Autoethnographic onomastics

Wheeler, Sara Louise

Methodological Innovations

Autoethnographic onomastics: transdisciplinary scholarship of personal names and 'our-stories'

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Prologue

> "**Name**: (Noun) A word or a combination or words by which a person, place, or thing,
>
> a body or class, or any object of thought is designated, called, or known"
>
> (Dictionary.com, 2017).

It is interesting to ponder the definition of names. They are, as the above quote states, 'words', or a combination of words. They are also very important words, without which we would struggle to communicate efficiently on almost any topic. Words are of course situated within the wider contexts of languages and cultures, within which they perform their important functions for communication. Names are thus an important social phenomenon and ought to be a topic of interest in many of the scholarly disciplines engaged in considering language and social interaction. It is curious therefore, that I, as a Sociologist, found myself in the winter of 2014, pondering the career of my own forename, without any knowledge of the scholarly fields within which to situate my personal stories.

At the age of 35, I had amassed a large collection of memories relating to the mispronunciation and misspelling of my forename, as well as experiences of negative attitudes towards it and, by extension, the Welsh-speaking community. However, I had never studied names and naming as a sociological topic, either at A-level or during my undergraduate degree. I hadn't seen it discussed at conferences or in books or articles. This wasn't, as I was to discover, because it had been completely neglected as a topic of study, but it was certainly a minority pursuit and had quite a low profile.

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Over the years, people had called me by all manner of name variations relating to my own, and responded equally as diversely when I corrected them, or else when I didn't correct them and they found out anyway. As a sociologist, I naturally became interested in what was happening and what I was doing. Why was my (Welsh) version of this common name so difficult to pronounce? And why did it bother me anyway? And, more curiously still, why did it bother other people so much to have it pointed out to them, or not? And how was I making these decisions – who to tell and who not to tell? And what did all this mean in the wider context of my being from the cultural and linguistic minority Welsh-speaking community?

The initial draft of my first autoethnographic article about my name was thus an example of 'writing as a method of inquiry' (Richardson, 1994; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005). Inspired particularly by Richardson's body of work (Richardson and Lockridge, 1991, 2002, Richardson, 1998, 2000b, 2003, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014), I simply wrote out everything from memory as vignettes. I then set about trying to prepare an introduction, for which I conducted scoping exercises of the electronic databases (Booth, Papaioannou and Sutton, 2012). The main keyword of 'name' was obviously quite broad and ambiguous and I didn't locate much of a literature, apart from one particularly excellent article by two authors exploring the careers of their own names, and some horrific experiences related to them (Rivera Maulucci and Moore Mensah, 2015).

Naively thinking that there simply hadn't been much work in this field, I completed my article and sent it off to a journal. Reading the reviews of my article brought an epiphany; it seemed that not only had some fairly recent sociological research been published on the matter of personal names (Finch, 2008), but there was in fact a wide field of inquiry known as 'Onomastics', dedicated to the study of names, which I had to confess that I had not heard of.

As I began to explore the adjunct literatures on names and naming, one of the curious

elements which struck me was that, somewhat ironically, there was a lack of consensus as to

what to call the study of names and naming, and its constituent elements; naming this field of

inquiry, using the appropriate words, seemed to be an unresolved matter. I will now briefly

outline the different fields of study and their monikers, before moving on to proposing

autoethnography as a useful, yet thus far under-utilized methodological approach for the

exploration of issues relating to personal names and naming practices.

Onomastics and various disciplinary studies of names and naming

Based on the Greek verb 'Onomazein' ('to name'), Onomastics refers to the field of

study concerned with the origin and forms of proper names of persons or places (Merriam

Webster Dictionary, 2017). Onomastics is a term which literally means the study of names

and naming. It does not then, it seems, emanate from any specific academic discipline, but

rather from the Greek language. In 2016, the Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming was

published, which used 'onomastics' as the preferred term for the study of names and naming;

it was separated into 7 parts: onomastic theory; toponamastics; anthroponomastics; literary

onomastics; socio-onomastics; onomastics and other disciplines; other types of onomastics

(Hough, 2016). Within Chapter 4 on names and discourse, Elwys de Stefani provides an

overview of methods of investigation whilst discussing how social actors use their names in

their everyday lives. As a sociologist, I was particularly intrigued by section 4.5 of this

chapter, entitled "Socio-onomastics and the sociology of names". De Stefani begins by

highlighting the currently dichotomous situation in this field of inquiry:

"The application of sociolinguistic and sociological methods to the investigation of names has led to two main fields of investigation, socio-onomastics and the sociology of names respectively" (de Stefani, 2016, kindle page 1583).

In exploring the different positions, he further explains:

"I draw a distinction between socio-onomastics and the sociology of names by observing divergent methodological procedures and research topics in the two fields. Socio-onomasticians apply methods inherited from sociolinguistics to the analysis of names. They use interviews, focus group discussions or questionnaires as the basis of their analyses, and describe name usage with respect to previously defined social categories (e.e. 'male', 'female', 'young', 'native', 'migrants', etc.)"

I found this interesting, if a little baffling, since I used interviews and focus group discussions for my sociological undergraduate dissertation, and indeed currently teach about these methods, alongside questionnaires, on core social science research modules, which are quite separate from the linguistics department. I would consider these methods to be generic methods across all disciplines engaged in social research.

On the matter of the previously defined social categories named by de Stefani, many of the recent sociological articles regarding names and naming have involved considerations of these; for example, there has been some work regarding 'migrants' and how they and their names are interpreted and perceived when they arrive (Madziva, 2017), and also work with 'migrants' who settle in the country of destination, enter into marriages with 'natives', and then face complex naming decisions with regards to their children (Wykes, 2015a, 2015b; Cerchiaro, 2017). Meanwhile, Pilcher's sociological inquiries have highlighted the gendered

aspects of names and naming (Pilcher, 2016, 2017). Many of these studies employed the use

of interviews within their methodological approaches to data collection.

However, it was this final paragraph of de Stefani which perplexed me the most:

"By contrast, the sociology of names mainly addresses larger societal questions,

arising for instance from language contact, in particular in the presence of so-called

minority languages or dialects. The use of names in the construction of an individual's

or a community's identity is a central topic of investigation" (de Stefani, 2016, Kindle

pages 1593-1594).

Issues such as language contact, minority languages and dialects are of course of

interest and importance to sociologists. Recent articles exploring issues regarding 'migrants'

and 'natives' have of course been unpacking what happens when different languages and

culture come into contact with each other (Edwards and Caballero, 2008; Wykes, 2015a,

2015b; Cerchiaro, 2017; Madziva, 2017), though I would argue that this has been at the

'everyday' and 'micro' level, rather than at a 'larger societal question' level (de Stefani,

2016, kindle pages 1593-1594).

My own recent article touched upon the issues around language contact between

minority and majority languages, from a Welsh borderland perspective (Author 2016).

However, again, this was not really from the 'larger societal' perspective; indeed, since it was

an autoethnography, the focus was very much on my own, personal, subjective experiences

and introspective reflections. However, whilst I had initially envisaged my article 'writing as

a method of inquiry', which would have left the vignettes to stand by themselves to be

interpreted by the reader, I did then, following the review stage, return to analysing my

experiences to understand the broader cultural experience, which is indicative of the

emerging popular methodology of autoethnography, which has gained popularity with scholars from a plethora of disciplinary backgrounds (Bochner and Ellis, 2016).

It would appear therefore, that there are tensions between the academic disciplines engaged in studying the phenomena of names and naming, and from what I have been able to observe, the emotional and subjective aspects of names and naming appear to be largely absent. This may in part be being compounded by the perceived, yet false, dichotomy between the disciplines, which, if removed, might make way for the data which is being simultaneously collected and produced in these separate spaces, to be shared and considered by a broader field of academics; this might in turn enrich the pool of resources and encourage a more dynamic and innovative approach.

There has also, to date, been surprisingly little in the way of autobiographical work on names and naming, in any of the disciplines. Indeed, when my article was published and I began sending it to people who I thought might be interested, I was delighted by the enthusiastic responses I received. Everyone, it seemed, had stories to tell about their names and my article had reminded them of this fact and inspired them to reflect on them. I will now therefore discuss the autobiographical writing I have found on the matter of names and naming, before making the case that onomastic autoethnographies could add valuable data to this field of inquiry; I shall conclude by calling for scholars across disciplines to write about the careers of their own names.

Autobiographical onomastics – towards an autoethnographic genre of my-story/ our-stories

Some of the sociological articles on names and naming include some autobiographical reflections. For example, Finch (2008) begins her article in the following manner:

Personal names are a core marker of the individual, with legal force and with social

purchase on an everyday basis. I must provide my name – Janet Finch – in order to be

able to transact even the most mundane of everyday tasks. My name has two

dimensions. It marks me as a unique individual, and it also gives some indication of

my location in the various social worlds which I inhabit – it encapsulates my legal

persona as a British citizen, it reveals my gender and probably my ethnicity, it

documents something of my family connections and, in my case, if I add my title

'professor' it states my occupation (Finch, 2008).

Finch then proceeds with a discussion of names and naming practices in much

broader, theoretical terms. She does return to the matter of her own name(s), on pages 713

and 714, using her name as an illustrative case of the fluidity and diversity of naming

practices in the family context, and thus the complexity of the link between names and family

relationships. However, the article does not explore in any depth the lived experience,

personal significance, or emotional aspects of her name, since the purpose of the paper is to

present "an exploratory analysis of the significance of personal names in contemporary

Western societies, the UK in particular" (Finch, 2008).

Similarly, Pilcher (2016) begins her article drawing on her own biography to provide

illustrative examples of the phenomena she will consider in the article:

My name is printed on the head of this article, identifying me as the author. My name

identifies me in other ways, too. My forename indicates my sex and gender and my

surname displays my family affiliation. My forename-plus-surname also suggests

other aspects of my identity, such as my ethnicity, and even my cohort-age and social

class. My name was officially registered by my parents shortly after my birth, in

adherence with legal and civil administrative requirements: under the UK's 1953

Births and Deaths Registration Act, newborn babies must be registered with both a

forename and a surname within 42 days of birth. Subsequently, my name has become

what I am 'known by'. I think of me as 'Jane Pilcher'. Family members, friends,

colleagues and acquaintances, and people in organizations and institutions, know and/

or identify me, or administratively process me, as 'Jane Pilcher'. My name is used, by

myself and others, routinely and repeatedly in my everyday life – in conversations and

in written communications in a multitude of contexts. My name appears on numerous

cultural artefacts that record and authenticate identity in the UK, including my birth

certificate, my workplace ID card, my passport and my utility bills (Pilcher, 2016).

Pilcher then draws on her autobiographical introduction to begin making links to key

points in the field of inquiry, weaving in citations as she leads up to stating the aim of the

paper. Thus again, the lived experience, personal significance and emotional aspects of the

author's name are largely absent.

By contrast, in an article I found from the field of education, two authors, in

conveying the experience of being 're-named', and the impact this had on them, began their

article with two personal stories, rather than autobiographical information useful to the wider

argument of the article. I found María's account particularly moving:

(María): My parents gave me the name, María, and when I learned to write, my

mother taught me to put a slanted line, not a dot, over the letter, I, in my name. Yet in

school, what was a source of ethnic pride was erased. I distinctly remember my

kindergarten teacher screaming at me, "That is not how you write the letter, i!" She

made me erase the accent mark and replace it with a dot. That was when I became

Maria. In school, the daily Pledge of Allegiance and celebrating the United States'

Bicentennial in 1976 solidified my identity as a proud, flag-waving American.

Around the same time, I learned that I was Hispanic, which was also a source of pride

because my father, a member of the New York City Police Department, was president

of the Hispanic Society. Later, I learned how controversial the idea of having one

group to represent all the Spanish-speaking police officers was at the time. They came

from many different countries, Puerto Roco, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and

 others, each with their own sense of ethnic pride, but now they were all Hispanic. I

am not Hispanic anymore, unless I have to fill out one of those government forms that

limits me to a series of bubbles that are somehow supposed to classify or identify me.

Instead, I call myself Latina and a scholar of colour, at least for now, until I can claim

a better way to represent who I am (Rivera Maulucci and Moore Mensah, 2015).

I could identify with the experience of being 're-named' as this has been a common

theme throughout my life, and formed the basis for many of my vignettes in my

autoethnographic article (Author, 2016). However, the idea of a teacher actually screaming at

a child, and enforcing an anglicized version of their name, was really quite shocking.

Furthermore, I found the few lines where María explains her feelings and responses to the

various ethnic group categorisations accessible and informative. Felicia's story (the second

author) of being one of the only African American children in a class, and having her teacher,

who was an older, White, southern woman, inform her that she was unable to pronounce her

name and thus had resolved to call her "Phyllis", was also very surprising. My reaction to

these two, quite short stories, highlights what I feel is missing from the field of inquiry as a

whole; the emotional, subjective, lived experience. Through telling personal stories, the

authors where able to convey an insight which might be really quite difficult to capture in any

other way, including through a series of qualitative interviews, which might be thematically analysed and presented as a series of short quotes, juxtaposed with others which the author considered to be along the same theme.

Interestingly, having published my own article, containing a series of personal stories presented as vignettes, I was ruminating over the added value brought to the discussions by these 'my-stories' (Richardson, 1997). I googled "autobiographical onomastics" and found one article which matched this description precisely: "An onomastics autobiography, or, in the beginning was the name", by W.F.H. Nicolaisen (1999), who as it turns out was a prominent scholar in language studies and onomastics. Nicolaisen's onomastics autobiography was interesting and entertaining, which Richardson has pointed out is not always the case with qualitative research and is a matter which needs to be addressed by adopting more engaging writing styles (Richardson, 1994; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005). And I think this is a key point to be made regarding autobiographical onomastics – authors often write well, and discuss issues well, when they are most relevant to them, and our personal names are often very important to us.

As well as being interesting and engaging, I would say that Nicolaisen (1999) is systematically analysing his experiences to understand the broader cultural experiences, and is thus engaged in autoethnographic thought (Bochner and Ellis, 2016), even if he was unaware of this at the time, and also unaware of the methodology. For example, he discusses the German and Danish naming conventions which influenced the composition and pronunciation of his name: Wilhelm Fritz Hermann Nicolaisen; he discusses the connections with the names of his various male relatives, commenting that he is onomastically as well as genetically related to his two grandfathers. He also makes the connection with the historical formation of surnames, which replaced patronymic systems of being named as "son of", in a

variety of cultures through time, including the Welsh and English languages (Morgan and

Morgan, 1985; Moore, 2011; Rowlands and Rowlands, 2013), commenting:

> In parenthesis, I should add that my Jutland surname, *Nicolaisen*, of course, also no
>
> longer corresponds to its lexical meaning "son of Nicolai or Nicholas;" if patronymic
>
> surnames had not yet become hereditary in Danish[1] at the time of my birth, I would
>
> naturally have been *Wilhelmsen* or perhaps *Andresen*). Lexically, therefore, I am a
>
> fraud, but onomastically my individual niche could not have been more definitely and
>
> appropriately selected (Nicolaisen, 1999).

As with María's story (Rivera Maulucci and Moore Mensah, 2015), I found the

information here accessible and useful, bringing an insight into cultural practices, with an

illustrative case study. There is even more similarity, however, when Nicolaisen reveals that

his actual name has probably been his least used appellation. One reason for this was his

move from Germany to England as an exchange student:

> When, in April 1950, I first stepped onto English soil as an exchange student in
>
> King's College Newcastle, now the University of Newcastle, I was immediately and
>
> without being consulted on the matter, called *Billy* - by professors, fellow students,
>
> my landlady, and others (Nicolaisen, 1999).

Nicolaisen then explores his feelings towards this re-naming, including his reasons for

not liking the name Billy, as it seemed immature, juvenile, insubstantial, and almost trivial.

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[1] Elsewhere in the article, he explains that his father, Andreas Wilhelm Albert Nicolaisen, was brought up close to the Danish border where Danish influenced the language of his birthplace, Flensburg, and thus also his pronunciation of their surname; he pronounced it [niko'laisən], with a voiceless fricative, instead of the German [niko'laizən].

However, the following year he gained his first full-time academic appointment at the University of Glasgow and became known as "Bill", which he was much happier with; in fact, this name stayed with him until the time of writing his article, some 48 years later.

Elsewhere in the article, he also shares what he terms an 'anecdote', but which I as an autoethnographer would term a 'vignette', to illustrate "the dangers involved in insisting on retaining one's surname more or less intact in a different linguistic and cultural environment, rather than changing it to *Nicolson* or *MacNicol*" (Nicolaisen, 1999). The anecdote, or vignette, involves recounting how in taking a suit to the cleaners, and in giving his name for the retrieval card, he had resolved to avoid the usual awkward conversations regarding how to spell his name, by giving the more anglicized version of *Nicolson*; however, this did not go according to plan since this elicited the question as to whether or not that was with a 'h'. Having answered that it didn't matter since this was not in fact his name in the first place, the shop attendant took offence and almost refused to take his suit (Nicolaisen, 1999).

I could identify very closely with this feeling and experience. When one's name is considered to be 'different' or 'odd' in the everyday context it can often cause awkward conversations which waste valuable time and lead to frustration and exacerbation on all sides – often to the point where the bearer of the name begins to weigh up the importance of accurate pronunciation or spelling of their name, against simply getting things done – even to the point of giving an entirely false name, in an attempt to avoid confusion. Any refusal to engage in clarification, which as in Nicolaisen's case can be due to fatigue and exacerbation, can be met with hostility and can cause disruption in what otherwise ought to be fairly routine activities. My recent article (Author, 2016) contains many examples of this kind of experience, including resolving not to correct people who continue to pronounce my name incorrectly, which then in turn caused confusion when others, aware of the correct pronunciation, wonder why I have not corrected the mispronouncers. Whilst my experiences

are only representative of one person, and Nicolaisen's are representative of only his

experiences, we both make links to the wider cultural contexts within which we reside and

also draw out themes and fully explain our experiences in the broad context of our lives; in

this way, our data is richer than if it was simply presented as single vignettes within a study

where each of our experiences might be compared and contrasted with, say, examples from

30 other interviewees. Equally, what we present is useful data and can be used by future

authors who are writing on similar themes. I will thus now explore and explain this issue

further in the next section, before drawing the article to a close, making the case for further

onomastic authoethnographies.

What autoethnographic onomastics studies could add to our knowledge of names and naming.

There have been some very interesting papers in recent years from across the

disciplines, many of which use similar methodologies and present data on similar subjects in

similar ways. For example, many recent sociological papers have written about migrants and

ethnic minority groups, and their navigation of their new contexts, understanding how they

are perceived and weighing up options regarding how much to seek integration and how

much they should honour their own cultural, linguistic and religious heritages (Wykes,

2015a, 2015b; Madziva, 2017). However, there have been very similar studies, in terms of

topic, participants and methodologies, which have emanated from other disciplines, including

anthropology (Pennesi, 2016).

Furthermore, whilst Pennesi (2016) talks about how the participants in her study are

displaying "meta-agentic discourses", by recounting at interview stage their active refusal to

assimilate their names, I feel that it is fair to say that the participants would have more agency

still if they were reporting their own stories, under their own names, applying their own

interpretation, within the context of their wider experiences. With this in mind, it makes good

sense for those who are in a position to write their own 'case studies' of the careers of their

names, to do so. For academics, particularly those engaged in reflexive writing and research,

this should be a reasonably easy and straightforward task which will be rewarding. This

methodology will bring the kinds of benefits noted for case studies, including concrete,

context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2011), which enables us to develop a deep

understanding of particular instances of phenomena (Mabrey, 2008). I would argue that this

autoethnographic, personal case study data, could be similar in nature and just as revealing, if

not more so due to the reflexivity of the participant and researcher, who are one and the same,

as some, if not most, of the other qualitative research in the current field of names and

naming. So, for example, in her study of migrant experiences in Canada and their reactions to

comments about their names, Pennesi includes a quote or vignette from one of her

participants, under the pseudonym "Kinga", who says of her name:

> People say it's interesting or it's unique or "oh that's different." When they say "oh
>
> that's different" you think okay well why is it different? Is it because you never heard
>
> of it? And I've actually said that a few times when people said "oh that's unusual" I
>
> said "why is it unusual? Just because you never heard of it that makes it unusual?"
>
> You know like – when you try to like turn the tables on them a little bit because like
>
> people have to be aware of the implications of what comes out of their mouths….
>
> Well it's mostly people with English sounding names who will say "oh that's
>
> different." Oh you know "that's unusual" in that kind of tone…" (Pennesi, 2016).

This resonates with many of the vignettes in my paper, including the one where I

describe the reaction of an English person to my name being pronounced Særæ, with two

short "As" (Griffiths and Jones, 1995) and a rolling r, or alveolar trill (The International

Phonetic Association, 1999), or at least the Anglicized version Saːɹə, rather than Sɛəɹə

(Sarah). He assumed I was "Trying to be posh" (Author, 2016). In another vignette, I recall

agonising before deciding against the idea of correcting someone's mispronunciation of my

name, thinking how I might have had to raise the issue, making awkward physical gestures

and saying "Oo, erm, Sara, yeah, the "Welsh way," sorry yeah, unusual…" (Author, 2016).

This illustrates the potential for autoethnographies to provide similar data as more

conventional qualitative research, but with the added value of being expressed by the person

experiencing the phenomenon. In this way, not only is the data grounded in the wider context

of the person's experiences, and thus is richer, it also provides the space for individual

agency, in that the participant is also the author and the one expanding on, and explaining, the

themes. Furthermore, I would point out that, since my paper discusses the experiences of

someone from a native linguistic and minority group – Welsh speakers in Wales, I am adding

something quite new and unique to the field of names and naming, which can then be

compared and contrasted with the growing literature regarding migrant linguistic, cultural and

ethnic minority communities (Edwards and Caballero, 2008; Wykes, 2015a, 2015b; Pennesi,

2016; Cerchiaro, 2017; Madziva, 2017).

In another paper, Pennesi talks about convocation ceremonies in Canada[2] (Pennesi,

2014). In this paper, Pennesi describes the efforts which are made to ensure correct

pronunciation of all names, including those which do not index as English, which is the

dominant language in this context. The university has a protocol, deploying a variety of

methods to ensure correct pronunciation. However, where non-English names are deemed

difficult, students bearing those names experience negative feelings about being treated as

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[2] Known as graduation ceremonies in the UK.

outsiders, for example if their names are deemed 'difficult', requiring repeated verification and halting pronunciation.

In my initial autoethnographic onomastics paper (Author, 2016), I included a vignette about my own, disastrous doctoral graduation day, in the city of Liverpool, the full saga of which can be read on my anonymous blog under the nome du plume Alwen Jones (Jones, 2012). Briefly, despite having engaged with the Liverpool (UK) version of the protocol Pennesi describes in her study, my name was pronounced Sɛəɹə (Serruh) rather than Særæ (Sara), with no apparent effort made to engage with the pronunciation notes I had provided. Here, my autoethnographic experiences can enhance our understanding of Pennesi's article in a number of ways. For example, Pennesi in her article discusses migrant and next generations of migrant families, whose names do not index to the dominant language of English, and their experiences. Meanwhile, my article addresses the inequalities and problems faced by an indigenous linguistic community within the UK context. Furthermore, whilst Pennesi in her article is reporting on a study seeking to identify positive and negative experiences of people studying or working at an Ontario-based university, who have non-English names or who deal with a diversity of names on their work-related tasks, my article, along with the full written account on my blog (Jones, 2012), begins to address one of the gaps in this important field, the actual lived experience of those with names which do not index as English.

It would be interesting to hear autoethnographic accounts in other settings, for example from the Welsh university, where I currently work; in Wales, graduation/ convocation ceremonies will by necessity comply with the Welsh language (Wales) measure 2011, which places the Welsh language on an equal footing with the English language (Stationary Office, 2011) and since the university offers many courses through the medium of Welsh through *Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol* [3] (Davies & Trystan, 2012) there are many

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[3] The National Welsh Medium College

Welsh-speaking students, who have names which index as Welsh rather than English

(Morgan and Morgan, 1985; Moore, 2011). Autoethnographies by students and staff would

create interesting case studies which could be used to assess the effectiveness of the protocols

currently in place in this context.

In her study on the experiences of ethnic minority migrants, who have changed their

names and chosen appropriate names for their mixed-race children, Wykes (2015a) includes

an interesting anecdote from one of her participants, which would seem to highlight the idea

that a name which indexes for English, rather than one which indexes for Zimbabwean,

grants access to an increasingly privileged position in society:

> Kayla explained that her 'credit file has improved, because I've got a new name…I'm
>
> getting…offered, more credit…just compared to [what I was offered] as Kayla
>
> Manyika [her maiden name]'. In addition, Kayla said that to have a 'white British'
>
> surname makes her appear more bona fide British in some contexts. It gives her that
>
> (albeit imperfect/partial) link to the privileges of being 'white British', which she felt
>
> her old surname did not have (Wykes, 2015a).

However, I would suggest that this example highlights the need to scrutinise personal

narratives, and explore their utility and accuracy. My personal experience, of swopping one

surname which would index broadly as Welsh but also as "British", for another name on the

same index, was that I also, as a white person, experienced an improved "credit file".

Moreover, one conversation with a car insurance company, when giving information and

details about my change in marital status, address and name, all in quick succession, was very

revealing on this matter. I was told outright that my insurance premium would now be

reduced, on account of my marital status – rather than my name change. Further elaboration,

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on the part of the insurance salesman, revealed that insurance companies consider marital

status as one of the factors when considering your propensity for risk; married people, they

felt, were not seen as 'risk takers' – which I personally felt was debateable, though a

welcome perception given that it went in my favour with regards to how much I would now

be paying, as a 'married person', to insure my car.

It is interesting here to reflect on whether I might have held a different view of this

change in my insurance status, perhaps one similar to Kayla's, had I have been changing

from a name which didn't index as "British/ English", and/ or had I not happened to have

elicited the explanation from the insurance salesman with regards to why my insurance was

now going to be reduced. The matter of the finer details with regards to insurance, and our

perceptions of them, is a subject for another paper in itself, however I think again this

highlights the added value which could be gained from autoethnographies in this field, as

opposed to traditional researcher-participant qualitative research. Autoethnography involves

the systematic analysis of the author's experiences to understand the broader cultural

experience (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011), which would include exploring the

autobiographical account in the context of the adjunct literatures and other relevant

contextual sources (Sparkes, 2017) – in this case, criteria used by insurance companies and

credit card companies when setting premiums. Whereas in traditional qualitative studies, like

the one conducted by Wykes (2015a; 2015b), the researcher is somewhat relying on the

participants to give insights into their lived experiences and lifeworlds, developing several

themes which are common to several individuals rather than to the experiences of one

individual in their situated context.

Other recent sociological papers have explored fascinating subjects, including

children's perspectives on contemporary (sur)naming practices (Davies, 2011) and surnaming

practices in present-day China, reflecting on the impact of the one-child policy and current

national political projects to circumvent some of this social impact (Qi, 2017). Both of these

articles make use of illuminating quotes from participants, however I would argue that the

emotional, embodied, subjective experiences of the participants are somewhat impoverished

by being simply juxtaposed with quotes by a number of participants, as part of a wider

sample, with quotes selected to illustrate themes developed by a researcher who is somewhat

removed from their context. As an autoethnographer, I was able to select my most salient

experiences, develop my own themes, and present my experiences within the broader context

of my culture and community, which I feel I am better placed to do than a researcher from

outside this community; again, this is also a better facilitative methodology in terms of

individual agency and autonomy.

Thus, my autoethnographic article about my forename adds something valuable to the

discussions on names and naming, whilst generating more questions and opening up new

lines of inquiry. For example, the specifics of Welsh names and naming practices (Morgan

and Morgan, 1985; Moore, 2011), which appear to have been under-researched. Furthermore,

the subjective experiences of re-naming, Anglicization and discourses of resistance amongst

members of the Welsh language community. I have been researching the literature on these

themes and recently presented a paper at a conference on this topic, which will be the subject

of a separate journal article in the near future. Since I am a Welsh-medium lecturer at a

Welsh university, I took the opportunity to explore the issue of Welsh naming practices with

my students on a sociology of language module and set an essay question for them to write an

autoethnography of the career of their own names, making the connections between their

biographies and the wider social, historical and public contexts, and thus engaging their

sociological imaginations (Wright Mills, 1959).

In giving the lecture I engaged in pedagogies of storytelling, which involved sharing

stories from my own experiences and encouraging students to reflect on their own

experiences (Storrs, 2009). I was richly rewarded, with the students not only reflecting on

their own personal experiences which were illuminating to the topic, but they also pointed to

phenomena within names and naming in a Welsh context which I had not fully understood or

appreciated before. An example of this is the trend for using two forenames in every day

practice, dropping the surname for all but official use – for example Dafydd Iwan, the Welsh

singer and political activist, whose surname is Jones, but he has always known simply by his

two forenames. Whilst this might be considered a stage name, it seems that this is an endemic

trend within the general population in Wales, with personal examples being cited. However

there was no clearly held theory as to where the trend originated or why it was considered to

be important – however it was held to be important and had been the subject of

confrontations with postmen and families being engaged in meta-agentic discourses.

Referring to the available literature, one might see this as what Moore (1990) terms an

'intermediate stage' between the old patronymic system of being known as son or daughter

of, thus two forenames joined by 'ap' or 'ferch', to a Christian name followed by an unfixed

surname. For example the great Methodist leader John Elias was the son of Elias Jones, who

was the son of John Elias. However, Moore states that this stage occurred between the late-

seventeenth century and the mid-nineteenth; interesting then, to ponder, on this trend

appearing in the present day, being much liked and advocated, but for which no specific

reason or explanation was forthcoming.

Writing our own experiences, and facilitating others to do the same, thus increasing a

sense of autonomy and agency, may raise questions regarding ethical considerations in

modern research, depending on subject discipline. Whilst I feel confident that this kind of

methodological practice is more ethical than the traditional approach to qualitative research, I

will now briefly outline the issues as I understand them.

Ethical and procedural implications of autoethnographic onomastic projects – single and multi-authored accounts

The first issue which occurs to me with regards to preparing, submitting and publishing autoethnographic onomastic accounts is how to navigate the anonymous peer review process. The process of anonymous peer review is often at least partially undermined, for example if someone is one of a handful of experts in a field and they refer to their work in the text of their article, it will be fairly obvious who they are to anyone who has enough knowledge of the field to be acting as a peer reviewer. Equally, if the author omits or anonymises all of their previous publications, their identity will become obvious by their exclusion and/ or attempts to anonymise all of their contributions on such a subject. When an author prepares and submits an autoethnography, they are in fact describing some aspect of their lives and selves. Thus, again, the chances for identification despite the removal of their names, are quite likely. So, if an author is actually writing about his or her name, anonymization is further complicated.

My original autoethnographic article (Author, 2016) was based solely on my forename. However, amongst my current writing projects, I have plans to write an article which will examine the cultural and personal implications of my full name, including my pre-martial surname. I feel that there is an important and powerful story to tell here from the name as a whole, whilst also considering the constituent parts. However, this will of course present a conundrum at the peer review stage, and might, in the end, require me to publish it outside of the formal peer-review process, in order to make the data available for future study. I am, however, heartened at seeing that Finch (2008) and Pilcher (2016) managed to include some autobiographical information in their sociological articles, and thus confident that solutions and compromises might be found.

One of the things that struck me whilst reading some of the qualitative articles, particularly Pennesi (2016) and Wykes (2015), was that the participants had been given pseudonyms; I felt that this got in the way at certain points, making comprehension more difficult. For example, in the case of "Elinor Murley", who had a white Scottish surname, which she used rather than her husband's Peruvian name. "Elinor" explains that:

> The part of her husband's surname that would pass to their children is Spanish in origin, but that this surname has become quite synonymous to South America. Nonetheless, she asserts that in the UK it does not tend to be understood as Spanish/ Peruvian, but rather is essentialised as generically 'foreign': that there is little desire within mainstream white British discourse to understand the origins of Other names – some are just 'foreign', contrasting with the invisibility and privilege of white British names. In this context, 'foreign' means not white British (Wykes, 2015).

As a reader, I found this section quite cryptic and difficult to follow. Furthermore, I found myself distracted by thoughts regarding what the name might be and what the significance of this description represented, and, possibly, masked. When the pseudo-surname was revealed as being "de Mendoza", it strengthened the connection I had made with "de Menezes", the surname of the Brazilian (thus South American) man who was shot in an airport in 2005, having been mistakenly identified as a suicide bomber fugitive from the London bombings (Wikipedia, 2017). I have no way of knowing whether I am correct in my assumption, or else way off the mark, however the anonymization has created some confusion here and I cannot see a satisfactory justification for the anonymization, other than that it is standard practice in current qualitative research. Thus, questions arise: do participants, who are involved in qualitative research, necessarily require or desire

anonymity? Or would some, perhaps, prefer to have their names and identities known? Furthermore, particularly with regards to names and naming practices, does anonymization impoverish and over-complicate the data? It would seem to me to be somewhat ironic, when engaged in exploring the significance of names and naming practices, to take for granted that 'participants' should wish to be 're-named', and that this will have no impact on the data produced and conclusions drawn. I would therefore propose that, at the very least, in any future studies in which personal stories are collected and portrayed regarding names and naming, due consideration to the impact of 're-naming' be given, with a reflexive section included where this is discussed.

In considering how to convey personal stories of people other than ourselves in auto/ethnographic studies, we might look to the first study in which the term 'autoethnography' was deployed, not for an individual project, but for anthropological, ethnographic researching involving the tribe of the Dani; in this study, children of the tribe were asked to respond to the simple question "what do people do?" Answers to this question, provided information about the Dani's own understanding of their world (Heider, 1975). I would propose that this might be an ethical methodology to use in the collection of personal accounts regarding names and naming practices. These would, by virtue of the subject matter, be situated accounts, grounded in their cultural contexts in a way which would make it difficult to anonymize; there is also then the question of the value of the data taken out of context – the accounts of the Dani are useful for understanding their tribe. If one were to conduct a study of Welsh personal names, the context would be equally important for understanding the significance of the names, and not just the country of Wales (or descendants and their current contexts) but also their geographical location within Wales, since particular counties, as well as a North, South, West and East divide, will have implications for cultural and linguistic practices. So, with regards to producing personal,

emotional accounts and data around names and naming practices, I feel strongly that

situatedness is more important than the traditional concerns regarding anonymization.

Conclusion

The field of onomastics, and the field of the sociology of names, have presented some

interesting data and theories regarding personal names and naming practices. However, thus

far they have been operating quite separately, without much cross-pollination between them,

and thus opportunities are being missed for sharing knowledge. Additionally, until now much

of the research and writing has used conventional methodologies and, except for my own

article (Author, 2016) and that of Nicolaisen (1999), and Rivera Maulucci & Moore Mensah

(2014), personal, lived experiences and emotional aspects to names and naming practices

have been largely absent. Whilst these conventional methodologies are the mainstay of this

broader field of inquiry, there is currently clearly a gap in the literature, as well as an artificial

separation between similar fields of inquiry, studying similar things, with similar aims in

sight, using similar methodologies. It is my contention that autoethnographies could help to

fill this void, bringing new insights to the field.

In any field of inquiry, when conventional wisdom is questioned, new insights may be

gained and sometimes the parameters of a field of inquiry may be altered (Isaacson, 2008). In

the field of medicine, the traditional medical case history has been criticized for being

characterized by artificiality, to the detriment of the patient's own narrative. In recent years

therefore, autopathographies or patient tales have addressed this deficit by revealing patients'

experiences of their own ailments (Aronson, 2000; Hall-Clifford and Aronson, 2017). I have

written articles in this genre recently which have attracted many positive comments, which

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have also revealed the low level of awareness the general public have about genetic

conditions (Author, 2017) and in particular the lived experience of tinnitus (Author, 2015).

Drawing on writing conventions which have traditionally not been a part of the field of

medicine, for example literary techniques and other aspects drawn from the humanities, can

bring new insights to the field of medicine, whilst also enhancing the discipline of humanities

by expanding the phenomena of study and attracting new audiences. This is also perhaps true

of autoethnographic onomastics.

All methodologies have limits and thus combining and experimenting with different

methodologies is more likely to facilitate new discoveries (Salmon, 2003). Often there isn't a

practical or academic reason for adhering to one way of researching and writing, but because

one particular way has been used before it becomes standard practice and thus considered to

be the only legitimate carrier of a particular kind of knowledge (Richardson, 1997, 2002).

Exploring new territory like this will inevitably bring challenges, for example how to assess a

genre/ methodology such as autoethnography, which appears to break many of the

conventions which are traditional to, for example, the social sciences. However, this should

not deter us from experimenting and pursuing new avenues of inquiry. Instead we should

look to see what tools might help to bridge the gaps between the various different fields. In

particular, I feel that Richardson's proposed criteria for evaluating ethnography (Richardson,

2000a) will be useful as a way of assessing autoethnographic onomastic articles. This criteria

is sensitive and will reduce the risk of overlooking the unique and nuanced contributions of

the autoethnographies, which might happen if they were to be reduced to the sum of their

constituent parts, for example tick boxes for recording their use of methods, which have been

criticised (Barbour, 2001).

Since publishing my own autoethnographic onomastics 'my-story', I have been

delighted by how many readers of this article, academic colleagues, friends, family and

members of the public, have told me how much they enjoyed my article. In turn, my article has also elicited many stories, which I have very much enjoyed hearing and reading. That these stories are currently in oral form only, however, is, I feel, a great shame. Everyone has an onomastics my-story to tell and I think a collection of onomastic my-stories would greatly enrich our current knowledge about the lived experiences of names and naming practices. I would therefore like to end this article by calling for my fellow academics to lead the way in building this collection of 'our-stories', by adding their own voices and my-stories to the current literature. Whether evocative (Bochner and Ellis, 2016), analytic (Anderson, 2006), or walking the line between them and embracing the benefits of both sides (Stanley, 2014), every autoethnography will contribute some new insight to the field of onomastics, and I for one would very much enjoy reading them.

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