

Fashions in Girls' Names at Smith College

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DURING THE LATTER part of my forty-two years of teaching at Smith I had begun to wonder if there were fashions in girls' names as in their dresses. So last summer I started a research on the subject. I began with a card catalogue of 2,302 of my own students from Smith 1914 to 1956. To get a better statistical base, more indicative of trends, I added samplings from the earlier classes, for a grand total of 3,664. These I arranged by first or given names. Treating different spellings of the same name as different names, I wound up with an astonishingly long alphabetical list of 573. Abbie was first, then Abby, Abigail, Adaline, Addie, Adelaide, Adele, Adra, Adrienne and so on and so on to Xenia, Zecille, Zelda, Zella, Zora, and Zulime at the end.

The next job was to count occurrences in decades. But since the list had started with my own students, total occurrences would not be adequate statistically: in different classes and decades the numbers had varied greatly due to curricular changes, course assignments, and sabbatical leaves. To allow for these variations, as a fairer basis of comparison, I worked out what I will call "weighted values" or points.

These values were used in rearranging the names in descending order. I limited this table to names worth at least 100 points, which meant that they occurred at least six or seven times. Ninety-five out of 573 names; Mary at the top and Eva at the bottom. Tabulated on the next page are the first 23 names. (The first figure is the order; the second, the weighted value; the third, the number of instances.)

Observing that in this group there are variants of the same name, for example, Mary and Marion, Anna and Anne, Jane and Jean, I tried to discover among the 573 names semantically related families. I found a Mary family: Mary, Mae, Maie, Maria, Marie, Marietta,

Marya, Maurine, Maureen, May, Marilyn, Marylin, Marlynn, Marion, Marian, Miriam; an Anna family: Ann, Anna, Anne, Annah, Hannah, Hanna, Aneita, Anita, Annet, Anette, Annie-wall, Nancy, Nina, Nita; a Jane family: Jane, Jean, Joan, Jan, Janaan, Janet, Janice, Janis, Jeanie, Jeanne, Jeanette, Jennette, Jennie, Joann, Joanne, Joanna (some of these may seem supposititious); and 59 other related groups. The most striking difference between the original list of 573 and the same names arranged

(1) Mary	3769	255	(13) Marion	785	54
(2) Helen	1944	130	(14) Edith	758	47
(3) Elizabeth	1889	144	(15) Harriet	757	48
(4) Margaret	1167	92	(16) Anna	689	42
(5) Alice	1151	77	(17) Virginia	682	53
(6) Ruth	1044	73	(18) Anne	621	44
(7) Dorothy	872	77	(19) Eleanor	547	41
(8) Frances	864	64	(20) Sarah	543	37
(9) Florence	863	55	(21) Jane	538	43
(10) Caroline	837	53	(22) Martha	532	38
(11) Grace	794	51	(23) Jean	530	42
(12) Barbara	786	72			

in these 62 families was the displacement of Alice, Ruth, Frances, and Florence, by the coming of Anna, Jane, Eleanor, and Katharine into the first ten.

After this preliminary work it was possible to study in detail the chronological vicissitudes of the several names during the eight decades of the college's history. The ever popular Mary was overwhelmingly so before 1900, moderately so in the 30's, least popular in the 10's and 50's. Helen's popularity was highest in the fourth and sixth decades, low since then. Elizabeth was at her height from 1920-1940. Margaret was a rather minor name until 1900, reaching peaks in the 20's and 40's. Alice ranked almost with Mary during the 1900's, has had a low score, like Helen's of late. Ruth increased in fortune gradually until the third and fourth decades, since then has gradually declined. Dorothy is a late comer: the first example in the third decade; and half of the examples and thirty per cent of the points concentrated in the 20's. Frances has wavered and recently declined. The vogue of Caroline and Grace

was largely 19th century. Barbara does not appear until the 1910's, but in the 1940's is second only to Mary. Marion was at her heights from 1890-1939. Edith was primarily a girl of the Gay Nineties. Harriet was most popular before 1900 but with an appreciable revival in the 1930's. Marion, Edith and Harriet are seldom heard of now. Anna came to Smith in largest numbers in the first years of the college, in decreasing numbers since 1900. Her sister Anne, while present in the early days, has been seen in largest numbers since 1930. Ann was unknown prior to 1920, in the 50's there have been more of her than her two sisters combined. Virginia answers the roll-call first in the 90's and then only once; she gains $\frac{5}{6}$ of her points in 1920-49. Eleanor is an unusual person before 1910, deigning to honor us with $\frac{4}{5}$ of her appearances in the next thirty years. On the contrary $\frac{4}{5}$ of Sarah's points were won before 1910. The twins, Jane and Jean, have been most evident since 1930; the late blooming Joan was born in the late 30's, now surpasses them both. Martha has been a girl of generally even popularity. One might go on down the list, but total point values decrease and statistical reliability, ever questionable, vanishes. However, one notes the almost total disappearance of once popular names, such as Ethel, Bertha, Charlotte, Clara, Agnes, Emma, and the sudden rise of Patricia, Lois, Betty, Constance, Priscilla, Marilyn, and Suzanne.

Just a word about names ending in ie: 29, Abbie, Addie, Allie, Annie, Bessie, Carrie, to Sadie, Sallie, Sophie, and Willie. The most popular (in descending order) Jessie, Annie, Elsie, Nellie and Carrie. Thirty per cent of the points are to be attributed to the first ten years of the college; and only six per cent to the classes of 1940-56. This confirms an impression that such names, while still occurring, are old-fashioned.

Another study might be made of the use of two given names together. Among my own students there were thirteen names thus linked with a following name; nearly 30 combinations with Ann (Anne, etc.) as the second name. Let me give the list with Mary as the first name (a numeral indicates the number of instances): Mary Elizabeth (14), Mary Jane (8), Mary Ann (4), Mary Alice (3), and Mary Francis, Mary Virginia, Mary Emily, and Mary Eleanor (2 each), and Mary combined once with: Lucile, Florence, Marjorie, Lee, Helen, Catherine, Rachel, Lois, Margaret, Caroline, Jean, Frances, Jo [sephine], Agnes, Aloise, Isabelle.