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# **Indexicality and Performativity: A Theoretical Approach to Transgender People's Self-Chosen First Names**

## **Abstract**

The paper presents a theoretical approach to transgender people's self-chosen first names and pronouns in Sweden. The theoretical concepts of *indexicality* and *performativity* are introduced, and their potential to serve as a framework for socio-onomastic studies of self-chosen first names and pronouns is explored and discussed. The paper is based on an ongoing dissertation project in Scandinavian Languages, which mainly focuses on combining socio-onomastic and discourse analytical research material in order to provide an interdisciplinary view on names, discourse, power and ideology. This is done through a qualitative study where I use surveys, interviews and discourse analysis. The paper presents a few examples from the survey to further elucidate the concepts of indexicality and performativity, and draws conclusions about ways that these concepts may be suitable to apply to socio-onomastic material.

## **Keywords**

indexicality, performativity, socio-onomastics, transgender studies

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I will present a theoretical approach to transgender people's self-chosen first names and pronouns, i.e. to socio-onomastic questions regarding names, gender and identity. The theoretical focus is mainly concerned with the concepts of *indexicality* and *performativity*. The paper is based on my ongoing dissertation project in Scandinavian Languages at Uppsala University, which will be described later in the text.

Many transgender people experience discrimination and oppression on a daily basis, both on a personal and a societal level (Lombardi et al., 2002; SOU 2017:92). Common issues that are often mentioned in reports on the situation of transgender people are *dead-naming*, *misnaming* and *misgendering*,<sup>1</sup> i.e. instances where a person's self-chosen designations, such as names and pronouns, are not used in the desired way by other people. Such acts, which can be done for different reasons and be both intentional and unintentional, are often referred to as micro-aggressions. Micro-aggression is defined as "a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This can include using the wrong designations when talking to and about a person (see also Nadal, 2013, pp. 5–6). In addition, names and pronouns can be viewed as central linguistic resources for creating and maintaining different kinds of identities, including those concerned with gender identity and gender expression.

With this in mind, there are well-grounded reasons to study transgender people's views on self-chosen designations and the impact such designations might have on gender and identity. I aim to write this paper from a trans-allied point of view, which means that I intend to present a body of research material consisting of accounts from people with experience of living as transgendered people in Sweden, in contrast to cases where matters

<sup>1</sup> Dead-naming is calling someone by the name they were given as a child, when they no longer wish to be referred to by it. Misenaming is using a name that the person referred to does not identify with. Misgendering is the act of ascribing a person a gender with which they do not identify; this is often manifested through the use of wrong pronouns.

concerning transgender people are discussed from only a cisgender<sup>2</sup> point of view. Examples from the survey material will be used to concretize the theoretical concepts of indexicality and performativity, and provide insights into how this kind of material can be understood from theoretical perspectives that have not previously been used in onomastic research to any great extent. I also aim to expand these theoretical concepts to include not only spoken and/or written linguistic interaction (see Section 4, Indexicality and performativity), but also a broader range of sociolinguistic and socio-onomastic material.

In the first part of the paper, I will introduce my dissertation project and the purposes and methods of my research. This is done to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the context within which I am using the concepts of indexicality and performativity, and to give a more transparent account of the research context of which this paper is a part. I will then present some earlier research, before describing indexicality and performativity. I will also provide a few examples from part of my research material to give a better understanding of how these theoretical concepts can be applied to this kind of onomastic material. The paper will conclude with some final notes on indexicality, performativity and onomastics, coupled with how I aim to proceed with my research in the future.

## **2. The dissertation project's main purposes and research methods**

This section introduces the dissertation project's main purposes and research methods. After briefly introducing the purposes and methods, I will provide a more elaborate description of how the project has shifted from having a both quantitative and qualitative design to adopting a mostly qualitative approach.

<sup>2</sup> *Cis* is the antonym of *trans*, and *cisgender* refers to a person whose gender identity is aligned with the gender assigned at birth.

## 2.1. Research purposes and methods

The dissertation project is mainly focused on combining socio-onomastic and discourse analytical research materials, in order to provide an interdisciplinary view of names, discourse, power and ideology. This is done for two main purposes. The first purpose is to describe and analyse transgender people's perceptions regarding first names and pronouns, and what role these linguistic resources play in creating gender and identity, coupled with how other people use the resources. The second purpose (which I will not be focusing on in this paper) is to analyse a selection of discursive designations, that is, other categorical nouns, in contemporary Swedish feminist discourse. My aim with the second purpose is to discuss who is positioned as eligible to be included in the discursive designations I intend to study. A few examples of discursive designations are Swedish nouns such as *kvinnna* (woman), *man* (man, husband), *cisperson* (cisgender person), *transperson* (transgender person), *födande förälder* (birth parent).

I use three qualitative research methods in my dissertation to gather and analyse material: a small-scale online survey, interviews, and discourse analysis of contemporary Swedish debate articles and feminist literature. Because this paper is mainly concerned with the first purpose of the dissertation, I will only deal with the survey, which was finished in May 2021. The interviews are planned to be conducted at the end of 2021 and will not be described further in this paper.<sup>3</sup> At a later stage, I also aim to make use of critical discourse analytical tools in order to analyse discursive designations in media articles and feminist literature, in line with the second purpose of my dissertation project.

## 2.2. The survey

The survey was distributed in May 2021 to transgender people who were Swedish-speaking and 18 years or older in three Swedish trans-separatist Facebook groups; the recruitment was thus solely based on the respondents'

<sup>3</sup> Both the survey and interview questions underwent ethical review by the Swedish Ethical Review Agency in early 2021.

own choice to participate, since no respondent was asked personally to participate in order to follow ethical principles. Another requirement was that respondents had to have self-chosen first names and/or pronouns, which they had been using for three months or more. The survey consisted of 39 questions divided into three parts. All questions were written in Swedish, and they covered several aspects of choosing a name and using it as a transgender person. In the first part of the survey, background information about the respondents was collected, and the respondents were given the opportunity to share their self-chosen first name(s)<sup>4</sup> and pronoun(s). The second part of the survey consisted of questions regarding how the respondents chose their first names and pronouns, and what traits they find important in a name. Below, two questions<sup>5</sup> are presented (in translation) from the second part of the survey on important characteristics of a first name and strategies for choosing it:

**14a) How important is it to you that your first name has the following characteristics?**

|  | Very important | Fairly important | Not important |
|--|----------------|------------------|---------------|
| Is similar to the name given to me at birth                |                |                  |               |
| Has the same first letter as the name given to me at birth |                |                  |               |
| Sounds nice  |                |                  |               |
| Looks nice in writing                                      |                |                  |               |
| Suits my age   |                |                  |               |
| Has positive associations                                  |                |                  |               |
| Is female coded  |                |                  |               |
| Is male coded  |                |                  |               |
| Is non-gendered  |                |                  |               |
| Easy to spell  |                |                  |               |
| Easy to pronounce  |                |                  |               |
| Is a common first name                                     |                |                  |               |

<sup>4</sup> The respondents were not obliged to share their first names, but they were encouraged to describe their first names, e.g., “a female coded name which starts with a ‘K’”.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that the layout does not match the one used in the actual survey.

|   | Very important | Fairly important | Not important |
|---|----------------|------------------|---------------|
| Is not a common first name                      |                |                  |               |
| Suits my other first names <sup>6</sup>         |                |                  |               |
| Is not similar to the name given to me at birth |                |                  |               |

**14b) Did you find inspiration in any of the following sources when picking your first name? If none of the options apply, please write your answer under the option “Other”. You can give a more detailed description for every option.**

- Societal/historical role model
- Fictional character from a TV show, movie and/or literature
- Religious scriptures or stories
- Names from my family or other relatives
- Name books/literature on names
- Internet forums
- Names that my parents considered giving me before I was born
- Other

Another crucial section of the second part of the survey concerned the respondents’ experiences of how other people used their (the respondents’) first names and pronouns. This usually had to do with whether other people (like family, relatives, friends, co-workers, healthcare workers, etc.) tended to use the correct designations, but also how the respondents introduced their self-chosen designations to the people around them:

**16) How did you introduce your self-chosen first name to people around you?**

Please note that the options do not cover every aspect of introducing a self-chosen first name. If none of the options suits you, please describe in your own words how you introduced your self-chosen first name, trying to be as specific as possible. You can choose more than one option in each row.

<sup>6</sup> It is common in Swedish naming practice to have more than one forename, but only one of the forenames is used as the *spoken name*. E.g., *Carin Erika Leibring Svedjedal*, where *Carin* and *Erika* are the forenames, but only *Carin* is used as the spoken name.

|                        | Letter | E-mail | Verbally<br>by<br>phone | Text message<br>(SMS, on<br>Messenger, etc.) | Post(s)<br>on social<br>media | In<br>conversation<br>"face to face" | Irrelevant |
|------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Workplace              |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Parent(s)              |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Sibling(s)             |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Your own<br>child(ren) |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Self-chosen<br>family  |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Partner(s)             |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| School                 |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Relatives              |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Close friends          |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Other friends          |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |
| Other<br>acquaintances |        |        |                         |  |                               |                                      |            |

**Other:**

**17a) Have the following people around you used your self-chosen first name when talking to you and about you?**

|                    | Yes | Yes, with some<br>exceptions | No | Not sure/<br>Irrelevant |
|--------------------|-----|------------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| Parent(s)          |     |                              |    |                         |
| Sibling(s)         |     |                              |    |                         |
| Your own children  |     |                              |    |                         |
| Self-chosen family |     |                              |    |                         |
| Partner(s)         |     |                              |    |                         |
| Relatives          |     |                              |    |                         |
| Close friends      |     |                              |    |                         |
| Co-workers         |     |                              |    |                         |
| Fellow students    |     |                              |    |                         |
| Healthcare staff   |     |                              |    |                         |



The third part of the survey covered broader perspectives on the importance of first names and pronouns for gender and identity. Here, the respondents were to answer Likert-type questions about the general impact of first names and pronouns on gender and identity, e.g.:

23a) It is important to me that people around me use my self-chosen first name(s) when talking to and about me

5 Completely agree       4       3 Agree       2       1 Do not agree

24a) My first name strengthens me in my gender identity

5 Completely agree       4       3 Agree       2       1 Do not agree

### 2.3. A qualitative approach

To sum up, the survey questions were usually closed multiple-choice questions or Likert-type scales, but the respondents were also given the opportunity to write more detailed responses in several open-text items. The survey did not, however, receive enough responses (24 in total) to make it possible to carry out a statistical analysis allowing such things as statistical significance to be tested between different groups. But the fact that the survey consisted of many open-text answers turned out to be an asset; it provided an opportunity to treat the survey material in a more qualitative way together with the scheduled interviews. Combined with the discourse analytical approach to the discursive designations, the dissertation project will aim to give a qualitative, interdisciplinary view of names, discourse, power and ideology.

### 3. A selection of previous socio-onomastic research

Previous and contemporary research on the topics of name-choosing and naming practices have mainly concerned parents' choices of names for their children, and not self-chosen first names among adults. There is also a notable lack of studies concerning naming practices and use of personal pronouns

in third person. I will therefore focus on research that might not be completely in line with the dissertation project's purposes, but nevertheless has relevance for names and social variation on different societal levels.

In her dissertation, Schmidt-Jüngst (2020) studies name choosing and name performativity among German-speaking transgender people and concludes that first names play a fundamental role in the marking of gender (p. 259). The study finds out on several levels how transgender people view their self-chosen first names, but also pronouns, and Schmidt-Jüngst describes how personal pronouns are the most important linguistic signs marking gender (p. 261), and that a self-chosen pronoun is more likely not to be used correctly by other people. Schmidt-Jüngst's study further shows how gendered names and pronouns also work together with other non-linguistic gendered markers, such as clothing and tone of voice (i.e. whether one's voice sounds "female" or "male"). The study also analyses how names are phonologically gendered, and how the respondents use these resources in creating their desired genders and identities. Wenner (2020) has done an interview study with Swedish-speaking transgender people about changing one's name as a transgender person. The respondents report that people around them sometimes have a hard time dealing with self-chosen names, but also that these names increase their well-being because they correspond better with their gender identities (p. 221). Aldrin (2011) has studied trends in name-giving among parents in Gothenburg between 2007 and 2009 through questionnaires and group-interviews; she concludes that the choice of a first name is an important social act, and the results show that name-choices often correlate with different social categorizations (mainly parents' level of education and age). Aldrin (2014) has furthermore used her research material on parents' name-choices to analyse motivations for naming from a gender perspective, with a more extensive focus on the concepts of gender indexicality and symbolic dominance. Hayn (2016) studies how everyday discrimination is affected by accustomed perception of personal names in Sweden and Germany. Hayn moves through a range of societal levels that affect hegemonic naming practices and concludes by presenting "a collection of empowering interventions in discriminatory naming practices and recommendations for a contra\_ discriminatory [sic] anti-structuralist perception of personal names" (p. 3). Fleming (2011) uses both indexicality and performativity to analyse tabooing of personal names in different sociocultural contexts. Although Fleming is studying practices where names are not used, the paper serves as good groundwork for determining how the

theoretical concepts can be adjusted to suit socio-onomastic material (see further 4.2 Indexicality and onomastics).

## 4. Indexicality and performativity

The following section describes and discusses how indexicality and performativity can be used in socio-onomastic studies and applied to socio-onomastic material. The theoretical concepts are first introduced in the scientific contexts where they are usually used, and then discussed from a socio-onomastic point of view with reference to examples from the survey.

### 4.1. The concept of indexicality

Indexicality is a central component of many third-wave sociolinguistic studies. Indexicality can briefly be described as a theoretical concept that usually is employed when studying linguistic interaction, such as conversations and other exchanges of information. It can be used to understand linguistic variation and social and regional linguistic varieties, i.e. linguistic use and verbal abilities of which speakers are not always aware to any great extent. This means that the use of linguistic resources, such as pronunciation and lexical choices, can index several qualities and personal traits of a speaker, for example, age, gender, ethnicity, and social background (Holmes & Wilson, 2017, pp. 247–248). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) describe the term *index* as designating “forms that gain their meaning through association with things in the social world” (p. 251).

To properly understand indexicality, one must also understand *semiotics* and *identity*, two central concepts in Bucholtz and Hall’s (e.g., 2004) work on indexicality. *Semiotics* can be understood as “the study of systems of meaning” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 377), i.e. how social and/or natural objects are linked to the meanings they bear, and most importantly how this association is created. *Identity* can be understood from several points of view (some more essentialist than others). This has raised questions about how identity

should be understood: can it be viewed as a reflection or attribute of oneself, is it simply inherited and based on fixed social categories, or is it action-based and situational, and therefore more of a performative and creational process? When using indexicality as a theoretical concept, the latter view of identity is more appropriate to maintain. Bucholtz and Hall describe how “identity inheres in actions, not in people”, and state that “as the product of situated social action, identities may shift and recombine to meet new circumstances” (p. 376). Thus, the semiotics of language understands “identification as an ongoing social and political process” (p. 376), rather than viewing identity in terms of fixed categories. Semiotics and identity, according to Bucholtz and Hall, are connected to indexicality, in that indexicality functions as a semiotic process associated with identity and is described as “the semiotic operation of juxtaposition, whereby one entity or event points to another” (p. 378). Indexicality can therefore be defined as a process where meaning is created and connected to identity, while identity is also created through different systems of meaning.

A crucial aspect of indexicality is that different indexicalities cannot be viewed as independent and isolated components (e.g., with one linguistic trait pointing to a speaker being a man, another to a speaker being of a certain age, and so on). Important theoretical work in the areas of language as social practice, linguistic variation, and the connection between micro-contextual and macro-sociological levels has been done by Silverstein (2003), on indexical orders, and Eckert (2008), on indexical fields. The main idea behind indexical orders and indexical fields is that any particular linguistic feature can have a range of possible associations with different social categories and identities that are activated in the situated use of a linguistic variable. Silverstein (2003) introduces the term “indexical order” and argues that indexical orders are central to analysing “how to relate the micro-social to the macro-social frames of analysis of any sociolinguistic phenomenon” (p. 193). This is done through an intricate system of indexical orders which are related both to locally situated contexts and ideological stances (p. 227). Eckert (2008) discusses Silverstein’s work and other previous variation studies where linguistic and social variables have been viewed as fixed and permanent, and argues that “the meanings of variables are not precise or fixed but rather constitute a field of potential meanings – an indexical field, or constellation of ideologically related meanings, any of one which can be activated in the situated use of the variable” (p. 454). Both Silverstein and Eckert thus argue that, and show

how, indexicality should be used to understand ideologically embedded pre-suppositions in language, and how this is constituted through the everyday use of linguistic, interactional resources.

#### **4.2. Indexicality and onomastics**

Previous theoretical work on indexicality has focused on linguistic traits and habits that do not necessarily include names and naming practices, but I would argue that there are no obstacles to expanding the concept of indexicality to include names as well. After all, a first name often carries information about the bearer's age, ethnicity and to some extent social background as well. Names and pronouns can also be viewed as semiotic processes, with names being more fluctuating and pronouns more fixed, and naming practices (with given or self-chosen names) can be viewed as semiotic processes where, depending on the sociocultural context, preferred traits or values are negotiated and interpreted in order to create a desired identity for the bearer. This is related to creating both meaning and several kinds of social orders, since a name and a pronoun are generally expected to be used throughout life, and thus the semiotic processes are assumed to be more fixed and constant. Ochs (1992) defines and discusses how language indexes gender and suggests that the relation between language and gender should be divided into three parts: non-exclusive, constitutive, and temporally transcendent (pp. 340–348). Here, the constitutive relation between language and gender can be used to approach indexicality and onomastics, as Ochs describes how “one or more linguistic features may index social meanings (...), which in turn helps to constitute gender meanings” (p. 341).

Another aspect of how the indexicalities of names differ from other linguistic resources is the fact that forenames have a clear (mono-)referential function. Fleming (2011) uses the term “referential indexical function” to apply more precise terminology to onomastic material, which is a good first step toward creating a suitable theoretical discourse (p. 143). This also points to the somewhat different assumptions regarding the function of names as a linguistic resource. Since names are used in creating and maintaining several social orders (see Aldrin, 2011), their indexicalities can be viewed as more constant than other linguistic resources, although naming trends and perceptions of names also shift over time depending on sociocultural contexts.

At the same time, names also carry inherent meanings, more or less based on their etymological origins; these meanings can be taken into account in the process of choosing a name, and result in an interactive process between external sociolinguistic considerations and these inherent meanings (see Schmidt-Jüngst, 2020).

First names can also be parts of indexical orders and indexical fields. For example, a gendered first name generally indexes a gendered pronoun, if the language in question has gendered pronouns. The female-coded first name *Erika* indexes the pronouns *she* and *her*, while the male-coded name *Adam* indexes the pronouns *he* and *him*. But of course, this does not apply the other way around: a gendered pronoun cannot index a particular name. First names and pronouns can also be parts of indexical fields where other linguistic and non-linguistic resources of identity, together with the first names and pronouns, can index the speaker's gender.

Below are some translated examples regarding indexicality from the survey. In the translation I have strived to achieve a balance between preserving the original meaning and phrasing the examples in idiomatic English. These are generally answers to questions about what a first name and pronoun can mean to the individual respondent in terms of how names and pronouns are used to create identity. The numbers indicate the respondent's number in the survey tool, and this is the only way that respondents are specified. All other identifying markers such as gender identity, age and so on, are left out.

2: They [the first name and the pronoun] are markers of who I am and who I want to be. They are part of my social gender in the same way as my clothing and the rest of my image.

6: I wanted it [the self-chosen first name] to be a counterpart to my female-coded name so I can choose depending on the context. To me, both my names are non-gendered, since I am non-gendered. In society, both my names are gendered which gives me a kind of a choice whether I want to show that I am trans or not.

12: My first name is currently what I have to confirm my gender identity, or more precisely, my lack of gender identity.

27: I introduced myself as trans and as my male-coded name, and everyone started to use "he" automatically.

These four respondents all describe in some way how their first names and pronouns index their identity. Respondent no. 2 describes their experience in line with Ochs' thoughts on the constitutive relations between language and gender. Respondent no. 6 also touches upon the fact that both the self-chosen and given first names are viewed as non-gendered by the respondent themselves, but the respondent also points out that in society in general, the names are viewed as gendered. This gives the respondent an opportunity to choose how to portray themselves, which also can be understood as an example of indexicality affecting the respondents' performative acts. The last quote, by respondent no. 27, is an example of an indexical order where the respondent describes how the male-coded first name indexes the male-coded pronoun *he*.

I would like to add something further to this: Some examples that I could not quote here to protect respondents' anonymity indicate that some non-binary respondents show signs of renegotiating indexicalities and indexical orders of gendered names. This is the case, for example, when a gender-neutral pronoun is used together with a gendered first name, or if a pronoun is left out altogether, and instead the name is used all the time when talking with and about a particular person. More evidence of this could be gathered through studies that exclusively focus on non-binary transgender people's naming and pronoun practices.

To summarize, onomastic indexicality is what a self-chosen, and of course also a given, first name can reveal about its bearer in terms of social categorizations. The term "referential indexical function" (Fleming, 2011, p. 142) can be helpful in differentiating onomastic indexicality from indexicality in other linguistic resources. Self-chosen first names can therefore be used as, and viewed as, a semiotic process by which gender-conforming identities are created and maintained, and names can be viewed as linguistic resources that are used to index particular genders and other personal qualities, for example.

### **4.3. The concept of performativity**

Performativity is, to some extent, a more well-known concept. Cavanaugh (2015) summarizes the main description of what performativity is in the following way: "language does not simply describe the world, but may instead

(or also) function as a form of social action”. Thus, performativity should be understood as what social actions we are able to perform through language.

The concept of (gender) performativity is defined by Butler in several works (e.g., 1990, p. xv): “The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body”. This view of performativity and gender has since been revisited and redefined, but the fundamental idea has always been that “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (Butler, 1988, p. 523). Performativity is based on speech acts and bodily acts, and these acts can be seen as connected through sociocultural, ideological and pragmatic stances. Performative acts should be understood as what we do with language, and how we use linguistic resources to create identity, both our own identity and other people’s identities. In later works, Butler points to a difference between speech acts, depending on whether the utterance’s meaning is consciously or subconsciously conveyed:

We say something, and mean something by what we say, but we also do something with our speech, and what we do, how we act upon another with our language, is not the same as the meaning we consciously convey (Butler, 2004, p. 199).

Thus, performativity can be seen as a theoretical way to describe the linguistic and interactional ways in which we constitute and create identity.

#### **4.4. Performativity and onomastics**

I wish to argue that performativity in onomastics must be understood first and foremost from a name-giving, or name-choosing, point of view. Names are not only given by one or more people to another – although this is a very common act, for example when parents name a new-born child – but they can also be chosen by the bearers themselves, usually as adults. This is the case for many transgender people, who often describe the process of choosing a name as an important part of living in a gender-conforming way (Schmidt-Jüngst, 2020). Another important feature of names (and of course pronouns) is that they are dependent on other people using them besides the bearer. A name and pronoun are, after all, often used when you talk to or about the



person who uses the name and the pronoun. This is a unique performative trait of names and pronouns, and leaves us with another perspective on performativity and onomastics, namely that, as a performative act, naming is still dependent on other people's willingness to use someone's self-chosen names. A third and final point is that names carry a performative potential, because of their different indexicalities. This is dependent on the cultural contexts in which the names are used and means that names can be used for performative acts, depending on the bearers' understanding of the indexicalities. Below are four examples of performativity from the survey, anonymized according to the same principles as with the examples of indexicality. As the numbers indicate, these examples come from four other respondents than the previous ones:

4: Other people's use of correct name and pronoun isn't actually crucial for confirming my gender identity, but not using correct designations, knowingly or unknowingly, often invalidates me and my identity.

11: It strengthens one's self-perception, when you hear other people use the correct name and pronoun.

20: It is important to me that other people respect me, and what and how I want to be called. My inner identity isn't affected by what other people call me, but of course I am disappointed when I'm not respected, and when it appears that I'm not "passing", when someone I don't know misgenders me.

34: When people respect my name/pronoun, it helps me to trust the person and feel comfortable in social situations. When people don't respect name(s)/pronoun(s), it makes me uncomfortable, it makes me feel insecure, and that's something I want to avoid.

Here, we see a trend among the respondents: they all focus more or less on how other people use their self-chosen names and pronouns, and stress the importance of other people acknowledging their identity through those performative acts. The quotes from respondents nos. 4 and 20 express what seems to be a difference between what the respondents call their inner identity and how other people use their self-chosen forenames and pronouns. Their inner identity is not affected by people using the wrong names and pronouns, but

they still experience disappointment when they are not “passing”<sup>7</sup> as their genders. Respondent no. 34 expresses another crucial part of having a self-chosen, gender-conforming name and pronoun, viz. a sense of being comfortable and safe. Many transgender people experience high levels of discrimination, including both physical and verbal abuse (Lombardi et al., 2002); therefore, using the correct name and pronoun when talking to, and about, a person with self-chosen designations can be viewed as a performative act to create a safer and more accepting environment.

In summary, performativity in onomastics can be understood as how a self-chosen first name, and also pronoun, can be used as a linguistic resource to construct gender and identity, both in inter- and intra-individual ways. This can be compared to Schmidt-Jüngst’s (2020) results.

## 5. Conclusion

The examples from the survey support the possibility of applying indexicality and performativity theories on socio-onomastic material (consisting of both names and pronouns). As mentioned earlier, these theoretical concepts have usually been applied to socio-dialectal material and interactional linguistic resources; however, they can be expanded to include socio-onomastic material as well, as has been shown in some previous studies (e.g., Aldrin, 2014; Schmidt-Jüngst, 2020), though not yet to any great extent and only from a Western European point of view.

The examples indicate that a first name’s indexicalities can combine with other gendered attributes to be more gender-affirming. There are also indications that the performative act of choosing a first name and pronoun can function in a gender-affirming as well as a non-gender-affirming way, but it does not necessarily affect what the respondents define as their “inner

<sup>7</sup> The term *passing* refers to whether transgender people experience that they are perceived as their authentic selves by other people. This can sometimes be a debated and problematic term, hence the use of quotation marks.

identity". Instead, the examples point to the importance of other people using the respondents' self-chosen first names and pronouns, as in the example from respondent no. 34. This highlights previous studies on transgender people's experiences of so-called micro-aggressions, where dead-naming, misgendering and misnaming are intertwined with (subtle or overt) discriminatory practices (Nadal, 2013; Schmidt-Jüngst, 2020).

Indexicality and performativity in onomastics can be viewed as closely related to other visual attributes, especially concerning gender. Gendered physical attributes and gendered first names can index a gendered pronoun, for example, but this is not necessary in all cases as shown above. These two theoretical concepts are also dependent on other people understanding and correctly using self-chosen names and pronouns, which gives us several types of performative acts that can be carried out to work in a gender- and identity-affirming way. Indexicality and performativity can thus serve as useful theoretical tools in research in onomastics and identity from a broader perspective and can be particularly useful in research in onomastics and gender. The theoretical concepts can also be adapted to suit this kind of material, for example by specifying the referential indexical function of names and the importance of other people's performative use of names, rather than only focusing on the name-bearers.

I would also like to mention some further relevant questions that might be interesting to look at. At the moment, these questions are mainly concerned with the differences in performativity and indexicality between given and self-chosen designations; one could ask whether self-chosen first names, for example, have more agency and performative potential than given first names. Are self-chosen first names and pronouns more powerful tools than given ones in renegotiating indexicalities and indexical orders? Can the self-chosen designations be used to reshape sociolinguistic boundaries for names and their purposes, if we think about the cases where a name is used to replace a pronoun?

The further aim of my dissertation project is to study the questions on self-chosen names and pronouns as part of a larger discourse, where, as stated in the introduction, I wish to look more deeply into who is positioned as eligible to be included in different types of designations, both names, pronouns, and discursive designations (see Section 2.1 Research purposes and methods). This will also be framed and analysed within the theoretical frameworks of indexicality and performativity, which hopefully will prove to be useful tools for answering these questions and understanding these matters.

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