A Labor of for Love

Bridging Intergenerational Dis/Connection in a Modern World

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I. About

Global shifts in politics and public health have heightened a decline in trust in public institutions and an erosion of relationships within the American public realm (Lamont 2023, 10 - 12). The erasure of relatedness in society is also mirrored within family units, magnified by perceived lines of difference. Family titles and roles can complicate these relations, which are further complicated by life crisis points, fear of an emotional response, and fear of discussing difficult topics (Astrachan and McMillan 2003, 20).

In an era where the demands of professional life often overshadow familial connections, my project delves into the evolving relationship between work and family across generations. I investigate how labor and technology have reshaped how and when we relate to our relatives in modern life.

Growing up, my grandparents were the ones who kept the family together. A score of children and grandchildren constantly orbited around them. Recently, when my grandmother died, I realized I began to drift out of orbit with my family. I noticed I was on a new journey of isolation all by myself. She was the organizing force I oriented around. Every summer, every holiday, family reunion. If not her, it was my grandfather, and when not him, my great-grandmother. But now, with all of them gone, there was no one great or grand to orient around anymore. In the absence of familial matri- and patriarchs, who is great or grand enough to give up your summer, weekend, or pinched free time?

I work full-time as a consultant while pursuing my graduate studies in oral history (OHMA) part-time. I explore how much a “labor of love” is required to nurture intergenerational familial bonds, highlighting the challenges posed by distance and the voids it creates. I also explore the “labor for love” of seeking (and defining) core needs, like validation and acceptance, in the work domain due to the absence of recognition within the family (Gibson 2015, 42-47). In this paper and the accompanying thirteen-minute documentary, I draw from personal experiences and oral histories with my family to navigate the complexities of intergenerational perspectives on love and labor in the modern world. I ponder the implications of our choices for stewarding our families' connections and cultural memory, contemplating the sacrifices made by current and previous generations for opportunity and advancement.

My work serves as a call to action for those grappling with the consequences of familial dis/connection. In my context, it provides insight and empathy for descendants of the Great Migration and individuals yearning to reconnect with their roots. I advocate for a renewed commitment to preserving cultural memory and legacy to strengthen familial bonds in an ever-evolving and drifting world by addressing the logistical barriers and the emotional labor required to sustain familial ties.

II. Methodological Essay

This paper is coupled with a documentary, poetically summarizing key themes outlined within my research. It is layered with material from my first OHMA exhibit, archived family photos and videos, phone calls and voicemails with family members, and

recent “day-in-the-life” videos of myself working from home and commuting to the office. I decided to place work and love as the ideological center of the project, using its amorphous boundaries as a tool to scope the distance that has grown between myself and my family. The motivation is to use memory and the archive to evoke nostalgia and whimsy while confronting my barriers of absence, anxiety, guilt, and grief to find healing in my journey with the company of family.

Historically, my family has utilized road trips to draw the family closer via face-to-face time spent, with phone calls to stitch people even closer in between. While I’ve struggled to balance family relationships, work, and graduate school, I also explore the emotional, geographical, and temporal distances that work creates between families. In this, the themes of time are also prevalent, as time competes in the marketplace of productivity and quality time within the family. I read a lot about spatial mismatch, labor, working, and time, and how the clock became the modern machine that cleaved our relationships with leisure and home life.

My original project evolved from my nostalgia for summer road trips with my grandparents. We spent ample quality time, 20 hours on the road, then together for a few weeks in the summer at our family’s home. During that time, I learned more about my family history through osmosis and what made my grandparents who they were. Though not featured in this documentary, I participated in five round-trip pilgrimages from Down South to up North via plane, train, and two road trips with family members, where we discussed this project. At the same time, I documented my travels and observations along the way.

However, while feeling the acute stress of balancing a full-time consultant job, which demands billable hours and answers, while in a program and practice that is generous with time and questions, my project took a detour after my first year of OHMA. Instead of focusing on road trips as a vehicle for oral histories, I had to discuss the link between family and work. Research for this new direction and these connections were derived from multiple sources. Connections within my work were inspired by my current life experience and prevalent national conversations related to The Great Migration, caregiving, The Great Resignation, quiet quitting, family therapy, and cut-off from families of origin. Great inspiration was taken from specific bodies of work, including *Daughters of the Dust* by Julie Dash, which echoes my family's migration story, and *Working* by Studs Terkel, an oral history of workers sharing their experience of working across many classes and professions. To thread the connection of work and labor, courses taken in Family Business and Conflict and Family Business Management within the School of Professional Studies and Columbia Business School, respectively, provided clarity to articulate the nebulous nature of work and family and working with family, which made it easier to communicate and underscore the systems approach to family connection and communication.

Decisions related to the style and editing of the documentary are made by intention and intuition. Knowing the core of my thinking about the project is within this paper. I narrate the documentary in a stream of consciousness mixed with other audio material to tackle the large question of disconnection within families related to work in an approachable manner. The documentary conveys disconnection through abrupt cuts,

distortions, and video of myself walking or talking alone to the viewer. Abrupt cuts and distortions represent the imbalance of work and school, allowing the viewer to feel the tension of isolation and insufficient time between work, school, and family, impacting one's ability to be present in either setting.

Discussions with peers experiencing similar phenomena also informed this work and insights. Support to work on this labor of love was facilitated by my instructors at OHMA and with negotiation with my employer. Though the total number of hours labored is uncounted, a culmination of my time compiling and completing my groundwork, like the speaking, reading, writing, (scholarly and archival) research, and rest necessary to produce both the documentary and its paper, occurred on subways, commutes, between weekday nights and mornings, and scant weekends. Formal and informal interviews with my family also informed this project, which will be mentioned in more detail in the subsequent section.

III. Oral History Interviews

Though my project is in documentary format, utilizing my family's archive, the oral history interviews informed its outcome. This means that oral histories were both tools for bridging connections to my family and also served as a process to achieve clarity for my project message, not for producing the oral histories themselves. I only utilized excerpts from interviews with my mother within the documentary and this paper. Due to this purpose and the sensitivity of these interviews and others, the oral histories are not featured in the documentary nor archived within the institution.

Oral histories were conducted with my mother and her siblings, including my grandmother before her passing. Oral histories were recorded via in-person videos, zoom interviews, and phone calls. The premise of my questions revolved around early life history, familial rituals, and travel traditions. However, in hearing these stories about how they lived their lives, I often asked, “Where would you have the time?” then and now to create and maintain these rituals of connection and relation. These conversations made my absence from family life evident. These conversations highlighted critical factors of my absence compared to the previous generation's conditions. Not only did I not have strong cohesion within my generational group, but I also did not have much support within my generational group (especially without having siblings to rely on) due to our large age gap. I spent more time at work than the previous generation, I have very limited paid time off in comparison, and I live further away from my family than others in the previous and current generations within my family. Other current factors also needed to be explicitly named that informed insights regarding dis/connection: My narrators were retired, and I was employed. My narrators grew up within tight-knit sibling relationships, whereas I was raised as an only child. They also lived close to their siblings, parents, and extended family, where they would spend quality time, and I, in time, at work and school programs. School programs that became accessible to my generation due to policy and cultural shifts in the nation. Their work, which spanned from family business to manual labor to office work, was not only done together; it was left behind at the office with physical bounds, without the pressure to build in-office non-family employee relationships, and was also left on the job. In contrast, my work is constantly in my hands

vis-a-vis remote work at home. Attending after-work activities, like happy hours and networking, is expected in my role. I must be immediately responsive to messages from supervisors and emails from clients received directly on my cell phone.

What became evident within these interviews were the factors, the glue, that kept the previous generation's relationships intact: shared labor in social, familial, and professional contexts. In early childhood, my mother's generation formed bonds by working together on the land from sun up to sun down, unrestricted time to play in the woods, and structured time with family as facilitated by my grandparents visiting their siblings and children via long drives and road trips. When they were not working in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, their free time was spent coordinating activities in and outside of the household for the benefit of the family. Though how free time is utilized is not different, compared to the previous generation, my free time is restricted, considering the current generation's need to recuperate from burnout (Terkel 1971, 522). My free time must be focused on other activities, such as recovering from burnout and achievement (Secunda 2019, 21). With the desire to spend time with my family, My family could not contribute to my professional work due to its structure. The way labor is organized in my life is that I am hired within the structure of a company that exchanges my time for labor. As they had done with one another, my family could not lend a hand or collaborate with me, which is where OHMA became a solution for connection.

IV. Working with Family for Connection

The conditions of familial collaboration changed when applying to OHMA. In OHMA, I would have a safe and "legitimate" container for free time to dedicate to my studies, this project, and my family. Before moving to New York in the summer of 2022, I left my non-profit job for a new, private-sector job in consulting. Though both jobs were committed to a 40-hour work week, my new job consumed my time in a way my previous role did not. My ideal reality of moving closer in geographical distance and, therefore, more physically present within my family proved false. In the cocoon of COVID, in my previous role, I had the mental space to call several of my family members, and I had more time to talk to them. However, with shifting back to in-person settings with the expectation of working remotely, the role of work in my life became more active than before COVID. Having the physical, emotional, and mental energy, physical space, and "free time" to visit or speak to family is harder than ever.

Ultimately, I recognized a tension between my deep desire to maintain my relationship with my family adequately versus my need to sustain my life via my consulting career. It felt like a zero-sum game to manage both. My project title explores the visible and invisible labor required to stay in touch with family and oneself, which is invisible and often silently shouldered by individuals within family systems. Though I sought to pursue oral history to spend more time with my family, I also began to recognize my desire to switch careers entirely and *how* I work, completely. These challenges, including managing a demanding job, the guilt of not being present within my family, the need to process prolonged grief, and unexpected family crises, sparked more introspection and a more profound desire to prioritize family and their stories.

In this case, the project is the process. The process is the project of working through family, grief, working through graduate school, working while working on my grief, my family, graduate school, and working on working on leaving it all (*it* being working) behind. The project and the process are inextricably linked. And, in the working world that revolves around labor and compensation, where is the incentive or compensation for families to exclusively work on the emotional well-being, connectedness, and stewardship of history and memories for their families?

V. Moving the Family for Work

In Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust, Nana Peazant imparts wisdom to Eli Peazant, her grandson, before his move up North from the Carolina Sea Islands in the early 1900s:

> "That's the challenge facing all you free Negroes. To keep the family together up north… 'Cause when you leave this island, Eli Peazant, you ain't going to no land of milk and honey… ' (Dash, 1991)

The Baby Boomer generation is in the process of passing the baton to Millenials and Gen Z as they get older. The fruits of their generation and my family's labor are being reaped to the next generation, with the largest wealth transfer in history. In wealth management, there is a quote, "shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations," which means wealth generation and assets gained by grandparents are inherited by their children but lost as they reach their grandchildren. The money, the business, and the legacy are squandered in three generations (Sage-Hayward et al. 2022, 22). This transition is not a bottleneck but a delicate hourglass, with memory, assets, and time running away from us.

The previous generation has much to give, and the next has much to gain. The alignment for transfer, however, is at the brink of severance. Culturally, I find my family in the same place.

Figure 1. Dis/Place/Meant (2021) is a digital collage of archival and media materials crafted to show the oscillation of urban and rural life and time and space through ruminations of summer time, roadtrips, and intergenerational connections in a modern world. Ambar Johnson

My grandfather moved my family from Georgia to up North for work—or rather, for safety and opportunity. The day they moved from their hometown, there was racial unrest, as typical in the rural South of the 1960s. For themselves and their children, home was a new and challenging place. After moving, they continued to visit the South in the summer to connect with family and pay respects to their ancestors, a pastime I continue to partake in.

My idea of family is derived from yellowed polaroids of family dinners, afros, large dogs, and larger gatherings. Compared to my mother and my grandparents, my life is much smaller. Memories are on SD cards, not photo albums. Reunions are on FaceTime, not backyards. I am the first generation not to be born in the South, the first not to live off the land, and the first not to have siblings. I am also the first to be born in a city, the first to be born up North, and to live in an apartment. In that, I am also the first generation not to grow my food and the first to not call or visit often in adulthood. In the effort for opportunity and advancement, what convenience, what was sacrificed?

Many in my generation feel this sacrifice as we choose between time, money, energy, and love. How do you spend your time, and with whom? The changing workforce landscape mainly contributes to the increased time spent away from families. Societal pressures and personal choices also significantly impact this phenomenon (American Psychological Association, 2018). People like my grandparents flocked to urban centers and pursued career opportunities, creating cultural, emotional, and geographic distance between loved ones. Seventy years later, these chasms continue.

To explain, across many countries, there has been a transition from traditional 9-to-5 employment to more flexible work options, resulting in individuals devoting longer hours to their careers (Secunda 2019, 7). The rise of technology has paradoxically led to emotional detachment. As individuals become immersed in their digital lives, they may spend less time with their families, leading to disconnection and distance (Secunda 2019, 8).

Conversely, spending more time apart from loved ones can have various consequences. One significant effect is the strain on relationships and the lack of emotional connectedness between family members (Gibson 2015, 36). When physically separated, face-to-face interactions decrease, resulting in isolation, loneliness, and weakened bonds among the family members. In addition, the constant demands of a demanding job, coupled with frequent travel, can result in exhaustion and heightened levels of anxiety (Secunda 2019, 34 - 35).

VI. Organizing Principles: Relating with Relatives

"...where are you?" A Labor of/for Love (Johnson 2024)

Family can be defined in many ways for many people. Family is an expansive term with different perceptions of what it is and how it functions (Sage-Hayward 2022, 242-243). For this project, I use family to mean my nuclear and extended family, a few of whom participated in this oral history project.

For this paper, I contextualize labor in two ways of my definition: of and for. *Labor of love* is related to typical labors of love, as in acts, work, and labor that is done out of love, altruism, and affection on the part of another person or group without expectation. *Labor for love* is defined as labor that is yearning for an unreachable goal, labor that is external to oneself, in the context of employment, for the means of survival, acceptance, love, and recognition. Labors for love are exhaustive and nongenerative. In the following sections, I will delineate the two and explain how they inform our ability to disconnect from work and family.

Figure 2. This table, created by the author, intends to delineate the differences between labor of love and labor for love between focus, organizing principles, and barriers to labor type.

	Focus	Organizing Principles	Barriers
Labor of Love	Connection, Longevity, Stewardship, Relationships	Family, specifically matriarchs, patriarchs, and babies, Life Events	Time, Family Size, Familial Trauma, Need for Resources or Survival, Awareness
Labor for Love	Survival, Recognition, Achievement	Work, Validation, Money	Obligation, Fulfillment

Labor of Love

Who is working to maintain our families? Labor to facilitate cohesion within the family is reserved for women or from matriarchs and patriarchs within the family. Family adopts their patterns of communication from one another. The next generation can embrace or reject these entirely (Astrachan and McMillan 2003, 14-16). Maintaining good relationships necessitates quality conversations and considerable time together (Astrachan and McMillan 2003, 10). Activities that can be done "for free," e.g., messages, social connection, and phone calls, or "invisibly paid," which requires resources that require extensive travel, hosting, food, gifts, and entertainment are interventions for family cohesion (Sage-Hayward et al. 2022, 98,105).

Regarding active memory preservation, social media passively archives our memories with relatives. Advancements in technology, like recording services, have made transcribing interviews and voice text easier. However, no distinct process or tool

intentionally creates space for this work. Yes, there are apps and programs to have relatives write their stories passively, but the act of memory-making becomes a solo activity.

For some, the answer may be more technology since oral history as a tool and method requires so much time; it is a practice that also requires efficiency. People who make oral histories easier to capture are missing the point. Oral histories with loved ones *should* take time. They are not an activity that can be bound by hours and calendars. They should be long, and they require lasting presence and energy. In this case, technology is a tool, not the solution, for organizing time, upholding systems for connection, and storing memory, as it is not a substitute for face-to-face work (e.g. memory making). Time is money, and money is necessary to live (Terkel 1971, 12). However, depending on how resources and the state of relationships, how individuals and families distribute their time, money, and energy dictate what we do with our time and who we spend it with.

Labor for Love

The desire to be validated and seen by others, at work or in the family, is normal and natural (Astrachan and McMillan 2003, 6). No matter age, every person needs recognition and validation from their family. They also have a need to figure out who they are independent of their family and other factors in life (Sage-Hayward et al. 2022, 50). More severe than differentiation, there are many reasons why individuals choose, or must, detach themselves from family ties, from indifference to unresolved issues and estrangement (Gibson 2015, 159-168). If not from their family, there are other avenues

for emotional connection and recognition, from social groups to employment (Gibson 2015, 7-11).

In a conversation with a friend, I share a reflection of a perspective myself and close colleagues also share relating to burnout as a result of yearning for recognition in work and family:

> You are invisible in the family structure in a way that you can only be seen externally, so much so that you're burned out. You shine so brightly that you're blind to your family. However, when you go out of the family, you go outside, starved for family and being seen; you then burn out in the workplace in overworking and production. (Johnson 2024)

If unaddressed at a young age, the unmet need to form an emotional connection with a parent can cause distress, misfiring an attachment for connection with labor. For example, lack of recognition or being seen for one's talent and contributions in childhood within the family sphere leaves the emotionally disconnected individual more susceptible to "jump[ing] into adulthood prematurely, getting jobs as soon as they can,..., tolerating exploitation, or staying with a job that takes more than it gives" (Gibson 2015, 11). An economist's study found that "60% of what makes work meaningful to people comes from factors other than money, such as having autonomy, feeling a sense of competence or mastery, and forming connection with others (Lamont 2023, 4). This cooperation can bloom into deeper relationships and trust in work and more frequent touchpoints for connection, despite how fleeting. These touchpoints breed familiarity. When work provides one's need for provision to live and recognition (regardless of how superficial or fleeting it may be) to sustain basic needs, one could question how worthwhile the tradeoff is in investing time in work versus the extended family. When work gives you shared

goals, purpose, and resources, one could ask, “What is the return on investment of time when invested in relationships with family?”

We must understand why labor is essential and investigate what it fulfills for those who participate. In her book, *The Art of Choosing*, Sheena Iyengar discusses the impact of work on wellbeing. Even if a person has a white-collar job, if that employee feels that they don't have any choice within their duties, they experience more health disparities and have even worse outcomes than folks who do manual, physical labor. The lack of choice being removed has dire impacts, including psychological harm and duress (Inyengar 2011, 14). Stress is a large motivator for staying in the workforce. In the Stress in America study, 91% of Gen Z respondents reported experiencing physical or psychological symptoms due to stress. 64% named money/work as a cause of that stress (American Psychological Association 2018).

VII. The Right to Disconnect from Work

An excerpt from an interview with my mother about her time working in 1978 in the transportation industry:

> When I got off that phone, and walked out that door. I left that work behind me. I didn’t think about the people until the next day. Because that was my peace, you know? I always thought that, “Where am I gonna get my peace of mind?” And to me that was very important – to have my peace of mind. Like even though – people can get on your nerves, you know, frustrate you… deal with confrontation... you know? You have to gain your control. You have to realize, you know one thing, nah, I can’t take this with me. At times you get mad, but you can’t take it with you when you leave the job. When you go home. ***Because, I see you more than I see my family.*** I’m not going to *take* that with me. At home. I *can’t* do it. My space is my space. That’s how I felt. That was me (Johnson 2024).

Work is with us in a way that it has never been. According to a recent study, a majority of workers in the United States feel overworked or overwhelmed by their jobs (Secunda 2019, 7). In generations past, employees left their work at their off-site offices. Now, with wireless technology, work is constantly at hand. Paul Secunda, an employment attorney who authored a law journal article on the right to disconnect, argued for introducing the law based on the negative impact of overwork on psychological and physical health. If passed, AB 2751 would be the first law in any state in the U.S. "It's not helping worker productivity when people have no time to rest. It makes things worse" (Truong 2024). In fact, with this digital interference, it was reported that half of Gen Z respondents reported being connected online for ten or more hours a day. More screen time meant less time for connecting with others in person, including families (VeryWell Mind 2023).

Being "ultra-connected" also means having more pressure and expectations with less free time (Secunda 2019, 7). These expectations and pressures can also be connected to the paradox of "at-will employment."

"At-will employment" is fundamental in many employment relationships, particularly in the United States. The principle essentially means that the employer or the employee can terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause, and with or without notice, as long as no employment contract specifies otherwise. Employers can quickly adjust their workforce to meet changing business needs, while employees can leave a job if they find better opportunities (Secunda 2019, 25-27). However, it also means job security may be lower, and employees may feel less loyalty to

their employers (Terkel 1971, 307). It also means that in an unstable job market, employees have a less than consensual working relationship with their employers when work is necessary for survival. In a society where universal income, social safety nets, and job security are non-existent, it is difficult to disconnect from a job in terms of social security and disconnect from work in the modern world, when "one *must* work. Or else" (Terkel 1971, 21).

What forms of connection are lost when time is invested in the workplace? What would our families look like if this connection were lost? Who is to remember us if we are always at work? If we are always at work, who will remember us and how? In the wake of this question, what work can be done to repair time lost?

VII. Building Bridges for Connection with Family

I am not unaware of the irony, paradox, and juxtaposition of my emotions and experiences in work and family. In my observations and conversations, It is interesting to see how workplace dynamics, consciously or not, coincide with family dynamics that play out in the professional world. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, power dynamics related to age, status, and more that play out across American society also play out within families, which can impede the ability to connect across differences (Lamont 2023, 159-160). Within the context of my examination of familial connection, severe limitations apply across familial and working contexts. For one, work and family can both be toxic and inhospitable. Not every person has the desire to connect or maintain relationships with their family for a multitude of reasons, from apathy to abuse (Gibson

2015, 159-167). Those circumstances are to be respected and not pushed, with support from trained professionals if desired. Second, the time, reflection, and resources necessary for such interventions are often reserved for enterprising families who have both the time, resources, and incentives for family harmony, which business success depends on, with help from professionals and advisors, to facilitate connection and healthy communication (Astrachan and McMillan 2003, 47-49). This advantage of shared interest in business and shared assets is a driving force and orienting principle for enterprising families that non-family enterprising families may need to bear in their spare time. With that insight, third, with the knowledge that the majority of Americans work to live, I am aware of the scarcity of time and heavy lift and toil that is asset management of familial relationships and connections that are necessary, require monetary resources to maintain, and are primarily unpaid and unsubsidized (Secunda 2019, 27).

As our generations move forward, what will our organizing principles be as people and as a family? With more generations having access to entry-level access to recent privileges, what will unite the family? Work(ing while pursuing graduate school) is a chasm between me and my ability to connect with my family. In conversations with peers and colleagues, I have observed that the closest form of connection with family is shared history, with near and far touchpoints to see family at weddings or funerals, points of emotional volatility.

In comparing my relationships with coworkers and family members, I recognize there are assumed starting places for building familiarity. Assumedly, a familial relationship is deeper in quality and connection, hence more prioritized due to shared

history and kinship, whereas a working relationship is transactional and superficial. However, where the role-self and roles in family dynamics can be fixed, within working relationships, there is flexibility to exercise one's true self without the burden of shared familial history (Gibson 2015, 145 - 147). Due to shared membership, we must acknowledge that familial relationships may not supersede work or working relationships. Perhaps there may be freedom in approaching non-family members without fixed perspectives of one personhood. The unburdening of roles and responsibilities can create new lenses to relate to our relatives (Astrachan and McMillan 2003, 38). Paradoxically, approaching family with a level of curiosity as one would a stranger can be the impetus for sparking new connections, perspectives, and deeper relationships with family members within and across generations.

Integrating an oral history practice within the family could be a solution for families across generations to build bridges back to each other in an increasingly technological and busy world. Oral history coupled with curiosity, self-awareness, commitment to (un)learning, and systems to stay in touch can create more curiosity, intention, and opportunities for families to orient towards a shared goal of stewarding memory and history while exercising skills often reserved for the workplace. Though difficult, it is worth trying to create low-effort, frequent touchpoints and systems that can be shared and sustained with meager maintenance. It also promotes opportunities for shared experiences, like collaboration and learning.

VIII. Conclusion

Who remembers me? How close are we? Who holds my memories? Though the currency of time is money, the currency of connection is memory. Much of our culture and memories have been inherited without the awareness of the labor necessary to facilitate their creation. Creating opportunities for connection, from the monumental, like honoring new life, to the mundane, like dinners and phone calls, have the opportunity to build relationships. However, with curiosity, systems, and oral histories, the opportunity to expand the depth of those relationships and steward memories across generations benefits the entire family system. Oral history is another avenue for curiosity to connect with family in substantive ways that are not superficial. Oral histories provide family members across generational ties and lines of difference opportunities to engage in compassion, understand new perspectives, and to see and be seen or recognized by their family group (Sage-Hayward et al. 2022, 28-29). Hopefully, these shifts within the family will expand into work, society, and vice versa, with a more cogent, curious, and compassionate society that can respectfully appreciate, engage, and relate to people similar and different from themselves.

The environment for emotional connection and proximity must also be tended to with support from those prepared and qualified. Those interested in strengthening connections among family members of all generations should take inventory of their desire to create stronger bonds within and across their generations, starting with themselves. To mend emotional disconnection, families should also examine their desire and willingness to understand their emotional intelligence, take inventory of their internal

relationships, and understand their behavior's impact on the family system (Astrachan and McMillan 2003, 28-33).

Though currently, workers resort to using their marginally free weekend time to plan, organize, and implement a range of family cultural memory-making activities, this is not enough.

As a country that prioritizes family values, we need more space in our weeks and policies in our employment systems that go beyond traditional paid time off and familial leave to allocate dedicated time to spend with family to steward our cultural assets. This project is not meant to provide an exhaustive list of solutions to remedy dis/connection or the circumstances that create it. It is an invitation to slow down and assess the status of labor of and for love, which can quickly go unexamined in a rushing and increasingly digital world with decreased in-person contact. It is also an invitation to ask, "What is at stake, for oneself, one's family, or family culture and history, if disconnection is left untended?" This examination is essential for members of generation groups who have depended on the previous generation or few family members to steward culture, family history, and connection. Older generations should broaden their means of connection by being flexible with meeting younger generations where they are in life while also monitoring and seeking out family members of younger generations to provide inroads for support in work and the family system (Sage-Hayward et al. 2022, 194-201).

Looking closely at how much time we spend working can tell us much about our lives and societies. We need money to live. We also need love. To remember that we are loved, we need our stories. This is the work that is worth doing. Stories are our wealth.

Stories are what we have from those who are passed on (Iyengar 2011, 17). We must be proactive to sustain our relationships and culture for generations. As is done in the workplace, it is worth examining ourselves and our behavior to ensure our families are inclusive environments for present and future generations that members have pride in stewarding and staying connected to. As raised previously, the family must understand the desire for younger generations to be seen and understood in the modern world rather than merely seen and not heard within the family (Lamont 2023, 160). The ability to adapt to different displays of love and deeper dives beyond superficial activities and conversations can ensure the longevity and quality of relationships in families.

"It's up to the living to keep in touch with the dead, Eli." (Dash 1991)

Tragedies, life events, and more can cause ruptures in the public domain that shock us back to our families. Death, by its sudden nature, organizes the family to gather quickly. However, we do not need to wait until death to appreciate and express our gratitude for our family members. In mundane and magical ways, we can keep in touch with our families while they are here. This effort is not to be done alone nor assumed to be inherent. It requires a shared goal, self-reflection, systems thinking, and intentionality. In my case and others, I hope this labor of love is regarded as both an inheritance and an invitation to do generational work that is perpetually worthwhile.

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