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What's In a Name?

What's In a Name?

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Several years ago while conducting a writing workshop for a group of clinicians, an attendee asked a question I had never considered. She noted that she had published a couple of papers under her “maiden name.” Since those early publications, she had married and was now, professionally and personally, using her husband’s last name. However, she wanted to keep using her maiden name (also called a “birth” name) for publications because of the previously published papers and because she had a very unique birth name—compared to a much more common married name. She asked me what she should do and in that moment I did not have an answer. So I asked my nurse editor colleagues the



question via the International Academy of Nurse Editors (INANE) mailing list. I received quite a few responses, which I will summarize here, along with a couple of recommendations regarding author names.

To begin, and not be too personal: I married young (still married after 40+ years) and took my husband's name. It is pretty unique a name; when I run a search, only a couple of other "Pickler" authors show up. My maiden name was also unique, but not quite as much as Pickler (originally Blankenbuehler). Moreover, I was Pickler long before I began writing or presenting—in fact, I was Pickler before I earned my first degree. So, to be honest, I never gave a thought to my name. I suspect that many women of my generation did the same.

However, I know many professional women, including nurse researchers and authors, who use only their birth or maiden names. Others use one name professionally and one socially. Still others have hyphenated their maiden/birth name with their married/spouse name; others use both names but without a hyphen. I also know individuals who have numerous professional names: maiden name, followed by first marriage name, followed by second marriage name, and so on. There are many name preferences and how they are used or listed can be very personal.

Responses to my email inquiry to the nurse editors resulted in several suggestions an author might want to consider. For example, some editors noted that, if already published it made sense to continue with the use of a maiden/birth name as one had already established a "professional brand" with that name. Others suggested the use of all names: first plus birth surname plus married surname.

Several editors noted that consistency was very important, especially if using (or not using) a hyphen. Hyphens can be tricky; not all publication houses or organizations use them or use them consistently or as an individual might prefer.

Sometimes the hyphen gets “broken,” resulting in the second name of the hyphenated name being used as the name of primacy versus the first name in the hyphen sequence. Of course using multiple names without a hyphen is problematic too. In this case, typically the last name in the string is the name of reference even though the individual may prefer a different name in the string to be the name that is cited. All of this, by the way, can cause an author who is attempting to cite you, quite a bit of difficulty to sort out.

Several editors noted that use of a preferred professional name for publication is possible, while using more “traditional” name usage in other circumstances. Many married women I know use “Dr.” in their professional work, but “Mrs.” in social situations. Some of the editors noted that “legal” concerns about names should be considered and suggested that a decision to legally change a name back to the birth (or perhaps just earlier) surname is also possible and perhaps would be preferred in some cases, especially if it was a name under which a person published. Changing one’s name legally (or not) is not very difficult although costs and subsequent confusion may entail. Changing your name when marrying is not a legal requirement—it is a tradition—although there are legal considerations for using any name (driver’s license, passport, etc.). “Pen names” (or pseudonyms) can be used, although these are uncommon in scientific writing. My concern with pen names is that most scientists and scientific writers want to be found. A person could be hard to find if the pen name is not the name a person uses professionally.

In addition to changing last names, there are other name issues. As one of the editors noted, some individuals do not use given first names, preferring to use middle names or even nicknames. This may be acceptable for scientific writing, especially since most searches for authors are run using last names and initials. Sometimes individuals change their names for other reasons, for example, following gender reassignment surgery or before, when a transgender author

declares a new name to match their gender identity. All of this is both acceptable and legal. However, there may still be confusion if someone is trying to cite you or find you and your work.



The best suggestion I received and one that I fully endorse, is to register on ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID), which provides a consistent identifier that does not change even if your name changes. In short, ORCID is a nonproprietary, alphanumeric code that uniquely identifies scientific authors.

This unique identifier addresses the problem of author recognition. As ORCID notes, personal names are not unique (such as John Smith), can change (for example, with marriage, divorce, gender reassignment), have cultural differences in name order (in China, for example, the family name is first), or that are inconsistently used by different organizations or publication houses (such hyphen usage, discussed earlier). Having an ORCID number provides a persistent identity for authors similar to that created for publications with digital object identifiers (DOIs). ORCID registration is now required for those submitting grant applications to the federal government and other funding agencies in order that those organizations might more readily track publications of people they fund. Some publishers ask submitting authors to provide their ORCID number and, if the author does not have one, they are directed to get one. However you come to the point of obtaining an ORCID, doing so will support automated linkages between you and your professional activities, thus ensuring that your work is recognized. Obtaining an ORCID is easy and free at <https://orcid.org/>

How we name ourselves in in our scholarly writing could be a non-issue if everyone were to register and use an ORCID number. It could also potentially

eliminate this issue for authors from the United States and perhaps a few other countries, since in many places in the world, women do not change names when they marry. There are many different naming conventions around the world; it is perhaps a very “western” tradition that women change their names upon marriage.

However, I suspect there will be lingering issues around author names, and not just for women; some men also take their wives' name and use a hyphen; same-sex couples may also take their marriage partner's name or use a hyphen to join the two. Again, although an ORCID number will help, there will remain citation nuances related to author initials (i.e. J. Smith may also be J.P. Smith). As many of the editors who responded to my mailing list inquiry noted, consistency is critical. It is hard to know what your name may always be; it is hard to always remember to add that middle initial, which can be particularly important if your first and last names are both very common. Both the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2009) and the *American Medical Association Style Manual* (AMA, 2007) include guidance for citing authors with name changes or with inconsistent name usage. They also both address how to cite authors whose names are not “conventional” in the United States. Other style manuals also offer guidance on author names in citations. New editions of both APA and AMA style manuals will be available by the end of 2019 and are expected to continue refinements to author names in citations. For authors, the message is to be as consistent as possible in how you call yourself in manuscripts, articles, and other scholarly documents.

Your name is yours. You can call yourself pretty much whatever you want. However, it is important to understand that once you establish an author identity, it can be difficult for you and for those who want to find your work if you change your name, especially more than once. In this case, I am reminded Suzanne Smith who

was the long-time editor of *Nurse Educator* and *JONA: Journal of Nursing Administration*. Over the course of her professional career she was known as:

- Suzanne P. Smith (also Suzanne Smith)
- Suzanne Smith Coletta
- Suzanne Smith-Blancett

I might note that these names were not always chronological or consistent. Those who did not know Suzanne and her work might have a hard time tracking her publications, especially since “Smith” is a very common surname. Think how much she might have benefited from an ORCID!

In time, I suspect all journals will require an ORCID number and will use that to help others find you and your work. If you are just starting to publish scholarly papers, give some thought to how you wish to be known, found, and cited in the future. Choose your name for publication wisely and use it consistently.

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