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Sociologist: Good morning, Ms. Adler. Thank you for participating in our study on how parents choose names. I see here on the form, you have a son and a daughter.

Participant Lucinda Adler: Yes, David and Sofia.

Sociologist: Well, first off, was choosing their names easy or difficult?

Adler: It was difficult. It's a big responsibility to pick out a name your child is going to be called forever!

Sociologist: Indeed. So, let's start with your son.

Adler: I wanted to name him "Robert" after my grandfather; that's the custom in my family. But my husband wanted to name our son after his grandfather, Kevin.

Sociologist: Ah-ha. A conflict.

Adler: Exactly. We couldn't agree. The nurse at the hospital kept asking us: What's his name? We were getting so stressed. Finally, it was time to leave the hospital. I said to my husband, "Let's go with a classic name—'David.'" He said, "Fine."

Sociologist: So, your son is David. That means "beloved" in Hebrew.

Adler: Yes, and we do love him a lot!

Sociologist: How about your daughter?

Adler: At first we considered gender-neutral names, like "Mason," or "Quinn"—you, know, not clearly a boy's name or a girl's. A lot of parents are doing that. But we decided against it because we're pretty traditional. One day, I heard the name "Sofia." I loved it. It has a soft, gentle sound, yet a strong feeling. My husband agreed that it's a beautiful name.

Sociologist: Yes, it is.

Adler: So, that's her given name. But, she prefers the nickname "Fieffie." All her friends call her Fieffie. Go figure!

Sociologist: That's too funny ...

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Speaker: Sociology is the science of studying society. In sociology, we study the behavior of people in social groups. Today's lecture will be divided into two parts. In the first half, I'll give you an overview of the various kinds of sociological research being done. For example, some sociologists study the effects of gender on a person's daily life. They ask: Do men and women—boys and girls—have different experiences just because of their gender? Then, in the second half of the lecture, we'll focus in on a particular area of

research: gender in the workplace. And we'll try to answer these questions: Does gender matter at work? Where do we find gender discrimination for women? What about for men? ...

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Professor Alexandra Shaw: E01 Good afternoon. The focus of today's introduction to sociology class is names. In sociology, we study social groups and how people interact and respond to each other. How we respond to names is an interesting study. For example, depending on if I say my name is "Alex," or "Alexandra," or "Dr. Shaw," you might respond differently to me. Names are a prime example of what we call a *cultural universal*. That means we all have names. And we all call each other by names. So, it's a practice we all share. Today's lecture will be divided into two halves. In the first half, you'll hear about four ways parents choose names. In the second half, we'll discuss whether or not our names influence how people respond to us in our daily lives. **(COACHING TIP 1)** Before we go on, though, I want to quickly mention that the scope of my lecture is limited to names from the English language. However, we would take a similar approach to analyzing how parents choose names in any other language. **E02** So, without a doubt, our names are important symbols of identity. And for some people, important enough to change! So, let's look at the four typical ways parents choose first names. They're also called *given names* because the name is given to the child. OK, the first is to rely on custom. Parents may choose a name in order to pass it down from one generation to the next. For example, a baby girl is born, and the parents decide to call her "Sarah" because her grandmother's name is "Sarah." Or, if it's a boy, in some families the first son is named after the father. So if the father's name is, say, "Thomas Proctor," then the son will be "Thomas Proctor Junior" or "Thomas Proctor the Second." I read a funny variation on this. In 2004, a new father, Jon Blake, didn't want to use *junior* or *the second*. He was a software engineer, so, so he named his son "Jon Blake Version 2.0." Talk about a true computer geek! **E03** The second way parents choose names is to name a child after someone the parents admire, such as a favorite teacher, a family friend, or even a famous athlete or movie star. **(COACHING TIP 2)** The third way is to choose a name the parents feel will provide some social benefit to their child. For example, if they are concerned about gender discrimination, they may choose a name that works for either a boy or a girl. A name like "Taylor," for example. Or my name, "Alex." In fact, my parents told me they thought "Alex" might give me an advantage when I applied for jobs. Or, if a parent wants people to

notice their child, they may choose an unusual name, like “Denali” or “Sky.” **E04** The fourth and most common way parents choose a name is simple: It’s because they like it. They like the sound or the feeling it has, or it’s a classic name. Now what qualifies as “classic”? Well, classic means the name never goes out of style. It’s a name that was popular in 1900, 1980, and it’s still popular today. Examples of classic boys names are “Robert” and “Michael.” For girls, “Emily” and “Anna” are a couple of classic examples. To summarize: Parents choose names either based on custom, or after someone they admire, or to help their child socially. Or, the most common way, because they like it. **E05** Now I want to consider these questions: Does someone’s name influence how other people respond to them? Does a person’s name affect their chances for success in life? A lot of research has been done around these queries. Specifically, researchers have explored whether it’s better to have a classic name, such as “Robert,” or an unusual name, like “Darvin.” At this point, sociologists like myself don’t agree which is better. We can’t say for sure. We do know, though, that there are stereotypes associated with names. By this I mean, we hear a name, and an image comes to mind. Fair or not, this is what happens. People get judged by the name they have. Does anyone doubt that? **E06** Well, here’s a convincing example: Researchers took a homework assignment and made photocopies. On half of the copies, they wrote the name “Michael.” On the other half, they wrote the name “Hubert.” (“Hubert,” by the way, is not a common name in English.) Then they asked teachers to grade the homework. Guess what happened? The teachers gave “Michael” high grades, and “Hubert” much lower grades. Why? It was the same homework, wasn’t it? The researchers concluded that the name “Michael” had to be the only factor. It appeared that teachers held a stereotype that a boy named “Michael” was smarter than a boy named “Hubert.” As a result, they gave “Michael” higher grades. **(COACHING TIP 3) E07** Let’s recap now. In today’s class, we looked at four ways parents choose first names: because of customs, after someone they admire, to help their child socially. And the most common—because they like the name. We also looked at research to answer the question: Does a name matter? In your study groups, I’d like you to discuss that question further. Also, discuss how you got your names—and compare that with the four ways we studied today. **(COACHING TIP 4)**

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Manny: It’s off-track but ...

Mia: Anyway, why don’t we start by telling how we each got our names? I’ll go first: “Mia” was just a name my parents liked. Pretty simple!

Manny: Well, in my case, I got my name from the first way that the lecturer mentioned, which was custom. My father was named “Manny” and my grandfather was also.

Hannah: Well, with me—“Hannah”—I was named after my mom’s high school teacher. I guess my mom really admired this woman.

Mia: What about you, River?

River: I’m not really sure where my name comes from. I doubt my parents chose it to help me socially. I mean, “River” isn’t exactly a popular name!

Hannah: Well, maybe they wanted you to, you know, get noticed?

River: Oh, I get noticed, for sure. Every time I tell someone my name, they stop for a second and look at me strangely.

Mia: So you must think names really do matter?

River: Yeah. Hey, do you think I got a low score on my last test because of my name?

Hannah: Seriously though. This lecture has made me realize it’s a big responsibility for a parent to choose, for their kids. Don’t you think?

Mia: You mean, it’s the parents’ responsibility to give good names?

Hannah: Yeah, right.

River: Yeah, that’s exactly why, if I had children, I would give them a classic name, like “John” or “Jennifer.”

Manny: Not me. My kid’s going to be the next Shakira or Tiger Woods—someone unforgettable!