

# Academia should respect and use authors' preferred names



By Victoria Guazzelli Williamson

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**Anglo-Saxon conventions in handling author names in the academy negatively affect scholars around the world. Academia can and must take steps to change this, writes Victoria Guazzelli Williamson.**

As is common in Brazil and in many countries in the Majority World, I inherited one last name from each of my parents. And, as a citizen of multiple countries, my legal last name differs based on the country of reference. Earlier in my career, advanced graduate students and faculty advised me to consider using only one last name or to hyphenate my last name to prevent confusion. Heeding their advice, I chose one last name for academic publications and applications during my undergraduate studies. It was not until graduate school that I saw another scholar in my field use a similar, unhyphenated name for academic purposes and made a decision to do the same.

Today, I experience first-hand some of the disadvantages that my mentors warned me about. Automated citation tools and Google Scholar often cite my work incorrectly. Copyeditors frequently incorrectly change my surname from 'Guazzelli Williamson' to 'Williamson', operating from an Anglo-Saxon perspective. Some manuscript entry fields still do not even allow for authors to specify multiple, unhyphenated last names or – as my colleagues have noted – accent marks or special characters. Later, when I committed to using both parents' last names, journals requested additional charges and the publication of corrigenda to adjust the way in which my name appeared in previously published articles – two practices that bring financial and, potentially, reputational costs.

And yet my experience only scratches the surface of the challenges faced by many others. Scholars whose names are composed of multiple parts, have accent marks or characters that are outside of the English alphabet face barriers within the current tradition of academic referencing, which pushes many

to anglicize their names or risk miscitation and erasure. For instance, when articles misrepresent an author's work or when an author undergoes a name change that results in separate publications having their names listed in different ways, it can be harder to find additional work by that same author and author citation counts may be incorrectly deflated. Together, these practices minimize the perceived impact of the scholar.

These issues are often compounded by the difficulties that academics face after changing their names. Importantly, name changes may be more likely to affect scholars who are already underrepresented in the academy – including those with Majority World backgrounds or certain gender identities. For instance, our transgender and non-binary colleagues may have records linked to names used before transitioning<sup>1–3</sup>. Spouses (frequently women) who adopt their partner's last name as part of their academic identity may also still have previous publications linked to their name. Because academic success hinges on citations and name recognition, without an easy way to update manuscript metadata after publication, these groups are at increased risk of credit misattribution.

As a solution, all journals should have the capacity to correctly display author names with accent marks, multiple unhyphenated words, special characters and non-Latin scripts. Many journals do not adequately support author names with accent marks or multiple unhyphenated words. Although some journals offer the option to display names in the script of the author's language (for example, the *Journal of Neuroscience*<sup>9</sup>), others still require the transliteration of author names from non-Latin scripts, with no option to also display author names in their native language. Professional associations also have a part to play in updating their practices to be more inclusive. For instance, although some guidelines allow for flexibility in citing non-Latin names in their original characters (for example, The University of Chicago Press)<sup>4</sup>, many organizations – including the American Psychological Association and the Modern Language Association – offer citation guidelines

that recommend transliteration into the Latin alphabet for use throughout the publication and reference lists<sup>5,6</sup>. Finally, for recognizability and a host of other factors, authors may prefer that their name be displayed in multiple ways. Thus, journals should consider allowing author names to be displayed in multiple formats (such as both native and transliterated scripts) to support the preferences of individual authors.

Journals should also consider granting all authors' requests to change names on their publications at any point – without the need for corrigenda, additional fees or proof of legal name-change documents (which can be taxing and expensive to obtain and are unavailable in some countries and contexts). These processes should be consistently enforced, regardless of the author's motivation for the proposed name change; silent (and without alerting coauthors) if requested by the author; and equally accessible. Although some publishers already offer free, silent name changes (for example, Springer Nature), others still require payment and/or corrigenda for requested name changes (for example, the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*)<sup>7,8</sup>. Even the most progressive of policies are often limited to name changes related to gender identity. These policies are crucial and should also be extended beyond the transgender community, as there are other identities and experiences for whom silent name changes are preferred and promote safety. Finally, journal employees should be made aware of any public-facing policies touted by their journal online and ensure that such policies are followed behind closed doors.

Several additional systemic changes could increase ease and accuracy in displaying appropriate author names. Indexing services should be dynamic and capable of updating all relevant versions of records when author names change. Greater integration of online content with ORCID – such as automating publication display names to match those on ORCID – would ensure that authors are accurately identified and, as has been proposed by other scholars<sup>2</sup>, could serve as a centralized mode of handling author name changes. Additionally, mechanisms that do not use names as

part of a permanent article identifier should be prioritized, so that name changes do not lead to artificially deflated citation counts or publication metrics.

Addressing biased naming conventions in academia will improve recognition for individual scholars and help to promote a more inclusive and diverse academy. By taking steps to make our naming conventions more equitable, we can remove this barrier to scholarly recognition and show greater respect for our brilliant colleagues.

**Victoria Guazzelli Williamson**  

Department of Psychology, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, USA.

 e-mail: [vgw@uoregon.edu](mailto:vgw@uoregon.edu)

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## Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.