*'s seasons one to five pointed out the predominance of a primordial discourse or a (latent) national belonging based on biological requirements. Examining the "representations of history, culture, and family through images, text and sound" (commenting on dated cultural references) Hjorthén analyses how "blood is imagined as a transmitter of culture" (2017: 128). He further notes the token inclusion of contemporary immigrants in Sweden and staged culture clashes with the "Americans" delimitating further the exclusion from the collective (imagined) Swedish identity. Likewise, Klareld's (2022) study examines season nine as a social text. Analysing participant statements from the broadcasted show to reveal what family history means to them, Klareld employs Saar's (2017) use of genealogy as a theoretical entry point to understand oneself, spatiality, and continuality. Genealogy,[1] she argues, is not neutral but requires judgement and evaluations of ancestral actions. Klareld found that *Allt för Sverige* portrayed the knowledge of these ancestors as a "valuable asset" and expressed as a specific type of story resulting in revelations, knowledge-sharing, and a purpose for the future. While both Hjorthén (2017) and Klareld (2022) include citations from participants, these are from the final "cut," the narrative of the produced broadcast.

However, does the broadcasted frontstage present a "true" picture of individuals' experiences and negotiations of this script? I argue that focusing only on the production, the complexity of the individual and the nuances of effect of *Allt för Sverige*'s script is hidden. I turn from the frontstage production, a "social history repackaged for public consumption" (Donnelly & Shaw 2020: 49) and look backstage in this study as, "the places where the camera is not focused at the moment or all the places out of range of 'live' microphones" (Goffman, 1990, p. 121). Backstage, for Goffman, is where individuals let their guard down, forgo performing what they think is expected, and is the space in which negotiations and dissonance can take place. While much information can be gained from the frontstage, I argue that it remains a condensed, manicured, scripted "cut" of contestants' experiences of what was in some cases weeks of filming into a maximum of eight hours of final production. In other words, the frontstage product does not relay the contestants' full un-edited experience and opinions.

For Swedish-American contestants there are four levels of negotiation with who/what represents Sweden and Swedishness while on set in Sweden. First is the official scripted version represented by the website, the programme leader-led "Swedish School" and cultural-historical activities/competitions planned, presenting in a sense a Swedish cultural canon flavoured with the nostalgic folk culture ideals. Second is their interactions with the television crew: the production team who have more power to direct the "script" and the technical crew who are involved in the production but have not the same decision-making power. Third is contestants' encounters with Swedes in the everyday ordinary, not related to *Allt för Sverige*'s filming, and the fourth is with each other, other Swedish-American contestants. These negotiations and encounters both confirm and contradict each other, and it is within these negotiations that the contestant builds an understanding of Sweden, Swedish culture, and identity. While additional factors, such as previous experiences with and knowledge of reality television programmes, are negotiated and have the potential to influence contestant's perceptions and expectations, this article will not include this in the analysis, focusing specifically on the negotiations of the scripted identity of Sweden/Swedishness.

Contestants' voice and agency to negotiate these encountered versions of Sweden and Swedishness is highlighted in this study. Contestants' own understandings, experiences, and process of authentication of such identity and family history is explored through their narratives collected through questionnaires and following semi-structured interviews. As a participant I call Sebastian said during their

interview, "remember that what you see on tv is just a little smidgen of what you're really going through during that whole time," underscoring that *Allt för Sverige* provides only one of the many possible narratives. This narrative could be argued as critically limited, projecting specific politicised perspectives of the past, Swedish society and culture today, and disregarding individual agency.

Theoretical framework

> All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players.

<div align="right">(Shakespeare 2000: 27)</div>

While *Allt för Sverige* is, as Sebastian acknowledges, a "smidgen" of the "real world," Goffman (1990) views the social world as a stage, as Shakespeare wrote, with individuals playing alternating and interacting roles. Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical model employs these theatrical terminologies to describe the interactions and performances of individuals in different arenas of life.

Social interactional behaviours and roles, according to Goffman (1990), are directed or governed by (but not necessarily always following) a script which regulates expectations and setting. The presented script is intended to inform how individuals should/could (re)act in varying contexts. It is in the "reading" of the script that individuals skillfully negotiate, create meaning, assess, and authenticate behaviour and objects (Hall 1983, Hochschild 1997). While scripts are often associated with a formalized version that actors use verbatim, such as in television productions, Goffman points out that we use scripts in our day-to-day activities as well. An example is the interaction between a server and customer within a restaurant. There are set expectations for behaviour and conversation between these two individuals that are social norms in that specific cultural context.

Observing that the same server and customer would act differently depending on where they are situated (in the restaurant vs in the back, or kitchen) and who they are with (work colleagues, strangers, or friends). Goffman divides these social interactions into different regions or stages which may in some cases overlap. The frontstage[2] is often institutionalised, formal and as in the case of *Allt för Sverige*, becomes a selected "collective representation" where individuals adhere to conventions knowing they are being watched (Goffman 1990: 37). In contrast, the backstage is an informal space away from the audiences' (and camera's)

eye, where one can be their "true self," and where tension or resistance to the presented script can take place. This performance is not always a conscious or intentional manipulation of impressions and is seen in this study through the relaying of previously undisclosed information regarding participant's negotiations of the specified scripted behaviours. As Goffman recognised, these regions/stages are culturally impacted and thus the presentation of self in the everyday life varies accordingly. Goffman in later publications describes script as an example of a social frame projecting the will/aim of institutions and reflecting a "normative" expectation of prescribed involvement (Goffman 1974, Persson 2019). The power and choice of the production team to direct the experiences *Allt för Sverige* contestants is expressed by the participant Leo. He noted the lack of the 'mean-spirited' competitiveness of other reality shows stating the production team were, "very intentional. They could have made it that if they wanted to, but they don't want that….so some credit goes to the way that they do it and set it up." This statement reflects Goffman's argument that scripts are influenced by previous experiences. Leo's comparison to other reality shows presents a further level of negotiation than those previous mentioned revealing the complexity and multiplicity individuals engage with in social interactions.

Allt för Sverige presents a script of a specific Swedish culture and identity as "true" or "authentic." The participant Noah notes that *Allt för Sverige* is "a national treasure…because it preserves Sweden in its own diaspora… reach[ing] into new generations." While perceiving the positive nature of including "new generations" his comment also highlights the problematic nature of preserving a specific culture (and identity) as canonical constructing the view of Sweden and Swedish culture as unchanging and stagnant. This article utilizes Goffman's theoretical concepts to examine the backstage negotiations of previous contestants from *Allt för Sverige* noting that for participants negotiating the script goes beyond the frontstage and camera's gaze.

Family History and Television

As Klareld wrote, *Allt för Sverige* "may promote its audience's interest in family history but it did not create it" (2022:5). Interest in Family History has grown exponentially, especially since the introduction of direct-to-consumer genetic tests in 1990s resulting in a myriad of consumable products including Family History television, however, the academic response in terms of research has not matched this pace.

A desire for belonging, a search for identity and "home" for seeking specific places related to ancestors was found as motivation for ancestral tourism with tourists valuing everyday objects as equal to if not more significant than official monuments and memorials by researchers Mehtiyeva and Prince (2020) and Alexander et al (2017). *Allt för Sverige* responds to this motivation and interest, providing a type of tourist experience for contestants (and audience), noting it, "Showcas[es] everyday Americans as they journey throughout Sweden to discover their land, roots and cultural heritage" (Meter-Television 2020). Presenting a specific form of Swedish cultural canon, *Allt för Sverige* includes tangible (e.g. traditional clothing) and intangible (e.g. traditional skills such as ploughing a field) cultural heritage with and through which contestants are meant to engage with or as they say "discover" and essentially learn how to be a Swede.

While individuals seek belonging and identity of "self," the influence and power of the interest in mediatized Family History is also recognised at the institutional level. Ancestral tourism is recognised as, "one of the most significant socio-cultural and economic forces today" (Timothy 2008: 118) with governments and socio-cultural institutions acknowledging the constructing "soft power" of media involving ancestral tourism aspect, such as *Allt för Sverige*, as contributing to positively marketing "the nation" (Larochelle 2019, Thelen et al 2020). This marketing involves the scripted presentation of identity.

Syvertsen (2001), identified the importance of the study of television participation as crucial as media becomes increasingly, "something to do" rather than just "something to watch" (319). Yet, despite the wide array of reality television studies, few focus on the participants/contestants. The studies which do have this focus tend to present a "top down," paternalistic perspective of both the programmes and participants (Salamon 2010: 142, Ruehlicke 2019). The majority, Patterson (2015) reiterates, analyse specific shows, audiences, or power relations neglecting the perspectives of contestants, and those studies that do include these perspectives tend to have a focus on contestants' exploitation and resulting "fall outs."

Research that has examined Family History television has problematized the construction and perpetuation of concepts within presented scripts such as ethnicity, race, gender (Scodari 2013), and nationality (Hunt 2006) in frontstage productions, with researchers arguing participation is used as a tool to confirm, develop and join an (arguably) dominant/hegemonic (national and/or cultural) identity (Hunt 2006, Kramer 2011). Other researchers have explored how Family History and

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Family History Television, has contributed positively to public and social histories by empowering micro-narratives and highlighting the use and development of historical consciousness and empathy by family historians (Shaw 2020, Shaw & Donnelly, 2021a, Shaw & Donnelly 2021b, Shaw 2021). And Lunt's (2017) study of the television show *Who Do You Think You Are?* argues that the analysis of Family History television contributes to the understanding of genealogy as a social practice and media representation of the relations between history and memory.

This study recognises *Allt för Sverige,* representative of Family History research, as a social practice and link between history, memory, and cultural heritage, and examines participants' backstage negotiations providing an alternative perspective to previous frontstage studies.

A product of "self" through a process of authentication

Learning about one's Family History and embracing the cultural historical aspects which are connected to this history becomes a process of authentication and production of "self" and "others" as much as a production of a family tree. The use of history or the past for purposes of identity and belonging within the present is a common theme in earlier research (e.g. Lowenthal 1985, Lowenthal 2012). Historical references through written text, images, tangible, and intangible culture in speech, acted or re-enacted in behaviours can be used in a variety of ways to reason or argue in the process of authentication, verifying someone or something and their claim to authenticity and "truth." Authenticity and truth are highly subjective and based on people's perspective which vary (Darlington 2020). What is perceived as "authentic" for one person in one moment may not be "authentic" for another. Moreover, this perception of authenticity is dynamic and may differ for each person over time as their horizons of understanding adjust and adapt through lived experiences. Therefore, focusing on the *process* rather than the product allows space for this variance. This approach has been explored through heritage tourism and is applicable to this and arguably many other instances (see for example Bucholtz 2003, Cohen & Cohen 2012).

Allt för Sverige presents a scripted identity that emphasises a primordial (or based on biology/genetics) inheritance and "belonging" (see Hjorthén 2017). This primordial argument Hunt believes reflects a "millennial spirit of introspective self-doubt over questions of national identity… European integration, accelerating

immigration, and a resurgent English nationalism" (2006: 844). Critics and sceptics of commercialized genealogy link this desire for identity to *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil), *Heimat* (homeland), and blood quantum which they perceive as "exclusionary, ethnocentric and reactionary" (Guelke & Timothy 2008: 3). Arguably, however, this perception of genealogy is not of the "new" Family History that has moved from seeking prestige and pedigrees of the past to the contemporary "ordinary" person whose lineages often reveal hybridity (Guelke & Timothy 2008). Moreover, this criticism of genealogy neglects to consider the agency of the individual. Despite scripted presentations of primordial inheritance and belonging, Edge (2017) asserted that individuals have the agency to resist these presentations. Furthermore, it has been argued that given the opportunity, Family History television has the potential to democratize historical knowledge and interrogate the presentation of a single authoritative depiction of family life in the past (Hunt 2006, Evans 2015).

So, what are participants' perspectives? How do they use their agency to position themselves using historical-cultural references to build connections, a sense of belonging, of identity in an argument for value and authenticity? It is important to remember that forgetting and rejecting presented images and historical references is as important and interesting as that of embracing and remembering.

Sample and Method

Allt för Sverige, an award-winning "reality" television programme with the ultimate prize of winning a family reunion, was chosen as a reflection of the popularity of Swedish family history research media, with the focus on "ordinary" people and their agency within this context. Inspired by Norwegian predecessor *Alt for Norge* (https://www.facebook.com/altfornorge/) *Allt för Sverige* recruits Swedish Americans who have never travelled to Sweden prior to compete in challenges that place value on physical/mental skill and/or the reproduction/remembering or performance of the Swedish culture that is taught. Further casting requirements, reflecting this study's participants, include a balance of ages (< 70 years), a variety of occupations and socio-economic backgrounds, and an "outgoing personality that would make a good impression on TV" (Thorsell 2014, Ljung 2019). More importantly, as the show's genealogists point out, contestants should not have extensive information about their family history, "as the idea for the program is … to come to Sweden to find their origins, not just to confirm what they already know" (Stark 2013: 8).

In other words, for many contestants their first interaction with Sweden and Swedish culture is through *Allt för Sverige* and thus is an interesting case to examine for the construction and process of authentication of identity.

Sixteen prior participants (eight female/ eight male) from seasons one to eight were requested to submit three-five photos with an online questionnaire of what they felt represented themselves for use in the semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted using the online platforms of Zoom and Facebook Messenger, engaging in photo-elicitation (Harper 2002)[3] based on the photos and questionnaires submitted. The interview was guided by themes: place, identity, and family history and asked questions such as, "how would you describe Swedishness" and "In what way if any, does where you are now or where your ancestors have been define who you are?" The interview atmosphere was informal and allowed participants the freedom to bring up their own interests and concerns-which they did frequently. All participants elaborated upon the questions and themes raised, often going "off-track" to relay unrelated life stories and intimate details. Interviews were between one and three hours. I have chosen to focus on the information provided which is within the scope of the study to facilitate a comparison between informants. The data was analysed according to reoccurring patterns which were reorganised several times to note overlapping themes. Hall's (2006) model of encoding/decoding is used to organise narratives drawn from participants' interviews to examine how the scripted identity of *Allt för Sverige* is encoded, presented, engaged with (decoded), and reacted to. Individuals either perceive the script as a) confirmation, b) almost "truth" but negotiate–noting exceptions, or c) oppose the script creating tension and dissonance (Hall 2006: 172–173). Participants within the television programme itself have the opportunity of directly engaging with the script (re)production and therefore have a unique perspective. All participants are given pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes.[4]

Finns det hjärterum så finns det stjärterum / If there's room in your heart, there'll be room for an ass[5]

The Presented Script

Before their acceptance as contestants, Americans apply through the website "Great Swedish Adventure." *Allt för Sverige* requires contestants to have never travelled to Sweden so, while contestants have varied levels of experience and

knowledge of Sweden/Swedish culture, the application website and programme itself acts as an authoritative entry point to and claims to provide a representative "snapshot" of the "real" Sweden and Swedish identity.

What is the "real" Sweden though? Stereotypes of Sweden and Swedes are prevalent, as various websites will attest to including *Nordic Perspective* (Andersson 2022) that has collected data from various sources including a 2019 poll from ebeach.se travel agency. Andersson reports that many believe that there are IKEA stores on every corner, polar bears/reindeer in the streets and ABBA on every loudspeaker. Swedes, Andersson (2022) reports, are perceived as blond and blue-eyed, sexually promiscuous yet socially reserved, are often on sun holidays and drunk, are secularised, democratic and love to eat meatballs and fish in various forms (fermented herring-*surströmming*, fish paste in toothpaste-like tubes, or dried fish rehydrated in lye-*lutfisk*). Swedes drive Volvo or Saab cars but are also climate conscious, a modern nation maintaining historical traditions. Moreover, Swedes and Sweden are often associated with the stories of Astrid Lindgren, most well-known outside of Sweden for Pippi Longstocking and the idyllic small village countryside of Sweden portrayed through this and Lindgren's other stories. According to Astrid Lindgren Company's website Pippi has been translated into 77 languages (Astrid Lindgren Company 2022) so arguably is well known around the world. How does *Allt för Sverige's* depiction compare?

The official *Allt för Sverige* website is representative of the same scripted identity which is later presented on the television programme. Juxtaposing Sweden to the United States, the website motivates *Allt för Sverige* as a type of social experiment stating that, "[s]ince America has such a strong impact on the world through its politics, financial institutions, television, film, fashion, and culture *it will be interesting to turn the tables and bring people back to their Swedish roots*" (Meter-Television 2020: emphasis added). Potential American candidates are described as "fun, outgoing", "adventurous", with "Swedish ancestry (even a little bit counts[6]), with a burning desire to find their roots and see their motherland" (Meter-Television 2020). Americans are told they will have a once in a lifetime opportunity to, "journey throughout Sweden to discover *their* land, roots and cultural heritage" which they are told is a "*new* land and culture" (Meter-Television 2020: emphasis added). The rhetoric used emphasises both

a possessive belonging ("*their* land" "*their* Swedish roots"), an intense emotional connection ("burning desire"), while simultaneously noting that it is unfamiliar and new.

Allt för Sverige's website *writes* very little about Sweden or Swedish identity however what it does present *visually* reflects the opening citation from Elias and his reflection of the romanticised Swedish identity. There is a series of four photos presented on the page that portray a dominant/hegemonic version of Swedish identity. These are entitled, "rich and fascinating Swedish cultural heritage" (Meter-Television 2020) with three out of the four depicting the traditional celebration of Midsummer. A blonde, blue-eyed, white woman, a red and white wooden summer cottage (stuga), raising of the maypole in the rain, dancing people in traditional costumes, traditional foods of eggs, potatoes, flatbread and alcohol, a statue of a cow with a political message of "fair/equitable milk" symbolising the social welfare state as key features of the larger Swedish culture. These four photos are representative of the larger portrayal of the "type" of identity that *Allt för Sverige* presents, a specific script of a people group who maintain their rich cultural heritage through the performance of traditions and rituals such as raising the Maypole, dressing in traditional clothing, and eating traditional foods, while simultaneously modern in their approach to human rights and equality.

Setting of the Script

Allt för Sverige presents a repeated dramaturgical setting in each season and episode through which the socio-cultural script is embedded and presented. Starting with the first episode, the programme leader, Anders Lundin, welcomes home the contestants as they make a dramatic (rehearsed beforehand) entry into Sweden often with Swedish flags flying in the background. Participants of this study have expressed that while these are not scripted in detail i.e., the production team does not instruct them to kiss the ground, but individuals do this and other emotional expressions on their own accord. Gustav in his interview relayed,

> I really wanted to see where [my ancestors] were born, and I had heard the stories and I really wanted to do that and so when we crossed the line, I was very emotional, which was… kind of surprised me.

Each season, there are ten contestants (eleven in season five). In each episode, a new place in Sweden is featured where contestants open a large sea chest (*Amerikakoffert*) that contains Swedish objects such as woollen socks, an ABBA

music record, and a dalahäst, or horse ornament (banal symbols for Sweden and/or Swedishness (see Billig 1995)) that are intended to be clues for the day's activities. Every episode includes learning about Swedish culture (language, history etc.) specific to the setting they are in and ends with an elimination challenge (often based on the lesson and/or place). While there is one "winner" of the show, who wins is not necessarily the individual who is physically strongest, nor is it the individual who has remembered or learned the most. Rather, it is a combination and at times simply "luck of the draw." The participants however, throughout their narratives noted they felt that they all have "won." When eliminated, participants receive all the research the show's genealogist found including a family tree and photos.

> In addition, one common element which participants in this study spoke about as "life-changing", eye-opening and turning points in their lives was receiving their "special day." Contestants are presented with a mini chest containing photos and a letter with a story of their family history which they open at a place significant to their ancestor's story. The viewer hears the letter/story read aloud but sees the individual reading it silently in a place of significance to their ancestral story. This individualised narrative within the collective identity and link to a personally significant place creates a confirmation of the individual's cultural identity as a Swede and "belonging" to Sweden.

Breaking Script

The script dictates and shapes how individuals are meant to experience Sweden by presenting a cultural canon. Through "Swedish school" Anders Lundin explains parts of Swedish history and cultural norms such as *jantelagen* (no one is or should be better than anyone else), and traditional celebrations. This presents a prescribed reference of a Swedish identity and what it means to be Swedish. As Olivia, recalls:

> I feel like we didn't get the real Sweden if that makes any sense. Like when Anders would do our little lessons. A lot of that stuff they said like the production people were like, "no, we don't believe that or that's not really true. It's not really what we do" … so, maybe that was considered a generalization. Like, maybe Swedish people [in general] are really like this so then they kind of play that up on the show.

Olivia points out that "real Swedes", the production people as she called them, had difficulty with the script of Swedishness presented by *Allt för Sverige* stating that it is not a true reflection of Sweden. Her narrative negotiates and tries to justify this objection by the crew, stating that in some way the script could still be authenticated, stating "I feel like they're just like us, but they maybe have

different ways of thinking…the ones that we were around were very reserved." Reflecting on the scripted experience she notes that the programme "handpicked people based on what they want[ed]" to emphasise the difference of cultures noting the stereotypical generalization of the loud, emotional American, echoing Hjorthén's (2017) observation of staged culture clashes:

> Americans are considered very loud, and they want you to go on the show and cry, they want you to have lots of emotion.… I think that's maybe a generalization that Swedes have [about] Americans that they're loud and emotional people but it is not what you see in America, you don't see men crying and all these men on the show are crying.

What was not included informs about the script as much as what was included in the final broadcast. As previously mentioned, Sebastian noted during the interview that not all their experiences in Sweden and with *Allt för Sverige* were televised "remember what you see on tv is just a little smidgen of what you're really going through during that whole time." Astrid, another participant, also expressed her frustration that so much was not included in the final "cut" suggests that a "bloopers" segment should be also broadcast to reveal more of what happened behind scenes. Emphasising that what happened backstage and absent from the frontstage final broadcast she thought was meaningful for herself and others.

It was not however just that which was "cut" but also the contestants' "days off" or hours before and after filming that was not revealed in the final broadcasted programme. Several participants relayed their desire to see the "real Sweden" and meet "real Swedes" and did so by various means. Their interactions with "real Swedes" caused reflection over the identity and information provided by *Allt för Sverige* by engaging with a Sweden/Swedishness that was not scripted by *Allt för Sverige*. Emma described going to the local grocery store so she "could watch actual people buying their groceries." Remarking that on the programme they were taught that Swedes are "very stoic and very standoffish," and that if Swedes did not speak to them, it is not because they were rude but simply being Swedish, Emma, like many others, disagreed. She argued that this was not reflective of her family, nor the Swedes encountered in the everyday ordinary. Emma argued that Swedes in the grocery store were very friendly and chatty and noted that many were making the same dish she made for dinner at home, tacos. Thus, emphasising their similarities or "sameness" rather than difference.

Similarly, Elsa, another participant, relayed an experience after a day of filming shopping at a second-hand store looking for a record which they had learnt about

during the "Swedish School." Elsa, accompanied by their castmate, upon relaying information about their relation to the record was promptly serenaded by the Swedes waiting in line singing the famous song, after which the two castmates were assisted with their purchases, offered a lift to their hotel, and were invited to a stranger's home. This, as others relayed, was directly breaking the scripted identity of the restrained and reserved Swede. Not only were the "real Swedes" not "standoffish" but on the contrary they were overtly friendly and loud.

Confirmation through Cultural Heritage and Satellite Sweden

Participants in their interviews access the script presented by the programme through the expression of intangible (e.g. prayers) and tangible (e.g. photographs) cultural heritage. *Allt för Sverige* itself utilised tangible and intangible cultural entities as symbolic markers for Swedishness in both the official website and in broadcasting. The intangible cultural celebration of Midsummer and its adjacent tangible objects such as the wreath of flowers, culturally traditional foods, and traditional clothing are examples touched upon in the script.

Participants in their interviews refer to what they learnt or experienced on the programme connecting it to memories of, or revitalised, cultural heritage. While most participants interviewed were of mixed heritage (another heritage(s) in addition to Swedish / American), many expressed the confirmation of Swedishness and belonging due to their physical likeness and similar "tastes" for activities and food as the Swedes and Swedish family they met.

Participants recalled celebrating common Swedish celebrations for example, Lucia with wearing a wreath of candles on their head, Christmas and the Swedish version of Father Christmas, which many call *Tomte* (correct Swedish *Jultomten*) visiting their house. Special holidays were not the only expression of Swedishness however, participants relayed their everyday banal Swedishness as well: collecting rain in Swedish barrels which their American neighbours do not do, wearing clothes more accepted in Sweden than the United States, and reciting in Swedish prayers and sayings their grandmother taught them. Participants were eager to note personality and physical similarities with the Swedish script presented, as Peter stated, "I tried to avoid people you know like the Swedes do. I think it is a characteristic I share" later reflecting, "you don't know if [what they teach on *Allt för Sverige* is] the Swedes today or yesterday's Swedes."

Other cultural items were presented through various collections of items. Hanna gave me a tour of her collection of Swedish items including photos, dalahäst ornaments, flags, wreaths etc. Her son joined the interview for a short period explaining his and his mum's passion for their ancestral heritage as key to regaining in a sense their Swedishness, stating:

> why my mom and I wanted to get them back is because we knew that was part of the American migration was losing or the bleaching or the loss of all the erasing of your ancestral heritage, so we wanted to get it back. …. You have to come from somewhere.

Astrid, another participant, echoes this sentiment of the importance of regaining cultural heritage, sharing her collection she laments that, while she is "into all things Swedish," she still cannot speak the language, which she "feels bad" about. Participants refer often to the photos they sent, recalled the inheritance of photos, furniture, and dishes and many utilised the Swedish they knew, intertwining their narratives with Swedish such as lagom (not too much and not too little) and fika (heart to heart coffee break).

Fig. 1. "Elias" with items from the "*Allt för Sverige*'s" American chest. Personal photo used with permission from the participant.

Elias (Figure 1) whose narrative opened this study, was not an exception to this attempt to authenticate the script through cultural heritage. The above photo is one that he submitted for the interview, which he felt described him. It was taken during the show, and he is seen wearing and holding items found in the American chest they had just opened. There is wool around his neck as a beard, a hat,

handmade knit woollen socks, and an axe. Elias explains, "that picture encapsulates all the eccentric dreams I have of Sweden. The stereotypical you know; this is just who I am." The items he found viewed as a bridge to the identity presented on *Allt för Sverige* perceiving these as "authentic" and valuable stating, "I kind of see that [authenticity] in older traditions and cultures and the kind of way things used to be done." Moreover, he sees in himself more characteristics that match with the "stereotypical Swede" personality-wise remarking that even his house is "kind of like a Swedish cabin… painted in the same way it's red with the white trim." It is not just a Swedish identity on the show, but it is an identity that is transferred either as an ornament in the collection, a revitalised celebration or as Elias reflects a satellite version of Sweden transplanted into the geographical region of the United States.

Opposing the Script

While the majority emphasised the sameness of identity scripts from *Allt för Sverige* there were some who did not agree with everything as it was presented. One participant, Noah emphasised that as a black person he felt they did not identify with "ABBA, Lutefisken, you know what else? Pippi Longstocking, Emil you know, I don't connect with that." Rather he identified with those who had parents who immigrated to Sweden long ago, stating, "they grew up, they were born there. They [speak] the language, they didn't look Swedish, they didn't look Swedish no, but they are Swedish…. They're making a life for themselves right there in that country Sweden. They're comfortable there." In his rejection of the script of identity presented by *Allt för Sverige*, he attempts to modify the narrative. Other participants, highlighted the hybridity of culture and historical heritage of both cast members and Sweden, noting there were individuals in Sweden's past as well as contemporary times who were not "white." Noah criticised that the Saami (the indigenous people of the Swedish geographical region) as individuals were underrepresented or not represented at all in *Allt för Sverige*'s script of Sweden/ Swedishness. This emphasises the hegemonic, multicultural Sweden. Noah summarises his negotiation questioning, "I mean you never know what [it] is… is there a cultural trait in you? Or is it your personality? or is your personality based on your cultural heritage?"

Discussion

Participants' backstage negotiations of their "reading" and understanding of *Allt för Sverige*'s presented frontstage script of Swedish identity is organised into three

responses according to Hall's (2006) model of encoding/decoding. Participants were found to break/negotiate the script modifying and adapting the script to what they deemed more authentic, many confirmed the script using cultural heritage evidence, and a few who opposed the script entirely attempting to create an alternative script. Negotiating the script on multiple levels, the four main negotiations occurred between the participants and the official script, with the television crew, with Swedes in the everyday ordinary, and with the other Swedish-American contestants.

The majority negotiated within the script, adapting it to match what they perceived as a more "authentic" Swedish/Swedishness through their experiences on their "days off" or with the production team, as was seen through the example of their attempt to see the "real" Sweden by visiting the grocery store. Actively participating in a process of authentication, the presented script is negotiated, questioned, and compared to what the participants perceive as the most "authentic" source. The presented frontstage script from *Allt för Sverige* of what Sweden and Swedishness is in general accepted by the participants but with many noting exceptions, for example by stating that their family or themselves do not act like what was described (stoic, quiet etc.), re-adjusting in their process of authentication to create meaningful connections.

Participants describe and utilise intangible and tangible cultural heritage such as sayings/prayers, cultural objects, places, and celebrations/traditions as evidence in their negotiations and process of authentication of the scripted identity. Like Mehtiyeva & Prince's (2020) findings, individuals of this study placed a higher value of meaning on everyday activities and places than public and famous monuments. The everyday Swedes and the identity they encountered were perceived by participants as more authentic and authoritative than the scripts presented by *Allt för Sverige*. Perhaps this signifies a shift from earlier generations of Swedish-Americans' nostalgic perception of the "old country" and preservation of folk culture. However, the continued collections of memorability and nostalgia for intangible connections provide cause to think that this desire for belonging to the past is not completely absent. The findings of this study strengthen the arguments found by Prince (2021) whose three performances categories of presenting an authentic genealogical self, enacting familiarity, genealogy as storytelling and giving off impressions of Swedishness are reflected throughout the narratives of the participants of this study. The fact that Prince examined Swedish-American tourists who were not on

a television programme and yet found very similar results, emphasises that the narratives of participants of this study are only partially influenced, and to different degrees, by the mediatized environment of *Allt för Sverige*.

The opposing of the script according to Hall (2006) is where a modified reading of the script occurs. In the participants' negotiation and rejection of the script of identity presented by *Allt för Sverige,* they attempt to modify the narrative again focusing on what they perceived as a more "authentic" contemporary Sweden, creating an alternative to the presented script. Participants' criticism of the narrow definition of who is included in Sweden's history and identity in *Allt för Sverige*'s script is similar to Hjorthén's (2017) critique of tokenism and exclusionary references to contemporary immigrants and descendants of immigrants. Klareld (2022) also described the negotiations of contestants' conflicting feelings surrounding colonization with juxtaposition of native American heritage. She noted that most tried to address or resolve their ancestors' actions and the dissonance creating either "an idealised picture of the past or by a more nuanced understanding of the past" (Klareld, 2022: 12). This reflects the findings of this study of participants' attempts to negotiate the presented script of Swedish identity, their process of authentication utilizing cultural, historical, and contemporary evidence to reflect their perception and reading of a Swedish identity. And while there are some who accept the presented script as "truth," such as one participant who emphasises their long line of ancestry and stating, "I'm probably one of the most Swedish people that was on the show," the majority adapt and adjust the script to reflect new experiences.

There has always been an element of collective identity connected to the personal search for family history but the relocation of this activity to the public medium of television has created additional complications. Those who engage with the programme are presented with, as Hunt (2006) argues, a scripted identity consisting of a national narrative of becoming, reflecting the argument that family history is not merely about connecting a person to a group of individuals related to them, but about connecting and constructing a collective identity. It produces a pattern of "something to do" as Syvertsen (2001) identified rather than just "something to watch" (319). This construction and projected script of collective identity, some argue is exclusionary and potentially dangerous as Hjorthén (2017) pointed out. However, the potential for democratization of knowledge and for individuals to gain greater historical consciousness, empathy and nuanced understanding of multiple possible

"authentic" pasts is also evident as Donnelly & Shaw (2020) and Evans (2015) have argued. This negotiation and situating of personal narratives within the larger context may be missed in the public frontstage broadcast of *Allt för Sverige*. It has been shown that participants' negotiations and process of authentication of the presented script of identity cannot be cut from their memories as easily. The "cutting" of the final broadcast does not mean these experiences/negotiations are any less valuable, rather this parallel or side narrative is arguably equally engaging and "authentic" as was shown. It does mean however, that the frontstage final broadcast does not present the whole story, nor does it comprehensively present the negotiations of the participants which occurs backstage.

As the narratives of participants of this study have shown, individuals engage and negotiate the presented scripts that go beyond the frame of the camera's lens and negotiate the presented script of identity within a larger reference than perhaps intended by the producers of the programme. *Allt för Sverige* has the potential of "soft power" similarly to what Anaz & Ozcan (2016) found in their study, to draw individuals to places perhaps they would not have considered prior to the show and challenge individuals' perceptions of Sweden and Swedish identity. This study's rich narrative data raises more wonderings than what is possible to discuss within the scope of this article. Further studies could examine deeper the concept of "authenticity," the role of emotions in individuals' evaluations and negotiations with culture and nostalgia, as well as the concept of hybridity and race in relation to "Europe" and "the old country."

Conclusion

This study started with asking, how do contestants negotiate backstage the presented scripted identity of *Allt för Sverige?* Previous studies have examined the frontstage broadcast, finding a primordial narrative of belonging presenting one aspect of the televised Family History as potentially exclusionary (Hjorthén 2017), while acknowledging that Family History is complex and significant in individuals' construction of self and belonging (Klareld 2022). I have shown that the backstage negotiations of participants are equally interesting and important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what influence the script of identity presented by *Allt för Sverige* has. The broadcasted representation of *Allt för Sverige* condenses six weeks of events into eight hours of television, and thus is only a small portion of participant's lived experiences and negotiations behind the curtain.

Driven by their purposes and desires for authentication, acceptance, and identity construction participants within this study utilize elements of cultural heritage and examples from their own experiences to either confirm, adapt, or reject the script to present their version of "reality" or "truth." Participants negotiate the presented script on four levels, the official scripted version presented by *Allt för Sverige* (their website, "on set" cultural-historical activities, and "Swedish School") is "read" and compared with alternative and often conflicting presentations of Swedishness from the television team and crew, the "everyday" Swedes on days off, and before and after filming, and finally with each other. It has also been revealed that other negotiations are ongoing however these are not the focus of this paper such as negotiations with previous experiences and knowledge of the form of reality television shows.

This study contributes a new perspective of the larger phenomenon of the interest in Family History, its televised transformation as "histotainment" (Donnelly & Shaw 2020) and "Biogravison" (Lynch, 2011) and the backstage negotiations of participants when not frontstage. *Allt för Sverige*'s form as Family History television results in public access and influence both reflecting and constructing the script of identity for consumption. While research and history have shown the potential and danger of the reach and influence that media possesses in many cases, the result of this study presents the thinking, "ordinary" person as one with agency. The scripted identity presented by *Allt för Sverige* is not simply accepted at "face value" but negotiated through participants' agency and active processing of presented scripts of Sweden/Swedishness in a process of authentication, demonstrating further, as Shaw & Donnelly have argued, that family historians develop historical consciousness through the embedding of personal micro-narratives in relation to a larger historical context (Shaw 2020, Shaw & Donnelly 2021a, Shaw & Donnelly 2021b, Shaw 2021).

Allt för Sverige presents a specific script as evidenced through both the programme's official website and the dramaturgical setting which dictates the rules of the programme. The recruitment process of Swedish-Americans is limited to individuals who have some ("even a little bit counts") biological connections emphasising a primordial dialogue of inheritance of blood as Hjorthén (2017) has pointed out. This study has demonstrated however, that despite the presented frontstage, backstage, participants actively negotiate, adapt, modify, and/or reject this scripted identity. Participants of this study were not bound by the strict dramaturgical script but actively created tension through their actions and

desires to see the "real" Sweden. Participants actively sought a wider exposure of Swedishness than the programme afforded, resulting in reflection, assessment, and a process of authentication of the scripted identity presented to them by *Allt för Sverige.*

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Karen Ann Blom is a PhD student within the Department of Natural and Social Sciences, at the School of Education and Communication, Jönköping University. Her research interests include the social constructions of identity and culture, experiential learning, spatial studies, and the use of the past–specifically Family History.

Notes

1. Genealogy traditionally is restricted to direct descent relations and therefore this paper uses "family history" to include kin relationships and biographical information beyond names, dates, and places. In reference to previous research the terminology used is kept the same as the source but is understood as definition above.
2. Managing this interacting through "impression management", facework etc.
3. Photo elicitation is meant to create a common base of information and detract the focus and stress on the interviewee to perform
4. This study has received approval from the Swedish Ethics Review Authority Dnr 2019-05944
5. Swedish proverb meaning to make room for one more
6. The participants of this study for example ranged from "100%" Swedish to those who were one eighth Swedish experiential learning, spatial studies, and the use of the past–specifically Family History.

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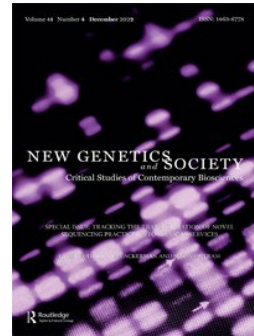
Introduction to Case Study Two Article

> You are a sum of a lifetime of experiences. You are the result of the choices you have made. You are the result of truths your parents instilled in you. You are the outcome of values drawn from your culture. From a genetic perspective, however, you are the outcome of a long process of genealogical fusion. A man and a woman coming together, one of the millions on a vast constellation that explodes out across the earth and coalesces back to a few ancient progenitors. The personal tree of life continues through you. (FamilyTreeDNA, 2021)

FamilyTreeDNA summarises the "double speak," as El-Haj (2012) points out, that I, as a consumer, am faced with the simultaneous genetic and scientific "truths" and the agency to choose to accept and adopt practices or reject this "truth." In this study, I examine how the self, the past, and the present inform each other in the in-between space of learning of the received results of genetic ancestry tests. I sent my DNA to four popular genetic ancestry testing (GAT) companies: Ancestry, MyHeritage, FamilyTreeDNA, and 23andMe, and used thematic narrative analysis to examine and compare the most commonly received documentation, namely, ethnicity percentages, deep maps, and accompanying histo-cultural information. I engage with Brubaker et al.'s (2004) theories to question how the resulting narratives categorise sameness/difference and how this translates to the boundaries of ethnicity/race/nationalism and compare the presented narrated interpretation of the results in this study.

The in-between or transitional space is where these negotiations occur and contains the potential to challenge preconceptions (Ellsworth, 2005; Grosz, 2001; Winnicott, 1982/2005). It is as Grosz (2001) claims, through the analysis of narratives presented in this space, "that the frayed edges of identity are exposed, and structuralist concepts of genetic groups, ethnicity, race, and nationality are challenged" (Blom, 2022, p. 335).

Navigating narratives of genetic categorization at the frayed edges of identity

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Navigating narratives of genetic categorization at the frayed edges of identity

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History can be described as a story, or narrative reporting on past events to create meaning and explanation for the present/future. Narratives of genetic history are presented in the genetic ancestry testing (GAT) results specifically maps, percentages, and related information to consumers expecting "answers" related to identity and belonging. Engaging in thematic narrative analysis I ask how GAT results' narratives use ethnicity/race/ nationality to categorize sameness/difference and what these narratives inform about group boundaries through the comparison of online result materials received from four GAT companies: 23andMe, Ancestry, MyHeritage, and FamilyTreeDNA. These results are presented as an in-between space where bio-historic-cultural contents are negotiated with previous knowledge/experiences. This study found results narrate dichotomies of "self" and others, individual and collective, personal and private, and the present and the historical, and serves to highlight problematic perceptions of genetics history as an essential/unchanging product, reducing and ignoring diversity within and moving between groups.

Keywords: genetic ancestry testing; narrative; results; ethnicity; culture; genealogy

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Introduction

Genetic ancestry test (GAT) companies offer consumers the story of their genetic history, emphasizing the results of genetic testing as revealing authentic belonging to one or several genetic groups each tied to a "unique" story imbedded in the collective through historical/socio-cultural narrative. Research has found that individuals engage with genealogy or family history research in their search for a sense of belonging and identity (Mehtiyeva and Prince 2020; Moore and Rosenthal 2021). Therefore, consumers, the majority "amateur" genealogists, who send their DNA samples to GAT companies for a fee, expect in return "answers" regarding identity questions such as "Who am I?"; "What genetic/ancestral/ethnic group do I belong to?"; "Where do I belong?"; and "What do these results mean?"

The body and its representation in a strand of DNA are presented by companies and researchers as an encrypted archive, whose secrets require an "expert" to decipher and are portrayed as illegible for "ordinary people" (Harrison 2020, 48). The gene in relation is represented as a historical document (Nash 2015), containing the resources for political, ideological, and individual claims to return to, and to learn and gain understanding from (de Saint-Laurent and Obradović 2019). Thus, engaging with GATs and specifically the results received, is presented as a means for gaining a better understanding of oneself, as MyHeritage (2021b) claims, "Your DNA-test offers you the powerful experience of discovering what makes you unique and learning where you really come from." Therefore, if individuals engage with genealogy and GATs to learn more about themselves, as previous research shows, the content of these results and how they are narrated is important in gaining understanding of the potential impact on individuals' construction, conceptualization, and maintenance of identity. This study compares the narratives presented through the results of autosomal tests from four GAT companies 23andMe, Ancestry, MyHeritage, and FamilyTreeDNA, and asks how GAT results' narratives use the underlying social phenomena of ethnicity/race/nationality to categorize sameness/difference and what these narratives inform about group boundaries.

This study applies Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov's (2004) challenge to treat racial, ethnic, and national groups as collective cultural representations rather than a stagnant product, arguing that traditional definitions undermine

the constructivist perspective of dynamic and shifting group borders. In other words, ethnicity/race/ nationalism become a way of seeing and making sense, classifying sameness and difference, acting as "filters that shape what is noticed or unnoticed, relevant or irrelevant, remembered or forgotten" (47). Therefore, they become part of the conceptual process of searching for "self" that occurs through and in relation with the "other," noting differences and similarities (Stets and Burke 2000).

Identity negotiations "between self and other, individual and social, personal and historical" made by consumers through their interaction with results on the GAT website can be understood as an in-between or transitional space (Ellsworth 2005, 60; Winnicott 1982/2005). Through acquiring knowledge and experiences that informs, this in-between space has the potential to challenge previously held conceptions (Barth 1993).

The narratives presented by GAT results are not always straight forward but underline a presumed link between ethnicity and "soil," while simultaneously presenting two seemingly contradictory constructions of ethnicity: one embodied, primordial in the biological (blood), and the other culturally constructed in the form of traditions. It is through the analysis of narratives presented in the in-between space that the frayed edges of identity are exposed (Grosz 2001) and structuralist concepts of genetic groups, ethnicity, race, and nationality are challenged.

Genetic ancestry tests (GAT)

Since the emergence of GATs beginning late 1990s, their status as a scientific authority versus recreational pastime, and influence on individuals' concepts of identity remains widely debated. Stories of "hidden ancestry" or mistaken identities followed by "discoveries" and revitalization of cultural heritage or disenchantments in family lore regularly appears in media. Genetic ancestry history relayed in television programming including celebrities serves to increase the scope of awareness and popularity of these tests and GATs have become more accessible through the reduction of fees and an increasing number of companies offering these services. The process for the test itself is intuitive: the consumer is provided with material to spit into a tube or wipe a cotton-swab inside their cheek that is subsequently returned to the company for analysis. The results are received several weeks later through the

company's website platforms in the form of genetic ancestry/ethnicity estimate percentages, color-coded geographical worldwide maps and various regions, and cultural/historical information.

In their study of interpreting other's genetic ancestry results, Bobkowski, Watson, and Aromona (2020) found that individuals initially perceive results as intuitive, but the closer they read and/or attempted to decipher meanings of percentages, concepts, groupings, and scientific explanations, the more confused and doubtful of the results' accuracy they become. Previous research has examined the marketing of the tests (Scodari 2017; Elliott 2020; Bliss 2013), the impact of tests on test-takers' perception of identity (Phelan et al. 2014; Roth 2018; Bliss 2013; Panofsky and Donovan 2019; Scully, Brown, and King 2016; Kramer 2015; Shim, Alam, and Aouizerat 2018; Williams et al. 2021; Bobkowski, Watson, and Aromona 2020; Gregory 2019), as well as motivations for engaging with GATs (Roth et al. 2020; Roberts et al. 2017). A few studies have engaged specifically with the results material provided by the GATs companies, however, these tend to focus on mDNA/YDNA (following the migration of maternal/ paternal line respectively) and the consumer's use of, or lack thereof result documents, and the online chat forum (El-Haj 2012; Ruckenstein 2017).

Consumers' agency and perceptions of results are highlighted by El-Haj's (2012) study of the adjacent online forum posts, finding that while "being Jewish" means more than simply having genetic material, upon receiving the test results users presume them to be meaningful and credible. Tyler's 2021 study also focused on commentators use of results to "self-fashion" identities to legitimize previously held social and political positions of race and national belonging. She concludes that a critical approach does not necessarily result in anti-racism or liberalism but rather can reinforce legacies of colonialism, and white racial/power hierarchies (Tyler 2021). Similarly, White Nationalists used statistical, logical, genetic and/or historical knowledge to dispute the legitimacy of unwanted results and to negotiate racial identity boundaries (claiming diversity within whiteness) (Panofsky and Donovan 2019).

While GATs may be used to reify biological notions of race, studies have found that GATs may also be used to empower, shape, and reimagine ideas of racial and ethnic groupings and experience (Benn Torres 2022; Tyler 2008). The current study, while noting the user's agency and interaction with results, also recognizes like others before (e.g. Reese 2001), that what information and

how it is presented to consumers affects the user's reading, and engagement (Ruckenstein 2017). This article uses Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov's (2004) proposition to take a cognitive perspective of ethnicity, race, and nationalism – perceiving the three to have a common underlying phenomenon.

The process that GAT companies engage in, including translating DNA samples into results presented through various levels of association i.e. reference groups, geographical regions, present and past inhabitants, and their associated cultural traits, (myths) of identity and continuality, and consumable end products, suggests that the results presented are far removed from the initial biological material submitted. It is through this process that the negotiation of dichotomies arises of "self" and "other/s," individual and collective, personal and private, biology and culture, and the present and the historical. The current study focuses only on one portion of this process of identification and belonging – the narrative in which this negotiation is situated and provides a critical examination of the three main information components received by consumers in their results from GAT companies: percentages, maps, and accompanied historical/cultural information.

Key concepts

Ethnicity, race, and nationalism

Definitions, discussions, and research surrounding this trilogy abound. What is interesting with Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov's (2004) discussion is how they observe an intersectionality of ethnicity, race, and nationality. They observe several common subdomains with varying dimensions of differentiation that could be attributed to all three, not exclusively to one conventional definition, including: criteria of membership, transmission, fixedness/fluidity, degree and form of naturalization, degree and form of embodiment (physical/phenotypic markers), importance attributed to distinctive culture, degree and nature of territorialization organization/symbolism, nature of claims to autonomy (48). While they do not suggest that one concept should take the place of all three, Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov argue that the cognitive and socio-cognitive mechanisms and processes, on a larger scale, are grounded in the same form of phenomena conventionally coded to the distinct domains of race, ethnicity, and nationalism.

The results presented by GAT companies act as a pedagogical pivot point, a hinge as Ellsworth argues, through which the past and present inform each other. The individual is presented a transitional in-between space of learning in which they negotiate past and future, self and others (Ellsworth 2005; Grosz 2001). Rather than a comparison of fixed identities, the in-between space allows for a comparison, a development or becoming that reveals the frayed edges of identity and the potential for social/cultural transformations (Grosz 2001, 92–93; Ellsworth 2005).

El-Haj (2012) argues that group categorizations of an ethnic/nation group are depicted with modern cultural and political ideas and that it is important to recognize membership as unstable/shifting. El-Haj observes the "double speak" of genealogy as individuals are faced with the "authenticity" of the biological meaning of genetics and simultaneously are told they have agency to choose (to forge ties, adopt practices, etc.). These choices are "made authentic" in relation to the genetic grid that provides "truths" of who you were from the beginning. Thus, choosing to "reject" GAT results, means to reject a "historical authentic self" that is verified scientifically (247).

Genetic ancestry

GAT companies emerging in the late 1990s (Nash 2017), are among the latest additions of marketed pursuits of the past to be consumed (Cross 2015; Sierra and McQuitty 2007; Salmose 2019), visited (Alexander, Bryce, and Murdy 2017; Murdy, Alexander, and Bryce 2018), or preserved/revitalized/discovered (Bennett 2018). These pursuits include historical media (e.g. television programs), ancestral tourism, theme parks, pilgrimages (religious and secular), and genealogy research groups/workshops (Foeman 2012).

Traditionally genealogy is defined as the study of pedigrees or descent and used mostly to prove rightful lineage/ancestry and thus, inheritance of power or land. The term genealogy is associated with building a family tree with names, dates of birth and death and in some cases place names. Genealogy has developed and is used often interchangeably with "family history" which is a broader concept and includes the concept of "kinship."

Genetic genealogy is a development of this traditional form of family history research. GAT companies attempt to differentiate genetic testing from traditional genealogy by way of emphasizing its "scientific rigour," presenting

their tests as "the latest science" (23andMe 2021a), "cutting-edge" and "more precise than ever" (AncestryDNA 2021) conducted by "experts in the field" (FamilyTreeDNA 2021a). They claim to break through "brick wall[s]" in your genealogy research and offer a "revolutionary strategy" (MyHeritage 2021b), implying not only the scientific "factual" value of GATs but its necessity for discovering "your origins" and who you are. Initial GATs focused on tracing mtDNA back to the "cradle" of civilization in Eastern Africa to one of the original "Eve(s)" (Nash 2015). Increased mediazation on public platforms resulted in an exponential increase of popularity of direct-to-consumer GATs. The Autosomal genetic test is now arguably the most well-known and popular, tracing all ancestral lines with the claim to reveal one's ancestral ethnicity (or the ethnic grouping of ancestors).

Genetic genealogy challenges and adds to the debate of whether identity is primordial (biology/genetics-based) or constructed through experience, culture and/or choice. Some test-takers perceive GAT through notions of legitimacy, as the "scientific nature appears to offer consumers a sense of objectivity" in terms of a claiming a particular identity or heritage (Golbeck and Roth 2012, 416). Other test-takers and researchers (e.g. TallBear 2013) argue that identity and the development of self, is more complicated and corresponds to a person's experience and environment, including their exposure to or possession of cultural heritage. Scodari (2017) studying GAT advertising concludes that while there is a primary focus of biological relatedness, the inclusion of culture inheritance is contextual and subjective. She points out that using terminology such as "ethnic ancestry," GAT companies construct categories that are based upon racial categories and the claim that race and ethnicity can be discerned from individuals' DNA. Scodari asserts that in doing so, GAT companies not only are complicit in the processes of racialization of identity but contribute to the misappropriations of genetic science (11–12).

Arguing that culture inheritance is nonbiological, El-Haj (2012) claims an entanglement of GATs with geography and ethnicity. Agreeing, Nash emphasizes that genetic identities (as opposed to other forms of identity) are a combination of empirical evidence (historic/cultural/social "facts"/archival or genetic material) and a practice of self-fashioning (choice) (2002, 2015, 13; Eller 1997). Thus, ethnic identities are behaviors that are learned/taught in relation to and interaction with others (Winnicott 1982/2005; Barth 1969,

1993). This perspective is in opposition to the primordial discourse which perceives ethnicity as predetermined, non-negotiable, and embodied in individuals' DNA.

Critiques of genetic ancestry

The analysis of the use of genetic data within academia as the field grows and divides into more specific areas including ancient DNA (aDNA) (Strand and Källén 2021; Halewood and Hannam 2001) is not proportional to the number of studies conducted (one exception is Claw et al. 2017). The geographic nature of DNA has been discussed and problematized extensively by Nash (2002, 2004, 2006, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020) and already in 2003 Welinder problematized the oversimplification in the interpretation of genetic data. Reardon and Tallbear (2012) among others, argue the databases collection of "original populations" closely resembles the theories of cultural evolutionism despite the Human Genographic Project (National Geographic Society 2021) organizers' attempts to steer clear of accusations of racism (Digangi and Bethard 2021). Roth and Ivemark (2018) found that individuals' construction of identity was based more on their identity aspirations and social appraisals than simply accepting GAT results. This paper continues this critique of the use of genetic data through the examination of the narrative(s) presented by GAT companies.

Sample and method

For around one-hundred US dollars GATs offer consumers a "scientific" breakdown of their genetic makeup related to ancestral genetic groups linked to geographical places. While the number of companies offering GATs has increased (74 in 2016; Phillips 2016) this study focuses on four of the most popular and longest operating namely: FamilyTreeDNA (the first direct-to-consumer GAT), Ancestry.se, 23andMe, and MyHeritage.

There are multiple types of tests focused on ancestry, mitochondrial (mtDNA) following the maternal line, the Y-chromosome (YDNA) following the paternal line, and the autosomal test that analyzes 22-pairs of (non-sexed[1]) chromosomes inherited from both parents in comparison to the company's "reference group"–specific to each company. Other tests available include health (e.g. Saukko 2017, 2018) and tests specific for various groups such as African Americans (e. g. Abel 2018).

This study focuses specifically on the autosomal test in the analysis and comparison of the results received by the author. Each of the GAT companies provided through their web-platform a list of percentages, a map, and historical/cultural information. This is the focus of the study's analysis and comparison, not the periphery information (e.g. adjacent blogs or chat forums).

In using my DNA, this study could have developed in various ways, including autobiographical or autoethnographic. As this study aims to analyze and compare the narratives of the four GAT companies rather than from a user's (or my own) perspective, my interaction with the results is to be seen as a convenient sample. Other researchers have utilized their own DNA samples prior. El-Haj (2012) submitted her DNA to understand the results received but does not describe or discuss these at length but analyses the online forum for users' reactions of results. Similarly, Ruckenstein (2017) used her sample to gain access to other users and their use of results.

Having submitted a sample of DNA to MyHeritage in December 2019, I submitted further samples to the remaining companies in the autumn of 2020. The results were returned at varying rates but all within 8 weeks of submission. All companies sent an email upon analysis completion with the invitation to login and view the results. As described above, autosomal tests compare a specific section of individuals' DNA samples to a "reference group" which is the combination of the company's reference population, those they describe as representative of a specific genetic origin – most often related to a geographical location, and customers' data results. These vary in size and thus are not proportionally comparable. For example, 23andMe uses the reference datasets of 45 populations of individuals who they believe, "reflect populations that existed before transcontinental travel and migration were common (at least 500 years ago)." Customers' data is included as part of the reference dataset when they indicate their known ancestry of both sets of grandparents from the same region that has not experienced "massive" migration in the last hundred years. 23andMe states they are vigorous in their filtering of candidates and 10% are not included (https://www.23andme.com/ancestry-composition-guide/). That means, however, that the majority, 90%, are included and the comparison data is reliant on individuals to some extent knowing their

ancestral heritage in advance. Strontium isotopic analysis which investigates human bones to determine where individuals have lived, ate etc. during their lifetime is not what GAT companies claim nor do.

Interestingly results are often "updated," shifting either percentages and/or inclusion in ethnic/genetic groups. For the sake of comparison purposes, the researcher has decided to focus specifically on the commonly found "Scandinavian"[2] or "Swedish" region of the results. Digitally saved results from Autumn 2021 are compared in this study.

Deep map

The map included in the results presented by the GAT companies could be described as a "deep map" or a "regular" map that is enhanced through the layering of socio-cultural and/or historical information that goes beyond the traditional geographical coordinates and description of environment (e.g. mountains, buildings etc.). The deep map is described as place and its contents (people, animals etc.) in a mediatized form that includes the ideological dimensions as well as the physical according to Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris (2015, 3). Deep maps are perceived as a useful tool to examine this complexity of the multiplicity of places and acknowledge reflexively how human agents construct spatially framed identities (Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris 2015, 3).

Thematic narrative analysis

Identity is not self-evident in a swab or spit-sample, and results, initially deceptively simple, create confusion (Bobkowski, Watson, and Aromona 2020). Thus, customers require GAT companies to dictate how they should interpret the results, by framing the construction of identity and "filling in the blanks." A story, or narrative(s) are thus, created to guide, create structure, and organize information presented. Riessman and Quinney (2005) emphasize how the use of narrative illuminates how everyday communicative action co-constructs knowledge. Oikkonen's (2013) study of UK GAT company Oxford Ancestors observed narratives of commercialization, scientific advance and personal quest in the construction of gender. Similarly, thematic narrative analysis in the current study examines the historical-socio-cultural components included within the results presented, highlighting reoccurring

patterns of text (including photos/sound) to reveal how, when interacted within the space, constructs a storied narrative of ethnic, racial, and national categorizations.

Key findings

All four companies presented the data similarly, but what they called my results varied. 23andMe presents the results as an "Ancestry Composition." My Heritage labels the same as an "Ethnicity Estimate" while including additional "Genetic Groups" (MyHeritage 2021a). AncestryDNA uses the same term "Ethnicity Estimate" with percentages of, as they call it, "identity-by-descent," genetic ethnicity or ancestry inference (Ball et al. 2021). FamilyTreeDNA labels this as my "Origins" stating that it is a "unique genetic assemblage that has been passed down to [me] from [my] ancestors" with the option of also examining my "ancientOrigins" (FamilyTreeDNA 2021b).

Regardless of label, GATs present results, ancestral composition and by proxy ethnic identity, as a primordial biological trait which can be "decoded" with the aid of the right scientific resources. The person attached to the body is presented as requiring assistance to access their "true" ethnic/genetic identity (self). The genes define the "self" in reference and in difference to "others," simultaneously defining the individual while drawing the boundaries of collective groups.

Ethnicity is prevalent in the narrative discourse placed forth by GAT results, either as a title or implied by description and is presented via percentages. As I am of mixed heritage and have conducted "traditional" paper and archives family history prior, I believed I had relatively good knowledge. As others prior (Tyler 2021; Panofsky and Donovan 2019) stressed, there is a danger for GAT results to be used to legitimize previously held social/political positions of race and national belonging, however like El-Haj (2012) and Ruckenstein (2017), I use my GAT results as an entry point for analysis. While this current study focuses on my Scandinavian and/or Swedish categorization, I am also Chinese and Polish. In focusing on one "part" of me, I am not ignoring nor rejecting my other "parts," but for the sake of simplifying the comparison and demonstration between companies I have chosen one region.

Examining specifically Scandinavia and/or Sweden as categories, 23andMe notes that I am a "likely match" with Sweden (21.2%) and specifically Västerbotten county (Northern Sweden) and did not detect evidence for recent ancestry from Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, or Norway. Ancestry concurs stating ironically that Sweden is "Primarily located in: Sweden" estimating that I am 19% Swedish and mostly likely from Northern Sweden. Contradictory, according to My Heritage I am not included in the Scandinavian/Swedish ethnic group but am included in the genetic group Sweden (Västerbotten, Västernorrland and Jämtland counties) asserting instead that I am 10.4% Finnish. The other companies also find Finnish ethnicity/origins/ancestry as 2.2%, 5%, and 8%. FamilyTreeDNA allocates 4% to Scandinavia (which by their definition and map is comparably an enormous geographical region).

Interestingly, while most groups overlap between companies, FamilyTreeDNA also found a large percentage Middle Eastern/ African, while Ancestry and 23andMe, found Ashkenazi Jewish heritage. As a consumer, one would assume that, as the samples of DNA sent to the companies were identical, the results received would be similar, however, as seen this is not the case. The large differences between the companies in reference groups, geographical placement and cultural associations that are made can result in very different results and thus may not be used for exact comparison. The presented narrated interpretation/translation of GAT results is the focus and is examined first by company and consequently compared in the discussion.

FamilyTreeDNA (FTDNA)

FamilyTreeDNA (2020) provides "myOrigins – a mapping tool that provides a detailed ethnic and geographic breakdown of where your ancestors came from" as well as "ancientOrigins" mapping ancient ancestors' migration routes matching customers' DNA to "ancient" European civilizations, and "Family Matching" which sorts the DNA matches according to maternal/paternal lines. A "Chromosome Browser" tool is also included to compare the DNA "blocks" with the "genetic matches."

FamilyTreeDNA compares the submitted sample to 90 "population clusters." These are grouped by first "Continental region" in which one or more "Super populations" are located. These "Super populations" contain one or more

"population clusters" which in turn consists of a "reference population" matching the submitted sample. These reference populations are based upon the combination of academic reference population clusters as well as the company's own testing databases.

Interestingly, the FamilyTreeDNA Help Centre answers "Who are you?" under the heading of "Population Clusters," stressing the "self" as the result of negotiated socio-cultural experiences and learning accumulated over a lifetime, while separating the genetic "self" as a scientific "fusion" of the past and future that "continues through you." They state:

> That's a question with many possible answers. You are the sum of a lifetime of experiences. You are the result of the choices you have made. You are the result of truths your parents instilled in you. You are the outcome of values drawn from your culture. From a genetic perspective, however, you are the outcome of a long process of genealogical fusion. A man and a woman coming together, one of the millions on a vast constellation that explodes out across the earth and coalesces back to a few ancient progenitors. The personal tree of life continues through you. (FamilyTreeDNA 2021c)

Information

Heavily focused on historical events, the information begins at the end of the last Ice Age in Europe 11,700 years ago. Scandinavia is described as the "last frontier" to be settled by Hunter-Gather groups migrating from continental Europe. Several key culture crossings are noted as important including: the "Corded Ware culture," the introduction of Indo-European languages from central Europe, and the Viking-era migration of Norse peoples. The 400-word narrative notes briefly the establishment of the kingdoms of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, and ends with describing the contemporary Nordic model of public welfare and free-market capitalism. Scandinavia is narrated while initially remote and "untouched" through history becoming a place of exchange and movement, and now-modernity. The edges of where exactly Scandinavia ends and begins are demonstrated as frayed, overlapping and as seen in the map-far reaching across political or national borders.

MyHeritage

"Genetic groups" introduced in December of 2020 by My Heritage are based on the comparison with a selected 1.7 million other consumers' test results (MyHeritage 2020). This they describe is an "enhancement" of the initial 42

ethnicities that are based upon comparison to the company's reference panel ("Founder Populations"). While results show a percentage for ethnicity estimate, the genetic groups are not assigned a percentage and state "you are either a member of the group or you are not" (MyHeritage 2020). Moreover, MyHeritage acknowledges the possibility of groups to be comprised of several ethnicities, stating that "members of a group share geographic origins, but they may have members who come from diverse ethnic backgrounds" who after migration create a group of their own (MyHeritage 2020). Thus, genetic groups are about who you are connected to (sameness of geography) rather than your composition (difference of ethnicity).

MyHeritage labels percentages as "ethnicity estimate," explaining further in a frequently asked section, "an ethnicity or ethnic group is a group of people who share distinct social attributes such as culture, heritage, language, history, religion, and other characteristics. Ethnicities are usually identified with a specific geographic region where their group originated" (MyHeritage 2021a). Thus, both ethnicity and genetic groups are connected to and through a geographic region. The results narrate difference portraying determined genetic groups and ethnicity as individuals who share constructed/learned "social" attributes. Curiously, although ethnicity is narrated as constructed, their social attributes are biologically measurable as a percentage.

Information

The connected information is brief but includes a music clip of a contemporary rendition of violin fiddling music with drums. Although there is no explanation for the music choice it can be assumed (as each "ethnicity" has a link) it is intended to be representative of the musical culture of the presented categorization. The text describes Finland and Western Russian culture as influenced by Nordic and Slavic culture–emphasizing the integration and interaction of cultural heritage and revealing the difficulty to categorize a "pure" genetic group, ethnicity, race, or nation. It describes that, while words were borrowed into the Finnish language, it is not related to Scandinavian nor Russian languages, but rather to Sámi languages and other minority languages. The included picture depicts two dogsled teams in Lappland, while Finland is shown at the edge of a snowy forest. There is a narrative of the contemporary grounded in the past–the gene (individual/"self") embedded in the socio-culture (collective in relation to "others"), utilizing references to folk-music, indigenous languages, and cultural activities as evidence.

Ancestry

Ancestry also features a subcategory to the "ethnicity estimate" called "genetic groups." According to Ancestry "ethnicity estimates" reveal information from your ancestry hundreds to thousands of years ago as a result of the DNA sample compared to the reference panel. "Genetic groups" in contrast, consist of AncestryDNA members (i.e. customers) who are connected through a shared recent ancestor from the same region or culture despite possibly having different ethnic backgrounds. To be included in the reference panel (70 overlapping regions/ groups) individuals require paper proof of a long genealogy connected to a place/ group and genetic confirmation (Ancestry 2021). Like MyHeritage, Ancestry narrates genetic groups as a commonality between people and ethnicity as unchanging for thousands of years.

Information

Ancestry provides another variation of a "deep map" for their consumers' results. This is particularly interesting as different maps highlight different information to the consumer (Reese, Gandy, and Grant 2001). Ancestry, while still a blend of socio-cultural and historical information has a clear emphasis on temporality (historicity) and emigration (little acknowledgement of immigration) demonstrated through an interactive timeline on the right-hand side of the map.

This timeline when scrolled down to read the information zooms in and out of corresponding places on the map. Each year listed has also been paired with selected DNA matches (i.e. other consumers). Beginning in the 1700s with an overview of Sweden's "group history" (contrasting previous companies' start at the Ice Age), it describes common work forms in northern Sweden (e.g. mining, reindeer herding, and seal-hunting), and historical crises (e.g. failed harvests and famine). After the overview, it details main historical/cultural events for every 25 years from 1700s to 1925.

Ancestry's description includes cultural and social aspects such as types of food baked, traditional gendered work roles, etc. The section 1800–1825 entitled "Traditional cultural expressions" includes the description of holidays and celebrations such as weddings and funerals that lasted for several days at home rather than in a church. Traditional dishes such as pickled herring,

meatballs and salmon were common for Christmas and Midsummer meant dancing around the Maypole. This, Ancestry claims, is the beginning of the "so-called Swedish identity" with music and stories folk-traditions "a newly awoken interest for the so-called Swedish identity was created." The years 1825–1850 narrate school reforms as a nation becoming–centralizing education through the building of schools and removing it from individual households and priests. Sections 1850–1900, 1900–1925, and 1925–1950s, focus on the Swedes' mass emigration specifically to the United States, the subsequent difficulties of employment, and maintenance and transference of cultural inheritance, describing how Swedish Americans "read Swedish newspapers and Swedish was spoken in clubs, churches and families." It also includes the struggle to keep their culture through attempts for their children to be offered courses in Swedish in school and through the Swedish church. Swedish identity is narrated as something created, and while grounded in the past requiring continual maintenance and refuelling for the next generation to carry into the future.

23andMe

While similar in many ways in its aim and services, 23andMe develops a more elaborate educational narrative. 23andMe's "Learn More Explore your Scandinavian heritage" is found under "Ancestry Composition"[3] with nation-states outlined and a table of "populations" and percentages included. 23andMe compares the GATs to 45 test populations divided into contemporary political nation-states/geographical connected regions (e.g. Northwestern European–Scandinavian–Sweden–Västerbotten County). Three exceptions are culturally defined: Ashkenazi Jewish, Gujarati Patidar, and African Hunter and Gatherer. Selecting a category causes the map to magnify and reveal corresponding information. For example, selecting Northwestern European provides brief information that these "countries rim the North and Baltic Seas and have been connected throughout much of history by those waters" (23andMe 2021b).

Information

Inside "Learn More Explore your Scandinavian heritage" a shared genetic heritage narrative of the people of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland is relayed. A pan-Scandinavian narrative of a genetic (racial/ethnic)

commonality is created by treating these four nationalities as one, while contradictorily treating the political borders and collective nationalist identity of nation-states as definitive.

Likewise, 23andMe reiterates the reciprocal influences and interactions of the historic Scandinavian people and others, emphasizing historic Vikings' maritime expansion and the continual immigration of people from hunter-gatherers to Germanic-speaking tribes– this contradicts the genetic uniqueness previously claimed. Highlighting the narrative of uniqueness, the consumer is asked by 23andMe if they are "curious about Scandinavian history, art, and traditions? Explore a few of the many nuances that make this population distinct" (2021c). Previously the focus of the results was its reliability evidenced by science. Now the myths and fantasies of Scandinavian culture create a "how-to" for engaged consumers.

A schematic organization of various "nuances" of Scandinavian cultural identity is presented, beginning with the "Anatomy of a Hygge Space" or the Danish concept of "coziness" instructing how to recreate and learn this cultural component to construct a Scandinavian identity. The space of Hygge with the use of the term "anatomy" implies a living embodied space. Noting how Hygge has become a "buzz word" internationally in recent times and provides a three-step guide to its construction, the individual is told to "be present" to eliminate noise "either literal or emotional" and to "surround yourself with joy" in the form of people and things. In this one cultural aspect, 23andMe has constructed a cultural space in which the individual can enact/embody their cultural identity concretely. Individuals are to tangibly feel, taste, hear, see, and smell this aspect of their Scandinavian identity which 23andMe labels "Craft & Tradition" underscoring the ritualistic historical nature of this activity and thus its "authentic" nature within the lexicon of (pan)Scandinavian culture.

Airbnb Advertisement follows on the webpage, reminding the reader of the business partnerships engaged with by GAT companies and questioning the divide between personal and private while offering cultural heritage for identity purposes as evidenced in the offering of playing with "polar dogs" and enjoying winter sports. 23andMe reflects the Norse mythological references in descriptions by highlighting specific cultural events which a person could inhabit for a limited amount of time. Connecting the Norse pagan goddess Skade with competitive Nordic skiing is an attempt to construct

skiing as specifically part of the Scandinavian ("(pan)nationalist") myth. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the cultural and scientific is highlighted in, "your DNA ties you to a millennia-long history of winter sports, cold-weather adventures," while noting you should start exploring the homes and experiences that are "as unique as your DNA." Additional information is included such as the teaching of the Swedish word "Gökotta" meaning the early rising to listen to birdsong and the introduction to the Icelandic Thorrablot Festival Feast, an offering of songs, poetry, stories and eating exotic foods such as selsheifar (fermented seal flipper). "The Magical Princesstårta" is offered as the quintessential Swedish dessert despite being a more recent cultural addition introduced in Åkerström's 1932 cookbook. The "Norwegian Fjords" is the final offering, narrating poetically as "dramatically towering" and noted as a UNESCO-listed wonder. 23andMe's business partners emerge again emphasized in the three alternatives to experience the Fjords from the railway, by kayaking "past the Viking-era ruins … crystal clear lagoons, and bubbling waterfalls" or hiking "along the craggy edge … [to see] ancient cemeteries, flowering meadows, and fairytale-like creeks" (2021c). These narratives, while highly descriptive aiming to bestow an atmospheric experience, is eclipsed by the photo of the Northern Lights which engages the viewer and at first glance one would think this is the "sight to see" as the category suggests.

Discussion and conclusion

Comparing the narratives presented in autosomal test results from four GAT companies 23andMe, Ancestry, MyHeritage, and FamilyTreeDNA, I show how this narrative of sameness/difference is an underlying factor grounding social categories of ethnicity/race/nationality. While previous studies indicated consumers are not naïve nor passive users of GAT, the conflicting narratives of scientific rhetoric, combined with historic, and socio-cultural traditions, create a confused message of what exactly is found in one's genes, and therefore potentially alters the reading and interaction of the user.

Geneticists perceive DNA as an encrypted historical document, or map, that contains instructions for the body while simultaneously citing the past (Nash 2015; Harrison 2020). The prominence placed on the requirement for another, an expert/scientist, to interpret and unlock this genetic history (Harrison 2020) underlines the test results as an in-between place of negotiation for consumers.

The following discussion is organized according to reoccurring (sometimes overlapping) thematic dichotomies of self-others, individual-collective, personal-private, present-historical and nature-culture.

"Self" and others

GAT companies, as seen in the rhetoric from their webpages and advertisement, emphasize that consumers and their genetic samples are unique and require deciphering to unlock their genetic secrets (Scodari 2017). The results received narrate identity as primordial and are relayed through a breakdown of the customer into various labelled percentages while simultaneously implying cultural inheritance as an inherent factor. While GAT companies emphasize the "uniqueness" and personal ancestral story, they do so through the comparison of others' genetic samples found in the companies' respective reference databases. Therefore the "self" is constructed relationally to "others" and as seen by the results, this "self" is constructed using different percentages depending on the "others" found in the reference database.

Individual and collective

The choice made by the GAT companies to utilize and focus on the map as the first presentation of a consumer's results is curious as traditionally genealogical information is presented as a family tree and many GAT companies offer the option to build a family tree connected to these results.

It is interesting to note that all four companies use maps with contemporary political borders labelled more or less extensively while not taking into consideration the changing nature and movability of these borders. This is problematic because when GAT companies connect reference groups to geographical regions and label them in contemporary terms, it creates a false sense of a continual, unadulterated collective identity; when in fact people from the beginning of time have migrated in and out of regions as described in the accompanying historical information. Following the logic of the "ancestry composition" or "ethnicity estimate," DNA results are equivalent to a collective imagined community of "nationality" (e.g. Swedish). While the GAT companies argue that DNA is compared to "population groups" these groups are visibly closely tied to a geographical landmass which they have

categorized in mainly nationalist terms. There are exceptions to this such as "Ashkenazi Jewish" which while tied still to land, is defined by a continual cycle of diaspora.

GATs results received by the four companies project a narrative of identity. FamilyTreeDNA, while first in its offering of direct-to-consumer genetic testing, provides the least amount of information. The sweeping and brief historical overview includes a nod to the cultural influence and migration patterns of individuals (e.g. cordware). MyHeritage interestingly allows and acknowledges the multiplicity of ethnic backgrounds and identities and includes the confusing information that while ethnicity is innate, primordial genetic groups are not and can comprise of several ethnicities. Moreover, the inclusion of contemporary musical representations and the influence of other cultures and languages portrays a culturally constructed narrative of identity. Ancestry provides a historical overview and migratory path for those individuals connected through the consumer's DNA sample. This historical account, however, also contains an emphasis on cultural traditions and the inheritance of "Swedishness" by Swedish Americans. The emphasis on Swedish Americans and the emigration to the US, while important, fails to recognize the unequal development of Swedish identity in Sweden vs the US, the former evolving and integrating new cultural activities and the latter primarily maintaining cultural traditions of yore (Blanck 2006). It also ignores the fact that many Swedes in the era of the great emigration of 1850s–1930s emigrated to a variety of places around the world including Australia, New Zealand, and Canada in addition to the US.

23andMe's results portray a similarly framed duality of identity construction. 23andMe attempts to separate "genetic ancestry composition" and "ethnic identity" but in their inclusion of cultural "how-to's" create a connection and narrative of identity as anything but separate. The inclusion of the "how-to" for individuals wishing to become more of the ethnic identity their genetic tests already state they "are," is flawed on many levels (El-Haj 2012).

Approaching Scandinavia as a homogeneous culture while there is intersecting and a sharing of cultural traditions (Barth 1969), there are many who would argue that "being Swedish" is different from "being Danish." The example of "Finnish" vs "Swedish" is perhaps even more complicated. Historically they have moveable borders, with Swedish still spoken in regions of Finland. Culturally there are some similarities but there are more

distinctions. In terms of language, Finnish is closer to the indigenous peoples of the indigenous region Sápmi than it is to its neighbor and once ruler, Sweden. The GAT results shared in this study reflect the discord of various heterogenous cultures placed together, which leads to the question of why certain geographical regions are categorized as a group while others are not. It is important to note that 23andMe in their definition of the so-called region of Scandinavia, does not include the indigenous and minority populations, namely the Sami, Romani, Jews, Swedish Finns and Tornedalers, nor do they acknowledge their historical and cultural influences, thus propagating a notion of an erroneous unified type of nationality, race, and ethnicity within the region. Likewise, cultural aspects emphasized by GAT results as "authentic," making the population note not a geographical region – "distinct," project the narrative of a culture gene rather than as Scodari (2017), TallBear (2013) and others argue as something contextual and based on experience/environment.

Furthermore, the choices of various cultural traditions are flawed. The reference to "polar dogs" and sledding is a false claim for "Scandinavian" identity and lifestyles, as large polar dogs used for sled pulling were not common or used in Scandinavia until very recently for "recreation" and tourism purposes (as evidenced by the ad). Indigenous Sami reindeer herders traditionally travelled on skis using smaller breeds of dogs for herding, and tame reindeer to pull their sleds. "Polar dogs" are a North American Inuit tradition and are a cultural import. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the cultural and scientific is highlighted in, "your DNA ties you to a millennia-long history of winter sports, cold-weather adventures, and so much more," while noting you should start exploring the homes and experiences that are "as unique as your DNA." These statements and the attempt to "pass" cultural imports as uniquely Scandinavian are falsehoods which present framed contradictions of the construction of identity as cultural and personal preferences, implying that the connected ancestral composition percentages can be proven valid through personal preferences and tastes (e.g. enjoying skiing validates a Scandinavian genetic ancestry).

The individual consumer is connected to collective groups through GAT results. The self and individual identity are attributed value through the connection and placement within various collective groups. These collective groups are constructed through the imagined community of shared genetic material and the presented historical, socio-cultural information (Anderson

2006). GAT results do not only divide the world into contemporary political geographical regions presented neatly on a map, but these regions are attributed historical and socio-cultural components that transcend temporal boundaries to create an anachronistic construction of a collective group identity. The cultures and traditions of the past are not differentiated from those more recently acquired, and thereby, facilitate the marketing of business partners' products as valid choices for consumers to connect with their ancestry and ancestors of another time. As 23andMe stated, "you may choose to identify with your Scandinavian ancestry" and this is accomplished, it is implied, through engaging in various ways with the presented cultural activities (2021c).

Personal and private

The GAT results' offerings of selected cultural experiences and information also is an indication of a blurring between perceived private or personal spheres of activity with that of the public and commercial. This blurring is also seen through the inclusion and connection with genetically matched "relatives" or as some say, "genetic cousins." Test-takers can access others' percentage ancestral/ origins/ethnic groupings as well as compare their results with those found on the list. The lists are updated regularly with the possibility (often requiring a subscription fee) to contact those they are matched with. Moreover, online forums/ chatrooms allow users to engage and "self-fashion" identities to legitimize as demonstrated by previous research (Panofsky and Donovan 2019; El-Haj 2012; Tyler 2021). The fact that personal genetic data results are collectively available for comparison with others and in some cases are shared beyond the marketing and matching, to researchers (upon the consumer's agreement) and/or in the case of FamilyTreeDNA to law enforcement, highlights the slippage between what is private and what becomes public.

The present and the historical

The blurring between historical and present is perceived in the anachronistic approach in the presentation in which all cultures regardless of when they occurred in time somehow are represented in the body of the consumer. This approach creates a conduit for consumers to construct an identity, connecting themselves to a collective group identity and their ancestors, through embracing all cultural traditions regardless of the fact if their ancestors

engaged with them (e.g. eating prinsesstårta) or not. Moreover, there is a clear lack of regard for the influence of cultures of indigenous populations, migration, and immigration. The critique of GAT company's business model (Moneer et al. 2021) is seen perhaps most clearly by the example of 23andMe. The various cultural activities presented to embrace and enact one's ethnic identity are advertisements for business partners. Moreover, results presented by GAT companies appear to be targeted at individuals who have limited knowledge of their ancestral cultural background, perceiving the anachronistic nature and the cultural activities suggested as "authentic" and valid suggestions. Whereas for others such as the "Swedish" author and others who have a personal experience with the places and cultures their ancestors referred to in the GAT results, it presents a clash of knowledge and brings into question the validity of the GAT as a whole. This echoes user responses presented by Bobkowski, Watson, and Aromona (2020), who in their attempt to decipher results became more doubtful of its validity.

GAT results have relayed narratives that project sameness/difference in several ways. First as a primordial identity associated with the "scientific" genetic material. GAT companies differ not in the scientific procedure to extract the genetic information but in their interpretation which in many ways produces a less reliable report. The second narrative follows the logic of genetic groups as seen in MyHeritage and 23andMe. These groups are based on connection—a sameness of geography which yet maintains a notion of personal (possibly differing) ethnicity. While geography is key to connecting individuals, the digital space of the website acts as an in-between space where past and future, self and others are negotiated with the potential for change. The lack of flexible understanding in the results surrounding migration, diverse ethnic/ racial populations, and the changing political borders in the definitions of groups and geopolitical regions is problematic. The inclusion of cultural traditions and historical information as instructional evidence for the genetic scientific "truth" confirms this lack of sensitivity. As the examples of "Scandinavia" and "Finland" revealed, overlapping and appropriation of cultural "stuff" between categories do not simply testify to the interaction between groups, but to the co-inhabitance and frayed edges of the group identity (Grosz 2001; Ellsworth 2005). Revealing that while scientists, and arguably humans in general, relish creating categories and organization of

people into groups, these are far from rigid, staid configurations. Rather, the narratives of sameness/difference, presented by GAT results, argue for an interconnected dynamic web that ebbs and flows.

Concluding remarks

This article has shown the dissonance of consumers' genetic identity narrative(s) presented by GAT results and emphasizes the problematic nature embedded within genetic ancestry testing. Consumers seeking answers and authentic belonging are provided with an array of dichotomies and selective categorical information. The results of this study expose the frayed edges of identity through the blurring of temporalities, social spheres, and boundaries of groups and self. The results ask who and what cultures, (historical) places are excluded and what does this mean for the individual consumer's search for answers and identity? It is critically important, then, to understand that while GAT companies present the resulting narrative as scientifically grounded, consumers should consider that narrative as just one story out of many possible stories of their genetic history.

Disclosure statement

Ethics

This article is included in the larger research project entitled Vid korsning mellan släktforskning, plats, och identitet (English title: At the crossroads between genealogy, place, and identity) that has undergone and received approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority https://etikprovningsmyndigheten.se/. # Dnr2019-05944.

Notes

1. I.e. not X chromosome or Y chromosome.
2. Historically includes countries on the Scandinavian Peninsula: Norway and Sweden but has developed to include Denmark.
3. The first option offered at the top of the main page after the consumer logs in.

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Introduction to Case Study Three Article

> The online course, which I would have guessed to be less personal, became an intimate, familiar, and lively exchange of information, helping each other and sharing tips and queries. Many attended because they wished to meet others who shared the same passion for family history, others for something to do when it is too cold to work in the garden; either way, they believe it is a hobby for those who are older–despite their age.

> In contrast, in the in-person course, despite having fika pauses, many participants never spoke to each other or knew each other's names. The classroom had a more pronounced teacher–student divide of knowledge dynamic. The online course participants were active in their discussions and did not hesitate to create friction or dispute the course leader verbally. Participants physically disputed and embodied their emotions in the in-person course rather than speaking out. Participants ignored the leader, shook their heads, rolled their eyes, and spoke with me after class to ensure I knew they thought differently.

Family history research courses are commonplace in Sweden. This brief reflection on my attendance in two of these courses introduces the following study. I was curious about how participants in family history research courses described their experiences and perspectives, what they were taught and learned, and what they valued as significant. These courses are often considered a traditional, everyday, banal approach to family history research compared to the seemingly more effervescence of case one's television programme and case two's genetic ancestry testing.

The courses that I attended while in different locations (digital versus in-place) had more commonalities in their contents than differences. The following article highlights the reflections of participants' narratives, their motivations for enrolment, their findings and what they perceive as significant and valuable. Results reveal that while research and media emphasise and focus on the extreme, effervescent experiences and events of family history research, that which occurs in the everyday banal and seemingly simple facts is perceived by participants in this study as equally life-changing and significant.

The banal significance of family history research: Experiences and narratives from participants of Swedish non-formal family history courses

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Abstract

Is family history research always life-changing and sensational? Or is there something significant in the banal that the participants in this study reported? This study aims to explore the spectrum of experiences of family history research, focusing specifically on the banal. I argue that it is in examining the banal everyday motivations, experiences, and findings that a greater understanding of how the average individual negotiates and builds meaning through their use of cultural heritage, family history, and the past. The everyday banal is what is reproduced and remains after the effervescence fades away and the normal redundancy in traditional society continues. The banal withstands the sands of time and effectively (re)produces narratives and binary tropes of identity and the past. This study examines the narratives collected from semi-structured interviews with seven participants from two Swedish non-formal courses in family history research. These narratives are important as they reveal participants' engagement with historical consciousness and the relationship between the past, present and future. Moreover, the stories they tell are significant in revealing that participants learn family history research for numerous reasons, including "something to do" alongside those who wish to have a deeper historical understanding. Family history research is a collective and collaborative activity despite the individualised nature of focusing on one's ancestors. Participants' research led to discoveries that were not always revolutionary, reinforcing, for example, banal traits seen in themselves and banal activities they carry out today. This study found that while the reasons for participation, the act of attending class, and participants' research may not necessarily result in the extraordinary–thieves or kings–for these individuals participating in family history research, the banal reasoning and banal results are significant.

Keywords

Family history research, Banality, Narrative, Non-formal education, Historical consciousness

The Banal Significance of Family History Research Experiences and Narratives from Participants of Swedish Non-Formal Family History Courses

Introduction

With millions participating across the globe in some form of family history research, one cannot help but wonder if the goal is to fill in a family tree or if there is something more. This study seeks to provide insight into the global phenomenon on a personal scale, examining participants' perspectives of Swedish non-formal courses. How do participants describe their experiences, motivations, learning, and the perceived significance of family history research?

Family historians, while not often professionally trained, are perceived as actively contributing meaningfully to the discipline of History through self-directed learning that motivates and encourages a greater appreciation for the past (Edquist, 2009; Shaw, 2021; Shaw & Donnelly, 2021a, 2021b). As a form of public pedagogy, family history research enables individuals to build contextualisation and develop their historical thinking, empathy, and consciousness (Shaw, 2021; Shaw & Donnelly, 2021a, 2021b). Public pedagogy views everyday informal spaces as inherently educational within the organised social relations of daily life, including popular culture and media (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010). Burdick and Sandlin (2013) identify three streams of public pedagogical research: 1) *transferring knowledge* for emancipation, 2) understanding the *phenomenological relationship* of learning as active and embodied, and 3) *posthumanist rupturing* of self. This research aligns with examining the lived experience and negotiations of individuals of family history research and positions itself in the second stream.

Individuals' frameworks of historical understanding emerge from previous experiences such as films, television, stories, traditions, and earlier schooling (Seixas, 1997, p. 22). Attention to a macro-historical context can enhance observing adjacent micro-events and people (Páez et al., 2017). Furthermore, understanding individuals of the past's contributions constructs appreciation and comprehension for actions, attitudes and motivations that persist in present times. Therefore, it is essential not to neglect individuals' interpretations of what is significant. Awareness of one's framework of

historical understanding is not always clear. According to Seixas, pedagogy is to expose what is often "partially submersed frameworks for orienting themselves in historical time," as attributed significance reflects historical interpretation and the meaning of history (Seixas, 1997, p. 22). The challenge with historical significance is that there is not one set of unquestionable facts or significant events (Hunt, 2000), but for each individual, culture, and group, there can be multiple that are contextually and temporally dynamic. Examining what individuals and groups deem significant draws awareness and greater comprehension of decision-making, the organisation of the physical and social world and why conflicts exist.

Comprehending the significance of individuals' evaluation of family history research necessitates an inquiry into motivations and contexts as contributing to their framework of historical understanding. Research in family history predominately finds motivations as the pursuit of identity and belonging (Bottero, 2015; Moore & Rosenthal, 2021; Nash, 2008). However, Shaw (2017) found that while her Australian participants incorporated identity, it was not explicitly sought; their findings were used to confirm their previously held conceptions. Shaw found that her participants provided many overlapping reasons for their participation, categorising these as Prompted, Inherited, Curiosity, History Buffs, and Recreation. Likewise, in Sweden, Börnfors (2001) noted that family historians often connected their motivations to tangible (e.g., photographs) and intangible (e.g., stories) inheritances that led to a sense of belonging and cultural embeddedness (identity). This reflects the portrayal of family history as a move of interest from the traditional disciplinary focus of notable events and famous individuals (e.g., wars and royalty) towards the banal, unremarkable or commonplace, embedded symbols and objects of historical narratives (Billig, 1995; Edquist, 2009; Karlsson, 2011; Nordgren, 2021; Shaw, 2021). Similarly, researchers found that motivation and reasoning can be related to one's lifespan and a desire to produce a legacy for future generations (Evans, 2023; Moore & Rosenthal, 2021). While others cite intellectual, spiritual, social and travel aspects as incentives (Moore & Rosenthal, 2021).

Compared to other family history experiences, such as ancestry tourism or genetic testing, attending a course may appear banal or non-consequential. However, researchers have shown that examining the banal can illuminate the context of sociocultural and historical complexities and influences. In this

study, I explore how Swedish participants describe their involvement in family history research, who it is for, and what is significant for their understanding and conceptualisation of the past.

Theoretical Approach

Historical Consciousness and Narrative

Examining participants' interactions and descriptions of their family history research involves assessing their awareness and interactions with presentations of the past. Historical consciousness is a culturally manifested process of becoming aware of the past through a dynamic present-day lens of understanding from individual and collective perspectives (Gadamer, 2004/1960; Grever & Adriaansen, 2019). Participants' reflections are an engagement of the horizons of their experiences and knowledge with the (re)presentation of the past (Gadamer, 2004/1960). This approach to the concept recognises that individuals carry with them previous historical knowledge and consciousness and insinuates a *negotiation* of this with new information and insights (not necessarily always leading to development) (c.f. Sexias, 2005). People are seen as dynamic rather than as a "blank slate" (*tabula rasa*), rejecting "strict relativism" and eschewing earlier ideas of history as a collection of "facts" and accepting a variety of legitimate histories (Körber, 2016, p. 441).

Historical consciousness is often connected to historical thinking in research and assessed through "competence models" (Körber, 2015) from a cognitive developmental standpoint (Popa, 2022). Others, such as Nordgren (2019) and Popa (2022), criticise this approach for the absence of relationships and recognition of its influence and negotiations between people, cultural objects, contexts and sociocultural communities. They prefer a hermeneutic approach examining meaning-making "that encompasses a vast, rich and ambiguous array of ways in which people and societies situate themselves in time and represent their past to themselves and others" (Popa, 2022, p. 173). This view of historical consciousness as meaning-making within a cultural complexity is what the current study applies.

Nordgren claims historical consciousness reveals "tensions and contradictions within and across historical cultures where the line between facts and myth, the unique and the exemplary, the distanced and the moral is crossed"

(Nordgren, 2019, p. 781). This reflection on the past is expressed in narratives that individuals and collective groups apply, contributing to and influenced by contemporary historical culture (Aronsson, 2004; Karlsson, 2014; Thorp, 2020). Historical culture is all representations of the past and the institutions/organisations that present/teach and govern them in the present (Nordgren, 2016; Rüsen, 2005; Thorp, 2020).

Narratives are dynamic cultural carriers or tools (Barton & Levstik, 2004) "endlessly transformed by human beings to inform the next generation of universal 'truths' of what it is to be human but within a vehicle that is continually culturally crafted to fit the listener" (Jarvis, 2019, p. 6). In creating narratives to suit their present context, individuals make sense of sequences of events and gain meaning and purpose by connecting themselves to a larger collective (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Karlsson, 2014). Historical consciousness guides and impacts these narratives as individuals engage with the relations between the past, present, and future (Nordgren, 2016). The stories we tell about ourselves and our families are purposeful and adjust over time, affected by culturally/temporally changing accepted behaviours and norms. They are significant to individuals' ability to explain, understand and position themselves within a cultural society.

While an effective tool, the danger lies in mistaking narrative as history itself, forgetting that narrative is selective and represents one of many ways to make sense of the past (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Narratives are powerful and can cause alternatives to appear illegitimate and reinforce problematic tropes and binaries, such as the primitive past/modern present and moral past/immoral present. These presentations and their newly acquired experiences and knowledge through family history research affect participants' perceptions and evaluations of the past.

Historical significance

While motivation connects to purpose and a future goal, significance is not linked to one temporality but can find significance in the past, present, and future. Significance is the attribution of inherent value or an evaluation of the value of something/one made by individuals (Martela & Steger, 2016). Martela and Steger (2016) argue that meaning-making is a reflective activity that develops mental connections between experiences, knowledge, things, and relationships (people). Individuals' relationship with the past, what they

perceive as relevant and meaningful, and their communication can represent their interpretation and construction of history (Thorp, 2016). This interpretation and construction of the past is also used for identity positioning and provides perspective for the future (de Saint-Laurent & Obradović, 2019).

Historical significance involves acknowledging certain events and individuals in the past and the perceived consequences of their actions. Numerous factors contribute to the perception of historical significance, such as the tendency for local orientation (e.g. national heroes/villains in textbooks), temporal nearness, and general norms and structures existing within a social context (Páez et al., 2017). Emotionally charged ingroup collective memories, reinforced through rituals and institutions, contribute to perceived significance (Páez et al., 2017). While memories fade and details are lost, the understanding derived from conclusions of the significance of events/people constitutes educational value (Hunt 2000). In various forms and countries, the so-called' history wars' (Samuelsson, 2017) reveal the contention that can occur when questioning the value of earlier epochs in curricula. Perceptions of events and individuals change over time due to sociocultural contexts and access to information. While criteria scales exist, I focus on the individuals' descriptions of what they deem significant and reflect what Peck and Seixas (2008) have condensed into two criteria: resulting in change/consequences and revealing or illuminating enduring/emerging issues.

Research design

In the spring of 2022 (Jan-June), I participated in two adult non-formal education courses offered by a study association and a local family history society in the southern region of Sweden. The study association provided an online course utilising the web platform Teams, comprising six (n=6) participants. The family history society met in person in a historic locale within a medium-sized city. It had eight (n=8) participants. Participants in both courses ranged between their early 20s and their late 70s. The courses were six sessions each; however, the in-person course continued as a study circle for a few weeks afterwards. The course leaders were not professionals but had extensive experience as family historians and were perceived as "experts" by the participants. As non-formal courses, there are no grades or prerequisites, and organisers limit the number of participants (max 8 in-person, max 9 online). The online course was less structured and open for collaborative learning–participants were encouraged to lead sessions.

Questioning the course leader's correctness was regular and perceived as non-provocative. The in-person class did not know each other's names and had a course leader with a more traditional approach, often sharing historical anecdotes and procedural knowledge in a one-way monologue. In this article, I focus on the individual participant's narratives.

Those individuals who consented participated in an audio-recorded semi-structured interview after the course completion, held online, over the telephone, and in person. While this is a small sample study, the age and dominance of female participation demographics reflect the comprehensive statistics of Study Associations in Sweden (Statistikdatabasen [SCB], 2023). Seven (n=7) females participated in this study, and the interviews were 40 minutes long on average and transcribed verbatim. Questions posed included, "Why did you take this class?" "How did you become interested in family history?" "Describe something that you learned/surprised you." Participants spoke freely, and the atmosphere was informal. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw and, in the text, were de-identified using pseudonyms and removing identifying features. In the initial familiarisation and coding phases of reflexive thematic analysis, I identified several reoccurring patterns for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). These I clustered for broader patterns, generating initial themes including motivations, desired results, interest in the past, frames of identity, the relevance of place, and learning environments. I reviewed, redefined, and renamed themes multiple times. Themes are patterns anchored in shared meaning, not passively emerging, but chosen by the researcher to provide a rich, in-depth understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I have chosen to organise the findings under the headings: Reasoning for family history research, Learning looking back-going forwards, and Significant knowledge.

This study is part of a larger research project that has sought and received approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority https://etikprovningsmyndigheten.se/ #Dnr 2019-05944.

Findings and discussion

The reasoning for family history research

Participants describe many reasons for taking the course and participating in family history research. Participants' motivations for their interest in family history and attending the course are generally similar to categories found by Shaw (2020) and Börnfors (2001). Most participants relate to the categories of History buffs, Prompted (by event, loss, objects), or Inherited (someone else in their family started, and it was something that they just "did"). Others relate more to the more banal categories of Curiosity and Recreation, as demonstrated by Elyse, who says, "to meet others who do family history."

The majority of participants' narratives reveal a combination of these reasonings. Several participants note that the course was about creating a sense of accountability. As the participant Elyse states, "I wanted to deepen [my knowledge] a little bit more and get a kick in the ass too, to get going again" after falling into a slump. This sentiment of the course serving the purpose of an accountability partner is echoed by several participants. Edda notes, "This is my third course, and I took it [because] I don't get anything done if I don't take a course." Noomi also states, "Yes [the course] contributed one hundred per cent. I wouldn't have gotten started myself, if I hadn't taken the course, I wouldn't have been able to [do it]." Many note the simplicity of having something to do in bad weather, as more than half of the participants emphasise the impact of annual seasons. Alice says, "It's a nice occupation, preferably in winter," while one participant Maj explains her husband signed her up for the course because "he thought I should have something to do while he plays golf." Reiterating that while for some doing family history is a passion for learning about the past, for others, it simply is a banal, regular activity to keep them occupied.

Despite this banal reasoning, most participants describe their interest in family history as connected to history buffs, prompted, and inherited categories. Therefore, it can be deduced that while some participated for banal purposes, they chose to participate in this particular class type due to their interest in family history and the general past. Moreover, it should be noted that while motivations for family history can and are categorised, these categories overlap.

A rite of age: "When I am retired"

Participants repeatedly refer to advanced age and retirement connected to researching family history, as if it were a rite of passage to participate when one becomes "old." This could be explained as the perception of having more free time. Ann initially thought she would "deal with [old letters, photos, and stuff] when I'm retired. Then I have plenty of time. Then I must have something to do as well." However, she later questions why she thought this way. "I just figured out why should I wait until I retire? I'm doing it now instead. So, I signed up for this course." One participant, Edda, was contacted by a course leader to help a Swedish-American relative find family in Sweden. Edda says, "I didn't think much of it at the time. I was a little over 30 years old at the time", implying that she was too young to consider family history and underlying that it is an activity for the old. Participants reiterate this belief by explaining why their children are not interested now and "might not be until he turns 50-60" (Ann). Similarly, Maj says her daughter is not interested: "No, it's not hers. No, they have enough with the present." This statement not only implies that interest comes with age but also disassociates family history from the present and future. This division of temporality contrasts with many participants who actively engage with the past, present and future as simultaneously intertwined.

The over-representation of family historians in advanced age is also seen in other studies (Börnfors, 2001; Shaw, 2020). The association with advanced age and family history can be argued as a growing appreciation for life's fragility and brevity, as discussed by Hookoomsing in Eriksen (1996). This realisation of life's brevity can result in the psychological desire to, in some form, continue to exist, leaving a legacy for future generations (Moore & Rosenthal, 2021). Edda reflects that her interest in family history intensified when her parents died, saying she became "nostalgic or hembygdskär"

(hometown love) in the realisation of her mortality and heritage that partly disappears with the memory "keepers." Perhaps it is, as Elyse, the youngest of the participants, says, "I think there are different phases in life and that you have different thoughts at different times." As every person's experiences, knowledge and relationships are uniquely theirs (Martela & Steger, 2016), the timing of these phases of life and the attributed significance are also highly personal. Thus, we can question if family history is an interest for those in the later years of their lives or an interest in the past in general. Furthermore, whether this perception of family historians as "older" will be changed over time with the introduction of genetic testing that markets to a broader population. It should also be observed that while most participants assert family history research is a pastime for the "old", this is often in direct contrast to their age and participation–perceiving themselves as exceptions to the "rule."

Learning looking back–going forwards

Edquist (2009) argues that "the family history research boom" (*släktforskningsboomen*) in Sweden is an example of the democratisation of historical culture. This reflects the public pedagogical perspective of learning outside formal education as active and embodied through negotiations of knowledge and experience (Ellsworth, 2005). Family history research is not necessarily a straightforward activity and is more than finding dates, names, and places. It reflects individual choices of what and whom to study and an underlying evaluation of what is significant to them. In Sweden, as in other countries, national, regional, and private archives, family history societies, websites, and companies offer various information and support beyond formal institutions. Participants in this study attend regularly offered non-formal courses. They learn how to search databases and the order of activities family historians generally use to follow a person through their life (i.e., birth, baptism, where they lived, worked, married, children, and died). Moreover, participants learn to critically assess a source's reliability, the abbreviations, older handwriting and "old Swedish" in church books and other records. Course leaders often provide historical contexts for these sources and individuals and explain why information may be missing.

While many sit alone reading or searching archives, family history is not necessarily a solitary task. Participants in this study demonstrate this by

sharing queries and solutions and practising together. Through their research, family historians connect to those who came before them, those who come after them, and those who are working beside them in the present.

Participants of this study often convey inheriting research, similar to the findings by Shaw (2017) and Börnfors (2001). Ann recalls receiving "memories of their upbringing in compendiums from older family members," something she says "gives a little more meat on bones" to create a more compelling and thick description of the factual events she records from the church book registers. Inheritance does not only come from behind or the past but is passed forward. As Moore and Rosenthal (2021) found the motive for leaving a legacy to future generations, participants in this study, despite their children not currently being interested, hope to pass their research on. Edda says, "I promised my kids that I'll document, write little stories around… like little, short stories around all these little trinkets that we have [inherited]." Noomi hopes her children and grandchildren will benefit from her work. She is giving them her research, "so my kids don't have to rummage among it, then they just have to add the ones that are in." Elyse, who does not have children, relays that she, too, has passed on her research in the forms of a family tree for her godson's confirmation and grandmother's 90th birthday. She explains that family history is not just a tree but that she "also tried to write a little bit, some life stories about those that are in the tree so that you still get the context as well." What they choose to include in these cultural inheritances reflects participants' evaluations of what is significant to share and what can be forgotten.

Participants also highlighted the transference of skills and the "how to's" of doing family history. Alice engages her mother, who did not do family history research previously, to participate in her family research. She now follows Alice to the national archives and visits places related to their family. Despite the individualised focus of family history research, participants' actions in this study reflect an interest in collaborative and collective history, including others in their research and doing research unrelated to their family (cf. Edquist, 2009). Participant Ann is teaching a newly retired friend how and where to start family research, and another participant is working with her neighbour on which archives to search. Participants express the benefit of reading and discovering together in class church book registers and the historical context. Therefore, as evidenced by participants' narratives, family

history does not only engage those who participate in a course or initiate family history research themselves but, like rings on the water, creates connections and impacts participants' wider social network. The continuation of inheritance in the form of skills and information reveals participants' perception of their family history research as significant and the desire for longevity and relevance (Peck & Seixas, 2008).

Significant Knowledge

What participants learn goes beyond names, dates, and places of people from the past, affecting their understanding of history. Sofia states that she has always enjoyed doing family history research. It makes history "real" and puts her ancestors into a historical context, creating a more complex understanding, "I can put them in Swedish history how it was then… you kind of paint a little bit more, you get a bigger palette, you can see more things and a bigger context. I think [it] is exciting." Likewise, Alice notes that individuals and the present time do not stand alone but are connected within a broader context, stating, "You're not by chance … you're in a context, somehow, and you come from something." Ann explains that if she learned that an ancestor worked at the matchstick factory, she would go to the factory's museum to understand how they made matches and "what history or stories they have in their registers about those who worked with matches." This example demonstrates participants' connections from family history to other histories, broadening their scope of interest and understanding. Elyse notes how family history is "a lot about putting myself in a historical context…every generation is shaped by the previous one." She explains that gaining this perspective and historical consciousness allows for a greater understanding of how people behave(d) and how past events impact the present.

> Social heritage, I think is strong. You can understand in a different way how grandma has been, for example, based on the fact that she came from a family that was quite tough and was free church and, in a way, a little outside of society, so, in some ways, that, yes, yes and of course, it's shaped my dad's upbringing, and then in turn my upbringing, I think it's a chain in some way. (Elyse)

Noomi demonstrates her development of historical consciousness, contrasting what was acceptable in the past to the present and draws comparisons between immigrants to Sweden today and those who left for America 150 years ago in a reflection of "how we had it then and how we have it today." Noomi

observes her change in perspective of her father-in-law's disposition when she learns that his father sold him at auction at age five. This causes her to reflect upon the limitations of sources, noting the "heart-wrenching information that isn't in the church books." This reflects Shaw's (2017, 2020, 2021) and Shaw and Donnelly's (2021a, 2021b) findings of family historians' heightened historical consciousness resulting in greater empathy. What participants relay as relevant and meaningful reflects their understanding of the past and the use of historical consciousness (Thorp, 2016). The emphasis on the consequence of the past on participants' understandings and the impact on the present reiterates Peck and Seixas (2008) categorisation of Result. Thus, accentuating that what family historians deem personally significant can also impact a wider population by increasing empathy and understanding for those less fortunate in society.

Sweden today and yesterday

Connection to Sweden of the past demonstrates more than historical consciousness and empathy for the "new(er) Swedes" of today. Participants' narratives convey a specific image of Sweden and the past, illuminating enduring binaries and the challenges to these, such as the past characterised by a different set of moral guidelines, as seen in the example of selling small children at auction. The past is described as more primitive, plagued by poverty, a place to escape (emigrate away from) to the more modern present, yet simultaneously nostalgic and containing something "golden" that should and is preserved and visited in the present. Alice describes that "they had large crowds of children" in the past. Noomi explains that it is because "there was no safety net… but that they must have the help of their children when they become old." This picture starkly contrasts contemporary Sweden's social welfare model that takes care of its citizens–which participants consider the "norm." This poverty led to forced migration. Sofia recalls that her great- aunt attempted to emigrate to America with a newly divorced man but "could not come in." They were turned away at Ellis Island because someone on the boat said he was married and had no divorce papers as proof. This example, like another participant who mentions their shock in realising there were divorces even 100 years ago, emphasises the perception of morals and what was socially acceptable in the past compared to today. The nostalgic and often politicised view of a traditional nuclear family unit may not be the whole picture of the past.

This conflicting picture of Sweden is also impacted by the participants' described banal interests, such as reading historical novels and watching family history television programmes. The banal findings of participants reinforce the view by providing evidence, such as counting how many spoons there are to inherit. As Noomi describes, "Only 100 years ago there was a lot of poverty in Sweden…you can read the testaments [*bouppteckning*]", noting how little they had, such as "five spoons, four plates." While not 'life-changing', these banal findings reaffirm ideals and binaries held by participants. Makky (2020) points out that activities and things are not created to be banal but *become* banal and are redeemed by examining banalities. Banalities, he argues, are "small and insignificant things, phenomena, and moments [that] 'co-create- our daily life and the world as we know it", and despite being fundamental and an "immanent part of our experience," these are often overlooked (Makky, 2020, p. 94). Although more "exciting" results exist, such as Ann finding her ancestor's murder reported in a newspaper, "he was beaten to death," it was the findings of "strong entrepreneurial [widowed] women" who took care of the farm that she underscores significant. Ann sees herself as having this characteristic and hopes her daughter will be the same. These banal findings of the past and their remnants in the present make up most participants' accounts, reiterating their felt significance.

Visiting historic Sweden in the present is made possible by local history museums and family history societies. Most participants also recall visiting or planning to visit where their ancestors lived. Elyse describes visiting where her family came from and walking beside banal everyday signage that "flags" the past embedded in the landscape of the present.

> They had done a croft (torp) inventory … so you walk beside the road [and] there are small signs that here was this croft and here lived these people. …you also put into a context that, okay, that it was this place.

This signage and local history associations are commonplace in the contemporary Swedish landscape. In their narratives, participants refer to *hembygsföreningar* (local history associations) as places to turn to for help in their family history research. Edda, while also reflecting on the continuation of the landscape of Sweden, points out that her ancestral home still stands in a prominent location in the middle of the town's square. In contrast to the other contestants, she notes that her family did not suffer nor were poor. Instead, Edda reports her disappointment of only finding the banal, "there are

no, no special things, [the course leader] told me [I would find] thieves and murderers and all sorts of things, [but] nothing like that I have found."

Historical significance for participants is found not only in the extremes but also in the banal. Participants highlight events and people that they perceive have resulted in consequences and reveal continuations in the present (Peck & Seixas, 2008).

Conclusion

This study presents and discusses the narratives of participants from family history courses. Participants' narratives reveal a complex and nuanced picture of family history as both highly significant for their understanding of self and historical culture but also as a means to satisfy banal desires of "something to do" during the winter or when the husband is playing golf. While the perception of family history as a hobby for those in the twilight years of their lives persists, a broader range of ages are interested in and impacted by family history. This stereotype may evolve with the increasing variety of consumer products offered.

Participants' reflections on the past and their positioning within their narratives as learners, researchers, and part of a larger collective highlight the significance of their learning and cultural manifestation of historical consciousness (Gadamer, 2004/1960; Shaw, 2017, 2021; Shaw & Donnelly, 2021a, 2021b). It highlights the role of family history narratives as dynamic cultural tools, used by participants to position and relate within and to a larger historical context, to make history "real" and foster empathy and consequential understandings (Jarvis, 2019; Karlsson, 2014; Nordgren, 2016).

Participants' motivations, experiences during the course, and findings reflect that family history research is a spectrum of experiences. Not simply the effervescence that is life-changing, as seen through the examples of crying participants on family history television programmes. Nor is it only the banal labelled family photo on the fridge. It is both extremes and everything in between. While much research has highlighted the life-changing aspects of family history research, it is equally important to recognise and examine the banality. As Billig (1995) cautions, banality is not synonymous with harmless but reproduces embedded ways of thinking. This is demonstrated by the recurring tropes and binaries in narratives of the primitive past/modern

present, moral past/immoral present, life-changing significance/banal everyday, and collective/independent. These reveal a layer of complexity to family history narratives that includes both the nostalgic and a challenge to traditional views.

Participants' narratives demonstrated that participation in, and the significance of, family history research is not always the effervescent excitement that is portrayed by commercialised marketing of ancestral companies and media. But it can and is a part of the everyday–something to do when the weather is bad or when your husband is golfing, a nice hobby. Their narratives demonstrate that this banality is also perceptible in their research findings–they were born, lived, and died in the same place. They had four spoons. They were all farmers. They all starved. Or, as Edda reported, there were no murders or thieves.

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Part Three: Bringing it All Back Home

Figure 7. 3x Great Grandfather's House.

Note. Reprinted with permission from the participant. Personal photo.
It is distorted for de-identification purposes.

It was emotionally overwhelming and for me,
it was [as] if time stood still.
Like I WAS my ancestors.
Like I was connected to Sweden and a part of the land.
It was like coming home.

(Emma, Case Study One)

Results Discussion

The three case studies revealed commonalities and differences. Engaging the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, I analyse and discuss the results further in the following section.

How do the three selected family history experiences present narratives of identity and the past?

Engaging with Rüsen's (1987b) typology of historical narration as an analytical tool (see Table 3 below), I investigate the narratives presented by the three family history research experiences: *Allt för Sverige*, Genetic ancestry test results, and non-formal family history courses. I present each experience through each typology and then synthesise the results.

Table 3 Reprise of Typology of Historical Narration. (See Table 1)

	memory of	continuity as	identity by	sense of time
traditional narrative	*origins* constituting present forms of life	*permanence* of originally constituted forms of life	*affirming* pre-given cultural patterns of self-understanding	time gains the sense of *eternity*
exemplary narrative	*cases* demonstrating applications of general rules of conduct	*validity of rules* covering temporally different of life	*generalizing* experiences of time to rules of conduct	time gains the sense of *spatial extension*
critical narrative	*deviations* problematizing present forms of life	*alteration* of given ideas of continuity	*denying* given patterns of identity	time gains the sense of being an object of *judgment*
genetical narrative	*transformations* of alien forms of life into proper ones	*development* in which forms of life change in order to establish their permanence dynamically	*mediating* permanence and change to a process of self-definition	time gains the sense of *temporalization*

Note. Reprinted from "Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason" by J. Rüsen 1987b, History and Theory, 26 (4), p.91.

Allt för Sverige

Allt för Sverige has a traditional narrative at its core. It uses the idea of a continuation from the past, presenting red cottages, midsummer festivals and other key symbols and factors as unchanged, stable, and constant. It highlights that this is evidence of a long tradition of an authentic Swedish identity. *Allt för Sverige* was identified by previous literature (Hjorthén, 2017; Klareld, 2022) as emphasising a biologically based (primordial) belonging and Swedish identity. This narrative is also found in this dissertation by examining the show's official website. However, this one-sided perspective is challenged and complicated by the pedagogical concept that the participating Swedish Americans (and audience) could learn to become or revitalise their Swedishness by including historical and cultural heritage, demonstrating an exemplary narrative. Presenting history as a lesson to be learned from is included in *Allt för Sverige*, for example, the "Swedish school," and as one participant stated, all their experiences become a living history classroom presented positive and negative to be consumed. There is no extroverted critical narrative offering deviations or judgments of the past. The genetic narrative, which emphasises that change is the only constant and learning history is for the continued betterment of the individual, is not as prominent in the narrative presentation as the traditional narrative. *Allt för Sverige* does describe how culture is changing within Sweden. To the credit of the producers, they are attempting to include a wider variety of stories and types of Swedes (e.g., they have had some immigrants in later seasons describe their journeys); this, however, still is very light in critical nature and attempts to present migratory experiences as singular and homogeneous.

GAT Results

Similarly, the GAT results of case study two accentuated various cultural heritage activities and knowledge that led me, as the consumer, to believe I can "learn" to become what the company reports as my ethnic identity. The genetic ancestry testing (GAT) companies' results and marketing most prominently present a traditional narrative. It claims to provide a scientific result produced with rigour and "cutting edge" technology displayed through the exacting percentages and deep maps, creating a sense of truthfulness for the consumer. The scientific fact that genetics do not change is underlined and emphasised as thus constant and authenticating for a permanence and ongoing

identity that does not change regardless of geographical placement. Despite the hybridity that the percentages can reveal, there is no presentation of a narrative that matches this hybrid reality. It is either this ethnic heritage or that one. There is culture attached to these ethnicities, and while these are an anachronistic blend of the past and the present, these are treated as temporally stagnant rather than dynamic.

History as a teacher, either to provide positive examples or to teach avoidance of adverse outcomes in the exemplary narrative I did not perceive in the GAT results. While there is room for the consumer to negotiate and make deductions, this is not presented directly to the consumer. Neither is the critical narrative. There is no room for deviations or problematising the past. Moreover, as El-Haj (2012) pointed out, denying the GAT's presented results essentially equates to rejecting one's biological self, creating a moral dilemma.

Genetic ancestry testing offers a process of learning by offering cultural instructions to become what they say you already are. The predominant narrative presented by GATs results assumes that the individual does not already know who they are or about the culture presented and provides, in this case, a clichéd and problematic pan-Scandinavian identity. An anachronistic blend of the past and present aims to engage the consumer in learning how to behave, think, speak, and eat like the presented ethnicity. In this manner, a genetic narrative offers a transformation, development, and self-definition process. This narrative is problematic as it treats identity and culture as individualistic and stagnant rather than dynamic and multifaceted or impacted by globalisation's increase in migration and digitalisation.

Furthermore, it does not reflect the contemporary demographics of Sweden and creates a false conception of an unbroken linear culture and identity propagating the traditional narrative, contradicting this invitation to "learn to become." On the one hand, the GAT results highlight the individuals' uniqueness, "Our genes are a lot like us: endlessly diverse, endlessly interesting, occasionally weird" (23andMe, 2021). On the other hand, it emphasises the collective identities one belongs to and relays that this (singular) identity can be "learnt" while somehow innately (biologically)

already part of the person. It reiterates the assertion that the individual is a whole being in its genetic form, requiring expert decoding. Consequently, the GAT results create a problematic and duplicitous message for the consumer.

Family History Research Courses

Like the two previous case studies, the family history research courses present a traditional narrative. This is the narrative of origins that sees a permanence of life, affirms pre-given cultural patterns, and creates a sense of continuation throughout time. There is a sense of an authentication process in affirming connections through finding a relative or further information about them. Despite the chances of mistaking a person for a relative, there is hope and drive to find more details and a feeling of confirmation upon finding a person related to you in a church register book from the 1800s or 1900s. Previous research found motivations for family history research as a desire and seeking of belonging and identity to link to a collective "we" (Anderson, 2006) and cultivate an imagined "sameness" (T. H. Eriksen, 1996, 2002). However, this study's participants narrated mostly banal reasoning of a "nice" hobby to have in winter months or something to do when they become old. In other words, their participation in the course was not motivated by seeking an identity, but as they reported, their research informed and confirmed their identity. These motivations confirm and reflect Durie's (2017) and Shaw's (2017, 2020) research.

While attending the courses, I noted that the space and the course leaders' leadership qualities influence the learning atmosphere. Both online and in-person courses centred around using computers and the digitalisation of archives and old book registers. In each course, I was able to actively participate while observing the other class participants and gain an understanding of how the courses ran. [18] Even more so in the in-person course

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[18] I want to emphasise that it was not within the scope of this study to assess or evaluate the teaching or the content of the course but rather to be an observer.

as we got up and moved between rooms and had the opportunity to have a fika (or coffee break) together. The mix of individual personalities played a role in how discussions in and outside of the learning portion of the class occurred. In the online course, many actively discussed and were encouraged to talk, so much so that I had thought they all knew each other prior to taking the course, which was not the case.

The course leaders provided information on past events and the historical context surrounding the findings from the church register books. There was an exemplary narrative that history can teach us how quickly life can change. Course leaders pointed out how you could see the fate of families moving from a place of relative economic security to a poor house in a matter of a year. They emphasised the importance of understanding what happened in the past, to see where you came from, how life has changed, and how we are similar to those less fortunate than ourselves today. The exemplary narrative heavily depends on the course leader's knowledge and experience.

Critical narration was not consistently presented as a rejection or deviation but was present in the discussions between participants and leaders. One example of a critical narrative surrounded the discussion of the prevalence of witch hunts in parts of Sweden. One course leader presented Småland as having few to no witches due to what they deemed was the result of having extremely strict nobles and clergy. However, despite common knowledge of *Blåkulla*, also known as Blå Jungfrun island, one of the most well-known witch meeting places in Småland, none of the participants verbally disputed this claim. In contrast, the other course similarly discussed witches but resulted in a different conclusion. One participant found a written account of one of the witch trials, which we read together to practice reading the old handwriting. This reading led to further discussions surrounding the social and historical context, such as the disproportionate number of women accused during these times.

Genetic narratives project the permanence of change, continual learning, and transformation. In the family history research courses, the discussion presented development throughout time based on the coexisting traditional narrative that maintains a contradicting, unchanging narrative of origin. These narratives intend for participants to recognise the permanence of origins and continuation from the past while encouraging them to continually learn, gain

and develop deeper perspectives and understandings of the past, how it relates to the present day, and what it can do for future generations.

Synthesis

All three family history research experiences present a traditional narrative mainly combined with the genetic narrative, highlighting family history research's emphasis on learning. The process of knowledge in the making becomes *Bildung*, the cultivation of the whole person, developing a holistic approach to learning. There is a strange balance of primordial thinking of origins (you are who you are because of where and from whom you came) with the idea that this innate biological "being" can be altered by gathering information, new cultural content and experience. Overall, there is a lack of critical narratives produced, and there is a lack of opportunity for alternative thinking or critique of what is presented by these three experiences.

In case study one, family history created a link to the past, a reconnection to Sweden and Swedish identity and long-lost family. In case study two, the past is presented as evidence of the uneasy combination of culture and science. The past is locked within a person's genetic material and can be "read" by experts. The past is always with you in the present, embodied in your DNA and can be used to map the past. Case study three participants presented family history research and the past as something to do when the winter season and winter of life comes, or in other words, when they have less important things to do. Although this sentiment was contradictory to their own participation in family history research, it is a sentiment that is widespread. The courses presented the use of family history and the past as puzzles to solve, a way to understand broader historical contexts and situate oneself in the (family, collective, national) timeline, and indirectly, a measure for comparison illustrating the advancements made in the modern present.

Participants from case study three noted the significance of the past in creating a greater understanding and compassion for their ancestors but refrained from stating that engagement with the past "changed lives." Thus, this reflects Harvey's (2001) observation that the individual attributes meaning and value to the past and cultural heritage. The past, for participants, did not require "flash" and illustrated Smith's (2006) observations that the use of the past was found in the sharing experiences, visiting places, (re)making connections

through stories and memories, and the process of engagement that was meaningful. Moreover, the narratives constructed and retold highlighted participants' assumptions and values and allowed the use of the past and cultural heritage to construct who they were and who they wanted to be (c.f. Harrison, 2012; Smith, 2006).

In case study one, in contrast to case study three, most participants were emphatic that their time on *Allt för Sverige* and visiting Sweden was life-changing. Using the past to foster feelings of belonging and continuality is reinforced through referencing cultural heritage (Lowenthal, 2012, 2015; Smith, 2006). Participants engaged with cultural heritage to connect to the past. Places in Sweden and inherited objects became similar to Nora's (1996) *les lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), facilitating points to access the past. Similar to Mehtiyeva and Prince (2020), the findings of this study reiterated that heritage places and objects of significance to participants were not necessarily monumental. Instead, participants preferred and perceived the ordinary as more authentic.

Family history research is arguably one of the "most widely practised forms of public history around the globe" (Evans, 2023, p. 2). These selected three experiences can empower participants to connect the individual story to the larger historical context, the present day with the past, and to develop greater historical empathy and consciousness. This study is limited in its scope as I focus on experiences which take place within Sweden; however, as previous literature has shown, this is not an isolated phenomenon, and it can foster intergenerational, cross-cultural, religious, and ethnic knowledge (Evans, 2023; Shaw, 2021; Shaw & Donnelly, 2021a, 2021b).

How do participants describe their negotiations with narratives presented by various agents (institutional, individual) of the selected family history experiences?

While media, institutions, and others in positions of power present a specific identity, participants of this study demonstrated their ability to claim, position, orientate and gain an understanding of the past (Ruin 2019; Rüsen 2005). I had the pleasure of speaking with and observing participants about their negotiations with these afore-identified presented narratives. Applying Hall's

(1973, 2006) encoding/decoding model (revisited in Figure 8), I explore how participants negotiate with these narratives differently (relayed in the following Table 4). This focus is not intended to simplify these negotiations as they are dynamic, overlapping, and not mutually exclusive, but rather to try and make visible some recurring patterns.
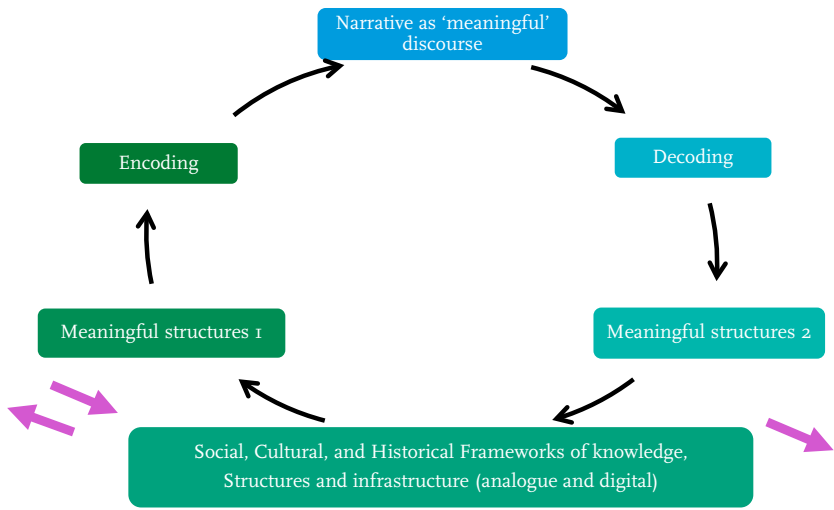

Figure 8. Reprise of Model of Encoding and Decoding (See Figure 3)

Note. Adapted from "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" [Discussion Paper] by S. Hall 1973, CCCS Stencilled Occasional Papers, Birmingham. p.4

As Evans et al. (2023) found in their study, family historians are capable and aware of their critical analysis of the information, stories, and sources. They, however, also point out that to consider family historians as a homogenous group is problematic as there is a wide range of motivations, abilities, and reactions from "ancestor gatherers" filling in the tree as much as possible to the profoundly concerned for accuracy and "self-governing part of the community" (Evans et al., 2023, p. 11). Therefore, it is essential to keep in mind that the participants and the family history research experiences that I include in this study are one part of the larger group of family historians who are individuals and impacted by their own experiences, social, cultural, and historical contexts and, therefore, could have very different interpretations of the same experiences. Despite this, previous research findings and those I have found in my studies reflect common threads suggesting there may be more commonalities than differences between people. Hall's (1973, 2006)

encoding/decoding method, revisited here in Figure 8, intends to visualise how the communication process produces a message (or messages) that is engaged with autonomously by the sender and receiver. The family history research experiences' message(s) or narrative(s) [19] I presented in the previous section are double-edged. There is an element of family history which requires the sense of an eternal timeline, that there has always been something, someone or somewhere in the past connected to the present–an origin story (traditional narrative), while simultaneously producing a pedagogical opportunity for participants to develop, learn, and engage with the identity presented related to the past (genetic narrative). This section examines the receivers' processing of the presented narratives.

Participants' negotiations either confirm or partially accept adding adaptions or reject and modify the presented narratives. I emphasise that these are not exclusive categories but dynamic and change according to context, place, and time. These categories allow further insight into how participants engage with and use history for understanding and interpreting the past and how this results in an increased historical awareness of the interconnected relations of temporality. In other words, how participants demonstrate historical consciousness (Rüsen, 1987a, 2005, 2012; Thorp, 2016) in their reflective practice and negotiations of the past connected to their interactions in the present. In their negotiations, participants consume history and are active agents in co-creating history, often utilising tangible and intangible heritage (things they attribute value to) to assert a specific view of the past and themselves.

A pattern reflecting Hall's model (Figure 8) is evident in a closer examination of participants' responses from *Allt för Sverige*, the family history research courses, and my reflections on the results received from GATs are summarised briefly in Table 4. While many agreed and felt the presented narratives emphasised their feelings of identity and belonging, the majority added or

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[19] This could also be called the text or script.

subtracted to this narrative using supporting examples and evidence from their research and experiences. A small minority criticised or rejected the presented narratives.

The narratives produced do not signify identity but messages about identity that are explicitly related to the past. Participants attribute meaning and value to these messages, negotiating with previous knowledge and experience and using cultural heritage to strengthen these reasonings. The production of the narrative by these family history experiences is instructed and influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts, structures, and infrastructures of the types of experience (analogue and digital). Likewise, the participants are influenced by their context and in reacting and adapting to these inputs by decoding the narrative. Participants' interpretations, negotiations and reactions influence their surrounding contexts, influencing the broader social infrastructure from which the production draws. The cycle of communication adjusts and continues.

All participants interacted with multiple actors and narratives of the past and identity. In the article related to *Allt för Sverige* (Blom, 2023), I mentioned several interactions where participants negotiated their previous knowledge and that which was presented to them by the programme. These included the programme's website, interview process, and interactions with the programme's producing staff; the technical crew who film and interact with the participants while they are filmed and off camera; the regular individuals they met when they had time off from filming; and with each other. The audience of *Allt för Sverige* makes further negotiations, but this is not a group I actively investigated. Likewise, in case study two, I as the consumer and participant of the experience presented by the genetic ancestry test companies' results, engaged with negotiations of the percentages, the deep maps, and the accompanying cultural and historical information provided. I could interact and engage with other participants if I chose to through chat and message functions. While I did not include these negotiations in this study, in other studies, such as El-Haj (2012), descriptions of these negotiations echo Hall's three categories of decoding. The non-formal family history research courses provided further opportunities for negotiations. For example, participants negotiated with church registers, other online archives (such as military lists and immigration ship registers), paper databases, cultural inheritance (tangible and intangible), with each other, and the course leader.

Table 4 Participant Negotiations of Presented Narratives

	Case Study One **Allt för Sverige**	Case Study Two **GAT Results**	Case Study Three **FHR Courses**
Confirming	The majority confirm or adapt by utilising cultural heritage and places of personal and familial importance in a process of authentication.	In some respects, the percentages confirmed my previous knowledge based on my paper research.	Many participants found the provided information and narratives to match their preconceived ideas.
Adapting	Some adapted the narratives presented through their negotiations and interactions with individuals beyond the television programme's set, such as at ICA or with other crew members.	However, the presentation of several variations, some of which were vastly different, caused me to pause and argue with the results received.	Some adapted these narratives providing examples from their families.
Rejecting / Modifying	A few rejected or objected to the specific narrative. Providing an alternative or modified narrative contradicted and contrasted the presented non-confrontational and non-critical view of Swedish identity (Swedishness) and Sweden. This mainly included objections to the lack of variety in demographics and the lack of voice of minority groups.	I found the cultural contents and historical accounts attractive and informative. However, being a scholar and researcher caused a critical assessment perhaps differently than an "everyday" person would do. I could appreciate how it would be interesting and exciting but equally how misleading the information received with its anachronisms and business motivations as shown through the various advertisements.	Few outright rejected the narratives, but many added critical thinking components such as the absence of female voices and the poorest of poor in the testament records. The in-person course, participants physically objected, using body language, ignored, continuing to work instead of following the lesson, shaking their heads or rolling their eyes when the course leader shared historical contextual information. Participants of the online course, asked questions, and called out, "That is not correct." The difference was the online course leader encouraged this type of communication; she did not perceive it as dissent or a challenge to her ability/knowledge.

Confirming or Adapting the Narrative

In case one, many participants from *Allt för Sverige* reflected upon their emotional responses of recognising various character traits or traditions as synonymous with those that *Allt för Sverige* presented. Many shared their realisations that it was not only the more prominent traditions of celebrating Lucia or Midsummer but the everyday preferences of sandwiches with only mayonnaise (no butter), hanging lace curtains in kitchen windows, saving rainwater in barrels, and drinking strong coffee. This association and connection was also explicitly expressed in the interview process, with participants keen to demonstrate and perform their identity-sharing collections, photos, and even hanging Swedish flags within the scope of the camera's lens; what Billig (1995) has pointed out reflects and reinforces their claim to identity and belonging to the collective group. These more minor cultural idiosyncrasies, perhaps some could argue as something many cultures and individuals share, but for the participants, this cultural "stuff" or heritage are significant symbols connecting them to a collective identity, reflecting previous research findings (Blanck, 2006; Conzen, 1991, 1992; Conzen et al., 1992). Like the findings of Barclay and Koefoed (2021), participants of case study one emphasised the importance of cultural heritage for connecting knowledge to family stories and the resulting emotions they felt (re)enforced feelings of belonging. Receiving the family history research and the empathy felt for their ancestors' plight reflects the influence of intergenerational transfers (Hirsch, 2012; Ruin, 2019) and the development of historical consciousness and empathy (E. Shaw, 2017; Shaw & Donnelly, 2021a, 2021b).

Similarly, in case three, course participants emphasised their increased understanding of their ancestors' plight. Participants expressed that by learning about the past, they better understood their own and their parents' traits and characteristics. Their negotiations with the presented traditional narrative of origin were not wholly contested but developed with the addition of the genetic narrative emphasising the development of the learning individual. Participants emphasised the necessity of a connection to the past for this *Bildung* or educational development for empathy, compassion, and historical awareness. Course participants referred to continuing the legacy of relatives who conducted family history before them and leaving items such as compendiums of stories, labelled photographs, and detailed historical data to

the next generation. The majority of participants of the courses reiterated that knowing where and from whom you came, in other words, your roots or origins (traditional narrative), was the key to moving forward. One participant who researched on behalf of her husband, who was adopted, recalled finding his biological parents and siblings as an emotional breakthrough and reflected that it was also a way forward to constructing a better understanding of people now. Another participant, in her description of family history, connected the emigration of relatives, the poverty and the struggles they faced in the past with that of a taxi driver she met in contemporary times who had immigrated to Sweden with eleven children. Another participant focused on the development of society and how Sweden has moved from poverty as a hindrance to attending school to a society where all citizens have (free) access to, and the majority attend tertiary education. These stories stress the historical significance of narratives as informing the next generation (Jarvis, 2019), creating meaning and purpose, and connecting the individual to the larger context (Karlsson, 2014; Thorp, 2016, 2020) and, in many ways, emphasising the present as a developing progression from the past.

Course participants demonstrated their agency in which ancestors to follow, what stories were interesting to tell, and their reasoning for participation in case three. It is this narration of the ordinary that enables the participants to confirm, argue and produce a telling of "authentic identity," selecting those who fit their story while rejecting or minimising those who do not "fit" (Bennett, 2018; Bottero, 2015; de Groot, 2016; Zerubavel, 2012). The case study's results exemplify Guelke and Timothy's (2008) "new family history" description of an editable, expansive hybridity of identities. Moreover, it demonstrates the act of taking "ordinary" individuals and situations and viewing these as significant and "extraordinary" for participants (de Groot, 2016).

Friction with Presented Narratives

Interestingly, while in all three case studies, narratives of identity construction are presented as primordial, innate, something to be found or learned, as problematised previously by researchers (e.g., Hjorthén, 2017), participants demonstrated agency and reflection, some questioning the perception of the singularity of identity. This presentation of one homogeneous identity is prevalent in the three family history research experiences. I, with other studies,

exhibit that these narratives can expose tensions between the familial/private and the dominant/national narratives (Clark, 2016b; Evans, 2023; Evans et al., 2023; Shaw, 2020).

That said, despite many Swedish Americans in case study one having additional cultural backgrounds, their narratives primarily highlighted their Swedish roots. There are some exceptions to this, and in the interview process, I asked participants about other identities. One could argue that the focus on Swedish heritage above other parts of the individual results from the study's connection to *Allt för Sverige*. However, many participants continue to demonstrate a solid connection and strive to maintain their Swedish identity and cultural heritage years after participation in the programme. At the same time, only a few problematised the presentation of a singular homogeneous (and unproblematised) Swedish identity.

In case study two, I, as the consumer, was presented with the genetic ancestry test (GAT) results of a pan-Scandinavian identity and "how-to" instructions; I could choose to go further by clicking on various links in the deep map or follow instructions and start practising these cultural activities. Engaging with my previous knowledge of my family history, I could compare the four different results findings and my own "paper knowledge." Although I did not include this negotiation in this study's formal analysis and subsequent article, it is undoubtedly a natural part of my knowledge in the making. Thus, allowing me to confirm, adapt, or reject the presented narrative as other participants.

As mentioned in the case study's article (Blom, 2022), I struggled to understand the percentages' sometimes-vast differences between companies in addition to what a percentage number would look like embodied. What part of me is 49% ethnic Chinese? Is it my eyes and/or hair? The results raised problematic questions, such as if one person has a more significant percentage than another of one ethnicity, for example, Swedish, does that make them more Swedish? Can an individual still claim to be something if they have only a tiny percentage? Or should they focus on the highest percentage for identity purposes? What implications could these ethnic categorisations have for the broader spheres of culture, society, and politics? If an individual receives what they perceive as a less desirable ethnicity, are we (and I mean us, society, and

academics with some semblance of authority) dangerously close to reinstating some essence of a "one drop" rule? Even if some percentages are similar, there are enough differences that one cannot be certain that there is one scientific "truth."

Likewise, the amount of cultural and historical content accompanied ranged in depth and detail. I found myself more interested in content that described the lives of individuals in more detail, such as the historical development of official schooling and the typical food, activities, and reasons behind migration. While I am critical of the pan-Scandinavian and the anachronistic combining newer cultural elements with the old with no differentiation, I can see how many companies, specifically 23andMe, sought to create a full body engagement with the presented culture. All five senses are engaged if one follows their instructions for various activities to become Swedish or Scandinavian. 23andMe emphasises tangible and intangible cultural traditions in the form of food (e.g., *prinsesstårta*), festivals (including music, food, and poetry), activities (e.g., skiing, sledging, birdwatching, hiking, *hygge*). There is an allure of the simplicity of following a recipe to become an ethnicity or to gain, as a process of authentication, a greater understanding or claim to an ethnic identity. However, as also argued in the article (Blom, 2022), the additional problem of including other companies and businesses poised to gain currency (in the form of money or data) for these genetic tests leads to a higher level of scepticism.

The deep maps presented by GAT companies are likewise problematic. Their modern political boundaries and encasing large regions represent an attempt to construct a spatial connection to and embodiment of percentages. While it is interesting to examine a map to see where ethnicity is supposedly geographically tied, this creates a false continuity that does not consider political and geographical border changes or mobility of the past. As maps of the past are accessible and increasingly digitalised, it would be interesting to see if these companies evolve to include a more accurate geographical association and thus construct a more complex narrative of the past.

According to Gadamer and Fantel (1975), historical consciousness as a reflexive practice allows the individual to critically examine narratives of the past to contextualise and interpret them in reference to individuals' positioning

for value. Therefore, even though I am critical of the GAT results I received, I can see how these provide insight, stimulate my thinking, and are significant to my understanding and knowledge of the past.

Synthesis

Participants, including myself, do not consume narratives and representations of the past as is but are co-creators in the retelling and negotiation of history. In these negotiations, individuals construct meaning relative to their previous knowledge and experiences and have the potential to develop further historical consciousness. As Hall's model depicts, the narrative passed and decoded by the receiving participant has an effect that influences, entertains, instructs or persuades and produces consequences (cognitive, emotional, perceptual, ideological or behavioural) (Hall, 1973, p. 3). The receiving individual's social, historical, and cultural understandings and contexts frame these effects and uses. For the participants in this dissertation, learning historical details of the individual and their connection to them in the present enabled a greater appreciation and spurred their interest to learn more, similar to the findings of Evans (2023; Evans et al., 2023) Shaw (2017; 2021) and Shaw and Donnelly (2021a, 2021b).

Historical narratives are multiple and complex. While acknowledging the narratives presented by the various family history research experiences, participants of this study added to, subtracted from, and contested these narratives. Their reasoning for participation in family history experiences was likewise manifold, ranging from the awareness of the brevity of life and the desire to continue others' research and legacy to the seemingly banal everyday desire to participate socially with others. These findings echo research conducted by Evans (2023), Shaw (2017), and Clark (2016b), who similarly noted the desire for continuation.

Participants viewed the past through the present day's lens, which reciprocally influenced their perspectives on past and present people and events (Rüsen, 1987a, 2005, 2012; Thorp, 2016). This informed perspective enhanced participants' use of tangible and intangible heritage in connection to their understandings and negotiations with narratives and impacted the meaning attributed to them. This attribution of meaning and application of historical consciousness to contextualise the past reiterates Gadamer and Fantel's (1975) findings.

In participating and engaging with the narratives of the past, the participants of this study shape and recreate through the communication of this process their view of themselves today, where and whom they came from, and what world and society they hope for the future. In learning more about their family history, participants undergo a process of narrative negotiation highlighting and challenging previously held assumptions, cultural values, and historical knowledge.

How do elements of family history experiences illustrate these spaces as public pedagogy?

Exploring the selected family history research experiences as public pedagogical spaces intends to be the beginning of a conversation rather than an end. All three family history research experiences offer opportunities that serve as pedagogical hinges or pivot points (Ellsworth, 2005), opening up transitional spaces where participants encounter knowledge and experiences beyond the self (Sojot, 2018; Winnicott, 1982/2005). Engaging and negotiating within these transitional spaces reveals the blurred edges and permeable boundaries of binaries, identities, and spaces (Ellsworth, 2005). Participants' understandings embody knowledge as a process. These public pedagogical spaces are a starting point, as family history researchers attest to, as one type of experience, more often than not, leads to another. Learning about one ancestor only leads to others and more questions about the broader historical context, places, and times. The complexity of public pedagogical places is revealed by examining potential moments of pedagogical hinges, places of pivot, that influence and engage the participant in negotiating the external and internal, potentially redefining knowledge and self (Charman & Dixon, 2021).

Allt för Sverige presents an experiential pathway for the contestants but also for viewers. By physically placing Swedish Americans in Sweden, the show allows the embodiment of outside experiences to be in situ with that of the inside known. The individual's private experiences become public for a short period through the television screen, but as demonstrated, not all these experiences make the final production cut (Blom, 2023). Instead, there is a continued negotiation and conversation between what is authentic Swedishness and Sweden and that which participants perceive, understand, and wish to know. Emotions, thoughts, and previous knowledge all engage

with the physical reality that participants face while participating in the family history research experience. This negotiation and conversation of what they believe is their identity and what they understand about their family history is pitted against presentations of a romanticised historical Sweden and the contemporary context.

This romanticised presentation of Sweden leads some researchers (Hjorthén, 2017; Klareld, 2022) and the current study's participants to criticise the exclusion of minorities and immigrants, while other participants highlight the entertainment value and desire for the nostalgic turn to the past. As shown in the accompanying article, this negotiation has created opportunities to develop greater historical awareness, empathy, and understanding for those less fortunate in society today (Blom, 2023). The findings highlight that despite the exclusion of minorities and immigrants, the similarities reflect the difficulties of the past with that of the present.

Incidentally, by projecting the historical upon the contemporary, *Allt för Sverige* creates a pedagogical hinge for both contestants and Swedish audiences. Creating this juxtaposition (while arguably not intended by the programmes' designers) creates potential for friction, critical thinking, and reflection. In other words, it creates an opportunity for participants (audience and contestants) to pit their inner understandings and knowledge with outside presentations, creating a transitional space for knowledge in the making.

While contestants on *Allt för Sverige* engage directly with the physical embodiment of otherness and in-person conversations, Genetic Ancestry Testing (GAT) company results offer a seemingly one-way monologue. Participants of genetic ancestry tests engage initially in an individual/personal activity through their saliva but end in a collective learning space that evolves depending on the company's reference group and participants themselves. Presented with numerous tools and links, GAT companies seek to teach a wide variety of subjects from history, geography, politics, migration patterns, cultural heritage (material and immaterial), how to read and compare various charts, percentages and further opportunities offered by some companies to gage the potential of various genetic qualities such as being afraid of heights or snoring. The web platform continuously offers participants the opportunity to click on links entitled "learn more," with many offering the opportunity to engage with matched DNA relations and others through messages, chatgroups, and connected blogs.

GAT participants converse in their negotiations with the presentation of their percentage results (ethnic estimation), accompanying deep maps (plagued by contemporary political boundaries), and (selected) cultural and historical content. These offer a pedagogical hinge. The results present external information that posits the previously known self against potentially new information and experience. Results present exacting percentages (e.g., 22.1% Swedish) and tell participants that their body is a scientific being decodable through the reading of their genetic makeup. In addition to the complication of the curated cultural and historical information instructions of how to become what one already is, there is confusion about how these percentages can change and are updated—as companies present results as unchanging scientific "facts."

Moreover, there is the critical point of attempting to construct a singular identity when the percentages often present multiple possibilities, including the percentage of Neanderthal genes by some companies. As the participant in this study, I reflected upon the previous knowledge that my paper research (examining church registers, collecting family lore and heritage items such as family bibles) noted that some of what my results presented reinforced these findings. In contrast, other parts of the results contradicted or added unknown factors. The fact that no company was exactly the same as the other led to the desire to see certain companies as "more correct" and others as "less" based on their relation to my previous research findings and knowledge. In other words, the specific points presented caused a pedagogical hinge for comparing and negotiating the presented information.

A further point of contention arose when I noted that my grandfather's parents emigrated from a country that no longer exists. However, their origins are pinpointed (in an array of variations) to specific geographical places labelled as the current political entity, effectively erasing the dynamic history of these places and, consequently, any specific connected cultural heritage. Moreover, this effectively erases any ethnic/cultural complexity or overlap within a geographical region. This lack or absence also creates a pedagogical hinge that attempts to negotiate the void—leading to questions surrounding connections between identity and place and surrounding cultural heritages that are not necessarily labelled "ethnicity." How do the political decisions and consequences of disruptions such as war, famine, forced migration, genocide,

and (internal) colonisation impact identity? These questions (among others) emerge, revealing the frayed edges of binary boundaries such as us and them, self and others, and nature and nurture.

Family history research courses, some may argue, have a clear pedagogical intent, and to examine the pedagogical hinges thus redundant. While these courses are pedagogically structured, I would argue that not all moments are created or encountered as such. Therefore, examining the points of interest that participants engage with contributes to a greater understanding of transitional spaces of knowledge in the making. While genetic ancestry tests attempt to place individuals within the global context, family history research courses seek the individual and highlight the regional local context and connections. While interested in their ancestors, participants demonstrate an interest in the broader society and historical context. Participants reiterated previous findings of collaborative, lifelong commitments to their craft, engaging with others' ancestral histories, and sharing their acquired skills and techniques (Hart, 2018; Hershkovitz & Hardof-Jaffe, 2017; E. Shaw, 2017).

Participants of this study interacted with archival content, with cultural inheritance such as letters and photographs, with each other in discussions and with the course leader. These reflect the three pathways described by Lambert (2006): descriptive (factual evidence), narrative (family stories), and experiential (interactions with tangible heritage). While Lambert uses these to describe how family historians "get to know" their ancestors, it is reflective as well of the family historian's negotiations and interactions with the multitude of inputs of sources, historical and cultural accounts, and their own subjective thinking. As E. Shaw (2017) and Lambert (2006) exemplified, participants are not "in a social vacuum" (Lambert, 2006, p. 328) but are historical thinkers who develop through their interactions a more complex historical consciousness and empathy. The course leader, likewise, is provided with pedagogical hinges presented in the form of these documents, objects, and participants. The online course leader in my study demonstrated this and actively created space within the course to respond to pedagogical hinges, such as discussions of emigration or reading together texts and discussing the historical contexts corresponding to previous knowledge. This course leader asked participants to present areas of research in which she did not have as extensive experience. She also had participants bring their questions and regularly sought to "solve" queries as a group, creating a collaborative and experiential learning environment. This open

format for leading courses constructed opportunities for the participants and course leaders to work for and play with the boundaries between what was known, what was new, and traditional roles and binaries of teacher/student, private/public, and past/present.

Family history research experiences present a public pedagogical space where individuals negotiate knowledge in the making and fuse horizons. The notion that family history research is individualistic is narrow in scope and contradicts the findings of this study. As in all interactions, participants are one part of a more extensive process, and through the contextualisation, the interaction, and the experiential nature of public pedagogical sites, learning is overlapping, multiple, dynamic, existing in the unremarkable and effervescent. It is the continual negotiations of sameness and differences, of self and other.

Synthesis

Family history research experiences contain design with a pedagogical intent. They intend to teach about histories, familial and social. There is an experiential path that is instrumental in how individuals perceive and negotiate with the experiences and narratives presented. The participants' experiences and responses to the pedagogy make it exciting and meaningful. For Winnicott (1982/2005) and Ellsworth (2005), it is the transitional area where individuals negotiate the self (including previous knowledge and experiences) with new, external experiences and knowledge that is essential in the learning process or knowledge in the making. An environment of interaction and interrelation engages the pedagogical hinge, which is the pivotal place that provides opportunities for learning and adjusting knowledge. What possibilities emerge when examining pedagogy and learning as a process rather than an end product? Acknowledging that pedagogical hinges facilitate the juxtaposition of the internal self and external other highlights the potential of family history experiences to develop selves further, connecting to the concepts of lifelong learning and *Bildung*. This focus also reveals how pedagogy and knowledge in the making, applying a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to lived experience, reflects cultural, societal, and historical influences, and creates increased awareness of self and context.

In the transitional space of family history research experiences, participants engage with their preconceived understandings of self, family history, and social and historical contexts with presented historical narratives and other inputs. The interaction between the inner and outer realities are not imposed upon or constantly contradict each other but instead are interrelated, woven to construct new understandings, aided by pedagogical hinges that confront the individual with the unknown.

A conclusion, but not the end

While this doctoral dissertation marks the beginning of my journey as a full-fledged researcher, it is also a contribution and a continuation of the discussion surrounding family history research and its connection to learning, identity, history, and meaning-making. This journey began with the desire to understand the phenomenon of interest in family history research and the past. I set out to explore three family history research experiences from a public pedagogical perspective, analyse presented narratives, and explore participants' perspectives and negotiations of these. The stories or narratives humans tell ourselves and others impact how we perceive and interact with the world. Everyone "comes from somewhere" and "someone," as the participants stress in this study. This dissertation illustrates that family history research is a story of origins and the past, but it is equally about the present and the future. While there are many consumable experiences of family history research, I have focused on three examples, setting this study apart from previous research that has focused on one or provided a more general overview. These selected three serve as hermeneutic phenomenological parts, referencing and adding insight to the phenomenon of interest and participation in family history as a whole.

With this dissertation, I contribute a perspective to family history research as a pedagogical activity that permeates multiple levels of society and experience. From the seemingly life-changing effervescent to the everyday banal, individuals, organisations, and society interact and consume the past. Individuals' encounters with family history research are complex and go beyond the packaged consumables that the designers of these experiences present. Participants revealed frictions in transitional spaces created within the family history research experiences. As the results demonstrate, consumption of the past is not without agency. This does not equate to an either-or response but is a complex negotiation with individuals' unique, respective previous understandings, knowledge, and experiences.

People often overlook public history embedded in the fabric of society as things that have "always been." Family history is often dismissed as a simple, nostalgic pastime for the old and many narratives are taken for granted as "historical facts" rather than one possible version among many. Throughout

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this dissertation, I have reiterated the importance and power of critical thinking and reflection in interaction with historical narratives and the danger of dismissing the knowledge-making processes in public pedagogical spaces. It is necessary to critically reflect upon presented narratives as contributing to constructing an understanding of the past and discuss these beyond and across academic borders. As the results of this study highlight, narratives often reinforce problematic binaries and stereotypes, omitting information surrounding minority/indigenous groups, migration, and political changes. I argue that while these narratives present challenges, critically reflective participants in family history research demonstrate an aptitude for applying historical thinking to their processing of diverse source materials. Moreover, participants exhibit heightened awareness, historical consciousness, and empathy for individuals past and present.

According to van Manen (2016), our pedagogical responsibility is to highlight possible "blind spots" and taken-for-granted ways of being and thinking to facilitate individuals' growth. As described, the amount of research on public pedagogy is disproportionate to the amount of learning that occurs beyond formal educational infrastructures. Focusing on only formal History learning would impoverish perspectives and dramatically limit the definition of learning and pedagogy. Despite Sweden having extensive examples of public history and public pedagogy, such as local museums, study associations, embedded historical and cultural artefacts in landscapes, various academic projects and articles, there are no academic examination programmes in public history (Cornu & Vorminder, 2023) or for public pedagogy offered that I have found at this time. The results of this dissertation emphasise the importance of recognising family history research experiences as public pedagogical sites that reach publics that academic History may not.

Family history research experiences present opportunities in the guise of entertainment, a nice hobby, a collection of photographs, or a television programme, enticing many who might not otherwise be interested in history. These experiences are public pedagogical sites that present transitional spaces where knowledge is confronted, constructed, and compounded. The findings of the family history participants are significant to them and impact their understanding of the past and their social interactions in the present. These results, such as finding an ancestor had only five spoons, are as significant as finding a murdered ancestor for these participants. Kings and thieves, while

exciting results, are not necessary for participants to construct meaning or to be perceived as valuable. I confront the assumption that family history researchers most value the connections to effervescent events and individuals and emphasise the weight of significance attributed by participants to banal everyday items and activities contributing to their development of historical consciousness, imagination, and empathy.

Contemporary culture's engagement with the past is hybrid and complex, and unchecked can lead to the misuse of history to further perpetuate stereotypes, racism, xenophobia, and extreme politics. I underline the power of recognising and criticising presented narratives and the agency of individuals in their negotiations of these. This dissertation offers insight through three case studies but is limited in its empirical scope. There is a need to continue to develop more nuanced understandings of individuals' engagement with and learning about the past, and the "soft" power wielded by public history and public pedagogy. Especially in a complex era of increasingly diverse narratives and rapidly developing technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), deep fakes, and ChatGPT, researchers would be prudent to examine these developments' uses of the past and influences on inclusion and disassociation in more detail.

Svenska abstrakt

I denna avhandling undersöks tre släktforskningsupplevelser som utgår från en svensk kontext och fungerar som exempel av det som på engelska kallas för *public pedagogical spaces*. Avhandlingen analyserar vilka narrativ som framträder och deltagarnas förhandlingar av dessa. Ökad digitalisering och snabbt utvecklad teknik påminner oss om hur instabil samtiden är. Problem och utmaningar i form av pandemier, hackerattacker och krig väcker existentiella frågor och underblåser människors strävan mot att förankra sig i det förflutna. Dessa tendenser förstärker även behovet av att studera släktforskning vetenskapligt vilket ännu inte fullt ut återspeglas av det växande intresset. I avhandlingen ses *public pedagogy* som relationellt lärande bortom formella institutioner men nära sammanvävt med samhället.

Det omfattande intresset för släktforskning och det förflutna representeras i denna avhandling av tre fallstudier. De inkluderar narrativen hos deltagare i den svenska släktforsknings-tv-serien *Allt för Sverige*, resultat från fyra genetiska släktforskningsföretag samt deltagares narrativ i två svenska icke-formella släktforskningskurser. För att analysera dessa används ett konceptuellt ramverk bestående av Rüsens historiska narrativa typologi, Halls encoding-/decodingmodell och Ellsworth användning av public pedagogy som relationellt och format av vad Ellsworth benämner *transitional spaces* i byggandet av kunskap. Centralt i denna hermeneutisk-fenomenologiska avhandling är betoningen av den pedagogiska processen, snarare än kunskapen som produkt, vilket återspeglas i användandet av begreppet *Bildung* som kultivering av hela människan.

Resultaten ger en mer nyanserad bild av familjehistoria, historieintresse och släktforskningsupplevelser än den som ofta presenteras. Deltagarna anser inte bara att de extraordinära resultaten och aktiviteterna som värdefulla, utan även att det vardagliga uppfattas som betydelsefullt och bidrar till utvecklingen av förståelse och mening. Oavsett den fysiska platsen för upplevelsen illustreras dessutom den pedagogiska avsikten genom deltagarnas interaktioner och förhandlingar. Att besöka en bondgård omgiven av stenmurar byggda av deras förfäder, upptäcka att en släkting bara hade fem skedar enligt testamentet, eller utforska en djupkarta för att spåra förfädernas rörelser ger ytterligare möjligheter att jämföra, bekräfta och/eller utmana tidigare kunskaper med ny

information och nya erfarenheter, vilket bekräftar den breda räckvidden av public pedagogy.

Trots förekomsten av motsägelsefulla framställningar av det förflutna i de undersökta fallen, visar deltagarna aktörskap i sina förhandlingar, vilket resulterar i ökad empati och ett berikat historiemedvetande. Att utforska släktforskningsupplevelser som pedagogiska miljöer för lärande ger en mer nyanserad inblick i det breda fältet public pedagogy. Denna avhandling bidrar med nya insikter från en svensk kontext, från ett deltagarperspektiv och med en pedagogisk inriktning, till det växande intresset för släktforskning. Avhandlingen belyser potentialer i att undersöka de små, till synes triviala, vardagliga föremålen och händelser. Dessutom bidrar den med en mer omfattande förståelse av public pedagogy som synnerligen komplext och relationellt.

Nyckelord: släktforskning, public pedagogy, pedagogik, offentlighistoria, historiemedvetande, betydelse, narrativ, banal, historiebruk, deltagarperspektiv, Sverige

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Figure 9. Case Study One Interview Guide

Appendix 2: Case Study Two

Table 5 GAT Company Comparison

	FamilyTreeDNA	MyHeritage	23andMe	Ancestry
Type of Test	Cheek swab	Cheek swab	Spit in tube	Spit in tube
Reference Database	90 "Reference populations"	42 "Founder Populations" called interchangeably "ethnicities". 2,115 "genetic groups"	45 "Populations"	70 groups
Title of Results	"Origins"/ "myOrigins"	"Ethnicity Estimate"	"Ancestry Report"/ "Ancestry Composition"	"DNA-historia" / *DNA history*; etnicitetsuppskattning "*ethnicity estimate*"
Information from Introduction Page of GAT Results	"Uncover the unique genetic assemblage that has been passed down to you from your ancestors and see to which of our 90 reference populations from around the world your autosomal DNA is connected. Our clusters highlight major historical and genetic events, thus shedding light on the complexity of your genetic tapestry. Though we are all unique and distinct, we are also woven from the same fundamental elements. The meaning of each thread is yours to decipher.	"B, this is you" "You have 8 ethnicities and 3 Genetic Groups"	*No info given until a region/group is clicked on.*	"Upptäck din etniska bakgrund" / *"Discover your ethnic background"* "Det är bara ditt DNA som kan visa dig de platser, den historia och den kulturer som skapat den du är idag." / *"It is only your DNA that can show you the places, the history and the culture that created who you are today."*
Price (at time of publication)	Family Ancestry Test- dollars US 79 (780 kr)	MyHeritage DNA kit 890 kr.+ Frakt (89 US)	Ancestry + Traits 99 Euro (1037 kr (105 us)	AncestryDNA 64 Euros (68 US) (670 kr)

Appendix 3: GAT Results

Table 6 GAT Results Percentage Comparison

Ethnicity Estimate	Genetic Groups	MyHeritage (MyHeritage 2021a)
Chinese and Vietnamese		42%
Filipino, Indonesian and Malay		6.0%
Japanese and Korean		3.1%
Balkan		16.8%
Baltic		13.2%
Finnish		10.4%
Irish, Scottish, and Welsh		7.2%
Greek and South Italian		1.3%
	Sweden (Västernorrland)	
	Sweden (Västerbotten, Västernorrland and Jämtland)	
	Western Ukraine, Moldova and Northeastern Romania	

myOrigins	Reference Groups	FamilyTreeDNA (FamilyTreeDNA 2021c)
Europe		48%
Eastern Europe	East Slavic	36%
Finnish	Finland	8%
Western Europe	Scandinavia	4%
Asia		42%
Southeast Asia	Southern Han	25%
	Laos, Vietnam & Cambodia	12%
Myanmar		5%
Island Southeast Asia	Philippine Lowlands	<1%
Central Asia	Mongolia	<1%
Middle East & North Africa		10%
Middle East	Anatolia, Armenia, & Mesopotamia	10%

Populations / Ethnicity Estimate	Ethnic Communities	Ancestry.se (AncestryDNA 2021a)
Southern China		50%
	Eastern China & Southeast Asia	
	Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang & Shanghai	50%
Eastern Europe & Russia	Poland, Slovakia, Hungary & Romania	23%
Sweden	Northern Sweden	19%
	Ångermanland	
	Uppland, Gästrikland & Hälsingland	
Finland		5%
European Jewish		3%

Ancestry Composition	Subgroup	23andMe (23andMe 2021b)
Chinese & Southeast Asian		50%
	Guangdong, Mainland China +2 regions	50%
Northwestern European		49%
	Scandinavian (Västerbotten County, Sweden	21.2%
	Finnish	2.2%
	Broadly Northwestern European	0.6%
Eastern European		16.9%
Ashkenazi Jewish		2.9%
Southern European		0.9%
	Greek & Balkan	0.9%
Broadly European		4.3%
Unassigned		0.4%
"B"		100%

Appendix 4: Deep Maps Scandinavia / Sweden

Figure 10. FamilyTreeDNA Map of Scandinavia

Figure 11. My Heritage Finnish
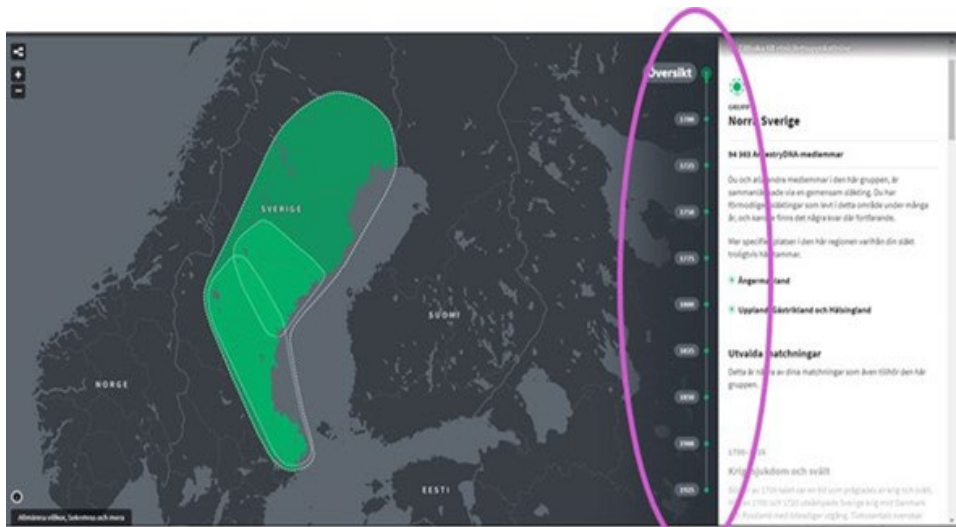
Figure 12. Ancestry Map of Northern Sweden
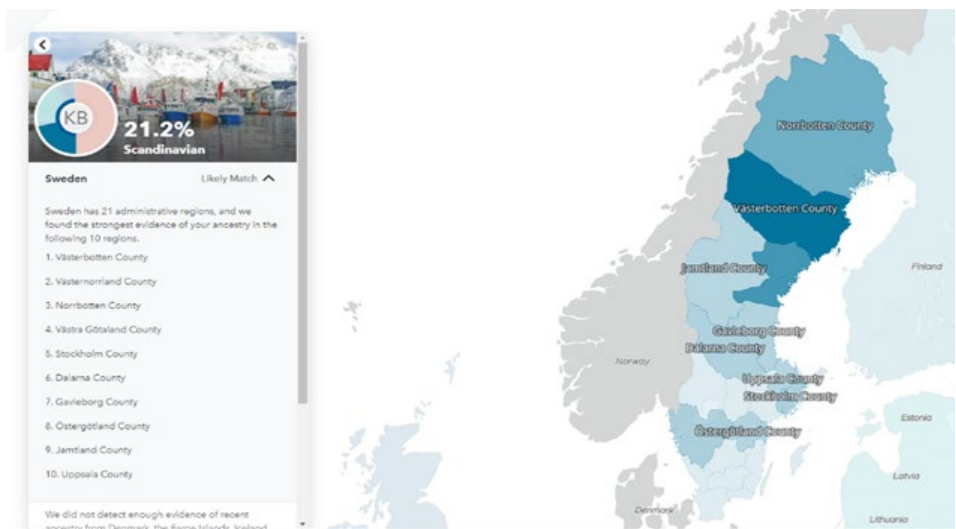
Figure 13. 23andMe Sweden

Appendix 5: 23andMe Scandinavian Culture

Figure 14. 23andMe Pan-Scandinavia Culture

Appendix 6: Case Study Three Interview Guide

Introduktion

Tacka att de är deltagare och har tagit tid att prata med mig.

På minne de att det är frivilligt och att projektet handla om hur och vad människor lära sig genom släktforskning processen.

På minne av deras rättigheter (sekretess, och att de få dra tillbaka innan publikation steget), att det ska transkriberas och inte delas vidare.

Be samtycke att spela i intervju.

Frågor

Kursen

- Varför går du denna kurs?
- Berätta, utifrån din åsikt, om vad kursen betyder för din släktforskning.
- Hur är denna kurserfarenhet olika från andra former av släktforskning? Till exempel att sitta hemma med dator?
- Hur upplevde du kursensformatet, miljö, deltagarna, ledare/lärare? Bidrog eller påverkat positivt, negativt, eller inte alls din lärande?
- Vad har du lärt dig om din släktforskning genom denna kurs?

Generellt Släktforskning

- Hur blev du intresserad av släktforskning?
- Vad hoppas du åstadkomma genom din släktforskning?
- Beskriva vad släktforskning betyder för dig.
- Vad, tycker du, är betydelsefull/meningsfull med släktforskning?
- Berätta om något som har påverkat dig personligt.
- Vad, tycker du, är utmaningar eller svårigheter med släktforskning?
- Vad gör du eller tycker du skulle göra för att lösa situationen?

Appendix 6: Case Study Three Interview Guide Continued

Kontext

- Visste du innan var dina släkt kommer ifrån?
- I din åsikt tycker du att släktforskning kan påverka ens förhållning till plats och identitet?
- Känner du att vad du har hittat påverkar din känsla av vem du är?
- När du släktforskar tanker du om det större historiska sammanhanget? Till exempel den person bodde på sammatid som den större världskriget eller när det var hungersnöd?
- Har några släktningar av dig emigrerad från eller immigrerad till Sverige? Vad betyder detta för dig? Har du eller vill du lära mer om deras resa och plats dem har flyttat till /från?
- Anser du att din relation till familjen/släkten har påverkats av din nya erfarenheterna/kunskaperna? Berätta gärna hur.

Framtid

- Vad tänker du att göra med din forskning nu? Ska du släktforska vidare?

Avslutning

- Har du några funderingar eller något du vill tilläga?

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Ordinary People, Meaningful Pasts

– Negotiating Narratives in Public Pedagogical Spaces of Family History Research

Amidst rapidly developing digitalisation and technologies and societal disruptions such as pandemics and wars, the desire to anchor oneself in the past grows. Nevertheless, academic research on the widespread interest in family history remains limited. This unique study focuses on a Swedish context and examines three case studies: narratives from the Swedish family history TV series Allt för Sverige, results from genetic ancestry test companies, and narratives from non-formal family history research courses. The analysis employs a framework including historical narrative typologies, decoding/encoding models, and concepts of public pedagogy. Emphasising the pedagogical process over the product of knowledge, this study reveals the significance of everyday experiences in family history research, illustrating participants' agency in negotiating conflicting depictions of the past and fostering empathy and historical consciousness. Through exploring these experiences, this dissertation offers a more nuanced insight into public pedagogy and contributes to understanding family history research from participants' perspectives. It highlights the importance of examining seemingly insignificant banal details and events and demonstrates the pervasive nature of public pedagogy.

KAREN ANN BLOM is a professional educator (BEd. & BA) and researcher with a master's in International and Comparative Education (MSc.). Her work extends from preschool to adult learning, with a focus on alternative learning spaces, community involvement, and an interest in the individual's agency and learning processes. Karen Ann's research interests are broad and transdisciplinary including Education, Spatial Studies, Cultural Heritage, Social Constructions of Identity, and History. This is her doctoral dissertation.