# For academic publishing to be trans-inclusive, authors must be allowed to retroactively change their names

*Many trans researchers change their name to match their gender identity. However, there is currently no clear, simple or standardised way for publications to be updated to reflect this. As a result, many trans authors are caught between losing their publication record and involuntarily being outed. **Lilian Hunt** explains the existing name change policies and outlines experiences of trans researchers of the current system. She calls on publishers to adopt processes that will allow authors to retroactively change their name and highlights the good practice that the coalition, EDIS- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Science- has spearheaded.*

Currently, researchers who have transitioned and legally changed their name have no clear, simple or standardised way of changing the name used on previous publications to match their updated identity. This could cause issues in having their publication record correctly attributed to them, but also in having to 'out' themselves as trans whenever these publications needed listing, e.g. on a CV or grant proposal.

EDIS is a coalition of organisations working within science and health research committed to improving equality, diversity and inclusion. The significance of changing your name to match your gender identity can be a momentous moment in gender transition, and we wanted to support researchers to be able to move away from using their previous name when listing previous work or being cited. We collected first-person testimonies from trans researchers within our professional networks and through Twitter, to better understand their experiences of trying to get publications retroactively changed to their new name and what they needed from publishers.
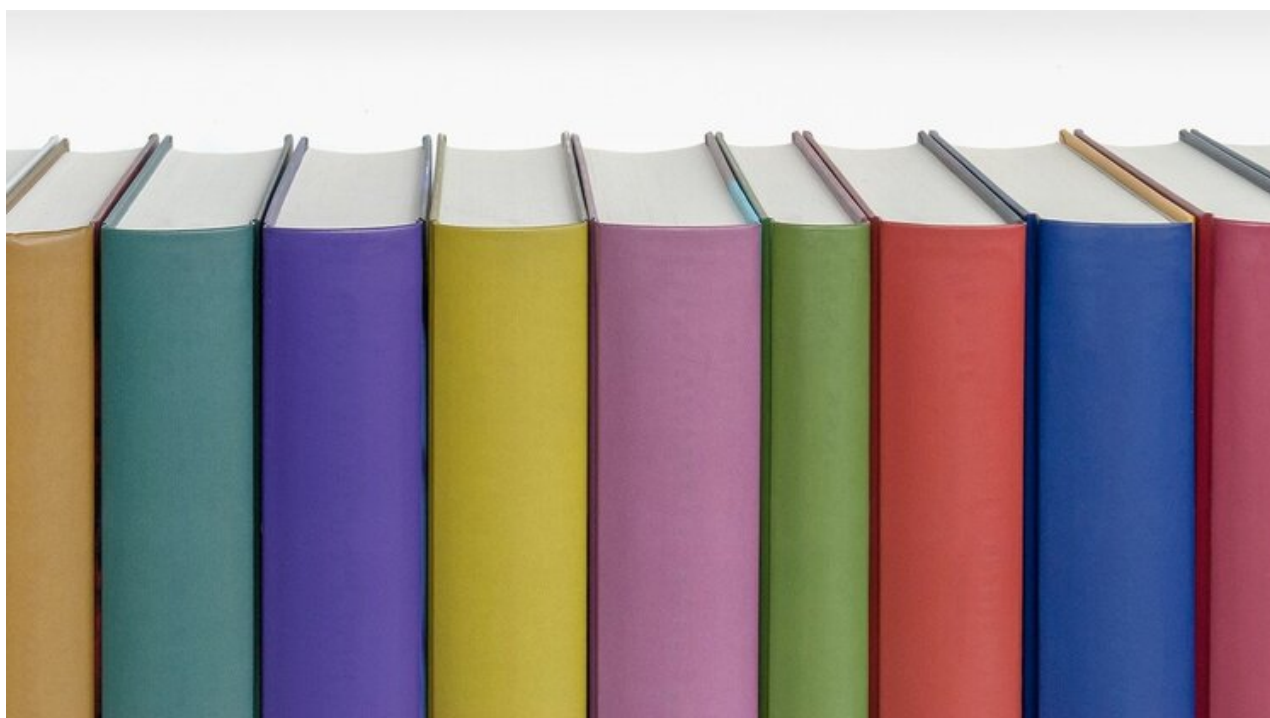
Investigation of policies and practices

Currently, very few publishers or journals have name change policies in place, and many guiding committees do not have formal recommendations to follow. There are countless forums where researchers discuss how to go about changing their name at 'X' journal with varying degrees of success. While most journals do not have name change policies, they often have a corrections policy where the editor publishes an 'Erratum' or 'Corrigendum' to 'correct' the publication record – this language is negative and insensitive in situations where a full name change is required.

The Committee for Publication Ethics (COPE) currently lists one case from 2013 where a researcher asked to change their name on a previously published article. Although in this instance COPE advised the journal that the author should not be allowed to change their name, the committee did touch on name changes in general, stating "It is not unethical to request a change in your name but the editor must be certain that the author requesting the change is in fact the author of the paper, and the editor should insist on proof of identification.".

One of the most detailed name change policies to date is listed in the *Association for Computing Machinery*. Their name change policy allows separating identities (to maintain separation between publications with old and new names), linking identities (to link publications published under an old and new name), and updating identities (to replace all publications under an old name with a new name).

These are only two examples that exist publicly. Anecdotally, we have heard that other journals do offer name changes, but these policies are not official. Therefore, the reality is that any name change policy a journal/publisher will implement will be novel and not based on formal guidance from external committees.

Trans researchers are caught between losing their publication record and being outed without permission

There are many times when a researcher might have to list or speak about past publications (job applications, grant applications, even in presentations) and trans researchers shared how this could and had resulted in them being forced into having conversations about their gender identity and transition to explain the differences in attributions. The difference in name is also more noticeable for researchers from countries that have gendered surnames, giving no space to have these conversations at the researchers' own pace and on their terms.

Researchers spoke of their disconnect with their deadname (many trans people refer to their previous name as a 'deadname' to highlight the distress that it can provoke) and their body of work published under it, and the emotional reaction seeing their deadname can cause.

 "I would like to associate my papers published under the "deadname", but I would like it to pass with as much stealth as possible … It would be important for me to have these papers on my record, as they set back my publishing record by 5 years … However, most of the time, avoiding the risk to be outed I do not use them in my CV. Fearing the public disclosure I did not contact the journal, nor did I connect my ORCID IDs yet." [anon, microbiologist]

The ask from the community was clear – allow researchers to correct their names on previous publications, and any policy or system to support this needed to protect the rights of the researcher to privacy. In addition, we learned of other instances where an inclusive approach to retroactive name changes could be beneficial to others in the instances of marriage, divorce, or religious conversion.

"Whilst name at the time of publication is information that I once volunteered to the publishers, inability for this information to be updated in the context of gender transition, has always represented a breach of my privacy." – [anon, biophysicist]

Working with publishers for change

EDIS' vision is for everyone to have equal opportunities and access to a successful career within science and health, its research and its outcomes.

We asked our members to reach out to their associated publishing arms or publishers they had close relationships with to start the conversation and find out 1) whether there were any standard ways of dealing with a name change request and 2) whether they were designed in a way to support the needs of a researcher who has changed their name as part of their gender transition.

Wellcome Open Research was the first publishing platform to respond positively to this call and, in conjunction with F1000 Research and EDIS, they created a policy, which was then assessed and validated by researchers, who have themselves been (or are) in the complicated process of changing their names on publications.

The name change involves two stages. In the first stage, a researcher requests a name change through the editorial office- ID is required to ensure the researcher is requesting a name change for themselves. If this is difficult to achieve, the editorial office will work with researchers to enable them to provide identification on their own terms, for example a letter from their supervisor.

Any change of name will not require a new version of the article to be created; all existing versions will be edited to reflect the change, and the DOI will remain the same. A 'Notice of Change' will be posted for transparency, which will not identify whose name was changed in order to safeguard the person involved. For articles that have been indexed, the files will be resent to indexers, who will be responsible to implement the change across their databases.

As we continue to move from print publications to digital formats, the barriers to correcting the academic record are reduced. We strongly encourage all publishers to implement policies allowing name changes on publications, in order to allow research to be inclusive for all.

The full policy can be viewed on F1000Research.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our comments policy if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.