

Aleksandra Agnieszka Płaczek
Doctoral School of Social Sciences
University of Lodz

***MY NAME IS... EXPERIENCING NAMES AND SURNAMES IN THE
PROCESS OF INTERACTIVE CATEGORIZATION AND HUMAN IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTION***

Doctoral thesis written under the scientific supervision of prof. dr hab. Krzysztof T. Konecki and dr Magdalena Wojciechowska

Abstract

The dissertation is devoted to analyzing the phenomenon of experiencing names and surnames. The main objective of the study was to explore the roles that names and surnames play in everyday interactions, as well as in the construction of both individual and collective identity. Particular attention was given to how names and surnames function in situations such as introducing oneself, reading attendance lists, or how they are perceived and reacted to by people in the participants' social environments. The study also examined the relationships between participants and their family members, as well as aspects related to shared values and cultural capital.

The structure of the work is divided into three main parts: the theoretical section (chapters 1–4), the methodological section (chapter 5), and the empirical section (chapters 6–10).

The theoretical part presents the adopted research perspective, which is based on symbolic interactionism, and includes references to the concepts of stigma and identity. It also features a review of the literature on names and surnames, along with a historical and legal overview of their use, intended to provide a broader context for the empirical analysis.

The methodological section discusses the research aims, subject, and key issues, as well as the hypotheses, sources, methods, and techniques applied. The sampling strategy is outlined, along with a reflection on the researcher's own positionality and personal involvement in the subject matter. Ethical considerations are addressed as well, particularly about disclosing the identities of research participants.

The empirical section offers an analysis of the collected research material in three main areas: individual identity ("I: Attitudes toward Names and Surnames"), social interaction ("They: Names and Surnames as Elements of Interpersonal Communication"), and collective identity ("We: Names and Surnames as Elements of Family Biography"). It is emphasized that

an individual's experience often lies at the intersection of these three dimensions, which tend to overlap and influence one another. A fourth empirical chapter ("Names and Surnames in the Process of Gender Transition") focuses on the relationship between names, surnames, and gender identity. Due to the specific nature of this issue, it was addressed as a separate area of analysis.

The dissertation concludes with findings, an critical reflection on the research process, and suggestions for future exploration of the topic.

The key conclusion drawn from the study is that the way individuals perceive and use their names and surnames is a dynamic process, shaped by social context and interactions. Names and surnames are integral to a lifelong "naming process," which includes introducing oneself, signing documents, modifying or changing names, and passing them on to children. This process extends beyond individual lives, encompassing historical, familial, and cultural contexts.

Naming is deeply rooted in identity, interactions, and culture, and its dynamics are influenced by three interrelated areas: personal identity, the social environment, and culture. These areas interact with one another and with the individual, shaping how meanings are assigned, stereotypes are formed, and labels are applied.

Names and surnames are not neutral—they are carriers of history, memory, experience, and values. While they serve an administrative identification function, they also bear traces of everyday life, language, culture, and family biography. As such, they are "lived names"—full of life, actively used in everyday communication and self-presentation.

Keywords: names, surnames, interactions, identity, sociology

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Alexandra
Kowal