UNIQUE AND COMMON FIRST NAMES OF MALES AND FEMALES

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Summary.—This study examined sex differences in unique and common first names of 6125 infants born over a 5-yr. period. Females were more likely than males to receive unique first names. This helps explain the results of previous research which showed that males with unique names were more likely to be maladjusted while this was not true for females.

Several studies have suggested that subjects with unique or uncommon first names are more likely to be maladjusted than those with common first names. Many of these studies have used only male samples in demonstrating that they are more likely to be maladjusted and perform poorly in school (Savage & Wells, 1948) and have a higher frequency of psychoses (Hartman, et al., 1968) when given unique first names. Further, males’ first names which are common have been judged more positively than unique first names (Buchanan & Brown, 1971; Lawson, 1971), while the connotative meaning of females’ first names has been relatively neglected.

In a study which used a female sample only, Houston and Sumner (1948) did not find greater neurotic tendencies in females with uncommon first names compared to those with common first names. Studies which tested both male and female samples found similar results. Schonberg and Murphy (1974) noted that males with more common first names scored higher on abasement than males with less common first names while there were no differences between uniquely named and commonly named females.

Ellis and Beechly (1954) observed in a large group of case histories that males with unique first names were more likely to be disturbed than males with common first names while this difference was not statistically significant for females. The results were explained as due to the possibility of females having a wider range of names than males. Further, Zweigenhaft, et al. (1980) found in contrast to the previous studies that uniquely named women scored significantly higher on a number of scales of the California Personality Inventory than women with more common names, suggesting that these women were more optimally adjusted than their commonly named counterparts. Earlier Zweigenhaft (1977) reported that black and white men had more unusual...
names than black and white women respectively, yet did not report these results as statistically significant.

These studies suggest that there might be personality differences between uniquely and commonly named males while these differences are generally, while not exclusively, absent for women. This study examined Ellis and Beechley's (1954) suggestion that females have more unique first names than males which may account for the discrepancy in the results of the above studies.

The subjects were 6125 infants born at The University of Michigan Hospitals between the years 1979 and 1983. A name was judged to be unique if it was given only once in a particular year, with slightly more than 1000 births recorded each year. The total number of unique and common names given at birth was tallied for male and female infants.

As predicted, Table 1 shows that males tend to be given more common first names while females tend to be given more unique first names, yielding a chi-squared with Yates' correction of 203.16 (p < .001).

<table>
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<th>TABLE 1</th>
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**UNIQUE AND COMMON NAMES GIVEN TO MALES AND FEMALES AT BIRTH (N = 6125)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Unique Names</th>
<th>Common Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is more an anomaly, then, for a male to receive a unique first name than it is for a female. If singularly named males have a greater propensity for psychopathology, they may inherit such tendencies from disturbed parents or respond to negative views (e.g., teasing) of peers and others which may subsequently lead to an unhealthy self view. This might explain why uniquely named males were more maladjusted in the above studies but not the females. Perhaps this is an aspect of identity assigned by parents at birth which could be considered in studies of unique names and maladjustment.

REFERENCES


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