

Struggling to name your baby? Call a consultant

Reuters - By Belinda Goldsmith, 24 March 2008

CANBERRA, March 20 (Reuters Life!) - Actress Halle Berry's decision to call her daughter Nahla had some people perplexed, but baby experts said it mirrored a trend for unusual names which has helped create a new profession -- baby name consultant.

Many parents have moved away from giving their children family or unisex names and want their youngsters to have names that stand out from the crowd -- but not in a bad way.

An online survey of 6,000 people by specialist Web site Babycenter.com found 58 percent of parents think the name you give a child plays a role in their success in life, so it is not a decision taken lightly -- and this has made people seek outside help.

"It used to be more common to choose from family names or names from the bible, but today's parents have so many more choices and many of them are overwhelmed," said Linda Murray, editor-in-chief of babycenter.com.

"It can be very stressful. It's the first big public parenting decision you make. People want extra help so consultants have cropped up in the last few years to provide this service, people who know about the origins of names."

Berry has not explained why she and her model boyfriend Gabriel Aubry chose Nahla for their new-born daughter, and a spokeswoman for the actress told Reuters the only information being confirmed was the name, itself.

But Nahla was found to have a few meanings ranging from gift in Swahili to "drink of water" in Arabic.

"What better name for a baby you've waited so long for than gift?" said Murray of Nahla, 41-year-old Berry's first child.

Spiritual names and names with meanings have become popular with consultants charging anything from \$25 to several hundred dollars to help couples find the right meaning for their child.

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Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt named their daughter Shiloh, which means "peaceful one" in Hebrew, while Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes' daughter is Suri, which can mean "princess" or "red rose."

One of the more surprising names to emerge in the past few years is Nevaeh -- which is heaven spelled backwards. It has hit the list of top 100 girls names, ranked 43rd in the United States in 2006.

"People don't want their child to be the ninth Sophia in her class at school. They are looking for strength in boys names and they want feminine names for their daughters," said Murray.

Phonetic spelling popular in text messaging and e-mails has been blamed by one Australia social analyst, Mark **McCrindle**, for sparking a trend in unconventionally spelled baby names.

Parents are opting for spellings such as Alex-Zander, Cam'ron, Emma-Lee, Ozkah, Thailah and Ameleiyah. **McCrindle** has found the name Jayden spelled 12 ways in birth registrations in 2007, while Aidan had nine spellings and Amelia eight.

"Today's Gen X parents want their children to be individuals -- just like everyone else!" **McCrindle**, of research agency **McCrindle** Research, said in a statement.

"Unique spelling and now differentiated pronunciation of traditional names is a growing trend. The use of "y" instead of an "i" has hit epidemic proportions, as has the use of "k" over "c" (Jaykob, Lynkon), double letters (Siimon, Chriss) and hyphens (Emma-Lee)."

But while some parents panic about giving their child the wrong name, the Babycenter.com survey found that this dilemma did not last for long.

The poll found 97 percent of parents end up happy with their name choice and only three percent regret their decision. (Reporting by Belinda Goldsmith, Editing by Bob Tourtellotte)