

Bruce Harry,¹ M.D.

Name Variation and Aspects of Body Image Among Male Offenders

REFERENCE: Harry, B., "Name Variation and Aspects of Body Image Among Male Offenders," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, JFSCA, Vol. 33, No. 1, Jan. 1988, pp. 200-203.

ABSTRACT: The author studied 100 incarcerated adult male felons who were referred consecutively for psychiatric evaluation. As part of the investigation, he ascertained whether each man had ever used a name variation, either by self-report or as documented in official records. He also administered two body-image questionnaires, each to half of the sample population. Those who used a name variation, however defined, were found to have increased head awareness and decreased stomach awareness when compared with those who had not used a name variation. Otherwise, these groups had no statistically significant differences among a wide group of descriptive variables. The author suggests that the differences in body image may be associated with cognitive differences in the ways in which these subjects approach themselves and their environments.

KEYWORDS: psychiatry, criminal aliases, prisons

Our names may in some way influence [1] or reflect [2-4] the way we think and feel about ourselves. The act of somehow altering the appearance or use of one's name may also suggest a change in self-attitude or the way in which one wants to portray oneself to others [5-7].

Several authors have also implied that names and name changes may be somehow related or analogous to body image. Boshier [7] noted that "(m)ost people feel their name is part of them, not fortuitous, but built in like an arm or finger." Hartman et al. [8] thought that names and somatotype had analogous impact upon personality development, while Murphy [9] described some names and name changes as indicating certain analysts' physical attributes. Lazard assumed a false name during World War II to survive the Nazi occupation of France [10]. Later, writing about his reflections and experiences, he reported that the effect of changing one's name is profound. Among many self-observations, he noted that it was important his physical appearance be consistent with his assumed name, lest undue suspicion about his true identity be aroused. Finally, Harry [11] compared 64 officially documented alias users with 143 alias nonusers, finding that "alias users had significantly more tattoos but the same number of scars as alias nonusers." This led him to speculate that alias users may in some way have different body images than alias nonusers since "[t]attoos are almost always intentionally applied, while body scars are only sometimes so applied."

With the above comments and findings in mind, the author decided to compare some aspects of the body image of alias users and nonusers in the hopes of seeing if and how they were different.

Received for publication 30 Jan. 1987; revised manuscript received 6 April 1987; accepted for publication 7 April 1987.

¹Assistant professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, MO.

Methods

The author assessed 100 men consecutively referred for psychiatric evaluations by the Missouri State Board of Probation and Parole. The evaluation method has been described before [11] and was essentially unchanged except for those differences described below.

First, the investigator divided the group into two equal subgroups for detailed investigation of their respective body images. Each member of the first group of 50 was administered Fisher's Body Distortion Questionnaire, while each member of the second group was administered Fisher's Body Focus Questionnaire. In summary, the Body Distortion Questionnaire quantitatively measures self-perceived distortions in the body image and yields findings according to size (larger; smaller), boundary integrity (boundary loss; boundary fortification, that is, "blocked openings"), boundary attention (skin; dirt), and identity (depersonalization). The Body Focus Questionnaire quantitatively measures how each subject distributes his conscious attention throughout his body during testing. This yields attention patterns to the arms, back, eyes, head, heart, mouth, right, and stomach. These instruments, their development, and interpretation have been described in detail by Fisher [12].

The author then determined alias use both by self-report and by review of official institutional records. That is, each offender was asked whether he had ever used a different name, and Department of Corrections records were later searched in detail for use of different names. A comparison of these two methods of alias use for this same population was reported earlier [13] and found to yield no significant differences among the range of socio-demographic, criminological, and psychiatric variables used to study them. Thus, the two groups were aggregated for the purposes of this investigation.

The investigator then compared body image variables between the alias user and nonuser groups, employing the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U Test. All tests were two-tailed, and a value of $p < 0.05$ was used for significance.

Results

Two men from the Body Focus Questionnaire group refused to complete the questionnaire and were deleted from subsequent consideration. Thus, 98 men were available for subsequent analysis, of whom 33 subjects (33.7%) had used an alias either by self- or official report.

As noted above, there were no significant differences in any of the sociodemographic, criminologic, or psychiatric attributes of the study groups. However, there were some differences in the body image qualities examined. Table 1 gives the mean ranks, Mann-Whitney U scores, and Z-score transformations corrected for ties, along with respective two-tailed p -values for each body image index compared between the alias users and nonusers. The only significant differences were that the groups of alias users had greater head awareness and less stomach awareness than the group of alias nonusers. When the self- and official report groups were compared separately, the only consistent difference among the body image indices was decreased stomach awareness among users of assumed names.

Discussion

While this investigation found that a group of alias users had some differences in body image measures when compared with a group of alias nonusers, there were no statistically significant differences in any of a wide range of social, criminological, and psychiatric variables by which these groups were compared and reported previously [13].

Most previous investigations have found several significant differences between alias users and nonusers. Alias users have almost uniformly been shown to be older offenders who have had more antecedent arrests and less education. They also tend to have committed property

TABLE 1—Mann-Whitney *U* tests of body image measures among alias users and nonusers.

	Mean Rank		U	Corrected for Ties	
	Alias Users	Alias Nonusers		Z-Score	P
Body Focus	(<i>N</i> =13)	(<i>N</i> =35)			
Arms	20.15	26.11	171.0	-1.3242	0.1854
Back	22.73	25.16	204.5	-0.5364	0.5917
Eyes	27.00	23.57	195.0	-0.7610	0.4466
Head	31.15	22.03	141.0	-2.0243	0.0429 ^a
Heart	23.04	25.04	208.5	-0.4434	0.6575
Mouth	24.77	24.40	224.0	-0.0821	0.9346
Right	24.35	24.56	225.5	-0.0469	0.9626
Stomach	12.85	28.83	76.0	-3.5354	0.0004 ^a
Body Distortion	(<i>N</i> =20)	(<i>N</i> =30)			
Total	24.77	25.98	285.5	-0.3394	0.7343
Large	28.45	23.53	241.0	-1.2624	0.2068
Small	23.55	26.80	261.0	-1.0348	0.3008
Boundary	25.05	25.80	291.0	-0.1902	0.8492
Blocked	25.92	25.22	291.5	-0.1797	0.8574
Skin	25.70	25.37	296.0	-0.0860	0.9315
Dirt	26.23	25.02	285.0	-0.3030	0.7619
Deperson	25.75	25.33	295.0	-0.1138	0.9094

^aSignificant with two-tailed $p < 0.05$.

offenses rather than violent or sexual crimes as part of their index assessments [11, 14-16]. Several have also documented increases in some psychopathology [11, 14, 15]. Each of these prior studies looked at only official records rather than self-report to determine alias use, and the present study involved a smaller sample than any of those used before. Additionally, the present investigation did not attempt to account for any body image differences that might be a function of duration in prison. Thus, there are sufficient methodological differences to preclude direct comparison of the present and past research on alias use among criminals.

Keeping this warning in mind, the author found two body image qualities to be statistically different among alias users and nonusers: alias users had greater head awareness and less stomach awareness than nonusers. In an attempt to interpret these findings, the author has searched the literature extensively and found no previous studies of body image among offenders, including alias users, that involved these particular instruments. Fisher [12], in developing and validating these measures, found significant statistical correlations between increased head awareness in men and decreases in selected measures of anality (less preoccupation with dirt and cleanliness, more correct perception of anal sadism, and less enjoyment of anal-expulsive jokes). He also found that increased stomach awareness was correlated with more accurate perception of, and selective concern with, hostility.

One possible interpretation of the present findings in the light of Fisher's conclusions [12] is that alias users may be less compulsive and less selectively concerned about anger and aggression. Thus, they may be less attuned to potential hostility or less conflicted about anger or both. This is consistent to some extent with earlier findings that alias users seem to commit less violent crimes [11, 15, 16].

Another possible interpretation is that alias users have a sense of identity more cognitive (that is, cerebral or head oriented) than visceral. Thus, it may be easier for them to change their name(s), a cognitive representation of the self, rather than their "gut-level" (that is, emotional) self in response to the relatively adverse circumstances of criminal apprehension

or detention by law enforcement authorities. It is unclear whether either of these interpretations is more correct, and the author is inclined to see them as operating somewhat independently, perhaps on different levels. It is possible that both may apply to a greater or lesser extent in any given subject.

In conclusion, this investigation suggests that alias use among criminals may be associated with alterations in body image. Although difficult to interpret, the particular differences identified suggest that alias users may be less aware of anger or hostility. This further implies that criminals who are destined to alter their name may be less hostile or that the act of changing one's name may be somewhat therapeutic by decreasing their hostility, or both. They may also take a somewhat more cognitive rather than emotional approach to themselves. Future investigations should attempt to further ascertain the possible relationship between hostility and changing names among criminals, as well as try to determine the degree to which criminal alias users deal with things in a cognitive way.

References

- [1] Plottke, P., "The Child and His Name," *Individual Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 3 and 4, 1950, pp. 150-157.
- [2] Boshier, R., "Self Esteem and First Names in Children," *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 22, 1968, p. 762.
- [3] Strunk, O., "Attitudes Toward One's Name and One's Self," *Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. 14, 1958, pp. 64-67.
- [4] Boshier, R., "Attitudes Toward Self and One's Proper Names," *Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. 24, 1968, pp. 63-66.
- [5] Wells, F. L. and Palwick, H. R., "Notes on the Usage of Male Personal Names," *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 31, No. 5, May 1950, pp. 291-294.
- [6] Hartmann, A. A., "Name Styles in Relation to Personality," *Journal of General Psychology*, Vol. 59, Oct. 1958, pp. 289-294.
- [7] Boshier, R., "Name Style and Conservatism," *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 84, May 1973, pp. 45-53.
- [8] Hartman, A. A., Nicolay, R. C., and Hurley, J., "Unique Personal Names as a Social Adjustment Factor," *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 75, 1968, pp. 107-110.
- [9] Murphy, W. F., "A Note on the Significance of Names," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Jan. 1957, pp. 91-106.
- [10] Lazard, D., "Two Years Under a False Name," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 41, No. 2, April 1946, pp. 161-168.
- [11] Harry, B., "A Diagnostic Study of the Criminal Alias," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, Vol. 31, No. 3, July 1986, pp. 1023-1028.
- [12] Fisher, S., *Body Experience in Fantasy and Behavior*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1970.
- [13] Harry, B., "Self and Official Report of Name Variation Among Male Offenders," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, Vol. 32, No. 6, Nov. 1987, pp. 1724-1729.
- [14] Glueck, S. and Glueck, E., *Later Criminal Careers*, Commonwealth Fund, New York, 1937.
- [15] Hartman, A. A., "Criminal Aliases: A Psychological Study," *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 32, No. 1, July 1951, pp. 49-56.
- [16] Boshier, R., "Henry Forger: A Psychological Study of the Criminal Alias," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 10, No. 3, March 1977, pp. 17-26.

Address requests for reprints or additional information to
 Dr. Bruce Harry
 University of Missouri-Columbia
 201 Mental Health Center Bldg.
 Columbia, MO 65212