

Baby Name Report Card: Beneficial and Harmful Baby Names

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Biographical Sketch of Albert Mehrabian

Albert Mehrabian came to psychology with B.S. and M.S. degrees in engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He received his Ph.D. from Clark University and in 1964 commenced his academic career at the University of California, Los Angeles. Now, as Professor Emeritus of Psychology, he devotes his efforts to research, writing, and consulting.

Professor Mehrabian's background in engineering and natural science provided him with a distinct approach to his work in psychology. Knowing that it is impossible to test the validity of ideas without measures, he has devoted much of his thirty-eight years of research to the development of psychological scales and measurement of individual psychological characteristics. He also has worked systematically to develop a concise emotion-based approach to psychological theory.

His numerous psychometric scales are used both nationally and internationally to help identify high achievers, individuals with strong social and communication skills, or those who have a high capacity for empathy in intense person-oriented work. Several of his measures are particularly suited for identifying prospective employees' potential problems with depression, anxiety, integrity (honesty), or violence. Dr. Mehrabian's approach to these problems includes a unique "opaque" (or camouflaged) system of measurement to obviate response distortions by those tested. Other applications of his work have helped identify individuals who are most likely to succeed in life (i.e., emotionally intelligent persons) and optimum emotional characteristics of top-level athletes and workers in high-stress situations.

Professor Mehrabian's major theoretical contributions include a three-dimensional mathematical model for the precise and general description and measurement of emotions and personality. His emotion scales can be used to assess the emotional impact of a workplace, a specific packaging idea, or an advertisement. His parallel three-dimensional temperament (personality) model is a comprehensive system for describing and measuring differences among individuals (e.g., extroversion, achievement, empathy, depression, hostility, cooperativeness, emotional intelligence).

Dr. Mehrabian is known for his pioneering work in the field of nonverbal communication (body language). His experiments helped identify nonverbal and subtle ways in which one conveys like-dislike, power and leadership, discomfort and insecurity, social attractiveness, or persuasiveness. Communication and leadership trainers and political campaign managers have often relied on these findings. Additional applications have led to methods for selecting personal names that are conducive to a desirable impression profile (successful, moral, popular, warm, cheerful) and methods for selecting product, service, or company names that enhance consumer appeal.

Professor Mehrabian has served as consulting editor to *Sociometry*, *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, and *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Currently, he is consulting editor of the *Journal of Psychology*. He is a frequent contributor to the psychological journals and has authored several books, including "Tactics of Social Influence," "Silent Messages," "Nonverbal Communication," "Public Places and Private Spaces," "Basic Dimensions for a General Psychological Theory," "Eating Characteristics and Temperament," "Your Inner Path to Investment Success: Insights into the Psychology of Investing," and "The Name Game: The Decision that Lasts a Lifetime," published by Penguin, USA.

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Preface

My book, "The Name Game: The Decision That Lasts a Lifetime" was published first in 1990 and presented a new perspective for parents on how to select baby names. Up to that time, books about baby names basically included information about origins of names and the meanings of the names (e.g., Stuart meant caretaker). In contrast, being a psychologist, my approach focused on the impressions generated by names. My thesis was that a name, like a person's grooming, clothing, physical appearance, or characteristic nonverbal behavior, can make an impression on others. I explored some of the different qualities people could infer from another's name. The present volume has augmented those qualities with summary ratings on the overall attractiveness of impressions made by each name.

To my surprise, "The Name Game" had a dramatic impact on ways in which parents and the general public think about names. Today, many are at the very least attuned to the fact that names can make a good or bad impression. This has encouraged me to write the present volume, based on extensive survey data, to summarize our newest findings. Comments taken from the preface of "The Name Game" are given below and are equally applicable here.

This volume is written to minimize intuition and guesswork, mistakes, and sometimes errors of tragic proportions in the naming process. First, it is addressed to parents-to-be and provides them with a systematic and intelligent approach to select names for their newborn. The present work can also help those who feel they have been given inappropriate, bothersome, or even handicapping names and who desire an objective and data-based approach to selecting new names.

Readers who wish to skip preliminaries can refer to chapter 6 (where use of the tables is explained) and then proceed to the tables they need.

As part of my effort to continuously improve and refine the ratings in this volume, I would appreciate feedback from those who use my name selection process. Let me know if there are names you would like included in our future surveys. More importantly, write me about your experiences with this name selection process, such as early reactions from friends and relatives to the names you selected based on my method and longer-term effects of the new names you select using my approach. You can find my email address by using your favorite search engine and doing a search on my full name. Correspondence regarding your reactions will be invaluable in improving future editions of this book.

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Chapter 1: What is in a Name?

Almost all books about baby names provide a simple list of names and their variants or also mention national origins and original meanings of the names. For instance, you are told that *Justin* has a Latin origin and means “upright” or that *Albert*, an English name, means noble or bright.

In contrast, this book provides very new and unusual information about names. Instead of focusing on the historical origins and meanings of names, it deals with names in today's world and the psychological impressions names make on people such as yourself. Have you ever wondered how others react to your name or felt that someone's name simply did not fit that person? Well, these are the kinds of issues considered here.

Each name in this book is described with a set of five numbers. These five numbers contain the essence of the psychological impression created by the name alone. Once you know the numbers for a name, you'll know many things about that name, such as, whether it makes an impression of a successful, intelligent, and creative person; a friendly, happy, and cheerful sort; a very masculine or “macho” type; or someone who is not ethical and should not be trusted.

Many people have asked me how I thought of this approach to studying names. I am a research psychologist and one of the main themes that runs through my 37-year career is the many subtle ways in which people communicate things about themselves. For example, a person's habitual choices of clothing might suggest that they are cold and impersonal, the arrangement and type of furniture in someone's office could mean the individual is open and friendly, or the massive gate and high walls surrounding a house could imply that the residents are important and powerful.

Names are a natural subject of study in this respect. Irrespective of whether we are aware of it, wish it or not, our names make statements about us to others. For example, in one of my experiments, I discovered that longer men's names are more likely to make an impression of someone of substance (i.e., of a trustworthy and successful person). In this case, the substantial quality of the name (its length) communicates a quality of substance for the person so named.

The sounds (harsh, soft, melodic), letter shapes (angular, curved), and meanings (*King*, *April*, *Prunella*) of names all contribute to the impressions names make. Also, historical associations between certain names and types of individuals help shape the meanings of names. For instance, regal names like *Katherine*, *James*, or *Alexander*, convey images of success to these names; in contrast, names like *Fifi*, *Didi*, *Brandy*, or *Trixie* evoke images of a hat-check girl or cocktail waitress.

The challenge for me was to develop a simple and uniform way to describe the complex and multi-faceted impression profile of any name. Our research produced four groups of individual characteristics that together yielded a balanced sketch of the impressions created by names. For instance, one group of the four, labeled “ethical-caring,” included the qualities of being trustworthy, loyal, sincere, kind, generous, honest, respectful, caring, polite, patient, warm, moral, obedient, sensitive, responsible, religious, loving, and congenial, listed in order of importance in defining the group. The statistical work that produced this group showed it to consist of interrelated impressions, that is, these impressions tend to go hand-in-hand. In similar ways, each of the other three groups of characteristics conveyed homogeneous aspects of personality or emotional makeup that could be used to describe reasonably distinct facets of impressions created by names.

The numbers for each name given in this volume are taken from extensive surveys involving thousands of respondents. Respondents in the surveys described the impressions made by specific names using numerical scores for each of the four groups of characteristics. As already noted, the fifth, overall attractiveness of impression created by

Chapter 1

a name, score is calculated from the first three. Although there is a tendency to view masculinity as more desirable in men and femininity as more desirable in women, some parents may disagree with such generalities. Therefore, masculine-feminine ratings are not included in the overall impression score.

The important point here is that numerical descriptions of names given in this book are not my opinions; rather they are based on the opinions and judgments of groups of people, such as yourself, drawn from the general population. Many safeguards were taken to ensure the validity of these survey results (see Appendix A).

In brief, the five numbers for each name provide a description of how the general public reacts to the name. Specifically, the numbers together yield an impression profile for each name, showing the specific combination of positive and negative impressions the name makes.

When you use these ratings to select a name for your baby, you will know the unspoken and culturally shared meaning of the name in today's world. You readily and quickly will recognize the "bad" or harmful names you should avoid because of the undesirable meanings they convey. In contrast, you also will find many fine names that fit the specific impression profile you would like to see in your child.

To help you make name selections, different chapters provide lists of the best and worst names for each of the four characteristics and the overall impression attractiveness scores. Two additional chapters contain alphabetical lists (one for each gender) of all the names rated for this book so you can easily find the impression profile of a specific name.

Chapter 2: What Impressions are Made by Names?

Let us say you are considering the name *Charlene* for your baby. Chapter 13 contains a row of five numbers for *Charlene*, as follows:

	Ethical-Caring	Popular-Fun	Successful	Masculine-Feminine	Overall Attractiveness
<i>Charlene</i>	47	77	32	15	53

These numbers describe four fundamental impressions created by the name, given in the first four columns, plus an overall score for attractiveness or positiveness of the impression, given in the fifth column and based on numbers in the first three columns. All five numbers can range from zero (extremely low) to 100 (extremely high), with 50 being average. Think of percentages, if you will, to understand what these numbers mean.

The five numbers represent the impressions others form based on the name alone and begin with ethical-caring in the first column, followed by popular-fun (second column), successful (third), and masculine vs. feminine (fourth). The number in the fifth column is calculated from the ethical-caring, popular-fun, and successful scores and is meant to provide an overall estimate of attractiveness or positiveness of the impression generated by the name *Charlene*.

The third number for *Charlene* shows a score of 32 for "successful." This clearly is below average and creates an impression of a moderately unsuccessful person; however, it is not as detrimental as a name with a success score of 15 (*Candida*), or, for that matter, one with a score of zero (*Bambi*). On the other hand, if the success rating of a name being considered is 65 or even greater, this means the name, in and of itself, creates an impression of a successful person; of course, the higher the score, the more success is implied.

In the fourth column, higher numbers show masculinity, with lower numbers conveying femininity. With a few exceptions, boys' names are receive scores of 50 or more in this column and higher numbers (such as, 88 or 95) represent greater degrees of masculinity. The mirror image applies to girls' names: excepting a few, most girls' names have scores of 50 or less in the fourth column, with lower numbers (such as, 12 or 4) representing impressions of greater femininity.

The five numbers you find for almost any name you consider will constitute the impression profile of that name. I chose the name *Charlene* as an example because it presents a mixed profile of positive and negative qualities. It implies average ethical-caring (47), high popular-fun (77), moderately low success (32), and very feminine (15) characteristics. In addition, the overall impression attractiveness score (53) for *Charlene* is average. This means that averaging across the impression profile, the name generates neither a distinctly positive nor a distinctly negative impression. So, the row of numbers for *Charlene* provides a reasonably detailed picture of the good and bad impressions made by that name.

If you have a name you are considering for your baby, try looking it up in chapter 13 (for girls' names) and in chapter 19 (for boys' names). Once you have discovered the impression profile of the name, ask yourself whether you want to make a gift of that name to your baby and have him or her live with it for an entire lifetime. It is easy to make that decision, if you ask yourself whether you would wish to dress and groom your child in a way that creates a desirable or an undesirable impression. Would you, knowingly and deliberately, send your child to school dressed in dirty, sloppy, or even bizarre-looking

Chapter 2

clothing? Would you dye your child's hair blue? I think, most parents would say, "Absolutely not!"

Just as parents do not knowingly dress and groom their children to produce undesirable impressions, given the necessary information, they probably would not select a baby name that conveys undesirable qualities. This book provides that necessary information.

The five numbers describing each name given here are not my opinions. Instead, they represent average judgments of people like yourself. In a massive survey, respondents were given detailed instructions (described in Appendix A) and were asked for numerical scores representing their reactions to names. The numbers for each name, then, are estimates of a group's average appraisal of that name's impression profile. Such averaged group opinions minimize the contributions of each group member's possible emotional bias by balancing these out against those of others in the group.

A parent can be far too emotional in selecting a baby name. Peculiar and idiosyncratic family circumstances or special life experiences with certain people and names can all come into play and prevent one from making a clear-headed choice. In most cases, it doesn't even occur to a parent to ask, "What kind of an impression will this name make on others?" Instead, choices typically are made on the basis of, "I like it," "I had a dear friend (or relative) with that name," "That's the name of my favorite TV personality," "It was the name of a terrific little boy in a novel I read," "I just love the sound of it," "It's funny, people will get a kick out of it," or "It shows the kid has a creative parent!"

Many of the names selected in these typically subjective and haphazard ways have undesirable connotations and become real life-long burdens for the persons named. This book is for readers who want to avoid the pitfalls of emotional name selection. The tables in this book provide objective descriptions of the impression profiles created by names and should help balance the urge to make gut-level (and possibly tragic) name choices.

Chapter 3: Names: Lifetime Advantage Versus Handicap

Supposing there is one, easy thing you could do that would provide an advantage or an extra edge for your child throughout her lifetime. This single action you would take would come to bear in numerous everyday life situations, such as, helping your child

- meet and make new friends,
- get more attention and favorable treatment from teachers,
- become popular among her peers,
- be liked by elders,
- be judged as more attractive,
- gain a better sense of self-worth and confidence,
- impress others as being moral and trustworthy,
- get an edge in competing with others for a job,
- have an advantage in advertising her own business,
- get more respect from coworkers,
- advance more rapidly at work,
- have fewer psychological problems or neuroses,
- project the right mix of masculinity-femininity,
- have a better chance to become a public personality,
- be happy and better adjusted,
- be more successful at any job or profession she selects,

and so forth.

This list is not exhaustive and is meant only to give you a sample of the many advantages you might provide your child with this single hypothetical action. But even this limited list of advantages seems enormous and it would seem that only a supernatural act (and not any specific simple action of your own) could possibly achieve such a great deal.

Yet, there is indeed a simple one-time action you can take as a parent to give your child an advantage or an edge in the most diverse areas of her life and throughout her lifetime!

The simple act consists of selecting a beneficial name for your child. In case you are puzzled as to how a name can be so important, let us begin with the foundation -- identity. A person's name is closely intertwined with his sense of self or the way the person defines himself. When you describe yourself to a stranger, one of the first things you do is to tell them your name. It is difficult to think about yourself without thinking of your name, because your self-image includes your name. Also, when others think of you, they think of your name. In other words, your name and your identity are intertwined and inseparable, both as you see yourself and as others see you.

My survey studies have shown that names by themselves make distinct impressions on others. In other words, the general public tends to have different consensus impressions for different names. If you think of the name, *Wilbur*, by itself and without reference to a specific person, you will find that it makes a distinct impression that is different than, for instance, the name, *Jonathon*.

I have researched the impressions made by names in survey studies using thousands of respondents and the conclusions are unambiguous: names, by themselves, make various kinds of positive and negative impressions. For example, if you were to ask ten or twenty friends and acquaintances to give you their impressions of the name *Wilbur* and, separately, of the name *Jonathon*, chances are they would give you far more desirable descriptions for *Jonathon*.

Now, think of a name as an object that has a distinct pattern of positive-negative impressions. Next, take a baby and assign him a name that will be part of him (an appendage, so to speak) for a lifetime. Doesn't it stand to reason that the impressions created by the name should begin to influence the way people think about the baby? After all, isn't this what a mother does when she washes and grooms her baby carefully and

dresses him in attractive clothes? The clean and well-groomed appearance and the attractive clothing make a positive impression in themselves and the mother intuitively senses that this positive impression will be extended to her baby boy.

Indeed, parents expend enormous amounts of time and effort managing the impressions made by their offspring -- training their children how to wash, dress neatly and attractively, eat properly, deal politely or courteously with adults, behave in friendly and helpful ways with their peers, and so forth. Parents intuitively sense that their children must learn certain habits of self-presentation that the parents consider acceptable or desirable -- habits that, in the long run, should be of considerable help to their children as they grow up.

I am suggesting that the name selected for a child is, by far, the single most important element for a parent to consider in his or her efforts to manage the impressions the child makes on the outside world. The selection of a name is especially crucial in that, unlike the choice of hair style or clothing or nonverbal mannerisms, a name is not altered easily. Also, with the rapid technological advances we are currently experiencing (e.g., interpersonal contacts via the internet, working relationships using email), we are more likely to interact with strangers who don't get a chance to meet us in face-to-face situations. Thus, the many nonverbal and behavioral cues that are normally present in personal meetings and can add to the overall impression we project are lacking. As a consequence, possible negative impressions generated by unfortunate choices of names are more likely to make lasting impressions when these remote and impersonal means of modern communication are used.

Think of the name you give your baby as an appendage that she must carry around with her for a lifetime. Also, remember that this appendage (the name) can make a distinct pattern of positive-negative impressions on others. If you mistakenly select a name that has an undesirable impression profile, then, this mistake will almost invariably be borne by your baby for a lifetime, because most people don't change their names.

In my work with names, I have encountered names such as *Fayle*, *Farm*, or *LaTrina* for girls and others such as *Cobra*, *Jane*, and *Swindle* for boys. These are extreme examples. Such names make highly undesirable impressions that are equivalent in intensity to the effects of dressing a boy in girls' clothing (analogue of calling a boy, *Jane*) or dyeing a child's hair blue or pink. The major difference, however, is that clothing and hair color can be altered, whereas names generally are not. These examples of obviously undesirable names are given here to illustrate the following generalization: a name is like an appendage, carried for life, and makes a distinct type of impression.

Most commonly used names tend to evoke more subtle patterns of positive and negative impressions. The lists of "good" and "bad" names given in this volume are derived from my surveys and show how names differ from each other in terms of impressions of ethical-caring, popular-fun, successful, and masculine-feminine qualities. Once you peruse the good and bad names within each list (for instance, names that give an impression of a successful person versus those that connote a failure), you will have a better grasp of the subtle, often unplanned, and persistent effects created by names.

My basic thesis, then, is that it is extremely important for parents to recognize that names can have beneficial and harmful effects on their offspring. Imagine a parent who has identical twins, loves them equally, and raises them in almost nearly the same way. However, imagine also that this parent selects a desirable name, *Chad*, for one of the twins and inadvertently selects an undesirable name, *Bud*, for the other. Chances are rather high that *Chad* will have a significant advantage over *Bud* throughout their lifetimes. *Chad*, compared to *Bud*, is more likely to (a) have a better and more secure self-image, (b) be regarded more positively by others, (c) be psychologically healthy, or (d) be treated well at school by teachers and fellow students or later in life by coworkers and superiors.

	Ethical-Caring	Popular-Fun	Successful	Masculine-Feminine	Overall Attractiveness
<i>Chad</i>	61	99	96	96	98
<i>Bud</i>	5	44	0	93	2

The beneficial edge that *Chad* will enjoy over *Bud* in these and many other life situations will derive simply from his name. Our survey findings for the two names show, for example, that *Chad* has extremely positive impressions with respect to popular-fun and successful qualities. In contrast, the name *Bud* connotes extremely negative impressions with respect to ethical-caring and successful qualities. Both names connote very high masculinity. Thus, *Bud* connotes an untrustworthy, uncaring, and very masculine person who is a failure; *Chad* fits the image of an extremely popular, self-assured, masculine, and successful person. The overall attractiveness of the impression generated by *Chad* (98) contrasts very sharply with that for *Bud* (2).

The consensus impressions for *Chad*, *Bud*, and all the other names rated in this book are based on survey data. Different samples of respondents were asked to imagine they were about to meet someone for the very first time and knew nothing about that person except the individual's name and sex. The respondents were given a list of scales so they could describe the characteristics of the person named *Chad* (or the person named *Bud*) they were about to meet. Averages of all respondents' impressions were calculated for each characteristic of a name and are given in this volume. For a detailed description of the procedure used to obtain ratings of name impressions, see Appendix A.

Lest the reader misunderstand, I don't want to imply that a name that gives the impression of success will *guarantee* success for the person so named, or that a name that connotes failure will ensure failure. My point, rather, is that a desirable name will provide an extra edge -- an extra statistical advantage -- just as an undesirable name will be a persistent handicap.

Available experimental findings tend to support this assertion. Children with more attractive names have been found to be more popular among their peers (Busse & Seraydarian, 1979). Among women's photographs of equal physical attractiveness, those that were associated with more attractive names were judged as representing greater beauty (Garwood, Cox, Kaplan, Wasserman, & Sulzer, 1980). The same short essays of school-children that were assigned more attractive author names were judged as being superior by teachers and by college sophomores, with teachers being influenced more than college sophomores by the supposed author names (Erwin & Caley, 1984; Harari & McDavid, 1973). Additional findings (reviewed by Mehrabian, 1997, and by Mehrabian & Valdez, 1990, p. 1309) showed that more uncommon or more unpleasant-sounding names were associated with greater maladjustment and with lower levels of achievement in academic work or in one's career (e.g., Anderson, 1985; Ellis & Beechley, 1954; Willis, Willis, & Grier, 1982). My own findings (Mehrabian, 1992) showed that names that generated stronger impressions of psychological health and adjustment tended to be associated with a healthier (more adjusted) personality of the individuals named.

The preceding are statistical findings and there are likely to be numerous exceptions. Obviously, a highly trained and capable applicant who looks unkempt could still get the job and in the process beat out others who presented themselves at the interview groomed and attired neatly. By the same token, a *Bud*, due to his innate abilities and excellent education and job experiences, could end up as president of a company that employs a *Chad* as custodian.

Another way to think about this is that a person's name is only part of the complex picture she presents to others -- a picture that, among other things, includes physical characteristics, clothing, grooming, speech style, mannerisms and body language, or level

of education and income. All elements of this picture contribute to the impression profile created.

Most individuals learn to be cognizant of these various elements of self-presentation and how each affects impressions. However, prior to this last decade, there was minimal public awareness of the important contribution of names to the overall impression profile. With greater awareness of the impact of names, one can take the same basic elements (looks, nonverbal mannerisms, education, etc.) and combine them with an attractive or desirable name, thereby gaining an extra advantage in self-image and impression management. Alternatively, the identical set of elements, when combined with an unattractive name, will result in a poorer self-image/impression profile combination and constitute a nagging handicap for life.