

Family Organization as a Determinant of Interpersonal Agency

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Family has long been observed as an organizational unit consisting of relational structures that affect family members, their engagement with others, and their involvement beyond the family. This research identifies family relational structures that affect a sense of interpersonal agency denoted as autogenesis. Autogenesis is a model of interpersonal agency consisting of increasingly differentiated frameworks of relating to others in an interpersonally agentic way. The increasing differentiation encompasses both an increasing sense of interpersonal agency and a widening sphere of interpersonal engagement. Details regarding family from 16 largely unstructured interviews of college-age participants on the topic of interpersonal relations are analyzed to identify (a) general family relational structures by an autogenetic framework determined by rating the interviews for autogenesis using the *Autogenetic Coding Manual* and (b) specific family interaction structures by an autogenetic framework associated with the degree or level of autogenetic differentiation. Four family interaction structures were identified: physical and psychological support, variety of alternative or opposing perspectives, sibling and friend relationships, and support from chronological seniors. For study participants, the presence of 1 or more of these interaction structures of family organization is found to be associated with increased levels of autogenesis, that is, more elaborated interpersonal agency and expansive interpersonal engagement. The absence of these unadulterated family interactive structures is associated with decreased levels of autogenesis, that is, less elaborated interpersonal agency and less expansive interpersonal engagement.

Keywords: autogenesis, interpersonal agency, interpersonal development, social development, family organization

Family has long been observed as an organizational unit (Farber, 1966; Lee, 1982) for the purpose of mutual assistance and support, particularly of a generational nature, with individuals of a childbearing age joining together in

relational structures for the purpose of begetting and rearing children. These structures may also extend to the care of the older generation by the offspring as they become adults (Fiske & North, 2015; Shanass, & Streib, 1965). Family structures are associated with a myriad of outcomes for families, family members, and society (Briar, 1964; Lareau, 2011; Pilkauskas, 2012; Tanihara, Akashi, Yamaguchi, & Une, 2014).

There are wide variations in family relational organization structures (Demo, Allen, & Fine, 2000; Schneider, 1973). Children may be cared for by the community, multiple generations, two-parent nuclear families, and single-parent families, with related outcomes for children and society (Lopoo & DeLeire, 2014). Parents can be revered and cared for in their old age by their offspring either alone as in traditional Eastern cultures practicing filial piety (Badshah, 2011; Ku, 1991; Kuykendall, 1972; Shi, 2009; Wang, 1985) or, more recently, with institutional and government assistance (Blieszner & Bedford,

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2012; Briller, 2000; Gans & Silverstein, 2006; Karagiannaki, 2011; Lența & Cormoș, 2014; Span, 2009; Wilson, 2000), with outcomes in each case that extend beyond the family (Risman, 2010).

Family relational structures can be described along a number of dimensions. The most frequent dimension applicable throughout social structures in multiple domains is that of power characterized as patriarchal, held by a male member (Hardwick, 1998; Ortner, 2014; Ruggles, 2015; Tazi-Preve, 2013); matriarchal (Diop, 1989; Means, 2011), held by a female member; and democratic, held by all family members (Briar, 1964; Heer, 1963).

Parenting is a prominent dimension of family relational structure that has been described in a number of ways. Baumrind (1971) has described parenting styles as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Maccoby and Martin (1983) reported the additional style of uninvolved or permissive. Parenting can also be described in terms of offspring attachment styles and outcomes: secure, anxious-ambivalent, anxious-avoidant, and disorganized (Ainsworth, 1964, 1979). These parenting structures contribute to outcomes in a number of areas both for the family as a whole and for individuals within the family and their participation within the larger society (Fraleigh, Roisman, Booth-Laforce, Owen, & Holland, 2013; Turner, Irwin, & Millstein, 1989). These approaches indicate that parental influences on child development are unambiguous and not insubstantial (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000).

The concept of family as an organizational structure extends beyond biologically related family groups and is often attached to biologically unrelated groups of individuals. It is not uncommon to hear organizations and businesses refer to themselves as being like a “family.” Relational concepts describing family structure can provide descriptions of similar structures within groups and organizations viewed as “family like” (Brownson, 2016; Elam, 2006; Feeley, 2010; McFadden, 2001; Walby, 1986).

Research will be reported that describes variations in the organization of family relations associated with the interpersonal agency of offspring and their agentic participation in relationships outside the family. These variations in family structure can be applied to “family like” groups as well.

The Model of Autogenesis of Interpersonal Agency

The model of autogenesis of interpersonal agency (Nordmann, 2014, 2016a, 2016b) presents a range of paradigms inclusive of frameworks of agency in interpersonal relations. The frameworks are theorized to be self-generated through interpersonal experience and the environments in which the experience takes place, although not necessarily consciously or with conscious awareness. Nonetheless, the paradigms and frameworks indicate both the way in which individuals frame interpersonal agency and the interpersonal agentic behavior they demonstrate.

The autogenetic frameworks of interpersonal agency provide descriptions of a number of ways of framing relationships and of relating to others in an interpersonally agentic way. These frameworks, comprising paradigms, could be considered working models, stages, or categories that extend from uninvolved with others agentially to reactive, interactive, proactive, and integrated agentic action with others. The range extends from views of the self’s agentic interaction with others that are global and undifferentiated through views of the self’s agentic interaction with others as highly differentiated within complex systems of desires, expectations, and social connection.

Autogenetic frameworks are displayed in Table 1. They fall within categories and levels/paradigms of complexity of engagement with others. The arrows indicate the direction of increasing complexity demonstrated by both an increasing degree of interpersonal agency and widening sphere of interpersonal engagement.

Background

The autogenetic model of interpersonal agency emerged from a study (Nordmann, 2014) of life satisfaction, as measured by the Life Satisfaction Index (Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1961), found to be correlated with the interpersonal trait of dominance, measured by the Interpersonal Adjective Checklist (ICL; Leary, 1957). The ICL dominance score was the single personality score of 19 personality measures examined that was found to correlate with the Life Satisfaction Index rating of life satisfaction. The purpose of the study was to explore

Table 1
Pairs of Autogenetic Frameworks With Category and Paradigm/Level Indicated

	Isolation from others ^a	
	↓	
	Reaction to others ^a	
	↓	
Accepting	Paradigm/Level 1 →	Rebelling
	↓	
Conforming by necessity	Paradigm/Level 2 →	Escaping
	↓	
Self-limiting/stinting	Paradigm/Level 3 →	Choosing limited environment
	↓	
	Interaction with others ^a	
	↓	
Manipulation	Paradigm/Level 4 →	Opportunism
	↓	
Unbalanced partnership	Paradigm/Level 5 →	Balancing partnership
	↓	
	Proactive with others ^a	
	↓	
Determining system constituents	Paradigm/Level 6 →	Managing system constituents
	↓	
Independent and directing dependents	Paradigm/Level 7 →	Independent and informing dependents
	↓	
	Integrated with others ^a	
	→	
		Independent and responsive to others

^a Category of paradigm/level.

what the ICL dominance score is discriminating that accounts for life satisfaction.

Unstructured life interviews of 27 individuals were grouped along the line of correlation dictated by their scores on life satisfaction and dominance, and then qualitatively analyzed to determine distinctions between the groups accounting for the increasing degree of the association of life satisfaction and dominance. The result was that increasing dominance ratings did not reflect a sense of increasing personal dominance but reflected differentiated expressions of interpersonal agency that provided far more nuanced expressions of interpersonal relation than increasing dominance. The increase was not that of increasing dominance over others but

that of an increasing sense of agency in relating interpersonally with others. The study resulted in a manual for coding the identified expressions of interpersonal agency (see Appendix) that provides descriptions of the frameworks comprising the autogenetic model of interpersonal agency.

Interpersonal Agency and Family Interpersonal Organization

The study reported here examines open-ended interviews of college-age students regarding interpersonal relations coded for interpersonal agency using the *Autogenetic Coding Manual* (see Appendix). The interviews are ex-

amined for descriptions of family interpersonal interaction occurring in the interviews. It is hypothesized that relationships will be found between the descriptions of family interpersonal interaction and student interpersonal agency. These relationships identified as interaction structures should suggest affordances for interpersonal agency within families and like organizations; the affordance of interpersonal agency being viewed as supportive of successful individual and group functioning.

Method

Participants

Six male and 10 female undergraduate students attending an elite, Midwestern, residential college who were enrolled in an interpersonal development course were invited to participate in an interview on the topic of interpersonal relations. The students participated voluntarily and received no course credit for participating. They had no prior experience with the autogenetic model of interpersonal agency.

Procedure

Participants were interviewed separately for an average of 1.5 hr. The interviews were open ended and largely unstructured on the topic of interpersonal relations. During the interview, participants were asked to describe instances of interpersonal relations that bother them, to describe how their response to such instances may have differed previously, and to present an instance of an interpersonal response that has caught their attention but that they have not tried or may be reluctant to try. For the purpose of reporting, the names of the participants were changed.

The transcribed interviews were coded for the framework of interpersonal agency using the *Autogenetic Coding Manual* (see [Appendix](#)). The interviews as coded were then ranked along the continuum of interpersonal frameworks of the autogenetic model depicted in [Table 1](#). The interviews thus ranked by the autogenetic framework were then examined on two levels. They were first examined for general descriptions of relations of the participants with their natal family. The interviews identified by description of family relation by the autogenetic framework were then examined for specific interpersonal interaction details.

These details were compared for similarity and differences across the range of frameworks seeking specific structures of family interaction associated with level of autogenesis. The frameworks and ranges of frameworks with identified structures of family interaction were then compared with frameworks and ranges of frameworks without these structures or with the obverse of these structures to confirm differences in structures of family interpersonal interaction associated with differences in autogenesis of these college-age offspring.

Results

All interviewees spontaneously detailed contemporary relational issues in their personal lives, including contemporary and historical accounts of relations with their parents and families. These accounts of relations with families reveal these late adolescents and young adults to be either involved with or connected to family or parents in interpersonally enabling or nondistracting ways or isolated from their families or involved in a concerned manner with their parents in ways that are interpersonally limiting or distracting.

The overall analysis entailed associating general family relation structures and specific family interaction structures to the autogenetic complexity of the interviewees. The interviews were ordered in terms of the level of complexity of autogenetic frameworks identified for each interview using the *Autogenetic Coding Manual* (see [Appendix](#)). When the interviews were ordered in terms of complexity of interpersonal agentic frameworks, correlated patterns of general family relation structures and specific family interaction structures as recounted by the interviewees were discernable. Interviewees identified as the least differentiated autogenetically gave accounts of a sense of isolation of one type or another either from their parents or from others or both. The most autogenetically differentiated individuals gave accounts of connected involvement with parents, families, and others.

The interviews were ordered for interpersonal agency from most global to most differentiated. An examination of student relation to family as described in the participant interviews produced the general descriptions of family relation structures, as displayed in [Table 2](#).

Table 2
Interviewee Autogenetic Framework and Interviewee Description of Family Relation Structure

Uninvolved Sean	Isolation from others ^a (isolated family that moved a lot) ↓		
Accepting Trudy	Reaction to others ^a Paradigm/Level 1 → (Isolation from family providing primarily financial support)	Rebelling	
David	(Physical punishment) ↓		
Conforming by necessity John Sally	Paradigm/Level 2 → (Forced nonconfrontation) (Conditional love) ↓	Escaping Matthew	(Constriction and indulgence)
Self-limiting/stinting Lynette	Paradigm/Level 3 → (Demanding mother) ↓	Choosing limited environment Celestine	(Parental marriage as between monads)
Manipulation Leon	Interaction with others ^a Paradigm/Level 4 → (Psychologically abusive father)	Opportunism Katrina	(Distance from strict parents by lying)
June	(Overprotective and bad-tempered parents) ↓		
Unbalanced partnership Jeanie	Paradigm/Level 5 → (Manipulative father and reversed parental roles)	Balancing partnership May	(Home unpleasant with divorced mother)
Janie	(Family access to friend relations) ↓		
Determining system constituents Earnest	Proactive with others ^a Paradigm/Level 6 → (Close sibling relations) ↓	Managing system constituents Sharon	(Parental protection)
Independent and directing dependents	Paradigm/Level 7 → ↓	Independent and informing dependents	
	Integrated with others ^a →	Independent and responsive to others	

^a Category of paradigm/level.

With the exception of the two most interpersonally agentic participants, Sharon and Ernest, who report parental protection and close sibling relationships, the majority of the general relational ways in which interpersonal structure by family is reported provide a variety of seemingly dysfunctional and disparate organizations of family relation. A further analysis of the participants' interviews revealed specific interactions of family-related interpersonal experiences associated with levels of autogenesis.

Ernest and Sharon as indicated are the most autogenetically differentiated of the 16 interviewees. They are functioning autogenetically at the level or within the paradigm of determining and managing systems of individuals and their needs. They are aware of myriad distinctions among individuals and anticipate others as potentially dependent upon them. They are concerned with how responsibilities should be discharged toward dependents. The level at which they are functioning would be age appropriate, as they as yet are neither agentially engaged with dependents for whom they would be expected to be fully responsible nor for realizing a relationship with them that enables both personal independence and responsiveness.

Ernest is concerned about relationships with younger Korean college students. He has a twin brother and an older sister he draws on and parents who took good care of them but worked and expected the children not to turn to them for help: "I know what to expect from them, I know what they expect from me . . . I don't know them . . . but . . . I respect them immensely. . . ." Ernest's experience suggests that siblings may serve as a source of developmental relationships within the family. Parents and parameters seem to need to be there, but interpersonal development can proceed with only their indirect influence. Parents such as Ernest's provide a certainty of support and expectations and children like Ernest become and remain highly motivated in their own right.

Sharon also expresses a differentiated view of others: "I can have many different levels of friendships." Sharon's family exemplifies an intense attempt to provide physical and psychological protection by getting Sharon out of the Mooney sect. Sharon's mother and father provide different interpersonal perspectives that Sharon actively discriminates. The comparison provides a fertile opportunity for development

resulting from comparison. Sharon's older brother provides sensitive understanding, emotional acceptance, and support to her. Sharon draws on a chronological senior, an advisor at the college. Sharon's experience suggests that crises are not necessarily a permanent setback to development when an individual is availed of the four observed types of experiences facilitative of interpersonal development: physical and psychological support, non-threatening exposure to alternative perspectives, sibling and/or friend relationships, and support of chronological seniors.

The next three interviewees, May, Jeanie, and Janie, have a less expansive and differentiated focus on interpersonal relations. They are concerned with partnerships of pairs of individuals and balancing relations within these partnership pairs rather than within systems of individuals.

May sums up this point of view when speaking of a friendship partnership of hers:

Um, I think, well, kind of because there're certain things that she's doing right now that I understand, um, but I also want to be understood that I have my stuff too and my priorities? And um, to be appreciated.

May's parents were divorced and she lived with her mother. Home was not a pleasant place and she was highly motivated to differentiate argument from feeling in arguments presented by her mother. She has a positive relationship with her brother. *May's* experience suggests that family relations are highly motivated and young adults attempt to make sense of them and resolve the feelings associated with their family relations. It also suggests that crises such as divorce need not necessarily be a setback to interpersonal development but yet another opportunity to differentiate in developmentally significant ways.

Jeanie struggles with partnership relations: "And that's what I'm having problems with right now is with people who are, who don't have, like, the relationship isn't equal and somebody's expected to give more or less or." *Jeanie's* father use to manipulate, which she hates, and was treated for drug use. Her parental roles are reversed. Her mother is the breadwinner but is codependent and not the "head" of the family. *Jeanie* declines marriage to a boyfriend who wants her to be a traditional model wife. *Jeanie* provides another example of family support coupled with parental conflict that enables comparison that appears to be of benefit for differentiation. Although parental

conflict may be seen as a frustrating development, parental models of family structures and behaviors that differ from the idealized norm influence the models the child adapts as a young adult and motivate analysis of approaches to interpersonal interaction. Children of parents whose relations with one another undergo strain or breakdown, like May and Jeanie, study parents' life decisions and arrangements in creating their own lives.

Janie is struggling with how to speak out to accomplish balance in a partnership paradigm of interpersonal perspectives. Janie provides evidence for family as access to a community of age-graded relationships in which one enacts differing roles with siblings and friends and draws on chronological seniors as mentors and protectors. She reports at camp, at school, and in the neighborhood: "Um, but I guess I always had someone in the wings who would be . . . there saying, oh, that was okay," and she talks about "regular stuff" with her brother. Janie's life suggests that young people practice interpersonal approaches with siblings and friends. The importance of age-graded relationships is demonstrated as valuable to children in that they are deeply impressed by older children. In the case of Janie and Earnest, as reported previously, family life that permits of close sibling and friend relationships appears to enable interpersonal relationships in the absence of direct parental involvement.

Katrina is the first interviewee in descending order of interpersonal agency to speak of isolating herself somewhat from her parents while remaining involved with her brother. Katrina exhibits opportunism and some partnership considerations in her relations with others. She wonders if she might find someone more perfect than her present boyfriend. She is close to her brother and his family, who live in her university community. She does not want to go home to her parents and best friend after graduation and has "a long history of lying to my parents," who are conservative Catholics. Katrina exhibits a distancing of herself from her parents correlated with a lack of genuine interpersonal engagement generally.

The remaining 10 interviewees whom I will describe in descending order of agentic interpersonal differentiation serve as examples of interpersonal outcomes of isolation associated with the noticeable absence or obverse in these families of physical or psychology protection, diverse perspectives, sibling or friendship role

engagement, and access to chronological seniors outside the family. The first five interviewees described above serve as examples of either proactive or interactive interpersonal agency expressed in terms of engagement in either systems of others or partnerships. The sixth and final interviewee above serves as an example of a shift beginning to occur in interpersonal agency among the interviewees which is described as reactive and expressed in terms of opportunism, manipulation, reaction or uninvolvedness. Interpersonal agency that is neither proactive nor interactive but reactive is fully evidenced in the remaining 10 interviews.

Leon is manipulative in his relations with others. Leon is alienated from his sister. Leon finds, perceives, or frames disappointing experiences with friends now in terms by which he describes relations with his family. He expressed his concerns regarding his friends by saying,

And just, and general feeling hurt and um, left alone, and thinking that people, people who you cared for or people who you thought cared for you didn't really give two cents about you or anything, so that's what's um, brought me to this point, I suppose.

Leon's father was not a protector but rather the perpetrator of physical and psychological aggression toward Leon.

Leon has memories of, like I said, him insulting or embarrassing me. And telling me, "you'll never amount to anything" and this and that, and "I don't like taking you to band rehearsals, you're going to find another way home" something like that. Just, I don't know. A feeling of emptiness, of not having someone to depend on. That kind of feeling.

At one point he had a bad fight with and punched his dad. ". . . they finally backed off" but remain more or less estranged, although Leon tries more not to place any blame. Leon's isolation from his parents is mirrored in his sense of isolation from friends.

June is manipulative and self-limiting in her relations with others. She reports her parents as overprotective and as having bad tempers such that she tries to maintain peace and reduce conflict. She has since long wanted a big brother or big sister. "Cause sometimes it—I always want some, you just push the burden off to someone else, right?" She has "always wanted an older person to say, I've been through that. And this is what happened. You know? And, um, but they're are just confused as I am." June appears

to feel subjugated to her parents. She evidences a natural search for advice and direction from elders, something which Janie in a benign family setting found in her friends. Her involvement with her parents is one of concern. She does not describe relations with siblings and describes being lonely and at a loss as to how to get what she needs out of relationships with her peers.

Celestine has adopted a philosophy toward interpersonal relations with others, which is exemplified in her parents' relations, which she disparages. She feels one cannot possibly reveal all of oneself to another and life is ultimately experienced as a "niche of one." *Celestine* reports little about her family life, except that regarding her parents, "there're huge chunks of each other that they just don't deal with, and they are wonderfully happy together." She evidences a blank view of interpersonal relations.

Everyone's in their, in their own sort of world, I think. Um, see, I, I think so. I think that's how I would put it. That everyone's sort of in, in their own little shape and every, everyone else has their own thing, you can only see so much or fit together worth so much.

Celestine expresses a partial sense of isolation in her relations with her parents and others and a lack of a sense of any possibility of vitalizing interpersonal involvement.

Lynette is relatively self-limiting in terms of her relations with others. She reports, "I guess I compromise a lot? I guess, my feelings." Her parents are divorced, about which she is unresolved. People in her life do not take her feelings into consideration and her mother is quite demanding. She calls her mother every day and acknowledges having the fear of losing her mother or their closeness. *Lynette's* goal interpersonally is to ". . . maybe just like be able to do my own thing and that can be okay." Her concerned involvement with parents tends to distract her from pursuing other activities.

Matthew deals with interpersonal relations by escaping from others to maintain his initiative. *Matthew* serves as an example of the isolation results of constrictive though indulgent parents. *Matthew* feels his parents who are very generous materially "own" him and speak condescendingly to him as a result. *Matthew* and his parents are in a conflict regarding his wanting to go on a long driving trip after college. He describes his parents as oppressive, lacking warmth, and not exceptionally affectionate.

Matthew is caught between wanting a concerned relationship with his parents and attempting to isolate himself from them in terms of initiative. *Matthew* reports no sibling closeness and no close or lasting friendships.

John conforms out of a sense of "should" in his interpersonal relations with others. His

dad is um, kinda has like, some missed opportunities, and he's kinda regretting that and doesn't want the same thing to happen to, you know, me and my brother. Um, so he's always telling me that, that's why he has the high expectations, I guess.

John was frustrated by these expectations and took it out on his brother. He was forced to be nonconfrontational. He would keep it inside or take it out on his brother, but they are fine now. He names no friends and describes no contemporary relations. *John's* experience is an instance of a child inculcated into realizing his parents' failed expectations for himself. Such children are concerned about relations with their parents to such an extent as to divert them from activities directed otherwise.

Sally also operates toward others by conforming or operating out of a sense of necessity, obligation, or responsibility. *Sally's* family relations are also relations of concern to her. Her involvement with her family is with emotional maintenance. *Sally* talks to her mother every day. She reports that her mother had a hormonal imbalance when *Sally* was in her formative years. *Sally* did not get much unconditional love, or unconditional caring. She had to earn love. She reports being unsure and needing approval from outsiders. She suffered from anorexia. She wants everyone to be the same. She is global in her discriminations. She idealizes a present relationship in which she reports she is likely to be disappointed.

David is very accepting in his interpersonal relations with others. *David* provides an example of continuing physical and psychological punishment by his father, which seems to have offset his supportive sibling relation. He has few friends at college and they are considered immature. *David* still gets physically punished, but he reports that his sister did a lot for him. He feels that he takes more of a submissive role to dominant people. He thinks about in future being repressed by his wife or his job, or maybe by a person, for instance his dad, if he is still around.

Trudy, although capable as an athlete and a student, reports global relations with a limited number of individuals. She reports a workable

isolation from her parents and appears to lack any range of interpersonal skills associated with paradigms other than acceptance or avoidance. She reports functioning on her own a lot and liking to be nice to everyone. She has a close group of friends. Friends such as these just happen. She seems to accept constriction where she finds it and avoid it where possible. She views whoever has the resources as the person in control. She reports being close to her parents, but feels very separate. She depends on them financially and for some other things and is separate, comfortable, her own person and can still do her own thing.

Sean is accepting in his interpersonal relations with others. Sean exemplifies a family setting that mitigated against the accumulation of peer-age friends and in which Sean is closely related to his parents. He moved a lot as a child. He does not pick friends. He does not get up and meet people. As Sean had personal difficulties, he withdrew during the term in which the interview was conducted. Sean seemed interpersonally to have slipped from being even passively involved generally to being withdrawn and uninvolved.

Families that do and do not provide children protection and multiple perspectives through intergenerational and intragenerational experiences seem to account for differences observed in the interpersonal perspectives and experiences displayed by these interviewees. Children thus provided for are less concerned in their relations with their families and are free to pursue their interpersonal relations with others. Children not so provided for are isolated from their families or experience concerned relations with their families and are distanced or distracted in their pursuit of interpersonal relations with others.

The families of the young people in the study who exhibit the most differentiated interpersonal agency are families who (a) physically and psychologically support and protect their children; (b) represent, embrace, or provide a variety of alternative and even opposing perspectives, and do so in conflictual situations nonthreateningly enough such that the perspectives can be considered and compared by offspring; (c) facilitate a setting of siblings and friends in which children may imitate, experiment with, and enact both positive and negative interpersonal approaches; and (d) provide a source or a basis for receiving support from chronological seniors in the forms of acknowledgment, affirmation, encouragement, direction, and strategies or options. The six most interpersonally

agentically differentiated interviewees provide positive examples of one or more of these four observations of family interactions associated with interpersonal agency. The remaining 10 interviews provide examples of how, in the noticeable absence, obverse, or alteration of one or more of these four observations of family interactions, interviewees express either a sense of isolation from their parents or concerned involvement with parents. These 10 interviewees who are isolated from or concerned with parents are pessimistic regarding involvement with others relative to the six more interpersonally agentically differentiated interviewees who experience unconcerned relations with their parents and positive involvement or optimism regarding relations with others. See [Table 3](#) for the association of study participant framework of agentic interpersonal differentiation and the four observations or structures of family interaction.

The participant interviews demonstrate that during late adolescence and young adulthood, individuals reflect spontaneously and with considerable feeling on their relations with their parents. The argument can be made based on the correlation of the interviewees' family experience of involvement or isolation and the interviewees' levels of interpersonal agency that general family relation structures and specific family interaction structures that promote in children a sense of unconcerned or enabling involvement with family are associated with more differentiated interpersonal agency and engagement in relationships and those that promote a sense of isolation from family or concerned relations with family are associated with less differentiated interpersonal agency and less engagement in relationships. [Table 4](#) provides a summary of the association between study participant autogenetic framework of interpersonal agency and participant reports of the general structure of their relation to family and their reports of occurrence, lack of occurrence, or obverse or altered occurrence of family structures of interpersonal interaction identified in the study.

Discussion

In contrast to psychoanalytic and social-learning approaches that focus on parents as primary contributors to children's socialization, developmental theories based in the cognitive-developmental work of [Piaget and Gabain \(1965\)](#) and [Kohlberg \(1969\)](#) have downplayed the role of

Table 3
Participant Autogenetic Framework and Report of Associated Structures of Family Interaction

Participant	Physical and psychological support for children	Alternative and opposing perspectives provided nonthreateningly	Setting for sibling and friend relationships	Provide source of support from chronological seniors
Sean				• (Family only)
Trudy	• (Physical only)			
David			• (Sister helped against abuse)	
John			• (Beat up brother)	
Sally				
Matthew				
Lynette				
Celestine				
Leon				
June				
Katrina			•	
Jeanie		•		
Janie			•	•
May		•	•	
Earnest	•		•	
Sharon	•	•	•	•

the family in social development, an example being that of the moral development of children. Walker and Taylor (1991) and Speicher (1994) have taken issue with this bias against parents. Speicher (1994), who attempted to control for methodological weaknesses exhibited in previous studies of which the findings were inconsistent, found statistically significant relationships between parental moral judgment and adolescent and young adult moral reasoning. Walker and Taylor (1991) identified specific ways in which parents reason with their children, determining that "Children's moral development was best predicted by a parental discussion style that involved Socratic questioning and supportive interactions, combined with the presentation of higher-level moral reasoning" (p. 264). This finding relevant to family discussion styles supportive of moral development seems consistent with the finding in the present study that family interpersonal interaction that provides a variety of alternative and opposing perspectives is associated with more differentiated levels of interpersonal agency.

In the area of ego development Hauser, Powers, Noam, and Jacobson (1984) demonstrated an association between parental behaviors involving adolescents and adolescent ego development as measured by the Loevinger Sentence Completion Test. Parental behaviors identified as enabling, for

example, involving problem-solving and empathy, were positively correlated with adolescent ego development, and parental behaviors identified as constraining, for example, involving devaluing and withholding, were negatively associated with adolescent ego development. Similarly, the results of the present study provide examples of devaluing, withholding, and constraining, along with conditional love, as lack of psychological support or the obverse of psychological support found to be associated with lower levels of interpersonal agency.

Research on parenting styles conducted by Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) distinguished the category of "permissive" (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) in terms of two types, "indulgent permissiveness" and "neglectful permissiveness," of which indulgent permissiveness is associated with the most negative outcomes (Maccoby, 1992). It is of particular interest that adolescents from indulgent homes are less engaged in school. The present study includes an individual exhibiting a low level of interpersonal agency and meaningful engagement with others who reports indulgent parents and, additionally, within the unreported remainder of the interview, low engagement in school.

Much research has been brought to bear on the negative outcomes of a lack of physical support for children in terms of poverty and the abuse

Table 4
Participant Autogenetic Framework and Participant Described Relation to Family and Specific Structures of Family Interaction

Participant	Autogenetic framework	Relation to family description	Structures of family interaction			
			Physical and psychological support for children	Alternative and opposing perspectives provided nonthreateningly	Setting for sibling and friend relationships	Provide source of support from chronological seniors
Sean	Uninvolved	Isolated family that moved a lot				• (Family only)
Trudy	Accepting	Isolation from family providing primarily financial support	• (Physical only)			
David	Rebelling	Physical punishment			• (Sister helped against abuse)	• (Beat up brother)
John	Conforming	Forced nonconfrontation				
Sally		Conditional love				
Matthew	Escaping	Constriction and indulgence				
Lynette	Self-limiting	Demanding mother				
Celestine	Choosing limited environment	Parental marriage as between monads				
June	Manipulation	Overprotective and bad-tempered parents				
Leon		Psychologically abusive father				
Katrina	Opportunism	Distance from parents by lying			•	
Jeanie	Unbalanced partnership	Manipulative father and reversed parental roles		•		
Janie		Family as access to friend relations				•
May	Balancing partnership	Home unpleasant with divorced mother		•		
Earnest	Determining system constituents	Close sibling relations	•			
Sharon	Managing system constituents	Parental protection	•			
	Independent and directing dependents			•		
	Independent and informing dependents					
	Independent and responsive to others					

associated with poverty (Amato, Booth, McHale, & Van Hook, 2015; King & Maholmes, 2012). In this study, in the absence of poverty, physical abuse in the form of physical punishment is associated with a low level of interpersonal agency. Physical support, absent physical punishment, and psychological support are found to be associated with higher levels of interpersonal agency.

Vaillant (2012), in his longitudinal study of life outcomes of Harvard men, identified family contributions to successful life outcomes. The most prominent contribution was relationships, and particularly the contribution of friends. This finding concurs with a family interaction structure identified in this study associated with higher levels of interpersonal agency, namely, a context for positive sibling and friendship relationships for children.

Resilience research notes the significance of an adult caring relationship in the life of a child (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Mentoring programs such as Big Brother and Big Sister and similar community-based experiences (Ingoldsby, Shelleby, Lane, & Shaw, 2012) have successfully applied this finding to mentoring programs for children living in difficult familial and community circumstances in which resilience mitigates these circumstances. Cicchetti and Rogosch (1997), in early work on resilience, found that children low in resilience were characterized by “lower ego-resilience and a greater difficulty in forming positive relationships with nonparental adults” (p. 812). They identified a variable they coined “interpersonal reserve” (p. 813) as an element of resilience that children derive from adult relationships. Similarly, in the present study, an interaction structure identified as support from chronological seniors, particularly outside the family, is associated with higher levels of interpersonal agency.

The contributions noted in these studies that support moral development, ego development, resilience, and successful life outcomes correspond to interpersonal interaction structures identified in this study associated with increased levels or differentiation of interpersonal agency in young adulthood. Additionally, among the young adults in this study, the presence of one or more of the unadulterated family interaction structures is associated with more expansive interpersonal involvement as young adults. Those least expansive report little in the way of friendship with others compared with those more expansive who report active engagement in partnerships with others or within systems of individuals. These interpersonal

interaction structures identified in families in which young adults express higher levels of interpersonal agency and more expansive interpersonal engagement or autogenesis appear to be good candidates for structures to be sought and encouraged in family organization: physical and psychological support for children, the nonthreatening availability of alternative and opposing perspectives, access to positive sibling and friend relationships, and provision of support from chronological seniors.

Although it is not the purpose of this article to apply family interaction structures contributing to autogenesis to institutional or organizational settings, it is not difficult to imagine “family-like” organizations operating most positively when providing an environment of physical and psychological support, opportunity for alternative and opposing perspectives, support for families and friendship building within the organization, and access to experienced senior individuals within and outside the organization. On the face of it, organizations so structured would be presumed to facilitate high levels of interpersonal agency beneficial to the members and the organization. Those organizations without these structures or consisting of the obverse of these structures could reasonably be expected to negatively affect autogenesis and indeed to be generally experienced as detrimental to both members and the organization.

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(Appendix follows)

Appendix

Autogenetic Coding Manual

General Notes Regarding Overall Interview

In terms of general category placement,

- Is there an upbeat or downbeat feel to the interview?
- Is there energy, direction, and momentum expressed or depression, sobriety, or restraint?
- Is there interpersonal success or limited or failed interpersonal interaction?

The general focus to attend to is the person's interpersonal attitudes, functioning, and orientation. Sometimes variations in expression leave some interviews more subtle than salient with regard to category characteristics.

General points:

- (1) Sometimes interviewees give very clear descriptions of how they use to be. They may retain limited instances of a previous type of behavior. This information, if classifiable, can give a clue to where they are presently functioning (beyond the earlier functioning). Such information can help to confirm or lend confidence to the assessment of where they are now functioning.
- (2) By the same token, an individual may philosophize on lightly, or use in passing, approximations to a category beyond his or her own. These thoughts may be less well formed than thoughts deriving from his or her primary category or previous category. They will seem a subject of fascination to the interviewee. The category in which the

interviewee is thought to primarily function can be determined with more confidence, if the interviewee expresses some fascination with a category above the one to which he or she is classified as belonging.

- (3) The interviewee may also exhibit the practice of limited instances of a category above his or her own. When people exhibit split protocols, rate them at the higher category as long as the higher statements are statements of fact or strong opinion and not fascination only.

Autogenetic Categories

(1) Uninvolved. The person expresses a desire not to be bothered and not to have to be concerned with others, not to have to tell them what to do in the sense of take responsibility for them. He is not successful in actualizing the desire not to be bothered or have to bother. Most of his positive relationships are fantasized ones. He is idealistic about relationships. He talks about his problems, over-verbalizes.

(2) Accepting. The person takes an accepting view of life. He has few expectations of others. He is not particular. He thinks in terms of having gotten what he should get in terms of what he deserved or expected, when he didn't expect much. He views the world in terms of security, being good, and getting taken care of by others. He may have been disappointed by this view.

(3) Rebellious. The person resists expectations placed upon him. He feels that nobody is going to tell him what to do. He mouths off.

(Appendix continues)

(4) Necessity. Obligation. Responsibility. Conforming. The person sees his activities in terms of doing what he has to do or must do. He may hate this or regret this but sees no choice or alternative. He speaks of responsibilities and/or experiences them in a negative way as onerous. He hates the activity, job, etc. but keeps going though he doesn't want to do so. He is insecure about the consequences of not doing so. He sees himself as having obligations to others and few rights himself.

(5) Escapism. The person flees a situation when he is imposed on, when is not going to his liking, when he's bossed around, or not treated right. He doesn't choose his next situation any more carefully. He flees to another situation and stays as long as it's alright. His images are of escape.

(6) Self-limitation. Stinting. The person limits his own natural level of activity or outlets of activity rather than rock the boat. He wouldn't mind, he would even like to work harder, but stints, if that's what the situation requires rather than jeopardize himself. He is concerned with greed. In this regard, he sees and holds self-limitation in the sphere of wants and material goods as a positive value. He limits himself in that he chooses not to do certain things one might normally be expected to choose to do.

(7) Limiting the Environment. The person chooses an environment where he does not have to limit a self-directed sense of activity. He chooses jobs, spouse, or schedule carefully so he can be himself, be his own boss or the boss of his group, and not be threatened, be bothered, or have to defend himself or be on his guard. The emphasis is on choosing or the realization of a choice in terms of an undisturbed or interpersonally intimate and secure and enclosed environment. Retirement can represent such a realized situation.

(8) Manipulation. The person has an unresolved dependency on his parents. He com-

plains about the quantity or quality of assistance they gave him as a child. He still regrets it or wishes it righted. He may have other sorts of dependence other than parental with which he is struggling. He may be interested in changing people to suit a situation from which he feels others, including himself, may benefit.

He is often disappointed that others fail to perform as he thinks most desirable. He talks a lot about his condition, over verbalizes. He does as much or more talking as doing. He may claim independence or to be concerned with independence while exhibiting forms of dependence in a situation.

(9) Opportunism. The person can provide for himself and makes that clear but is not above accepting gifts, benefits, or returns from others.

(10) Single-handed Effort in Partnership. The person is involved in partnership undertakings in which he puts forth more effort than the partner. He is active in his involvement and aware of the deficiency of the other with whom he is involved, but perseveres in his own activity, recognizing and accepting the attitude of the other. He can judge the other person objectively but doesn't try to speak out or change him, doesn't let his evaluation of the negative (perhaps) other affect, that is, inhibit, his own effort and activity. He suffers the other person's inabilities. He continues in his part because he wants to or thinks it's right.

(11) Manage Balance in Partnership. The person is involved in a partnership or group endeavor, and sees the necessity of holding his own, speaking up for himself, keeping the other person from running over him. He actively speaks out and corrects the partner when he is infringed upon by him and/or holds that as a value. By the same token he believes in not taking advantage as well as in not being taken advantage of. Balance, cooperative individual endeavor, helping is the key to this individual's functioning.

(Appendix continues)

(12) Determining System Constituents. The person perceives himself as functioning in a complex system of individuals and needs. He is not fully adept in functioning within the system. He is struggling to determine the essential elements of the system, their relations, and how to use this information effectively.

(13) Managing System Constituents. The person sees himself as part of some system or other, understands it, can function in it, but is aware of its limitations. He sees a need to actively and realistically wait, retrench, or otherwise seek aid in the sphere he's in. He has not given up hope but his past approach is not working for him or has evidenced a problem. The person verbalizes a lot.

(14) Independent: Limiting Dependent's Activities (Directing Dependents). The person feels no particular encumbrance. He is doing or does what he wants to do. His interpersonal concerns center around defining standards or conditions for those with whom he deals. He doesn't necessarily expect to be able to make others perform, but they must behave in certain ways if they wish to interact with him. He also may take advantage of other's if his situation or position allows, realizing though, that he probably shouldn't; or it wouldn't work elsewhere or under different conditions. He feels a little guilty or some misgivings about the applicability of taking advantage. He sees life in terms of successful problem-solving.

(15) Independent: Specifying One's Activities Regarding Dependents (Informing Dependents). The person feels no particular encumbrance. He

is doing what he wants to do. He is involved with his dependents and concerned about them. He makes clear what he will and will not do with regard to his dependents without expectations as to their behavior. He limits what he will do or conversely and more positively, specifies what he will do and not what they must do or must not do. What the person decides to do for a dependent, may help the dependent but may not necessarily be what the dependent may have in mind. He is not as yet responsive, though he is concerned. He sees life in terms of successful problem-solving.

(16) Independent and Responsive to Others. The person expresses a high degree of effectiveness and self-initiated and self-directed activity. He loves challenges. He works with people with relish and sees himself as a problem solver in terms of people type problems. He has come to accept psychological causation for others' behavior. He says that in his everyday life, he doesn't look for things. He has to have them pointed out to him. He is then very responsive.

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