

ATTITUDES TOWARD SELF AND ONE'S PROPER NAMES

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It has been hypothesized that a person's name is a significant aspect of self, so much that some primitive people regard a child as being not born until he has been named. Others regard the person's name as being the person himself (6).

In what Sherif and Cantril (7) have called the most "thorough, well-documented treatment of the subject," Robert Holt (5) suggests that an overwhelming majority of people feel that their names are a part of them, not fortuitous but built in like an arm or a finger. If this is so, one would expect a relationship between a person's attitude toward himself and toward his name.

The present paper reports essentially a replication of a study by Strunk (8). He found with 120 undergraduate students of whom 100 were males and whose names were not peculiar, a "tendency for individuals who dislike their first names to have less affirmative attitudes toward themselves than do those who like their first names." But because of methodological difficulties this relationship is by no means certain. The present study attempts (a) to study further the suggested relationship between one's first name and one's self; (b) to discover if such a relationship also exists with regard to the middle name.

METHOD

Ss were 40 female and 10 male adults enrolled in a first year adult-education psychology course. Their mean age was 24 years. The mean educational attainment was one year at secondary school. Following Strunk's method, the Ss were given a one-page inventory with three spaces in which they wrote their first, middle, and last names. Below each was a 5 point rating scale with the instruction to "circle the number which best indicates your feeling toward each name," i.e., 1 for great like, 2 for like, 3 indifference, 4 dislike, and 5 great dislike. Ss were also instructed, if they disliked any of their names, to "write a few short sentences explaining why." One week later Ss were asked to complete the "self" scales of the modified Bills Index of Adjustment and Values (IAV) (2). On these, measures of self concept, acceptance of self, ideal self, and discrepancy between the first and the third are obtained. Strunk had used a modification the Brownfain Inventory (3).

RESULTS

Since only 13 Ss indicated great like or dislike for any of his three names, ratings were combined into like, indifference and dislike. The results are shown in Table 1. It will be seen that most Ss like

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGES OF LIKE, INDIFFERENCE AND DISLIKE TOWARD ONE'S FIRST, MIDDLE, AND LAST NAMES (N = 50)

	first	Name middle	last
Like	70	44	54
Indifference	20	30*	40
Dislike	10	26	6

* Includes 8% who had no middle name.

their names, especially the first name (70%); middle names are disliked most often (26%); while indifference is greatest toward the last name (40%). A factor in this indifference may be that 80% of our *Ss* were women and as such had either changed their last name upon becoming married, or perhaps hoped to change it soon or eventually. The sample was too small to investigate sex differences. In Strunk's study where 83% of the *Ss* were men, indifference towards the last name was only 19% compared with 10% toward the first name and 26% toward the middle name.

Correlations between degree of liking one's name and Bills IAV scores are shown in Table 2. For the first name the correlations

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ADJUSTMENT (IAV) SCORES AND DEGREE OF LIKING ONE'S NAME

Adjustment (IAV) score	Name	
	first	middle
Self concept	.241	.60**
Self-acceptance	.00	.015
Self—ideal self discrepancy	.165	.195

** Significant at the .005 level.

were: with self concept, .241; with self-acceptance, .00; and with self—ideal self discrepancy, .165. For the middle name the respective correlations were .60, .015, .195. Only the *r* of .60 is significant.

The mean self concept score of those who liked their first name was 180 (SD = 18) and of those who disliked it, 169 (SD = 24), which was in the expected direction but not statistically significant. Strunk, using the Brownfain inventory, found that his 81 students who liked their first names obtained a mean score of 6.32 (SD .98), the 26 who disliked their first names, a mean score of 5.78 (SD .83), the lower score standing for a lower self rating. This difference is statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

If one's name serves as an "anchorage point" for selfhood (1, p. 163), then why should the middle name rather than the first name be significantly related to a self-regarding attitude? Perhaps because the middle name is not used much and hence is of minor relevance in one's total phenomenal field, it does not represent such a significant aspect of self and a dislike for it is more easily admitted.

Reasons given for the dislike of one or more of one's names were: uneuphonious (for 15% of the *Ss*), old-fashioned (15%), difficulty of pronunciation, too common or too uncommon, too long, foreign, easily turned into slang, and failing to support one's sex role. Regarding the last it may be mentioned that transvestites generally adopt first names of the opposite sex (10).

Some *Ss* reported that they are not called by their real names. Sometimes a modified or fictitious name is used to express special affection and familiarity. In relation to this, Taylor (9) has highlighted the invention of "darl" or "special darl" names among delinquent girls in custody, apparently to symbolize the psychological relationships the girls had constructed to overcome their problems of insecurity and immaturity.

The present study seems to contradict Strunk's finding of a relationship between attitude toward oneself and like or dislike of one's first name. This may be due in part to differences between the Brownfain and Bills measures of self-esteem. E.g., Cowen (4) found no correspondence between the Brownfain discrepancy measure and any of the Bills measures.

In summary, among primarily female *Ss* there appears to be a significant relationship between self concept on the Bills inventory and attitude toward one's middle name, while the relationship to the first name noted by Strunk with primarily male *Ss* was in our case insignificant although in the expected direction. The difference in results may be due to sex differences and differences in the self-regard instruments used. Further studies of attitudes toward one's name seem warranted.

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(continued from page 2)

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