

What's In Your Name? Associated Meanings of the Common Filipino Names Among Young Filipinos

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Abstract – Name is important in knowing someone's identity. By a person's name someone can know his or her character. It is also possible that they bear a particular name because of their background and other factors that can lead to something important. This study aimed to find out the associative meanings of the most common Filipino male and female names among the Polytechnic University of the Philippines-Sta. Mesa students. Different factors such as character traits, physical appearance, and skills/talents were considered in determining meanings of the names. The study used quantitative and qualitative research approach, specifically the descriptive method, to analyze the gathered data. A self-administered survey was distributed to 400 randomly selected respondents. General findings revealed that the respondents associated the most common Filipino male names in the same way regarding character traits and skills/talents. However, they have different associations to the male names in terms of physical appearance. On the other hand, the respondents associated the most common Filipino female names into similar character traits and physical appearance but associated them with different skills/talents. Results also revealed that the most common factors that influence the respondents' associated meanings were relationships, experiences, popularity, and perception. The results imply that while young Filipinos associate similar character traits, physical appearances and skills to common Filipino names, they have different reasons in giving meanings to them.

Keywords: Associative meanings, Filipino names, Male and female, Names

INTRODUCTION

Names have a powerful bearing on the culture of language as it evolves over time. That is, names can provide an avenue to ascertain one's cultural or ethnic heritage [1]. One of the results of colonization here in the Philippines was the name-giving basis of the Filipinos. From the Catalogo Alfabetico de Apellidos that produced and organized by the Governor General Narciso Claveria to order a systematic distribution of family names for the Filipinos; to the influences of western countries to the Philippines [2]. The name of Filipinos is somehow mixed with historical events and beliefs.

Today, after so many changes and influences on the name giving, Filipino parents are now conscious and picky regarding giving names. A Filipino parent makes sure that their child would be born with a unique and compelling name. An article in the Telegraph (United Kingdom) stated that parents give a

name to their children to stand out in the crowd by giving them unique and famous names [3]. They believe that a good name can add to the uniqueness and character of a child.

Also, a name can have philosophical impact on the child's life or future [4]. The parents try to make the first bit of the child's identity. And if a society looks on the span of names, they can see that people's name can influence the way they think about themselves, and others might think about them. A person's essence, status, gender cannot possibly be defined based on the nature of his name; however the study suggests that expectations of others tend to associate with individual's names. Meanwhile, Jeanna Bryner, author of "Bad Names or Good Names", said it is not just the socioeconomic factors like family background and character might define someone but also by his or her name [5]. If someone doesn't come

from a rich family, other people might treat him or her differently.

Name is important in knowing someone's identity. By a person's name someone can possibly know his or her character. However, association of a person with a particular name differs from one another. Some may look at it positively while other people may don't. It is likely that someone bear a particular name because of his background and other factors that lead to something important. In the article entitled "Filipino Names: A reflection of Culture and History", it is stated that looking at someone's name may reflect to his interpersonal relationship to others too [1]. To add, researchers say that names have long affected how people perceive other people and that these perceptions change as the trends and traditions on the topic of age, gender, race and ethnicity change too.

Researchers have also pointed out that people of certain culture prefer different names, assuming that based on a name can, in fact, determine the level of their achievement. They have spent time in studying personal names and how can it affect someone's personal behavior [6].

According to Merriam Webster, the word "associated" means to relate or connect a thing to another thing that can be a person or thing. Associated meaning differs from the "true" meaning of a word. A meaning refers to the direct connotation of a word, while association means a word or thing has been related or attached to another word or thing. Since a name is a vital part of an individual, it is intriguing to know what the possible associated meaning of each name is.

This study identified the associated meanings of college students to the most common names of Filipino men and women. Name is essential and a valuable source of identity to a person, knowing what others think of your name by just hearing, seeing, and thinking of it could give you a hint on the impression of other people towards you. This study will provide the readers a view of the perception of the Filipino youth regarding common Filipino names when they hear, see, or think of it. The study could also help the parents have supplementary knowledge about such names other than their literary meaning.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to find out the associated meanings of PUP – Sta. Mesa students to the top 20

common Filipino names as of April 2015. Specifically, it determined the students' associations in terms of character traits, physical appearance and skills and talents. Moreover, this study explored the factors that influence the students' associated meanings on the most common Filipino names.

METHODS

This study employed the mixed method to collect both quantitative and qualitative data needed to find out the associated meanings of undergraduate students from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines – Sta. Mesa on the most common Filipino names. The sample respondents to this study were composed of first to fifth year students from different colleges of the university enrolled in the academic year 2015-2016. Moreover, this study utilized the list obtained from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) which contained the most common Filipino men and women names as of last April 2015.

Table 1. List of Common Filipino Names as of April 2015

MALE	f	FEMALE	f
Anthony	6	Althea	8
Christian	7	Andrea	8
Daniel	12	Angel	10
Ezekiel	7	Angela	7
Francis	36	Angelica	7
Jacob	10	Ashley	9
Jerald	6	Francheska	18
Matthew	6	Nicole	10
Nathaniel	8	Princess	6
Xander	8	Samantha	9

Data from the study were gathered from two types of methods: survey and focus group discussion. The close-ended questionnaire used in the self-administered survey was used to gather the respondents' demographic profile and their associated meanings on the common Filipino names in terms of character traits, physical appearance, and skills. The instrument was developed by the researchers based on the results of the open-ended preliminary survey they conducted. Also, the 400 respondents of the survey method were selected using appropriate sampling techniques.

Furthermore, to discover the factors affecting the respondents' associated meanings of the common

Filipino names, the study employed another method – focus group discussion. The researchers devised a discussion guide containing questions that allowed the informants to express their insights regarding the meanings they associate with the common Filipino names. The study selected six informants based on the following criteria set up by the researchers: the informants should all be studying at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines; each of them should come from a different college in the university; and none of them must have a name similar to one of the common Filipino names.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Associated meanings of common Filipino male names

Table 2. Perceived Meanings on Most Common Filipino Male Names

Name	Character Trait	Physical Appearance	Skills/Talents
Anthony	Naughty (17%)	Tall (19%)	Good in Dancing (20%)
Christian	Religious (19%)	Tall (21%)	Has Good Artistic Skills (18%)
Daniel	Naughty and Quiet (12%)	Handsome (19%)	Has Good Athletic Skills (18%)
Ezekiel	Religious (14%)	Tall and Cute/Charming (14%)	Has Good Athletic Skills (20%)
Francis	Naughty (14%)	Slim (14%)	Has Good Athletic Skills (19%)
Jacob	Kind and Brave (12%)	Muscular (18%)	Has Good Athletic Skills (19%)
Jerald	Naughty (14%)	Slim (13%)	Has Good Athletic Skills (19%)
Matthew	Religious (16%)	Handsome (14%)	Has Good Academic Skills (15%)
Nathaniel	Kind (23%)	Cute/Charming (19%)	Good in Acting (16%)
Xander	Naughty and Boastful (14%)	Handsome (34%)	Good in Dancing (20%)

Based on the data gathered and generated results, young Filipinos have different views and perception on the most common male Filipino names in terms of character traits, physical appearance, and skills or talents. As most of the male names included in the list of common male Filipino names are from biblical and religious figures, most of the names such as Christian, Ezekiel, Jacob, Matthew, and Nathaniel were associated to being kind or religious. While other names such as Antony, Daniel, Francis, Jerald, and Xander were perceived as naughty, the mentioned names were perceived unlikely to the literature meaning of the names which are all positive. The perception of the youth will be influenced if they know a person with the same name that was mentioned on the list; they would tend to give meanings based on the person that comes first on their mind.

The common male Filipino names were perceived positively by the respondents in terms of physical appearance. Names such as Anthony, Christian, and Ezekiel were perceived as tall. Filipinos are known to be short in nature, but the names mentioned were from foreign countries, and so the students tend to compare them to American shows with characters of the same name (e.g., Christian Grey from the novel-film *Fifty Shades of Grey*). Meanwhile, names such as Daniel, Matthew, and Xander were perceived as handsome similar to actors who have the same name. According to *Filipino American Psychology: Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practices*, men are obsessed on their external look which has become evident especially among teenagers nowadays [7]. Names such as Francis and Jerald were perceived as slim while the name Jacob as muscular, from our ancestors Negritos and Malays or Indonesians, they are slim and quite muscular and that's where the Filipinos got his genes for being slim. The media also cultivated it by using well-built celebrities to portray beauty.

Half of the names listed in the common male Filipino names such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Francis, Jacob, and Jerald were perceived as having good athletic skills. In a 2012 survey conducted by *American Time Use*, it was determined that the number of male participation in sports was higher than females, especially for team sports [8]. Apparently, Filipinos are into sports such as basketball which is evident during PBA ball cups and even in basketball leagues held on numerous barangays. Other names

such as Anthony and Xander were perceived as being good in dancing, Christian, into having good artistic skills, Matthew, into having good academic skills and Nathaniel, into being good in acting. A variety of perceived skills/talents only shows that Filipino men are talented and are good at a certain field or area.

Associated meanings of common Filipino female names

Table 3. Perceived Meanings on Most Common Filipino Female Names

Name	Character Trait	Physical Appearance	Skills/Talents
Althea	Sweet (28%)	Beautiful (32%)	Good in Dancing (24%)
Andrea	Sweet (14%)	Cute/Charming (19%)	Good in Dancing (18%)
Angel	Kind (23%)	Cute/Charming (20%)	Good in Singing (20%)
Angela	Friendly (14%)	Slim and Cute/Charming (16%)	Has Good Artistic Skills (18%)
Angelica	Talkative (12%)	Beautiful (13%)	Good in Singing (16%)
Ashley	Mean (17%)	Sexy (18%)	Good in Dancing (17%)
Francheska	Mean (13%)	Slim (13%)	Good in Singing (15%)
Nicole	Talkative (11%)	Beautiful (17%)	Good in Singing and Has Good Academic Skills (14%)
Princess	Sweet (16%)	Beautiful (18%)	Good in Acting (15%)
Samantha	Kind and Intelligent (10%)	Beautiful (23%)	Has Good Academic Skills (16%)

Based on the data gathered and generated results, Filipino youth have different views and perception on the most common female Filipino names in terms of character traits, physical appearance, and skills or talents. In terms of character traits, not all of the names were perceived positively by the students. For instance, names such as Ashley and Francheska were

perceived as mean. The mentioned names sound unfriendly since it was popularized to portray an antagonist character in western films like Ashley Tisdale as Sharpay in High School Musical. On the other hand, the respondents of the study perceive the names Althea, Andrea, and Princess as sweet just as how sweet the names sound. Names such as Angel and Samantha were perceived as kind, while the name Angelica as friendly. The mentioned names were derived from the Bible which could be the reason the respondents perceive the names into those particular character traits. The names Angelica and Nicole were perceived as talkative. Well-known personalities in the Philippines such as Angelica Panganiban (actress and host) and Nicole Hyala (radio disc-jockey) could have influence the perception of the respondents since both of the mentioned personalities are known for being chatty and good in speaking.

In terms of physical appearance, half of the names on the list such as Althea, Angelica, Nicole, Princess, and Samantha were perceived as beautiful. It is common knowledge that in the Philippine history, colonization shaped how Filipinos perceive things which include the perception of the concept of beauty. The Spaniards brought about the idea of relating being mestizo/mestiza into being beautiful. Social media also contributed in shaping the idea of many Filipinos regarding beauty. Advertisements, TV programs and also print materials show different or same images of beautiful women. Names such as Andrea, Angel, and Angela were perceived to have a very pleasing or appealing appearance as the respondents perceives the meaning of the names as cute/charming. The name Ashley was perceived as sexy while the name Francheska as slim. A study conducted by a beauty product called Dove shows that women all around the world considered some associated meaning of beautiful such as sexy, gorgeous, natural and average [9]. The study also shows that majority of their respondents said that they are more comfortable to be called natural or average in describing their looks. According to Filipino American Psychology by Kevin Nadal, it was in the Philippine history that the Filipinos are slim [7]. There are distinct messages about being fat or ugly which are why Filipinas are strict on their diet.

In terms of skills/talents, names such as Althea, Andrea, and Ashley were perceived into being good in dancing while the names Angel, Angelica, Francheska, and Nicole were perceived as being good

in singing. Dancing and singing are two of the many talents that are commonly recognized and enhanced in the Philippines. Since the early years of the 2000s, many girl dance groups emerged in the Philippines. There were Sexbomb Dancers, Viva Hot Babes and Wowowee ASF Dancers and those who are still in the business like the EB Babes, Mocha Girls, and Showtime Dancers. Meanwhile, the founder of the internationally-acclaimed Philippine Madrigal Singers, Andrea Ofilada Veneracion was proclaimed a National Artist in 1989. Through Veneracion's group, the development of choral music in the country was encouraged, taking on the company's vast collection of folk compositions, kundimans and contemporary songs [10]. The name Angela, on the other hand, was perceived as having good artistic skills, the name Princess as being good in acting, and the name Samantha as having good academic skills. Filipinos now are making noise throughout the country and even worldwide when it comes to skills and talents. Filipinos are very talented in a way. In fact, many Filipinos are known for such great talents presented around the globe.

Factors influencing associated meanings of common Filipino names

The research revealed from the data obtained from the focus group discussion that there are factors that influenced the key informants of their perception on the most common Filipino names of men and women. Based on the results, the factors that influenced the key respondents are their relation to their family and friends. Also, their life experience brought them on how they give association to the names. Popularity and perception are also factors that influenced the key informants on how they give association to the most common names in terms of character traits, physical appearance and skill or talents.

Television personalities and characters do not only influence people in their lifestyle but could also affect people in giving meanings to names. Famous actor and actresses may be associated with the names listed on the top common Filipino names, and may use the celebrities as a reference in describing the names. Perception not only refers to the way in which people react to stimuli from the five senses, it is also defined as a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensations to give meaning to their environment [11]. Perception happens when people combine personal experiences with expressed or

expected views of others, to form a belief or preconception about reality [12]. Perception varies differently from person to person. Experience is another factor that may influence one's perception and also another factor that influences the key informants on how they give associated meanings to the most common Filipino names. It is the process of getting knowledge or skills that are obtained from doing, seeing or feeling things, or something that happens which has an effect on someone (Webster's Dictionary).

RESULTS

The results of the study found out that young Filipinos associate common Filipino male names to naughtiness, and only a few names are perceived as religious and kind although most of the names are from biblical and religious figures. On the other hand, results also revealed that they perceive male names in terms of physical appearance to positive traits such as handsome, cute or charming, tall, slim, and muscular. Moreover, youth today perceive the common male names to having good athletic skills.

Obtained results also show that the Filipino youth have the same perceived meaning of the most common female names. They associate female names with positive qualities especially in terms of character traits and physical appearance. While there is a variation of answers in terms of the skills and talents, it only showed that Filipino women are talented and are good at a certain field or area. The factors influencing the associated meanings on the common names were also explored, and results revealed that students' associations are commonly based on experiences and the people around them.

Names can affect the way people behave and how they feel about themselves. According to Myron Brender [13], one of the parents' ways in giving name is through the use of names that are highly fashionable and popular at any given time or, in other words, fad names. Parents who select fad names may be giving in to subtle social pressure to conform to what they think the general culture says is acceptable, and this, in turn, may result from a lack of confidence in their own judgment, fear of being conspicuous by going against the prevailing tide, or simply a lack of originality. This explains why most of the names are perceived based on popular personalities who happened to have the same name.

Psychologists and others who study human behavior have explored the feeling that names influence their bearers, and the researchers have discovered psychological aspects of names. The most important aspect of personality affected by names is self-concept. Self-concept develops as children develop, and it is "learned" from the verbal and non-verbal messages significant people in children's lives send them. Parents are the most important message-senders, but, as children mature and become more and more independent, the messages of teachers, classmates, and other people all contribute to their developing concepts of self [13].

In a sense, self-concept works as a kind of script for the way people act. Persons with good names such as Christian, Ezekiel, Matthew, and Nathaniel whose names are perceived as kind/religious may tend to have higher confidence than those with bad names. Persons with names such as Anthony, Daniel, Francis, Jerald, and Xander whose names are perceived as naughty may tend to act the way that their names are perceived.

Interestingly, the tendency of giving mental illness due to the link of names and self-concept seemed stronger among boys and men than among girls and women. One pair of researchers who noticed this tendency attributed it to the fact that our culture permits greater flexibility and freedom in the names of females than of males. Girls are given unusual names much more often than boys are. As noticed, most of the Filipino male common names are from TV characters and religious figures unlike those of the Filipino female common names which are not that common. Therefore, these names do not attract as much attention and are less likely to cause embarrassment for the girls who have them. As a result, these names do less damage to the self-concepts of the girls as they develop during childhood and adolescence [13].

Meanings are mainly dependent on an individual. Many things, and that includes names are subject to many interpretations. A qualitative study conducted on name experts is possible to obtain more substantial results and reliable conclusion on the associated meanings of names. Furthermore, researchers can also look more closely at the topic by adding another category such as socioeconomic status aside from traits, appearances, and skills on the objectives of the study. Further quantitative studies about the topic

should also have a larger number of respondents to explore on such as a whole barangay or municipality.

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