DISTINCTIVE AFRICAN AMERICAN NAMES: AN EXPERIMENTAL, HISTORICAL, AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF INNOVATION*

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Many African American parents create unique names for their children. Although in the United States there are no formal "rules" limiting the sounds parents may combine in creating a child's name, innovative names are not simply free-floating imaginative acts; they actually incorporate certain implicit practices found in the culture of both Whites and African Americans. Consequently, on hearing an innovative name, a stranger usually can guess the sex of the child. We are able to infer the linguistic features that influence innovations because these features appear more appropriate or less appropriate, depending on the sex of the child. We interpret our observations in terms of a cultural perspective on innovation which argues that the existing culture operates as an independent force to set bounds on creativity and imagination, independent of the influence of organizations or institutions. We also evaluate an alternative perspective. We analyze innovative naming patterns in the past 75 years and then consider both the influence of African heritage in America and the thrust toward African roots in recent decades. Here too we find a naming mechanism whereby adopted African names are modified by American linguistic conventions.

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"No innovation springs full-blown out of nothing; it must have antecedents, and these are always traceable, provided that enough data are available for an analysis. An innovation is, therefore, a creation only in the sense that it is a new combination, never in the sense that it is something emerging from nothing."

—Barnett 1953:181

We begin with the proposition that all novel ideas, no matter how imaginative or creative they may appear to be, are embedded in the existing thought structure of a society. As a consequence, unbridled imagination or creativity is virtually impossible. From the almost infinite range of potential new ideas, some will be far more likely to occur than others. Moreover, even after they occur, new ideas will vary in their appeal and in the likelihood that they will come into fruition. At least two mechanisms influence the potential outcome of a new idea: (1) existing practices set bounds or restrictions that mold what one is likely to imagine, and in turn, (2) the appeal of what is imagined, and hence its conversion into an actual choice, is also affected by existing practices. The first condition occurs because new ideas can normally only build on existing ones. (From this perspective, truly revolutionary ideas not easily linked to existing

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ideas in the culture are extraordinarily rare events.) The second condition occurs because existing practices and customs inevitably influence how a new idea is evaluated, and hence, whether we accept it, or discard it almost as soon as we think of it. Consequently, no matter how novel or creative an idea appears to be, we must assume that it rests heavily on the practices and knowledge that already exist in society.

This view of the creative process is difficult to evaluate because often organizations or institutions restrict the creative process as well, and these additional restrictions can have the same consequences for new ideas. For example, in popular culture various gatekeepers encourage or block innovations as they move from originator to actual commercial realities (Hirsch 1972; Bielby and Bielby 1994). If institutions are averse to risks and prefer to follow existing trends and develop only minor variations, then truly innovative ideas will flourish, even if the model above is not operating. Indeed, organizational restrictions tend to bend and coerce the creativity of artists who are subject to organizational approval. A variety of other institutional forces also influence the innovative process, as do, for example, organizational structure (Peterson and Berger 1975; Lopes 1992), patronage (DeNora 1991), and critics (Shrum 1991). These influences are important for understanding creativity and imagination, at least in formal organizational contexts.

We wish to understand how an existing culture operates as an independent force to set bounds on creativity and imagination, even without the influence of institutions. Certainly, some researchers have addressed this question. Ogburn (1950:90–102), for example, lists 148 inventions and discoveries made independently at about the same time by two or more people. Consistent with the perspective taken here, he observes, "By definition, to invent is to contrive something new. But in trying to describe the particular new thing about an invented object, it is seen that the new is sometimes quantitatively inconspicuous in comparison with the amount of old in such a newly invented object" (p. 88). Likewise, Mueller (1951:389–96) observes that changes in classical music are more gradual and more closely based on existing tastes than is commonly believed. As for fashions in clothing, empirical studies by Young (1937) and by Richardson and Kroeber (1940) describe gradual changes that build on existing tastes, rather than revolutionary changes. More recently, Davis (1992) draws a similar conclusion about fashion.

These results add to our knowledge, but much remains to be learned. It is difficult to gather strong evidence, as opposed to weak evidence that is merely consistent with our basic proposition (Lieberson 1992). Not only do organizational and institutional factors interfere, but it is especially difficult to develop systematic studies on how existing ideas influence *conceptual* innovations (as opposed to *material* innovations). Barnett's (1953) landmark work really only describes the potential ways that conceptual connections can be formed that lead to innovative ideas. He *illustrates* rather than systematically studies the question.

DATA

We use two different data sets in this paper. Trends over time are based on data from the Illinois Department of Public Health for all births occurring in the state between 1916 and 1989; this is also the source for cross-tabulations between the age of the mother and unique names given to children in recent years. A second race-specific data set is also used in parts of this study: a pooling of all births in New York State between 1973 and 1985. These data, supplied by the New York State Bureau of Biostatistics, also include information on the mothers' education. The New York data were the first obtained and provided our source for the unique names included in the experiment. These data were also the basis for the tabulations on the overlaps in sex, class, and race.

AFRICAN AMERICAN NAMES

Background

Recent African American naming practices provide an extraordinary opportunity to evaluate the creativity thesis free from formal institutional restraints and also to contribute to our understanding of a significant and rather

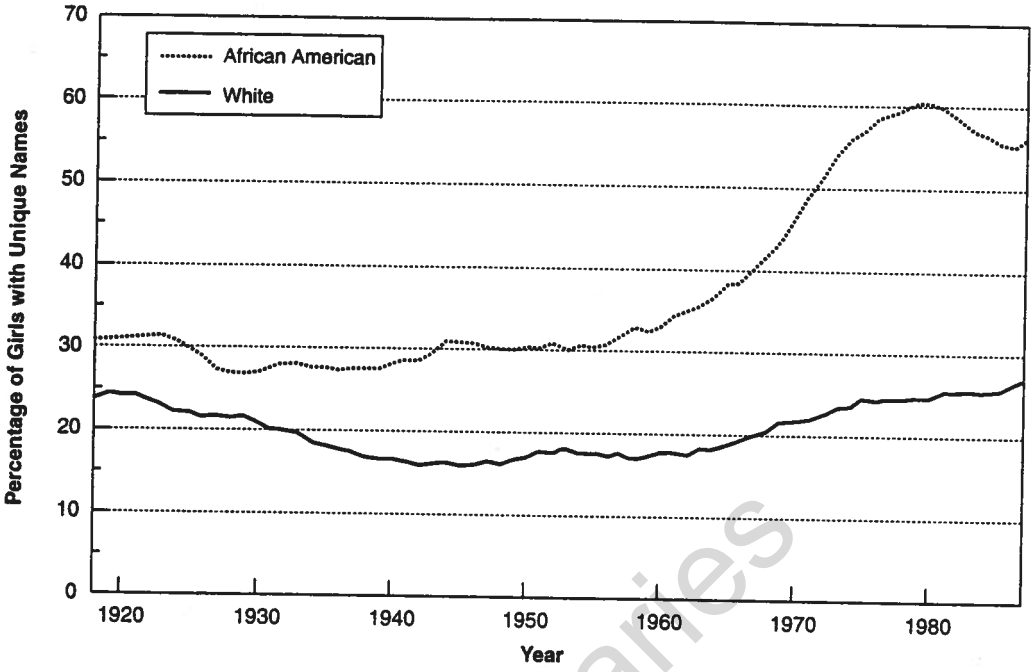

Figure 1. Standardized Percentages of Unique Names for Girls Born in Illinois, 1916–1989

distinctive cultural development. At present, many African American parents give their children distinctive or unique names instead of names from the "standard" repertoire. In 1989, 29 percent of African American girls and 16 percent of African American boys born in Illinois were given unique names. By "unique" we mean a name given to no other child born in that year who is of the same sex and race. In some cases, a name appears to be unique because it is an unusual spelling variant of a more common name or it is simply a standard name that is so unpopular at present that only one child in our study has this name. However, inspection of the lists of names indicates that the vast majority are unique because they are invented or are adaptions from existing words (typically nouns) not initially used as first names, for example, a geographical name, a surname, or a commercial product.

An analysis of names given to children born in Illinois between 1916 and 1989 enables us to determine if giving unique names is a new development among African Americans and whether the names given differ from names given by Whites. Such an analysis calls for more than simply ascertaining the percentage of unique names found in each population in each year. This is because the probability of recording a unique name is a nonlinear monotonic function of the number of births.[1] As the number of births shifts through the years, an index is used to control for size of the birth cohort. (In 1916, for African Americans there were only 914 boys and 850 girls born in Illinois that reported a name on the birth certificate; by contrast, there were more than 20,000 such African American cases for each sex in 1989.) By determining the number of unique names obtained from a random sample of a constant number of births among African Americans and Whites in each year, we control for number of births and, in effect, examine the intrinsic race- and sex-specific trends. We sample 914 male births and 850

[1] With a relatively small number of births, there is a certain likelihood that unpopular standard names will only appear once and hence will not be distinguished from a name innovation. As the number of births increases, the likelihood of finding only one case of an unpopular standard name declines: hence, the percentage of unique names will more closely approximate the percentage of innovative names.

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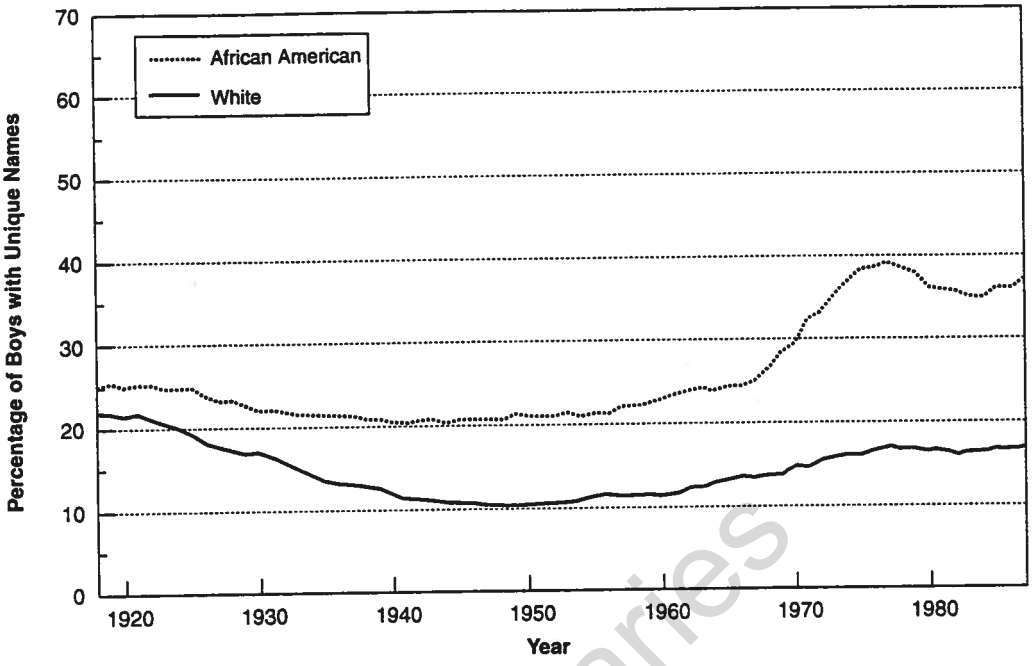

Figure 2. Standardized Percentages of Unique Names for Boys Born in Illinois, 1916–1989

female births in each year from 1916 to 1989, separately for both African Americans and Whites. These are the smallest numbers of race-specific births in any given year; a larger number would not permit a standard N for all years.

Figure 1 displays the standardized frequency of unique names among White and African American females born in Illinois in each year from 1916 through 1989.[2] Throughout the period, the rates for African Americans were higher than those for Whites. However, until the early 1960s, the five-year moving averages show relatively steady patterns for both groups, albeit the modest decline for whites was not entirely matched among African American girls. The most striking feature is the massive jump (beginning in the early 1960s and accelerating for 20 years) in the frequency of giving unique names to African American girls. There is an increase for White girls during this period, but it is moderate; indeed the level in 1989 differs little from that in 1916.

For boys, the pattern is similar in form to that for girls, but the percentages of unique names are much lower (Figure 2). Throughout the period, African American parents are more likely than White parents to give their newborn sons an innovative name. Again the racial differences are relatively slight at the beginning of the period, and the rate remains fairly steady for African Americans until the mid-1960s, when it rises sharply until the late 1970s. Among Whites, there is a drop in the standardized measure of unique names in the earlier period, a steady level beginning in the 1940s, followed by a very modest rise in recent decades; but so far it is not back to the levels observed at the initial period.

Other evidence is consistent with the observation that the contemporary racial differences in the giving of distinctive names is a relatively recent development that reflects a surge in the practice among African Americans. Drawing on 1910 census data for Mississippi, London and Morgan (1994) find little difference between the races in the use

[2] The figures reflect the disposition toward unique names, but not the actual percentages of unique names among *all* gender- and race-specific births in a given year. For example, 29 percent of all African American girls born in 1989 had unique names; the standardized percentage for a sample of 850 African American girls born in that year is approximately twice this value.

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of unique names. Mencken (1963:628–29) and Puckett (1975:135) find name innovations were once uncommon among African Americans. To be sure, there is reason to believe that usage of distinctive names was increasing before the period covered by the Illinois data. Unusual names are more common among African American college students from 1910 to 1930 than in the 1880 to 1910 period (Puckett 1938). Puckett also reports unusual names increasing in comparisons between the pre-1870, 1870–1900, and post-1900 birth cohorts listed in *Who's Who in Negro America*. However, a study of African American and White college women in the 1931–1932 and 1940–1941 academic years indicates only a small number of either race had unique names (Eagleson and Clifford 1945; for a fuller view, see Lieberson and Bell 1992:547).

Not only is the disposition to innovate currently more common among African Americans, but the age and education of mother are relatively less important influences among African Americans when compared to Whites. The frequency of unique names in Illinois between 1985 and 1988 is examined separately for African American and White mothers who are cross-classified by five age categories and six educational attainment categories. The coefficient of variation, *CV*, describes the relative dispersion of unique names within each subdivision of each population.[3] The relative variation among the age and educational categories of African American mothers is far narrower than among Whites. For girls born during these years, $CV = 19$ among African Americans, compared with 60 among Whites. Likewise, for boys, $CV = 36$ and 139, respectively. This result is harmonious with both Lamont's (1992:146) observation, that racial minorities tend to "celebrate their distinctiveness" through such cultural devices, and with research indicating that African American–White differences in musical tastes cannot be explained by the usual SES differences (DiMaggio and Ostrower 1990; Peterson and Simkus 1992).

What accounts for this growth in preference for unique names? The 1960s is a period of broad social and political changes. It is a time of intensified African American social protest, an emphasis on Black power, renewed emphasis on a distinctive and valued African American culture, and separatism. Although no distinct event marks the beginning of this period, the excellent review by Marden, Meyer, and Engel (1992:195–201) lists important events, such as the March on Washington (1963), widespread large-scale riots (1964 through 1967), the organization of the Black Panther Party (1966), the separatist theme among African American activists (1954 through 1968), emphasis on a distinctive African American culture (as in the use of the concept of *soul*, Afro haircuts, and the study of Swahili in the 1960s), and the development of a call for Black Power (as in Carmichael and Hamilton 1967, as well as in the National Conference held that year).

Although these cultural, social, and political developments within the African American community may well have played a role in the increased creation of names, the causal process is probably complex. Several important shifts in African American naming tastes prior to this period may have been necessary prerequisites for the later increase in the use of unique names. In Illinois, long before the 1960s, African American and White tastes in leading names had started to diverge. For girls, the Spearman rank-order correlation between the top 20 African American names and the top 20 White names was as high as .65 in 1919, and by 1960 the correlation was essentially 0.[4] For boys, the correlations between the top 20 White and top 20 African American names was as high as .74 in 1918, but declined sharply after World War II such that the Spearman rank-order correlation was about .20 in 1960. (The correlations since then were as low as −.40 between African American and White girls in the early 1980s and −.20 for boys in the late 1980s.) This de-

[3] This measure of relative variability is obtained by dividing the standard deviation by the mean (see Blalock 1979:84). This statistic permits the comparison of relative homogeneity, even though the four age- and sex-specific groups differ considerably in their use of unique names.

[4] A list of names is obtained by pooling by sex, the top 20 African American and the top 20 White names. The rank order of names for each race is determined for this restricted list, and a Spearman rho is then computed.

cline in shared tastes was also accompanied by a decline in the concentration of name choices being made by African Americans. In 1916, the 20 most popular African American boys' names were given to 40 percent of African Americans born in that year; among White boys, 43 percent were given one of the top 20 White names. By 1960, 33 percent of African Americans were given one of their top 20 boys' names, whereas the concentration for Whites was 55 percent. The gap is substantial for girls as well. In 1960, the concentration of the top 20 names is 37 and 25 percent, respectively, for White girls and African American girls—however this is not substantially larger than the gap at the outset of the period. In brief, as we enter the 1960s, the period of intensifying African American nationalism, there was already an increasing divergence between the two groups in their naming tastes and also an increasing diversity among African Americans in their newly popular names, conditions which themselves may have laid the groundwork for an increased disposition toward naming innovations.

The Problem: Innovation and African American Names

Where do these innovations come from? The potential array of sounds that one can combine to create a name is virtually infinite. Yet assuming imagination is embedded in a set of existing social conventions, we expect that the existing body of linguistic practices sets bounds on the choices made by parents when they create a name for their child.

Based on a comparison of 60 societies, Alford (1988:66–68) finds that the sex of an individual is the most common item of information conveyed by first names. This is certainly the case in the United States, where first names typically convey gender. Androgynous names are relatively uncommon, even at present: In New York State not one of the leading 100 boys' names overlaps with the leading 100 girls' names. We start then with the question, do parents who create names do so in such a way that the names still convey their child's gender? We first determine whether people can correctly guess the sex of children bearing names they presumably have never heard before. Second, we turn to our central concern—inferring how existing cultural practices structure and restrict the inventiveness of parents when they create a unique name. In doing this, we consider how existing phonemic practices in the society may influence these new names, and we determine if these names reflect a distinctive African American culture that has ties back to names used in Africa.

DO INVENTED NAMES COMMUNICATE THE SEX OF THE CHILD?

In the United States it is generally easy to determine the sex of people with standard names—the only exceptions are rarely used names or the occasional androgynous name. In a small field study, we consider if an infant's gender influences the linguistic character of names invented by parents. A sample of 8 boys' and 8 girls' names were randomly obtained from a list of unique names given to African American children in New York State between 1973 and 1985. Subjects were given this list in the format shown in Figure 3 and were asked to guess the sex of each child.[5] The questionnaire was completed by 224 subjects from a nonrandom convenience sample of persons approached in a shopping mall, airport, summer stock theater, workshop for promising African American high school students, and in an inner city program for low income children. Altogether, 122 of the subjects were White, 61 were African American, 41 either reported "other" or did not report their race. Among those reporting age, 144 were under 25 years old, and 72 were 25 or older. Among those who were 25 or older, or who were under 25 but did not attend school in the previous year, 93 had no more than a high school education and 122 had at least some college.[6]

The guesses are extremely lopsided (Table 1, column 1, lists the names in declining or-

[5] Five additional questions were included on race, age, education, and birthplace of the respondents, as well as questions on the social class of other names.

[6] An initial pilot study of this questionnaire on college students attending Harvard University, formulated by the senior author as a project for a student, yields results consistent with those reported here.

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Figure 3. Questionnaire to Determine If the Sex of Children with Invented Names Can Be Guessed Correctly

This is a list of 16 unusual names. Some are girls' names and some are boys' names. Please indicate which ones you think were given to girls and which ones you think were given to boys.

Name	(G = Girl, B = Boy) G or B
Cagdas	_____
Chanti	_____
Furelle	_____
Gerais	_____
Husan	_____
Jorell	_____
Kariffe	_____
Lamecca	_____
Maleka	_____
Olukayod	_____
Rashueen	_____
Shameki	_____
Shatrye	_____
Sukoya	_____
Timitra	_____
Triciaan	_____

der of concentration). For all but 2 of the 16 names, at least two-thirds of respondents guessed the same gender (the exceptions are Kariffe and Shameki). Nearly 94 percent of the respondents gave the same response for Lamecca, and almost 90 percent for Chanti, Husan, and Timitra. The percentages for all of the remaining names range from about the low 70s to well into the 80s. On average, nearly 80 percent of respondents gave the same answer (median = 77.8 percent; mean = 78.1 percent). The concentration of guesses about the gender of each name suggests that diverse subjects responded to commonly shared linguistic cues.

Not only is there a high degree of consensus about the gender conveyed by most names, but the majority guess was usually correct (in 13 of the 16 names). The exceptions are: Chanti, incorrectly guessed as a girl's name by 89 percent; Furelle, incorrectly guessed as a girl's name by 75 percent; and Kariffe, incorrectly guessed as a boy's name by about 59 percent (Table 1, column 2).[7] Overall, however, 69 percent of the time the respondents correctly guessed the sex of the child with an invented name, and less than 10 percent of the respondents incorrectly guessed half or more of the names.

Also, note that the dispersion of correct answers for each name is far different from what we would expect based on a binomial model applied to the average for all 16 names (Kolmogorov-Smirnov $D = .49$; $p < .01$).[8] The correctness of the responses to each name tends to be more extreme than a binomial model would predict. When the majority of respondents are right, they are *overwhelmingly right*; when the majority are wrong, they are *overwhelmingly wrong*. The average percent correct hides the fact that respondents are correctly picking up the linguistic markers for gender for most of the created names by a large margin; but in a small number of cases there is also high agreement among respondents and they are wrong.

There is a widely shared cultural agreement regarding the sounds associated with names for girls and boys. African Americans and Whites had equal ability to guess the gender of these names (67.8 and 68.5 percent, respectively). Indeed, the level is actually slightly higher for subjects reporting a race other than White or Black. Likewise, there were only minor differences between young (age < 25) and old (69.2 and 68.9 percent, respectively), and between those with higher or lower levels of education (70.1 and 67.8 percent, respectively). Within this sample there is no indication that any of the subgroups possess greater skills in coding these names.

[7] Because these invented names are presently not part of the standard repertoire of names, one cannot say that these are girls' or boys' names in the same way that one might describe Jennifer or Michael. Rather, there are names given to specific a boy or a specific girl.

[8] Based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov one-sample test, given the average proportion correct for these names (.689875) and the number of usable respondents (N = 220).

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Table 1. Gender of 16 Invented Names: Concentration of Responses and Percent Correct

Name	Sex of Child	Concentration of Responses (Declining Order)	Percent Correct Answers
Lamecca	Girl	93.6	93.6
Husan	Boy	89.5	89.5
Chanti	Boy	89.1	10.9
Timitra	Girl	89.0	89.0
Oukayod	Boy	86.3	86.3
Maleka	Girl	85.5	85.5
Sukoya	Girl	79.5	79.5
Jorell	Boy	79.1	79.1
Rashueen	Boy	76.4	76.4
Furelle	Boy	75.0	25.0
Shatrye	Girl	72.7	72.7
Gerais	Boy	71.7	71.7
Triciaan	Girl	68.9	68.9
Cagdas	Boy	68.8	68.8
Shameki	Girl	65.5	65.5
Kariffe	Girl	58.6	41.4

Thus far, our evidence *suggests* that African American naming innovations are not free of existing customs. Rather, certain phonemes are more appealing for a boy and others are "better" for a girl. In our experiment, we find that respondents share a common understanding of these cues, such that the distribution of their guesses tends to be lopsided. Moreover, they tend to respond to the same sounds that the parent(s) had in mind, because the overwhelming majority of respondents are usually correct about the sex of the child.

HOW DOES THIS GENDER COMMUNICATION OCCUR?

What are the linguistic features that influence names parents invent for their children and in turn enable others to correctly guess the sex of the child? Evans (1992) observes, "African-Americans also commonly create new names for their children by combining their own sets of fashionable sounds and syllables" (p. 13). We particularly want to know if invented names incorporate any existing links between gender and phonemes found among the most common African American and White children's names.

For each of the 16 names in our list (including the three cases where the majority of respondents incorrectly guessed the sex of the child), we infer the phonemic feature(s) that signaled a given gender to most respondents. In turn, we examine gender differences among the top 100 African American and White names in New York State in the years 1973 through 1985 to see if these same phonemic features operate there.[9] If this first test supports our inference, then our second step is to see if the same gender links occur among all unique names in New York State (not just the sample of 16 names).[10] We examine the 16 names in declining order of gender concentration among responses.

The name Lamecca generated the highest concentration of responses: Nearly 95 percent of respondents correctly guessed it was a girls name. Why? For both African Americans and Whites, among the 100 most popular girls and boys names, there is a massive gender difference in the frequency of names ending with an *a*-sound. Joshua is the only male name in the top 100 ending in *a*. By contrast, for girls one-half of all leading names among African Americans and one-third of all leading names among Whites end with an *a*-sound (as in, say, Latoya, Jessica, or Sarah). In effect, due to the etymological origins of names used in the United States, the *a*-ending provides a powerful clue to gender: We implicitly *know* that such an ending almost certainly indicates a girl's name. This phonemic feature also accounts for three other unique names in our study (Timitra, Maleka, and Sukoya). These also are girls' names, and all three generated fairly lopsided guesses (80 percent and higher thought they were girls' names). Does this association of *a*-endings with names for girls affect the

[9] Because of ties in rank for the 100th most common name, data on African American names for girls refer to the top 104 names, and data for White girls' names includes the top 105.

[10] Analyses of suffixes are based on samples of 208 African American girls and 197 African American boys, 177 White girls, and 214 White boys. Analyses of prefixes, because they are easier to sort via computer, are based on 5,320 African American girls, 3,337 African American boys, 4,578 White girls, and 2,711 White boys.

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Table 2. Linguistic Characteristics of Invented Names for Children Born in New York State, 1973–1985

	Percent of Names with Characteristic			
	African American		White	
Linguistic Characteristic	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Ending Sounds:				
All vowels	29	65	34	63
a/ah	8	51	7	38
i	7	4	6	5
ie	4	2	4	5
other	11	7	16	15
All consonants	71	35	66	37
d	5	1	7	2
el or ell	5	3	6	3
elle	1	0	0	1
n	20	13	14	17
s	6	4	7	3
other	35	14	33	11
Beginning Sounds:				
Sh	4	9	2	4
Ch	2	3	1	2
K	8	7	4	6
Kar	1	0	2	1

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construction of unique names generally? Yes, and to a stunning degree: In New York state from 1973 through 1985, 51 percent of unique names for African American girls and 38 percent of unique names for White girls ended in an *a* sound, compared with 8 and 7 percent respectively, for boys (Table 2). It is as if the *a*-ending does not quite "sound right" for a boy, but does for a girl.

The name Husan yields the second highest concentration of responses, with essentially 90 percent correctly guessing that it is a boy's name. It is unlikely that the *n*-ending of Husan serves to signal a male name, even though *consonant*-endings are very common among male names. Eighty-two percent of the top 100 names for African American boys and 87 percent of the top 100 names for White boys end in a consonant sound; the frequency of consonant endings is far lower for leading girls' names, ranging from about 30 percent for African Americans to about 40 percent for Whites. However, there is no real difference between White boys' and White girls' names in the frequency of an *n*-ending among the top 100 names (24 and 23 percent, respectively). Among African Americans the *n*-ending is favored for boys as compared to girls in the top 100 names (23 percent versus 14 percent), but the *n*-ending would not be a sharp gender marker and hence, probably does not account for the concentration of guesses that Husan is a boy. The best speculation, at this stage, is that the response to the name Husan relates to its similarity to several well-known male Arabic names. For example, Hasan is "one of the most popular names in all Islamic countries and has strong religious associations" (Baker 1990:368). Moreover, the spelling of Husan is similar to Husayn, which is a diminutive of Hasan (Baker 1990:369). Husan is also fairly similar to Hussein (as the King of Jordan is referred to) and is the last name by which the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, is popularly called. All of these factors probably affected subjects' responses to the name Husan. There are several examples of African Americans using one variant or another of such Arab names for boys. In our sample of births in New York State between 1973 and 1985, we find: 10 boys named Hassan, 5

named Hasan, 2 named Hasaan, and also Haason, Hasson, and Hussan.

The response to Chanti is noteworthy on two counts: first, a high percentage of respondents (90 percent) thought it was a girls' name; second, the majority were wrong.[11] Is there some phonemic feature that leads people to guess that Chanti is a girl? A likely cause is the initial sound. If respondents interpret the *Ch* in Chanti as getting a *Sh* pronunciation, this would account for the predominance of female guesses. Names starting with *Sh* or *Ch* (when the latter has the *Sh* pronunciation, as in Charlene) tend to be preferred more for girls' names than for boys'. Among leading African American names for girls, four start with *Sh* (Sharon, Shamika, Sheri, and Sheena) and three start with *Ch* (Chantel, Charlene, and Chanel—all have the same *Sh* pronunciation). By contrast none of the leading African American names for boys begin with *Sh*. The pattern occurs for Whites on a lesser scale: Shannon, Cheryl, Sheri, and Sharon are popular names for girls; only Shane occurs for boys. Shatrye and Shameki, two other names used in our study, are relevant to this point. As with Chanti, the majority of respondents guessed that both of these names are given to a girl—and in these cases they were correct. The distribution for unique names also supports this conclusion. Girls are twice as likely as boys to be given a name beginning with *Sh* (Table 2). *Ch* is also favored for girls over boys in each racial group, albeit to a less pronounced degree. In short, the initial *Sh* sound is associated with unique names for girls, not just among those included in our survey. A similar association likely operates for those unique names beginning with *Ch* if the pronunciation is the same as *Sh*, which is often the case.[12]

For both Chanti and Shameki, one might speculate that the *i*-ending (which normally get a long *ee* sound) generated the guess that it was a girl's name. This *i*-ending occurs only among top girls' names (albeit not very frequently): Sheri, for both African Americans and Whites, and Lori, Jodi, and Heidi for Whites as well. Looking further, Shatrye has no *i*-ending, but still nearly three-quarters of respondents attributed this name to a girl. The results in Table 2 suggest that among African Americans, unique names ending in *i* or *ie* are actually slightly more common for boys than for girls; there is no distinguishable difference for White boys and girls. The tendency for respondents to label Chanti and Shameki as girls' names—as the case of Shatrye—probably reflects the association of the initial *Sh*-sound with girls.

Olukayod appears to be a polysyllabic name, and a variety of phonemic dimensions could account for the majority of respondents guessing it is a boy's name. One phonemic explanation is quite striking: None of the top African American or White names for girls end in a hard *d* sound. Among boys, however, seven of the leading African American names end in a hard *d*, as do nine of the leading White names. David, Richard, Ronald, Edward, Raymond, and Donald occur for both groups; African Americans also use Reginald, and Whites use Todd, Chad, and Jared. Thus the *d*-ending is a strong gender-linked distinction and could easily serve as a gender cue for the name Olukayod. Examining all unique names supports this conclusion: For both African Americans and Whites, the frequency of unique names ending in a hard *d* is at least several times greater among boys as among girls (see Table 2). We can infer that the *d*-ending in Olukayod triggered the "boy guesses" predominant among our respondents.

Jorell and Furelle are both invented names given to boys. Among our respondents, Jorell generated predominantly boy guesses, but 75 percent of the respondents thought Furelle was a girl's name. Why? In English, the *elle-*

[11] Our methodology does not allow us to address the question of why particular parents would name their son Chanti. Rather, we assess only the overall pattern. On the whole, we can draw some inferences as our experimental results indicate that these name choices generally indicate gender—in most cases a name correctly communicated the child's gender for the majority of our respondents.

[12] The *Ch* beginning could designate a phoneme identical to *Sh*, or a hard *K* (as in Christopher or Christine), or a phoneme such as is found in Charles or Chad. Accordingly, we can see why it is a less lopsided gender marker than *Sh*. Further research should consider the actual pronunciation respondents tend to give these invented names they have not seen before.

ending commonly designates girls' names of French origin (e.g., compare Daniel with Danielle and Michael with Michelle).[13] Examining a list of the 60 top names among females of all ages in France estimated by Besnard and Desplanques for early 1992 (1991:268), we find a number of names using the *elle-* or *ele*-endings, as in Isabelle, Michèle, Danielle, Christelle, and Marcelle. In contrast, the comparable list of names for males (p. 267) includes names with *el*-endings, as in Michel, Daniel, Marcel, and Mickaël. So in France, among the leading names there is simply no gender overlap in the use of the *elle-* and *el*-endings.

In New York State during our study period, Michelle and Danielle are among the top 100 names for girls among both African Americans and Whites, and none of the top 100 names for boys end with *elle*. In contrast, only boys' names use the *ell*-ending, as in Terrell and Darnell for African Americans and Russell for Whites. The *el*-ending also appears to be linked to gender. It occurs among the top 100 names in all four race-gender categories, but most occurrences are for boys (13), with only a few for girls (4). Thus, our respondents' guesses that Jorell is a boy's name and Furelle is a girl's name are consistent with the observation that adding a final *e* to *el* or *ell* generally converts a boy's name into a girl's name.

Among invented names, the use of *el* and *ell*-endings is similar to that for leading names, but less consistent. The *el-* and *ell*-endings occur more often in boys' names—among unique names for girls, 3 percent of both African American and White names end in *el* or *ell*, whereas for boys' names, 5 percent among African Americans and 6 percent among Whites have these endings. The *elle*-ending, however, is so uncommon among invented names in our sample that we can make no firm conclusion—only one white girl's name and one African American boy's name end in *elle*. Overall, then, our results support a linguistic explanation for the divergent gender guesses of our respondents to the names Jorell and Furelle.

Three-fourths of our respondents correctly identified Rashueen as a boy. The prefix *Rash-* is unusual in American names, and we speculate that its use is inspired by Arabic names, such as Rashad and Rashid for boys and Rashida for girls (Baker 1990:379). However, by itself, neither the *-een* suffix nor the *Rash-* prefix accounts for the predominant response. None of the top 100 names—African American or White, boys' or girls'—begins with *Rash*. Endings with an *een*-sound are also uncommon, if anything found more often in the list of leading girls' names (Kathleen and Colleen among Whites, Charlene among African Americans, and Christine among both races); the only top-100 male name ending in an *een-* sound is Eugene among African Americans. The pattern among unique names suggests an explanation for the predominantly boy guesses to the name Rashueen. Among African Americans, 22 boys and 12 girls were given innovative names beginning with *Rash-*, *Rash-*, or *Rahsh-*; among Whites there were 5 boys and 6 girls. There is also an association between the sex of the child and the name's ending. For Blacks, among the 12 *Rash-*girls' names, 9 have vowel endings (Rahsheta, Rasha, Rashada, Rasheela, Rasheeta, Rashella, Rashema, Rashina, and Rashonda), 2 end with a consonant sound (Rasheen and Rahsheed), and the pronunciation of 1 is uncertain (Rashonne). In contrast, of the 22 boys given a unique name beginning with *Rash-*, 20 have consonant endings—and of these 9 end with a *n*. Among Whites, 6 girls' names begin with *Rash-*; 3 end with a consonant (one of them an *n*), and 3 end with a vowel. Of the 5 boys with *Rash-*names, 4 end with a consonant (none with an *n*). Thus, invented names beginning with *Rash-* are likely to have a *consonant*-ending if given to a boy (24 of 27 cases for boys of both races) and a *vowel*-ending if given to a girl (12 of 18 cases). This suggests an interaction effect, such that a given sound has an association with one gender only in the presence of another phonetic characteristic. These rules would both affect the appeal to parents of a given combination of sounds for a boy's or a girl's name and, additionally, would provide cues to the sex of the child

[13] See Dunkling (1977:113), who observes that the popularity of the name Belle late in the nineteenth century may have contributed to using *elle* in English for girls' names. See, also, the discussion of masculine and feminine name endings by Besnard and Desplanques (1991:46–47).

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understood by people in general either overtly or subliminally.

About 70 percent of respondents correctly guessed Gerais as a boy's name. In the United States at present, the *s*-ending is a common and distinctive ending for boys' names. None of the 100 leading names given to White girls born during this period end in a hard *s*-sound and there are only two among African American girls (Alexis and Denise, the latter because of its silent *e*). In contrast, both leading African American and White boys' names include six with *s*-endings: James, Thomas, Charles, Dennis, Carlos, and Travis. In addition, Nicholas, Luis, Douglas, Louis, and Francis occur among Whites, and Marcus and Curtis among Blacks. Although the number of cases makes it easy to overinterpret this pattern, the gender link of *s*-endings for unique names supports this conclusion (see Table 2). These results also help to account for the fact that two-thirds of respondents correctly guessed Cagdas as a boy's name.

It is difficult to explain the gender responses for the two remaining names Triciann and Kariffe. The majority of respondents (68.9 percent) correctly guessed that Triciann is a girl's name. The respondents may have thought the name was a combination of two standard female names, Tricia and Ann. The concentration of responses for this name, however, was modest compared to other names, and certainly compared to what we might expect if the vast majority of respondents identified the name as the aforementioned combination. What, then, led 31 percent to identify Triciaan as a boy's name? Perhaps the *n*-ending interacts with some other sound in the name to indicate a boy and hence modify the strong girl response we would otherwise expect. A test for the future could give some respondents the name Triciaane rather than Triciaan.

The responses to the name Kariffe were the most balanced of any name; nearly 60 percent identified it as a boy's name—it actually was given to a girl. This suggests there is no strong linguistic cue to influence respondents in a certain direction; or perhaps several cues have opposite influences and cancel each other out. Three linguistic features of the name Kariffe are all inconclusive. First, three of the top 100 African American boys' names begin with a C(K)ar sound: Kareem, C(K)arl, and Carlos. Only one Black girl's name begins in this way, Karen. Among Whites, by contrast, *C(K)ar-* occurs in three leading girls' names (Karen, Kara, Carolyn). Among White boys' names there is Carlos and C(K)arl. This pattern is certainly consistent with the relatively balanced gender response to Kariffe. Likewise there is no obvious gender gap in unique names beginning with either *K* or *Kar* (see Table 2)—the gaps are both slight and inconsistent. Second, the double consonant, *ff*, occurs in one leading boy's name (Jeffrey) and in one leading girl's name (Tiffany). No name with an *iffe*-ending occurred in our sample of unique names in any race-gender group, and, like the double consonant, *ff*, there is no reason to expect this *iffe*-ending to trigger a strong gender response in either direction. Third, the *e*-ending in Kariffe is common for names for both sexes, albeit more so for girls than boys (22 versus 14 among the top names for African Americans, and 19 versus 7 for Whites). If anything, the *e*-ending should have generated more girl guesses among our respondents. In short, there is no linguistic reason to expect anything but a mildly lopsided gender response to the name Kariffe.

In summary, the linguistic construction of invented names in the United States at present is affected by two critical factors. First, there is a widespread assumption that names will be gender-specific—this is the case for virtually all of the standard first names in our society. Second, among the prominent conventional boys' and girls' names, certain sounds are more often associated with gender (albeit the English language in general, and naming practices in particular, are irregular and full of exceptions). As a consequence, parents find some linguistic characteristics more appealing when they invent a name for daughters and others more appealing for boys. Because the population in general, at least implicitly, resonates to the same associations of gender with certain sounds, people do quite well when guessing the sex of a child on hearing an invented name.

The fact that invented names do convey gender tells us much about the bounds of creativity. However, we should not gloss over

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the fact that an extraordinary association exists between names and gender. Androgynous names obviously exist. Recall, however, that in New York State, during the years 1973 through 1985, not one of the leading 100 boys' names was the same as a leading girl's name. The power and pervasiveness of a gender-based stratification system is illustrated rather nicely when we compare this fact with the overlap between African Americans and Whites, or between social classes. The list of the 100 most frequent names for African American boys and the list of the top 100 names for White boys have 60 names in common; For females the two races have 51 names in common. Among Whites, comparing mothers with college degrees with those achieving only one to three years of high school, 66 of the boys' names overlap and 63 of the leading girls' names overlap. (The relatively small N prevents educational comparisons for African Americans.) At present, names signify gender to a far greater degree than they signify race or class. Using the top 100 name criterion, it is literally impossible for any stratification variable to be *more* segregated by the naming process than is gender. Our experimental results, which show that even invented names indicate gender, suggest that it is a contemporary process, not merely an earlier naming process. Since names could represent many other physical, social, or relational features, the consciousness and emphasis on gender-marking in the naming process reflects the fact that such gender-marking is a central feature in our culture. In this regard, the greater numbers of unique names for girls, for both Whites and African Americans, may reflect a different view of males and females in the society such that tradition and continuity are defined as more important for males and fashion and expressiveness more important for females (see Rossi 1965; Lieberson and Bell 1992).

AFRICAN INFLUENCES: EVALUATING AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

Before addressing the ramifications of our conclusion, let us consider a radically different interpretation. Perhaps many of these invented names are, at least in part, historical derivations from African practices and/or simply reflect a contemporary surge of interest in Africa among African Americans.

Evidence from a variety of sources support this conclusion. The increase in the use of distinctive names occurs at a time when African Americans were stressing their distinctive culture and turned to their African roots. Some well-known people changed to Muslim names (particularly those used by Arabs) or African names. For example, in 1964, heavyweight champion Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali; in 1971, the basketball star, Lew Alcindor became Kareem Abdul-Jabbar; and playwright LeRoi Jones became Imamu Amiri Baraka (Rosenkrantz and Satran 1988:221). Moreover, popular and semi-popular guides to African names were published to help African American parents find a suitable African name for their infants (e.g., see Osuntaki 1970; "Some African Names" 1971; Chuks-Orji 1972; Sanyika 1975; Karim, 1976; McKinzie and Tindimwebwa 1980), and African names were included in volumes oriented toward the larger society (e.g., Ellefson 1987). The impact of "Roots," first shown on television in January 1977 and watched by more people than any other dramatic series (Brooks and Marsh 1985:722), illustrates the attractiveness of names associated with Africa. After the program aired, Kizzy—in "Roots" the American-born daughter of an African who was captured and transported into slavery—ranked as the 17th most popular name given to African American girls born in Illinois in 1977; in the previous year it was not in the top 200.[14] Likewise, a resurgence of interest in Marcus Garvey, a pre-World War II separatist and nationalist who pushed for a return to Africa, probably inspired the sudden popularity of the name Marcus. The name ranked 164th among names for boys born to Blacks in 1956, 98th in 1960, moved up to rank as the 13th most popular name in 1970, and finally ranked fifth in 1983. (There is no comparable change in the use of Marcus among Whites; in 1983, for example, Marcus ranked 128.5 among White boys' names.) Finally, a substantial minority of African Americans report a positive orientation toward African

[14] The popularity of the name promptly dropped off; ranking 86 and tied for 109 in 1978 and 1979, respectively.

names. About 20 percent in the 1979–1980 National Survey of Black Americans either "agree" (17 percent) or "strongly agree" (3 percent) with the statement, "Black parents should give their children African names" (Jaynes and Williams 1989:199, tables 4–7).

It is the Gullah living along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, however, who provide the most significant evidence in support of this alternative view. Black slaves working on the plantations in that area were unusually isolated from New World influences; there were very few Whites present and African slaves were imported directly with no intermediate time in the West Indies. Turner (1949), in a pioneering study, was the first to demonstrate the influence of the slaves' African origins on the Gullah language.[15] Turner observed that among themselves the Gullah used a set of African-derived personal names, but used a different set of names in front of Whites.

> Most of the Gullah people use two kinds of given names. One is English, and they call it their real or true name and use it at school, in their correspondence, and in their dealings with strangers. The other is the nickname, known also as the pet name or basket name. In their homes and among their friends and acquaintances they use the nickname almost exclusively. In fact, so general is its use that many of the Gullahs have difficulty in recalling their English given-names. The nickname is nearly always a word of African origin. (Turner 1949:40)

These observations are supported by the current work of the linguist Salikoko Mufwene, who emphasizes the influence on Gullah of the Kwa languages spoken in West Africa (see Obermiller 1993:34). Mufwene estimates that about 300,000 African Americans at present speak Gullah. He also finds a resistance to speaking Gullah with outsiders.

Thus, the evidence presented above raises the alternative interpretation that many distinctive names are *not* invented, but are names currently drawn from Africa or known to have been part of the African American population all along and only now are coming to the surface. If African-based names use linguistic gender markers that are similar to those found in standard names in the United States, then this would account for Whites as well as African Americans doing so well in guessing the sex of children with these unique names. The question is whether there is anything in the relevant African linguistic roots that might affect the linguistic features of unique African American names. We will focus on the *a*-ending, an especially important gender marker for unique names.

Empirical Evidence

It is unlikely that the African names, based on those listed in four popular naming books (Osuntoki 1970; Karim 1976; McKinzie and Tindimwebwa 1980; Ellefson 1987), *caused* the distinctive *a*-ending to be so much more common among unique names for girls than among unique names for boys. Although the African names listed in these four books often end with *a*, there is only a modest gender difference: 35 percent of boys' names in all these lists end in *a*, compared with 44 percent for girls (Table 3). Of course, the gender gap varies among specific African languages—indeed in some cases, the *a*-ending is more common for boys than girls, but in other languages the disposition towards *a*-endings is far more pronounced for girls' names (see results in Table 3). Nevertheless, the African naming models provided in these popular books would not cause such a massive gap as that reported earlier for unique names.

Do Gullah first names exhibit this strong gender tendency toward *a*-endings? Turner (1949) lists about 3,500 personal names in Gullah, giving gender, pronunciation, meaning, and African language origin (1949:43–190). The ə phoneme, which is similar to "the English sound of *a* in *Cuba*" (Turner 1949:20), occurs in Gullah. Turner also reports the occurrence of ʌ in Gullah, which is approximately the sound of the English

[15] Prior to Turner's (1949) study it was widely assumed that all features of the Gullah language could be explained on the basis of English. See, for example, the review of Krapp (1924) in Turner (1949)."In vocabulary, in syntax, and pronunciation, practically all of the forms of Gullah can be explained on the basis of English, and probably only a little deeper delving would be necessary to account for those characteristics that still seem strange and mysterious"(p. 6). Turner was able to show enormous African influences on this language.

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Table 3. Frequency of *a*-Endings among African Names Listed in Popular Naming Books, by Gender

Name Source and Languages	Names with *a*-Endings			
	Boy's Names		Girl's Names	
	Percent	N[a]	Percent	N[a]
Osuntoki (1970):				
West Africa	38	65	49	51
Yoruba	18	17	0	15
Benin	20	10	0	2
Akan	33	9	50	4
Central Africa	43	35	40	20
Acolia	0	5	0	1
Bajita	56	9		NA
South Africa	33	9		NA
East Africa	19	36	50	12
Ma-Shona	50	8	38	13
Total Osuntoki	33	203	39	118
Karim (1976):				
African	35	130	39	114
McKinzie and Tindimwebwa (1980):				
East Africa	48	201	58	112
Ellefson (1987):				
Ghana	21	80	56	39
Kenya	27	92	57	95
Nigeria	20	195	109	19
Uganda	47	192	107	52
Total Ellefson	31	559	44	350
Grand Total	35	1,093	44	694

[a] Number in parentheses refers to total names listed by gender and language source.

Note: Names ending in "ah" are also included with *a*-endings.

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vowel in *but* (p. 19). We use no sample here, but examine every one of the names to see the gender of those ending with either ə or ʌ. Not one name in the entire list has either ending. To consider all possibilities, we also examined the simple *a*-ending, which Turner employs to represent a sound similar to the French vowel in *la* (1949:16). Although this is somewhat removed from the sound in *Cuba* and *but*, many of the unique names with *a*-endings in our list could have such a sound. This proves to be a common ending for names for both sexes (based on a sample of three names on each page, 41 percent of girls' names and 25 percent of boys' names end with an *a*). The direction of this gap is similar to the contemporary pattern among unique names, but clearly the gender differential in the use of an *a*-ending is far more developed among unique names than among names in Gullah. Indeed, given that there are more boys' than girls' names in Turner's list, approximately 40 percent of the names in our sample with an *a*-ending are for boys. In any case, the Gullah results indicate there is a greater disposition for African *a*-ending names to be female, but not enough of a difference to attribute the sharp gender gap in the United States to these African roots.

Thus, neither historical African roots (as indicated by Gullah names) nor current African naming models (as indicated in popular naming books) can account for the gender differences in the use of the *a*-ending we

Table 4. The Influence of Gender on the Continuity of African Name Endings Used in United States

Probable African Origin	Percentage of American Adoptions: with *a*- and Non-*a*-Endings			
	Girls' Names		Boys' Names	
	a-Ending	Non-*a*-Ending	*a*-Ending	Non-*a*-Ending
One Root Name:				
A-ending	93	7	53	47
Non-*a*-ending	31	69	2	98
Several Possible Root Names:				
All *a*-ending	98	2	69	31
All non-*a*-ending	12	88	4	96
A- and non-*a*-endings	82	18	28	72

Source: Analysis of data reported in Puckett (1975, chap. 5).

have observed. We can consider one additional model—that African origins do influence naming, but these influences do not operate in a societal vacuum and are modified by the existing practices within the dominant society. Puckett (1975) lists "all the names used by Blacks, slave and free, and Whites in this country which suggest African origin" (p. 347). For each name listed in his 122 page "Dictionary of African Origin" (see chap. 5), Puckett identifies "those African languages or dialects from which it seems to have derived, or at least resembles strongly. The form, if different, and meaning of the word in that language is indicated" (pp. 347–48). In other words, we can compare the endings of African American names with the endings of their most likely African roots, allowing for a "before-and-after" analysis of what happened to names imported to the New World. The results, shown in Table 4, offer a powerful clue to how African cultural origins were adapted and modified when naming children in American society. Consider, for example, American names that derive from a specific African word ending with an *a*. Observe that 93 percent of such girls' names keep the original African *a*-ending and only 7-percent shift to a non-*a*-ending. In contrast, for girls' names derived from an African word that has a non-*a*-ending, nearly one-third shift to an *a*-ending,and only 69 percent keep the non-*a*-ending. These patterns are in the opposite direction for boys' names. Among those derived from an African word with an *a*-ending, nearly half (47 percent) shift to a non-*a* ending, while among boys' names with an African root that has an *non-a* ending, only 2 percent shift to an *a*-ending. This propensity in the United States to move toward *a*-endings for girls' names and *non-a*-endings for boys' names also holds when there are several possible African roots. For males, there is a tendency to drop the *a*-endings in the African root names; for females, there is shift toward *a*-endings (see the third and fourth rows of Table 4). The results are impressive for names with different possible African roots that include at least one name that ends in *a* and at least one that does not: More than 80 percent of American girls' names with such mixed possibilities end in *a*, whereas 72 percent of American boys' names with mixed roots have non-*a*-endings.

Summary

Our results indicate that the ability of respondents to guess the gender of uncommon African American names is not explained by the alternative view—that these names are really African names and hence respondents are resonating to existing knowledge about such names.[16] Moreover, the observed gender differences in the frequency of *a*-endings is not

[16] Of course, this is in keeping with the results obtained in our non-random survey, which shows no difference between Whites and African Americans in their ability to guess the gender of these names.

modeled on the African names listed in various popular naming books examined above. Although a-endings are more common for girls' names, the gender gaps are not of the magnitude that would explain the radical differences observed among invented names. Analysis of the endings of Gullah first names also suggests that the gender association with *a*-endings is not explained by their African origins. Indeed, two common sounds that might be signified by an *a* simply do not appear as endings in Gullah names. The *a* as in the French *la* is a common ending for Gullah names, but here too the gaps are not sufficient to account for the unique names used by African Americans.

Among a sample of African-derived names used in the United States (Puckett 1975), 41 percent of girls' names and 25 percent of boys' names have an *a*-ending. Similar to the results above, the gap is not as large as is found at present. However, the link between names thought to have African roots with the form used in the United States suggests that an important innovative mechanism is operating to delineate gender. The American adaptation of African girls' names keeps the *a*-ending, if one exists, or often adds the *a*-ending, if it is not found in the African root. In contrast, for boys' names an African name ending in *a* is frequently changed to end another way, and rarely are non-*a*-endings changed. Hence, the historic African influence on African American names, in so far as it exists, suggests a tendency to modify the linguistic characteristics of the African root to conform with the socially predominant mechanism for designating gender in the United States. Based on our evidence, the most reasonable conclusion is that the distinctive phonemic markers for gender found in name innovations conform to the existing informal system for gender marking in conventional names used in the United States.

COMMENTS

Our results have ramifications for cultural innovations generally, and for developments within the African American population in particular. The naming process that developed in the Black community is an excellent example of how innovations are grounded by an existing set of cultural practices. In particular, the gender of a child affects the sounds parents find appealing or unappealing. Hence their imagination, which has burst away from using "standard" names, is still bounded by cultural practices. We need to reword questions about the African roots of African American culture and African American practices. These questions may be more fruitfully viewed not as *either/or* questions but rather as ones in which African origins operate within the ever-changing constraints of the receiving society. Hence, the challenge is to understand, on the one hand, the institutions and culture Africans brought with them to the United States, and, on the other hand, the institutions and culture of the dominant American society. What is the outcome when these clash? When they clash, what principles influence the outcome? If unique African American naming patterns are based on existing linguistic practices for indicating gender in the larger society (i.e., using or not using an *a*-ending), this does not rule out the possibility of using other distinctive phonemes, for example, initial sounds or other sound combinations that may have an African or Arabic ring.

Finally, we should not lose sight of our most important conclusion. Even in a society that has virtually no formal restrictions on the names parents give to their children, there are still subtle but powerful forces operating on the innovative process.[17] As we noted at the outset, institutional influences on tastes are important. The earlier review suggests the increased use of distinctive names is probably linked to several important changes within the African American population. Beyond this, however, the linguistic structure of the innovations supports the notion that tastes in general—and innovations in particular—are not a simple process such that individuals "like" or "do not like" something (even if that may be what they perceive). The existing set of cultural

[17] Many European societies control the names allowed. In France, for example, name choices have been regulated since the Revolutionary Law of 1803—although the controls were at times relaxed (Withycombe 1977:xlvi). The law was modified in 1987 and again in 1993, but officials can reject a proposed name if they judge that it is contrary to the child's best interest (Besnard and Desplanques 1993:44).

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practices and rules—even if not fully articulated—impact on innovations in taste. In this case, the cultural expectation that names will be gender-specific combines with the existing association of certain sounds with each gender to mold and restrict the linguistic structure of innovations in names.

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