

Social Science Contributions to Names Introduction

[This special issue is dedicated to Robert R. Holt and Muzafer Sherif whose work serves as an inspiration for social science onomastics.]

EDWIN D. LAWSON, ISSUE EDITOR

A substantial portion of the scholarly work in onomastics has been done by scholars in the humanities. But it is also true that interest in names is shared by colleagues in the social sciences, law, medicine, biology and other disciplines. To demonstrate the kinds of research being done by social scientists, our editor, Kelsie Harder, asked me to arrange a special issue.

We have been fortunate to obtain eight contributors who represent a broad range of interest: an educational psychologist, a psychiatrist (psychiatry and psychoanalysis are being considered social sciences for this issue), three sociologists, two psychologists who have worked independently, and a team of five psychologists. We are especially pleased to welcome the participation of the two Canadian contributors: Dion and Seeman.

The first paper by psychiatrist Mary V. Seeman deals with various cultural aspects of the naming process. She describes how names show genealogy, geography, and circumstances of birth and also how unconscious associations appear in nicknames and dreams.

In the second contribution, Kenneth L. Dion, a social psychologist, discusses the importance of the name for the individual's concept of identity. Then, in a second section, Dion goes on to describe some of the new laboratory research on perception and its application to names.

The third article by Richard L. Zweigenhaft, also a social psychologist, reopens the old question of whether having an unusual name handicaps the individual or predisposes to a difficult adjustment. Zweigenhaft marshals evidence to indicate that the bearer of an unusual name, contrary to the common view, actually has a better chance for success.

The fourth report by sociologist Robert L. Herrick departs a bit from the contributions on personal names. Herrick is concerned with place names and cultural influences on them. He has evaluated thousands of New Mexico place names in the context of shifts from Indian to Spanish to Anglo culture and the current pressures on those names.

Donna K. Darden, another sociologist, has been interested in symbolic interaction. Her article demonstrates how multi-dimensional scaling can provide information about the dimensions of names.

Thomas B. Busse, an educational psychologist, has investigated nicknames in a high school. His research indicates that the majority of boys and a substantial percentage of girls do have nicknames. Busse evaluates the origins and types of nicknames.

Irving Lewis Allen is a sociologist interested in the ethnic aspect of names. He shows how the use of ethnic epithets (such as calling Irishmen, Murphy; Swedes, Olaf; and Germans, Hans) is an index of the hostility and clashing between cultural groups.

Finally, there is the contribution of a team of psychologists: S. Gray Garwood, Jefferson L. Sulzer, Douglas W. Levine, Lewis Cox, and Valerie Kaplan. Their research simultaneously tested four factors: type of name, sex, attribution of responsibility, and sanction assignment in a sophisticated type of judgmental experiment. The results indicate how type of name and sex of the bearer have an effect on how aspects of behavior are judged and social sanctions are assigned.

It was initially planned that this special issue would include a comprehensive survey of the contributions of social scientists to onomastics. However, the volume of material turned out to be much larger than anticipated and the survey will appear in the next issue of *Names*.

It is hoped that the articles in this special issue of *Names* will clearly demonstrate that not only have social scientists been concerned with names but also their work will be of interest to colleagues in other disciplines. If this special issue has been successful, it is due to the editor, Kelsie Harder, for his help and encouragement, the contributors, whose cooperation has been tremendous, and Bernard Gerling and Bettye Myer who assisted in the translation of the abstracts.

State University College, Fredonia, New York