

A Note on US Immigrants' Choice of Baby Names

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It used to be that immigrants from European and East Asian countries in the USA tended to choose first names for their children that they thought were 'American' to help them fit into American society, with any names from their original culture being put in the middle name position. However, because they were not assimilated enough into American culture to be affected by the same trends as native-born American parents, they tended to give their children names belonging to American adults that they knew. This resulted in their children having names that were 'too old' for their generation. For example, a few years ago, Stanley Lieberon of Harvard found that immigrants from China and Korea were much more likely than were other Americans to be naming their daughters *Linda*.

Hispanic immigrants tend to be a bit different in naming sons vs. daughters. Because of the machismo and focus on family in traditional Hispanic cultures, there is still a lot of pressure for sons to be named after fathers and grandfathers. This means that many Hispanic-American boys still receive names such as José, Juan, Luis, and even Jesus. But girls are often given 'new' names taken from Hispanic media and celebrities. Of course this sometimes leads to Hispanic girls also getting 'older' names, e.g. at the moment Jennifer, because of the fame of Jennifer Lopez, is a popular name for Hispanic baby girls even though it is now out of fashion with other Americans.

Because of religious factors, immigrants from the Middle East and South Asia are not as likely to give their children 'American' names. Both Islam and Hinduism expect children to be given names somehow related to the original language of their religious texts (Arabic or Sanskrit, respectively). But many Muslim or Hindu parents try to choose names from their own culture which they think will 'fit in' with American culture and be easy for English speakers to pronounce.

It has been reported that some East Asian immigrant parents are starting to give their children names from their home culture, perhaps being influenced by the increasing acceptance of diversity in the United States. However, this seems to be a fairly recent phenomenon; if it is occurring, it has not yet shown up in available statistics.

It is hard to make observations about the idea that 'famous' people influence the naming of immigrants' babies, because few famous people migrate to the United States *after* they have become famous. However, there may be some famous people whose parents were immigrants. And if we look at international entertainment

celebrities, many of them seem to adopt American-sounding names even before they become well known in the USA. Vivian is a popular name with East Asian immigrant parents partly because of Vivian Chow, a famous Hong Kong actress and singer, but she has not immigrated to the United States. Either she or her parents chose Vivian as her 'English' name to be used in Hong Kong itself.