

# Contemporary Language Motivation Theory

60 Years Since Gardner  
and Lambert (1959)

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## 6 What's in a Name? Motivations for Baby- Naming in Multicultural Contexts

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### Chapter Overview

An increased diversity in the repertoire of first names has been one of the most visible, yet under-researched, cultural products ensuing from increasing cultural diversity in the West. Given the role that names play as markers of identity, a systematic examination of naming among bicultural individuals can help shed light into some of the motivational factors that relate to processes of acculturation and identity formation. The present chapter synthesizes our work on the topic of baby-naming among bicultural individuals in Canada. One approach to understanding the motivations underlying naming choices and preferences is through applying Gardner and Lambert's (1959) framework of second language acquisition, specifically, the role of integrative and instrumental motives. Across a number of studies conducted with bicultural past and prospective parents we find evidence that both integrative and instrumental motives have a role to play in naming choices and preferences. Specifically, bicultural individuals perceive ethnic names as a way of ensuring that their Canadian-born children identify with their heritage cultural roots, as well as fostering a deeper sense of connection with one's family and ethnic community. Importantly, these integrative motivations towards one's heritage culture and language are underscored by a sense of ethnic pride and individual agency. We also observe an integrative motivation toward mainstream Canadian culture, reflected in choices of mainstream names as a way of embracing mainstream culture; however, this motivation is weaker compared to the integrativeness towards heritage culture. Lastly, we also found evidence of a more pragmatic, or instrumental motivation in naming, with some bicultural individuals choosing mainstream names in order to avoid any potential prejudice or discrimination associated with

having an ethnic name. We conclude the chapter by acknowledging the role of the context in which our research has taken place, and point to future research directions.

### Introduction

Choosing a name for one's child is not a random act. On the contrary, naming is a conscious deliberation underlined by the motivations the parents bring into this process. In this chapter, we will focus on a specific instance of baby-naming, one that happens in a multicultural context and which focuses on bicultural individuals. Therefore, we approach baby-naming as a cultural decision that reflects the increasing ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of many Western countries. Although we draw on various theories and empirical work, most of the discussion in this chapter is based on results from our own research conducted in Toronto, Canada.

### Names, Identity and Motivation

Names are an important part of language, one that follows us throughout our lives and has a prominent place in our individual identity. Importantly, names have the power to convey a lot of social and cultural information about its bearer, including gender, race or ethnicity, religion and even socioeconomic status. Thus, one can argue that language and identity come together in the naming process. This is particularly true for bicultural parents, whose name choices may reflect parental motivations to maintain their heritage culture or fit within the mainstream culture. Thus, among bicultural individuals baby-naming reflects a cultural decision (Cila & Lalonde, 2015; Cila *et al.*, 2019; Sue & Telles, 2007). In other words, choosing an ethnic name for one's child may be interpreted by parents and their ethnic communities as an indication of ethnic maintenance. To majority group members, however, this may indicate a motivation to distinguish and separate oneself from the mainstream culture (Becker, 2009; Berry, 1997; Gerhards & Hans, 2009; Sue & Telles, 2007; Watkins & London, 1994). Conversely, adoption of anglicized names among immigrants, for instance, may be seen as an indication of their intention to assimilate into mainstream culture. Thus, there is an understanding that naming can be used as a tool to signal belongingness with a particular cultural group. An appreciation of baby-naming as a cultural decision can therefore highlight the underlying cultural motivations for choosing a particular name. It is at this level of motivation that we see key parallels between baby-naming among bicultural individuals and Gardner's theory of second language acquisition.

In their seminal paper, Gardner and Lambert (1959) argued that individuals' success in learning a second language is in part determined by

their motivation orientations. Of particular importance is the conceptual and operational distinction between integrative and instrumental motives. They argued that a key feature of integrative motivation reflects an aim to 'learn more about the language group, or to meet more and *different* people' (Gardner & Lambert, 1959: 267, emphasis in the original). In other words, an integrative motivation reflects an individual's openness and willingness to adopt features and characteristics of another linguistic or cultural group, and has a strong affective component (Gardner, 2010). In the context of naming, this can imply a motivation to adopt names that permit the child to fit within mainstream cultural naming conventions. Thus, among bicultural parents, choosing a mainstream name (i.e. a name that is common in that country's official languages), as opposed to a name that reflects their heritage culture and language, might be interpreted as a strong motivation to integrate into their new host nation. There is, however, the competing motivation to choose a name that is rooted within the heritage culture traditions and language. In this case, their motivation to maintain their heritage culture and transmit it to future generations is akin to fostering an integrative motivation for the child to learn one's heritage language. In other words, through ethnic naming parents may express their wishes and desires for the child to identify and connect with other members of their cultural and linguistic group. Thus, integrative motivations can inform our understanding of both ethnic and mainstream naming choices, and in our research we examine both the motivation to integrate in a new host culture and the motivation for heritage cultural maintenance. To examine these motivations, our work draws on bi-dimensional models of acculturation (Ryder *et al.*, 2000), as well as the construct of ethnocultural continuity (Lamy *et al.*, 2013). We believe that when it comes to baby-naming among bicultural individuals, it is important to consider not only the extent to which these individuals are immersed in their heritage and mainstream cultures, but also the extent to which they are motivated to transmit their heritage culture to future generations.

Gardner and Lambert refer to the second motivation orientation in second language learning as being more 'instrumental' in nature, and described it as a motivation that reflects a more utilitarian aspect to language learning. Here, too, we see a parallel between this particular motivation orientation and baby-naming among bicultural individuals. Specifically, we recognize that baby-naming reflects not only parental motivations to maintain one's heritage culture or adopt a new one, but also more pragmatic (i.e. instrumental) concerns about the implications of ethnic (versus mainstream) naming in a mainstream cultural context. One particular factor involved in baby-naming among bicultural parents, which is of interest to our research, is a motivation to avoid any potential negative consequences of ethnic naming, such as teasing or bullying by peers, or discrimination later on in the job market (Cila & Lalonde, 2015; Cila *et al.*, 2019).

In this chapter we will present some initial evidence linking four key variables to name preferences and choices among first and second generation Canadians, both past and prospective parents. Specifically, we will discuss the role of (1) acculturation to ethnic/heritage culture; (2) ethnocultural continuity; (3) acculturation to mainstream culture; and (4) perceived consequences of ethnic names. In our work, we approach the first two factors as illustrating a motivation to retain and transmit the heritage culture to future generations, reflecting an integrative motivation. The third factor also illustrates an integrative motivation, but this one is directed towards the mainstream culture, whereas the last factor illustrates a more pragmatic motivation, or in Gardnerian terms, an instrumental motivation towards baby-naming.

### Review of Methodologies

This chapter is based primarily on studies we have conducted in Toronto, between the years 2014–2017. During this period, we conducted six studies with sample sizes ranging from 71 to 326. Participants in these studies included bicultural parents (i.e. parents of an immigrant background with Canadian-born children), as well as non-parent, young adults, who were asked to reflect on the types of names they would prefer for their child, should they have one. Thus, we present information on both name choices and naming preferences. Our research programme has employed a mixed-method approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative responses from participants. Quantitative data from some of these studies have been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Cila & Lalonde, 2015; Cila *et al.*, 2019). In this chapter, we synthesize key quantitative findings and provide an analysis of the qualitative data collected across all studies. In our research we use the term bicultural to refer to individuals who identify with two cultural groups. Typically, these individuals identify with a heritage or ethnic culture and a mainstream culture, and have internalized the values and norms of both cultures, albeit to varying degrees (see Hong *et al.*, 2000). All of our participants reported identifying with an ethnic culture (e.g. Indian), in addition to mainstream Canadian culture, and the extent of involvement with each culture was quantitatively assessed using a well-established measure of acculturation (Ryder *et al.*, 2000).<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, we use the term ethnic name to refer to names that reflect our participants' heritage cultural background. In other words, we conceived of an ethnic name as being non-English or non-French.

The first study we conducted on this topic focused on a culturally diverse group of parents representing over 30 different cultural groups (e.g. Chinese, Dutch, Filipino, Indian, Italian and Jamaican). Findings from this exploratory study laid the groundwork for the rest of our research program. Our next set of studies was more focused in scope and included participants of South Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan)

and Iranian cultural backgrounds. The decision to focus on these cultural groups was made primarily on two key factors. First, South Asian Canadians constitute one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Canada, and Iranian Canadians constitute a smaller, but quickly growing cultural group in the country (Statistics Canada, 2017). Second, and most importantly for our purposes, both groups have strong linguistic and cultural ties to their heritage culture (e.g. Corbeil, 2012), making them ideal candidates for the study of names.<sup>2</sup>

Qualitative data were primarily obtained through targeted open-ended questions (e.g. 'How important was it to choose a name that maintained some of your heritage cultural roots?', 'Who were the people involved in the naming process?'), but also from generic open-ended questions (e.g. 'Was there anything else that influenced your choice of names?', 'Why would you prefer one type of name over the other?'). Participants' responses to these questions ranged from one sentence to a full paragraph. These responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that is both useful in identifying patterns or themes in the data, and very accessible and flexible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Before starting data analysis, a decision was made to identify a theme based on its importance and relevance to the topic, and not necessarily on prevalence or extent of elaboration. In other words, a theme could be something that was discussed by most participants or a single participant, or something that was discussed in relative detail or in a single sentence. The writing of this chapter was also informed by informal interviews conducted by the first author with past and prospective parents of various cultural backgrounds, and by both authors' personal experiences with naming their own bicultural children. Throughout the chapter we include direct quotations from participants to illustrate some of the key themes and motivations.

The rest of the chapter is organized in four key sections: (1) motivation to retain and transmit ethnic language and culture; (2) motivation to adopt mainstream language and culture; (3) motivation to avoid prejudice and discrimination; and (4) contextualizing naming motivations. Within each of these main sections we discuss a number of specific topics.

### Motivation to Retain and Transmit Ethnic Language and Culture

Becoming a parent is a highly significant event in people's lives. Among minority group members in particular, this is a time when parents-to-be reflect on their own identities and the identities they want to transmit to their children (e.g. Zirroun, 2004, 2005). For instance, following the 1960s, there was an increase in the use of distinctly African American names among Black people in the USA. This was largely interpreted as an effort by this group to affirm their racial identity (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). Within a social identity framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), in fact, ethnic naming could be considered as an instance of establishing positive distinctiveness

from the majority group. Naming, thus, can be a powerful tool in one's quest for identity affirmation, but it can also be interpreted as an indication of one's attitudes towards both ethnic and mainstream cultural groups.

In our work, we examine two related constructs that are associated with preferences and choices of ethnic names among bicultural individuals (e.g. Cila *et al.*, 2019). The first construct is that of acculturation to one's heritage culture (or what sociologists call enculturation). Qualitatively, we have assessed this construct by asking bicultural parents open-ended questions about the extent to which their heritage culture, as well as related customs and traditions, have influenced their choices of baby names, as well as the extent to which it was important to them to choose a name for their Canadian-born child which reflected their heritage culture. Quantitatively, we have assessed the degree to which a bicultural individual identifies with and is engaged in maintaining and practising values and customs from one's heritage culture using well-established measures of acculturation (Ryder *et al.*, 2000). We argue that the more strongly one is involved with their heritage culture and the more they identify with it, the more likely it is for them to choose an ethnic name for their child.

The second construct we examine in this context is that of ethnocultural continuity, which reflects a motivation to transmit one's heritage culture and language to future generations (Lamy *et al.*, 2013). An individual's level of engagement with the heritage culture (i.e. acculturation) and the desire to transmit that culture to future generations (i.e. motivation for ethnocultural continuity) are two related, but conceptually distinct constructs, and in our work we find that each contributes uniquely to preferences for ethnic names. In other words, choices of ethnic names can be predicted by both one's level of acculturation to the heritage culture and a desire to transmit that culture to the future generations. These two factors, together, have more predictive power in baby-name selection among bicultural individuals than either of them separately (Cila *et al.*, 2019).

### Embracing ethnic culture

One of the key findings we have observed across a number of studies is a clear and strong preference for ethnic names over mainstream Canadian names (Cila *et al.*, 2019). For many bicultural individuals, retaining their culture is very important to their sense of self. There is a strong sense that the name defines the individual, and because heritage and ancestry is an important aspect of an individual's identity, an ethnic name is seen as the logical choice for many. Thus, engaging in naming practices that emphasize the use and transmission of ethnic names across generations seems to be one way in which bicultural individuals can ensure that at

least part of their heritage culture can survive across generations. As an Indian Canadian father recalls:

It was quite important to pick a name that maintained our heritage/cultural roots. As we want our son to know and remember where his parents and ancestors are from.

This sentiment is echoed by our prospective parents as well. In the words of a young Iranian Canadian adult:

I have actually thought about this topic before, and every time, I only considered Iranian names. It came to me naturally. The thought of choosing a Canadian name, did not even cross my thoughts. I would choose an Iranian name; however, one that is easily pronounced ... I would give my child an Iranian name because I believe it expresses his/her identity.

And as one Indian Canadian prospective parent discusses:

I would choose a name that reflects my heritage because I would want my child to know to be proud of where he is from. Most likely a child growing up in Canada will reflect most the Canadian culture, however if he has a name that reflects cultural heritage then perhaps he would want to learn a little bit about their background when they grow up.

These quotes help highlight not only the importance of ethnic naming for individual identity, but also the expectation that an ethnic name would make an individual want to connect more with their heritage culture. An important element of embracing one's culture relates to the meaning of names.<sup>3</sup> Many of our respondents explicitly discussed the deep meanings associated with ethnic names, something that they do not necessarily find in mainstream names. Ethnic names are often deeply rooted in the heritage culture and religion; they can be part of the family's history and traditions, and they are meaningfully rooted in the language itself. An Ethiopian Canadian mother, after describing that it was important to her as a mother to pick a name for her daughter that maintained her Ethiopian heritage, explained:

My daughter's name means the beginning of the spring season and the end of the darkness ... generally 'a new beginning'.

Yet another aspect of embracing one's heritage culture reflects the rituals involved in baby-naming. As this prospective Sri Lankan Canadian prospective parent explains:

Also, in our culture we number each letter and see how the name should be spelled according to the child's lucky numbers, so I would follow that as well.

Keeping such traditions and rituals alive facilitates ethnic name maintenance from one generation to the next.

### Fostering parent-child connection

On one level, practices of ethnic naming could reflect a basic desire on the part of the parents for the child to be more like them. And this may include a similarity in naming. Especially among first generation immigrants, who likely have ethnic names themselves, choosing ethnic names for their children can help foster a sense of cultural connection to the child. Interestingly, we have some data that provide partial support to this contention. Specifically, among those individuals who are considered to be visible minorities (e.g. Pakistani, Sri Lankan and Jamaican), some of our preliminary data have shown that those who have an ethnic name report stronger ties to their families and a stronger desire to transmit their culture and language to future generations, compared to visible minorities who have a mainstream name. These groups, however, did not differ in the extent to which they reported identifying with their heritage culture or Canadian culture (Cila, 2015). The issue of how being a visible minority might impact naming decisions has also been spontaneously discussed by participants in some of our other studies. As a prospective parent of an Indian cultural background stated:

But if the child looked or resembled me in any way including skin color it wouldn't feel right to give him/her a typical Canadian name.

The above quote raises an interesting point as it highlights the relationship between the way one looks and their perceived belongingness with the majority group, suggesting that the two may seem to be irreconcilable for some. Anglo-Canadian names are likely to elicit the prototype of a White person, particularly in a Canadian context, and it is understandable why some bicultural individuals would be aware of a perceived 'mismatch' between the way one looks and the name they carry. The potential for mismatches may thus be influential in naming choices.

### Fostering a sense of family and community

An examination of our qualitative data have revealed yet another important element of ethnic naming. Specifically, ethnic names, just like the languages they derive from, are perceived to have the power to connect the individual to family and ethnic community. Thus, the name is seen as central to one's social identity, and necessary for successful interpersonal relationships within that community. Therefore, we believe that fostering a sense of connection with one's ethnic community is fundamentally driven by an integrativeness motivation. At the family level, several parents

described how the names they chose for their children were names that ran in the family, and that it was important to keep that tradition. The following quote from a prospective Indian Canadian parent, illustrates how an ethnic name is important for both family and community:

The first step for me in choosing a baby name is wondering if my mom can pronounce it. So, an ethnic name is more suitable over a mainstream Canadian one ... Ethnic name also works in my community of mostly South Asians.

This sense of community can also be seen in the process of baby-naming, and more specifically, in the people and the rituals that are involved. Whereas in mainstream Canadian culture (and other Western cultures) it is typical for the parents of the child to be the only decision-makers in the naming process, in many other cultures around the world, including some of those we have surveyed, naming a baby can be a community effort, one that can include grandparents, uncles, aunts and even community or religious leaders, and is sometimes embedded in specific rituals and practices (e.g. Sutton, 1997).

### Ethnic pride

Another interesting factor that has emerged from our qualitative data is the role of emotion in naming. Pride, in particular, seems to be very important to participants, and it seems to operate at two distinct levels. On one level, participants themselves report feeling proud of who they are and proud of their heritage. On another level, participants believe their children should feel pride in their ethnic background and their heritage culture and language. As these prospective parents stated:

I want my child to wear his ethnic name with pride.

An ethnic name will always remind them where they came from and to be proud just like it does for me.

Although we have not explicitly examined the role of emotions in our work thus far, we recognize that this could be an avenue for future research. Understanding how emotions, in particular group-level emotions such as pride, relate to naming practices would further refine our understanding of naming from a social psychological perspective, and extend the literature that examines the links between emotion and behaviour to a new domain, that of personal names. Gardner (2010) himself stressed the affective component of integrativeness for second language learning, and here we discuss it in the context of naming, as a specific aspect of language.

### Identity continuity and parental agency

On a broader level, ethnic naming can be considered an illustration of the concept of identity continuity (e.g. Iyer & Jetten, 2011; Sedikides *et al.*, 2008). Moving into a new country and a new culture can be an exciting experience. It can, however, also present various challenges. One such challenge relates to a disruption in the continuity of one's engagement with the heritage culture and the social and cultural identities that come with it. Among bicultural individuals, in particular, social identification based on their heritage culture is not only an important part of their self-identity, but also an important part of the social identity being ascribed to them by majority group members. In the context of naming, one way in which individuals can maintain a sense of identity continuity is through ensuring that new generations have names that carry the heritage culture and the identity that comes with it. Importantly, however, there seems to be an understanding that if the child is to identify with the parents' heritage culture at all, it is up to the parents themselves to make sure of that. As the following Indian Canadian prospective parent explains:

It is important that my children are knowledgeable about my heritage culture as well as the Canadian culture. In school, they would learn about the Canadian culture for sure, however, it is my responsibility that I teach them about my heritage culture along the side.

This quote illustrates an active agency on the part of the bicultural individual to make sure that the child is rooted in their heritage culture and does not lose touch with it. Although the particular focus here is on naming, this illustrates a broader phenomenon among bicultural individuals. Specifically, it highlights the pivotal role that family plays in teaching children about their heritage culture and religion, and the norms, values and traditions associated with them, thus ensuring some degree of cultural continuity across generations. This may be seen as important not only to one's identity, but perhaps also to the survival of the group as a distinct cultural entity, as illustrated by the quotes below from two prospective parents of an Indian cultural background:

It's just the right thing to do. If everyone chooses Canadian names then there will one day be no one with a name from their culture.

I would choose a name from my heritage culture because that is one thing I want my child to have if they ever assimilate into the Canadian culture.

Some of these responses suggest that being born in Canada automatically identifies one as Canadian, but an ethnic name is necessary for the individual to identify with their heritage culture. Moreover, whereas the



larger society provides the child with mainstream cultural knowledge, it is the responsibility of the parent to teach the child about their heritage culture. We argue that part of the child's acculturation and identification with their heritage culture comes through ethnic naming.

### Motivation to Adopt Mainstream Language and Culture

In this section, we focus our attention on a third motivational factor, namely wanting the child to identify with the majority culture (in our studies, Canadian). Thus, this reflects an integrative motivation, and is typically related to the parents' own engagement and identification with the mainstream culture. Thus, the argument can be made that those bicultural parents who strongly identify with the mainstream cultural group and are more fully immersed in the mainstream culture, will tend to prefer mainstream, as opposed to ethnic, names for their children. The extent of intergroup contact one has with the mainstream culture has sometimes been used as a proxy for cultural immersion and integration. Specifically, the quality of that contact is important. Thus, close friendships and inter-marriage with members of the majority group tend to be related to more mainstream naming (e.g. Gethards & Hans, 2009). Other work has shown that citizenship status in one's adoptive country may also impact the chances of giving one's child an ethnic or mainstream name, with possession of full citizenship status being linked to a higher probability of choosing a mainstream name (Becker, 2009).

### Embracing mainstream culture

In our work, we have employed a bi-dimensional model of acculturation (Ryder *et al.*, 2000) that assesses various aspects of engagement with the mainstream culture (e.g. having friends from the majority group, watching typical mainstream TV shows, etc.), and we have also asked participants to respond using open-ended questions. Quantitatively, we have observed that mainstream name preferences are significantly related to one's levels of reported acculturation to mainstream Canadian culture, so that those bicultural individuals who report being more engaged with mainstream Canadian culture also report higher preferences for mainstream names (Cila *et al.*, 2019). As a Peruvian Canadian parent stated:

Trying to keep a balance for her, to embrace her home country, was a very important aspect.

And an East Asian Canadian mother of a mixed Chinese-Korean background described:

We both agreed that it is more important to choose a name that maintained more of the Canadian root than our own heritage cultural roots.

The above quotes illustrate how for some parents, choosing a mainstream Canadian name for their child is seen as a sign of embracing Canadian culture, and recognizing it as part of the child's identity. The latter quote serves the added purpose of drawing attention to an important demographic, that of bi/multiracial individuals, who, depending on the specific configurations of their identities, may be trying to juggle three or more cultures. With the rise of mixed unions and increasing numbers of bi/multiracial children, this is an interesting demographic to study with regard to baby-naming.

Integrative motivations towards Canadian culture were also echoed by some of our prospective parents, such as the following Indian Canadian respondent:

A mainstream Canadian name may allow the person to feel better fit with the Canadian society. A person may feel as if they are an outsider or different if they had an ethnic name.

While these identity concerns were emphasized by some of our bicultural participants, for others identity and pragmatism intertwine. In other words, wanting the child to feel Canadian was just as important as avoiding certain difficulties with ethnic naming, in particular, pronunciation. As this Indian Canadian prospective parent explained:

[mainstream names] sound nice and simple. Ethnic names are generally hard to pronounce and people often get it wrong. Also I've been very attracted to Canadian culture.

### Being Canadian without having a mainstream name

An interesting observation from our studies has been that while wanting the child to identify with the culture in which they are born seems to be important to many biculturals, not all believe that this identity can be fostered through choosing a mainstream name. This, in fact, is in stark contrast to beliefs about the role of names in fostering ethnic identity. Whereas choices of ethnic names were seen as an important aspect of making sure the child identifies with their heritage culture, mainstream identification does not seem to require having a mainstream name, at least for some of our participants. Rather, being born in Canada is seen by some as sufficient proof that the child is Canadian, and does not need an English/French name to attest to that. As an Indian Canadian prospective parent put it:

As I said earlier, I want my child to be unique and represent our culture. Being a Canadian does not mean having a Canadian name. Being a Canadian means much more than that. A name does not define how dedicated you are towards your country or your patriotism.

Others, however, explicitly mentioned that a mainstream name would make their child's identification as Canadian easier, and that a mainstream name can actually facilitate one's perceived belongingness to the majority group. In the words of another Indian Canadian prospective parent:

It's easier to pronounce and people don't question you or treat you like you're from out of this country.

Although we believe this to be an interesting theme, relatively few participants explicitly discussed how a mainstream name would be important for their child's identification as Canadian (in contrast to the importance of ethnic naming for ethnic identification). Thus, the extent to which this particular motivation is important in naming decisions is subject to future empirical investigation.

### Motivation to Avoid Prejudice and Discrimination

A fourth motivational factor we discuss here relates to the perceived negative consequences of ethnic naming. This reflects an instrumental motivation to baby-naming. As Gardner noted, there can be multiple practical reasons for people to learn a new language, and we acknowledge that there can be various practical reasons why people choose a certain name. Our work thus far has focused on one specific reason, namely the motivation to avoid potential negative consequences of ethnic naming. The limited literature on the topic of naming among bicultural or biracial individuals, suggests that ethnic names can be associated with negative consequences such as teasing by friends and peers, discrimination in the job market, as well as discrimination in the rental housing market (e.g. Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Carpusor & Loges, 2006; Edwards & Caballero, 2008; Kaas & Manger, 2011). In Canada, recent news stories have highlighted another issue facing some bicultural parents, namely having their young children being flagged in no-fly lists primarily because of the cultural and religious belonging of their names (e.g. Murphy, 2016). This is no doubt a frustrating experience for parents, and as some scholars suggest, experiences such as these may lead parents to have doubts about their naming choices. For instance, through their in-depth interviews with parents of biracial children in the UK, Edwards and Caballero (2008) found that some of the parents who had given their children names that clearly denoted their racial or ethnic origins had started having doubts about their choice, fearing that their children might become targets of racism on the basis of their name. Children themselves sometimes were made to feel different from their peers because their name did not fit mainstream naming conventions.

Other work has shown how some individuals whose names clearly convey a racial or ethnic heritage choose to engage in 'resume whitening',

oftentimes by changing their first name from a clearly ethnic one to a more mainstream name in hopes of increasing their chances of employment (e.g. Bursell, 2012; Kang *et al.*, 2016). It is likely that when these individuals become parents, their personal experiences with name-based prejudice or discrimination (real or perceived) might influence the choices they make for their children's names. To the best of our knowledge, however, we are the first to offer an empirical testing of the role of motivation to avoid negative consequences of ethnic naming (Cila *et al.*, 2019).<sup>4</sup>

### Name-based prejudice or discrimination

Our research has found support for this particular motivation to be a clear and distinct motive influencing bicultural individuals' naming choices and preferences. Different from the other three motivations discussed above (motivation to retain heritage culture, transmit heritage culture and motivation to be identified with mainstream culture), which tap into identity issues and reflect integrative orientations, the motivation to avoid negative consequences of ethnic naming reflects a more pragmatic concern (or as Gardner might call it, instrumental). Not only have we seen this play out statistically, but open-ended responses from various participants in our studies have explicitly indicated concerns over name-based prejudice and discrimination.

A Jamaican Canadian mother explains:

It was very important for our son's name to reflect North American culture because we did not want him to be identified as Black when completing forms.

Similar concerns about possible negative consequences of ethnic names were observed among our prospective parents:

I want to choose a name where he/she won't be picked on for. I was teased a lot when I was in school in Canada for my name and it made my experience in school that much tougher. I don't want that for my child. (Iranian Canadian prospective parent)

But I have seen that people get declined at my workplace, not because of the lack of qualification, but the name that points to their culture and can be hard to pronounce. (Indian Canadian prospective parent)

The following quote by another Indian Canadian prospective parent also hints at another strategy employed by some individuals who have ethnic names, that of legally changing one's name:

Being born in Canada has great benefits, and having an ethnic name might make those benefits less effective when in a social or public situation. For the comfort of my child and safety of his well-being, I would name him



something I knew he would be comfortable carrying the rest of his life, instead of changing it once he reached a legal age.

We need to point out that the motivation to avoid negative consequences of ethnic names does not operate the same way for all individuals. For some, higher concerns that one's child might be faced with prejudice and discrimination if they have an ethnic name can lead to choices of mainstream names. Others, despite expectations of possible negative consequences of ethnic naming, report they would still choose those names, but pay more attention to certain features of the names, such as pronounceability, to make the names and hence their children, less likely to be targets of teasing or bullying in school, or targets of discrimination in the job market. Research on this topic is still in its early stages, and at this point we are not able to offer an empirical explanation of these two different ways of addressing the same issue, and how individual difference variables, situational constraints or the interaction between the two may influence either choice. From a social identity framework, however, it is plausible that individuals who identify strongly with their heritage culture would be more likely to prefer ethnic names, despite experiences of name-based prejudice or discrimination.

### Issues of (mis)pronunciation

Pronunciation of names was not something that we explicitly assessed in our studies. This did, however, spontaneously emerge as an important issue for many of our respondents. Interestingly, however, not all of our participants seemed to be affected the same way from recurring mispronunciations of their ethnic names. Although many individuals report feeling annoyed and irritated when others constantly mispronounce their name, some interpret this as a relatively small price to pay for the pride that comes with being an identifiable member of their ethnic group. In other words, a strong sense of attachment to one's culture and community, and a motivation to carry that forward through ethnic naming, is deemed to be more important than the relatively small inconveniences that may arise from it. These individuals, in particular, tend to feel personally responsible for the transmission of their heritage culture to future generations, highlighting that while their children will inevitably adopt Canadian culture through their immersion in Canadian society, the main way to learn about their ethnic culture is through the parents. For other individuals, however, these experiences of constantly having to correct others' mispronunciations of their names translate into a desire and motivation to spare their children from its negative effects. As an Indian Canadian prospective parent explained:

I have an ethnic name, so I have been through the stages where for example a teacher mispronounces your name, and you attempt to correct them

however, it is too embarrassing to do so. Which is why many people with ethnic names have given themselves nicknames.

Often this means that they will opt for a mainstream name, whereas other times, individuals try to be creative and come up with names that would be common to both languages, or if that is not a possible or a desired option, they might opt for ethnic names that can be easily pronounced in the mainstream language. For instance, it is not uncommon for bicultural parents to 'test' their preferred ethnic names with majority group members before making a final decision on the name.

### Contextualizing Naming Motivations and Other Considerations

It is important to note that all of our research has been conducted in one of the most multicultural cities in the world, where diversity is a fact of life and individuals representing over 200 ethnic and linguistic groups from all over the world live in relative harmony (Corbell, 2012). In such cultural contexts, individuals cherish the ability to not only openly use their own languages in public without any fear or expectation of being stared at, but also the ability to transmit that language to their Canadian-born children. For instance, schools, which normally act as the key milieu of immersion into mainstream culture, have over the years increasingly encouraged children and their families to learn their mother tongue. They are doing this by not only emphasizing to families the importance of teaching one's mother tongue to their Canadian-born children, but also offering a number of practical supports to achieve that, such as furnishing libraries with bilingual books and offering heritage language classes.<sup>5</sup> It would not come as a surprise then that in these particular contexts bicultural individuals are strongly motivated to transmit their language and culture to their children. This is something that is perceived to be not only accepted, but also enabled by mainstream society. Ethnic naming can thus be seen as a product of such encouragement to retain and live out the heritage culture.

It is unclear at this point if similar, strong preferences for ethnic names would be observed in contexts that are less culturally diverse or contexts which tend to favour assimilationist over multicultural ideologies. In fact, some of our participants, in their open-ended responses have reflected on this specific issue. These participants demonstrate an awareness of the specific characteristics of Canada, and the Greater Toronto Area more specifically, that make it possible to want to name one's child an ethnic name. In the words of two of our Indian Canadian respondents:

Canada is a diverse place and they would fit in even if they didn't have a mainstream Canadian name.

To me it doesn't matter. I feel like in 2016, Canada is so multicultural, our different ethnic names are in fact Canadian in their own sense now. Sanjay is as Canadian as Rick to me.

The second quote in particular suggests that increasing diversity in naming may imply a shift in what constitutes a 'mainstream' name, at least in the more multicultural cities in Canada. This could be an interesting area of research in its own right.

Another important issue we want to draw attention to is the fact that naming does not have to be an either/or decision for parents, although our discussion so far may have implied that. Specifically, for certain cultural groups, especially those that share a common religion or linguistic similarity with the majority culture, it is possible to choose names that are in fact common to both cultures. In those cases, one can simultaneously transmit heritage culture and adopt mainstream culture, thus showing an integrative orientation to both cultures. Importantly, however, even among those cultural groups that do not share any religious or linguistic connections with mainstream culture, it is still possible for parents to come up with name combinations that would accommodate both cultures. For instance, parents could choose a first name that is common in one cultural group (e.g. mainstream) and a middle name that is common in the other cultural group (e.g. heritage). While such name combinations may sometimes simply reflect parental identity motivations (i.e. wanting the child to identify with both cultures), at other times, this strategy may combine both pragmatic and identity concerns (i.e. both integrative and instrumental motivations). As a Vietnamese Canadian mother described it:

I chose a mainstream Canadian name to make it easier for my son's life here. I have a Vietnamese name for my son that is used at home instead to still preserve culture. I refer to my son by his Vietnamese name.

## Religion

We acknowledge that research on baby-naming from a cultural perspective is still in its infancy, and many new research avenues could be pursued in the future. Specifically, most of our work so far has focused on a definition of culture based on nationality or ethnicity. Culture, however, can take many forms, including religion, socioeconomic status and region within a country (Cohen, 2009). All of these other forms of culture can influence the types of names parents choose for their children. In this section, we focus on religion as an important source of influence, not only because it informs traditions and customs, but also because it often is an actual source of names. Religion provides its adherents with many names to choose from, and many of the names appearing in religious texts and scripture are still in use today (e.g. Bethany, David, Eva, Fatima, Jacob,

Mohammed), and some of these names cut across religious divides (e.g. Adam, Sara(h), variations of Mary). Just like choices of ethnic names can be interpreted in terms of integrative motivation, choices of religious names for one's child can also be considered as a reflection of an integrative motivation towards one's religion.

Although our baby-naming studies did not explicitly examine the role of religion, respondents sometimes spontaneously invoked religion to explain their naming choices. As a Jewish mother remarked about naming her daughter:<sup>6</sup>

We wanted an original name that sounded Jewish.

An Italian Canadian father also emphasized the role of religion in naming his son:

It was not important to be common but it was important to be a Christian name.

A Sikh mother explained that in her religion, naming decisions start at the place of worship:

The letter G was picked at the Gurdwara (place of worship). The first letter of the hymn that appears in the holy book is the letter the name should start with.

And an Indian Canadian father also invoked the holy book when describing the decision to name his son:

Our son's name is from the Quran, it is the name of a prophet.

In a study with Muslim Canadian young adults that examined the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward various social issues, Haji *et al.* (2017) found that stronger religious identification predicted a stronger preference for Islamic names. The same study observed denominational differences, with participants who identified as Sunni or Shia showing a stronger preference for Islamic names, compared to those who identified themselves as 'just Muslim' (Haji *et al.*, 2017). Other work has also shown religion to be an important factor in baby-naming, so that stronger religious observance is associated with choices of religious names (e.g. Edwards & Caballero, 2008). Thus, if religion is an important part of the individual's identity, then it is likely that they will be motivated to transmit that part of their identity to their offspring, so it becomes part of their child's identity too.

## Gender

Another interesting aspect of naming that we have yet to discuss, but which may offer additional insights into identity processes, relates to the

gender of the child. Literature suggests a consistent effect of gender in naming practices among parents with an immigrant background, with parents giving their sons names that are more reflective of their ethnic identity, while giving their daughters names that are more mainstream (Becker, 2009; Lieberman & Mikelson, 1995; Sue & Telles, 2007). This research suggests that the importance of traditions and generational continuity may be gendered (Finch, 2008; Joubert, 1985). We have not observed an effect of gender that would be expected based on this literature, although this may be a function of the specific cultural context where our studies have taken place or the specific cultural groups we have studied (see Cila *et al.*, 2019). Given that in many cultures, generational continuity follows the paternal line, it would not be surprising to see the above-mentioned gender difference in naming patterns, especially when continuity and survival of the cultural group is at stake. From a motivational standpoint, it would be interesting to examine whether integrative versus instrumental motivations might differentially influence choices of names for daughters and sons.

### Uniqueness

Lastly, an interesting trend has been observed over the years showing an increase in unique name choices, paralleling increases in individualism (Grossmann & Varnum, 2015; Twenge *et al.*, 2010). In fact, there is a trend showing names moving away from tradition and custom and more towards uniqueness, thus being centred more on the child and less on tradition. Whereas these trends have been mostly observed in individualistic cultures, we do not know whether the same would be true for more collectivistic cultures that typically emphasize family and tradition. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine preferences and choices of unique names among bicultural individuals, and how their connection to the heritage culture and the motivation to transmit it to future generations may be influenced by these trends. A few of our respondents did in fact mention that they did not have any preferences for specific cultural names, and would rather prefer names that were unique in some way. Nevertheless, it is unclear at this point how prominent such preferences are among bicultural individuals and the various factors that may be associated with it. Furthermore, comparing different generations of bicultural groups (e.g. first- versus second-generation) would add yet another layer of inquiry and understanding to this issue, and would provide further insights into the potentially different motivations underlying naming decisions.

### Conclusion

Studying personal names is especially relevant in today's increasingly diverse world. Our work shows that naming choices and preferences

among bicultural individuals are informed by both identity and pragmatic concerns, or using Gardner's terminology, integrative and instrumental motivations, respectively. An integrative motivation was reflected toward both the heritage culture and mainstream Canadian culture, and was related to choices and preferences of ethnic or mainstream names, respectively. Nevertheless, the integrative motivation toward one's heritage culture was more prevalent than an integrative motivation toward mainstream Canadian culture, and more fully elaborated by our participants. This preference for ethnic naming was underscored by a number of factors, including importance of embracing one's ethnic identity and the sense of pride that comes with it, the role that naming can play in fostering a sense of family and community, and also an understanding that ethnic naming offers one way in which bicultural individuals can be active agents in the intergenerational transmission of their heritage language and culture. The importance of ethnic names in the larger context of ethnic culture maintenance has been previously observed in the literature (e.g. Edwards & Caballero, 2008; Gerhards & Hans, 2009; Kim, 2007). This integrative motivation towards heritage culture and language is in line with Gardner's conceptualization of integrativeness as being primarily driven by an affective, as opposed to a cognitive, component. In this context, individuals' strong emotional connections to their heritage culture and language can emerge as key factors influencing naming choices, and can supersede the more practical (and often cognitive) reasons for choosing a mainstream name. For instance, while a number of participants highlighted issues of mispronunciation of their ethnic names, many emphasized that the importance of carrying an ethnic name and the pride associated with it superseded the pragmatic convenience of carrying a mainstream name. Another interesting finding we observed was that while participants perceived an ethnic name to be necessary and important for the formation of ethnic identity in the child, the same was not true for a mainstream name, at least among some of our respondents. In other words, one can be and feel Canadian without having a mainstream Canadian name. Across our studies, we have also found that choices and preferences of mainstream names are also associated with more pragmatic concerns (i.e. an instrumental motivation), such as avoiding potential prejudice or discrimination that may come as a result of having an identifiably ethnic name. Such perceptions or expectations seem to have at least some empirical support. For instance, individuals who have a clearly ethnic name have been found to be targets of prejudice or discrimination (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Carpusor & Loges, 2006; Edwards & Caballero, 2008; Kaas & Manger, 2011; Kang *et al.*, 2016; Zhao & Biernat, 2017). Overall, our findings point to the complex nature of baby-naming in a multicultural context, both in terms of its motivational antecedents and outcomes. In this chapter, we provide a number of new research directions, but acknowledge that the empirical paths one can pursue are not limited to the ones proposed here.

Robert Gardner, along with his mentor, Wallace Lambert, have established a tradition of looking at the seminal role of language in intergroup relations and intercultural communication. The name that one receives as a baby serves as an important anchor in these areas. Not only does the name often reveal parental motivations that are framed within a cultural context, but it will also serve as the individual's calling card in daily interactions throughout their life. First impressions are formed not only on appearance, but also on individualized personal labels. The title of this chapter asks the question 'What's in a name?' We hope the reader can share the same answer that we have reached, and that is 'plenty!'

## Notes

- (1) Although our conceptualization of biculturalism is well-established in the literature, we recognize that it might not capture the whole spectrum of bicultural experiences. For instance, some recent work points to the importance of understanding how different bicultural individuals may negotiate their cultural identities (West *et al.*, 2017). These different ways of navigating one's cultural identities may have different implications for baby-naming. In addition, our research so far has focused on individuals who identify with two cultural groups, but an increasing demographic in many Western countries comprises individuals who identify with more than two cultural groups, which would provide new insights into the role of culture and identity in baby-naming.
- (2) Interestingly, group size and ethnolinguistic vitality may offer necessary, but not sufficient conditions for observing variability in naming choices. Notably, Chinese Canadians, despite being one of the largest minority groups in the country and demonstrating relatively high levels of ethnic language maintenance, show a consistent and strong preference for mainstream names compared to ethnic names. To the best of our knowledge, however, there has been no systematic analysis of naming patterns among this population, although some literature on name-changing among college-age Chinese immigrants in the USA supports our observations (Zhao & Biernat, 2018).
- (3) Meaning of names in one's heritage language needs to be considered against the backdrop of its possible meaning in the dominant language of the mainstream culture. Although to the best of our knowledge there is no empirical research on this particular topic, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that certain ethnic names sound 'funny' or 'embarrassing' in English and can therefore make individuals targets of teasing and bullying by peers. A few of our respondents raised this issue in their responses.
- (4) In our studies, we have used a three-item measure of perceived negative consequences of ethnic naming: (a) 'A mainstream Canadian name would make my child's life easier'; (b) 'I fear my child might be teased if I give her/him an ethnic name'; and (c) 'An ethnic name will only make life harder for my child.' These questions were asked separately for sons and daughters, although no gender differences were observed.
- (5) Such moves, especially in the elementary school years, can be seen as an extension of the bilingual (French-English) learning models which were pioneered by Wallace Lambert (e.g. Lambert & Tucker, 1972).
- (6) We acknowledge that at times it can be difficult to distinguish religious from cultural influences unless a person makes an explicit reference to one of them. Jewish identity, in particular, can encompass both religious and ethnic cultural elements (e.g. Friedman *et al.*, 2005; Haji *et al.*, 2011). In this case, however, we can add that in addition to a Jewish first name, the child was given a Hebrew middle name and that the parent reported being quite religious on a single-item measure of religiosity (7 on an 11-point scale, with 0 = Not at all religious and 10 = Extremely religious).

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