Biased Preferences to Names

Timothy J. Panek and Megan Gibson

Lindenwood University

The experimenters intended to show support that children have a bias against names that are uncommon and difficult to pronounce. Common and uncommon names were taken from the social security administration. Sixty-nine college students participated in a survey to determine what names are difficult to pronounce. Names that were common and easy to pronounce were paired with those names that were uncommon and difficult to pronounce. These pairings underwent a t-test to ensure they were significantly different from each other. Twenty-one children whose ages range from 6 to 12 took part in an interview on preferences of names. In using a chi square analysis, statistical significance was found at the .001 level, showing support for the hypothesis that children prefer names that are common and easy to pronounce.

One of the most prevalent components of a person's identity is his or her name. A person's name is used in conversation others have with them and to refer to them. What if an individual's name was also used as a factor in deciding how liked that individual is? A person's first name may be part of an initial impression when meeting someone for the first time. First names may be the difference between seeing someone in a positive or negative way. It may be the difference between making a friend and not making a friend. It may also be the difference between getting hired or not for a desired job.

Dinur, Beit-Hallahmi, and Hofman (1996) conducted an experiment involving 408 high school and college students in Israel. The students were presented with 12 common first names divided into 2 categories Israeli and Jewish names. The more recent Israeli names were the most preferred, followed by biblical names, traditional Jewish names, and lastly names connected to Diaspora Jewish names. Another study done by Erwin (1999) dealt with the association of the attractiveness of a person's name with their academic performance. Erwin obtained records of 68 students who completed their second year of their psychology degree and rated their first names for attractiveness. Results showed that individuals whose names were rated as unattractive achieved better grades in their academic assessments then individuals whose names were rated attractive.

In 2001, Mehrabian conducted 7 studies regarding characteristics attributed to people on the basis of their first name. Four characteristics were identified: Ethical Caring, Popular Fun, Successful, and Masculine-Feminine. His results showed that men's names were attributed to having more masculine, less ethical caring, and more successful characteristics than women's names. Nicknames were associated with less successful, greater popular fun and less ethical caring characteristics than names given at birth. Neutral gender names were associated with greater popular fun and less masculine characteristics for men and less ethical caring, greater popular fun and more masculine characteristics for women than gender specific names. Lastly, less common names were associated with higher levels of anxiety and neuroticism than those with common names (Mehrabian, 2001). Van Fleet and Atwater (1997) conducted 4 studies examining gender neutral names. These studies showed that most gender neutral names identified were Pat, Terry, Chris and Lee. Another study done by Levine and Willis (1994) was conducted to

examine people's reactions to common and uncommon names. Two hundred participants were given 40 names and asked to rate them on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The more common names received higher ratings on success, health, morality, cheerfulness, warmth, and sex stereotype. From these previous research experiments, it can be understood that the mere presence of a first name already gives a person, in general, a preconceived mental image of what the individual will be like without ever meeting them. Conclusions about a person are made solely based on their first name.

It is believed that there is a bias in children in which they are prone to like names that are more common and easier to pronounce. The purpose of the research is to determine whether or not children show a preference toward familiar names and easier to pronounce names. Based on their answers to simple questions regarding name preference and the first name of their best friend(s), it can be concluded as to whether or not it is a factor in how they choose their friend(s). (Do children prefer names that are simpler, common, and easier to pronounce? Do children choose friends that have names which are similar in those given factors to their own name?) If this preference is demonstrated in children, it may also be able to be said the same about adults. If children exhibit this behavior, then it could as be demonstrated that when people grow up, the same preference may exist; but may be less obvious. Due to juvenile thinking of children, it could be expected to get a more honest answer to our questions than what we would get from adults. For the experiment, it was believed there will be a statistical difference in children's preferences for common names and those easier to pronounce. There would be little to no preference for names that are uncommon and difficult to pronounce.

Method

Participants

Sixty-nine students from Lindenwood University and 21 children participated in this study. The Lindenwood University participants were recruited by going into classes with the professor's permission and asking for participants. They were also recruited in dormitories on campus. The children were recruited from Faith Christian School and the greater St. Charles, Missouri Community. No compensation was given to the college students, but candy was given to the children. The college students were used only to rate names based on how easy they were to pronounce. The main focus of the study, however, was the preferences children had in their name selection.

Materials

There were several documents used in this experiment. There were two types of informed consent forms: the Lindenwood students consent form and a parental consent form. There was also a feedback letter that explained the general idea of why the experiment is being preformed and contained contact numbers of the experimenters. The experimenters used scripts to request permission from a professor to use their class, and permission to use an after-school or daycare facility, and lastly, in the interview with the children. A survey composed of a list of 60 male and female names taken from www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/1999/top1000of90s.html (see Appendix A), listing the most popular names of the 1990s, was given to the Lindenwood student participants.

There were two parts to this experiment. The child participants were recruited from Faith Christian School in Florissant, Missouri. The students were interviewed outside of their classrooms in a commons area. Upon completion of the interview, all

children received candy, regardless as to whether or not they participated in the study. (Children in their classes that did not participate also received candy.) The researchers used a pen to record the answers of the children on a data sheet (see Appendix B).

Procedure

In order to recruit college participants, professors were asked permission of use of their classroom and students to survey. Once permission was granted the experimenters asked students if they would be willing to complete a survey. The students who wished to participate were asked to sign a consent form and were then given the survey (see Appendix C). A feedback letter was also given to each participant upon completion of the survey. Those college students not recruited via a professor's class were recruited by asking them for permission in a dormitory. The same procedure for administration of the survey was followed. From the results of the surveys, one female and one male common and easy to pronounce name as well as one female and one male uncommon and difficult to pronounce name were paired. They were paired as such to make two pairs of boy names and two pairs of girl names. They were paired using the top two names (boys and girls) that were rated the most common and easy to pronounce and the two names that were rated most uncommon and difficult to pronounce. The names that were rated most common and easy to pronounce were Emily, Sarah, David, and John. The names that were rated most uncommon and difficult to pronounce were Yajaira, Kelia, Nikhil, and Giancarlo. We then used a Latin square design to counterbalance the order in which we were going to present the names to the child participants. Boys only received boy names to choose from and girls only received girl names to choose from. Next, permission to recruit participants from Faith Christian

School was requested and granted. The school completed an informed consent form granting us use of their facility. A note explaining the experiment and a parental consent form was sent home to the parents. The child was also asked to sign or mark a specific area on the parental consent form, which their parent had signed. The children were asked the following questions: "How old are you?" "Who would you rather play with (Name 1) or (Name 2)?" and second "Who would you rather play with?" (Name 3) and (Name 4)." "What is the name of your best friend?" A datasheet was used to record the responses. It was also recorded as to whether or not the child was Caucasian or not. Upon completion of the interview the children were given a feedback letter to take home to their parents in the same manner in which they were given the initial informed consent form. Candy was given to all of the students in the school regardless of participation.

Results

Two independent t-tests were conducted to show the names we had chosen to present to the children were statistically significantly different from each other based on how easy they were to pronounce in addition to how common and uncommon they were. For the boy names we showed statistical significance at the .0005 level, $t(2) = -42.709$, $p < .0005$. For the girl names we showed statistical significance at the .05 level, $t(2) = -3.835$, $p < .05$.

In order to show statistically significant preference in the choices of the children we interviewed, we used several chi-square analyses.

Analysis 1

A chi-square analysis was conducted on the preference of common and easy to pronounce first names over uncommon and difficult to pronounce first names for both the boys and girls. The results revealed that the differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 13.714$, $p = .001$.

Analysis 2

A chi-square analysis was conducted on the names the boys preferred. The results revealed that the differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 10.889$, $p = .001$.

Analysis 3

A chi-square analysis was conducted in on the names the girls preferred. The results revealed that the differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 4.167$, $p = .05$.

Analysis 4

A chi-square analysis was conducted on the preferences of only the Caucasian children. The results revealed that the differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 13.5$, $p = .001$.

Analysis 5

A chi-square analysis was conducted on the preferences of the children whom were not Caucasian. The observed value (2.0) was less than the critical value (3.841) at the .05 level; therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. These differences are not statistically significant.

Analysis 6

A chi-square analysis was conducted on the preferences the children had when the children themselves had names that were common and easy to pronounce. The results revealed that the differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 16.133$, $p = .001$.

Analysis 7

A chi-square analysis was conducted on the preferences the children had when the children themselves had names that were uncommon and difficult to pronounce. The observed value (.333) was less than the critical value (3.841) at the .05 level; therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. The differences are not statistically significant.

Analysis 8

A chi-square analysis was conducted on the preferences of children who's best friend has a name which is common and easy to pronounce. The results revealed that the differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 12.8$, $p = .001$.

Analysis 9

A chi square analysis was conducted on the preferences the children had when the children had a best friend whose name was uncommon and difficult to pronounce. The observed value (2.909) was less than the critical value (3.841) at the .05 level; therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. These differences were not statistically significant.

Discussion

The hypothesis of the study was that children have a bias against names that are uncommon and difficult to pronounce. Therefore, it was expected that children would choose names that were common and easy to pronounce when paired with those that are uncommon and difficult to pronounce. It was found that overall, boys and girls show a

preference for names that are common and easy to pronounce. It was also found the same when the boys and girls were viewed as individual groups. The Caucasian child participants showed a very strong preference for names that are common and easy to pronounce. Also, it was discovered a child's own first name is common and easy to pronounce or when their best friend's name is common and easy to pronounce, they show a strong preference for the same kinds of names. Those children who were not Caucasian did not show a strong preference toward either kind of name. In fact, the preference was almost equal on both sides of the spectrum. Children who had uncommon and difficult to pronounce first names and children whose friends had uncommon and difficult to pronounce names also did not show a preference toward either kind of name.

In general, the child participants showed a preference for more simple, mainstream names. All of the participants who had uncommon or difficult to pronounce names were non Caucasian. The non Caucasian participants comprised nearly half of the sample population, yet overall, the sample overwhelmingly preferred common and easy to pronounce names. Eight out of nine of the boys in the study had best friends with names that were common and easy to pronounce, and when given their choices, the boys overwhelmingly showed a preference towards names that were common and easy to pronounce. Interestingly enough, even though 9 out of the 12 girls reported having best friends with unusual names, when given their choices of names, they still showed a strong preference for names that were common and easy to pronounce.

Alternative possibilities (rather than having a bias) could include various reasons. The child may have chosen a simpler, familiar name because he or she could not pronounce one of the names in the choices given. One participant stated that they chose

the more difficult name rather than the easier one because they knew with a name that sounded similar. This may lead us to believe that the participants, who showed a preference to the more difficult names, may have only showed that preference, because despite the name being generally non mainstream, they may be more familiar with it.

If this study were to be repeated, we would suggest a larger sample size when recruiting children. Other than that, our experimental design limited extraneous variables. Our sample size for our undergraduate participants was 69, and was a nearly equal ratio of men to women (35:34). The ratio of boys to girls was almost equal. (9:12), as well as the ratio of Caucasian to non Caucasian child participants were almost equal (9:12). Girl participants were only given choices of girl names and asked by the female experimenter in order to eliminate bias against the opposite gender when choosing a name. Boy participants were only given choices of boy names and were asked by the male experimenter, also to eliminate bias against the opposite gender when choosing a name.

References

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Appendix A

List of Names

Most and least common names in the 1990's taken from

www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/1999/top1000of90s.html _

1. Michael	Ashley
2. Christopher	Jessica
3. Matthew	Emily
4. Joshua	Sarah
5. Jacob	Samantha
6. Andrew	Brittany
7. Daniel	Amanda
8 Nicholas	Elizabeth
9. Tyler	Taylor
10. Joseph	Megan
11. David	Stephanie
12. Brandon	Kayla
13. James	Lauren
14. John	Jennifer
15. Ryan	Rachel
976.Rudolph	Deana
987.Francesco	Jessi
988.Giancarlo	Jodi
989.Giovanny	Kelia
990.Harris	Kendal
991.Harvey	Kimberlee
992.Jess	Reina
993.Jovany	Yajaira
994.Koby	Alena
995.Nikhil	Brea
996.Omari	Georgina
997.Stetson	Joana
998. Storm	Meranda
999.Tristian	Mikala
1000 Abdullah	Nikole

Appendix B

Data Sheet

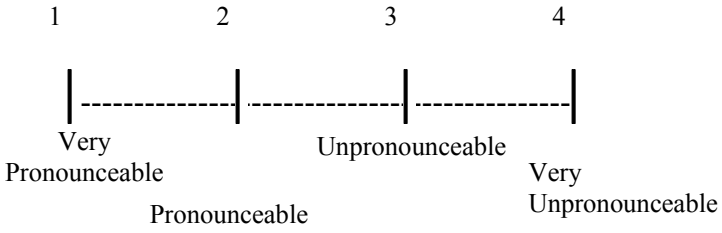
Subject Number	Sex	Age	Has Common/Easy Name?	Options/Choice One	Options/Choice Two	Best Friend Common/Easy Name?
1B	M		Yes / No	John / Giancarlo	Nikhil / David	Yes / No
2B	M		Yes / No	Nikhil / John	David / Giancarlo	Yes / No
3B	M		Yes / No	David / Nikhil	Giancarlo / David	Yes / No
4B	M		Yes / No	Giancarlo / John	John / Nikhil	Yes / No
5B	M		Yes / No	John / Nikhil	Giancarlo / John	Yes / No
6B	M		Yes / No	Giancarlo / David	David / Nikhil	Yes / No
7B	M		Yes / No	David / Giancarlo	Nikhil / John	Yes / No
8B	M		Yes / No	Nikhil / David	John / Giancarlo	Yes / No
9B	M		Yes / No	John / Giancarlo	Nikhil / David	Yes / No
10B	M		Yes / No	Nikhil / John	David / Giancarlo	Yes / No
11B	M		Yes / No	David / Nikhil	Giancarlo / David	Yes / No
12B	M		Yes / No	Giancarlo / John	John / Nikhil	Yes / No
13B	M		Yes / No	John / Nikhil	Giancarlo / John	Yes / No
14B	M		Yes / No	Giancarlo / David	David / Nikhil	Yes / No
15B	M		Yes / No	David / Giancarlo	Nikhil / John	Yes / No
16B	M		Yes / No	Nikhil / David	John / Giancarlo	Yes / No

Subject Number	Sex	Age	Has Common/Easy Name?	Options/Choice One	Options/Choice Two	Best Friend Common/Easy Name?
1G	F		Yes / No	Emily / Yajaira	Kelia / Sarah	Yes / No
2G	F		Yes / No	Kelia / Emily	Sarah / Yajaira	Yes / No
3G	F		Yes / No	Sarah / Kelia	Yajaira / Sarah	Yes / No
4G	F		Yes / No	Yajaira / Emily	Emily / Kelia	Yes / No
5G	F		Yes / No	Emily / Kelia	Yajaira / Emily	Yes / No
6G	F		Yes / No	Yajaira / Sarah	Sarah / Kelia	Yes / No
7G	F		Yes / No	Sarah / Yajaira	Kelia / Emily	Yes / No
8G	F		Yes / No	Kelia / Sarah	Emily / Yajaira	Yes / No
9G	F		Yes / No	Emily / Yajaira	Kelia / Sarah	Yes / No
10G	F		Yes / No	Kelia / Emily	Sarah / Yajaira	Yes / No
11G	F		Yes / No	Sarah / Kelia	Yajaira / Sarah	Yes / No
12G	F		Yes / No	Yajaira / Emily	Emily / Kelia	Yes / No
13G	F		Yes / No	Emily / Kelia	Yajaira / Emily	Yes / No
14G	F		Yes / No	Yajaira / Sarah	Sarah / Kelia	Yes / No
15G	F		Yes / No	Sarah / Yajaira	Kelia / Emily	Yes / No
16G	F		Yes / No	Kelia / Sarah	Emily / Yajaira	Yes / No

Appendix C

Questionnaire

Please rate each name on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being the most pronounceable and 4 being the least pronounceable.



___ Michael
___ Christopher
___ Matthew
___ Joshua
___ Jacob
___ Andrew
___ Daniel
___ Nicholas
___ Tyler
___ Joseph
___ David
___ Brandon
___ James
___ John
___ Ryan
___ Rudolph
___ Francesco
___ Giancarlo
___ Giovanny
___ Harris
___ Harvey
___ Jess
___ Jovany
___ Koby
___ Nikhil
___ Omari
___ Stetson
___ Storm
___ Tristian
___ Abdullah

___ Ashley
___ Jessica
___ Emily
___ Sarah
___ Samantha
___ Brittany
___ Amanda
___ Elizabeth
___ Taylor
___ Megan
___ Stephanie
___ Kayla
___ Lauren
___ Jennifer
___ Rachel
___ Deana
___ Jessi
___ Jodi
___ Kelia
___ Kendal
___ Kimberlee
___ Reina
___ Yajaira
___ Alena
___ Brea
___ Georgina
___ Joana
___ Meranda
___ Mikala
___ Nikole