

# Nicknames as sex-role stereotypes

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## Abstract:

*Nicknames are powerful indicators of attitudes towards gender categories and because of their transient and optional nature, it has been argued that they are more likely to show a closer relationship to ongoing trends in the culture and society than other more fixed parts of the language E. B. Phillips (1990) ["Nicknames and Sex Role Stereotypes," Sex Roles, Vol. 23, pp. 281-289]. This study reports on a survey of nickname usage among a group of South African adolescents from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds (approximately 25% other than white) in an attempt to explicate gender-linked trends in frequency of occurrence, usage and attitudes to such special names. It reveals that conventions regarding nickname coinage and usage are intimately connected to the gender of bearers and users, and that more males have nicknames and coin them than females; it also shows significant sex-linked differences in the linguistic sources and users of nicknames, and reveals a greater tendency for female nicknames to function as indicators of affection rather than for humorous or critical effect. It could be argued that these trends could be linked to the nurturing and nurtured role of females in society, and to the differences in social power generally between males and females.*

"Names mean something - not just in an etymological sense but in a synchronic sense. They carry important pragmatic meanings which color and even shape the character of human interaction" (Wierzbicka 1992:302). While parents in many Western cultures can choose the name of their child arbitrarily, which creates the impression that names have no stable pragmatic or attitudinal value at all, such a view is not supported by research, especially when it comes to morphological derivatives of first names and nickname coinages, which shows how versatile usage of the same name can be. The attitudinal meanings of names (and their use) may be structured in terms of prototypes rather than in terms of explicit emotional or attitudinal features, and these prototypes involve fundamental human categories based on age and gender.

According to Wierzbicka "a rigorous analysis of the semantics of names reveals to what extent different attitudes are linked in a given culture to different genders and to different age statuses, for example, to what extent overt displays of affection and similar feelings depend on the addressee's being seen as a woman, child, or a girl" (1992:304). Such analyses also reveal the extent to which various emotions are expected to be shown in human relations in general; English, despite its penchant for generally discouraging much display of emotion, has a wealth of nicknames which reveal masculinity (e.g., Mike), femininity (e.g., Suzie) and good feelings towards children (e.g., Suziekins).

An analysis of nicknames should, because of their transient nature, show a closer relationship to culture and society than other more fixed parts of the language (Phillips

1990). As Wierzbicka (1992:375) points out, "those parts of the language . . . which are related to the relationship between the speaker and the addressee are . . . among those most likely to reflect the living, on-going culture," and linguistic categories which are optional are more likely to be linguistically revealing of trends within the ongoing culture than obligatory ones; while structural aspects of the language (such as the pronominal system) are likely to be extremely resistant to change, despite strong pressure from certain (feminist) groups to influence usage or introduce new alternatives (such as hesh as a neutral third person pronoun), lexical choices allow far greater flexibility. Thus while certain older (sexist) attitudes may remain "trapped" in the lexicon (Phillips 1990:281), nicknames might be regarded as fairly reliable indicators of current trends and attitudes.

Another important aspect of nicknames is their role in influencing the perceptions of users (Holland 1990; Aiford 1987) because of the semantic value evident in some nicknames (e.g., Sexy Ankles, Bunnikins). Such names have the consequence of reinforcing the character of certain relationships and social attitudes, reminding everyone of the attributes of the bearer and creating expectations which affect perceptions, even if (often) inaccurately, and this can be particularly influential with regard to the perpetuation of gender-related stereotypes (e.g., that male nicknames relate typically to connotations of strength, hardness and maturity, while female nicknames relate more to beauty, pleasantness, kindness and goodness) (Phillips 1990). Bearers too may well accept their appellations as somehow indicative of the kind of person they are, the nickname functioning as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy (e.g., Baby - cute, needing protection?).

It is commonly claimed that male nicknames have a higher frequency of occurrence, and are more "masculine" in being phonetically shorter, often derived from surnames and less affectionate than female nicknames (Busse 1983:302-3; Phillips 1990; Koopman 1979; Neethling 1994; Bosch 1994). Wierzbicka points out that while masculinity appears to inhere in the short CVC structure of many (male) nicknames such as Bob or Bill, and many female names are typically bisyllabic (with the "diminutive" ending, such as Debbie or Lindy, instead of Deb or Lin), this does not automatically make monosyllabic female names (such as June, Kate etc.) unfeminine, and native speakers' intuition confirms this (1992:228). Instead of asking about the value of the short form, one should examine the effect of the morphological process and the alternative names available: the shortening of a masculine name (William [greater than] Bill) heightens masculinity, but the shortening of a female name often reduces femininity (Pamela [greater than] Pam), and in this case the addition of a suffix heightens the femininity (Deborah [greater than] Deb [greater than] Debbie).(2) She points out that spelling is an important indicator of femininity too, as in English it is only female names which can be spelled either -ie or -y (Debby, Debbie), while male names get only -y (Tommy). (An interesting trend noticeable in the data in the current study was the use of -i, as a trendy South African alternative spelling, used only for female names e.g., Jacqui; Trini; Nikki; Shari).

Nicknames serve a range of functions over and above the typically referential function of the first name; they are frequently semantically transparent and their usage reveals insights into the characteristics (personal and physical) of their bearers, as well as into

their role in society (Leslie and Skipper 1990; McDowell 1981; van Langendonck 1983) and in the subculture which devised and uses them (Raper 1987; Landman 1986). Such names evolve spontaneously among small groups of people who know each other intimately, and are frequently indicative of a need to express particular attitudes and feelings (such as warmth, affection (e.g., Ingrid [greater than] Ingipoo), solidarity (e.g., Dude), friendship and playfulness (e.g., Bugs, Ginga Ninja) which would not be expressed in the use of the full first name. In early childhood these names are typically terms of endearment, often with a humorous flavor (de Klerk and Bosch, in press), but those which offer a more significant insight into cultural, social and interpersonal relations are those which are assigned at school, during adolescence, when there is heightened awareness of gender-related roles.

Attitudes to nicknames and their usage are also an important consideration. Only 5% of boys and 15% of girls in Busse's (1983) study actually disliked their nicknames, and these frequently had a direct physical meaning. The overwhelming majority either liked them or didn't mind them. It is possible that unwanted names wither away through passive resistance or efforts to discourage their use, but many offensive-sounding nicknames are not disliked because of the playful, teasing or affectionate pragmatic effect inherent in their use by particular people (e.g., Pong: "from the rhyme Inky pinky ponky, daddy bought a donkey - only my brother uses it").

Wierzbicka stresses the importance of distinguishing between those first names which have commonly accepted (standardized) abbreviated forms (e.g., Bill for William; Gill for Gillian) from those that do not (e.g., Bas for Sebastian or Che for Cheryl), because the pragmatic value of using the former is very different from that of the latter: in using the full form Benjamin instead of the expected standard form Ben, one is making a marked and particular statement, different from the pragmatic force of choosing the full form Cheryl instead of Che. It is far more marked (and affectionate) to use the form Che for Cheryl or Bas for Sebastian than it is to use Ben for Benjamin. For this reason, names such as Ben and Gill often develop additional "affectionate" forms (Benjy, Gilly), to provide that additional nuance already present in the use of Che.<sup>(3)</sup> The degree of standardization of such forms is also an important consideration, because less standardized options have special effects: a strongly masculine name, such as Adrian, when shortened to Ad, loses some masculinity, while a strongly feminine name, such as Katherine, when shortened to Kath loses some femininity.

## THE MAIN STUDY

Respondents in this study all attended the annual Schools English Festival which is held in Grahamstown in South Africa. About 2000 high-school pupils, who attend a wide range of schools, travel from all over the country to attend this week-long course, and those who chose to attend a lecture on naming practices in the Eastern Cape were asked to fill in a questionnaire at the end of the lecture. Informants came from a range of racial and linguistic groups and socioeconomic classes, and approximately 25% of them were other than white.

The questionnaire elicited personal particulars, and then requested that informants write down their first-names, callnames (the names normally used at home) and nicknames (if they had any). Respondents were asked to say why they thought this particular nickname had been bestowed on them, how they had discovered it, who devised it, who used it, how often it was used and whether they liked it or not. In the report which follows, these nicknames will be referred to as primary nicknames. A second section of the questionnaire focused on the nicknames of other close acquaintances of the informant, and requested information on the relationship, age and gender of the namebearer, whether the bearer was aware of his/her nickname, who devised it and why, how it was discovered and why it was used. These nicknames will henceforth be referred to as secondary nicknames.

The primary hypotheses investigated in the study were as follows:

1. Males are more likely to have nicknames than females.
2. Patterns in nickname coiners and users will differ between males and females, with males being more likely to coin nicknames than females.
3. Male nicknames are more likely to be used by the peer group than female nicknames.
4. Male nicknames are more likely to relate to physical or personal characteristics of the bearer.
5. The social functions and intentions of nickname usage will differ between males and females, with female nicknames being more likely to serve an affectionate function.
6. Males and females will have different attitudes towards their own nicknames.
7. The phonological structure of female nicknames is likely to differ from that of male nicknames in being more likely to be longer and to end in /-i/. Phonological sources of nicknames are also likely to differ.

## RESULTS

The data consisted of 261 primary nicknames and 454 secondary nicknames and the linguistic and gender distribution of informants is reflected in Table I.

Table I. Language and Gender

	Primary		Secondary	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
English	38% (39)	50% (79)	52% (105)	48% (96)
Afrikaans	38% (39)	24% (38)	63% (89)	37% (53)
Other	24% (25)	30% (41)	51% (57)	49% (54)
Total	39% (103)	61% (158)	55% (251)	45% (203)

The primary data revealed almost no gender-linked difference in terms of having a nickname or not: 89.3% (92) of all male informants had nicknames, and 81.4% (127) of all the female informants did ( $Z$ -score = 2.59,  $p$  [less than] .05). When the primary data were reanalyzed, taking into account whether informants were at single-sex or coeducation schools, results revealed a marked strengthening of trends at single-sex schools, especially among the girls: in coeducational (mixed-sex) schools, 89% ( $n = 66$ ) of the male informants had nicknames versus 73% ( $n = 94$ ) of the females ( $Z$ -score = 2.49,  $p$  [less than] .05); in single-sex schools 93% ( $n = 28$ ) of male informants had nicknames while 95% ( $n = 55$ ) of female informants did. Without the presence of the opposite sex, the intimacies and camaraderie so necessary for the development of nicknames seem to flourish among both gender groups.

Elicitation of the nicknames of friends and acquaintances yielded 52% (105) male and 48% (96) female names. This indicates a bias in favor of males having nicknames, since the majority of these names were being reported by females themselves, some of them in single-sex schools. Indeed, of all the informants in single-sex schools, 19 females wrote down the nicknames of males (despite not being at school with any) while only 1 male wrote down a female nickname. Overall, males offered 50 male examples and 8 female examples, while females offered 55 male and 88 female names, which again reveals this masculine bias.

#### Nickname Users

Analyses in terms of the typical users of the primary nicknames of informants showed a stronger tendency for females' nicknames to be reserved for family use, while male nicknames were more "public," and available for outsiders to use [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N = 113$ ) = 21.2,  $p$  [less than] .0001]. The secondary nicknames, because they were common knowledge, revealed different trends in users, owing to the fact that they were being reported by peers who know each other within a school milieu. The gender-based differences in the secondary data in the conflated categories "teachers" and "other" were highly significant [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N = 98$ ) = 10.45,  $p$  [less than] .0001].

Table II. Nickname Users

	Primary Data		Secondary Data	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Family	25% (32)	42% (81)(a)	9% (24)	11% (22)
Friends	62% (78)	51% (99)	64% (155)	73% (146)
Teachers	10% (13)	7% (14)	24% (59)	15% (30)
Others(b)	3% (3)	0% (1)	3% (6)	1% (3)
	100%	100%	100%	100%

a Significant at the .001 level.

b It is interesting to note that 2 informants specified under "other" that the nickname-bearer was an "enemy."

Table III. Coiners of Nicknames

Nicknamer	Primary		Secondary	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Friends	62% (55)	52% (64)	37% (88)	29% (55)
Siblings	9% (8)	6% (7)	3% (6)	3% (6)
Parents	11% (10)	23% (29)	7% (17)	12% (24)
Family(a)	7% (6)	10% (13)	3% (7)	4% (7)
Team member	5% (4)	3% (4)	21% (49)	14% (27)(d)
Opposite sex	1% (1)	4% (5)	0% (0)	0% (1)
Other(b)	5% (4)	1% (1)	5% (13)	0% (0)
Self(c)	1% (4)	1% (1)	24% (56)	38% (72)
	100%	100%	100%	100%

a Aunts, uncles, grandmothers, etc.

b This category includes teachers, matrices and antagonists.

c As far as primary data is concerned, "self" means that the informants coined their own nicknames. In terms of secondary data, "self" means that the informant claims to have coined (someone

else's) nickname him/herself.

d Significant at the .01 level.

### Coiners of Nicknames

The analysis of those who coined the nicknames (see Table III) reveals that female nicknames originated in family contexts far more than male nicknames, whose names came most often from friends in the peer group and co-members of teams. The gender differences with regard to names originating from the three "family" categories ("siblings," "parents" and "family") were highly significant [Chi<sup>2</sup>] (1, N = 73) = 8.56, p [less than] 0.0001]. Because those names which originate from the family context are typically terms of endearment, the higher survival rate of such names among girls into the public sphere suggests a greater readiness among the female namebearers to allow this to happen. It may well be that males suppress (or overtly discourage) their childhood nicknames, owing to their typically affectionate (effeminate?, diminutive?) nature. This is confirmed in the section reporting on personal attitudes to nicknames, where it is clear that females tended to approve of their "affectionate" names while males expressed some discomfort about theirs; one informant said of her shortened name "Rhodi suits me better than Rhoda." The number of female coinages by "the opposite sex" (often specified as a boyfriend) is also notable in contrast to the paucity of such male nicknames, since assigning a nickname to someone (and having it accepted into common usage) is directly linked to social power of a sort. Many of the reported names were coined by males and tended to be petnames or physical descriptions (e.g., Honey, Numschkin, Sweetie), suggesting that the namegiver is in a powerful role vis-a-vis the namebearer.<sup>(4)</sup> Phillips (1990) also reported that girls received far more names from fathers and boyfriends.

Although one might assume that people do not use their own nicknames in reference to themselves, it is interesting to note that while in the primary data there were only two instances of informants admitting that they had invented their own nicknames, in the secondary data informants frequently reported that the bearers had actively propagated their own nicknames. This suggests a strong approval of their use as a social device for underlining popularity or solidarity, and a commensurate need to have a nickname of some kind as a signal of acceptance. 6% (n = 22) of the respondents to this question had discovered other people's nicknames in this way.

### Reasons for Nicknames

During analysis, categories of nickname emerged relating to

\* physical characteristics of the bearer (e.g., Fat Boy; Mosquito: "he has a long nose which sticks out like a proboscis")

\* personal characteristics of the bearer (e.g., Batbreath; Dude: "he is very conscious of being 'cool'"; H2S: "his cubicle at school smells similar to H2S"; Pota: "he always tries to join in people's conversations and be part of the action.")

\* contextual events (e.g., Sput: "he was born when Sputnik was in the news a lot"; Siemens "he thinks Siemens is just the best and greatest . . . only buys products from Siemens"; Spaza: "she runs a shop at hostel and loves money")(5)

\* obvious terms of endearment (e.g., Precious Petunia; Numschkin)

\* simple abbreviations of first name or surname (e.g., Bull (surname Bullmore); Andy)

\* morphological derivations of the first or surname (e.g., Goussard [greater than] Goose, Cheryl Rozanne Woodbridge [greater than] Crow; Natalie [greater than] Tilly, Caitriona [greater than] Trini, Furry: "my name is Jennifer, which became furry")

Table IV provides details of the distribution of these categories, and it is worth noting the higher proportion overall of male nicknames which are derived because of characteristics of the bearer (either personal, physical or contextual). While frequencies in these categories were relatively low in the primary data, and results of chi-square tests were not significant, the differences between males and females in the secondary data were highly significant. Contrary to Phillips' (1990) finding that more names based on physical characteristics were given to females than males (27% vs 11%), the secondary data revealed a greater tendency for male names to have a physical motivation [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 114) = 14.03, p [less than] .001], a personal connection to the bearer [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 182) = 8.79, p [less than] .001], or a contextualized link [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 70) = 6.91, p [less than] .01]. Female nicknames tend to evolve linguistically, as derivations of given names, as a signal of affection or femininity [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 22) = 4.55, p [less than] .05]. Male nicknames are less likely to be direct derivatives, and the preference seems to be to devise a completely new name; gender-based differences of overall frequencies in both primary and secondary data in this category were significant [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 198 = 5.83, p [less than] .05].

### Nickname Usage

Analyses to determine the frequency with which nicknames were used showed almost no gender-linked difference, the majority of nicknames (80% for both males and females) being used either most of the time or often. More interesting is the underlying intention in using the nicknames of friends and acquaintances (see Table V). Analysis in terms of the gender of informants revealed a highly significant stronger tendency among females to use nicknames as a signal of solidarity and friendship [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 283) = 37.48, p [less than] .0001), or light-hearted fun, rather than with negative intent (although there were more critical names for females than for males). These results correlated fairly closely with the number of genuinely derogatory nicknames in the database as a whole.



Table IV. Explanations for the Nicknames

	Primary		Secondary	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Physical	11% (11)	13% (18)	26% (77)	16% (37)
Personal	25% (25)	12% (16)	37% (111)	31% (71)
Contextual	29% (29)	20% (28)	15% (46)	11% (24)
Affection(a)	2% (2)	5% (6)	2% (6)	7% (16)(b)
Abbreviation	6% (6)	14% (19)	2% (5)	6% (14)
Derivation	28% (28)	36% (50)	18% (54)	29% (66)(b)
	100%	100%	100%	100%

a Although several names were reported as being used to show affection and friendliness, informants seldom explicitly mentioned affection as a reason for derivation.

b Significant at the .05 level.

Table V. Intentions in Using Nicknames

	Males	Females
Funny	29% (48)	23% (68)
Friendly	55% (90)	65% (193)
Sarcastic	12% (19)	6% (17)
Critical	4% (6)	7% (20)

#### Awareness of and Attitudes to Nicknames

While all the primary data were collected first-hand, and the bearers were reporting on their own nicknames, the nicknames in the secondary data regarding dose acquaintances were not necessarily known to the bearers, and it emerged that while 86% (393) were reported as being aware of their names, 9% (42) were reported as definitely not knowing these names, and 5% (23) were unsure of whether they knew them or not. Thirty-five percent (32) of these names were derogatory, sarcastic or critical, hence the need for some secrecy in their use. Of the 13 male names reportedly used in order to be critical, 7 (Pseudo; Grenade; Porky Pig; Craft; Fat Cat; Casper; Handbrake) were reportedly not known to their bearers, and of the 6 female names used with negative intent, 5 were secret names (Whitefang ("she has a very white color"); Hairwoman; Buffalo Bev ("she

is rude, mean, strong and big and her hair looks like the horns of a buffalo"); Gappy; Butcher).

Regarding informants' personal attitudes to their own nicknames (see Table VI), it was clear that females felt significantly more positive about their nicknames than did the males [[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 161) = 21.621, p [less than] .0001]. Reasons given for these attitudes were classified into eight categories (see Table VII): explanations for disliking a name included a view that the name was derogatory (e.g., N/A: "it is rude and derogatory"; Ndludlu: "when I was young I was fat, but I don't like it because it doesn't sound good"; Gofor: "my older brother always tells me to get things for him . . . makes me sound like his slave"), a dislike of the name for "social" reasons, such as the name no longer being appropriate (e.g., Tomqi: "I am no longer small"), embarrassment about the name (e.g., Toesie: "I get shy if others hear it"), or a sense that the name was too childish (as the bearer of the name Kosie put it, "dis hie goed vir my manlike ego nie" [it's not good for my male ego]). A number explicitly stated that they preferred their "real" name, because they were irritated by their nickname (e.g., Muffy: "it bugs me"), regarded it as inappropriate (e.g., Atie) and merely tolerated it (e.g., Ponko: "I have no choice in the matter"). One male informant was very explicit: "I hope you don't find me boring and unimaginative, but I like my name M and I don't want to be called anything else - I think nicknames are stupid and pointless and I never use them".

Table VI. Attitudes to Nicknames

	Males	Females
Negative	14% (13)	10% (15)
Unsure	29% (26)	19% (30)
Positive	57% (51)	71% (110)
	100%	100%

Table VII. Reasons for Attitude to Nicknames

Feeling	Why?	Males	Females
Negative	Derogatory	4% (3)	3% (4)
	Social	26% (21)	13% (16)
	Prefer first name	12% (10)	11% (14)
Unsure	Depends	7% (5)	6% (8)
	Neutral	15% (12)	10% (12)
Positive	Affectionate	28% (23)	36% (45)
	Unique	6% (5)	18% (22)
	Lighthearted	2% (2)	2% (3)
		100%	99%

Those who were unsure of whether they approved of their nicknames or not frequently said it depended on who used it and in what context, indicative of their awareness of the strong constraints on right of use (e.g., J: "it depends who uses it"; Kenno: "when I first met him his friends used it and as the friendship progressed I started using it as well"). Others said they were neutral (e.g., Skipper), but some admitted that they had no choice in the matter.

Among reasons for positive regard for nicknames were a liking for their affectionate connotations, especially among female informants [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 68) = 7.117, p [less than] .01] (e.g., Ingipoo, Beertjie [little bear], Precious Petunia: "I am precious in my friend's eyes - it's flattering"; JoJo: "it sounds so 'cool' when they use it") and for the light-hearted friendliness inherent in their use, often despite apparently negative connotations (e.g., Vuilbuizen [old soak] "I like the name a lot"). Uniqueness of the name was a positive factor for several informants (e.g., Mandoza: "It's nice to be called differently sometimes"), especially among the females [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 27) = 10.7037, p [less than] .0001].

It is notable that a significantly higher proportion of females felt positively about their nicknames because they perceived them as terms of endearment, or as terms that made them feel special and unique.

### Morphological Processes in the Derivation of Nicknames

Using Wierzbicka's semantic framework, those callnames and nicknames which were morphologically derived from first names were identified and analyzed more closely. Altogether 51% (134) of all names were either abbreviated or received suffixes when used as callnames or nicknames (e.g., Gareth [greater than] Gary; Grant [greater than] Granty [greater than] Gruntal; Jacobus [greater than] Jaco [greater than] Joffie; Nicola [greater than] Nicky [greater than] Ningy; Sasha [greater than] Sash [greater than] Slash; Natalie [greater than] Nats [greater than] Tilly; Gillian [greater than] Gilly [greater than] Gill). Forty-two percent of the male names were of this kind, and 58% of the female names were, showing a far greater tendency to take liberties with girls' names than boys' names [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 238) = 17.12, p [less than] .0001]. As far as gender-linked differences are concerned, the following points are worth noting:

\* 77% (40/52) of all female informants who were called by an abbreviated form of their full names did not regard such abbreviations as nicknames (e.g., Bronwen [greater than] Bron; Catherine [greater than] Cath; Melanie [greater than] Mel; Nicolette [greater than] Nic; Tamsyn [greater than] Tam), leaving only 23% (12) who did (e.g., Gillian [greater than] Gill; Janet [greater than] Jan; Colleen [greater than] Col; Louise [greater than] Lou)

[[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 52) = 15.07, p [less than] .0001]. On the whole, then, callnames which abbreviate the first name were not really regarded as "special." Among the male names the opposite seems to be the case: only 28% (12/43) of the standardized shortened derivatives which were used as callnames at home were not regarded as nicknames (e.g., Bevan [greater than] Bev; Michael [greater than] Mike; Edward [greater than] Ed; Marcus [greater than] Mark; Nicholas [greater than] Nick) [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 43) = 8.39, p [less than] .0001]. Closer analysis suggests that when the full name is normally used, any variation from this is perceived as a nickname; when the bearer has a nickname in addition to an abbreviated first name, only the former tends to be regarded as a genuine nickname: the social meaning of a name depends on the choices available.

\* 12 female first names already ended phonetically with /i/ (spelled -y, -ie or -i).(6) Table VIII shows that in these cases a further abbreviation took place in the formation of callnames and/or nicknames.

\* Significantly more female names acquired an /-i/ ending: 48% (44/91) of the female nicknames and callnames derived from first names received such an ending (26 as callnames at home and 18 as nicknames) and 5 additional nicknames were coined which also ended in /i/(e.g., Furry; Muffy; Tutti). Only 4 of the 43 male names acquired such a suffix (Alberto [greater than] Birtie; Kobus [greater than] Kosie; Fuad [greater than] Adi; Grant [greater than] Granty) and 3 of these were reserved for home use as callnames [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 48) = 14.35, p [less than] .0001]. There is obviously strong femininity and affection inherent in this pattern. One of the informants named Katharine reported that instead of being called Kath or Kathy, her nickname (which she disliked) was Katrinatjielie, in which the diminutive ending has been duplicated (in Afrikaans), for obvious exaggerated teasing effect.

\* Only 8% (7/91) of the females disliked their nicknames when they had been derived from their first names and could be construed as obviously affectionate or babyish (e.g., Natalie [greater than] Nats; Katharine [greater than] Katrinatjielie; Ingrid [greater than] Ingipoo Michelle [greater than] Michy). Twenty-eight percent (11/40) of the males disliked such names, seeing them as effeminate or childish (Christoffel [greater than] Kosie; Sebastian [greater than] Bessie) or possibly too affectionate (Peter [greater than] Pete; Gareth [greater than] G-man; Justin [greater than] J; Jacques [greater than] Jack; Alberto [greater than] Birtie) [[[Chi].sup.2] (1, N = 18) = 11.11, p [less than] .0001].

Table VIII. Derivations from Names Ending/-i/

First name	Callname	Nickname
Bessie		Bes
Julie	Probs	Jules
Lucy	Lulu	Baba
Melanie	Melan/Mel	Checken
Molly	Molla	Connections
Natalie	Nats	N/A
Natalie	Nats	Tilly
Nathalie		Nats
Shani	Shans	Shanster
Sheri	Sher	Bubbles
Traci	Trace	Mary-Lou
Wendy		Twinkle

When one compares some of the names which recurred in the data, some interesting patterns emerge:

First name	Callname	Nickname
Natalie	Nats	N/A
Natalie		Nats
Nicola		Nic
Nicola	Nikki	Ningy
Nicola	Ninnie	Nicky
Nicolene	Nicky	Niknaks
Nicolene	Nick	Crunch

In the case of Natalie, when Nats is used as the common (affectionate) name, an additional name indicative of camaraderie and solidarity became necessary and the rather caustic pun N/A resulted (using the first two letters of her name); where the full form Natalie is commonly used as callname, Nats can serve the solidarity function instead of as a mark of affection. One sees the same process at work with Nicola: the Nicola whose family prefer to use her full name has her name shortened as a nickname, and the affectionate -ie/-y is noticeable by its absence.

Back-formation of this kind (see Wierzbicka 1992) in search of a nickname which expresses solidarity without sounding childish or too "soppy," especially when the abbreviated form is already used to show affection, occurred 19 times (21%) in the female data. The resulting form was usually a short friendly name, frequently derived by

the addition of a -s/-z as suffix (e.g., Julia [greater than] Julie [greater than] Jules; Shani [greater than] Shans [greater than] Shanster; Michelle [greater than] Chellie [greater than] Mo; Belinda [greater than] Binnie [greater than] Bins; Catherine [greater than] Cath [greater than] Cat; Amanda [greater than] Mandy [greater than] Moo; Sharon [greater than] Shari [greater than] Shaz; Sasha [greater than] Sash [greater than] Slash; Jacqueline [greater than] Jacqui [greater than] Jax; Katherine [greater than] Kathy [greater than] K; Liza-Jean [greater than] Liza [greater than] Lees; Magdalena [greater than] Magda [greater than] Mags; Lisa [greater than] Lees [greater than] Lee). Among the males, this back-formation occurred 8 times (19%), the final name usually a no-nonsense unsentimental (often slightly derogatory) form (e.g., Gareth [greater than] Gary [greater than] G-man; Grant [greater than] Granty [greater than] Gruntal; Justin [greater than] Just [greater than] J; Kenric [greater than] Ken [greater than] Keno-B; Dylan [greater than] Dyl [greater than] Dildo; Victor [greater than] Vic [greater than] Vic-man).

Monosyllabic (CVC) names have frequently been associated with masculinity, but this trend was not upheld in the data: of the 24 monosyllabic nicknames, only 5 were male names; much more significant was the distinct lack of male names ending in a diminutive -ie/-y,(7) preference being given rather to -o (a la Australian style) or -a. Ten names in the male data had such endings (e.g., Ponko, Keno-B; Sterro; Crilo; Minko; Monko; Makko) while only 3 female names did (Mo, Sella, Poppa).

Despite reported trends that male nicknames are often based on their surnames (Phillips 1990), the data provided only 2 instances. Most male names were "masculine" (e.g., Big 6; Bison; Vic-man) or derogatory and offensive (Arachnid; Skapie; Dildo; Stunted; Jewboy; Vuilbuizen),(8) with only 2 examples of typically female nicknames for males (Bessie (from Sebastian) and Cheryl) and only one nickname distinctly childish (Beertjie [little bear]).

Seventeen female names were distinctively childlike, either in phonetic shape or in meaning (e.g., Baba, Muffy, Noekie, Numschkin; Ogies [little eyes], Pookie, Precious Peach, Precious Petunia,(9) Katrinatjellie, Miss Muffett, Candy Cuddles, Chicken, Lulu, Ingipoo, Tinks, Toesie and Twinkle) and in only 5 of these cases did the bearers disapprove of their use. Very few female names were overtly derogatory, and even in these cases (e.g., Stemmetjie [little voice], Tortoise, Maggot, Mouse) some of the bearers said that they liked their nicknames.

## CONCLUSIONS

Because it is the pragmatic aspects of language which seem to be the most revealing and most responsive to social and cultural change, a study focusing on nicknaming practices could be regarded as an accurate (and up-to-date) barometer of societal attitudes to the gender groups. This study has shown that conventions regarding nickname coinage and usage are intimately connected to the gender of bearers and users, and the following trends emerged:

1. Males were more likely to have nicknames than females, especially in single-sex schools [89% of males had nicknames in coed schools versus 73% of females  $Z$ -score = 2.491,  $p$  [less than] .05]; 93% of males in single-sex schools had nicknames compared with 95% of the females. Since there were more female primary informants, the fact that far more male secondary nicknames were elicited confirms this finding.
2. Patterns in nickname coiners depended on the gender of the bearer: males were more likely to coin nicknames than females; parents and family members were more likely to coin female nicknames, and these "family" nicknames were more likely than male family nicknames to spread to wider circles of usage [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 73) = 8.56,  $p$  [less than] 0.0001].
3. Male nicknames were more likely than female nicknames to be used by peer group members, while female nicknames were used more by family members [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 113) = 21.2,  $p$  [less than] .0001]. The higher usage of male nicknames in the secondary data by "teachers" and "others" was also highly significant [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 98) = 10.45,  $p$  [less than] .0001].
4. Despite some lack of fit between primary and secondary data, in general male nicknames more typically related to personal attributes of the bearer (physical, personal or contextual) than female nicknames, and chi-square values revealed that these differences were highly significant in the secondary data.
5. The social functions of nickname usage differed between males and females, female nicknames being more likely to serve a friendly function [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 283) = 37.48,  $p$  [less than] .0001], or to be coined as terms of endearment [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 198) = 5.83,  $p$  [less than] .05]. Nicknames for females were often gentler, more childish and more affectionate than male nicknames; in addition there was a greater likelihood that male nicknames would be used with negative intent than female nicknames.
6. Females were more likely to approve of their nicknames in general than males [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 161) = 21.621,  $p$  [less than] .0001], and specifically of their affectionate [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 68) = 7.117,  $p$  [less than] .01] and unique nicknames [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 27) = 10.7037,  $p$  [less than] .0001].
7. The phonological structure of female nicknames was more likely to be longer and to end in /-i/ [[[Chi].sup.2] (1,  $N$  = 48) = 1435,  $p$  [less than] .0001], and female nicknames were shown to be more likely to evolve linguistically from the first name (e.g., Margaret [greater than] Maggie [greater than] Mags [greater than] Magsions).

It could be argued that these trends could be linked to the nurturing and nurtured role of females in society, and to the differences in social power generally between males and females. More nicknames are coined by males, and it would seem that males play a more active role in suppressing or rejecting unwanted nicknames than females do. Nevertheless, both gender groups clearly approve of the social practice of using nicknames, and display considerable sensitivity to their role as badges of membership to a subculture.

With South African society in flux, owing to recent sociopolitical changes, ongoing research into the shifting patterns of nicknaming practices, particularly among the speakers of languages other than English, promises to yield interesting information about gender relationships in future.

2 In defining nicknames, many writers choose to exclude from their analyses those names which are obvious short forms or derivatives of the first name (Thomas [greater than] Tom; Natalie [greater than] Nats; Candice [greater than] Candy). However, it is these forms which offer important insights into social relationships within a cultural group, and in the data gathered for this study 23% of all reported short forms were regarded by their informants as genuine nicknames. If the numbers of a group consider them to be nicknames, the researcher has an obligation to do likewise, and such abbreviations and morphological derivatives are therefore included as an integral part of this study (Holland, 1990: 226).

3 The -y/-ie ending, while it may often be affectionate (e.g., Granty, Tessie) is not always so, as is evident in the fairly neutral forms Terry or Sally.

4 Numschkin wrote of her nicknamer: "because he's my boyfriend he can call my anything."

5 A spaza is a Zulu/South African English slang term for an informal trading outlet.

6 There was only one such male name: Rudi, whose nickname was Ploets.

7 Phillips (1990) found 33% female (vs. 21% male) had names ending in -ie/y, while those ending in -o were more typically male. Carson (1976) found more male names ending in -er (cited in Phillips, 1990: 284).

8 Interestingly enough, of these names, only Dildo and Stunted were disliked by their bearers, the social functions of the other nicknames outweighing their strongly negative meanings.

9 These two were friends, and coined each others' nicknames.



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