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## Family of origin influence on workplace dynamics: a qualitative study

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**FAMILY OF ORIGIN INFLUENCE ON WORKPLACE  
DYNAMICS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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**A Research Project  
Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graziadio Business School  
Pepperdine University**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
In  
Organization Development**

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**by  
Megan E. Malave**

**August 2023**

This research project, completed by

MEGAN E. MALAVE

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2023

Faculty Committee

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Committee Chair, Darren Good, Ph. D.

---

Committee Member, Miriam Lacey, Ph. D.

---

Deborah Crown, Ph.D., Dean  
The Graziadio Business School

## **Abstract**

This study delves into the intricate interplay between Family of Origin influences and the professional practice of Organizational Development (OD) practitioners. Rooted in the recognition that Family of Origin experiences significantly shape individual perspectives and behaviors, this research investigates how OD practitioners leverage this understanding to navigate complex workplace dynamics. Grounded in the Use of Self framework, which emphasizes intentional utilization of one's complete being for enhanced effectiveness, this study explores the multifaceted connections between Family of Origin dynamics and common relational aspects such as leadership, influence, power, conflict, and belonging. Through qualitative analysis of OD practitioners' perspectives, the study seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which familial patterns impact their work and strategies for managing these influences. By achieving its objectives of comprehending the Family of Origin's role, this research contributes to both scholarly discourse and practical applications in leadership development and organizational effectiveness.

*Keywords:* family of origin, organizational development, use of self, leadership development, organizational effectiveness

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate my work to my grandfathers, Jim Whitlow and Gary Weed, who did not see me finish this work but who loved, supported, and enabled me throughout my life.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

“There you are, negotiating with your boss, when suddenly your five-year-old self shoves the adult you aside and reacts. Or, when meeting with your peers, you find yourself behaving as you so often did in sibling free-for-alls”  
(Ancona & Perkins, 2022, p. 95).

The term Family of Origin exemplifies one of the most intimate and longest relationships in a person’s life. This relationship shapes how one develops into adulthood and their outlook on life (Chambers, 2009; Framo, 1992; Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991). As such, “Patterns of interaction to which people become accustomed in their families of origin often play largely unacknowledged roles in their lives at work and can contribute to unwanted pressures and stress on the job” (Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991, p. 1). As suggested in the literature, familial dynamics largely shape how a person interprets and interacts with the world around them. *Family of Origin* experiences are identified as the transgenerational forces that frequently influence marital, parenting, and other intimate relationships (Framo, 1970, 1992). The study of familial dynamics has notably impacted mental health, self-awareness, behavioral changes, and personal relationships of individuals. The examination of the Family of Origin has been applied heavily to intrapersonal work, therapy work with couples, and with helping professionals such as therapists, psychologists, and physicians (Johnson et al., 1992; McDaniel & Landau-Stanton, 1991; Mengel, 1987; Rovers et al., 2000).

*Use of Self*, also known as Self as Instrument, refers to intentionally using one's complete being to enhance effectiveness in various roles, particularly in the realm of change agents and helping professions. It involves self-awareness, perceptions, choices, and actions, and is seen as a crucial aspect of personal and professional development (Cheung-Judge, 2001; Goodwin & Stravos, 2021; Jamieson et al., 2010; Rainey & Jones,



2014; Schwind et al., 2014; Seashore et al, 2004). While the Use of Self frameworks emphasizes overall self-work, there is little focus in the literature on Family of Origin influences for OD practitioners. This research looks to explore this gap in the literature.

In the field of Organizational Development (OD), practitioners utilize an integrated whole-person approach emphasizing the use of one's self as an instrument in the practice. This involves not only revealing a more personal self but requires reflection on personal experiences and the lens they view the world to integrate and enhance their professional lives. The idea of reaching further into the underpinnings of one's core is rooted in early childhood familial dynamics: how one developed to be, how one was raised to view the world, familial behavior patterns, and how one understands and reframes childhood trauma. These dynamics are frequently mentioned in terms of the Self as Instrument framework, but there is less exploration of how OD practitioners manage these dynamics in their practice. "Shedding light on these veiled pieces of ourselves is significant; whether we are aware of them or not, they influence our present thinking and actions, thus impacting our future ways of being and doing" (Schwind et al., 2012, p. 226). There is a heavy focus on the Use of Self theory in the OD Profession, but to date there has not been a focus on one of the biggest influences in a person's life for the profession: the Family of Origin.

As OD practitioners integrate with their clients and in the workplace, it can be assumed Family of Origin dynamics may have an impact on their practice. The systematic transference of familial patterns of behavior raises the question: in what ways does the family of origin influence behavior, patterns, or situational outcomes in their work with clients? Psychologists, family systems theorists, and scholars have examined

patterns of Family of Origin transgenerational patterns in people's career choices, effectiveness, and behavior at work (Larson & Wilson, 1998; Mengel, 1987; Philpot, 2004). There has been little exploration of Family of Origin dynamics on individuals who work in managing conflict and relationships directly. OD Professionals have explicit roles in managing relationships and conflict, leading, coaching, and empowering others in the workplace. They often utilize the Self as Instrument or Use of Self framework as a necessary competency for practice (Rainey & Jones, 2014). This research sets out to examine the perceived complexity of Family of Origin's influence on work behavior and patterns from OD Professionals' perspectives. What does an in-depth exploration of the role of Family of Origin influences reveal about its practical manifestations from an OD practitioners' perspective?

The purpose of this study is to explore how OD practitioners, who understand how their Family of Origin affects their behavior in workplace interactions, use this knowledge to inform their approach to managing common relational dynamics like leadership, influence, power, conflict, and belonging. The objectives of this study are to understand the perceived influence that Family of Origin has on OD practitioners at work, identify key learnings from practitioners on how they manage these factors in their organizations through the Use of Self Framework, and to make the case that OD practitioners should focus on their Family of Origin influences as part of their Use of Self development. These implications could be a new avenue to explore the effectiveness of leaders in organizations at every level; this means there could be implications for scholarship, practice, education, and leadership development.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

OD professionals are a group of informed employees or consultants in the workforce who, as a helping profession, utilize Self as Instrument theory to develop an awareness of self and execute their practice (Rainey & Jones, 2014). As OD Professionals encounter organizational dynamics, the Self as Instrument theory enables them to respond appreciatively and positively, looking for optimistic possibilities in interpersonal relationships, conflict, and other dynamics that are ever-present in organizations (Godwin & Stavros, 2021). This research sets out to examine what ways Family of Origin work informs how OD practitioners approach organizational or workplace dynamics.

In the next sections, additional context regarding the informed population chosen for this study is provided, followed by a literature review on Self as Instrument and Use of Self, a definition of the Family of Origin, and a review of the existing literature directly related to the current study. This research focuses on theory and previous studies that examine Family of Origin dynamics with attention to career related matters. The research is rooted in Family Systems Theory, but does not explore all aspects of the theory. It is not the role of this research to define all concepts; however, the following outline draws on the most useful ideas that are relevant to the discussion of specific applications. The research does not seek to understand how or why Family of Origin may influence individuals at work but rather what those individuals can do to mitigate the risk of unsuccessful outcomes and increase success.

## **The Informed Population: Organizational Development Practitioner**

The field of OD serves to diagnose systems, develop interventions, and aid in the implementation of change processes with a deep understanding of applied behavioral sciences. It is this application of behavioral sciences that aids in the human-centric design of organizations for effectiveness and results. Since OD practitioners hold explicit roles in dealing with organizational behavior, individual psychology, group dynamics, and cultural perspectives, practitioners are held to a high standard of ethics and values like those in the medical field. "The cultural values that guide OD practice in the United States... include a tolerance for ambiguity, equality among people, individuality, and high achievement motives" (Cummings & Worley, 2019, p. 35). As such, it is crucial for them to possess a profound understanding of their own "values, feelings, and purposes" (Cummings & Worley, 2019, p. 47). The OD profession is steeped in the practice of helping relationships (Rainey & Jones, 2014; Schwind et al, 2012), like teachers, nurses, or therapists. This profound understanding of self aids in their practice as change agents and people leaders.

Many OD practitioners do training in intrapersonal and interpersonal work to establish a lens and perspective that aligns with this profession in which it is key to know oneself deeply. These practitioners are responsible for diagnosing organizational issues, processing intricate information, and leading change, all while practicing self-mastery to behave responsibly in a helping relationship (Cummings & Worley, 2019). The self-mastery that these practitioners employ is derived from the concept of Use of Self. Narrowly defined, "Use of self is the conscious use of one's whole being in the intentional execution of one's role for effectiveness in whatever the current situation is

presenting” (Jamieson et al., 2010, p. 5). The Use of Self, or Self as Instrument, consistently needs maintenance which may consist of reflection, self-assessment, and recalibration. OD practitioners spend a great deal of time sensemaking big strategy problems and events that alter the path of an organization. They deal with how to overcome poor culture and other challenges faced by organizations throughout their careers. To tackle this, a wise OD practitioner will “...become more aware of and intentionally evolve [their] personal way of operating so that [they] can explore, elevate, and extend strengths and create possibilities in the VUCA [volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous] times...” (Godwin & Stavros, 2021, p. 19). This continued evolution of self includes Family of Origin sensemaking which is directly related to this study.

The nature of OD work makes this informed population an ideal subset of the population to learn from. Little research exists on how, specifically, the Family of Origin work of an OD practitioner might shape the approach of that practitioner given their specific self-work in the Use of Self theory.

### **Use of Self**

The theory of “Use of self is the conscious use of one’s whole being in the intentional execution of one’s role for effectiveness in whatever the current situation is presenting” (Jamieson et al., 2010, p. 5). This theory is a core competency in the role of a change agent and in the practice of the helping professions, such as OD practitioners (Goodwin & Stravos, 2021; Jamieson et al., 2010; Rainey & Jones, 2014; Schwind et al., 2014; Seashore et al, 2004). Use of Self in simple terms is self-awareness, perceptions, choices, and actions (Seashore et al., 2004). Starting with awareness, enacting Use of Self

requires one to sense and interpret their intentional and unconscious actions (Jamieson et al., 2010). Goodwin and Stravos (2021) describe this phenomenon as

Our personal OS [operating system] creat[ing] the framework for how we take in information from the world around us, process that information, and interact and respond to others and the situations we face. It is our personal OS that impacts how we apply ourselves, as well as our OD methods and tools as change agents with others. (p. 21)

The Seashore Use of Self Model (Seashore et al., 2004) acts as a crucial link between our individual potential and the dynamic nature of the world. It begins by delving into our conscious understanding of ourselves, commonly known as the ego, alongside the unconscious or unnoticed aspects of our being that often steer our actions. This comprehensive self-awareness is then intertwined with our perceptions of the world's needs, enabling us to select a strategy and a role that effectively channel our energy toward driving change. The main emphasis lies in our ability to transform our personal reality, as we perceive it, and proactively make an impact, thereby leaving behind a meaningful legacy that others can appreciate.

The Managing Use of Self Framework (Jamieson et al., 2010) takes a similar approach. It is structured around three primary competencies and three progressive levels of proficiency. Creating a foundational framework for effectively harnessing one's own abilities is a crucial step that enables a deeper understanding and practical application of the concept through tangible behaviors and skill development at various stages. This framework advances the existing body of knowledge by:

- integrating and building upon previous insights from both internal and external sources, encompassing the broader field of OD;
- emphasizing the significance of taking action, which has often been overshadowed by an excessive focus on self-awareness;
- pinpointing specific competencies that practitioners can actively cultivate; and
- incorporating developmental levels to facilitate discussions on continuous improvement and growth in utilizing one's own potential.

The human experience encompasses one's past, present, and potential future. Self-reflection enables individuals to gain awareness of their connections with themselves, others, and the world (Schwind et al., 2012). It is common to act automatically based on ingrained patterns that may not align with the current situation. Recognizing our control over choices allows us to take responsibility for our decisions. Conversely, when we are unaware of our choices, we tend to rely on familiar patterns or habits (Rainey & Jones, 2014). Use of Self as an instrument is an ongoing journey that can never be completed, but not engaging in the self-work comes at a high personal and professional cost (Cheung-Judge, 2001). While the Use of Self frameworks emphasizes overall self-work, there is little focus in the literature on Family of Origin influences for OD practitioners.

### **Family of Origin Definition**

The Family of Origin exemplifies one of the most powerful relationships in a person's life. The Family of Origin is defined as the family with which one was raised and does not necessarily mean the individual's biological family (American Psychological Association, 2023). Traditionally, the Family of Origin is the first and

longest intimate relationship in a person's life. "The family of origin is... [where] a person has his/her beginnings physiologically, psychically, and emotionally. The impact of these primordial roots is deep and pervasive" (Hovestadt et al., 1985, p. 1).

Familial dynamics (i.e., patterns, roles, power, conflict) largely shape development and how a child interprets and interacts with the world around them. Parents and relatives close to a child unconsciously align the child's development to meet their needs by systematically encouraging behavior that they find satisfactory. Interaction among the family may not always be agreeable, but children find comfort and some safety in the consistency of these patterns (Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991). The Family of Origin possesses varying levels of functional and dysfunctional patterned behavior ranging in tolerance of closeness, distance, and anxiety (Lustig & Xu, 2018). A child adapts to challenging, complex patterned behavior by developing defense mechanisms that protect the child and are typically subconscious so they go unrecognized. The lack of awareness around these adaptations allows the child to survive and is subsequently carried into adulthood whether or not they are still serving the individual.

Patterns of behavior learned from the Family of Origin tend to emerge in adult relationships. "Current marital, parenting, and personal difficulties are viewed, basically, as reparative efforts to correct, master, defend against, live through, or cancel out old, disturbing relationship paradigms from the original family" (Framo, 1992, p. 2). Family Systems Theories set out to better understand the role of the Family of Origin throughout an individual's lifetime, which includes making sense of these patterns.



## **Family Systems Theory: Bowen**

Many family systems theories have developed during the last century, including theories from Bowen, Kerr, Fogarty, Guerin, Friedman, Framo, Nagy, Paul, Williamson, and others (McDaniel & Landau-Stanton, 1991, p. 465). In applying family systems theory to organizations, the premise suggests that organizational systems can be effectively analyzed using the principles of family systems theory, implying a significant alignment between the functioning of these two systems (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006). Bowen Family System theory has been successfully applied to anxious work systems by OD practitioners (Kott, 2014). Although it is not appropriate to always suggest that organizations operate like families do, in certain aspects, they are very similar and share common functions and themes making the implicit assumption that organizations can be viewed from a family systems lens (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006).

Bowen's fascination with the family system originated from his intrigue with the psychological symbiosis between schizophrenic patients and their parents, which he encountered during the NIHM Family Study project (Butler, 2013). From his research, Bowen developed a framework that describes and predicts emotional systems based on the original family system. In this system, everyone holds a functioning role that guides their interpretation, understanding, and reactions to the world around them (Chambers, 2009; Kott, 2014; Rovers et al., 2000; Weinberg & Maukach, 1999). While Bowen was not the first to conceptualize the family as an emotional unit, his work was the first observational research (Butler, 2013). This view of the family system as an emotional unit situates individuals within a web of multigenerational relationships. Emotionally charged, patterned behavior can arise when individuals interact within this family unit,

and such behavior can extend beyond the unit as individuals systematically carry their past experiences into the present. For this reason, the Bowen Family Systems model can be helpful when observing organizations.

Bowen expanded his research to the work of therapists as a theory and practical understanding of their unique organizational dynamics. According to Bowen, an individual’s ability to remain neutral and act consistently depends on their ability to maintain objectivity in an emotionally charged environment. Family of Origin dynamics, including those described in Table 1 (Chambers, 2009; Kott, 2014, Mengel & Mauksch, 1989, Rovers et al, 2000), all play a role in how an individual engages with the present world and in their present relationships.

**Table 1**

***Bowen Theory Family Dynamics***

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Differentiation of Self	Describes an individual's ability to maintain a healthy level of autonomy and emotional independence within the context of their relationships and family system.
Emotional Fusion	A state where one becomes overly enmeshed with others emotionally.
Triangulation	Involvement of a third person to address conflict or tension between two other people.
Projection	Attributing unresolved problems, including thoughts, feelings, and characteristics, onto an uninvolved person.
Emotional Processes	Patterns of emotional functioning within a family used to regulate intensity.
Multigenerational Transmission	Intergenerational transmission of emotional processes.
Emotional Cutoff	Distancing or separating from a system where unresolved emotional issues exist.

As an example, if an individual becomes fused with their current system or cannot differentiate themselves from the system, they will be less effective (Mengel, 1987).

Differentiation of self within the context of relationships breeds personal autonomy that enables individuals to be more successful in life.

In Kott's (2014) application of Bowen's theory to work systems, Bowen's theory is described as the emphasis on a biological sensitivity that human beings have to each other and the focus "on managing self, being clear about one's own beliefs and values, and avoiding reactivity while remaining responsive" (p. 76). Building from this foundation of Bowen's theory, this research examines the complexity of how, by differentiating one's self, individuals in the workplace can utilize practical applications from an informed group to become more successful in an organization.

### **Family of Origin Influence**

Identified as transgenerational forces, Family of Origin experiences frequently influence marital, parenting, and other intimate relationships (Framo, 1970, 1992). Research studies have shown that the family system consciously or unconsciously influences an individual's behavior and emotional stability, as evidenced by how these dynamics repeat themselves and play out throughout one's lifetime (Framo, 1992; Kott, 2014; Larson & Wilson, 1998; Lustig & Xu, 2018; Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991). The research on Family of Origin influence is extensively studied in the context of individual and family therapy. For example, the intergenerational family theorist and therapist "[Donald] Williamson remarked that 'relatively few people are aware of how they continue to be influenced and controlled in their behavior by the unachieved goals and the unresolved problems of the parental and the grandparental generations'" (Hovestadt

et al., 1985, p. 1). Lafair (2009) writes that Family Systems Theory offers clear reasoning as to why family patterns tend to come to the surface in the most inopportune times: this is one's most primitive and ingrained ways of being in the world. The Family of Origin influences our preconceived notions about others and guides our decision-making in life. Current relationships and personal difficulties are reparative efforts to correct patterns from the original family (Framo, 1992).

Bowen's theory states that a person's ability to maintain objectivity in emotionally charged situations is dependent on how well they can differentiate from their Family of Origin. Objective effectiveness, in any relationship but specifically in helping professions, depends on the degree of differentiation from one's family (Mengel, 1987). Family systems theory has incited an interest in how these transgenerational forces from the Family of Origin influence everyday life.

### **Family of Origin Influence: Work Life**

Philpot (2004) conducted research attempting to understand the relationship between individuals' interpersonal patterns learned from their Family of Origin and the patterns replicated in their work life. Philpot (2004) utilized Murray Bowen's Family Systems theory to understand the relationship between childhood family dynamics and work patterns. The current study builds on Philpot's work, which identified several key themes derived from interviews with 10 white women. First, Philpot (2004) noticed that the participants confirmed it is their belief that Family of Origin patterns are regenerated in other relationships throughout life and in work. Participants also confirmed that they behave differently with relationships in their family than they do with others at work. Philpot (2004) notes that the participants also projected familial relationship patterns onto

work authority figures most frequently. Lastly, most of the participants had relatively high correspondence between methods of handling conflict in their Family of Origin and at work. They also tended to utilize avoidance and minimization as tactics to deal with conflict in the workplace.

Similarly, individuals adopt roles within their work environment that mirror those from their Family of Origin, such as parent-child, sibling, and less conspicuous roles, initially formed during early life experiences. The roles played in the Family of Origin that maintained stability and comfort can disrupt the present day work system when conflict arises. The patterned way of thinking and reacting stemming behavior can naturally arise leading to ineffectiveness and even cause damage to teams and the system (Lafair, 2009).

### **Family of Origin Influence: Career Choices**

Examining college students entering the workforce, several studies in the 1990s focused on linking Family of Origin experiences to early career thoughts. Larson and Wilson (1998) tested Bowenian theory by studying 1,006 college students and determined Family of Origin dynamics can have a direct impact on career decisions and indecisions. With questionnaires, Larson and Wilson (1998) determined that evidence of fusion and intimidation dynamics in the Family of Origin are correlated to career decision-making problems for young adults. The family systems perspective used emphasized the emotional and interactional patterns of the family in decision-making later in life. Dysfunctional family processes can result in chronic anxiety for an individual, which can negatively impact decision-making processes long term, specifically as it relates to career decisions. Based on the evidence, the authors call for a

Bowenian Family Systems perspective in career counseling for young adults (Larson & Wilson, 1998).

Lustig and Xu (2018) investigated links between students' Family of Origin cohesion and adaptability to dysfunctional career thoughts. They surveyed 269 volunteer college students in the Southeastern United States, utilizing the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale IV (FACES-IV) and the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI) to test their hypothesis. The FACES-IV measures the family dimensions of cohesion and adaptability, where higher levels of family cohesion and adaptability are considered healthier. The CTI measures dysfunctional career thoughts, defined as one's attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and strategies related to career problem solving and decision making. The results indicated that (a) higher levels of family cohesion resulted in lower levels of decision-making confusion, commitment anxiety, and external conflict; (b) higher levels of family adaptability resulted in lower levels of external conflict; and (c) age and family income are significantly related to decision making confusion and commitment anxiety in young adults (Lustig & Xu, 2018).

### **Family of Origin Influence: Career Development**

Family of Origin work in psychologist training has been studied as individuals working in this field deal directly with Family of Origin issues in their patients' treatment. There is a salient need to understand how Family of Origin transference and influence may show up in the therapist's work. McDaniel and Landau-Stanton (1991) call for family therapy skills training and Family of Origin work to develop the self of the therapist in their integrative training approach. They identified that family therapists tended to have skill deficiencies in areas that reflect their Family of Origin issues. They

found that the transgenerational Family of Origin issues needed to be addressed when skills training failed and proposed that exploration of their personal, familial experiences deepened the understanding and knowledge of the family therapist trainees. The reasoning behind this research was to support psychologists in their desire to maintain healthy boundaries with clients and avoid becoming enmeshed in their clients' lives through scenarios of projection and triangulation.

Johnson et al. (1992) studied the relationship between one's Family of Origin dynamics and a psychologist's orientation. Psychologists were surveyed to determine if their Family of Origin experiences had a statistically significant relationship to their theoretical orientation in the field. The study showed relevant data to support the hypothesis. These studies show that one's Family of Origin influences and informs, consciously or subconsciously, psychologists' and therapists' orientation and effectiveness in their chosen profession.

### **Family of Origin Influence: Work Functioning**

Mengel (1987) conducted a study of systematic variables to determine if Family of Origin issues and therapeutic effectiveness in physicians are linked. Mengel interviewed five participants, asking them to describe a situation where the physician felt ineffective in their practice, followed by a discussion of their Family of Origin. Mengel then helped the participating physician develop a genogram of their Family of Origin, postulating links between their origin and work. He hypothesized that objectivity and neutrality are required to be effective as a physician; therefore, if a physician's Family of Origin experiences were salient or were their Family of Origin characteristics fused with the patient's system, the physician became ineffective by losing neutrality. Mengel cited

the countertransference literature and Object Relations Theory as emerging patterns.

While the study aimed to link variables contributing to ineffectiveness, Mengel (1987) called for additional research in the future.

Mengel and Mauksch (1989) developed the outline for an educational tool to bring awareness of Family of Origin experiences to therapeutic providers to decrease patients, decrease unhealthy patient relationships, and improve physician effectiveness. Mengel coined the phrase “disarming the family ghost” as part of a workshop experience in which physician participation in the workshop provided a short-term educational solution to surface awareness of potential Family of Origin problems (Mengel & Mauksch, 1989). While the workshop only raises surface-level issues, this tool highlights the benefit of awareness of Family of Origin issues to counterbalance challenges an individual may experience in life and, in this case, at work.

Rovers et al. (2000) examined the efficacy of the Family of Origin workshop and assessed participant experiences using a pre and post Personal Authority in Family System Questionnaire. The results indicated that the workshop format had a beneficial impact on participants' well-being and perception of personal authority. Through the process of individuation within the workshop, participants were able to attain personal authority from their Family of Origin.

Building from Mengel (1987), Weinberg and Mauksch (1991) examined Family of Origin Influence in the workplace. They state that relationships, structure, and culture of the organization can elicit responses from employees like those experienced in their Family of Origin. While not all family patterns are negative, patterns that limit behavioral options can be problematic, especially in the context of work, and Mengel's (1987)



methodology is recommended. The proponents advocate for identifying patterns and employing suitable strategies to mitigate them, as it holds value in 1) recognizing and altering patterns as needed, 2) acknowledging the influence of Family of Origin issues on heightened emotional reactions, and 3) utilizing strategies to reduce unfavorable responses to Family of Origin dynamics that arise. They concluded that Family of Origin influence in work systems occurs through systemic transference and as part of natural human development. These exercises lead to greater awareness and fulfillment at work.

Weinberg and Mauksch (1991) posit several factors affect interpersonal relationships stemming from family of origin dynamics: (a) recurring actions typically leading to predictable reactions, (b) comfort in familial dynamics, and (c) a general lack of awareness around these patterns. Given that Family of Origin influences are present in the workplace, awareness of these dynamics may increase an individual's success within an organization as they navigate the intricacies of group psychology.

### **Awareness of Family of Origin Dynamics**

Most of the studies discussed thus far have highlighted two key findings: (a) an individual's Family of Origin significantly influences their chosen career, and (b) being aware of Family of Origin dynamics positively impacts career effectiveness. For instance, educational interventions aimed at raising awareness of Family of Origin issues have been found to improve the quality of patient care. Mengel and Mauksch (1989) observed that helping healthcare providers become aware of their own Family of Origin dynamics can minimize emotional fusion and enhance their effectiveness in handling challenging cases. Such interventions can lead to increased self-awareness, reduced frustration with difficult patients, and decreased contribution to unhealthy patient systems.

The Family of Origin Workshop is one approach that facilitates the process of awareness and evaluation. Hovestadt et al. (1985) emphasized the importance of individuals' perceptions of their Family of Origin experiences, suggesting that perceived reality holds significant influence. Additionally, they highlighted that many individuals remain unaware of how the unresolved issues and unachieved goals of previous generations continue to impact their behavior.

Creating awareness in the workplace and drawing parallels between Family of Origin dynamics and work patterns can lead to valuable insights. Chambers (2009) discussed how utilizing the Family of Origin theory in a clinical context prompted self-reflection within their own work environment. By recognizing repeated behavioral patterns and applying theory to manage anxiety and avoid potential pitfalls, they were able to navigate a new work role successfully.

In summary, the research supports the idea that increased awareness of one's Family of Origin dynamics can have a positive impact on career and effectiveness. By cultivating awareness, individuals can recognize familial patterns that manifest as intensified reactions in current circumstances, allowing for the opportunity to modify or address them through strategic approaches, thereby mitigating unfavorable responses stemming from Family of Origin dynamics. By understanding these dynamics and their influence on behavior, individuals can ultimately foster personal and professional growth.

## **Conclusion**

This study aims to harness the wisdom of those who have already done the Family of Origin sensemaking and applied this wisdom to organizational dynamics they encounter. As the literature in family systems theory states, Family of Origin experiences

continue to influence individuals for the rest of their lives. By applying Bowen's family systems theory to understanding organizations, there is an implicit assumption that organizations and families share similar characteristics as social constructs (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006). The research also confirms this assumption:

Family and work organization systems have common functions and themes...  
[and] there appears to be some value in exploring how family therapy interventions can be used to supplement or enhance existing organizational development approaches for improving organizational effectiveness.

(Brotheridge & Lee, 2006, p. 156)

As Chambers (2009) states, the steps to applying Bowen's theory to organizational issues include 1) attending to self, 2) monitoring self and which people, issues, and situations preoccupy the mind and why, 3) monitoring which people, issues, or situations are avoided, and 4) operationalize self-monitoring. The research in this study aims to understand how to harness the awareness and operationalize that to apply these ideas to workplace dynamics.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **Research Purpose**

This study aimed to gather data from OD practitioners to address the question: “What does an in-depth exploration of the role of Family of Origin influences reveal about its practical manifestations from an OD practitioners' perspective?” More specifically, this research sets out to examine the perceived complexity of Family of Origin influence on work behavior and patterns from an OD perspective. This chapter describes the research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

### **Research Design**

A constructivist worldview was utilized in defining an approach that allowed participants to construct meaning or sense make their own life experiences through open-ended, conversational like questions that were intentionally both broad and general (Creswell, 2003). A qualitative research design was selected for this study since this design allows data to emerge from participants and, given the research was seeking to explore participants' subjective experiences, this method was most appropriate (Creswell, 2003). Little research has examined how an individual's Family of Origin influences their interactions in their organization. While extensive research exists identifying ways that the Family of Origin is instrumental to intrapersonal work and interpersonal work with couples (Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991), less attention has been given to applying this to organizational dynamics in professional settings. Therefore, this study was conducted as phenomenological research seeking to describe the participant's lived experiences and uncover the essence of the culmination of these experiences (Creswell, 2003). The qualitative research method of interviewing probed into participant Family of Origin

experiences and their awareness of the influence these experiences have on their approach to managing workplace dynamics.

### **Participants**

Eighty potential research participants were contacted, and 15 were interested and met the qualifications for participation. Participants were required to be members of an informed population on the subject and meet several additional criteria, including:

- Completed a post-graduate program in OD in a program that had an explicit component of the curriculum that addressed the Use of Self.
- Have at least 3 years of full-time work experience in an OD capacity.

The rationale for only allowing participants belonging to the informed population was to minimize the risk to participants with the understanding that graduate students have explored these topics during their education in the study of the Use of Self and Self as Instrument. Additionally, this group was specifically identified as OD practitioners who have explicit roles in managing relationships and conflict, leading, coaching, and empowering others in organizations.

There were 15 participants interviewed for this study: 10 women, 4 men, and 1 transgender man. They were both internal and external OD Practitioners. They were geographically located within the United States. Industries in which participants worked included technology, finance, not-for-profit, OD, media, renewable energy, and transportation.

### **Interview Protocol**

An interview protocol was developed in accordance with the phenomenological research approach (Creswell, 2003). The questions were specifically left open-ended and

open to interpretation as the participants made sense of their own experiences. Workplace dynamics identified for this study were chosen based on the common nature of an individual's typical experience in the workplace. Interview questions were revised by two experts in the field of OD and modifications were made to align better with my approach to the design methodology. Qualitative questions were asked in a semi-structured interview format to obtain facts about the participants' Family of Origin and workplace dynamics. The interview questions are presented in Table 2:

**Table 2**  
***Interview Protocol***

<b>Workplace Dynamic</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Leadership and Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How does your awareness of your Family of Origin experiences inform how you approach leadership and influence in the workplace?</li> <li>● Can you give an example?</li> <li>● Are there instances where your Family of Origin experiences has gotten in the way?</li> </ul>
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How does your awareness of your Family of Origin experiences inform how you approach power in the workplace?</li> <li>● Can you give an example?</li> <li>● Are there instances where your Family of Origin experiences has gotten in the way?</li> </ul>
Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How does your awareness of your Family of Origin experiences inform how you approach conflict in the workplace?</li> <li>● Can you give an example?</li> <li>● Are there instances where your Family of Origin experiences has gotten in the way?</li> <li>● Are there any specific roles you have played in conflict in your Family of Origin? How are those similar or different from the roles you play in conflict in the workplace?</li> </ul>
Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How does your awareness of your Family of Origin experiences inform how you approach dynamics around belonging in the workplace in terms of yourself and others?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Can you give an example?</li> <li>● Are there instances where your Family of Origin experiences has gotten in the way?</li> </ul>
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**Procedure**

Participants were initially contacted via a private message on the professional networking site, LinkedIn. Eligible participants were identified through the researcher’s professional network, referrals, and research on LinkedIn. The researcher collected qualitative data through virtual interviews conducted over Zoom, followed by an online questionnaire. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was recorded so that the interviewer could focus on the conversation and listen intentionally. The interviewer also utilized a transcription service and periodically logged handwritten notes to supplement the recording.

Every interview started with a brief introduction to the research purpose and reviewed the workplace dynamics that would be focused on during the course of the interview. The participants were reminded of their rights during the interview and their commitment to intentional confidentiality.

Next, the interviewer began the interview by following the interview protocol. In instances where appropriate, the interviewer asked probing questions to gain additional insights into the participant’s lived experience. At the end of the interview, the participant was thanked and asked to complete a short demographic survey utilizing a participant code generated specifically for each individual.

**Data Analysis**

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and notes kept to review the data gathered during each interview. The raw data was organized to generate patterns and categories using inductive reasoning (Creswell, 2003). During this reflective process, the researcher

reflected on the data to garner the essence of the collective to begin the process of coding the data. A coding matrix was generated using computer-assisted qualitative data software. Once the data was coded, the data was analyzed using deductive analysis to generate themes.



## Chapter 4: Results

The objective of this study was to collect data from OD practitioners to investigate the practical implications of Family of Origin influences. The main question guiding this research is: “What insights can be gained from OD practitioners regarding the practical manifestations of Family of Origin influences?” Specifically, this study aims to explore the perceived intricacies of how Family of Origin impacts work behavior and patterns, as viewed from the perspective of OD Professionals. This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the qualitative content gathered during the interviews. Key themes from the analysis are presented along with data that emerged supporting the themes.

### **Leadership and Influence**

The first question asked participants how their awareness of their Family of Origin experiences informs how they approach leadership and influence in the workplace. Several themes emerged from the analysis of this question. The meta theme revealed that most participants ( $n = 7$ ) only identified a challenging experience or an experience they have actively worked to change from their Family of Origin, which carried over into their present-day leadership style. Additionally, fewer participants ( $n = 5$ ) identified both challenging and positive impacts of Family of Origin leadership. Moreover, only a few participants ( $n = 3$ ) identified only positive experiences from their Family of Origin. Additionally, themes of authenticity as a leader, hierarchical structures, gender preference in leadership, and decision-making were identified.

To illustrate the meta themes which describe the types of challenges and positive attributes that were identified as transgenerational influences on leadership style, included quotes demonstrate exemplary ideas presented by participants. The salient

connections and examples provided by participants were generally raised because of their awareness gained through Family of Origin sensemaking through a variety of avenues. To highlight the theme that participants shared challenging experiences learned from their Family of Origin, one participant shared, "My father has a narcissistic personality disorder. So I have a very high level of influence naturally, but it's also something I struggle with insecurity about. I have a deep-seated fear of causing harm and using that skill set inappropriately, and sometimes that actually hurts my efficacy." This quote illustrates how the individual's upbringing was perceived to influence their leadership approach and self-doubt.

Another participant mentioned, "I actually like strong independent women, especially in HR and OD. They remind me obviously of my mom and that upbringing and it creates this really interesting dynamic where all, like, I almost Junior myself or step back because I could see them as this leader and hierarchy." This quote demonstrates how influences from her mother's way of being shaped leadership preferences and behavior. The participant went on to say that it has presented challenges for her as she does not always bring her voice into the room because of this learned behavior.

Likewise, one participant reflected,

In between my own interpersonal therapy, and then working through some of the family of origin experience, I realized that I grew up with a mother with a very high need for control. And so I had less experience claiming my own agency. Less experience setting direction for others, like I wasn't a big brother to any little brothers and sisters. And so I see myself show up that way. And I see that that family of origin experiences being an only child and in that position as part of the reason why.

This excerpt emphasizes how family dynamics can impact the development of leadership skills and autonomy.

On the other hand, Family of Origin experiences and influence have also been identified as positively impacting their leadership today. One participant reflected,

The positives are when I'm feeling perhaps like imposter syndrome or I have something big coming up, I really try to channel my mom. Like I think about how strong she is, and I picture the behaviors that I watched her doing growing up—whether it's kind of her presence and how she enters the room, her tone of voice, [or] how she speaks with confidence.

These quotes from the participants' reflections provide valuable insights into the challenging experiences and efforts to change behaviors that carry over from their Family of Origin into their present-day leadership styles. It highlights the significance of understanding these influences to develop effective leadership practices in the organizational context.

Within the theme of challenging experiences or experiences participants have actively worked to change within themselves learned from their Family of Origin, another prominent theme participants noted was that before they gained awareness of some of these challenges, their ability to show authentically as a leader was diminished in some capacity. Notions of deference to power, lack of safety, ability to build relationships, lack of transparency, lack of emotions, lack of joy, and fear-based leadership emerged from the interviews as lived experiences that challenged participants in bringing their whole self to work. One participant described the transformation of her leadership style after gaining awareness of her Family of Origin dynamics as,

I knew I was an effective leader, but I didn't know that by not showing up authentically, as myself and fully myself, that was affecting, like my impact, my influence, and the results that I was getting. I think after... gaining that self-awareness and seeing how much more impactful I could be, and how much I could drive results in a team or in a project or just by myself just by being myself and honoring those parts that I was hiding before. It really ignited some of the impact that I was missing.

She went on to state that there were patterns that she noticed in her Family of Origin's leadership that were helpful and areas where there were gaps. With this knowledge, she has actively worked to close those gaps to be a more effective leader in the present day.

While the aforementioned themes were more prominent, discussion of hierarchical leadership, gender preference, and decision-making also arose throughout the interview process. The participants who remembered hierarchical leadership within their Family of Origin all stated that they are collaborative leaders in their current roles and preferred active participation from their teams. Participants who stated they felt more comfortable with the leadership of a specific gender paralleled that with the level of comfort they felt with that parent of the same gender in their Family of Origin. Lastly, as it related to leadership, participants who did not have the opportunity to make decisions within their Family of Origin found decision-making in the workplace to be more difficult early in their career, whereas those who were given more autonomy around decision-making felt very comfortable.

### **Power**

The next question asked participants how their awareness of their Family of Origin experiences informs how they approach power in the workplace. One major theme and one subtheme were found. First, the major theme identified was that the authoritarian style of power experienced within the Family of Origin contributed to unproductive behaviors later in the workplace. Unproductive behaviors included power struggles or pushing back at inappropriate times, avoidance, bulldozing others or leaving a trail of destruction in their path, feeling triggered by certain people or behaviors, and feelings of

frustration with leaders who were not seen as “smarter than me.” The participants who noted authoritarian-like behavior in their Family of Origin found that the learned behaviors, which allowed them to survive or succeed within this family power style, did not translate well into the workplace earlier in their careers. One OD consultant describes this phenomenon:

I found that whenever I was in the presence of a strong leader, I was ready to push back just because they were in power, but truly I didn't know it at the time. But that's exactly what I did. If you're in charge, I'm gonna push against you... So to recognize that power has its place and not everybody that has it is a bad person, but when your dad's strong handed, you kind of wonder about anybody with power.

During his OD program, he had an enlightening experience during a lecture on counter dependence, which led him to question the distinction between counter dependence and immaturity. When the professor clarified that there was no difference, it prompted him to recognize his own need to "grow up." This realization profoundly impacted his perception of power and authority, marking a clear shift in his understanding and behavior. His desire to engage in the Use of Self increased his curiosity and opened him to gaining awareness and ultimately making more mindful decisions around his actions.

In one counterexample of this theme, another OD consultant working for a large worldwide consulting firm shared that his Family of Origin perpetuated a noncompetitive environment which has led him to easily translate that into his work and view everything as a “zero-sum game.” This has allowed him to succeed in his roles and attain one of the fastest promotion track records in the company's history while simultaneously coaching others on their year-end presentations who are competing with him for the promotions. He genuinely feels that it is his nature and attests to this being his natural state of being in the world and the workplace.

The final sub-theme emerging from the interview data on power revolves around cultural power dynamics. The participants in this study hailed from culturally resilient families that had immigrated to the United States. Within their respective family cultures, strong dynamics emphasizing reverence for elders and adherence to traditional gender roles were prevalent, which contrasted with the less prominent role of such dynamics in American culture. Notably, the behaviors expected and accepted within the family context did not prove advantageous for these participants in their American work environments. Interestingly, one participant shared an opposing experience wherein her American family empowered her to tap into her own inner strength. However, she encountered challenges when attempting to apply this way of being within an international organization.

### **Conflict**

Participants were then asked how their awareness of their Family of Origin experiences informs how they approach conflict in the workplace. The data analysis revealed that nine of the participants described their Family of Origin with a tendency to avoid conflict within the family by responding anxiously. The respondents identified that they then carried those anxious patterns over to the workplace and were less effective at managing conflict when they encountered it in the workplace. Ineffective responses to conflict replicated in the workplace were illustrated as overly accommodating, developing a superiority complex, avoiding others who appear emotional, overly aggressive behaviors, taking a moderator role, or inability to engage in healthy dialogue. One OD practitioner described embodying conflict as,

I'm definitely in the conflict avoidant, conflict-averse category, more on the flight, freeze quadrant of things, and I definitely would have attributed that to more of

my family dynamics. I grew up in a lot of conflict in my home. My brother is sort of the opposite of me. He would get upset himself and become very angry and join into the fights and for me, I retreated. I'm still like that. And I think in workplaces, I've definitely had a lot of negative workplace experiences involving conflict... So all of that informs my work as I think about conflict and in orgs.

They described this awareness as something they continue to work on, but also an opportunity to utilize other skills and resources to overcome this in the workplace.

Another participant said,

... Because of my family dynamic, I think my conflict style was very accommodating. [If] We don't see eye to eye on that, like, oh, something must be wrong with me so I'll just do whatever you think is right. Except for I would say... I have a very, very strong moral compass. So that's the only place when it gets to something like that, I am like, this is the way it is my way or the highway, and if you don't like it, you can get out of my life. So like, very highly accommodating or avoidant.

The data analysis highlights that participants' awareness of their Family of Origin experiences significantly influences their approach to conflict in the workplace, with some carrying over anxious patterns that hinder effective conflict management. Despite this challenge, participants recognize the opportunity to continue working on these aspects while leveraging the Use of Self and other skills and resources to navigate workplace conflicts more successfully.

Additionally, participants were asked if they found themselves playing any specific roles in conflict in their Family of Origin and if those roles are similar or different from those in the workplace. Few participants recognized their roles as the same and identified that if they played the same role, it showed up differently in each environment. There is an opportunity identified in the workplace to show up differently that is not readily available in their Family of Origin. For example, an OD professional working for an organization as an internal individual contributor, commented that the role

she played in conflict in her family was one of quiet obedience, and that served her with her mother. When the same role shows up for her today in the workplace, it builds resentment because she holds her voice back in the room and described it as harmful to her well-being in the workplace. The data supports the notion that Family of Origin conflict styles influences participants' conflict style in the present day at work.

### **Belonging**

Lastly, participants were asked how their awareness of their Family of Origin experiences informs how they approach dynamics around belonging in the workplace. The major theme that emerged from the data was that 13 respondents said that they either felt like they belonged in the Family of Origin and subsequently have had an easy time finding community and feelings of inclusion in the workplace, that they did not feel like they belonged in their Family of Origin, or felt like an outsider and find it difficult to manage feelings of inclusion and belonging in the workplace. One participant said,

Even within my family of origin, I felt different than the other three mom, dad, brother. There was something that they all had in common, and I felt like an outsider. I think as I take that into the work environment, I still struggle with that at times. I look for ways to connect with people. I'm not sure that's in service of me or that's in service of them. So I'm very intentional about helping others belong.

Another participant described this sense of belonging within her family and chosen community: "I have a very big family, and it's a very inclusive family... I'm constantly connecting people, creating community because it's the environment in which I most thrive, and so I will create a system that looks like my family whether I'm in grad school or a corporate job." Those who felt a strong sense of belonging stated that it was only in extreme situations, such as attending military school, where they did not feel like they belonged.



On the other hand, those who did not experience a strong sense of belonging within their own family cited feelings of hyper-independence in the workplace, questioning if they were a diversity hire and having a transactional way of achieving belonging. One participant stated that she feels like “a peacock in a land of penguins,” both in her family and at work. There was a sense of not belonging within the communities that a few people grew up in, which fueled the challenges faced in belonging in any space.

In addition, nine participants indicated that they actively try to make others feel included and like they belong in the workplace. In reviewing the data, none of the participants attributed this behavior directly back to their Family of Origin.

### **Awareness**

Another prominent theme that emerged, across all questions, was the notion of self awareness and the impact that awareness has on individuals’ ability to integrate their Family of Origin experiences with their professional experiences. OD professionals talked about the workplace dynamics through a lens of how awareness of their Family of Origin experience has shaped how they show up in the workplace. Participants were able to identify their awareness and noted that behavior shifts began to occur. As one participant described the phenomenon,

I began to understand that awareness is not enough. It's like okay, now I was very self aware before my program, but I was not able to take that awareness and actually experience behavioral change. And so in my program is where I learned how to actually make that shift. A lot of my automated responses previously before my program, was to become aware of it and then to internally punish myself and experience a lot of shame. And it wasn't until I was in the program that I was able to identify that that was the process happening and start changing the way that I talked to myself and begin to understand that awareness is neutral and I can make choices about my behavior now that I'm aware of it. That was very empowering.

Participants described how they utilized principles of the Use of Self to progress beyond mere awareness and initiate tangible changes in their behavior. They identified a range of valuable skills and tools related to the Use of Self, including emotional regulation, creating self-space and capacity, self-confidence, embracing their entirety, recognizing and understanding their emotions, being mindful of personal habits and conditioning, and practicing self-compassion and forgiveness while aligning with their values. Moreover, participants emphasized the importance of actively moving beyond awareness to transform automatic responses and behaviors. They stressed the significance of increasing agency in their actions and leveraging their emotions to gain new perspectives and intentionally shift their outlook. This transformative process entailed making purposeful choices and courageously embracing discomfort by engaging in challenging situations.

Environmental scanning was recognized as a crucial aspect, involving the identification of inappropriate behavior and the establishment of healthy boundaries. Trust-building and empowerment of others were equally emphasized in their approach. Language emerged as another powerful tool utilized by participants to foster more extensive conversations, deepen their self-awareness, and create space for complexity and paradox. Leading with curiosity, being open to feedback, and embracing vulnerability were highlighted as essential components of personal growth. Lastly, conscious choice played a vital role, as participants acknowledged the value of holding space between stimuli and responses (Frankl, 1985). They utilized tools like the conscious choice matrix to aid them in making intentional decisions, empowering themselves to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

## **Summary**

This chapter outlined the research findings and summarized the key themes of the data that was discovered. Chapter 5 will discuss the conclusions, implications, and recommendations based on the dominant themes of each research question and will discuss the interpretations and implications of how Family of Origin dynamics inform OD practitioners' approach to organizational dynamics. Furthermore, Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the study's findings and offer recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how OD practitioners, who understand how their Family of Origin affects their behavior in workplace interactions, use this knowledge to inform their approach to manage common dynamics like leadership, influence, power, conflict, and belonging. The objectives of this study were to:

- Understand the perceived influence that Family of Origin has on OD practitioners at work;
- Identify any key learnings from the practitioners on how they manage these factors in their organizations through the Use of Self Framework; and
- Make the case that OD Practitioners should focus on their Family of Origin influences as part of their Use of Self development.

The results did not provide definitive answers but provided insights from OD practitioners in leadership, influence, power, conflict, belonging, and awareness. This chapter reviews the study's conclusions and interpretations, implications, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

This study found that Family of Origin influences the approach to workplace dynamics through which an OD practitioner's perspective is framed within their Use of Self work. Family of Origin transgenerational patterns show up in personal and professional relationships as cited in the literature and are further supported by the data in this study. These patterns learned from Family of Origin experiences can be identified and then appropriately adapted to find more success in leadership, relationships, and well-being. Those who have done the emotional labor to identify these forces believe that

it was worth the time and energy to make changes to their behavior as it has improved their authenticity and connections in the workplace. It can be said that they were able to upgrade their Use of Self.

The first conclusion drawn from the interviews was that every participant could depict clear connections to how their Family of Origin influences their approach to workplace dynamics either positively or negatively. They were able to articulate how they have actively worked towards making positive changes to support themselves, their teams, their mental well-being, and improve their success in their organization or in professional relationships with others. While the participants noted that they have done the intrapersonal work necessary to identify these Family of Origin influences, many noted that it is ongoing work that they engage with regularly and that when one piece of work is completed another piece takes its place; hence, the work is never done.

This conclusion supports the literature that states the family system consciously or unconsciously influences an individual's behavior and emotional stability, as evidenced by how these dynamics repeat themselves and play out throughout one's lifetime (Framo, 1992; Kott, 2014; Larson & Wilson, 1998; Lustig & Xu, 2018; Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991). The research supports the literature, which declares that several factors affect interpersonal relationships stemming from family of origin dynamics: (a) recurring actions typically leading to predictable reactions; (b) comfort in familial dynamics; and (c) a general lack of awareness around these patterns (Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991). This further implicates the need for a next step in how to manage these Family of Origin patterns, specifically in the workplace.

The second conclusion gleaned from this study is that the ability to feel belonging in the workplace is not only due to the organization's culture and focus on belonging but also influenced by factors stemming from the Family of Origin. While there are existential factors that contribute to these feelings, the Family of Origin has the potential to develop skills within a person to build intrinsic feelings of belonging. Individuals make sense of the world based on their childhood experiences in their family (Hovestadt et al., 1985; Kern et al., 1995; Weinberg & Maukach, 1991). Individuals are predisposed and conditioned to understand, react, and resolve challenges and opportunities within their environments (Weinberg & Maukach, 1991) and the ability to connect and engage with others could be influenced in the same fashion. Similarly, the healthcare providers who engaged in Family of Origin education and training were better able to differentiate from their patients and saw less emotional fusion to be more effective care providers (Mengel & Mauksch, 1989). OD practitioners were able to identify those feelings of belonging and able to better manage them in the workplace following intrapersonal work. This ability to manage feelings of inclusion or exclusion has led to better outcomes for individuals who struggled with this in their early careers.

Surprisingly, there is an absence of empirical data addressing the impact of understanding one's Family of Origin on OD work and how this knowledge influences the management of related dynamics. This gap in the existing research underscores the need for future studies to delve into this aspect and explore its implications, extending the investigation to diverse populations beyond the current scope of this study. In terms of practical application to the field of OD, this study makes a case for the specific application of Family of Origin sensemaking in the Use of Self development during OD-

specific educational programs, training, and other forms of adult education. From the data gathered in the interviews, it can be deduced that practitioners learn a lot about leadership and influence from their mothers and fathers early in life. These learned behaviors impact their work within systems, working with their leaders, and their leadership style. Other dynamics (e.g., power, conflict, belonging) are impacted by their Family of Origin's approach to these dynamics. Exploring these facets of Family of Origin opens the avenue for increased awareness. Asking oneself about these dynamics in their family and how that is similar or different from their approach within the context of their professional life can drive curiosity towards improving effectiveness.

Conclusion three was that intentional exploration of these topics aided in the development of self awareness even for seasoned OD professionals. While it was not the intention of this research, the interview seemed to help participants make sense of their understanding of Family of Origin influence. Participants commented, "This is interesting," "Great question," "I've never thought about this," "This has been helpful," "I think I just had an insight," and "I'm kind of building my awareness around this as I talk to you." Asking a question the participants had never been asked before led to greater awareness or insight when the participant was able to think deeply to formulate an answer. This supports the literature that calls for identifying patterns and employing suitable strategies to mitigate them, as it holds value in 1) recognizing and altering patterns as needed; 2) acknowledging the influence of Family of Origin issues on heightened emotional reactions; and 3) utilizing strategies to reduce unfavorable responses to Family of Origin dynamics that arise (Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991).

The last conclusion is around awareness and sensemaking of Family of Origin experiences. During the interview process, participants identified challenges brought about by their Family of Origin patterns they were replicating in their professional life were discovered through their OD program, therapy, feedback, or training. Study subjects were an informed population who were identified as having successfully completed some combination of the former from which they could draw conclusions about their Family of Origin influence and an affinity for Use of Self work. The OD practitioners stated they found more fulfillment in their work once they had this awareness because they could better manage any triggers they may have previously felt. It is interesting that participants successfully managed difficult dynamics once they were given the language to describe what was happening in moments of uncertainty or volatility. From this analysis, an implication could be that working professionals should consider Family of Origin training as part of their self/leader/leadership development plan to increase their awareness in terms of how their Family of Origin impacts their leadership and influence, how they address power in the workplace, how they manage conflict, and how they see belonging in the workplace.

This research study may have implications for all industries, levels of leadership, and cultures. While organizations spend time and money developing leaders, they should also look at the implications of the individual lens each person brings to the workplace regarding their Family of Origin. A person's origin story is the unique perspective they bring to the organization and can promote or hinder their ability to be successful within a given environment. Although this topic is generally taboo in organizations, as this research shows, it should be a topic brought to life thoughtfully and intentionally. It is the



work of OD practitioners to find appropriate ways to weave this into OD work with people and organizations at every level.

Future studies are needed to further explore and illuminate the multifaceted impact of Family of Origin work in various domains. The integration of Family of Origin conversations within leadership development initiatives warrants in-depth investigation to ascertain its potential in nurturing authentic leadership behaviors and fostering psychological safety for leaders and employees of organizations. Understanding how sharing origin stories contributes to a deeper sense of belonging and trust could unveil a significant avenue for enhancing workplace collaboration and overall performance. Additionally, focusing on early career training and development holds promise in equipping young professionals with essential tools to manage the intricate interplay between their Family of Origin experiences and their professional growth. Investigating the efficacy of integrating Family of Origin training into coaching practices offers a rich area of study, potentially empowering leaders at all levels to leverage these insights for more effective decision-making, conflict resolution, and team dynamics. As these topics remain relatively unexplored within the context of Family of Origin work, dedicated research endeavors can unveil practical strategies to advance leadership development, nurture authenticity, and create thriving, psychologically safe work environments.

The study was limited in its small sample size of the research participants and the fact that only OD practitioners were interviewed. This research relied only on the self-reporting of each participant. This research only examined the practice of OD and the possibility of extending this to other industries exists. Additionally, not all workplace dynamics were discussed in this study, so extending the validity of the findings to all

workplace dynamics would not be appropriate. Lastly, the participants in this study grew up in various locations and communities, attended different schools, and generally had different backgrounds, all of which may contribute to the perception of each of the workplace dynamics. Researcher bias also recognizes that their own background and experiences shape interpretation and that the personal lens brought to this study stems from personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2003).

As this study ends, the researcher wonders if there is an opportunity for further research to explore further how to build a component of Family of Origin work into an organization's culture, training, or leadership development. Since this is not currently happening, it would be the next step in furthering and complementing this research.

Additionally, more study is needed on how connected psychological safety, authentic leadership, and an individual's origin story is in the workplace. A comprehensive look at organizations that are currently practicing this and how that relates to other factors of organizational commitment and retention would be interesting for further exploration.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the significant yet underexplored impact of Family of Origin influences on OD practitioners' approach to workplace dynamics. The research objectives, encompassing the exploration of Family of Origin effects, key learnings from practitioners' Use of Self framework, and the case for integrating Family of Origin work into OD practice, have provided valuable insights. While the study did not offer definitive answers, it illuminated the profound interplay between Family of Origin patterns and professional behaviors. The participants' clear connections and proactive efforts to manage these influences underscore the importance of this area of study. The

findings align with existing literature on the lasting impact of Family of Origin on behavior, highlighting the need to address and manage these dynamics within the organizational context. This research points toward a transformative direction for OD practitioners, embracing Family of Origin awareness and training to encourage a richer Use of Self theory.

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