

Social aspects of introducing the multiple forename system in Skellefteå, Sweden: 1720–1890

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Abstract: With a particular focus on differences within social groups, this article describes the multiple forename system as it emerged between 1720 and 1890 in the area of Skellefteå in the north-east of Sweden. Female and male forenames are compared, as is the introduction of the multiple forename system in different social groups in the study data. Theoretical starting points are taken from the discipline of cultural sociology, especially the work of Simmel (1957) and Bourdieu (1984; 1989; 1997). The results indicate that this naming pattern was introduced in the naming of girls prior to the naming of boys. Analysis of the social aspects of the process takes its starting point in fields like ‘names and social identity’, ‘status and (group) solidarity’, and ‘the importance of taste’. The data studied are divided into six social groups based on the father’s social rank at the time of the child’s birth, one group comprising unmarried mothers and one ‘miscellaneous’ group. The results illustrate that the practice of giving children at least two forenames was introduced by the upper middle class (upper bourgeoisie), who then either returned to giving one forename or increased the number of forenames to three for each child. This may have created exclusiveness within the group.

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Differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ can thus be elucidated on the basis of the naming pattern used.

Keywords: multiple forename system; propertied/unpropertied farmers; social groups; skilled/unskilled workers; unmarried mothers, 1720-1790, 1791–1890; upper/lower middle class; ‘us’ and ‘them’

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the relationship between names and identity has come into focus in onomastic studies. It is not surprising that this connection has attracted interest, because ‘personal names provide us with a great deal of information, from markers of individuals and groups to signifiers of the relationships between individuals and groups’ (Emmelhainz 2012:157). This discussion has taken place internationally as well as in the Nordic countries, where both anthroponyms (e.g. Borg 2017; Hagström 2017) and toponyms (e.g. Edlund 2017; Ainiala & Olsson 2021) have been studied. In previous research on anthroponyms, different types of names have been emphasized in different studies, including surnames (Finch 2008; Stafford & Kline 1996; Twenge 1997; Wikström 2012), nicknames (Harré 1980; Adams 2009; Gustafsson 2016; 2017a; 2018), and forenames (Finch 2008: 719; Aldrin 2011). In studies of forenames, the expectations and wishes behind the name (e.g. Ashley 1996:33), name choices (e.g. Aldrin 2011) and name structures (Gustafsson 2017b) have been central, but naming patterns and full name strings have not been examined in the same way. The aim of this article is therefore to explore the social aspects of a particular naming pattern – the emerging multiple forename system – in the area of Skellefteå in the north-east of Sweden from 1791 to 1890. As a subsidiary aim, the article also provides an introduction to the evolution of this system by briefly describing the changes that occurred between 1720 and 1790. Specifically, the study asks whether there were differences in the way the multiple forename system was introduced for female and male names, and between different social groups, over the period 1791–1890. Some of the results

have been previously published in Gustafsson 2002, but are here analysed in the light of more recent theoretical developments.

The multiple forename system developed over a long period of time and spread at different rates in different social groups. With some exceptions in the Nordic countries during the Middle Ages (c.1000–1500), when two forenames were given to individuals upon conversion to Christianity or entry into a monastery, the multiple forename system first appeared in Sweden among the aristocracy in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, predominantly among girls, e.g. Christina Sigrid Bielke (born 1603), Anna Margareta Sture (born 1615) and Ebba Margareta Banér (born 1623). It then spread further to the middle (bourgeois) classes, before trickling down to the rest of the population (Steenstrup 1894:733; Otterbjörk 1979b:33–34; Meldgaard 1990:137; 1992:151). Scholars have suggested that the new naming practice was partly a prestigious Baroque trend (Otterbjörk 1979b:33–34; Andersen 1987:103), and partly offered greater scope to give commemorative names (Otterbjörk 1979b:33–34). Although this change took a long time to become established, it was a relatively radical one, since it involved giving newborn children several first names instead of only one.

2. Identity and group identity

Explaining identity is difficult, and our understanding of it has consequently changed over the years. From once being regarded as having an essential core, the focus of identity has since shifted towards a more constructivist view, meaning that identity is now perceived as inconsistent and influenced by factors such as living conditions, environment and social relations, among others (e.g. Krogseth 2012:162). This article takes social relations and their various dimensions as its starting point.

Identity can be described from several angles, including individual, social and cultural perspectives (Aldrin 2016), and all types of personal names (i.e. first names, last names and nicknames) can be used to emphasize different kinds of identity. In this analysis, the focus is

primarily on social identity, which reflects a collective rather than an individual concept of identity (Henriksen & Krogseth 2004:131–132).

From the perspective of names, individual identity is often connected to how a first name reflects its bearer and grows with him or her. Names and naming can therefore be regarded as symbols of individual identity for both the child who bears the name and the parents who named them. At the same time, the specific choice of a name often connects the child to a certain social or cultural group. The choice of name can thus help to define the individual identity that parents desire for their children, while their social and cultural identities reflect their environment and can be manifested in particular in names that are ethnically or socially marked. Collective identities can also be manifested in a surname indicating which family the bearer belongs to, by using specific nicknames (Gustafsson 2016), or by using commemorative names that emphasize kinship ties and convey a respectful attitude towards relatives (Finch 2008:719). Choosing a name is therefore a complicated process that balances several potentially competing aims (Finch 2008:722), such as wanting to reflect current trends while also preserving the names of older relatives (which are often considered old-fashioned at the time of the new baby's arrival).

Both individual and collective identities are based on group solidarity and are therefore symbiotic (cf. Hylland Eriksen 2004:37). The choice of a name, as well as the naming process as a whole, can consequently be taken as an individual expression of a collective identity. Identity is a particular form of social representation that mediates the relationship between the individual and the social world (Finch 2008:711). As a result, the choice of a first name can be perceived as a linguistic opportunity for parents to position themselves as part of different social groupings (Gustafsson 2002; Aldrin 2011).

Previous research has shown that it is important for individuals who feel that they belong together to manifest individual behaviour that is consistent with the group's behaviour, indicating that identity is connected to similarity and difference. Through various actions, inclusion and exclusion take place and the demarcation between 'us' and 'them' is clarified (Hall 1997:234–238; Woodward 1997:29). The

difference can be illustrated by artefacts as well as by symbols that are more common within a certain group. This difference can manifest itself in terms of lifestyle, appearance, clothes, interests, taste, linguistic expressions etc. A linguistic resource that makes this possible is the symbolic value of language (Schiffrin 2006:106). Examples of linguistic expressions are names, naming patterns and naming conventions. Researchers have noted that the use of specific names in a group can help to create or maintain the same sort of identity within this group (Ashley 1996:1748; Rymes 1996:252; Lieberman 2000:144–154).

Concurrently, social identity is about manifesting and consolidating a certain status or showing solidarity with a certain group. The pattern of representations that different types of manifestations can create may, in a way, be close to a person's identity – or at least to the identity that the individual wants to have at that particular time. In this way, a marker arises between 'us' and 'them'. For individuals, it can be important to feel a sense of belonging to a certain group and to manifest this in front of others.

Researchers from several disciplines have analysed how different attributes and linguistic resources have been used both to raise status and to signal belonging to different groups and distance from other groups. In the sociocultural discipline, one of the focuses has been on taste. This theory was first formulated by the German philosopher George Simmel and later adopted by Pierre Bourdieu (1989: ch. 5; 1997:177), who was interested in the tastes of different social groups and their significance as (group) indicators, but neither of them considered naming choices. Instead, clothing, furniture, art, music, lifestyle, travel and other pleasures have been used as examples, but choices of name could also have been taken into consideration in this context, along with other linguistic expressions that are used to differentiate between groups (Bourdieu 1991:45; Eckert 1991:228).

The two components of Bourdieu's argument – taste and linguistic expression – are relevant to this article and fall under the heading of 'symbolic capital', which includes everything that is attributed a collective value in a society, such as degrees, titles, familiarity with

certain music, art, literature etc. (Bourdieu 1984:46–47; Broady 1991:169). This symbolic way of distinguishing groups from each other establishes a kind of unconscious social contract between them. Nevertheless, the different choices at different levels appear to be quite a conscious process (Simmel 1957; Chambers 1995:34–35; Broady 1991:169, 300; Bourdieu 1997:177–178). Certain groups in society are unaware that they attribute a particular value to certain symbols (e.g. taste in clothing or music), but they know that it is possible to buy certain clothes or listen to a certain kind of music (Broady 1991:169, 300; Bourdieu 1997:177–178).

When a phenomenon becomes too common, it can no longer manifest a difference in taste between social groups. A widely shared taste therefore leads to a structural movement away from the more common to the less common. When a certain taste loses its exclusivity and rareness, its value as a form of symbolic capital declines, as the general public is both mindful of it and capable of appropriating it. A strategy that is often used to preserve the distinction is the constant modification of exclusivity. The focus shifts towards the less trivial, and hence the less devalued – in other words, the unusual (Simmel 1957; Bourdieu 1997:186–188; Lieberson 2000:15). Consequently, the dominant group is forced to turn towards exclusiveness, and ‘good taste’ remains inaccessible to the social groups that do not have the interpretive prerogative. The symbolic value which the distinction between directions in taste creates is of great importance in clarifying the connection to a group, and thus it is important for the dominant group always to maintain this distinction, so that not all groups are able to achieve equally high symbolic status.

In the end, the ambition of preserving the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ may lead to cycles of recurring (re)orientations in taste. These can be observed in constantly changing fashions in clothing, or in the waves of popularity of certain forenames, which often lead to a return to something that has previously been abandoned.

3. Skellefteå and its surroundings

The data used in this article were retrieved from church records collected in the area of Skellefteå (see Figure 1) and originally used in my 2002 dissertation, at which point in time this was the only Swedish data set that was sufficiently extensive, well preserved and digitalized to be used for the intended analyses.



Figure 1: Map of Sweden with the area studied indicated by a circle.

The area studied is interesting because it contains several different types of environments (e.g. urban, industrial and agrarian), and in addition its societal structure changed substantially over the study period. From the end of the 18th century until the beginning of the 20th, the population grew considerably, but the area could still be considered sparsely populated (Brändström 2001:12, 16). Most of the villages were small, with fewer than 25 inhabitants, but within the area there were also denser settlements, like Skellefteå, which received town privileges in 1845. In 1890, the town had approximately 1,300 inhabitants (Brändström 2001:19–20). Skellefteå's sizeable population

was largely due to industrialization, which had led to the emergence of a working class in the 19th century and inspired young people to move there from the countryside (Jacobsson 2000:172). There are also many testimonies to the importance of the church, and as a ‘church town’ Skellefteå was a natural meeting place for the region’s inhabitants. Since it had the only church in the area, it was where all those inhabitants attended services, married, and baptized their children (Bergling 1964:116–117, 237; Westerlund 1973:40–41; Johansson 1985:12–13; Jonsson 1988:15–16; Jacobsson 2000:77, 105; Gaunitz et al. 2002:68; Norrländsk uppslagsbok 2:385). During a baptism, all of the child’s names would be announced, making the multiplicity of names known to a larger social circle in the area. Between 1770 and 1870, which largely corresponds to the period examined in this study, social gaps in Sweden increased (Löfgren 1974:23–29). It has been indicated that, linguistically, it is more important to make social differences visible in times of greater social stratification, especially for those who belong to one of the more privileged groups in society. In the area studied, there was no regular aristocracy; the group perceived as the most distinguished was the upper middle class, where the fathers were, for example, clergymen, surveyors and doctors.

4. Data

The study data include all children born in the area between 1720 and 1890 and consist of two contingents. One (covering 1720–1790) serves more as a basis for comparison, and is more consequently analysed in broader terms. It represents a prelude to the study. The other contingent contains the effective data (1791–1890), which are analysed in greater depth. The former group is divided into three periods (1720–1755, 1756–1773 and 1774–1790) and consists of 5,422 girls, of whom 855 have two first names, and 4,925 boys, of whom 115 have two first names. The first of these periods is longer than the other two because no real changes regarding the multiple forename system took place during that time.

The data between 1791 and 1890 comprise 44,361 children (21,720 girls and 22,641 boys) who received a total of 71,149 forenames – 38,335 female and 32,814 male names. They thus consist of more female names than male. The word ‘forenames’ refers here to the names recorded in the ‘Christian name/forename’ column of the registers of births of the church at the time. In the data and the analysis, these names are divided according to both time periods and social strata. The hundred years between 1791 and 1890 are divided into six shorter periods: 1791–1815, 1816–1830, 1831–1845, 1846–1860, 1861–1875 and 1876–1890. Exactly how numbers of first names are distributed across girls and boys during these five periods is shown in Table 1. As it becomes increasingly common to have several names for each child over the whole of the study period, it should be noted that the number of forenames in the data set is not the same as the number of children.

Table 1. Numbers of forenames included in the analysis over six periods.

	1791– 1815	1816– 1830	1831– 1845	1846– 1860	1861– 1875	1876– 1890	Total
Female names	4,472	4,457	4,498	5,503	7,909	11,496	38,335
Male names	3,268	3,300	3,461	4,662	6,890	11,233	32,814
Total	7,740	7,757	7,959	10,165	14,799	22,729	71,149

The numbers of children born into different social groups are unevenly distributed (Table 2). These discrepancies are due to the structure of society at the time.

Table 2. Numbers of forenames in different social groups over six periods.

	1791– 1815	1816– 1830	1831– 1845	1846– 1860	1861– 1875	1876– 1890	Total
Upper middle class							
Female names	42	65	73	69	105	159	513
Male names	42	73	54	69	98	140	476
Total	84	138	127	138	203	299	989
Lower middle class							
Female names	95	127	107	132	204	382	1,047
Male names	95	82	102	132	206	403	1,020
Total	190	209	209	264	410	785	2,067
Skilled workers							
Female names	634	433	345	332	556	826	3 126
Male names	434	310	279	306	464	895	2 688
Total	1,068	743	624	638	1,020	1,721	5,814
Unskilled workers							
Female names	83	123	130	179	574	2,026	3,115
Male names	81	112	117	145	554	2,162	3,171
Total	164	235	247	324	1,128	4,188	6,286
Propertied farmers							
Female names	1,648	2,533	2,272	2,499	4,109	6,216	19,277
Male names	1,142	1,784	1,619	2,021	3,402	5,858	15,826
Total	2,790	4,317	3,891	4,520	7,511	12,074	35,103
Unpropertied farmers							
Female names	328	819	1,031	1,630	1,987	1,544	7,339
Male names	266	646	828	1,408	1,814	1,437	6,399
Total	594	1,465	1,859	3,038	3,801	2,981	13,738
Children of un-married mothers							
Female names	147	160	176	254	314	315	1,366
Male names	146	167	167	259	301	303	1,343
Total	293	327	343	513	615	618	2,709
Miscellaneous							
Female names	1,495	197	364	408	60	28	2,552
Male names	1,062	126	295	322	51	35	1,891
Total	2,557	323	659	730	111	63	4,443

The area's inhabitants were categorized into social groups according to the father's title at the time of the child's birth, except for the children of unmarried mothers, who form a group of their own. The entries in church registers were then clustered into larger groups according to a model for coding historical occupational titles, developed by the Demographic Database in Umeå, Sweden. As the research progressed, however, it became necessary to modify this classification somewhat, which was done in such a way that the differences between rural and urban groups were emphasized. This was a result of separating (a) propertied farmers and small businessmen or other kinds of small business owners, and (b) unpropertied farmers and unskilled workers.

Altogether, eight different groups are analysed in this article: children of the upper and lower middle classes, children of skilled and unskilled workers, children of propertied and unpropertied farmers, children of unmarried mothers, and a miscellaneous group of children for whom basic biographical data could not be determined. The first seven groups reflect an outdated division of society. The social affiliation of the children is based on the father's title. Within the upper middle class, those titles may include wholesalers, senior military officers, ministers, officials and professors, and in the lower middle class it is possible to find, for example, bookkeepers, school teachers, traders and master artisans.

5. Results

The presentation of the data will be divided into two parts. The first, covering 1720–1790, consists of data intended more as a basis for comparison, which are analysed in a shallower way, while the second, covering 1791–1890, comprises data that are analysed in more depth.

5.1 1720–1790

The multiple forename system starts to become visible in the data between 1720 and 1790 (see Figure 2). To clarify this, the period is divided into three shorter intervals (1720–1755, 1756–1773 and 1774–1790). During the first of these, 1720–1755, the practice of giving children more than one forename remains sporadic in the Skellefteå area. During the second half of the 18th century (1756–1773 and 1774–1790), the number of girls receiving two forenames in Skellefteå and its surroundings gradually increases, while there is no major change from the first to the last of the three periods when it comes to boys' names.

About one-third of the middle-class girls named between 1720 and 1755 are given two forenames at their baptism. A change takes place in the data during this period, in that it is the middle classes who account for two-thirds of multiple forename strings containing two first names in the early part of the period, whereas the closer we get to 1755, the greater the competition from the other social groups. In the years leading up to 1755, a slightly smaller proportion (one-quarter) of all two-name combinations is to be found among the middle classes.

This creates the illusion of a continued decline in the number of middle-class children with two forenames from 1756 to 1773, when only one-sixth of multiple forename strings are found in the names of newborns in this social group. But the percentage of girls in this group who are given two names at baptism in fact continues to increase. This means that almost half (44%) of newborn girls in the middle classes are given two names. Between 1774 and 1790, only 7% of multiple forename strings with two names are given to middle-class girls. However, this is because other social groups are also beginning to adopt the multiple forename system, and the proportion of girls in the middle classes who receive two forenames continues to rise, to four-fifths.

The same trend as in the naming of girls can also be observed in the naming of boys, but it is slightly less clear. Four of the first six boys given two forenames belonged to the middle classes, but even in this group only a few boys received two names during the first

period (1720–1755). Between 1756 and 1773, half of the boys given two names were from the upper or lower middle class. This means that one-third of the boys in this group were given two forenames at baptism. This tendency persists during the last period (1774–1790), when, again, about one-third of middle-class boys were given two names at baptism. Overall, the middle classes account for one-fifth of the two-name combinations given to boys in the study area in this period, implying that other social strata have by then begun to use the multiple forename system as well, for boys as well as girls.

Table 3. Numbers of named girls and boys in the data, 1720–1790 (absolute terms).

	1720–1755	1756–1773	1774–1790
Girls with one forename	1,685	1,364	1,518
Girls with two forenames	39	171	645
Total	1,724	1,535	2,163
Boys with one forename	1,827	1,419	1,564
Boys with two forenames	13	36	66
Total	1,840	1,455	1,630

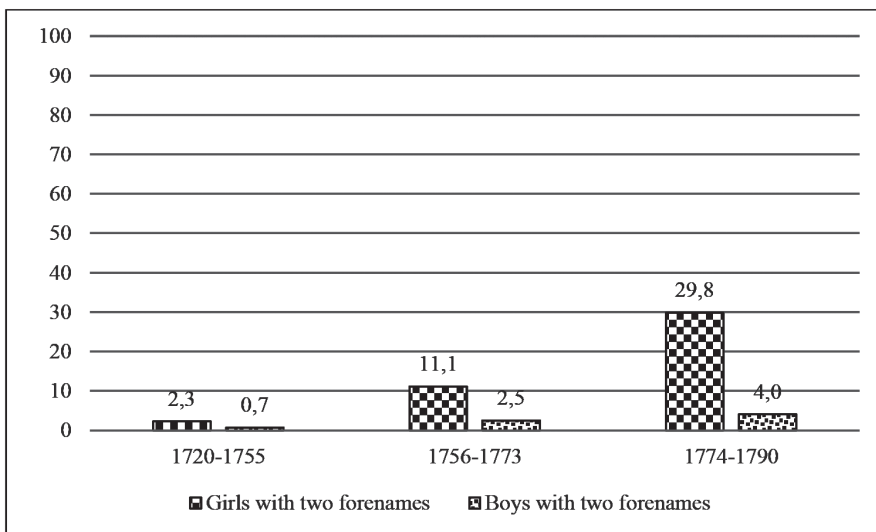


Figure 2: Expansion of the multiple forename system in the Skellefteå area, 1720–1790 (percentages).

5.2 1791–1890

In the Skellefteå area, the number of children bearing several forenames continues to rise throughout the primary research period 1791–1890, indicating a significant rate of increase in the late 18th and the early 19th century. The increase continues throughout the 19th century, as it does in other parts of Sweden (Otterbjörk 1979b:33–35; Utterström 1995:29–30). To better illustrate this, the hundred-year period is divided into six shorter intervals: 1791–1815, 1816–1830, 1831–1845, 1846–1860, 1861–1875 and 1876–1890. The change is shown graphically in Figure 3.

During the first of the periods, 1791–1815, a total of 43% of the children (both girls and boys) were given at least two forenames at baptism, and by the last period, 1876–1890, the percentage had increased to 86%. According to Utterström (1995:29–30), the proportion of children with two or more forenames in Stockholm had reached 92% as early as 1810, which may indicate that this innovation in naming, like many other linguistic innovations, first occurred in the capital, before eventually spreading to more peripheral parts of the country (cf. e.g. Kisbye 1990:92).

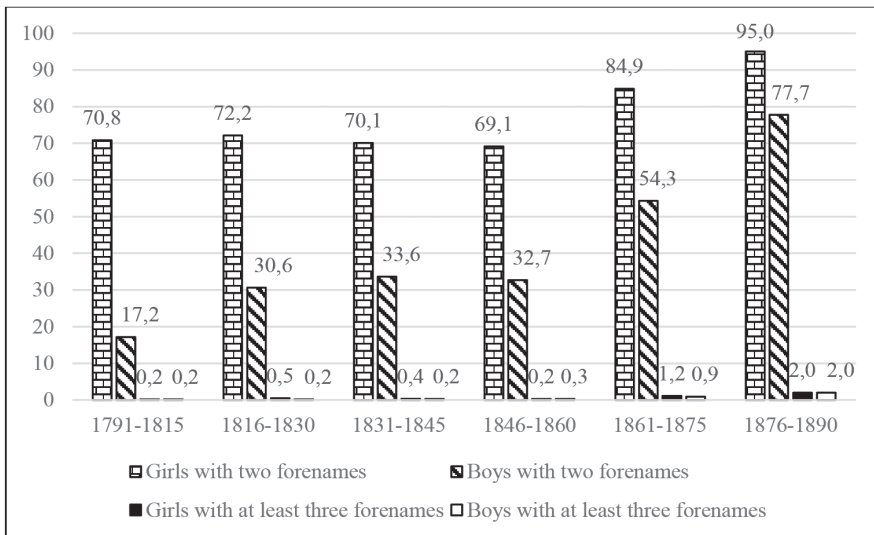


Figure 3: Expansion of the multiple forename system in the Skellefteå area, 1791–1890 (percentages).

In Figure 3, the difference in naming of girls and boys is noticeable throughout the period studied. The number of girls with at least two forenames increases somewhat more slowly over the hundred years analysed (1791–1890) than the corresponding number of boys, as it was already considerably more common for girls than for boys to have two forenames in 1791, the starting point of the study. The increase in multiple forenames for boys thus began at a lower point and therefore shows a steeper rise. The majority of newborn girls (71%) received at least two names at baptism in 1791–1815, while it was far less common for boys to do so in the same period (17%) (cf. Otterbjörk 1979a:16; Utterström 1995:29–30).

Between 1816 and 1830, 72% of girls and 31% of boys were given at least two forenames, and these levels remain basically stable throughout 1831–1845 and 1846–1860. During the fifth period, 1861–1875, the proportions of girls and boys with at least two names increase yet again, to 85% and 54% respectively, and in 1876–1890 95% of girls and 78% of boys were given more than one forename. Thus, at the end of the 19th century, it was rather unusual in Skellefteå to be a girl with only one first name. Regarding the number of forenames, naming patterns for girls and boys seem to have been in two completely different stages of development, a finding also confirmed by other Nordic onomasticians (e.g. Valtavuo-Pfeifer 1985:99, 106; Meldgaard 1990:145–154).

Table 4 shows that use of the multiple forename system for newborn girls increases between the first and the last period in all social groups except the upper middle class. However, there is no major difference between social groups during the first period (1791–1815). Despite this, it is possible to demonstrate a general increase in the number of names per girl (despite a temporary decline in the middle of the 19th century) in all social groups except the upper middle class. (I disregard here the quite remarkable numbers generated by the small ‘miscellaneous’ group of children.)

In contrast to other social groups, the proportion of girls belonging to the upper middle class who were given several names is lower in all periods than it was in 1791–1815. A similar change was demonstrated

by Valtavuo-Pfeifer (1983; 1985) in a study of female names in Kristinestad (a town in Ostrobothnia in Finland) in the years 1724–1855, where it became more common for girls in general to have several names prior to the beginning of the 19th century, at which point the trend reversed and the popularity of a single name increased once more. In the 1840s, the frequency of only one name per girl again rose significantly, and Valtavuo-Pfeifer showed that the same groups – namely officials, merchants and skilled workers – as had introduced the multiple forename system into the town were the first to return to giving just one forename (Valtavuo-Pfeifer 1983:65; 1985:99).

Table 4. Prevalence of at least two forenames per girl by social group, 1791–1890.

	1791– 1815	1816– 1830	1831– 1845	1846– 1860	1861– 1875	1876– 1890
Upper middle class	79%	68%	64%	71%	78%	73%
Lower middle class	72%	71%	64%	73%	91%	99%
Skilled workers	79%	73%	69%	67%	84%	94%
Unskilled workers	79%	75%	56%	65%	88%	95%
Propertied farmers	71%	71%	73%	72%	86%	96%
Unpropertied farmers	72%	78%	71%	68%	82%	95%
Children of unmarried mothers	69%	72%	74%	68%	85%	91%
Miscellaneous	67%	61%	61%	60%	77%	100%

The social groups that Valtavuo-Pfeifer included in her study essentially correspond to the group referred to as the ‘lower middle class’ in the present study. In the data from Skellefteå, however, it is the upper middle class, rather, that first introduces and uses the multiple forename system between 1720 and 1815, and this is also the first group later to return to some extent to giving children only one forename at baptism.

Table 4 shows that in all social groups in the Skellefteå area, with the exception of the upper middle class, a general increase in the number of forenames per girl can be observed from the beginning of the 19th century to its end, although in some cases the percentage

temporarily drops. In these seven groups, more than 90% of newborn girls are given multiple forenames in 1876–1890.

Regarding the use of the multiple forename system for boys, there is a significant difference between the different social groups as early as the first period, 1791–1815. At this time, it is very clear that it is upper-middle-class parents who most commonly give their sons more than one forename. This occurs in 73% of cases. During the next three periods, multiple forenames among boys born to this social group are still the most common (64%, 64% and 60%, respectively), but given the spread of the multiple forename system in the other social strata, the dominance of the upper middle class becomes less marked (cf. the corresponding tendency regarding girls' names). During the first period, 1791–1815, the prevalence of at least two forenames per newborn boy is significantly different between the upper middle class on the one hand and the other social groups on the other. An exception that should be mentioned here is boys born to unmarried mothers, who, during the first three periods – 1791–1815, 1816–1830 and 1831–1845 – quite often have at least two names (54%, 64% and 64%, respectively). Table 5 also shows that it becomes more common in the other five social groups for boys to have at least two names over the entire hundred-year period studied.

Between 1791 and 1815, in all social groups in the area except the upper middle class and unmarried mothers, the percentage of boys given multiple forenames is below – and in some cases, far below – 50%. In all groups except the upper middle class, the proportion of boys given two or more forenames increases from the first period, 1791–1815, to the last, 1876–1890, with some temporary declines. During the last period, all social groups (except the 'miscellaneous' group) outpace or match the upper middle class regarding the percentage of boys given at least two forenames. The numbers thus indicate stagnation in the expansion of the multiple forename system among upper-middle-class boys.

Table 5. Prevalence of at least two forenames per boy by social group, 1791–1890.

	1791– 1815	1816– 1830	1831– 1845	1846– 1860	1861– 1875	1876– 1890
Upper middle class	73%	64%	64%	60%	74%	73%
Lower middle class	29%	50%	51%	57%	71%	86%
Skilled workers	26%	36%	46%	46%	72%	89%
Unskilled workers	29%	46%	41%	40%	69%	86%
Propertied farmers	15%	23%	28%	28%	49%	73%
Unpropertied farmers	19%	37%	34%	38%	54%	76%
Children of unmarried mothers	54%	64%	64%	56%	59%	80%
Miscellaneous	9%	34%	28%	23%	47%	62%

5.3 Three or more forenames

The practice of giving children a third forename also gradually emerges in Skellefteå and its surroundings, especially during the last two periods, 1861–1875 and 1876–1890. Prior to 1861–1875, the use of a third forename is extremely rare, with an incidence rate below 1%. It is worth noting that the increase occurs simultaneously for both female and male names.

Similarly, the practice of giving children a fourth forename is exceedingly rare, and it only occurs among girls (e.g. *Laura Matilda Vilhelmina Katarina* [*1870] and *Gurli Sofia Signe Charlotta* [*1876]). Some of these cases are probably ‘clarifications’ of short forms of names (e.g. *Greta Maglena Margareta Helena* [*1819] and *Helena Christina Lena Stina* [*1823], where *Greta* may be a short form of *Margareta*, and likewise *Lena* of *Helena* and *Stina* of *Christina*) (cf. Otterbjörk 1979b:34–35).

In the last period, when three, and occasionally four, forenames are given, this occurs in particular (in percentage terms) in upper-middle-class families.

Over the hundred years studied (1791–1890), the use of three or four forenames increases gradually in all social groups, but in per-

centage terms the increases in the upper and lower middle classes are the most significant. The average percentage of children given three or four forenames within the upper middle class is 23% in 1861–1875 and 17% in 1876–1890; within the lower middle class, the corresponding averages for those periods are 5% and 13%, respectively. These groups are followed by skilled workers, whose proportion of children (both girls and boys) with three or four forenames is 4.5% during the two last periods. For a more detailed account of the numbers, see Tables 6 and 7, where the numbers are reported in absolute terms as they are very small, but percentages have been added for the last two time periods.

Table 6. Prevalence of at least three forenames per girl by social group, 1791–1890.

	1791– 1815	1816– 1830	1831– 1845	1846– 1860	1861– 1875	1876– 1890
Upper middle class	2	2	2	1	13 (26%)	16 (20%)
Lower middle class	0	0	0	1	4 (4%)	26 (15%)
Skilled workers	0	1	2	0	15 (5%)	21 (5%)
Unskilled workers	0	1	1	1	6 (2%)	8 (1%)
Propertied farmers	2	4	0	2	8 (0%)	34 (1%)
Unpropertied farmers	1	5	3	2	3 (0%)	7 (1%)
Children of unmarried mothers	0	0	1	1	1 (1%)	3 (2%)
Miscellaneous	0	1	1	0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 7. Prevalence of at least three forenames per boy by social group, 1791–1890.

	1791– 1815	1816– 1830	1831– 1845	1846– 1860	1861– 1875	1876– 1890
Upper middle class	0	1	0	1	10 (19%)	10 (13%)
Lower middle class	0	0	2	1	7 (6%)	25 (12%)
Skilled workers	0	0	0	4	7 (3%)	22 (5%)
Unskilled workers	0	0	0	0	2 (1%)	26 (2%)
Propertied farmers	4	1	1	1	7 (0%)	31 (1%)
Unpropertied farmers	0	1	2	2	7 (1%)	6 (1%)
Children of unmarried mothers	0	1	1	1	0 (0%)	4 (2%)
Miscellaneous	1	0	0	0	0 (0%)	2 (10%)

6. Analysis and discussion

One way of showing identity by the use of forenames is the multiple forename system, and the data studied have therefore proved interesting, as this is a naming pattern that can provide us with information about the connection between names, naming and identity (cf. Emmerhainz 2021:157). The multiple forename system was a naming innovation in the Skellefteå area, evidence of which first appeared in local records as early as the first decades of the 18th century, and which continued to expand until 1890. The practice of giving children several forenames affected both girls and boys in the area, but at different rates, with girls given multiple forenames before boys were (cf. Valtavuo-Pfeifer 1985:99, 106; Meldgaard 1990:145). In the area studied, the middle classes – specifically the upper middle class – were the group in which this trend had appeared by the turn of the 19th century.

In the study area, the most prominent social group drove the change in the naming system, and the other groups followed to varying degrees. Judging from the data analysed, it is possible that the multiple forename system was used to mark the collective social identity of the group with the highest status. The results correspond to those

of other researchers, who have pointed out that the multiple forename system was first observed among the middle classes, after initially being introduced by the aristocracy (e.g. Otterbjörk 1979b:33–35), which does not exist in Skellefteå and therefore can be disregarded in this study. The analysis shows that the multiple forename system can be used as a way of expressing an individual as well as a collective identity (cf. Hylland Eriksen 2004:37, Finch 2008:711). This sort of social identity is connected both to the child who bears the names and to the parents and their wish to emphasize the social group identity of the family. This way of naming gives the parents an opportunity to emphasize the demarcation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and to manifest both similarities within the social group and differences vis-à-vis other social groups (cf. Hall 1997:234–238, Woodward 1997:29). We are thus concerned here with an identity that emphasizes the social group which the child is born into. When members of the lower middle class realized that the multiple forename system constituted a group identity marker for the upper middle class, they embraced the same naming system, to such an extent that they became its greatest proponents during the latter half of the study period. It is interesting to note that the first group to imitate the naming pattern used by the upper middle class was the group immediately below it in the social hierarchy.

The fact that the upper middle class was the first group to use the multiple forename system in Skellefteå, after it was first introduced by the aristocracy elsewhere, marks it as a prestigious naming pattern. It may have manifested and consolidated a certain status within this group, who probably recognized their social position as the highest in Skellefteå and its surroundings. When the use of two forenames became too common, the upper middle class again sought to increase the exclusivity of their pattern of naming by changing the number of names given to children, either by reverting to a single first name or by increasing the number of forenames to three or even four. This is a common course of action when something becomes too common to be distinctive any more. When social group affiliation is no longer indicated in the usual way, a group that wants to stand out must use

other strategies, which may include the multiple forename system. And since the upper middle class drove the change by both increasing and decreasing the number of names given to children, it is reasonable to assume that this group also found it most important to maintain a distinction between social groups (i.e. ‘us’ and ‘them’). In the middle of the 19th century, the upper middle class was the group in the study area with parents who were least inclined (in percentage terms) to give their children two names.

More privileged groups in society may consider it more important to make their social group and connections visible, especially in times of greater social stratification, like the period studied. This may be one way of indicating a symbolic capital that constitutes either a conscious or an unconscious contract between groups in society (e.g. Broady 1991:169, 300; Bourdieu 1997:177–178). The pattern of the number of children’s forenames may reveal the parents’ wish to mark a social group identity. This can be perceived as an individual expression of a collective identity that simultaneously generates group solidarity.

To sum up, naming patterns, like the multiple forename system, can be seen as a manifestation of a collective social identity that simultaneously reinforces the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Names and naming patterns can thus be used freely to create distinctions between groups and simultaneously mark differences in their status. Not only naming trends, but also naming patterns, can thus illustrate a symbolic relationship between the individual and the social environment. From a sociocultural perspective, the same approach can be used by groups that consider themselves to have higher social status, which they signal through different attributes such as enjoying a certain lifestyle, wearing certain clothes, and having specific tastes in art and music (Simmel 1957; Bourdieu 1984, 1989, 1991). Whereas a strong economic position is often required to be able to maintain a certain lifestyle, choices of name and naming patterns are completely decoupled from economic conditions, since choosing a name is free and accessible to all, regardless of social standing.

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