NoSo 2024

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik
Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics

Utgiven av Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur

gästredaktör / guesteditor
Jane Pilcher

2024:4(1)

http://gustavadolfsakademien.se
noso@gustavadolfsakademien.se

NoSo 2024:4(1)

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik
Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics

Utgiven av Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien
för svensk folkkultur

Insända artiklar granskas i anonymiserad form av två oberoende och anonyma vetenskapliga experter.

För översättning resp. granskning av engelskspråkiga texter svarar Rhian Coggin (aukt. translator), Ystad.

NoSo har sedan årgång 1 (2021) utgivits av Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur i samarbete med Högskolan i Halmstad.

——

Submissions are reviewed by two independent and anonymous reviewers using a double-blind process.

English translation and language editing by Rhian Coggin, BA (Cantab.), Ystad.

NoSo has since volume 1 (2021) been published by the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy for Swedish Folk Culture in association with Halmstad University.

Distribution
eddy.se ab
e-post: order@bokorder.se
Box 1310, 621 24 Visby
Telefon 0498-25 39 00
http://kgaa.bokorder.se

Tidskriftens webbplats/The Journal's website
http://gustavadolfsakademien.se/tidskrifter/tidskrift/nordisk-tidskrift-for-socioonomastik-nordic-journal-of-socio-onomastics

Klostergatan 2
SE-75321 UPPSALA

ISSN 2004-0881

Produktion/Production: eddy.se ab, Visby 2024

Innehåll / Content

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (5–14)

Introduction: Conventions and creativity? Names in the (re)construction of gender

Jane Pilcher

1. Introduction to the special issue

The main goal of this special issue is to advance the present state of knowledge and understanding about contemporary gender-related personal naming practices. A landmark cross-national study by Alford (1988) of naming in 60 different countries showed gender to be the most common identifier conveyed through the 'given' names of an individual (also referred to in many countries as 'forenames', or 'first' name and 'middle' name). Articles in this special issue do examine gender and first names (Pilcher, Deakin-Smith, Aldrin and Nguygen, and also Sinclair-Palm, this issue) but its scope is broader, extending to gendered practices of surnames (also known as 'family names' or 'last names') in the context of marriage (Castrén, this issue) and/or family relationships (Bechsgaard, and also Grønstad, this issue). The special issue's theme of 'conventions and creativity' is inspired by theorizing and research which emphasizes the important role played

Jane Pilcher (Visiting Research Fellow, School of Social Sciences, University of West of England, Bristol, United Kingdom). Introduction: Conventions and creativity? Names in the (re)construction of gender.

NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.25435

by names – first names and surnames – in the social (re)construction of gender (e.g. Pilcher 2017; Robnett 2017).

2. The social (re)construction of gender

Understandings of gender as a social construction, as something we 'do' that is not determined by our biology, are rooted in a range of sociological theorizing and research. Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological analysis of gender is foundational. His theory is based on his case study of a transgender woman ('Agnes') who had to learn how to 'pass' as a woman. Garfinkel used Agnes' conscious and purposeful experience of this process to argue that, in fact, everyone has to learn (mostly unconsciously) how to 'do gender' and everyone has to (always) actively manage their gender. For people who are not transgender, however, the process is obscured by the taken-for-granted, routinized character of their normative gender socialization and their ongoing gender conventional behaviour. Goffman's symbolic interactionist analysis of gender is also important to ideas about gender as 'doing'. Drawing on his notion of 'the presentation of self' (1959), Goffman (1976) is concerned with people's 'display' of their gender through 'conventionalized portrayals' of sex and gender (1976:69), and how these are interpreted by other people in particular locales.

In elaboration of the ideas of Garfinkel and of Goffman, Kessler and McKenna (1978) emphasized that the 'attribution' of gender to an individual, by themselves and/or by others, is the method by which the gender binary is (re)constructed. Similarly, for West and Zimmerman (1987:126), gender is a routine and reoccuring 'accomplishment' and a 'situated doing' achieved in and through social interaction (see also Westbrook and Schilt 2014). In turn, Butler's (1989; 1990) signficant contribution is their argument that sex and gender are 'brought into being' through ongoing enactments of discourses and are sustained through gender performances, or the repetition of ritualized actions.

In 'doing gender' perspectives, then, gender is theorized as a complex reoccurring set of socially constructed categorizations, identifications, practices and structures. As noted by Bechsgaard (this issue),

doing gender perspectives have attracted criticism because they seem to allow for the inevitability of gender, and of gender inequality (e.g. Deutsch 2007). Subsequently, concepts of 're-doing' gender and 'undoing' gender have emerged to address the ways that the creative practices of individuals can and do result in deviation from and/or rejection of typically binary, heteronormative and patriarchal gender conventions (e.g. Butler 2004; Connell 2010).

3. Names and the doing, redoing and undoing of gender

Whether early or more recent, and irrespective of differences in their deeper ontological roots, the various iterations of social constructionist approaches to gender I outline above have all tended to overlook the complex significance personal names and naming practices have in the doing, redoing and/or undoing of gender. In Pilcher (2017), and building on Pilcher (2016), I addressed this oversight and set out my argument that first names and surnames strongly merit enhanced and sustained recognition as 'doing' words that are intrinsic to sex categorization, to gender display, to gender attribution, to ritualized actions and to the accomplishment of gender through the ongoing management of gender conduct. To substantiate my claim, I repurposed sociological research evidence on names to illuminate the powerful role they play in people's doing, redoing or undoing of gender. I showed how first names, given to babies at birth, or chosen by transgender people, can be used as tools either in compliance with or in resistance to the conventional doing of sex and gender as binaries. Likewise, with surnames, I showed how marriage and the surnaming of children are key decision points where individuals have an opportunity to either replicate gender normative naming conventions or to disrupt them. In a commentary on and extension of my argument, Robnett (2017) undertook her own review of research evidence – this time drawn primarily from the fields of linguistics, developmental psychology and social psychology – to explore what it shows about the doing of gender through first names and surnames.

4. Issue contributions

The various contributors to the special issue address, in different ways, how people respond to predominant gendered naming conventions in their naming practices. The articles share the common the topic of the doing, redoing or undoing of gender, either through name keeping or through name changing, and whether in relation to surnames, or to first names, or to middle names or to some combination of these. Drawing mostly on qualitative data, contributors analyse decisions that people have already made about changing, or not changing, their names, and why, as well as people's thoughts about name changing as a future possibility either for themselves or their partners. Between them, authors in the special issue discuss these various aspects of gender and naming in eight different countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

The special issue opens with Pilcher, Deakin-Smith, Aldrin and Nguygen's article which examines gendered patterns of name changing in the United Kingdom. The authors analyse name changes made by more than 10 000 individuals over a 21-year period (1998 to 2019), focusing on gender differences in the incidence of name changing and in the changes individuals made to their names (first names, and/or middle names and/or surnames). As well as contributing new data on surname changing by women, the article extends knowledge about and understandings of practices of name changing by men and by people whose first name and middle name changes indicate a transition in gender identity. Moreover, the authors show that between 1998 and 2019, rising numbers of individuals changed some parts or, in a minority of cases, all parts, of their own names. Pilcher, Deakin-Smith, Aldrin and Nguygen argue that their findings point to the increasing complexity of name-based identities in the United Kingdom and to the pivotal role different types of name changes can have in people's (re)doing of their gender.

The next article, by Julia Sinclair-Palm, focuses on name-changing and the self-naming practices of young transgender people. Drawing on her qualitative study of trans youth in Australia, Canada and Ireland, Sinclair-Palm examines how these young people navigated their

gender identity when choosing a first name for themselves. Data reveal the complex and creative ways trans youth choose and relate to their names and highlight the potential that first names have in the undoing and/or redoing of gender. Sinclair-Palm shows how, by opting for names that are gender-neutral, some trans youth disrupted the gender binarism typically conveyed within first names. Other trans youth strategically exploited the typical gender binarism of first names, in the hope that respect for their gender identity would be enhanced and/or that such a name would help protect them from transphobia and misogyny. The author concludes by arguing that trans youths' stories about their self-naming practices not only demonstrate the fluidity of their own conceptions of gender but also contribute to the expansion of wider understandings of the complex plurality of gender identities, beyond the binary.

The remaining contributors to the special issue each report on their studies, all undertaken in Nordic countries, of people's actual marital and family surnaming choices, or people's feelings about the possibilities of name changing in these circumstances. Anna-Maija Castrén's article examines marital surnaming in Finland, where – as in other Nordic countries – gender equality is strongly embedded in the national mindset and features centrally in legislative programmes, including in name laws. Against this background, Castrén presents qualitative data drawn from interviews with soon-to-be-married mixed-sex couples and analyses the humour used by some participants when discussing surnaming options. Castrén found that, through humour, couples played with gendered expectations about family names but without any real intention of deviating from patrilineal surnaming practices. Castrén argues that the joking and playfulness she uncovered represents a reflexive recognition among couples of their equality as partners, but at the same time was a way for them to rationalize plans for the woman in the partnership to take the man's surname. Castrén's article illuminates how micro-level processes such as humour within couples' discussions about marital surnaming feed into the reproduction of gendered social orders and extends understandings of why, in 2022 and in a country like Finland

with a strong ethos of gender equality, 47 per cent of mixed-sex marital couples followed patrilineal surnaming conventions.

In her article, Katrine Kehlet Bechsgaard focuses on surname choices in the diverse landscape of contemporary Danish family formations and where changes in name law have weakened the bonds of traditional ideas about and conventional practices of family surnaming. Bechsgaard draws on data from her qualitative study of participants within mixed sex or same sex relationships, who were interviewed up to 15 years after their family relationships were first formed and whose initial choices about surnames may have changed during that period. Bechsgaard found that decisions about family surnames were typically made in relation to the birth of a family's first child. Her data show how the interchangeability of middle-surnames and surnames under Danish name law since 2005 enhances flexibility of choice in family surnaming. Most of the participants in Becshgaard's study aimed for gender equality in their everyday family practices, and this included how they displayed themselves to the outside world as a gender equal family through their surname choices. In these ways, Bechsgaard analyses the role of surname choices in the interplay between individual identities, the signaling of different family belongings and the (re)doing of conventional gender identities.

As noted by several authors in this special issue, research on marital surnaming in mixed sex couples has tended to focus on what women do and why, while men's surnaming practices are largely unexamined. In her contribution Grønstad addresses this neglect by focusing on how men account for the keeping of their surname or, the choice of a small minority, the changing of their surname at marriage. Drawing on qualitative data from Norway, Grønstad argues that keeping their surname was taken-for-granted by some men in her study and was a conventional practice important to their gender identity. In contrast, participants who were younger men tended to give gender-equality-informed reflections about their marital and/or family surname choices. Some men had changed their surname for gender equality reasons, and this practice was linked to their (re)doing of masculine identities. Grønstad's findings of cohort-linked differences in ideas

that Norwegian men have about surnames and about men changing their surnames suggest the beginnings of a shift toward the redoing of gender through surnames – and so too the possibility of enhanced gender equality in the future.

5. Concluding remarks

A foundational principle of socio-onomastics is that neither the naming practices of individuals nor larger scale trends in naming are random but are instead embedded within a complex range of sociocultural processes operating at different levels of the social world. With the exception of Sinclair-Palm, who examines self-naming by trans youth in Australia, Canada and Ireland, authors in this special issue each embed their discussion of their findings within the sociocultural processes of one specific national context. Yet, it is evident that there are several points of crossover between the five articles making up this special issue. Of course, each article is evidence of conventions and/or creativity in gendered naming practices, but other commonalities are present too. One example here is how humour is used to manage what Castrén calls (this issue) the 'sensitive' topic of surname choices. Castrén's article clearly focuses on the teasing and joking evident in her interviews with soon-to-be married couples in Finland when surnaming was discussed. Yet, Bechsgaard also notes humour to be a feature in marital and family surnaming discussions by her interviewees in Denmark and it features too in Grønstad's account of Norwegian men's ideas about marital surnaming.

A second point of crossover is that surnaming practices are shown to be gender work that is primarily done by women (see also Thwaites 2017; Wilson 2009). In Pilcher, Deakin-Smith, Aldrin and Nguygen's article (this issue) on name changing and gender in the United Kingdom, women are shown to be the majority of name-changers, a finding especially linked to their changing of surnames. The dataset analysed by Pilcher, Deakin-Smith, Aldrin and Nguygen's is, however, very unlikely to have captured the ubiquitous normative practice whereby heterosexual women change their surname at the time of their mar-

riage to a man. The authors suggest that surname changes by women in their dataset are instead evidence of, for example, a choice to discard their former married surname following a divorce. Castrén (this issue) shows that, because changing surnames is seen as 'women's work', men in her couple interviews in Finland had less to say about this topic than their woman partners did. Similarly, Grønstad reports that, in a call-out for participants to give accounts of surname choices and experiences, men volunteers were notably fewer than women volunteers. For Grønstad this finding suggests that surname choice in marriage is perceived in Norway to a less salient topic for men than it is for women.

A third commonality between articles in this special issue is how a country's laws can influence – negatively or positively – gendered naming practices (Nick 2024). For example, Sinclair-Palm notes how trans youth in Australia, in Canada and in Ireland face barriers to legally changing their first name related to their being 'underage' and/or to the costs involved. Pilcher, Deakin-Smith, Aldrin and Nguygen evidence the positive effect the Gender Recognition Act 2004 seems to have had on name changing linked to gender identity transitions in the United Kingdom. Similarly, name laws are noted by Bechsgaard, by Castrén, and by Grønstad to have enabled greater flexibility of choice and some variability of practices in marital and family surnaming in Denmark, Finland and Norway respectively.

The focus of this special issue is in keeping with both Robnett's (2017) call and my own (Pilcher 2017) for more research to be conducted on how people use names in their responses to gendered naming traditions – yet still more needs to be done. Apart from Pilcher, Deakin-Smith, Aldrin and Nguygen (this issue), who analyse gender and different types of name change made by adults, and Sinclair-Palm (this issue), whose topic is first name changing by transgender youth, the focus of the other contributors in this special issue is what adults say, or do, about marital and family surnaming, and especially in same-sex couples (although see Bechsgaard, this issue). The five articles in this special issue cannot be said to provide a comprehensive discussion of the ways that names feature conventionally or creatively

in the doing, redoing or undoing of gender. Indeed, each of the authors published here do make their own suggestions for further research to fill in our gaps in knowledge and understanding related to their particular topic. Clearly, there is capacity in breadth and depth for future research on multifarious aspects of conventions and creativity in the (re)doing of gender through names, including, for example, how parents account for their choice of gendered first names for their children. I hope, in discussing gender first name and/or gender surname practices, contributions in this special issue give people access to what Robnett (2017) has called 'alternative narratives' and thereby potentially contribute to the wider development of more varied, flexible and equal gender orders.

References

Alford, Richard D. 1988. *Naming and identity: A cross-cultural study of personal naming practices*. New Haven, Connecticut: HRAF Press.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of 'sex'.* London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1989. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity.* London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing gender.* New York: Routledge

Deutsch, Francine M. 2007. Undoing gender. *Gender and society* 21(1). 106–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206293577.

Connell, Catherine. 2010. Doing, undoing, or redoing gender? Learning from the workplace experiences of transpeople. *Gender & society,* 24. 31–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209356429.

Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Goffman, Erving. 1976. Gender advertisements. *Studies in visual communication* 3(2). 69–77. https://core.ac.uk/reader/214186440. (accessed 10 June 2024).

Kessler, Suzanne J. & McKenna, Wendy. 1978. *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Nick, Iman M. 2024. (ed.) *Names, naming, and the Law: Onomastics, identity, power and policy*. New York: Routledge.

Pilcher, Jane. 2016. Names, bodies and identities. *Sociology* 50(4). 764–779. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515582157.

Pilcher, Jane. 2017. Names and "doing gender": How forenames and surnames contribute to gender identities, difference, and inequalities. *Sex roles* 77. 812–822. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0805-4.

Robnett, Rachael D. 2017. Overcoming functional fixedness in naming traditions: A commentary on Pilcher's 'Names and "doing gender"'. *Sex Roles* 77. 823–828. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0838-8.

Thwaites, Rachel. 2017. *Changing names and gendering identity*, London: Routledge.

West, Candace, & Zimmerman, Don H. 1987. Doing gender. *Gender & society* 1(2). 125–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002.

Westbrook, Laurel, & Schilt, Kristen. 2014. Doing gender, determining gender: Transgender people, gender panics, and the maintenance of the sex/gender/sexuality system. *Gender & Society* 28(1). 32–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243213503203.

Wilson, Rebekah. 2009. *A name of one's own: Identity, choice and performance in marital relationships* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. Gender Institute of the London School of Economics and Political Science, London. http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/305/ (accessed 10 June 2024).

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (15–40)

‘The family fight is on!’: Finnish mixed-sex couples, humour and alternatives to patrilineal surnaming

Anna-Maija Castrén

Abstract: Finnish marital surnaming practices give precedence to the husband’s surname as the family name after marriage. Legislation treats partners symmetrically and offers alternatives, but a patriarchal mindset still has a hold on the transition to a family. This article analyses interviews of 19 mixed-sex wedding couples and focuses on how they resort to humour in discussing alternatives to patrilineal practice. Literature shows that humour plays an important role in maintaining and regulating close relationships, but it can also be used as an indirect way to dismiss partners’ concerns. The results of this exploratory and descriptive analysis of couple interviews highlight different ways in which humour is used when discussing the potentially sensitive matter of marital surnaming.

Keywords: marital surnaming, couples, humour use, gender, Finland, couple interviews

Anna-Maija Castrén (University of Eastern Finland). Finnish mixed-sex couples, humour and alternatives to patrilineal surnaming.

NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.17605

1. Introduction

In her seminal work on forenames and surnames as 'doing words' in relation to embodied sex categories and gender, Pilcher (2017) suggests that marriage is a key choice crisis point for individuals transitioning to a new life phase. This applies in particular to societies leaning towards what is sometimes called the one-name-for-a-family model (Nugent 2010), highlighting two partners' 'we-ness' (Elias 2001) and the family unit in the making. As with the surnaming of children, upon marriage, couples are offered an opportunity either to follow the normative surnaming practice that prioritizes the male-line surname in relation to sex and gender, or to disrupt it (Pilcher 2017:819). According to Pilcher, patrilineal family surnaming reproduces the patriarchal gender order, as 'a man's (embodied) sex categorisation invariably means that there are no cultural expectations whatsoever that he should, at marriage to a woman, change his surname to hers [while] precisely the opposite is true for those whose bodies have been categorized as female' (ibid.).

In this article, I analyse decision making on surnames of 19 Finnish mixed-sex couples about to marry for the first time. Gender issues in Finland are framed by an equality discourse (Holli 2003; Vuori 2009). Gender equality is considered something everybody agrees on, and it is seen as a national project that benefits everybody. The image of gender relations is harmonious and the discourse emphasizes women and men holding equal positions, their collaboration, and common goals instead of differing views (e.g. Julkunen 1999; Raevaara 2005; Vuori 2009). This symmetry is also realized in the current (effectuated in 2019) and the previous (effectuated in 1986) Finnish Names Act that treats partners as equals in transition to marriage. Since legislative changes in the mid-1980s, neither partners' surname is prioritized and the options available for couples have increased considerably in the most recent change of law.

A survey from the early 2010s on attitudes towards gender equality in Finland found that the majority of respondents in the youngest age group (15–34 years) believed that society had already achieved gender equality (Kiianmaa 2012). However, it should be noted that

 NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.17605

this kind of widespread equality discourse is prone to generating subject positions from which it may be difficult to see inequality when it comes very close, for example in one's own intimate relationships (Holli 2003; Vuori 2009).

The data analysed here were collected before the current Finnish Names Act entered into force in 2019. At the time of data collection (carried out in several batches between 2006 and 2011), the options available were that two partners could keep their original surnames or choose a common surname that could either be their original surname or some other surname, or one partner could use a hyphenated surname. Unless the marrying authority was informed about the surname change before the wedding ceremony, both partners were assumed to keep their original surnames. The choice affected any children the couples may have, who could have either their mother's or father's surname (when partners had kept their original names) or the name that partners shared. Children could not have a hyphenated surname, and all children born to the same couple had to have the same surname (Finnish Names Act 1985).

Historically, from 1930 to 1985 it was mandatory in Finland for women to change their surname upon marriage and either take their husband's surname as their only surname or use his surname after hers with a hyphen (Paikkala 2012). Before 1930, surname changing was not enforced and different practices co-existed from one social stratum or locality to another. Even though the period during which it was mandatory for women to take their husband's surname lasted less than six decades, the custom of a woman taking her husband's surname as her only surname, following the 'one name for a family' model (Nugent 2010), came to be considered as the 'traditional' way (Kotilainen 2016). Only during the most recent years, and especially after the latest legislation change in 2019, has there been a visible decrease in the popularity of patrilineal surnaming and an increase in both partners retaining their surnames. According to the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (2023), in 2022, for the first time in history, less than a half of Finnish mixed-sex marital couples (47 per cent) followed the patrilineal naming pattern. Both partners kept their

surnames in 41 per cent of cases, while the option for the man to take the woman's surname was chosen only by fewer than 1.8 per cent of marital couples (ibid.). Thus, even if the husband's surname has lost some of its popularity, the appeal of the woman's surname as the only family name shared by two partners in a mixed-sex couple continues to be very modest.

Despite wide prevalence of cohabitation in contemporary Finnish society (Official Statistics Finland 2017), marriage still has importance in the transition to a family (Castrén 2019). Nearly 60 per cent of first-born children are born to unmarried women, but many couples marry afterwards (Official Statistics Finland 2017). Getting married for the first time, especially when there are no prior children, is a highly significant point in a young adults' life in terms of transitioning to a family of one's own. Following marriage, two partners are institutionally and socially acknowledged members of the same family unit, with new social roles as marital partners (wife or husband), and possibly in the future also as parents (a mother / mothers – a father / fathers). These family roles are already in the making during the transition to marriage (Castrén 2019), turning couples' discussion of surnames into a negotiation where the two partners' gendered family roles are also taking shape. In a society that perceives itself to be advanced in terms of gender equality, a tradition that privileges the man's surname poses – at least potentially – a sensitive question to the two partners.

The analysis in this article focuses on how couples use humour when discussing marital surnaming and it draws on what Pilcher (2017:813), following previous researchers (e.g. West & Zimmermann 1987), calls the 'doing gender approach'. Scrutinizing the use of humour in couples' discussions and negotiations on surnames draws on a relational approach to marital naming: instead of analysing surname changing or keeping as an individual's choice (usually the woman's choice; see next section), the analysis focuses on decision making as a dynamic and relational process in which both women and men are involved and participate with different agentic engagement (Castrén 2019). The analysis adopts a sociological view on humour that highlights it as 'a quintessentially social phenomenon' (Kuipers 2008:362) and offers

understanding on how, for example, conversational humour contributes to reproducing gender relations (Kotthoff 2006) and maintenance of social order (Kuipers 2008). In this article, a functional perspective on the use of humour in conversation between long-term romantic partners takes precedence. The article asks how humour is used in negotiation of gendered family roles in the transition to marriage and to family. A descriptive analysis is conducted to provide insight on micro-level relational practices in intimate relationships that contribute to the persistence of unequal gender roles in a society considered advanced in gender equality. Indeed, it is intriguing that in Finland, as in other Nordic welfare states with a long history of gender equality policy and support for shared parenthood (generous parental leave for both parents, subsidized daycare, etc.), for example, gender relations in society and in families are still not equal.

2. Deciding on names, potentially conflicting interests, and the use of humour

In the research literature, women's surname choice has been associated with other indicators of women's status in society (Goldin & Shim 2004; Scheuble & Johnson 2005; Noack & Aaskaug Wiik 2008; Hamilton et al. 2011). In a Norwegian study of marital surname changing and keeping from 1980 to 2002, Noack and Aaskaug Wiik (2008) found that the women's age at marriage, level of education, urban residence, labour market position, liberal family values, and egalitarian work-family roles had a positive influence on marital name-keeping. A link between name-keeping and higher level of education has frequently been identified in empirical studies (e.g. Goldin & Shim 2004). According to Hoffnung (2006), the likelihood of women keeping their original surname is associated with feminist attitudes and higher career commitment; identity and career aspects have frequently been found to be significant in marital name-keeping (e.g. Kline et al. 1996; Twenge 1997; Nugent 2010; Rom & Benjamin 2011; Thwaites 2013). Kelley (2023) found that women who kept

their surnames and women who shared hyphenated surnames with their husbands are perceived to be less committed to their partners and less loving. In a very recent study with Canadian data investigating brides-to-be, the woman's mother's surname choice was found to predict surname keeping (MacEcheron 2024). However, despite the increase in liberal family values and gender equality in society, as well as in diversification of family life more generally, sharing the man's surname has remained popular (Hoffnung 2006; Noack & Aaskaug Wiik 2008; US Pew Research Center 2023).

A previous analysis focusing on Finnish couples' reasoning on marital surname decision identified three patterns highlighting the gendered division of agentic work required in the transition to marriage (Castrén 2019). First, the woman taking the man's surname at marriage was taken for granted, as something self-evident. Changing surname was seen as intimately linked with becoming 'us', a new family unit, of which the shared surname was a valued symbol. The couples did not reflect upon the fact that the patrilineal surnaming practice is based on unequal treatment of genders. Second, the symmetric position of women and men in legislation was acknowledged and was seen to give couples a right to choose. However, it was considered a choice of the woman. The third pattern emerging in the analysis and shaping the discourse on surnames distanced itself from the patrilineal practice perceived as traditional and recognized women's and men's equivalent positions in relation to the marital surname. This led, however, to a dilemma that was difficult to resolve if partners were drawn to the one name for a family model, as only one surname could be chosen to represent the family unit being formed (ibid.).

The issue of conflicting interests in relationships and in decision making has been examined in the sociological research literature with the concept of ambivalence. According to Connidis and McMullin (2002), individuals experience ambivalence when social and cultural structures collide with their attempts to exercise agency in negotiating relationships that constitute what they consider a desirable family life. Ambivalence entails 'oscillating between polar contradictions of feeling, thinking, wanting, or social structures, contradictions that

appear temporarily or permanently insolvable' (Lüscher 2011:197). Individuals privileged by existing structural arrangements and cultural models are usually motivated to reproduce and defend them, while the opposite may apply to those in a more subordinate position (Connidis & McMullin 2002; c.f. Connell 2002).

Personal interactions using humour are often used to address ambivalence and potential conflicts of interest between romantic partners. Humour has been found to have important functions in long-term romantic relationships (Hall 2017; Lukasz, Kubicius & Jonason 2022). In a wide meta-analysis, Hall (2017) concluded that high levels of humour production and appreciation in romantic relationships were related to higher relationship satisfaction. People use humour to relieve tension and it can play an important role in bringing partners emotionally closer and in increasing feelings of togetherness (Ziv & Gadish 1989; Campbell, Martin & Ward 2008). Humour can help partners to maintain positive mood, prevent decrease in marital satisfaction, and thus acts as a kind of buffer in the changing situation – especially during stressful life course transitions, such as becoming a parent (Theisen et al. 2019). Humour can be used to subtly express affection in the event of disagreements, relieve tension in conflicts, and provide a way to withdraw from conflict without losing face (Campbell et al. 2008; Long & Graesser 1988). Friendly teasing can also be used to gently criticize a partner (Keltner et al. 2001).

The functions of humour depend on the type of social relations involved, the social context, and the content of the joke or humorous statement (Kuipers 2008:368; Robinson & Smith-Lovin 2001). In addition to its positive consequences, humour can also have harmful effects on interactions (Billig 2005) and can be used in ways that erode both intergroup relations and personal relationships (Campbell et al. 2008). Teasing can turn into belittling and can subject the other person to ridicule (Billig 2005). Humour can also be used to manipulate a partner (Long & Graesser 1988; Ziv 1988). For example, a humorous response to a partner's proposal can be used as an indirect way to bypass the concern expressed by the partner and to refuse a constructive discussion (Campbell et al. 2008).

Following Kotthoff (2006a; 2006b), humour can be used in cultural shaping of gender. Close analyses of humorous interactions reveal how people negotiate and confirm specific gender identities (Kotthoff 2006b) and form and perform masculinities and femininities in interaction (Kuipers 2008). Humour is used in interaction to perform and reinforce gender roles and power relations; 'social differences on a macro-level are created and perpetuated on [micro-level] interaction' (Kuipers 2008:375). Different kinds of masculinities and femininities can be detected in joking styles depending on the situation, age group and social milieu, for example (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp 2006). The ambivalence involved in the marital surname decision of mixed-sex couples and discussed in a humorous tone in research interviews offers a valuable view of the ways in which couples do gender relations and, in particular, gendered family roles without jeopardizing their perception of themselves as equals. Marital surname decision is at least potentially a sensitive topic, as two surnames, with a reference to two partners' childhood families, can be weighed up against each other. The analysis presented in this article focuses on wedding couples' decision making on surnames, with a particular interest in the use of humour. To my knowledge, no prior research has examined how conversational humour plays a part in couples' discussions on surnames in transition to marriage, which justifies the descriptive and explorative approach adopted in the analysis.

3. Data and analysis

The data include couple interviews with 19 mixed-sex couples soon to be married for the first time. The interviews were originally conducted in a study focusing on weddings and couples' social networks (see Maillochon & Castrén 2011). Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the topics discussed in the interviews, and before starting the interview they were informed of their right to refuse to answer questions and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. At the time of data collection no ethical approval process was required by the university

for social scientific research based on self-recruited participants' consent to participate.

All participants except one were of Finnish origin, aged between 20 and 36 (mean age for women 27 years, for men 28 years), and they had no children from either their current or any previous relationship. They lived in the metropolitan area of Helsinki and the majority had high levels of education, one groom had no formal education after high school and all others had a degree from a higher education institution or were currently students at one. All couples except one had cohabited before marriage.

The couples were recruited via adverts placed on Finnish wedding websites, in local newspapers and on the noticeboards of universities in the metropolitan area of Helsinki. Two couples were found via personal contacts. The recruitment criteria were that the couple was getting married for the first time within the next few months (date and venue of the wedding already set) and that neither partner had children. The sample is a convenience sample; the couples' participation was voluntary and based on their willingness to talk about their relationship, future wedding, and their social networks. Couples did not receive remuneration for their participation.

Cohabitation without marriage and births out of wedlock are widespread in Finland, although highly educated Finns are more likely to marry than others (Jalovaara & Fasang 2015). Furthermore, an analysis of all Finnish births between 2003 and 2009 found that most mothers with higher levels of education were married (69 per cent), with only one in four simply cohabiting (Jalovaara & Andersson 2017). Hence, when compared to the family trajectories of highly educated Finns in terms of union type and childbearing (ibid.) the study's participants are quite typical.

As a method of data collection, couple interviews have been associated with a low response rate, as two individuals must consent and remain involved to provide one participant couple (Arksey 1995; Racher, Kaufert & Haven 2000). Most of the couples who made contact were accepted to participate, and only two couples were rejected because their wedding was too far ahead. Thematic interviews were

conducted in Finnish at the couple's home or on the university's premises, and the interviews took place a few weeks before the wedding (except for two couples, who were interviewed soon after their wedding). The length of the interviews varied from 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim in their entirety.

Couple interviews are a far less common method of data collection than individual interviews (see e.g. Evertsson & Nyman 2009; Gabb & Fink 2015; Pahl 1989). Joint interviews permit and encourage partners to portray themselves as a couple (Bennett & McAvity 1985) and elicit couple interaction. The purpose of couple interviews is not (only) to obtain accounts from two people, but also to observe the manner in which information is generated (Allan 1980). Joint interviews provide an opportunity to observe couples' verbal and nonverbal interaction and the construction of their conjoint dialogue (Racher, Kaufert & Havens 2000). Thus, they allow researchers to explore themes that cannot be tackled with, or that remain hidden in, individual interviews (Allan 1980).

The interview guide included a list of topics addressing the couple's relationship history, their reasons for getting married and their wedding guests and arrangements; the main emphasis in the interviews was on weddings and the couples' social networks. As in qualitative research interviews more generally, the topics were introduced by the interviewer in a freeform discussion and not by using fixed wording (Edwards & Holland 2013). Marital surnames were originally not among the research questions the data collection was designed for, so the question 'What are you going to do about surnames?' was presented in a rather casual manner to all couples and without giving any specific weight to it. It was not one of the interview topics, but more of a factual question, such as 'When did you meet?' and, for this reason, there were no pre-planned questions to elicit answers from those interviewees who preferred not to participate in the discussion at this point. Thus, the rich material on marital surnames generated by the question was not pre-meditated in any way but came as a surprise. Similarly unexpected was the abundance of ways in which the marital name was entwined with the transition couples saw taking place: through marriage they

were to become a family (see Castrén & Maillochon 2009). Moreover, the surname choice captured the gendered expectations that positioned women and men differently in relation to the agentic work required in the transition. It also illuminated how men's privileged position granted by patrilineal surnaming practice – a potential threat to partner equality – was circumvented (Castrén 2019).

The analysis followed a broadly defined critical realist framework in which material practices are given an ontological status independent of discursive practices (Sims-Schouten et al. 2007). Material practices, such as surnaming at marriage, were seen as accommodating, although not determining, the discourse that arose (ibid.). According to Sims-Schouten et al. (2007:102), critical realism combines constructionist and realist positions; it argues that 'while meaning is made in interaction, non-discursive elements also impact on that meaning'. Finnish name law with the options it offered at the time, the widely accepted cultural model of one name for a family, and the society at large in which certain gendered practices were seen as 'traditional', created a context in which certain discursive constructions were more easily enabled than others (Sims-Schouten et al. 2007).

The analytical process began with careful thematic coding of all 19 interviews carried out with the AI-powered analytical device ATLAS.ti (https://atlasti.com). In the next stage, lengthy portions of discussion on surnames were collated into a separate file. Then, a more detailed analysis of the use of humour followed. Most couples did not shift to a humorous tone when discussing marital surnames and humour played a role in only seven interviews. Sections of interview talk in which couples were playful and humorous about surnames were then thematically coded according to the type of humorous talk and whether humour seemed to be used for a specific aim. The analysis was descriptive in nature with a focus on the functions of humour use in conversation (Kuipers 2008). Throughout the analysis, the structure of dialogue was under scrutiny (c.f. Racher, Kaufert & Havens 2000), referring to what was said, who said what, and in what order. The general atmosphere of the interviews was also important: humour use was often accompanied by warm-hearted laughter,

smiles, and even flirtatious looks between the partners. As the interviews were audio recorded and not videotaped, it was not possible to systematically include, for example, facial expressions in the analysis. However, the field notes written immediately after each interview included memos about the general mood of the interviewees.

While discussions on weddings and social networks mostly engaged both partners equally, men were much less involved when discussing surnames (Castrén 2019). The question about what the couple intended to do about surnames was presented to both partners using the plural form, but it was mostly the woman who took the first – or only – initiative to answer for herself or for both. The men, while not indifferent, tended to follow the discussion between their partner and the interviewer, for example with a happy smile or more passively; many grooms acted as if the name question did not really concern them (ibid.).

In the next section presenting the results, all names are pseudonyms chosen by the author. The used pseudonyms are Finnish first names for women and men with a clear gender reference and the one surname is a common Swedish surname that is also used in Finland. When mentioning both partners of a couple, the woman's name is always mentioned first and the man's second.

4. Results: three ways of using humour

In the data, humour arises in many contexts. The overall atmosphere in the interviews was without exception highly positive, as the main topic – the forthcoming wedding – was perceived as the high-point of the couples' relationship and to be the most memorable day of their life so far. Humorous talk, generating laughter, smiles and playfulness between the two partners created moments of joy in an otherwise rather serious context of a research interview conducted for scientific purposes on the university premises or the couple's home. However, humour was also applied purposefully by the interviewees to achieve certain goals.

There were three distinct ways in which humour emerged in relation to surnames. Firstly, the use of humour regarding surname decisions centred on turning the traditional order and the related roles upside down. Secondly, the couples drew on the ridiculousness of the assumed demand for absolute gender equality in family and relationships and from the absurdities to which the compulsive search for equality can lead. Thirdly, humour was used to gently disregard the partner's concerns as well as the general importance of the surname decision altogether with a simultaneous aim of persuading the partner towards personal opinion.

Reversal of the traditional order is evident from Tilja and Tero's interview. Turning the social order that is perceived as natural, traditional, or self-evident upside down is a classic recipe for humour and fun. Turning hierarchies upside down for a set period of time is the root of carnival, for example (e.g. Le Roy Ladurie [1979] 1990). Even young children recognize the absurdity and delight in jumbling up everyday routines. To share a personal anecdote, my son considered the 'topsy-turvy day' in kindergarten as the utmost fun: he rejoiced days in advance at the prospect of eating pudding before his main course at lunch, and he laughed his heart out, year after year, at the plastic shoe cover his kindergarten teacher wore on her head when she greeted the children in the morning.

In the interview, Tilja jokes about the possibility of Tero taking her surname. After explaining how she has always known that she will change her name when getting married, she adds playfully: '[A]lthough, I have, every now and then, put forward the idea of what if Tero took my name instead!' She teases her future husband, but Tero comfortably – and smiling contentedly – refrains from commenting. On a more general level, and as already mentioned, men distancing themselves from the discussion on surnames was extremely common in the data (Castrén 2019).

Tilja reversed the traditional order to be funny and to create a good-humoured atmosphere. Also in the next excerpt, from an interview with Sara and Jouni, the idea of a man taking a woman's surname is perceived as a joke. However, the real fun starts when the

groom, Jouni, frames his future wife's potential claim for equality as something fearful. The interviewer plays along in a humorous manner. In the following excerpt, Sara, the bride, has just explained that she will take Jouni's surname and that she has not really thought of any other option.

Example (1)

Jouni:	But I've been so afraid the whole time that you'll start demanding that I have to be the one changing name.
Interviewer:	Well, now that I mentioned it…
Sara:	The family fight is on! (laughter) Well, for a fleeting moment I thought of having a hyphenated name. But it's not that practical, and then again, if we ever have children, the whole family would have the same name [if she took her husband's name]. At least it would sound nicer.
Jouni:	Actually, we didn't consider any other option.
Sara:	Yeah, no we didn't. It didn't occur to me to ask if you'd like to be [her surname].
Jouni:	Well, you said that you'll take [his surname]. And I'm okay with that.

The absurdity of a 'family fight' over Sara's surname is the focal point of the teasing shared by Sara and Jouni, implying that even the idea itself is ridiculous. As a couple, they would never fight over such matter. However, the true source of humour in this dialogue is the reversal of the traditional order. Seeing Jouni taking Sara's surname (or Tero taking Tilja's surname) as hilarious indicates the prevalence and taken-for-grantedness of patrilineal surnaming practice for the couples. In addition, the quote above from Sara and Jouni's interview brings up an important aspect in decision making, i.e. the children the couple may have in the future. Women in particular think about the surname from the point of view of children and the family in formation. The decision was therefore not only about them as two individuals (Castrén 2019). Women are generally more likely to feel forced to balance between commitment to other people and to themselves in different

areas of life, for example when reconciling work and family (Nugent 2010; Gerson 2002).

Many couples were aware of the possibilities afforded by the law and brought up the alternatives when discussing surnames. However, in the interviews, there was rarely any serious reflection on what an equitable or fair way would be to decide which surname to choose, if the spouses wanted one shared family name. Instead, they made fun of the ways in which to solve the dilemma. An example can be found in the interview with Venla and Arttu:

Example (2)

Interviewer:	What will you do with your surnames? How do you decide from many options?
Venla:	Well, we will follow the traditional way. I'll be taking my husband's surname.
Arttu:	Although, we first thought about having a tug-of-war between the two families at the wedding party (Venla laughs) but…
Venla:	It would have ended like this anyway…
Arttu:	Yeah, it would, and it was my suggestion, because I knew I had a bigger family.
Venla:	… because you have the bigger one… (laughs)

Tug-of-war was offered as a joking solution to the dilemma regarding fairness over decision making, something the couple would never seriously consider. In this second type found in the data, the humour was based on *exaggeration*; the example involves ridiculing the assumed social expectation to pursue equality in every aspect. Tug-of-war served as an exaggerated example of conflict solving, from which Venla and Arttu, as a couple, distanced themselves as a forced ideal of gender equality.

Also in Selja and Jan's interview, playfulness is related to finding an equitable solution. In the next excerpt, the couple made fun about surnames and first languages, which is Finnish for her and Swedish for him.

Example (3)

Interviewer:	What will you do with surnames?
Selja:	Svensson, Jan's surname.
Interviewer:	Was this clear from the beginning, or did you have to negotiate? Did you consider other options?
Selja:	[Her surname translated in Swedish], we thought of taking my surname and translating it to his first language (laughing). For some reason Jan wasn't too excited about this.
Interviewer:	Jan wasn't enthusiastic about the idea?
Jan:	Well, I didn't take it (Selja: … seriously) seriously, really.
Selja:	Although, for me it seemed like an absolutely splendid idea!
Jan:	I still can't believe that you were serious about this.
Selja:	Yes, I was! But, yeah, I had to give up, and actually, it was self-evident to me [to take Jan's surname]. Only if his surname had been something really horrible, well, in that case, I would probably have said something like… But, yeah, I probably would have gone with that horrible surname as well.

As in Selja and Jan's case, the possibility of taking a completely new shared surname was a frequent source of joking in the interviews. The couples happily played with different possibilities, such as taking one part of her name and another of his. Or, like Selja and Jan, translating her Finnish name into Swedish, the outcome being peculiar and humorous. One groom, Pekka, mentioned this in the interview: 'We did talk about having a brand-new name, but it was not that serious really, more as a joke, not that serious'.

Aila and Ville's interview brings up yet another aspect related to the funniness of a made-up surname and they spoke of how their entire circle of friends had thrown themselves into the topic. The friends had suggested different new names made by combining parts of the couple's original names, and according to Ville, the friends 'placed friendly bets on what our surname will be'. Friends participating in the couple's deliberation over their surname tells something about Aila and Ville

as a couple with a very open-minded approach to the decision, having talked about the matter extensively with their friends. In addition, friends participating in the process – in a humorous manner – shows that surname choice is recognized as something to be carefully considered. In this sample of 19 couples, Aila and Ville were one of only two couples who resorted to an alternative surname practice, and they ended up keeping their original surnames at marriage.

While the examples given above highlight joking about the surname decision as good-humoured banter between partners without any real tension surfacing in the interviews, the third type of humour in the data is somewhat different, illustrating a fundamental ambivalence related to decision making about surnames. The third way in which humour is used in the discussion has a purpose and is targeted to achieve something; humour is used for *persuading a partner* in some way, to overcome ambivalence experienced by the woman. At the time of the interview, Auli and Asko had not yet decided on surnames and actual negotiation took place when discussing the topic with the interviewer. In addition, this couple considered the question on surnames as being meant exclusively for the woman and, at first, only Auli and the interviewer discussed the topic.

Example (4)

Interviewer:	What will you do with your surnames? Will either of you change, or will you keep your own names?
Auli:	This has been discussed a lot. (pause) At least Asko is not going to change his name, that's for sure, and in that we're really traditional. So, I'm thinking just because I've never really liked my own name, and I can see myself taking Asko's name. But, well, Asko is a [his surname; one of the most common surnames in Finland] and I don't really know if I want to be a [his surname] either. (chuckles) This is, it's something I've been thinking about terribly, all the time really. And I think we're just going to end up drawing lots at the last minute.

Auli was very open about her conflicting thoughts over her surname and was ready to elaborate on the topic in more detail. Her mother had taken a hyphenated surname upon marriage, which was something quite rare in the small town where the family lived. Her mother then gave up using her husband's surname altogether when the legislation changed in the 1980s. Her mother's unusual decision had aroused fascination during Auli's childhood. At this point, Asko joins the conversation for the first time with a humorous tone of voice:

Example (5)

Interviewer:	Would it be out of the question for you to have different names?
Auli:	No, at least I don't think so myself. My mother kept her own name, or first she had a hyphened name and then, later, dropped the other name and used only her original surname. I do remember that when I was a child I was sometimes asked if she really was my real mother when she had a different name. I remember things like this, and at the time it was a bit like, well, why do you have that name, why can't you be like everyone else. […]
Asko:	Well, my mother did take my father's surname. And yes, I may have tried to put some pressure on you (both laugh).
Auli:	Yes, there is a lot of pressure going on there, but eventually this will be my decision.
Asko:	Yeah. It's mainly because it would be more practical or easier if and when you have children. But, well, I don't know, it's Auli's decision after all.
Interviewer:	So, you see it as Auli's decision?
Asko:	Yes. It's like, well, nowadays, when we look at our friends, those who are married, it's pretty much half and half, those who keep their own and those who don't [i.e. woman changes to husband's surname]. It's not that significant in the end.
Auli:	In a way, however, I see it as a decision that has also wider relevance, that it's not only a personal one. I

 NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.17605

> do have those tiny seeds of feminism in me, so the decision is not, like (pause)… this has been thought over a lot, but so far no decision has been reached.

Two excerpts from Auli and Asko's interview cited above highlight the multiplexity of the surname decision and the ambivalence involved; especially Auli's last comment. It was uncommon for the interviewees to explicitly refer to feminism or gender equality when discussing names, which indicates that only few couples perceived the question in such a context. Asko appealed to his future wife based on his mother's decision with a playful tone of voice, knowing that advising the bride on the choices made by her future mother-in-law carries a certain irony. In the next sentence, however, he acknowledges his underlying effort to persuade Auli to accept the solution he personally prefers. It is worth noting that while Tilja's suggestion (quoted earlier) for Tero to take her last name instead of the other way around was clearly intended as a joke, Asko bringing up his mother's decision was not – he is offering a decision that conforms to the prevailing order. The comment was a teasing and persuasive remark that his father's last name, which Auli was not particularly fond of, had been good enough for his mother. Asko uses humour to gently disregard his partner's concerns and the general importance Auli gives to the surname decision with a simultaneous aim of persuading her toward his own opinion. In addition, he returns to the discussion to further justify his suggestion with practical aspects of a shared name 'if and when you have children'. Here, as in almost all the interviews, only the man's surname is offered and considered as the shared family name (Castrén 2019).

Asko's way of using humour to persuade Auli to adopt his preferred choice is important considering the transition to a married couple and the tensions, at least potentially, associated with it. The interviewees' teasing about the surname decision can be understood to be affiliative, referring to using humour to increase emotional closeness and to relieve tension between partners (Campbell et al. 2008). Even if in the data both partners used humour in conversation, previous research literature focusing on couples has highlighted that it is men in particu-

lar who use affiliative humour to maintain relationship satisfaction in stressful or potentially stressful situations (Theisen et al. 2019). The use of humour when discussing surnames can be understood as a gender-politically correct means of not threatening the idea of partners as equals in the relationship while arguing for the patrilineal surnaming practice. Nevertheless, the humour use in the data is also doing gender relations and gendered family roles, as the couples' fun-making draws on the reversal of the traditional order (presenting the man taking the woman's name as hilarious), from resorting to exaggeration to showing the ridiculousness of forced gender equality, and from referring to gendered family roles and the choices of the couple's parents in persuading one's partner to make a decision following the traditional order (the man's father's name was good enough for his mother, so it should be good enough for his future wife as well).

5. Discussion

When using humour in talking about surnames, the interviewed couples played with gendered expectations regarding the family with no real intention to change the patrilineal surnaming practices. Indeed, making fun about and discussing the matter highlights the transition process taking place in marriage on two levels: doing 'we-ness' (Elias 2001; or, becoming 'us', Castrén 2019) and doing gender (Pilcher 2017). Going against the man's embodied sex categorisation (Pilcher 2017) was clearly a powerful resource for humour and playfulness for the interviewed couples. As was the assumed cultural expectation to pursue equality at any cost and in every possible way in marital and family life. The analysis presented highlights the difficulty of perceiving unequal and constraining tendencies in society when they enter the sphere of our most intimate relationships (c.f. Holli 2003; Vuori 2009). It is as if the couples distanced themselves from the equality discourse (and potential conflict) to emphasize instead their particularity as a committed couple and their mutual love.

Although the interviews conducted that focused on a forthcoming wedding were far from the mundane and everyday life, in the discus-

sion on surnames, a piece of the everyday life of gender relations was being shaped and stated. In these discussions, the 'semi-careless and established customs' (Jokinen 2005:156) that define something as significant in Finnish gender relations were highlighted. From a gender perspective, most couples acted simultaneously both conventionally and reflectively (c.f. Jokinen 2005:67). Yet, for some couples, the patrilineal surnaming was so self-evident that what was considered traditional eclipsed all aspects of structural inequality (Castrén 2019), as if it had nothing to do with doing gender relations in society.

Being playful with surnames can be interpreted as relaxed reflexivity in the sense that Jokinen (2005) defines the term. It refers to varied ways in which reflexivity on gender connects with action when Finns talk about their everyday life and mundane routines, emphasizing the ease and relaxedness of gender relations in society (Jokinen 2005:67). Nevertheless, humour use when discussing surnames reproduces the patriarchal order and instils it in society in a way that does not question the individuality of couples, the agency of spouses, or their equality as partners. Joking is like candy floss spun from gender reflexivity; it is airy and tastes sweet, but it still promotes unequal structures in society.

The analysis shows that, to the interviewed couples, the alternatives to patrilineal surname choice (both partners keeping their own surnames, one of them combining two surnames with a hyphen, husband taking the wife's surname, or both partners taking an entirely new shared surname) are first and foremost sources of warm-hearted and affiliative humour (Campbell et al. 2008). Humour use when discussing surnames does not promote more equal surnaming practices but instead can be understood to indicate that the couples, despite being aware of the alternatives, deliberately distance themselves from them, not because they are against more equal gender relations in society and in family, but because for them as individuals and as 'who they are as a couple' patrilineal practice just happens to be a better fit. This resonates with what Gross (2006) has written about marriage in contemporary societies being a meaning constitutive tradition instead of a tradition that constrains and pushes individuals to normative life

choices. Humour offers the couples means to evade the nagging question of unequal treatment of genders inherently linked to the patrilineal surname choice and, in a sense, to go against initiatives for extending gender equality.

Decision making on surnames at marriage shows hidden and implicit practices and micro-level processes that reproduce the patriarchal order in Finnish society (Castrén 2019). What does this mean for the family being formed? As I see it, the consequences are parallel with what Jokinen (2005:158) calls the gender paradox in her analysis of everyday life: 'Women control everyday life, and it weighs heavily on them; men may get by with less burden, but they don't easily achieve the position of a functioning subject'. Making the decision and taking responsibility for the ensuing consequences fall on the woman's shoulders in the matter of marital surnames. On one hand, this is a burden, but on the other hand, it gives them a head start in building family identity (Castrén 2019). Men temporarily get by with less responsibility, but at the same time lose the opportunity available for a more collective mindset in this early stage of family life before possible children and the weight of everyday life (ibid.).

References

Allan, Graham. 1980. A note on interviewing spouses together. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 42(1). 205–210.

Arksey, Hillary. 1996. Collecting data through joint interviews. *Social Research Update* 15, Winter 1996. University of Surrey. Available at: http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU15.html (accessed 17 April 2024).

Bennett, Linda & McAvity, Katharine. 1985. Family research: A case for interviewing couples. In Handel, Gerald (ed.), *The psychosocial interior of the family*, 3rd ed. Hawthorne: Aldine de Gruyter, 75–94.

Billig, Michael. 2005. *Laughter and ridicule. Towards a social critique of humour*. London: Sage.

Campbell, Lorna, Martin, Rod & Ward, Jennie. 2008. An observational study of humor use while resolving conflict in dating couples. *Personal Relationships* 15. 41–55.

Castrén, Anna-Maija. 2019. Becoming "us": Marital name, gender, and agentic work in transition to marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81. 246–263. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12519.

Castrén, Anna-Maija & Maillochon, Florence. 2009. Who chooses the wedding guests, the couple or the family? Individual preferences and relational constraints in France and Finland. *European Societies* 11(3). 369–389.

Connell, Raewyn. 2002. *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connidis, Ingrid Arnett & McMullin, Julia. 2002. *Sociological ambivalence and family ties: A critical perspective. Journal of Marriage and Family* 64(3). 558–567.

Digital and Population Data Services Agency. 2023. Personal communication, 21 April 2023.

Edwards, Rosalind & Holland, Janet. 2013. *What is qualitative interviewing?* London: Bloomsbury Academic. https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/58752.

Elias, Norbert. [1990] 2001. *The society of individuals*. London: Continuum.

Evertsson, Lars & Charlott Nyman. 2009. If not negotiation, then what? Gender equality and the organization of everyday life in Swedish couples. *Interpersona* 3(Suppl. 1). 33–59.

Gabb, Jacqui & Fink, Janet. 2015. *Couple relationships in the 21st century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gerson, Kathleen. 2002. Moral dilemmas, moral strategies and the transformation of gender. *Gender & Society* 16. 8–28.

Goldin, Claudia & Shim, Maria. 2004. Making a name: Women's surnames at marriage and beyond. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18(2). 143–160.

Gross, Neil. 2006. The detraditionalization of intimacy reconsidered. *Sociological Theory* 23. 286–311.

Hall, Jeffrey. 2017. Humor in romantic relationships: A meta-analysis. *Personal Relationships* 24. 306–322.

Hamilton, Laura, Geist, Claudia & Powell, Brian. 2011. Marital name change as a window into gender attitudes. *Gender & Society* 25(2). 145–175.

Hoffnung, Michele. 2006. What's in a name? Marital name choice revisited. *Sex Roles* 55. 817–825.

Holli, Anne Maria. 2003. *Discourse and Politics for Gender Equality in Late Twentieth Century Finland*. (Acta Politica 23) Helsinki: Department of Political Science.

Holli, Anne-Mari, Magnusson, Eva & Rönnblom, Malin. 2005. Critical studies of Nordic discourses on gender and gender equality. *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 13(3). 148–152.

Jalovaara, Marika & Andersson, Gunnar. 2017. Disparities in children's family experiences by mother's socioeconomic status: The case of Finland. *Stockholm University Working Paper Series*, SRRD 2017:22.

Jalovaara, Marika & Fasang, Anette. 2015. Are there gender differences in family trajectories by education in Finland? *Demographic Research* 33(44). 1241–1256.

Jokinen, Eeva. 2005. *Aikuisten arki*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Julkunen, Raija. 1999. Gender, work and welfare state. In Lipponen, Päivi & Setälä, Päivi (eds.) *Women in Finland* Helsinki: Otava, 70–100.

Kelley, Kristin. 2023. The Effect of Marital Name Choices on Heterosexual Women's and Men's Perceived Quality as Romantic Partners. *Socius* 9. https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221148153.

Keltner, Dacher, Capps, Lisa, Kring, Ann, Young, Randall & Heerey, Erin. 2001. Just teasing: A conceptual analysis and empirical review. *Psychological Bulletin* 127(2). 229–248.

Kiianmaa, Nelli. 2012. *Tasa-arvobarometri*. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön julkaisuja 2012:23. Helsinki: Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö.

Kline, Susan, Laura Stafford & Miklosovic, Jill. 1996. Women's surnames: Decisions, interpretations and associations with relational qualities. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 13. 593–617.

Kotilainen, Sofia. 2016. Suomalaisen perheen yhteisen sukunimen lyhyt historia. *Kasvatus & Aika* 10(5). 42–57.

Kotthoff, Helga. 2006a. Introduction to a special issue. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38(1). 1–3.

Kotthoff, Helga. 2006b. Gender and Humor: The state of art. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38(1). 4–25.

Kuipers, Giselinde. 2008. The sociology of humor. In Raskin, Victor (ed.), *The primer of humor research*. De Gruyter Mouton, 361–398.

Lampert, Martin D. & Ervin-Tripp, Susan. 2006. Risky laughter: Teasing and self-directed joking among male and female friends. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38(1). 51–72.

Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel. 1990 [1979]. *Karnevaalit: kynttelinpäivästä piinaviikolle, 1579–1580* (orig. in French, Le Carnaval de Romans: de la Chandeleur au Mercredi des cendres, 1579–1580, translated by Inkeri Tuomikoski). Helsinki: Art House.

Long, Debra and Arthur Graesser. 1988. Wit and humor in discourse processing. *Discourse Processes* 11. 35–60.

Lukasz, Jach, Kubicius, Dominika & Jonason, Peter. 2022. "Do they fit together like the Joker and Harley Quinn?": Joking, laughing, humor styles, and dyadic adjustment in long-term romantic relationships. *Personality and Individual Differences* 199. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2022.111859.

MacEcheron, Melanie. 2024. Canadian brides'-to-be surname choice: Potential evidence of transmitted bilateral descent reckoning. *Genealogy* 8(1). 13 https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy8010013.

Maillochon, Florence & Castrén, Anna-Maija. 2011. Making family at wedding: bilateral kinship and equality. In: Jallinoja, Riitta & Widmer, Eric (eds.) *Families and Kinship in Contemporary Europe: Rules and Practices of Relatedness*. Palgrave MacMillan, 31–44.

Names Act 1985. Names Act 694/1985; amendments up to 13/2015 included. https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1985/en19850694_20150013.pdf (accessed 17 April 2024).

Noack, Turid & Aarskaug Wiik, Kenneth. 2008. Women's choice of surname upon marriage in Norway. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70(May). 507–518.

Nugent, Colleen. 2010. Children's surnames, moral dilemmas: Accounting for the predominance of fathers' surnames for children. *Gender & Society* 24. 499–525.

Official Statistics of Finland, 2017. Official Statistics of Finland (2017). Perinatal Statistics: Mothers, Childbirths and Newborns. Report 37/2017, National Institute for Health and Welfare.

Pahl, Jan. 1989. *Money and marriage*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Paikkala, Sirkka. 2012. Puolison nimi vai oma nimi? *Kielikello* 1(2012). 14–19.

Pilcher, Jane. 2017. Names and "doing gender": How forenames and surnames contribute to gender identities, difference, and inequalities. *Sex Roles* 77. 812–822.

Racher, Frances, Kaufert, Joseph & Havens, Betty. 2000. Conjoint research interviews with frail, elderly couples: Methodological implications. *Journal of Family Nursing* 6(4). 367–380.

Raevaara, Eeva. 2005. *Tasa-arvo ja muutoksen rajat. Sukupuolten tasa-arvo poliittisena ongelmana Ranskan parité- ja Suomen kiintiökeskustelussa*. TANE-julkaisuja 2005(7). Helsinki: Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö ja Tasa-arvoasiainneuvottelukunta.

Robinson Dawn & Smith-Lovin, Lynn. 2001. Getting a laugh: Gender, status and humor in task-discussions. *Social Forces* 80(1). 123–158.

Scheuble, Laurie & Johnson, David. 2005. Married women's situational use of last names: An empirical study. *Sex Roles* 53(1/2). 143–151.

Sims-Schouten, Wendy, Riley, Sarah & Willig, Carla. 2007. Critical realism in discourse analysis. *Theory & Psychology* 17(1). 101–124.

Theisen, Jaclyn, Ogolsky, Brian, Simpson, Jeffry & Rholes, Steven. 2019. Dyad to triad: A longitudinal analysis of humor and pregnancy intention during the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 36(11–12). 1–20.

Thwaites, Rachel. 2013. The making of selfhood: Naming decisions on marriage. *Families, Relationships and Societies* 2(3). 425–439.

Twenge, Jean. 1997. "Mrs. His Name": Women's preferences for married names. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21. 417–429.

US Pew Research Center. 2023. About 8 in 10 women in opposite-sex marriages say they took their husband's last name. September 7, 2023. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/07/about-eight-in-ten-women-in-opposite-sex-marriages-say-they-took-their-husbands-last-name/ (accessed 17 April 2024).

Vuori, Jaana. 2009. Guiding migrants to the realm of gender equality. In Keskinen, Suvi et al. (eds.), *Complying with colonialism: Gender, race and the ethnicity in the Nordic region*. Farnham: Ashgate, 207–224.

Ziv, Avner. 1988. Humor's role in married life. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research, 1*(3). 223–229.

Ziv, Avner and Orit Gadish. 1989. Humor and marital satisfaction. *The Journal of Social Psychology* 129(6). 759–768.

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (41–67)

Tradition and gender: Norwegian men's surnames

Line Førre Grønstad

Abstract: Until recently, little attention has been given to men's surname choices in couples. By analysing men's narratives, this study investigates the motivations and social implications of their choices. Drawing on historical and sociocultural perspectives, it demonstrates how men's names are privileged in Norwegian culture compared to women's names despite a high degree of gender equality. Men who break the norms want to make their own decisions. Overall, this research contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality by highlighting the transformative potential of seemingly small acts, such as name choices. It also contributes to socio-onomastics by highlighting surname choice as a meaningful and gendered activity.

Keywords: surnames, gender, men, tradition, heterosexual couples

1. Introduction

> Prince Philip: You are my wife. Taking my, taking my name is the law.
> Queen Elizabeth: It's the custom, not the law.

Line Førre Grønstad (University of Bergen). Tradition and gender – Norwegian men's surnames.

NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.15577

> Prince Philip: A custom practiced so universally that it might as well be the law. You can't do that. Am I to be the only man in the country whose wife and children don't take his name? […] What kind of marriage is this? What kind of family? You have taken my career from me, you have taken my home, and my name? I thought we were in this together.

The British television programme, *The Crown,* portrays the life of the British royal family. The above conversation takes place in the third episode of the first series aired on 4 November 2016. In the early 1950s, Elizabeth, the newly crowned monarch of the United Kingdom, faced pressure, both from her husband and from the government, in matters such as where to live and what to call the family. In *The Crown*, and in real life, Queen Elizabeth had the superior position as head of the nation. Yet she was also a wife, hence in a subordinate position in the nuclear family she created together with Prince Philip.

The quote illustrates how closely connected customs and laws can be, and how individuals may relate to them. Norms become more visible in situations where gender and action do not align and examples of such situations include when a woman becomes the head of the United Kingdom in the mid-1900s or Norwegian men change their surname in the 2010s. Until recently, little attention has been given to men's naming choices as gendered, as it is most often women's choice to keep, change or combine surnames in marriage that has faced the greatest interest (examples of this focus includes Noack & Wiik 2008; Omura 2019; Fitzgibbons Shafer 2017; Hoffnung & Williams 2016; MacEacheron 2016; Robnett et al. 2016; Keels & Powers 2013). In sum, the impression is that women must offer an explanation regardless of surname choice. Men's surname keeping has resulted in few questions, even though it is the seemingly neutrality of men's keeping combined with the idea of the nuclear family as surname sharers that make women's choice making necessary. Women must in many cases choose between keeping their birthname or sharing surnames with their children and husband. In this article I aim to shift the focus from women to men to shed light on how men perceive their own surname keeping as well as surname changing.

Norway has been declared one of the most gender equal countries in the world (World Economic Forum 2022). Still, men in Norway as a group have higher wages (Penner et al. 2022) and they work longer hours (Statistics Norway 2022a), spend less time on household chores (Statistics Norway 2012) and have lower rates of sick leave than Norwegian women (Statistics Norway 2022b). In addition, and more specifically to the point here, men in Norway take their partner's surname to a much lesser extent than women. A survey from 2018 showed that almost half of the women who married took their partner's surname, while less than 5 per cent of the men changed their surname (Grønstad 2020:106).[1] And while the number of women keeping their surname increased from the 20 per cent in a 2003-survey, the number of men changing surnames stayed almost the same during the same period (Noack and Wiik 2005). Even though the majority (52 per cent of the men and 68 per cent of the women) preferred to use both the mother's and the father's surnames for the children, most preferred that the child had its father's name as the main surname (Grønstad 2020:109).

The preference for using the man's surname for all the members of the nuclear family and for the family line in a Norwegian (as well as a British) context can be termed an institution of patronymy. Historically, this use of the man's surname is a rather recent practice. The custom among most Norwegians was to have a personal name only, with the first name of their father as a last name (see for example Utne 2001). In addition, the name of the place where they lived could be added, more like an address (Utne 2003). Hence, even today, most Norwegians have surnames signifying either the first name of a man from their family living in the late 1800s (i.e. Rasmussen from Rasmus, Størksen from Størk) or the name of the place or farm where a relative lived in the early 1900s (i.e. Gjerde, Fjørtoft, Rødstøl).

Only from 1923, when the first Norwegian name law came into force, were wives and children required to use the surname of the husband and the father respectively (see Lundh 1924 for a commented

[1] In the Norwegian numbers, the gender of the partner has not been asked for, and they may also include members of married same-sex couples as same-sex marriage became legal in Norway in 2009.

version of the law). The wife was allowed to keep her surname from birth as a second first name, later termed a *middle name*. A middle name is a name of the surname type that is placed before the main surname (Utne 1999). In Norway, the custom of patronymy had been introduced among the upper classes in the late 1700s and had become the norm among the upper classes and in the urban areas by the late 1800s (Nedrelid 2002; Utne 2002). In some parts of the United Kingdom, this custom stems from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (S. Wilson 1998). Hence, in the 1950s, Prince Philip had a long tradition to lean on, as did the internationally oriented upper classes in Norway some decades earlier.

During the decades following 1923, patronymy became more broadly institutionalized among Norwegians. The patronymic institution continually recreates the heteronormative family with the man as a surname-keeper, his wife who takes his surname and his children who continues his surname. Even as the custom slowly changes, making it more common for women to keep their surnames, and even giving their surnames to their offspring, men rarely change their surnames (Grønstad 2020:105–109). During the 1940s, the 1960s and the 1970s, the law was changed in favour of increasing women's possibilities for keeping their birthnames (Fisknes, Løkkeberg & Stabel 1976; Nerdrum 1971; Austbø 1986). But it was not until 1979, that men could take their wife's surname without needing special legal permission. Of the three – men's surname keeping, women's surname changing and children's use of the father's surname – men's surname keeping shows the greatest consistency (Grønstad 2020:112). This is still the case, also in most other countries with a similar naming custom (Fitzgibbons Shafer and Christensen 2018:9; Slade 2015:337; Johansen quoted in Brylla 2009:94).

Naming practices vary around the world. In most cultures where individuals carry more than their given names, the choice of surname is highly gendered. In most of the Scandinavian countries, the Anglo-speaking countries, large parts of Europe and Japan, men keep their surnames, women tend to change upon marriage and children take surnames from their father (MacEacheron 2016; Fitzgibbons

Shafer & Christensen 2018; Kyoko 2018; Castrén 2019; Noordewier et al. 2010). Even where women tend to keep their surnames in marriage, such as Spain and Portugal, China and the Arab speaking countries, children are usually given their father's name as their main surname. If given names from both parents, these usually originate from the grandfathers, not the grandmothers (Utne 2000; Valetas 2001; Qi 2018; Pietsch 2022). Hence, the women's surnames are lost, if not in the first generation, then in the next.

In a Norwegian context, I aim to investigate the following questions: How do norms of gendered naming emerge in men's stories about their surnames and surname-choices? How do they relate their actions to these norms?

2. Material and method

The material I use to answer these questions consists of responses to two qualitative questionnaires. A qualitative questionnaire is a list of open questions on a certain topic, and is a method used within ethnology and folkloristics for documenting everyday life from the early 1900s and onwards (Skott 2008; Grønstad 2013; Lilja 1996). The first of the two was sent out by Norwegian Ethnological Research (NEG) in 2014.[2] It was aimed at a general audience who could read Norwegian, and asked for accounts of surname choices, experiences, and reactions. It was sent to the regular respondents of NEG, and spread through social media. The questionnaire allowed for a single narrative from the respondents, making both long and short responses possible and encouraged. I use the 101 responses received from those who identified as men, out of the total of around 450 responses. The difference in number between men and women questionnaire respondents may be part of a larger pattern of more women than men responding

[2] The questionnaire can be found here: https://dms08.dimu.org/file/032wazLzTo37 (accessed 5 July 2022). NEG is a tradition archive who has documented everyday life mainly through qualitative questionnaires since 1946, located at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History. For more information about NEG, see: https://norskfolkemuseum.no/en/neg (accessed 5 July 2022).

to qualitative questionnaires, something I experienced while being part of the NEG-team (Grønstad 2013). It could also be argued that surname choice in marriage is a topic more salient for women than men. With very few exceptions, the men wrote from a heterosexual perspective. One transman wrote about how surnames contributed to his transition process, and I expand on his response and the possibilities surname choice offers for the formation and confirmation of self elsewhere (Grønstad 2020:231), Of the men, 99 can be termed *keepers*, including the transman, as they all kept their surnames in relationships, or took their own surnames for granted in their accounts. Two can be termed *changers*, as they took their woman partner's surname or combined their surnames.

The respondents in the NEG questionnaires are generally asked to avoid providing their own names or the name of others due to privacy and data protection, and researchers use the responses under the condition that personal information about the respondents is not included in this work. Hence, I do not refer to the respondents by name. These men were born between 1924 and 1993, with the majority having been born in the 1940s and the 1950s. They came from most counties in Norway, from both rural and urban areas, and had academic as well as manual labour occupations.

I distributed the second questionnaire in 2016 and it was aimed at men from a majority Norwegian background who had changed their surname in heterosexual relationships. They were recruited through social media and local newspapers. The questions were similar to those in the first questionnaire, tailored especially to men with women as partners. In addition, I asked about personal information such as their original and new full names, as well as the year of their surname change and years when they had children. This questionnaire received 60 responses. These men also came from both rural and urban areas from all over Norway and had a variety of occupations. They were born between 1951 and 1991 and were younger on average than the men who responded to the first questionnaire. The majority were born in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. American research has shown that younger men took their wife's surname to greater extent than

older men, suggesting that shifts in possible choices may be related to changing attitudes across generations (Fitzgibbons Shafer & Christensen 2018:15). A Norwegian study of surname choices in marriage in Oslo in the 1990s (Fjellhaug 1998:52) also found that men who took their wife's surname were younger than those that did not.

In addition, I have interviewed three men. One was interviewed before the questionnaire was sent out, and two were chosen based on the questionnaire responses to obtain additional information on certain aspects of their stories.

I conducted several close readings of the written and oral accounts from the men in order to identify patterns and themes, looking at the different accounts in relation to each other as well as to previous research on surnames and surname choices. My analysis has been guided by the theoretical framework of 'doing gender', as developed by sociologists Candace West, Don H Zimmerman and Sarah Fenstermaker (West & Zimmerman 1987; West & Fenstermaker 1995; West & Zimmerman 2009). The practices where gender is done, happen routinely in everyday interaction with others (West & Zimmerman 1987:126). Certain forms of expression are taken to be results of a womanly or a manly nature, even though they occur as results of social situations. This means that they are both the result of, and the rationale for, different social situations and happenings. By exploring how gender is done, it is possible to discuss how differences between gendered categories are produced (West & Fenstermaker 1995:9; West & Zimmerman 1987:126).

Despite the close connection between gender equality and naming practices, the use of surnames in relationships has received little attention in discussions on gender equality in Norway (Melby et al. 2006 is one exception, with their focus on marriage and family in the decades before and after the turn of the 20th century). In works aimed at providing overviews over practices and laws where men and women as groups have been treated differently, naming laws are hardly mentioned (examples are Hagemann et al. 2020; Danielsen, Larsen & Owesen 2015). While topics such as the right to vote, work and provide care are important, practical needs such as the every-

day organization of children's care and household chores may have resulted in some of the changes towards greater gender equality. Hence, as gender researchers Laura T. Hamilton, Claudia Geist and Brian Powell argue, surname practices may to a greater extent reflect ideas of gender and the organization of gender hierarchies as they have few practical consequences for the individual (Hamilton, Geist & Powell 2011). The institution of patronymy may be more difficult to break with if the costs of following it are experienced as smaller and the benefits higher than the costs and benefits of breaking with it.

I base my work on Hamilton, Geist and Powell's argument that changes in naming practices say something about changes in gender equality. In addition, I lean on political scientist and gender theorist Anne Phillips' argument: 'When outcomes are "different" (read unequal), the better explanation is that the opportunities were themselves unequal' (Phillips 2004:6, her paranthesis). When men and women's surname choices differ to such a great degree, I take it as an indication that men and women make their choices under different circumstances. When men change surnames, the tensions that follow may illuminate gender inequality and highlight power relations.

I organize this article into five topics. In the first, 'the neutrality of surname keeping', accounts from men who have kept their birthname make it clear that for many respondents, men are supposed to retain their surnames. Many of these men belong to the older generations. The second topic, 'a rise of reflexivity', deals with how surname keeping and surname changing has become a topic of discussion for some men; they are often younger. Here, the institution of patronymy is questioned. One reason for such reflection, is the growth of strength in the norm of gender equality, as I discuss as the third topic, 'men's choices as feminist'. Some of the men who made changes to their surname did so because, as described as the fourth topic, they had certain 'understandings of a past', where naming practices were not patronymic, arguing that present day traditions of patronymy were both recent and unfavourable for women. The fifth and final heading, 'modernizing tradition', includes accounts from men who took the act of surname sharing to be tradition, not the preference of the hus-

band's surname. These men reframed surname choice traditions and included their own change of surname as part of the traditions.

3. The neutrality of surname keeping

I begin my analysis of the responses with stories where men's keeping is taken for granted. Some of the men in the material spoke of men's surname keeping and women's surname changing as something that just happened by itself, as it actually did, when many of them married until 1979. These men spoke of their actions as tradition, not law. Perhaps few reflected on the law. However, it is probable that the law of the latter half of the twentieth century reflected the common understanding of surname giving and gender hierarchy.

Upholding the institution required gendered actions, and one respondent wrote: 'I am a man, and for me (76 years) it was and is natural to continue to use the surname that my father had' (born 1937, his parenthesis). Another, younger, man wrote: 'As a Man [sic] I have, true to tradition, kept my family name' (born 1963). As men, they took the use of their surnames for granted. American work on name choices has also shown that men used their gender as an argument for keeping their birth name (Atkinson 1987:37; Robnett and Leaper 2013:108–110). Gender researcher Rebekah Wilson's British survey found that the surname topic was experienced as irrelevant for many men with the argument that they were men (R. Wilson 2009:140). Other research from countries with a patronymic naming practice shows that men elsewhere also take the use of their surnames in the families for granted (Hagström 1999:188; Jones et al. 2017:315). Similar findings in a Swedish study made the name researcher Sonja Entzenberg conclude that the lack of reflection among men contributed to making men's surnames the natural choice for the nuclear families (Entzenberg 2004:39).

These men closely associate their surnames with their birth families, mainly to their father's side. An image of the past guides the future, and certain actions are valued above others. Sometimes this goes without saying, and sometimes patronymic practices are vocal-

ized as tradition. Even the idea of traditions more generally, could strengthen a sense of meaning in a surname. One respondent grew up in a 'family line with strong traditions' (born 1954). Traditions strengthen certain connections above others, as this family line followed the previous users of the surname and excluded other possible family lines. The respondent's wife changed from a rather common surname, 'for the reason that it was not a surname that was worth keeping – and perhaps she was polite toward me. Perhaps she was somewhat shaped by tradition, like me' (born 1954). The surname was closely tied to his identity as it connected him with the past and to a certain family through the 'strong traditions' that followed the surname.

The respondent used the term tradition in two ways. Naming choices had to do with his *surname* and her *change*. Both are needed to keep up with the order of the patronymic naming institution, and both ensure continuity. By splitting naming into element and action using folklorist Anne Eriksen's analysis of the concept of tradition (Eriksen 1994), the gendered nature of the norm was less visible. The respondent did not elaborate on what activities these traditions included, but the use of the word connotes authority through stability and continuity. For the wife, tradition meant changing surnames, strengthened by the argument that her birth name was rather common.

Changing surnames for men could be likened to disavowing the other surname bearers (Fowler & Fuehrer 1997:319; Grønstad 2015:272). Breaking with the social order could cause humorous responses aimed at managing the situation for the surname changer, of his family, friends, and colleagues that I have described elsewhere (Grønstad 2021). It may also cause frustration. This came up in the accounts of some of the men when they spoke of naming. One respondent who kept his own surname, declared: 'Today it is rather messy with naming in the same family. I do not understand why it should be made to be so confusing. Who benefits from that??' (born 1943). By using two question marks, he implies that nobody benefits from this, and that families where the members do not share the same surname cause problems and disorder. He does not define what kind

of problems these could be. This illustrate an overall understanding that disorder will happen if certain norms are not followed.

In the following example, one man who described how his wife took his surname in marriage without question, continued his account with describing his feelings about his own surname from birth:

> [I am] very happy that *I* did not have to change my name. That would be like giving away something of myself, losing myself somehow. Almost like an amputation. I felt proud of the name. It marked a big and good and resourceful family line. I thought little about my mother's maiden name that disappeared when she got married, and that her family was as good and resourceful as mine (born 1938).

The quote shows how his surname marked a connection with his father's family. His mother's surname belongs to 'her family', which is not 'mine'. He did not reflect on his wife's surname. The connection between him and his relatives following his father's line and not his mother's, would be brutally severed if he took another surname.

Gender may create blind spots in whose relations matter and how. Now, with hindsight, he showed reflexivity towards his mother's side of the family, but the call for action has been for him to keep his surname, and for his wife to share his. While it was also legally required at the time of marriage, this obligation was not questioned, nor mentioned by the respondent.

4. A rise of reflexivity

One of the younger surname keepers showed a very different form of reflexivity towards the use of his surname:

> I want to pass my family name on to the next generation, and I am the only one in my generation who can do that. This feels like a very patriarchal and paternalistic point of view, and that is something I am not 100 per cent comfortable with, but I really do feel that this is something I truly want to do (born 1983).

The respondent favoured norms of gender equality and knew that men's surnames often dominate. Hence his wish to use his own surname caused discomfort. Surname choices have become part of the conversation, and acting patronymically needs an explanation. Sociologist Anthony Giddens describes the changing situation like this:

> No longer can someone say in effect, "I am a man, and this is how men are", "I refuse to discuss things further" – statements that are normally carried in actions rather than stated in words. Behaviour and attitudes have to be justified when one is called upon to do so, which means that reasons have to be given; and where reasons have to be provided, differential power starts to dissolve, or alternatively power begins to become translated into authority (Giddens 1994:106).

Giddens might have been a little early when he wrote that men could no longer use their gender as argument and may be criticized for making generalizations based on limited data. After all, as mentioned, several respondents wrote that they kept their surnames because they were 'men'. But not all take this possibility for granted any more. Describing the use of the man's family name as 'patriarchal' shows that alternative understandings of men's (and women's) surname choice are available, even if they may be less common. Differential power has at least started to dissolve.

One respondent who took his wife's surname reflected on his choice when we spoke 18 months after the change. He explained how having a new surname still felt a bit awkward (born around 1980). Those feelings may connect with ideas and experiences of the surname as something that cannot easily be separated from the individual. The ethnologist Charlotte Hagström has written the following on names:

> The personal name is such an important part of the personal and cultural identity for many individuals that they cannot be separated from the name. The name identifies me and makes me who I am […] (Hagström 2006:16, my translation from Swedish).

Implicit for many of the men who keep their name is the understanding that the full name and the person are closely connected, independent from the family of origin. The given name combined with the surname are integral parts of them. The neutral choice according to patronymy is to keep the same surname throughout life. The respondent had weighed his options and found that his wish for the family to share a surname was stronger than his desire to keep the surname he had from birth.

For some of the respondents, patronymy norms were replaced by other norms of choice-making. For one respondent, it was not only the outcome but the process of the choice making that guided his actions:

> I see myself as an innovator, someone who likes to challenge established norms and traditions, especially when I see logical flaws. I am a person who seeks to make conscious choices, and I often ask the question "why". When we got engaged, some of these questions were: why should she take my surname, or why should we "change" surnames? […] It would have been easier not to have specific meanings about this, and instead to go with the flow (do what others do) but I see myself as an independent and reflexive person who is not afraid to try new roads or question existing norms (born 1983, his parenthesis).

Taking his wife's surname became a choice which showed coherence between action and his identity as a man who takes responsibility for his own choices. His description of the choice fits well with an ideal of reflexivity where critical distance to norms is important. The change of surname did not change who he was. Rather, for him, it confirmed that he had the willingness and ability to act according to his ideals also when they came with the cost, or even benefit, of standing out from the crowd.

Central to many of the respondents was what the philosopher Charles Taylor calls *authenticity* (Taylor 1998). Taylor describes authenticity as part of a subjective turn in modern culture, where choices ought to be made based on authority from within the individual, rather than tradition. Taylor describes it as a need to be true to oneself and live a life that is not based on what others do (Taylor

1998:43). Authority has shifted from tradition to the individual subject, guided by choices of norms to follow, and ideas of what society should be like.

5. Men's choice as feminists

Personal choices where 'the question of identity' are central cannot necessarily be sufficiently answered by reciting 'given name and genealogy,' according to Taylor (1989:27). His use of examples highlights the importance that may be attached to names and meaning. For Taylor, authenticity is not about following one's own needs but about making judgements between needs. Inner authenticity needs to relate to something outside oneself.

One of the respondents described the process of changing his surname as a journey where, in the beginning, he paid most attention to his own needs. In the end, he had a much broader perspective on the costs and benefits of his choice. Early in their relationship, he and his wife discussed which surname(s) they wanted to use together. They ended up choosing her surname as their common middle name and his as their common surname. This felt like a relief to him as his surname became the main surname. It was easier to explain this to family, friends, and colleagues. It also required fewer practical changes in his everyday life. For example, his work email stayed the same. However, when he fathered his first daughter, his wife mentioned the topic of surnames again. She argued that women's surnames often become middle names. Middle names are frequently used by Norwegians but are formally in the position of an additional first name. Many are shortened to an initial or are left out of everyday use. At this point, his focus shifted from his own needs and conveniences to how he wanted society to be for his daughter. He and his wife then decided to switch the positions of their two original surnames, making her surname the main name. For the respondent, this decision was a 'feminist project' for both of them. It was:

> a form of silent but visible rebellion against set structures symbolizing so much historically and socio-culturally, both at the family level and society level […]. We have no illusions that our choices mean much to others, but it gives me a good feeling that my daughters share the surname of their mother and mother's mother, and that this signifies to them that the women in our family (and hence in our society) are at least as important as the men while at the same time not taking this for granted (born 1975).

He, like some of the other respondents, argues that women are equally important as men. As a father, he wanted to improve the conditions for his daughters (he went on to have more children). Gender should not decide how the family structured themselves, at least not with names.

In this couple, the wife mentioned the surname choice both times. Other respondents as well became aware of the gendered nature of choosing names after women raised the topic. When it was salient for both men and women, they could make surname choices on more equal and gender-conscious grounds. Understandings of gender equality have become part of our cultural understanding and may affect us even if we do not think about it. Surname change is no longer something that Norwegian women do, rather it has become something that Norwegian women choose (Grønstad 2015). When some men begin to think about their surnames as well, the opportunity arises for men to also be changers. The responsibility of choosing surnames can be shared by men and women, and the roles of surnames in doing gender may fade away (Pilcher 2017). Following Giddens, differential power may also fade away (Giddens 1994:106). When feminist thoughts have become commonplace in a Norwegian reality, the opportunities to act according to feminist values increase. Hence, what is considered normal has shifted.

6. Understandings of a past

The difference in conditions between men and women in society guided, as shown, some men's choice of surnames for the nuclear

family. Acting rationally and authentically meant taking more arguments into account. One argument addressed how the past should be understood. One respondent took his wife's surname nearly 40 years ago in the early 1980s. He was:

> amazed that more women did not see the paradox of after (usually) several years of cohabitation and often children, they choose to be given as a package from one man to another when they get married. As with surname choice, it is up to you who you walk down the aisle with, but "it's so nice when daddy can do it." (The old Norwegian custom was after all that the couple walked up the aisle together; being followed by the father is actually recent and urban and comes from the bourgeois class in the late 1800s.) Do people not see the pattern? Or does it not matter? (born 1959, his parenthesis).

The respondent argues that surname change upon marriage, as today's wedding customs, gives the impression of being old, but that the 'Norwegian custom' was both older and more gender-equal. This way, today's practices could be separated from something more original, hence more legitimate, and with Norwegian roots. The past may be used as a resource to challenge present practices. Ideas of the present and ideals of the future may guide the interpretations of past practices and the authority given to them.

This kind of argument can be recognized from the debates around the name law. In 1922, the Norwegian biologist and women's rights activist Thekla Resvoll argued that in the 18th and 19th centuries, women of the Norwegian upper classes kept their surnames from birth, and that farmer's wives at the time often kept their surnames (Resvoll [1922] 1923). In addition, in 1960, a working group preparing for the new and revised name law that came in 1964, used similar arguments in favour of increasing a woman's right to keep her surname from birth: 'About the meaning of tradition, it can be said that all reforms aiming towards gender equality have in part represented strong changes in traditions. The tradition in question here is neither old nor without exceptions' (Gaarder et al. 1960:13, my translation). Both during the 1920s and during the easing of the law to make it eas-

ier to use women's surnames for women and children in the 1960s, the authority of the patronymic tradition was questioned based on alternative understandings of the past.

This was also the case in the arguments of gender equality in connection with laws in other countries. When the Finnish name law became gender-neutral in the early 1980s, it was described as turning the clock backwards 50 years, to a more gender equal past (Blomqvist 1987:153). In Sweden, the argument that husband and wife should share the husband's surname was described as a 50-year (1916–1963) of brackets in the history of Swedish surname customs (Andersson 1984:111). Further abroad, the Japanese naming system where men and women have been required to choose either his or her surname, and where 96 per cent chooses the man's, has been described as 'not a *traditional* system at all' (Kyoko 2018:80, cursive in original).

The point here, is not the age of the different practices, but that older practices or customs exist that may be interpreted as more authentic. This way of understanding traditions aligns with historians Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's ideologically founded critique of 'invented traditions' which:

> is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983:1).

Hobsbawm and Ranger show how various phenomena belonging to a tradition were made or revised in the 1800s to fit certain political needs. The past used as reference is not just any past, but a carefully selected past. These traditions could then work to legitimize certain forms of power. In the case of naming, both the upper classes and men as a group benefited when patronymic customs became law.

For some of those arguing in favour of gender equality, the careful selection of a past that breaks with patronymic wedding practices may create links with the past of a more favourable flavour.

7. Modernizing tradition

Several respondents took their wife's surname in defiance of the favouring of men's surnames. They wanted to help change patriarchal structures and create a more gender equal society and sacrificed their own surnames to do so. Their sacrifices did not go unnoticed. One surname changer described how some of his friends commented on his surname change:

> [Men] make jokes about it because it's a woman thing. Traditional in the wrong way. At the same time, it is modern (born 1974).

The respondent did what was common – he shared the surname with his nuclear family, but with a twist – he was the changer, not his wife. He reflected on the tradition of patronymy and explained that he was traditional to some extent. After all, sharing a surname is tradition, and one of the two would have to change in order to fulfil the tradition, so why not him, the man, he asked rhetorically.

The respondent redefined the naming tradition to focus on surname sharing rather than surname continuity. By focusing on 'why not the man?', he shifts the focus of tradition from women's change of surnames to the sharing of surnames in the nuclear family. He positioned himself in relation to patronymy by adapting the practices within the patronymic tradition to norms of gender equality. This shift in focus illustrates how traditions may be understood as encompassing both change and stability. Tradition was important to him, as he described himself as 'quite traditional, yes, I believe it has to do with that'. However, he also agreed that his surname change could be understood as a break with tradition because 'it is the opposite' without detailing what it is the opposite of (born 1974). He reflected on the gendered nature of naming, and in addition to norms of patronymy, i.e. tradition, he had access to norms of gender equality. Patronymy as an institution is renegotiated here, still making its mark, and it was still necessary to take it into account and to position himself in relation to it.

The respondent's account of his own choices and how they were simultaneously traditional and untraditional aligns with the argument

of folklorists Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin that traditions are created anew in the present as symbolic constructions (Handler & Linnekin 1984). Traditions are constantly interpreted, and both change, and continuity are important. Even just talking about traditions or viewing certain actions as traditional means that they are being interpreted in the present: 'To do something because it is traditional is already to reinterpret, and hence to change it' (Handler & Linnekin 1984:281). Traditions are constantly shifting, even when attempts are made to keep them unchanged.

Rather than acting in accordance with or dismissing customs, some men cherished the idea of continuity across time but dismissed arguments and customs that broke with norms of gender equality. These respondents did not take the patronymic naming tradition for granted. They deconstructed and reconstructed the different elements of practices from the patronymic customs. They did not break with all previous customs but combined them in ways appropriate for their views and families. They chose surnames in certain ways, not because of tradition but because tradition and ideals of gender equality allowed for them to name their families in accordance with authenticity and connection to something other than themselves, based among others, on ideas of continuity with a past.

8. Concluding remarks

While many social elements in Norway have changed drastically in accordance with a growth in gender equality from the 1970s, naming practices show more continuity. They mirror social structures and family ideals. The choice of surnames signals subordination and power. Hence, exploring men's surname choices challenges the story of gender equality in Norway, following Hamilton et al.'s (2011) argument that symbolic actions such as surname choices give additional insight into gender hierarchies.

When men are expected to keep their surname from birth and give it to their wife and children, women have less of a choice. Surname continuity has been related to men, and surname change to women,

with continuity accorded the higher status. This part of the patronymic custom was important for some men who kept their surnames from birth. For them, their original names symbolized their individuality as men, which made the change of surnames challenging. Keeping their names was part of *doing gender* as men, following West and Zimmerman (1987). By affording women the right, or even obligation to change their own surnames, men were also doing *difference*, in the sense of West and Fenstermaker (1995). They make connections between actions specific to certain cultural, temporal, and geographical contexts, and individuals based on gender.

Despite changing surnames throughout life having been common a century ago for both men and women, it makes more sense today for women to keep their surnames throughout life than it is for men to change their surname. But as the younger men, born in the 1970s and 1980s, more often reflect on their naming practices than the older men, these traditions continue to shift in a more gender equal direction.

Certain rationality and the need to make independent choices played a part in a different set of norms to which some of the men related. This could open for surname changes for them, highlighting the coherence between values and choice-making processes. Some men took responsibility as members of the category of men and even though they had not themselves actively oppressed women (at least to their knowledge), they took one for the team, so to speak. They understood gender equality as a norm in a society where their actions mattered, at least a little bit.

This research has shown the great variety in action and attitude towards surname choice among Norwegian men in relationships with women. Even though most men still seem to take their surnames for granted, younger men are more willing to reflect on their name choices, hence a shift across generations can be seen. Both notions of tradition and notions of gender equality are important in choice making. The choices made depend on the weight given to tradition and gender equality respectively in relation to ideas of identity and self, and of family.

 NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.15577

The aim of this research has been to contribute to a greater understanding of choice-making among people in privileged majority positions. Several questions remain to be researched. One would be to investigate how the couples begin their conversations about surname choices, and who first raises the topic. Further, who are the men who keep their surnames, and who changes their surnames, in terms of sociological categories of education, work and size of hometown? What is the relationship between the men who make changes to their surname, the surname choices of their parents, and the surname choices of their wife's parents? Further research on experiences and perspectives of Norwegian women is needed, as well as from individuals who do not conform to gender norms, those from a minority group background such as the Sámi, as well as individuals with immigration backgrounds. Also, choice making in non-heteronormative families is still an under-researched area, not the least in the Norwegian context.

Present day surname customs are both temporally and geographically situated. The narrative of surname use in couples may be understood as linear, moving from patronymy to gender equality. This narrative does not necessarily consider that both the past and the present are rather disorganized. The practices of patronymy were included in the law in 1923 to remove the perceived disorganization of naming practices at the time. That men's surnames in couples are still preferred in the 2010s, challenges idea of contemporary Norway as gender equal. Changes across the generations in the material suggest a certain movement toward gender equality in surname practices. However, we are not quite there, yet.

Epilogue

In 1960, Queen Elizabeth declared that the members of subsequent generations requiring a surname was to be Mountbatten-Windsor (Agnew 1960). Clearly, the question of surnames in the family was a topic even for a head of state, and Prince Philip was able to name his family after all, albeit together with the family name of his wife.

References

Agnew, W.G. 1960. *Supplement to the London Gazette of Friday 5th February 1960*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Andersson, Thorsten. 1984. Jämställdhetsprincipen i 1982 års svenska personnamnslag. [The principle of gender equality in the 1982 Swedish name law]. *Studia Anthroponymica Scandinavica* 2. 107–121.

Atkinson, Donna. 1987. Names and titles: Maiden name retention and the use of Ms. *Women and Language* 10(2). 56–83.

Austbø, Anne Hillestad. 1986. *Navneloven. Kommentarutgave. Lov 29. mai 1964 nr. 1 om personnamn*. [The name law with comments. The 29. May 1964 law on personal names]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Blomqvist, Marianne. 1987. Den gamla och den eventuellt nya släktnamnlagen och deras konsekvenser i Finland. [The old and the possible new family name law and their consequences in Finland]. In Schmidt, Tom (ed.), *Nyere nordisk personnavnskikk*, 151–153. Uppsala: Norna-förlaget.

Brylla, Eva. 2009. *Andersson, Pettersson, Lundström och…Beachman: Om nordiska personnamn i sin europeiska omgivning.* [About Nordic personal names in the European context] Uppsala: Bombus.

Castrén, Anna-Maija. 2019. Becoming "us": Marital name, gender, and agentic work in transition to marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81. 248–263.

Danielsen, Hilde, Larsen, Eirinn & Owesen, Ingeborg Winderen. 2015. *Norsk likestillingshistorie*. [Norwegian history of gender equality] Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Entzenberg, Sonja. 2004. Gemensamt efternamn eller var sitt? En studie över gifta Uppsalapars efternamnsval. [Sharing last names or keeping? A study of last name choices among married couples in Uppsala]. In Strandberg, Svante (ed.) *Namn. Hyllningsskrift til Eva Brylla den 1 mars 2004*, 35–45. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet.

Entzenberg, Sonja. 2006. *"Det får ju vara någon ordning på torpet!" Svenska personnamnsregler i ett historiskt perspektiv.* [Swedish personal name laws in a historical perspective]. (Småskrifter 2) Uppsala: Språk- och folkminnesinstitutet.

Eriksen, Anne. 1994. "Like before, just different". Modern popular understanding of the concept of tradition. *Arv. Nordic yearbook of folklore* 50. 9–23.

Fisknes, Ole Herman, Løkkeberg, Oddvar & Stabel, Ingse. 1976. *Utredning fra arbeidsgruppen til å vurdere endringer i navneloven*. [Exposition from the working group about changing the name law] Oslo: Justisdepartementet [Department of Justice].

Fitzgibbons Shafer, Emily. 2017. Hillary Rodham versus Hillary Clinton: Consequences of surname choice in marriage. *Gender Issues* 34(4). 316–332. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-016-9182-5.

Fitzgibbons Shafer, Emily, & MacKenzie A. Christensen. 2018. Flipping the (surname) script: Men's nontraditional surname choice at marriage. *Journal of Family Issues* 39(11). 3055–3074. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18770218.

Fjellhaug, Marit. 1998. *Hans eller hennes? Valg av slektsnavn ved giftermål*. [His or her? Choosing surnames in marriage] Oslo: University in Oslo. (Master dissertation)

Fowler, Rebekah Ileanne, & Fuehrer, Ann. 1997. Women's marital names: An interpretive study of name retainers' consept of marriage. *Feminism & Psychology* 7(3). 315–320.

Gaarder, Karsten, Sverdrup-Thygeson, Gustav, Nilsen, Gerd, Ramndal, Lars & Selmer, Elisabeth Schweigaard. 1960. Utkast til lov om personnavn: innstilling. [A draft for a law on personal names] *Innstillinger og betenkninger fra kongelige og parlamentariske kommisjoner, departementale komitéer m.m.* 1960. Oslo: Justis- og politidepartementet.

Giddens, Anthony. 1994. Living in a post-traditional society. In Beck, Ulrich, Giddens, Anthony & Lash, Scott (eds.), *Reflexive modernization. Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*, 56–109. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Grønstad, Line. 2013. Norsk Etnologisk Gransking. In Rogan, Bjarne & Eriksen, Anne (eds.), *Etnologi og folkloristikk* [Norwegian Ethnological Research]. Oslo: Novus, 2013.

Grønstad, Line. 2015. Val av etternamn i 2014. [Choice of surname in 2014]. *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforsking* 39(3–4). 263–282. https://www.idunn.no/tfk/2015/03-04/val_av_etternamn_i_2014.

Grønstad, Line. 2020. *Fellesskap og individualitet. Kjønna etternamnsval blant norske menn i heterofile parforhold.* [Gendered surname choices among Norwegian men in heterosexual relationships]. Bergen: University in Bergen. (Doctoral dissertation) https://bora.uib.no/bora-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2711989/archive.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Grønstad, Line. 2021. The Tough Tøffel. Managing Manliness and Unmanliness for Norwegian Men Who Have Taken their Wife's Surname. *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 51. 119–135.

Hagemann, Gro, Melby, Kari, Roll-Hansen, Hege, Sandvik, Hilde & Øye, Ingvild. 2020. (eds.), *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie.* [With a gender perspective on Norwegian history] Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk.

Hagström, Charlotte. 1999. *Man blir pappa. Föräldraskap och maskulinitet i förändring.* [One becomes a dad. Parenting and masculinity in change]. Lund: Nordic academic press.

Hagström, Charlotte. 2006. *Man är vad man heter: Namn och identitet*. [You are your name: Name and identity]. Stockholm: Carlssons.

Hamilton, Laura, Geist, Claudia & Powell, Brian. 2011. Marital name change as a window into gender attitudes. *Gender & Society* 25(2). 145–175.

Handler, Richard, & Linnekin, Jocelyn. 1984. Tradition, genuine or spurious. *Journal of American Folklore* 97(385). 273–290. https://doi.org/10.2307/540610.

Hobsbawm, Eric. J., & Ranger, Terence. 1983. *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hoffnung, Michele, & Williams, Michelle A. 2016. When Mr. Right becomes Mr. Wrong: Women's postdivorce name choice. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 57(1). 12–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2015.1113814.

Jones, Lucy, Mills, Sara, Paterson, Laura L., Turner, Georgina & Coffey-Glover, Laura. 2017. Identity and naming practices in British marriage and civil partnerships. *Gender & Language* 11(3). 309–335. https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.27916.

Keels, Megan M, & Powers, Rebecca S. 2013. Marital name changing: Delving deeper into women's reasons. *Advances In Applied Sociology* 3(7). 301–306. https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2013.37038.

Kyoko, Ishida. 2018. Why does surname matter? Past, present, and future prospects of family law from a gender perspective in Japan. *Journal of Korean Law* 18(1). 59–81.

Lilja, Agneta. 1996. *Föreställningen om den ideala uppteckningen: En studie av idé och praktik vid traditionssamlande arkiv – ett exempel från Uppsala 1914–1945.* [The idea of the ideal response: A study of ideas and practices at the tradition archive in Uppsala 1914–1945] Uppsala: Dialekt- och folkminnesarkivet. (Doctoral dissertation)

Lundh, Henrik. 1924. *Navneloven av 9 februar 1923*. [The name law of 9. February 1923]. Kristiania: Aschehoug.

MacEacheron, Melanie. 2016. North American women's marital surname change: Practices, law, and patrilineal descent reckoning. *Evolutionary Psychological Science* 2(2). 149–161. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40806-016-0045-9.

Melby, Kari, Pylkkänen, Anu, Rosenbeck, Bente & Wetterberg, Chistina Carlsson. 2006. *Inte ett ord om kärlek: Äktenskap och politik i Norden ca. 1850–1930*. [Marriage and politics in the Nordic countries ca. 1850–1930] Göteborg: Makadam förlag.

Nedrelid, Gudlaug. 2002. Framvoksteren av norske slektsnamn. [The growth of Norwegian surnames]. I Sprauten, Knut (red.), *Å kallast med sitt rette namn: person- og stadnamn i lokalhistoria*, 115–137. Oslo: Norsk lokalhistorisk institutt.

Nerdrum, Gunnar. 1971. *Navneloven: lov om personnamn av 29. mai 1964 nr. 1 med kommentarer*. [The name law: Law on personal names from 29. May 1964 nr. 1 with comments]. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget.

Noack, Turid, & Wiik, Kenneth Aarskaug. 2005. Navnevalg ved giftermål. Likestillingens siste skanse? [Name choice in marriage. Gender equality entrenchment?]. *Samfunnsspeilet* (5). http://www.ssb.no/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/likestillingens-siste-skanse.

Noack, Turid, & Wiik, Kenneth Aarskaug. 2008. Women's choice of surname upon marriage in Norway. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70(2): 507–518. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40056290.

Noordewier, Marret K., van Horen, Femke, Ruys, Kirsten I. & Stapel, Diederik A. 2010. What's in a name? 361.708 Euros: The effects of marital name change. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 32(1). 17–25.

Omura, Makiko. 2019. Why can't I keep my surname? The fairness and welfare of the Japanese legal system. *Feminist Economics* 25(3). 171–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2019.1588467.

Penner, Andrew M., Petersen, Trond, Hermansen, Are Skeie, Rainey, Anthony, Boza, István, Elvira, Marta M., Godechot, Olivier, Hällsten, Martin, Henriksen, Lasse Folke, Hou, Feng, Mrčela, Aleksandra Kanjuo, King, Joe, Kodama, Naomi, Kristal, Tali, Křížková, Alena, Lippényi, Zoltán, Melzer, Silvia Maja, Mun, Eunmi, Apascaritei, Paula, Avent-Holt, Dustin, Bandelj, Nina, Hajdu, Gergely, Jung, Jiwook, Poje, Andreja, Sabanci, Halil, Safi, Mirna, Soener, Matthew, Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald & Tufail, Zaibu. 2022. Within-job gender pay inequality in 15 countries. *Nature Human Behaviour*. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01470-z.

Phillips, Anne. 2004. Defending equality of outcome. *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12(1). 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2004.00188.x.

Pietsch, Bryan. 2022. Italian babies should carry both parents' family names, top court rules. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/28/italy-surname-children-mother-father-court/.

Pilcher, Jane. 2017. Names and "doing gender": How forenames and surnames contribute to gender identities, difference, and inequalities. *Sex Roles* 77(11). 812–822. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0805-4.

Qi, Xiaoying. 2018. Neo-traditional child surnaming in contemporary China: Women's rights as veiled patriarchy. *Sociology* 52(5). 1001–1016. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516688613.

Resvoll, Thekla. 1923. Navneloven. Skrivelse til Stortingets justiskomité. [The name law. Letter to the Commettee of justice at the Storting]. *Nylænde*: 40–42.

Robnett, Rachael D., & Leaper, Campbell. 2013. "Girls don't propose! Ew." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 28(1). 96–121. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558412447871.

Robnett, Rachael D., Underwood, Carrie R., Nelson, Paul A. & Anderson, Kristin J. 2016. "She might be afraid of commitment": Perceptions of women who retain their surname after marriage. *Sex Roles* 75(9). 500–513. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0634-x.

Skott, Fredrik. 2008. *Folkets minnen: traditionsinsamling i idé och praktik 1919–1964.* [The people's memory: Collecting tradition as idea and practice 1919–1964] Göteborg: Institutet för språk och folkminnen i samarbete med Göteborgs universitet. (Doctoral dissertation).

Slade, Michael. 2015. Who wears the pants? The difficulties men face when trying to take their spouse's surname after marriage. *Family Court Review* 53(2). 336–351. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12149.

Statistics Norway. 2012. Tidsbruksundersøkelsen. [The time use survey] *ssb.no*. Accessed 17.08.2022. https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/tids-og-mediebruk/statistikk/tidsbruksundersokelsen.

Statistics Norway. 2022a. Fakta om likestilling. [Facts about gender equality] *ssb.no.* Accessed 17.08.2022. https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/faktaside/likestilling.

Statistics Norway. 2022b. Sykefravær. [Sick leave] *ssb.no.* Accessed 17.08.2022. https://www.ssb.no/arbeid-og-lonn/arbeidsmiljo-sykefravaer-og-arbeidskonflikter/statistikk/sykefravaer.

Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1998. *Autentisitetens etikk*. Translated by Petter Nafstad. Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag.

Utne, Ivar. 1999. Praktisering av personnamnlova. Slektsnamn og mellomnamn. [Praciticing the name law. Surnames and middle names]. *Namn og nemne* 16. 31–40.

Utne, Ivar. 2000. Mellom- og etternavn i andre land. [Middle names and last names in other countries]. *Nytt om namn* 31. 24–33.

Utne, Ivar. 2001. Utviklinga av slektsnavn i Norge, med særlig vekt på sennavn. [The development of surnames in Norway, with special weight on sen-names]. *Genealogen. Medlemsblad for Norsk Slektshistorisk Forening* 2. 13–26.

Utne, Ivar. 2002. Gifte kvinners etternavn, slektsnavn og mellomnavn. [Married women's last names, surnames and middlenames]. *Genealogen. Medlemsblad for Norsk Slektshistorisk Forening* 2. 5–19.

Utne, Ivar. 2003. Etternavn danna av navn på gårdsbruk – sett i et navnebeskyttelsesperspektiv. [Last names made from farm names in a name protection perspective]. *Namn og nemne* (20/21). 95–128.

Valetas, Marie-France. 2001. The surnames of married women in the European Union. *Population & Sociétés. Bulletin Mensuel D'Information de l'institut National D'Études Démographiques* 367. 1–4.

West, Candace, & Fenstermaker, Sarah. 1995. Doing difference. *Gender & Society* 9(1): 8–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124395009001002.

West, Candace, & Zimmerman, Don H. 2009. Accounting for doing gender. *Gender & Society* 23(1). 112–122. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243208326529.

West, Candace, & Zimmerman, Don H. 1987. Doing gender. *Gender and Society* 1(2). 125–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002.

Wilson, Rebekah. 2009. Raising the curtain on survey work. In Ryan-Flood, Róisín & Gill, Rosalind (eds.), *Secrecy and silence in the research process: Feminist reflections*. 133–144. London: Routledge.

Wilson, Stephen. 1998. *The means of naming: A social and cultural history of personal naming in Western Europe*. London: Taylor and Francis Group.

World Economic Forum 2022. *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*. Geneva: World Economic Forum. http://reports.weforum.org/globalgender-gap-report-2022.

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (69–100)

‘Our family came to be with this name’: Family identity and gender roles in surname choices

Katrine Kehlet Bechsgaard

Abstract: The article focuses on surname choices among families in Denmark, seeking to add a new perspective by proposing that the choices and narratives of surnames contain information about and reflect family identity formation as well as family and gender practices. It examines individuals and couples in different family formations in accordance with the diverse family landscape of Denmark in the 2020s. The analysis shows that for some, surname choices are closely related to the idea of family, while others attach less importance to surnames. It also demonstrates that while surname choices are sometimes used for doing gender, surname choices are also part of undoing gender practices.

Keywords: personal names, surnames, socio-onomastics, family identity, gender roles, Denmark

Katrine Kehlet Bechsgaard (University of Copenhagen) ‘Our family came to be with this name’: Family identity and gender roles in surname choices.

NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.17083

1. Introduction

One of the main societal changes in the past six decades has been the change in family forms and structures, including gender norms, and the use of surnames in families in Denmark reflects this development. Just four decades ago, until 1982, Danish women automatically assumed their husband's surname. Today, Danish name law no longer distinguishes between genders, and it now allows for example unmarried couples and same-sex couples to share a surname. It is no longer a given that a woman will change her surname upon marriage, and it is also common for men to change their surnames (Statistics Denmark 2020). As is the case with other modern lifestyle choices, surname choices in families are subject to individual preferences to a much larger degree than in previous times when tradition was a more dominant factor in families and society (e.g. Giddens 1990; 1991; 1992; Beck 1992). Name choices have become a way of positioning oneself as a certain kind of couple or family and forming identity (Aldrin 2011; Bechsgaard 2015).

Denmark, like other Nordic countries, has a high degree of gender equality in families and society in general, as well as in surname diversity (Valetas 2001; Statistics Denmark 2015). Yet the connection between the rise in gender equality and surname options over the past decades in Denmark has not been studied before. This article examines the role of surnames as part of family identity formation and gender roles. The study seeks to add a new perspective to surname choices in Denmark by proposing that the choices and narratives of surnames in couples and families both contain information about and reflect family identity formation as well as family and gender practices. It examines individuals and couples representing different family forms in accordance with the diverse family landscape of Denmark in the 2020s.

The recent development in surname use in Denmark is not the norm in all Western cultures. In the United States, a study from 2010 indicated that 90 per cent of married women took their husband's surname (Gooding & Kreider 2010), and in European countries such as

Germany and France, a study from 2001 concluded that most women did the same (over 85 per cent). Fewer women did so in countries such as The Netherlands, Portugal, and Denmark (51–71 per cent) (Valetas 2001). These differences in surname practices are reflected in previous studies in which, for example, men taking the surname of a spouse has not been in focus.

First names have been used as cultural indicators in several studies across research fields (e.g. Hagström 2006; Aldrin 2011; Bechsgaard 2015; Abramitzky 2017; Knudsen 2018), some of which focus on identity formation. Surnames in families have been studied, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, and also France, most commonly with a focus on the significance of women’s marital surname changes (Johnson & Scheuble 1995; Valetas 2001; Gooding & Kreider 2010; Pilcher 2017) and negative attitudes toward married women’s surnames (Forbes et al. 2002; Murray 2013; Shafer 2017). Studies on surname choices in non-traditional families have also emerged in the United States (e.g. Patterson & Farr 2017; Underwood & Robnett 2021). In the Nordic region, a Norwegian study focused on keeping and changing surnames between 1980 and 2002 (Noack & Aaskaug Wiik 2008), and another Norwegian study has focused on men’s marital surname choices (Grønstad 2020). A Finnish study has also examined how couples negotiate marital names when first getting married (Castrén 2019). In contrast, the present study examines couples and individuals representing a variety of family forms. They were interviewed up to 15 years after first forming a family with the intention of capturing the continuing name considerations that in some cases even lead to new name choices after several years.

2. The role of surnames in Danish families

Until the revision of the Danish naming law in 1981, the official term for ‘surname’ in Danish was ‘slægtsnavn’, which can be translated to ‘family name’ with an emphasis on extended family as opposed to, for example, a nuclear family. However, since 1981 the official Danish term has been ‘efternavn’, meaning ‘last name’. Whereas the former

term referred to this type of name being shared by several members of an extended family, the current term merely describes where in the full name this type of name is situated. This change in terminology thus reflects the usage of this name type, as it has become more flexible and in some cases with an emphasis on just the closest family (as will be discussed later in this article).

Of course, the terms used in English are similar to the Danish terms: 'last name' (the term usually used in the United States, according to Cambridge Dictionary) and 'family name'. However, the term 'surname', mainly used in the United Kingdom (Cambridge Dictionary 2023) originally referred to 'an added name derived from occupation or other circumstances' (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023). The term 'surname' will be used in this article, as I estimate that this is the term most widely used in studies of this kind.

Like in English (The Brittanica Dictionary 2023), in Danish the surname comes after the first name(s) (there can be several) and middle name(s). Surnames are thus used in similar ways in Danish and in English. However, whereas middle names are most commonly a first name-typological (having a typology usually seen in first names) second name in English language and English-speaking cultures, in Danish an individual can have one or several (first name-typological) first name(s) and one or several (surname-typological) middle name(s), which are situated before the surname (Kællerød 2019; Lov om personnavne 1981). It is most common for Danes to have three names in total; in January 2023 this was the case for 55 per cent of the population (Statistics Denmark 2023).

For example, in the full name *Kasper Thomas Martini Petersen*, *Kasper* is the first of two first names, *Thomas* is the second first name, *Martini* is a surname-typological middle name, which is also in use as a surname (Danish naming law stipulates a person may only have one surname), and in this instance, *Petersen* is the surname. Had the names *Martini* and *Petersen* switched places (*Petersen Martini*), *Petersen* would be classified as a middle name, and *Martini* would be a surname. Within the same family, it is possible for some family members to choose *Martini* as their official surname and *Petersen* as

an official middle name, and other familiy members can decide on another combination. This has been the case since the latest revision of the Danish naming law in 2005, which removed the distinction between middle names and surnames. When hyphenated (like for example *Martini-Petersen*), it is officially considered one surname. This version of the naming law also equated cohabiting couples and same-sex couples with married and heterosexual couples (Lov om personnavne 1981). Marriage for same-sex couples was legalized in 2012. The interchangeability of middle names and surnames offers a number of options for couples wanting to change their names in connection with starting a family. Whereas a woman taking a man’s surname was the default option, in terms of legislation, up until 1982, when the naming law passed in 1981 came into force, the default option today is keeping one’s original name, but many still choose a middle name and/or surname change.

Figures from Statistics Denmark show that in 2020, 42,701 people (of a population of 5.8 million) changed their surname. Of these, the majority changed from a surname ending in *sen* (such as *Hansen* and *Jensen*; originally patronymic names) to a surname not ending in *sen*. Surnames with a *sen*-ending are very common in Denmark (the top 20 of most common surnames consists of 19 *sen*-names), and some change to a more unusual surname (Bechsgaard 2021). Of the 42,701 surname changes, 31,096 were made by women, while 11,605 by men, meaning that men accounted for approximately 25 per cent of surname changes (Statistics Denmark 2020).

This development is in line with the development of the gender-equal family, which was established in Danish family politics, starting in the 1960s. This at least has been the ideal for the past six decades in the Nordic region (see for example for Sweden: Lundqvist 2011; and for Finland: Holli 2003). The Nordic welfare states have been called ‘women friendly’ and ‘state feminists’ (Hernes 1987:153). However, studies have shown that there is still a gap between the equality ideal and practice. Research has shown, for instance, that gendered practices in families are still present to a certain extent, as are different expectations and norms of what constitutes motherhood

and fatherhood (Ahlberg et al. 2008; Roman & Peterson 2011; Anving 2012; Anving & Eldén 2019).

The changes to family life and family structures over recent decades also include a change in the frequency and timing of marriage and having children. For example, in 2017, 33 per cent of Danish women having their first child were married, compared to 40 per cent in 1997. In 2017, 53 per cent of second-time mothers and 66 per cent of third-time mothers were married (Statistics Denmark 2018). These numbers illustrate the common practice in Denmark of postponing marriage until after (at least) the first child. This practice also means that for some couples, the discussion and decision of which middle and surname(s) to use often takes place in connection with having the first child, rather than when getting married.

3. Family, gender, and identity

Since the 1990s, several theoretical approaches to family life have emerged as a reaction against the existing framework, mostly focusing on the nuclear, heterosexual family (Anving & Eldén 2019:20). New theoretical approaches have focused on a need to better capture the 'fluidity and complexity in modern life' (Morgan 2011:52), and one of the most influential is Morgan's approach of 'family practices' (Morgan 1996), focusing on 'doing' rather than 'being' family, meaning that a family is constituted and reconstituted through actions, rather than stereotypical notions of family. Some key features of Morgan's approach are 'an emphasis on the active or "doing"', 'a sense of the everyday' and 'a sense of the regular' (Morgan 2011:1–2). Concepts similar to doing family have been presented as well, including Finch's concept of 'displaying families' (Finch 2007). Linking to Morgan's idea, Finch argues that 'families need to be "displayed" as well as "done"' (Finch 2007:66) and defines 'display' as 'the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute "doing family things" and thereby confirm that these relationships are "family" relationships' (Finch 2007:67).

The actions of keeping a surname, one party taking the other party’s surname, or two parties deciding to combine surnames can be viewed as both ‘doing’ family and ‘displaying’ family. Such an action is something that is ‘done’ in a family, and it is visible to the surroundings and an established symbol of being a family. However, surname choices can be seen as related to stereotypical ideas of what constitutes family, more so than everyday actions in a family such as doing laundry and cooking, which are usually connected to the idea of ‘doing’ family. Therefore, in this article, I use the term ‘doing family’ in a slightly different way, as I am using it to refer to actions that strengthen being a family. Since I distinguish between doing actions that strengthen the bond to the original family and the bond to the newly created family, I introduce the terms ‘doing original family’ and ‘doing new family’, while also introducing the term ‘doing individuality’, meaning performing actions that strengthen a person’s individuality.

Similarly, the concept of ‘doing gender’ also focuses on actions constituting a phenomenon. In the case of the doing gender approach, gender is understood as ‘a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction’ (West & Zimmerman 1987:125) rather than as an innate quality in individuals. Before West & Zimmerman’s (1987) introduction of the doing gender theory with its important contribution to this understanding of gender, Kessler and McKenna (1978) made the argument that gender is a social construction. These contributions built on the understandings of gender introduced by Goffman (1959) and Garfinkel (1967). Over the past few decades, the doing gender theory has been criticized, as new understandings of gender have emerged, and the concepts of ‘undoing gender’ and ‘re-doing gender’ were introduced (e.g. Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009; Connell 2010). It has been argued that ‘doing gender’ ‘has become a theory of gender persistence and the inevitability of inequality’ (Deutsch 2007:106). Similar to the way in which ‘doing family’ is used in the present article, the concepts of ‘doing gender’ and ‘undoing gender’ are used with an emphasis on strengthening and weakening (or erasing) traditional gender roles.

In relation to personal names, Pilcher (2017) has argued that names should be recognized as 'doing' words and has introduced the concept of gendered embodied named identity (Pilcher 2016, 2017), showing 'how naming practices are, in fact, core to the production and reproduction of binary sex categories and to gendered hierarchies and inequalities' (Pilcher 2017:820). Pilcher (2017) also connects personal names to the concept of 'functional fixedness', referring to the idea that common name practices can be a block for new practices to be introduced. Even though the use of first names is more obviously gendered, the concept of functional fixedness in relation to personal names and gender is also relevant to surname use. Danish surnames themselves are not gendered in the way that most first names are (even though the number of gender neutral first names is increasing in Denmark, see Bechsgaard 2023). This is the case in other countries, such as Iceland, where surname endings traditionally indicate gender *(dóttir* and *son*), with the recent addition of the gender-neutral ending *bur* (Bechsgaard 2020:122). However, even though surnames (in Danish) are not functionally fixed themselves, the usage of surnames has been and still is to some extent (Bechsgaard 2023). While a surname like *Østergaard*, for example, is not connected to a specific gender, societal structures (and, until 1981, legislation) have determined that if *Østergaard* is the surname of a man entering a heterosexual marriage, his wife would assume this name, as well. The analysis below shows that this functional fixedness is loosening its grip in Danish society.

For couples in same-sex relationships, the functional fixedness is naturally less prevalent than for heterosexual couples, as there is not a long tradition of marriages not involving a man and a woman (same-sex marriage was legalized in Denmark in 2012). There is evidence that LGBTQ couples are typically more resistant towards social norms (such as taking a spouse's surname) and show more flexibility in gender presentations (Lamont 2020). For individuals in same-sex and queer relationships, traditional surname practices are not present to the same degree as for individuals in heterosexual relationships (Bechsgaard 2023), and an American study has shown that same-sex

couples who had children were less likely to follow traditional patterns in surname practices, and were more likely to keep their original surnames than heterosexual couples (Patterson & Farr 2017). In contrast, another study points to a tendency towards same-sex couples wanting their family to have one shared surname in order to have their status as a family recognized in society on the same terms as heterosexual couples (Underwood & Robnett 2021).

It has been argued by Elias (1991) that first names signal individuality or 'I-identity', whereas surnames are used to show collective identity or 'we-identity'. In the context of surname use in families, the definition of the 'we' is particularly interesting, as it can refer to both the original family, with whom an individual shares a surname and the newly created family, with whom the individual may or may not share a surname. This is in line with concepts from social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel & Turner 1979), according to which social identity is an individual's sense of self based on the group(s) that the individual belongs to. Tajfel (1978) argues that when categorizing people, we exaggerate the differences between groups as well as the similarities within the same group. The concepts of 'in-group' (a group that an individual is a member of) and 'out-group' (a group that an individual is not a member of) are central in social identity theory, which argues that individuals categorize individuals based on their membership of social groups, and that members of an in-group will look for negative features of an out-group in order to improve their self-image. These concepts are relevant to this study, since the idea of belonging to a certain group is connected to the decision to keep an original middle name and/or surname (shared with the original family) or change to a different name (shared with a newly established family and possibly in-laws as well). Furthermore, I argue that concerning family identity, the feeling of belonging to a group can be more or less weak or strong, and the we-identity can also vary in strength. This means that one individual may have a strong we-identity (or collective identity) or a strong feeling of group identity with the original family and a weaker we-identity or group identity feeling with the newly created family.

4. Method and data

The present study uses qualitative methods, allowing me to collect knowledge of individuals' lives, attitudes, experiences, and opinions (Brinkmann & Tanggaard 2020). The data include in-depth interviews conducted in 2021 with 23 individuals. 15 participants were interviewed individually, and the remaining eight participants were interviewed as couples (that is, in four interviews). The participants lived in the Copenhagen area, and they were between the ages of 29 and 54, all having formed a family unit (or a relationship equivalent to marriage) within the past 15 years. I draw on a social constructionist perspective on family, meaning that the participants themselves defined who they consider family. Social construction in relation to family focuses on how family members construct, maintain, repair, and change shared understandings (Braithwaite et al. 2018). This entails, for example, that one person may consider an ex-partner family and another may not, and that individuals have varying emphasis on the original family and the new family.

The majority of the participants had a long cycle higher education, while a minority had a medium-cycle higher education. They all grew up in Denmark, except that one partially grew up in another Nordic country and also has a surname from a cultural tradition of patronymic naming. Two participants had been adopted from other countries at a young age. The variation in family forms and name choices among the participants is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of study participants.

Participant number	Name	Gender	Age	Family	Children ages	Name choice	Time of marriage	Time of name change	Still open to name change?
1	Sofie Løve	F	37	2	0, 3	4	1	1	Possibly
2	Marie Lindell	F	31	1	0, 3	5	2	2	Possibly
3	Maria Bisgaard Hansen	F	38	5	10, 13	4	3	1	No
4	Mette Sonne	F	40	1	8, 10	5	3	1	No
5	Martin Sonne Øhrgaard	M	41	1	8, 10	1	3	3	No
6	Nina Kathrine Holm	F	40	2	2, 9	4	1	1	Possibly

 NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.17083

Participant number	Name	Gender	Age	Family	Children ages	Name choice	Time of marriage	Time of name change	Still open to name change?
7	Kasper Thomas Martini Petersen	M	47	2	2, 9	4	1	1	Possibly
8	Pernille Falk	F	37	1	1, 4	1	3	2	No
9	Nanna Lundholm Christensen	F	36	1	5	1	2	2	No
10	Julie Beck Morgan	F	29	6	N/A	2	2	2	No
11	Merete Nørgaard Skovsager	F	38	1	0, 4	1	2	2	No
12	Ronny Bergholt Cortzen	M	30	6	N/A	2	2	2	No
13	Louise Divya Mahler Bruun	F	36	7	0	2	3	2	No
14	Anders Mahler Bruun	M	38	4	0, 4	2	4	2	No
15	Mette Marie Brønlund Frederiksen	F	45	1	6, 8	4	2	1	Possibly
16	Malene Aarestrup Holm	F	32	6	N/A	2	2	2	No
17	Marielouise Anette Sørensen	F	49	3	16, 19	4	7	1	No
18	Camilla Høi Rovsing	F	41	1	8, 12, 15	1	3/6	5	No
19	Christian Rovsing	M	40	1	8, 12, 15	5	3/6	1	No
20	Karina Trier Winther	F	45	5	10	1	2	2	Possibly
21	Kristín Jónsdóttir	F	34	4	5, 12	4	4	1	Possibly
22	Nikolaj Kuhlmann-Bentzen	M	45	1	3, 4	2	2	3	No
23	Jette Baumann Vang Olsen	F	54	5	14	1	2	2	Possibly

Family: 1 = Married, only shared children. 2 = Cohabiting, only shared children. 3 = Divorced, re-married, children from previous relationship, but not with current partner. 4 = Divorced, re-married, children from previous relationship, and also with current partner. 5 = Divorced, children from previous relationship, not married/cohabiting again. 6 = Married, no children. 7 = Married, shared children, and partner has children from previous relationship.

Name choice: 1 = Taken partner’s name and not the other way around. 2 = Taken partner’s name and also the other way around. 3 = Kept original name but given name to partner. 4 = Kept original name, and so did partner. 5 = Partner took their name and not the other way around.

Time of marriage: 1 = Not married. 2 = Before (possible) children. 3 = After first child. 4 = After first child with new partner (second child in total). 5 = After second child. 6 = After third child. 7 = Re-married after divorce.

Time of name change: 1 = No name change. 2 = Same time as wedding. 3 = After first child. 4 = After second child. 5 = After third child.

In order to recruit participants for the interviews, I turned to social media as well as my personal and professional network. The criteria for participation were that individuals had started what they considered a family within the past 15 years, and that they lived in the greater Copenhagen area. The criterion regarding family formation was included in order to assure that their memories of surname deliberations were still fresh while also making room for possible future deliberations (for instance, it was not uncommon for the participants to have changed their surname several years after getting married, or still be considering doing so). The study was limited to the Copenhagen area in order to avoid interference from the cultural differences between the capital and other parts of the country. However, the study can therefore not provide a full picture of surname practices in Denmark. I posted on Instagram and LinkedIn with the purpose of recruiting participants, and I sent emails to parents of my children's elementary school and pre-school as well as contacted personal acquaintances inviting them to participate in the study. The participants decided whether they wished to speak to me as a couple or individually. While there are advantages to interviewing couples – for example, they can provide more complete data, as the interviewees can fill in memory gaps for each other (Seale et.al. 2008; Arksey 2016; Wilson et.al. 2016) – it became evident that it was much more challenging to arrange an interview with couples than individuals and several potential (female) participants ended up dropping out because of difficulties with scheduling an interview also involving their (male) partner. This was not surprising, as couple interviews have generally been associated with low response rate (Arksey 1996; Racher, Kaufert & Havens 2000). Another drawback to doing couple interviews is the fact that there can be two realities in a relationship. However, interviewing couples has gained increasing attention in recent years (Eiskovits & Koren 2010), and the literature points to neither individual nor couple interviews being superior (Blake et.al. 2021).

The participants decided whether the interviews were conducted in person, online or over the phone. In-person interviews posed a challenge as the study was conducted during the Covid-19 lockdown. At

the same time, at least some of the participants had become used to online communication (using Zoom and Google Meet, for example), and since some participants were working from home, they could be interviewed during the day, which might otherwise not have been an option. I ended up interviewing six participants in person, seven online, and 10 over the phone. The average length of the interviews was approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, and the interview guide included 35 general questions touching on the following eight themes: 1. job, education, age, etc., 2. family and names in the family, 3. name usage in their family when growing up, 4. daily life and routines, 5. family values, 6. attitudes towards names, gender roles and family life, 7. attitudes towards names and aesthetics, and 8. feelings about (potential) name changes.

However, the exact phrasing of questions, the order of the questions, and in some cases the questions themselves varied. For example, when interviewing a divorced individual with children, some questions had to be different from when interviewing a married couple without children. The interviews were then transcribed, and the data was analysed based on content and elements of narrative analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015) and in relation to the theoretical frame of the study. There are certain ethical concerns when studying something as potentially identifying as personal names. The names themselves are important, for instance because of the aesthetic value that participants attributed to them, which frequently affected the decision to add or remove a name. However, in order to protect the privacy of the participants, I decided to use pseudonyms (Lahman et al. 2022). The names of the participants were pseudonymized taking factors such as frequency of the name in the Danish population (Statistics Denmark) into consideration, together with attachment to geographic location, ending (for example, typical endings such as *sen* and *gård* were preserved), cultural/linguistic origin, and length. Some names were easily pseudonymized (such as a name like *Jensen* being replaced with a name like *Hansen*), while other names were more difficult to replace; for instance, names connected to specific geographic locations, specific languages, or being the name of a specific animal. The participants all consented to their interviews

being used for the study, and the study also went through the University of Copenhagen's ethical approval process for data collection.

5. Gender in surname choices

Surname choices are related to either doing or undoing gender. However, ambivalence concerned with doing and undoing gender in both surname choices and everyday practices is common.

5.1 Surnames and doing gender

The majority of the participants expressed aiming for gender equality in both their everyday family practices and in their surname choices, thus undoing traditional gendered surname practices. However, a minority of the participants explicitly expressed a desire to adhere to traditional gender roles in their surname choice and thereby uphold traditional gender norms. Camilla Høi Rovsing had recently changed her former surname *Pedersen* to her husband's surname *Rovsing* while keeping her original middle name *Høi*. The couple have three children, and they married at the city hall, when their oldest child was little, but they were preparing for a large church wedding and party a few months after the interview. Camilla talked about her dream of a traditional wedding in which a surname change was included, and about the fact that she changed to her partner's surname in connection with renewing her passport and after somewhat losing hope of having her dream wedding. Unlike the majority of the participants, Camilla expressed a preference for traditional gender roles, and taking her husband's surname was an important part of this:

Example (1)

> I had a dream of maybe getting proposed to, and that we would have a real wedding, and then we could change my name. And get everything that goes with it. Rings and surname and those things. So, it has taken a really long time. And suddenly, I needed a new

> passport, and I thought, I don't know about that damn wedding – if it will ever happen.

Camilla's husband, Christian Rovsing, was also interviewed, and like Camilla, he expressed a positive view on traditionally gendered surname practices. During the joint interview, he said to his wife: 'I think it's super cool that you have taken my surname. It's an honour. I mean, it's kind of a sacrifice you make for your family. That means something.' The fact that Christian did not take Camilla's middle name in return, however, he explained with not wanting to be identified with her family. His choice of not taking her middle name did not have to do with gender, he said the following:

Example (2)

> It has nothing to do with Camilla. It's just… There's just a lot of trouble, you know? With some of the other family members. And I thought, I just didn't really need that. I don't know, you're a part of it, but I didn't have a need to be part of it like that. There were some things that I didn't want to identify with.

Christian referred to Camilla's family as an out-group that he did not 'feel a need to be part of', mentioning negative features of the group. Camilla on the other hand was concerned about her in-laws' reaction to her entering their in-group by taking their surname: 'I have thought a lot about whether his parents thought I was good enough to have their name.' The upholding of traditional gender roles also shines through in the idea of a woman entering a man's family by taking their name.

Julie Beck Morgan and her husband, on the other hand, have taken a name from each other and in that sense taken an undoing gender approach. They decided to create a new surname combination by using one name from each of them, meaning that Julie gave up her original middle name, because she preferred her original surname, *Beck*. For Julie and her husband, who do not have children and changed their names upon marriage, aesthetics initially played a significant role, and for fun, they tried out the surname combination *Morgan Beck*

on their dog before changing their names themselves. However, *Beck* was Julie's name, and *Morgan* was that of her now-husband, and Julie explained that she felt external pressure to eventually do the traditionally gender affirming thing and change the order, so that the man's name (*Morgan*) would be last and thereby be the official surname, while her name (*Beck*) would be an official middle name. Despite not having a need for doing gender in their surname choice themselves, when realizing a societal norm for gendered surname choices, Julie and her husband ended up following this perceived norm:

Example (3)

> Well, it was a bit weird, actually, because we encountered some comments about my name being at the end. You know, that it was the woman's name at the end. So, there were some humorous comments like 'now we know who wears the pants'. And I guess we just thought it was a bit silly. Like, if that's the way it was, that there was something traditional about his being last, then it was fine with us.

5.2 Surnames and undoing gender

The participants who expressed a wish to not follow traditional gender rules range from being very explicit about this wish – expressing a conscious attempt to undo gender and promote equality – to being less explicit and to a greater degree treating the gender issue as less important and thereby undoing gender in another sense by simply not recognizing its importance. This approach then, to some degree, erases the importance of gender in surname choices altogether. However, there is also an ambivalence in the doing, re-doing, and undoing of gender. All individuals in the study have taken some action towards gender equality, whereas other actions point to more traditionally gendered practices and values. The most explicit gender undoing is, unsurprisingly, seen in individuals who are in same-sex marriages. As Lamont (2020) mentions, there is typically more resistance against social norms and a greater degree of flexibility in gender

presentations for same-sex and queer couples. As same-sex couples have a shorter tradition of marriage customs to relate to and of course because a same-sex relationship does not consist of two individuals of different genders each associated with specific roles, doing gender and upholding gendered norms is neither a societal expectation nor an expectation within the couple to the same degree as it can be for heterosexual couples (Bechsgaard 2023).

The two participants in same-sex marriages (Ronny and Nikolaj) hyphenated their name with their husbands’ (using a middle name or surname) and both said that the specific name combinations were based on aesthetic considerations, and (as also mentioned by Underwood and Robnett 2021) a need to have a shared surname for their newly created family. However, for Nikolaj Kuhlmann-Bentzen and his husband, who have two children (through surrogacy), the thought of changing their names did not occur to them when they first got married, illustrating that they at first did not consider the traditional practices related to marriage relevant to them (Patterson and Farr 2017). However, Nikolaj says that things changed once their children were born:

Example (4)

> I think we were both very attached to our surnames and proud of our surnames, and the thought that we could take each other’s surname hadn’t really occurred to us, and we wanted to keep our own name. But when we became a family in this modern way that we did, well, then we thought that it gave the kids something and it gave us something to all have the same surname.

For Nikolaj and his husband, then, it simply did not seem like an option to do the traditional name-changing action when entering marriage, but the action had a different meaning, when the children entered the picture. In that sense they simultaneously broke out of and stayed inside the heteronormative framework.

It is clear in Table 1 that many participants are undoing traditional marriage practices and undoing gender norms by not changing names

upon marriage and instead, name changes may occur at a later point and remain a possibility even years after the wedding. Mette Sonne and Martin Sonne Øhrgaard are among those illustrating this. Martin's original full name was Martin Øhrgaard, and when he married Mette Sonne after having their first child, neither of them changed their names. Mette was very much against adhering to traditional gender norms:

Example (5)

Mette:	'I am not wired that way. I don't feel the need for us to have the same name.'
Martin:	'I wanted us to have the same name. My mother took my father's name – yours didn't.'
Mette:	'I've never had a dream of sharing a name with my husband. It also works as a marker of your attitude towards independence. It's important for me to say that I am me, and I can get by on my own. A core value for me is that I can get by on my own.'

Martin talked about having more traditional values and also wanting to follow traditional gendered practices concerning marital naming, which also connects to the practices in his original family, where his mother followed the gendered norms (of the time). Martin connects his family values to his own parents being divorced: 'I really appreciate having a nuclear family, considering the family I came from. A quite fragmented family. I make a point of creating a more old-fashioned family.' He compares this with his sister and offers the difference in the way they do family as an explanation: 'My sister got divorced. They lived pretty individual lives.' Martin took Mette's name Sonne as a middle name, when their second child was underway, in line with his view on doing family, while at the same time undoing the traditional gender roles. However, Martin had expected his action to be reciprocated: 'I actually thought Mette would take my name as well, when I made the gesture of taking her name.' Christian, mentioned above, was honoured that his wife took his surname, whereas Martin viewed taking a spouse's name as a favourable action towards the spouse.

So, there is not a single answer to the question of who is doing who a favour. Studies from the United Kingdom and the United States, however, typically describe women as the receivers of a ‘gift’ by getting a man’s surname (e.g. Thwaites 2014; Carter & Duncan 2018), for example highlighting a man’s role in making a woman ‘a Mrs instead of just being a live-in partner’ (Carter & Duncan 2018:116). Martin’s expectation of reciprocity illustrates his preference for a mix of the traditional and the modern. He wanted the traditional symbol of being married – sharing a name – and wanted ‘a more old-fashioned family’ but did not express a preference related to gender in that context. He did, however, express a wish for equivalence in that he expected his wife to join him in taking each other’s name. This way, Martin ended up reversing traditional gender roles by taking his wife’s name, as did Mette by not taking her husband’s.

5.3 Gender role ambivalence and everyday practices

All participants expressed and displayed some degree of ambivalence in relation to doing or undoing gender, especially when considering everyday practices. When considering other practices besides name choices that are traditionally related to gender, the participants leaned towards either doing or undoing gender to a certain degree. However, many participants expressed or displayed contradicting attitudes and actions. For example, when talking about housework traditionally done by women – such as laundry, cooking and childcare – the women participating in the study would often disclose that they do more of these chores than their partner, while expressing some degree of shame related to this.

Marie Lindell said that she has a higher income than her husband, and that he usually cooks and would also be taking paternity leave. Furthermore, he has taken a name from her, while she has not taken one from him, illustrating that this family has in some ways reversed gender roles from the traditional. However, the picture is less clear when it comes to ‘emotional gender roles’ such as understanding the children’s needs, knowing their bedtimes, etc.:

Example (6)

> I am just completely tuned in to their rhythms. And my husband is just totally not. (…) So there is something about understanding and following children's rhythms that comes much more naturally to me, which is much more the traditional role, right? And there might also be a slight imbalance in who does more around the house.

Marie's case shows that there is a difference between the formal and symbolic action of choosing a name and the more informal everyday actions, and even between the more formal housework, such as cooking dinner, and the more subtle and informal responsibilities, such as knowing when a child needs a nap. Furthermore, surname choices are visible to the outside world in a way that housework and childcare practices are not, and these surname choices can thereby be seen as a way of displaying a gender-equal family.

Marielouise Anette Sørensen is in her second marriage, and her current husband never mentioned the idea of her taking his surname. She expressed that even if he had, it would not be an option for her: 'I think, why should the woman be the one to change her name?' She sees her surname as closely connected to her identity, prioritizing I-identity over we-identity. 'And it is who I am. This has always been my name', while also making a connection between the name choice and a more general view on gender roles: 'I don't want to succumb to norms that once were. There is a liberation in it.' However, Marielouise's opinions on gender roles regarding surname change somewhat conflict with the everyday chores in her home:

Example (7)

> I do most of the cooking, because I like it better (…) Those gender roles don't bother me. I can see that I clean more and so on, but I have accepted that that's the way it is. If I ask him to do something, he will do it. He is not doing it to oppress me.

So, even though there is quite a traditional distribution of domestic chores in Marielouise’s home, she does not mind, because these practices are not caused by a conscious attempt by her husband to adhere to traditional gender roles.

6. Individuality versus family in surname choices

Whether individuals prioritize their individuality or the collective identity of the family is connected to reflections and choices of surnames.

6.1 Individuality in surname choices

Maria Bisgaard Hansen is a mother of two, divorced, and has neither remarried nor re-cohabited. Like Marielouise, who was mentioned above, it was not an option for Maria to take her husband’s middle name or surname, and ‘there is a touch of women’s empowerment in it, as well’. Maria said that she did not have a family ideal as was the case for some of the other participants: ‘I don’t think it has ever been important to me to have a nuclear family (…) I have always said that I didn’t really know if I wanted to have children.’ She also expressed a less traditional view on marriage compared to the majority of the participants: ‘I actually don’t think I have ever thought that it is necessarily forever. Maybe I don’t really have that romantic idea about it.’ Of course, Maria’s statements should be seen against the backdrop of her marriage having ended; she also reflected on not changing her name in this context: ‘Then we got divorced, and I guess it was a good thing that we hadn’t taken each other’s surnames.’

Among remarried individuals participating in the study, there is a sense of already having gone against the established norms by getting divorced and subsequently remarrying, which shines through in the individuals’ narratives about their name choices. For example, Kristín Jónsdóttir explained how she has given up on doing family in the

'right' way and thereby has come to focus more on doing individuality in her current marriage:

Example (8)

> Having a shared family identity wasn't important. We both agree that we are individuals in a relationship (…) He gets to be him, and I get to be me. That's more important than that we belong together. It probably also has to do with the fact that we've tried it before, doing it right, carefully picked a name for the first child, and it didn't work! That wasn't what fixed the marriage. So, it's actually more important to us to be individuals.

For Sofie Løve, who is cohabiting and has two young children, her surname is so closely attached to her identity that changing it would feel strange to her: 'I am my surname. It would be weird for me to take his. And the same for him. Taking a different surname does something to your identity.' Sofie associates doing individuality with both her and her husband being represented in their children's names: 'In terms of the individual, it has been important that we included both names, even though maybe they sound a little peculiar together.' Despite Sofie not being convinced that she and her husband will never change their names ('You should never say never'), her wish to hold on to her own surname was closely connected to the aesthetic value and the rareness of her surname: 'I have always been proud of my name (…) well, if you can be proud of a name, but I mean been happy with my name, always thought it was fun that I had a special name.'

6.2 Doing family in surname choices

For some, prioritizing family identity over individual identity means focusing on their own newly established family, while others use surnames to uphold ties to their original family.

6.2.1 New family

Pernille Falk got rid of her original surname and instead took a name from her husband when they got married. Now they also have two young children. Both Pernille and her husband had surnames ending in *sen* before getting married (she was *Madsen*, and he was *Andersen*), and *Falk* was Pernille's husband's middle name. They decided that they would have one shared surname (and both remove their *sen*-names), and they decided on *Falk*; not because it was the man's name but because of the desire for a shared family identity: 'For us, the important thing was that we were something as a family, that we shared a name, whether we had ended up choosing mine or his or the middle name like we ended up doing.' The desire for a name signalling (nuclear) family identity was also clear, when Pernille described the fact that they are the only ones in the extended family with this name:

Example (9)

> Now we are the Falks. We're the only ones in the family with this surname. Most of the others took it as a middle name in the generation before us. We liked that it was short and easy to say and easy to understand, and that then it was our family name. Our daughter was born before we got married, so the decision of what we wanted to be called was made with her.

Their status as a family unit with the shared name as a strong symbol is obviously important to Pernille. The practice of making the family name decision when the first child is born is common among the participants. Pernille attributed their shared surname with symbolically creating their family: 'Our family came to be with this name.' Pernille also viewed the action of taking the name *Falk* as making her part of a new in-group. She talked about the name coming from her mother-in-law, who is pleased that Pernille and her husband are using the name, and Pernille reflected on her new name's connection to her mother-in-law: 'Of course, we wouldn't have picked it if I had thought that she was awful.'

Several participants indicated that they took their partner's middle name or surname as a way of obtaining a more attractive, less boring, and/or more identifying name. For most, this meant switching a very common name ending in *sen* with a less common name. Nina Lundholm Christensen took both middle name and surname from her husband, who in turn did not change his name at all. They have a young son. Nina's original middle and surnames was *Kjærsgaard Olsen*. *Kjærsgaard* is also the name of a Danish politician, and Nina described her reasons for changing both names: 'I wanted to get rid of Kjærsgaard (…) it sucks to be associated with the politician.' Besides this association, Nina described the name choice as somewhat coincidental:

Example (10)

> I guess I think that Christensen is nicer than Olsen, like in writing and sound, I'm not really sure why. But otherwise, if I had had a better middle name to bring to the table, we could easily have been the kinds of people who had taken my middle name, all three of us. And his surname or the other way around (…) It's kind of coincidental, I guess. I think we just agreed that he has the best names. We agreed that we wanted the same name, all three of us. That was the most important thing for my husband, and I could see the reasoning in that. And then we ended up with this model, because I thought he brought the best name to the table.

Nina described the idea of having a shared name as being 'most important' for her husband and her reasoning about it: 'I understand my husband's point of view; it's important that we have the same name (…) I don't think that holding on to your own identity is that important.' However, Nina described her father reacting to the name change: 'I could see the disappointment in his face.' This led to Nina's son being given her father's second first name as a second first name: 'It was kind of an act of compensation.' Nina clearly values performing actions that strengthen the new family identity over strengthening her individuality and also over strengthening the bond with her original family (when it comes to middle and surnames) but adheres to her father's view on the matter by 'compensating' in a different but still name-related way.

6.2.2 Original family

Even though the participants generally emphasized doing new family, there was also a focus on doing original family. In other words, what is considered the in-group and what is considered the out-group varies, and there is variation regarding who is included in the we-identity. Most participants said that their parents did not care about possible surname changes, but several participants talked about their parents having an opinion about their name choices (such as Nina above). Some participants talked about the important connection to their original family – some referring to their family as their clan – which is connected to sharing a name. Ronny Bergholt-Cortzen and his husband combined their names and now share a surname that consists of a name from each joined by a hyphen. Ronny described being indifferent to the order of the names (just caring about which combination sounded best) but being adamant about his name *not* becoming a middle name. So, the hyphen was added in order for the two names to have the status of one surname. Ronny is aware of not being subject to traditional marriage norms because of his status as a gay man: ‘We have pretty consciously taken advantage of the fact that we are detached from traditional norms.’ Therefore, Ronny said, they also had an untraditional wedding party, which took place a few weeks prior to the interview. They wanted to keep the names of both of them, ‘because there has to be an obvious attachment to both families. There is a strong clan culture on both sides.’ The joint name, then, was talked about in a way that puts more weight on the continuation of two ‘clan cultures’ than the beginning of a new family. Ronny emphasized the importance of his original family as a unit by talking about the fact that his original family has a saying, ‘just the four of us’, originally referring to Ronny, his parents and his sibling, but now, his husband is also part of ‘just the four of us’, highlighting the emphasis on the original family as an important unit, and in-group, to which Ronny’s husband now has access.

Merete Nørgaard Skovsager and her husband share his surname and have each kept their original middle names. She also expressed a sense of shared identity with her original family, which in this case

is closely connected to the name itself. She 'would not under any circumstances lose the name Nørgaard', which she said is the name her family is known by in the community where she grew up. This emphasizes the role of Merete's original family as an in-group and a group with whom she shares a we-identity. Similarly, Merete's husband's surname, Skovsager, symbolizes a strong family identity and 'there was no doubt that we were going to use that because of its history.' She said that she thought 'his name was so nice', based on the fact that it is rare and has a rich history. She also expressed an awareness that taking the name Skovsager makes her part of another in-group: 'then you're a part of them.'

Concerning the reason why Merete's husband did not reciprocate her taking his name, she said: 'He was supposed to have my name, as well, but he would rather keep a name from both his mother and his father.' Merete's husband, then, decided to keep a name-related connection to both of his parents by keeping a middle name/surname he got from each of them. rather than take his wife's name, signalling a sense of we-identity with his original family, viewing them as his in-group. This choice gives a sense of a family leaning in a traditionally gendered direction, which is reinforced by Merete stating that 'If we didn't have the same name, we might as well not get married at all'. There was also a gendered difference concerning the distribution of household chores. However, as was the case for other participants as well, this was partially explained by having very young children and building a house. Merete said the following about gender roles:

> Well, they're completely classically distributed right now. My husband works on the house, and I do the domestic things. Well, that's the way it is. We can't run from that fact. I guess, we just have to acknowledge that it easily gets distributed into men's and women's chores.

While an awareness that this is not the 'modern' way of doing family is evident ('Well, that's the way it is. We can't run from that fact'), Merete expressed an acceptance of the current state, just as she did regarding the name choices in her family.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined the role of surnames as part of gender identities, individual identities and family identity formation. It has highlighted the connection between the choices and narratives of surnames in Danish families and practices, actions, and attitudes in families by examining individuals representing different family forms in order to represent the diverse family landscape of Denmark in the 2020s. The surname choices and family practices of the participants were analysed by leaning on concepts such as doing family and doing individuality, showing a variation among the participants regarding the degree to which their actions and attitudes work towards strengthening family or individuality. Similarly, the concepts of doing gender and undoing gender were applied and showed a variation in actions and attitudes that either reinforced traditional gender roles or weakened them. Whereas some participants were very explicit about undoing gender, others were more implicit. The analysis also showed that some participants have an emphasis on I-identity, finding it important to hold on to their own identity rather than be absorbed by family identity, whereas others prefer strengthening we-identity by sharing a name. Whether this sense of collective identity is directed towards the original family or the newly established family is subject to variation, and I argue that the we-identity can vary in strength.

The majority of the participants expressed aiming for gender equality in both their everyday family practices and in their surname choices, thus undoing traditional gendered surname practices, while a minority of the participants were explicitly expressing a desire to adhere to traditional gender roles in their surname choice and thereby uphold traditional gender norms. The participants who expressed a wish to not follow traditional gender norms ranged from being very explicit about this wish – expressing a conscious attempt to undo gender and promote equality – to being less explicit and to a greater degree treating the gender issue as less important and thereby undoing gender in another sense by simply not recognizing its importance. All participants expressed and displayed some degree of ambivalence in relation to doing or undoing gender, especially when consider-

ing everyday practices. While participants lean more or less in one direction, when also considering other practices besides name choices that are traditionally related to gender, many expressed or displayed contradicting attitudes and actions, showing that there is a difference between the formal and symbolic action of making a name choice and the more informal everyday actions. Furthermore, since surname choices are visible to the surroundings, and the distribution of everyday practices such as housework are usually not, the focus on gender equality in surnames can be seen as displaying family.

The analysis has shown that in Denmark, predominant gender naming traditions are being challenged by new and more flexible practices that are less dependent on gender, and the findings of this study show a greater variation in gendered naming practices within Western societies than those of the typical narratives. Additionally, traditional surname practices are being renewed by for example the ongoing possibility of surname change years into a marriage. Surname choices are closely related to the stereotypical and symbolic idea of family for some, while others attach less importance to surnames. Furthermore, it has shown that the switch from the term 'slægtsnavn' [(extended) family name] to 'efternavn' [last name] is appropriate in a society, where sharing a name with extended family members is no longer a given.

References

Abramitzky, Ran. 2017. What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants. *Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research*. http://siepr.stanford.edu (accessed 10 April 2024).

Ahlberg, Jenny, Roman, Christine & Duncan, Simon. 2008. Actualizing the 'democratic family'? Swedish policy rhetoric versus family practices. *Social Politics. 15.* 79–100.

Aldrin, Emilia. 2011. *Namnval som social handling: Val av förnamn och samtal om förnamn bland föräldrar i Göteborg 2007–2009.* Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Anving, Terese & Eldén, Sara. 2019. *Nanny Families: Practices of Care by Nannies, Au Pairs, Parents and Children in Sweden* (Sociology of Children and Families). Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Anving, Terese. 2012. *Måltidens paradoxe. Om klass och kön i vardagens familjepraktiker.* Lund: Lund University.

Arksey, Hilary. 1996. Collecting data through joint interviews. *Social Research Update* 15. https://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU15.html (accessed 7 July 2023).

Bechsgaard, Katrine Kehlet. 2015. *Hvorfor skal barnet hedde sådan? En undersøgelse af motiver bag valg af børnenavne og social variation i forhold til navnevalg.* Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

Bechsgaard, Katrine Kehlet. 2020. *Navne*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

Bechsgaard, Katrine Kehlet. 2021. *Nielsen og de andre sen-navne – som mange har, og mange vil af med.* University Blog Post 2023-08-06: https://navn.ku.dk/maanedens_navn/nielsen/

Bechsgaard; Katrine Kehlet. 2023. Opblødning af kønsbestemte navnegrænser? Udvikling i normer for brug af fornavne og efternavne. *NORNA-rapporter 100: Namn och gränser.* 23–35.

Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* London: Sage.

Blake, Sharon, Janssens, Astrid, Ewing, Jan, & Barlow, Anne. 2021. Reflections on Joint and Individual Interviews With Couples: A Multi-Level Interview Mode. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211016733 (accessed 10 April 2024).

Braithwaite, Dawn O., Foster, Elissa, & Bergen, Karla M. 2018. Social constructionist theory: Communication co-creating families. In: Braithwaite, Dawn O., Suter, Elizabeth A. & Floyd, Kory (eds.). *Engaging Theories in Family Communication: Multiple Perspectives.* 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 267–278.

Brinkmann, Svend & Tanggaard, Lene. 2020. *Kvalitative metoder.* Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Butler, Judy. 2004. *Undoing Gender.* New York: Routledge.

Cambridge Dictionary. *Surname*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/surname (accessed 11 August 2023).

Carter, Julia & Duncan, Simon. 2018. *Reinventing Couples: Tradition, Agency and Bricolage.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Castrén, Anna-Maija. 2019. Becoming 'Us': Marital Name, Gender, and Agentic Work in Transition to Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81. 248–263.

Connell, Catherine. 2010. Doing, Undoing, or Redoing Gender? Learning from the Workplace Experiences of Transpeople. *Gender & Society* 24. 31–55.

Statistics Denmark. *Hvor mange hedder...?* https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/navne/HvorMange (accessed 23 June 2023)

Statistics Denmark. 2015. *Kvinder og mænd i 100 år – fra lige valgret mod ligestilling 1915–2015.* https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/nyheder-analyser-publ/Publikationer/VisPub?cid=22699 (accessed 12 February 2024).

Statistics Denmark. 2018. *Færre er gift når de får børn*. https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/nyheder-analyser-publ/nyt/NytHtml?cid=29823 (accessed 25 July 2023).

Statistics Denmark. 2020. *4.600 skiftede fornavn i 2019.* https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/nyheder-analyser-publ/nyt/NytHtml?cid=30209 (accessed 18 June 2023).

Statistics Denmark. 2023. *Over halvdelen af befolkningen har tre navne*. https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/nyheder-analyser-publ/nyt/NytHtml?cid=36036 (accessed 25 July 2023).

Deutsch, Francine M. 2007. Undoing Gender. *Gender and Society* 21(1). 106–127.

Eisikovits Zvi & Koren, Chaya. 2010. Approaches to and outcomes of dyadic interview analysis. *Qualitative Health Research* 20(12). 1642–1655.

Elias, Norbert. 1991. *The Society of Individuals*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Finch, Janet. 2007. Displaying Families. *Sociology. 41.* 65–81.

Forbes, Gordon B., Adams-Curtis, Leah E., White, Kay B. & Hamm, Nicole R. 2002. Perceptions of Married Women and Married Men with Hyphenated Surnames. *Sex Roles 46(5–6).* 167–175.

Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *Transformation of Intimacy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Gooding, Gretchen E. & Kreider, Rose M. 2010. Women's Marital Naming Choices in a Nationally Representative Sample. *Journal of Family Issues* 31(5). 681–701.

Grønstad, Line Førre. 2020. *Fellesskap og individualitet. Kjønna etternamsval blant norske menn i heterofile parforhold.* Bergen: University of Bergen.

Hernes, Helga Maria. 1987. *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press.

Holli, Anne Maria. 2003. *Discourse and Politics for Gender Equality in Late Twentieth Century.* Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

Johnson, David Robert & Laurie K. Scheuble. 1995. Women's Marital Naming in Two Generations: A National Study. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 57(3). 724–732.

Kessler, Suzanne J. & McKenna, Wendy. 1978. *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Knudsen, Anne Sofie Beck. 2018. *Persistence and Change in Long-Run Development*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

Kvale, Steinar & Brinkmann, Svend. 2015. *Interview: Det kvalitative forskningsinterview som håndværk.* Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Kællerød, Lars-Jakob Harding. 2019. *Adam Gottlob Øhlenschlæger Hauch & Jeppe Smed Jensen: Et studie af etableringen af det efternavnetypologiske mellemnavn i Danmark i 1800-tallet.* Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

Lahman, Maria K. E., Thomas, Rowen & Teman, Eric D. 2022. A Good Name: Pseudonyms in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 29(6). 678–685.

Lamont, Ellen. 2020. *The Mating Game: How Gender Still Shapes How We Date*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Lov om personnavne (LOV 193 by 29/04/1981) https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/1981/193 (accessed 28 July 2023).

Lundqvist, Åsa. 2011. *Family Policy Paradoxes: Gender Equality and Labour Market Regulation in Sweden, 1930–2010*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. *Surname.* https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/surname (accessed 11 August 2023).

Morgan, David. 1996. *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies*. Cambridge: Polity.

Morgan, David. 2011. Locating 'Family Practices'. *Sociological Research Online* 16(4). 174–182.

Murray, Thomas E. 2013. Attitudes Toward Married Women's Surnames: Evidence from the American Midwest. *Names* 45(3). 163–183.

Patterson, Charlotte J. & Farr, Rachel H. 2017. What Shall We Call Ourselves? Last Names Among Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Couples and Their Adopted Children. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 13(2). 97–113.

Pilcher, Jane. 2016. Names, Bodies and Identities. *Sociology* 50(4). 764–779.

Pilcher, Jane. 2017. Names and 'Doing Gender': How Forenames and Surnames Contribute to Gender Identities, Difference, and Inequalities. *Sex Roles* 77. 812–822.

Racher, Frances E., Kaufert, Joseph M. & Havens, Betty. 2000. Conjoint Research Interviews With Frail, Elderly Couples: Methodological Implications. *Journal of Family Nursing* 6(4). 367–379.

Risman, Barbara. 2009. From Doing to Undoing: Gender as We Know It. *Gender & Society* 23(1). 81–84.
Roman, Christine & Peterson, Helen. 2011. *Familjer i tiden: Förhandling, kön och gränslöst arbete.* Umeå: Boréa.
Seale, Clive, Charteris-Black, Jonathan, Dumelow, Carol, Locock, Louise, & Ziebland, Sue. 2008. The Effect of Joint Interviewing on the Performance of Gender. *Field Methods* 20(2). 107–128.
Shafer, Emily Fitzgibbons. 2017. Hillary Rodham Versus Hillary Clinton: Consequences of Surname Choice in Marriage. *Gender Issues* 34. 316–332.
Tajfel, Henri. 1978. The achievement of inter-group differentiation. In: Tajfel, Henri (ed.). *Differentiation between social groups*. London: Academic Press, 77–100.
Tajfel, Henri, & Turner, John C. 1979. An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In: Austin, W. G. & Worchel, S. (eds.) *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Monterey: Brooks/Cole, 33–47.
The Brittanica Dictionary. *Surname*. https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/surname (accessed 11 August 2023).
Thwates, Rachel. 2014. The Making of Selfhood: Naming Decisions on Marriage. *Families, Relationships, and Societies* 2(3). 425–439.
Underwood, Carrie R. & Robnett, Rachael D. 2021. 'I Would Like Us to Share a Name so That We Can Be Recognized in Society.' Marital Surname Preferences in Same-Sex Relationships. *Journal of Homosexuality* 68(2). 290–310.
Valetas, Marie-France. 2001. The Surname of Married Women in the European Union. *Population and Sociétes* 367. 1–4.
West, Candace & Zimmerman, Don H. 1987. Doing Gender. *Gender and Society* 1(2). 125–151.
Wilson, Angie D., Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J. & Manning, LaShondra P. 2016. Using Paired Depth Interviews to Collect Qualitative Data. *The Qualitative Report* 21(9). 1549–1573.

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (101–136)

Name changing and gender: an analysis of name changes made in the United Kingdom via enrolled deed polls, 1998–2019

Jane Pilcher, Hannah Deakin-Smith,
Emilia Aldrin & Hanh Thi My Nguyen

Abstract: Name changing is an under-researched topic in socio-onomastics. In this article, we extend knowledge of and understanding about gender and name changing by analysing 'enrolled deed polls', which people in the United Kingdom can use to change any part or all parts of their names. We examine which names are changed in relation to gender, including those we linked to transitions in gender identity. Our quantitative analyses of 10 665 enrolled deed polls for the period 1998–2019 shows that, over time, women have replaced men as the majority of applicants for name change and that, compared to men, women are more likely to make 'surname only' changes

Jane Pilcher (Visiting Research Fellow, School of Social Sciences, University of West of England, Bristol, United Kingdom), Hannah Deakin-Smith (Researcher, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom), Emilia Aldrin (Associate Professor, Swedish Language, Halmstad University, Sweden) and Hanh Thi My Nguyen (Doctoral Candidate, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom & Lecturer, University of Economics, The University of Danang, Vietnam).

NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.16876

to their name. Among men applicants, there was an increase over time in changes made to first and middle names (a doubled figure in 2019 compared to 1998). Although case numbers are small, of the name changes we attributed to gender transition, the majority were changes made to the applicant's first name and/or middle name. Our article concludes by reflecting on what our analysis of otherwise unexamined records of enrolled deed polls reveals about the (re)doing of gender identities through name changing in contemporary societies.

Keywords: name change, gender, United Kingdom, enrolled deed polls, name change trends

1. Introduction

The names of a person are closely linked to their familial, civil-legal and socio-cultural identities (e.g. Finch 2008; Aldrin 2011; Pilcher 2016) and, relatedly, to their self-identity (e.g. Emmelhainz 2012; Watzlawik 2012). Given that names are a key part of who someone 'is', a change of a person's name may signal a change in one or more of their identities. The study of name changing remains an under-researched area of socio-onomastics (Aldrin 2016; Scherr 1986), despite the potential it has for developing insight into the complexities of contemporary identities within socially and culturally diverse societies. In this article, we extend knowledge of and understanding about the gender identities-related significance of name changing behaviour by analysing 'enrolled deed polls'. These are a formal procedure through which people in the United Kingdom can achieve a change of any or all of their official names.

Our article begins with an overview of research literature relating to name changing, identities and gender, along with a description of the legal context of, and several routes to, officially changing a person's name in the United Kingdom. We then outline the methods and data of the wider study of enrolled deed polls that we draw on here. We present findings from our quantitative analyses of cases of enrolled deed polls where people change their own name and show

that name changing and gender are associated in different ways. We examine which parts of people's names are changed in relation to gender, including those linked to transitions in gender identity. Our article concludes by reflecting on what our analysis of otherwise unexamined records of enrolled deed polls reveals about the (re)doing of gender identities through name changing in contemporary societies, including in the longer term.

1.1 Name changing and identities

There are several different types of name change, and each is likely to have multifarious implications for the identity-related causes, and consequences, of a person's change of name. For Strauss (1959:18), 'The changing of names marks a rite of passage. It means such things as that the person wants to have the kind of name he [sic] thinks represents him [sic] as a person, does not want any longer to be the kind of person that his [sic] previous name signified' (see also Alford 1988). Here, Strauss is describing identity motivations that precede a name change made voluntarily by an individual, and to their own name. A person's name can also be changed without consent, by someone else. For example, the name of an enslaved individual may have been changed by their 'owner' (Benson 2006) or a child's names changed by their adoptive parents (Hagström 2017; Pilcher, Hooley & Coffey 2020). It is also important to recognize that a person's name may be changed through a formal, legally recognized procedure, as well as unofficially through situational variation in everyday encounters (nicknames are one example). Law and procedures regulating official name change are shown to vary cross-nationally (Walkowiak 2016; e.g. Coulmont 2014 details the process in France, Leibring 2017 describes the Swedish context and Wentling 2020, the United States). Our focus in this article is on gendered patterns in official name changes made by people in the United Kingdom in relation to their own name (we refer to these people as 'applicants' in our analysis). We include changes in several kinds of names (first names, middle names and surnames).

While early research on name changes (primarily in relation to heterosexual women's marital surnames) found identity change to be an inevitable cause and/or consequence of a changed name (see Stafford & Kline 1996, and references), later evidence in the field points to a much more complex process. For example, Emmelheinz (2012) described name change as a manifestation of identity elasticity, enabling people to maintain a sense of self while adding or re-negotiating certain elements of meaning attached to it. This perspective is in line with social constructivist theory recognizing that names can be seen as resources that people may use in varying ways: to create, confirm, project, or re-create various identities (Goffman 1968), including in relation to gender (Aldrin 2015; Pilcher 2017). In line with this approach, it is argued that name changes, like other kinds of meaning making, must be recognized as deeply situated in a specific context or community of practice (McConnell-Ginnet 2008), and as motivated by specific social, cultural and communicative goals.

To date, the two main topics in the empirical study of people's official name changes are name changes by or for individuals whose ethnicities are minoritized in contexts of migration and/or racial discrimination (e.g. Bursell 2012; Fermaglich 2018; Koshravi 2012; see also Coulmont 2014 and references), and heterosexual women's marital surname changes (e.g. Bechsgaard, in this issue; Castrén 2018; Duncan, Ellingsæter & Carter 2020; Gooding & Kreider 2009; Seheuble, Klingemann & Johnson 2000). There are also a few studies examining the incidence of and motivations for marital surname change by couples who are gay (e.g. Patterson & Farr 2016; Suter & Oswald 2003) and, more recently, first name changing linked to gender identity transitions (e.g. Anzani et al. 2023; Lind 2023; Obasi et al. 2019; Sinclair-Palm, in this issue; Wentling 2020). Hence, as Mills (2003) emphasized, name change implies a complex negotiation of identities, and pressures from social values, norms and traditions. Name change has been argued to be a way to leave an unwanted or stigmatized identity behind (Koshravi 2012; Strauss 1959) or to avoid practical issues with spelling and pronunciation (Frändén 2010). Relevant to our topic of gender identities, official name change is also argued to

be a way to establish a new identity as a couple (e.g. Kerns 2011), as a 'proper family' when living in a complex arrangement (e.g. Duncan, Ellingsæter& Carter 2018) or as a person who is transgender or gender non-binary (e.g. Anzani et al. 2023; Sinclair-Palm, in this issue). In addition, as Frändén (2010) points out, the identity work performed through a change of name can point in several directions: simultaneously both inwards (creating a sense of 'self' or 'us') and outwards (creating an image or expectations among others).

People's names can comprise first name, middle name and surname (although not all naming cultures follow this convention). An official name change can therefore involve amendments to one, or more, or all, parts of an individual's 'name' and in a variety of combinations. Voluntary changes of first names are argued to be rarely practiced in most cultures of the world (Alford 1988), a rarity reflected in the paucity of empirical studies examining change of first names (although, see Coulmont 2014). The low incidence of first name changing indicates that first names are so closely linked to personal identity that voluntarily changing them risks identity loss and would require very specific reasons, such as communicating a new gender identity to oneself and to others (e.g. Sinclair-Palm, in this issue; Wentling 2020). Indeed, we argue that the most substantive grouping of empirical research examining the phenomenon of first name changing are studies of first names in relation to gender identity transition.

Official changes of surnames (family names or last names) occur in many cultures and are argued to be connected to changes in civil or social status (e.g. linked to marriage or civil partnership – see, for example, Bechsgaard, in this issue; Grønstad, in this issue; Duncan, Ellingsæter & Carter 2018), or to the adoption of children (Pilcher, Hooley & Coffey 2020) or as a strategy to avoid racism (e.g. Fermaglich 2018; Khosravi 2012). The higher incidence of surname changing compared to first name changing is reflected in the larger number of empirical studies examining this practice. These include some longitudinal studies (e.g. Fermaglich 2018; Scherr 1986) and/or studies using sizable datasets (e.g. Broom, Beem & Harris 1955; Khosravi 2012). Surnames are often seen as primarily linked to col-

lective identity (Hanks & Parkin 2016), expressing the individual as part of a specific group, especially as a couple or in terms of family lineage but also in terms of a language community or a nation, for example (Finch 2008). These are group affiliations which can be changed or re-negotiated throughout life and can be marked through surname change. Surnames can also be linked to the construction of personal identity and the choice to keep or change one's surname, as well as the choice of one surname over another, can contribute to a sense of uniqueness, independence and the establishment or maintenance of a professional identity, especially for women (Laskowski 2010). In some cultures, including in the United Kingdom, surname changing is strongly gendered, a reflection of power relations in patriarchal, gender binary and heteronormative societies (see Pilcher 2017). In such cultures, empirical evidence on marital surname change suggests that, in heterosexual couples, it is the woman partner who is often expected to change her surname, and if she does so, common rationales relate to family connectedness (to show marital union and commitment, family solidarity, to signify the beginning of a new stage of life) or pragmatism, as a means of avoiding disparity of surnames within a family unit (e.g. Boxer & Gritsenko, 2005; see also Thwaites, 2016; Wilson, 2009). In relation to surname change, it is women's experiences that have been the focus of enquiry and men's experiences are neglected (Aldrin 2016:390; although see Grønstad, this issue). Studies of the surnaming practices of gay men couples suggest that surname changing is not practiced (Clarke et al. 2008; Patterson & Farr 2016), whereas studies of gay women couples reveal more variance in surnaming practices (Dempsey & Lindsay 2017; Suter & Oswald 2003).

Our review of the research literature on name changing and gender shows that marital surname changing by women in heterosexual relationships forms the most substantive topic area. In this article, in addition to extending understandings of women's surname change, we significantly advance knowledge about other aspects of name changing and gender that are currently under-researched. These include men's name changing practices, gendered patterns of changes made to first

names and to middle names, and name changing by people who are transgender. By analysing records of enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom 1998–2019, we also break new ground in documenting what long-term trends are in name changing and the (re)construction of gender identities in contemporary societies.

1.2 Official name changing in the United Kingdom: contexts and procedures

As we noted earlier, law and procedures regulating official name change vary cross-nationally. Under English common law, an adult in the United Kingdom may change any part or all of their name an unlimited number of times and for any reason, and without using any particular legal procedure, provided that such action is not undertaken for deceptive or fraudulent purposes (UK Government 2024). Probably the most common and routine means of evidencing name change is via certificates of marriage, used by women who change their surname when marrying a man (a name changing practice that is the norm in the United Kingdom). Certificates of civil partnerships could similarly be used as evidence of surname change, and presumably also certificates of divorce or dissolution of civil partnerships. A further means of officially-evidenced name changing are adoption certificates, which record names by which a child is to be known after their legal adoption is completed. Outside these scenarios, adult individuals wishing to evidence change of their own name(s) can do so simply by completing a 'deed of change of name' (we term this an 'ordinary' deed poll). This is a simple do-it-yourself but effectual form of contract in English law, concerning one person and signed by that person in the presence of a witness (who does not have to be legally qualified). Alternatively, individuals may choose to pay a fee to a commercial service provider (e.g. deedpolloffice.com) to undertake the process of obtaining an ordinary deed poll on their behalf, and which may also include verification by a qualified legal professional. Perhaps because using a commercial service provider makes the process *appear* to be more 'official' and 'legal' than the

'do-it-yourself-with-a-friend' method, it seems to have become an increasingly popular route to name changing in the United Kingdom. In 2011 it was reported that 58 000 people had used one company's service to change a name, an increase of 4 000 on the previous year and compared to only 5 000 people a year who did so in the previous decade (McClatchey 2011). Likewise, it was reported that a record 85 000 people had used one company's commercial deed poll service to change a name in 2015 (Johnston 2016). However, there are no centrally held or publicly available records in the United Kingdom relating to ordinary deed polls, or to any of the above-described procedures by which an official change of name can be achieved and/or evidenced. This makes it impossible to find out the total number of people using these procedures, what their socio-cultural characteristics are, and which names are changed.

1.3 Enrolled deed polls

'Enrolled' deed polls are a further route to name changing available to individuals in the United Kingdom, and one for which there are centrally held and publicly available records. Compared to an 'ordinary' deed poll, an enrolled deed poll is a legal procedure by which an individual publicly declares a change of name through application to the Royal Courts of Justice. Enrolled deed polls enable resident British or British Commonwealth citizens to change their own name(s) officially and to have their name change published as a matter of public record. Applications for an enrolled deed poll can also be made on behalf of another person (e.g. parents, guardians or local authorities seeking to change the name of a child in their care).

Records of enrolled deed polls for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have been openly published in *The Gazette* (the official journal of statutory notices) since 1914. Enrolled deed polls are not among the most commonly used procedures to formally enact and/or evidence name change in the United Kingdom. Compared to ordinary deed polls (whether the do-it-yourself version – which is cost-free – or through a commercial service provider, where fees vary

but currently average approximately GBP 21), enrolled deed polls are more complex, take longer to achieve, and are more costly (currently approximately GBP 42). Moreover, because they result in a public declaration of name change, enrolled deed polls are unlikely to be used by people whose name change is motivated by safeguarding reasons. Nonetheless, as with ordinary deed polls, increasing numbers of people have used enrolled deed polls. There were 205 published records of enrolled deed polls in *The Gazette* in 1998, a figure that remained steady up until 2014 (235 published records). However, in 2015 there were 1 236 published records, a significant – and unexplained – sudden increase. For 2019, the end date for our analysis, 2 552 records of enrolled deed polls were published. The figure for 2022 (at the time of writing, the latest full year for which published records of enrolled deed polls were available), showed a further increase to 3 233.

The precise wording of enrolled deed polls varies, including over time, but all contain key details that enable analysis of name changing behaviour. As shown in the following example, records of enrolled deed polls specify the applicant's 'old' and 'new' name(s):

> Notice is hereby given that by a Deed Poll dated [day/month/year] and enrolled in the Supreme Court of England and Wales on [day/month/year], I, [applicant's new full name], of [applicant's postal address], [applicant's marital status and citizenship], by virtue of section 1l(1) of the British Nationality Act 1981, abandoned the name of [old names] and assumed in lieu thereof the name of [new names].

Records of enrolled deed polls are an atypical route to official name changing, as we note above. Despite this, and their previous neglect by onomastic scholars, we argue that records of enrolled deed polls are richly deserving of analysis. The growth in numbers of people using enrolled deed polls mirrors reported growth in numbers of people using ordinary deed polls (Johnston 2016; McClatchey 2011). They are the only official and openly available source of evidence in the United Kingdom about long-term trends in, and contemporary patterns of, the incidence of name changing, types of name change

and of the characteristics of people who change their names – including in relation to gender identities. In this article, we use this valuable source of evidence about name changing to explore two key research questions about name change in the United Kingdom for the period 1998–2019. Among people changing their own names ('applicants') (1) Is there an association between name changing and gender? (2) Are there any gendered patterns in the types of names being changed?

2. Data and methods

2.1 Data collection

This article and its focus on gender and name changing draws on a wider descriptive and analytical research project on name changing conducted through an examination of records of enrolled deed polls, published in *The Gazette* between 1998 and 2019. The rationale for this timeframe is that: (i) digital records of enrolled deed polls are searchable only from 1998 onwards; (ii) key acts potentially impacting gendered name changing behaviour passed into law during this period, including The Civil Partnership Act 2004, The Gender Recognition Act 2004, and the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. Ethical review of the wider study of name changing via enrolled deed polls was undertaken by the chair of the relevant research ethics committee at Nottingham Trent University, who decided that, due to the project's use of secondary data from published sources, a full ethics review was not required. Subsequently, the principal investigator of the wider study (Pilcher) used *The Gazette's* data service to purchase a dataset of all 15 976 records of enrolled deed polls from 1998 to 2019. These records were found by using the code 2 901 ('Change of Name') to search within the digitized version of all three editions (London, Edinburgh and Belfast) of *The Gazette*. The dataset was delivered in a comma-separated values (CSV) file format compatible with Microsoft Excel and customized to exclude people's postal addresses.

2.2 Data analysis

Initial analyses of the customized dataset of records of enrolled deed polls within a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet involved researchers reading each record of an enrolled deed poll and transforming data each record contained about name change into new categorial or nominal variables. For ethical reasons, and to comply with the Open Government Licence V3.0 regulating use of data, and to prepare data for statistical analysis, all names contained within the customized dataset were removed by coding names of applicants and/or subjects of the name change into relevant categorical variables.

Researchers removed first names and middle names from the full dataset by assigning a gender to them and coding as the variables 'woman/girl', 'man/boy' or 'gender neutral'. First names and/or middle names were therefore used as a proxy for the gender of the applicant and/or subject of an enrolled deed poll. It is a very strong cultural norm in the United Kingdom (and elsewhere) to give a new-born baby a sex-specific first name (Alford 1988), according to the initial sex categorization of its body as female or male. Further, in the United States at least, almost all (97 per cent) of first names thought of as female-appropriate are only given to children whose sex category is female and almost all (97 per cent) of first names seen to be male-appropriate are only given to children whose sex category is male (Lieberson et al. 2000; see also Herbert & Aylene 2014). First names are therefore widely recognized as a robust indicator of the sex and/or gender of the bearer. We used the online application programming interface (API) tool Genderize (see genderize.io) to reach decisions about the gender attributes of first and middle names, and in a small number of cases, a Google search if a first or middle name was not included on Genderize. If no information could be found about the gender attributes of a first or middle name, it was coded as missing. Using these resources, first and/or middle names were coded as 'woman/girl', as 'man/boy' or as 'gender neutral' (gender non-binary names). Cases of name change linked to gender transition were identified by comparing the gender attributes of the 'new' first name and/or middle name and the gender attributes of the 'old' first name and/or

middle name. We assumed applicants whose 'new' first name(s) had masculine gender attributes compared to their previous 'feminine' first name(s) were people who had gender transitioned from being a woman to a man. Likewise, we assumed that applicants whose 'new' first name(s) had feminine gender attributes compared to their previous 'masculine' first name(s) were people who had gender transitioned from being a man to a woman. Applicants whose 'new' first name(s) had gender neutral attributes we assumed had transitioned from a gender binary identity to a gender neutral or gender non-binary identity. Names were also removed from the dataset by coding into 'name type' (i.e. first name, middle name, surname). Through these steps, people's names were excluded from the customized dataset and anonymity of applicants and/or subjects of enrolled deed polls was ensured.

The following key actions were taken in the wider project to clean data within the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and to prepare for analysis. First, removing from the original spreadsheet dataset of 15 976 categorial records cases that were duplicates, cases where there was more than a year's discrepancy between application date of the deed poll and its publication date and cases which had missing values making up more than 50 per cent in all variables, leaving a total number of 15 568 records. Second, a numeric code was assigned to each unique categorial variable, including to values missing from categorial variables. Third, data were then analysed by using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Descriptive statistics and frequencies were conducted to summarize features of name-changing within enrolled deed poll data and to highlight any potential relationship between variables. For correlation analysis, Chi-square tests were used to determine which associations were statistically significant because this is an appropriate statistical test to find the correlation between categorical variables in our data. In addition, crosstabulation tables (or two-way tables) were utilized to look at what the association is and find patterns of data (Yates, Moore, & McCabe 1999).

Among the total of 15 568 cases, 68.5 per cent of applications (10 665 records) for name change via enrolled deed poll in the United

Kingdom between 1998 and 2019 were made by an individual in relation to their own name, while 31.5 per cent of applications were on behalf of a child under the age of 18, and made by applicants who were either an individual, couples or organizations. Because this article focuses only on cases where an individual made changes to their own name(s) (we refer to these cases as 'applicants'), 10 665 records were therefore used in subsequent analysis.

3. Results

Results are based on analysis of a baseline of 10 665 records of people who changed their own names ('applicants') and percentages reported for each variable are calculated based on valid cases with non-missing values.

3.1 Name changing and gender of applicants

As shown in Table 1, people whose first names and/or middle name were coded as 'woman' were the majority of applicants seeking to change their own name(s) via enrolled deed polls (57 per cent), followed by those coded as 'man' (42.2 per cent). The gender of 94 applicants or 0.9 per cent of the total is neutral because their first and/or middle names did not align with gender binary first names which typically indicate if the bearer is a woman or a man.

Table 1. Gender characteristics of name change applicants via enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom, 1998–2019, frequencies and percentages.

Gender	Applicant changing their own name(s)	
	Frequency	%
Woman (single applicant)	6 050	57
Man (single applicant)	4 477	42.2
Gender Neutral	94	0.9
Total	10 621	100
Missing*	44	
Total cases	10 665	

* 'Missing cases' are those where the gender of the applicant cannot be determined from the information provided in the legal statements. Missing cases are different from 'gender neutral', where the first and/or middle names of the applicants did not align with gender binary first names which typically indicate if the bearer is a woman or a man.

3.2 Long-term trends in name changing and gender of applicants

To analyse long-term trends in name changing and gender of applicants over the 21-year period (1998–2019) covered by our dataset of records of enrolled deed polls, we first compared name change applications at two date points: 1998 as the start point and 2019 as the end point. As shown in Table 2, in 1998 there were more name changes made by applicants coded as men (53.4 per cent) than by applicants coded as women (45.1 per cent). Yet, this finding is reversed in 2019 where women are the majority of those applying to change their own name(s). Name changes by applicants coded as gender neutral were, in comparison, more consistent between the two dates.

Table 2. Long-term trends in gender of applicants of name changing via enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom, 1998–2019, frequencies and percentages.

Applicant gender	1998		2019	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Man	71	53.4	695	40.9
Woman	60	45.1	988	58.1
Gender neutral	2	1.5	17	1
Total cases	133	100	1 700	100

3.3 Types of name change via enrolled deed polls

In the United Kingdom over the 21-year period between 1998 and 2019, 'surname only' was the majority type (57.6 per cent) of all name changes made by people changing their own name(s) via enrolled deed poll (see Table 3). Also, surname change involving other types of name change accounted for 77.5 per cent of all types of name changes. Eight per cent of changes were 'first name only', but 28.5 per cent of all types of name changes involved a first name change. 'Middle name only' changes were 5.6 per cent of non-surname changes, but 30 per cent of all types of name changes involved a middle name change. Also, 7.2 per cent of all name change cases were related to all parts of name (i.e. surname, first name, and middle name).

Table 3. Types of name change made by applicants via enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom, 1998–2019, frequencies and percentages.

Name change type		Frequency	Percentage
NON-SURNAME CHANGE	First name only	859	8.0
	First name & middle name	945	8.9
	Middle name only	597	5.6
	Total		22.5
SURNAME CHANGE	First name & surname	475	4.4
	First name & middle name & surname	764	7.2
	Middle name & surname	885	8.3
	Surname only	6 139	57.6
	Total		77.5
Missing		1	
Total		10 665	100.0

3.4 Association between gender of the applicant for name change and type of name change

The null hypothesis is that the type of name changing and the gender of applicant, as indicated by first and middle names, are not associated with each other – they are independent variables. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a Chi-Square test on 10 620 valid cases of people changing their own names (44 missing cases of applicant gender and one missing case of name changing type are excluded).

Table 4. Chi-Square Test results for applicants' gender and type of name change via enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom, 1998–2019.

Chi-Square Test		
		Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square (df)	180.255[a] (12)	<.001
Likelihood Ratio (df)	152.569 (12)	<.001
Linear-by-Linear Association (df)	18.138 (1)	<.001
Number of Valid Cases	10620	
Missing cases	45	

[a] 1 cell (4.8 per cent) have expected count less than five. The minimum expected count is 4.14.

The result from Table 4 shows that the Pearson Chi-Square value is 180.255 with degree of freedom (df) = 12 and p <.001. Because the *p*-value is very small and smaller than the standard alpha value (0.05), we can reject the null hypothesis that asserts the gender of the applicant of name change and the type of name change are independent of each other. In other words, the type of name changing via enrolled deed poll and the gender of the applicant of name change are associated with each other. Besides, only one cell (4.8 per cent) of the expected count is less than five and the minimum expected count is 4.14. The results meet the assumption of the Chi-Square test, i.e. 'no more than 20 per cent of the expected counts are less than 5 and all individual expected counts are 1 or greater' (Yates, Moore & McCabe, 1999: 734), and are therefore valid.

Now taking a closer look at the association between type of name change and the gender of the applicant of name change, it can be seen in Table 5 that for all gender categories, changes involving a surname was the type changed the most. Yet the change of surname only was even more common among applicants coded as woman (61.5 per cent) than among those coded as man (53 per cent). Where name change involved either first name only, first name and middle name or middle

name only, there are only small differences between the percentages of women applicants and men applicants.

Table 5. Gender of applicant of name change by type of name change via enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom, 1998–2019, percentages.

Applicant gender	Name change type								
	NON-SURNAME				SURNAME				
	First name only	First name & middle name	Middle name only	Total	First name & surname	First name & middle name & surname	Middle name & surname	Sur-name only	Total
Man	8.7	9.3	6.5	24.5	4.3	8.2	10	53	75.5
Woman	7.6	8.4	5.0	21	4.2	6.2	7.1	61.5	79
Gender Neutral	9.6	14.9	3.2	27.7	20.2	18	4.3	29.8	72.3

There were only a small number of cases (94) where applicants are coded as gender neutral over the 21-year period between 1998 and 2019 (see Table 1). With this caveat in mind, we note that applicants of name change whose gender was coded as neutral were somewhat more likely to change their first names only (9.6 per cent), as well as to change their first name and middle name (14.9 per cent) but were somewhat less likely to change their middle name only (3.2 per cent), compared to other gender categories. In cases involving surname change, applicants whose gender was coded as neutral were, compared to other gender categories, more likely to change their first name and their surname (20.2 per cent), and more likely to change their first name, middle name and surname (18 per cent) but less likely to change only their middle name and surname (4.3 per cent). In cases of surname only change, gender neutral applicants were the least likely to do so (29.8 per cent) of all the gender categories (61.5 per cent woman, 53 per cent man).

 NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.16876

3.5 Long-term trends in types of name changes and gender

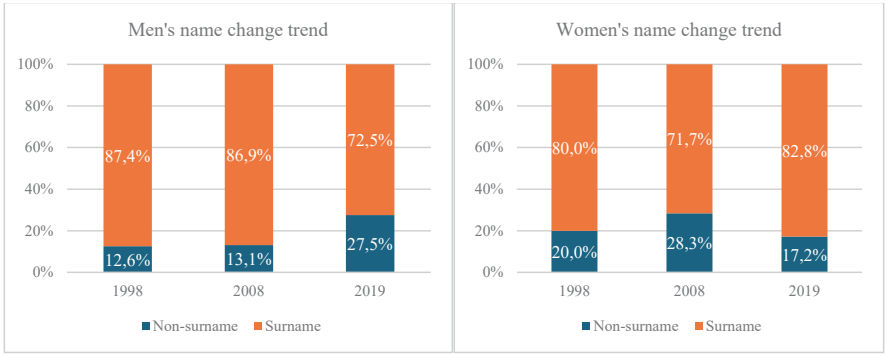

Figure 1. Long-term trends in types of name changes by women and men via enrolled deed polls, United Kingdom 1998–2019.

To examine gendered trends by types of names changed, we compared three date points: 1998, 2008 and 2019. As shown in Figure 1, focusing on applications of people coded as woman or man, changes involving surnames accounted for a large majority of all types of name changes. Women and men both made more surname changes than non-surname changes at each of the three date points.

Next, in a closer examination of long-term trends in the types of name changes by those applicants coded as men, women and gender neutral, we use a two-date point comparison between 1998 and 2019 (see Table 6). In 1998, there was little difference between women and men in the types of name changes made. Name changes involving a change in surname are prominent for both women and men applicants (and 64.8 per cent of men and 73.3 per cent of women made changes only to their surname) while under 20 per cent of women and men applicants made non-surname changes. In comparison, and although numbers of cases here are very small, of the two applicants in 1998 categorized as gender neutral (see Table 2), one changed their first name and their middle name (non-surname changes) and the other one changed only their surname.

Table 6. Types of name changes via enrolled deed poll by gender, 1998 and 2019, percentages.

Applicant gender	1998								
	NON-SURNAME				SURNAME				
	First name only	First name & middle name	Middle name only	**Total**	First name & surname	First name & middle name & surname	Middle name & surname	Sur-name only	**Total**
Man	7.0	2.8	2.8	**12.6**	4.2	11.3	7.1	64.8	**87.4**
Woman	11.7	6.6	1.7	**20.0**	1.7	5.0	0	73.3	**80.0**
Neutral		50.0		**50.0**				50.0	**50.0**

Applicant gender	2019								
	NON-SURNAME				SURNAME				
	First name only	First name & middle name	Middle name only	**Total**	First name & surname	First name & middle name & surname	Middle name & surname	Sur-name only	**Total**
Man	8.2	9.8	9.5	**27.5**	4.6	7.9	10.6	49.4	**72.5**
Woman	5.3	6.3	5.6	**17.2**	4.0	5.3	9.3	64.2	**82.8**
Neutral	5.9	5.9	5.9	**17.7**	5.9	41.2	5.9	29.3	**82.3**

Compared to 1998, for all genders, the proportion of applications involving only surnames is lower by 2019. Also in 2019, a higher percentage of women changed only their surname (64.2 per cent) compared to men (49.4 per cent) and compared to the 17 people (see Table 2) categorized as gender neutral (29.3 per cent). Amongst men applicants there was an increase in changes to non-surname elements names in 2019 (a doubled figure compared to 1998). This proportion of men applicants (27.5 per cent) is significantly higher than people of other genders changing non-surname elements (17.2 per cent of women and 17.7 per cent of gender neutral). In 2019, the 17 people (see Table 2) categorized as gender neutral applicants made more changes to all parts of their name (41.2 per cent) than either women (5.3 per cent) or men (7.9 per cent).

 NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.16876

3.6 Gender transition and name changes

We explained earlier how we identified cases of name change linked to gender transition in our dataset. To recap, an applicant whose 'new' first name(s) had 'masculine' gender attributes compared to their previous 'feminine' first name(s) were assumed to have gender transitioned from being a woman to a man. Likewise, an applicant whose 'new' first name(s) had 'feminine' gender attributes compared to their previous 'masculine' first name(s) were assumed to have gender transitioned from being a man to a woman. Applicants whose 'new' first name(s) had gender neutral attributes compared to their previous first names, we assumed to have gender transitioned to a non-gender binary identity.

Table 7. Name change via enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom attributed to gender transition before and after 2004.

Name change cases attributed to gender transition			
	Between 1998 and 2004	Count	25
		%	5.9
	After 2004 up to 2019	Count	396
		%	94.1
Total		Count	421
		%	100

Almost all (94.1 per cent) of cases of name changing via enrolled deed polls that were attributed to applicants' transitions in gender identity, as reflected by first and middle names, occurred between 2004, when the Gender Recognition Act was passed, and 2019 (Table 7). Just under six per cent of cases of name changing due to gender identity transition took place between 1998 and 2004.

As shown in Table 8, in the 21-year period under our scrutiny, the majority of people (76.9 per cent) changing their name(s) in connection with transition in gender identity tended to make only a non-surname change. Sixty-six per cent of these people changed their first name and also changed their middle name at the same time, and 10.4 per cent changed their first name only. In 17.1 per cent of name change

cases attributed to transition in gender identity, a change was made to all parts of their name (first name, middle name and surname).

Table 8. Gender transition and type of name change via enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom, 1998–2019, percentages.

Non-surname			**Surname**		
76.9			23.1		
First name only	Middle name only	First name & middle name	First name & surname	Middle name & surname	First name & middle name & surname
10.4	0.5	66	5.5	0.5	17.1

3.7 Changes over time in types of name changes linked to gender transitions

In 1998, there were only a total of three cases of name change linked to gender transitions. Of these, a single case was of a person who had changed their first name and middle name to gender neutral names. Further, one woman applicant chose to change their first name and middle name, and one woman applicant changed all parts of their name.

Table 9. Type of name change via enrolled deed poll linked to gender transition, 2019, United Kingdom, frequencies and percentages.

Applicant gender	2019					
	NON-SURNAME			SURNAME		
	First name only	First name & middle name	Total	First name & surname	First name, middle name & surname	Total
Man						
Count	5	20	26	-	2	2
%	17.9	71.4	92.9		7.1	7.1
Woman						
Count	4	34	38	-	5	5
%	9.3	79.1	88.4		11.6	11.6

In 2019, there were total 72 cases of name change by applicants that can be linked to gender transitions (Table 9), a significant increase compared to 1998. Most men and women applicants (92.9 per cent and 88.4 per cent) choose to change non-surname elements of their name when they changed names following gender transitions. Specifically, 71.4 per cent of men applicants changed their first name and middle name and 17.9 per cent changed their first name only. For women applicants, 79.1 per cent changed both first name and middle name and 9.3 per cent changed their first name only. However, women applicants for name change linked to gender transitions tended to change all elements of their names, more so than for men. While only 7.1 per cent of men applicants (those whose 'old' first name(s) had feminine attributes) changed all elements of their name (first name, middle name and surname), this figure is nearly doubled (11.6 per cent) for women applicants (those whose 'old' first name(s) had masculine attributes).

4. Discussion

4.1 Gender and name changing

Our first research question asked: Is there an association between name changing and gender? Our analysis of name changing and the gender of applicants of enrolled deed polls shows that name changing is associated with gender. Women are the majority of applicants (57 per cent) changing their own names by enrolled deed poll in the United Kingdom between 1998 and 2019 (Table 1). Moreover, as shown in Table 2, over time between 1998 and 2019, women replaced men as the majority of applicants of name change. The finding that women are the majority (57 per cent) of applicants of name change via enrolled deed polls – over and above the slight majority (51 per cent) of women in the United Kingdom population (UK Government 2023) – supports claims that, in late modern societies like the United Kingdom, it is women's name-based identities that are now somewhat more flexible and open to change, particularly when compared to men's

(Pilcher 2016; 2017). Of course, a key aspect of greater flexibility in women's name-based identities is the still prevalent norm (at least in the United Kingdom) that, on marriage to a man, women should drop their birth surname and take the surname of their husband (e.g. Duncan, Ellingsæter& Carter 2018). However, given the strength of the normative expectation that women change their surname when they marry a man, and the ease by which such a name change is evidenced, it is very unlikely enrolled deed polls would be used by heterosexual women for this purpose (although, as we note below, divorced women may be using enrolled deed polls to establish a new identity by reverting back to their pre-married surname). Given that records of enrolled deed polls are very *unlikely* to be capturing heterosexual women's surname change at the time of their marriage to a man, the difference in women's and men's surname change behaviour in the United Kingdom is actually much larger, more significant and more enduring over time than even our study of enrolled deed polls shows.

4.2 Types of names change and gender of applicants

Our second research question asked: Are there any gendered patterns in the types of names being changed? Our comparison of the types of changes made by people to their own names using an enrolled deed poll in the United Kingdom 1998–2019 shows that 'surname only' changes are the majority type (57.6 per cent; see Table 3). This finding is in keeping with our earlier argument that, linked to the importance of surnames as markers of familial and other collective affiliations of belonging (Finch 2008) that are also gendered (Pilcher 2017), surname changing is a more widespread practice in the United Kingdom than first and/or middle name changing. The lower incidence of first name and/or middle name only changes, and of surname changes also involving a first name and/or a middle name shown in Table 3, confirms that, compared to surnames, it is first names that hold more significance and have sustained longevity for personal identity (Aldrin 2016; Alford 1988), including in terms of (re)doing gender (Pilcher 2017).

Very few (7.2 per cent) cases of enrolled deed polls between 1998 and 2019 resulted in changes to all parts of an applicant's name (Table 3), a finding that suggests the combined importance of multiple name components for an individual's identities, including gender identities. Most people using enrolled deed polls to change their own names retained at least one element of their previous name. Name change may indicate identity elasticity (Emmelheinz 2012) or as argued by Strauss (1959), a desire no longer to be the kind of person their previous name signified, but wholesale name change (first name, middle name and surname) was the choice of only a minority of users of enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom. Our findings here show that name-based identities including in relation to gender are a more complex phenomenon than is implied within arguments that insist on the inherent flexibility of identities under conditions of post-modernity (e.g. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Giddens 1991).

Our analysis established a correlation ($p = <.001$) between the gender of the applicant of the name change and the type of name change made via enrolled deed polls (Table 4). For the period 1998–2019, among women changing their own name, 61.5 per cent changed their surname only, compared to 53 per cent of men and 29.8 per cent of people coded as gender-neutral who changed a surname only (Table 5). Surname change implies a complex negotiation of identities of belonging and familial ties, as well as pressures from social values, norms, and traditions (Bechsgaard, in this issue; Finch 2008; Grønstad, in this issue; Patterson & Farr 2016; Mills 2003). The finding that women as applicants of enrolled deed polls were the most likely gender group to change only their surname further confirms the enduring character of the enhanced importance of surnames changes for women's identities that we note above. Here, records of enrolled deed poll most likely capture women's surname change linked to marital breakdown: women who divorce may be using enrolled deed polls to revert back to their pre-married surname and thereby realign their surname-based identities in terms of who they 'belong' to. This can be interpreted as a practice through which women are (re)doing their

gender identities within the otherwise patriarchal culture of family surnaming predominating in the United Kingdom.

Nonetheless, it was surprizing to find that, of men changing their names via enrolled deed poll, over half did so to change only their surname (Table 5). As we noted earlier, little is known about men and surname change (although, see Grønstad and also Bechsgaard in this issue) and there is plenty of scope for its more detailed examination. In the United Kingdom, for a man to change his surname at marriage to woman is against the norm; perhaps some men use enrolled deed polls to officially evidence and declare their choice to do so precisely for that reason. Others may use enrolled deed polls to realign their family affiliations of belonging for other reasons or do so to change (e.g. anglicize) their own surname to discard a stigmatized identity and thereby achieve cultural assimilation (Bursell 2012; Fermaglich 2018; Khosravi 2012). Cultural assimilation through surname change may also help account for some of the surname changes made by women.

In our study, cases of name changed by applicants coded as gender neutral or gender non-binary gender are small (Table 1). With this caveat in mind, it was surprizing to find that, among people making a change to their own name who were categorized as gender-neutral, in 2019, a higher proportion made changes only to their surname (29.3 per cent) as those who made changes only to their first name and/or middle name (17.7 per cent; see Table 6). Perhaps having non-gender binary first and/or middle name means that the name-based identities of some of these individuals also extended to flexibility and creativeness in terms of the family affiliation signalling function of surnames. Further research is needed to better understand 'surname only' changing by people with gender-neutral first names and/or middle names. In terms of non-surname changes (that is, changes to first names and/or middle names), applicants in the gender-neutral category were the most likely of all gender groups to have made this type of name change in the 21-year period between 1998 and 2019 (Table 5). Applicants in this gender-neutral group were also the most likely to change all component parts of their name (first name and surname, and first

name, middle name and surname), a finding that further suggests enhanced flexibility and creativeness in their name-based identities and a desire to completely transform how names signal who they 'are' and who they belong to.

4.3 Long-term patterns in types of name change and gender of applicants

In terms of long-term patterns in types of name change between 1998 and 2019, a growing proportion of non-surname changes (first and/or middle names) were made by men (Table 6 and Figure 1). This is a finding which suggests that, for men who made name changes via enrolled deed polls, first names and middle names became increasingly important as markers of their identity over this period and surnames less so. For women, the pattern over time is rather more even. Nonetheless, name change involving surnames continued to be the main type of name change between 1998 and 2019, and this is especially so for women.

4.4 Types of name changes linked to gender transitions

As shown in Table 8, of name changes attributed to gender transition of the applicant, 76.9 per cent related either to first name only, middle name only or to first and middle name. Although the number of cases is comparatively small, these findings underline the continuing importance of first names and middle names in communicating gender identity (Anzani et al. 2023; Obasi et al. 2019; Pilcher 2017; Aldrin 2015, Sinclair-Palm, in this issue; Wentling 2020). At the same time, our findings here suggests that while people who have gender transitioned may change their first names to reflect their gender identification, most choose to retain their surnames. This can be interpreted as retention of familial affiliation and feelings of belonging signalled by their surnames. Data in Table 8 show that women applicants (whose 'new' and 'old' first names indicated a transition from a masculine gender identity to a feminine one) were more likely than men appli-

cants (whose 'new' and 'old' first names indicated a transition from a feminine gender identity to a masculine one) to change all parts of their name including their surname. This finding suggests that, compared to men applicants, women applicants for name change linked to gender transition may have a stronger desire for a completely new identity.

We also demonstrate that rising numbers of people used enrolled deed polls to change their own first names and/or middle names linked to a transition in gender identity, from three cases in 1998, to 72 cases in 2019 (Table 9). Although the number of cases is small, we are the first to be able to show the effect of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 on name changing and gender identities in the United Kingdom. According to our data analysis, the majority of name changes via enrolled deed polls that we attributed to gender identity transitions took place after 2004 (Table 7). The Act seems to have empowered people to change their names via enrolled deed poll, especially their first names and middle names, to better communicate their gender identity, both to themselves and to others. It is a clear example of the transformative potential of legislation change for enabling the (re) doing of gender identities in contemporary societies.

5. Limitations

First, our study is limited because it draws on records of enrolled deed polls which may not be representative of official name changing behaviour in other national contexts. Second, our findings may not be representative of official name changing behaviour in the United Kingdom either – enrolled deed polls are the most complex, lengthy and costly process way of achieving an official change of name in the United Kingdom and they also result in a public declaration of name change. Third, the typical wording of enrolled deed polls, and we suspect, administrative processing of records, altered during our census period of 21 years between 1998 and 2019. These are changes which may have impacted on the gender comparisons we made. For example, there is an unexplained abrupt and significant increase in records

of enrolled deed polls after 2014, while changing in their wording over time resulted in some missing values otherwise used in our data analysis. A fourth limitation is that we relied upon first names and/or middle names to position applicants into one of three categories of gender identity (women, men, gender neutral) and to ascertain if a change of names was linked to a transition in gender identity. This method has limitations because, although a robust indicator of sex and/or gender, forenames do not accurately signal a person's identity in every case. Further, and irrespective of the gender attributes of their forenames, we cannot know the preferred gender identification of anyone who used an enrolled deed poll to change their own name(s). Fifth, the nature of the dataset meant that we were unable to determine the reasons why people chose to use enrolled deed polls to change their names rather than any of the other available procedures. Similarly, we were unable to infer (other than in cases where transition in gender identity was indicated) the specific social, cultural and communicative motivations that might explain why applicants had changed their names. A sixth limitation relates to name changing linked to gender transitions and related to gender neutral first names. Here, our findings are based upon a relatively small number of cases. Last, it should be recognized that, by ending our analysis of records of enrolled deed polls on 31 December 2019, we were not able to consider any effects the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent lockdowns and disruption of everyday normality, may have had on people's name-based identities and the incidence of name-changing including any variations by gender.

6. Conclusion

People in many contemporary societies do choose to change their names (e.g. Bechsgaard, in this issue; Bursell 2012; Fermaglich 2018; Scherr 1986; Sinclair-Palm, in this issue). We have shown that, in the United Kingdom over the period 1998 and 2019, rising numbers of people used enrolled deed polls to change some parts or, in a minority of cases, all parts, of their own names. This trend in name changing

via enrolled deed polls in the United Kingdom points to the increasing complexities of identities, including gender identities, in contemporary societies and to their inextricable links with names. People change their names as they navigate the tessellation of their identities over time, thereby (re)creating, confirming and projecting who they are as embodied named beings (Pilcher 2016). In this article, we have especially focused on name changing in relation to gender identities, comparing women, men and people with gender neutral names and/or those whose name change implied a gender identity transition. Our analysis shows that there are gender differences in who uses an enrolled deed poll in the United Kingdom to change their own name, and in the types of names that they changed. These findings evidence the importance of names as social and cultural resources used by people in contemporary societies in the (re)doing of gender identities, and in the communication and confirmation of these identities.

Our analysis of a large-scale longitudinal dataset of 10 665 records, drawn from a previously overlooked source of data on name changes, quantifies for the first-time gender differences in name changing in the United Kingdom, including by types of names, and so makes a significant contribution to the limited literature on name changing. Our analysis also extends in several respects sociological understandings of the complexities of gender identities linked to names in contemporary societies. In contrast to studies focused on capturing individual experiences of specific types of gender-related name changing and/or by particular gender groups, our analysis of applicants of name changes made by enrolled deed polls facilitates both a wide and a detailed understanding of gender differences in the incidence of name changing and in different types of name changes made by women, men, people with gender neutral first names and/or middle names and/or people whose first and/or middle name changes indicate a transition in gender identity. While our study shows interesting, gendered patterns in surname changes, it also demonstrates that, on the whole, and compared to surnames, first names and/or middle names are much less likely to be changed. People wanting to change the gender identity signalled by their first names are the important

exception here. First names and/or middle names, then, continue to be more intimately and more securely linked to people's gender identities than surnames which signal (still changeable but more stable) identities of belonging. More qualitative research is needed on people's identity investments in these different types of names, including in terms of gender (although, see Anzani et al. 2023) so that we can better understand the social, cultural and communicative motivations that lay behind changes made to them. Further research on surname changing and gender identities should explore surname changing by men, address surname changing by women related to divorce or relationship breakdowns and consider surname changing by people with gender neutral forenames and/or people who are transgender. For example, is it the case that, as our limited data suggest, women who are transgender are more likely to have changed their surnames as well as their first names, compared to men who are transgender, and if so, what does that reveal about the name-based identities of transgender women and transgender men? Furthermore, future research could also consider gendered implications of the kinds of surnames that are preferred or changed by women and men. For example, what are the gendered patterns in the retention or change of surnames where elements may indicate gender of the applicant (e.g. Andersson or Andersdottir, Navratil or Navratilova)? In addition, from a United Kingdom perspective, we need to understand more about what motivates people to use enrolled deed polls to change their names, rather than use other procedures. Finally, there is a pressing need to examine the effects of COVID-19 and its disruption of social and cultural life on name changing behaviour including in relation to gender.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The lead author received financial support for the enrolled deed poll study from the School of Social Sciences at Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom.

Acknowledgements

In addition to co-authors Hannah Deakin-Smith and Hanh Thi My Nguyen, Dominic Holland and Delihlah Chadwick-Smith provided research assistance on the wider study of records of enrolled deed drawn on in this article.

References

Aldrin, Emilia. 2011. Namnval som social handling. Val av förnamn och samtal om förnamn bland föräldrar i Göteborg 2007–2009 [Naming as a social act. Choice of first names and conversations on first names among parents in Gothenburg 2007–2009.] Uppsala university. http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:402591/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Aldrin, Emilia. 2014 [printed 2015]. Förnamnsvalet som resurs för förhandling av könsidentiteter och könsgränser. [Choice of first names as a resource to negotiate gender identities and gender boundaries] *Studia Anthroponymica Scandinavica* 32, 169–191. https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn%3Anbn%3Ase%3Ahh%3Adiva-29249

Aldrin, Emilia. 2016. Names and identity. In Hough, Carole (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of names and naming*, 382–394. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.013.24

Alford, Richard. 1988. *Naming and identity: a cross-cultural study of personal naming practices*. New Haven: HRAF.

Anzani, Annalisa, Rucco, Daniele, Lorusso, Maric, Martin, & Prunas, Antonio. 2023. Identity values of chosen names in transgender and non-binary youth: a qualitative investigation. *LGBTQ+. Family: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19(1). 87–104. https://doi.org/10.1080/27703371.2022.2149656

Beck, Ulrich, & Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth. 2001. *Individualization*. London: SAGE.

Benson, Susan. 2006. Injurious naming: naming, disavowal and recuperation in the contexts of slavery and emancipation. In Gabrielle vom Bruck & Bodenhorn, Barbara (eds.), *An anthropology of names and naming*, 178–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boxer, Diana & Gritsenko, Elena. 2005. Women and last names across cultures: Reconstituting identity in marriage. *Women and Language* 28. 1–11. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A141493509/AONE?u=anon~cea30350&sid=googleScholar&xid=d1ad2431

Broom, Leonard, Beem, Helen & Harris, Virginia. 1955. Characteristics of 1,107 petitioners for change of name. *American Sociological Review* 20(1). 33–39. https://doi.org/10.2307/2088197

Bursell, Moa. 2012. Name change and de-stigmatization among Middle Eastern immigrants in Sweden. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35(3). 471–487. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.589522

Castrén, Anna-Maija. 2018. Becoming "us": Marital name, gender, and agentic work in transition to marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81(1). 248–263. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12519

Clarke, Victoria, Burns, Maree, & Burgoyne, Carole. 2008. 'Who would take whose name?': Accounts of naming practices in same-sex relationships. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 18. 420–439. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.936

Connell, Catherine. 2010. Doing, undoing or redoing gender? Learning from the workplace experiences of transgender people. *Gender & Society* 24. 31–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209356429

Coulmont, Baptiste. 2014. Changing one's first name in France: A fountain of youth? *Names*, 62(3). 137–146.

Dempsey, Deborah & Lindsay, Jo. 2018. Surnaming children born to lesbian and heterosexual couples: Displaying family legitimacy to diverse audiences. *Sociology* 52(5). 1017–1034. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038517696218

Duncan, Simon, Ellingsaeter, Anne Lise & Carter, Julia. 2018. Understanding tradition: marital change in Britain and Norway. *Sociological Research Online* 25(3). 438–455. https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780419892637

Emmelheinz, Celia. 2012. Naming a new self: Identity elasticity and self-definition in voluntary name changes. *Names* 60(3). 156–165.

Fermaglich, Kirsten. 2018. *A Rosenberg by any other name: A history of Jewish name changing in America*. New York: University Press.

Finch, Janet. 2008. Naming names: Kinship, individuality and personal names. *Sociology* 42(4). 709–725. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038508091624

Frändén, Märit. 2010. *”Att blotta vem jag är”. Släktnamnsskick och släktnamnsbyten hos samer i Sverige 1920–2009.* [*‘Laying bare who I am’. Surnames and changes of surname among the Sami of Sweden, 1920–2009*]. http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:355278/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and self-identity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Goffman, Erving. 1968. *Stigma*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Gooding, Gretchen, & Kreider, Rose. 2010. Women’s marital naming choices in a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Family Issues* 31. 681–701. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X09344688

Hagström, Charlotte. 2017. Från Kim till Sara och tillbaka till Kim: Namn, adoption och identitet. [From Kim to Sara and back to Kim. Names, adoption and identity]. In Leino, Unni-Päivä, Forsskåhl, Mona, Harling-Kranck, Gunilla, Jordan, Sabina, Nakari, Minna, Pitkänen, Ritva Liisa. (eds.), *Namn och identitet. Handlingar från NORNAs 46:e symposium i Tammerfors den 21–23 oktober 2015*. Uppsala: NORNA-förlaget, 5–21. https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-91-7276-097-4

Hanks, Patrick, & Parkin, Harry. 2016. Family names. In Hough, Carole (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of names and naming*, 214–236. Oxford: University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.013.9

Herbert, Barry, & Aylene, Harper. 2014. Unisex names for babies born in Pennsylvania 1990–2010. *Names* 62(1). 13–22.

Johnston, Ian. 2016. Call me Mr Cheeseburger: record number of people change their name by deed poll. *The Independent*, 22 February. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/call-me-mr-cheeseburger-record-number-of-people-change-their-name-by-deed-poll-a6888521.html

Kerns, Myleah Y. 2011. North American women’s surname choice based on ethnicity and self-identification as feminists. *Names* 59(2). 104–117.

Koshravi, Shahram. 2012. White masks/Muslim names: immigrants and name changing in Sweden. *Race and Class* 53(3). 65–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396811425986

Laskowski, Kara. 2010. Women’s post-marital name retention and the communication of identity. *Names* 58(2). 75–89.

Leibring, Katharina. 2017. The new Personal Names Act in Sweden – some possible consequences for the name usage. *Namenkundliche Informationen* 109/110. 408–419. https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn%3Anbn%3Ase%3Asprakochfolkminnen%3Adiva-1568

Lieberson, Stanley, Dumais, Susan, & Baumann, Shyon. 2000. The instability of androgynous names. *American Journal of Sociology* 105(5). 1249–1287. https://doi.org/10.1086/210431

Lind, Miriam. 2023. How to do gender with names: The name changes of trans individuals as performative speech acts. *Journal of language and sexuality* 12(1). 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.21002.lin

McClatchey, Caroline. 2011. Why are more people changing their name? *BBC News Magazine*. 18th October. Available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-15333140

McConnell-Ginnet, Sally. 2008. "What's in a name?" Social labeling and gender practices. In Holmes, Janet & Myerhoff, Miriam (eds.), *The handbook of language and gender*, 69–97. John Wiley & Sons.

Mills, Sarah. 2003. Caught between sexism, anti-sexism and 'political correctness': Feminist women's negotiations with naming practices. *Discourse Society* 14. 87–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926503014001931

Nyström, Staffan. 2016. Names and meaning. In Hough, Carole (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of names and naming*, 39–51. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.013.26

Obasi, Sharon, Mocarski, Richard, Holt, Natalie, Hope, Debra & Woodruff, Nathan. 2018. Renaming me: Assessing the influence of gender identity on name selection. *Names* 67(4). 199–211.

Patterson, Charlotte J., & Farr, Rachel H. 2017. 'What shall we call ourselves? Last names among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples and their adopted children. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 13(2). 97–113. https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2016.1169239

Pilcher, Jane. 2016. Names, bodies and identities. *Sociology* 50(4), 764–779. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515582157

Pilcher, Jane. 2017. Names and "doing gender": How forenames and surnames contribute to gender identities, difference, and inequalities. *Sex Roles* 77, 812–822. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0805-4

Pilcher, Jane, Hooley, Zara, & Coffey, Amanda. 2020. Names and naming in adoption: birth heritage and family-making. *Child & Family Social Work* 25(3), 568–575.

Scherr, Arthur. 1986. Change-of-name petitions of the New York courts: An untapped source in historical onomastics. *Names* 34(3). 284–302.

Seheuble, Laurie, Klingemann, Katherine, & Johnson, David. 2000. Trends in women's marital name choices: 1966–1996. *Names* 48(2). 105–114.

Stafford, Laura, & Kline, Susan L. 1996. Married women's name choices and sense of self. *Communication Reports* 9(1). 85–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/08934219609367638

Strauss, Anselm. 1959. *Mask and mirrors. The search for identity*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, republished 1997 London: Routledge.

Suter, Elizabeth, & Oswald, Romana Faith. 2003. Do lesbians change their last names in the context of a committed relationship? *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 7. 71–83. https://doi.org/10.1300/j155v07n02_06

Suter, Elizabeth. 2012. Negotiating identity and pragmatism: Parental treatment of international adoptees' birth culture names. *Journal of Family Communication* 12. 209–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2012.686940

Thwaites, Rachel. 2016. *Changing names and gendering identity*. London: Routledge.

UK Government. 2024. Change your name by deed poll. Available at https://www.gov.uk/change-name-deed-poll.

UK Government. 2023. Male and female populations. Available at https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk

Walkowiak, Justyna B. 2016. *Personal name policy: From theory to practice*. Poznań: Wydział Neofilologii UAM. https://doi.org/10.14746/9788394601720

Watzlawik, Meike, Pizarroso, Noemi, Silva Guimaraes, Danilo, Guimaraes Doria, Nilson, Han, Min, Ma, Chuan, & Ja Jung, Ae Ja. 2012. First names as signs of personal identity: An intercultural comparison. In *Proceedings of the 10th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS).* 1159–1176. Universidade da Coruña (España / Spain). https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/61912521.pdf

Wentling, Tre. 2020. Contested citizenship: Renaming processes among people of transgender Experience. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 67(12). 1653–1674. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1610634

Wilson, Rebekah. 2009. *A name of one's own: Identity, choice and performance in marital relationships* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. Gender Institute of the London School of Economics and Political Science, London. http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/305/

Yates, Dan, Moore, David, & McCabe, George. 1999. *The practice of statistics* (1 st ed.). New York: W.H. Freeman.

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (137–161)

Names as a trans technology: Exploring the naming practices of trans youth in Australia, Ireland and Canada

Julia Sinclair-Palm

Abstract: Children are often given a name based in some part on the sex they were assigned at birth. For trans youth, their given name does not always reflect their gender and so an aspect of their transition often includes changing their name. Drawing on interviews with trans youth in Australia, Ireland and Canada, I explore how trans youths' naming practices offer insight into the ways that they express their desire for intelligibility and safety, while simultaneously navigating gender norms and a new sense of identity. In this paper, I engage with trans studies and critical child studies to argue that naming practices are a trans technology that trans youth use to strategically navigate gender. For some trans youth, chosen first names are described as way to be seen as one of the two societally recognized genders (man or woman), and for others, their chosen first name reflects their resistance to cisnormativity and naming practices that adhere to binary gender norms.

Keywords: trans, youth, naming practices, Australia, Ireland, Canada

Julia Sinclair-Palm, Carleton University.

NoSo 2024:4(1) | https://doi.org/10.59589/noso.42024.16669

1. Introduction

One of the first ways some trans youth narrate their gender is through the process of choosing a first name. Children are often given a first name based in some part on the sex they were assigned at birth. Sex is typically assigned by a doctor at the time of birth based on the appearance of external genitalia, whereas gender refers to a combination of a person's felt sense of identity and gender expression. For trans youth, their given name does not always reflect their gender and so an aspect of their transition often includes changing their first name. Trans people may also change their first name as a way to assert agency and claim an identity, even if their given name does not betray their felt sense of gender. Because of their age, trans youths' relationships to and negotiation of naming is particularly complex: these young people are often still dependent on the very families who named them.

My research adds to the growing number of studies that explore the complex daily lives of trans youth. Trans youths' narratives about their naming practices offer a way to further understand how they signify their identities, navigate various contexts, and negotiate relationships with peers and family. In this paper, I engage with trans studies and critical child studies to argue that naming practices are a trans technology that trans youth use to strategically navigate gender. Trans technologies are tools and strategies that trans people use to navigate cisnormativity and trans oppressive systems and structures in society (Haimson et al. 2020). Trans technologies name the creative apparatuses that trans people use to increase their safety, resources, and access. Trans technologies are also a pathway for trans people to feel a sense of agency, to disrupt norms, to exert creativity, and to find joy in being trans. For some trans youth, first names are described as way to be seen as one of the two societally recognized genders (man or woman), and for others, their first name reflects their resistance to cisnormativity[1] and naming practices that adhere to binary gender norms. Some trans youth are doing both at the same time. Names as

[1] Cisnormativity is the assumption that all individuals are cisgender and denies the existence of trans people (Bauer et al. 2009).

a trans technology are about subverting the binary as an essentialist structure and finding joy in that creative process.

2. Literature review

Although research about naming practices is a relatively contemporary field of study (Palsson 2014), it is clear that gender plays an important role in naming practices (Connell 2010; Pilcher 2017). Names are culturally universal (Alford 1988) and are used to designate individual identities (Finch 2008; Elias 1991). Western cultural norms dictate that parents should give a newborn baby a legibly gendered forename based on the sex they were assigned at birth (Alford 1988; Lieberson et al. 2000; Pilcher 2017). For example, research in the United States reports that the majority of parents give their children forenames regarded as female-appropriate or male-appropriate names based on their assigned sex at birth (Herbert and Aylene 2014; Lieberson et al. 2000). Messerschmidt (2009) argues that names then come to be part of the ways that children 'do' their gender, and how gender becomes tied to the sex one is assigned at birth. Forenames then come to stand in for ones' assigned sex at birth and reinforce a child's gender.

Forenames are part of what Shilling (2008:15) calls the 'body pedagogy' of an individual and supports how they 'do' their gender and assert their belonging and membership to a sex category. Building on this research, Pilcher uses Connell's (2009:107) term 'contradictory embodiment' to describe 'when normative expectations about the coincidence of bodies, sex category, gender, and forenames are breached' (2017:814). For example, when someone has a forename that does not easily correspond to their legible gender and adhere to normative gendered naming practices, a person's gender identity may be challenged. This is especially the case for some trans and nonbinary people.

Research has also explored how forenames are not only based on ones' sex assigned at birth, but are also important 'embodied processes of racial and ethnic honouring and identification' (Pilcher 2017:814).

Forenames offer a way for parents to express cultural belonging, ethnic identification and honour one's heritage (Edwards & Caballero 2008; Fryer and Levitt 2003). These naming practices are typically gendered (Fryer & Levitt 2003; Sue & Telles 2007). Naming practices are also impacted by a desire to express or represent one's affiliation to a specific group or ones' desire to distance themselves from an affiliation to a particular group (Khosravi 2011). For example, Khosravi (2011) found that some Muslims living in Sweden change their first name to what participants described as a more neutral European name to help them integrate into society. Naming research has also studied the impact of the mispronunciation of first names on students in high education (Pilcher 2022). Naming practices in Western society are inflected by colonization and white supremacy, reinforcing cisnormativity in naming practices and pressuring racialized parents to assimilate (Khosravi 2011; Sinclair-Palm 2016; Sinclair-Palm & Chokly 2023; Sinclair-Palm 2023; Sue & Telles 2007).

Names and naming practices sometimes arise as important ways that trans people navigate gender norms in Western society (Connell 2010; Schilt 2006). There has been some research that explores how trans adults choose first names. For example, in a recent study in the United States about trans adults' process of choosing a name, researchers found that participants emphasized the importance of honouring family heritage and used the practice of choosing a new name similar to their birth name (Obasi et al. 2019). Connell (2010) also finds that in their negotiation of gendered interactions at work, trans people's chosen first names are sometimes questioned or not respected. Research has also documented how choosing a new first name can provide trans people with the possibility of expressing their gender and identity in new ways (Pollitt et al. 2019; Sevelius 2013; Pamfile et al. 2024).

Trans youth often use a new first name socially, before changing it legally because they face a number of barriers to legally changing their first name and to provide opportunities to experience using the first name (Tan 2022; Vance 2018). First, the financial cost of changing one's first name in Canada, Australia and Ireland is a barrier for

many trans youth. Second, some trans youth do not legally change their first name because the applications typically require parental permission and so they fear social stigma and family rejection. Third, trans youth also face barriers related to the formal (and sometimes medical) documents needed to apply for a name change, the difficult process of changing identity documents after getting a legal name change, and having to engage with the government about their trans identity. These are all additional factors that complicate trans youths' naming practices and access to legally changing their first name in Canada, Australia and Ireland.

Since 2020, there has been a rise in the number of anti-trans bills proposed in Canada, the United States and in the United Kingdom (Abreu et al. 2022; Carbonaro 2023; Levesque et al. 2021; Mason & Hamilton 2024; Trans Legislation Tracker 2023). Many of these policies seek to limit trans youths' ability to use their name at school and to stop educators from using trans youths' chosen first names. Recent research about trans youth highlights the importance of using the chosen name of a trans person (McLemore 2015; Pollitt et al. 2019; Russell et al. 2018). Using a trans person's first name is a matter of dignity, respect and safety. Studies find that trans people experience reduced depression, suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour when people use their name (Gaskins & McClain 2021; Pampati et al. 2021; Russell et al. 2018). Although this research is important, these studies often approach the topic of trans youths' naming practices from a deficit model and fail to capture the complex ways trans youth choose, navigate and relate to their names. Victim narratives about trans youth 'depoliticize youth once again, creating safe, sanitized images that conform with white middle-class standards of visibility and value' (Driver 2008:5). My research resists these victim narratives, and instead seeks to explore the complexity of trans youths' naming practices.

My research also builds on studies that have explored the way language sometimes fails trans youths' ability to narrate the complexity of their gender, names, and identity (Connell 2010; Noble 2006; Sinclair-Palm & Chokly 2023). First names are a way to express

individuality and can be an important part of one's identity, and the narrativizing of one's changing identity (Elias 1991; Emmelhainz 2012; Pilcher 2016). I am interested in the creative strategies trans youth draw on to describe who they are and to avoid being misnamed (Hillier et al. 2020; Meadow 2018; Sinclair-Palm 2017; Sinclair-Palm & Chokly 2023). Much of the literature about trans youth describes them as a white, gender-conforming, homogeneous population and pays little attention to trans youths' multiple and intersecting identities (Jourian 2015).

3. Theoretical Framework

Forenames are often used by others to determine one's gender. Kessler and McKenna (1978) and West and Zimmerman (1987) offer frameworks for thinking about how people 'do' their gender and the ways that gender is both a socially constructed category and something that others read on individuals based on their behaviour, clothing, and practices. Westbrook and Schilt (2014) build on these social theories about gender to explore how individuals are dependent on the other for gender recognition. They use the term gender determination to describe how 'people can be recognized as a member of the gender category with which they identify if their identity claim is accepted as legitimate by other people determining their gender' (Westbrook & Schilt 2014:33). The intelligibility of one's gender can vary depending on context and community, and is highly dependent on the other person's understanding, knowledge and relationship to gender. Connell (2012) uses the concept of contradictory embodiment to describe how embodiment and narratives about trans experience are shaped by the dissonance between how trans youth are perceived by others and how trans youth perceive themselves.

For Butler (1990; 2001; 2004), recognition and intelligibility are important to understanding how people navigate gender norms and tell stories about themselves. They argue that 'gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of

substance, of a natural sort of being' (1990:33). Gender does not exist prior to subject formation but is rather achieved in and through its repetition: gender is a part of becoming a subject and gender shapes the subject. Butler finds that although recognition from others may be important to a liveable life, 'the terms by which [one is] recognized [may] make life unliveable' (Butler 2004:4). This demand for legibility is wrapped up the history and ongoing role of colonialism, nationalism, racism, and cisnormativity. For trans youth, narrating and navigating their gender cannot be removed from these systems of power that insist that people have a consistent and legible gender.

Children are the foundation of much of the research and theories about gender, and early scientific theories about gender argued that the sex and gender of a child can be altered and are malleable (Gill-Peterson 2018). These beliefs about the plasticity of children, and in turn, their gender, are used as a tool to perpetuate the erasure of trans people and as a way to deny trans children rights and autonomy (Gill-Peterson 2018). Trans studies scholars have traced how these transphobic, racist, classist and ableist beliefs about young trans people are still used to gatekeep access to knowledge, resources, and rights (Clare 2013; Gill-Peterson 2018; Salamon 2018; Johnstone 2019; Pyne 2020; Stanley 2021; Ashley 2022). Trans people have written about their strategic navigation of this gatekeeping (Seburn et al. 2019; Spade 2006) and how this gatekeeping is tied to the intelligibility of a young trans person's gender. Trans youths' process of choosing a first name provides a glimpse into the ways that they are expressing their agency, describing their gender, and navigating cisnormativity.

4. Methodology

The data for this paper were collected from two research projects, both with a focus on young trans peoples' experiences of choosing a first name. In 2014, I interviewed 10 young trans people ages 15–25 years old in Canada and in 2019, I expanded the project and conducted interviews with young trans people in Australia and Ireland. I recruited participants through local LGBT centres and existing

contacts. I conducted semi-structured interviews via Zoom with 15 young trans people ages 16–28 years old in Australia and 13 young trans people ages 16–28 years old in Ireland. Participants did not need to have legally changed their first name to be part of the study, and less than half of the trans youth interviewed had. Consent was obtained from a copy of a signed form that was emailed to me prior to the interview and verbal consent was provided prior to the start of the interview. I refer to participants in the study by the pronouns they told me they use. Participants had the choice of using their first name or choosing a pseudonym to be used in the project[2].

The purpose of the interviews was to solicit rich, nuanced stories about renaming from trans youth to get a sense of how identity is negotiated and shifts over time. These locations were selected because I had existing relationships with scholars and community members in those places. These countries have a similar history and ongoing culture of colonialism, and both have had an increase in social awareness about young trans people and political shifts regarding trans rights.

Interviews were analysed through inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involved a process of moving back and forth between the data, the initial codes developed by the principal investigator and research assistants, and research about names and young trans people to explore patterns in the data. In this paper, I focus on stories about how trans youth navigated their gender when choosing a first name. I am not reporting on generalizable conclusions about how young trans people understand and choose their first names, but I do hope to add to the conversations about young trans people's relationship to gender, names, and agency.

[2] In this paper I do not state whether I am referring to a participant by using their first name or a pseudonym. This practice provides an added layer of anonymization and supports the idea that the name someone wants to be called does not need to be legally recognized to be respected.

5. Findings

Through my analysis of the interviews, I found two themes that highlight the ways trans youth use naming practices as a trans technology to navigate gender and subvert the gender binary as an essentialist structure. The first theme addresses how young trans people are using first names to disrupt the gender binary. For example, a number of participants spoke about wanting a gender-neutral first name and their strategies for avoiding gender norms and gender assumptions based on their first name. The second theme I will discuss, explores how trans youth are choosing first names that exploit the gender binary in order to increase the possibility of being treated with respect and to navigate transmisogyny. Transmisogyny was coined by Julia Serano (2007) and refers to the intersecting oppressions and discriminations of transphobia and misogyny. For example, some trans women described that they felt the need to choose a feminine name even if their gender does not feel reflected in their first name. Within this discussion, trans youth also noted the importance of people using their name as a way to feel a greater sense of gender authenticity. In this analysis, I also note how some trans youth are using both of these strategies at the same time.

Disrupting the gender binary

In Western society, forenames are often associated with either boys or girls. Parents typically give their child a forename that corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth, and this cisnormative practice is what often leads trans people to change their name. In my interviews with young trans people, they described how gender was an important factor in their process of choosing a first name and that they often looked for a name that reflected their gender identity.

Some of the trans youth I spoke with identify as genderqueer, gender fluid or nonbinary, and in their process of choosing a first name that reflected their gender, they sometimes disrupted the gender binary by choosing a gender-neutral name. For example, Jamie described the

naming choices that felt available to them in their search for a first name:

Example (1)

> I wanted something that was less feminine, either kind of like a gender-neutral name that kind of could be male or female type thing. You know, I went with Jamie obviously or Alex or you know that style thing or I was also thinking about like making up a new name type thing, so it doesn't have any gender association because it's you know Leaf or whatever.

Jamie highlights how some first names are seen as gender-neutral in Western society and that they also considered the option of choosing a first name without any gender connotations.

In Charli's naming process, they also sought to find ways to represent their gender and struggled because of the ways that the gender binary influences the associations people have to particular first names. Charli described this challenge and their strategies for navigating gender:

Example (2)

> Maybe I think it was around like June, July, maybe last year, and so I started going by Charlie, I started with like the E on the end. And then I was like 'nah.' I wanted it with without the E because I felt like it was more firm and a bit more me. And I like it, because Charli, it means like strong man and I'm gender fluid. And it's a bit of a like gender fuck and I really like that. I like that you know just the name Charli is very like, it's seen as one of those things that can be like for boys and girls, so for me being gender fluid, I really like it. It really fits me.

Charli's strategy was to adapt the first name they began using to make it more aligned with their gender. They found pleasure in choosing a first name that fit with their gender, but their description of the meaning of the name complicates their insistence that it reflects their gender fluidity. One way to understand Charli's decision is in recogniz-

ing the pleasure of creating confusion and disrupting gender norms associated with names. The sound and spelling of the name Charli is also important to their relationship to the name and might be a way that they are expressing playfulness, marking difference, being intentionally disruptive, and doing in group signalling to other trans folks. Charli tells multiple stories about the meaning and gender associated with their name, and this complexity allows them various stories to explain how they chose their name.

Similarly, Leighton spoke about wanting a first name that was 'masculine slash gender neutral.' Leighton knew they did not want the feminine first name they were given at birth, and wanted to find something that better characterized their gender. Leighton did not want others to make assumptions about their gender that would make them feel trapped: 'I just didn't want people to like see me or see my name and then immediately put me in a box that I have to fight to get out of. The most neutral, it could be the more I think it just made my life easier.' This is a common sentiment among the nonbinary participants I spoke with. For some trans youth, first names feel like a trap or a gender container that does not allow for them to be recognized as the gender they identify with or for their gender to shift over time.

In choosing a first name, Palace spoke about their desire to find a name that didn't announce their gender. In response to assumptions people often make about the relationship between gender and names, they wanted a first name that wouldn't hint at what theirs is:

Example (3)

> When I heard Palace, I was like, "that's not a name, that's what I want." I really liked the idea of having something that's like not a name, because then there's no already associated gender role. And I think it was important so that nobody had any sort of preconceived ideas about who a Palace would be or what a Palace would look like or act like or think like or what their gender would be, especially written on paper, because they'd be like "Palace…" and then have no idea who was going to walk through the door. And I like that.

Palace found joy in their creative process of choosing a first name that captures the way they feel about gender as a concept. Some people feel trapped in the assumptions people make about them because of their name, and Palace offers a strategy to escape these gender norms.

Trans youth also spoke about how their disruptions of normative gender naming practices were sometimes met with confusion. Some participants explained how friends and family members felt like the name they had chosen did not match their gender identity. For example, Eli described how their friends asked them 'why, if you're nonbinary, why did you choose the name Eli, which is a boy's name like it's a masculine name.' Eli didn't expect to be questioned about this and explained to these people that 'the fact that it's masculine like is okay, for me. A name doesn't equal gender and that gender expression is different from gender identity. The name Eli is a part of my gender expression which is like, for me, is more masculine leaning as well.' Eli chose a first name that aligned with their nonbinary gender but the community perception of their name failed to recognize the complexity of their gender. Their desire to have their gender intelligible, or for their friends to find their name a clear reflection of their gender, is challenged by the messy gender associations people have with names and the way that most names are seen as for a girl or a boy.

Navigating transmisogyny

In my first interview with Beryl, they began by telling me about how their first name reflected both their ties to their culture as Irish and Chinese, and was a name they choose to strategically navigate gender-based violence and discrimination. Although a more feminine first name does not reflect their gender identity, Beryl chose what they described as a 'traditionally feminine name' to provide them less trans visibility and more protection from transphobia. Beryl was well aware of the violence and discrimination that trans women face and strategically choose a name that they hoped would allow them greater recognition as a woman: 'The name Beryl is more distinctly feminine and as a trans person, especially a trans feminine spectrum person,

I'm probably going to experience more violence than other people.' Beryl's story demonstrates how even though they may not feel like a woman, they have to perform femininity through their first name in order to avoid discrimination. While it may be important for some trans people to define themselves, social norms and the policing of gender restrict how trans youth like Beryl use language to describe themselves.

Like Beryl, Zoe was aware of the ways that trans feminine people are treated and so they strategically chose a feminine first name despite not always identifying as a woman:

Example (4)

> I wanted, well, as I mentioned I wanted… the fact that it is inherently effeminate is pretty big because even though I identify as genderqueer, I wanted to get like far away from male as I could. I just spent so long being there, male, I was just done with it, and yet here I am.… Male is kind of like my go to for I don't care. And female is for really, I care about it. So, it needed to be something that was inherently female so that it could show that I was actually trying to present as female.

Genderqueer is an identity that reflects Zoe's gender identity as someone who is neither a man nor a woman, and is thus outside of the gender binary. Zoe's gender expression changes depending on how they are feeling on a particular day, but it was important for Zoe to have a first name that allowed the possibility of being read as a woman. Choosing a feminine name provided Zoe and Beryl a tool for navigating their gender and the transmisogyny they might face.

Another participant named Lily also referenced how choosing a feminine first name was a strategy for making sure that other people read her as a woman: 'I didn't want any ambiguity about [my name]. Like, if someone tells their name is Lily, you're almost always going to assume that's a woman. There's less of an excuse for me to get misgendered then.' Similar to Lily, Tamara also used their first name as a litmus test for who would be accepting of their chosen gender. She

explained how when they first started introducing herself using her first name, that people didn't always believe that was her name:

Example (5)

> But they like almost didn't believe me when I told them. You know? Which was like… so a lot of my early introducing to people was like, negative and it's like, it wasn't even like that much people actively going "ugh, as if your name is a girl's name," it was more just people going, "excuse me? what? huh?" And it's like, it's not an uncommon name, the problem you're having is that you have decided that I am not a woman, but I have a woman's name."

Tamara went on to describe how when she first encountered this kind of transmisogyny, she lacked confidence and thought that the resistance she was met with was because other people couldn't hear her say her first name. She responds to this situation differently now:

Example (6)

> And I also have the confidence now. Because, like, I know what my voice sounds like, I know that there are things that make people clock me. And I'm like, but that's a them problem, so now, if someone like, has a problem, I'm just like "what?" Like if I say my name is Tamara and they get "excuse me?" I go, "you heard me!" Not always that rude, but like. If someone has that same sort of discomfort, I now put them – I'm like, "No, this is all on you," like I used to be very insecure and be like, "oh I'm not like performing femininity well enough," but now I'm like "no actually, fuck you, like, I'll tell you what my name is, and you'll listen. And I'll tell you everything else about me and you'll listen," like.

Tamara's relation to the harassment and discrimination she faced has shifted and she no longer puts up with people's resistance to calling her by her name.

For some trans youth, it can take time to get used to being called a new first name. For example, Beryl explains the conflicting experience of using a new name:

Example (7)

> We're still battling internalized transphobia and cis-sexism and all these things because when it comes to trans people, often we still feel that our genders are not authentic and this is something from my own research and experiences. And so hearing our names, even though they are affirming our experiences at present, it may still sound a little bit weird to us because you can still hear that voice in the back of my head saying "oh you're still a boy and this name is unnatural."

Faced with uncertainty, social norms and the work of gender transitioning, Beryl doubts the story of their first name and gender. The 'realness' of their gender is challenged through their relationship to their new first name. For Beryl, the repetition of their first name invited them into feeling more comfortable in their identity as a feminine person named Beryl: 'It felt really fake initially but hearing it in a positive manner was a lot more affirming, which solidified this feels okay.' For Beryl, their first name, and possibly their gender, became more real through repetition and when others offered them recognition.

Robert also spoke about some of the challenges they faced when choosing a new first name and starting to use that name. As part of their naming process, Robert worried about how others would perceive them based on their gender and first name.

Example (8)

> I think there were a few things. I was really sort of scared of like being too masculine. I came out as gay when I was 16 or 17, as a lesbian, and I was always really hyper aware of being too masculine. And so, it's weird to think now, but I was, you know, very much like, girly. I think there was a lot of sort of internalized homophobia and I think probably as well, I knew that I wanted to be masculine. It was just, it was sort of a battle in my mind. I was terrified of having like this masculine sort of identity. Even though I was coming out as trans and sort of saying, yeah, like, I do want to be more masculine, but I was like, ah, but not that, you know,

> not too much. At the time the name Robert felt too masculine. It felt very like, "That's a boy kind of name" and I wasn't ready for that sort of transition myself and I was also really worried about how my friends and family would sort of react like. I felt like I had to sort of ease them into it. Which I didn't even end up doing, but it was in my head that I was going to do that.

Parents and friends of trans people often speak about the struggle to address trans people by their new first name (Wahlig 2015), yet we rarely hear trans people narrate their own struggle to address themselves with a new first name. Siobhan remembers how 'it took a long time for [her] to take on the name' because she felt like she 'wasn't really worthy of it.' When she chose her first name, she was a 'beefy, five-foot seven dude' and her 'voice wasn't really doing the part.' She felt like a 'farce' and needed to 'earn' her name. Reflecting on this process, Siobhan explains how she 'didn't really know how hard it was to internalize a name for one's self' and found that repetition helped her form an attachment to her name: 'You see it more places, you use it with more people. And suddenly you get an affinity, and you start to attach to that name.' Siobhan felt like her body and gender presentation conflicted with her new first name and needed the help of others to feel secure and confident with her name. The process of naming and having a name repeated, whether it be by others or in documentation, makes the name and therefore the gender identity more real. This iterative process is the technology of trans naming practices.

Trans youth also spoke to me about how they use different first names in different contexts. Depending on their assessment of possible risks, the way they wanted to be understood, and their relationship to the people in a particular space, trans youth made decisions about which first name to use in each space or community they entered. Lukah offered an eloquent discussion of this in his interview.

Example (9)

> And I think that names should… Not from a logistical point of view, but from a personality kind of point of view, I think the

> names are too stagnant and too stuck in place, and I think that we should all be able to have like two or three aliases that we want to go by separate things. And I use it to compartmentalize my life. Even before I was trans, I would use different names to compartmentalize my life. Because my name was really long, it had multiple nicknames. So in church spaces, I would be one name, in school spaces I'd be another, in family spaces I'd be another. And I could kind of keep how I presented myself, like a church it was more formal compared to school, based on my name. And it was all the same name in the end.

This was not an uncommon strategy among the trans youth I spoke with. For some these multiple first names reflected their expression and creativity, and for others it was about intimacy and relationships.

Zoe uses multiple and different first names, depending on who they are with. For example, at university, Zoe often spends time in the Centre for Women and Trans People. When new people enter the space there is a common practice of going around the circle of people in the room and stating one's name and preferred pronoun. Zoe told me about a time when they introduced themselves to a new person stating: 'Hi my name is Nicky or Zoe, and you can use male or female pronouns.' This introduction confused the new person, who was left wondering which name to use. Zoe explained how their gender identity changes, and their first names and preferred pronouns reflect that fluidity:

Example (10)

> It's dependent on how I'm feeling, how I'm presenting, and frankly I'm fine with them using both. But if I am presenting [in a feminine way], please use Zoe. That's pretty much how it is. If I'm presenting I do like to be referred to in my female name. But for the most part I'll either be presenting as male or gender neutral so I really don't care otherwise.

Zoe's gender is symbolized through their preferred first name and pronoun and is dependent on 'if [she is] not passing or if [she is] not even trying to.' Similar to Bornstein's (1994) discussion of gender,

Zoe locates gender expression and identity as a feeling; 'If I'm not trying, it's not really how I'm feeling.' Zoe's daily decision of whether to look like a woman also insists on the social construction of gender. For Zoe, gender is both fluid and rigid, and their naming practices demonstrate how they strategically communicate this complexity.

6. Discussion

Stories from trans youth expose the complex ways they refuse the gender binary and navigate transphobia in their naming process. Traditional naming conventions insist that one's gender assigned at birth neatly correspond with the first name you are given. Trans youth understand how naming practices within cisnormativity function in Western society, and use this knowledge to strategically navigate this oppressive gender system. For some trans youth, this meant that they chose a more feminine first name so that their gender and humanity was less likely to be questioned and threatened. While other trans youth chose a first name that either had no gender associations or was associated with both girls and boys.

In their narratives about naming practices, trans youth demonstrate Butler's (2004) analysis of the ways that gender is important to how we understand our gender and the complex ways people navigate intelligibility. Trans youth expose how one's first name can provide recognition and intelligibility, and are important to how trans youth express their gender and navigate gender norms. Forenames are like a story trans youth tell about their gender and who they are, and yet are in some ways dependent on others for recognition. Simultaneously, first names are a compromise for trans youth, and act as a tool for avoiding conflict, misrecognition, transmisogyny, and violence.

Trans youth tell stories about refusing the limitations of the gender binary in their naming practices, and also narrate how they skilfully navigate the oppressive enactments of the gender binary. Too often trans people who adhere to normative gender practices are cast as reproducing rather than challenging gender norms. This misunderstanding has consequences, and denies trans youth both the know-

ledge they have about gender oppression and their strategic navigation of gender violence. Choosing a legibly gendered first name is a technology that acknowledges the gender binary and yet recognizes that when safety and survival is at stake, you cannot always refuse these normative naming practices.

Some trans youth chose a first name that they thought would be less perceived as a gendered name, and for some, this was because they felt less worried about the violence or discrimination they would face because of their resistance to normative naming practices. In other instances, trans youth who strategically chose a less gendered first name, thought it would be easier for their friends and family to adjust to their new name and gender by selecting a first name that wasn't too feminine or too masculine.

Forenames often signal to others how we want to be perceived and yet we cannot always predict what gender associations people have with particular names. Forenames, like gender, rely on the other for recognition. The repetition of a new first name helps trans youth feel like it is their name, and that they deserve to be called that name. Reflecting Butler's (2004) argument about gender as a repetition of behaviours and actions, names too become something that is facilitated by the other.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have drawn on trans studies and child studies to explore how trans youths' narratives about naming expose the strategic ways they navigate oppressive normative naming practices and make compromises about how they incorporate their gender identity into their first name. Naming practices are a trans technology that trans youth use to strategically navigate gender, and their narratives about their naming practices demonstrate their agency, creativity, and the strategic ways they navigate cisnormativity and transphobia. These narratives offer insight into how young trans people navigate their desire for recognition and negotiate the role of their first name given at birth in the story of their gender and self. Some trans people identify within

the gender binary, while others understand their gender to be outside of the binary, while still others want to throw away the idea of gender. Trans youths' narratives about their naming practices demonstrate the ways they are thinking about gender beyond the binary and conceptualizing a more fluid understanding of gender. Trans youth are increasingly bringing new language to describe their genders, disrupting binary understandings of gender and expanding social awareness about the complexity of gender. The trans technology of naming is not just supporting trans people, it is also shaping larger discourses about gender.

The ethics protocol for this project has been reviewed and cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. This paper draws on research supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

References

2023 Anti-Trans Bills. 2023. Trans Legislation Tracker. https://translegislation.com

Abreu, Roberto, L., Sostre, Jules, P., Gonzalez, Kirsten, A., Lockett, Gabriel, M., Matsuno, Em, & Mosley, Della, V. 2022. Impact of gender-affirming care bans on transgender and gender diverse youth: Parental figures' perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology* 36(5). 643–652. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000987

Alford, Richard. 1988. *Naming and identity: A cross-cultural study of personal naming practices*. New Haven: HRAF Press.

Ashley, Florence. 2022. *Banning transgender conversion practices: A legal and policy analysis*. UBC Press.

Bauer, Greta R., Hammond, Rebecca, Travers, Robb, Kaay, Matthias, Hohenadel, Karin M., & Boyce, Michelle. 2009. "I don't think this is theoretical; this is our lives": how erasure impacts health care for transgender people. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care* 20(5) 348–361.

Bornstein, Kate. 1994. *Gender Outlaw: Men, Women and the Rest of Us*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 2001. Doing justice to someone: Sex reassignment and allegories of transsexuality. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7. 621–636.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing gender*. London: Routledge.

Braun, Virginia, and Clarke, Victoria. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology". *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2). 77–101.

Carbonaro, Giulia . 2023. 'Out of touch and cruel': Trans rights groups condemn UK government's new schools guidance. *Euronews.* (December 21). https://www.euronews.com/2023/12/21/out-of-touch-and-cruel-trans-rights-groups-condemn-uk-governmments-new-schools-guidance

Clare, Eli. 2013. Body Shame, Body Pride: Lessons from the Disability Rights Movement. In Stryker, Susan & Aizura, Aren (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, 261–266. London: Routledge.

Connell, Raewyn. 2009. *Gender in world perspective*. Cambridge: Polity.

Connell, Cati. 2010. Doing, undoing or redoing gender? Learning from the workplace experiences of transgender people. *Gender & Society* 24. 31–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209356429

Connell, Raewyn. 2012. Transsexual Women and Feminist Thought: Toward New Understanding and New Politics. *Signs* 37(4). 857–881. https://doi.org/10.1086/664478

Driver, Susan. 2008. Introducing queer youth cultures. In Driver, Susan (ed.), *Queer youth cultures*. 1–25. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Edwards, Rosalind, & Caballero, Chamion. 2008. What's in a name? An exploration of the significance of personal naming of mixed children for parents from different racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds. *The Sociological Review* 56. 39–60. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.00776.x

Elias, Norbert. 1991. *The Society of Individuals*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Emmelhainz, Celia. 2012. Naming a new self: Identity elasticity and self-definition in voluntary name changes. *Names* 60(3). 156–165.

Fryer, Roland, & Levitt, Steven. 2003. *The causes and consequences of distinctively Black names*. Working Paper 9938. Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Haimson, Oliver L., Gorrell, Dykee, Starks, Denny L., & Weinger, Zu. 2020. Designing trans technology: Defining challenges and envisioning community-centered solutions. *Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (Honolulu, HI, USA, Apr. 2020), 1–13.

Herbert, Barry, & Aylene, Harper. 2014. Unisex names for babies born in Pennsylvania 1990–2010. *Names* 62. 13–22.

Hillier, Amy, Kroehle, Kel, Edwards, Hazel, & Graves, Giana. 2020. Risk, resilience, resistance and situated agency of trans high school students. *Journal of LGBT youth* 17(4). 384–407.

Gaskins, Leo C., & McClain, Craig R. 2021. Visible name changes promote inequity for transgender researchers. *PLoS Biolog* 19(3). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3001104

Gill-Peterson, Jules. 2018. *Histories of the transgender child*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gossett, Reina, Eric Stanley, and Joanna Burton. 2017. *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Johnstone, Fae. Health Care Needs To Start Seeing Trans Youth For Who They Are. *HuffPost*. 2019. (July 2). https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/trans-kids-health-care_ca_5d1b7555e4b07f6ca5848b10?fbclid=IwAR3Ff-IEgafa5w0pgXYTTx7KcG_Az-3ngG9SB1lZqpo_DxhAu0DXzXpeZBR4

Jourian, T. J. 2015. Evolving nature of sexual orientation and gender identity. *New Directions for Student Services* 152. 11–23.

Kessler, Suzanne, & McKenna, Wendy. 1978. *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.

Khosravi, Shahram. 2012. White masks/Muslim names: Immigrants and name-changing in Sweden. *Race & class*. 53(3). 65–80.

Levesque, Anne, LaFontaine, Fannie, Thabet, Clemence, Cameron, Angela, Salyzn, Amy, Bouclin, Suzanne, Kirkup, Kyle, McGill, Jena, Rich, Sylvia. 2021. A huge step backward for trans rights: Québec's proposed family law reform will only serve to reverse important human rights gains for trans people in the province. *National Magazine*. (November 10). https://nationalmagazine.ca/en-ca/articles/law/opinion/2021/a-huge-step-backward-for-trans-rights

Lieberson, Stanley, Dumais, Susan, & Baumann, Shyon. 2000. The instability of androgynous names: The symbolic maintenance of gender boundaries. *American Journal of Sociology* 105. 1249–1287. https://doi.org/10.1086/210431

Mason, Corrine, & Hamilton, Leah. 2024. Alberta's new policies are not only anti-trans, they are anti-evidence. *The Conversation*. (February 4). https://theconversation.com/albertas-new-policies-are-not-only-anti-trans-they-are-anti-evidence-222579

McLemore, Kevin A. 2015. Experiences with misgendering: Identity misclassification of transgender spectrum individuals. *Self and Identity* 14(1). 51–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2014.950691

Meadow, Tey. 2018. *Trans kids: Being gendered in the twenty-first century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Messerschmidt, James. 2009. 'Doing gender': The impact and future of a salient sociological concept. *Gender and Society* 23. 81–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243208326253

Noble, Jean Bobby. 2006. *Sons of the movement: FtMs risking incoherence on a post-queer cultural landscape*. Toronto, ON: Women's Press.

Obasi, Sharon N., Mocarski, Richard, Holt, Natalie, Hope, Debra A., & Woodruff, Nathan. 2019. Renaming me: Assessing the influence of gender identity on name selection. *Names* 67(4). 199–211.

Palsson, Gisli. 2014. Personal names: Embodiment, differentiation, exclusion, and belonging. *Science, Technology and Human Values* 39. 618–630. https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243913516808

Pamfile, Dana, Bourquin, Céline, Michaud, Laurent, Brovelli, Sebastien, Pécoud, Pascal, & Stiefel, Friedrich. 2024. What is in a chosen name? An exploratory study on the renaming experiences of transgender people. *International Journal of Transgender Health*. 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2023.2301318

Pampati, Sanjana, Andrzejewski, Jack, Steiner, Riley J., Rasberry, Catherine N., Adkins, Susan H., Lesesne, Catherine A., Boyce, Lorin, Grose, Rose G. & Johns, Michelle M. 2021. "We deserve care and we deserve competent care": Qualitative perspectives on health care from transgender youth in the Southeast United States. *Journal of pediatric nursing* 56. 54–59.

Pilcher, Jane. 2016. Names, bodies and identities. *Sociology* 50(4). 764–779. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515582157

Pilcher, Jane. 2017. Names and "Doing Gender": How Forenames and Surnames Contribute to Gender Identities, Difference, and Inequalities. *Sex Roles* 77. 812–822. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0805-4

Pollitt, Amanda M., Ioverno, Salvatore, Russell, Stephen T., Li, Gu, & Grossman, Arnold H. 2019. Predictors and mental health benefits of chosen name use among transgender youth. *Youth & Society* 53(2). 320–341. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X19855898

Pyne, Jake. 2020. "Building a Person": Legal and Clinical Personhood for Autistic and Trans Children in Ontario. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 35(2). 341–365.

Russell, Stephen T., Pollitt, Amanda M., Li, Gu, & Grossman, Arnold H. 2018. Chosen name use is linked to reduced depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior among transgender youth. *Journal of adolescent Health* 63(4). 503–505.

Salamon, Gayle. 2018. *The Life and Death of Latisha King*. New York University Press.

Schilt, Kristen. 2006. Just one of the guys? How transmen make gender visible at work. *Gender & Society* 20. 465–490. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206288077

Seburn, Kaeden, Burns, Jason, Clarke, Emily, Faulkner, Sam, Garcia, Rowan, Thorne, Oliver and Warren, Donnie. Youth and Family Experiences at the CHEO Gender Diversity Clinic. 2019. *Youth and family experiences at the CHEO gender diversity clinic. SAEFTY Ottawa*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e28c14d70afe4486a9ccc83/t/5fbc79bc00f7af3919c65a94/1606187 454941/SAEFTY+Report+on+CHEO.pdf

Serano, Julia. 2007. *Whipping girl: A transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

Sevelius, Jae. M. 2013. Gender affirmation: A framework for conceptualizing risk behavior among transgender women of color. *Sex Roles* 68(11-12). 675–689. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0216-5

Shilling, Chris. 2008. *Changing bodies: Habit, crisis and creativity*. London: Sage.

Sinclair-Palm, Julia. H. 2016. *What's in a Name? Trans Youths' Experiences of Re-Naming*. Toronto: York University.

Sinclair-Palm, Julia. 2017. "It's non-existent": Haunting in trans youth narratives about naming. *Occasional Paper Series* 2017(37). 7.

Sinclair-Palm, Julia. 2023. The role of family in trans youths' naming practices. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2023.2181450

Sinclair-Palm, Julia, & Chokly, Kit. 2023. 'It's a giant faux pas': exploring young trans people's beliefs about deadnaming and the term deadname. *Journal of LGBT Youth* 20(2). 370–389.

Spade, Dean. 2006. "Mutilating Gender." In Stryker, Susan & Whittle, Stephen (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader*, 315–333. New York: Routledge.

Stanley, Eric. A. 2021. *Atmospheres of violence: Structuring antagonism and the trans/queer ungovernable*. London: Duke University Press.

Sue, Christina, & Telles, Edward. 2007. Assimilation and gender in naming. *American Journal of Sociology* 112. 1383–1415. https://doi.org/10.1086/511801

Tan, Kyle H., Watson, Ryan. J., Byrne, Jack L., & Veale, Jaimie F. 2022. Barriers to Possessing Gender-Concordant Identity Documents are Associated with Transgender and Nonbinary People's Mental Health in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *LGBT health* 9(6). 401–410. https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2021.0240

Vance, Stanley. R. 2018. The importance of getting the name right for transgender and other gender expansive youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 63(4). 379–380.

West, Candace, & Zimmerman, Don. 1987. Doing gender. *Gender and Society* 1(2). 125–151.

Westbrook, Laurel, & Schilt, Kristen. 2014. Doing gender, determining gender: Transgender people, gender panics, and the maintenance of the sex/gender/sexuality system. *Gender and Society* 28(1). 32–57.

NoSo 2024:4(1)

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (NoSo) är en plattform för forskning som utforskar namns roll i samhället och i människors sociala interaktion. Tidskriften har en bred ansats som bygger på såväl historiskt som modernt material, olika typer av metoder, och teoretiska likaväl som praktiska frågeställningar. Inriktningen är nordisk på så sätt att forskningen som presenteras ska vara intressant ur ett nordiskt perspektiv.

Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik / Nordic Journal of Socio-Onomastics (NoSo) is a platform for research that explores the role of names in societies and in social interaction. The journal has a broad approach, including historical as well as contemporary data, different methods, and both theoretical and practical research questions. The focus is Nordic in the sense that the research presented should be of interest from a Nordic point of view.

ISSN 2004-0881
Nordisk tidskrift för socioonomastik
Högskolan i Halmstad
Box 823
SE-301 18 Halmstad
Sweden