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Naming Patterns in Rural South-Central Nebraska

Sharon N. Obasi
University of Nebraska-Kearney, USA

A common strategy in naming a newborn is "namesaking," that is, the practice of naming the newborn after a specific family member. Namesaking may be considered a unique form of parental investment, advertising the connection between the newborn and specific kinfolk. Namesaking patterns were assessed in rural, south-central Nebraska by examining 841 birth announcements printed in a local newspaper during the calendar years 1994 and 2014. Results indicated that male newborns were significantly more likely to be namesaked than female newborns; first-born children were more likely to be namesaked than later-born children; and namesaked newborns were more likely to be named after paternal relatives than maternal relatives. These findings suggest that namesaking may be a way of preserving familial connections within rural, south-central Nebraska.

KEYWORDS Namesaking, parental investment, birth, family, Nebraska

Introduction

Selecting a name for a newborn often involves an intense familial effort. Naming patterns are not only reflective of sociocultural trends but may have adaptive significance as well. This is particularly true of the practice of namesaking, which is naming a newborn after a specific relative. Throughout history, naming patterns have changed as a result of social and cultural influences. Social historian Daniel Scott Smith (1977), in his classic study of naming patterns in the town of Hingham, Massachusetts, from 1640–1880, identified several rules of naming which were used by the settlers of this area. Hingham parents generally gave their children biblical names, primarily from the Old Testament (e.g. Abraham), rather than popular names indicative of their English heritage (e.g. William). Another peculiar naming practice adopted by settlers of Hingham was that of necronymic succession, in which a child was given the name of a deceased sibling. According to Smith, this practice, which declined in the nineteenth century, reflected changing attitudes to death more than ideas about the uniqueness of individual offspring. At the start of the 1800s, death may have been considered absolute; therefore, there was no hesitation in giving a child the same name as a dead sibling. By the end of the century, however,

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attitudes about the finality of death had changed; hence, the memory of the dead child was more likely to be cherished. Consequently, there was a decline in necronymic succession. Generally, however, Hingham parents gave their children different names, as many parents do today. This particular practice, according to Smith, reflected the increasing concern and attention given to offspring and exemplified the cultural choices imposed on this society primarily by the church.

Despite these naming practices, however, some "truths" concerning namesaking persisted. Sons were more likely to be named after kin than daughters. Patrilineal names (patronyms) were more likely to be used in namesaking, regardless of the sex of the child. Birth order proved to be a strong indicator of the likelihood of being named after a family member, since it was usually the first-born who enjoyed this privilege. In Hingham, 49.5 % of first-born sons between 1861 and 1880 were named after a paternal relative, usually the father or the paternal grandfather.

Rossi (1965), in analysis of twentieth-century naming patterns among middle-class families in Chicago, noted changes in naming styles indicative of changing societal conventions. In this study, a more equitable distribution in the allocation of names was noted rather than the usual bias towards patronyms. Hence, sons were less likely to be named after paternal relatives exclusively and daughters were less likely to be named after maternal kin exclusively. Nevertheless, the usual biases of namesaking were observed. Of the 951 children in the study, 62 % were named after relatives. Namesaking, however, was more prevalent among first and second-born males. Of the boys, 70 % were named after a relative, with 78 % of these being the first-born son. Of the females, only 52 % were named after relatives, with 61 % being the first-born daughter. Rossi interpreted this bias as indicative of the parents' desire for sons to perpetuate the lineage. Female offspring were more likely to undergo a name change through marriage. The name of male progeny was less likely to change; thus, namesaking of sons ensured a nominal continuation of the family line. Furthermore, professionally and socially successful male children bring prestige to their entire lineage that is readily identifiable as a result of the practice of namesaking.

The theory of namesaking as a mechanism for aligning offspring with certain kin was also espoused by Gutman (1977) in his analysis of namesaking among slaves in the US in the period 1750–1925. Naming offspring after relatives, particularly fathers, prevailed among slave populations since it assured kinship-reckoning, especially with the reality that the family would more than likely be separated. Furstenberg and Talvitie (1980) expressed similar views in their analysis of naming patterns among 323 predominantly black, unwed, teenaged mothers in Baltimore in 1966–1972. The authors found that the naming of the children was usually done by the mother, or some maternal relative, but about one-fifth of the mothers reported that the fathers of their offspring had taken an active role in naming their children. With respect to namesaking, approximately 50 % of the males in this study were named after their fathers, compared to 8 % of females who either had their father's names or a variant thereof. Furthermore, there was a high incidence of offspring being given their father's surname irrespective of the marital status of the parents: 43 % of boys and 46 % of girls had their father's surnames. This practice can be considered evidence of naming as a way of indicating lineage and kinship ties.

Studies on naming patterns generally focus on the naming of birth or genetic offspring. Similarities in namesaking also have been observed among adopted children (Johnson

et al., 1991). These authors found that adopted children were more likely to be namesaked than genetic children (76 % versus 48 %). They also found that genetic children were significantly more likely to be named after patrilineal relatives. In contrast, adopted children were more likely to be named after maternal relatives, although this difference was not significant. These authors argue that adopted children were more likely to be namesaked after parental blood relatives of both lines in order to validate their entry into the family. Thus, the naming of an adopted child after relatives seemed to be a means of increasing perceptions of the genetic relatedness of the parents and the adoptee.

Naming patterns, especially namesaking, also may be used as credible indicators of affection or solidarity within families. Rossi (1965) noted that mothers were less likely to name children after relatives whom they disliked. Furstenberg and Talvitie (1980) argued that namesaking served to ensure closer relationships between fathers and their offspring which may have had beneficial effects on children. Boys who were named after their fathers experienced fewer behavioral problems including bed-wetting and temper tantrums. Furthermore, children of either sex who had their father's surname were more likely to receive economic assistance from them. Boys who bore their father's forename were also more likely to interact with their father. More recently, Brown et al. (2014) reported that the use of patronyms was significantly higher in "honor states," which are identified based on the seventeenth and eighteenth-century immigration patterns of Ulster Scots or Scotch-Irish within the US. Researchers have identified "honor states" as those within the southern and western regions of the US (excluding Hawaii and Alaska). "Honor states" exhibit significantly higher rates of argument-based homicide among white males, higher levels of suicide, higher levels of school violence, and higher levels of risk-taking (Barnes et al., 2012; Brown et al., 2009; Nisbett and Cohen, 1996). Varnum and Kitayama (2010) argue that regional differences in naming patterns correspond to regional differences in history of settlement. Cross-cultural examinations of naming indicate that parents are more likely to choose popular (common) names in regions with a longer history of settlement, whereas parents in more recently settled areas are more likely to select fashionable (uncommon) names (Varnum and Kitayama, 2010).

Bestowing a familial name on a newborn may be considered a form of parental investment and a mechanism for fitting children into a kinship network. While the practice of namesaking has been documented, the interaction between namesaking and the fostering of familial connection remains to be fully explored. If namesaking is indeed a strategy for advertising genetic kinship and acquiring resources then the expectation is that there should be a paternal bias in namesaking in the US since the paternal line is typically the one used to identify ancestry, and to allocate inheritance. The present study examined naming patterns in a rural south-central Nebraska community to identify the frequency of namesaking, to determine if there are any changes in namesaking within the past two decades, and to determine if there are any identifiable differences in naming and namesaking reflective of changes in population demographics.

Methodology

Naming patterns and namesaking were assessed by examining 841 birth announcements published in the *Kearney Hub*, a primary newspaper for rural, south-central Nebraska. Birth announcements were assessed for two calendar years, 1994 and 2014. This time-span

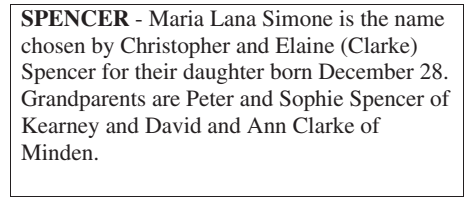
SPENCER - Maria Lana Simone is the name chosen by Christopher and Elaine (Clarke) Spencer for their daughter born December 28. Grandparents are Peter and Sophie Spencer of Kearney and David and Ann Clarke of Minden.

FIGURE 1 Birth Announcement Example.

was selected because the early 1990s saw the start of increases in the immigrant population in Nebraska. According to the US Census Bureau (2001, 2013), the Latino population within Nebraska grew from 2.3 % in 1990 to 9.8 % in 2013. Birth announcements were analyzed for instances of namesaking. In this study, namesaking was operationally defined as having any name that was the same as that of a relative mentioned in the birth announcement, irrespective of the placement of that name in the sequence of names. For example, if a father had the name "James Spencer Clarke" and the infant had the name "Christopher James Clarke" that case was coded as namesaked. Figure 1 represents a typical birth announcement. Information recorded from the birth announcement included the name, sex, and birth order of the infant, whether the infant was a natural or adopted child, and the names of all of the close consanguineal relatives mentioned in the announcement, including parents, siblings, and both sets of grandparents and great-grandparents. The lack of reference to a sibling was coded as a first-born child.

Results

Of the 477 birth announcements assessed for 1994, 93 (19.5 %) were cases of infants being named after a family member mentioned in the announcement. Of the 364 birth announcements for 2014, 68 (18.6 %) were cases of namesaking. There was no significant difference in the frequency of namesaking in 1994 and 2014 (X^2 (1, N = 841) = 0.9, n.s.). As anticipated, there was a higher incidence of namesaking among male newborns than female newborns irrespective of year of birth (29.4 % (132/449 male newborns) versus 7.9 % (31/392 female newborns) (X^2 (1, N = 841) = 61.85, $p < 0.001$). Further analysis revealed that, in 1994, 78.9 % (75/95) of those named after a family member were male newborns compared to 21 % (20/95) female newborns. Thus, 29.9 % (75/251) of all the sons born in this period were named after a relative compared with 8.8 % (20/226) of all the daughters born in this period. These data were subjected to chi square analysis and proved to be significant (X^2 (1, N = 477) = 32.98, $p < 0.001$). In 2014, 83.8 % (57/68) male children were named after a family member in comparison with 16.2 % (11/68) of female children (X^2 (1, N = 364) = 29.19, $p < 0.001$).

The incidence of namesaking appeared to be positively associated with birth order. In this particular study, the lack of reference to a sibling led to the case being coded as a first-born child. Overall, first-born children, regardless of gender, were more likely to be named after a relative than later-born children (X^2 (1, N = 841) = 6.14, $p < 0.05$). In 1994, 72.6 % (69/95) of namesaked children were first-born (X^2 (1, N = 477) = 1.65, n.s.).

TABLE 1
OVERALL FREQUENCY OF NAMESAKING

	Namesaked	Namesaked after patrilineal relatives	Namesaked after matrilineal relatives
Male (*n* = 449)	132 (29.3 %)	95 (71.9 %)	36 (27.3 %)
Female (*n* = 392)	31 (7.9 %)	7 (22.6 %)	14 (45.2 %)
First-born male (*n* = 240)	79 (32.9 %)	56 (70.9 %)	22 (27.8 %)
First-born female (*n* = 208)	22 (10.6 %)	4 (18.2 %)	13 (59.1 %)
Later-born male (*n* = 209)	53 (25.4 %)	39 (73.6 %)	14 (26.4 %)
Later-born female (*n* = 184)	9 (4.9 %)	1 (11.1 %)	7 (77.8 %)

Note: The data in the latter two columns reflect clear patrilineal or matrilineal namesakes. Children for whom this information was not available were not included in the totals of the latter two columns.

In 2014, 47 % (32/68) of namesaked children were first-born (X^2 (1, N = 364) = 5.19, $p < 0.05$). Further analysis, however, did not identify any significant differences with respect to sex, namesaking, and birth order. Analysis revealed that, in 1994, 69.3 % (52/75) of the namesaked sons and 85 % (17/20) of the namesaked daughters were first-born. In 2014, 47.4 % (27/57) of namesaked sons and 45.5 % (5/11) of namesaked girls were first-born. Notably among the namesaked newborns, there was no significant difference in the use of patronyms versus matronyms (refer to Table 1).

Naming patterns in rural Nebraska were compared with state-wide naming patterns in Nebraska, as well as national naming patterns using the US Social Security Administration's (SSA's) names database (SSA, n.d.). In this study, the uniqueness in the spelling of names was preserved so that each name was considered separately. For example, "Ann" and "Anne" or "Chris" and "Kris" would be assessed as four distinct names. There was a high level of variability in the different first names given to newborns in 1994 and 2014. In 1994, 139 different names were used for sons and 155 different names were used for daughters. The 10 most frequently used boys' names constituted 24.7 % (62/251) of the total frequency of names used for sons. The 10 most frequently used girls' names constituted 18 % (41/226) of the total frequency of names used for daughters. In 2014, 156 different boys' names were used and 151 different girls' names. The 10 most frequently used boys' names constituted 19.2 % (30/156) of the total frequency of names used for sons. The 10 most frequently used girls' names constituted 14.5 % (22/151) of the total frequency of names used for daughters. Of the 10 most frequently used boys' names in 1994 only three were on the most frequently used names statewide and nationally. Of the 10 most frequently used girls' names in 1994 only four were among the most frequently used names statewide and nationally. In 2014, only two of the most frequently used boys' names and one of the 10 most frequently used girls' names were also among the most frequently used names statewide and nationally (refer to Tables 2–5).

Discussion

This study identified certain factors associated with the likelihood of an infant being namesaked, that is, named after a family member. Boys were more likely to be namesaked than girls. First-borns were more likely to be namesaked than later-born children. There was also a tendency for newborns to be named after paternal relatives rather than maternal relatives (nonsignificant observation). Thus, as examined in this study, namesaking patterns in rural, south-central Nebraska were comparable to those observed in honor

states such as western and southern US states. Interestingly, irrespective of year, there was little overlap between the 10 most frequently used names in rural, south-central Nebraska and the 10 most frequently used names in the entire state of Nebraska or the US.

In this study, namesaking was assessed indirectly through birth announcements published in an area newspaper. Thus, the full complement of infants born in rural, south-central Nebraska was not assessed, which may have contributed to the comparatively small percentage of newborns identified as "namesaked." In addition, parents of newborns have to purposefully give birth announcement information to the newspaper.

TABLE 2
TOP 10 MOST FREQUENTLY USED NAMES FOR BOYS IN 1994

Rural South-Central Nebraska	Nebraska	USA
Jacob	Jacob	Michael
Michael	Austin	Christopher
Austin	Tyler	Matthew
Tanner	Matthew	Joshua
Trevor	Michael	Tyler
Tyler	Zachary	Brandon
Aaron	Andrew	Jacob
Alex	Nicolas	Daniel
Logan	Joshua	Nicolas
Ryan	Cody	Andrew

TABLE 3
TOP 10 MOST FREQUENTLY USED NAMES FOR BOYS IN 2014

Rural South-Central Nebraska	Nebraska	USA
Henry	Liam	Noah
Carter	Mason	Liam
Andrew	Noah	Mason
Hudson	William	Jacob
Jace	Henry	William
Mason	Oliver	Ethan
Miles	Samuel	Michael
Noah	Logan	Alexander
Samuel	Jacob	James
Brooks	Jackson	Daniel

TABLE 4
TOP 10 MOST FREQUENTLY USED NAMES FOR GIRLS IN 1994

Rural South-Central Nebraska	Nebraska	USA
Taylor	Jessica	Jessica
Courtney	Emily	Ashley
Jessica	Taylor	Emily
Jordan	Samantha	Samantha
Morgan	Ashley	Sarah
Olivia	Megan	Taylor
Rachel	Hannah	Brittany
Ashley	Sarah	Amanda
Emily	Elizabeth	Elizabeth
Jenna	Amanda	Megan

TABLE 5
TOP 10 MOST FREQUENTLY USED NAMES FOR GIRLS IN 2014

Rural South-Central Nebraska	Nebraska	USA
Avery	Olivia	Emma
Ella	Emma	Olivia
Amelia	Harper	Sophia
Ashtyn	Ava	Isabella
Aubrey	Sophia	Ava
Ava	Avery	Mia
Brecken	Isabella	Emily
Delaney	Charlotte	Abigail
Finley	Evelyn	Madison
Gwendolyn	Amelia	Charlotte

The submission of birth announcement information to a newspaper may be indicative of a certain level of education and social-awareness. Reliance on birth announcements also may account for the individualism in naming patterns observed in this region, which was exemplified by there being little overlap between the 10 most frequently used names in rural, south-central Nebraska and the 10 most frequently used names in the entire state of Nebraska or the US. Collectively, however, the findings of this study contribute to advancing knowledge about regional differences in naming patterns, especially namesaking, in the US. Namesaking may be viewed as a unique form of advertising to align offspring with kinfolk. Future studies will utilize direct measures such as surveys and one-to-one interviews to investigate namesaking and familial relationships in order to index the connection between namesakes and namesaked.

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Notes on contributor

Sharon N. Obasi is Assistant Professor of Family Studies at the University of Nebraska-Kearney. Her research areas of interest include parental investment, namesaking and familial relationships, and families and social policy.

Correspondence to: Sharon N. Obasi, University of Nebraska-Kearney, 905 West 25th Street, Kearney, Nebraska 68849, USA. Email: obasis2@unk.edu