

PAWEŁ TOMANEK
University of Warsaw

Names with Class: Education and Occupation as Determinants of Name Preferences Among Polish Mothers

Abstract: This paper examines the naming preferences of Polish mothers across different educational and occupational groups. An online survey of 2,579 respondents asked mothers to rate the attractiveness of 25 male and 25 female names. Exploratory factor analysis identified five name categories for each gender. Mean ratings by education level and EGP class position were compared using one-way ANOVA. The results indicate that mothers with higher levels of education and occupational status tended to prefer names rooted in Polish tradition—whether already popular or experiencing a revival—while avoiding those considered outdated. In contrast, mothers with lower levels of education and occupational status were relatively more favorable toward recently imported names. Preferences for male names showed greater social differentiation than those for female names, supporting the view that boys' names more strongly reflect social background and parental cultural capital.

Keywords: first names, cultural capital, highbrow tastes, lowbrow tastes, social distinction, social stratification

Introduction

First names, like many other cultural items, are socially patterned; the likelihood of choosing a particular name for one's child depends on the person's naming taste, which in turn is shaped by their overall volume of cultural capital (Besnard and Desplanques 1986; 2001; Besnard and Grange 1993; Bloothoof and Onland 2011; Elchardus and Siongers 2010; Levitt and Dubner 2006; Lieberman 2000; Lieberman and Bell 1992). Thus, naming choices indicate the parents' social position and the social background of the named children. Moreover, a person's first name—unlike their taste in food or music—is known to those they interact with in many diverse contexts. This means that a name's stereotypical association with a lower social status or a low volume of cultural capital (as is often the case with recently invented names or those imported from other countries—see Lindsay and Dempsey 2017; Siwiec and Rutkowski 2014) carries a considerable risk of class prejudice and discrimination, for example during the hiring process (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Cotton et. al. 2008; Meagher 2015).

However, the cultural standing of first names and their associations with different status groups are usually more implicit and less discursively elaborated than in the case of other cultural objects or activities, such as consuming music or art, where judgments of taste are rooted not only in the “structuring structures” of habitus (Bourdieu 1977: 2) but also

in established discourses and institutions (DiMaggio 1987; Lamont and Fournier 1992). Naming and evaluating names, on the other hand, lack such clear supra-individual points of reference, and no clearly delineated types of first names are widely recognized and referred to in social practice. Thus, researchers approaching this area of taste usually conduct their analyses at the level of particular names, trying to identify meaningful similarities between those that are chosen (or not chosen) disproportionately often by members of certain social categories. This can be compared to a situation in which scholars of musical taste would be confined to analyzing preferences for particular songs, singers, or bands without any agreed-upon knowledge of what musical genres they belong to—or, for that matter, what constitutes a “genre.”

I devised this study as a preliminary step in a larger research project on first names given by members of different social strata in Poland. Its primary goal was to establish a meaningful, non-arbitrary categorization of first names based on their subjective appeal to respondents (female users of a popular Polish parenting website) and to compare these categories with broader, cross-domain taste distinctions, such as highbrow versus pop versus folk (van Eijck and Lievens 2008). The resulting categories were then used to compare name preferences among mothers from different educational and socio-occupational groups. The detailed nature of the categorization made it possible to move beyond the dichotomous alternative of “traditional” versus “novel” names and the commonly drawn conclusion that higher cultural capital and social position relate to the former. As it turned out, respondents applied more nuanced criteria when evaluating names, distinguishing between various shades of “traditionality” based on a name’s position in the fashion cycle. Furthermore, gender emerged as an important factor, with both overall and intra-category taste differences being greater for male names than for female ones.

Class Reproduction and Class Tastes in Contemporary Poland

The cornerstone of Bourdieu’s (1984) theory is that the game of social and cultural reproduction is largely played out “at home,” within the family. In stable societies with low or moderate levels of intergenerational mobility, members of the younger generation are likely to inherit their parents’ (or, traditionally, their father’s) social position and its correlates—cultural capital, habitus, and lifestyle. This does not, of course, mean acquiring the same specific tastes or forms of consumption, as these are also shaped by fashion cycles and broader socio-cultural changes. However, in Bourdieu’s seminal insight, habitus consists of *generalized* dispositions that are transferable across different fields of cultural practice and adaptable to new contexts and phenomena (Bourdieu 1990: 54–55). Thus, even if the cultural elite at a given moment can be identified by the specific objects they appreciate, it is their mode of engagement—seeking rarefied aesthetic enjoyment for its own sake—that defines their elite identity and thereby elevates those objects to the status of highbrow or “serious” culture. This disposition, like other forms of class habitus, is instilled in children through familial role modelling and later reinforced by educational trajectory and peer groups—both of which partially reflect the individual’s social background and their initial volume of cultural capital.

In Poland, as in all other class societies, we can find ample evidence supporting Bourdieu's theory. However, compared to Western countries, the extent—or “success rate”—of class reproduction has arguably been lower, as the process was disrupted over several generations by social and economic upheavals, including the imposition of state socialism in the late 1940s and the subsequent transition to a capitalist market economy in the 1990s. In both cases, the overall result was increased upward social mobility, which, however, reflected change in the occupational structure rather than a lowering of class barriers (Domański et al. 2018, 2024a). For large segments of Polish society, the reintegration of the national economy with global markets created new earning opportunities through entrepreneurship and professional employment in foreign or newly established Polish companies (Hardy 2009). The number of professional, managerial, and lower non-manual positions increased significantly, especially for women, accompanied by a corresponding decline in the number of skilled manual workers and farmers (Domański et al. 2024a: 322–323). The growing demand for white-collar jobs has fueled an education boom, with more than 40% of people aged 25–34 attaining tertiary education in recent years (Eurostat 2025). All these tendencies contributed to what has been described as “the steady ‘upgrading’ of class structure” (Domański et al. 2024a: 324).

The extent of recent social mobility in Poland, along with the specific conditions under which it occurred, raises the question of whether Bourdieu's conceptual framework fully captures the Polish socio-cultural reality. Gdula and Sadura (2012) applied his original class model with few modifications and identified habitus effects similar to those described in *Distinction*, with clear qualitative differences in cultural practices and attitudes among the higher, intermediate, and popular classes. However, other scholars have shown that class-based cultural boundaries are, in many respects, blurred and fragmented. For instance, general preferences for movie genres (Domański et al. 2024b) and television formats (Domański et al. 2023) appear to be fairly evenly distributed across occupational and educational groups, with only a few genres exhibiting stronger discriminatory power. Even musical tastes—the most extensively researched form of class distinction—exhibit only a moderate degree of class homogeneity. As expected, classical music and jazz are relatively more appreciated by higher-grade professionals and managers, while disco polo—a Polish lowbrow genre—is more commonly preferred by farmers and manual workers. However, internal hierarchies within occupational categories reveal a more nuanced picture: higher-grade professionals and managers actually prefer pop over classical music and rock over jazz, while intermediate groups (lower non-manual workers and small business owners) rate classical music and jazz lower than pop, rock, and even, in the case of the former, disco polo (Domański et al. 2020, 2021).

These findings suggest that mapping social position onto the landscape of cultural tastes in Poland is far from straightforward. This can also be hypothetically attributed to increased social mobility, as cultural omnivorousness—defined as the inclination to engage with a wide range of cultural forms spanning the highbrow–lowbrow continuum (Peterson, Kern 1996)—has been shown to result, among other factors, from upward biographical trajectories. In such cases, individuals “superimpose” new tastes, acquired through secondary socialization, onto preferences absorbed in their families of origin and early peer groups (Coulangeon 2015; Friedman 2012).

This makes it all the more compelling to examine the impact of class on preferences in first names. While this topic has been studied in several Western countries with relatively stable systems of social stratification (see below), similar inter-class differences may not necessarily emerge in a society that has undergone extensive structural change. Moreover, actual naming choices, being one-time decisions, leave little room for cultural omnivorousness. Thus, preferences in first names offer a clear, laboratory-like example of group aesthetics and a valuable window into the processes of cultural stratification.

Social Differentiation of Naming Preferences

Large-scale research on the social differentiation of naming preferences has so far been conducted mostly in two countries: France (Besnard and Desplanques 1986; 2001; Besnard and Grange 1993) and the United States (Levitt and Dubner 2006; Lieberman 2000; Lieberman and Bell 1992; Oliver et al. 2016; Taylor 1974). There are also single studies available for Belgium (Elchardus and Siongers 2010), Germany (Gerhards and Hackenbrosch 2000), and the Netherlands (Bloothoof and Onland 2011). However, the comparability of this research is limited due to differences in scope and methods of determining social position. Some studies compared the naming preferences of a narrowly defined social elite with those of the general population (Besnard and Grange 1993), while others employed markers of social position such as education (Bloothoof and Onland 2011; Elchardus and Siongers 2010; Levitt and Dubner 2006; Lieberman and Bell 1992; Oliver et al. 2016), income (Bloothoof and Onland 2011; Levitt and Dubner 2006; Oliver et al. 2016), or elements of lifestyle such as musical tastes (Bloothoof and Onland 2011; Elchardus and Siongers 2010) and TV viewing preferences (Elchardus and Siongers 2010). In three studies (Besnard and Desplanques 1996; Gerhards and Hackenbrosch 2000; Taylor 1974), differences in first names were related to the father's occupation, but the occupational classifications varied in detail—from a very general categorization of highly qualified, qualified, and unqualified workers in Germany (Gerhards and Hackenbrosch 2000) to six occupational categories in France (Besnard and Desplanques 1996) and eight in the United States (Taylor 1974).

Notwithstanding these differences, the findings of the cited studies are quite coherent. In all the countries researched, parents with higher social position, higher income, or greater volumes of cultural capital were more likely to choose “classic” first names, strongly rooted in the naming tradition of the country concerned, whereas parents from lower social strata were relatively more inclined to give their children “novel” names, recently introduced or popularized. For example, in the United States in the late 20th century, mothers with college education were particularly keen on choosing “important biblical names,” such as *Sarah* or *Jonathan*, while mothers with lower education leaned towards newly created or popularized names, such as *Crystal* or *Jason* (Lieberman and Bell 1992: 525–526). Similarly, in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, researchers found that wealthier and better-educated parents preferred “historical” names with an established presence in the country, whereas names given by parents with lower income or education were relatively more often of recent foreign origin, even when local counterparts were available, as in the

case of *Mikaël/Michel* or *Anthony/Antoine* in France (Besnard and Desplanques 1986: 63; Bloothoof and Onland 2011: 31–34; Elchardus and Siongers 2010: 424–426).

In an interesting study from the United States, Oliver et al. (2016) refined the observations made by Lieberman and Bell by identifying further differences among white Americans with high socio-economic status. In general, white mothers with higher education and those living in more affluent neighborhoods were more likely to choose popular names; however, this tendency also depended on political orientation. It was more pronounced among mothers living in conservative-voting precincts, whereas mothers from more liberal neighborhoods were relatively more inclined to choose uncommon, “esoteric” names such as *Brittany* or *Esme*. Importantly, most of these names were not entirely invented but rather emerged from the revival of outdated personal names or the appropriation of geographical names or common words. In this respect, they differed from the unique or uncommon names favored by members of lower socio-economic classes, which—especially among Black Americans—were more often entirely fabricated (as in *Areeda*), featured unconventional spellings (as in *Jasmyne*), or were modifications of popular names (as in *De-John*). The authors hypothesize that educated and affluent liberal mothers, through their “esoteric” but not idiosyncratic naming choices, signaled high cultural capital, whereas for conservative mothers from the same social stratum, it was relatively more important that the name convey high socio-economic status, traditionally associated with popular Anglo-Saxon or Biblical names.

In Poland, there is a knowledge gap regarding the social differentiation of naming preferences. A few studies on the topic were conducted in the 1970s (Borek 1978; Gajda 1973), but they were limited to local communities and focused on the most popular names, which showed a comparably strong presence across different social groups. In a more recent study (Tomanek 2021), I analyzed first names given to present-day medical students compared to naming choices for the entire birth cohort of 1995–2000. Medical students were selected based on the assumption—supported by other research—that their parents have, on average, higher volumes of cultural capital than the rest of the population. As it turned out, both men and women in the research sample bore first names rooted in Polish naming tradition disproportionately more often, regardless of whether those names were currently popular or gaining or losing popularity. Conversely, the parents of future medical students born in the 1990s were relatively less likely to choose fashionable “names of the day” with a low historical presence in Poland, such as *Klaudia*, *Patrycja*, *Adrian*, or *Damian*; the relative occurrence of these names in the studied group was three to four times lower than in the entire birth cohort (Tomanek 2021: 99–100). However, since the parents’ large volumes of cultural capital were only inferred and the study addressed naming preferences from over two decades ago, further research is needed to determine whether today’s naming preferences show social differentiation along similar lines.

Method

I examined the name preferences of Polish mothers through an online survey conducted via the Google Forms platform. The survey was carried out from July 25 to 31, 2022,

among users of the parenting website [Mamy-mamom.pl](https://mamy-mamom.pl). The choice of this forum as a recruitment site was motivated not only by convenience but also by the fact that most users had either recently gone through the process of choosing first names for their children or were currently in the process of doing so. This was intended to increase the likelihood of obtaining more decisive evaluations, as the topic of first names was directly relevant to the respondents.

The site's administrator published the survey link on its Facebook fan page, which has over 250,000 followers—the largest reach among Polish parenting websites. The survey was completed by 3,555 participants, overwhelmingly female (26 male responses were removed from the sample). Each respondent provided information on her first name, age, education, occupation (or occupational status), family income per capita, as well as the first names of her partner and child(ren), along with their year(s) of birth. In the main part of the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate the attractiveness of 25 male and 25 female names using a 5-point Likert scale (1—"I don't like it at all"; 5—"I like it very much"). The names were selected based on their rootedness in Polish naming tradition—ranging from medieval pagan and Christian names, early modern names introduced by the 20th century, to "novel" names introduced in the 20th or early 21st century (Grzenia 2010; Rymut 1995). Selection also considered their current popularity in the general population (high, medium, low) and their trend (gaining vs. losing popularity) (Gov.pl 2022). Within these criteria, specific names were chosen to ensure diversity in etymology, length, and certain phonetic features such as opening phonemes and ending syllables.

The dataset was cleared of 829 respondents who bore one of the names being evaluated or had a partner with such a name. This step aimed to reduce the likelihood of respondents giving more favorable ratings to names from the same category as their own—usually trendy names from the late 20th century, which, as my previous research suggests (Tomanek 2021), were themselves socially patterned in the generation of today's parents. Respondents still in education (121 persons) were also excluded from further analysis to avoid misclassifying their level of institutionalized cultural capital before it was fully attained. The final dataset comprised 2,579 mothers.

The sample composition by respondents' educational attainment was roughly representative of Polish women of childbearing age (see Table 1). The percentage of respondents with tertiary education (Bachelor's, Master's, or doctoral degrees) was 50.5%—almost identical to that of women aged 25–34 in the general population (50.3%). Similarly, the share of respondents with upper secondary education was comparable (46.8% vs. 45.0%). The only underrepresented group in the sample was women with primary and lower secondary education (2.8% vs. 4.7%). This suggests that the sample was not heavily biased in terms of educational attainment and allowed for detailed inter-group comparisons. As the group of respondents with doctoral degrees was too small for statistical purposes, it was combined with the group of Master's degree holders.

Occupation was coded based on two separate questions: one regarding respondents' current or most recent occupation, and another concerning the number of people they supervised or employed. Since the first question was open-ended, not all responses were conclusive enough to allow for clear categorization. Among the respondents, 81 individuals declared that they were full-time homemakers, on maternity leave, or

Table 1

Sample composition by respondents' educational attainment (N = 2,579) compared to the educational attainment of Polish females aged 25–34 in 2022

| Education | N sample | % sample | % women aged 25–34 in population ^a |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|---|
| Elementary or lower secondary school | 72 | 2.8 | 4.7 |
| Basic vocational school | 255 | 9.9 | |
| Upper secondary school | 760 | 29.5 | 45.0 |
| Post-secondary vocational school | 190 | 7.4 | |
| Master's degree | 444 | 17.2 | |
| Bachelor's degree | 835 | 32.4 | 50.3 |
| Doctoral degree | 23 | 0.9 | |
| Overall | 2,579 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Original survey categories: (1) “Podstawowe lub gimnazjalne”; (2) “Zawodowe lub branżowe”; (3) “Średnie (mam maturę)”; (4) “Policealne”; (5) “Tytuł licencjata lub inżyniera”; (6) “Tytuł magistra”; (7) “Doktorat”.

^aSource: Eurostat 2022.

Table 2

Sample composition by respondents' occupation (N = 2,405) compared to the occupational structure of Polish women aged 25–39

| Occupation (EGP) | % sample | Occupation (ISCO 08) | % woman aged 25–39 in population ^a |
|---|----------|--|---|
| Higher-grade professionals and managers | 6.8 | Managers | 6.7 |
| Lower-grade professionals and managers | 37.8 | Professionals | 32.5 |
| | | Technicians and associate professionals | 17.0 |
| Lower-grade clerical workers | 21.4 | Clerical support workers | 11.3 |
| Routine service workers | 12.0 | Service and sales workers | 18.5 |
| Self-employed with employees | 1.8 | N/A ^b | |
| Skilled manual workers | 9.9 | Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers | 0.2 |
| | | Craft and related trades workers | 3.3 |
| Semi- and unskilled manual workers | 10.3 | Plant and machine operators and assemblers | 3.5 |
| | | Elementary occupations | 6.2 |
| | | No response | 0.2 |
| Overall | 100.0 | | 100.0 |

^aSource: Eurostat 2025.

^bIn the ISCO-98 classification, the self-employed are not treated as a separate category; instead, they are assigned to other categories based on their occupations.

unemployed, and did not provide any information about their previous occupation. Additionally, 74 individuals either refused to answer or gave incomplete responses. The remaining subsample included 2,424 respondents whose occupations were categorized according to the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP) classification, as operationalized by Ganzeboom and Treiman (1996). The validity of the EGP classification for the Polish occupational structure has been demonstrated by Domański and Przybyś (2003).

The self-employed without employees were not treated as a separate category, since this group included individuals with very different work conditions and prospects—for example, computer programmers and hairdressers. Consequently, these respondents were categorized based on their occupation rather than their employment status. Another group—farmers—was excluded from further analysis altogether, as it was too small for comparative purposes (19 respondents), and its average ratings differed markedly from those of other groups it could theoretically be combined with (e.g., the self-employed with employees). The final categorization included 2,405 respondents (see Table 2).

Unlike in the case of education, it was more difficult to obtain comparative data to assess the general representativeness of the sample, as the available data for women of comparable age were not categorized using the same criteria. Eurostat data on the occupational structure of Polish women aged 25–39 (see Table 2) indicate that managerial and professional groups may have been underrepresented in the sample, while lower-grade clerical workers and skilled manual workers may have been overrepresented.

Results

Exploratory factor analysis with Promax rotation, conducted separately for male and female names, yielded five factors in each case with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 52.2% of the total variance for male names and 49.6% for female names (see Tables 3 and 4).

A comparison of the two tables shows that the underlying taste categories, which account for correlated ratings of different names, were much fuzzier in the case of female names than male names. Among the latter, only three names (*Mariusz*, *Edward*, and *Sylwester*) exhibited high cross-loadings according to the .40-.30-.20 rule (Howard 2015), whereas among the former, as many as eight names (*Anastazja*, *Franciszka*, *Gloria*, *Helena*, *Iwona*, *Jadwiga*, *Janina*, and *Nikola*) did so. Since the factors were not intended to be used directly as variables (e.g., in regression analysis) but rather to help delineate general categories of first names, the rule for excluding cross-loadings was relaxed in the case of one name, *Nikola*. This decision was partly motivated by the desire to maintain symmetry between the categories of male and female names recently imported from abroad (see below). Removing *Nikola* would have left the female category without any foreign-origin names often ridiculed in Polish internet discussions as markers of underclass taste—such as *Dżesika* (*Jessica*) or *Andżelika* (*Angelica*)—while the corresponding male category included one such name, *Alan* (see Siwiec and Rutkowski 2014). Furthermore, *Nikola* alone displayed the steepest educational gradient among female names and the second steepest among all names studied (after *Alan*). These considerations favored retaining *Nikola* despite the compromise in methodological strictness.

Conversely, the male name *Zachary* was excluded from further analysis despite not exhibiting strong cross-loadings on multiple factors. This decision was based on its distinct characteristics compared to other names in the first factor: *Zachary* had low recent popularity (appearing in only about 50 cases), showed a stable rather than rising trend, and had a much shorter history in Poland, emerging only in the late 20th century, whereas the

Table 3

Rotated factor loadings for male names (Promax rotation)

| Name | Factor | | | | |
|---------------|--------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Teodor | .693 | | | -.108 | |
| Gustaw | .690 | | | | -.140 |
| Konstanty | .660 | | | | |
| Beniamin | .592 | .144 | | -.115 | .121 |
| Zachary | .545 | | | | .102 |
| Ludwik | .540 | | | .175 | |
| Florian | .534 | | | | .130 |
| Patryk | | .703 | | | |
| Kamil | | .645 | | | |
| Dominik | .133 | .621 | | -.102 | |
| Sebastian | | .550 | | .110 | |
| Mariusz | | .411 | | .375 | |
| Antoni | -.116 | | .753 | | .134 |
| Franciszek | | | .728 | | |
| Stanisław | | | .615 | .152 | |
| Jan | | | .593 | | |
| Zbigniew | | | | .696 | |
| Władysław | .146 | -.102 | | .590 | |
| Sławomir | | .148 | | .556 | |
| Janusz | | | | .505 | |
| Edward | .320 | | | .402 | |
| Sylwester | .197 | .249 | | .261 | |
| Liam | | -.123 | | | .711 |
| Aron | .157 | | | | .558 |
| Alan | -.162 | .217 | | | .473 |
| Eigenvalue | 5.73 | 2.60 | 2.16 | 1.43 | 1.12 |
| % of variance | 22.9 | 10.4 | 8.6 | 5.7 | 4.5 |
| Cumulative % | 22.9 | 33.3 | 42.0 | 47.7 | 52.2 |

Note: Factor loadings > -0.1 and < 0.1 were suppressed. Names loading strongly onto one of the factors are marked with a light gray background; high cross-loadings are marked with a dark gray background.

others dated back to the 19th century at the latest. Excluding *Zachary* helped enhance the homogeneity of the derived category and facilitated its clearer interpretation.

As we can see from the descriptions of categories in [Table 5](#), the evaluations provided by the participants were quite coherent. The first three categories included names that shared a general feature of traditionality but differed in their position within the fashion cycle—ascending in the case of Fancy names, fashionable in Classic ones, and in long-lasting decline for Old-Fashioned names. The Worn-Out category encompassed names that were somewhat less traditional yet very popular in the late 20th century, and similarly displayed a downward trend among more recent birth cohorts. Finally, the Imported names were all introduced only recently into Polish naming practice, but they differ in important respects. *Alan* and *Nikola* achieved significant popularity in the 2000s and 2010s (*Alan* peaked at 3,485 nominations in 2012, *Nikola* at 5,571 in 2008), but both now exhibit

Table 4

Rotated factor loadings for female names (Promax rotation)

| Name | Factor | | | | |
|---------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Patrycja | .660 | | | | |
| Karolina | .615 | | -.109 | | |
| Kinga | .604 | | | | |
| Weronika | .603 | | | | |
| Iwona | .384 | | | | .369 |
| Jaśmina | | .595 | .233 | -.108 | |
| Rozalia | | .553 | .120 | | |
| Stefania | -.140 | .527 | | | .191 |
| Matylda | .17 | .451 | | | -.110 |
| Gloria | | .450 | .289 | -.105 | |
| Janina | | .446 | -.134 | | .268 |
| Franciszka | -.146 | .353 | | .195 | .242 |
| Lea | -.169 | | .735 | | .107 |
| Ariana | | .207 | .567 | -.102 | |
| Liwia | | | .563 | | |
| Nikola | .292 | -.289 | .362 | .103 | .141 |
| Anastazja | .240 | .221 | .270 | | -.116 |
| Zofia | | | | .704 | |
| Hanna | .110 | | | .631 | |
| Antonina | | | .154 | .594 | |
| Helena | | .320 | | .380 | |
| Grażyna | | | | | .636 |
| Renata | .289 | | | | .492 |
| Mariola | .249 | | | | .486 |
| Jadwiga | | .318 | | | .380 |
| Eigenvalue | 5.09 | 2.42 | 2.38 | 1.47 | 1.03 |
| % of variance | 20.4 | 9.7 | 9.5 | 5.9 | 4.1 |
| Cumulative % | 20.4 | 30.0 | 39.6 | 45.5 | 49.6 |

Note: Factor loadings > -0.1 and < 0.1 were suppressed. Names loading strongly onto one of the factors are marked with a light gray background; high cross-loadings are marked with a dark grey background.

a strong downward trend. Other names in this category, male and female alike, remain either unpopular (50–200 nominations) or at best moderately popular (e.g., *Liwia* with over 700 nominations), though their numbers have increased in recent years. From this, it follows that when evaluating female names lacking traditionality, respondents treated this as the principal feature, outweighing any considerations of popularity.

The mean rating of each category was calculated for all educational and occupational groups, and a one-way ANOVA was subsequently performed to examine whether respondents' education influenced their name preferences. To identify significant differences between groups, post-hoc tests were conducted under the assumption of homogeneity of variances. When comparing educational groups, Tukey's HSD test was applied to male Classic and Worn-Out names, as well as female Classic, Fancy, and Worn-Out names—categories in which Levene's test indicated equal variances ($p > .05$). For the remaining name cate-

Table 5
Factor-derived categories of first names

| Category | Description | Names | Cronbach's α |
|----------------------|--|--|---------------------|
| Classic | Names present in Poland since at least the 18th century, popular in the early 20th century, that fell out of fashion in the late 20th century but regained popularity in the early 21st century. | Antonina, Hanna, Zofia | .651 |
| | | Antoni, Franciszek, Jan, Stanisław | .782 |
| Old-Fashioned | Names present in Poland since at least the 19th century (medieval origins for male names), popular in the mid-20th century, but out of fashion since the late 20th century. | Grażyna, Mariola, Renata | .639 |
| | | Janusz, Sławomir, Władysław, Zbigniew | .692 |
| Fancy | Names present in Poland since at least the 19th century, nearly out of use in the late 20th century, and currently in fashion though not very popular. | Jaśmina, Matylda, Rozalia, Stefania | .609 |
| | | Beniamin, Florian, Gustaw, Konstanty, Ludwik, Teodor | .783 |
| Worn-Out | Names present in Poland since at least the early 20th century, popular in the late 20th century, but currently out of fashion. | Karolina, Kinga, Patrycja, Weronika | .729 |
| | | Dominik, Kamil, Patryk, Sebastian | .719 |
| Imported | Names absent or scarcely present in Poland until the late 20th or early 21st century, imported from other countries. | Ariana, Lea, Liwia, Nikola | .617 |
| | | Alan, Aron, Liam | .582 |

gories (male Old-Fashioned, Fancy, and Imported names, and female Old-Fashioned and Imported names), the Games-Howell post-hoc test, which does not assume equal variances, was used. In comparisons between occupational groups, the Games-Howell test was applied to all categories of male names and to female Old-Fashioned and Worn-Out names. For the remaining female categories—Classic, Fancy, and Imported—Tukey's HSD test was used. The results are presented in [Tables 6 and 7](#).

Table 6
Mean ratings of male names by name category and respondents' educational attainment (5-point Likert scale)

| Education | Male names | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Classic | Old-Fashioned | Fancy | Worn-Out | Imported |
| Master's degree | 2.98^a | 1.49 ^a | 1.90^a | 2.44 ^a | <i>1.63^a</i> |
| Bachelor's degree | 2.90 ^a | 1.51 ^{ab} | 1.89 ^a | <i>2.41^a</i> | 1.75 ^{ab} |
| Post-secondary vocational school | 2.76 ^{ab} | 1.50 ^{ab} | 1.84 ^{ab} | 2.47 ^a | 1.90 ^{bc} |
| Upper secondary school | 2.69 ^b | 1.41 ^b | 1.66 ^b | 2.44 ^a | 1.96 ^c |
| Basic vocational school | 2.68 ^b | 1.54^{ab} | 1.67 ^b | 2.58 ^a | 2.04 ^c |
| Elementary or lower secondary school | 2.45 ^b | <i>1.41^{ab}</i> | <i>1.55^b</i> | 2.65^a | 2.21^c |
| $F_{5,2572}$ | 8.37*** | 2.85* | 11.10*** | 1.76 | 18.95*** |
| η^2 | .016 | .006 | .021 | .003 | .036 |

*** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$.

Note: The highest rating for each name category is **bolded**, and the lowest—*italicized*. Different superscript letters indicate significant differences between groups based on post-hoc comparisons ($p < .05$). Groups that do not differ significantly share the same letter.

Table 7

**Mean ratings of female names by name category and respondents' educational attainment
(5-point Likert scale)**

| Education | Female names | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| | Classic | Old-Fashioned | Fancy | Worn-Out | Imported |
| Master's degree | 3.33^a | 1.47 ^{ab} | 2.41^a | 2.59^a | 2.19 ^a |
| Bachelor's degree | 3.16 ^{ab} | 1.49 ^{ab} | 2.36 ^a | 2.48 ^{ab} | 2.29 ^{ab} |
| Post-secondary vocational school | 3.16 ^{ab} | 1.46 ^{ab} | 2.34 ^{ab} | 2.39 ^{ab} | 2.44 ^b |
| Upper secondary school | 3.01 ^b | 1.42 ^a | 2.19 ^b | 2.39 ^b | 2.40 ^b |
| Basic vocational school | 3.01 ^b | 1.61^b | 2.13 ^b | 2.56 ^{ab} | 2.48 ^b |
| Elementary or lower secondary school | 2.85 ^b | 1.60 ^{ab} | 1.99 ^b | 2.45 ^{ab} | 2.49 ^{ab} |
| $F_{5,2572}$ | 8.74*** | 3.86** | 8.44*** | 4.60*** | 6.20*** |
| η^2 | .017 | .007 | .016 | .009 | .014 |

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$

Note: The highest rating for each name category is **bolded**, and the lowest—*italicized*. Different superscript letters indicate significant differences between groups based on post-hoc comparisons ($p < .05$). Groups that do not differ significantly share the same letter.

Male names exhibited a clear educational gradient in three categories: Classic, Fancy, and Imported. The first two—comprising revived names with a long-standing presence in Polish tradition—received the lowest average ratings from mothers with elementary or lower-secondary education and the highest from those holding a Master's degree. Post-hoc tests confirmed significant differences between, on the one hand, mothers with at most upper secondary education and, on the other, those holding Bachelor's and Master's degrees. By contrast, Imported names were rated most favorably by the least-educated mothers and least favorably by those with a Master's degree. Here too, post-hoc comparisons revealed that mothers with at least a Bachelor's degree rated these names significantly lower than respondents with upper secondary or lower levels of education. The remaining two categories—Old-Fashioned and Worn-Out—did not show consistent educational differentiation. Old-Fashioned names were generally disliked across all educational levels, with the only significant post-hoc difference appearing between upper secondary school graduates and Master's degree holders. Worn-Out names received similar evaluations across groups and consistently ranked second, after Classic names, in average ratings.

Among female names, the patterns for the Classic and Fancy categories mirrored those observed for male names: well-educated mothers rated these names more highly than their less-educated counterparts. For Classic names, significant post-hoc differences emerged between respondents with at most upper secondary education and Master's degree holders; for Fancy names, differences were significant between respondents with at most upper secondary education and those holding Bachelor's or Master's degrees. The reverse gradient appeared for Imported names, with significant differences between Master's degree holders and graduates of basic vocational, upper secondary, and post-secondary vocational schools. However, compared to male names, the differences in ratings for Imported female names were much smaller—a finding that may warrant separate interpretation (see Discussion). As with male name categories, Old-Fashioned and Worn-

Table 8

Mean ratings of male names by name category and respondents' social class (5-point Likert scale)

| Class (EGP) | Male names | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Classic | Old-Fashioned | Fancy | Worn-Out | Imported |
| Higher-grade professionals and managers | 3.04 ^{ac} | 1.56 ^a | 1.92 ^a | 2.30 ^a | 1.71 ^{ab} |
| Lower-grade professionals and managers | 2.96 ^a | 1.50 ^a | 1.89 ^a | 2.41 ^{ab} | 1.67 ^a |
| Lower-grade clerical workers | 2.75 ^{bc} | 1.43 ^a | 1.81 ^{ac} | 2.48 ^{ab} | 1.86 ^{bc} |
| Routine service workers | 2.64 ^b | 1.48 ^a | 1.63 ^b | 2.49 ^{ab} | 1.95 ^{bc} |
| Self-employed with employees | 3.02 ^{ab} | 1.40 ^a | 1.88 ^{ab} | 2.45 ^{ab} | 1.92 ^{bc} |
| Skilled manual workers | 2.75 ^{ab} | 1.43 ^a | 1.67 ^{bc} | 2.53 ^{ab} | 1.97 ^{bc} |
| Semi- and unskilled manual workers | 2.72 ^{bc} | 1.45 ^a | 1.72 ^{ab} | 2.60 ^b | 2.07 ^c |
| $F_{6,2398}$ | 5.63*** | 1.46 | 6.20*** | 2.47* | 10.56*** |
| η^2 | .014 | .004 | .015 | .006 | .028 |

*** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$.

Note: The highest rating for each name category is **bolded**, and the lowest—*italicized*. Different superscript letters indicate significant differences between groups based on post-hoc comparisons ($p < .05$). Groups that do not differ significantly share the same letter.

Table 9

Mean ratings of female names by name category and respondents' social class (5-point Likert scale)

| Class (EGP) | Female names | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Classic | Old-Fashioned | Fancy | Worn-Out | Imported |
| Higher-grade professionals and managers | 3.27 ^{ab} | 1.42 ^a | 2.43 ^a | 2.47 ^a | 2.25 ^{ab} |
| Lower-grade professionals and managers | 3.28 ^a | 1.47 ^a | 2.40 ^a | 2.54 ^a | 2.25 ^a |
| Lower-grade clerical workers | 3.05 ^b | 1.44 ^a | 2.30 ^{ab} | 2.46 ^a | 2.33 ^{ab} |
| Routine service workers | 3.02 ^b | 1.49 ^a | 2.16 ^b | 2.52 ^a | 2.41 ^{ab} |
| Self-employed with employees | 3.19 ^{ab} | 1.43 ^a | 2.41 ^{abc} | 2.19 ^a | 2.49 ^{ab} |
| Skilled manual workers | 3.09 ^{ab} | 1.54 ^a | 2.08 ^c | 2.52 ^a | 2.42 ^{ab} |
| Semi- and unskilled manual workers | 3.12 ^{ab} | 1.54 ^a | 2.21 ^{abc} | 2.46 ^a | 2.45 ^b |
| $F_{6,2398}$ | 3.74** | 1.33 | 6.16*** | 1.33 | 3.09** |
| η^2 | .009 | .003 | .015 | .003 | .008 |

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$

Note: The highest rating for each name category is **bolded**, and the lowest—*italicized*. Different superscript letters indicate significant differences between groups based on post-hoc comparisons ($p < .05$). Groups that do not differ significantly share the same letter.

Out names were rated similarly across all educational groups, with no consistent or interpretable pattern emerging from the data.

Similar patterns emerged when average name ratings were computed for class categories (see Tables 8 and 9). Classic and Fancy male names received the highest ratings from higher-grade professionals and managers, and the lowest from routine service workers. For Classic names, significant post-hoc differences appeared between, on the one hand, both categories of professionals and managers, and on the other, routine service workers as well as semi- and unskilled manual workers. For Fancy names, significant post-hoc differences showed up between the first three occupational categories and routine service workers. The reverse pattern was observed for Worn-Out names, rated the highest by semi- and unskilled

manual workers, and the lowest by higher-grade professionals and managers, with a significant post-hoc difference between the two. Similarly, male Imported names were rated highest by semi- and unskilled manual workers and lowest by lower-grade professionals and managers, with a significant post-hoc difference also observed between semi- and unskilled manual workers and higher-grade professionals and managers. Finally, ratings of Old-Fashioned names did not exhibit clear inter-group differentiation.

Among female names, Classic and Fancy ones received the lowest ratings from skilled manual workers, and the highest from lower-grade professionals and managers (Classic) and higher-grade professionals and managers (Fancy). For Classic names, significant post-hoc differences emerged between lower-grade professionals and managers, on the one hand, and lower-grade clerical workers and routine service workers, on the other. For Fancy names, significant three-way differences were observed between both categories of professionals and managers, routine service workers, and skilled manual workers. Imported names were rated least favorably by both categories of professionals and managers, and most favorably by the self-employed with employees, with a significant post-hoc difference between semi- and unskilled manual workers and lower-grade professionals and managers. The remaining name categories—Old-Fashioned and Worn-Out—showed no significant class gradients.

Discussion

The present study supports the broader observation that cultural tastes—here, in the domain of first names—can no longer be neatly organized along a single highbrow–lowbrow continuum. As Bellavance (2008: 200) argues, “instead of a single unassailable system of distinction, [there rather exists] a variety of relatively antagonistic and overlapping systems referring to diverse registers of legitimacy.” In other words, the relative cultural status of particular items may stem from different sources of valuation, which vary depending on the specific field of cultural practice and the situational context.

According to van Eijck and Lievens (2008) and van Eijck and Michaels (2010), it is useful to distinguish between two types of taste patterns (or, as Schulze [1992] calls them, cultural schemes) that were previously grouped together under the umbrella of lowbrow culture—namely, pop and folk culture. Both share a lowbrow orientation, characterized by a lack of intellectual aspirations and a focus on undemanding entertainment. However, pop culture locates its “entertaining value” in novelty and fashionability, while folk culture emphasizes familiarity and security—that is, a sense of belonging to an established order. Bellavance (2008) goes further, arguing that the old/new distinction also operates within highbrow culture, distinguishing the classic from the contemporary (with the folk/pop distinction functioning in a parallel way, as discussed above).

Obviously, first names differ significantly from most cultural items, particularly in that they represent a one-time choice—made by the child’s parents—rather than a series of repeated selections over time. Nonetheless, the fact that name preferences exhibit recognizable patterns suggests that the reasons behind these choices are not entirely idiosyncratic but instead reflect broader taste categories, such as those discussed in

the previous paragraph. This is perhaps most evident in the names classified as Old-Fashioned, Worn-Out, and Imported. The first two categories resemble what Bellavance terms folk taste, as they combine familiarity—being common among older and middle-aged generations—with a lack of trendiness. Imported names, by contrast, are relatively unfamiliar and strongly tied to fashion trends, placing them closer to pop taste.

The two remaining categories—Classic and Fancy names—can be broadly aligned with the Classic/Contemporary distinction proposed by Bellavance (2008), albeit with some qualifications. Classic names are traditional and “serious,” characterized by deep historical roots; in the case of male names, they coincide with those of prominent Catholic saints. Fancy names, while also traditional in the sense of having been in use for over a century, diverge somewhat from this logic. They are relatively “novel” in that they have never achieved widespread popularity in Poland. As a result, they may appear somewhat “bookish”; many people may not personally know anyone bearing such names, and the names’ primary associations are with historical figures or literary characters. Choosing such a name may thus reflect not only a commitment to tradition but also—perhaps more importantly—a desire to distinguish one’s children (and, by extension, oneself) through a measure of cultural sophistication.

These preliminary conclusions offer insights into how name preferences vary with mothers’ education and occupation. It should first be emphasized that across most educational and occupational groups, the overall preference hierarchy favored the “safe” names—those most common among today’s children—falling into the Classic and Worn-Out categories. The only notable exceptions were found among female names, where mothers with elementary or lower secondary, upper secondary, and post-secondary vocational education—as well as the self-employed with employees—rated Imported names as second-best, ahead of Worn-Out names. Thus, the influence of education and social class on name preferences was primarily reflected in the relative distances between taste categories, rather than in a fundamental reordering of the overall hierarchy—particularly at its upper end.

This pattern contrasts markedly with the social distribution of tastes observed in other well-researched domains of cultural consumption, such as music (Bourdieu 1984: 16–18; van Eijck 2001) or reading (Atkinson 2010: 137–140; Bennett et al. 2009: 94–112), where preference hierarchies differ so sharply that the genres most favored by higher-status groups tend to be the least liked by those with lower education and occupational status, and vice versa. In contrast, the realm of first names in Poland appears to be characterized by a broad pool of names with cross-class appeal (notably Classic and Worn-Out names) or near-universal disfavor (as in the case of Old-Fashioned names).

Despite these broad similarities, mothers’ name preferences are shaped, to some extent, by social class—and more strongly by education—which influence the relative importance placed on names’ traditionality and trendiness. Well-educated and high-status mothers exhibited a stronger appreciation for well-established names—those in circulation in Poland for over a century—but not indiscriminately. They tended to dislike names that had long fallen out of fashion and showed no signs of revival (Old-Fashioned names). In this, they demonstrated an awareness of contemporary naming trends, even if they did not gravitate toward the most popular options. This finding diverges somewhat from the results of my

previous study (Tomanek 2021), in which medical students—disproportionately drawn from privileged social backgrounds—were more likely to bear traditional names, regardless of their position in the fashion cycle. One possible explanation for this difference is that, between the late 1990s and the 2020s, “trendiness”—or attunement to fashion—may have gained prominence in Poland as a form of cultural capital in its own right and as a factor shaping omnivorous cultural practices, as some Western research suggests (Bellavance 2008; van Eijck and Michael 2010; Taylor 2009). A preference for Classic names—if reflected in actual naming choices—thus allows parents to combine the benefits of being trendy with the symbolic weight of choosing a name that carries a certain gravitas, befitting a child for whom they project high socio-economic status.

Alternatively, a more refined taste may be signaled by a preference for Fancy names which—though traditional and aligned with current trends—have not (yet) become widely popular and therefore retain a certain distinguishing value. As Oliver et al. (2016) suggest in the context of the United States (see Section 3 of this paper), members of higher social strata may adopt either of the two naming strategies, depending on their political orientation (conservative vs. liberal) and the type of capital (economic vs. cultural) they seek to emphasize through the chosen name. This may help explain why members of the highest-status categories in the present study rated both Classic and Fancy names more favorably than other groups. In this case, average group ratings may obscure distinct emphases linked to more specific social characteristics. As this study has been largely exploratory, I did not attempt to collect data on respondents’ ideological affiliations; however, this line of inquiry clearly warrants further investigation.

At the other end of the spectrum, less-educated and lower-status mothers showed a relatively stronger preference for “novel” names recently imported from abroad. This finding is hardly surprising, given the well-documented association between such names and lower education or social position in the naming literature (Besnard and Desplanques 1986, 2001; Besnard and Grange 1993; Bloothoof and Onland 2011; Elchardus and Siongers 2010; Levitt and Dubner 2006; Lieberman 2000; Lieberman and Bell 1992), as well as their frequent discussion and ridicule in Polish popular discourse (Siwiec and Rutkowski 2014). Nevertheless, this phenomenon should not be glossed over or taken for granted. For example, in certain domains of cultural consumption—such as food—an affinity for “the novel,” “the foreign,” or “the exotic” is often associated with higher social strata, while preferences for “the familiar” or “the ordinary” are more commonly claimed by lower social groups (Bennett et al. 2009: 164–166; Bourdieu 1984: 186; Domański et al. 2015: 79–85). So why should the case of first names be any different?

Here, it is useful to revisit the distinction between folk and pop tastes. As mentioned earlier, only the former rejects novelty and unfamiliarity, whereas the latter embraces these qualities as key drivers of entertainment. Obviously, it would be an overstatement to claim that names are chosen—or even appreciated—for their entertainment value, but the subjective appeal of some names may well derive from their international character and associations with global popular culture, especially in semi-peripheral countries such as Poland. Moreover, in this context, the threshold for adopting a foreign cultural item and using it “properly” is arguably much lower. It does not entail material constraints and requires only a relatively undemanding form of cultural capital—namely, familiarity with

pop-cultural trends. Thus, parents with lower levels of education may find in first names an accessible means of escaping the confines of the “taste for necessity” (Bourdieu 1984: 372) and of distinguishing their child from others within their immediate social circle. This hypothesis aligns with Peterson and Simkus’s (1992) observation that horizontal lifestyle differentiation is more common among members of the lower social strata, where the means of vertical distinction are harder to attain or master.

The remaining question is: why was the social differentiation of preferences for imported names more pronounced for male names than for female ones? Of course, much depends on the specific names used in the study, and the results could have differed if respondents had rated other names with similar characteristics. However, there are some gender-specific factors that may also contribute to this disparity. The first possible factor is the cultural emphasis on the role of boys, especially first-born sons, as perpetuators of the family line, name, and status (Alford 1988; Lieberman 2000; Lieberman and Bell 1992; Rossi 1965; Tomanek 2023). This places a premium on male names’ traditionality—particularly in the form of naming children after kin—and may discourage parents from choosing “experimental” names with no previous presence in the family, immediate social circles, or society at large. Female names, on the other hand, have often been perceived more in terms of their aesthetic value, as individual “assets” contributing to a woman’s general personal appeal that can enhance her standing in the marriage market (Lieberman and Bell 1992). This partly explains why newly created or imported female names, which have high distinguishing or individualizing value, may gain wider traction across different social groups. However, an emphasis on traditionality—similar to that observed among boys—may also be present in the middle and upper social classes, where female names are expected to sound ‘serious’ rather than ‘girly’ or ‘frilly,’ and to align with the professional status envisioned for the child (Lieberman and Bell 1992; Lindsay and Dempsey 2017).

Of course, these general considerations are not mutually exclusive, as specific choices are made within the pool of traditional names based on their particular aesthetic qualities, which in turn are perceived through the lens of current fashion (e.g., the popularity of names with certain phonetic features — see Lieberman 2000; Lieberman and Bell 1992). Consequently, only a fraction of traditional names manage to retain or regain enough popularity to effectively fulfill their function of signaling cultural continuity or normalcy. Conversely, the desire to individualize one’s child with a very distinctive name may be realized by selecting from a pool of traditional but relatively uncommon names—an approach that seems preferred by well-educated parents who hold such aspirations. Thus, even though the two principal emphases in naming children—the focus on familiarity versus individuality—can be analytically distinguished and, to some extent, aligned with the gender divide, they may also be combined in individual naming choices, producing more nuanced categories such as “distinctive traditional names.”

Conclusion

The results of this study confirm that in Poland—as in some other Western countries—preferences for first names are socially patterned. More specifically, they depend on

mothers' education attainment and class position. The overall pattern emerging from the comparison of educational and socio-occupational groups' preferences aligns with findings from other studies: well-educated and higher-class mothers placed a premium on well-established, traditional names, while those with less education and lower social position showed a relatively greater appreciation for "novel" names recently imported from abroad. However, when evaluating traditional names, mothers made more nuanced distinctions between those that have been consistently popular over a long period with only moderate fluctuations (Classic names), those that lost popularity in the late 20th century (Old-Fashioned names), and those that, despite a long history in Poland, have never been very popular but have recently begun to gain traction (Fancy names). Only names from the first and third categories were rated relatively higher by well-educated and higher-class mothers, whereas Old-Fashioned names were almost equally disliked across all educational and occupational groups.

This indicates that mothers with higher social position and greater cultural capital do not regard traditionality as a standalone factor in a name's attractiveness; rather, they differentiate between traditional names occupying various positions within the fashion cycle. When naming their own children, they can choose historical, less common, but ascending names (here categorized as Fancy), or they may opt for a more popular choice among fashionable traditional names (Classic). As noted earlier, both choices have their merits: the former offers a more distinctive way of displaying one's greater cultural capital, while the latter may be more effective in signaling high socio-economic status. At the other end of the spectrum, parents with lower cultural capital and lower social status may seek distinction through "novel" names with international appeal. This shifts the meaning of distinction itself, as familiarity with and appreciation of such names signals competence in global popular culture rather than in local history or literary tradition. Moreover, this distinction is more likely to be horizontal—relative to others within the same social milieu—rather than vertical (Peterson and Simkus 1992).

Limitations and Further Research

This study has some limitations. Most notably, the self-selection method used to recruit participants likely favored mothers with a stronger interest in names and naming. On one hand, this was anticipated and even leveraged, as it was expected to produce more decisive evaluations—larger differences between "liked" and "disliked" names—which could help in delineating clear taste categories. On the other hand, the "level of interest in first names" may itself vary across educational and occupational groups, meaning that some of the variation in name ratings could stem from the specific composition of the sample rather than reflecting genuine taste differences present in the broader population.

The second limitation is that the study was restricted to women. Research from other countries indicates that mothers typically have more influence than fathers in choosing first names for their children (Johnson et al. 1991), making their cultural capital and preferences better predictors of actual naming outcomes. Nevertheless, it would be interesting—and potentially enlightening—to compare the preferences of women with those of men. Such

a comparison might reveal differences in how traditionality and popularity are valued between the genders, as well as more specific variations in their ratings of male and female names. For instance, it is plausible that Polish fathers place particular importance on traditional male names, since in the patrilineal Polish society—where the family name usually comes from the husband (father)—they are naturally more invested in establishing a symbolic “male line of succession.” Conversely, the opposite pattern might emerge for female names, with mothers more strongly maintaining the expectation that a girl’s name serves as part of her personal appeal rather than as a marker of social background.

Thirdly, the indicators of social position used in this study are incomplete, as they do not allow for reconstructing respondents’ social backgrounds and biographical trajectories. Since the primary objective was to collect as many name ratings as possible, the demographic section of the questionnaire was streamlined to minimize discouraging participation. However, this precluded comparisons between socially mobile individuals and those who inherited their social position. This line of analysis remains promising, and I intend to pursue it further in subsequent studies.

All of the above limitations could be addressed by conducting research on a large, stratified sample that includes fathers and is representative of all educational and occupational groups, incorporating additional questions about respondents’ social background. However, there is a fourth limitation of a different nature that requires other remedies. This research focuses solely on quantitative evaluations of the names’ perceived attractiveness and does not provide direct insight into participants’ subjective motives behind their ratings. Such insight would be difficult to obtain in a study where as many as 50 names are rated, and participants might often find it challenging to articulate explicit reasons for their preferences. The drawback of this quantitative approach is that, while it facilitates the identification of naming taste categories, it restricts the interpretation of their significance—more specifically, their relevance across different educational groups. Consequently, all proposed explanations regarding why members of these groups tend to favor or reject certain name categories remain hypothetical and require validation through qualitative research, which is my next objective. A qualitative study would explore participants’ actual naming choices, which can be more readily explained and expressed in nuanced terms. Moreover, such research could uncover cases where personal name preferences do not translate into naming decisions due to conflicts between parents, pressure from other family members, or concerns that a chosen name might be disapproved of or ridiculed by others. These issues also warrant detailed investigation in future studies.

References

- Alford, R. D. 1988. *Naming and Identity: A Cross-Cultural Study of Naming Practices*. New Haven: HRAF Press.
- Atkinson, W. 2010. *Class, Individualization, and Late Modernity: In Search of the Reflexive Worker*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bellavance, G. 2008. Where’s high? Who’s low? What’s new? Classification and stratification inside cultural “repertoires,” *Poetics* 36(2–3): 189–216. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2008.02.003>
- Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M., & Wright, D. 2009. *Culture, Class, Distinction*. London: Routledge.

- Bertrand, M., & Mullainathan, S. 2004. Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination, *American Economic Review* 94(4): 991–1113. <https://doi.org/10.1257/0002828042002561>
- Besnard, Ph., & Desplanques, G. 1986. *Un prénom pour toujours. La cote de prénoms, hier, aujourd'hui, et demain*. Paris: Éditions Balland.
- Besnard, Ph., & Desplanques, G. 2001. Temporal stratification of taste: The social diffusion of first names, *Revue Française de Sociologie* 42 (Supplement: An annual English selection): 65–77.
- Besnard, Ph., & Grange, C. 1993. La fin de la diffusion verticale des goûts? (prénoms de l'élite et du vulgum), *L'Année Sociologique* 43: 269–94.
- Bloothoof, G., & Onland, D. 2011. Socioeconomic determinants of first names. *Names* 59(1): 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1440783317690925>
- Borek, H. 1978. Socjolingwistyczne aspekty imiennictwa. *Onomastica* 23: 163–173.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cotton, J. L., O'Neill, B. S., & Griffin, A. 2008. The “name game”: Affective and hiring reactions to first names, *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 23(1): 18–39. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940810849648>
- Coulangeon, Ph. 2015. Social Mobility and Musical Tastes: A Synthesis of Sociological Theories of Cultural Consumption, *Social Compass* 62(3): 314–331. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcac049>
- DiMaggio, P. 1987. Classification in art, *American Sociological Review* 52(4): 440–455. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.2307/2095290>
- Domański, H., Karpiński, Z., Przybysz, D., & Straczuk, J. 2015. *Wzory jedzenia a struktura społeczna*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Domański, H., Mach, B. W., & Przybysz, D. 2018. Otwartość polskiej struktury społecznej: 1982–2016, *Studia Socjologiczne* 232(1): 25–63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24425/122489>
- Domański, H., Mach, B. W., & Przybysz, D. 2024a. A Cohort-Based Temporal Analysis of Social Stratification in Poland, *Polish Sociological Review* 228(4): 313–338. <https://doi.org/10.26412/psr228.01>
- Domański, H., Przybysz, D. 2003. Analiza przydatności schemata EGP jako wskaźnika pozycji społecznej, *ASK. Społeczeństwo. Badania. Metody* 12: 85–116.
- Domański, H., Przybysz, D., Wyrzykowska, K., & Zawadzka, K. 2020. The Homology of Musical Tastes in Poland, *Studia Socjologiczne* 239(4): 183–211. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24425/sts.2020.135142>
- Domański, H., Przybysz, D., Wyrzykowska, K., & Zawadzka, K. 2021. *Dystynkcje muzyczne. Stratyfikacja społeczna i gusty muzyczne Polaków*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Domański, H., Przybysz, D., Wyrzykowska, K., & Zawadzka, K. 2023. Seriale telewizyjne a dystanse klasowe w Polsce, *Studia Socjologiczne* 248(1): 115–143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24425/sts.2023.144836>
- Domański, H., Przybysz, D., Wyrzykowska, K., & Zawadzka, K. 2024b. Oglądanie filmów z perspektywy podziałów klasowych, *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 73(1): 75–100. <https://doi.org/10.26485/PS/2024/73.1/4>
- van Eijck, K. 2001. Social differentiation in musical taste patterns, *Social Forces* 79(3): 1163–1184. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2001.0017>
- van Eijck, K., & Lievens, J. 2008. Cultural omnivorousness as a combination of highbrow, pop, and folk elements: The relation between taste patterns and attitudes concerning social integration, *Poetics* 36(2–3): 217–242. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2008.02.002>
- van Eijck, K., & Michael, H. 2010. Cultural consumption and the anesthetization of everyday life. Paper for the 3rd ESA Sociology of Culture mid-term Conference, Università Bocconi, Milan, Italy, October 7–9.
- Elchardus, M., & Siongers, J. 2010. First names as collective identifiers: An empirical analysis of the social meanings of first names, *Cultural Sociology* 5(3): 403–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975510390748>
- Eurostat. 2022. *Educational attainment statistics*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_attainment_statistics. Accessed July 17, 2025.
- Eurostat. 2025. *Tertiary education statistics*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tertiary_education_statistics. Accessed July 17, 2025.
- Friedman, S. 2012. Cultural Omnivores or Culturally Homeless? Exploring the Shifting Cultural Identities of the Upwardly Mobile, *Poetics* 40(6): 467–489. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2012.07.001>
- Gajda, S. 1973. Socjolingwistyczne aspekty imion na przykładzie Opola i okolic, *Studia Śląskie* 23: 267–296.
- Ganzeboom, H. B. G., & Treiman, D. J. 1996. Internationally Comparable Measures of Occupational Status for the 1988 International Standard Classification of Occupations, *Social Science Research* 25: 201–239. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ssre.1996.0010>

- Gdula, M., Sadura, P. 2012. *Style życia i porządek klasowy w Polsce*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Gerhards, J., & Hackenbroch, R. 2000. Trends and causes of cultural modernization: An empirical study of first names, *International Sociology* 15(3): 501–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F026858000015003004>
- Gov.pl 2022. Imiona nadawane dzieciom w Polsce. Retrieved from <https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/219,imiona-nadawane-dzieciom-w-polsce>. Accessed December 14, 2022.
- Grzenia, J. 2010. *Nasze imiona. 200 najczęściej nadawanych imion w XX wieku*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Nomen Omen.
- Hardy, J. 2009. *Poland's New Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Howard, M. 2015. A review of exploratory actor analysis (EFA) decisions and overview of current practices: What we are doing and how can we improve?, *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction* 32(1): 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2015.1087664>
- Johnson, J. L., McAndrew, F. T., & Harris, P. B. 1991. Sociobiology and the naming of adopted and natural children, *Ethology and Sociobiology* 12(5): 365–375. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0162-3095\(91\)90031-K](https://doi.org/10.1016/0162-3095(91)90031-K)
- Lamont, M., & Fournier, M. (Eds.) 1992. *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levitt, S. D., & Dubner, S. J. 2006. *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*. New York, NY: HarperCollins (e-book).
- Liebertson, S. 2000. *A Matter of Taste: How Names, Fashions, and Culture Change*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Liebertson, S., & Bell, E. O. 1992. Children's first names: An empirical study of social taste, *American Journal of Sociology* 98(3): 511–554.
- Liebertson, S., & Lynn, F. B. 2003. Popularity as a taste: An application to the naming process, *Onoma* 38: 235–276. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2143/ONO.38.0.2002560>
- Lindsay, J., & Dempsey, D. 2017. First names and social distinction: Middle-class naming practices in Australia, *Journal of Sociology* 53(3): 577–591. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783317690925>
- Meagher, K. 2015. Name discrimination in the recruitment process by recruiters, *International Journal of Social Science Studies* 3(6): 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v3i6.1052>
- Oliver, J. E., Wood, T., & Bass, A. 2016. *Liberellas Versus Konservatives: Social Status, Ideology, and Birth Names in the United States*, *Political Behavior* 38(1): 55–81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11109-015-9306-8>
- Peterson, R. A., & Kern, R. M. 1996. Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore, *American Sociological Review* 61(5): 900–907.
- Peterson, R. A., & Simkus, A. 1992. How musical tastes mark occupational status groups. In M. Lamont & M. Fournier (Eds.), *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality* (pp. 152–186). University of Chicago Press.
- Rossi, A.S. 1965. Naming children in middle-class families, *American Sociological Review* 30(4): 499–513. www.linkhttps://doi.org/10.2307/2091340https://doi.org/10.2307/2091340
- Rymut, K. 1995. *Słownik imion współcześnie w Polsce używanych*. Kraków: Instytut Języka Polskiego PAN.
- Schulze, G. 1992. *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kulturosoziologie der Gegenwart*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.
- Siwiec, A., & Rutkowski, M. 2014. “Dżastiny i Alany to łobuzy.” Forum internetowe jako źródło informacji o wartościowaniu i motywacji imion osobowych, *Onomastica* 58: 279–296.
- Taylor, R. 1974. John Doe, Jr.: A study of his distribution in space, time, and the social structure, *Social Forces* 53(1): 11–21.
- Taylor, T. D. 2009. Advertising and the conquest of culture, *Social Semiotics* 19(4): 405–425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330903361091>
- Tomanek, P. 2021. Mam na imię Dystynkcja. Kapitał kulturowy rodziców a preferencje w wyborze imion, *Studia Socjologiczne* 242(3): 89–107. <https://doi.org/10.24425/sts.2021.138476>
- Tomanek, P. 2023. Birth Order, Gender, and Naming Preferences in Contemporary Poland, *Names* 71(1): 45–57. <https://doi.org/10.5195/names.2023.2387>

Biographical Note:

Paweł Tomanek (Ph.D.), assistant professor at the Department of Cultural Research Methods at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Warsaw. His research interests include identity-related aspects of names, class differentiation in lifestyles, and the construction of class distances in popular culture.

ORCID iD: [0000-0002-3795-4751](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3795-4751)

pawel.tomanek@uw.edu.pl