

Sharing Surnames: Children, Family and Kinship

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Today's Talk

- Brief mention of existing Sociological research on naming
- Other useful conceptual frameworks
- Children's accounts of the significance of surname
- Some conclusions on naming, family and kinship



The Project

- Looking at how children (age 8-10) constitute family (2006-2007)
- Twenty-four children, 4 British South Asian, remainder white British
- Small Midlands primary school, deprived area
- Lots of family fluidity – parental separation, divorce, re-partnering, new half/step siblings, bereavement

Existing Sociological Research on Naming

- Naming makes visible and 'displays' family and kinship (Finch, 2008) .
- Naming as a family practice (Almack, 2006; Edwards and Caballero, 2008; Finch, 2008) .
- Naming no longer indicates belonging with family (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 4) versus naming establishing 'belonging' (Bond, 1998; Almack, 2006; Edwards and Caballero, 2008).
- Children's needs/identities central to decision-making about naming (Almack, 2006; Edwards and Caballero, 2008).
- Children's voices absent.
- We know children are 'creative' in constituting family and kinship and that shared biographical experience is important to their constitution of family (Mason and Tipper, 2008: 450) . Is naming one of these shared aspects of biography?

Other Conceptual Frameworks

- **Gillis' (1997)** Family we live by and family we live with.
- Set of ideals or aspirations surrounding family, and real life practices of family.
- **Mason's (2008)** Fixed and negotiated/creative affinities.
- Fixed – 'regarded as or feels, *fixed*' , can become fixed over time (Mason, 2008: 33).
- Negotiated or creative – interacts with fixed.

Why do we need sociological accounts of naming?

- Naming is used in public policy for e.g. Joint Birth Registration (2009). Compulsory naming of parents on birth certificates gives them both parental responsibility.
- Birth certificate – public document which connects children to parents and allows for identification and tracing of family relationships.
- Use of naming in policy constitutes and 'displays' family relationships.
- Changing children's surnames: continuity of identity, and important connection to a non-resident father or a unified family identity?



Methods

- Field study over 18 months
- Participant Observation
- Interviews with children in pairs with a friend or peer
- Children drawing families
- Children making books about family stories/memories
- Observational visits and discussions with children and their family members in their homes

In this interview conversation Cara said:

Cara: I've got four *last names in my family*. I've got Jameson, Richards, Penfold, I think it is. I've got, um, I don't know what the other one is.

Hayley: Who's Jameson, who does that name belong to?

Cara: It's my mum's, um, all my nan and everything, my uncle and my auntie's are something else. My granddad, he's Richards, one's Longe, 'cause my little brother's called Longe and my mum's going to be called Longe 'cause they're getting married.

Bridget: *I've got five last names*. Bright, Scanlan, O'Donavon, Donald and Gainham.

Hayley: And who do they belong to?

Bridget: I'm really a Bright but my mum calls me Scanlan.

Hayley: So how are you a Bright?

Bridget: 'cause of my dad. My mum's a Scanlan, my sister's a Donald and my aunty and cousins are Gainhams.

Hayley: What about your brother Ben?

Bridget: Six names then, he's a Cross.


Hayley:(confirming) So Ben's got a different dad to you and you've got a different dad to your older brothers and sisters?

Cara: It's very complicated.

Bridget: I thought that they were all Newtons.

Cara: Yeah. I did first 'cause I knew Harriet's name was Newton. I thought, because they get along so well, that they were brothers and sisters. I knew Harriet and Catherine were sisters but because I didn't know James' last name when he first came here, I just thought they were, well they are in the *same* family but not brothers and sisters. And they all came *together*, but Hannah had told us about Harriet and Catherine but she hadn't told us about James. I knew straight away that the girls were sisters because Hannah kept talking about them but because James, I didn't know his name then, I assumed that they were brothers and sisters. *The minute I saw them I thought that they were all the same, all Newtons, and he kept talking to them and laughing.*

Bridget: Then Mrs Goodley said that his name was James King.



Oliver: Sometimes you consider your friends as family. Sometimes they're not related to you, but your family are related to you.

Hayley: What does it mean to be related to someone?

Oliver: It means you're in the *same* family as them. You're like, your last name is the *same* 'cause I'm a Bradford and so is my dad, and my mum.

Hayley: What about your brother and sister, are they Bradfords?

Oliver: Yeah they are. Yeah, but sometimes people are called Bradford but aren't the *same* people.



Hayley: What makes these people in your drawing your family? Stella?


Stella: Because they made me and I was born with them, and I've got the *same* second name.

Tanya: Yeah but, my mum hasn't and she's well, I'm Campbell and my dad's Campbell.

Hayley: So it's not about names then?

Stella: Well, she's not married to your dad then?

Tanya: No. She's married to, my mum is married to Kevin.



Laura: This is really important to me Hayley....me and Kayla, 'cause we class each other as cousins...

Hayley: I thought you said that you and Kayla were like sisters, but you're like cousins now?


Laura: Yeah.

Hayley: What is like a cousin? And what is like a sister?

Laura: Well, a sister is like someone who has the same last name as you but cousins don't have to have the same last name as you.

Hayley: That's why she's like a cousin and not a sister?

Laura: Yeah.



Tanya: Me and my mum went for a walk with my mum's friends in the park just over the road. And I always played in there and I had this skateboard 'cause my mum's friend's boy had loads of skateboards and he gave me one. And I was on the skateboard, on the ramp, and I went down it and then I met this girl. And she said "hello do you want to play with me?" And I said "yeah, how old are you?" And then she said "ten" and I was seven and um. I said I was seven and then um. We both played together, and I got another skateboard so we could play together, and then we came off the skateboards and played on the monkey bars and then we went to see my mum to see if we could go to the shops. And my mum said "no" and then my mum said to Eli "what's your name?" And she said "Eli". And mum said "you're Tanya's sister". And then I said "no she's not, we're friends". And mum said "No you're not". And then Eli said um to me, "What's your father's name?" And I said "Kim". And um, she said "Mine's Kim as well. Is your dad's last name Campbell?" And I said "yeah". "Then we're sisters". Then my dad came to pick me up on the weekend and my dad took me and Eli around the block. And my dad started to cry 'cause he never saw Eli, only when she was born.

Hayley: Really? And what did you think about that?

Tanya: I thought, wrrrrr, this is crazy! 'Cause I've never met this girl before and then my mum's saying she's my sister.

Hayley: Did you feel happy or sad?

Tanya: Happppppy.

Stella: That you had another extra sister.



FIELD NOTES:

Hannah: I don't want to be called Sheilder, because that's my dad's name and I hate him. He's not part of my life.

Alice: No, my name is just Brown too. But I have a different name to my stupid nanny. My mum says that I can't have the same name as stupid nanny 'cause she might want to take me away.

Tajinder: It's because I'm from India. It is my name, stop laughing. Ask Salem or Sadiq, they'll tell you, they're from Pakistan. It is my name really.

Leena 'they're from our village in Pakistan'.



Summary

- Concern with developing sociological exploration of surnames as a way of examining family and kinship
- (Sur)naming as a family practice
- Naming and potential for creatively constituting and displaying family relationships and affinities with wider kin
- Family we live with/by and tangible affinities can develop understandings of naming and how this constitutes or denies kinship

Some Conclusions

- Naming is significant to children in accounts of who is their own and others' family/kin and in their family imaginaries.
- Children had limited agency to choose surname – difficult for them to choose to display relationships through shared names.
- Who is conferring names and who is in receipt of names? And is it that simple?
- Children are reinventing collective ideas and ideals of what family and kinship is.
- Need to attend to how surname features in idealistic or aspirational notions of the family as well as the lived family.
- Exploring the circumstances by which surname shifts from fixed to negotiated or creative affinities or vice versa, is important for understanding how naming and broader decision-making is negotiated within family and kin relationships.
- Children's accounts of kinship challenge the notion that surname or 'family' name has lost its meaning as a way of indicating belonging with a family