Is Political Science Meant for Every Tom, Dick, or Harriet? The Role of First Names and Middle Initials as Predictors of Academic Success

A Wuffle, *University of California, Irvine*
Kristine Coulter, *University of California, Irvine*

ABSTRACT We take advantage of the data set compiled by Masuoka et al. (2007, *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (1): 361–66) on lifetime citation counts of political science faculty at PhD granting institutions in the United States to look for "lucky names," that is, names parents can give babies that predispose them toward scholarly success in political science. Seeking to test an hypothesis offered by Wuffle (1972, *PS: Political Science and Politics* (Summer): 290), we also briefly look at the importance of middle initials for citation success in political science.

Why are some successful and others not? Many scholars look to biological features that are given cultural meaning, for example, gender (Guinier, Fine, and Balin 1997; Monroe et al. 2008), good looks (Rosenberg et al. 1986), height (Hensley 1993; McCann 2001; Sorokowski 2010;[1] Wilson, 1968; Young and French 1996), or race (Arrow 1998). Here, our interest will be in the determinants of citation counts, which have been found to be an important determinant of academic salaries in political science (Grofman 2009).[2] We use the large data set compiled by Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) on lifetime citation counts of political science faculty at PhD-granting institutions in the United States ca. 2005. Unfortunately, variables such as good looks, height, and race are not found in the Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) data set, although we can approximate gender by using gender coding of first names. Moreover, as everyone knows, the most important predictor of success in any area is "luck," but we found no plausible way to properly operationalize this variable.

In the light of these methodological limitations, we take our inspiration for choice of the key independent variable to predict citation success in political science from the art of naming, or "Nameology," as this branch of scientific astrology is properly named.[3] With the notable exception of Cash's (1969) definitive musical monologue on the importance of baby names for the formation of gender identity, the science of naming was remarkably neglected in the social sciences until Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, in their magisterial work, *Freakonomics* (2005), demonstrated the insights that could be gleaned from studying the evolution of racial and class preferences for baby names as a Veblenian race to distance oneself from the Jones's.[4]

The direct inspiration for this article, however, was the intention of the first-named author's long-time officemate to teach a graduate course whose working title was "The Importance of Being Gary," using the seminal contributions to the discipline of Gary Cox, Gary Jacobson, and Gary King as a means of giving students an appreciation of first-rate political science methodology and research design. The potential for such a course suggested that mothers/fathers who wished their (male) babies to grow up to be political scientists should consider giving them this auspicious first name. But, perhaps there are other Garys who do not publish as often or as well, but one tends only to remember the Garys who do?[5] It was that question that led to this article. But, in the interests of comparative research, as the article has evolved, we go well beyond "Gary" studies.

In the remainder of this article, drawing on the Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) data set of lifetime citation counts of political science faculty at PhD-granting institutions in the United States ca. 2005, we examine citations according to first name.[6] There are 3,743 names in this data set. First, we compare all names with at least 20 instances,[7] of which there are 29, to see if there are some that appear statistically distinct in their mean per year citation counts from the overall average of 6.7 citations per year.[8] In particular, we check to see if "Gary" has an unusually high mean citation count. Then, we look to see if those whose first names match those of recent past

A Wuffle *is an associate to professor. As far as s/he is aware s/he is the only person in political science with a single letter first name. (There is no period after the A.) Because Facebook will not allow what they insist on regarding as an initial to be used as a first name, A Wuffle's Facebook cognomen is Aismyfirstname Wuffle. A Wuffle may be reached c/o Sbrasier@uci.edu.*
Kristine Coulter *is a political science graduate student at University of California, Irvine, who aided in the initial data analysis but should not be blamed for the results. She can be reached at kkcoulter@gmail.com.*

doi:10.1017/S1049096513001522

presidents have a distinctive citation profile. Also we check whether sets of first names with Christian religious significance, such as the four authors of the Gospels ("Matthew," "Mark," "Luke," and "John"), or famous names from the Old Testament ("Abraham," "Isaac," and "Jacob"), have an unusually high citation count relative to the entire data set.[9] Next, to check for gender effects, we take advantage of a natural experiment involving paired comparisons of matched pairs involving similar first names (e.g., Paul and Paula),[10] and we also compare some famous mixed gender pairings (e.g., Jack and Jill). Finally, to deal with potential confounding effects, we check to see whether those with middle initials or middle names have any citation advantage, and we look to see if those with first letters of their first name toward the end of the alphabet appear penalized relative to those with letters closer to the front.

DATA ANALYSIS

We first look to see if the "Gary" phenomenon is statistically significant. It is not. Although the mean yearly citation count of the 23 political scientists in the Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) data set with first name "Gary" or "Garry" is 14.6, more than twice as high as the 6.7 mean for the data set as a whole, when we use the *t*-test option with unequal variances, the *p* value misses statistical significance at conventional levels, ($p = .08$). The only two first names with more than 20 instances that have statistically significantly more than average yearly citations are "Kenneth/Ken," with a mean of 11.9 ($p = .04$) and "Robert/Bob" with a mean of 10.1 ($p = .047$). But, of course, because we have 29 possibilities to obtain *p* values as low as .04, this is not convincing evidence that any common names are "lucky names" vis-à-vis political science.[11] Although there are certainly names that are, at least in the United States, unusual and/or only one of which is found in our data set, an informal review revealed no clear link between uniqueness of name and academic citation success. For every first name such as "Arend" (Lijphart) or "Elinor" (Ostrom) or "Aristide" (Zolberg) or "Atul" (Kohli) associated with high name recognition in political science, there is a singleton first name in the Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) data set that has close to zero annual citations.

Turning to first names of recent US presidents, we find no advantage to having a president's name. Looking at the combined mean yearly citation count for "George," "Bill/William," "Ronald," "Jimmy/James," and "Dick/Richard" we find a mean citation count of 6.9 ($p = .40$) However, turning to names with great significance in Christianity or Judaism[12] (the authors of the Gospels: "Matthew," "Mark," "Luke," and "John"; the three (Catholic) archangels: "Gabriel," "Michael," and "Raphael"; iconographic figures such as "Peter," "Paul," and "Mary"; and the biblical patriarchs ("Abraham," "Isaac," and "Jacob")[13], we find that, in *toto*, that, as the Church Lady might have said, there is something "special" about the mean citation count of political scientists with one of those first names. As a whole, the group has a mean yearly citation count of 8.0 ($p = .02$).[14]

Turning to gender differences, despite the title of our article (chosen primarily for its euphony), and although there are five "Harry's" and even more "Harold's," there is no one in the Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) data set named "Harriet." Thus, a "Harry" versus "Harriet" comparison could not be made. Looking instead at paired comparisons of other names with both a male and a female version: "Frances/Francesca" and "Frank/Francis/Francisco," "John" and "Joan/Joanne," "Michael/Michel" and "Michelle/Michele," "Patricia and Patrick," and "Paul" and "Paula/Paulette/Pauline,"[15] we find that, as a whole, the male names in the set average more yearly citations than their female counterparts (8.3 vs. 5.0), although the results are not quite statistically significant ($p = .07$). Similarly, the mean citations for Bob (Robert) and Ted (Theodore) are higher than those for Carol (Carole/Caroline) and Alice (10.2 vs. 6.9), but the differences are again not statistically significant ($p = .19$), because of the very high variances involved. However, we would note that "Jack" has a higher yearly citation count than "Jill" (14.9 vs. 4.6: $p = .02$), and that "Ken/Kenneth" has a higher citation count than "Barbie/Barbara" (11.9 vs. 5.0: $p = .02$).[16] Moreover, if we compare the male and the female halves of each of these nine pairs of names *in toto*, we do get differences (9.3. vs. 5.7) that are statistically significant ($p = .02$).

Several researchers have suggested that middle initials or middle names lend gravitas that may be conducive to greater success. Wuffle (1972), in work that has been little noted nor long remembered, provided a useful early contribution to Nameology by demonstrating that those with middle initials fared better in elections to the APSA Council in 1970 than those without—even after controlling for endorsements and gender. Although this long neglected work is what provided inspiration for our current investigation of the importance of middle initials for citation success, there has been much more visible recent work, dealing with vote share in US presidential elections. Wallis (2006), for example, observes that, although only three of our first 17 presidents carried middle names (John Quincy Adams, William Henry Harrison, and James Knox Polk), most modern presidents sported middle names or initials, and Anne Bernays (quoted in Wallis, 2006) has argued that today, "a name without a middle name or middle initial sounds unfinished or unsubstantial, unpresidential."[17]

Although there are certainly names that are, at least in the United States, unusual and/or only one of which is found in our data set, an informal review revealed no clear link between uniqueness of name and academic citation success.

To get a handle on the importance of middle initials and names, while trying to control for potential confounds, we looked at the set of those named either Tom/Thomas or Dick/Richard or Harry/Harold in the Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) data set and compared the mean yearly citation counts of members of that set who have initials or middle names with those who have neither initials nor a middle name.[18] Unfortunately for Wuffle's (1972) hypothesis, we found no real difference (5.6 vs. 6.2, $p = .36$).[19]

Finally, we examine the letters with which first names begin. It is well known than those with last names toward the end of the

alphabet may suffer from lack of recognition. Here, we find a similar result for first names: whereas no single letter seems to stand out as especially lucky, political scientists whose first names begin with the letters U through Z ($n = 200$) do not fare that well in the citations sweepstakes. Those with names beginning A through T have a mean yearly citation count of 6.9, whereas those whose names begin with the last six letters of the alphabet average only 5.1 yearly cites ($p = .001$).[20]

CONCLUSIONS

Our inspiration for this essay was the apparent citation success associated with the name "Gary." But, like all too many political scientists, we failed to adequately take into account interaction effects, such as those associated with the interdependence of first name and last name.[21] On the one hand, we now see the importance of not just being named "Gary" but also being named either "Cox," "Jacobson," or "King."[22] On the other hand, using coarse inexact pairwise matching techniques, we did find that, for large enough samples, men with certain first names do seem to be more cited than women with very similar, or frequently associated, first names. Thus, we see our work as definitely having further advanced the science of Nameology. ■

Our inspiration for this essay was the apparent citation success associated with the name "Gary." But, like all too many political scientists, we failed to adequately take into account interaction effects, such as those associated with the interdependence of first name and last name.

NOTES

1. Cf. Sorokowski, Sorokowska, and Mberira, 2012.
2. But we should also note that citations matter most in determining salaries only in top departments; in most departments Grofman (2009) finds the single strongest predictor of salary to be years since PhD.
3. The origins of Nameology have been attributed to astronomers in Ur of the Chaldees, with its more modern incarnations traced to "Vedic influences." It is "based on vibrations. See" http://www.lucky-name-numerology.com/nameology.html accessed in April 2012 and again in June 2013. (Because there was not a Wikipedia reference to the term, a *PS* reviewer suggested that further documentation of Nameology was called for in addition to just the reference to this website. Here I/we would simply point out that, according to the strict tenets of Public Choice theory, because its contributors receive no pay and remain nameless, and yet supposedly provide a public good, clearly either Wikipedia does not exist or it does not provide a public good, so the absence of a reference in Wikipedia to "Nameology'" should not be taken as definitive.)
4. See Bernays and Kaplan (1999) for a more literary overview of "naming."
5. By definition, Garys that do not publish (much) are less visible in the journals. *Cf.* the false memories of "It always snows on Christmas" that the cognitive psychologist Elizabeth Loftus has investigated so extensively (Loftus 1996).
6. In an appendix, Masuoka et al. (2007a) offer an extensive discussion of limits to citation counts as indicators of achievement, and also discuss some limitations of their own data collection efforts.
7. Cf. Thetop100babynames.com/USBabyNames/1941BabyNames.htm; cited in *University of Chicago Magazine* November–December 2012, p. 56.
8. To control for years of professional life we look at mean citation counts per year rather than at total lifetime citations. Masuoka et al. (2007a) deal with this issue by making use of cohort analysis, but we will avoid that further complication because of the problem it would generate for our cell sizes. The correlation between date of PhD and mean per year citation count is very low. The bivariate regression has an adjusted R^2 of only .03. The range of values in the data set is from 0 to 229, with a standard deviation of 12.7. The curve is quite skewed: the median is 2.7 compared to a mean of 6.7. Only roughly a quarter of the data set is at or above the mean. Almost 300 have zero citations. On the other hand, there are 10 political scientists who average more than 100 citations yearly during their career; while 96 average more than 40 citations per year.
9. At the suggestion of a reviewer for *PS* we checked to see if there was a political scientist named Gary Powers. (The U-2 reconnaissance—a.k.a. "spy"—plane of Francis Gary Power was downed in the Soviet Union in 1960, which made him, for 15 minutes or so, a famous person.) Unfortunately, exactly as this percipient reviewer had feared, no political scientist with this name is in the Masuoka et al. (2007a,b) data set, and so the idea of checking citations for this particular Gary had to be ditched.
10. The use of sophisticated matching technology is becoming increasingly common in political science (see e.g., Iacus, King, and Porro, 2012, and references cited therein). Here we provide a rather coarser (but more intuitive) approach to matching than that which they offer.
11. On the other hand, statistical significance is not the same as substantive significance and it may well be that we fail to find statistical significance in many cases simply because our sample sizes are not large. The 29 names we examine average fewer than 50 names each, and most are under 30 names, although the most common (Robert) has 259 instances.
12. There was neither a "Mohamed" nor a "Fatima" in the Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) data set, but we suspect that would no longer be true were there to be a follow-up study published in 2017.
13. There was no one with first name "Luke" or first name "Raphael" in our data set. There was also no one named "Moses," nor anyone named "Jesus."
14. We had also thought of examining the importance of having the first name of a very well known (secular) superhero such as Batman or Superman ("Bruce" or "Clark") but, for those two names, combined cell size is too low for statistical significance ($p = .06$), although results are in the correct direction, with a mean yearly citation count of 11.6 for those named either "Bruce" or "Clark." "Peter," as in "Peter Parker," we have already used for other purposes.
15. There are other paired comparisons we might have added, but we chose this set since there were a number of name holders for at least one gender, and the comparisons seemed straightforward in terms of little difference in the male and female versions of the name. We did not compare Robert and "Roberta" because there is only one "Roberta" in our data set and because we will be using "Robert" in our comparison of "Bob" and "Ted" with "Carol" and "Alice."
16. We had hoped to compare those with first name "Adam" to those with first name "Eve," but no one with the name "Eve" is in the Masuoka et al. (2007a, b) data set. We would note, however, that "Adam" does appear to be a very auspicious name in that the mean yearly citation count for those with that name is 25.5; but cell size is much too low to put great weight on this finding. Also, we had thought of comparing "Lois" with "Clark," but again limited cell size vitiated the meaningfulness of such a comparison.
17. See also Bernays and Kaplan (1999). We should also note that a percipient *PS* reviewer pointed out that Harry S. Truman gave himself a middle initial to increase his political chances, since he thought that "Harry" was not a serious enough name.
18. Use of middle names is rare, so most of our data involves those with middle initials.
19. On the other hand, the claim has also been made that too many names may not be good either. For example, in 1992, "some Democrats routinely referred to the incumbent as 'George Herbert Walker Bush,' which, according to Wallis (2006), "recalled an ascot-wearing British aristocrat, the type of fellow who seems surprised by the invention of the supermarket checkout scanner and who asks his waitress for a 'splash' of coffee." Wallis further asserts that "It might have been one middle name too many for recession-battered American voters." Because there are so few people in political science with four names (even counting II or III as a name) we did not seek to test this hypothesis.
20. Whereas those with names that are toward the end of the alphabet might end up at the back of alphabetized lists and be called last, why alphabetic order of first name should matter is rather more obscure. Perhaps there is something different about people whose first name begins with X, Y, or Z?

21. Here we should call attention to an intriguing suggestion by the *PS* reviewer, namely that we ought to look at citations for those whose first and last names were alliterative, because alliteration might have political payoff (e.g., Calvin Coolidge or Herbert Hoover). This topic must, regretfully, be left to future work.

22. If we eliminate Gary Cox, Gary King, and Gary Jacobson from our list of those name "Gary," the mean yearly citation count of the remaining Garys is only 5.6—which is below the population mean.

REFERENCES

Arrow, Kenneth J. 1998. "What Has Economics to Say about Racial Discrimination?" *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12 (Spring): 91–100.

Bernays, Anne, and Justin Kaplan. 1999. *The Language of Names: What We Call Ourselves and Why It Matters*. New York: Touchstone.

Cash, Johnny. 1969. "A Boy Named Sue." *Johnny Cash at San Quentin* record album (based on a poem by Shel Silverstein). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Boy_Named_Sue

Grofman, Bernard. 2009. "Determinants of Political Science Faculty Salaries at the University of California." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 43 (4): 719–27.

Guinier, Lani, Michelle Fine, and Jane Balin. 1997. *Becoming Gentlemen: Women, Law School, and Institutional Change*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hensley, W. E. 1993. "Height as a Measure of Success in Academe." *Journal of Human Behavior* 30: 40–46.

Iacus, Stefano M., Gary King, and Giuseppe Porro. 2012. "Causal Inference without Balance Checking: Coarsened Exact Matching." *Political Analysis* 20 (1): 1–24.

Levitt, Steven D., and Stephen J. Dubner. 2005. *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Reveals the Hidden Side of Everything*. New York: William Morrow.

Loftus, Elizabeth. 1996. *Eyewitness Testimony*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Masuoka, Natalie, Bernard Grofman, and Scott Feld. 2007a. "The Political Science 400: A 20-Year Update." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (1): 133–45.

———. 2007b. "Production and Placement of Ph.D.'s: 1902–2000." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (1): 361–66.

McCann, S. J. H. 2001. "Height, Societal Threat, and Victory Margin in Presidential Elections (1824–1992)." *Psychological Reports* 88: 741–42.

Monroe, Kristen, Saba Ozyurt, Ted Wrigley, and Amy Alexander. 2008. "Gender Equality in Academia: Bad News from the Trenches and Some Possible Policy Solutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 6: 215–34.

Rosenberg, Shawn W., Lisa Bohan, Patrick McCafferty, and Kevin Harris. 1986. "The Image and the Vote: The Effect of Candidate Presentation on Voter Preference." *American Journal of Political Science* 30 (Feb.): 108–27.

Sorokowski, Piotr. 2010. "Politicians' Estimated Height as an Indicator of Their Popularity." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40 (7): 1302–309.

Sorokowski, Piotr, Agnieszka Sorokowska, and Mara Mberira. 2012. "Are Preferences for Leg Length Universal? Data from a Semi-Nomadic Himba Population from Namibia." *Journal of Social Psychology* 152 (3): 370–78.

Wallis, David. 2006. "Malice in the Middle: Barack Hussein Obama and the History of Bad Middle Names in Politics." *SLATE*, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2006/12/malice_in_the_middle.html. Posted Wednesday, Dec. 27.

Wilson, P. R. 1968. "Perceptual Distortion of Height as a Function of Ascribed Academic Status." *Journal of Social Psychology* 74: 97–102.

Wuffle, A. 1972. "A Caveat to the 1970 APSA Election." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 5 (Summer): 290.

Young, T. J., and L. A. French. 1996. "Height and Perceived Competence of U.S. Presidents: A Trend Analysis for 1948–1996." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 82: 1002.