

## **Women's Full First Names, Short Names, and Affectionate Names: A Semantic Differential Analysis**

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### Authors' Note

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Several years ago a semantic differential analysis was done (Lawson, 1973) of the stereotypes of men's first names in various forms, full first name (FFN), as David, Robert, or William, short name (ShortN), as Dave, Bob, or Bill, and affectionate name (AffN), as Davey, Bobby, or Billy. That research investigated ten common first names and their variations. The conclusions were that names in the affectionate form were ranked lower than the other two categories on the three dimensions of Evaluation, Potency, and Activity (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, 1957) plus a composite scale. There was a suggestion that at least some ShortNs were preferred over FFNs.

Questions arise with women's names. Would Barb, Sue, and Deb be preferred to Barbara, Susan, and Deborah, and all of these to Barbie, Susie, and Debbie? Would there be differences in the perceptions of men and women? Advances in measurement techniques make it pos-

sible to explore new dimensions. What differences might there be on some of these?

## Method

### *Concepts/Names Rated*

Reference concepts and names were rated. The basic reference concepts were Good/Bad, Strong/Weak, and Active/Passive, which were to represent the poles of three assumed axes of Evaluation (E), Potency (P), and Activity (A). In addition, Sincere/Insincere, Intelligent/Dumb, and Calm/Emotional were included to measure poles on new dimensions.

Nine women's names were used in full form, short form, and affectionate form; these are shown in Table 1. The names were selected because they had all three forms, were relatively well-known, and were thought to represent a range of preference.

Table 1

#### *Mean Personality Dimension Scores of Names by Sex*

	GOOD		STRONG		ACTIVE		SINCERE		INTELL.		CALM	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
1. Barbara	88	94	54	73	47	71	85	89	83	77	62	55
2. Barb	75a	98a	82	86	60	79	76	94	87	78	64a	50a
3. Barbie	80	86	44	29	47	38	87	80	68	55	64	53
4. Margaret	81a	94a	70	72	53	72	71	85	73	85	64	48
5. Maggie	68a	79a	52	55	45	55	71	73	64	62	65	57
6. Meg	63a	93a	29a	65a	30a	63a	65	90	54a	68a	49	57
7. Susan	91	93	70	69	58	75	95	92	79	75	75b	44b
(7a Susannah)	89a	75a	45	43	37	43	91	77	78	64	65	48
8. Sue	89	94	72	85	59	83	81	91	71b	86b	72	50
9. Susie	90	86	56	55	46	61	94	84	76	74	79	50
10. Kristin	80c	99c	59	56	49	64	88	95	80	86	56	53
11. Kris	95	96	69	73	66	73	100	93	92	82	63	51
12. Kristy	94	92	53	41	58	53	95	84	96a	71a	62	63
13. Elizabeth	78	92	59	63	40	58	84	95	68	73	72	62
14. Liz	90	77	54	60	47	55	95	74	64	74	62	39
(14a. Beth)	84	87	57	60	53	48	90	82	84	71	73	51
15. Betsy	91a	90a	73a	39a	53	43	89	76	74	68	68	44
16. Anna	80	95	66	67	50	56	85	94	87a	61a	63a	57a
17. Ann	84b	97b	58	60	42	61	73a	97a	72a	84a	67a	55a
18. Annie	90	85	52	47	49	45	90	87	85	65	61	52
19. Deborah	62	86	66	72	50	63	68	84	67a	73a	66	45
20. Deb	90	90	59	66	55	66	90	87	81	79	57	57
21. Debbie	91	89	67	58	63	68	96	81	87a	74a	65	50
22. Patricia	76	93	64	65	51	63	92	85	71	80	74	53
23. Pat	97	86	79	74	73	70	88	79	83	78	64	56

24. Patty	99	78	56	61	43	56	97	74	83	68	74	37
28. Frances	81	71	63	47	60	43	65	62	80a	48a	65	39
29. Fran	85	58	50	53	40	45	77	57	63	53	71	37
30. Franny	80	73	50	65	41	48	82	67	63	50	65	43

*Note:* Within each group the following scores are significant at the levels indicated: 21-27, 73-78  $<.05$ ; 14-20, 79-86  $<.01$ ; 7-13, 87-93  $<.001$ ; 1-6, 94-99  $<.001$ ; 0, 100  $<.00001$ . Differences between names on the same dimension *within* a sex group are probably significant at the .05 level if they are 17 units apart. The significance level of the differences between the sexes is indicated by suffix letters following the comparison pairs, a =  $p <.05$ ; b =  $p <.01$ ; c =  $p <.001$ . In determining the significance of scores between the sexes, not only is the average or mean score important but also the *pattern* of the scores. This may help to explain why scores such as those on Betsy for Good, 91 and 90, can be significantly different. Also see text. Susannah and Beth were included for reference since these names are also popular. Names 25-27, Kathleen, Kate, and Kathie, were omitted from the table since the ShortN Kate was inadvertently spelled incorrectly on the original data cards. Thus, appropriate comparisons were not possible.

The specific form used in this investigation consists of a card printed with rating scales for each concept or name evaluated. Each card has nine 7-step subscales: (1) *Kind-Cruel*, (2) *Weak-Strong*, (3) *Fast-Slow*, (4) *Cold-Hot*, (5) *Large-Small*, (6) *Dishonest-Honest*, (7) *Happy-Sad*, (8) *Delicate-Rugged*, and (9) *Sharp-Dull* (the polarity of the scales is alternated to avoid a directional tendency). Scales 1, 6, and 7 measure the E factor; 2, 5, and 8 the P; 3, 4, and 9 the A.

### Respondents

The respondents were 50 students (25 men and 25 women) at State University College, Fredonia who chose participation in a research project as a way of earning a small amount of extra credit in an introductory psychology course. Testing was done in group sessions with conventional semantic differential instructions.

### Results

Results were analyzed using several computer programs developed for use with the semantic differential by Lawson and Metivier (1980). One of the measures for analysis suggested by Osgood is the *D* (Distance) score. The *D* score is essentially a difference profile between rating of two concepts on the same subscale. Thus, scores on the nine

subscales (*Kind-Cruel*, *Weak-Strong*, *Fast-Slow*, etc.) for the concept Good would represent one profile, scores for the concept Bad, another profile. The  $D$  score is the sum of the differences on the subscales and is found by the generalized distance formula  $D = \sqrt{\sum d^2}$  in which  $d$  is the difference in ratings of two concepts on the same subscale. The  $d$ s of the nine subscale scores were combined into a single  $D$  score. For concepts or names perceived as being close together, such as Good and Susan,  $D$  would be small; for concepts far apart, such as Good and Bad,  $D$  would be large. For each participant,  $D$  scores were computed between each concept and every other concept.

The Wilcoxon matched pairs procedure (Wilcoxon & Wilcox, 1964) was used with the  $D$ s for each name and reference concept to determine the degree of proximity to either Good or Bad, Strong or Weak, Active or Passive representing the E, P, and A dimensions. Similar computations were done for the new dimensions of Sincerity, Intelligence, and Emotionality. The significance levels of the Wilcoxon tests can be expressed in probability levels and standard scores. However, for clarity all of the original standard scores were recalculated on a range from 0 to 100, with the high scores at the more positive end of the dimension. Thus, in Table 1 a score of 100 for Kris on the Sincere/Insincere dimension by men is actually so close to Sincere rather than Insincere that the probability of this occurring by chance is  $<.00001$ . Scores were similarly derived for the other dimensions. The probability levels for associated scores are shown at the bottom of Table 1.

When comparisons are made between the sexes, several computations have to be made using the Mann-Whitney test for independent groups (Siegel, 1956). Because of the nature of the semantic differential, the assumed axes for E, P, and A (and probably other dimensions as well) vary in length from sample to sample. Thus, in order to test whether Maggie (rating on Good by men is 68, by women 79) is really rated differently, it is necessary to compare the Good-Maggie scores for men with those of women. It is also necessary to compare the Bad-Maggie scores for men with those of women. In this comparison the scores differ at a .05 significance level. Similar computations were performed for the other dimensions. For further information on the procedure, see Lawson and Metivier (1980).

While there is a great deal of similarity in how men and women rated the names, the name Meg was scored lower by men on all six of the dimensions, significantly so on four. Ann, Anna, Kristin, and Betsy were among those also perceived differently by the sexes.

Another way of expressing the data is to show how the concepts and names position themselves in three-dimensional space. This procedure, originally developed by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), uses loadings derived from scores on the E, P, and A factors of the original scales. Figures 1 and 2 show the models for men and women. Readers can check for themselves the position of favorite names in relation to the reference concepts and other names. These models help to show how the names in their various forms are conceptualized by men and women in a type of linguistic space. The models attempt to show in another way, the data drawn from the same source as Table 1. What is striking, is how men and women differ on their positioning of the names in relation to the reference concepts. Thus, it is quite apparent that women see many of the names as closer to Good, Strong, and Active, relatively positive concepts.

We must now return to the original question as to which type of name is preferred. Table 2 shows mean scores on each dimension by type of name and by sex, along with the appropriate significance tests, Wilcoxon rank sum test for between-sex comparisons, Wilcoxon two-way classification for within-sex comparisons (Wilcoxon & Wil-

Table 2  
Mean Scores on Dimensions by Type of Name

	Full		Short		Affectionate		Averages	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Good:	79.7**	90.8**	85.3	87.7	87.0	84.2	84.0*	87.6*
Strong:	63.4	64.9+	61.3	69.1+	55.8	50.0+	60.2	61.3
Active:	50.9**	62.8**	52.4*	66.1+*	49.4	51.9+	50.9**	60.3**
Sincere:	81.4	86.8+	82.8	84.7	89.0**	78.4+**	84.4	83.3
Intell:	76.4	73.8	74.1	75.8++	77.3*	65.2++*	76.0	71.6
Calm:	66.3**	50.7**	63.2**	50.2**	67.0**	49.9**	65.6**	50.3**
Means	69.7	71.6	69.9	72.3	70.9	63.3	70.2	69.1

Note: Analyses within sex were done using the Wilcoxon two-way procedure. No significant differences were found with the Men. With women, + $p < .05$ ; on the Active dimension both FfN and ShortN are significantly different from the AffN; ++ $p < .01$ .

\* Between sex comparisons,  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$  by the Wilcoxon rank sum test.

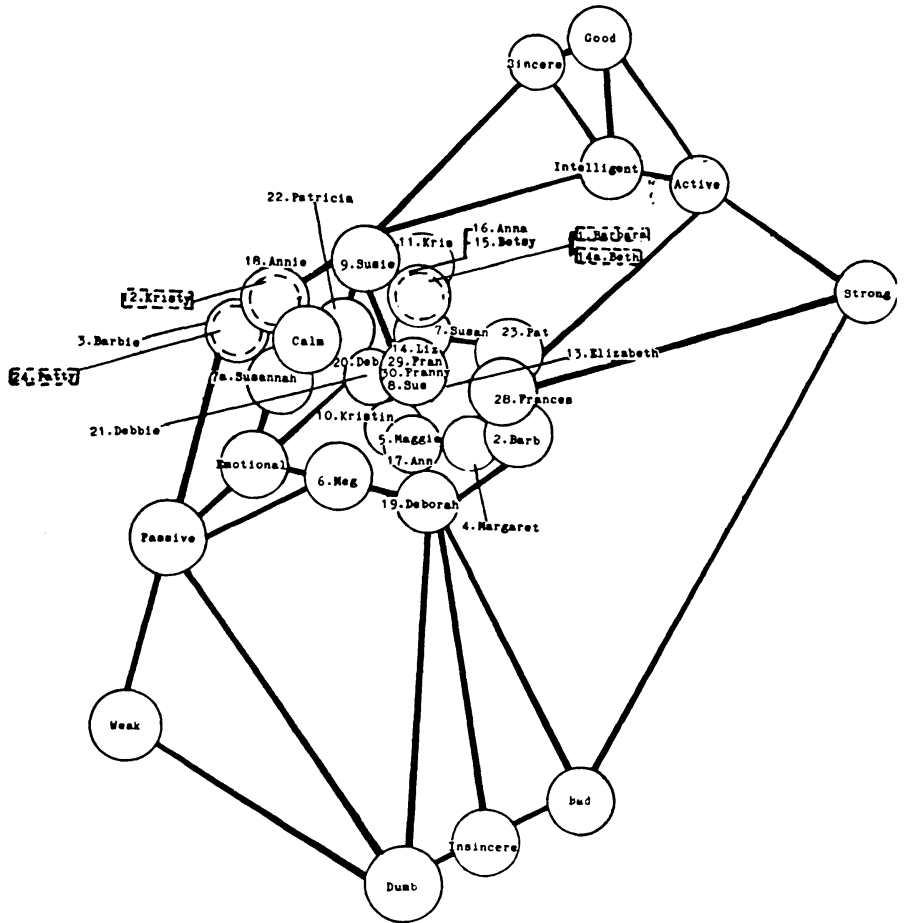


Figure 1. Three-dimensional model of men's ratings of full first names, short names, and affectionate names. Note that in comparison with the ratings of women, men tend to see women's names farther from their concept of Good, Strong, and Active.

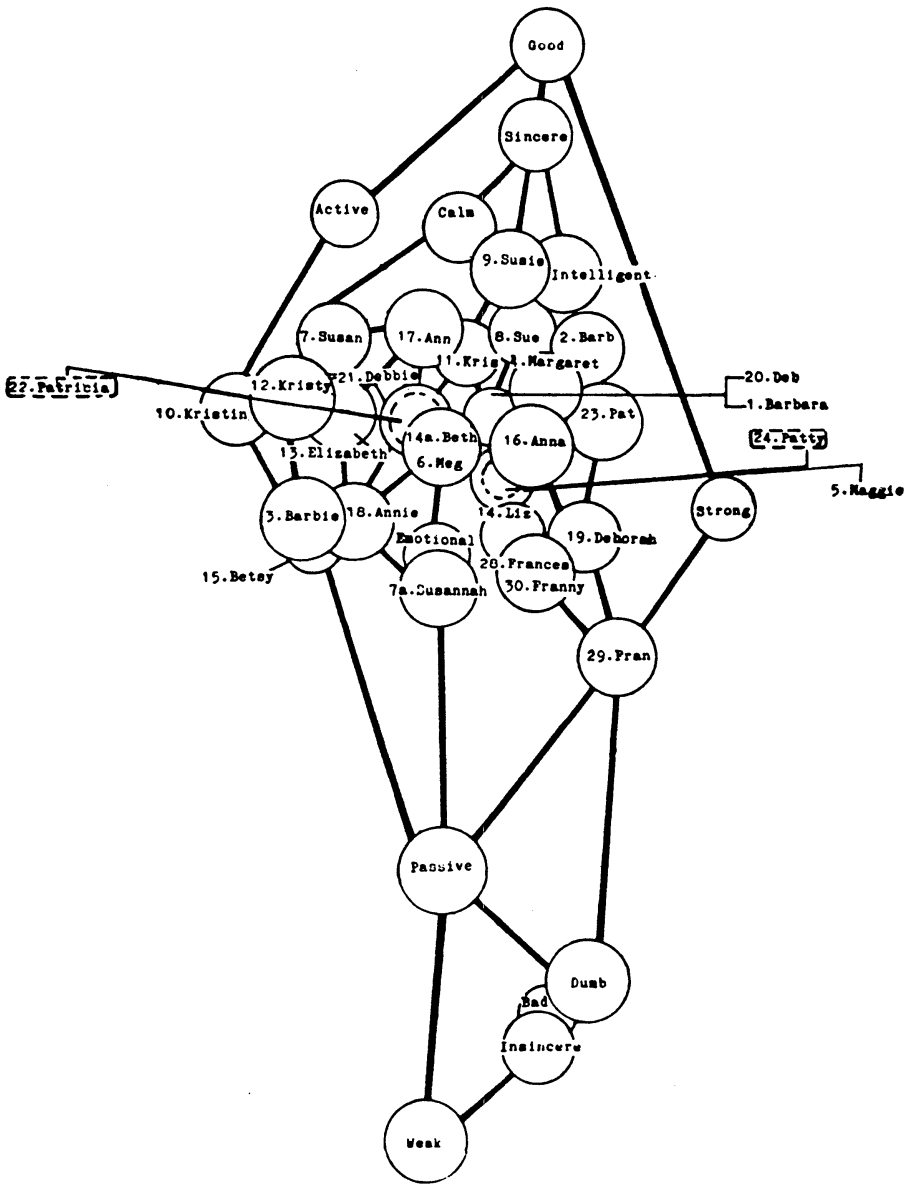


Figure 2. Three-dimensional model of women's ratings of full first names, short names, and affectionate names.

cox, 1964). This last procedure analyzes type of name. The responses of the women are more clear-cut than those of the men. Women rated the AffN form lower than the others on all six dimensions. The men's responses were somewhat mixed. A summary of the relative standings by type of name is shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

*Lowest Ranked Name Type by Sex*

	GOOD	STRONG	ACTIVE	SINCERE	INTELL.	CALM
Men	FFN	AffN	AffN	FFN	ShortN	ShortN
Women	AffN	AffN+	AffN+	AffN+	AffN++	=

+*p* <.05 the mean indicated is significantly different from at least one of the other means using the Wilcoxon two-way analysis; ++*p* <.01.

= All three means considered equal since they are so close.

Table 4

*Highest Ranked Name Type by Sex*

	GOOD	STRONG	ACTIVE	SINCERE	INTELL.	CALM
Men	AffN	FFN	ShortN	AffN	FFN/AffN	AffN
Women	FFN	ShortN+	ShortN+	FFN+	ShortN++	=

+*p* <.05 the mean indicated is significantly different from at least one of the other means using the Wilcoxon two-way analysis; ++*p* <.01.

= All three means are considered equal since they are so close.

FFN and AffN for Men on Intelligence are considered as tied since they are within a point.

Table 3 may clarify that women rated AffNs lowest on five dimensions (the sixth, Calm, is also rated lowest but just marginally), with four of the dimensions being significantly so; men rated the AffN form lowest on two dimensions, Strong and Active.

The pattern of the highest-ranked name form is shown in Table 4. Here again, the results with the women are more clear-cut than those of the men. The ShortNs were significantly preferred on three of the dimensions, the FFNs on two, and a tie of all three types on the sixth. Men, however, rated the AffN form higher on three of the dimensions, with a tie between the FFN form and the AffN form on a fourth, though none of these comparisons are at a significant level. Clearly, then, the pattern of the preferred name is different between men and



women, women showing some preference for the ShortN form; men for the AffN form.

### Discussion

The evidence from this investigation is that differential stereotypes of women's names in various forms, FFN, Short, and AffN, do exist. There are also differences in how men and women perceive specific names such as Kristin, Ann and Meg. To obtain some information as to the possible origin of these differing perceptions, post-experimental interviews were conducted informally. Respondents appeared to be either positively or negatively biased toward some names as a result of exposure to television. At the time this investigation took place, two of the most popular television programs were *Dallas* and *One Day at a Time*. Two names, Kristin and Ann, were those of characters who had major roles. Kristin was a schemer in *Dallas*. Ann was an iron-willed, women's liberation type in *One Day at a Time*, a type of character more acceptable, we can infer, to the women in our sample than to the men. Responses to the name Meg were possibly influenced by the character depicted in Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds*, the television adaptation of which was being shown at the time the research was being conducted. (Meg was the girl in love with the priest.) We can only speculate that it is possible that the men (or some of them) disliked the character while the women identified positively with her.

Evaluating the patterns of the forms as a group, it does seem clear that women clearly dislike the AffN form but the men do not. The results from the earlier study of men's names showed that both sexes ranked the AffN form the lowest. Why the difference with women? Indeed, the men even ranked the AffN form of women's names highest on two dimensions.

If we go along with the reasoning of Lawson (1973) and Van Buren (1974), we are forced to conclude that the AffN form is perceived as more immature, more dependent, more childish. While, as Van Buren has pointed out, the AffN form is acceptable for men in some circumstances (baseball players, entertainment figures, criminals), most men do not care for the AffN (Jimmy Carter was an exception). Women tend to go along with this same reasoning. They also reject the AffN image of the immature, dependent "baby doll" female. But why do men accept it? We can only speculate that it is more satisfying to the male ego to perceive women in this way. Dependent, immature women

may represent less of a threat to male sensitivities, or at least to those of the males in this sample.

The results of this investigation are perhaps somewhat limited in that the names used were all relatively popular. Whether additional research using a broader range of names with their variations would get similar results is not clear. However, the results of this investigation seem to clearly point out that (1) differential stereotypes on form of name do exist, (2) women clearly dislike the AffN form of a name and have some preference for the ShortN form, (3) men show a mixed pattern, with perhaps some preference for the AffN form.

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