Man, woman or me? Conflicting identities as evidenced by cross-gender name changes

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Sex and gender
There are two

- Biologically, there are women and men
  - everyone learns this as a child

- Social gender grounded in biological sex
  - legal gender
  - gender roles
  - presentation

- Names typically gender-specific
  - in Finland a legal requirement since 1945
Sex and gender
Medically not so simple

- Intersex conditions
  - not completely of one sex chromosomally / anatomically
  - several very different conditions
  - c. 1.7% of live births
  - ambiguous genitals c. 0.05%

- Transsexuality
  - mismatch of anatomical sex and mental gender
  - traditionally a psychiatric diagnosis, but this is changing
  - inborn, strong correlation with brain structures
  - c. 0.03–0.1%
Sex and gender
Socially even less simple

- Gender ≠ sex
  - gender equality: which differences are needed, which should be fought?
  - genderqueer: people consciously outside the binary

- Not all names are gender-specific
  - 2.2% of Finnish names gender-neutral\(^1\)
  - 57.9% female, 39.9% male

\(^1\)Gender distribution in the Population Information System more even than 95/5%
Names and identity
Identity?

- The condition of being a single individual
  - I am the same person as the ICOS assistant secretary

- Who or what a person or thing is
  - I am an adjunct professor in Finnish
  - I am blond

- The condition of being identified in feeling, interest, etc.; identification with.
  - I am a Finn
  - I am a science fiction fan
Names and identity
Names contribute

- A proper name (supposedly) identifies the person uniquely
  - except most personal names are not unique
  - and a single person can use different names

- A name gives hints as to various characteristics
  - ethnical or cultural background
  - gender

- One’s name is highly personal
  - part of self-identity
  - neurolinguistically special
Names and identity
So?

- Conflict between the gender of one’s name and
  - one’s gender identity
  - one’s legal gender

- different types of gender variance
- changes in a name’s gender distribution

- Is this common?

- What happens when one’s name is in conflict with one’s self-identity?
Cross-gender name changes
Population data

- Finnish Population Information System
  - set up in 1969
  - Finnish citizens and permanent residents

- Here, a subset
  - extracted in early 2002
  - current and oldest known names
  - current sex
Cross-gender name changes
Name changes

- Names in three categories
  - male / female: over 95% of bearers of this sex
  - neutral: a minority of at least 5%

- People in the Population Information System
  - with Finnish as their native language
  - grouped by their birth decade

- Changes where at least one name is in a different category
  - changing just one name is enough
  - definition of ‘neutral’ is not perfect
## Cross-gender name changes

### Number of changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>born</th>
<th>f → n</th>
<th>f → m</th>
<th>n → f</th>
<th>n → m</th>
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<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>34</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>58</td>
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## Cross-gender name changes

### Complete gender changes

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<th>m → f</th>
<th>f → n</th>
<th>m → n</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1920</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>1940</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>1970</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
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</table>
Cross-gender name changes
Different types of changes

- Away from gender neutrality
  - especially with people born in the 1920’s & 1930’s
  - typically, dropping one name
    - in the early decades, neutral names like *Kaino* or *Vieno*
    - also, some mixed-gender names
    - in the 1960’s, *Jani* became male
    - in the 1970’s, *Mirka* became female
Cross-gender name changes
Different types of changes

- Towards gender neutrality
  - mostly formal adoption of nicknames
    - hypocoristic forms, e.g. Ami < Aimo / Amalia
  - sometimes ‘real’ gender change
    - neutral names can be freely adopted
    - gender neutrality can be the real goal

- Gender change
  - most common with those born in the 60’s and 70’s
    - older groups had it harder
    - younger mostly still minors (data from 2002!)
  - first cases already in the oldest group
Feelings and considerations
Supplementary data

- Survey during May–July 2011
  - web questionnaire
  - announced at various trans support forums
  - 68 answers (37 male, 19 female, 18 other)

- Questions regarding
  - feelings towards one’s old name
  - criteria for choosing the new one

- Possibly interviews as a next step

\(^2\) thanks to the Trans Support Centre in Helsinki, and others who published the link
Feelings and considerations
Old name

- Three questions
  - did the old name feel like your own
  - was it easy to let go of it
  - did it feel sad to let go

- Scale: 1 = not at all – 5 = very much

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>median</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>variance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>felt like own</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy to let go</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad to let go</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- In other words, mostly a great desire to change (as expected)
Feelings and considerations
Criteria for new name

- Eight criteria: the name should
  - be beautiful
  - feel like one’s own
  - attract attention
  - not attract attention
  - have the correct gender
  - not have the wrong gender
  - be right for the age group
  - resemble the old one
  - be the one the parents would have given

- Scale: 1 = didn’t matter – 4 = very important
### Feelings and considerations
**Criteria for new name**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>median</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>attention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no attention</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>right gender</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not wrong gender</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similar to old</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Again, no big surprises: most important that the name
  - feels like one’s own
  - is the right gender and not the wrong
Feelings and considerations
Notable correlations

● Old name felt like one’s own vs.
  ■ age: 0.20
  ■ easy to drop it: -0.57
  ■ sad to drop it: 0.41
  ■ new resembles it: 0.46
  ■ new has the right gender: -0.37

● Gender: being female vs.
  ■ age: 0.50
  ■ new name should be beautiful: 0.29
  ■ new name should feel one’s own: -0.22
Summary

- No big surprises
  - Gender congruence appears important
    - cissexuals change away from cross-gender names
    - transsexuals see the right gender / absence of the wrong gender as very important
  - The more attached one is to old name the harder it is to change it
    - some correlation with age, too
  - Beauty is more important to women than men

- Gender is so important an aspect of identity that a wrongly gendered name does not feel one’s own
Thank you
Questions?