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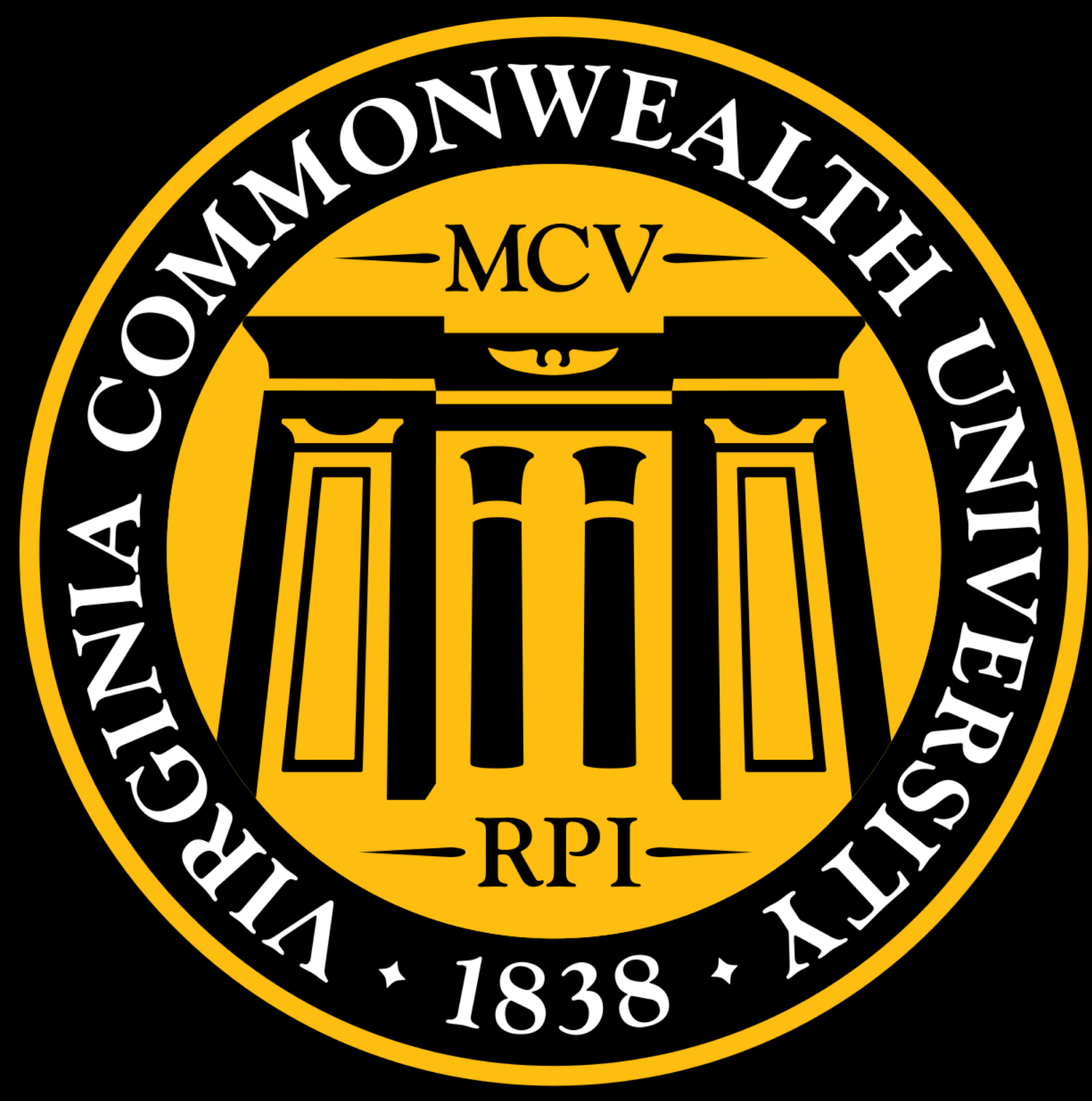
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1. Bowlin, B. [BrainStuff – HowStuff Works]. (19 February, 2015). Does Your Name Determine Your Future? [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5wp1bDmLJA>. 2. Half as Interesting. (21 December, 2017). What Your Name Decides About Your Life [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSMynBIIdOY>. 3. Hill, B. J., Crosby, R., Bouris, A., Brown, R., Bak, T., Rosentel, K., . . . Salazar, L. (2017). Exploring Transgender Legal Name Change as a Potential Structural Intervention for Mitigating Social Determinants of Health Among Transgender Women of Color. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 15(1), 25-33. doi:10.1007/s13178-017-0289-6 4. Kalist, D. E., & Lee, D. Y. (2009). First Names and Crime: Does Unpopularity Spell Trouble? *Social Science Quarterly*, 90(1), 39–49. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2009.00601.x 5. Kang, T. S. (1971). Name Change and Acculturation: Chinese Students on an American Campus. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 14(4), 403–412. doi:10.2307/1388539 6. Pilcher, J. (2017). Names and “Doing Gender”: How Forenames and Surnames Contribute to Gender Identities, Difference, and Inequalities. *Sex Roles*, 77(11-12), 812-822. doi:10.1007/s11199-017-0805-4 7. van Tilburg, W. A. P., & Igou, E. R. (2014). The impact of middle names: Middle name initials enhance evaluations of intellectual performance. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(4), 400-411. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2026 8. Waismel-Manor, I., & Stroud, N. J. (2012). The Influence of President Obama’s Middle Name on Middle Eastern and U.S. Perceptions. *Political Behavior*, 35(3), 621-641. doi:10.1007/s11109-012-9210-4



How Personal Names Shape the Way Society Sees People as Individuals in the United States.

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Introduction

In a world where people are disadvantaged by first impressions and implicit bias, names factor a lot into a person's successes in life. Whether it be first names, last names, the number of middle initials, the gender and racial implications of a person's name, and societal standards surrounding names and naming systems, there are multiple ways names shape a person's identity. Thus, it is important to ask how personal names shape the way people are seen as individuals in the United States and contribute to their identity. Names are a trait that people are born with, usually determined before anything is known about that person. From a person's educational worth to an association with lesser valued societal qualities, names allow people to form assumptions and draw conclusions without actively trying to. Immigrants in the United States have even faced less adversity upon anglicizing their name, simply because it allows them to more easily blend in and assimilate. As a result, bringing together this research allows a more holistic understanding of implicit bias. Broadly, this can further be applied to explaining why certain people have more privilege than others. Just like how teachers can treat certain individuals differently based on their name, affecting how that individual receives education, societal stereotypes can similarly impose different attitudes due to how names are perceived.



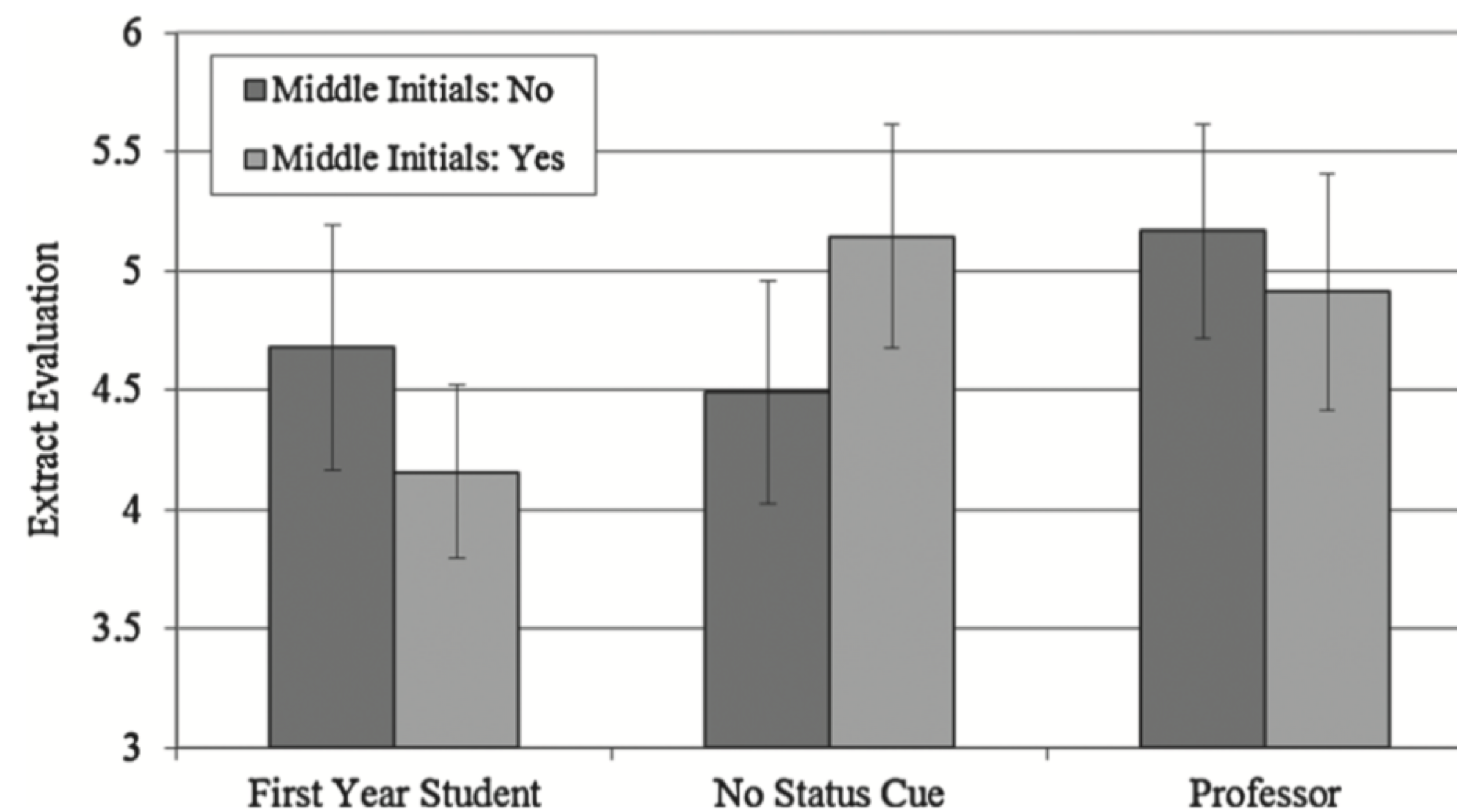
Figure 1. Name cloud of the most popular names in the United States in 2012 from *Behind the Name*

Background

It was expected that there would likely be implications surrounding only race and gender signaling names, yet it was discovered that there are much more biases that names can signal based on the contents of that person's name. This whole project started with an interested piqued by YouTube videos, such as *What Your Name Decides About Your Life* (Half as Interesting 2017). People's appearances can actually be shaped by their name; there's also a significant amount of dentists with the name of "Dennis" and "Denise" (Bowlin 2015). The name cloud in Figure 1 depicts the variety of names that can be seen in the United States. While it's an interesting visualization, people with names not listed are already at a disadvantage. The objective of this research is to explore these disadvantages, looking through a psychosocial lens.

Methods

To find the various impacts names have on a person and how they are perceived, numerous scholarly articles were examined and compared. Research for this involved exploring articles about the various aspects of names, as well as investigating the psychosocial effects they have on people. A thorough understanding of the impact of names was found. The research can be divided into five different categories. Essentially, the sources delve into the components of a name, how names affect a person's future, the effect of foreign or non-anglicized names, the role gender has on names, and name changes.



Note: Higher scores indicate more positive evaluations of the extract. Error ranges indicate the 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2. Extract evaluations as a function of initials as status cues from van Tilburg et al. (2014)

Results

Through the correlations of the different categories, there is sufficient evidence that personal names can signal various assumptions and cause implicit bias. Names reflect a person's identity and if that identity is perceived as lesser, incorrect, or unfamiliar, those values get automatically associated with those traits. For example, Kalist and Lee (2009) found a larger concentration of "black sounding" names in juvenile detention facilities. Pilcher (2017) found that males with "female-appropriate" names get associated with those lesser feminine values. Waismel-Manor and Stroud (2012) unveiled that the inclusion of Obama's middle name, Hussein, devalued the United States support for Israel. However, names can also inflect positive attributes. As seen in Figure 2, more middle initials compared to none at all, when there is no status cue, give the impression that the person is more scholarly (van Tilburg et al. 2014). Pilcher (2017) also found that females with "male-appropriate" names get associated with the positive masculine values and do better in life. With names having such a close relation to one's identity, name changes can have drastic effects. Transwomen of color who already received a name change had much better economic stability and healthcare visitation than pre-name changers (Hill et al. 2017). Chinese students who anglicized their name accrued advantages in the United States but had a much weaker tie to their ethnicity (Kang 1971). While the name itself may not directly cause these impacts, the way people treat each other can be influenced and have downstream effects.

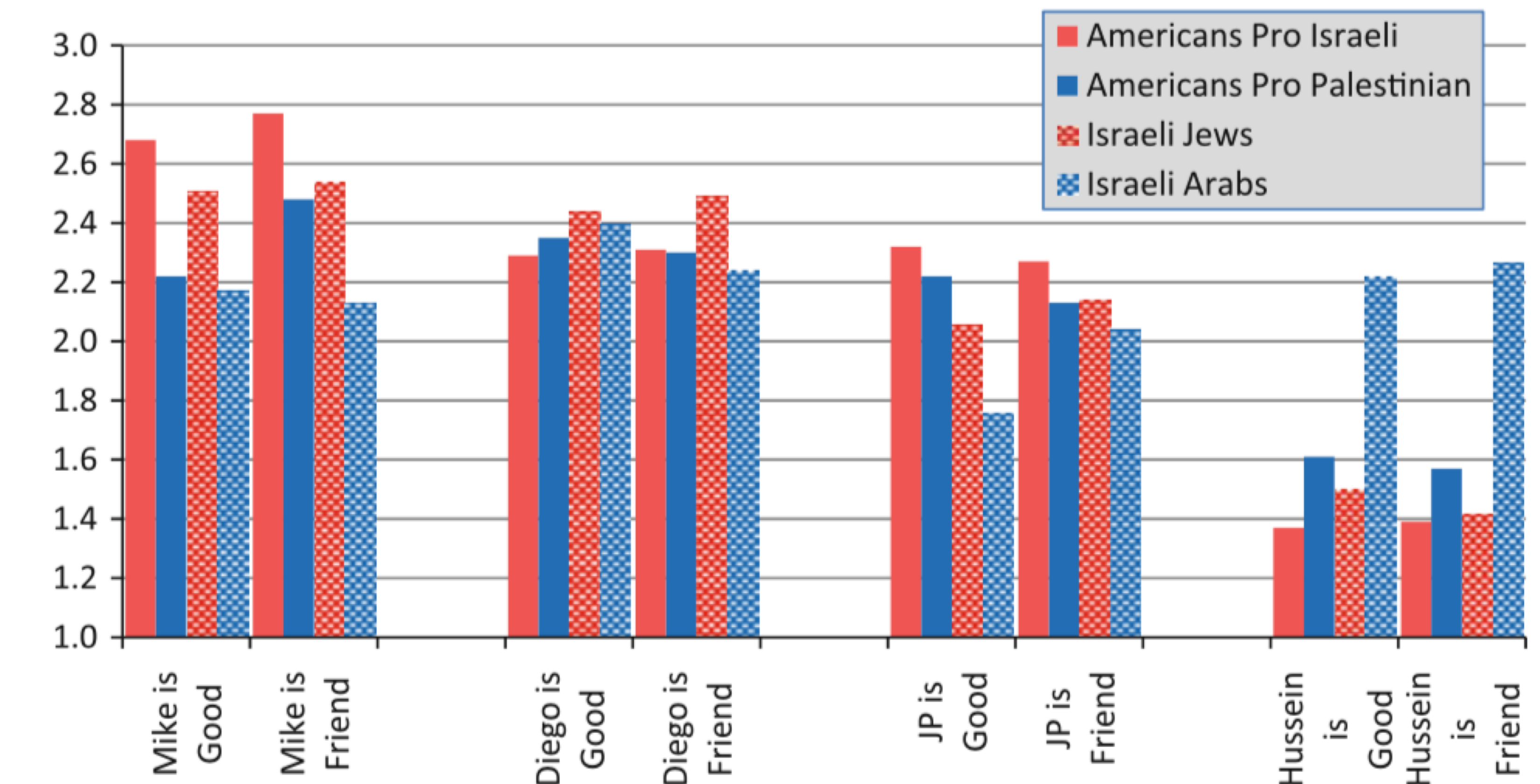


Figure 3. Name ratings on good-bad and *friend-enemy* measures, by group. Note ratings range from 1 (bad/enemy) to 3 (good/friend) from Waismel-Manor and Stroud (2012)

Conclusions

Names have much relevance in everyday life. They're the first thing that is seen on applications, the first thing people ask about each other, yet decided before a person is born. Names can go on to decide factors such as juvenile delinquency, scholarliness and career paths, and the ease of landing a job. In the United States, people with anglicized names that essentially do not signal negative values in the society are automatically at an advantage. Yet, if everyone had these names, the United States would lose the mass amounts of diversity and ties to culture it has. Names are still a method people can use for discrimination. Understanding how names affect perceptions is a step in reducing the cultural stigma and acknowledging everyone's identity.

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