

EMBELLISHED COMMUNICATION: THE COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF  
FAMILY SCRAPBOOKS

THESIS

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## **DEDICATION**

For my mother: The woman who taught me the importance of family,  
put me through school to study it,  
read far too many drafts,  
and still spends her nights crafting and piecing together the stories of our lives with me.

You dreamt me, birthed me, raised me, and still inspire me.

Thank you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The recent growth in the popularity of scrapbooking has been nothing short of phenomenal. As of April 2004, there were an estimated 25 million scrapbookers in the United States and over 3,000 scrapbooking stores (Craft and Hobby Association, 2004). Specialty shops devoted to scrapbooking are popping up in most cities: Scrapbooking now has its own heading in the Greater Austin SBC Yellow Pages and mainstream stores like Target and even Best Buy have started carrying scrapbooking supplies (SBC, 2003). Everywhere one looks these days are small brightly colored stickers and novelty cut outs—little flowers and party hats, holiday doodads, animals, and celebratory slogans. These “embellishments” are indicators of the modern scrapbooking craze which has swept the nation in the last five years. The scrapbooking fad has simply grown too popular to ignore.

What used to be a grandmother’s occasional hobby or a senior year project has recently become a popular and profitable obsession. Each year, the Hobby Industry Association (HIA) puts on the largest craft and hobby trade exposition in the world. In 1998, there was no scrapbooking on the show floor. However, in 2004, fifty percent of the show floor was devoted to scrapbooking (Hobby Industry Association, 2004). The scrapbooking industry has experienced phenomenal growth in the last five years—it grew

from \$350 million a year in 1998 to more than \$2.5 billion dollars a year in 2004 (DiFranco, 2004; Craft and Hobby Association, 2004).

But scrapbooking isn't all shopping—there are scrapbooking clubs, scrapbooking slumber parties, scrapbooking conventions, scrapbooking bed and breakfasts, and scrapbooking cruises. Crafters who attend these events and go on these vacations do more than just craft and shop—they talk to each other, share their scrapbooks with one another, and then go home to share their updated books with their families. It is these personal interactions surrounding scrapbooking that interest me. Why share scrapbooks? What do people talk about as they share the books? What do they get out of sharing albums? What do readers get out of looking at other people's books? How does looking at a scrapbook affect an interaction? What does sharing an album do for a relationship?

A cursory look at any scrapbooking magazine or the offerings at any scrapbooking store demonstrates that scrapbooks are frequently created about families. This thesis is an attempt to examine the ways in which family scrapbooks function as communicative artifacts within the interpersonal context. For the purposes of this study I defined “family scrapbooks” as “any scrapbook designed around or for a family (i.e. heritage albums, baby books, scrapbooks devoted to one family member or to family traditions, etc)” (Appendix A). What follows is an in-depth look at messages sent by such scrapbooks. I will discuss both the conversations that take place while sharing family scrapbooks, the implicit and explicit messages recorded in scrapbooks, and the implied messages of choosing to make and/or share a scrapbook about and/or with another person.

The scrapbooking craze has captured a large audience and thus, like any sweeping pop culture phenomenon, merits examination simply for insight into the cultural zeitgeist. Furthermore, the scrapbooking trend bears special relevance to the field of communication because it revolves around an object which can be described as a communicative artifact.

Judee Burgoon (1995) defines nonverbal artifacts as the physical objects that “communicate directly, define the communication context, or guide social behavior in some way” (p. 109). Scrapbooks clearly fit this definition. The pictures included in a family’s scrapbooks communicate, at the very least, superficial information about that family’s basic composition, culture, and appearance. Additionally the very act of physically sharing a scrapbook has the potential to impact social interactions by acting as a shared point of attention and thus shaping both the content and the form of a given social interaction.

### Artifacts as Communication

Museums are full of old, mysterious and enlightening artifacts. We pay admission, and walk carefully with our hands in our pockets to peer through glass at old and often broken objects. Somehow we understand that these pieces are precious—that they tell us something about the people who made and used them. Searching for understanding we examine the remnants carefully and respectfully: We forget that the “precious artifacts” we now regard with so much awe and nervous appreciation were once merely someone’s “things”. Many of the pots, crafts, and tools of old were probably regarded by their original owners as wholly mundane and completely un-noteworthy and

yet we elevate them to a special status as a primary connection to another time—as messengers of meaning.

It is a simple truth, and a well respected one within the academic world, that in order to understand an ancient time, culture, or people we examine that people's things. Anthropologists conceptualize whole cultures from shards of broken pottery, ruins, primitive tools, and ancient drawings. Archeologists spend entire careers crawling around digging up small fragments of the lives of people long dead. But somehow there is a disconnect between this appreciation of ancient artifacts and the understanding that modern day “things” are artifacts too.

An object does not need to be buried for an epoch before it reveals meaning. As individual people we understand this. In our day to day lives we make judgments about people based on the cars they drive, the clothes they wear, and the size of their homes. We intrinsically recognize the power of objects in our relationships, we wear jewelry to announce status, agonize over what presents to buy our loved ones, and send flowers to congratulate, celebrate, and comfort.

On an individual level we draw on this understanding but as academics we seem to forget, discount, or simply dismiss the communicative significance of day-to-day objects. The study of artifacts and material culture is practiced by a loose community of scholars based in the humanities and social sciences. There is no single sheltering professional organization for material culturists, and so there is little formal interaction among the various constituencies and disciplinary bases (Grier, 1996). Further, many of these researchers are not employed in academics but instead work at museums, in advertising, at historic sites, or for other similar public agencies. What little research has

been done on the meaning and functions of physical artifacts is spread so thinly between the fields of communication, anthropology, art history, graphic design, semiotics, archeology, interior design, social and cultural history, architecture, and sociology cultural geography, folk life and ethnology, it can elude, confound, and frustrate even the most dedicated scholar (Mayo, 1985).

Communication as a field is generally described as the study of human symbolic behavior or the study of messages. Given these descriptions it is startling how thoroughly our discipline has neglected the study of messages sent by physical symbols. We humans are all material entities in a physical world. But we do not exist only in this physical world, “we inhabit yet another domain—the domain of the sign” (Salwen & Stacks, 1996, p. 46). This “semiotic domain” is where we “make sense of ourselves, the world around us, and our manner of being in it” (Salwen & Stacks, 1996, p. 46). When we encode and decode meaning into or from objects we impose meaning where there might otherwise be none and, by so doing, we make sense of our experiences in the world.

Objects form the tangible basis of a socially constructed reality (Garfinkel, 1967; Pollner, 1987). It is the everyday objects we imbue with social meanings that allow us to communicate our identities to others as well as to identify and categorize one another (Burgoon, 1994). Objects play a critical role in how we interact with and understand each another. We use objects as “identity badges,” to signal our cultural, social, demographic, and personal characteristics to one another as well as to outwardly reflect our inner selves (Burgoon, 1994, p. 245).

The idea that objects both communicate themselves and help structure communicative interactions is intuitive but has been largely neglected by communication

scholars. Given the importance of artifacts in both personal and historical contexts, and the relative dearth of information on how such artifacts function, an examination of how people utilize objects to communicate with one another is worthwhile. This study focuses on the social functions of one particular personal artifact: the family scrapbook. By examining communication within this unique context I hope to increase understanding of interpersonal communication as well as add to the limited body of research concerning the communicative power of physical artifacts.

### Scrapbooks as Meaningful Artifacts

The bond we all share with our treasures and memories creates many friendships that grow even stronger as we bring these artifacts of our lives together in a creative manner to display, share, and enjoy...these thoughts and remembrances are all marvelous and become the real ties that bind us to our family and friends. Even strangers, who may never have known us, gain a clue about our lives... These memories make up a map that helps another person understand our time, our journey, our contributions during our time here. (Sheerin, 2003, p. xi)

A scrapbook is really nothing more than paper, glue, bits of metal and plastic and perhaps some fiber, but when put together on a page, placed in a book, and held close to the heart these insignificant objects take on a meaning beyond their mere composition. Scrapbookers spend thousands of dollars a year and countless hours creating family scrapbooks. While all this fuss over paper may seem frivolous to the outside observer the people who make these albums say they are priceless and profoundly meaningful.

Scrapbooks function on multiple levels within interpersonal communication. First, and perhaps most obvious, is that they act as "shared objects of attention" which serve to

enrich and enhance other forms of communication (Carlsson, 2001). From this point of view, rather than acting as vehicles of communication in and of themselves scrapbooks simply provide a good starting place from which to converse verbally (Weiser, 2001). When two people share a family scrapbook they typically sit together and go through the book from cover to cover discussing the background story and importance of each page (James LL 248-258). This convention is evidence that scrapbooks stimulate, structure, and supplement verbal discourse. Scrapbooks give us “something to talk about,” an order in which to talk about it, and provide evidence for what we say.

While the conversational facilitation function of scrapbooks is certainly important, scrapbooks provide more than just structure and support for spoken conversation—they have their own voices too. Crafters explicitly record their perspectives by journaling directly in their scrapbooks and this commentary is clearly communicative. But even without verbal commentary (oral or written), photographs and visual crafts provide some very basic information about the families they depict and gives us a sense of those families’ structures, appearances, cultures, likes and dislikes, and other basic facts (Dollinger, 1996; Ziller & Rorer, 1985). Scrapbooks also provide some insight into the crafter’s taste and personality through color choice, compositional style, journaling and photographic style (Dollinger, 1996; Ziller, 1990; Henry & Solano, 1983).

Photographs (and the scrapbooks that contain them) allow us to revisit moments, see expressions again, and remember how we felt in specific instances (Hirsch, 1997). And even for those who weren’t involved in an original moment viewing a photograph makes that moment real: it is as if they *were* there. The visual aspect of scrapbooks makes them especially effective at capturing nonverbal messages and thus preserving

their meaning and power. There are many important things which verbal language can describe but never truly communicate: “it is difficult to discuss in words what naturally exists in people without words” (Weiser, 2001, p. 1).

Because photographs capture that which language can only describe scrapbooks have many of the same powers to communicate as original family interactions they document. A picture of a family embrace sends much the same message (both to those depicted and to those observing) as an actual family embrace. But unlike hugs and compliments scrapbooks are relatively permanent. Hugs, “I love you” laughter, and even fights fade and give way to new experiences. Spoken words, facial expressions and tears all dissipate. Time marches on and behaviors are carried off into the void. But photographs and scrapbooks remain. These artifacts are *time binding*—they lift the moments they feature up out of the flow of time and preserve messages that would otherwise fade from existence (Innis, 1951). The power to freeze time and give eternal voice to the message of a particular moment is a powerful communicative function.

The concepts and experiences featured in family scrapbooks vary greatly but there is one universal similarity: No scrapbook includes absolutely every moment of every day. This simple fact demonstrates that scrapbooks are subjectively edited *interpretations* of family life rather than absolute and objective *facsimiles* of those lives. Every scrapbook is shaped by the scrapbooker who creates it. Scrapbookers edit which parts of their lives to include and which to leave out on several levels. First, scrapbookers make initial decisions about whether or not to take photographs of a given happening. Second, scrapbookers choose which photographs should be included in their albums (or if pages can be created without a photograph). Finally, scrapbookers choose how to treat the



events that are included. By choosing which life events and concepts to include in an album and how to present each included moment scrapbookers create unique artifacts which *select* (draw attention to) the memories/concepts they deem worthy of inclusion in their scrapbooks and *deflect* (draw attention away from) all other happenings and concepts (Burke, 1969).

Because decisions about what to include in (and exclude from) family scrapbooks are made freely by the crafter it is fair to say that a completed scrapbook *reflects* its creator's values (Burke, 1969). Whatever explicit story a scrapbook tells about a family it also sends implied messages about what the person who created it does (and does not) consider important and noteworthy. Including a particular concept or moment in a scrapbook not only freezes the message of that moment in time forever but, by so doing, also sends a clear message of value. That is, by examining a person's scrapbooks we can tell "what the person considers worth looking for and at" (Ziller, 1990, p. 35).

While the manifest content of scrapbooks has clear communicative power omissions are equally communicative. Editing the extraneous and/or the unwanted implies forgetting and creates a picture in the audiences' mind that differs from "actual" reality (Whalen, 2002). Many of the scrapbookers I interviewed expressed a knowledge that scrapbooks serve as a sort of hand crafted "selective memory" for their families. One woman informed me quite plainly that in making and sharing her family scrapbooks her major goal was to "'gild the lily' as it were". She wanted to "gloss over and minimize" her (now grown) children's "abusive alcoholic" father and show them that, despite the trauma in their lives "their childhood was good" (Meredith, LL 16-24). This idea that scrapbooks play a role in how people remember life is reflected in the title of one very

popular scrapbooking magazine, “Memory Makers”. It seems that scrapbookers are intentionally, and in a very literal sense, crafting their family’s memories.

Erving Goffman’s (1959) “dramaturgical approach” characterizes life as an ongoing drama in which “actors” put on strategically constructed “performances” for the benefit of audiences (p. 17). This approach can be applied to scrapbooks as well. Family scrapbooks are like miniature theaters, complete with sets, costumes, props, stars and supporting casts (Whalen, 2002). Scrapbookers, as if creating their own films, perform the duties of writer, editor, narrator, director, and camera operator. Scrapbookers capture the actors, events and settings they deem essential to their scripts, place those scenes in whatever order they chooses, and write narrative “voiceovers” to provide personal interpretation (Whalen, 2002). Scrapbooks are storybooks, morality tales, cliffsnotes, epics and advertising brochures all rolled into one; in them scrapbookers piece together the stories of their family’s life as they most want them to be told.

The conversations that take place while sharing scrapbooks, the stories written on their pages, the pictures included, the aesthetic choices each crafter makes, and even the decision to share a family scrapbook with another person are all communicative. Scrapbooks are prime examples of communicative artifacts because they are inanimate (largely nonverbal) objects that structure interactions, guide conversation, and speak for themselves. Scrapbooks are powerful tools of communication: They provide people an excuse and structure for conversation, information with which to better understand one another and the past, and a wealth of both implied and explicit messages of interpersonal value. Any single object which carries out these functions has far reaching implications for interpersonal communication and warrants careful examination.

### The Functionalist Perspective

A functional approach to communication examines the collectivity of behaviors that perform certain interactive functions such as maintaining coherent dialogue and topic development, signaling affiliation and rapport, regulating communicative control, and managing interpersonal impressions (Patterson, 1983). This functional perspective is relatively common among nonverbal researchers. Several different researchers have proposed classifications of functions that apply to nonverbal behavior in relation to verbal behavior. Ekman and Friesen (1969) propose that, in addition to regulating interaction, nonverbal behavior may also repeat, contradict, complement, or accent particular verbal messages. Argyle and his colleagues (Argyle, 1972; Argyle & Dean, 1965; Argyle, Lalljee & Cook, 1968; Kendon, 1967) have emphasized the role of nonverbal behavior in the following areas: a) synchronizing speech; b) providing feedback; c) expressing intimacy; and d) supporting or replacing verbal communication. While the roles nonverbals play in relation to verbal messages are certainly important, more recent research has more adequately acknowledged the roles of nonverbal cues beyond their relationship with verbal discourse (see Burgoon & Hoobler, 1994; Patterson, 1982). For example, Patterson (1982; 1983; 1988: 1991) developed a functional approach that conceives of nonverbal cues as serving seven specific functions: a) providing information; b) regulating interaction; c) expressing intimacy; d) attempting social control; e) managing impressions; f) managing affect; and g) engaging the service-task function.

Application of functionalist ideas to the notion of family scrapbooks as meaningful artifacts provides a way to explore the roles that these objects play in

interpersonal communication. The focus of this study is to discover the function of family scrapbooks within the interpersonal communication context. This study is neither an exploration of the aesthetic qualities of family craft nor of the psychological effects of such crafts. By exploring the communicative functions of family scrapbooks I hope to further elucidate the truly communicative phenomena of people speaking to one another through objects. Thus, my research question is:

**RQ:** How do family scrapbooks function in interpersonal communication?

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### Participants and Procedures

I interviewed seventeen scrapbookers and then ceased interviewing because I had reached saturation (N=17). These interviews lasted from twenty minutes to three hours (with an average interview taking about forty minutes). All interviews were carried out face-to-face and recorded for later transcription. Individual participants choose the location for their interviews. Fifteen interviews took place in the homes of the participants and three in a private backroom of a local scrapbooking store. Sixteen participants were female. One was male: While sex was *not* a condition of eligibility for this study only one male volunteered and all attempts to recruit additional male participants failed (this is not surprising given the overwhelmingly female makeup of the scrapbooking population (DiFranco, 2005)). Sixteen participants considered themselves Caucasian and one described herself as Mexican American. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 61 though the majority were between 30 and 50 years old.

To participate in the study, participants were required to satisfy three criteria. First they had to be 18 years or older. Secondly, they had to have personally *completed* at least one *family* scrapbook, defined as “any scrapbook designed around or for a family (i.e. heritage albums, baby books, scrapbooks devoted to one family member or to family traditions, etc)”. I did not specify any particular type of family (i.e. nuclear, heterosexual)

thus I allowed participants to self identify as families. Finally, participants had to have *shared* at least one such scrapbook with another person.

I followed a six-step process during each interview. First, I took time to make the participant comfortable and establish rapport. Second, we discussed the informed consent form, and confidentiality agreement (all participants chose to use their real names). Third, the participant signed the informed consent form. Fourth, the participant completed a brief questionnaire regarding demographic information and scrapbooking experience. Fifth, I asked the participant a series of open-ended questions. Sixth, I thanked the participant and encouraged her/him to ask me any questions (s)he had about the interview process or the study itself. Participants were not compensated for taking part in the study. Audio recordings of all interviews were later transcribed verbatim, resulting in a total of 171 single-spaced pages of data.

I utilized both passive and active sampling techniques to find participants. I delivered flyers to several local scrapbooking stores at which time I explained the project in as much depth as the store personnel seemed to want. Many women volunteered themselves (and even some of their friends) during that initial interaction. I also made active appeals for participation at “crops” (informal meetings where scrapbookers get together to work on their craft).

While much of my sample was obtained through my own interaction with women at crops and while delivering flyers I also utilized a modified version of Lindolf’s (1995) snowball sampling technique. While I did not directly ask participants to recommend specific friends/associates I did ask that they talk with others about my research and provide my contact information to anyone who seemed interested (I gave extra flyers and

contact information to women who seemed particularly interested in recruiting friends). Additionally, I spoke about my research in social settings when appropriate (as did my family). Several women volunteered to participate as a result of these purely social conversations. Because my sample was small and purposive my findings are not generalizable to the larger scrapbooking population. However, a small and nonrandom sample may be considered sufficient for a researcher who is “concerned primarily with discovering the range of ideas or behaviors available in a given culture, rather than their prevalence in a population” (Carpenter, 2001 ¶17)

Qualitative interviews offer researchers “access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 18). Such interviews are the best avenue for revealing the “meanings that people ascribe to their own and others’ behaviors during communication episodes” (Metts, Sprecher, & Cupach, 1991, p. 164; Polkinghorne, 1988). Rubin and Rubin explain that “through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 1).

Due to the exploratory nature of this study I chose a semi-structured open-ended interview format. Following an “emotionalist” perspective I formulated open-ended questions which created rapport and encouraged the women to express their “lived experiences” honestly and openly. The emotionalist perspective calls on researchers to “become emotionally involved with respondents and to convey their own feelings to both respondents and readers” (Silverman 2001, p. 91). Open-ended questions more fully explore participants’ views of reality than do close-ended questions (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). I also adopted a “feminist” semi-structured style to further increase

understanding and identification. The semi-structured nature of this type of interview encourages relatively free interaction between the researcher and participant (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Similarly Ann Oakley's (1981) feminist paradigm calls for interviews to be fully interactive in order to minimize the objectification of participants as data. Oakley insists that answering interviewees' questions places the interaction on a more equal footing while personalizing and humanizing the researcher in the mind of the participant.

The flexible interview strategy has been critiqued for its subjectivity and potential to affect participants' answers (Mouly, 1970 pp. 266-267). This criticism is fair: It is true that this sort of interview is not replicable and that what I said affected what the participants said. What is less clear is if this effect is necessarily a problem. Some scholars argue that the "naturalness" added to the interview experience by free interaction lends validity to the information obtained (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). If the purpose of a given study is to allow the participants free range of expression and to facilitate greater understanding of a whole phenomenon, then understanding itself must be held as a higher goal than objectivity or structure.

The exploratory nature of this study made semi-structured open-ended interviewing an appropriate methodology. Remaining flexible and interactive during the interview process allowed me to "maximize discovery and description" (Raymond, 1982, p.16). By allowing participants to use their own unrestricted words, permitting digression, and interacting openly with the participants I was able to get a more holistic understanding of their experiences.



Scholars are increasingly concluding that all interviews are meaning-making reality constructing interactions and thus unavoidably collaborative (Alasuutari, 1995; Gubrium & Holstein, 1995). Reason and Rowan (1981) argue that in-depth interviews in which the participant and interviewer become peers or companions creates the possibility of deep mutual understanding. Maria Mies (1983) explains that a researcher's awareness of her connectedness to her interview participants constitutes a sort of "conscious partiality" and becomes a way to replace mere "spectator knowledge," (which emphasizes neutrality and indifference toward subjects' lives) with a deeper level of understanding (p. 123). Proponents of active interviewing hold that the validity of respondents' answers derives not from their correspondence to personal meanings held within the respondent but from their ability to convey those personal realities in terms that are comprehensible to the person to whom they are being explained (Gubrium, & Holstein, 1995).

In keeping with this dedication to mutual and holistic understanding via conscious partiality my interviews varied in structure and level of interaction. I utilized a 28-question interview guideline consisting of open-ended questions and follow up questions but the format of each interview was flexible and reflexive. I developed the guide through reflection, discussion with my thesis advisor, and limited pre-testing to determine if the questions were useful and valid. Though not all questions were asked in each interview the same topics were addressed in each.

### Data Analysis

Open-ended interviews explore people's views of reality and allow the researcher to generate (as opposed to appraise) theory (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). In order to honor the scrapbookers who shared their thoughts with me and attempt to discover truth

rather than simply test my own preconceived hypotheses I utilized Glaser and Strauss's (1967) *grounded theory* for my analysis.

Grounded theory is a systematic methodology for the “discovery of theory from data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1). It is called “grounded” because the results are “always traceable to the data that gave rise to them” (p. 278. Strauss and Corbin, 1994). This perspective emphasizes “*theory as process*; that is, theory as an ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32). When using grounded theory data are continually, systematically, and intensively examined, compared with similar phenomena and regrouped and reconceptualized until a provisional theory emerges inductively from the analysis.

Grounded theory requires the researcher to use a specified set of procedures to code data in a series of passes (open, axial, and selective). Spigelman (1996) explains these coding procedures as “numerous intellectual maneuvers for grouping data and for naming the relationships among the groups or categories thus derived” (as cited in Anson & Farris, 1998 p. 132). Open coding is the initial process of disassembling and categorizing the data set according to similarity and difference (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The aim of open coding is to “open up the inquiry” (Strauss, 1987, p. 28). In open coding categories are continually added, combined, and revised (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The second phase of coding, axial coding, involves relating the emergent categories to one another and finding the deeper meanings. The analyst attempts to discover underlying similarities in the original set of categories or their properties, and to then reformulate the theory with a smaller set of higher level concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The final stage of coding is selective coding in which the researcher systematically examines the

categories developed in the previous steps with the specific aim of finding and developing core categories. These core categories create a “kind of ‘story line’ or interpretive frame” (Spigelman, 1996, as cited in Anson & Farris, 1998 p. 128).

While all three types of coding are vital to the research process they do not necessarily need to be performed in discrete steps. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), collection, coding, and analysis of data “should blur and intertwine continually, from the beginning of an investigation to its end” (p.43). In keeping with this ideal I began coding and analysis during the early stages of the interview process. As functional themes became obvious I wrote coding memos on my field notes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I took time after each interview to reflect, make further notes, and record any emerging connections I saw. Additionally, I kept an analytical journal throughout the project to write down insight and understanding as they came to me.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) hold that coding does not need to be explicit:

If the analyst wishes only to generate theoretical ideas, new categories and their properties, hypotheses and interrelated hypotheses [s]he cannot be confined to the practice of coding first and then analyzing the data since, in generating theory, [s]he is constantly redesigning and reintegrating his [or her] theoretical notions as [s]he reviews his [or her] material. Analysis after the coding operation would not only unnecessarily delay and interfere with his [or her] purpose, but the explicit coding itself often seems an unnecessary, burdensome task. (p. 100-1)

I chose to adopt this fluid and interconnected perspective and thus intentionally allowed my analysis to overlap and inform coding.

I began the more formal phase of coding informed by the categories and analysis I had discovered during collection. In order to ensure that my analysis was grounded in the participants' actual accounts and not unduly influenced by my own ideas I read through each transcript in its entirety in order to gain a holistic understanding of that participant's experience and then took time to reflect upon and record emergent functions. Because I was specifically looking for the function of scrapbooks in interpersonal communication I only took note of themes that could reasonably be considered interpersonally communicative functions (for example, I never explicitly coded the common theme of scrapbooks as intrapersonally therapeutic). While considering each transcript I utilized a version of constant comparative method to further identify and understand the relationship between emergent themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The rest of my analysis was accomplished through contemplation and struggle for synthesis. As I began to see patterns in the transcripts and connections among the functions I wrote more memos and recorded my thoughts in my analytical journal. I kept constant notes of my evolving analysis about the relationship between the emerging functions as well as any insight I had into plausible core functions. As I continued to develop my theories I read, reread, and referred back to the participants' accounts as well as to my notes and memos.

Before writing my final report I read each transcript one last time looking specifically for negative case examples that would render my findings invalid (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). To further insure validity five participants were asked to engage in participant checking (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I discussed my emergent functions with these participants early in the project and then asked each to read

my results chapters in order to assure that my findings were in keeping with their perspectives. The participants were chosen because of their familiarity with the scrapbooking community, interest in the project, and general competency. All five participants confirmed that the themes and structures I proposed were consistent with their experiences.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONVERSATIONAL FACILITATION FUNCTION

At first glance it may seem odd to begin a thesis devoted to a type of book with a chapter on conversation. It is true that books are typically read rather than spoken about but, unlike reading a novel in the privacy of one's own home, sharing a scrapbook is a social event and, as such, involves conversation. Actively looking through a scrapbook with another person is a fundamentally different experience than reading alone. Whereas reading by oneself is a largely silent, event sharing a scrapbook with someone necessitates interaction and conversation. It is this conversation that is the subject of this chapter. The pages that follow are dedicated not to the messages found within family scrapbooks but to the conversations that take place around them.

Though largely ignored in the scholarly literature, the role physical objects play in providing both a topic of and an excuse for discussion is well understood by people outside the academic realm. This concept is so prevalent that there is even a term for it, objects on display are frequently described as "conversation pieces." This simple yet descriptive phrase perfectly denotes one of the most basic social functions of many nonverbal artifacts, that of giving people "something to talk about" and a socially accepted way to do so. It is my contention that by sharing their family scrapbooks scrapbookers facilitate conversation in two primary ways. First scrapbooks provide

something for people to talk about by encouraging storytelling and questions. Second, scrapbooks ease what otherwise might be difficult conversations by circumventing social, physical and emotional barriers to communication.

### Scrapbooks Give People Something to Talk About

In a sense scrapbooks serve conversation in the most fundamental way possible; the simple presence of such a book creates an opportunity for conversation and provides a subject for discussion once conversation begins. Scrapbooks act as a focal point of conversation and thus provide both things to say and opportunities to say them. Just having a physical object involved in an interaction relieves conversationalists of the burden of searching for an appropriate topic for discussion or a way to introduce a subject that is of particular interest to them.

When we place an object on display we direct attention toward that object and by so doing provide an easy avenue for conversation (both conversational partners can easily talk about whatever object is in front of them). Family scrapbooks, like any other object of joint attention, facilitate conversation by providing a readily accessible and relatively non-threatening subject for discussion. However, unlike many other types of display objects, family scrapbooks allow for more than simple discussion of an object—family scrapbooks offer up the myriad of life experiences within their pages for discussion as well. My analysis revealed four types of talk stimulated by sharing family scrapbooks: a) scrapbooks allow scrapbookers to discuss their own experiences with readers; b) scrapbooks invite the readers to ask questions; c) scrapbooks encourage readers to share their experiences with scrapbookers; and d) scrapbooks stimulate conversation about mutual memories shared by scrapbookers and readers.

*Scrapbooks Help Scrappers Relate Their Experiences*

All of the scrappers (“scraper” is a term used by many scrapbookers to describe themselves) I interviewed said that sharing their books with others gives them an opportunity to share their stories both through the actual content of their books and through what they say while sharing their books with others. In fact, the desire to share personal stories through conversation was so prevalent that all but one of the scrapbookers I interviewed felt it was important to sit with anyone who looks through their books and talk them through the pages. For instance, Connie told me, “I have to comment on every single page” (LL 130-132). Like Connie, most of the scrapbookers I spoke with commented on talking about stories while showing their books. Nancy confessed, “sometimes even though you’ve written the stuff and they can read the stuff you have to—it’s like ‘well this is where we are and this is what we saw and ...’” (LL 378-380). Pat agreed, “You always talk about where the pictures were taken and what we were doing” she said (LL 177-178). Maggie expressed similar thoughts:

Nobody just gives someone else their book and says “look at this and give it back to me tomorrow” ... it’s important that you be there to explain your scrapbooks.

People have questions and there are things that you don’t want to waste journal time on but they are nice tidbits you can add while you are explaining. (LL 402-410)

Comments like these illuminate the ways in which family scrapbooks shape interpersonal conversation by providing a jumping off point for scrapbookers to verbalize their stories. Paula, who owns a local scrapbooking store and thus looks at many family albums, expressed her understanding of how scrapbooks affect interactions in this way:



There was a lady in here the other day and she had done albums for her granddaughter.... So it stimulated all this conversation about what they do when they are together: “Where were you?”, “What were you doing?”, “Well that looks like that was a lot of fun.” And then it goes from there. It just goes on to stories about more details about what is going on in the pages and then before you know it you’re in these long conversations. (LL 163-168)

The conversational significance of providing a topic for discussion is inherent. It may seem overly simplistic to explain that providing a topic for discussion helps people converse, but it is an important point to make. By sharing their scrapbooks scrapbookers provide a subject for discussion and thus stimulate conversation and ease conversational disfluency. However, it would be disrespectful to the scrapbookers who shared their stories with me if I acted as if the only role that sharing their scrapbooks plays is to fill conversational voids. Scrapbooks serve a deeper purpose as well. Telling personal stories fulfills scrapbookers’ basic human *autobiographical imperative*—the need to be known (Randall, 1995). Though none of the scrapbookers I spoke with could articulate exactly why it feels so good to share their stories it was clear from their exuberance that sharing their experiences is its own reward—significant simply because it is.

It is heartening to discover that, at least in one crafting community, people have found a way to shape conversation around their basic desire to be known. While the desire itself is psychological it both manifests itself in conversation and can only be satisfied through interpersonal communication and therefore is relevant to communication scholars. Additional research must be done to more fully understand conversational expression for the sake of expression.

*Sharing Scrapbooks Invites Readers' Questions*

It is true that sharing family scrapbooks provides scrapbookers an opportunity to share their personal experiences but it is important to note that the conversations surrounding the sharing of albums are not one-sided. Storytelling is naturally interactive (Phillips, 2002). The scrapbookers I spoke with all talked about their scrapbooks providing an opportunity for readers to speak and help guide the conversation by asking questions. James explained, "they are reading, they are looking, they are questioning you" (LL 265-266). Jimmie Sue gave an example of how simple questions can serve conversation:

Like with our vacation scrapbooks it would definitely be an easy way to have a conversation based on the pictures and "what did y'all do there?" and "if we wanted to go there what would be good things for us to see?" (LL 216-218)

While scrapbookers choose what subjects are included in their scrapbooks (and thus set a basic outline of conversational topics) readers plays an active role in determining the exact path of discussion. Nancy explained how an onlooker's interests can affect conversation:

I mean you are looking at the scrapbook and something is going to keep your interest. You may want to know more about it... it's like "oh where was this?" ...

I think it is an opening—you are going to see things that you might find interesting and you'll ask about them. (LL 385-389)

It is logical to conclude that the interplay between a scrapper's interests (as represented in the contents of their scrapbooks) and the reader's interests (as reflected in the questions they ask about the presented materials) would make for mutually satisfying

conversations. More research must be done to explore this aspect of the scrapbooking context. The very fact that one conversational partner is literally laying their life on the table as a topic for discussion makes for a unique and potentially very powerful communicative context.

The interactive nature of sharing scrapbooks allows readers to not only affect the content of the discussion but also the level. Readers can choose to stick to rudimentary questions like “Where are you here?” or ask more complex questions. For example: Paula explained how scrapbooks affect her interactions with her children:

I think it just opens up conversation too with your children: “Mom why do I look so small? Why do I look smaller than Ashley did when she was a baby?” Those kinds of things: “Why was I dressed in red?”... “Why blah blah blah blah blah...” Just questions where I think if you didn’t have those scrapbooks some of those things may never come up so it gives them an opportunity to learn even more than you’ve got in their books because it opens up dialogue for them to start asking you things. (LL 385-391)

Jimmy Sue also commented on scrapbooks’ ability to arouse more informed questions:

Because that person has more information they might ask you something about something they learned because of the scrapbook whereas if they just know you in the environment in which you are with them on a regular basis that’s all they’ve got to go on—that’s the only conversation you can have. But after you’ve shared a scrapbook they have more information and they can ask more questions based off that information and even get to know you better. (LL 202-207)

It seems obvious that any scrapbook would provide opportunities for its reader to question its creator. More surprising is the role family scrapbooks can play in facilitating questions between those who read scrapbooks and the people about whom the books are made. For example, Haley told me how her family scrapbooks help her mother and six-year-old daughter communicate:

For my Mom it's just she'll sit with the kids and look at the book and ask more about "what was going on here?" or "do you remember this?" and it's a way for her to be more involved with their day-to-day lives. My daughter does not talk on the phone... so ... it is only when she sees her in person that she opens up and they get to connect like that... I think they help her feel like she at least knows some of the stuff that happened she knows so she can ask Sophie "did you like having that for your birthday?" or whatever. It gives her stuff to talk about. (LL 155-163)

The pages of every family scrapbook contain not only glimpses of that family's life but also keys to conversation with the members of the family. After seeing a scrapbook readers are more able to ask informed and appropriate questions. These questions in turn contribute to greater understanding and a deepening of conversation. Though the subject of relational messages in and around scrapbooks will be covered in detail in chapter five it is important to note here that one notable consequence of increasingly appropriate questions may be increased interpersonal intimacy and relational growth.

*Sharing Scrapbooks Facilitates Reciprocal Storytelling*

While certainly scrapbooks provide a way for onlookers to ask questions, by no means are readers limited to mere inquiry. The personal nature of family scrapbooks encourages a deeper level of involvement from anyone who looks through them. Family stories are, by their nature, evocative of personal memories—that is, hearing other people’s stories has the power to stimulate one’s own memories (Leichter, 1997). Like with any other type of storytelling scrapbooks have the potential to evoke memories in those who come into contact with them. “When you show somebody something about your life that relates to their life it’s like accessing prior knowledge in them and they are like ‘Ahh we did that too,’” Susan told me (195-196). But those who look through scrapbooks are expected to do more than simply remember; they are expected to verbalize those memories. The scrapbookers I interviewed told me that they expect (and want) others to share their own stories. This presumed give-and-take is consistent with the widely accepted norm of reciprocity as applied to self disclosure which holds that people will disclose to one another to the extent that the other discloses and vice versa (Goldner, 1960, Jourard, 1959; Jourard & Landsman, 1960; Jourard & Richman, 1963).

The expectation that both conversational partners will share their personal experiences is also very much in keeping with the notion of the “feminine style” in which women are conceptualized as communicating in a style characterized by a personal tone, the use of personal experiences as evidence, an emphasis on audience participation, and a focus on speaker-audience identification (Campbell, 1973; Dow and Tonn, 1993). Given this research it only makes sense that the scrapbookers I interviewed (who exist in a

primarily female sphere) saw reciprocal storytelling as the normal, appropriate, and desirable outcome of sharing their family albums.

Many of the scrapbookers I interviewed spoke about how sharing their family scrapbooks encourages others to share. Maggie put it simply when she said, “Your memories trigger theirs and they will tell you stories” (L 220). Amanda agreed: “As they see things that have happened... [like] the first bath...they share the story of their child’s first bath and then you have a shared experience which is—it is just great” (LL 121-123). Further illustrating the ability of scrapbooks to trigger memories in those who look through them Sandy concluded:

I don’t think that you can look at something that was built with that much love that it doesn’t resonate with something in you ... I think that when we share our albums with someone else that we are actually offering up an opportunity in that other person to remember things that were important to them (LL 904-909).

By sharing their family books scrapbookers set a precedent of openness and encourage others to share their stories as well. This type of conversation allows both partners to be engaged in actively sharing their own stories within minutes of beginning a conversation. I have found that the sharing of a family scrapbook is intended (and received) not just as a psychological and emotional invitation to remember one’s own family memories but also as a social cue to share those stories. “You can connect on a different level” Maggie told me: “...some of the things in your scrapbooks are going to trigger memories for them and they will be like ‘oh I remember...’ and you will hear these cool stories and ... you will get to learn more about them” (LL 189-194). The ultimate in sharing reciprocity is represented by Tina’s comment that “a lot of times if I

share my album then that person will share their album so it becomes like a whole sharing event” (LL 223-224).

One common subject of reciprocal storytelling is travel. Many of the scrapbookers spoke of the stories that came from sharing family vacation pages with people who had visited the same location or taken similar trips. Pat told me, “It’s fun to share books of places where people have been like Jackson Hole” (LL 178-179). Connie explained how sharing travel experiences can help conversation: “sometimes you scrap places that you’ve been and they might have been there and then you can both talk about it and that is just another thing that gets you to become better friends or get to know somebody better” (LL 177-180). James revealed how his family vacation albums encourage others to share their stories:

They flip through and they see this and they “oooh” and “ahh” over the pictures and then they begin to share in it...like this one couple—they’ve been to the Grand Tetons .... so flipping through our book they shared their stories with us (LL 251-254)

James’s wife Nancy recalled, “We were showing the Grand Tetons and they were all ‘oh yeah I remember when I went...’ and you can have a long conversation about where you went and what you did” (LL 373-376). Laura also talked about creating conversation and connection by sharing similar experiences:

I take my kids places I went when I was a kid and then if I make a page about “when mom went” and “when we went” we can share because we were both there so it is something in common ... you have something to talk about—something that you both can relate to (LL 18-22).

While vacation stories are commonly told while sharing family scrapbooks discussion in this context is not limited to the superficial or impersonal. Because both conversational partners are expected to share personal stories scrapbooks provide an effective tool for circumventing small talk and prompting more personal sharing. “I know when I look at other people’s pictures it fires things in me,” Sandy told me. She added, “it makes me remember things...how often I’ll be looking at pictures in other people’s albums and go; ‘I’ve got one like that—I’ll show you...’” (LL 865-868).

Because family scrapbooks provide a wealth of information about the person who made them very quickly they allow conversational partners to zero in on common ground with little or no searching for common ground. Meredith explained how scrapbooks allow the people who share them to circumvent much of the initial “feeling each other out” that accompanies many initial social interactions:

It is just a wonderful wonderful way to communicate.... It opens up things really quickly because they are right there in front of you. You don’t have to say “oh yeah you went to camp?... My kid went to camp too!” Nobody has to say anything it is right there in front of you .... so it is a very quick shortcut...It opens doors to communication. If you’ve got a scrapbook on your table and somebody opens it and says “ohh this is so cool” and you explain ... whatever is going on and that person says “ohh I’ve been there”, ... or “our family has *this* tradition”... we communicated. Doors were opened which I think is fabulous (192-206).

Meredith commented on the sheer amount and variety of personal sharing that takes place while showing and looking at family scrapbooks:



I think there is a lot of communication between people when you share your scrapbooks ... because we share our scrapbooks, and our stories, and what is going on in our lives, and what our kids are going through, ... and what we are going through and it is all part of the sharing and the communication. (LL 100-106)

Further illustrating the variety of topics which can be spurred by sharing a scrapbook Susan gave an example of a deeply personal conversation prompted by looking at a friend's scrapbook:

A really good friend of mine... did a scrapbook for her parents' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary right before they both died... and it was beautiful and I think that through that we shared—I shared the same situation with my parents and we shared how our feelings about our parents changed our lives. (LL 137-147)

Maggie explained how, even though sharing her scrapbooks is not explicitly intended to encourage others to share their stories it happens none-the-less: "I've never thought 'if I show them this they will maybe tell me something about them' ... or anything like that. But I do think it helps the process and it creates more to talk about and helps communication" (199-202). Whether strategic or not sharing a family scrapbook does send a message of openness and set the stage for mutual sharing. Haley probably summed it up best when she said: "I think that when you share a scrapbook with someone it opens them up to share things with you about their lives and about their families and it sort of opens the floor for discussion" (LL 385-387).

It is interesting to note that while most research on self disclosure characterizes personal disclosure as interactive and largely reciprocal, the scrapbooking context exists

in some ways outside of this reciprocity effect (Altman, 1973; Jourard, 1959; Jourard & Landsman, 1960; Jourard & Richman, 1963). Because scrapbooks are created before they are shared it is not possible for the level of disclosure in these books to be mediated by the amount a specific reader discloses. While it is true that scrapbookers can adjust the level of their verbal disclosures while actually sharing their books the books themselves are fixed: they cannot be altered in response to readers' levels of disclosure. It is possible that those who scrapbook are simply predisposed to high levels of self disclosure and thus, like the high disclosers paired with low disclosures in Jourard and Resnick's (1970) study, are unlikely to lower their frequency of disclosure regardless of the level of disclosure of the person with whom they are speaking; however more research must be done to explore the unique concept of premeditated disclosure (as cited in Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 202).

#### *Sharing Scrapbooks Prompts Reliving Shared Experiences*

Thus far I've approached family scrapbooks primarily as a vehicle for one or the other of two conversational partners to share his or her personal stories. While scrapbooks certainly do act as platforms for personal storytelling family, scrapbooks play an equally powerful role in stimulating conversation about mutual experiences (those events or activities in which both the scrapper and the reader participated). When looking through a scrapbook which features something the scrapper and reader did together (as opposed to a book dedicated to the scrapper's personal events which may trigger the reader's memories of similar but separate experiences) both people are invited to recall and discuss one mutual experience.

The role scrapbooks play in spotlighting shared memories and calling for shared recollection was central for several of the scrapbookers I interviewed. Kelly said one of her two top reasons for making family scrapbooks is “so a few years down the road I ... can remember and share it with people or get with those old people and remind them of the fun we had” (LL 16-19 ). This idea of sharing old memories was so important to James that he admitted that he wouldn’t scrap if there wasn’t someone to share it with (LL 651) and then explained:

There is a social element that is of value to me. There is the element of sharing—the element of being able to laugh about it and joke about the pictures and fun over “when we were young...” and “do you remember...?” and sharing common memories and things like that. So that is the value that I see and I think there is just such an awesome value in that.” (LL 654-658)

When I asked him what his scrapbooks would say if they could talk he said:

It just speaks to us wanting to...not so much remembering our childhood but bringing that into the picture for other people to see and enjoy ... I know that when I do family reunions I’m wanting to be able to share and relive with cousins sitting around laughing and talking about what we did, and where we were, and what we got into, and what we got out of, and what we didn’t get caught at, and just the relive those instances together. (LL 718-724)

James was not the only one who wanted to stimulate sharing memories with old friends and family. Sandy talked about a memory sharing ritual she’s developed with her husband and two young sons:

Whenever I come home from scrapbooking the whole family looks at the pictures—everybody. We sit down after I've been out at night the next day I'll have my books sitting out on the counter and ... they'll look and they'll go "Mama, that was me and I was at the park and I went down the slide face first. Mama, that was fun." (LL 604-608)

Tina and her husband also have a ritual for looking at the books: "I hand it to him at the end of the year so that we can relive the memories of the past year.... at the end of the year we all go through them together and it makes us happy" (LL 239-243). While less scheduled Yoli also spoke of regularly sharing the books (and memories) with her husband:

We usually look back once the girls go down and Orlando and I are watching David Letterman or something and we'll break them out and we're looking at them or something and we are like "look at her!" you know and we get so excited to see that they were so little. (LL 272-275).

Interestingly, even with family scrapbooks, looking back and sharing family fun is not limited to immediate family—Sandy told me about reliving her son's birth with her nanny:

I have a friend that had a new little baby the other day and we were waiting for it to come ... and I was talking with my nanny and I said "oh there is going to be this new little baby let's get out the book" and we grabbed Spencer's book and then we grabbed Martin's book ... we looked at that album with her holding Martin in her arms ... and we just relived that whole what was it like to have that brand new baby in your arms and how cool it was going to be for this family. So I

really think that they are just focal points for memory and for conversation. (LL 374-382)

Once again I must draw a distinction between the psychological and the communicative. Remembering an event is not communication but the *sharing* that memory is. The relationship between memory and conversation is clear in Sandy's comment about her young son's excitement over the stories recorded in her scrapbooks:

"When I was a little bitty baby" is his favorite story in the entire world.... He'll go "Mama when I was a little bitty baby I sat in my little saucer that turned around and I ate Cheerios" and I'll say "yes you did...." (LL 581-587)

Sandy's comment demonstrates how family scrapbooks stimulate the subjects of those books to retell their own stories. This sort of behavior is not uncommon. Haley's kids share stories when they look back at their albums too: "Whenever I finish one they will sit and look through it repeatedly and we'll talk about it and I love that" (LL 173-174). And family scrapbooks are not just for mothers and small children. Meredith's two grown sons enjoy recalling their past experiences while looking through her books. She described them laughing and having fun while looking at pictures of themselves roughhousing with their cousin and saying "oh dude look—this is when you dropped me!" (L 121).

Clearly, stimulating memories is a psychological function but to the extent that those internal memories manifest themselves in external statements they constitute a conversational and communicative phenomenon. In the case of mutual memories scrapbooks serve communication by guiding the memories of both the scrapper and the reader. This memory guidance, in turn, stimulates both conversational partners to talk

about their memories and thus guides the conversation into discussion of a shared past. This sort of shared memory stimulates conversation about a subject which relates directly to both conversational partners and thus it seems logical to assume that such conversation would lead to an increased feeling of involvement for both conversational partners. Additional research might address the effect of joint recall on conversational satisfaction.

### Scrapbooks Ease Difficult Conversations

One of the more surprising themes that arose from the interview process is that scrapbookers see sharing their scrapbooks as a way to ease potentially difficult and/or awkward conversations. My analysis revealed that scrapbooks can help overcome three major hurdles to meaningful communication: a) social awkwardness, b) physiological difficulties, and c) sensitive subject matter.

#### *Scrapbooks Help Overcome Social Awkwardness*

Initiating social interaction can be difficult (Gabor, 2001). Almost everybody has had an experience at some point in their life in which they simply had no idea how to begin or sustain a conversation. This social uncertainty may explain the prevalence of pick up lines as well as why conversations so often consist of common social scripts like “nice weather we’ve been having” or “how ‘bout them Yankees?” Interestingly it seems that for many of the people I interviewed questions about and offers to share family scrapbooks are somewhat akin to the collegiate conversational standby “what’s your major?” As Susan aptly phrased it: “I think [sharing a family scrapbook] definitely improves your interaction because a scrapbook can be like an icebreaker” (194-195).

Displayed objects, much like the weather, serve as common points of reference about which anyone can make (relatively) intelligent conversation. Like any other display

object, family scrapbooks act as shared objects of attention and, consequently, provide a convenient “talking point.”

Scrapbooks provide a concrete and multifaceted object for social interactions to center around and thus supply a readily accessible and relatively non-demanding subject for discussion. Consequently, sharing a scrapbook can provide the social crutch necessary to get through many potentially awkward conversations (or lack thereof). Haley explained how a scrapbook can act as a social opening as well as how scrapbooks provide a universal subject matter:

It can even give you an excuse to invite someone over; you can say “hey there is this scrapbook that I want you to come look at.” And it does give you something you can talk about especially sometimes it is just so hard to find something to talk about with some people but everybody has a life. (LL 374-378)

The idea that scrapbooks provide an easy and stress-free avenue for conversation was echoed by many of the scrapbookers I interviewed. For example, Nancy’s frank statement about how her scrapbooks help keep her from feeling awkward in social settings beautifully embodies the social crutch aspect of the conversational facilitation function:

My scrapbooks help me interact. It is like social show and tell...it’s not like having nothing in front of you, with your scrapbook you have something in front of you... you have something that you can show or share... I’m not just “hi how are you doing?”.... It doesn’t make me feel like “What am I gonna say? What am I gonna do?”... I guess it is a way that I can not be so shy. (LL 273-278)

As is evidenced by the popularity of self help titles like *How to win friends and influence people* and *The pocket guide to making successful small talk: How to talk to anyone anywhere about anything*, many people worry about what to say and how to make conversation (Carducci, 1999; Carnegie, 1990). Family scrapbooks ease conversational anxiety by acting as both a justification for initiating social contact, and a conversational crutch once that contact is made. Like other displayed objects, scrapbooks provide a mutually accessible “talking point” for both conversational partners and thus ease social pressure.

Because family scrapbooks are devoted to a nearly universal topic—family—discussing these books can act as a “great equalizer” of conversation. While it is true that the subject of family is basically universal and thus makes for conversational ease it is also true that disclosing facts about one’s family could potentially make for increased vulnerability and thus lead to more—not less—social discomfort. Additional research must be done to more fully understand the relationship between disclosure, social ease, and personal comfort.

### *Scrapbooks Help Overcome Physiological Difficulties*

An interesting example of scrapbooks helping a family traverse a physical barrier to communication occurs in Haley’s family. She told me about how her father uses her family scrapbooks to “talk” with his grandkids despite difficulties with his speech:

My father is aphasic so he has very little speech left. He had a massive stroke a few years ago ...he’s gotten some of his language back but ... the kids have trouble because they don’t understand that it takes grandpa longer to get the words out and he can’t make complete sentences but he can sit and open the book



and just point and then the kids will just chatter away at him about what happened so that really opens doors for him. (LL 150-155)

*Scrapbooks Ease Psychological Barriers*

As noteworthy as Haley's example is, physiologically problematic exchanges aren't the only kind of difficult conversations that can be helped by sharing a scrapbook. Several participants noted how scrapbooks help them navigate emotionally tricky subjects. Nancy explained it well when she said, "it can be an avenue to open up conversation with someone but not hitting them over the head or anything like that" (LL 564-565). Paula further elaborated on the ability of scrapbooks to open up a topic without causing any discomfort:

When you look at books I think it is pretty safe. I mean people can look and they can see what's going on with your page and I think it leaves an open—if somebody reads your page and they want to talk I think it leaves that open where they can and yet if they don't want to talk about it, its not...intimidating to them...if they see something like for instance, my grandfather's memory page, I think when she looks at my album ... it leaves that open for my grandmother to say "I really miss him. I wish your grandfather were still here". But on the other hand if she is not there and she doesn't want to talk about it—it doesn't force her to talk about him she can just smile and pass the page or she can cry and turn the page but she doesn't have to address it if she doesn't want to. It's like it allows for conversation without forcing it; its there if they want to talk about it (LL 219-230).

Sharing their feelings and experiences about difficult issues (i.e. death or family trauma) allows scrapbookers to set the stage for sharing and by so doing invite others to share their own thoughts at whatever level they choose (without forcing readers to spend time on that topic). By communicating their personal perspectives scrapbookers are able to gently allude to, and thereby offer up for discussion, topics that might otherwise not come up in the flow of normal conversation. LaDonna explained how scrapbooks can provide an uncommon opportunity for families that don't typically discuss emotionally difficult topics:

For families, my family in particular, (and I am sure that there are millions more out there that are just like us), we grew up where there was not a lot of communication ...Because of the way my dad died—suicide—my mom was very tough and strong and “we are fine”. And that’s it that is all we communicate; “*we are fine, everything is FINE*”.... For people in my family it can open up conversation you know which is difficult for our family so it provides that opportunity: “let’s have a dialogue”. My brother and I have done that many times: “what was it like for you”, “what was it like for me”.... My mom... she can’t go there but this would give her the opportunity should she want to.... I think it can open doors for communication.... (LL 184-193)

The ability of family members to open up conversations about difficult issues in a non-threatening way could have far reaching potential for healing and connection within the family as well as for communicating about family issues outside of the family.

Some people might say that difficult family issues are private and should only be discussed within the family sphere but this is not necessarily the case. It can be helpful

for survivors of trauma to talk to others outside their own families who have experienced the same thing (Herman, 1997; Sommer, 1994). Sharing family scrapbooks that feature or allude to difficult family issues may provide an opportunity for healing discussion. When I asked LaDonna what effect sharing the page she made about her reaction to her father's suicide with people outside her family might have she said:

I think for other people who have been through similar situations it gives them the feeling of “oh my god I’m not all alone—somebody else has been through this too. Wow! Maybe I can talk about it. Maybe it is okay.” (LL 435-438)

Pat also expressed a belief that family scrapbooks can encourage discussion about difficult issues. Recalling her difficulty with babysitting her grandchildren on September 11<sup>th</sup> after being instructed by their mother not to discuss the tragedy with them she said:

That is the kind of stuff that I think you have to address ... there are some people that want to stick their head in the sand and think it is going to go away but I think that if you talk to your children about things ... it takes away the mystery and it means that it is okay to talk about it from their perspective. If we make scrapbooks about things like 9/11 it gives us a means of trying to communicate about those things (LL 190-198).

Scrapbooks alleviate conversational difficulty by opening doors to conversations about difficult and or potentially painful subjects without forcing any specific conversation. There is a level of ambiguity in scrapbooking that makes a scrapbook page an appealing way to bring up difficult topics. Unlike verbal statements scrapbooks have the ability to gently introduce a subject without demanding a specific response. For example if I were to tell my mother “I want to talk about my father's death” then it would

seem strange for her not to acknowledge my request or for her to begin talking about what a good man he was. If, however, I show my mother a page dedicated to my father on which I discuss his life, his death, and his contribution to my life it leaves the door open for her to discuss any and all aspects of my father and his death. While verbal comments can be viewed as direct solicitations of a particular conversation, scrapbook pages are meant as suggestive offers to discuss broader topics.

The pages of a scrapbook act as sort of a conversational menu from which readers can choose any of several topics of conversation. Because each page introduces a number of potential subjects for conversation readers are free to address the page in many different ways ranging from discussing whatever is actually featured on the given page, to the quality of the photographs, or even the technique used to put the page together. The relative ambiguity of scrapbooks as opposed to spoken language makes scrapbooks feel like a safe way to bring up sensitive subjects.

The significance of findings that indicate families are able to use scrapbooks to address difficult issues with relative ease are obvious. Such findings inform the field of family communication and could have a profound effect in the therapeutic setting as well as in everyday life. More research must be done to determine what effect scrapbooks have on the frequency of discussing difficult issues and the satisfaction of those who use scrapbooks as a stimulus for such conversations.

### Conclusion

Scrapbooks facilitate conversation by acting as a readymade but infinitely variable topic for discussion. By quite literally laying their own experiences on the table for discussion scrappers provide a conversational menu from which readers can choose

topics to discuss. In addition to empowering readers to choose topics for discussion family scrapbooks also allow for varying levels of reader involvement. Scrapbooks can either be flipped through quickly and discussed at a superficial level or be more fully examined and discussed at great length. Scrapbooks act as basic conversational maps but the ambiguity inherent in the craft empowers readers to choose their own unique paths through the terrain.

While the information in a scrapbook doesn't change within a given social interaction any reader's response to that information is free to vary. It is true that the personal nature of family scrapbooks invites readers to reciprocate this disclosure but ultimately the decision about whether or not to accept the invitation to share their own personal stories is entirely up to each reader. The non-demanding nature of looking through a family scrapbook allows people to interact at whatever level of disclosure and emotional depth they are comfortable with. Though a family scrapbook can act as a rough topical guide for conversation, the depth and type of conversation are determined by the people conversing. Because the conversations that take place while sharing scrapbooks are so variable and personalizable it seems that a wide variety of people could enjoy (or at least not mind) this type of conversation. While it is true that no type of conversation is universally appealing the scrapbooking context seems to have a potential to appeal to a large audience simply because it allows for such personalization.

By providing an external and complex focal object around which conversation can center and inviting readers to engage in whatever level of personal disclosure they wish scrapbooks provide for semi-structured but extremely personalizable discussions between both family and friends. Regardless of the exact conversations that take place

while flipping through their pages scrapbooks enable, ease, support, and possibly even create conversation where there might otherwise be little or difficult communication. No matter what level of relationship exists between two people before sharing a family scrapbook, or the depth of discussion that occurs while looking, scrapbooks provide something to talk about, an invitation to relive and discuss mutual memories, and a means of overcoming physical as well as emotional barriers to communication.

One barrier that scrapbooks cannot overcome is people's resistance to look at the books in the first place. Unfortunately I've found that in many (particularly masculine) social spheres there is a stigma attached to scrapbooking which can undercut people's willingness to look at the books. This unwillingness to look at scrapbooks could keep many people (especially men) who are concerned with not appearing overly "soft" from engaging in much discussion about scrapbooks and thereby keep those who may have the least number of alternative ways to discuss family issues from a potentially powerful and painless way to do so (in addition to perpetuating the conception that family issues are "women's work").

Because family scrapbooks allow for two people to share their personal stories and discuss potentially painful family issues at whatever level they are comfortable, scrapbooks provide a low risk and potentially very highly rewarding avenue to personal interaction for those who will look at them and discuss them with others. Be they shortcuts, menus, or crutches the central theme remains the same: Whichever metaphor one chooses the simple truth is that scrapbooks help people talk to one another.

## CHAPTER 4

### INFORMATIONAL FUNCTION

Family information is highly valued in the scrapbooking community. In fact, most of the scrapbookers I interviewed explained their scrapbooking largely as an attempt to preserve and pass on family information. Every scrapbooker I spoke with expressed a desire for their scrapbooks to help their families look back, remember, and understand what came before.

One common theme in many of my interviews was a forgotten shoebox stuffed full of family photos “buried” in the back of someone’s closet. The scrapbookers told me stories of looking through such boxes and realizing, much to their dismay, that they either had no idea who the people in the pictures were or that they had forgotten many of the details over the years. None of the scrappers were comfortable with the idea that their memories, and their families’ communication, could be so faulty that once loved family members had been reduced to “empty pictures,” unknown even to their own families (Nancy L 44).

In listening to the scrappers’ stories I was struck by their passion. It was as if they were talking about a cardboard mass grave, a sort of a “tomb of the unknown relative”. Nancy spoke sadly about seeing family photographs abandoned to strangers in flea markets and antique stores when she told me: “it makes me sad because there are all these

pictures of ... babies and moms and dads and brothers and sisters and you don't know who they are" (LL 39-41).

The scrapbookers' concern over the loss of information about how individual people fit into the larger family is not surprising from practitioners of a female dominated craft. Women have traditionally been the "kin keepers" of their families (Rosenthal, 1985). Throughout history women have been responsible for maintaining kinship networks. Sharing family information is a form of "symbolic kinkeeping" by which I mean behaviors "that go beyond any functional requirement to keep families together, such as arranging family gatherings, marking birthdays, mediating conflicts, and *disseminating news of kin*" (Treas & Mazumdar, 2004 emphasis added ¶ 4).

Without considering the idea of kinkeeping it would be easy to read the scrappers' worry about people fading from memory as a personal fear of being forgotten. However, fear of oblivion truly did not seem to motivate most of the scrapbookers with whom I spoke. The scrappers expressed considerably more desire to *know* and help others know than to actually *be known* themselves. Much scrapbooking begins from a personal dislike of not knowing and extends into an enthusiasm for collecting and communicating knowledge in order to spare others the same feelings of frustration associated with not knowing. I believe that scrapbookers' own uncertainty about their families' past creates an altruistic and empathic desire to reduce uncertainty for future generations. It is this desire that appears to be the primary motivating factor for family scrapbookers. In this chapter I will discuss briefly uncertainty reduction theory as it relates to scrapbooks and then develop an argument that scrapbooks serve to reduce uncertainty in two primary



ways: First as family history books that provide data and information, and second as family story books that help that information come alive for the reader.

### Family Scrapbooks and Uncertainty Reduction

The phrase “uncertainty reduction” comes from Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) (Berger, 1979; Berger & Calabrese, 1975) which holds that people attempt to reduce uncertainty in communication contexts because feeling uncertain is personally uncomfortable. On the surface it is easy to see how scrapbooks might be seen as tools for reducing uncertainty; however, some aspects of this theory don’t quite fit with the retrospectively oriented nature of scrapbooking. URT as a theory is primarily concerned with the past only as it affects the future. Uncertainty within URT results from a lack of confidence about how an interpersonal encounter will proceed; it involves the inability to describe, explain, and/or predict behavior within interaction (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). Scrapbookers, on the other hand, seem to desire some level of certainty about the past even without necessarily looking forward to how that past will affect a future interaction.

Given that (at least with heritage albums) many scrapbooks feature deceased relatives it is clear that scrappers’ goal cannot be to predict the actions of the people about whom the books are made. What then is the purpose of reducing uncertainty about what has come before? After speaking with the scrapbookers I found that, for them, reducing uncertainty is important for two primary reasons. First scrapbookers seek to find answers to reduce their own levels of discomfort (perhaps resulting from a failure to sufficiently kin-keep). Second, and more importantly to the communication scholar, is scrapbookers’ own experience with the discomfort of uncertainty motivates them to share

the information they discover with their families in order to reduce family members' potential discomfort. It is this sharing of information that makes the historical aspect of scrapbooks an issue worthy of considering from an interpersonal communication standpoint. If they are not shared, scrapbooks serve purely psychological (or perhaps intrapersonal communication) functions and are of little significance to the interpersonal scholar. However, the act of sharing a scrapbook with another person is an interpersonally significant communicative action and therefore makes scrapbooks worthy of study by communication scholars.

According to URT, there are three primary sources of uncertainty within interpersonal interactions: the self, the partner, and the relationship. I contend that the information scrapbookers communicate in their books serves to reduce all three types of uncertainty. Self uncertainty is said to occur when people are not able to describe, predict, or explain their own attitudes and/or behaviors (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In these situations, people are prompted to ask questions such as "Why did I do that?" or "Why did I say that?" (Berger & Bradac, 1982, p. 9). I found that scrapbookers attempt to reduce self uncertainty for their children by giving them not only a sense of their own histories, but also of their families' collective history as a way to understand who they are as individuals:

I guess—to me [my kids'] books are kind of... "where did I come from?" and "what have I experienced?" and so it's not really a complete picture... unless you can talk about "okay I came from mom and dad, but where did mom and dad come from? And where did they come from?"...I guess for me it is important to

do that because then it gives them a much clearer picture of where DID I come from and what came before me. (Paula LL 84-90)

While some scrappers seek to reduce their children's self uncertainty by providing information about the lives and experiences of their parents, grandparents, and any other family members who might have some influence on the children's development other scrappers simply seek to remind the children of their own histories:

I think the biggest things that I really hope that they get out of it is that they will be able to look back and kinda look at a—a little history of their lives—of just different things that they did in their lives and some things that they said and things that they did. (Connie LL 415-418)

This sort of detailed information can give scrapbookers' children a level of self-certainty not possible with other forms of family communication.

According to much of URT literature the second type of uncertainty, *partner uncertainty*, emerges from the lack of adequate information about a partner's attitudes, values, and/or preferences and the difficulty the lack of such knowledge creates in predicting a partner's behavior (Berger, 1979; Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). None of my interviewees expressed a desire to predict other people's behavior. However, the more general idea that uncertainty about another person is uncomfortable was a major theme. Scrapbookers clearly wanted to know about other people. Interestingly I found that the most commonly lamented form of interpersonal uncertainty was not uncertainty about a conversational or relational partner but, instead, was uncertainty about a third person with whom it is impossible to communicate (i.e. a deceased relative). I propose that a new,

broad, conception of uncertainty must be put forth to fully explain uncertainty and its affect on communication behaviors.

Uncertainty about the person with whom one is conversing (or will converse later) can have an obvious effect on those interactions. However, I found that uncertainty need not be related to the person with whom one is or will be conversing to have a powerful effect on communication. In fact, uncertainty about a third person with whom it is impossible or difficult to communicate can also cause distress and affect one's communication. For this reason I choose to utilize a notion of *other uncertainty* as a more general type of partner uncertainty. While partner uncertainty is a result of a person's fear of a future interaction going poorly, other uncertainty results from the discomfort associated with having limited knowledge of *another* person (who has some influence on one's life) with whom it is impossible to interact.

It could be said that uncertainty about a person with whom it is impossible to communicate (i.e. a dead relative) should not be considered a communicative factor. At first glance this argument makes sense. However I argue that other uncertainty is relevant to communication in exactly the same way that partner uncertainty is: Both types of uncertainty motivate people to communicate. It makes no difference if uncertainty is caused by an interaction, an anticipated interaction, or the absence of any possibility of interaction. Uncertainty is an inner state regardless of what causes it. What makes uncertainty reduction theory a communicative (rather than psychological) theory is that it posits a relationship between an inner state and a communicative act. In this way uncertainty caused by the lack of knowledge of an unknown dead relative is as much a communicative factor as uncertainty caused by an interaction with a stranger. In each

case what matters is that uncertainty motivates the uncertain person to take a communicative action. At least in the scrapbooking context other uncertainty meets this requirement. Scrapbookers' other uncertainty results in a communicative interaction when scrapbookers make and share scrapbooks in an effort to save their families from the discomfort associated with other uncertainty. Much scrapbooking is an empathetic response to a scrapper's own frustrating experiences with other uncertainty and her/his desire to give her/his own children a more complete picture (and thereby reduce their uncertainty). There is an interesting parallel here: interaction *creates* partner uncertainty while other uncertainty can spur people to interact.

The third cause of uncertainty is *relationship uncertainty* in which people may experience doubt about the status of the relationship apart from either self or partner uncertainty (Berger, 1988; Berger & Bradac, 1982; see also Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). Though scrapbooks are an efficient way to reduce relationship uncertainty, this chapter deals with informative rather than relational issues. The effect of sharing scrapbooks on relationship uncertainty and on relationships in general will be addressed in chapter five of this thesis.

In addition to distinguishing areas of uncertainty, URT differentiates between behavioral and cognitive uncertainty within interpersonal interactions (Berger, 1979; see also Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). Whereas behavioral uncertainty refers to not knowing what to say or do within an interaction, cognitive uncertainty derives from a lack of information about a specific subject (Berger, 1979). I maintain that scrapbooks address cognitive uncertainty by functioning as information sources from which scrapbookers, their families, (and anyone else who cares to look), can learn.

### Communicating Certainty

However interesting it may be to muse about the causes of uncertainty within families the question is not one of communication. As a communication scholar my concern lies in exploring the ways families seek certainty through communication. The only way to reduce uncertainty is to increase knowledge. Family scrapbooks are ideally suited to the task. Scrapbooks are veritable treasure chests of family information. With each turn of the page a reader gets a better idea of what it feels like to live (or have lived) in a given family. Whether it is a picture of great grandma Jo, mom and dad's wedding announcement, or a kindergartener's most recent art project, each picture and every word in a scrapbook provides readers with some sort of information. Even beyond basic information scrapbooks help give a "sense" of things through personal journaling, artwork, and photographs. Every sentence and color choice helps to create context, foster understanding, and reduce uncertainty.

In both tone and content family scrapbooks provide insight into family life as little else can. Family scrapbooks explicitly relate family stories and display photographs (which give visual data about race, sex, ethnicity, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and other basic demographic information). Furthermore, these books provide the additional information needed to help readers interpret a series of otherwise dry and disjointed facts. Family scrapbooks are both history teachers and storytellers. In their books scrapbookers relate both the dry factual names, dates, and places of a given family's history and the highly personal comments, perspective, and passion of an exuberant orator.

With family history, as with other types of information, the facts may form the backbone of the story but it is the personal reflection that enables the reader to truly understand that information. My research reveals that family scrapbooks allow scrapbookers to pass on information in two different ways: First scrapbooks act as family reference books that teach, remind, and provide clarity about basic family information (i.e. names, dates, faces). Second, scrapbooks serve as storybooks, which provide the context and additional information needed to make the basic facts come alive.

### *Scrapbooks as Reference Books*

All the scrapbookers I spoke with explained their scrapbooking, at least in part, as a response to their personal experiences with not knowing “who?”, “what”, “when?”, “where?”, or “why?” about their own family pictures. The scrappers told me that scrapbooking is an opportunity to record information while the details are still fresh in their minds and thereby create meaningful reference books for themselves and their families. In a sense scrapbookers are crafting their very own history books. By building scrapbooks, scrappers seek to assure that their children and future generations will not be stuck with a box of nameless faces, or find themselves desperately struggling to remember the significance of the photographed events in their own lives. By recording their family information in scrapbook form scrapbookers ensure that the information they have does not die with them. Scrappers give their children a point of reference to which they can refer when the scrappers themselves are no longer around to act as a reference.

No matter how sentimental a person is feeling, an unlabeled and unidentifiable photograph is almost meaningless:

When you look at pictures unless you know who is in the picture and what is going on they are not very meaningful to you. But when you've got some verbiage there that tells you who, what, when, where, and what's going on then it is a little bit more meaningful to you. So ... that is why scrapbooking is more important than just putting them in an album. (Paula LL 23-27)

Without any additional information or knowledge an old photograph becomes simply that—an old photograph. Without knowing the name of the person in the photo or anything about that person it is difficult to feel any personal connection to them. Names were of particular importance to many of the scrappers I interviewed. Several participants spoke specifically about the importance of naming the people in each photograph, and they saw naming the awards their children won, the dances their daughters did, and their kids' friends as valuable functions of scrapbooks. A focus on something as simple as a name really makes clear the importance scrapbookers give to communicating information through their scrapbooks.

Family scrapbooks serve as treasured time capsules in which scrapbookers place family information for safe keeping and future use. The pages of scrapbooks contain names, dates, relationships, happenings, people's appearances, and much more. Preserving and passing on this sort of information is a fundamental reason many scrapbookers make their books. Scrapbooks communicate basic information in four primary ways: a) scrapbooks teach about previously unknown family pasts; b) scrapbooks remind family members of their forgotten personal histories; c) scrapbooks provide updates about the current lives of families that the reader doesn't see often; and, d) scrapbooks provide evidence to clarify any contested information.



*Scrapbooks as Familial History Teachers*

Heritage albums and scrapbooks about past events provide both visual and verbal information about past events and people (e.g. what they looked like, their names, dates, and other brief descriptors). By providing this sort of data scrapbookers give their children, their grandchildren, and anyone else who looks through their books, a tremendous amount of information to which they might not otherwise have access to. Scrapbooks are certainly not the only way to teach family information, but the books are an easy way to keep a large amount of family information together, organized, accessible, and preserved against the ravages of time.

In my interviews the scrapbookers spoke often and with much resolve about their desire to pass on information about the past to their children and future generations. Almost every scrapbooker spoke at some point about the importance of recording personal data for future generations. Pat explained it well:

In a hundred years I want someone to be able to come and look at these and have an idea of what we were doing and what was going on... my grandmother had a box of pictures that nobody knew what they were and my mother threw them out and ... I'm very sad about that today... so we all ought to be due-diligent about at least writing on the back of the pictures with the right kind of pen so at least that much information can get onto it. (LL 16-22)

Pat's above comment makes clear the circular nature of scrapbooks, information, and time. A major function of scrapbooks is to teach people about the past. However, this takes place largely by recording the present for the future. For example, Tina explained how scrapbooks allow her to record information for her children's use later in time:

“[Scrapbooking] forces me to journal and say what was in the pictures—so that after I’m gone my daughter and my children can know what these pictures were about, and dates, and places, ...” (Tina LL 16-18). It is very clear that scrapbookers are making their books for future use—they are intentionally leaving messages for the future.

One of the most prevalent (if not *the* most common) theme in my interviews was scrapbookers’ desire to label family photographs (with a date, the names of the people in the photograph, and often a brief explanation of how each person relates to the current family). This sort of basic information helps the current generation better see the past and enables future generations to know the present. As James told me, a valuable function of scrapbooking is “doing spreads [multi page layouts] that encompass the loved ones that are gone ... naming them and making them known to those who may not have known them as well as we did” (LL 524-527). By providing names, pictures, and personal information about those who came before scrapbookers teach themselves, their children, and future generations all about their family’s past.

In addition to names and dates, scrapbookers want to pass down information about the general goings-on of life. This focus is largely motivated by the scrapbookers’ desire to provide future generations with the types of information that the scrappers themselves wish they had had about their parents and ancestors. In many ways scrapbooks are seen as an opportunity to correct a communicative wrong: the failure of information to be communicated from generation to generation. Meredith gave voice to this goal:

I want them to see what went on in the past. I would be thrilled if I had the same information about my family—my mom, I mean when I find pictures that she’s

left that have something written on the back I'm thrilled. But if they are in a scrapbook and I've written about them and my children and grandchildren can look at them and know what went on that's what I hope to accomplish. (LL 10-14)

The desire to communicate to future generations is not limited to grandmothers like Meredith. Kelly, though still in college, unmarried, and without children, is already looking to the future and planning how her scrapbooks will help her kids see what she was like before they were born: "I want to ... be able to tell my kids basically what I did in my life because I don't really know what my mom did" (LL 4-5).

While Kelly focused primarily on teaching her kids about her own life many scrappers include family information about their parents and other older relatives. In particular, it is common for scrapbookers to include information about their children's grandparents as a way to teach the children about the larger family:

I just think it would be more complete... if their mom and dad were there. And really, not just Mom and Dad but "here's your grandmother"... and "here is your grandfather—even though he was not alive when you were born here is something about him."... So that it completes them and their history. (Paula LL 76-81)

Laura also spoke about teaching her children about their grandparents through her scrapbooks:

I'm redoing one of my dad's... he was a policeman in Chicago... just so that the kids know—they know that Papa was a policeman but they don't know all the details... So it says all the sections he worked in and what he did and it has pictures in it.... and it'll all be around for generations to come. (LL 64-72)

The focus on scrapbooks' longevity is important when talking about their ability to teach lessons about the past. In order for scrapbooks to communicate about a past that is currently the present, the books themselves must endure for the future. The simple fact that scrapbooks are meant to communicate with future generations makes them difficult to study. Interestingly modern scrapbooking, a hobby largely dedicated to preserving information across generations, is still in its infancy, and thus it is difficult to know for certain how the books will function in the future. However, despite the difficulties of studying a single message across multiple life spans, the ability of scrapbooks to communicate scrapbookers' messages even from beyond the grave makes them a largely unique mode of communication within the interpersonal sphere. If nothing else, this unique capacity makes scrapbooks worthy of careful examination.

By providing basic verbal and visual data about the past family scrapbooks allow readers to "go back and look at what was going on in the past" (Pat L 315). Together the visual information in the photographs (age, sex, race, physical appearance, etc) and the verbal data (who, what, when, where) in scrapbookers' journaling can give anyone who looks through a scrapbook a glimpse into the past and some very basic information about what took place there. It is worth noting here that the "information" scrapbookers pass down is hardly an objective replication of the present. Every bit of information included in a scrapbook is subjectively selected for inclusion and presented in personal ways. IT seems reasonable to assume that scrapbookers as much shape history as record it. It is impossible to know how future generations will decode the messages left for them by today's scrapbookers, but there can be no doubt that scrapbooks will both communicate family legacies and become a sort of communicative legacy.

*Scrapbooks as Reminders*

In addition to teaching family members information about events that took place and people who lived before their time scrapbooks also serve to refresh family members' memories about experiences they lived through but have forgotten. The scrapbookers I spoke with explained their choice to make scrapbooks, at least in part, as an effort to stop their own and/or other family members from forgetting valuable information. The scrappers wanted to make sure that their children remembered their childhoods even as they grew up and that the adults in the family remembered their lives despite growing old.

My research revealed that families use their books in much the same way that people use other types of reference books—they look back on them whenever their memories are less than perfect. It is as if scrappers are leaving their future selves little handcrafted notes to stave off forgetting:

Sometimes there are stories that we can't quite remember how they go and I'll say "lemme see if I wrote it down" and I'll go pull out a scrapbook from that year and see if I wrote down what it was. (Sandy LL 385-387)

Or as Kelly explained:

A few years down the road I won't know what happened that day and so the fact that I have the date, and the people, and the story written down and I can remember and share it with people ... is kinda why it is important to write it all down ... I just want to know. I hate when I forget things and people. It is really important to me to remember my life. (LL 16-21)

The way that scrapbookers use their scrapbooks to refresh their own memories is a prevalent, and powerful form of intrapersonal communication. However, as interesting as the intrapersonal communicative aspect of scrapbooks is, my research is primarily concerned with interpersonal functions and thus it is necessary to focus primarily on the messages scrapbookers send to other people. While many scrapbookers do make their scrapbooks as an attempt to fight personal memory loss, the memories they work to save are not always their own. Many scrapbookers use their own inability to remember their childhoods as motivation to document their kids' lives:

I have a very very bad memory...I can't remember things that happened... last week let alone things that happened when I was ten so maybe this will help keep things in their memories. They can look at it and go "oh okay now I kinda remember that." (Connie LL 26-29)

Refreshing children's memories was a common theme. Paula's remarks are representative:

My kids...they already don't remember who some of their elementary teachers—what their names were and who some of the kids were that they used to play with... the more information that you can write in there the more I think it does make it meaningful to your kids because it refreshes their memories and it documents their history—the history of their lives. (LL 28-34)

There is a very practical outlook within the scrapbooking community.

Scrapbooks, while very sentimental objects, are also seen as efficient tools for guarding against forgetfulness: "later on, like when she is 18, or 20, or 30 she is not going to remember what happened in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade—so I can preserve that for her" (Tina LL 260-

261). Laura told me quite plainly that she scrapbooks “so that my kids will know about their family and about the things that we’ve done together throughout the years because when you get older you tend to forget things” (LL 4-5).

Scrappers see their books as helpful in combating the loss of information that so often accompanies both growing up, and growing “old and forgetful” (James L.12). Interestingly, the scrappers I spoke with also told me how their scrapbooks can combat memory loss due to more ominous causes like Alzheimer’s disease. In fact, when I asked Jimmye Sue why she chooses to scrapbook her family information she told me quite plainly “Because we may all get Alzheimer’s one day and we don’t want to forget it” (LL 69-70). LaDonna gave an extraordinary example of how scrapbooks provide information that can allow people with Alzheimer’s to communicate more normally when she told me about a couple for whom she had made a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary album:

Shortly after they got the album the wife was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s....She got to the point where she kept it by the phone and if somebody called and said “Hi this is Ruth” she would say “just a minute” [and] she would think “I don’t know who that is.” And she would flip through and ... read a letter and [think] “Oh our kids grew up together and then we went to...” And then she would talk to them. She wouldn’t talk to you if she couldn’t find the book. So it made it okay for her.... It helped her deal with life. (LaDonna LL 139-145)

It is clear that scrapbooks serve as points of historical reference to which families can look for answers about their past. Additionally, more than just *answering* questions about the past, scrapbooks also *stimulate* such questions: “When you are making a book it makes you think. And if you aren’t sure about certain things you can go to that other

person and say ‘hey do you remember what happened?’” (Nancy LL 108-110). It may seem that a chapter on communicating information should not include any mention of asking questions. However, in this case the questions are relevant. Making scrapbooks requires scrapbookers to ask (and answer) questions about their families’ past experiences, this process results in clear, concise books of family information. And these books, in turn, serve a valuable purpose for families by acting as an easy reference when memories get foggy.

### *Scrapbooks as Updates*

In addition to providing a portal into family and personal pasts, scrapbooks also offer a glimpse across distance. By sharing their scrapbooks scrappers give family members and friends who don’t have updated information “a sense of what we are up to” by documenting life events. (LaDonna L 183). Scrapbooks act like the previews from weekly sitcoms which say “previously on \_\_\_\_\_” and then show scenes from previous episodes in order to help the viewer follow the new plot twists. Just as such previews provide a brief overview of any story development in a given TV show, scrapbooks enable friends and family to “catch up” quickly on one another’s lives by providing quick, illustrated, recaps (Tina LL 53-54):

It is a very good way to share with people who come in from out of town ... you can keep them up to date on what you’ve done since you’ve last seen them by bringing out the latest scrapbook. (Tina LL 9-11)

Haley elaborated more on how scrapbooks help keep distant family members in the informational loop:



I think they get a sense of our day-to-day lives or a sense of the things that they can't be there for ... I know for my mom ... they help her feel like she at least knows some of the stuff that happened ... a sense of the facts ...[like] what the name of that dance that Sophie did last July is and things like that. (LL 133-139)

While many family scrapbooks focus on babies and children, scrapbooks provide information about adults too. LaDonna told me how her scrapbooks help her husband's family continue to have some knowledge of him despite their infrequent visits:

For them to look at our albums it is easier [for them] to see [that] this is who he is now, this is what he's doing—like ... they came in May ... but that was the first time in the 16 years that Paul and I have been married that his mother has ever been in one of our homes—ever.... so [sharing scrapbooks] is a way to communicate what is going on in our lives since we are not that close with them. (LL 270-280)

Scrapbookers' ability to literally *show* family and friends what has been going on in their lives is potentially very significant in an era of ever growing geographic dispersion of families (Sprecher, Felmlee, Orbrach, & Willetts, 2002). LaDonna had this to say:

In our society today we are so mobile...so spread out. People don't live with their families like we did generations ago ... you live in Texas and maybe mom lives in California and aunt Gertrude lives in New York ...you don't get to see each other all that often and I think scrapbooks help with that connection—that to me is important. (LL 40-42)

Yoli aptly summed up how scrapbooks function as updates when she explained that after looking at her scrapbooks other people “will know what we do ... it will give them little glimpses of our lives” (LL 145-147). It is important to remember that scrapbooks are more than just convenient places to record family data. That recorded data is meant for future reference. Simply recording family information is not a communicative act, but when a scrapper shares that information with someone else it becomes communicative.

Perhaps it is the devotion to communicating information about family to other people (and a desire to do so accurately) that prompts some scrapbookers to argue that the pictures used in scrapbooks should not be altered in anyway (Connie LL 185-190). While it is tempting to assume that scrapbookers would seek to present their families in the most flattering light (i.e. choosing only flattering photographs, retouching them when possible, etc) many of the scrapbookers I spoke with volunteered an objection to this sort of “airbrushing” be it literal or metaphorical. It would be interesting to further explore scrapbookers opinions on authentic vs. idealized presentation.

### *Scrapbooks as Evidence*

As the perfect complement to scrapbooks’ role in teaching and reminding families about their history, scrapbooks also act as proof of information that is known but uncertain and/or disputed. Because photographs act as “records” to “preserve instant appearances” they give people the ability to view and review an event even after it has passed (Berger, 1980, p. 51). One way to think of this is that the photographs in scrapbooks give a “freeze frame” view of family life and allow scrapbookers and their families to use their scrapbooks as sources of proof. The idea that scrapbooks are seen as

authoritative voices on the past makes sense in light of literature that tells us that photographs have an “evidential force” that “authenticates the reality of the past” (Barthes, 1981, p. 89).

I was surprised to learn that anyone would use such a precious object for something as practical as evidence but Yoli explained how the same scrapbook (even the same page) can simultaneously serve both a sentimental and an evidentiary function:

My daughter learned to walk the other day so naturally I wanted to take pictures of her ... first steps ... I want her to remember what she looked like and all the little things about her first steps and also share it with my mother on that part because she was worried she was never going to walk so its like “Mother look—look this is her first step!” (LL 49-53)

Laura also spoke about using her scrapbooks as proof: “Sometimes if we don’t go places or do something for a while the kids will think that we haven’t done anything ever—and I’ll take out the scrapbooks and it’s like ‘see, look, remember when we went over here?’” (LL 338-340).

Both Yoli and Laura’s examples illustrate writer and critic Susan Sontag’s (1977) explanation of how photographs communicate a sense of reality:

Photographs furnish evidence. Something that we hear about but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it....A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened...there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, that is like what’s in the picture. (p 5)

Despite the intuitive appeal of an argument like “I’ll believe it when I see it” more research is necessary to further explore the role that scrapbooks (and other forms of visual evidence) play in interpersonal disagreements.

### Scrapbooks as Storybooks

In addition to providing basic historical data scrapbooks also provide the extra, more personal, information needed to make these histories come alive. Knowing someone’s name is not the same as knowing their life story. And knowing someone’s life history is not the same as seeing that history illustrated, explained, and embellished. While scrapbookers certainly make an effort to communicate the basic information about their families (names, dates, etc) every scrapper I spoke with also made it clear that such written descriptions were not adequate by themselves. Scrappers intend not only to provide basic journalistic data, but also to make the stories in their books come alive for those who look through them. Just as an unidentifiable and unlabeled picture is relatively un compelling a name or location with no picture or story to illustrate it can feel distant and academic. Scrapbookers seek not only to pass on information but to give that information meaning as well.

In the beginning of this chapter I discussed the uncertainty reduction model. I now propose a focus, not on reducing uncertainty, but on increasing understanding. At its heart URT is actually concerned with more than the simple reduction of uncertainty: in fact, URT argues that people’s fundamental goal within interaction is to attain interpersonal understanding (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). It is this aspect on which I choose to focus now. Scrapbooks not only reduce uncertainty by

providing information, they also facilitate understanding by making that information come alive.

The goal of most scrapbookers is to move beyond simply documenting the details of their families' lives. Scrapbookers want to contextualize, explain and make relevant that data:

I know that I want to know how it was for my mom and ... nobody scrapbooked that stuff ... they'd have boxes of movie stubs and you know really odd things and you're like WHY do you care about this stuff? But when you put it in a scrapbook you can put it in context and then people can basically read through a storybook of your life and it is really cool. (Maggie LL 40-47)

Perhaps the best metaphor I can put forth for the information scrapbookers try to communicate in their scrapbooks is one that arose out of Connie's comment that scrapbooks give their readers "more pieces of the puzzle" (L 40). I contend that scrapbooks not only provide readers factual puzzle pieces but they also help put those pieces together in a meaningful way. Both the visual and verbal elaborations in family scrapbooks provide small pieces of additional information which help create a more cohesive and meaningful picture. When looking through family scrapbooks readers are "able to look at the whole picture—or several pieces together and get a whole scenario of what that was" (Connie LL 40-41). The handcrafted and extremely personalized nature of scrapbooks allows scrapbookers to weave together words, pictures, colors, and artwork to convey information and understanding that might otherwise never be shared. It is as if by adding embellishment and journaling to a page scrapbookers are opening a portal to the past.

Alfred Korzybski (1921) saw humans' awareness of time and our ability to manipulate it as being a defining characteristic of what it is to be human. By creating an artifact wholly dedicated to preserving and communicating past moments scrapbookers freeze those moments and make them accessible to readers. This ability to almost cheat time is a large part of the appeal of scrapbooking for many scrapbookers. Sandy expressed her understanding of time binding by referencing the magical world of Harry Potter:

I am freezing time—its kind of like [when] you watch Harry Potter and all the magazines have little video clips in them and they talk ... We are not quite there yet but I'm trying—I want to get it down on paper so that it feels like that to me. And other people will read that and they'll get parts of that...if they don't get all of it that's okay ... they got a piece and that is more than they would have had if I hadn't put it down. (LL 845-851)

Scrapbookers take events that really existed in only one specific time and place and capture them in a form that is tangible, permanent, and readily accessible. Scrapbooks effectively freeze time and make permanent moments (and aspects of moments) that would otherwise remain unknown and unknowable to those who did not live through the events in the first place (or whose memories are fading). By binding time scrapbookers make it possible for others to, in essence, go back in time and relive/access selected memories.

Photographs and the scrapbooks that contain them act as both “visual narratives” and “prose pictures” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 9); that is the pictures and artwork in scrapbooks tell stories, while the verbalized stories and factual data create pictures in the mind of the

reader. Just as words inform pictures, pictures inform words. Each level of information makes the time or experience being described seem more tangible

Jimmy Sue explained how embellishments and journaling work together to make scrapbooks more powerful storytellers:

It sort of takes a very not so exciting picture and brings it to life. The way we do the layouts—we put embellishments and we put some sort of notation on it ... a picture of my mom and dad is one thing but looking at it and knowing oh that was their honeymoon ... or something like that brings it more to life. (Jimmy Sue LL 14-19)

Together the visual cues and verbal data tell a more complete story, and enable a deeper understanding, than either mode of communication could provide alone.

### *Visual Narratives*

Perhaps the most obvious part of a family scrapbook is the photographs. These pictures serve a valuable purpose in providing information about what things looked like. However, scrapbookers value the visual data (i.e. pictures showing what their grandmothers' kitchens looked like, samples of their great grandmothers' handwriting, a picture of their fathers as a small children) as much, if not more, for their narrative power as for their purely informational value. The value scrapbookers place on visual data makes sense. Nonverbal researchers have long maintained that nonverbal artifacts convey meaning (Burgoon & Hoobler, 2002).

Visual data gives information about life in a way that reference books cannot. Photographs, handwritten notes, and old drawings are like primary sources—they are like shadows of the past echoing through time to give a glimpse of life “back when”.

Scrapbooks provide a visual record of family life through which family members and others can glean “knowledge based on imagery rather than words” (Harper, qtd. in Prosser, 1998, p. 100).

Scrapbookers are cognizant of the communicative power of photographs and other visual cues: “there is a story in and behind pictures”; “you have this picture and then you create this layout and its like the picture takes on a whole different life because of what you’ve added to it” (Connie L 17; Jimmye Sue LL 31-33). And scrappers purposefully utilize visuals to increase their communicative abilities. Maggie explained her scrapbooks as a way to communicate clearly despite feeling like she struggled when trying to tell her stories verbally:

A lot of people can verbally describe everything that is going on. They are really good at pulling in all those details that they remember and making it fit and flow.... for me that isn’t quite as easy but if I can put it down on a page, and if I can have the pictures, and I can have them look through the photos in the order that I want, then it can like create the experience and that will put them there. (LL 100-104)

In a very literal sense scrapbooks allow scrapbookers to show others what they are talking about: “ You can take it out and be like ‘this is the event I was telling you about...’” (Kelly LL 139-140); “With a scrapbook you can say ‘look this is what we saw and this is where we were.’ You can show them, they can see” (Nancy 410-411). But more than just showing a picture, sharing a scrapbook helps share the experience: “If you scrapbook and you show someone ... it’s not one of those ‘oh you had to be there’



moments because they could ‘be there’ because they are looking at your scrapbook... This gives them a window” (Maggie LL 18-22).

The attempt to increase understanding is a primary reason scrappers create scrapbooks. One way that scrapbookers make otherwise unconnected information intelligible is by making the connections between photographs explicit. The simple ability to place several pictures grouped together on a single page tells a story in a way that picking pictures at random out of a box cannot (Connie LL 24-26). By placing pictures of the same event together and in some sort of order scrapbookers create a more complete picture than might otherwise be had.

An important distinction between scrapbooks and photo albums must be made here. Traditional photo albums have some of the same ability to illustrate stories as scrapbooks in that the photographs themselves provide a glimpse of times past. However, scrapbooks’ communicative power goes well beyond what can be accomplished by simply displaying photographs. Scrapbooks are made up, not just of photographs, but also of colored paper, embellishments, and different artistic techniques (i.e. glitter, metal work, etc). When combined these varied visual pieces effectively illustrate each scrapbooker’s “storybook of life” and give all those who “read” it an idea of what exactly *once upon a time* really looks like for the scrapper’s family.

The visual narratives scrapbooks tell can be as simple as showing a pregnancy develop:

I ... put the sonograms and ... pictures of me all along the way.... The whole time keeping in mind that this would be something that he could look at when he got

older and see the pictures of mommy pregnant all the way along. (Amanda LL 17-20)

Or the stories can be much more subtle and complex. LaDonna made a page all about her father's suicide (right before her eighth birthday). As part of that layout she mounted a picture of her seven year-old self on pink paper. She explained her color choice:

I try to have it be the embellishments either add to the focal point of what's going on in the page or to help create the feeling behind the page like this page for example: I am the little girl—they shaped the little girl. I am *so* not a pink person but it was really important to my dad that I be the perfect little girl—I never wore a pair of pants until he died... and that is why I chose to put pink on these pages—I'm wearing the pink dress—I HATED that dress. I still remember that dress—I think I am wearing blue tights because I didn't care—but I remember when we got the picture back ... and I'm on the front row and the blue tights didn't match the pink dress and he was mad and so when I look at that I remember those things... so that is why I chose pink embellishments for this page... I often times do that kind of thing. (LL 565-579)

LaDonna was not the only one who spoke about color choice. Several of the scrappers I spoke with talked about how color choice effects their messages:

If you are using dark colors you can know that it is like a “gothic moment” or something like that. If you use bright colors you know this is a silly page or this is fun... other people will understand—unconsciously of course—but they'll look at the page and it will be bright and it will be happy and it will have these colors that

pop out and they will see it and they will feel some of the same things you felt.

(Maggie LL 10-17)

Color can effect peoples' listening, hearing, and respiration (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Such physiological results demonstrate the power of color to effect viewers. If a painted wall can raise someone's breathe rate certainly a block of colored paper can communicate an exciting event: "When people look through [the colors] may help them... feel the pictures" (Jimmye Sue LL 114-116). Clearly color choice plays a role in how readers experience and react to scrapbook pages.

In addition to color, scrapbookers utilize different materials to evoke different feelings:

If I used metals on that page... as opposed to if everything was very soft ... those mediums let me paint a picture—give you a different tone—a different feeling about either what I thought about that moment, or perhaps where I was in my life at that point in time... Every scrapbook page is all about the color and what I used on it and so when I open it I get a real tangible feeling off of not just the pictures and the words but the colors and the mediums and how it feels. (Sandy LL 96-103)

The mixed media utilized by most scrapbookers provide additional avenues for communication and create a full range of communicative options from the obvious choice of color and contrast to the less immediately noticeable but still powerful use of texture, material type, and even selection of font (or the choice to write everything out by hand).

Maggie perfectly summed up the role of visual narration:

There is nothing tangible that can be used to describe how a hug was or how your love felt or how the wind felt but there are so many things you can use as a tool to elaborate and get as close as you can to convey the whole experience—it adds levels of meaning. (LL 416-425)

### *Prose Pictures*

As much as pictures serve to illustrate words, words inform pictures. As important and informative as family pictures can be they can never tell the whole story. In much the same way that a toddler graduates from picture books to storybooks the family crafting culture has moved from largely wordless photo albums to scrapbooks featuring journaled commentary. While family pictures are highly valued in the scrapbooking community these pictures are not expected to stand on their own. Many of the scrappers I spoke with expressed a desire for their scrapbooks to both communicate more information than traditional family albums typically do and also to make that information more meaningful:

I think with scrapbooks you can really do some detail with the journaling and share ... what your thoughts were ...and all kinds of things ... that you can't do with just a photo album... I think that the scrapbooks are just more meaningful because there is more information in there. (Paula LL 18-23)

Amanda explained how the extra information scrapbookers include in their books helps readers to understand what they are seeing:

Having the picture and then immediately around the picture being able to put who's in it what was going on, what was so important about that day...allows you in one format to be able to look at that and understand it. (LL 47-50)

Connie also talked about the value of additional information: “it just gives you all the pieces to the puzzle as opposed to looking in a shoe box full of things with so minimal information on the back” (LL 62-64).

Many scrappers share Connie’s objection to stuffing photographs into a shoe box. When tucked away in a box (or even an old photo album) pictures are separated from the information that is needed to make sense of them. Connie explained how journaling about photographs can help keep the stories and the pictures together (and thus ensure that the pictures are meaningful):

The older pictures we don’t have stories—there is usually a name and a date on the back [But] with the scrapbooks that I do now... instead of looking at just pictures there is a story so that they can see... “here is a picture of you picking strawberries” okay great “here’s your name on the back and here’s the date on the back”... okay great—but when you journal... it says “this is where we were and this is what happened and this how you felt” or “you liked it” or “you didn’t like it” or “you fell” or whatever it is and it has a little story. (LL 17-29)

By including detailed information about each photograph (as opposed to simply the names and dates) scrapbookers flesh out the stories and allow readers (be they children looking back on their lives or future generations reading about their ancestors) a way to understand what a specific time or experience was really like. The journaling that scrapbookers add to their albums brings their pictures to life and gives them meaning beyond simple description:

Some of the writing may be kinda mechanical... but some of the writing is... how did this make us feel—what was the scripture that came to mind when we looked

out across this point of the lake down this valley looking up at these mountains...  
and that type of thing—and that is what really can bring it alive. (James LL 20-25)

By sharing their thoughts and reactions scrapbookers inform their readers about not only what happened but also how it felt.

### Conclusion

Scrapbooks are like historical safe deposit boxes: inside scrappers place information for safe keeping. But more than mere repositories of family knowledge scrapbooks are also platforms for sharing that knowledge. In making their books scrapbookers are intentionally encoding messages for the future. In many ways, scrapbooks are simply elaborate letters to the future designed to teach facts, refresh memories, and tell stories and thereby preserve family information.

Scrapbooks provide both the factual information a family needs to have a basic knowledge of its history and the additional information readers need to begin to understand, retain, and care about that history. In much the same way that a good teacher makes a subject come alive for her/his students, scrapbookers supplement factual data with contextual information, reflection, visual aids, and anecdotes in order to make the names recorded in their albums become people in the minds of their children as well as to remind themselves and their children of precious memories that might otherwise be forgotten with the passage of time.

By acting as history books scrapbooks provide and teach data. As storybooks scrapbooks illustrate, illuminate, and contextualize such data. The information in scrapbooks is cyclical and synergistic—just as scrapbookers elaborate facts with stories

and support their stories with facts, scrapbooks illustrate words with pictures and inform their pictures with words. By providing both visual and verbal information scrapbookers create more complete understanding in the minds of their readers; that is the words flesh out the visuals and the visuals give life to the words.

As convenient as the division between visual and verbal messages is it is a largely artificial distinction. Scrapbooks are not simply verbal artifacts nor are they strictly nonverbal. Every page of a scrapbook is infused with both visual and verbal cues. In scrapbooks both verbal and nonverbal messages come together to form not simply a prose picture and/or a visual a narrative but to create an illustrated story book of life within a given family.

Every bit of journaling and every choice of color, paper, embellishment, quote, and art effect adds depth and meaning to a scrapbook page and helps scrappers communicate. Together the words, art, and photographs create a synergistic effect and provide a richness of information that is unlike anything possible with traditional photographic albums or journals. However, simply because the additional information is there does not mean that everyone who looks through a scrapbook will “get” it:

If you just sit down with a scrapbook and you flip page to page and you never read any of the writing...if you never read any of it, if you aren't really looking beyond the pictures—I mean you can look at two or three pictures and flip I mean—“oh isn't that a cute baby”... but I think... if you don't really look at the page and you don't read any of the words—if you don't really allow the page to tell you a story... I just don't think you are getting as much out of it... there is a lot to miss if you just flip. (James LL 273-285)

Scrapbooks are the intersection of fact and story, visual and verbal, and even past and present. In their books scrapbookers pull the facts of the past into the present by telling and showing their stories in scrapbook form. Nancy told me how the pictures, factual data, and stories in scrapbooks communicate family information and increase understanding:

Sometimes all you have is a name and that is all there is but ... just having a picture without any knowledge of what it is—you aren't going to know the background...so I think having a blend of the written history and whatever pictures there are... is an important thing. It helps us know who everybody is and understand how everything fits together. (LL 434-450)

As Nancy's above comment indicates it is the combination of visual data, written accounts, and simple names, dates, and places that make scrapbooks such powerful artifacts for communicating family information in a meaningful way. Whereas facts tell about the past, stories bring those facts to life. Quite simply, history books teach, storybooks regale, and scrapbooks do both.



## CHAPTER 5

### RELATIONAL FUNCTION

Once upon a time, when people made more of their own things, they created more stories about their life experiences. They told these tales to each other regularly, gracefully, and productively, they did it to give each other insights, to entertain each other, and to engage each other in times of celebration, trial, mourning, or reverence. But primarily they did it to connect with each other. Sharing real-life stories was an essential element in forging friendships, alliances, families, and communities. It brought individuals a greater intimacy with each other and, simultaneously a stronger sense of self. (Maguire, 1998 p. xiii)

In the previous chapter I discussed scrapbooks' role in documenting family life but scrapbooks serve a deeper purpose than merely recording and disseminating information. When one looks beyond the surface it is clear that scrapbooks are instruments of relational development and maintenance. By creating scrapbooks about their families and sharing those books with other people scrapbookers send relational messages to the people they scrap about, with and for.

It is easiest to divide the relational messages of scrapbooks into five main categories. First, scrapbookers send relational messages to the subjects of their books. Second, scrapbooks facilitate interaction and relational growth between scrappers. Third, by sharing their books scrapbookers send relational messages to readers. Fourth, scrapbooks highlight subjects' relationships with one another. Fifth, scrapbooks can stimulate readers' relational feelings towards subjects.

### Scrapbooks Send Relational Messages to Subjects

Every message in every interaction has both an explicit meaning denoted by the content of the message and an implied meaning detailing the nature of the relationship between the individuals (Nichols, 1984). One of the reasons that scrapbooks are a powerful channel for sending relational messages is that they can effectively send explicit and implicit relational messages through both verbal and nonverbal channels. In other words, scrapbooks simultaneously both show and tell readers how scrappers feel. Nancy beautifully explained how scrapbooks marry verbal and nonverbal messages:

[Scrapbooking] provides a way of honoring [other people] and a way of showing them that you love them both with words and with actions. Because... there are words and there are actions but with scrapbooking they aren't on a spectrum—it is like tying words and actions together—it is the way that they overlap and kind of meld together. (LL 13-24)

Nancy's comment indicates the synergistic nature of scrapbookers' relational messages. Explicit verbal and implicit nonverbal messages meld together to send potent messages of interpersonal value.

#### *Explicit Messages*

Scrapbookers often explicitly record their feelings in their books in order to communicate love to their family members. Sandy told me:

I make family scrapbooks because... I wanted something that I could do [to] get down... what this family meant to me... I just want them to know... it's all real mushy stuff... about hugging them and smelling them and then having to tell them that "I just can't stop hugging you and smelling you". (Sandy LL 30-41)

Many scrapbookers share Sandy's desire to tell their families, particularly their children, exactly how they feel about them: "I've even done pages where I just write... things to them, and put them in little envelopes on pages... for them to read" (Paula LL 46-48). Words have powerful relational effects. Simply by writing down how important their families are to them scrappers reinforce the very connections they so cherish:

We had a mom's weekend ... last year... I gave a speech to my mom... and I wrote the speech in [my scrapbook].... And I wrote... how she reacted and it just... makes her realize how important she is to me. (Kelly LL 63-67).

The relational effects of pages which contain explicit verbal messages of love and affection are obvious. "Positive communication produces positive relationships, whereas negative communication results in negative ones" (Bryant & Heath, 2000).

### *Implicit Messages*

Less obvious than simple declarations of love but equally (if not more) powerful, are the implied messages scrapbookers send by creating books entirely about other people. Creating a scrapbook about a person requires an investment of time, energy, and money (for paper, photos, art, the album itself, etc.) that implies a level of interpersonal importance which cannot be communicated through words alone. Scrapbooks allow scrappers to communicate positive messages without words: "If she sees me scrapbook... any pictures of her... she knows I'm very proud of her and I think that reinforces that without having to say it" (Tina LL 90-92). Scrapbooks are familial love letters in action. I argue that this action is a large part of what makes scrapbooks such a powerful medium for communicating messages of love.

Scrapbooking is extremely interconnected with photography. Almost every page of a scrapbook includes at least one photograph. Consequently, the messages scrapbookers send to their subjects are sent partly by their taking photographs to scrapbook. It has been said that “there is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera” (Sontag 1977, p. 7). I disagree. While certainly taking someone’s photo requires action I believe that the attention, desire, exuberance, and even assertiveness involved in taking another person’s picture send positive rather than negative relational messages. Scrapbookers send positive messages by taking the time and making the effort to take photographs of people they love in order to scrap them later.

Sontag (1977) claims that the terminology associated with photography (i.e. “loading”, “aiming”, and “shooting”) are aggressive terms and therefore indicate hostile motives (14). I maintain that these words are used more to indicate *action* on the photographer’s part than any sort of desire to diminish or hurt the subject. It is this action that makes taking someone’s photograph a communicative act. Internal motivation, hostile or not, is irrelevant to the study of communication. Because a photographer’s actual inner thoughts are unknown to their subjects any interpersonal message comes not from these invisible motives, but from how the subject interprets the act of taking a photograph. I maintain that taking a photograph can just as easily be seen as a positive indication of interpersonal value and importance as it can be taken for an act of hostility. I believe, as do the scrapbookers I interviewed, that subjects see scrapbookers’ efforts to take their pictures as indicative of importance not as any sort of hostile act.

The very fact that someone cares enough about another person to want to spend time and energy to get a photograph of that her or him indicates that the person matters to

them. As Americans we inherently understand this fact. Our culture is so caught up in pictures being a sign of affection that “not to take pictures of one’s children, particularly when they are small, is [seen as] a sign of parental indifference” (Sontag, 1977, p. 8). If neglecting to take photographs signals indifference then putting someone in a scrapbook sends a clear message of importance.

Scrapping about someone is a way of honoring that person and sending messages of love (Nancy LL 292; 413). Kendon (1967) found that eye contact communicates to other people that you are “taking account of them” (as cited in Andersen, 1985). Including someone’s picture in a scrapbook serves much the same purpose: “They notice that I notice I guess” (Haley L 177). Noticing another person in this way has positive relational implications. “They like feeling that they are important enough to be in a book” Haley continued (LL 177-178).

LaDonna told me how scrapbooks can send relational messages above and beyond what families typically express verbally:

We get so caught up in the business of everyday life that we don’t sit down and say “You know I think you are so cool. Yeah, we’ve been married almost 17 years but I still think you are so cool.” It’s an opportunity to say that... this page that I made may show him... so it is that opportunity to communicate things that don’t get communicated but should. (LaDonna LL 486-490)

LaDonna also gave a more specific example of how scrapbooks can benefit relationships by sending positive messages:

I think ultimately the family benefits. Like for Paul for example, if I’m doing pages about his experience at Southwest [Texas State University] where he got

the presidential level honors scholarship thing... me making a page about it shows him that I am really proud of him... Whereas in the middle of it I may feel really annoyed because he is staying is up until 2:00am studying every morning and I miss him... it is sort of saying, “Even though going through this whole you-going-back-to-school experience was hellish at times you did awesome things and, I’m really proud of that” and so I think that each of us benefits. (LL 120-130)

As in LaDonna’s above comment, pride was a common theme in my interviews. I believe that much of the message of pride comes from the public nature of scrapbooking. Chalfen (1998) refers to the sharing of family snapshots even among a very few individuals as a public exhibition event (221). I agree with this conception—within the family context “public” need only refer to an audience beyond the picture taker (Chalfen 1998). Because sharing a scrapbook is a public exhibition of affection, messages of pride are amplified. Sharing a scrapbook is a scrapper’s way of shouting their love from the rooftops—it is a grand gesture, intended as much to demonstrate the scrapbooker’s love and pride as to inform the reader. Nancy told me why scrapping about her husband is so important: “I love him very much, I’m very proud of him. And I just I want everybody to know that. I want everybody else to see that” (LL 133-134). Sharing books clearly communicates to the subjects that they are worthy of being documented and shown off. However, more research is needed to support my claim that public declarations of love send messages beyond the initial explicit message, as well as to explore the greater relational implications of such public demonstrations.

Another way that scrappers communicate interpersonal importance is by giving books to the people they scrap about. By spending the time, energy, and money to make a

handmade, personalized gift scrappers send a message that the recipient is important. Sandy shared her experience with giving a scrapbook as a way to communicate love, appreciation, and value. When her boys were old enough to go to school and no longer needed a full-time nanny, she made her nanny a scrapbook as a farewell gift:

It was pictures of her and the boys and pictures of things that she had done for us... it showed her that she was part of our family—it showed her that we loved her... it told her that what she did was important and that it had lasting meaning... That it was about family and what she had put in for us was important to us... (LL 432-448)

All of the scrappers I spoke with saw giving scrapbooks as gifts as powerfully communicative:

I think it sends the message that you care about somebody because ...there is a lot of time and energy and love and all of that that goes into the scrapbooks. ... so I think it touches people and I think it means something to them... that's what it means to me when someone gives me something that is handmade... that I've done something special enough for them to spend some time and energy on a gift. (Paula LL 102-115).

Gifts are tie-signs designed to secure and demonstrate relationships (Leeds-Huwitz, 1993, p. 136). By giving their books as gifts scrappers venerate their connections with recipients and create tangible reminders of their relationships. Much like traditional “friendship quilts,” scrapbooks give crafters a creative way to document and honor their relationships with other people (Anderson & Gold, 1998).

Unlike many other gifts, scrapbooks' messages of love lie not only in the giving but also in the content of the book. Scrapbooks tie subjects to scrappers regardless of who actually possesses the books. Laura explained: "whether I give them the scrapbook or whether I keep it I just want them to know at anytime they look through it they are going to be in it because they are important to me" (LL 83-85). This comment perfectly illustrates my claim that, in scrapbooking, inclusion *equals* importance.

The significance of inclusion is demonstrated by the fact that family members, particularly children and their parents, count the number of times they appear in the scrapbooks. Haley told me about the careful attention that her children pay to the number of times they each appear in her books:

For my kids it definitely makes them feel special [to be in a book] and they always count pages: they'll be like "Mom there are 9 pages about Max and only 7 pages about me so when are you doing the next page about me?" They notice that.... They will count how many times they show up on the [individual] pages even [not just within a whole book]. There is an older lady I know who... has 8 grandchildren and every grandchild will show exactly the same number of times in her books because of that—cause she says they count. And their parents count. (LL 167-172)

Pat also emphasized the need to be fair: "Like with any special treat there is an emphasis on fairness. There is one of my sister's kids that I would love to do books for but then if I do one you have to do it for everybody" (LL 75-77). Pat's description of scrapbooks as "special treatment" is appropriate. Choosing to make a scrapbook for or about another person is special treatment—it is a way to demonstrate their importance. And, as Pat



indicated, as with any other type of special treatment there is a potential to hurt other people's feelings. For example, Nancy told me about an instance in which she unintentionally left one grandchild out of a holiday scrapbook for her in-laws. The boy's mother grew very upset and screamed and cried, and caused a confrontation. Nancy told me she's learned "I have to be very careful now" in making sure she gives each grandchild equal treatment (L 36).

Nancy's story demonstrates that in the same way presence indicates importance, absence sends negative relational messages. While in Nancy's case leaving out one child was unintentional it is also possible to intentionally exclude or deemphasize a person in order to send a message of dismissal or unimportance. Meredith explained how deliberately leaving someone out of an album can send a message when she told me about her decision to downplay her husband: "We are separated... he isn't front and center in any of them because he's been a real jerk and I didn't want him in there" (LL 65-67). By not including him much Meredith sends a powerful message about her husband's lack of an important place in her life. This is a logical and intuitive finding but one about which there is little research. It would be interesting to explore the relational satisfaction of married couples and families in relation to the number of photographs and/or references to one another they have in their scrapbooks and/or other artifacts (i.e. photographs on their desk, wallet photos etc.).

In light of my finding that scrappers use inclusion to send messages of importance it is interesting to note that their own images are infrequently incorporated in their books. Most of the scrappers I spoke with told me they are hardly ever in their books. When I asked what message they thought this absence sent most simply told me that it is a

relatively inevitable result of being the family photographer and that people do not typically expect to see the photographer in pictures. While some seemed comfortable with this justification several others admitted that they were concerned that it might send a message that they were somehow less active in their family's life:

By not having myself in there... it almost makes me feel like I'm absent even though I'm putting the words and what I feel in there... I think that it kind of perpetuates a feeling that ... mom was on the sidelines ...I don't want them to think that I wasn't available. (Sandy LL 301-307)

There is a tension for many scrapbookers between worry about the potential message sent by their absence and the pragmatic difficulties of taking pictures of themselves. But most scrapbookers see the messages communicated by their absence as minor in comparison to the obvious messages of involvement sent by doing such a demanding and intensive craft: "I hope that some day somebody will say 'She's not in here very much but she sure took a lot of time to do it.' So hopefully that will relate my love for my kids" (Paula LL 262-264).

The idea that the time scrappers spend creating scrapbooks demonstrates love and importance was a major theme in my interviews. "It says I love them and I care enough about them to spend time on them" (Meredith LL 90-91). Some of the scrappers I spoke with got quite emotional trying to explain how their use of time demonstrates their love for their children. Connie told me:

My hobby is still with them... my husbands hobby is golf—when he goes to play golf he goes he leaves the family and he golfs. When I do my hobby, scrapbooking, I go but it still involves them. They are not there in body... but I'm

still doing it about them... So I hope that they know that that—that that is love—  
ahh see look, I'm crying. (LL 428-432)

Connie's comment points out the inherent paradox all scrappers face in spending time away from their families in order to send a message that family is important. Many scrapbookers struggle between wanting to spend time *with* the people they love and wanting to spend time *on* them. Sandy explained how her choice to spend time away from her sons is actually a message of value:

I'm saying "I love you enough that this is important enough to me to spend time away from you to do it"... it is a sacrifice for me to take that time away from them but this is important enough for me to do it... it is creating something that they will be able to have forever... and so that small amount of time that I spend away is exponential to what they'll be able to gain from what I've put down. (LL 825-832)

Sandy has effectively altered the traditional conception of "family time" from time spent with family to include time spent for/on family. In this way, she clearly explains how time spent scrapping can constitute a message of love despite her temporary absence from actual interaction. In keeping with the metaphor of time as money, scrapbookers see time spent scrapbooking as an investment. By sacrificing a small part of the present to preserve the past for the future scrapbookers try to circumvent the limited nature of time. The research does not address the relational messages of time spent *with* vs. time spent *on* but it is an interesting quandary and deserves additional investigation

### Scrapbooks Facilitate Social Interaction Between Scrappers

One way scrapbookers circumvent the potential dilemma over whether to spend time *with* or *on* their families is to do both. In my small sample alone I interviewed three people who scrap with their spouses, one mother-and-daughter scrapbooking team, one grandmother who scraps with her granddaughter, and several mothers who scrap with their children (field notes, Oct 13 2004; Nov 9 2004; Sept 19 2004; Oct 15 2004; Oct 13 2004; Sept 1 2004; Sept 10 2004; Oct 17 2004). Each claimed that scrapping together was good for their relationships: “My daughter loves to scrap... it actually brings us closer together in the sense that she scraps with me sometimes... it is family time: me and her” (Yoli LL 308-315). This claim is supported by industry reports which state that scrapbooking together “can bring families closer” (DiFranco, 2005). More academic research is needed to fully understand what if any role crafting together plays in family relationships.

Even outside of the family context scrapbooking with other people has relational implications. Many scrappers attend scrapbooking conventions, retreats, classes, and “crops” (gatherings during which scrapbookers work on their pages, share ideas, talk, and bond) (DiFranco, 2005). Such activities can be compared to the quilting bees of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Traditionally quilting bees formed “the basis of meaningful social ritual and community as groups of women came together to commemorate significant life events and rites of passage (including births, deaths, engagements, moving, coming of age)” (Anderson & Gold, 1998). Sandy told about her fellow scrappers:

These are my girls... I can’t imagine—even like quilting and something that is that tangible and that focused around women doesn’t have this whole being able to

interconnect with someone else's family the way that sitting and looking at pictures and seeing what they're writing about their families [does]... We are interconnected with each other's lives... I know that if I had to go and lean on people I've got an interconnected group of people that I may not see but every three of four... weeks that I could completely rely on and they would know enough about my family to be able to come and intervene for me if I needed for that to happen. It's very cool. Especially when you are living in a life where things are very separate these days it's hard to build a community. (LL 470-489)

Sandy's comment demonstrates a desire for and appreciation of connection with people outside of the family. Family scrapbooking allows for that sort of connection. Strasser (1982) suggests that there is an inherent isolation in domestic life in modern times. While certainly not all scrapbookers fill traditional domestic roles it is a hobby largely dominated by married upper-middle class women with children and thus it is logical to assume that they may experience similar feelings (DiFranco, 2005). Scrapbooking events may help relieve feelings of separateness by bringing scrappers together to work on their pages and connect with one another while sharing their lives (DiFranco, 2005). The space limitations of this project prohibit a thorough discussion of this topic but additional research should examine scrapbooking events as the modern quilting bee.

### Scrapbooks Send Relational Messages to Readers

Sharing a scrapbook with someone else requires interaction and reveals personal information; both actions which can stimulate relational growth (Kalbfleisch, 1993; Jourard, 1971). By sharing their scrapbooks with other people scrappers offer others a

glimpse into their lives and thereby indicate trust and a desire to create, and/or deepen relationships. Unlike typical small talk sharing a family scrapbook provides a more intimate, personal, and involved subject matter:

When you sit down and look at somebody's scrapbook... you are communicating... on a different level than just "hi, hello, how are you?" because you instantly know their families and for most people that is really precious ... to let someone else in about your family... it's more intimate I guess. It puts the friendship on a different level. (Meredith LL 106-112)

This "different level" of conversation and more intimate knowledge of one another's lives creates a unique communicative context in which relationships are easily formed, strengthened, and deepened. Showing someone else a scrapbook involves both sharing personal information and sharing an interaction. Both forms of sharing can affect relationships.

*Shared Information: Scrapbooks as a Form of Personal Disclosure*

In chapter four I explained how the information scrapbookers record in their albums serves to reduce interpersonal uncertainty. I now turn my attention to the relational results of such reduced uncertainty. Self-disclosure, a central communication activity in the development of interpersonal relationships, occurs when a person reveals previously unknown details concerning identity, values, views, and opinions (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). Self disclosure theory holds that "low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 54). In fact, intimacy has been defined as having feelings of trust and emotional closeness toward one another and being able to disclose thoughts and feelings to each other (Acitelli & Duck,

1987). Clearly disclosure is an important construct when considering relational communication. Self disclosure is both a means to and an end of close relationships (James & Miller, 2000).

The personal nature of family scrapbooks makes them inherently self disclosive. Scrapbooks provide “a window in to your life” (James L 362), and as such are a form of manifest disclosure. According to Ziller (1990) examining a person’s photographs shows “what the person considers worth looking for and at” (p. 35). Similarly, Weiser insists that “every photograph someone takes is also a type of self-portrait reflecting them... [which] contains information about the person who made it.” If photographs are so self revealing then certainly scrapbooks which contain not only photos but also art and journaling reveal much about the crafters who make them. Scrapbooks provide insight into the lives, feelings, color preferences, relationships, cultures, ideas, values, and hopes for the future of the people who make them:

Different people have different styles of scrapbooking and I think that reflects their personality and says things about them as a person... your scrapbook speaks for you through its style—the art, the content, the journaling, how it is done... if you had a table full of scrapbooks and the people that made them you’d have ten entirely different lives—stories—people—styles—personalities—and you can tell by looking at their books... they are sharing themselves, their families, their beliefs, their festivals, their everything their whole life practically. (Meredith LL 217-221)

Because scrapbooks are so highly personal choosing to let someone look through them sends a message of trust and desire to connect: “I think it opens up the avenue for me to share a little bit more of who I am... I’m showing them my heart” (Sandy LL 677-685).

Self disclosure promotes love, liking, caring, trust, and understanding (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). According to Petronio (2000) “in order to stay healthy, relationships need to be nourished by self-disclosure” (7). Meredith further elaborated the relational impact of sharing a scrapbook:

You instantly sort of open yourself and your family to someone else so I think it deepens the friendship. Or the acquaintanceship becomes a friendship, and then... into a deeper friendship because you have shared all these things... whether it is through the journaling, or the photographs, or the art, or a combination you have exposed more of your inner self perhaps than you would normally do.... if you’ve shown somebody your scrapbook... it makes your life an open book... It is just... “there is my life look at it”... It’s trust, confidence, friendship, all of the above.  
(Meredith LL 180-188)

Sharing a scrapbook introduces a new level of depth to a relationship: “It’s kind of like you’ve gone from 0 to 4 in a conversation” (Sandy LL 686-697). Jimmye Sue told me:

There are some people who just surface talk but there are some people who really want to get to know you.... the people that I take the scrapbook to genuinely want to have a relationship not just an acquaintance—so I share with them to give them a better understanding of who we are and that deeper understanding opens up for more conversation and furthers the relationships. (LL 207-212)

While sharing a scrapbook can be a highly personal act it is not necessarily so. Many scrappers have multiple albums, (i.e. a holiday album, an annual chronology, a heritage album, and/or a more personal “book of myself”) by choosing which album to



show another person, (or which to avoid sharing) scrappers have some control over the depth of interaction they want. LaDonna explains:

It can be an opportunity to really get to know me. Like... there was one woman down the street... and she came down... with her scrapbook and was showing it to me and making that sort of connection and I found myself feeling like “okay it is my turn. Which book am I willing to show her?”... And I found... that level of intimacy [was missing]. “I don’t know you well enough, and I don’t feel that kind of a connection with you. And I’m not sure I want to. Oh my holiday album that would be great”... and so I think that is it too: what level of intimacy is there? And what level do I want there to be?... I think it brings, depending on what the book is about, a deeper level of intimacy. (LaDonna LL 225-233)

Because scrapbooks allow readers to see into scrappers’ lives they enable relationship building much more quickly and completely than other types of social interactions:

Let me put it this way, I have a better connection to the women that I sit in the scrapbooking room with that I may never have met in my life within 15 minutes of sitting down and looking at each other’s scrapbooks ....seeing, their families seeing [and] what they’ve written—getting an idea of what they think is important enough for them to have taken a picture of and spent the time to build a page [about]—than I may have in a month of sitting in conference room with another person. So I do think that there is a connection to the very essence of who we are and ...what we think is important.... That interconnectivity ... happens when you

tap the inner person of who you are and want to connect that inner person with other people. This really does create a community. (Sandy LL 731-741)

Many of the scrapbookers echoed Sandy's thought that scrapbooks create communities. Amanda said it well. I asked her simply what the purpose of making family scrapbooks is and she said:

The same reason that you put pictures up around your house and the same reason that any two moms that are standing in a grocery store share stories about their children ... that is the way we connect to other people and come up with a world outside of ourselves—it is the way you make friends...as we reveal about ourselves and others do then it creates stronger bonds and then we come up with a larger group of friends. (LL 103-109)

Nancy told me that sharing a scrapbook:

Builds a bridge to community and to building the basis for a deeper relationship that might not have been there before... It allows people to see each other deeper into who you are and what makes your life important... it goes back to being vulnerable and sharing yourself... I don't know how else to say it, it is a building block and it helps. (Nancy LL 338-348)

The above quote refers to sharing a scrapbook as a vulnerable act. Several other scrappers felt the same way. There is a level of disclosure inherent in showing another person a scrapbook of one's family: "I'm showing my very best treasures in all of its forms in all of its realness... just showing... what my real life looks like besides whatever persona you may be actually hitting on that day" (Sandy LL 547-549 ). Disclosing to another person requires and indicates a level of trust (Bryant 2000; Jourard, 1971). The

willingness to share that real “inner person” sends a message of desire to connect. Susan explained the relational message inherent in letting someone look at her books:

[When you let someone look] I think you are sending a message like “I like you enough that I’m going to let you share this part of my life.” I guess there has to be a trust factor and I guess it makes you a little bit vulnerable. (LL 205-206)

In order to disclose most people have to feel a certain degree of trust and or liking (McKinney & Donaghy, 1993). Kelly illustrated this point when she told me:

I think it is very personal. It has everything about me so if I’m dating someone I want to wait until I find out if they are good enough—to learn my life really fast because sharing it pretty much means that I’m ready for them to know everything. (LL 53-56)

People have to feel safe with one another before they feel comfortable disclosing (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). This need to feel safe can cause some scrappers to hold back: I guess there are some people I might not let look because you don’t have a bond with them or you don’t like them... [or] don’t feel comfortable with them (Susan LL 202-204). Allowing oneself to be open with another person sends a powerful message. “For me it’s sending a message of trust... ‘I trust you enough to... really know me and not who you think is me’” (LaDonna LL 217-219).

Making private selves public can have a profound effect on personal relationships. Sharing one’s inner thoughts is an act of intimacy (Haight, 2001). In fact according to McAdams (1988) sharing is so integral to closeness that most definitions of intimacy “converge on the central idea of sharing that which is inmost with others” (p. 18). James

gave a personal example of how sharing his scrapbooks shares his innermost self with others:

I did a four page spread on bull riding... from back just... a couple of years prior to my accident... I was injured riding a bull in a rodeo ... I think [seeing that spread] gives [other people] a view of me that they would never have otherwise.... I mean, I've shown that to people that ... never saw me any other way, than in a wheel chair. I'm a quadriplegic ... Anybody that I've met ... in the last 28 years knows me as ... a severely disabled man. And so what ... their perception of me is something totally different than my own perception of myself ... Showing a four page spread like that: showing [that] I was young and virile... I was 10 foot tall and bullet proof... until my accident at seventeen. And I hope, and I think, that the spread in some way shows... that other piece of me that other people don't know... I like showing that to people... Showing that shares a piece of who I was.... I would hope that in some ways it opens their eyes to just a different way of perceiving me... I would hope that [seeing the scrapbook] would help our relationship. (LL 298-330)

James's comment about hoping his disclosure would help his relationships is supported by research. The literature indicates that appropriate self disclosure leads to the formation of intimate relationships (Leaper, Carson, Baker, Holliday & Myers, 1995; Melinat, Aron, Vallone, Bator, 1997).

Further discussing the relational impact of sharing the photographs of himself before his accident James said:

If they've seen the family album...I've got pictures of my first grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade...just seeing that I was the same that they were—I don't know if that affects our interaction... on a palpable level [but] maybe it effects us relationally and how they view me or treat me... after that. (James LL 342-347)

James' example is profound and very moving; however, the relational power of being “just like them” is not limited to special cases like James'. Similarity-attraction theory suggests that we like other people whose attitudes, values, and beliefs appear to be similar to our own (e.g., Heider, 1958; Secord & Backman, 1964; Byrne, 1971; Byrne, 1969). Given this theory, it follows that that people would be attracted to other people whose scrapbooks demonstrate similar values, experiences, and perspectives. Haley told me how recognizing similarity in other people's scrapbooks can lead to a “bonding moment” (L 331). Susan also spoke of scrapbooks stimulating bonding:

When you show somebody something about your life that relates to their life it's like accessing prior knowledge and they are like “Ahh we did that too...” and you can bring out commonalities and people really bond over that sort of thing. (Susan LL 195-197)

Family scrapbooks make it easy for scrappers and readers to recognize and highlight personal similarities. Since scrapbooks typically feature many common or universal themes of family life (the first bath, birthdays, major holidays, weddings, etc) these books may also draw on general family themes to enhance feelings of similarity even when differences abound. For example, a Jewish holiday scrapbook will vary significantly from a Christian holiday book; however, in both scrapbooks families are depicted together, performing rituals, and enjoying one another's company. I contend that

such similarities may help broach cultural differences and, thus, draw together people who might otherwise not know how to conceive of each other's family lives.

An interesting area for further research is the extent to which (if any) scrapbooks increase empathy, identification and/or understating between readers and viewers with different backgrounds. It would be interesting to find out if looking through a scrapbook helps readers feel more or less engaged in stories than simply listening to or reading other people's family stories. This sort of finding could have considerable relational significance.

*Shared Interaction: Scrapbooks and Immediacy Behaviors*

Self disclosure alone does not invariably lead to intimacy; rather "intimacy entails not only the disclosure of inner information but also a warm, sympathetic response by the other person" (Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999 p. 50). I believe that the scrapbooking context provides a unique opportunity for disclosing personal information in a situation predisposed toward such warm, sympathetic behavior. Further, I believe that, because of the personal warmth typically involved in sharing a scrapbook the self disclosure inherent in sharing such a personal artifact is more likely to be taken as a sign of intimacy than in other social settings.

People behave differently when sharing a scrapbook than they do in other social settings. They tend to sit closer together (Maggie, L 206), gesture more, and have greater vocal warmth and variety (field notes Sept 21 2004). These behaviors are part of what is termed "nonverbal immediacy" (Mehrabian, 1971). Immediacy is a multidimensional, multichanneled construct embracing a number of different behaviors. Communicating immediacy involves, at least, the use of personal space and distance, interpersonal touch,

facial expressions, body movement, gaze behavior, and vocal behavior to: (a) signal physical and/or psychological approaches; (b) signal availability for communication; (c) increase sensory stimulation; and (d) communicate interpersonal warmth and closeness (Andersen, 1985 p. 2).

Immediacy behaviors generally reduce psychological distance and create feelings of interpersonal closeness in positive relationships (Johnson, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2003; Mehrabian, 1971). What follows is a code-by-code examination of immediacy behaviors in relation to sharing a scrapbook. While the scrappers I spoke with often did not speak directly of such behaviors I observed the behaviors at crops while recruiting participants, in stores while shopping for myself, and with the few participants who showed me their books.

### *Proxemics*

Proxemics refers to the use of physical space to communicate (i.e. the use of physical distance, body orientation, forward leans, etc). I argue that sharing scrapbooks provides a norm of socially conducive proxemic behavior. For example, “usually you sit like in the middle of a couch and they sit by you or side-by-side at a table” (Pat L 176).

When you show someone a scrapbook you don’t show them from across the room... showing them requires that you sit close. You... are right there in their personal space... You’re closer than you’d usually be. (Maggie LL 205-206)

James agreed:

I don’t know how you can look at a scrapbook and not be next to each other ...If you want to think in terms of body language ... if you were sitting in the chair like you are and there was a scrapbook in front of you I would probably pull up

beside you in my chair and maybe lean on the chair and just kind of look at the scrapbook with you... so I think in those ways there is a real openness... that takes place. (LL 248-261)

Given findings that closer distances and other proxemic indicators of immediacy typically result in positive attitudes and perceptions (Mehrabian & Ksionzky, 1970) it is reasonable to assume that sharing a scrapbook with another person (and the resulting physical proximity) may positively affect the relationship between the scrapper and the reader.

### *Haptics*

Haptics relates to touching behavior. Sometimes sharing a scrapbook involves touching the other person: "If I'm showing my daughter her scrapbook she'll often sit on my lap" (Haley LL 365-366). Given findings that touching another person generally sends a message of relational immediacy (Mehrabian, 1971; Burgoon, 1991), it is logical to assume that the touches exchanged while looking at a scrapbook would lead to feelings of warmth and positivity.

I must note that touch is not necessarily part of sharing a book: "it doesn't mean that you and I have to be sitting hip to hip or anything like that" (James LL 349-350). However, Maggie explained how showing someone else a scrapbook can ease physical contact in future interactions even if the initial interaction does not include touch:

It facilitates things and if you see each other again they will feel more comfortable giving you a hug instead of just shaking hands... because that is intimate in a way I mean... letting someone else touch you is not always easy for everyone but



showing them your scrapbook... makes it more comfortable later on. (Maggie LL 209-217)

Maggie is the only participant who directly addressed the function of touch in the scrapbooking interaction. Her words alone are not enough for me to make any sort of real claims about touch and scrapbooking. However, her ideas are worthy of additional exploration. More research is needed to know what (if any) relationship exists between interpersonal touching behavior and scrapbooking.

Whether or not scrappers and readers touch one another while sharing a book, they do typically both touch the scrapbook: "You have the book... one side will be in their lap and the other side will be in yours and you're pointing" (Maggie LL 206-208). It would be interesting to research the possible relational effects of two people touching the same object rather than directly touching one another. It seems possible that two people touching an object together may be a way to circumvent the potential awkwardness of touching each other while still gaining some of the relational benefits.

### *Kinesics*

None of my participants spoke directly about their kinesic behaviors while sharing scrapbooks (i.e. smiles, head nods, gestures, body relaxation, open body position, etc). However, while spending time in scrapbook stores and at scrapbooking events in order to recruit participants I noticed a seemingly large increase in the number of smiles exchanged while scrappers shared their books. Research indicates that smiling is one of the primary ways interpersonal affiliation is communicated ( Mehrabian, 1971b; Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967; Rosenfeld, 1966a, 1966b). In fact, Bayes (1970) found smile frequency to be the best single predictor of perceived interpersonal warmth. While I can

draw no conclusions about kinesic behavior and scrapbooks based on my informal observation additional research could explore the relational effects of smiling on scrappers' relationships. If scrappers and/or readers increase their smiling behavior while looking at scrapbooks it is possible that these smiles may positively affect their relationship with one another. It might also be interesting to determine what, if any, affect the smiles and other kinesic behaviors of the people depicted in a scrapbook have on the interaction between scrapper and reader. Can scrappers predispose their conversations to intimacy by sharing smiling pictures?

### *Vocalics*

While conducting my interviews I noticed that the scrapbookers tended to "light up" when they talked about their books. That is, their vocal rate, variety, and expressiveness increased, their tones grew warmer, and they laughed more easily and frequently. Such behaviors have been found to play a major role in interpersonal liking (Andersen, 1985). If scrappers change their vocal behavior in a similar manner while showing their books to others it is reasonable to assume that readers would feel more positively toward them and their relationships would benefit. While I never directly questioned the participants about their vocalic behavior while sharing scrapbooks, their frequent reference to laughing and laughter is indicative of positive vocalic behavior. Additional research could discover what, if any, relationship exists between sharing a scrapbook, vocal immediacy, and relational growth.

### *Interaction Synchronicity and Congruence (matching)*

Interpersonal synchrony (congruence, accommodation, etc.) refers to the simultaneous or sequential coordination and/or matching of a variety of behaviors such as body

movements, body position, conversational time patterns, vocal intensity, and speech accents (Cappella, 1981; Feldstein & Welkowitz, 1978; Gils, 1980). Andersen (1985) suggests that such interactional synchrony may “operate to build rapport, warmth, and immediacy” (p. 11). If, as J. F. Andersen (as cited in P. A. Andersen, 1985 p. 11) suggests, body congruence may constitute “relational immediacy”, then does it not make sense to argue that looking at the same object at the same time might have a similar effect? Gantz (1985) noted “covieving, even without communication interaction, may be sufficient to reinforce the sense of togetherness valued in close relationships” (p. 75). I maintain that coviewing a scrapbook does precisely that.

### *Chronemics*

Chronemics is “how humans perceive, structure, and use time as communication” (Burgoon, Bueller, & Woodall, 1996, p. 122). In American culture, where time is seen as a commodity that can be wasted, spent, and saved, choosing to spend time conversing with another person indicates interest in that person (Burgoon & Aho, 1982 p. 12). According to Peter Andersen (1985) “spending time with someone communicates closer psychological distance, increased availability, and interpersonal approach” (p. 12). This idea applies to scrapbooking. Scrappers see offering to share their scrapbooks as “offering a hand” (Nancy L 93) and extending an “opportunity to develop intimacy” (LaDonna L 537). Simply by giving one another the “gift of time” necessary to look through a scrapbook together both scrappers and readers communicate interpersonal interest and value (Meredith L 241).

Choosing to share a scrapbook with another person sends an additional and less obvious chronemic message of value too. Scrapbooks take time to make. Choosing to

share such precious and time intensive artifacts with other people indicates that scrappers trust the readers with the products of their labor. If time spent on scrapbooking is an investment, then allowing someone else to hold and look at that scrapbook is like giving them your ATM pin number. It seems logical to assume that this trust would convey a positive message. However more research is needed before drawing any conclusions about the relational messages implied by trusting others with time intensive and precious objects.

Offering to share a scrapbook is an invitation to connection. But invitation alone does not equal friendship. Readers' reactions plays a large part in determining the relational outcomes of sharing a scrapbook. The amount of time readers spend looking at scrapbooks sends powerful messages of personal value (or lack thereof) to scrappers.

Meredith explained how a reader's time and level of interest can have a relational effect:

It depends on if they appreciate them or not... if he just goes flip flip flip flip then I have a tendency to go flip flip flip flip to him and write him off (or her). It's like "oh well never mind then. I opened myself up and you couldn't care less"... it's not an open book anymore it's now a closed book... (LL 162-165)

As the above comment indicates, refusing to take time to really look at a scrapbook can send a negative relational message. For instance, Meredith explained how her husband's dismissive attitude toward her books caused her to pull back from him

[He] used to come in and he'd look at them and go flip, flip, flip, flip... he knew he was doing it and being ugly... so since we separated he hasn't seen anything that I've done. He hasn't asked and I'm not volunteering.... It means I don't care about him and I don't want to share this with him... [not showing him says] "I do

not care about you”, “you do not count enough to share these with—they are important and personal to me and there is a wall. There is a line of demarcation here and you have no access.” (LL 176-172)

Meredith’s comments illustrate Gottman and DeClaire’s (2001) claim that denying a “bid” for connection can negatively affect a relationship. By sharing their books scrappers “share [their] heart[s]” (Sandy L 687) and thus take a risk in an attempt to establish a connection. If the reader doesn’t return the gesture with suitable time and reverence then the scrapper will likely cease to be as open to the reader.

It has been said that “no function of nonverbal communication is more central to human interaction than the process of communicating warmth or intimacy to one another” (Andersen, 1985 p. 1). Sharing a scrapbook creates a social interaction in which immediacy is the norm and therefore stimulates feelings of closeness for both reader and scrapper. Even short periods of interaction and disclosure have been found to create significant feelings of closeness between conversational partners (Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997). By sitting closer than usual, perhaps touching one another (or at least touching the same object), increasing smiling and vocal warmth, engaging in the same activity, and spending time with one another scrappers and readers both invite and enact intimacy. That is, sharing a scrapbook, as Amanda said, “makes you instant friends” (L 256).

#### Scrapbooks Highlight Subjects’ Relationships with One Another

In addition to building connections between readers and scrapbookers scrapbooks also highlight and enhance relationships between subjects. I spoke in chapter four about scrapbooks as evidence. One additional area of visual evidence warrants consideration

here: the idea that scrapbooks serve as evidence of relationships. Sontag (1977) eloquently explained how photographs can serve as proof of family closeness: “Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness” (8). I argue that scrapbooks are such chronicles. By documenting moments in which family members are connected scrapbookers highlight both the existence, and the value of such connection. For instance, showing a young girl a sweet picture of herself playing with her father calls attention to the closeness in that relationship. Additionally, scrapping such moments sends a message that closeness is “scrap worthy” and important.

Several scrapbookers spoke about using their scrapbooks to highlight, preserve, and demonstrate a connection between their children and their fathers:

I like to take ... pictures with the kids sitting on his lap or if my daughter falls asleep on his lap I have to run and get the camera and take that picture... I guess it shows and it will show the future that he was there and was very involved...

(Haley LL 91-95).

In addition to father-child pages, scrapbookers frequently make pages featuring their kids and their parents as a way to demonstrate and remind their children about their connection with their grandparents:

My parents are in their 70s and... they do things with my children... [but]... she is five. If my parents die in five years she's not going to remember that they went to... Sea World or whatever so it's nice that she'll have pictures to see and say “oh—look there Gummy” or “there's DaDoo.” So they can see pictures of

themselves with... their grandparents and they can kinda know that they are part of their lives. (Connie LL 92-97)

Scrapbookers intentionally document and highlight their subjects' relationships in order to preserve intimacy despite the passing of time. Calling their subjects' attention to the positive relationships in their lives has the potential to influence the subjects' relationship with one another and/or their feelings about a past relationship. For example, Pat told me about a page she did about her husband and grandson's shared love of peanut butter:

We have the funniest pictures of them sitting together with a great big jar of peanut butter and they are both sticking their fingers in and eating the peanut butter... it is something that they share... I think it gives you a lot of feeling of connection, safety, and a feeling of a supportive family. (LL 201-216)

Interestingly, families rely on their scrapbooks not only to demonstrate their closeness but also to provide them with opportunities for interaction. Julia Hirsch (1981) said it beautifully when (s)he said "the family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness; it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals" (7). This is an important point. Many scrappers live life constantly on the lookout for sweet scrap-able moments between family members and if none present themselves the scrappers construct opportunities for them:

I think it has made me more aware of not letting too much time go by where we don't have a family event because I'll think "I don't have any pictures from this month—we need to go to the park." So I think in that way it has brought to the

front of my mind more to make sure that we have times when I force the kids to interact with each other. (Haley LL 16-20)

Such scheduled moments provide family members opportunities for connection and relational growth.

Scrapbooks not only demonstrate the existence of family cohesion by displaying affectionate photographs but also reinforce that connection by highlighting togetherness as desirable and worthy of the time, energy, and money invested in scraping about it. Additional research should examine scrapbooking as a potential relationship shaping tool. It is possible that being placed in a scrapbook is seen as a positive reinforcement and thus may condition subjects to engage in more positive relational behavior than they might otherwise.

I was surprised to find an additional function of highlighting family togetherness in scrapbook form. Many scrapbookers expressed a hope that their books might inspire readers to cherish and work on their own personal relationships:

I just hope that in the scrapbooks I can get across how close I am with my family and I'm hoping maybe that some people will look at it and say oh I wish I had that. (Maggie LL 243-245)

By calling attention to subjects' relationships scrappers hope to inspire both the subjects themselves and any readers who see the scrapbooks to appreciate and cherish the relationships they already have.

#### Scrapbooks Stimulate Readers' Relational Feelings Toward Subjects

Scrapping about an existing relationship draws attention to an already established connection. Interestingly, it is also possible to use scrapbooks to create relational feelings



between two people who do not already have a relationship. Heritage albums are an excellent example of how family scrapbooks can help family members develop a sense of connection to and understanding about relatives with whom they could otherwise never have any sort of relationship. Nancy explained how scrapbooks can help readers feel a connection to a subject despite never having met and living in a different time:

Either my great uncle or my great great uncle... when he was in his 80s... he wrote... a book about his life... from as early as he could remember until he was an old man. And it was so neat... just hearing how he described his house... he described it to the tee.... and you felt like you were able to know him through that.  
(42-48)

By providing information and personal perspective scrappers hope to help readers feel connected to the subjects of their books.

It may be a stretch to argue that it is possible to create a relationship with dead relatives but the desire to do so is a powerful motivation within the scrapbooking community. While heritage albums are an obvious example, the scrappers told me they specifically designed all of their books to create feelings of understanding, warmth, and connection for future generations after their own deaths:

It's a great family heirloom... I think that scrapbooks are more valuable than any jewelry or money you pass on... because it is part of yourself—it is your heart that you put into it. (Susan LL 106-108)

Scrapbooks are meant to establish connections and create continuity across generations whether past or present. For example, Paula told me:

I'm thinking that later when they are adults ... they will still look through them and their kids will look through them.... So that is really why I do. It is for them...it gives them a kind of a family connection. (LL 11-15)

The “family connection” Paula speaks of is a form of relationship and scrappers’ efforts to create it is an attempt to create relationships across life times and generations. This desire to create a connection between current family members and the larger historical and future family network is a relational function.

Scrapbooks are intended to echo into the future and to keep the past alive. Because subjects of photographs live in a “perpetual present” (Hirsch, 1997 p. 9) scrapbooks bind time and make it possible for readers to feel as though they are encountering a person who may no longer be alive. Roland Barthes (1981) explained it well:

From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being... will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze. (p 80-81)

By putting their family stories and pictures in archival quality books scrappers hope that future generations will be able to “know” their families despite being separated by time. Scrapbooking “is a tool in that it connects the past to the future and it connects the past to the current time” (Susan 114-115). By bridging the gaps between past, present and future scrapbookers bring together family members whose lives may otherwise never affect one another’s.

### Conclusion

The relational messages communicated by scrapbooking are four-fold. First, creating scrapbooks sends messages of love, pride, and importance to subjects. Second, by sharing personal information in an immediate way scrapbookers invite and enact relationships with readers. Third, by highlighting the connection between two subjects scrapbookers remind those subjects about their connections and encourage both subjects and readers to remember and cherish their relationships. And fourth, by documenting family members past and present scrapbookers enable readers to feel a connection with subjects they have never met and may never be able to communicate with. Recording information connects the past to the present and allows both past and present to live into the future. Scrapbooking is about connections. It bridges the gap between strangers, deepens the intimacy between friends, and draws families closer together.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

While working on this project I've found that I need only mention the word "scrapbook" in conjunction with the word "thesis" to instantly be demoted from scholar to something significantly less flattering in many people's eyes. It seems that, to many peoples' minds, scrapbooks are much too "girly" and simplistic for legitimate academic research. However, I strongly disagree with the notion that scrapbooks are inconsequential.

Family scrapbooks constitute a new and powerful medium for communicating messages within and about families. First, scrapbooks act as conversational tools by providing an excuse for interaction, structure for conversation, ready-made topics for discussion, and proof of disputed claims. Second, at an informational level, the mixed verbal and visual messages integral to scrapbooking allow scrappers to communicate both basic factual information and to make that information come alive for the readers. Third, the personal nature of family scrapbooks helps scrappers send relational messages to those they scrap about and with, as well as to those with who they choose to share their books.

#### Discussion

This study informs communication literature in three major ways: First, my study adds to limited knowledge about artifacts and their role in familial communication.

Second, researching scrapbooks gives us insight into the modern times as they shape, and are shaped by, family communication. Third, a focus on scrapbooking is a small step toward revaluing traditional women's crafts as the powerful communicative objects they are.

*Add to Communication Literature*

My research is worthwhile, if for no other reason, simply because it adds to two relatively small areas of communication research and to communication literature in general. Research about nonverbal artifacts is relatively rare and family communication is still a new and evolving field. My examination of family scrapbooks directly informs both of these areas. Studying family scrapbooks is particularly valuable because scrapbooks, as unique artifacts, have not been previously examined from a scholarly point of view. At its most basic level this study indicates that artifacts in general, and family scrapbooks in particular, can be used to stimulate, support, and enhance conversation as well as to convey more subtly encoded nonverbal messages.

I am especially pleased with this research because, in addition to introducing a new communicative context, this study addresses several fundamental functions of artifacts in communication. While researching this project it came to my attention that a great number of basic "truisms" about communicating with objects have been neglected in our literature. For example, the scrappers I interviewed told me with confidence that looking at something together brings people closer, that showing someone else a photograph of one's children implies intimacy, and that having an object to talk about makes conversation easier. These simple "facts" are not suitably researched in the scholarly literature. The lack of research on such basic topics leads me to conclude that

some academics think that because something is simple or intuitive it is trivial and not worthy of study. I argue that the opposite is true. The very fact that we see certain things as obvious means that they are foundational to what it means to be human and are, therefore, very much worthy of study. We must conquer our fear of the obvious and realize that “simplistic” often also means “fundamental.” It is time that we, as communication scholars, explore the little truths that we, as humans, know to be true.

*Provide Insight into Current Trend/Times*

As a communication scholar my job is to investigate how people communicate. One aspect of this job is noting and exploring trends in communication. Nothing becomes a fad without capturing a large number of people quickly. And anything with enough popular appeal to be labeled a trend or fad is worthy of study simply for the insight it provides into modern human experience. The sudden popularity of scrapbooking demands attention. Modern scrapbookers spend thousands of dollars a year and countless hours creating family scrapbooks and these scrapbookers share their books with others whenever they get the chance. As students of communication we are dedicated to exploring the interpersonal exchange and creation of shared meaning; this focus obligates us to explore any shared object that is imbued with as much personal meaning as family scrapbooks are.

In a society plagued with high divorce rates and long work hours, there seems to be a need for any sort of tool that can reconstitute, strengthen, and enhance family (Herring & Ebner, 2004). Scrapbooks are such a tool. In the fast paced and isolated world of wireless internet and drive-through restaurants, scrapbooks provide a way to slow down, pull people together, and truly focus on family. Scrapbooks tell us what

scrapbookers value and provide helpful insight into modern family life. In the age of “family values” perhaps studying family scrapbooks can shed some light on what those values are and how they are communicated.

*Revalue Traditional Women's Crafts*

To be honest, I expected to be smirked at and dismissed by many when I chose to study an object that is so typically characterized by hot pink magazines and cutesy stickers. And to be fair this bias is not only external. While doing the initial research for this paper I took a trip on a plane with a stack of scrapbooking magazines for background research. I was embarrassed by the bright pink covers and did all I could to hide them from strangers' eyes. At the time I was worried that the glossy flowered paper and pictures of children would make me look dumb or simplistic. However, looking back my true shame is not being seen in public with a pink magazine, it is behaving as an intellectual snob who categorically dismisses women's hobbies (even my own) as trivial and somehow shameful.

The fact that I felt a desire to hide my magazines is reflective of our society's view of traditional women's hobbies. Women's contributions to public life have been traditionally ignored and devalued in our society (Wood, 2003). Unfortunately, “homemaking and domestic culture have traditionally been disdained or overlooked... Decades of scholarship, following prevailing attitudes in our society, have placed a higher value on customary male activities than on customary female activities” (Motz 1988, p. 2). Academia has largely neglected traditional women's crafts (although there is some research about quilting particularly in the African American culture, see Davis, 1998).

I believe the dismissal of women's hobbies is two pronged. These hobbies are probably devalued partially because they are traditionally feminine and partially simply because they are hobbies. It is true that neither men's nor women's hobbies are very well represented in scholarly literature. In many ways it makes sense that hobbies are only rarely considered in academic research since hobbies are typically thought of as insignificant pastimes meant only to bring personal enjoyment. However, I argue that making scrapbooks is fundamentally different than watching football, playing golf, or other stereotypical male hobbies in that crafting is not just a personal pleasures activity: it is a functional mode of interpersonal communication engaged in largely for others' benefit.

Scrapbooking *is* a hobby, and it *can* be personally enjoyable—but it is also work done for, and with, others. Many of the scrappers I spoke with discussed feeling overwhelmed and occasionally dismayed by the amount of scrapbooking work they felt they needed to complete for their families. This feeling of familial obligation and other focus differentiates scrapbooking from other more purely personal leisure hobbies.

Sadly, women's hobbies have been, historically, dismissed as frivolous without regard to their greater value: "The creative domestic products and processes for which women traditionally have been responsible have been most commonly relegated to the devalued category of the merely decorative... as leisure rather than work activities" (Motz, 1988 p. 2). However, classifying scrapbooking as merely decorative and/or leisure is a mistake. Scrapbooking is not always easy, it is not always fun, and it is often highly disrespected and written off; yet, page after page, dollar after dollar, hour by hour, scrapbookers sacrifice their time, money, and energy, to create these books.



Traditional female crafts and the women who practice them have been dismissed for far too long. Surely we cannot categorically dismiss an entire craft based on a simple prejudice against the color pink or an assumption of frivolity. As researchers isn't it our job to look deeper, to probe and find the hidden meanings? Shame on us for judging the proverbial book by its cover. We owe women who choose traditional hobbies an apology.

As a woman who considers herself both a scholar and a scrapbooker I've grown weary of the seeming incompatibility of those two roles. I'm frustrated and disappointed by those who write off crafting as a fluff activity before making an attempt to fully explore the phenomenon. This thesis is an attempt to bridge the gap between crafters and scholars and to explain, in scholastic terms, the communicative value of one traditional woman's craft: scrapbooking.

Though traditionally relegated to hobby status scrapbooks serve vital communicative functions. People scrap to pass on information, facilitate and enrich understanding, send relational messages, and to communicate with the future. By sharing their scrapbooks scrappers facilitate and enhance conversation, convey and make meaningful family information, and invite and deepen relationships.

A great many people feel very passionate about scrapbooking. These people do not cherish scrapbooking simply because they love the stickers or the fun colors, nor because they have nothing better to do with their Saturday afternoons. Scrapbookers aren't dumb, un-ambitious, or overwhelmed with leisure time. People don't scrap because they are incapable of other things (In fact, most of the scrappers I spoke with had college degrees, and a couple had graduate school experience.) Scrapbookers choose to spend their time and money creating scrapbooks for their families not purely for fun, but

because they feel that the work they do on them will benefit their families and future generations.

My research clearly indicates that scrapbooks serve some of the most fundamental of all communicative goals: to create and support conversation, pass on information, facilitate understanding, and create connection. How sad it would be for us to continue to dismiss scrapbooking as a mere hobby and fail to acknowledge its true communicative nature. My findings clearly indicate that scrapbooks are not useless bits of warm fuzzy fluff—they are invaluable tools of communication. I hope to lift the veil of ignorance that has blinded so many to the communicative significance of scrapbooks and other women's crafts.

Despite prejudicial ideals about the intellectual value, or lack thereof, of scrapbooks and the people who make them I maintain that scrapbooks and scrapbookers have much to teach us about human communication. Scrappers care about their books because they communicate to their families the most cherished message they can think of—the stories of their families' lives and love. As scholars we do ourselves and our field a major disservice by ignoring and/or downplaying any facet of communication simply because it does not fit with our preconceived notion of what it is to be communicative. Is it not our job as scholars to discover and explore all the myriad ways there are to communicate? Simply because handicrafts are traditionally feminine does not make them any less important than any other type of communication. And refusing to study them limits our potential findings.

In some ways scrapbooking is worthy of study not despite its "girly" nature but because of it. Some scholars argue that crafting is more than just another context in which

women communicate: it is the formative context. That is, as Campbell (1989) argues, crafting and the process of learning and teaching domestic crafts have historically played such a part in shaping women's experience in the world that such interactions have shaped how women communicate and produced a distinct "feminine style" (pp 12-13). Scrapbooks are a perfect embodiment of the feminine style. That is they tend to a) "be personal in tone... relying heavily on personal experience, anecdotes, and other examples"; b) "be structured inductively... bit by bit, instance by instance, from which generalizations emerge"; c) "invite audience participation"; d) address audience members as "peers"; and, e) make efforts "to create identification with the experiences of the audience" (Campbell, 1989 p. 13).

The use of the feminine style is not necessarily limited to women nor do all women utilize it at all times: Both sexes can use feminine style, and neither sex automatically does. There are men who communicate in a "feminine" manner, and there are women who rely on more logical, "masculine" modes of communication. This paper is in no way an attempt to claim that the feminine style is superior to other types of communication: It is simply a cry for an unapologetic look at feminine style communication as enacted through crafting. We must revalue feminine activities and examine them for the insight they give us into human experience.

Scrapbooking is largely a feminine hobby. So what? Does this not mean that it will give us insight into how feminine women communicate? Shouldn't we value a glimpse into any group's communication equally? Why should feminine communication be any less important than masculine communication? All types of communication exist in the world and therefore all merit study. Any research that examines alternative styles

and/or modes of communication is valuable because it adds to our basic understanding of how people communicate.

In order to effectively understand, control, and/or predict our social world we must examine all types of communication. We shoot ourselves in the feet as scholars when we refuse to study something for no reason other than our own prejudice. Perhaps scrapbooking is old-fashioned and quaint but its extreme popularity tells us it is anything but antiquated and obsolete. And if scrapbooking is “girly” surely its fashionable status indicates that it is worthy of investigation for what it can teach us about being a woman at this point in history. If we ever hope to understand the totality of human communication we must overcome our aversion to the feminine and embrace it as part of who we are as a people.

### Limitations

Like any exploratory research my project has several limitations. While I discussed and defended my methodological choices in chapter two it is worth reiterating here that my small sample and qualitative interviews do not allow me to generalize my findings beyond this group. Future studies in different geographical regions and with larger samples would help increase the generalizability of my initial findings.

Though appropriate for a pilot study, my sampling technique may also diminish the generalizability of my findings. Because I used word-of-mouth recruiting to solicit my sample, and the majority of my sample came from contacts at a single store, my subjects may have all been in the same larger social constellation. Though my participants did not all directly know one another I may have inadvertently interviewed people who had taken many of the same classes and attended the same events. To the

extent that the participants did move in the same social circles it is possible that some of my findings may have been unduly influenced by a single teacher and thus are not generalizable to a population which has not been exposed to this particular teacher. Future research should make an attempt to control for disproportionate influence of this sort.

It would be typical for me to discuss the racial makeup of my sample as a weakness. It is true that 16 out of my 17 participants were Caucasian but this only limits my sample if the community I'm studying is not also predominantly Caucasian. Though I was not able to find any statistics about the racial make up of the scrapbooking community my personal experience is that most scrappers are Caucasian. I spoke with the owners and workers of several scrapbooking stores (P. Rudisill, personal communication, April 5 2005; five anonymous sources, personal communication April 11 2005)<sup>1</sup> who all shared this opinion. Future research may prove otherwise but I feel that the racial makeup of my sample was relatively representative of the group I set out to study in the first place. There is no limitation inherent in a largely Caucasian sample if one is studying a largely Caucasian phenomenon.

Similarly, it is typical to discuss the limitations of the socio-economic makeup of one's sample in comparison to the class of the larger population under investigation. Though I did not collect data about my participants income levels, all of my participants appeared to be at least middle class. For some research questions this would be a problem; however, in this case, I see this limitation as fairly insignificant. Scrapbooking

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<sup>1</sup> I spoke with four store owners and 2 employees of Texas scrapbooking stores who all confirmed that, in their experience, their clientele tend to be overwhelmingly Caucasian. Five of them asked not to be named out of a fear of appearing racist.

is a largely middle-to-upper class activity and thus the make-up of my sample seems appropriate (DiFranco, 2004).

An additional limitation of this research is that, in initially setting up this study I conflated “scrapbooking” and the modern scrapbooking trend as represented in hobby magazines and stores. It is possible that there are people (perhaps of more varied racial and socioeconomic classes) who make scrapbooks about their families without participating in the consumerist aspect of modern scrapbooking. People have been making scrapbooks for generations—there is no reason to assume that the birth of a consumerist branch of scrapbooking has completely replaced “classic scrapbooking” (Rosenbluth & McDiarmid, 1998). Classic scrapbookers, those who create books with actual scraps rather than ready-made scrapbook materials, might not shop in modern scrapbooking stores and thus would have been invisible to my sampling techniques. If a scrapbooker does not visit scrapbooking stores there is no way that they my direct efforts recruiting at such stores would have found them. It is possible, though unlikely that the scrapbookers I interviewed (who participate in store-based scrapbooking social circles) would have known classic scrapbookers to tell about my research. It was a fallacious assumption on my part to equate shopping in scrapbooking stores with being a scrapbooker. Future studies should make an effort to recruit participants outside of stores. Perhaps older individuals could be interviewed for their ideas about what classic scrapbooks offered before the rise of the current scrapbooking trend.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of my research is that, though my research concerns the interpersonal functions of family scrapbooks, I only interviewed scrapbookers. While ideally interpersonal scholars would always examine both

participants in any dyad the scope of such an endeavor was impractical for this thesis. Because I only interviewed scrapbookers and not their families my results are somewhat limited. Every scrapbooker I interviewed also looks at other people's scrapbooks but, as scrappers themselves, they are not the best sample for understanding how non-scrappers view scrapbooks. More research must be done before any definite conclusions can be drawn about how scrapbooks are received as communication.

#### Future Directions and a Call to Action

This study provides a jumping off point for many future investigations. One large-scale need for future research is to explore the motivation behind scrapbooking and other types of family communication. My research indicates that a major reason scrapbookers make the effort to communicate family information is a desire to reduce others' uncertainty. This altruistic motive is not accounted for by traditional communication theories (like URT) that focus on individuals' discomfort as the primary driving force in social interaction. It seems logical, particularly in the family communication context, to begin to try to understand more other-focused motivations for communication. Additional research must be done to further investigate people's desire to communicate information without a self-rewarding motive.

Other specific directions for research call out as well. In particular, I hope that future researchers will find a way to more directly assess the nonverbal immediacy cues involved in scrapbooking. Perhaps a future study could observe scrappers and different types of readers sharing a book (i.e. a scrapper and her/his child, a scrapper and a stranger, two scrappers, etc.). I tried, in this thesis, to address all the various relationships

touched by scrapbooking. Further researchers might do better to focus on particular relationships (i.e. family OR friends, not both).

It is imperative that readers' perspectives are featured more prominently in future research. Additionally it would be interesting for more critical and theoretical thinking to be done about the possible shaping effects of scrapbooks. It seems possible that scrapbooks may help shape the identities of the children who grow up reading about themselves in their pages. As current scrapbookers' children grow up it will become easier to examine how scrapbooks actually function rather than how scrappers hope their books function.

One particular aspect of scrapbooking which merits further consideration is if, when, and how scrapbookers present negative life events in their books. Due to space limitations I was not able to discuss this aspect of scrapbooking. However, while speaking with the scrapers I found that many of them see their books as teaching tools through which they can shape both their own and their children's' perspectives. Future research should further investigate how scrapbookers use their books to frame family life in ways which create meaning from an otherwise chaotic flood of life experiences.

Many more specific recommendations and directions for future research are peppered throughout the text of this thesis. However, my primary suggestion for the future is a very general one: more research must be done about traditional women's crafts in general. "Not celebrating women's traditional activities ignores generations of cultural contributions" (Payne 2001 p. 31). When we, as scholars, turn our backs on feminine activities we not only disrespect the women who engage in them but we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to understand an important segment of the population we



claim to study—humans. How can we learn from a group we refuse to study? As scholars of human communication we must examine the communication within all groups, not just the intellectually appealing or typically explored.

### Conclusions

Family scrapbooks are nothing if not communicative. The very act of making a scrapbook about someone signals value. And sharing such a book not only connotes trust and liking but also directly communicates information and supports conversation. The pictures and colors in family scrapbooks illustrate the words and provide context for the verbal messages while the words, in turn, explain the photographs. Together words, photographs, and art combine to create a cohesive storybook which, when shared, functions not only as a topic for conversation, and a sourcebook for family information, but also as an invitation to a mutual interaction that enhances the relationship between scrapper and reader.

The communication that takes place through and around scrapbooks is invaluable and worthy of respect and further research. Scrapbooks teach us that with a little creativity, a lot of love, and an investment of time scrapbooks can invigorate conversations and relationships in much the same way embellishments enhance a page. Like glitter catches the eye, so too, can stories ignite sparkling conversation. In much the same what that pictures provide visuals, journaling passes on information. And just as sentimental quotes create feelings of love, sharing a book can draw two people close.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

#### **Informed Consent Form for Research Texas State University at San Marcos for Embellished Communication**

This research is being conducted under the auspices of Texas State University. By signing this document you give your consent to participate in the Embellished Communication research project under the conditions listed below.

**Principal Investigator:**

**Ruth Friede**  
Department of Communication Studies  
Masters Candidate

**Supervising advisor:**

**Dr. Maureen Keeley**  
Department of Communication Studies  
Associate Professor

**“Shared Family Scrapbooks”**

This research project focuses on family scrapbooks—by this I mean any scrapbook designed around or for a family (i.e. heritage albums, baby books, scrapbooks devoted to one family member or to family traditions, etc). This category may, or may not, include vacation albums and excludes more artistic portfolio books devoted to one subject matter (i.e. a book of landscapes or art photos). This project is further limited by a focus on shared family scrapbooks—to be eligible for participation in this study you must have shown your scrapbooks to other people.

**Description:** the purpose of this study is to examine the communicative function(s) of shared family scrapbooks—to determine the messages sent by sharing family scrapbooks with others.

If you decide to participate I will ask you to complete a brief questionnaire about your scrapbooking experience as well as document some basic information about your family. After you complete this questionnaire we will begin the oral interview. The questions included in the interview will center on your experiences with family scrapbooks. The interview will be tape recorded for later transcription. The questionnaire, your written

response, the transcription of your oral answers from the interview, (and any notes I make) will be a part of my “data set” for my study. I expect that each interview will last about 40 minutes. Please keep in mind that this is an estimate and what you choose to share with me will dictate the actual length of the interview. It is not my desire to invade your privacy so please feel free to refuse to answer any question at any point. If, at any time, you feel uncomfortable you can terminate your participation.

**Approximate Duration of Interview:** 40 minutes

**Consent: I hereby give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that:**

1. I must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.
2. My participation is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am entitled.
3. I may terminate my participation at any time during the duration of the study and all data collected up to that point will be destroyed
4. Any information I give during my participation in this study will be used for research purposes only.
5. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with me will remain **confidential**. I will **not be identified** in any way in the final results of these findings **unless** I request my real name be used. Additionally the informed consent form will be kept separately from the raw data.

I request that the researcher(s) use my real name (first name only) in any/all work

\_\_\_\_\_

I confirm that I would like the researcher(s) to use a pseudonym for my name

\_\_\_\_\_

6. I understand that there are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study.

**I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thank you for your participation!

If you have any questions you can reach the primary investigator Ruth Friede by phone at (512) 238-9546 or by e-mail at [Nemeshh@yahoo.com](mailto:Nemeshh@yahoo.com) or by contacting Dr. Keeley at the Department of Communication Studies.

## APPENDIX B

### PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **“Embellished Communication” PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE**

##### **“Shared Family Scrapbooks”**

This research project focuses on family scrapbooks—by this I mean any scrapbook designed around or for a family (i.e. heritage albums, baby books, scrapbooks devoted to one family member or to family traditions, etc). This category may, or may not, include vacation albums and excludes more artistic portfolio books devoted to one subject matter (i.e. a book of landscapes or art photos). This project is further limited by a focus on *shared* family scrapbooks--to be eligible for participation in this study you must have shown your scrapbooks to other people.

##### **Background Information:**

Name: (will be kept confidential) \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Race: \_\_\_\_\_ Education level \_\_\_\_\_

Relational Status: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_

##### Children's' ages and sexes

Child #1: age: \_\_\_\_\_ sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Child #2: age: \_\_\_\_\_ sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Child #3: age: \_\_\_\_\_ sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Child #4: age: \_\_\_\_\_ sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Child #5: age: \_\_\_\_\_ sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you work outside the home? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how many hours per week? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been scrapbooking? \_\_\_\_\_

How much time do you spend scrapbooking per month? \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you share your scrapbooks with others?

Do other members of your family scrapbook? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

1. Why do you make family scrapbooks?
2. What do you hope to accomplish with your family scrapbooks? (What do you want them to do for you? How do scrapbooks help you accomplish that?)
3. Why scrapbooks as opposed to photo albums or journals or other mediums?
4. What are some of the things that you scrapbook about?
5. Why scrapbook these things? What does having those things in your scrapbook accomplish/say/do?
6. How often are you in your scrapbooks? (Your significant other?)
7. What message does that send (your presence/absence, and his/her presence/absence, the two relative to one another)?
8. Who do you make your scrapbooks for? (Who benefits?)
9. Do you give them as gifts? –what message are you sending when you give a scrapbook as a gift?
10. Who do you let look at your family scrapbooks?
11. Why share them? What is the purpose of sharing your family scrapbooks? (what are you hoping to accomplish by sharing them).
12. What do your scrapbooks do for the people you share them with? (how)
13. In what ways (if any) does sharing your family scrapbooks effect your relationship with the people/person you share them with? (What about the people you make them about?)
14. How does sharing scrapbooks effect your interactions?
15. Is there anyone you would not let look at your family scrapbooks? (why?)
16. So what message are you sending by letting (a particular) someone look at your family scrapbooks?
17. What are you saying about your family to the people who look at your family

scrapbooks?

18. What do your scrapbooks say about you?
19. (in a more general sense) What types of things do you think “should” be included in family scrapbooks? **Why**--what do those things say to the people who look at the scrapbooks? What does sharing them do/say?
20. What types of things “should” be left out? **Why**--what message do we send by leaving these things out?
21. Do you include painful/sad stories/ideas/happenings in your family scrapbooks?  
Could you tell me a little about that (why you made that choice, what you think that means)?
22. What message is created by including (or not including) these things?
23. Do you include shameful/secret stories/ideas/happenings in your family scrapbooks?  
Could you tell me a little about that (why you made that choice, what you think that means)?
24. What message is sent by including (or not including) these things?
25. Do scrapbooks give a complete picture of family life? (What makes you say that?  
And why do you think we do that?)
26. What effect do you think presenting life in this manner (edited) has?
27. If your scrapbooks could talk what would they say?
28. What would saying those things accomplish (what would it do for those things to be said?)
29. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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## **VITA**

Ruth Ellen Friede was born in Austin, Texas, on March 21, 1981, to Victoria and Kerry Sullivan. After her father's death and mother's remarriage she was adopted by her new stepfather Bob Hendricks and has been trying to figure out what makes families tick ever since.

Ruth got her GED in 1998 and attended Austin Community College for two years before transferring to Texas State University—San Marcos in the fall of 2000. In December, 2002 Ruth received her B.A. in Communication Studies from Texas State University. Immediately after her graduation Ruth began the graduate program at Texas State in January, 2003. As she neared completion of her M.A. Ruth started a portrait photography business in February of 2005. This thesis is the culmination of her graduate studies and a perfect project for a photographer obsessed with the power of family stories.

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