

# Psychological Factors Affecting Preferences for First Names\*

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Anecdotal and anthropological evidence suggests that personal names are of considerable psychological significance, but they have not received much attention from psychologists. The relationship between the familiarity of first names and the degree to which they are liked is of particular interest from the point of view of research in related areas of experimental aesthetics. Evidence from investigations carried out in England and Australia suggests that there is a strong tendency for first names to be liked in direct proportion to their familiarity: in general, the most familiar names tend to be best liked and the least familiar names to be most strongly disliked. These findings are discussed in relation to previous research into familiarity and liking for letters of the alphabet and words, and a hypothesis is developed which may account for the cyclical vogues in first names and certain other cultural objects.

**I**N SPITE OF THEIR importance in everyday life, personal names have been largely neglected as objects of investigation by psychologists.<sup>1</sup> This neglect is difficult to account for, but it may be partly due to the fact that we tend in our culture to take personal names for granted. There are other cultures in which the social significance of names as tokens for representing human beings is more evident. The powerful effects which names can have on behavior are vividly illustrated for example among the Ashanti people of West Africa. At birth, every Ashanti child receives a name corresponding to the day of the week on which he or she was born. There is widespread consensus among the Ashanti that Monday boys are quiet and well-behaved, while Wednes-

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<sup>1</sup>Albott, W. L., & Bruning, J. L. "Given names: A neglected social variable." *Psychological Record* 20, 1970, 527-533; Morgan, J., O'Neill, C., & Harré, R. *Nicknames: Their origins and social consequences*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

day boys are supposed to be quick-tempered and aggressive. A study by Jahoda<sup>2</sup> showed that the proportion of Monday boys who were delinquent was indeed significantly smaller than chance, and that Wednesday boys were more frequently guilty of offences against the person than others. These findings suggest a tendency for Ashanti boys to "live up to their names".

Another striking example of the psychological importance of names is found among the Pondo tribesmen of Southern Africa. The patriarchal structure of the Pondo kinship system is reflected in a set of taboos governing name avoidance by married women. A Pondo bride is forbidden to utter the names of her husband's elder brothers, her father-in-law and his brothers, or her husband's paternal grandfather, whether they are living or dead. She is not even permitted in day-to-day speech to use words whose principal syllable rhymes with any of these names. She is also forbidden to use the personal names of her husband's mother, paternal aunts, and elder sisters, but she need not avoid words which rhyme with them.<sup>3</sup>

Taboos related to name avoidance are part of Western industrial culture as well—status factors often prescribe whether or not we may call people by their first names, for example—but on the whole the social significance of personal names is not as strikingly reflected in our culture as it is in many others. Such evidence as there is, however, suggests that even in our own culture a great deal of psychological significance may attach to personal names. The psychological significance of first names is, for example, evident in the strongly held likes and dislikes found in this area.

An individual's aesthetic reactions to particular names are no doubt influenced by numerous aspects of his or her personal experience in relation to real or fictional people bearing these names, but reasons exist for believing that there are also more general principles involved in the determination of aesthetic preferences in this area. One clue is given by the distribution of first names at a given historical time: in any one year 125 different girls' names and 100 boys' names would easily account for 80 per cent of the children named in the United States, Canada, Australia, or England.<sup>4</sup> A second indication of the non-randomness of people's aesthetic reactions in this matter is the way in

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<sup>2</sup>Jahoda, G. "A note on Ashanti names and their relationship to personality." *British Journal of Psychology* 45, 1954, 192-195.

<sup>3</sup>Hunter, M. *Reaction to conquest*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup>Dunkling, L. A. *First names first*. (London: Dent, 1977), p. 17.

which some first names go through well-demarcated cyclical vogues.<sup>5</sup> The girl's name, *Susan*, will serve as a typical example. This name occurred 63 times per 10,000 girls' names in the *Index of Births for England and Wales* in 1850. In 1875, it occurred 15 times per 10,000. In 1900 the frequency was 19; by 1925 it had dropped to 8. The name then then gained rapidly in popularity, and by 1950 the frequency was 654, but a gradual decline set in once again: the frequencies for the years 1960, 1970, and 1975 were 446, 102, and 86 respectively.<sup>6</sup>

One important factor which may be implicated in the determination of people's aesthetic reactions to first names, and one which may incidentally help to account for the apparently cyclical manner in which they often come into and go out of fashion, is the familiarity of the name. It may be the case, for example, that (other things being equal) people tend to like names in direct proportion to their familiarity with them. Such a suggestion does not imply that idiosyncratic factors are not of very great importance in explaining a given individual's preference for certain names; but it leads to the prediction that if a sufficiently large group of individual preferences are averaged, a positive relationship will be found between familiarity and liking. The hypothesis that a positive function exists between familiarity and liking for widely differing classes of stimuli has received a great deal of empirical support from various investigators<sup>7</sup> ever since Zajonc<sup>8</sup> suggested that "mere exposure" is sufficient to increase an individual's liking for a stimulus.

It cannot be taken for granted, however, that a simple Zajonc-type "mere exposure" effect necessarily holds in the case of first names. In the first place, such a hypothesis suffers from the defect that it cannot sufficiently account for the cyclical vogues in names which have been mentioned above. Well-liked first names tend to become more familiar because they are frequently chosen by parents; the "mere exposure" hypothesis fails to explain how this increased familiarity is often associated with a decline in popularity. A different hypothesis regarding the familiarity-liking relationship for names could go a long way towards explaining these phenomena, as will be shown, but the

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<sup>5</sup>Seeman, M. V. "Psycho-cultural aspects of naming children." *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal* 17, 1972, 149-151.

<sup>6</sup>Dunkling, p. 192.

<sup>7</sup>Harrison, A. A. "Mere exposure." In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

<sup>8</sup>Zajonc, R. B. "Attitudinal effects of mere exposure." *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 9, *Monogr. Suppl.* 2, Pt. 2, 1968, 1-21.

question is ultimately an empirical one; and if the evidence turns out to support the hypothesis that familiarity always increases liking, the problems of cyclical fashions and the decline in popularity of certain very familiar names will simply remain to be explained in some other way. Secondly, there is now some persuasive empirical evidence for an inverted-U relationship between familiarity and liking for such things as letters of the alphabet and words.<sup>9</sup> In these cases, increased familiarity leads to increased liking only up to a point, beyond which further increases in familiarity are associated with a decline in liking: a graph showing the relationship between the two variables resembles an inverted U. The evidence suggests that one of the key factors may be the *range* of the novelty-familiarity continuum which is sampled: when a very wide range, from complete novelty to extremely high levels of familiarity is embraced, an inverted-U function seems to emerge. It may be that a sample of first names, properly chosen, may span the novelty-familiarity continuum sufficiently widely to replicate the above results. This would imply that when names are either very unfamiliar or very familiar they are not generally liked very much, but at some intermediate level of familiarity they achieve peak popularity.

Some names are bound, of course, to come into vogue or to fall more or less completely out of vogue for what may broadly be called cultural reasons unrelated to the processes described above. The name *Glenn*, for example, reached unprecedented heights of popularity in the United States following John Glenn's widely publicized space flight in 1962, and the name *Adolf*, once very popular in Germany, has virtually disappeared since the Second World War (*infra* n. 5), while the variants of *Mary* are perennially fashionable in Christian (especially Catholic) countries, and so on. Despite such "accidental" cultural factors, it may be possible to explain a large portion of the variance in people's preferences for names by means of an inverted-U familiarity-liking function. It is, in any event, of some considerable interest to discover in what way familiarity is functionally related to first name preferences, if it is related at all.

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<sup>9</sup>Colman, A. M., Walley, M., & Sluckin, W. "Preferences for common words, uncommon words and non-words by children and young adults." *British Journal of Psychology* 66, 1975, 481-486; Sluckin, W., Colman, A. M., & Hargreaves, D. J. "Liking words as a function of the experienced frequency of their occurrence." *British Journal of Psychology* 71, 1980, 163-169; Sluckin, W., Miller, L. B., & Franklin, H. "The influence of stimulus familiarity/novelty on children's expressed preferences." *British Journal of Psychology* 64, 1973, 563-567.

<sup>10</sup>Arthaud, R. L., Hohnneck, A. N., Ramsey, C. H., & Pratt, K. G. "The relation of family name preferences to their frequency in the culture." *Journal of Social Psychology* 28, 1948, 19-37.

A handful of empirical studies have centered on factors influencing preferences for names. Arthaud, Hohneck, Ramsey, and Pratt<sup>10</sup> questioned 201 American university students about their personal satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their own surnames. Subjects whose surnames were either extremely uncommon or extremely common in terms of objective frequency in the population turned out to be least satisfied, while those with surnames of intermediate frequency were most satisfied. More recently Lawson,<sup>11</sup> Buchanan & Bruning,<sup>12</sup> Bruning & Husa,<sup>13</sup> and Bruning & Albott<sup>14</sup> reported experimental evidence which shows that first names in the United States tend to be stereotyped. In one of Bruning & Albott's experiments, for example, a speaker was introduced to a group of students as either *Adam Williams* or *Myron Williams*. After he had delivered a short talk, the speaker was rated by the students on a number of semantic differential scales. *Adam Williams* was consistently rated as more active, masculine, dominating, competitive, cold, and responsible than *Myron Williams*. The studies in this area have revealed that stereotypes exist for both male and female first names, but the evidence points to more powerful stereotypes, as evidenced by greater agreement among raters, for male first names than for female first names. This may be partly due to the influence of the mass media: the names of well-known public figures, the majority of whom are men, may tend to become stereotyped according to the perceived characteristics of their possessors.

Although it centered on people's own surnames rather than their own or other people's first names, Arthaud *et al.*'s (*infra* n. 10) study suggests that there may be a curvilinear relationship between familiarity and liking, with names of intermediate familiarity being best liked. The evidence is however indirect since familiarity was not systematically varied in this study: people with rare and common surnames may differ in other ways from people with surnames of intermediate

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<sup>11</sup>Lawson, E. D. "Semantic differential analysis of men's first names." *Journal of Psychology* 78, 1971, 229-240; "Men's first names, nicknames, and short names: A semantic differential analysis." *Names*, 21(1), 1973, 22-27; "Women's first names: A semantic differential analysis." *Names* 22, 1974, 52-58.

<sup>12</sup>Buchanan, B. A., & Bruning, J. L. "Connotative meanings of first names and nicknames on three dimensions." *Journal of Social Psychology* 85, 1971, 143-144.

<sup>13</sup>Bruning, J. L., & Husa, F. T. "Given names and stereotyping." *Developmental Psychology*, 7, 1972, 91.

<sup>14</sup>Bruning, J. L., & Albott, W. "Funny, you don't look Cecil." *Human Behavior*, 1974, reprinted in D. Krebs (Ed.), *Readings in social psychology: Contemporary perspectives*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

frequency. The studies of Lawson (*infra* n. 11) and Bruning & Albott (*infra* n. 14) suggest that whatever the nature of the familiarity-liking relationship for first names, it may be more pronounced for male names than for female names. The evidence for this hypothesis is also indirect since these studies were not concerned directly with examining the effects of familiarity on liking. The two experiments reported below were designed to provide some direct evidence on the relationship between familiarity and liking for first names. These experiments set out to discover whether this underlying relationship was of the same type in two different cultural settings, namely England and Australia, even if the actual names were not equally familiar or equally popular in the two countries.

### EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

A direct investigation of the relationship between familiarity and liking for first names in England and Australia was carried out by Colman, Hargreaves, & Sluckin.<sup>15</sup> Technical details regarding the experimental design, the procedure, and the statistical treatment of the results are contained in the original research report. The present account centers on qualitative aspects of the findings and theoretical problems which they raise, and includes detailed information about specific names.

The essential features of the investigation were as follows. Samples of 100 male names and 100 female names were selected from the *Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*<sup>16</sup> by a quasi-random procedure. The dictionary was divided into 100 sections of equal length, and in each section the first male or female name encountered was selected. The most common form of each name was chosen. The final list of 100 male names, from *Abraham* to *William*, included such uncommon items as *Balthasar* and *Fulbert*. The female names, from *Adeline* to *Zoe*, included rare names like *Etheldred* and *Griselda*. A sample of 80 subjects in England, all students and staff at the

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<sup>15</sup>Colman, A. M., Hargreaves, D. J., & Sluckin, W. "Preferences for Christian names as a function of their experienced familiarity." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 20, 1981, 3-5.

<sup>16</sup>Withycombe, E. G. *The Oxford dictionary of English Christian names*. (3rd ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

University of Leicester and at local adult education classes, and 80 students and staff at the University of Melbourne, Australia, served as subjects. There were equal numbers of men and women in both samples. Each subject rated each of either the male or female names on a five-point scale, either from “very uncommon names in my experience” to “very common names in my experience”, or from “names I dislike” to “names I like”.

*Results: English Sample*

Each subject’s ratings of familiarity and favorability were scored from 0 to 4, with “very uncommon” and “dislike” corresponding to a score of 0 and “very common” and “like” scoring 4. The mean or average of the familiarity ratings of the male names was found to be 1.86 (S.D. = 1.09), and the mean of the favorability ratings for male names was 1.76 (S.D. = .76). For female names, the mean of the familiarity ratings was 1.66 (S.D. = 1.07) and the mean of the favorability ratings was 1.70 (S.D. = .74).

The five male names which received the highest familiarity ratings and the five which were rated as most unfamiliar are given in Table 1 together with their respective mean favorability ratings. The most liked and the least liked male names are given in Table 2 together with their respective mean familiarity ratings. Table 3 lists the most and least familiar female names and their mean favorability ratings, and Table 4 gives the most and least liked female names and their mean familiarity ratings.

*Table 1. Male Names: Most Familiar and Least Familiar Names in England and their Favorability Ratings.*

Name	<i>Most Familiar Names</i>		Name	<i>Least Familiar Names</i>	
	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Fav. $\bar{X}$		Fam. $\bar{X}$	Fav. $\bar{X}$
John	3.75	2.95	Constantine	0.15	0.95
David	3.70	3.35	Balthasar	0.25	0.50
Peter	3.70	3.40	Fulbert	0.25	0.55
Richard	3.70	3.35	Gawain	0.25	0.95
Stephen	3.60	2.85	Lambert	2.25	0.65

**Table 2. Male Names: Most Liked and Least Liked Names in England and their Familiarity Ratings.**

<i>Most Liked Names</i>			<i>Least Liked Names</i>		
Name	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Name	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Fam. $\bar{X}$
David	3.50	3.70	Oswald	0.45	0.70
Peter	3.40	3.70	Balthasar	0.50	0.25
Richard	3.35	3.70	Clarence	0.55	1.00
Andrew	3.25	3.50	Fulbert	0.55	0.25
Graham <sup>a</sup>	2.95	3.20	Eustace <sup>b</sup>	0.60	0.50

<sup>a</sup>John and Matthew tied with Graham (Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 2.95); their Fam.  $\bar{X}$  values were 3.75 and 2.75 respectively.

<sup>b</sup>Horace tied with Eustace (Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.60, Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.90). In this and subsequent tables, whenever a tie for fifth place occurred, the names were chosen alphabetically for inclusion in the table.

**Table 3. Female Names: Most Familiar and Least Familiar Names in England and their Favorability Ratings.**

<i>Most Familiar Names</i>			<i>Least Familiar Names</i>		
Name	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Name	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Fav. $\bar{X}$
Anne	3.80	2.90	Etheldred	0.05	0.35
Jane	3.75	2.80	Anastasia	0.10	1.55
Caroline	3.55	2.60	Griselda	0.10	0.35
Linda	3.50	2.40	Petronella	0.10	1.05
Mary	3.50	2.30	Imogen	0.15	1.45

**Table 4. Female Names: Most Liked and Least Liked Names in England and their Familiarity Ratings.**

<i>Most Liked Names</i>			<i>Least Liked Names</i>		
Name	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Name	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Fam. $\bar{X}$
Clare	3.30	3.45	Hilda	0.25	1.45
Elizabeth	3.10	3.40	Ethel	0.30	1.00
Sarah	3.05	3.30	Gertrude	0.30	0.60
Anne	2.90	3.80	Etheldred	0.35	0.05
Alison	2.80	3.20	Eunice <sup>a</sup>	0.35	0.50

<sup>a</sup>Griselda (Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.35, Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.10).

An examination of Tables 1 to 4 reveals a close relationship between familiarity and favorability for these selected names. In general, the most familiar names received high favorability ratings and the most



unfamiliar names were disliked. The converse also seems to be true: on the whole the most liked names were rated high in familiarity and the least liked names tended to be rather unfamiliar. This pattern is remarkably consistent: no examples are to be found of extremely well-liked or extremely familiar male or female names which received an average or lower than average mean rating on the other variable, nor are there any cases of extremely unfamiliar or strongly disliked names which received an average or above average mean rating on the other variable. Statistical analysis (*infra* n. 15) confirmed that for both male and female names the correlations are strongly positive, with a tendency for names to be liked in direct proportion to their familiarity.

*Results: Australian Sample*

The mean familiarity rating of the male names was found to be 1.61 (S.D. = 1.09), and the mean favorability rating was 1.80 (S.D. = .73). For the female names, roughly similar figures were obtained: the mean familiarity rating was 1.60 (S.D. = .97) and the mean favorability rating was 1.76 (S.D. = .61).

The five male names which received the highest familiarity ratings, and the five which were rated as most unfamiliar, are given in Table 5, together with their respective favorability ratings. The five most liked, and the five least liked male names are given in Table 6, together with their respective familiarity ratings. Table 7 lists the five most and the five least familiar female names with their respective favorability ratings, and Table 8 gives the five most liked and the five least liked female names with their respective familiarity ratings.

*Table 5. Male Names: Most Familiar and Least Familiar Names in Australia and their Favorability Ratings.*

<i>Most Familiar Names</i>			<i>Least Familiar Names</i>		
Name	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Name	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Fav. $\bar{X}$
John	3.85	2.95	Balthasar	0.10	1.55
Peter	3.85	3.05	Barnabas	0.10	1.65
David	3.55	3.15	Eustace	0.10	1.20
Stephen	3.55	2.90	Fulbert	0.10	0.70
James	3.45	2.50	Cedric <sup>a</sup>	0.20	0.40

<sup>a</sup>Clement and Lambert tied with Cedric (Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.20); their Fav.  $\bar{X}$  values were 1.25 and 0.75 respectively.

**Table 6. Male Names: Most Liked and Least Liked Names in Australia and their Familiarity Ratings.**

<i>Most Liked Names</i>			<i>Least Liked Names</i>		
Name	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Name	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Fam. $\bar{X}$
David	3.15	3.55	Cedric	0.40	0.20
Andrew	3.10	3.55	Horace	0.45	0.30
Adrian	3.05	1.75	Archibald	0.50	0.65
Peter	3.05	3.85	Cyril	0.55	0.75
Alexander <sup>a</sup>	3.00	1.80	Cecil <sup>b</sup>	0.70	0.80

<sup>a</sup>Daniel (Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 3.00, Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 2.00).<sup>b</sup>Fulbert (Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.70, Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.10).**Table 7. Female Names: Most Familiar and Least Familiar Names in Australia and their Favorability Ratings.**

<i>Most Familiar Names</i>			<i>Least Familiar Names</i>		
Name	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Name	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Fav. $\bar{X}$
Anne	3.75	2.80	Etheldred	0.10	0.60
Jane	3.60	2.45	Imogen	0.10	1.70
Mary	3.60	2.05	Griselda	0.20	0.90
Elizabeth	3.50	2.45	Anastasia <sup>a</sup>	0.30	2.25
Helen	3.45	2.50	Arabella <sup>b</sup>	0.30	1.55

<sup>a</sup>Petronella (Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.30, Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 2.15), Zoe (Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 0.30, Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 1.55).**Table 8. Female Names: Most Liked and Least Liked Names in Australia and their Familiarity Ratings.**

<i>Most Liked Names</i>			<i>Least Liked Names</i>		
Name	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Fam. $\bar{X}$	Name	Fav. $\bar{X}$	Fam. $\bar{X}$
Sarah	2.90	2.40	Mildred	0.40	0.45
Anne	2.80	3.75	Gertrude	0.50	0.55
Melanie	2.75	1.45	Ethel	0.55	1.05
Camilla	2.60	0.50	Etheldred	0.60	0.10
Angela <sup>a</sup>	2.55	2.05	Eunice	0.65	0.45

<sup>a</sup>Caroline (Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 2.55, Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 3.05), Madeline (Fav.  $\bar{X}$  = 2.55, Fam.  $\bar{X}$  = 1.10).

From a perusal of Tables 5–8 it appears that, just as in the English sample, there is a strong relationship between familiarity and liking. On the whole, the most familiar names received high favorability ratings and the most unfamiliar names scored low on favorability. The converse also seems to be true: on the whole, the most liked names tended to be rather high on familiarity, while those which were strongly disliked tended also to be rather unfamiliar.

In the case of male names, the pattern is entirely consistent: no examples are to be found of an extremely well-liked or an extremely familiar name which received an average or lower than average mean rating on the other variable, nor are there any cases in which an extremely familiar or a strongly disliked name received an average or an above average mean rating on the other variable. Among female names the overall pattern is the same, but there are three exceptions which are worth noting. In Table 7 it can be seen that *Anastasia*, which was the fourth most unfamiliar name, received a favorability rating (2.25) which was considerably above the mean (1.76), and in Table 8 we find that *Melanie* and *Camilla*, ranked third and fourth in favorability, were below average in familiarity (1.45 and .50 respectively), compared with a mean of 1.60. Once again, statistical analysis (*infra* n. 15) confirmed the strong positive correlations for both male and female names: the more familiar the name, the more it tends to be liked and vice versa.

## DISCUSSION

The familiarity ratings given to the names by the subjects in these experiments correspond roughly with what is known about the objective prevalence of first names among the subjects' contemporaries in English and Australian culture. The five male names rated as most familiar by the English subjects, for example, all appear in the *Index of Births and Deaths for England and Wales*<sup>17</sup> among the 20 names most frequently given to newborn boys in 1950, and the five most unfamiliar male names were all chosen very infrequently between 1900 and the present. The five most familiar female names, with the exception of *Caroline*, were all in the top 30 names given to new-born girls in 1950, and the least familiar female names were all chosen extremely rarely by parents since the turn of the century (*Caroline* was chosen rarely in 1950 but became somewhat more common in 1960). There is therefore

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<sup>17</sup>Reprinted in Dunkling, pp. 186-195.

some indirect evidence that the English subjects' ratings of familiarity bear a consistent relationship to the objective frequency of names in their day-to-day experience.

A similar correspondence was found between familiarity ratings and the objective prevalence of names in contemporary Australia. For example, *John, Peter, Stephen, and James* were rated as the most familiar male names (in that order). A frequency count of birth announcements in the *Melbourne Sun* in 1950,<sup>18</sup> which provides an estimate of the frequency with which various names were bestowed on new-born boys at the time, reveals that the six most frequently selected boys' names (in order) were *John, Peter, Michael, David, Robert, and Stephen*. Bearing in mind that *Robert* and *Stephen* were not included in the sample of names used in this experiment, it is clear that a high degree of correspondence exists between the subjective familiarity ratings of the subjects and the frequency with which names were chosen for new-born boys in Melbourne about a generation ago. The male names rated as least familiar by the Australian subjects are all of low prevalence in the Australian population. Similarly, the female names rated as most familiar in this experiment were among the most frequently chosen girls' names by Australian parents in 1950, and those which were rated as least familiar were all of objectively low prevalence.

It is not possible to provide any objective check of the favorability ratings, of course, but it worth making a few comments about them. Most of the extremely well-liked male names given in Table 2 have been increasing in objective prevalence for at least the last 30 years according to the *Index of Births and Deaths for England & Wales* (*infra* n. 17). The only exception is *Graham* which has been declining steadily over this period. Similarly, most of the best-liked female names given in Table 4 have increased in objective prevalence over the past three decades. *Elizabeth*, however, has been steadily declining in frequency for about 150 years, and *Alison* rose sharply in frequency between 1950 and 1970 but now seems to be declining slightly. The general pattern seems to be for the most well-liked male and female names to be ones which are being chosen increasingly frequently by parents. This is in line with commonsense expectations and provides informal evidence for the construct validity of the subjects' favorability ratings.

A comparison of the most frequently chosen names by Australian

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<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Dunkling, p. 213.

parents in 1950 with a similar frequency count for 1975, again using announcements in the Melbourne *Sun* as an estimator,<sup>19</sup> reveals that the three most strongly liked male names in the present experiment (*David*, *Andrew*, and *Adrian*) are all ranked higher in the 1975 list than in the 1950 list. This suggests that these names have become increasingly popular in recent years; this is particularly striking in the case of *Adrian*. Of the three most favorably rated female names, two (*Sarah* and *Melanie*) are ranked higher in the 1975 list than in the 1950 list. The third (*Anne*) was apparently chosen less frequently in 1975 than in 1950, but one may wonder whether the fall in popularity of this name may have been reversed since 1975 following the widely publicized marriage of Princess Anne to Captain Mark Phillips.

The main concern of this experiment was, of course, to examine the nature of the association between familiarity and liking for male and female first names. The high positive correlations found between these two variables for both male and female names in both the English and the Australian samples provides strong presumptive evidence for a purely linear association in both cases, and there is no indication of any inverted-U trend. All the evidence seems to point to a simple Zajonc-type effect<sup>20</sup> in which increased familiarity with objects is held to result in a monotonic increase in liking.

Strong positive correlations between familiarity and liking emerged in both samples, but the correlations were somewhat higher in the English than in the Australian sample, especially for male names. The differences between the familiarity-liking correlations for male and female names in the two experiments are all in the direction which would be anticipated on the basis of the findings of Lawson (*infra*. n. 11) and Bruning & Albott (*infra*. n. 14) regarding the stereotyping of male and female first names. These researchers found evidence for greater stereotyping of male than female names in the United States, and this was interpreted above as possibly due to the effects of the mass media in creating stereotyped images of the names possessed by predominantly male public personalities. The tendency for higher correlations between familiarity and liking in England than in Australia is in line with this speculation on account of the more centralized character of the mass media in England than in Australia.

Positive linear relationships between familiarity and liking have fre-

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<sup>19</sup>Both counts are given in Dunkling, p. 213.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. *infra* n. 8; cf. also Zajonc, R. B., & Rajecki, D. "Exposure and affect: A field experiment." *Psychonomic Science* 17, 1969, 216-217.

quently been reported by investigators who have artificially manipulated the familiarity of stimuli by means of repeated exposures during the course of experiments (*infra* n. 7). Other investigators, however, have reported a decrease in liking following familiarization,<sup>21</sup> or an inverted-U relationship between the two variables (e.g. *infra* n. 9). It is clearly of some importance to understand why positive linear relationships are found in the present experiments, and, more generally, why different types of relationship seem to obtain in different circumstances.

Using an essentially identical design and methodology to those used in the present experiment, Sluckin, Colman, & Hargreaves (*infra* n. 9) found strong evidence for an inverted-U relationship between familiarity and liking for one-syllable words. One hundred randomly-selected words, ranging from the extremely common (e.g. *chair, meet, two*) to the extremely rare (e.g. *crore, nard, surd*) were rated in the manner of the present experiment for either familiarity or liking. Statistical analysis confirmed that there was a significant inverted-U relationship between familiarity and liking, with words of intermediate familiarity being liked most. Since the design and methodology were essentially identical to those used in the present experiments, the differences in the results are probably due in some way to differences inherent in the nature of the stimuli used.

One possibility which suggests itself is that the inverted-U function has universal validity in a hypothetical world in which objects of all kinds occur with frequencies spanning the entire novelty-familiarity continuum, but in the real world only part of this continuum may be represented in some classes of objects. The one-syllable words used by Sluckin, Colman, & Hargreaves (*infra* n. 9) may be assumed to have sampled a wider range of this continuum than the names used in the present experiments, since even the most familiar names (e.g., *John, Peter, Anne, and Jane*) are probably nowhere near as common in the everyday experience of most people as are the most common words used in the previous experiment. It is possible, therefore, that in the absence of any names as common as the most common words in the previous experiment, only the rising part of what is indeed an inverted-

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<sup>21</sup>Cantor, G. N. "Children's 'like-dislike' ratings of familiarized and unfamiliarized visual stimuli." *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 6, 1968, 74-81; Cantor, G. N., & Kubose, S. K. "Preschool children's ratings of familiarized and non-familiarized visual stimuli." *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 8, 1969, 74-81.

<sup>22</sup>Faw, T. T., & Pien, D. "The influence of stimulus exposure on rated preference: effects of age, pattern of exposure and stimulus meaningfulness." *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*

U curve has been sampled in the present studies. This possible explanation for the discrepant results should not be dismissed as mere speculation; it is testable in principle since some names (e.g. those of very close associates) are probably as common in the experience of any specified individual as are the common one-syllable words.

There are, of course, other possible explanations. It has been argued<sup>22</sup> that Zajonc-type results (positive relationships between familiarity and liking) are most likely to occur when complex stimuli are used, and the Cantor-type results (negative relationships) are most likely, *ceteris paribus*, when extremely simple stimuli are used. This suggestion stems from the assumption that it takes a greater degree of familiarity to "get to know" (and then to like) a complex object than a simple one; conversely one can more easily become bored with a simple object than with a complex one, since there is less in it to arouse interest. If these speculations are justified, it may be assumed that when stimuli of intermediate complexity are used, the relationship will be found either to be approximately flat (if a relatively short range of familiarity is sampled) or curvilinear (if a wide range is sampled). Although a rather wide range of familiarity was sampled in the present experiments, positive linear relationships were nevertheless found for both male and female names. In the light of the above conjectures, this may be attributed to the fact that the names used were relatively complex in relation to the subjects' prior experience when compared with the letters and letter-like shapes (Sluckin, Miller, & Franklin, *infra* n. 9) the three-letter words and non-words (Colman, Walley, & Sluckin, *infra* n. 15) and the one-syllable words (Sluckin, Colman, & Hargreaves, *infra* n. 9) which have been found to conform to the inverted-U hypothesis. Both in their structure and in the myriad associations they are bound to conjure up in the minds of the subjects, the names used in the present experiments were, it is reasonable to assume, more complex than the stimuli used in the previous experiments, and this may account for the linear relationship between familiarity and liking which was found.

The above theoretical speculations share one important deficiency: they fail to explain the cyclical vogues to which first names seem often to be subject. A final suggestion, which has the merit of accounting not only for the apparent conflict between the findings of the Sluckin, Colman, & Hargreaves (*infra* n. 9) and the Colman, Hargreaves, &

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gy 11, 1971, 339-346; cf. also Harrison (1977), *infra* n. 7, and Sluckin, Colman & Hargreaves, (1980), *infra* n. 9.

Sluckin (*infra* n. 15) experiments, but also for the cyclical vogues, is the following.

Let us assume that cultural objects of all kinds—tunes, clothes, colors, as well as letters of the alphabet, words, and names—are potentially subject to the inverted-U principle. Then, provided that they become sufficiently familiar (this critical level of familiarity may be extremely high for complex objects), they are bound to pass the peak of popularity and begin to decline in attractiveness. In some cases, this point may never be reached; conditions under which this is likely will now be considered.

It is necessary to distinguish between two categories of cultural objects: those whose familiarity is within the voluntary control of the people who are exposed to them, such as clothing fashions and pop music, and those which are not. Letters of the alphabet and words, such as those investigated by Sluckin, Colman, & Hargreaves (*infra* n. 9) clearly fall into the latter category; people's exposure to these objects is largely beyond their voluntary control, since they cannot avoid further exposure to letters or words which have passed the peak of the inverted U and become too familiar to be maximally liked. In cases like these, the inverted-U principle manifests itself in a straightforward manner: the most well-liked of these objects are those of intermediate familiarity. The familiarity of first names (and clothing fashions and pop music) is, on the other hand, subject to the voluntary control of people in a cultural group: when a name begins to pass the peak of popularity, for example, it tends to be chosen less frequently by parents. It therefore become less familiar once again, until its attractiveness gradually returns and it comes back into fashion. In such cases, not only is liking influenced by familiarity, but familiarity is influenced by liking.

It may be speculated that first names, unlike letters of the alphabet and words, are prevented from becoming so familiar that they pass the peak of the inverted U by the hypothetical feedback mechanism outlined above. According to this hypothesis, a straightforward positive relationship is likely to be maintained between familiarity and liking for cultural objects, including first names, whose familiarity is responsive to voluntary actions of people. If correct, this hypothesis provides an elegant resolution of the apparent conflict between the findings of Sluckin, Colman, & Hargreaves (*infra* n. 9) and Colman, Hargreaves, & Sluckin (*infra* n. 15). It also accounts for the cyclical vogues in names (and in pop music, clothing fashions, etc.). The hypothesis can be tested through empirical investigations of the fam-



iliarity-liking relationship in cultural objects whose familiarity is known to be within or beyond the voluntary control of people.

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