

The life of a name

Business



Each person has a given name at birth chosen by someone else. Throughout life, new, more applicable names are given to a person. The latter names are called nicknames, or pet names in certain cultures. They can be descriptions of the person, silly mockeries, or random ideas. Other times, people are given names that they deserve, due to their actions. In a few cases, a person will choose his or her own name.

Though this practice is not common, it is an option if one's given name is undesirable. Jhumpa Lahiri demonstrates the importance of names in her novel, *The Namesake*, through her main character's strife for self-understanding. Meanwhile, the poet Zelda discusses different identities in her poem, "Each of Us Has a Name," and how people's names evolve throughout life. In my own life, I have struggled with names and meanings of names. Names become a person's legacy, whether real or fictional. Names are an important part of life because they reveal one's personality to the world.

At birth, a person's name shows others what the guardians desired for the person's future. "Each of us has a name/given by God/given by our parents" [Zelda 1-3]. All people are named, even if it takes a couple years to find the perfect one. Yet, names are expectations, "given by God" and "given by our parents." When a person is told that not only did one's parents choose his or her name and create endless expectations, but that God also did, then he or she feels immense pressure to live up to those expectations.

In Indian cultures, children are eventually given "good names" to "represent dignified and enlightened qualities" [Lahiri 26]. Good names are

believed to be the perfect representation of one's personality. Therefore, a person is pushed to become what the name means. In relation, Gogol Ganguli, the main character of Jhumpa Lahiri's book, feels duress throughout his entire life when involving his "pet name." Pet names are supposed to be compassionate names used by those who know the person best.

Unfortunately, Gogol's father, Ashoke, and mother, Ashima, are forced to use his pet name when the doctor will not let them leave unless they do, and Gogol's teacher will not accept "Nikhil" as Gogol's good name.

Ashoke calls his baby Gogol after Nikolai Gogol, the writer that saved Ashoke's life in a train crash. For the rest of Gogol's life, the dead author and Ashoke's pressure to be a scholar haunt him. He cannot do so, disappointing Ashoke. Likewise, in my life, my middle name has created pressure for me to be someone I am not. My middle name is the Hawaiian word for "calm ocean:" La'ia. My parents gave me this middle name to remind me of where I was born, and, more specifically, they wanted me to be peaceful.

In utero, I was always kicking and punching, so a Hawaiian woman told my mother to call me La'ia to make me a calmer child. Unfortunately, I have not stayed true to the Hawaiian woman's promises. My personality is not tranquil, and sometimes I think this exhausts people. However, I am constantly reminded of my birthplace, and I hope to go back there one day and study the calm ocean I was named after. People can experience pressure due to their birth names to become someone they are not. After birth, life can bestow new names on a person depending on the relations made.

People have names varying with the relationship, “ given by our enemies/and by our love” [Zelda 16-18]. The names given by enemies are not always pleasant, so one should focus on the names given “ by...love.” Love, whether romantic or platonic, brings people together. As a reaction, people create nicknames to represent the closeness of their relationship. For example, Gogol experiences both kinds of love.

However, he has more functional platonic relationships than romantic ones. Such a platonic relationship would be with his sister, Sonia. She tells him, “ I’m scared, Goggles” as they face their family in India [Lahiri 82]. Sonia calls Gogol, “ Goggles,” showing what kind of relationship she has with him. Though the nickname annoys him at times, it is silly and affectionate, two characteristics commonly associated with siblings.

Their relationship is special, so Sonia gives Gogol a special name. In my case, I have been given several nicknames. While my family calls me Nan, or alternative forms of Nan, most of my friends call me Hammer, or variations of Hammer. The former nickname surfaced because my mother always loved that nickname for Hannah. In response, my father makes up unique forms of Nan to demonstrate our relaxed bond.

At the same time, I have a very different relationship with my friends. The story of my nickname, “ Hammer,” is tedious, so in short, everyone now calls me Hammer. Curiously enough, two of my best friends do not call me Hammer. They will call me Han, Nan or Hannah. I believe they feel closer to me if they call me by my given name. Nicknames represent different relationships and, partly, one’s identity to the world.

The other part of a person's identity is shaped by actions. People are given specific names when they commit certain acts. " Each of us has a name/given by our sins/and given by our longing" [Zelda 13-15]. When a name is " given by...longing," the names are usually not malevolent. If a person gets married out of love, he or she becomes a spouse.

Gogol, after marrying Moushumi, becomes " My husband"[Lahiri 264]. Yet, Moushumi refuses to be, mentally, Gogol's wife. By keeping " her last name," she makes it obvious she is not fully committed to being with Gogol [Lahiri 227]. She does not want to have the title " wife" associated with her. In fact, Moushumi is a prime example of having a name " given by [her] sins.

" She commits adultery with a man she met a long time before Gogol. After her affair comes to light, her reputation is forever tainted to the world. She is known as a " cheater," a " liar," and most likely is called many more unpleasant names. Personally, I am associated with my actions. Once, I wanted to become close to a peer, and I worked hard to become an important part of her life. I am now considered one of her " best friends.

" In retrospect, when I gossip about people—I am not going to pretend like I do not—I am called a " fool," " idiot," and other less friendly names. My actions lead to titles, and a malicious title is very difficult to get rid of. A person's actions create a reputation, which is the title the world will associate with that person. In the end, a person becomes whoever he or she would like the world to see him or her as. " Each of us has a name/given by the sea/and given by/our death"[Zelda 25-28]. Everything ends with " our death," including longing, sins, relationships, and expectations.

At the end of life, a person goes back to nature, back to “ the sea,” and becomes just another human being, like they were at birth. The idea of having a name “ given by the sea” relates to Gogol’s experience with death, where Indian culture demands for a corpse to be cremated so the human spirit can escape and rest peacefully with the earth. Even though a person becomes truly human again when they die, everyone wants to be remembered after their death. Like Gogol, who “ suddenly...envision[s] ‘ Gogol’ added to the list of names, ‘ Nikhil’ printed in tiny letters upside down” while reading an article about famous people who changed their names, wishes to be remembered in a certain way [Lahiri 99]. Gogol longs to be known as Nikhil, an American-Indian architect, when he passes away. He does not want to be associated with the mentally unstable Nikolai Gogol, the Russian author who committed suicide by starvation.

He hopes to be remembered for his accomplishments, not the author Gogol’s failures. Similarly, I desire to have a unique legacy. I want to be written about in textbooks for discovering the cure for cancer in Marine animals. Or, I yearn for people to know my name because I figure out how to prevent pollution in the oceans. I feel as if it is important for my name to be associated with one of the people who save the planet.

Names are beautiful in their own way as an image of a person’s soul. They should change constantly, but in the end represent what one desires to be remembered for.