

A Note on the Names in *Names*

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Names, the journal of the American Name Society, has been publishing articles on names since 1953, but, in the fifty-plus years of publication, *Names* has yet to publish any studies on the names of the authors who have contributed to the journal. This article examines the names of these contributors in terms of academic associations, prosody, and diversity.

KEYWORDS authors, affiliation, prosody, diversity

The American Name Society (ANS), founded in 1951, is a professional organization devoted to the study of names and their roles in society (Gasque, 1991). *Names*, the journal of the ANS, has been publishing articles on names since 1953. Periodically, articles have appeared describing the history of the society, its early organizers and members, and its trials and tribulations (e.g., Ashley, 2002; Bryant, 1976; Gasque, 2001; 2010; McMullen, 2001; Murray, 2001). A series of articles appearing in the early issues of the journal (now discontinued, the section, not the journal) provided biographical information, including name origins, of many of the society's members under a "Your Name" and "In Memoriam" section. Biographical information about contributing authors still appears in the journal in a "Contributors" section after each article, although the information is sometimes lean, and rarely includes middle names.

While literally hundreds of articles have appeared in *Names* describing the origins and meaning of personal names, place names, brand names, ethnic names, pseudonyms, nicknames, and names given to animals, and so on, no articles have as yet appeared analyzing the names of the people writing those articles. As an initial foray into this "know thyself" analysis, the present article surveys these names in *Names* in terms of academic affiliation, prosody, and diversity.

Affiliation

The first question this article addresses is: Who writes the articles published in *Names*? For this and subsequent analyses, I restricted the "data" to articles only (which excludes book reviews and comments) published between 1980–2009 inclusive, to keep the data manageable and because I was not able to identify affiliations consistently for earlier years. Affiliation in this analysis was that mentioned in the author's

biographical statement, in other sources mentioned above, or from personal contact with authors or ANS members who knew those authors.¹ Contributors for whom no affiliation or association was listed, or about whom no information was available, were classified as “unknown”.

The answer to the question about who writes articles in *Names* was not surprising — most contributors are overwhelmingly academics. The breakdown appears in Table 1. As evident from the Table, the two main academic affiliations for contributors to *Names* are Departments of English or Linguistics (sometimes these are one and the same; distinctions were made on the basis of the department in which the highest degree was awarded). Tom Gasque, himself a professor of English, likewise noted this weighting of members in his recent historical overview of the ANS (Gasque, 2010).

Prosody

Many studies in literary onomastics are focused on why writers have chosen the names they give to their characters (Croft, 2009). One reason is prosody. A well-known example is Charles Dickens who scanned lists of names for those “that had a pleasant sound or connotation to him or appealed to his sense of the grotesque” (Harder, 1982: 34). Although many prosodic elements in names could have been studied, this next analysis is focused on plosives. Plosives are speech sounds produced by a complete closure of the oral passage and the subsequent release of air. Linguistically, there are six plosive letters in the alphabet (p, t, k, b, d, and g). The first three are considered the “stronger” plosives because they require greater aspiration to pronounce (Roach, 2009: 28). There were two reasons for this focus on plosives. The first is that these sounds are considered by several linguists to have constituted mankind’s “first threatening aggressive noises” (Johnson, 1998). Several empirical studies in fact have found that such sounds are more likely to occur in words appearing in poems judged to be “aggressive” in tone (Fonagy, 1961; Tsur, 1992). Four-letter word obscenities, many of them used in aggressive contexts (Hughes, 1998),

TABLE 1
ACADEMIC AFFILIATION OF CONTRIBUTORS¹ TO *NAMES* 1980–2009 (N=419)

English	31%
Linguistics	11%
Geography	12%
Psychology	8%
Languages (Fr., Sp. Ger.)	4%
Sociology	4%
History	4%
Anthropology	4%
Other (law, entomol.)	17%
Unknown	5%

¹ “Contributors” refers to authors of “articles” and does not include authors of Book Reviews or other contributions.

also contain one or more plosives. Some linguists speculate words with plosives produce a cathartic emotional release when expressed (Hughes, 1998). The second reason was ancillary to the first. If plosive sounds are inherently “aggressive”, and names are bestowed in some cases because of their prosody, I hypothesized that individuals involved in professions not noted for physical aggressiveness, like those contributing to *Names*, would have fewer names with plosives than individuals involved in professions requiring physically aggressive behavior. As a comparison group representing the latter, I relied on the names of professional hockey players. The reason for focusing on hockey players is that hockey is considered a “blood sport”, a sport in which violent aggressiveness is expected and rewarded (Jones and others, 1993).

For this study, authors whose articles appeared 1980–2009 in *Names* were compared with the names of professional hockey players listed in the *Hockey Scouting Report* for 1995 (Ross, 1995). This analysis only compared given names since family names are not intentional, and arbitrarily excluded non-Anglo names when they were recognizable as such (to me) because of problems associated with transcription of sound to letter characteristics (Gustafson, 1995). Additionally, only males were compared since there were no female hockey players in the *Scouting Report*.

Forty-four (44) of the 193 (23%) authors in *Names* had names with strong plosives compared to 33 out of 65 (51%) hockey players. Statistically, this kind of difference could have occurred by chance only once in 1000.² The difference was even greater when names were compared for only the “k” plosive. In that comparison, only 14 of the 193 authors in *Names* (7%) had the requisite plosive compared to 19 out of 65 hockey players (29%), a four-fold difference.

If, as hypothesized, names with plosives tend to be associated with physical endeavors much more than names without plosives, one explanation for these findings is that parents who consciously or unconsciously are more aggressively inclined in thought or behavior choose names for their children with sounds that reflect that mind set. Parents who choose names characterized by fewer plosives, like those given to future *Names* scholars, may have a different mindset. This is of course pure speculation, but, in light of the results, not implausible.

Diversity

The next question addressed in the present study was whether contributors to *Names* have a more diverse set of names than contributors to other academic journals. For this analysis, I relied on the Barry-Harper Index, eponymously derived from ANS members Herbert Barry III and Ayleen Harper (2010), to compare the percentage of diverse names of authors who had published in *Names* with authors who had published articles in the *American Journal of History*, between 1970–2000. As described by Barry and Harper, I listed all the names of authors contributing articles to these respective journals, then removed duplicate names from each, arranged the remaining names alphabetically, determined the 50% rank for each group of names, and counted the number of names in each of the lists of the 50% most frequent names. In this analysis, a higher number of names indicates a more diverse set of names.

The data are shown in Table 2. As evident from the data and the analysis, authors who published in *Names* had a greater diversity of names than those who published

TABLE 2

MEDIAN NUMBER OF NAMES IN LIST OF AUTHORS PUBLISHING ARTICLES IN THE JOURNALS *NAMES* AND *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF HISTORY* (AM. J. HIST.)

	Median	Total	Percent
Males			
<i>Names</i>	28	574	10.2%
<i>Am. J. Hist.</i>	16	571	2.8%

Probability of difference is < .001.

	Median	Total	Percent
Females			
<i>Names</i>	31	100	31.0%
<i>Am. J. Hist.</i>	28	162	17.3%

Probability of difference is < .02.

in the *American Journal of History*. As expected, there was a much higher percentage of diverse female than male names, but, within each gender, authors publishing in *Names* had the higher percentage.

Several years ago in this journal, Ed Lawson, past president of the ANS, mused that many of its members had unusual names (Lawson, 2001). One could probably document this scientifically by comparing the frequency of members' names with their frequency in the general population, when matched for age of birth, but I leave that for some more enterprising onomastic study. Instead, I anecdotally draw the reader's attention to the names of some of ANS's current, and past presidents. It seems to me, for instance, that two "Kemps" (Malone, 1956 and Williams, 2012) in a list of about 50 presidents (4%) is unusual. And how many presidents of learned societies are named "Elsdon", "Kelsey", "Edwin", "Meredith", "Lurline", "Byrd", "Cleveland", or "Priscilla?" Tables 3-5 list the first, middle (when I could find them),

TABLE 3

FIRST, MIDDLE, AND LAST NAMES OF AUTHORS PUBLISHING FIVE OR MORE ARTICLES IN *NAMES* 1950S-1960S

Stewart, George R(ippey)	11
Smith, Elsdon C(oles)	10
Gudde, Erwin G(ustav)	9
Dabbs, Jack Autrey	9
Janzen, Assar (Gotrik)	7
Pearce, T(homas) Matthews	6
McAtee, W(aldo) L(ee)	5
Loomis, C(harles) Grant	5
Holmer, Nils, M(agnus)	5
Georgacas, Demetrius, (John)	5

TABLE 4
FIRST, MIDDLE, AND LAST NAMES OF AUTHORS PUBLISHING FIVE OR MORE ARTICLES IN *NAMES*
1970s–1980s

Nicolaisen, Wilhelm F(ritz) H(erman)	11
Ashley, Leonard Raymond Neligan	11
Lawson, Edwin D(avid)	7
Algeo, John (Thomas)	7
Cassidy, Frederick, G(omes)	6
McDavid, Raven, I(oor)	5
Millward, Celia McCullough	5

TABLE 5
FIRST, MIDDLE, AND LAST NAMES OF AUTHORS PUBLISHING FOUR OR MORE ARTICLES IN *NAMES*
1990s–2000s

Murray, Thomas E.	12
Lawson, Edwin, D(avid)	12
Nicolaisen, Wilhelm, F(ritz) H(erman)	12
Ashley, Leonard, Raymond Neligan	11
Gasque, Thomas, James	10
Algeo, John (Thomas)	9
Fleissner, Robert, F(erdinand)	9
Tucker, D. Kenneth	7
Barry, Herbert, III	6
Cohen, Gerald, Leonard	6
Harper, Alyene, Sharp	6
Kelsie, B(rown)	6
Rayburn, Alan	6
Rennick, Robert, M(oris)	6
Skipper, James, K(inley)	6
Smith, Grant, W.	6
Abel, Ernest L(awrence)	5
Randall, Richard, R.	5
Zelinsky, Wilbur	5

and surnames of authors who have published five or more articles by combined decades. As evident from these lists, there are a lot of *Names* authors with what also seems to me “unusual” middle names.

In summary, the largest percentage of authors, in terms of academic affiliation, publishing in *Names* are located in English and/or Linguistics departments. These authors have fewer plosive sounds in their names compared to the names of professional hockey players. Compared to authors publishing in another academic journal,

authors publishing in *Names* have a more diverse set of names. I leave it to onomasticists with a curiosity about such esoterica to determine if, in fact, they are unique as well.

Notes

¹ I thank the many people who took the time to respond to my many inquiries regarding this and other questions, e.g. “middle names.”

² Statistical probability was determined by the Fisher’s Exact Test. The Fisher’s exact test allows for comparisons involving only two possible outcomes and two variables, for example, males and females

tossing coins. Here the question would be, do heads come up more often when men toss coins. There are only two possible outcomes (heads or tails) and only two possible tossers (men or women). In the present study the two outcomes are “contains plosives” and “does not contain plosives” and the two groups that are being compared are authors and hockey players.

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