

Popularity as a taste: an application to the naming process

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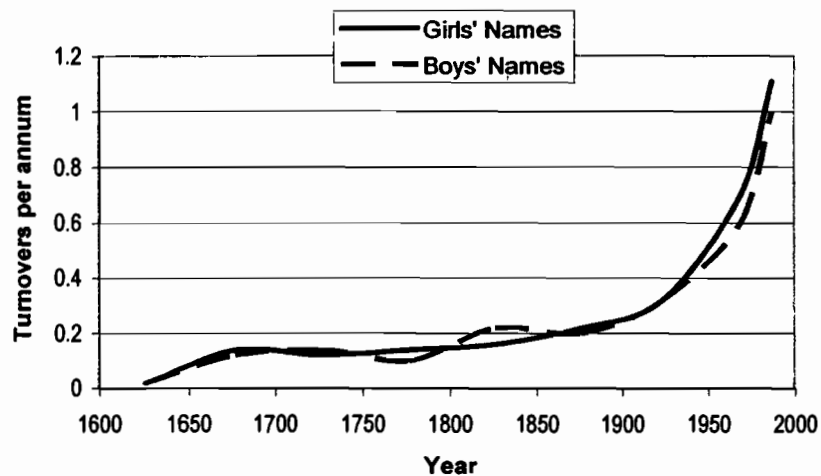
Introduction

TWO REMARKABLE AND DRAMATIC long-term shifts in naming practices began in the second half of the nineteenth century, accelerated through the twentieth century, and show no indication of diminution so far during the twenty-first century. The first of these, an accelerating change in the names given to children, is thoroughly documented for a number of countries (Lieberson 2000: chapter 2) and can be quickly summarized. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, names chosen for children began a gradual shift from being matters of tradition and other conventions to being matters of fashion and taste. Prior to this, the leading first names barely changed over long spans of time, leaving one to conclude that the choices were not based on esthetic and fashion considerations. Throughout the twentieth century, changes in the leading names increased at an ever-growing rate.

It is difficult to sort out the causes; the shift occurs during a span in which there is unprecedented industrialization, growth in mass education, widespread literacy, migration within and across national boundaries (particularly a movement away from smaller communities and rural areas to larger urban centers), a decline in the intensity of religious practices, a decline in the extended family and even the beginning of a decay in the nuclear family. These developments *preceded* radio, motion pictures, and television and there is no reason to view these media changes as central causes (Lieberson 2000: 55–66). Drawing on results originally reported in Lieberson (2000), three figures for Denmark nicely illustrate changes in the turnover of names from early in the seventeenth century through late in

the twentieth century. Early on the changes are modest (a turnover rate of 0.1 means that one of the twenty leading names was replaced on average every ten years). We see an acceleration starting around the mid-nineteenth century which reaches and then exceeds an average of one name replaced in the top 20 every year (figure 1). The next two graphs provide examples of how turnover in popular names occurs with parallel social developments in Denmark, namely, increases in both urbanization

Figure 1. Denmark, Changes in the Top 20 Girls' and Boys' Names, 1600-1991



and in divorce rates (figures 2 and 3, respectively). In any case, we start with a period in which first names were not a matter of fashion, and the leading names barely changed, and then observe a progressively more rapid turnover in names during a period with a noteworthy set of fundamental shifts in the social order. A second long-term change is the declining numerical dominance of a small number of leading names—what we will refer to as the *concentration* of the names given to children. Naming choices were once highly concentrated: a small number of names were used for a very large proportion of children. In many countries the concentration of names is now radically lower, meaning that the most popular names are given to a far smaller number of babies. This on-

going change is not as widely recognized as the shift in turnover. In turn, its ramifications are less appreciated for both onomastics in particular and the social order in which it occurs. Our goal is to help fill this void.

Figure 2. Denmark, Percent Urban and Changes in the Top 20 Girls' and Boys' Names, 1677-1986

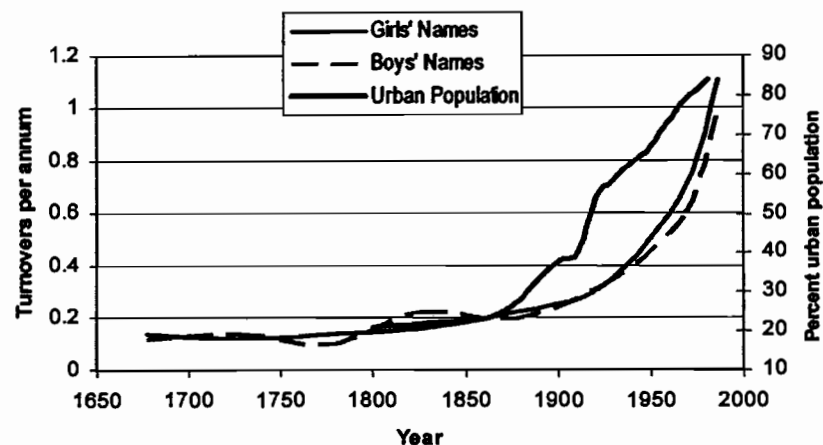
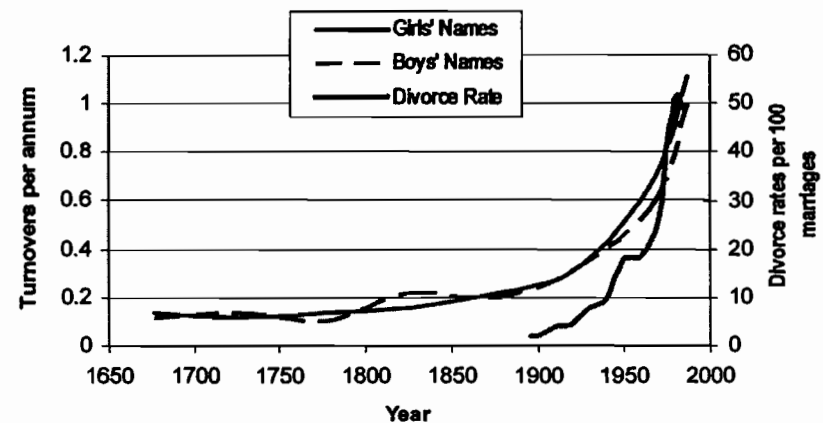


Figure 3. Denmark, Divorce Rates and Changes in the Top 20 Girls' and Boys' Names, 1626-1986

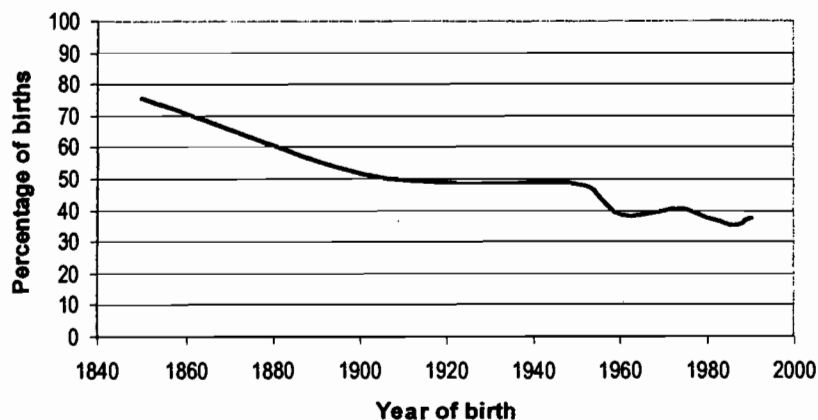


Trends in concentration

Starting with a noteworthy study of naming practices from 1538 through 1700 in England (Smith-Bannister 1997), we observe a level of concentration that is radically different from the present time. During this span, decade by decade, the choice of names remains concentrated and stable. The three most common boys' names were given to virtually half of all sons (mean values in Smith-Bannister 1997: 150). The girls' averages are also striking: the three most common names range from 36 to 52 percent (151). At the other extreme, relatively few boys or girls are given unique names (about 4 percent). This high level of concentration continues through at least the end of the eighteenth century. Half of boys and girls born in every 50-year period from 1550–1599 to 1750–1799 are given one of the three most common names (Withycombe 1977: xxviii). The most common male names during this period were *William*, *John*, and *Thomas*; *Elizabeth*, *Mary*, and *Anne* are similarly common for females. It is difficult to imagine a period in which one of every four girls born in England was given the same name.

More recent developments in England (combined with Wales) from 1850 to 1990 are summarized in figure 4. In 1850 about 75 percent of newly born girls were given one of the leading 20 names. This is not

Figure 4. England/Wales, Twenty Most Popular Girls' Names, 1850-1990



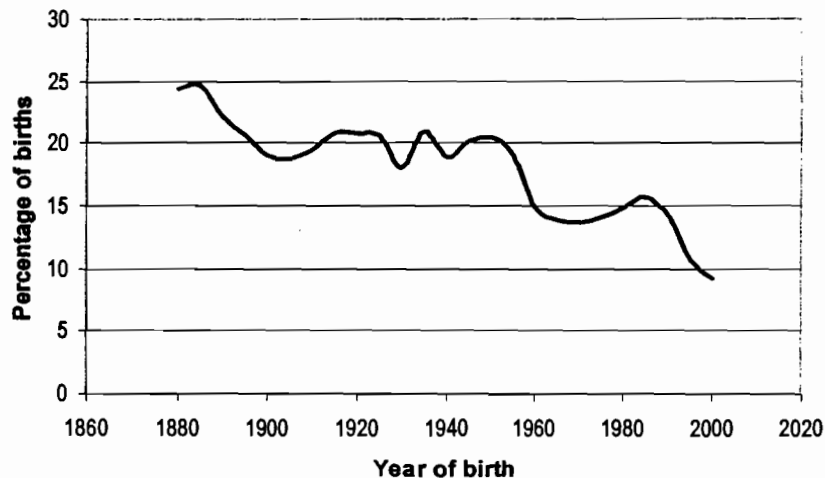
comparable to earlier figures, but we can be reasonably confident that concentration had probably declined by 1850. (The single most popular girl's name in 1850 was given to 15 percent of all daughters, whereas the single most popular name in Withycombe's figures for the second half of the eighteenth century garnered 25 percent). The graph displays a fairly steady decline throughout the 140-year span ending in 1990. Indeed, proportionately more girls are included in Withycombe's data for the top three in the 1750–1799 period than are included among the 20 most common names in 1990 (57 versus 38 percent). And, the single most popular name was given to 4 percent of girls born in 1990, whereas it was 25 percent in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Given these high levels of concentration in England, it is not too surprising to find comparable levels in parts of early America settled by English colonists. The Raleigh Colony (established in 1587) was the earliest English-speaking colony in what is now the United States. Of the 99 men and boys in the Colony, 23 were named *John*, 15 were named *Thomas* and 10 were named *William* (Stewart 1979: 10). This adds up to roughly 50 percent of males concentrated among three names. (The number of recorded women is too small for a comparable tabulation.) Stewart (1979: 15) also analyzes other early data, and these also display high levels of concentration: birth records for girls born during the first forty years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1630–70) show that the name *Mary* was given to 21 percent, *Elizabeth* to 17 percent, and *Sarah* to 15 percent. (Note here these are the names given to children *born* in the colonies, as contrasted with migrants from the old country). Among males enrolled at Princeton and Harvard in the first decade of the nineteenth century (and therefore born between about 1780 and 1789), 80 percent of Princeton students and 51 percent of Harvard students have one of the ten most common names (Stewart 1979: 23). Of course, the influence of selectivity cannot be ruled out in accounting for some degree of these high levels of concentration in early America since the immigrants are highly selective by religion and destination, and so too are the residents of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and those attending colleges associated with different religions and regions. However, the results are reasonably comparable to those reported for England—at least in the sense of displaying levels of concentration far in excess of what is later found in the United States.

The Social Historian Daniel Scott Smith provides us with a useful series for Hingham, Massachusetts (a town southeast of Boston). Using spouses' names in marriage cohorts to reconstruct naming preferences beginning before 1701 and running through every twenty-year period up to 1861–1880, he finds the ten most frequently given boys' names in each period constitute between 30 and 50 percent of all births. For girls the percent share of the top 10 ranges from 77 to 43 percent with a clear downward trend during this period (Scott Smith 1985: 545). The point is that these figures are far above those presently found in the United States.

The decline in naming concentration continues during the span between 1880 and 2000 (figure 5). National data for the United States, gathered from Social Security records, indicates a decline to the point where slightly less than ten percent of all girls have one of the top 10 names by the end of century (indeed, the single most popular name was

Figure 5: United States, Ten Most Popular Girls' Names, 1880-2000

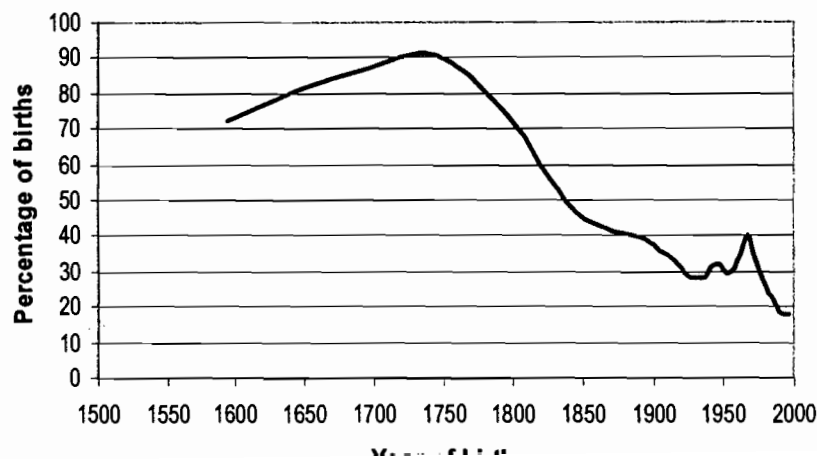


given to 1.3 percent of all daughters born in 2000). As is the case for England, the United States also exhibits a remarkable and stunning shift in the concentration of naming tastes.

There are many other examples of an intense concentration of choices during earlier periods into a small number of names. Von Nell (1974) cites numerous German communities in earlier centuries, although mainly for boys. Baptismal records in São Paulo between 1740 and 1800 show that about half of all girls were given one of three names (*Maria, Anna, or Gertrude*—21.8, 16.9, and 12.0 percent). It took the four most popular names to cover half of the boys being baptized (Marcilio 1974: 41).

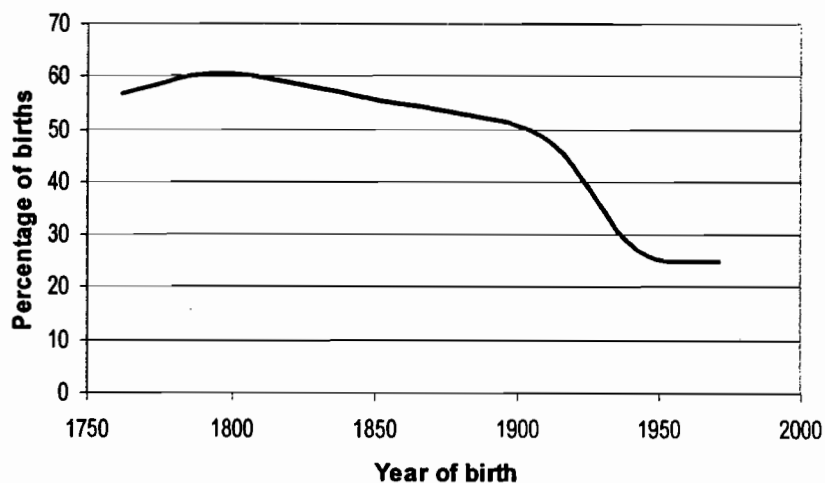
Long-term concentration patterns for France, Germany, Hungary, and Scotland are shown below (figures 6, 7, 8, and 9). In all four cases, there is unmistakable evidence of a downward slide in concentration. As was the case for England and the United States, the available information is not identical with regards to the period examined, the nature and quality of the data used, and the number of leading names considered. For example, in order to maximize comparability over time within a nation, the French and German graphs are based on the top 10 names; the 15 most popular is used for Hungary, and Scotland employs the 20 most popular. (Because there is access to the entire set of names in Scotland over a wide span of years, later it will be possible to use Scottish naming patterns to address more complicated problems about changes in concentration and the causes.) These nations, along

Figure 6. France, Ten Most Popular Girls' Names, 1594-1995



with the results reported earlier, allow us to go forward with reasonable confidence that there is a declining concentration of the most common names given to children in a large number of nations. Put another way, this decline occurs among all of the nations encountered with suitable long-term data.

Figure 7. Germany (Nordfriesland), Ten Most Popular Girls' Names, 1762-1971



Existing explanations

Before describing a Collective Theory of Popularity and applying it to the deconcentration of naming choices, we should consider plausible explanations based on important social processes known to be occurring during this period. These are the relocation of the population from smaller communities to large urban areas in which anonymity could change the context under which concentration in names operates; the increasing diversity of the population due to the numerical importance of immigrant groups with different historical tastes in names possibly coupled with the decline in the pressures to adopt existing tastes (and therefore reducing the overall level of concentration even if concentration within the earlier groups remained constant); the use of high speed computers to tally up-to-date information on

current tastes in names and use of the internet, which permits the rapid spread of this information to parents contemplating a name for a newborn child. These technological developments allow for faster responses to changing tastes than in earlier periods. Finally, we will consider the increasing turnover in the popularity of names observed at the outset to see if this accounts for declining concentration as well.

Figure 8. Hungary, Fifteen Most Popular Girls' Names, 1522-1959

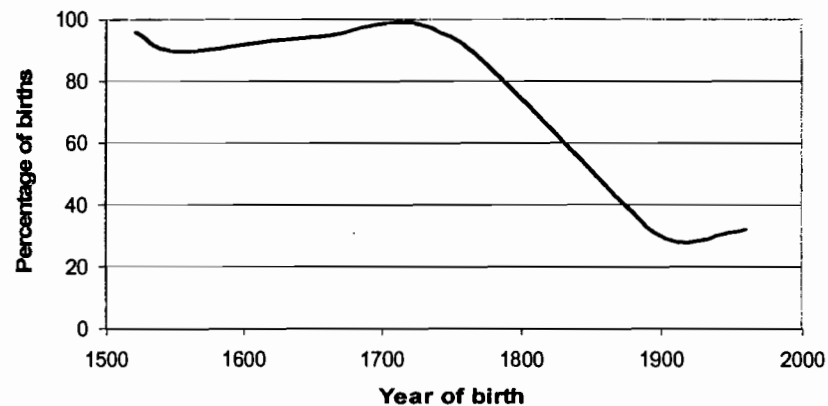
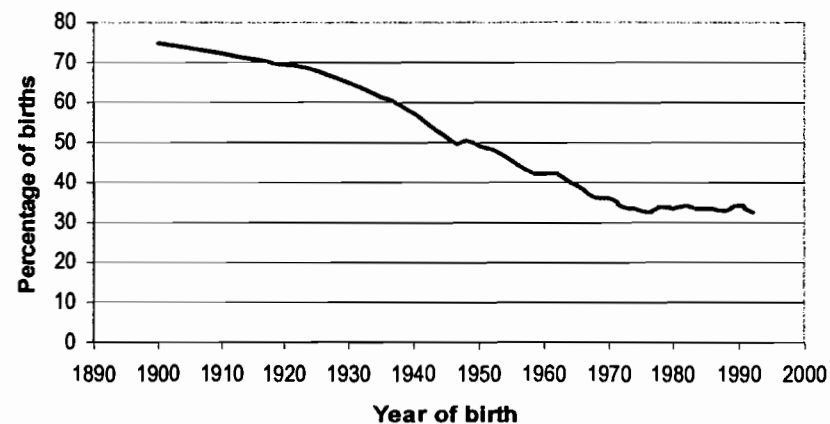


Figure 9. Scotland, Twenty Most Popular Girls' Names, 1900-1992



Growth of the urban population

One could argue that, in the same period of declining concentration in names, increasing segments of the population live in urban areas. In large urban areas, the argument would run, people are more anonymous than those living in small communities. Might we expect parents in larger communities to have a stronger tendency to give their children more distinctive names? If so, there would be a drift through the years away from high concentration of names towards names that are less concentrated, with a quicker disposition to avoid the name once even a very small number of children with the same name are encountered. As the size of an urban place increases, the rejection of the name would reach a progressively lower numerical threshold.

How does this thesis work out? Our evidence is not as powerful as we would like, but note that it lends no support for such an interpretation. We divide California into three sub-areas: metropolitan Los Angeles, metropolitan San Francisco, and the remainder of the state. Except for the first two periods studied, 1906 and 1914, there were substantially more births in Los Angeles than in San Francisco. Births in the residual California category include some rather sizable urban areas, but overall this population is less metropolitan. Considering the percentage of births receiving one of the twenty five most common names, the evidence provides no support for the influence of city size. In nearly all cases, names in San Francisco are slightly more concentrated than in the larger Los Angeles, but actually the remainder of the state is the least concentrated in all but the most recent years (figure 10). In other words, the pattern is in the opposite direction of what would be expected if residents in larger areas were more averse to concentration.

In similar fashion, no clear-cut connection is exhibited between concentration and metropolitan size in the seven Wisconsin Health Service Areas (HSA) in 1986. The most urban of them, the one including Milwaukee, has about as much naming concentration as the least urban HSA and, overall, the lowest level of naming concentration occurs in the fifth and sixth least urban HAS's (figure 11).

Bear in mind that more information would obviously affect our confidence in this conclusion, but the data on naming concentration in communities of varying size and density do not provide much of an al-

ternative explanation for the decline in concentration. And, no matter how much adjusting one might make (for example, the population heterogeneity of the residual part of California), it appears that these two data sets provide little confidence in urban growth accounting for the decline in naming concentration.

Population diversity

The diversity of populations in various nations also offers another interpretation. From this perspective, increasing ethnic diversity in many societies will generate a decline in concentration because these groups have distinctive name preferences. To the degree that different subgroups maintain their naming patterns, changing ethnic/racial composition could lead to a decline in the concentration observed in the society. Let us carry this to the extreme and assume there are four different ethnic groups: *M* accounts for 33 percent of the newborn daughters; *C*, 32 percent; *E*, 31 percent; and *J* is 4 percent of all girls. In turn, each group has an incredibly high level of

Figure 10. California, Twenty Five Most Popular Girls' Names, 1906-1984

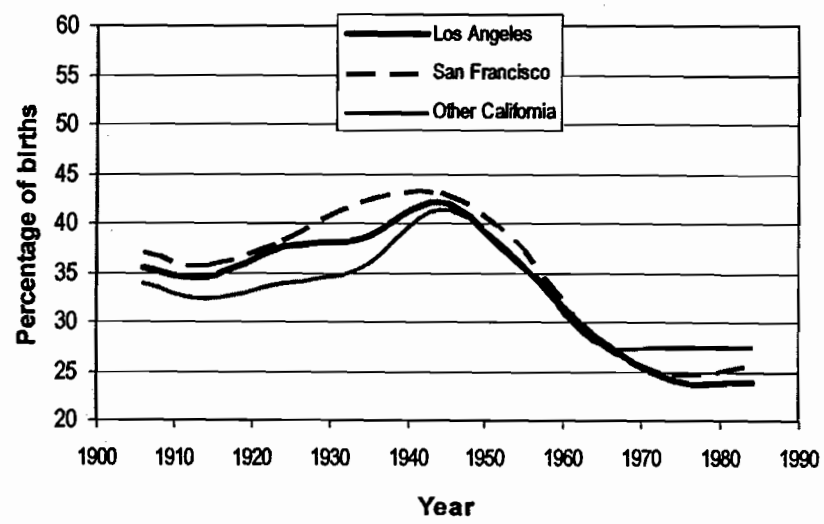
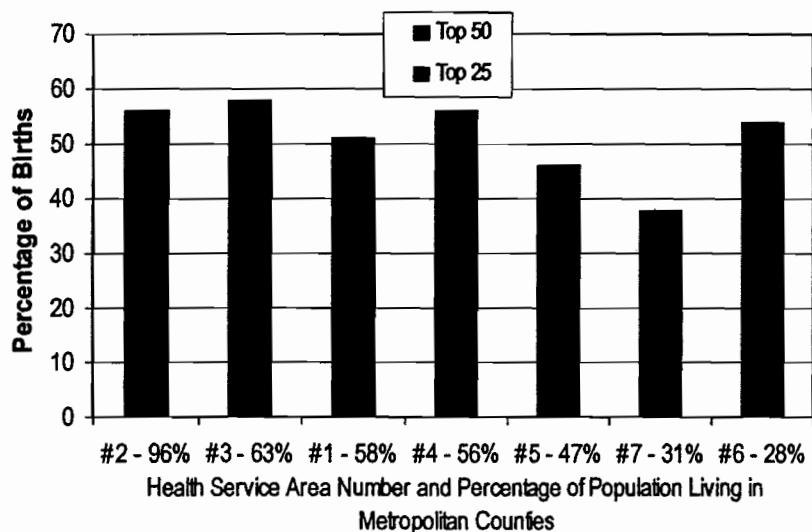


Figure 11. Metropolitan Influence on Level of Name Concentration, Wisconsin, 1986



concentration in tastes: all *M* girls are named *Mary*; all girls from the *C* group are named *Catherine*; every *E* is called *Elizabeth* and *J*s are all named *Jennifer*. In this case, the concentration is extraordinarily high. One name in each group is given to 100 percent of all of the newborn girls. But for the society as a whole, the single most common name is given to 33 percent of all of the girls born. We leave it to the reader to play around with the various permutations and combinations that may occur as the groups change in composition and new groups with other distinctive tastes migrate into the country, and so forth. The point, however, is clear: differences between cultural subgroups will lower the level of concentration in the society as a whole, even in the extreme case where taste concentration is exceptionally high *within* each group.

Do these cultural differences account for the persistent decline in concentration of names? Consider a striking shift in the gap between blacks and whites in the state of Illinois in the twentieth century (table 1). In the earliest year noted, 1920, blacks and whites

chose similar names for their daughters; fourteen of the twenty leading names were shared by both groups. By 1940, eleven of twenty are in the top 20 for both. And by 1989 the number of shared names is only six (Lieberson 2000: 204). Also, beginning with the black protest period in the 1960s, there was a sharp surge in the use of invented names among blacks (Lieberson and Mikelson 1995).

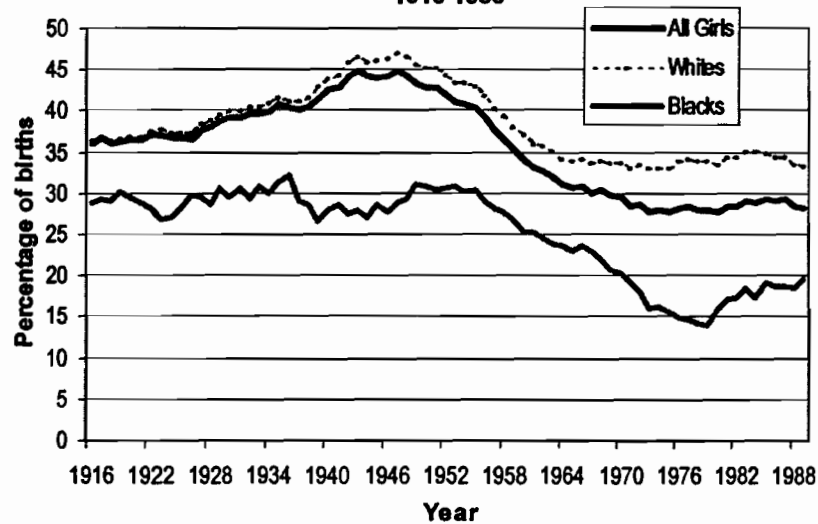
Table 1. Most popular names for baby girls in Illinois, by race, 1920, 1940, 1989

1920		1940		1989	
<i>Shared by Blacks and Whites</i>		<i>Shared by Blacks and Whites</i>		<i>Shared by Blacks and Whites</i>	
Alice	Helen	Barbara	Joyce	Ashley	Jessica
Anna	Margaret	Beverly	Margaret	Brittany	Michelle
Catherine	Marie	Carol	Mary	Christina	Nichole
Dorothy	Mary	Dorothy	Patricia		
Elizabeth	Mildred	Joan	Sandra		
Evelyn	Ruth		Shirley		
Frances	Virginia				
<i>White only</i>	<i>Black only</i>	<i>White only</i>	<i>Black only</i>	<i>White only</i>	<i>Black only</i>
Betty	Ethel	Carolyn	Betty	Amanda	Alicia
Eleanor	Gladys	Donna	Brenda	Caitlin	Amber
Florence	Lillian	Janet	Delores	Catherine	Ariel
Lorraine	Louise	Judith	Gloria	Elizabeth	Bianca
Marion	Lucille	Karen	Gwendolyn	Emily	Candace
Marjorie	Thelma	Linda	Helen	Jennifer	Crystal
		Marilyn	Jacqueline	Kelly	Danielle
		Nancy	Loretta	Lauren	Dominique
		Sharon	Yvonne	Megan	Ebony
				Rachel	Erica
				Rebecca	Jasmine
				Samantha	Kiara
				Sarah	Latoya
				Stephanie	Tiffany

(Lieberson 2000: 204)

With the accelerating gap between black and white tastes during the century, consider the concentration shifts in Illinois during this period. The percentage of newborn girls who are given one of the top 20 names in the state of Illinois is described by the dark line in figure 12 (it is based on the combined pooling of all black and all white births each year). If anything, concentration was actually moving upward until the end of World War Two, and then declined sharply after the war. The question is whether this conclusion about

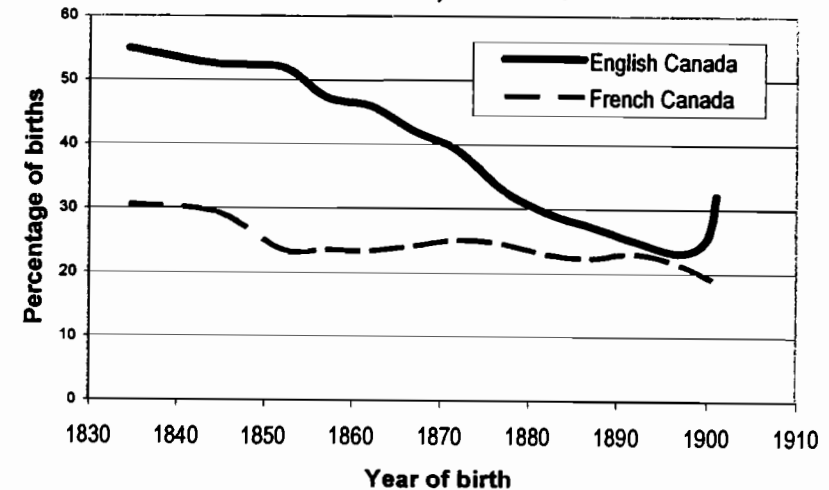
Figure 12. Illinois, Twenty Most Popular Girls' Names, 1916-1986



shifts is in some way warped by the divergent behavior of blacks and whites. The rise in concentration is not simply an artifact of racial taste differences; the decline in concentration is harmonious with the declines among blacks and whites. Both groups were experiencing a decline in concentration based on their specific tastes, and the overall curve for Illinois exhibits a decline that is not a statistical artifact of black-white divergences in taste coupled with the increased demographic role of blacks beginning with World War Two and onward. The point here is that growing diversity *can* generate misleading conclusions about

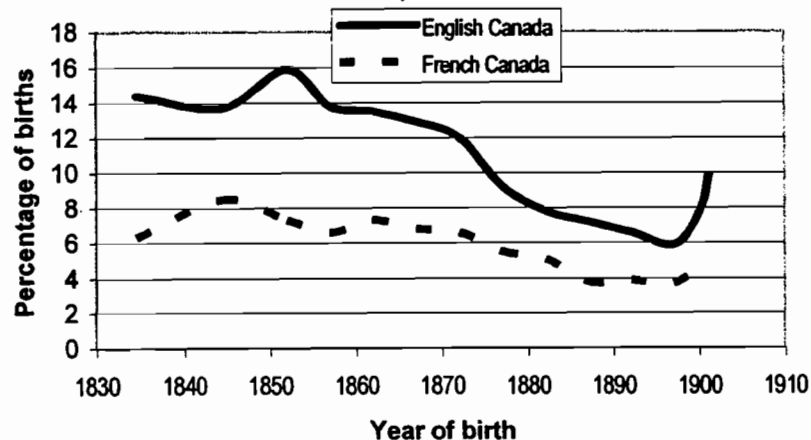
the cause of the decline in concentration, but *can* is not the same as *will*. The post-World War Two decline is genuine, in the sense that it reflects a decline within each group, pure and simple. (Incidentally the gap between the white curve and the Illinois curve, which increases beginning in the 1940's, reflects the fact that blacks are of increasing numerical importance. Indeed the rather choppy curve for blacks earlier in the century probably reflects their small number and therefore greater variation from year to year.) Thanks to the analysis of the Canadian Census of 1901 by Louis Duchesne, we are able to compare the naming processes involving English and French Canadians between 1834 and 1901 (figures 13 and 14).¹ We observe some differences between these groups, but there is a basic decline in the concentration of naming preferences among English Canadians during this period, with something of a reversal towards the very end.

Figure 13. English/French Canada, Ten Most Popular Girls' Names, 1834-1901



¹ Figures 13 and 14 are derived from data reported by Louis Duchesne on his website, <http://www.qbc.clic.net/~loduches/index.html>. These data are taken from the Canadian Families Project's 5% sample of the 1901 Census of Canada. More information about the Canadian Families Project is available at <http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/cfp/>.

Figure 14. English/French Canada, Most Popular Girl's Name, 1834-1901



A more modest decline during the same period occurs among French Canadians. This is true whether we consider the broader measurement based on the ten most common names (figure 13) or the single most popular girl's name for each group (figure 14). It is certain that there would be less concentration (by an absolute standard, less certain in terms of trend) were the two groups combined. This is because the French favor a distinctive set of French names and the English favor a distinctive set of English names. As a consequence, concentration would be lower if they were combined. However, the key point is that each group is declining and therefore, no matter what, there is a true downward shift in concentration that is not simply a function of new groups entering the nation. There is a downward shift in each of the leading two populations. This is further evidence, then, that while changing composition can play a role—or in the black and white comparison, a changing disposition linked to racial and ethnic issues—this should not mask the fact that concentrations within each of the component groups can be declining in themselves.

Based on the evidence from these studies, several cautious conclusions are in order about interpreting declines in concentration as a reflection of increasing population diversity. First and foremost, a decline in

concentration coupled with increasing population diversity hardly need mean that the latter is the cause of declining concentration (as is shown for Illinois). This is clear in both cases, where the major groups are declining in concentration during the post-World War after relative stability during the period between the two World Wars. Second, from 1834 onward to the end of the century, concentration declines in both English- and French-Canada. Since the two groups are oriented towards radically different names, the overall level of concentration is lower than what would occur if they were pooled into one population, but this is different from what occurs in terms of trends over time. The trend itself declines within each group and therefore it will not be a reflection of some complicated distortion when combined together. Accordingly, the widespread decline in concentration over a long span of time need not be attributed to increasing diversity—as contrasted with society-wide changes which are reflected in the leading groups. One problem with such a default interpretation is the assumption that newly arriving groups fail to shift their naming disposition to reflect the society in which they live. There is strong evidence that this often occurs, possibly not fully for names that immigrants give their children but certainly in the names favored by American-born parents (see Lieberman 2000: chapter 7).

Feedback systems

A case can be made that recent declines in concentration reflect the growth of the internet and the increasing availability of information on the popularity of names. The Social Security Administration, for example, publishes lists based on the records derived from parental registrations of newborn children. With greater access to more information, the argument runs, there is the potential for more rapid feedback on name choices. Were a subset of parents inclined to avoid relatively popular names (and that standard could vary among parents at a given time and between periods as well), then it will be easier to know the facts and respond accordingly. In an earlier period it would be harder to know about recent developments immediately and hence responses will be slower. Assume that four percent of all parents are attracted to girl's name *X* if it is not independently given to more than

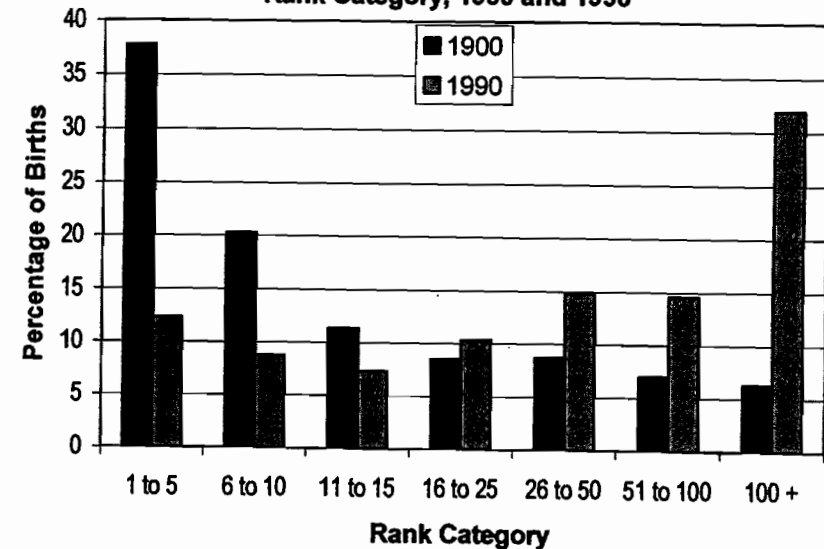
two percent of all girls born in the year. With minimal information, it will be easier for the percentage to exceed two percent before parents are turned off. Parents will eventually develop a certain impression of how popular *X* has become and the name will decline. The information has value but it is not very accurate. As we move forward to a situation where the information is precise, reasonably accurate and widely accessible, one would expect a more rapid drop once it is given to two percent of all girls *or* even before then if parents speculate on future events based on current shifts in the name's popularity. Of course, even here, this is a simplified view. In effect, as information improves, the concentration of names will be a tighter approximation of what would occur with perfect information. Of course, questions about decisions based not merely on the actual facts, but on the parents' anticipation of future shifts, are another matter.

Does information affect choices? In terms of the Collective Popularity Theory developed below, information would affect choices because the popularity of a name affects parents' disposition towards a name. In other words, if a name's popularity affects tastes for the name, information will matter. However, the evidence suggests that the information available on the internet is *not* the primary cause for the decline in concentration. Returning to the previous figures describing the decline in concentration, we observe a largely consistent trend towards declining concentration well before this current period. It was not until June 1998 that the Social Security Administration started to report the most popular given names (Social Security Administration 1997). In the majority of cases, there were patterns of decline well before these developments. Also, we will see below that long-term shifts of naming concentrations in both Scotland and the United States have not been accelerating in recent years.

Three bar graphs help us avoid overestimating the role of contemporary information and technology. The first (figure 15) orders parents of girls born in 1990 by the rank of the name given to their daughters, and in turn compares them with ranks of girls born in 1990. The five most common names in 1900 were given to well over 35 percent of all daughters born in that year; by contrast the five most common in 1990 were given to 12 percent of daughters. Overall, figure 15 shows substantial drops be-

tween the three most common rankings (1–5, 6–10, and 11–15) and massive increases in the importance of last three rank categories during this ninety year period. A dramatic shift is disclosed in the next bar graph,

Figure 15. Scotland, Concentration of Girls' Names by Rank Category, 1900 and 1990



where 1950 is compared with 1990 (figure 16). This is a most spectacular example of deconcentration. The number of girls in the top five has halved and, at the other extreme, the number of girls with names of modest popularity (not ranking in the top 100) has doubled and this category is now the single most important. At first blush, it would appear technology has played a major role. The crucial fact is that this great decline in the concentration of tastes is exhibited long before the current period. The comparison between 1900 and 1950 (figure 16) displays a widespread decline in the names of daughters long before the internet and access to detailed naming data. When we consider the shifts between 1900 and 1950 (figure 17), the declines in concentration are already operating. The percentage in the 100+ category nearly tripled and there are relatively important shifts in the 26–50 and 51–100 categories. By contrast, the 1–5 and

6-10 categories capture a far smaller share of the girls. There is simply no reason to assume that deconcentration is driven by the recent technology.

Figure 16. Scotland, Concentration of Girls' Names by Rank Category, 1950 and 1990

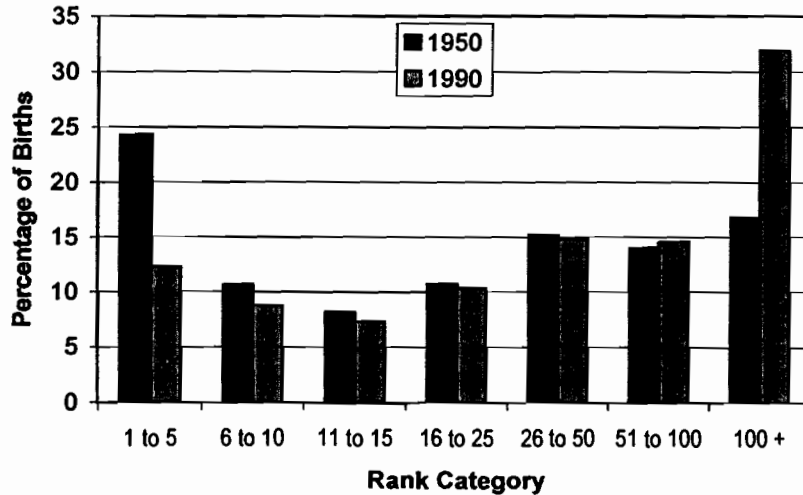
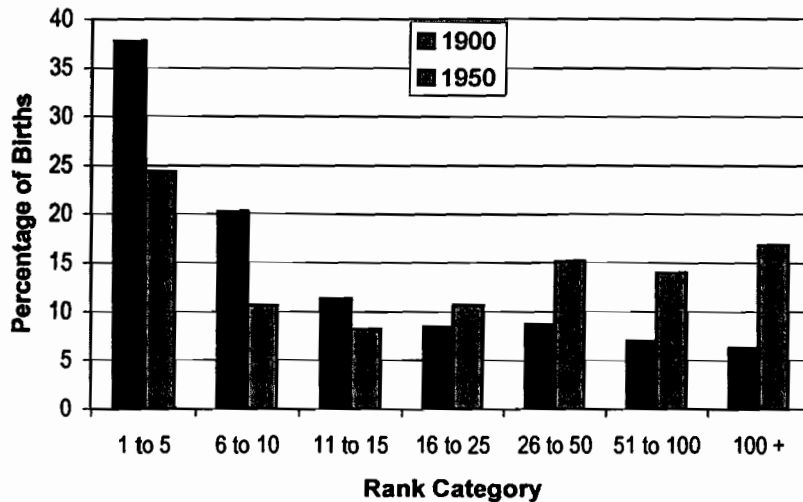


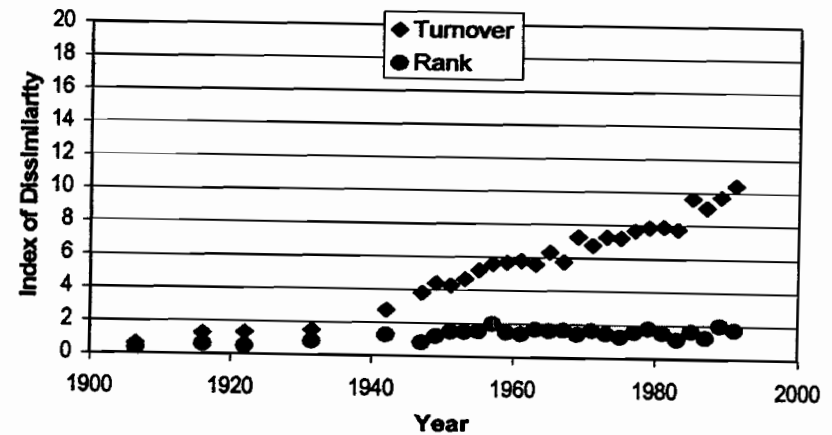
Figure 17. Scotland, Concentration of Girls' Names by Rank Category, 1900 and 1950



Turnover

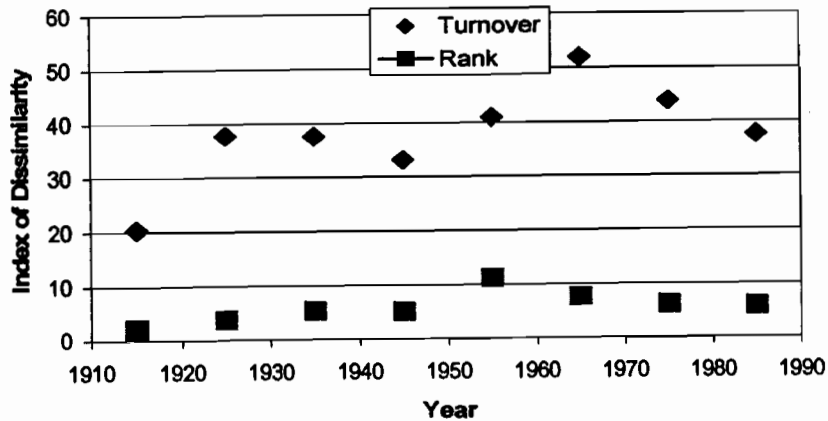
As noted at the outset, turnover in popular names has been increasing for well over a century. Is the decline in concentration a reflection of the simple fact that popular names come and go at an increasingly rapid pace? It is reasonable to hypothesize that increasing turnover will decrease the likelihood of names reaching higher levels of concentration? We are able to consider this possibility for both Scotland and the United States (There are extensive data in both cases that permit application of the concentration and turnover measures for a larger set of names over a long time span, thereby providing a much fuller picture.) The Scottish data are based on all names in Scotland for various periods between the

Figure 18: Scotland: Girls' Turnover and Rank Distributions, Comparative Changes Over Time, 1906-1992



years 1906 and 1992 (figure 18) and the United States draws on data for the fifty leading names between 1915 and 1985 (figure 19). In each case we measure the change between adjacent periods in the turnover of names and change in the concentration of names. For the United States, these are uniform spans of ten years length; the Scottish information is available only for longer spans in the early period and shorter spans during the post-World Two period (hence the markers are closer together later and further apart earlier). In each case, the index of dissimilarity measures these changes for both turnover and concentration. (The index

Figure 19. United States: Girls' Turnover and Rank Distributions, Comparative Changes Over Time, 1915-1985



has very useful qualities that receive closer attention later, but at this point it is sufficient to keep in mind that this index describes the level of change in turnover and in concentration during comparable spans with zero meaning no shift and 100 being the maximum.)

For both Scotland and the United States, there is absolutely no evidence that declining concentration is a consequence of the rise in turnover. Comparing turnover and concentration in Scotland (figure 18), observe that changes in specific names in Scotland go up over time, but there is essentially no comparable shift in concentration. At the extremes, we start with a fairly stable level of name turnover early in the century (the diamond shaped markers in figure 19) and then observe turnover increases after World War Two at an increasingly rapid pace (actually understated because of the shorter spans in the latter period). By contrast, the pace is rather different for concentration; concentration does change from year to year (the square markers throughout are above zero), but the shifts are at a fairly stable level throughout, without any obvious impact generated by the increasing turnover observed at the same time. In brief, turnover increases over time, but the changes in the concentration level do not accelerate in any comparable way.

The same essential conclusion is suggested by the analysis of the United States patterns (figure 19). Shifts in concentration are fairly steady throughout the period. In all cases, turnover in names is far greater and, moreover, the movement up and down in name turnover is unrelated to the much lower movement in concentration changes. (Incidentally, one cannot make too much of any differences between the two countries in their index levels for either attribute since the time spans are of a different length and this has its own independent impact on the index.)

There is an important bottom line to this analysis: the decline in the concentration of naming choices is not simply the product of an accelerating turnover in names. This negative result, along with the failure of other plausible explanations analyzed earlier in this section, prepares us for a radically different interpretation of declining concentration, one based on a Theory that views popularity itself as a taste that is affected by collective forces, rather than as a simple product of external events. Indeed, after developing this Theory, one of the important sources of supporting evidence is derived from a deeper analysis of the turnover-concentration pattern just examined.

Popularity as a taste: a theory²

Choices are affected by a wide variety of tastes. This holds for many other choices besides names: clothing, foods, automobiles, houses, furnishings, the arts, and so forth (even when money plays a role). One could expand this to less obvious domains that we are likely to overlook such as the sciences or academia in general. In any case, although we discuss names, the theory is applicable to a variety of domains. Tastes are typically viewed in substantive ways, as if there is a probabilistic coupling between the subject's tastes and some features of the choice that leads the subject to think of the name as particularly attractive or unattractive. This usually entails one or more substantive features of the name, say the appeal of: a biblical name; an invented name; a name with or without a certain sound; an association of the

² Parts of this theory are stated more fully in Lieberman 2000: 154-58.

name with a person that we like or dislike; the connection with an ancestor; a political or social linkage; or the semantic qualities suggesting beauty or strength or intelligence or loyalty, and the like. However, there is another quality involved in tastes that is not substantive, but entails *form* rather than *content* (Simmel 1952). We refer here to the name's frequency of usage (in other words its level of popularity). The thesis is that the popularity of a name (or other tastes such as musical performer or a restaurant) affects its level of appeal or antipathy to the person making the choice. In other words, it is not the name per se that is the only dimension to choice.

Some parents have a preference for an invented name, or a rarely used name that is part of the standard repertoire. Other parents favor names that are uncommon, and so forth along a continuum such that we eventually encounter parents who resonate only to highly popular names. In practice, it may be hard to analytically separate the factors in the choice made by a parent, but we have no problem visualizing such a taste. In other words, parents respond to the apparent popularity of names such that, in a crude way, names gain or lose appeal as a function of the name's popularity coupled with parental dispositions towards the existing level of usage. Of course, tastes towards popularity in names are not necessarily the same when it comes to other matters. If we put names aside and think of clothing, it is easy to visualize popularity as a taste. For some, any item of clothing is automatically unattractive because it is *popular*; for others a novel style is unappealing because it is *novel*. Were the latter style to eventually become popular (through a mechanism described below), some of those who earlier rejected the fashion would then find it appealing. On the other hand, those who were initially attracted to the novel style would be looking elsewhere. In this way, although the specific styles change over time, a roughly constant frequency distribution would result such that the proportion purchasing popular, unpopular, rare, or traditional fashions would all remain fairly stable.

The condition described above would be a simple and static matter, were it not for three features that lead to a highly complex and dynamic model of popularity: 1) the appeal of a given level of popularity varies within the population; 2) there is a dynamic collective process that can

alter the popularity of a name and therefore its appeal to different subsets of the population; 3) the dispositions towards various levels of popularity can change over time.

The dynamics of popularity tastes

Not everyone has the same disposition towards popularity. As we observed above, at one extreme there are persons for whom a name cannot be too popular—or at least for whom the maximum limit is very high. At the other extreme are parents who prefer a unique name that is invented or, at least, is rarely used. And other popularity dispositions range between these two extremes: some parents are attracted to names that are not unique but are infrequently given; others are attracted to names with somewhat greater popularity, and so forth. In effect, then, we can visualize a distribution of parents (or persons choosing a restaurant and so forth) who range from attraction to something undiscovered to those who find a highly popular name (or restaurant, etc.) particularly appealing. If for the moment we visualize the distribution of popularity tastes remaining unchanged over time (in other words, the percentage of parents with various tastes remains constant as new parents replace older ones), even then the appeal of the same name can still change, with its popularity decreasing or increasing accordingly. Start with the extreme: parents attracted to an invented name, say *Stanleyetta*, may give their daughter this name (although they have a virtually infinite set of possible names meeting their criterion), but if a few parents do choose it independently of one another, then this name will no longer be favored by parents with such a disposition—parents will move on to a different possibility. On the other hand, parents inclined to a relatively uncommon name, but not a totally rare one, may now be attracted to *Stanleyetta* even though earlier its uniqueness would have made it unattractive. And this sort of process of replacement or succession can go on along the scale such that a name that is say the fiftieth most popular name (and hence unattractive to all sorts of parents with a disposition toward less popular names) on the other hand could now appeal to parents who find this level of popularity attrac-

tive. At the extreme, we can visualize a set of parents who are attracted to a highly popular name, but not to an infinitely popular one—as it were—and hence the appeal begins to turn downward if popularity increases. In other words the appeal of *Stanleyetta* or *Madison* or *Elizabeth* is affected by more than its “intrinsic” qualities. Rather, it is also affected by its popularity. If a declining but recently popular name does not immediately regain an attraction to those with tastes for less popular names, then the name is likely to remain “contaminated” for others and decline accordingly.

These two conditions have an interesting consequence that we can evaluate empirically. If the disposition towards different levels of popularity is constant within a population (and is spread out across a wide range and is not overwhelmingly located at one point of the popularity disposition), then the forces generating turnover in names are likely to have far less impact on the popularity distribution of names. This is assuming relative stability in the distribution of tastes for popular names. The names would come and go, but if the popularity niches are largely constant, different names will fill the same niches over time. In other words, if there is a substantial taste disposition for names of a given range of popularity, then those leaving that range for any reason will be replaced by other names occupying the same popularity distribution.

So far, two conditions have been described: 1) a population that varies in their taste on a continuum ranging from attraction to names that are *rare and unique* at one end and “*very*” *popular* at the other; and 2) a dynamic collective process where the appeal of a name will be altered if its popularity changes; it will lose appeal to new parents who would have been attracted at an earlier period and, in turn, gain appeal to other parents who would have found the name unattractive at its earlier state of popularity.

The third element is that the distribution of tastes for various levels of popularity can change over time. Note that we use the term “distribution” because it is not that everyone now wants a unique name and nobody wants a popular name, but rather that the proportions favorably or negatively disposed towards various points on the continuum may change over time. This is, itself, an interesting and

complicated matter. The danger of ending up with a circular argument that uses the observed changes to provide evidence for its own explanation is not trivial. For example, if we see that more parents are giving their children uncommon names (which indeed is the case), then we cannot explain this as a reflection of changing dispositions towards such names. If the explanation is valid, then it is necessary to obtain independent evidence of a changing disposition. Otherwise, the observed change becomes the evidence for its own cause. The empirical questions are also challenging because the observed distribution need not be solely the product of the propositions presented here. Obviously, there are profound issues of imperfect information feedback. At any given time, parents with a certain popularity disposition may make errors. They really do not fully know what is happening among other parents at the same time and hence may select a name they would not have chosen if they knew the current condition (or vice versa). Anecdotally, the senior author has met many parents who report giving their child a name that was more popular than they realized.

Applying the theory to declining concentration

What accounts for the declining concentration in the choice of names? We started by evaluating a variety of explanations that have one feature in common: the decline is approached in terms of external events that might account for the shifts. These include the growth of urban residence compared with the decline in the rural population; changes in ethnic and racial diversity; the information impact due to the internet and the prompt diffusion of information on naming preferences; and the increasing turnover in names. They are all perfectly plausible, and would enable us to view the decline in concentration as the direct product of an external event that, under certain simple conditions, would lower the level of concentration.

Alas, the evidence for what is *plausible* does not appear to *stand up*—granted that our data in some cases are less than ideal. Only a cautious conclusion is appropriate: the data do not support the thesis that these causes are at least partially responsible for the long-term decline in

concentration. These plausible accounts may or may not be valid explanations, but what we have now is not encouraging. Also bear in mind that the disposition to account for tastes in terms of external social events is certainly appropriate some of the time, but there is substantial evidence supporting a radically different view: tastes may change due to internal mechanisms that can operate indefinitely and which will generate changes even in the absence of any new shifts in the social order; this is a central thesis in Lieberson (2000: chapters 1 and 3–5) or, at the very least, a set of internal mechanisms operate jointly with external events to impact on tastes (as in chapters 7 and 8).

At this point, however, we ask if there is positive evidence in support of Popularity Theory. Can the theory help account for the decline in concentration?

Turnover and concentration: a deeper analysis

Earlier, changes in taste concentration were considered as possibly a product of the increasing turnover in popular names (pages 250–52 above). There was no support for this because the changes in concentration were largely steady over time during the span when name turnover increased radically (figures 18 and 19). Here we shall re-examine in much greater detail these two phenomena, investigating whether the actual concentration levels are in fact harmonious with expectations generated from Popularity Theory. In particular, we will seek to find out if the levels of concentration, although going down, show a certain degree of resilience in the replacement of similar dispositions towards popularity over time. As before we consider the index of dissimilarity over time between two separate—but related—distributions. One is the difference between popular names at one time from what occurs in a later period (this is a measure of turnover). The second is a measure of change in the percentage distributions of names ranked by their popularity distribution in each period. In both cases, we employ the index of dissimilarity as to make a ready comparison between the shifts in these two features.

Tables 2 and 3 use actual Scottish data (between 1982 and 1992) to illustrate the computations and also to help the reader understand

our conclusions. Table 2 shows the ten most common girls' names given in 1982. *Laura* is the most important, given to 3.29 percent of girls, *Claire* is second (2.97 percent), and so on with *Kristy* being in tenth place (1.54 percent of girls). The second column describes the same names ten years later. In all but one case, the percentages given to these names in 1992 are lower than they had been ten years earlier. *Laura* goes from 3.29 to 2.37, *Claire* is less than half of what it had been, and so forth. *Emma* is the only exception, rising from 1.8 percent to 2.6. The third column illustrates how the Index of Dissimilarity is used to summarize these changes. This column shows absolute differences between the percentages in the first two columns. For example, the difference between *Laura* ($|3.29 - 2.37|$) is 0.93. We add all of these differences together and obtain 8.60.

Table 2. Index of name dissimilarity: turnover in names, Scotland, 1982 and 1992

Ten most common names, 1982		Same names, ten years later, 1992		Differences used for Index of Dissimilarity
Name	%	Name	%	$ \Delta\% $
Laura	3.29	Laura	2.37	0.93
Claire	2.97	Claire	1.38	1.60
Lisa	2.51	Lisa	1.10	1.41
Michelle	2.31	Michelle	0.53	1.78
Nicola	2.23	Nicola	1.20	1.03
Sarah	2.08	Sarah	2.03	0.05
Louise	1.93	Louise	1.18	0.75
Jennifer	1.91	Jennifer	1.66	0.26
Emma	1.81	Emma	2.55	0.73
Kristy	1.54	Kristy	1.48	0.06
Sum = 8.60				

In reality, these computations are not performed for just the top ten names, but ideally for all names lined up in the two periods and the differences are halved to ascertain the index of dissimilarity. The index ranges from a value of zero to 100. Zero would occur at one extreme where there is no change between the two periods in the per-

centage of girls given each name. If *Louise*, say, is given to 1.93 percent of girls in 1982, then the same percentage of girls would be given that name in 1992, and so forth. A value of zero means no change in the two percent distributions. The other extreme for the index is 100. This value would occur if no girl in 1992 was given a name that was used in 1982. Or, put another way, it would occur if none of the names given in 1992 had been given to any girl ten years earlier. Obviously, neither extreme is likely. The index is very valuable, however, because it describes the extent of the gap in a quantitative scale and therefore permits us to compare indexes over time and also to compare different measures at the same time.

Table 3. Index of rank dissimilarity: change in popularity distribution, Scotland, 1982 and 1992

Ten most common names, 1982		Ten most common names, 1992		Differences used for Index of Dissimilarity
Name	%	Name	%	\Delta%
Laura	3.29	Emma	2.55	0.75
Claire	2.97	Laura	2.37	0.61
Lisa	2.51	Rebecca	2.06	0.45
Michelle	2.31	Sarah	2.03	0.27
Nicola	2.23	Lauren	2.00	0.23
Sarah	2.08	Nicole	1.86	0.22
Louise	1.93	Stephanie	1.82	0.11
Jennifer	1.91	Amy	1.78	0.13
Emma	1.81	Jennifer	1.66	0.15
Kristy	1.54	Rachel	1.56	0.02
Sum = 2.94				

Table 3 provides comparisons not for the names themselves, but rather analogous comparisons for the percentages of the choices. For example, the first column starts as before with the names listed in declining frequency: *Laura* is first, *Claire* is second, and so forth. (In a full analysis, ideally, it would be down to names that were given to only one girl.) Here, however, the second column does not list the names in the same order. Rather, it lists the names in 1992 in order of

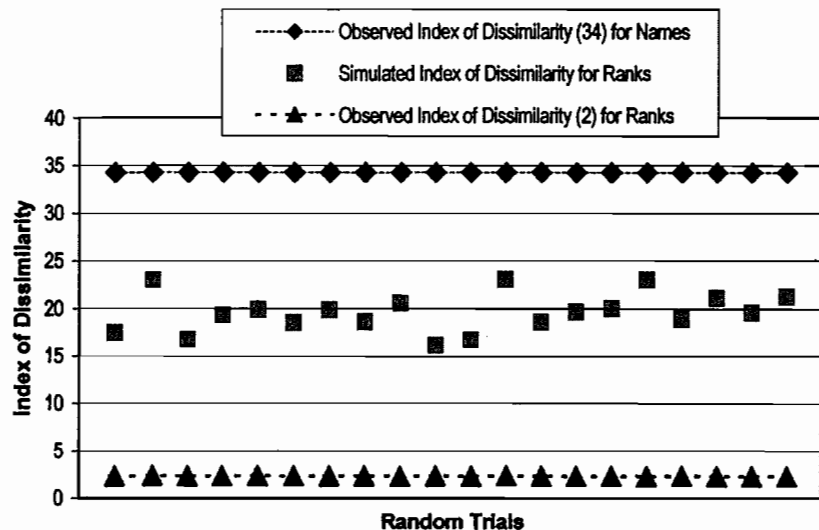
their percentages. For example, the most popular girl's name is now *Emma*, and the 2.55 percent is listed opposite the percentage for the most popular name in 1982, and so forth. *Michelle*, which is fourth most popular in 1982 is not among the ten most popular anymore. This means, if we had a complete table of all names, that we would see the figure for *Michelle* much later in the table. The percentage in the second column opposite *Michelle* is 2.03 (for *Sarah* which is the fourth most common name in 1992). In other words, the index of dissimilarity for ranks describes the difference between the percentages of girls' given names of comparable rank position. By and large these percentages are far more alike than the differences between the same names over time. With one exception, the percentage differences are smaller between names of the same rank than comparison between the same name itself. (The only exception of the ten is *Sarah*, where the percentage given to the name barely changes—from 2.08 to 2.03, whereas *Sarah* matched against the sixth most popular name in 1992 differs slightly more than that—2.08 versus 1.86.)

This is an interesting approach to a key consequence of the Theory. However, we have to keep in mind that a certain statistical bias makes it easier for another name to match the percentage for a given rank than it is for names to remain so stationary in their percentages. Bear in mind that even though this statistical bias remains a constant influence throughout, the index for ranked names is rather steady over time even when the index based on turnover in name popularity increases rapidly. In order to pursue this further, we have to ask if changes in the distribution of popularity for a given time period are less than expected by chance, given the observed amount of turnover in names for that same period. To explore this issue, we simulate turnover in names using a random assignment routine and then compare rank distribution dissimilarities for the actual data versus the simulated data. The procedure is described in an appendix to this paper.

The results of this modeling are shown for both Scotland and the United States (figures 20 and 21, respectively). In each case, we use the observed index of dissimilarity in names to ascertain the level that would be expected under the simulation approach described be-

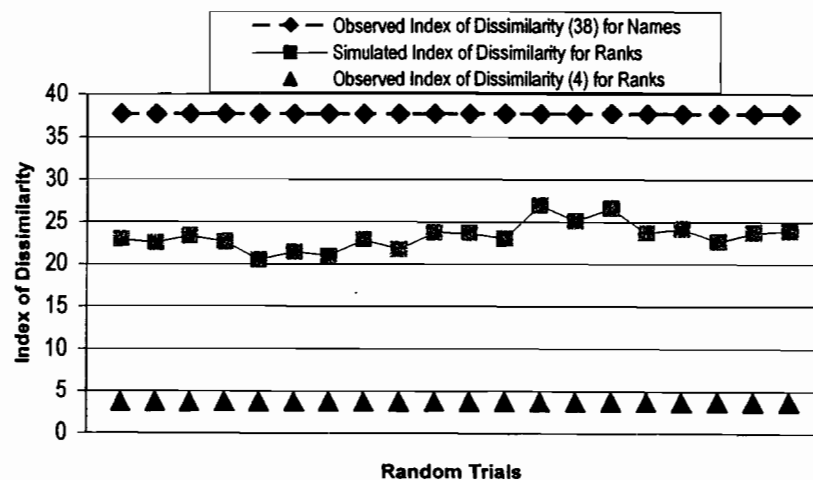
low in the technical appendix. This permits a comparison between the actual dissimilarity for ranks and the level that would occur under

Figure 20. Scotland: Comparison Between the Actual Rank Index and the Index Expected Due to Turnover, Girls' Names, 1958-1964



chance. Looking at changes in Scotland between 1958 and 1964, there is an index of 34 between the distributions for the names in the two periods. By contrast, there is an index of only 2 for the percentage distributions when ordered by rank. The 20 random trials show that we would expect the latter index to range between 15 and 25 if due to chance. In short, the actual difference between the two percentage distributions when the names are ordered in frequency for each year is far less than would be expected under chance redistributions if the turnover in names themselves was the sole causal factor. In other words, there appears to be a substantial pull towards having a similar popularity distribution, and this force is far stronger than chance would lead us to expect. Popularity Theory operates such that although many names decline or increase during the span, the out-

Figure 21. United States: Comparison Between the Actual Rank Index and the Index Expected Due to Turnover, Girls' Names, 1920-1930



come is a strong tendency for old distribution to be replaced by other names of comparable popularity. As a consequence, the popularity distribution, although losing concentration over time, is much more stable than would be expected. Parents who prefer a given level of popularity and are repelled by other levels of popularity substitute new choices for old choices in a way that maintains this popularity distribution. Hence the distributions ordered by rank are far more stable than are the names themselves. Although we only show one period for Scotland, we actually made these trials for a number of other periods with similar results.

There are comparable results for the United States between 1920 and 1930. The index of dissimilarity in names ranked by frequency (4) is far lower than the index based on changes in the same name over time (38). Again, what is striking is that the index based on ranks would be far higher if it were due exclusively to chance factors emanating from the turnover in names. In this case the index would range from 20 to 27 (again based on 20 random trials), and in all

cases it is far higher than the observed value of 4. Again, the distribution of preferences is far more stable over time than name stability during the same span, and is far more stable than what would be expected if turnover in names were the sole force.

These results are consistent with the expectation generated by Popularity Theory. The popularity of specific names is changing at an increasingly rapid pace; the concentration of choices is also declining but at a much slower rate—a rate which cannot be explained by the turnover in the names themselves. Let us rank girls' names at two different points in time, t_1 and t_2 . Although many of the specific names attaining a given rank at t_2 are different from the name occupying the same rank at t_1 are different, the percentages in the same rank tend to be similar. And they are much more alike than are the percentages for same names in the two periods. Visualize a mass of pedestrians at a busy downtown intersection. The traffic lights change over and over again, but through a sequence the proportion of pedestrians making a right turn at the corner, or making a left turn, or crossing straight ahead are more or less constant. Yet the specific subjects are continuously changing. Obviously there are cycles during the day and differences between weekends and weekdays, so the flow is not constant throughout. But the point is that there are patterns of choice that are not random obviously, but work out to generate a fairly steady movement pattern over a given amount of time. And, in the same sense but obviously over a far longer span of time, the preference distribution for names of given levels of popularity are fairly steady.

The evidence presented above is consistent with the proposition that the distribution of names in the society is, in part, a reflection of a taste disposition towards the popularity of a name, not simply towards the name *per se*. In other words, there are names that appeal to some parents and repel others simply because of how common or unusual they are. As a consequence, as names rise and decline in usage, the new distribution tends to have a relatively strong correspondence to recent distributions even though the names are different. The names are replaced

but the disposition towards specific levels of popularity does not change as rapidly.

The information provided above is consistent with this thesis but confidence in the theory would be helped through direct evidence that such a taste exists. The 1994 General Social Survey (GSS) of the American population, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (N.O.R.C., 1994) provides an exceptionally fine opportunity. The study had an unusually rich set of data on the families of the subjects—both their offspring and their siblings. First names are normally collected as part of the survey but not reported in the publicly available tapes. In this case, the senior author was able to pay for the coding of these data.³ We are able to ask whether there is direct evidence of a taste for popularity. For all white female respondents with at least one other sister, we recorded their first names and then ascertained the popularity of each sister's name at the year of birth.⁴ We need direct indications that parents are indeed affected by the level of popularity of the name at the time of the child's birth. In other words, we are asking if parents tend to have a consistent disposition towards using names of a given level of popularity.

Each pair of sisters is classified by the popularity of one sister's name at the time of her birth with the popularity of the other sister's name at the time of the latter's birth. There are four classes: names that were among 25 most popular at time of birth; names that ranked from 26 to 50, others that ranged from 51 to 100, and names that were not among the 100 most commonly used girls' names that year. As predicted by the theory, table 4 shows there is an association between the sisters in level of popularity of their names. In other words, parents show a consistent tendency towards one or another type of name. Parents who favored highly popular names at one time, for example, also did so for their other daughter; likewise, at the

³ Thanks to a grant from the National Science Foundation SBR-92-23418.

⁴ This was no easy task because the popularity of names changes over time so we had to ascertain popularity distributions for each specific year. Also, many of the responses used diminutives of the name, e.g. *Jim* instead of *James* or *Peggy* instead of *Margaret*, etc.

other extreme, if a relatively uncommon name was chosen by parents, then they had a higher likelihood of doing so for the other daughter as well. There is a taste for the popularity of names.

Table 4. Persistence of taste ranks, white sisters, United States, 1994 survey

		Second sister				Total
		Top 25	26–50	51–100	100+	
First sister	Top 25	98 (45.79%)	35 (16.36%)	19 (8.88%)	62 (28.97%)	214 (100%)
	26–50	40 (42.11%)	18 (18.95%)	9 (9.47%)	28 (29.47%)	95 (100%)
	51–100	32 (34.78%)	16 (17.39%)	14 (15.22%)	30 (32.61%)	92 (100%)
	100+	69 (26.44%)	36 (13.79%)	33 (12.64%)	123 (47.13%)	261 (100%)
	Total	239 (36.10%)	105 (15.86%)	75 (11.33%)	243 (36.71%)	662 (100%)

gamma = 0.2423 ASE = 0.046

Popularity affects the disposition of parents towards a name. Indeed, it is even stronger than that. Exploring the possibility that there are subdivisions within these categories, we use two different classification schemes to subdivide highly popular names in the top 25 (tables 5 and 6). We can think of top 25 names that are “traditional” at the time they are used and others that had only recently entered this category when the daughter was given the name (table 5; the distinction is based on, respectively, 11 or more years in the top 25 versus 10 or fewer years). Another related measure was also employed for subdividing the top 25, in this case based on whether the name was still gaining in popularity when given to the daughter (table 6). Again there is an association between what might be considered newly popular and long-standing popular. And, again, parents who favor one type of name for their daughters tend to resonate to other leading names of the same type for their second daughter.

Table 5. Tastes among white parents favoring top 25 names, long-standing or recent, 1994

		Second sister		Total
		Longstanding	Recent	
First sister	Longstanding	43 (70.49%)	18 (29.51%)	61 (100%)
	Recent	18 (48.65%)	19 (51.35%)	37 (100%)
	Total	61 (62.24%)	37 (37.76%)	98 (100%)

gamma = 0.4321 ASE = 0.176

Longstanding = eleven or more years in the top 25 when the child was given the name.
Recent = ten or less years in the top 25 when child was given the name.

Table 6. Tastes among white parents favoring top 25 names, on the upswing or already peaked, 1994

		Second sister		Total
		Upswing	Peaked	
First Sister	Upswing	11 (34.38%)	21 (65.63%)	32 (100%)
	Peaked	9 (13.64%)	57 (86.36%)	66 (100%)
	Total	20 (20.41%)	78 (79.59%)	98 (100%)

gamma = 0.5368 ASE = 0.184

Upswing = Gaining in popularity or at its peak when the child was named.
Peaked = Now declining in popularity at time child is named.

Ramifications and discussion

The popularity pattern for names has ramifications for various issues. There is great concern and speculation about individualism in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Has it increased? declined? or more or less remained the same? (See the excellent review in Cerulo 1996 as well as the analysis by Ridgeway 2000 and the speculations in Bellah 2002 and responses by Warren, Dienstag, and Hunter.) Deconcentration in the choice of names can be viewed as, in a certain sense, a matter of individualism where parents have moved from a period where using a very popular name was either itself good or was a practice that was rarely questioned or

at least rarely violated. Obviously, the naming pattern is but one indicator of the broad set of events that go under the rubric of "individualism." However, such a profound shift is hardly trivial since it is an important choice involving one's children. Moreover, since there are comparable shifts towards deconcentration in a number of other countries, there is no reason to think that the United States is unique in this shift (although, of course, we are painfully aware of the lopsided and selective set of nations that we are studying).

Also we have said very little about the gradual shift over time from a lopsided disposition towards high concentration to a far less concentrated set of tastes. This is a second influence, namely a decline in this correspondence that, we argue, reflects the declining inclination to choose highly popular choices. Is there such a shift? And, if so, what drives it? Unlike the other information, we do not have independent evidence that the dispositions have changed over time. All we do know is that the outcomes have changed radically (witness the 1900–1990 bar graph for Scotland, figure 15). It is also difficult for us to propose with any confidence a satisfactory explanation for the shift. One possibility is that it is part of a broad and sweeping change towards individualism throughout the social order. If so, then independent measurements of other such changes are necessary. Another possibility, that is not evaluated, is that these changes occur in the absence of gradual shifts in the parental preference disposition. Remember, we are considering this as a collective process and such collective processes can generate outcomes that are far removed from the initial dispositions of the population. This is exactly the case for various segregation models that lead to outcomes quite contrary to the desires of most, but a disequilibrium operates counter to these dispositions. (Consider Schelling 1978 and Lieberson, Dumais, and Baumann 2000.) This is a central question that remains to be fully resolved at this point.

In any case, we have an internal mechanism driving change that is radically different from a substantive taste. Indeed, the outcome is not simply a product of substantive taste. Rather, it is a set of parents who certainly have substantive preferences, but the choice within that set is based on the names' perceived level of popularity. If the level of popularity changes or the perception of popularity changes, then the theory suggests that a given disposition on the popularity-unpopularity contin-

uum would now no longer find the name appealing. On the other hand, another set of parents with a disposition at some other place on the continuum would now find the name appealing. Of course, this is an empirical question, but the linkage observed between sisters in the naming preferences of their parents supports this.

This analysis of concentration changes opens up a very general question involving the popularity-unpopularity continuum as a feature influencing all sorts of tastes. It can be as simple as names, with people having different dispositions towards, say, music, food, the arts, residential locations, clothing, physical attractiveness, haircuts, cosmetics, political and intellectual ideas, areas of interest in a scholarly domain, and the like that reflect their disposition based on popularity. Other tastes will be carried out within the setting of those dispositions. For example, a salesperson telling someone that an item of clothing is *very* popular might find some customers responding with enthusiasm and others repelled by the thought of wearing such an item. It is an open question as to what the popularity distributions look like for other types of choices; certainly there is no reason to assume the same distribution across the spectrum of tastes. Likewise, although we would speculate that people's popularity dispositions will tend to be correlated across items, we have no knowledge about the level of correlation. And, also, there is the question of whether subsets of the population (say educational, occupational, racial, regional, religious conservative or progressive) tend to differ in their popularity dispositions.

In any case, Popularity Theory does operate to help us understand a striking change in the deconcentration of naming choices. Various alternative explanations, when put to the test, do not hold even though they are plausible. What we uncover here is the operation of an abstract disposition that is likely to be of considerable value in understanding a wide range of choices. We are impressed, for example, by the likelihood that even in scholarly areas or various artistic areas, judgments are made differently by people with varying dispositions towards the popular-unpopular continuum and, in turn, how collective processes of changing popularity will lead other sets of the population to be attracted to a choice while others are no longer attracted.

Appendix: modeling the expected rank turnover

To simulate expected change in rank dissimilarity given name dissimilarity, we generated hypothetical time-2 name distributions that are in turn the basis for time-2 rank distributions (from which we could then calculate hypothetical indices of rank dissimilarity). Simulated time-2 name distributions are based on the *actual* amount of turnover as we observe in the original data. To produce a hypothetical time-2 name distribution, we take the actual number of gains and losses observed between times 1 and 2 and re-distribute them randomly throughout the real/observed time-1 name distribution, which yield a *simulated* time-2 name distribution. Suppose, for example, the total number of changes in name frequencies is actually 420 (composed equally of 210 gains and 210 losses). To simulate a time-2 distribution, we would randomly assign 210 gains and 210 losses to the observed time-1 name distribution.

Then, we ranked the names in time-1 (real) and time-2 (simulated) to calculate the index of rank dissimilarity when turnover is generated randomly. The objective is to examine whether observed rank dissimilarity is systematically lower when turnover is real compared to when turnover is random. To be sure, upon randomly re-assigning gains and losses to name frequencies, the index of rank dissimilarity can take on a range of numbers while the index of name dissimilarity remains constant (that is, total amount of turnover does not change in simulation process). Given X amount of turnover in names, the index of rank dissimilarity ranges theoretically from 0 to X ; that is, given the index of names dissimilarity, the index of rank dissimilarity cannot mathematically exceed the index of names dissimilarity.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the help of Cheri Minton for assistance and suggestions in developing an appropriate computer procedure for estimating the index of rank dissimilarity that would randomly occur with the observed turnover in names over time, Andrew Doolittle in the outstanding assistance in preparation of the manuscript and data in ways that go far beyond the usual duties of a faculty assistant, and Lincoln Quillian for his help during his graduate days in putting together the naming data obtained from the 1994 GSS. We also thank the participants of seminars at Rutgers and the University of Washington for their

excellent comments and suggestions—they will note many of them incorporated in this paper. And we thank Peter V. Marsden for advice to avoid what would have been an inappropriate procedure and John Martin for comments about this project.

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