

Effects of Social Stimulus Value on Academic Achievement and Social Competence: A Reconsideration of Children's First-Name Characteristics

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An individual's social stimulus value is a potentially important determinant of his or her behavior and development to the extent that it mediates how others behave toward him or her. One social stimulus characteristic that has received considerable attention is the commonness or desirability of an individual's first name. Unfortunately, the evidence for possible negative effects of first-name characteristics on personal functioning is equivocal due to problems of measurement, sampling, and statistical control. Two studies were conducted that avoided these methodological problems. The results consistently indicated that children's social competence and school achievement were unrelated to the frequency or desirability of their first names. Apparent effects were observed only when ethnicity was uncontrolled. The results are discussed in terms of the need to distinguish cognitive representation and behavioral regulation effects of social stimulus characteristics, and to study these characteristics using ecologically valid research designs with adequate controls.

It is widely believed that a variety of social stimulus characteristics, such as body size and facial attractiveness, influence individuals' development by triggering evaluative thoughts and stereotypic beliefs and expectations in others that affect patterns of social interaction and opportunities for social learning (Dion, 1974; Dion & Berscheid, 1974; Garwood, 1976; Harari & McDavid, 1973; Krebs & Adolfini, 1975; Lerner & Gellert, 1969; Rich, 1975). These effects on the way a person is treated may have consequences for a child's academic achievement, social development, and self-evaluations. One social stimulus characteristic that has received considerable attention is the commonness or desirability of an individual's first name. It has been well demonstrated that names that differ in frequency of occurrence or rated desirability tend to be as-

sociated with different stereotypic conceptions; in particular, negative stereotypes are typically ascribed to names low in frequency or desirability (Allen, Brown, Dickinson, & Pratt, 1941; Bruning & Husa, 1972; Bruning & Liebert, 1973; Buchanan & Bruning, 1971; Gladding & Farrar, 1982; Lawson, 1971; McDavid & Harari, 1966; Nelson 1977). These stereotypes are evidently well formed by the early school-age years (Bruning & Husa, 1972).

An impressive body of evidence suggests that individuals with unusual or undesirable names may be at risk developmentally. Garwood (1976) found that a group of sixth graders with desirable names scored significantly higher than a group with undesirable names on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and a series of measures of personality adjustment and achievement motivation. In a large sample of elementary-school-age children, Busse and Seraydarian (1978a, 1979) found significant positive correlations between name desirability and a variety of measures of cognitive development, academic achievement, and popularity, although the results were stronger for girls

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than they were for boys. McDavid and Harari (1966) also obtained a positive correlation between name desirability and popularity ratings. Savage and Wells (1948) compared men from the Harvard College classes of 1941-1944 with common names and those with "singular" names (those occurring only once in their sample of 3,320) and found that the latter group was overrepresented in the categories of "flunkouts" and psychoneurotics. In a study involving 10,000 court psychiatric clinic cases, Hartman, Nicolay, and Hurley (1968) discovered that the frequency of functional psychoses was greater in a group of subjects with unique names than it was in a group with popular names. Similarly, Ellis and Beechley (1954) reported that the incidence of emotional disturbances in a sample of 1,682 child psychiatric clinic cases was greater for children (especially boys) with "peculiar" names than it was for those with common names.

However, the evidence has not always supported the hypothesized connections between uncommon or undesirable names and deficits in cognitive, social, and personality functioning. For example, Houston and Sumner (1948) found nonsignificant differences between women with very common names and those with uncommon names in their performance on the Bernreuter Personality Inventory. Schonberg and Murphy (1974) also found no differences between women with high-frequency names and those with low-frequency names in their scores on the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule. In fact, they observed that men with common names actually scored worse than those with uncommon names on several dimensions of the EPPS. Similarly, Zweigenhaft, Hayes, and Haagen (1980) found that women with unusual names scored higher than did women with common names on 17 of 18 CPI scales (six differences were significant). In a separate study, these researchers also found no support for the notion that individuals with sexually ambiguous or misleading names would develop social or personality problems. Finally, Zweigenhaft (1977) discovered that men with unusual names were overrepresented in *Who's Who*, which again suggests the possibility that under some circumstances, the

consequences of having a unique name could be positive, at least on some criteria.

In addition to these discrepant results, there are several other considerations that cast doubt on the validity of conclusions that suggest a general causal link between name characteristics and indices of achievement and adjustment. First, there is great inconsistency in the operational definitions used for name frequency and name desirability (Zweigenhaft, 1977). In fact, name frequency scores are often assumed to represent name desirability even though the two characteristics are only moderately correlated (e.g., .67 for boys and .62 for girls in Busse & Seraydarian's, 1978b, study of 1,769 elementary-school-age children). Second, in most cases in which significant relationships have been found, the results have been based on either psychiatric populations or extreme group comparisons (e.g., Ellis & Beechley, 1954; Garwood, 1976; Hartman et al., 1968; Joubert, 1983; McDavid & Harari, 1966). Finally, and perhaps most crucial, few studies have controlled for certain "third" variables that may account for the correlations between name characteristics and indices of personal functioning. Specifically, it appears that ethnicity or some variable associated with ethnicity may have produced spurious correlations in some studies. Minority persons are more likely to have uncommon and undesirable names (within the majority culture) and also tend to be overrepresented in groups with achievement or adjustment problems (Busse & Seraydarian, 1977; Zweigenhaft, 1977). For example, Zweigenhaft (1977), in a study of 11,246 high school students, found little evidence for the hypothesized impact of name characteristics on academic achievement when the data for black students and data for white students were analyzed separately. Similarly, Busse and Seraydarian (1978a, 1979) discovered that part of the covariation they observed between name desirability and measures of academic and social competence was accounted for by ethnicity and parental education.

The purpose of the present two studies was to test the hypothesized connection between children's first-name characteristics and their academic and social functioning in a way that would be sensitive to these issues.

Specifically, separate scores for name frequency and name desirability were used and compared, both total sample and extreme group analyses were conducted, and analyses were performed that controlled for both ethnicity and sex. In addition, separate analyses were conducted for each of the grade levels represented in the academic achievement and social competence data sets. This was done because most theoretical analyses of the labeling process (e.g., Hobbs, 1975; Mercer, 1973) seem to suggest that the hypothesized impact of first-name characteristics should show a developmental increase as a result of deviation-amplifying reciprocal feedback processes.

Study 1: Children's First Names and Academic Achievement

Method

Subjects. Virtually all of the 2nd- to 11th-grade children enrolled in the public school system of a medium-sized Midwestern city provided data for this study ($N = 23,878$). Although the majority of these students were white, there were sufficient numbers of students in four minority groups to permit separate analyses by ethnicity. Demographic breakdowns for the sample are given in Table 1.

Measures and procedure. Four indices of academic

achievement were available for each child. The first three scores represented performance on the reading, math, and language subtests of the age-appropriate form of the Science Research Associates (SRA) Achievement Series Test. The fourth score was a composite of these three subtest scores and represented overall achievement in the "3 R's."

We determined the frequency of each child's name by counting the number of times that a particular name or any of its common variants occurred in the sample. Names that sounded the same were grouped together regardless of their spelling (e.g., Jane and Jayne; Jerry and Gerry). Conversely, names that sounded different were typically not grouped together even if they were similarly spelled (e.g., Katy and Kathy, Robert and Roberto), unless one was a common nickname for the other (e.g., Bob and Robert; Sheri and Sheryl). To ensure that appropriate groupings and distinctions among names had been made, two independent pairs of raters categorized all of the names. Most names were easily combined and differentiated using the criteria just described. We resolved ambiguities and disagreements in the ratings by having the second pair of raters evaluate different grouping results against these criteria. In the few cases in which this procedure failed to indicate a clear course of action (e.g., when the pronunciation of the name was uncertain or the diminutive version of the name was not clearly a nickname), potentially equivalent names were left uncombined.

We determined the desirability of each child's name by submitting the list of name groupings (721 male names and 1,030 female names) to nine adult raters who collectively were diverse with respect to age, sex, ethnicity, and occupational status. For each grouping, only the most common variant of that set of names was presented for the raters' consideration, except when a

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (Study 1)

Grade	Sex	White	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Asian	Total
2	Male	963	169	80	19	17	1,248
	Female	989	146	67	36	17	1,255
3	Male	930	139	52	24	13	1,158
	Female	915	152	71	25	19	1,182
4	Male	947	87	62	27	14	1,137
	Female	893	113	49	23	12	1,090
5	Male	852	124	62	22	5	1,065
	Female	823	117	54	20	8	1,022
6	Male	882	115	58	18	9	1,082
	Female	942	110	65	22	8	1,147
7	Male	919	116	69	17	7	1,128
	Female	869	114	54	20	7	1,064
8	Male	997	110	61	25	1	1,194
	Female	931	91	60	25	7	1,114
9	Male	1,174	99	47	12	1	1,333
	Female	1,145	113	64	11	2	1,335
10	Male	1,203	112	50	17	13	1,395
	Female	1,176	98	48	6	7	1,335
11	Male	1,067	73	67	19	10	1,236
	Female	1,212	81	46	10	9	1,358
Total		19,829	2,279	1,186	398	186	23,878

name and its nickname or nicknames were each commonly used (e.g., William and Bill; Susan and Sue or Suzy). Because it was not always clear in such cases what variant of a name a child would actually use, and because preliminary analyses indicated that ratings for names and their nicknames were fairly similar ($r = .65$), we used only the ratings given to the standard version of each name.

Ratings were made on a 7-point scale ranging from *very desirable* to *very undesirable*. We asked the raters to work quickly so that their responses would represent initial evaluative reactions rather than "intellectualized" judgments arrived at through reasoned contemplation. We computed name-desirability scores by simply obtaining the mean of the nine ratings. The correlation between name frequency and name desirability in this sample was .69.

Analyses. We performed two sets of statistical analyses to determine the degree of association between name frequency and name desirability and the four measures of academic achievement. In the first set, we computed correlations within grade levels using both the entire pool of subjects and various subgroups broken down by ethnicity, sex, or both variables. The second set of analyses involved comparisons of groups of subjects with names of very low frequency or desirability with the remainder of the sample or subsamples from which they were identified. We conducted this second set of analyses to test the hypothesis that first-name influences may be more salient when the first name is highly unusual or undesirable. Subjects whose name frequency was 1 or whose name-desirability score was less than or equal to 2.1 (where 7 = very desirable and 1 = very undesirable) were included in the extreme group. We chose the somewhat arbitrary cutoff for the name-desirability scale because it was the most stringent criterion possible that would still provide *Ns* in the extreme group large enough for us to proceed with separate comparisons for majority and minority subjects.

Results

Correlational analyses. Because the sample size for most correlations was quite large, and because a fairly large number of correlations were to be computed, we adopted a significance level of .001 for this study. Even with this relatively strict criterion, correlations as low as .07 were significant in some analyses.

Results combining all students at a given grade level indicated that, for the most part, name desirability was significantly related to academic achievement, and name frequency was not. Of the 40 relevant correlations for name frequency (10 grades \times 4 test scores), only two were significant, whereas most of the corresponding correlations for name desirability were significant (31 of 40). However, even these latter cor-

relations were not of high magnitude, as the highest was .14 and over half were less than .10. Similar analyses conducted separately for each sex showed that this pattern of results was virtually identical for boys and girls.

These correlational findings appear to provide consistent, although modest, support for the hypothesized negative impact of having an undesirable (but not an uncommon) name. However, there was no overall increase in the magnitude of these correlations with age, as one would expect from a reciprocal social learning perspective. Moreover, analyses conducted separately for each ethnic group clearly demonstrated that most of the shared variance between name desirability and academic achievement could be accounted for by the minority students' tendency to have both lower test scores and less desirable names. Of the 160 separate correlations between name desirability and academic achievement for whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans, none was significant, and only 2 of 40 were significant for the Asian group.

These results, which were very similar for all four academic achievement variables, are illustrated in Table 2, which shows the correlations between the name variables and the composite achievement score for three different groups within each grade: white students, minority students, and all students combined. The four minority groups were collapsed into one category for this table because they showed very similar patterns of results. Although none of the correlations was statistically significant, there did appear to be slightly higher positive correlations between the name variables and academic achievement for the minority groups in the sample. However, this is probably also a spurious result, attributable to the tendency for minority groups to have some individuals who are particularly far removed from the majority culture. These individuals typically have the most distinctive names as well as the lowest test scores. Also, it seems plausible that these individuals might tend to fall further and further behind over time. If so, that could account for the slight elevation in the magnitude of the correlations displayed in Table 2 for the older minority children.

Table 2

Within-Grade Correlations Between Name Frequency and Name Desirability and Overall Academic Achievement for White and Minority Students (Study 1)

Grade	Name frequency			Name desirability		
	White	Minority	Combined	White	Minority	Combined
2	-.08	-.07	-.03	.04	.04	.12*
3	-.02	-.06	.02	-.01	.00	.08*
4	-.04	.08	.02	-.01	.05	.07
5	-.04	.04	.01	.06	.03	.11*
6	-.02	.09	.04	.04	.11	.12*
7	-.08	.04	-.01	-.01	.06	.08*
8	-.05	.03	.00	.03	.06	.09*
9	-.05	.15	.01	.03	.07	.08*
10	.01	.22	.05	.05	.17	.10*
11	.00	.14	.03	.04	.13	.09*

Note. *N*s ranged from 1,468 to 2,209 for white students, from 211 to 519 for minority students, and from 1,831 to 2,512 for the combined groups.

* $p < .001$.

Extreme group analyses. Virtually the same pattern of results as that obtained with the full sample was observed when subjects with highly atypical or undesirable names were compared with other subjects. Before ethnicity was controlled for, a few of the t tests using name frequency as the independent variable and most of those involving name desirability were either significant or nearly so. However, when each ethnic group was considered separately, only two name-desirability results were significant, neither of which was in the expected direction. Table 3 illustrates these findings by showing the mean composite achievement scores for white and minority students with and without highly unusual or undesirable names.

Study 2: Children's First Names and Social Competence

The results of Study 1 clearly indicate that children's first-name characteristics are unrelated to their academic achievement, even in the most extreme cases, so long as a confound is prevented between name frequency or desirability and the child's ethnicity. However, the potential effects of social stimulus value on personal functioning may be more evident for social outcomes than it is for nonsocial ones. Therefore, in Study 2 we explored the possibility of a relationship between children's first-name

characteristics and the children's competence in handling challenging social situations, as judged by peers, teachers, and the children themselves.

Method

Subjects. The subjects for this study were 9th- and 12th-grade students from two separate suburban Midwestern high schools. School 1, located in an older, middle-class suburb, provided 119 male and 126 female subjects, and School 2, located in a rapidly growing upper-middle-class suburb, provided 260 male and 219 female subjects. Although the ethnic group membership of individual students was not recorded, the sample as a whole was approximately 96% white and only 4% nonwhite.

Measures and procedures. Although the primary purpose of this study was to collect measures of subjects' social competence, two measures of academic competence were available from school records. These measures were grade point average and a standardized test score representing overall academic aptitude (in School 1, where the Differential Aptitude Test was used) or achievement (in School 2, where the SRA Achievement Series Tests were used). The primary social competence measure was the Social Competence Nomination Form (SCNF; Ford, 1982). The SCNF was used to obtain self-ratings, teacher ratings, and peer nominations of social competence in six specific hypothetical social situations requiring self-assertive skills, integrative skills, or both. In addition, students were asked to rate themselves on their ability to accomplish five general social goals (e.g., having a lot of close friends, getting along with parents). The students were also asked to complete Hogan's Empathy Scale, a 39-item questionnaire that has proven successful in differentiating people considered to be empathic from those considered to be nonempathic (Hogan, 1969).

We obtained name-frequency and name-desirability

Table 3
Mean Overall Academic Achievement Scores for White and Minority Students With and Without Highly Unusual or Undesirable Names (Study 1)

Grade	White			Minority			Combined			White			Minority			Combined		
	Unusual names	All others		Unusual names	All others		Unusual names	All others		Undesirable names	All others		Undesirable names	All others		Undesirable names	All others	
2	2.13	2.17		1.76	1.69		1.94	2.07		1.91	2.17		1.74	1.69		1.80	2.07*	
3	3.76	3.31*		2.67	2.61		3.11	3.17		3.68	3.32		2.50	2.63		2.77	3.18*	
4	4.59	4.26		3.59	3.55		4.06	4.15		4.88	4.26		3.72	3.53		4.03	4.15	
5	4.98	5.14		4.23	4.29		4.57	4.98		4.59	5.14		4.32	4.28		4.38	4.98	
6	6.11	6.18		4.93	4.99		5.51	5.98		5.60	6.19		5.05	4.98		5.30	5.98	
7	6.93	6.94		5.36	5.50		6.07	6.70		6.88	6.94		5.24	5.51		5.71	6.71*	
8	7.71	7.57		5.88	5.98		6.91	7.33		8.21	7.57		5.58	6.01		6.32	7.33*	
9	8.89	8.46		6.75	6.78		8.01	8.27		9.17	8.47		6.64	6.78		7.84	8.27	
10 ^a	13.19	12.59		9.10	9.97		11.33	12.35		12.05	12.61		10.35	9.78		11.05	12.35	
11	15.37	15.09		9.25	11.20		12.88	14.74		12.44	15.13		9.41	11.16		10.68	14.77*	

Note. Table entries are grade-equivalent scores.

^a The large increase in the size of the mean grade-equivalent scores between 9th grade and 10th grade is the result of a discontinuity in the type of Science Research Associates Achievement Series Tests used for students above and below the 10th-grade level.

* $p < .01$.

scores by referring to the results of Study 1, which involved subjects from essentially the same cohort and geographical area. A few students in Study 2 had names that did not appear in Study 1; these subjects were excluded from both the name-frequency and name-desirability analyses.

Analyses. As we did in Study 1, we computed correlations between name frequency and name desirability and social and academic competence for boys and girls within each grade and for the two sexes combined. It was not possible to compute correlations broken down by ethnicity because information about individuals' ethnic group membership was not available. However, because there was an extremely small number of minority students in either school, we assumed that the "third variable" problem observed in Study 1 would be minimized in this study. Because the number of subjects in these schools who met the criteria used in Study 1 for defining highly unusual and undesirable names was too small for us to make reliable comparisons, we did not conduct extreme group analyses for this study.

Results

We adopted a significance level of .01 for this study because the number of correlations to be computed was somewhat smaller than that for Study 1. Results for boys and girls were very similar; consequently, the correlations reported in Table 4 are broken down only by grade and school.

Overall, there was little evidence in either data set for the hypothesized impact of name characteristics on either social competence or academic competence. Only 4 of the 56 relevant correlations were significant, and none of them were significant in the ex-

pected direction. In general, correlations were as likely to be negative as positive, and no consistent age trends emerged.

General Discussion

The results of these studies clearly fail to support the hypothesis that unusual or undesirable names are generally or systematically associated with deficits in academic or social functioning. Nonsignificant results were repeatedly obtained regardless of the child's age, sex, or ethnicity. When significant correlations between name characteristics and achievement or competence were obtained, it appeared that a third variable, namely, ethnicity or some attribute correlated with ethnicity, could easily account for most of the shared variance. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of these data is the absence of developmental or cohort differences over a full 10-year period. This is a strong indication of the robustness of the null result—it is neither restricted to a particular type of sample nor restricted to a specific point in time. Moreover, it is generalizable to aspects of both cognitive and social functioning. In sum, it appears to be a result in which one can have an unusual degree of confidence.

These findings help clarify the discrepant results of previous research on first-name characteristics. Studies that have reported significant positive relationships between

Table 4
Within-Grade Correlations Between Name Frequency and Name Desirability and Seven Measures of Social and Academic Competence in Two Schools (Study 2)

Competence measure	Name frequency				Name desirability			
	School 1		School 2		School 1		School 2	
	9th grade	12th grade	9th grade	12th grade	9th grade	12th grade	9th grade	12th grade
SCNF ^a								
Average self-rating	-.10	.05	.03	-.14	-.08	.08	-.08	.00
Average teacher rating	-.25*	-.08	-.09	-.19*	-.06	.19	-.05	-.06
Total peer nominations	-.12	.05	-.04	-.09	.06	.13	.12	.05
Social goal attainment capabilities	.06	.16	.06	.00	.01	-.01	.12	.04
Empathy	-.04	.02	-.02	-.13	-.06	.04	.04	-.10
Grade point average	-.02	-.12	-.15	-.17	.08	.04	-.17	-.18
Composite ability/achievement score	-.05	-.10	-.25*	-.06	.01	.05	-.21*	-.09

^a Social Competence Nomination Form.

* $p < .01$.

name characteristics and indices of personal functioning have typically focused on name desirability and have not controlled for the ethnic status of the child (e.g., Garwood, 1976; Hartman et al., 1968; McDavid & Harari, 1966; Savage & Wells, 1948). In contrast, studies that have failed to find consistent or reliable positive correlations between name characteristics and indices of personal effectiveness have typically used name-frequency scores or have tried to control for the child's ethnic characteristics (e.g., Houston & Sumner, 1948; Schonberg & Murphy, 1974; Zweigenhaft, 1977; Zweigenhaft et al., 1980). The only apparent exception to these generalizations is the work of Busse and Seraydarian (1978a, 1979), in which for girls, small but significant relationships were found between name desirability and various indices of academic and social competence even after ethnicity was controlled for. However, in the Busse and Seraydarian studies, ethnicity was defined by nationality (e.g., German, Irish, Italian) rather than by minority-group status, except for an Afro-American group, which was identified by unspecified "physical characteristics" obtained from an unspecified data source. Thus, although the hypothesized negative impact of having an unusual or undesirable first name has been accepted as common wisdom by many teachers, parents, and researchers (e.g., Albott & Bruning, 1970; Carlson, 1981; Garwood, 1976; Lobenz, 1982; Marcus, 1976), the more appropriate conclusion is that one simply cannot make accurate predictions about academic or social competence (or at least those aspects of competence addressed here) on the basis of an individual's first name.

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that first-name characteristics cannot be influential in some individuals' cognitive and social development. For example, an undesirable name might create problems for one individual but be "character building" for another. An unusual name might cause one person to feel unique and another to feel defective. Nevertheless, it seems likely that these kinds of idiosyncratic effects are the exception rather than the rule, because otherwise, there would have to be a rather implausible canceling out of significant but opposing effects. Thus, the consequences

of having a particular name are probably weak or transitory compared with other effects, so that for most individuals, name characteristics do not play an enduring role in academic and social success. At the very least, future research investigating these issues should be designed in a way that is more sensitive to the idiosyncratic organization of individual's psychological characteristics and social interactions (Mischel, 1973), because there is little evidence for normative influences of name frequency and name desirability.

The apparent arbitrariness of first-name labels stands in sharp contrast to the demonstrated impact of other kinds of labels, such as sex-role labels (e.g., Masters, Ford, Arend, Grotevant, & Clark, 1979), family status labels (Masters, Carlson, Felleman, & Peterman, 1983), social class labels (Masters, Carlson, & Baum, 1983), and diagnostic or psychiatric labels (Hobbs, 1975; Mercer, 1973). Perhaps the primary reason that first-name labels apparently do not have the strong or consistent effects of these other types of labels is that first names typically function only as identifiers rather than as guides to behavior. That is, social-stimulus characteristics can serve two functions: (a) providing information that helps one cognitively represent the person in a meaningful way and (b) providing information that helps one decide how to behave with that person (Ford, 1984). The literature suggests that social-stimulus characteristics are likely to affect behavior only if they serve the latter function (i.e., a behavioral regulation function; Ford, 1984). This explains why beliefs, attitudes, and attributions are often only weakly tied to behavior—in many cases, their primary function is simply to enhance informational input rather than to shape behavioral output. Whereas labels denoting sex, ethnicity, social class, and diagnostic status are likely to evoke expectancies about the labeled individual that help one determine whether and how to interact with that person, first-name labels are not. Despite their salience and utility as social identifiers, first-name labels are commonly associated only with global evaluative responses rather than particular patterns of behavior or social interaction considered to be appropriate or typical for individuals with that label (e.g.,

Buchanan & Bruning, 1971). In other words, the effects of a social stimulus are likely to remain within the cognitive realm in some instances, namely, those in which the informational value of the stimulus is limited to personal description and not behavioral prescription. On the other hand, when the acquired meaning of a social stimulus (Mischel, 1973) includes both the descriptive and prescriptive components, one can expect effects to be both private (cognitive-evaluative) and public (social-behavioral). In such instances, the consequences of social labeling are likely to be relatively strong and enduring. They may still be somewhat idiosyncratic, however, because the impact of the label will depend greatly on how the individual responds to the social behaviors evoked by his or her stimulus characteristics.

The present results indicating the overall insignificance of first-name characteristics as influences on a person's development raise the possibility that some other social-stimulus characteristics commonly believed to be important in this regard may actually be relatively unimportant. Although the salience of some characteristics (e.g., skin color) is hard to doubt, the role of others merits further investigation, especially in terms of how they actually influence children as they behave and develop in natural contexts. For example, most of the research on physical attractiveness has focused on stereotypic responses to unknown others who can only be judged by their pictures or by descriptions of their superficial physical features. In contrast, very little research has examined the actual long-term developmental success of individuals varying in physical attractiveness. The present finding that at least some commonly held stereotypes about names are not typically translated into actual behavioral outcomes suggests the possibility that too much emphasis has been placed on the study of cognitive-evaluative responses to superficial aspects of a person under artificial laboratory conditions. Clearly, more consideration needs to be given to the study of social-behavioral responses to more fundamental characteristics of individuals as manifested in their natural surroundings. Only research fitting this latter description can help re-

searchers and practitioners determine when a social stimulus characteristic is likely to have an effect on truly significant aspects of an individual's functioning and development. With regard to first-name characteristics, perhaps it is time for researchers to redirect their attention to what these characteristics might reveal about parents rather than to continue to persist in the belief that these characteristics play an important role in children's cognitive and social development.

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