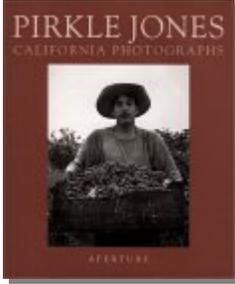


What is in a Name?

Does Your Name Affect How You Are Treated?

By Patti Wood MA, CSP

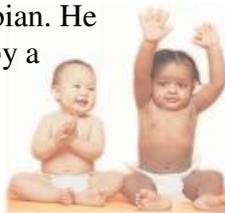
I was reading the Sunday Paper and looking at photos from a current art exhibit here in Atlanta. I was taken by the simple beauty of the photos and began to read the article on the photographer. As I got to his name I laughed out loud. "Pirkle Jones!?" I am not making this up. His first name was Pirkle. Don't wonder how parents could stand over a crib and say, "Look at our beautiful new baby." "Let's call him Pirkle!"



Pirkle studied photography at the California School of Fine Arts in 1946 and that brought him into a charmed circle of mentors that included Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and Dorothea Lange, were they worked together as peers. You probably have heard of Ansel Adams, but have you heard about the fine photographs of Pirkle Jones? I began to wonder if his name may have impacted his lack of fame. His odd name, the nonverbal symbolism and therefore the power of a name and how it can impact perception was interesting to me. It is also a particularly timely topic to me since in the last few weeks we have been talking about names for a future member of our family tree. My nephew and his wife want to name their soon to be born child Maxine, if it is a girl and Silas, if it is a boy. Maybe, my sister and I aren't hip enough but we think those are retirement home names. Wonderful names for children born in the 40's, who are currently eating liver and onions and apple sauce at Morrison's Cafeteria, but I am trying to imagine a Silas with an IPOD. If you are familiar with George Eliot short story, "Silas Marner" you can only imagine someone named Silas hording gold.*

I decided years ago that being called Patti, yes, Patti not Patricia was a great blessing. The name Patti almost requires that I be cheerful. Patricia's wear dresses and drink tea, Pat's are no nonsense women who wear jeans or khakis, and play golf. But Patti's are perky. Y & I ending names tend to connote energy and playfulness. So I think that Patti's are inevitably happy. What about the power of your name? Do you think it has affected you? Has your name made people see you and treat you in a particular way?

Research shows that names, by themselves, make various kinds of positive and negative impressions. I was recently reading a research paper by the famous father of Nonverbal Communication, Albert Mehrabian. He believes that naming a child is one of the single most important acts by a parent. He categorized the symbology of names under the categories; ethical/caring, popular/fun, successful, masculine/feminine, and those that connoted overall attractiveness... After studying thousands of subjects, Mehrabian was able to be so specific on the impressions names created that he could say that the name Chad, for example, connotes the image of an extremely popular, self-assured, fun loving person and Bud is considered an undesirable name, that connotes and image of someone who is untrustworthy, uncaring and a failure. Oh my goodness!



There is research that says that names affect self concept because they affect the behavior the child receives from others. Check it out at http://www.parenthood.com/articles.html?article_id=711 It says that, "...Curt, David, Diane, Jeff, Judy, and Linda are all considered desirable and positive while Agatha, Edgar, Francis, Mabel, Marvin, and Phoebe all provoke the opposite reaction."



Because of this, people unconsciously, but nevertheless effectively, send positive and negative messages in keeping with positive and negative images." Think of the nonverbal behavior that a funny name elicits from the children on a playground. There is even research that suggests that because I have a name that connotes happiness I may get more smiles because I was named Patti?

I was talking to my assistant Melinda and I said, "M names, Melinda, Melissa were so popular for girls 25 years or so ago and the girls with popular names tended to be popular. She said, "Your right, I am 26!"

Those who know me know that one of my favorite areas of research is first impressions. Research by Robert Needlman (Yes, that is the correct spelling, no "e" and I am sure he got teased on the playground about needles). Check it out at



<http://www.drspock.com/article/0,1510,6024,00.html>. This article discusses other links to names and personality. Sure enough first impressions are effected by names. I have also been blogging about the body language of the presidential candidates. Needlman says, "In one recent Democratic primary race, for instance, the two candidates with all-American names, Hart and Fairchild, beat two other candidates with ethnic names, Sangmeister and Pucinski. Their victory was quite unexpected because the winners actually were pushing a highly unpopular political agenda, while the two losers had been enthusiastically endorsed by the Democratic Party to which most of the voters belonged! In fact,

the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* points out that, names only seem to hold sway in elections when little or nothing else is known about the candidates." Hmmm. I wonder about the power of names for the upcoming presidential election? I believe the names Clinton and Giuliani have certain connotations.



I always thought that teachers liked the girls with prettier names more than me. Needlman discusses a study in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* that shows that, "...experienced elementary school teachers were asked to grade a set of paragraphs written by 10th graders entitled "What I Did Last Sunday." Eight different paragraphs were used, all about average in quality. Attached to these essays were eight different names: Four--Karen, Lisa, David, and Michael--were rated as desirable by students and teachers; the other four--Bertha, Adelle, Hubert, and Elmer--were rated as undesirable. The names were attached to the papers at random so that, for example, one paper that was labeled as written by Adelle one time was attributed to Karen or Lisa at other times. Bottom line? You've probably guessed it by now: Although the teachers were given identical papers, with only the names being different, they gave significantly higher

grades to the papers "written" by the students with the desirable names." And "...Sixth-graders' self-concept--how effective, attractive, and valued they felt--was related to the desirability of their first names. Moreover, children with desirable first names scored higher on a standardized test of academic achievement."



In Junior High I memorized Juliet's part of the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet. You know the famous line, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." But would someone named Rose seem as sweet to us as someone named Pampers; Yes! That is someone's name! In traditional Hindu culture babies are given a name that start with the first letter of the alphabet of his/her Nakshatra, (that is his/her birth time in relation to the stars). These names are either related to God or other fortune meanings. They believe by simply knowing the name of a person you can judge the nature of the person. The wisdom is contained within the Kabalarian Philosophy which says your name is the **single most important influence** on the development of your personality and creates your destiny. Check out their website for what your name means. <http://www.kabalarians.com/cfm/surf-by.cfm>.

I will be blogging on www.bodylanguagelady.com with more information on the impression given from names. In the meantime I would love to hear your "name" stories.

* I highly recommend one of my favorite Steve Martin Movies, called "A Simple Twist of Fate," it is based on the classic story "Silas Marner"