

Unisex Names for Babies Born in Pennsylvania 1990–2010

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Most first names are exclusively popular for females or males. A minority of first names are unisex, defined as being given with substantial frequency to both genders in the same population in the same year. First-name frequencies for births in Pennsylvania in 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010 provided information on babies given unisex names. Children of a White mother were compared with children of a Black mother. The unisex names were divided into two types of gender preference or consistency, from 1990 to 2010. Change usually was from a small majority of males to a large majority of females. Consistency generally was a preference for males. Females more often than males therefore were given a name that was consistently more popular for the opposite gender. Great diversity of names given in Pennsylvania contributed to the occurrence of unisex names.

KEYWORDS first names, unisex names, name frequencies, gender, race, USA, name diversity

Most first names for residents of the United States of America (USA) are given almost exclusively to either female or male babies. Unisex names are defined as being given with substantial frequency to babies of both genders in the same population in the same year.

Our initial report on unisex names (Barry and Harper, 1982) identified names that were listed as both female and male in books of names for babies. Comparisons between earlier and later books indicated that the majority of unisex names were previously male names and subsequently became female names.

It is preferable to identify unisex names from actual first-name frequencies in a population of babies born in the same year. We obtained the preferable information on births in Pennsylvania in 1960 and 1990 (Barry and Harper, 1993). Unisex names

in 1960 usually were given in 1990 to fewer males, and to more females than males. Unisex names in 1990 usually had been given in 1960 to a small number of males, and to fewer or no females.

Preference for giving unisex names to females than to males was also found by Lieberman et al. (2000). They summarized information on “androgynous” names of babies born in Illinois each year 1916–1989 and in 1995. The authors emphasized the small proportion of androgynous names and also the limited number of years while a name was given to a substantial number of both female and male babies. Among 45 androgynous names, 21 have the same spoken sound but are spelled differently for the two genders. Choice of a name can be influenced by its spelled letters in addition to its spoken sound. These 21 names are not unisex if the criterion is the same spelling instead of the same spoken sound.

Beginning in 1990, Pennsylvania began reporting first-name frequencies separately for children of White and Black mothers. The first-name frequencies were obtained separately for the two racial categories, the two genders, and births in five years: 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010.

Sample and methods

Birth certificates in Pennsylvania were used because of the availability of first-name frequencies. Information on births in 1990, 1995, and 2000 was used for an article on diversity of names (Barry and Harper, 2010). First-name frequencies were subsequently obtained on births in 2005 and 2010. Four populations of babies are daughters and sons of a self-described White and Black mother.

For children of a White mother, a name is designated as unisex if given to 20 or more females and to 20 or more males in the same population born in the same year. For children of a Black mother, the criterion is six or more babies of both genders born in the same year. The number of children of a Black mother was approximately one-seventh of the number of children of a White mother. Six children of a Black mother are more than one-seventh the criterion of 20 for children of a White mother. A criterion of five or fewer unisex babies of both genders would increase the probability that the unisex naming is attributable to chance fluctuation in frequency, or to occurrence in a single community.

The criterion for children of a White mother is stricter in two attributes than the same criterion of 20 or more babies used by Barry and Harper (1993). The prior report included all babies instead of smaller numbers of babies in a single racial category. The prior report combined the frequencies in the two years of birth, 1960 and 1990. The new criterion is less strict in one attribute, the five years of birth. The criterion is attained if the same name was given to 20 or more females and 20 or more males born in any of the five years from 1990 to 2010.

For White mothers, the total number of babies in 1990 was 73,164 males and 69,017 females. The numbers decreased progressively thereafter to 52,274 males and 49,253 females in 2010. For Black mothers, the total number of babies in 1990 was 12,651 males and 12,533 females. Because of increasing percentages of Black mothers after 2000, the lowest number of babies was 10,220 males in 2005 and 9,830 females in 2000.

In each year, the number of babies was slightly but consistently larger for males than females. Diversity of names was greater for female than male babies, resulting in larger numbers of different names. Diversity of names was much greater for children of a Black mother than of a White mother. For both genders, both racial categories, and in all five years, the majority of names were given to only one baby.

The unisex names are divided into two types, defined as change or consistency of gender preference from 1990 to 2010. The gender preference changes if the years containing the name include any with more females and also with more males, or any year with an equal number of female and male babies. The gender preference is consistent if the name is given to more babies of the same gender, female or male, in all the years that contain the name.

Frequencies of first names were obtained in the form of magnetic records of the information compiled by the Bureau of Health Statistics and Research, Pennsylvania Department of Health, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. For 1990, 1995, and 2000, it is the Pennsylvania Live Birth Certificate 1989 revision. For 2005 and 2010, it is the Pennsylvania Live Birth Certificate 2003 Revision. The Department specifically disclaims responsibility for any analyses, interpretations, or conclusions.

Pennsylvania has nationally representative attributes. The State contains Philadelphia, one of the most populous cities in the USA, many smaller cities, and many rural communities. The percentage of Blacks born in Pennsylvania is similar to the percentage in the USA. Among all the births in Pennsylvania in 1990, Blacks constituted 15 percent and other non-Whites 2 percent (Pennsylvania, 1992). Whites usually included Latinos because there was no separate category for that ethnic group.

The number of babies given each name was recorded in an electronic file. The SPSS statistical package, Release 20, was used for summaries and statistical analyses of the information. SPSS is a component of the IBM Corporation. Norusis (2009) describes some of the statistical procedures.

Results

Lists of unisex first names are divided into four groups. Table 1 contains names with change of the gender preference for children of a White mother. Table 2 contains names with consistency of the gender preference for children of a White mother. Table 3 contains names with change of the gender preference for children of a Black mother. Table 4 contains names with consistency of the gender preference for children of a Black mother.

In the tables, the name is followed by the number of babies given the name in each of the five years from 1990 to 2010. Adjacent rows of numbers facilitate comparison of the numbers of female (F) and male (M) babies. The last column shows the total number of babies in the five years, separately for females and males. The word “both” following the name indicates that the name was unisex for both racial categories, thereby appearing in two tables, 1 or 2 and 3 or 4. The sequence of names in each table begins with the smallest number of babies in 1990, combining both genders.

Table 1 lists 15 unisex names with change of gender preference, given to children of a White mother. Six names, *Peyton*, *Payton*, *Emerson*, *Reese*, *Riley*, and *Angel*, shifted from more males born in 1990 to more females born in 2010. Three names,

TABLE 1
 UNISEX NAMES ARE LISTED WITH CHANGE OF GENDER PREFERENCE FROM 1990 TO 2010.
 THE BABIES HAD A WHITE MOTHER

Name	Gender	Years of Birth					Total
		1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	
Jayden	F	0	2	11	36	36	85
	M	0	0	33	196	293	522
Rowan	F	0	5	4	14	31	54
	M	0	0	5	26	53	84
Jaden	both F	1	7	23	44	6	81
	M	0	0	45	101	60	206
Peyton	both F	0	9	46	102	254	411
	M	1	7	43	76	61	188
Payton	F	0	17	56	73	158	304
	M	1	7	27	29	22	86
Emerson	F	0	2	7	26	35	70
	M	3	4	2	10	25	44
Reese	F	0	0	11	41	80	132
	M	4	9	15	20	26	74
Avery	both F	10	13	53	150	236	462
	M	5	39	50	54	77	225
Riley	both F	3	31	124	290	283	731
	M	16	64	125	149	133	487
Skylar	F	11	23	91	93	62	280
	M	11	23	29	25	16	104
Ashton	F	20	16	25	1	5	67
	M	12	6	20	98	80	216
Kasey	F	54	56	42	20	14	186
	M	13	7	12	23	9	64
Angel	both F	52	34	66	61	31	244
	M	62	53	89	33	30	267
Devon	both F	78	98	47	29	14	266
	M	72	135	122	63	33	425
Casey	F	189	188	116	39	31	563
	M	124	105	74	44	30	377

Jaden, Ashton, and Davon, shifted from more females born in 1990 to more males born in 2010. The total frequencies show that more female than male babies were given nine of the 15 names.

Table 2 lists 17 unisex names given consistently to either more females or more males in each year of occurrence. The babies had a White mother. The total numbers, in the last column of the table, show that more male than female babies were given 11 of the 17 names.

Changes during the 20 years from 1990 to 2010 for names with consistent gender preference indicate that females more often than males were given a name that was more popular for the opposite gender. Among the 11 names in Table 2 given to a

TABLE 2

UNISEX NAMES ARE LISTED WITH CONSISTENCY OF GENDER PREFERENCE FROM 1990 TO 2010.
THE BABIES HAD A WHITE MOTHER

Name	Gender	Years of Birth					Total
		1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	
Jaiden	F	0	0	4	21	12	37
	M	0	6	11	39	31	87
Parker	F	0	0	2	8	21	31
	M	12	20	80	99	185	396
Bailey	F	17	65	127	100	108	417
	M	0	43	77	18	8	146
Harley	F	12	35	27	31	22	127
	M	9	22	16	15	8	70
Skyler	F	9	10	34	23	25	101
	M	12	35	47	41	38	173
Quinn	F	7	11	15	28	55	116
	M	17	34	50	57	79	237
Hunter	F	0	16	24	10	1	51
	M	29	135	531	342	295	1332
Mackenzie	F	36	175	319	288	198	1016
	M	14	31	3	3	2	53
Dakota	F	12	48	64	46	39	209
	M	50	249	202	118	51	670
Logan	both F	6	33	44	24	21	128
	M	98	264	421	652	688	2123
Cameron	both F	10	8	48	58	40	164
	M	128	167	421	277	271	1264
Devin	F	34	40	25	13	4	116
	M	138	209	234	126	69	776
Taylor	both F	211	763	593	254	177	1998
	M	126	141	60	30	22	379
Morgan	F	225	527	476	311	121	1660
	M	28	36	19	14	16	113
Jamie	both F	309	164	90	49	20	632
	M	39	30	16	8	11	104
Jordan	both F	159	190	196	122	48	715
	M	544	433	322	234	114	1647
Ryan	both F	12	14	15	26	13	80
	M	1605	1315	1096	887	577	5480

total of more males than females, nine were given to more females in 2010 than in 1990. Most of the names therefore became more popular for females during the span of 20 years. The two exceptions are *Devin* and *Jordan*. Among the six names given to more females than males, five names were given to fewer males in 2010 than in 1990. Most of the names therefore became less popular for males. The exception is *Bailey*.

The final letter of the name appears to influence the choice of gender. Four of the six names given to a total of more females than males in Table 2, *Hailey*, *Bailey*, *Mackenzie*, and *Jamie*, end in the letter *y* or *e*. These final letters occur more often in popular names of females than males. The exceptions are *Taylor* and *Morgan*. Among the 11 names given to more males than females in Table 2, ten end with the letter *n* or *r*. Both of these final letters occur in more male than female names.

The remaining name given to more males than females in Table 2 is *Dakota*. Its final letter occurs very seldom in unisex names and in names of males. The preponderantly female final letter *a* might be a reason why the proportion of females named *Dakota* was higher in the most recent year, 2010, than in any of the four prior years.

Table 3 lists 12 unisex names with change of the gender preference, given to children of a Black mother. Five names, *Riley*, *Armani*, *Justice*, *Kendall*, and *Paris*, shifted from more male babies born in 1990 to more female babies born in 2010. Two names, *Kai* and *Shannon*, shifted from more female to more male babies.

In Table 4, containing 15 names with consistent gender preference for children of a Black mother, ten of the names were given to more male than female babies. The five exceptions are *Peyton*, *Angel*, *Taylor*, *Courtney*, and *Dominique*.

TABLE 3
UNISEX NAMES ARE LISTED WITH CHANGE OF GENDER PREFERENCE FROM 1990 TO 2100.
THE BABIES HAD A BLACK MOTHER

Name	Gender		Years of Birth					Total
			1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	
Jaden	both	F	0	1	3	6	2	12
		M	0	1	22	50	63	136
Riley	both	F	0	0	0	5	10	15
		M	1	2	0	0	7	10
Armani		F	0	1	13	4	10	28
		M	1	1	8	4	4	18
Amari		F	1	2	4	8	11	26
		M	0	2	1	10	17	30
Kai		F	1	0	6	3	9	19
		M	0	2	1	7	9	19
Justice		F	0	11	4	4	11	30
		M	1	8	6	6	5	26
Logan	both	F	0	1	2	5	15	23
		M	2	5	0	8	20	35
Kendall		F	2	11	8	4	6	31
		M	4	7	1	1	3	16
Jamie	both	F	11	6	7	2	2	28
		M	2	5	6	2	2	17
Paris		F	5	7	3	17	23	55
		M	9	8	1	1	4	23
Tracy		F	7	1	1	3	0	12
		M	9	3	0	0	1	13
Shannon		F	24	14	4	0	2	44
		M	7	3	4	3	3	20

TABLE 4
 UNISEX NAMES ARE LISTED WITH CONSISTENCY OF GENDER PREFERENCE FROM 1990 TO 2100.
 THE BABIES HAD A BLACK MOTHER

Name	Gender	Years of Birth					Total	
		1990	1995	2000	2005	2010		
Kayden	F	0	0	0	1	6	7	
	M	0	0	0	2	16	18	
Peyton	both	F	0	0	1	7	30	38
	M	0	0	0	3	7	10	
Zion	F	0	0	6	5	15	26	
	M	0	1	34	38	46	119	
Dylan	F	0	0	0	1	6	7	
	M	0	2	9	12	31	54	
Avery	both	F	3	5	1	5	6	20
	M	8	13	8	8	12	49	
Angel	both	F	16	22	31	26	19	114
	M	4	4	4	6	4	22	
Adrian	F	6	1	1	2	0	10	
	M	15	10	8	5	9	47	
Taylor	both	F	16	99	66	37	47	265
	M	10	8	2	2	5	27	
Cameron	both	F	3	0	8	4	2	17
	M	29	20	43	36	41	169	
Jordan	both	F	7	18	26	25	14	90
	M	77	56	77	59	41	310	
Christian	F	7	8	1	1	4	21	
	M	47	51	50	67	63	278	
Devon	both	F	6	4	5	2	0	17
	M	52	48	29	19	17	165	
Ryan	both	F	4	3	0	12	9	28
	M	48	36	25	23	27	159	
Courtney	F	78	30	14	8	2	132	
	M	11	3	0	1	1	16	
Dominique	F	69	40	13	40	5	167	
	M	53	12	3	0	4	72	

Combining the White mothers in Table 1 with the Black mothers in Table 3, 16 names were given to more female babies and ten names were given to more male babies. The names that changed in gender preference were more often given to females. The same combination of racial categories in Tables 2 and 4 reveals 11 names given to more female babies and 21 names given to more male babies. Names with consistent gender preference were more often given to males. The association of female instead of male gender preference with changing instead of consistent gender preference is statistically significant (Chi Square = 4.26, 1 degree of freedom, probability less than 5% that the association is attributable to random chance variation).

The 12 names that were unisex for both racial categories appear to indicate that the same attributes of a name attract unisex naming for children of both a White and Black mother. Because unisex naming is unusual, much fewer than 12 unisex names would be expected for both racial categories in the absence of mutually determined choices.

The total frequencies show that the different racial categories shared the same gender preference for ten names. The exceptions are *Avery*, given to more daughters of a White mother and to more sons of a Black mother, and *Angel*, given to more sons of a White mother and to more daughters of a Black mother. Hispanic mothers, who usually classified themselves as White, pronounced the *g* letter of *Angel* with the *h* spoken sound. This is a rare occurrence of different pronunciations of a name with the same spelled letters.

Unisex naming usually occurred for a limited duration. Among the 32 children of a White mother, listed in Tables 1 and 2, the only unisex naming in all five years was for *Angel* and *Casey* in Table 1, *Taylor* and *Jordan* in Table 2. Unisex naming was limited to one of the five years for ten of the 32 names: *Rowan*, *Emerson*, *Ashton*, *Kasey* in Table 1, *Jaiden*, *Parker*, *Harley*, *Hunter*, *Mackenzie*, *Ryan* in Table 2. Among children of a Black mother, listed in Tables 3 and 4, unisex naming in all five years was limited to *Jordan*. Unisex naming was limited to one year for 21 of the 27 names.

Prevalently short duration of unisex naming is also indicated by comparing the information in Tables 1 and 2, on children of a White mother, with births in 1960 and 1990 listed by Barry and Harper (1993). Among 18 names given to 20 or more female and male babies born in 1960, only one, *Jamie*, was given to 20 or more female and male children of a White mother in 1990. Table 2 shows that *Jamie* was unisex in 1990 and 1995 but not thereafter. Table 3 shows that among children of a Black mother, *Jamie* was unisex only in 2000.

Barry and Harper (1993) identified ten names that were given to 20 or more females and males in 1990 but not in 1960. Tables 1 and 2 show that four of the ten names, *Angel*, *Casey*, *Taylor*, and *Jordan*, were given to 20 or more female and male children of a White mother in all five years, 1990–2010. Among children of a Black mother, unisex naming was for *Jordan* in all five years, for *Taylor* in 1990, for *Angel* in 2005, and did not occur for *Casey*. Among the remaining six names, *Devin*, *Devon*, *Morgan*, *Shannon*, *Dominique*, but not *Jessie* are included in one or more of the four tables.

Discussion

A major difference from the prior report by Barry and Harper (1993) is that the number of female and male babies given each unisex name was recorded for births in each of five years. Changes from births in 1990 to births in 2010 are shown in intervals separated by only five years. The information enables a distinction between names that changed the gender preference, in Tables 1 and 3, and names with consistent preference for the same gender, in Tables 2 and 4. The new information also enables a comparison between two racial categories, White mothers in Tables 1 and 2, Black mothers in Tables 3 and 4.

Unisex names usually changed from more males to more females so that a traditionally male name was given to a baby girl more often than a traditionally female name to a baby boy. The change is consistent with prior observations by Barry and Harper (1982; 1993). Unisex names were usually given consistently to more males than females. The unisex criterion requires a substantial number of babies to be given the name that is not preferred during the 20 years from 1990 to 2010. A baby girl more often than a baby boy therefore was given a name predominantly associated with the opposite gender. Both differences between the names given to baby girls and baby boys are attributable to the traditionally higher status and greater vocational opportunities for males than females. Similarly, trousers are worn by women more often than dresses worn by men.

The substantial number of females given a unisex name that was consistently preferred for males is an expression of the greater diversity of names for females than for males, reported by Barry and Harper (2010). Diversity is even greater for names of children of a Black mother in accordance with Lieberman and Mikelson (1995) and Barry and Harper (2010). For both genders and for both racial categories, diversity of names increased greatly from 1990 to 2010. Tucker (2009) likewise reported an increase in diversity of names given to babies born in the USA in the same span of years.

The full duration of unisex naming is sometimes longer than the 20 years from 1990 to 2010. Names that were given to few or no babies in 1990 show the beginning but not always the end of unisex naming. Some unisex names omit the beginning and end of unisex naming.

First names have many attributes that might influence the choice of names given to a substantial number of females and males in the same population in the same year. The final letter *n* appears to increase the occurrence of unisex naming. Tables 1–4 contain a total of 47 different unisex names, omitting the duplications of 12 names that are unisex for both racial categories and therefore duplicated in Table 3 or 4. The final letter is *n* for 22 (47%) of the 47 unisex names. The same final letter occurs in a lower percentage of the popular names for males and in a much lower percentage of the popular names for females.

Choice of a unisex name ending in *n* might be attractive because it is the most frequent ending of popular names of males and except for *a* is one of the most frequent endings of names for females. Among births in Pennsylvania in 2010, the 25 most frequent names for sons of a White mother include *Mason, Logan, Ryan, Benjamin, Ethan, John, Aiden, Jackson, Gavin, Owen, and Evan*. For sons of a Black mother, they include *Jayden, Christian, Jaden, Aiden, Brandon, Justin, Zion, Cameron, and Jordan*. For daughters of a White mother, they include *Madison, Addison, and Lillian*. For daughters of a Black mother, they include *London, Madison, Milan, Londyn, Autumn, and Peyton*. Tables 1–4 contain some of these very popular names.

The final letter of the first name predicts the gender less accurately in the USA than in 13 other contemporary nations (Barry and Harper, in press). Each unisex name is a failure of its final letter to predict the gender consistently. Our findings on unisex names given in Pennsylvania to babies born in 1990–2010 further indicate great diversity of names in the USA. A substantial number of names were unisex for children of a White mother, in Tables 1 and 2, and for children of a Black mother, in Tables 3

and 4. Several unisex names were exceptions to the tendency for a shift from more males to more females in Tables 1 and 3, and for more males than females whose names had a consistent gender preference from 1990 to 2010, in Tables 2 and 4.

The same name is usually given to a substantial number of females and males for a limited duration, sometimes less than 20 years. In the USA, the great diversity of names enables unisex naming to persist. Names that cease to be unisex are replaced by new unisex names. The information on Pennsylvania indicates that in 1960, the principal unisex names were *Terry*, *Lee*, *Robin*, and *Dana*. In 1990, they were *Kelly*, *Jamie*, *Casey*, and *Taylor*. In 2010, they were *Riley*, *Peyton*, *Quinn*, and *Avery*.

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