

Shantal Rodriguez

Professor Caitlin Geoghan

FIQWS

15 December 2021

Why Do I Have To Do It?; First Born Child on Becoming the Third Parent and Code-Switching.

Part 1: Knowledge Before Search

Before starting this research, I am aware that there are many first born children that become responsible for their younger siblings. This can happen at a young age and old age, childhood and adulthood. I have a personal connection to this topic being that I had to raise my younger brother from a childhood. First borns, in general, are considered extremely knowledgeable on how to address their peers, elders, and siblings. First born children that become the third parent learn how to be “very responsible” teenagers, this is evident in their language performance. I found myself code-switching between groups and becoming a more assertive person the more I considered myself a parent.

Part 2: My Process

Today, I will conduct an interview on my friend. Her name is Ashley. There is nothing I don't already know but in her own words would be nice lol. We were raised together but she was an only child for most of her life and now is not. I choose to interview her because I feel we are comfortable enough to have this type of conversation with (making it easy for me) and having

know that she became care-giver after already having a set lifestyle adds a new perspective that my grandmother or myself could bring.

My keys words during this search are: first born, third parent, and care-giver. Looking for article is harder than I thought; I find a lot of articles that talked about birth order and parent-child relationship with a concentration on the first born child. I have to add more key words like younger/ older sibling and raising.

Alright, my grandmother is coming to the US soon and I find it easier to interview her in person rather than through the phone. I am now going to create a series of questions to ask her. You may be saying to yourself “ Why? Didn’t she interview her friend already...”. The answer is yes but I have to ask a different series of question being that both circumstances differ (which you’ll find out soon).

I find myself to be procrastinating. I don’t like to touch into myself like my personal life in detail. I can say anything really about my life but in detail off, but tis the topic I chose. I am strengthen my diary today. I am going to try and add more detail and ask myself how does my language differ and in what ways did I code-switch and why.

Part 3: What I learned

First born children, like any other person, have to navigate the world and most people use language. Language is a crucial part our development as it is a pipeline to understand social cues, norms, and our own place in the world. There are a certain demographic of first born children that become a third parent to their sibling: caring for them mentally, physically, and in some cases financially. First born children are tasked with the difficult responsibility of caring for their own safety and security to maintain the same for their siblings. If the first and/ or second parent

are still involved in some way, first-borns' have to learn to communicate different for every aspect of their life, [dominant] parent to their siblings, [submissive] child to their parent(s), and regular student [equal to their peers]. Code-switching is an (un)conscious skill that is manifested through managing different forms of language to accurately conform to the listener's norms.

The job of being care-taker can be defined differently by those imposed with the task. Ramona Denby- Brinsonis Dean of Chapel Hill School of Social Work and Professor at the University of North Carolina and Professor Jessica Ayala at the School of Social Work in University of Nevada wrote "Am I My Brother's Keeper: Adult Siblings Raising Younger Siblings.". This article references the life of an adult raising their younger siblings and showcases in what ways that is a challenge, stating, "When an older sibling assumes care for younger siblings, questions of whether to maintain a sibling-to-sibling relationship or begin a parent/sibling-to-sibling relationship loom. The transition is complex and becomes convoluted by the fact that many adult sibling caregivers have already provided day-to-day direct care of their younger siblings" (5). Ashley, a Drama major at La Guardia High School, stated that caretaking replaced what would've been memorable experiences as a high school junior with the task of maintaining the health and well-being of a toddler, saying "I'm expected to just drop my life". To understand the task, we must ask why does a kid have to become responsible for another [even younger than them]. I asked my grandmother why and she said "I was ordered to, she hated me and so it became my job but she never knew it sadden me". This quote encapsulates the larger issue at hand: unnecessarily becoming a physical and emotional provider as a kid undermining your life to support another.

Verbal and bodily forms of language maintain a strain of communication between people. The socialization aspect of it categorizes and stereotypes language, pushing for the use of multiple structures of expression. John Edwards, member of the Faculty of History and a Research Fellow at the Modern Languages Faculty within the University of Oxford, uses “Multilingualism” to talk about how language is key in perpetuating notions. The way we use language is essential in understanding society around us. Edwards’ notes, “Although not without some methodological problems, this study demonstrates that what people think and feel may not always be reflected in what they do. There are, of course, a great many reasons why this should be so, ranging from immediate self-interest, to the desire to avoid embarrassment, to a difference between views of an abstraction (members of a given ethnic group, for example) and of concrete instances” (98). Merely concentrating on eldest siblings, language is a way to maneuver through their dominant and submissive personas based on settling. Like my grandmother said, the responsibility of caring for twelve siblings and her first son, whom she had at sixteen, sadden her but her mother never knew. She went on to mention “my childhood was traumatized by becoming a parent and by 16, I thought that was my only job”. Learning when to turn on and off the switch is vital in maintaining survival, for it protects the individual in censorship.

Code-switching/Socialization: Code-switching enables the alternating between two or more languages at the same time. This can mean between Spanish and English, or knowing when to use specific words around who. In “Code-Switching and Language Ideologies: Exploring Identity, Power, and Society in Dialectally Diverse Literature”, Professor Michelle D. Devereaux at Kennesaw State University and Professor Rebecca Wheeler at Christopher Newport University take this paper to express the likelihood of code-switching. Something worth mentioning is “In fact code-switching offers a perfect bridge to discuss language ideologies.

Thus, exploring Calpurnia's language shift means we explore how the setting prompts her shift: we can see that the place differs (Calpurnia's church vs. the Finch's house), the people differ (Calpurnia's community vs. the Finches), and the purpose changes (language in community vs. on the job). These aspects- place, people, and purpose -all affect Calpurnia's choice to speak one or another variety of English.” (96). First born children have to swift between speaking to their liabilities and speaking to their superiors. I remember having to censor the dialogue held with my mom because if in anyway I indicated that my brother was my son rather than hers’, she would be furious and I would have to accept whatever consequences that followed. I had to be cautious when to implement discipline to my brother and myself, just to avoid distress and discomfort.

I believe moving forward it would be substantial to introduce active language corresponding to care-taking. After digesting all the information provided, we must explore this on an outside- active level. Scrolling through twitter, I found myself reading, “I'm also the older sibling of eight children that I had a very direct hand in raising. When people complain about kids or shit on kids or say things like ‘oh I hate kids kids are horrible’ it genuinely hurts my feelings because my siblings are the only reason I’m still alive” (nautica). In summary, this person shows how their own life was devoted to the care of their siblings and somber feeling is clouded over the thought of not passively enjoying the responsibility of providing. In addition, the show Shameless, is a great example in providing a visual of what it looks like to be a first born child. What I also love about this show is how responsibility shifts down by age but also by gender in certain aspects. Fiona Gallagher to her [absent, alcoholic, and addict] father Frank Gallagher, “I was nine! Nine, and taking care of you. Taking care of all of us. I was in fourth grade, dragging your ass passed out in front of the yard so you wouldn't freeze to death. Staying up all night with Ian when he had chicken pox; I washed Carl's shitty diapers; I picked lice out of

Liam's hair; and I was here when Debbie got her first period; not Monica; me.”(Shameless (US) season 7 episode 12). Fiona says “I” nine times while frantically trying to explain to her father: she has been the sole provider. Furthermore, Cindy Lamothe is a writer and journalist based in Guatemala who wrote “When Kids Have to Act like Parents, It Affects Them for Life.” stating “Amy K. Nuttall, an assistant professor in human development and family studies at Michigan State University, told me. This may account for why some parentified siblings who come from abusive homes end up maintaining close, albeit complex, bonds into adulthood, with some ‘continuing to attempt to fill parental needs at the expense of their own.’”. First born children are burdened with supplying a support system and continue to do so for eternity.

First born children have many expectations for themselves but also from others; they are tasked with being there for others especially those who become third parents. Success in this lifestyle is maneuvered through their everyday use of language. Language sustains communication and provides a road for nurturing, which is the priority of most parents. First borns’ use code-switching to survive the responsibility of fostering a child. Subsequently, people of all circumstances have to manipulate language in order to achieve their goals.

Part 4: My Reflection

During this time I learned a lot. This may seem so generic but I can explain. In the beginning of this I was able to do some introspection. I used this time to dissect my own experience and thus created a perfect outline to what I would compare , other primary sources (e.g. interviews) . On that topic, this assignment [designed to put in play all the things I learned this semester) presented the perfect opportunity to strengthen my writing skills whilst concentrating on finding primary and academic sources. Finding sources is a difficult task

already, and I pushed myself into the deep end by electing a topic that was almost vacant with research and higher level academic awareness. Finally, right above the water, I finish my quest for sources moving onto making use of outside day-to-day in the academic realm. Using a television show in my writing was new and granted a new way to contextualize informal work. I don't think I've ever jotted down my process this way. I am that person that reads-out-loud while I'm reading a book, texting on my phone, or typing on my laptop; there will be silence and then a series of continuous clicks quickly followed by a whisper of what I'm writing. That being said it was easy to just talk out-loud as that is routine for me. The actual writing of what I've learned came natural as I was purely spitting out everything I sat, read, and studied during the research process. Part four (4) of the paper I relish, I am able to look back on my experience writing this paper and aside from this project being a mandatory form of assessment; I was able to deepen my knowledge and awareness of my chosen topic. I got my money's worth and grateful for it!

Work Cited

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