Part II

Families and Relationships: Auto/Biography and Family—A Natural Affinity?

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There would seem to be an almost natural affinity between auto/biography and family. A life begins with birth and in the majority of cases this birth takes place within a set of family relationships. These family configurations (Widmer and Jallinoja 2008) may be extended or truncated, and they may frequently include significant others who are not related by birth or through marriage. They change in size and composition over time. Where such configurations do not exist, this will be a matter for extended comment and speculation.

Certainly, in modern times there is a strong expectation that any published biography or auto/biography will contain at least one chapter devoted to the subject's family of origin. In some cases, these accounts may go back over two or more generations. Although the subject is usually of interest because of her or his current status within sport, entertainment, politics or the arts, the published account would seem to be incomplete if it excluded all accounts of childhood and growing up. At the most simple level, such accounts of childhood provide points of connection between the reader and the subject, connections which may become lost as the subject enters into the more public realms. But these accounts are also seen as important in that they help the reader to place the subject in a variety of ways.

First, such accounts serve to 'place' the subject socially, showing family connections and the ways in which these connections identify, give solidity to, class, ethnic, national or religious backgrounds. To read such accounts is to gain some sense of social and geographical mobility and of the degrees of continuity or rupture between the families of origin and the lives and

experiences of the subject in adult life. At one extreme, the subject seems to be embedded into a particular social milieu and the subsequent career a continuation, extension or modified version of these early configurations. At the other extreme, there is a clear sense of rupture, of distance travelled between the early worlds of family and childhood and later achievements.

Second, accounts of early childhood and the family configurations within which childhood is lived, place the subject psychologically. In a post-Freudian world, it is customary, almost mandatory, to look to childhood experiences in order to discover clues to the subject's adult character. In some cases, these may be major family dramas dealing with neglect, abuse, separation or divided claims and loyalties. In others, it may be more a matter of certain traits being, it is supposed, carried over from one generation to another. A mother's interest in amateur dramatics may be believed to be a clue to a daughter's Oscar award. Diffused, and frequently unexamined, ideas about genetics and psycho-analysis help to account for the abiding fascination of accounts of early childhood in published auto/biographies. This fascination. Is reflected, for example, in the popularity of programmes such as '*Who Do You Think You Are?*'. (A popular BBC television programme in which celebrities, with the aid of archivists and historians, explore their genealogies.)

Finally, such accounts of early family life help to place the subject historically. Even the most minimal pieces of information such as date and place of birth can provide strong hints as to the historical events and changes that the subject passed through. If the reader, the author and/or the subject have some points of overlap in terms of historical experience, this may give rise to a kind of sharing and an understanding of commonalities and differences. Even where there may be decades or centuries between the subject and reader—say between a reader of today and Samuel Pepys for example—there will still frequently be that sense of an appreciation of the links between biography and history that Mills saw at the heart of the 'sociological imagination' (Mills 1959). The historical appreciation, it must be stressed, is not simply to do with major events such as The Great Fire of London (1666, recorded, among other sources, in Samuel Pepys' diaries) or the UK General Strike of 1926, but to do with the very character of everyday life and its points of difference from or overlap with the everyday life of later times.

Thus, the links between family life and auto/biography can be seen most clearly in these accounts of childhood that frequently, almost inevitably, are to be found in the first chapters of published works. These accounts, it has been argued, help to 'place' the subject socially, psychologically and historically. These accounts are often vivid and frequently provide points of connection between readers and subject.

But, of course, family life does not cease once the subject has left home. Not only do old and existing relationships persist in their influences and significance but new relationships are established and add to existing family configurations. If these later relationships sometimes lack the immediacy of these earlier accounts it may be partly due to a desire to preserve privacies (or to avoid legal action) and partly due to the fact that personal relationships are now competing with public lives and public roles. In studying the backgrounds of Anglican bishops, I frequently discovered relatively sparse references to the subjects' marriages and later family lives. Wives might be sometimes named and placed, socially, and described as 'helpmeets' but as little more. (Morgan 1981). Clearly, some sense of the divisions between public and private was at play here as well as, perhaps, some patriarchal assumptions. The way in which public lives tend to eclipse private lives can sometimes be evidenced in the obituaries published in newspapers or other outlets. Here it is not unusual for the account to focus almost entirely on the public achievements of the subject, simply noting, at the end, marriages and children.

Auto/Biographical accounts, published or unpublished, may provide valuable source material for scholars, especially sociologists, interested in family life (Summerfield 2019). But it should be clear from what has been said so far that such material does not imply or unambiguously provide data about everyday family living. As the bishops' example in the previous paragraph demonstrates, sometimes absences may be as significant as what is actually printed or published. More generally, it can be recognised that what we have before us in these accounts are representations or constructions of or discourses about family. Such accounts need to be interrogated for the way in which family is presented or displayed (Finch 2007).

Over the past twenty or thirty years, family researchers have made clear moves away from writing about *the Family* as if it were some relatively stable system or structure performing clearly identifiable functions for societies and individuals and towards addressing something more fluid and open (McKie and Cunningham-Burley 2005; Morgan 2011; Widmer and Jallinoja 2008). In some cases, family relationships may be seen as part, often an important part, of some wider set of relationships such as intimacy (Jamieson 1998) or personal life (Smart 2007). An example of this increasing fluidity in understanding family relationships is provided by discussions of family boundaries (McKie and Cunningham-Burley 2005). Who is included or excluded in a particular family? How do these inclusions or exclusions vary according to external events or changes over the life course? How far do family configurations include persons not formally related by birth or marriage?

These questions clearly connect to discussions of social networks and personal communities which frequently, but not necessarily, include family ties (Spencer and Pahl 2006).

This stress on openness and fluidity in our understanding of 'family' would seem to enhance the affinity between auto/biographical enquiry and family life. The everyday 'messiness' of family life and relationships frequently becomes apparent in our readings of the early chapters of auto/biographies. Put simply, family life rarely conforms to some pre-ordained script of the kind found in some social science models as well as in ideological and cultural representations. This simple insight can be enhanced and enriched by a study of auto/biographical accounts. The emphasis shifts from a search for illustrations of some essential nature of family relationships to, for example, a study of how family gets 'done' (Morgan 2011) or 'displayed' (Finch 2007). There is, in other words, an affinity between family practices and auto/biographical practices. Thus, for example, everyday accounts or presentations of 'family troubles' are both accounts of particular troubles that affect individuals and also presentations of 'family' and the ways in which family relationships are constituted and reconstituted on a day-to-day basis. Auto/Biographical accounts frequent force the readers to take the messiness of everyday family life seriously and not just as some kind of aberration.

One way of exploring the relationship between family practices and auto/biographical practices is to view family living as a 'nexus of stories'. It is likely that any collectivity—a community, a workplace or whatever—can be seen in this way (Morgan 2005). The everyday life of any collective arrangement is constituted and reconstituted, given a sense of reality, through the stories that members tell each other. These stories may be latent or manifest, formal or informal, big or small. They form part of everyday experience and part of the way in which these wider collectivities are reproduced.

Families provide one example of this way of viewing social collectivities but it is likely that the role of story-telling is frequently both more likely and more significant in family configurations. This is because of the co-presence (in actual awareness if not always in terms of physical presence) of people of different ages and generations. Moreover, some of these people are constructed as having responsibilities for others (Finch 1989; Finch and Mason 1993). Further, many of life's most dramatic experiences to do with sickness, abuse, disability and death occur in and are amplified by the family constellations within which they take place. The stories within families may constitute links between siblings, between partners and across generations. Such stories may unite or divide. They can provide links between the living

and the dead and between the absent and the present. A family without such stories is barely deserving of the name.

To talk of a 'nexus of stories' is not to imply equal participation. Some may be listeners or observers rather than key narrators and such differences may reflect power differentials (to do with age or gender) within families. These positionings will, of course, vary over time and today's listener may become tomorrow's narrator. The development of new media of communication means that such storytelling does not always require the bodily co-presence of all participants. Further, some of the key practices of social enquiry such as qualitative interviews or oral histories may provide further occasions for the presentation of family through stories.

It is important to note that although these stories involve family members, past and present, and play a role in the reproduction of family connections and identifications, they are rarely just about families. They are also about times past, the times and the contexts within which family practices were played out, how things have changed and how they have remained the same. Thus, family life and family stories provide important mediators between individual autobiography and history and hence are an important constituent of the 'sociological imagination' (Mills 1959).

A key feature of family life, and one that is often marginalised in some accounts, is intergenerationality. Public concerns about divorce, co-habitation, lone-parents and so on tend to lose sight of the fact that, whatever happens to our adult marital or relational ties, individuals remain connected to family others over time and over generations. Paul Thompson's demand that we should see family as 'an intergenerational system of interlocking social and emotional relationships' (Thompson 2005: 27) expresses this clearly. Indeed, it may be argued that as ties within generations sometimes appear to be becoming more threatened, ties across two or more generations become the more important. Such ties may be of practical importance as when we consider the wealth and property that may be handed down across generations (Finch and Mason 2000). But of at least equal importance, from the point of view of this part, are the family scripts and myths and secrets that are passed down and which are woven into the stories that family members tell to each other (Brannen 2015; Thompson 2005).

The term 'generation', as has frequently been pointed out, has at least two meanings. One is more closely related to the individual and to his or her placement in family relationships over time. Thus, an individual may make references to 'my father's generation' or 'my grandmother's generation'. But even here, although it is an individual making this placement, there are strong suggestions of larger groupings. To refer to 'my father's generation'

is to look beyond a particular individual and to see that individual in relation to sets of others, related or un-related, who enjoy a rough commonality in terms of being born at around the same time. Even here, we are making some kind of linking between individuals and history.

The other meaning of 'generation' confronts this question of history more directly. Conventionally, there may be references to decades; the 'nineteen sixties', the 'nineteen seventies' and so on. But frequently, these rather artificial designations may be replaced by something more historically descriptive. Thus, people may talk of 'the baby boomers', 'Thatcher's children', the 'inter-war generation' and so on. These designations are often fluid and overlap with each other, providing only a rough sense of commonality. But their use also highlights the ways in which ideas of generation serve to locate individuals and to provide the links between individuals and history. Thus, the stories which link family members are stories of particular individuals who have undergone particular historical experiences. It is here, in generations, that we see the link between family practices and auto/biographical practices.

In this focus on the stories told and the way in which these provide links across generations, it is important to recognise that these links, and the experiences which go with them, are never uniformly positive. Intergenerational relationships are frequently characterised by degrees of ambivalence (Brannen 2015: 35). This may reflect differences in perceived power, gender or, sometimes social class, as individuals move away from their families of origin, socially and geographically. They may reflect conflicting or competing obligations or contradictions between ideal, imagined families and everyday realities. But more generally the idea of ambivalence here indicates the fluctuating mixtures of the positives and the negatives in encounters between the generations.

The theme of generation, which so clearly links family and auto/biographical practices, is clearly to do with the location of individuals in time. Equally, we must see these individuals as being located in space. Here we are principally dealing with the idea of 'home' and the actual spatial location of many family practices. As with the term 'generation', the idea of home brings together many different themes and meanings. Most directly, there is the physical location, the meanings that attach to the rooms, surrounds and entrances, the material and economic significance of the home as property and as an investment (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005; Richards 1990). There are the ideological meanings of the idea of home with the links to notion of personal property and individual achievement. There are the emotional meanings of home, both positive and negative, ideas of home as a refuge or a prison.

It is the more material aspects of home that sometimes gets missed in sociological accounts of family living. Yet this is of considerable importance, providing links between family, the economy, the state and the local community. Further, this materiality does not end with the actual physical construction of the house or the apartment. It continues with the material items that individuals bring into the home and which become as much part of the home as the actual dwelling. These are the pots and pans, the items of furniture, the personal effects which, in the past were often detailed in wills and inventories. We are also talking about the pictures on the walls, the items on the mantelpiece (Hurdley 2013), the paint or the paper on the walls. These material items, with their own histories and provenances, also combine to construct the emotional space of the home.

Of course, people do not always live in family-based households. They may live on the streets, in temporary accommodation or in total institutions such a prisons or hospitals (Goffman 1968). In these cases, there may be a gulf between imagined or ideological constructions of home and the current reality. But ideas of the physical and emotional basis of home may exist in memories or in imaginations and become part of individuals' locations in social space.

Introducing the Three Chapters

Julia Brannen begins her chapter with an introduction to some of the many strands in biographical research and indicating their relevance for family studies. As with much family research, life stories can either be grand narratives or they may deal with the experiences of everyday life. Narrating stories is not simply the provision of valuable source material for researchers; it is also a key element in the continuous construction of personal identities. She considers three key figures in the development of biographical research -Thomas and Znaniecki, C. W. Mills and G. Elder—and it is important to note that family relationships over time are central concerns for the first and the third of these researchers. She indicates the links with developments in oral history and focuses on one particular approach: the 'biographic-narrative interpretive method' or BNIM (Wengraf 2001).

Issues of methodology are at the heart of this, and other, biographical approaches. These deal with questions of memory, the interactions between the interviewer and the subject, the way in which stories are constructed in the course of an interview and the links between these stories and wider narrative conventions. A key distinction is between the 'lived life' and the 'told

story' and this highlights the hard work that is required in teasing out the differences between them. Thus, it may be easy to discover that, say, an individual migrated to England in 1950. But to contextualise this movement, to come to an understanding of the part this move played in the construction of a life requires considerable interpretive skill.

Brannen chooses as an extended illustration the stories of an Irish migrant grandfather, Connor, and his adult son, Murray. In so doing, she reflects and develops the growing interest in inter-generational research. In some ways, these are highly contrasting stories. Connor loses both parents and breaks his back as an infant and spends some time at an Irish industrial school. His is a story not only of a geographical move but a social move to a position as a foreman in a major building site. His son, has wholly different experiences, seeing his life as a 'playground' and having a well-paid position in finance in the City. As might be expected, there is evidence of continuities (Murray acknowledges the formative influence of his father) and difference. (It is possible, for example, to see marked differences in fatherhood practices).

Wider analysis, of course, would link these stories to other intergenerational accounts, painstakingly building up sets of stories which are not simply memorable stories of individuals but which also provide accounts which point to wider historical changes. Further, by considering the very processes by which these stories are generated we come to an appreciation of their significance in the construction of personal identities and understandings of family life.

Elizaveta Polukhina's chapter focuses primarily on housing, specifically inequalities in housing in Post-Soviet Russia. Housing can be seen from two perspectives. At the more macro-level, inequalities in housing are the outcome of the complex exchanges between State, market and family. In this particular account, the story is one of a move from a context where the State played the dominant role to one where greater importance was assumed by the market and family relationships. At the more individual level, housing provides the framework for the lived experiences of much of family life. Polukhina's account moves from the large-scale historical changes to the more experiential level where housing interacts with family relationships and self-identities.

Polukhina's discussion is concerned mainly with the methods of enquiry into housing inequalities and experiences across the life course. While large-scale surveys and censuses clearly have an important part to play in exploring inequalities in housing life chances, there are also limitations in these approaches. There is a need, even within quantitative research, for more complex, compounded measures to recognise and explore diversities.

Similarly, more complex understandings of social class are required in this exploration (Savage 2015). Research needs to be alert to the complexities of meanings attached to apparently everyday (in the Russian context) words such as 'barracks' or 'cottages'.

Polukhina's account demonstrates the important role that can be played by qualitative ethnographic research with a strong auto/biographical emphasis. Such approaches can explore the changing meanings and experiences over time and can alert the reader to differences within (in terms of gender and generation) as well as between households. Such an approach may provide a more complex understanding of the very different significance of the role of family and intergenerational ties within different social classes. The better-off may, as in the UK, benefit from financial help from the 'bank of mum and dad'. Less well-off may find themselves sharing accommodation with members of different family generations. Hence, everyday talk (say to an interviewer) about housing may take on a particular sensitivity (other family members may be listening) or may provide an opportunity for a more elaborate presentation of self. Here, as elsewhere, the processes of social enquiry may be just as important as any actual findings.

An account of housing inequalities in Post-Soviet Russia is, of course, of considerable interest in its own right. But here, it provides an insightful case-study into the interplays between housing, family and auto/biography. This discussion clearly demonstrates the roles of gender, generation and class in shaping access to and use of housing in a particular historical context.

In the third paper by Aidan Seery and Karin Bacon, the close connections between auto/biography and family life are explored directly. There are two distinctive features of their discussion. The first is the distinctive source material, a set of letters written on a school exercise book and circulated between a set of siblings. This correspondence not only provides insights into what individuals are experiencing and feeling on a shared basis but also continuously reaffirms a particular set of family ties. It is a form of family display (Finch 2007) although one largely for internal consumption.

Second, these exchanges take place at a very distinctive period of Irish history, one which includes the Easter uprising of 1916 and the subsequently civil war. All auto/biographical practices take place in a historical context but here we see a particularly powerful meeting of history and individual lives. Not only are these young correspondents increasingly and actively caught up in these wider struggles but some of them went on to play an active part in the politics of the new Irish state.

Using the lives of three of these siblings (there were 12 in all), Seery and Bacon elaborate some key ideas about the relationships between auto/biographical and family practices. The first is the idea of the family being both 'networked and internalised'. Family is always more than a collection of individuals; it is best seen as a fluid set or network of relationships that change over time. This complex, networked family is the one that individuals internalise and live with. The stories that are shared, told and retold, serve to recreate and reaffirm the family ties within which these exchanges take place.

The second key idea is that 'changes in narrated family relations over time are a reflection of individual life changes'. The authors were fortunate enough to have access both to accounts of events and feelings close to the time that they actually happened and to accounts, recounted in interviews, several years later. How individuals view particular events and their part in them varies according to their own life trajectories as well as the occasions and audiences for the presentation of particular recollections. Over time, of course, these individual siblings entered into relationships and had children themselves. They remained siblings but their shared sense of family would change over time.

The final idea deals with 'family narrative as distributed autobiographical knowledge'. This emphasises the essentially relational character of family and auto/biographical practices. We see in this chapter accounts of events and encounters which do not simply reflect the fact that their recounting takes place between family members but which also constitute those family relationships. The authors write of a 'familial self' which reflects the strong links over time between family members and which impact upon individual selves. In this case, we have a family self which is middle-class, educated and which, perhaps unusually for the time, is strongly supportive of the aspirations of women. Sometimes, this distributed family self may over-ride deep political divisions such as those which accompanied the Irish civil war.

As part of this process, we read of the role of the family farm, a 150 acre estate at Tomcoole. This played an important role in shared family experiences and subsequent holidays for young generations. This shared space, with all its memories, to some extent transcended possible divisions. More generally, it demonstrates the importance of place and space in the construction of family identities albeit, in this case, ones associated with a relatively privileged group of individuals.

Concluding Remarks

This part has been designed with the aim of demonstrating the close connections between the practices of auto/biography and family life. There can be no auto/biography without some reference, positive or negative, to family life and family life itself is constituted and reconstituted through stories and narratives. This can be seen in the way in which accounts of family life, especially but not exclusively of childhood and early years, serve to 'place' individuals. These accounts can place individuals socially. We can see this clearly in the accounts of the educated Irish middle-class in Seery and Bacon's chapter and in the accounts of social and geographical mobility in Brannen's presentation of Connor and Murray. This kind of social placing is also present in the quotations provided by Polukhina who clearly demonstrates the key importance of social class in the housing careers in post-Soviet Russia.

Psychological placing is clearly present in the accounts we have of Connor's childhood and the contrasting fathering practices between Connor and his son, Murray. Psychological placing of a different, perhaps more gentle, kind is shown in the relationships between siblings presented in the final paper. This kind of placing is, initially, less apparent in Polukhina's account until we consider the enforced family density experienced by some of her subjects and the concerns about who might be listening to the exchanges between interviewer and subjects.

Historical placing is evident in all three accounts. Thus we have the dramatic experiences of the struggles for Irish independence and the moves to a post-Soviet Russia. Connor's story, in Brannen's paper, begins post-Irish independence although it is likely that stories of the earlier struggles continue to have their influence. Instead, we have the changing relationships between the British and Irish economies and the experiences of migration. The close relationships between auto/biography and history are clearly apparent in the three papers.

A key element in the linking of family and auto/biography is the idea of generation. This is itself a complex and multi-stranded theme, playing out at both individual and more collective levels. In terms of individual experiences, generations provide the basis for intra-familial exchanges and, with them, ambivalences. This is clearly demonstrated in Polukhina's account where it is frequently the case that members of the working classes are required to share accommodations with members of other generations. In the other two accounts, we see how the various capitals (economic, social and cultural) are passed on across generations and how these exchanges solidify the links between family living and social class.

At a more macro-level, generations provide links between individual life chances and experiences and historical change. Individuals do not simply, and passively, experience historical change but they are part of cohorts which move through history, which respond in different ways to these changes and, sometimes, can be seen as having an active part in shaping these changes. This last point can be seen most clearly in the case of the Ryan family, discussed in the paper by Seery and Bacon. The story of Connor is both an individual story and an illustration of wider patterns of migration between Ireland and Britain. In the Russian case, historical change is given physical shape in the accounts of the barracks and cottages that provide accommodation for members of different social classes and different times.

Polukhina's account is the one that focuses most directly on the physical settings of family relations, the ideas of and the aspirations for home. Her photographs of exteriors and interiors are not just illustrations but are demonstrations of places and spaces as convergences of meanings. The same meetings of meanings can also be seen in the account of the family farm at Tomcoole, a place of shared memories and shared family practices. Themes of home are not directly developed in Brannen's account but there are hints of a more fluid understanding as when Connor describes Britain as his 'second home' and Murray refers to the 'bomb-site' that was his childhood playground and around this, the general background of post-war urban renewal.

The key terms in family analysis—generations, home and place and stories—are, it has been noted at several points in this part, never just about individual families or more general notions of family. They are also about the contexts within which family practices are performed. Migration, civil war and social reconstruction provide some of the contexts for the family stories presented in this part. In reading these stories, we can enhance a more general understanding of how historical contexts can impact upon individual lives lived out within family constellations.

Family life, it was suggested, might be seen as a 'nexus of stories'. These are stories which not only take place within and across generations and within locations often described as 'homes' but which also serve to constitute these homes and generations. The stories might be the stories which, frequently well-rehearsed, that individuals tell to interviewers or researchers. Or they may be stories directly but artfully included in correspondence that is shared between family members. These stories, short or more elaborated, vary with the time of their telling and the audiences to which they are presented. However, and whenever the stories occur, they provide potent illustrations of the close relationships between auto/biography and family living.

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