

ATTITUDES TOWARD ONE'S NAME AND ONE'S SELF

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Historically, one's name has always represented an important aspect of the self. Garnot (7) has shown that as early as 2000 B.C. the power of a proper name was such that it might well determine the individual's destiny. That some persons like their names and others do not has been conclusively illustrated in an extensive study by Arthaud, Hohneck, Ramsey, and Pratt (3). The relationship between name and personality has received periodic attention by psychologists for several decades (2, 8, 10, 12, 13). The relationship between one's name and neurotic tendencies has been investigated by several workers (6, 9, 14, 15). Generally, the results of these studies indicate that such a relationship does indeed exist. Katz (11), however, has pointed out that the importance assigned to one's name diminishes with the ending of school.

The present study attempts (1) to point up some additional aspects of attitude toward name, and (2) to discover if there is a relationship between satisfaction with one's name and with one's self. This latter hypothesis stems from the general belief that one's name serves as an "anchorage point" for selfhood (1, p. 163).

PROCEDURE

The subjects were 100 male and 20 female undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory course in psychology. Their mean age was 20.6 years. They were given a one-page inventory containing three spaces in which they were instructed to print their first, middle, and last names. Below these spaces appeared three rating scales, each headed great like, like, indifferent, dislike, and great dislike, a scale for each name. Ss were instructed to check the block which best indicated their feeling toward each name. Ss were then asked to turn over the page and those who had indicated dislike for any name were asked to record why they disliked their name. These evaluations were then collected. Three days later a modification of the Brownfain Self-Rating Inventory (4) was administered to the same group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Very few individuals indicated great like or great dislike for either their first, middle, or last name. Therefore, the results were combined into the categories like, indifferent, and dislike as presented in Table 1.

The table shows that most students like their names. Greatest dislike is expressed toward the first name; greatest indifference, toward the middle name; and greatest like, toward the last name.

TABLE I. PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS INDICATING ATTITUDES OF LIKE, INDIFFERENCE, AND DISLIKE TOWARD FIRST, MIDDLE, AND LAST NAMES

Attitude	Name		
	First	Middle	Last
Like	68%	58%	76%
Indifferent	10	26*	19
Dislike	22	16	5

*Includes 4% who had no middle name.

When a name is disliked, what are the reasons given? Commonality and uncommonality are mentioned frequently, which finding confirms previous research (3). Lack of a satisfactory aesthetic quality is also mentioned often; "it just doesn't sound right." Furthermore, many boys believe that their name is "not masculine enough," and many girls, that it is "not feminine enough." A few described past negative associations as reasons for dislike. Here it should be noted that a good number of individuals who dislike their first name have a nickname. This very often helps to compensate for an unusual and disliked name (5).

According to our results, the first name is the most critical. This might be explained by the fact that, in our culture, it is a reference point. It appears to be by far the most meaningful to the individual and undoubtedly represents an important part of the phenomenal self. The middle name, on the other hand, is rarely used and is usually displayed by a mere initial, while there is a certain finality about one's last name. Our further analysis of the results and discussion will, therefore, be limited to the first name.

2. (a) Do students who express dissatisfaction with their first names tend to express general dissatisfaction with themselves? On the Brownfain Inventory, our sample obtained a mean score of 6.17 (*SD* .69), which, according to the descriptive categories of the Inventory, indicates "distinctly above average but not outstanding" satisfaction with one's self. This relatively high level of satisfaction with one's self may explain why in our sample few individuals expressed great like or great dislike for their names, the two attitudes being related, as we shall see.

The 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. The difference is significant.

The two groups were also compared on the self-acceptance category of the Brownfain Inventory alone. Low self-acceptance is defined in the scale as "extremely dissatisfied to be the kind of person he is; wants very much to be a different kind of person." High self-acceptance is defined as "generally pleased (but not conceited) about being the person he is; feels no need to be like a different person." The 81 students who liked their first names obtained a mean self-acceptance score of 6.3 (*SD* 1.5); the 26 who disliked their first names, a mean score of 5.5 (*SD* 1.7). This difference is also statistically significant.

(*b*) To test the relationship of the attitudes toward one's first name and toward one's self further, the data were subjected to correlational procedure. For this purpose numerical values from 1 to 5 were assigned to the name ratings from great dislike to great like.

The product-moment correlation between first-name ratings and total Brownfain Inventory scores was found to be $+0.356$, which is significant. The correlation between first-name ratings and scores on the self-acceptance category was found to be $+0.254$, which is significant at the 5 percent level.

In summary, there appears to be a persistent tendency for individuals who dislike their first name to have less affirmative attitudes toward themselves than do those who like their first name. The homogeneity of our sample prevents us from claiming any final conclusions; a similar study on a group containing more individuals with stronger negative feelings toward themselves is needed. While the importance of name satisfaction in the clinical setting is problematic, certainly research to date indicates that it is a variable worth consideration. The very practical implications of "finding a name for the new baby" are axiomatic.

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