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## **Profs: Your destiny is in your first initial**

**By Sam Fulwood III**

*The Cleveland Plain Dealer*

If William Shakespeare had lived a few centuries later and spent an hour with Leif D. Nelson and Joseph P. Simmons, a pair of academics with a great deal of time on their hands, he might not have used that line about what's in a name.

As Nelson and Simmons explain it, the letters of your name might predict your life outcomes.

"For example," they wrote recently in a scholarly journal, "Toby is more likely to buy a Toyota, move to Toronto and marry Tonya than is Jack, who is more likely to buy a Jaguar, move to Jacksonville, and marry Jackie."

A skeptical mind might think this is, at best, anecdotal coincidence. Or, at worst, some egghead exaggeration.

But that would be a misreading of these fun-loving professors' very serious work. Nelson, an assistant professor of marketing, teaches this name-letter effect at the University of California-San Diego's Rady School of Management. Simmons teaches it at Yale University.

Nelson and Simmons were studying social psychology as graduate students at Princeton University when they stumbled upon a 2002 study that suggested people make decisions based on the initial of their first name.

They laughed at that paper by University of Buffalo's Brett Pelham, thinking it so much intellectual hocus-pocus. They researched the matter and were shocked by their finding: The preponderance of academic inquiry supported Pelham's theory. Other scholars, dating back to the mid-1980s, had discovered the same name-initial effect.

Nelson and Simmons set up experiments to test the idea. They published their findings recently in *Psychological Science*, an academic journal.

In one study, they combed more than 90 years of baseball statistics to discover that professional baseball players whose names begin with the letter K — the symbol for a strikeout — are more prone to whiff than other players.

Another study found that college students with initials A or B tend to earn higher grades than those with initials C or D.

"We were having a lot of fun with this, but we didn't expect to discover that people actually do pursue life outcomes that resemble their names," Nelson said during a phone interview. "Subsequent studies repeatedly found this to be true."

In other words, as Shakespeare might have said after meeting with the profs, "thy moniker 'tis thy destiny."

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