

THE RISE OF UNIQUENESS: TRENDS IN AMERICAN PARENTS' CHOICES FOR BABY NAMES, 1880-2007

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More recent generations score higher in individualistic traits on several measures, but as self-report data these questionnaires have limitations. This study uses a behavioral measure, names given children to track changes in the importance of uniqueness over time. Data were obtained from the Social Security Administration's database, which is a 100% sample of the names of Americans with a social security card ($n = 325$ million). The percentage of popular names decreased sharply with time between 1880 and 2007. The correlation with year is large, between $r = -.65$ and $r = -.95$ depending on the measure. The pattern is not entirely linear: There was a slight rise in the use of popular names between the 1920-1950s with a steep drop after the 1970s and 1980s. The change is not explained by immigration; year is still a significant predictor.