

Middle names make you look smarter

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(Medical Xpress)—A new study by researchers at the Universities of Southampton and Limerick suggest that people benefit from displaying their middle name initials in situations where intellectual performance matters.

The study, published in the *European Journal of Social Psychology*, looked at the perceptions people form about others when middle initials were present or not.

The researchers, including Dr Wijnand A. P. Van Tilburg, from the University of Southampton and Dr. Eric R. Igou, of the University of Limerick, conducted a series of studies with more than 500 participants.

One of the studies included an evaluation of an essay. When the author's name, David Clark, was given without initials, it was evaluated less positively than the same essay written by an author named David F. P. R. Clark. Moreover, results also showed that the middle initials effect only occurred in domains where intellectual performance matters (e.g. intellectual quizzes) but not where intellectual performances is secondary (e.g. team sports).

Dr Van Tilburg explains: "At the start of this research project we discussed various findings suggesting that names have a tremendous impact of person perception and on life in general. We wanted to examine the impact of middle names, and in particular the impact of middle initials, on perceptions that people form about others with versus without middle initials in their names.

"Middle initials are often displayed in contexts in which intellectual achievements matter. We found that the display of middle initials would increase perception of intellectual capacities and performance. Importantly, however, these person perceptions are limited to contexts where intellectual achievements are central."

Additionally the studies found that, the middle initials effect on inferences about intellectual performance was based on the perception of status. For example, a person with no middle initial was seen as lesser in status than one with middle initials, and this difference accounted largely for the inferences about intellectual performance.

Dr Igou, of the University of Limerick, adds: "This is the first detailed study to establish a link between middle name initials and perceptions of

status and intellectual capacities and performance. We believe that these findings have implications for the psychology of person perception and in particular for inferences about people's status and intellect."

More information: van Tilburg, W. A. P. and Igou, E. R. (2014), "The impact of middle names: Middle name initials enhance evaluations of intellectual performance." *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.*.. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.2026

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