

Exercising Agency Over Gender Diverse Identity: Experiences with Legal Name Change in  
Saskatchewan

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## Abstract

In recent years there has been an increase in individuals who identify two-spirit, transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming (Allen et al., 2020; Jones, 2022). Chosen name use is associated with improved mental health, and increased access to employment and housing (Crosby et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2018; Russell et al., 2018; Pollitt et al., 2019; Restar et al., 2020). Legal name is a natural step for 2STNBGN people to support chosen name use. Amidst a rise in anti-trans sentiment in Saskatchewan there is a need for research on the legal name change process. Using self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) an open-ended approach was used to explore the ways in which 2STNBGN people decide about and experience legal name change. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom with 2STNBGN people who resided in Saskatchewan, Canada. Convenience sampling through advertisements on social media resulted in a final sample of 15 2STNBGN people living across Saskatchewan ranging in age from 18-37, who had considered legal name change. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to explore participants' past or anticipated experiences with legal name change, decision making about legal name change, and perceptions around gender identity.

Participants associated multiple challenges with the legal name change process (e.g., the publication requirement, complexity, cost, etc.). Perceived benefits of legal name change included recognition of their chosen name, self-confidence, and mental wellbeing. Accounting for the challenges and benefits, participants arrived at various decisions about legal name change based on their assessments and the extent to which legal name change may help resolve discrepancy between gender identity and perceived gender. While most participants felt that legal name change was worthwhile, some expressed that they could reduce gender dysphoria associated with their name in other ways. The results of this study suggest that policy changes (e.g., removing the publication requirement, simplifying the process, and removing or reducing parental/spousal permission requirements) could improve access to legal name change for 2STNBGN people. When 2STNBGN individuals legally change their name, they are protected from misnaming and can control when, how, and to whom they reveal their identity. Additionally, legal name change supports 2STNBGN peoples' agency to claim and perform gender diversity.

*Keywords:* Legal name change, self-discrepancy theory, chosen name, gender identity, gender

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## Introduction

In recent years, we are seeing a significant increase in the visibility of different gender identities and the use of gender terms beyond the binary genders of man and woman (Allen et al, 2020; Jones, 2022). The recognition of diverse gender terms was further legitimized in 2022, when the Oxford English Dictionary - a cultural influence for language - introduced 18 new 2SLGBTQ+ terms to acknowledge the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ people around the world (Dobson, 2023). Despite the “rise” in gender diversity, it is important to acknowledge that these gender experiences have always existed. However, gender diverse people often remained silent and conformed to their assigned binary gender for safety (Surtees, 2020). The recognition and surge of visibility of gender diverse experiences also brought counter-discourses, resisting this so-called “gender ideology” (Allen et al, 2020). Nonetheless, these cultural shifts provide opportunities to explore how governments and society have evolved to accommodate (or not accommodate) gender diverse individuals today.

An increase in social awareness of gender diversity resulted in the use of a rapidly evolving list of terms that describe the influx of these unique experiences. Also in flux are the meanings behind gender diverse terms, both in research (Thorne et al., 2019) and among gender diverse people (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Indeed, even the term transgender itself has been debated by gender diverse youth who discussed whether experiencing gender dysphoria is sufficient to be called “trans” or whether one must physically transition (Ok & Kang, 2021). Given the ongoing debate and the personal nature of gender diverse terms I have decided to define the most well-established umbrella terms for use in this thesis. As such, the largest identities and umbrella terms being used today include being two-spirit, transgender, nonbinary, and otherwise gender non-conforming. To elaborate, two-spirit is a term specific to Indigenous people that includes gender and/or sexual diverse identities and is rooted in Indigenous culture and history; transgender is a term used when a person’s gender is different from their gender assigned at birth; and nonbinary is term that explains when someone’s gender identity exists outside the man/woman binary (OutSaskatoon, n.d.).

These terms are defined by a community-based organization local to Saskatchewan and may differ from other definitions in literature. However, this research examined the legal system in Saskatchewan and engaged with participants living in the province, meaning these local definitions are appropriate to use. In this thesis, I use gender non-conforming as an umbrella

term to encompass other gender diverse identities. I will use the umbrella acronym 2STNBGN (two-spirit, transgender, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming) when referring to gender diverse people. Finally, individual terms may be used when referring to research or participants where a specific identity is referenced. Understanding 2SLGBTQ+ lexicon is only one aspect of gender-diverse journeys.

Names are often a fundamental part of gender diverse identity and self-expression, a name that represents a person's chosen gender identity is important in their gender journey (Lind, 2023; Butler, 2002). Research shows that having a name that accurately represents a person's gender is associated with improved mental wellbeing (Russell et al., 2018; Pollitt et al., 2019; Restar et al., 2020; Crosby et al., 2016), and improved experiences accessing social programs such as healthcare and housing (Hill et al., 2018, Soled et al., 2022). Considering the information above, it can be said that legal name change is a key step toward ensuring that gender diverse individuals are accepted and that their identity is recognized. According to Lind (2023, p. 1), "Whether or not this new name is accepted and adopted by others is not only a matter of time, but correlates to the acceptance of the 'new' gender and thus of a person's right to change their name."

Legal name change is an important part of gender performance that affirms gender for many 2STNBGN people. In Saskatchewan, changing one's legal name is a simple process to navigate for most people. For example, people who are getting married, divorced, having their marriage annulled, or who have recently experienced the death of their spouse can simply start using their new last name because the mechanism to change it is already embedded in these legal processes (eHealth, n.d.). To contrast, for people who wish to change their full name for reasons other than marriage, annulment/divorce, or death – including 2STNBGN people – the process becomes less direct. People need to complete an application with eHealth to obtain a legal name change certificate, following which they can proceed to updating their name with key agencies using the certificate.

Given the importance of legal name change to 2STNBGN individuals, the purpose of this thesis is to examine the significance of names among gender-diverse individuals living in Saskatchewan and how they experience or perceive the legal name change process. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how identity may affect 2STNBGN peoples' decision making about legal name change, examine the facilitators and barriers in the legal name change process in

Saskatchewan as experienced by 2STNBGN people, and explore the effects of legal name change on 2STNBGN peoples' lives. To fulfill this purpose, I conducted a qualitative study using reflexive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews focused on aspects of 2STNBGN peoples' identity and their perceptions of and/or experiences with legal name change.

## **Literature Review**

### **Identity**

Identity from a psychological standpoint is a person's understanding of who they are and who they hope to become (Bronk, 2011). Developing a strong sense of identity is seen as important because it helps create consistency and stability in peoples' lives from one day to the next (Erikson, 1968; VandenBos & APA, 2015). A sense of identity also helps people understand their values and interests, which guides decision making and how and with whom they socialize (Gupta, 2023). Having a strong sense of identity has been linked to improved self-esteem, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and more positive self-reflection (Stets & Burke, 2014; Morin & Racy, 2021). The legal understanding of identity differs from the psychological understanding of identity. The United Nations Legal Identity Agenda's<sup>1</sup> definition of legal identity is "the basic characteristics of an individual's identity. [For example] name, sex, place and date of birth conferred through registration and the issuance of a certificate" (UN Statistics Division, n.d.). Legal identity is connected to an individuals' right to access healthcare, social benefits, and to be protected from discrimination (Kurp, 2023; Iyer, 1993). This definition of legal identity overlooks the interpersonal and social aspects of identity including the goals, memories, beliefs, ethnic belonging, and religious and political affiliations that contribute to each person's internal understanding of who they are (Erikson, 1968; Bronk, 2011). An understanding that identity may evolve over the course of one's life is essential to the psychological understanding of identity (Erikson, 1968; Bronk, 2011) but is at odds with the legal definition which assumes that the "basic characteristics" of identity will remain constant over a person's life. 2STNBGN people must navigate identity change when realizing that the legal gender and name assigned to them do not align with their internal gender identity. For many 2STNBGN people this misalignment between legal identity and gender identity requires physical and social transitioning to align with their gender identity.

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<sup>1</sup> A branch of the United Nations Statistics Division

Several theories of identity have been proposed over the years and each theory has its own strengths and weaknesses. Prominent theories of identity include social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), identity theory (Stryker, 1968), and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). Social identity theory is a social psychological theory which mainly deals with how individuals develop shared identity with in-groups and the psychological processes involved in intergroup relations (Hogg et al., 1995). Social identity theory proposes that individuals categorize themselves and others into social categories and tend to focus on the differences between the social categories while minimizing individual differences within their own category (Treppe, 2013). Based on group membership and a desire to see themselves positively, individuals tend to compare the in-group favourably to out-groups, creating a sense of positive distinctiveness which reinforces in-group identification (Treppe, 2013). In comparison, identity theory is a sociological theory focused on how society shapes the multiple roles that make up an individual's identity (e.g., parent, student, leader, hockey fan, etc.) and how these identity roles shape behaviour (Hogg et al., 1995). Identity roles may come into conflict with each other from time to time and identity theory gives attention to how the individual navigates their identity roles in relation to society and recognizes that identity is continuously negotiated (Stets & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stryker, 2016). While social identity theory has a place in understanding how 2STNBGN people form a group identity and relate to other groups and identity theory helps to understand how 2STNBGN identities are negotiated, when the act of naming is considered both theories provide an inadequate foundation to understand a 2STNBGN individual's internal dilemma.

Self-discrepancy theory provides a theoretical understanding of identity that offers a better framework to understand the internal dilemma of 2STNBGN people. Self-discrepancy theory defines three aspects of self identity: the actual self, who you are now; the ideal self, who you want to be; and the ought self, who others want you to be (Higgins, 1987). Discrepancies between these different aspects of self may lead to distress in individuals, for example if the actual self does not align with the ideal self a person may feel dissatisfied or depressed (Higgins, 1987). People may change their behaviour or physical presentation in order to better align the ideal, actual, and ought selves (Higgins, 1987).

When applying self-discrepancy theory to transgender identity, the ideal self is the person's gender, the actual self is how they are perceived by others based on their gender

presentation, and the ought self is the gender roles and expectations of others based on sex assigned at birth. The gender binary upholds the belief that there are two separate categories of gender which individuals can be sorted into – boy/man or girl/woman (Hyde et al., 2019). Individuals are typically sorted into either category at birth based on physical sex characteristics such as external genitalia and chromosomal makeup (Hyde et al., 2019). The construct of binary gender supports the assumption that one's gender and sex characteristics will remain the same over an individual's lifetime (Hyde et al., 2019). Once gender has been assigned to an individual, society applies strict social roles and an individual's attitudes, behaviours, preferences, and physical gender presentation are shaped to match assigned gender (Bem, 1983). Based on self-discrepancy theory, from the moment a 2STNBGN person realizes their gender diverse identity, a discrepancy is created between their actual, ideal, and ought selves which cannot quickly be corrected. 2STNBGN people often must go through changes in how they present their bodies, behaviours, and names to reduce the discrepancy between their actual gender identity (or how they're perceived now) and their ideal (which aligns with their true gender); all while navigating societal gender expectations that are based on binary sex and gender roles. Self-discrepancy theory has been applied to 2STNBGN individuals in a number of different studies in recent years, including the study of sexual self-esteem, mental health, and even how clothing relates to the sense of self (Kennis et al. 2022; Rider et al., 2018; Strübel & Goswami, 2022).

Kennis and co-authors (2022) have applied self-discrepancy theory to transgender participants in the context of sexual self-concept research, specifically, examining the discrepancy between ideal gender identity and actual gender presentation. The researchers found that greater alignment between ideal and actual sexual self-concepts fully mediated the relationship between gender dysphoria and three areas of sexual self-concept. As gender dysphoria decreased, feelings of attractiveness, sexual adequacy with a partner, and body perceptions improved (Kennis et al., 2022). Greater incongruency between ideal and actual sexual self-concepts also mediated relationship between gender dysphoria and anxiety around sex, wherein as gender dysphoria increased so did anxiety around sex (Kennis et al., 2022). The sexual self-concept discrepancy that Kennis and colleagues identified may be resolved when transgender people are able to transition and present in a way that reflects their gender identity, ultimately reducing their gender dysphoria. This further supports the idea that transitioning helps

make congruent the discrepancy between ideal gender identity and actual gender presentation experienced by transgender people.

Another study by Rider and co-authors (2018) using data from the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey which included over 80,000 ninth and eleventh grade students examined the discrepancy between actual gender presentation and ought gender presentation based on assigned sex. The researchers found that transgender and gender non-conforming youth whose presentation deviated from what is expected of their sex assigned at birth experienced poorer health, accessed preventative check-ups less frequently, and visited the school nurse more frequently than peers whose appearance conformed to the expectations of their assigned sex (Rider, et al., 2018). Most often transgender and gender non-conforming people will not want to present in alignment with their sex assigned at birth; however, transgender people who are transitioning from one binary gender to the other (binary trans people) are more likely to be accepted because they still fit within socially sanctioned gender roles. The discrepancy between actual gender presentation and ought presentation is more difficult to resolve for non-binary or gender non-conforming people who may not wish to present strictly according to either the man or woman role. Therefore, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming gender identity was correlated with poorer access to healthcare and other services compared to binary transgender individuals (Rider et al., 2018).

Self-discrepancy theory may help explain some of the dissonance that characterizes feelings of gender dysphoria among 2STNBGN people. The quantitative studies mentioned above have given some examples of how actual/ideal and actual/ought discrepancies may manifest among 2STNBGN people. Based on these findings, it is possible that one outcome of the name change process may be to help reduce dissonance and dysphoria by creating alignment between one's name and internal identity.

### **Gender Presentation: Gender Dysphoria and Euphoria**

Gender dysphoria is defined by OutSaskatoon (n.d.) as anxiety or stress experienced by a person when others do not perceive them as their true gender. The DSM-5-TR defines gender dysphoria for diagnostic purposes as “the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender” (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Although gender dysphoria is commonly thought of as something that only gender diverse people experience – and it is when definitions that include “anxiety” and

“distress” around perception of their gender – cisgender<sup>2</sup> people can also have bodies that are incongruent with their gender or feel pressured to perform their assigned gender (Engelhardt, 2021). For example, women are told they should not have large amounts of body hair to fit feminine beauty standards, yet many women have bodies that grow hair. Older men may lose their hair and feel the need to take steps to regrow it to fit norms of masculine attractiveness while younger men and boys may be unable to grow a beard and feel elated when their facial hair begins to grow. Men may feel pressure to be aggressive or unfeeling and women may feel pressure to be accommodating and avoid confrontation (Engelhardt, 2021).

Feelings of discomfort are magnified among 2STNBGN individuals where the incongruity between their ideal gender identity and actual presentation is far greater than what cisgender people may experience, leading to the term gender dysphoria. Engelhardt (2021) notes that while cisgender people can feel discomfort in their gender presentation, the term gender dysphoria is specific to 2STNBGN people who experience a large discrepancy between their gender identity and how their gender is perceived. This gender discrepancy is sometimes difficult to overcome for 2STNBGN people because physically transitioning takes time, it is not possible to adjust their bodily presentation at the same time as they realize their gender identity, and they may find themselves stuck in a body and assigned a gender role that is extremely incongruent with their gender identity. Gender dysphoria is often associated with 2STNBGN peoples’ names given at birth because names are often gendered to match the sex and gender role assigned at birth (Sinclair-Palm, 2023). Expressing themselves through a chosen name is one way that 2STNBGN people can begin to change their gender presentation more quickly than transitioning their body (Lind, 2023).

Gender euphoria is a feeling of enjoyment or satisfaction experienced when a person’s gender identity is aligned with how they are perceived (OutSaskatoon, n.d., Austin et al., 2022). 2STNBGN people often experience gender euphoria when choosing a new name that others associate with their desired gender identity (Austin et al., 2022). Austin and co-authors (2022) carried out a grounded theory study of gender euphoria using photo elicitation among trans, nonbinary and gender diverse adults. The participants’ narratives clearly identified that experiences of gender euphoria were linked to an experience or event that validated, enhanced,

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<sup>2</sup> Cisgender is a term used to refer to people whose actual gender identity matches their gender assigned at birth (OutSaskatoon, n.d.).



or supported the participants' gender identity. These experiences are referred to as gender affirming antecedents and can include having a body that fits your desired gender presentation, being gendered correctly by others, and having your chosen name and correct pronouns used (Austin et al., 2022).

Using a person's birth name<sup>3</sup> instead of their chosen name is one possible way of misgendering<sup>4</sup> a 2STNBGN person. Some other ways that misgendering can occur are through using the wrong gendered term to refer to the person (i.e., man/woman, girl/boy, male/female) and using the wrong personal pronouns when referring to the person. Misgendering is a harmful act that can lead to gender dysphoria because the discrepancy between the person's ideal gender and actual gender presentation is highlighted. McLemore (2015) used a questionnaire to investigate the impacts of misgendering among transgender people. The researchers found that being misgendered more frequently was associated with lower self-confidence in appearance, and with lower identity strength and congruence. Identity congruence was defined and measured using a scale to assess congruence between external presentation and internal self (McLemore, 2015; Kozee, et al., 2012). Kozee and co-authors (2012), who originated the gender congruence scale, concluded that higher scores on the newly validated measure were associated with higher wellbeing and higher life satisfaction. Given that misgendering is a negative experience for 2STNBGN people that can be damaging to their well being it is important to minimize the number of times that misgendering occurs. With this in mind, a legal name change is one action 2STNBGN people can take to reduce misgendering by making it easier to publicly present as their ideal gender, which is referred to as "passing."

Being able to pass is another act that can decrease the chance of experiencing gender dysphoria among 2STNBGN people. Passing is when 2STNBGN individuals are not recognized as transgender and instead "pass" as their desired gender (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Most often, passing in the context of gender speaks specifically to transgender peoples' ability to be perceived as either a man or a woman. In terms of self-discrepancy theory, the discrepancy between their ideal gender identity and actual presentation has been resolved and people now

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<sup>3</sup> A 2STNBGN person's birth name is also called a dead name within the 2SLGBTQ+ community (OutSaskatoon, n.d.)

<sup>4</sup> Misgendering is a colloquial term used by gender diverse people to describe when a person incorrectly uses language that does not match a gender diverse person's gender to refer to them (OutSaskatoon, n.d.).

perceive them as their ideal gender identity. It is important to note that not all 2STNBGN people wish to pass. For those who do wish to pass, passing is important because it allows the person to control who they tell that they are gender diverse (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019).

Coming out refers to when an individual's sexual identity and/or gender identity is revealed to a person or a group of people (Babst, 2018). Coming out can be done with the individual's control, or without their control. Based on a thematic analysis of transgender coming out experiences, Brumbaugh-Johnson and Hull (2019) concluded that coming out as transgender is an ongoing and strategic process of managing who knows and who does not know about one's trans identity. Transgender people make decisions about how and when to come out to others to minimize the chances of being rejected and many trans people are never fully out, especially if they can pass (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Rather, coming out is an ongoing process and 2STNBGN and other queer people may be more or less out with different people in their social, family, or professional lives (OutSaskatoon, n.d.; Klein et al., 2015). Having access to timely legal name change can allow 2STNBGN people to pass, giving them greater control over who knows about their gender identity which may lead to many positive outcomes for their social standing, mental well-being, and overall health.

### **Choosing a Name**

Before pursuing legal name change, 2STNBGN individuals must find their chosen name. Most people are given a name at birth by their parents that aligns with their assigned gender (Lind, 2023). Names perform several important functions including: consistently identifying an individual; sharing details of a person's identity; and indicating who the person is related to (Emmelhainz, 2012). As Emmelhainz (2012) identified, society allows for changes to surnames to reflect who a person is related to but does not easily allow for name changes that reflect a change in identity. This limitation on social acceptance of name change is problematic for 2STNBGN people. Choosing a name is an important part of realizing gender identity for many 2STNBGN people and involves working to understand one's identity deeply (Lind, 2023; Sinclair-Palm, 2023; Sinclair-Palm, 2017).

Lind (2023) conducted interviews with 16 participants in Germany about coming out and found that chosen names are used to communicate, perform, and claim the gender associated with the name. Supporting circumstances such as having a body that performs the gender claimed by the name and the willingness of others to accept the chosen name are central to the

success of claiming and performing gender through a chosen name (Lind, 2023). Having a body which performs the gender claimed by one's chosen name is important because general society often believes that a person's gender always matches their appearance (Lind, 2023). Most people quickly place others' into either the man or woman category based on binary gender schemas which are developed at an early age (Bem, 1983). Although Lind's research and gender schemas point to the importance of having a body that matches the gender claimed by a chosen name, most 2STNBGN people need time to transition their bodies (Sinclair-Palm, 2023). In the meantime, 2STNBGN people choose a new name that reflects their ideal gender as a way to align their gender expression with their gender identity. Choosing a name occurs alongside coming out and acts as an early way of expressing gender identity while legal name change represents legal sanctioning of the newly claimed identity (Lind, 2023). After choosing a new name 2STNBGN people often desire to change their legal name to their chosen name.

### **The Legal Name Change Process in Saskatchewan**

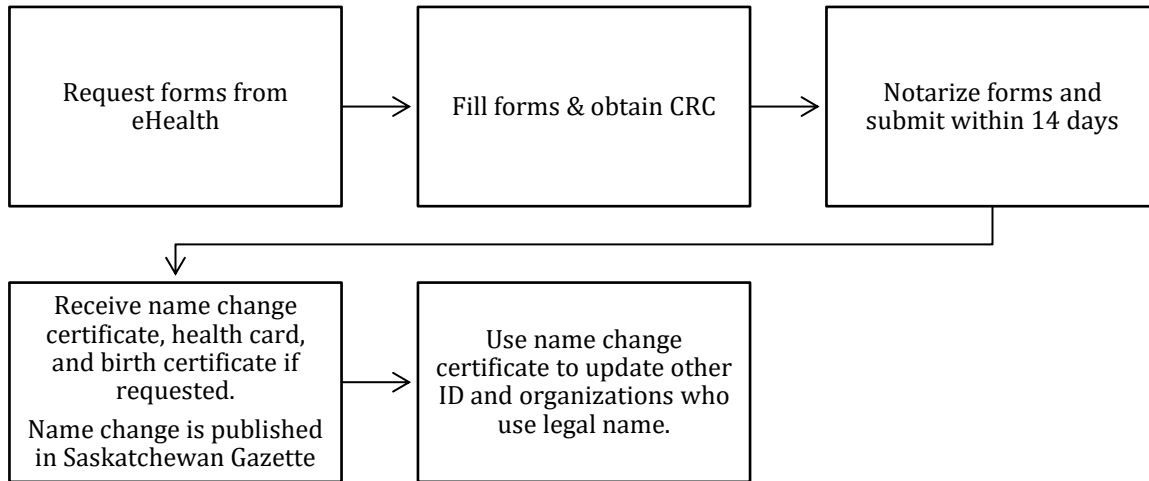
The legal name change process in Saskatchewan (Figure 1) has many steps, each of which may have distinct impacts on the experience of 2STNBGN people navigating this process. The process begins with contacting eHealth<sup>5</sup> to request the name change form. Once an applicant provides their full name, Saskatchewan health number, mailing address, email, phone number, and the reason that they are seeking a legal name change then eHealth will mail a physical application form. To complete the application form, the applicant must obtain a notary public's signature and a criminal record check (CRC). The CRC must be obtained no more than 14 days before submission of the entire application. The application costs \$125 plus the cost of the CRC, signature of the notary, and the cost of updating other ID such as, obtaining a new drivers license and passport (if applicable). The applicant must also agree to publish their name change (both their birth and new names) in the Saskatchewan Gazette, an online government publication (Government of Saskatchewan, 1995). Once the application is submitted it takes six to eight weeks to be processed, after which time a new health card, birth certificate (if requested), and name change certificate will arrive by mail. At this time the individual can update their name on all other identification such as, drivers license, passport, SIN card and with the organizations who use the information such as, the Canada Revenue Agency, banks, insurance companies, etc.

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<sup>5</sup>eHealth is the government body that is responsible for building and maintaining Saskatchewan's electronic health information systems.

**Figure 1**

*The Basic Steps of the Legal Name Change Process in Saskatchewan*



As figure one demonstrates, the name change process seemingly follows a straightforward path, however, eHealth does not lay out these steps in as much detail on their website and this is the most simple process for someone born in Saskatchewan who is at least 18 years old and unmarried. The process becomes more complicated if an individual is born out of province, is under 18 years old, or is married. Individuals born out of province must change their birth certificate in the jurisdiction of birth first and individuals who are under 18 years old or married must obtain parental/spousal consent.

One of the steps which specifically affects 2STNBGN people, is the requirement to publish the name change. The Saskatchewan government does not state why legal name changes must be published either in the Name Change Act (Government of Saskatchewan, 1995) or on the eHealth webpage (eHealth, n.d.). According to Marriage Name Change<sup>6</sup> U.S. publication requirements are often required by the law to create “a searchable, archived, historic chronicle” (Jones, 2023, para. 17) because anyone who is owed “statutory obligations [has] a right to know when [someone has changed their name]” (Jones, 2023, para. 18). It is likely that the Saskatchewan government has a similar reason behind the publication requirement in this province, although it is not stated. The Saskatchewan legal name change form has an option to request exemption from the publication requirement, however, the form and eHealth website are vague on who may qualify (eHealth, n.d.). While the publication requirement is inconsequential

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<sup>6</sup> A U.S. business which helps clients complete legal name change.

for someone who is changing their name due to marriage or who wishes to simplify a complex name, it is potentially more invasive for 2STNBGN people. The requirement to publish the birth name alongside a person's chosen name can effectively "out" transgender people who have completed a legal name change through a web search of either their birth or chosen name.

As previously established, coming out is an ongoing process during which 2STNBGN people come out strategically to different people, depending on how comfortable they are sharing their identity (OutSaskatoon, n.d.; Klein et al., 2015; Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Being out is often positioned as the ideal state that benefits mental health and wellbeing (Legate et al., 2012; Li & Samp, 2022). However, a body of literature has developed to challenge the idea that being fully out is always a positive experience (Legate et al., 2012; Klein et al., 2015; Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019; Rood et al., 2017). For example, Klein and co-authors (2015) reported that LGBTQ youth challenged being out as the ideal in a photovoice study of coming out narratives. Transgender youth specifically described how coming out as trans in settings where gender roles are reinforced, such as a feminist women's group, may lead to losing that social support system (Klein et al., 2015). Given that 2STNBGN people strategically come out in different settings, it is important that they have control over the decision about whether to come out, and how and when to share their story. The publication requirement for legal name changes can effectively remove control over coming out for 2STNBGN people by maintaining a public link to their birth name.

2STNBGN community members in Saskatchewan have reported to Trans Sask<sup>7</sup> that exemption requests on the grounds of being gender diverse have often been denied, with eHealth simply stating in the decision that being of diverse gender is insufficient reason to issue an exemption (Trans Sask, n.d.). In contrast to the unexplained resistance to allow 2STNBGN people an exemption in Saskatchewan, Ontario offers a publication exemption specifically for transgender people (Service Ontario, 2023). The province of Ontario simply requires a short self-declaration form to be submitted along with the name change application to exempt the publication requirement for those changing their names due to gender identity. Quebec similarly protects exemptions where the name change is related to the person's gender and Alberta lists no publication requirement on its website for legal name changes (Directeur de l'état civil, 2023;

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<sup>7</sup> Trans Sask is a Saskatchewan wide non-profit that supports trans and gender diverse individuals, their families, friends, and allies.

Government of Alberta, n.d.). As these provinces show, it is possible to exempt individuals from publication when changing their name for reasons related to gender identity. Despite the fact that an exemption from the publication requirement is not usually an option in Saskatchewan, many 2STNBGN people still choose to pursue legal name change.

### **Outcomes of Legal Name Change**

There are many positive outcomes associated with name change (Crosby et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2018; Pollitt et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2018). One of the benefits of legal name change is that having a legal name which matches the gender one wishes to convey allows 2STNBGN individuals to more easily publicly present as their ideal gender, which may result in fewer experiences of small acts of discrimination, often called microaggressions. By having an ID with a name that conveys the correct gender, 2STNBGN people are able to pass in situations where ID or legal name is required. This allows 2STNBGN people to mitigate the risks of experiencing microaggressions, such as being misgendered based on incorrect ID, asked inappropriate questions about their trans bodies, and harassed about their gender identity (Nadal, 2013; Wesselmann et al., 2022; Rood et al., 2017; Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019; Scheim et al., 2020). Legal name and gender marker change have been associated with less frequent experiences of microaggressions and fewer negative feelings as a result because a 2STNBGN person's ID does not out their gender identity (Restar et al., 2020). In addition to improving 2STNBGN peoples' ability to pass, legal name change signifies crossing a threshold into legal acceptance and affirmation of their gender identity.

The second potential benefit of legal name change is improved mental health and wellbeing. 2STNBGN individuals are at a greater risk for negative mental health outcomes including an increased chance of experiencing anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation compared to cisgender individuals (Pollitt, 2019; Rood et al., 2017, Restar et al., 2020). Using data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Study, it was found that among the U.S. transgender population, having gender congruent ID is associated with improved mental health and reduced suicide ideation (Scheim et al., 2020). The authors of this study asserted that gender affirmation should be considered a social determinant of health for 2STNBGN people given the strong association between gender congruent ID and mental health (Scheim et al., 2020). Additionally, among black transgender women, a strong correlation was found between mental health outcomes and social gender affirming factors (Crosby et al., 2016). Anxiety, depression, and

suicide ideation were reduced in women who had higher social affirmation, such as that attained through legal name and gender marker change (Crosby et al., 2016). Poor mental health outcomes are consequences of microaggressions, being more at risk of experiencing employment discrimination, and being unable to access gender affirming healthcare (Bradford et al., 2013). Use of a transgender person's chosen name in family, work, and school settings has been associated with reductions in negative mental health outcomes, showing that chosen name use serves as a protective mechanism (Crosby et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2018; Russell et al., 2018; Pollitt et al., 2019; Restar et al., 2020).

The third benefit of the legal name change process is that a gender congruent legal name supports access to housing, employment, and other parts of society where legal name and ID are required. Transgender people tend to thrive when able to legally change their name, which is associated with higher income and more secure housing (Hill et al., 2018; Crosby et al., 2016). For example, among transgender women of colour those who had completed their legal name change were more likely to have stable housing and higher income compared to those who had not completed their legal name change (Hill et al., 2018). Social spaces that welcome 2STNBGN people often support the use of chosen names both in language and on official documents. However, school, healthcare, and other government institutions do not always support the use of a trans person's chosen name because such institutions may be resistant to 2STNBGN acceptance and may uphold policy barriers that restrict chosen name use (Sinclair-Palm, 2017). In order to ensure that their chosen name is always accepted, 2STNBGN people often opt to change their legal name to their chosen name.

It is also important to consider that the relationships between improved mental health, higher income, and more secure housing to legal name change are correlational trends, not causative links. These trends may also be due to the fact that individuals who are already mentally well, higher income, and in secure housing are the people who are most able to complete the complex legal name change process, rather than legal name change causing these outcomes. In addition, it is possible that those who are higher income, have better mental health, and are more secure in their gender identity are also more likely to pursue legal name change in the first place. While the causal direction of the correlation between legal name change and improved mental health, higher income, and more secure housing is unclear, the general findings

nonetheless show that positive overall outcomes are associated with access to legal name change for 2STNBGN people.

### **Socio-Political Context in Saskatchewan**

Saskatchewan has a unique socio-political context and this in relation to the rest of Canada impacts the 2STNBGN people who live in the province. The population of Saskatchewan is predominantly of European settler ancestry with about 15 percent of the population identifying as a visible minority according to the most recent census (Statistics Canada, 2023). There is also a rural, small town feel to Saskatchewan, with the biggest cities, Saskatoon and Regina, only having a population of 266,000 and 226,000 respectively out of 1,132,505 people as of 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023). The majority of the Saskatchewan population identifies as religious, with about 56 percent of people claiming one form of Christianity or another (Statistics Canada, 2023).

These demographics contribute to a more conservative perspective on most social issues, however, at the same time Saskatchewan has a strong socialist history as evidenced by the many Crown Corporations that operate major essential services and the fact that Saskatchewan originated universal, single payer healthcare in Canada (Klatt, 2023). Saskatchewan is the birthplace of socialism in Canada and the New Democratic Party, which began as a farmer's movement in the 1930s (Klatt, 2023). The more recent conservative swing is evidenced by the near 20-year reign of the Saskatchewan Party, a conservative leaning political party that prioritizes balanced budgets and tax cuts while maintaining the Crown Corporations (Guiding Principles, n.d.). With its alternative conservatism the Saskatchewan Party has introduced interesting policies, such as new oil and gas focused courses<sup>8</sup> (Sciarpelletti, 2024) and a laissez-faire approach to handling the COVID-19 pandemic that left the healthcare system struggling to meet demand (Quon & Vescera, 2024). Overall, Saskatchewan has a diverse make-up of people and in recent years leans socially conservative which has implications for the policies that the government enacts around 2STNBGN people.

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<sup>8</sup> The courses are 20 and 30 level options that involve oil and gas theory and work placements provided through a partnership with Teine Energy and potentially other companies, intended to encourage interested students to pursue careers in the oil and gas sector (Sciarpelletti, 2024)



## **Rising Anti-Trans Sentiment**

Beginning around 2021-2022 there has been a general rise in anti-queer discourse and policies specifically targeting 2STNBGN people in the U.S. and Canada, which I refer to as anti-trans sentiment. Although the start is difficult to pinpoint, the political swing has become evident in laws enacted since the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting with bans against drag queens in schools and libraries in the U.S., anti-trans legislation is now common across the country totalling 543 bills put forward in 49 states as of May 2023 (Pepin-Neff, 2023). Anti-trans legislation broadly includes legislation that has a negative impact upon trans and gender diverse people in various settings such as education, healthcare, civil rights, employment, sports, marriage, ID changes, etc. (Anti-Trans Bills Tracker, 2024). For example, laws may limit access to gender affirming care, limit the right to change one's name or gender at school, or limit access to processes for legal name and gender marker change. Concerningly, these policies are now starting to spread to Canada, most recently with Alberta having introduced plans to restrict gender affirming care for 2STNBGN youth and prevent 2STNBGN youth from using their chosen names at school without parental consent (French, 2024). New Brunswick and Saskatchewan have already introduced policies that prohibit schools from using a youth's chosen name without parental consent, citing protection of parental rights (Taylor, 2023).

In Saskatchewan specifically, the provincial government first introduced parental consent policies that required schools to obtain parental consent to change the preferred name and pronouns of students under 16 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2023). The courts have determined that the policy presented a risk to the wellbeing of youth (*UR Pride v Saskatchewan (Education)*, 2023). In response, the government wrote the parental consent requirement into law and used the notwithstanding clause to protect the law from legal challenges. The use of the notwithstanding clause is significant, it allows laws to be passed while overriding sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that pertain in part to equality rights (Zimonjic, 2023). Essentially, the law is allowed to come into effect and cannot be legally challenged and struck down by the courts for at least five years.<sup>9</sup> The enactment of the law using the notwithstanding clause represents a significant challenge to the autonomy that 2STNBGN youth have over their name and pronouns in Saskatchewan. It is critical that experiences with the legal name change

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<sup>9</sup> At time of writing a legal challenge of the law based on the charter violations has been allowed to proceed, even if it cannot be struck down (Simes, 2024).

process among 2STNBGN people in Saskatchewan be investigated given these recent challenges, how important the process is to transitioning, and the positive outcomes associated with a legal name change.

### **The Current Study**

The decision-making process for a 2STNBGN person around legal name change is long and thoughtful because in addition to the beneficial outcomes there are challenges that the individual must evaluate before making a final decision. While the benefits of legal name change may often outweigh the challenges in the process of applying for legal name change, the barriers are significant and may lead 2STNBGN people to delay their application or fail on their first attempt. Common barriers include obtaining a CRC, publication of the person's dead name, difficulty to navigating the process, the need for a notary signature, cost, and a tight timeframe in which to obtain all the components of the application. Consequently, it is not just the outcomes that 2STNBGN people have to consider, but also the complicated bureaucratic process that they have to navigate to achieve legal name change.

Despite the amount of research on chosen name use and outcomes there is a lack of research in two key areas. The first is 2STNBGN people's experiences with the legal name change process in the province of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's legal name change process may be experienced differently compared to other Canadian provinces given the challenges of the application process which may be intertwined with the predominant conservative ideology in the province. The second area lacking research is how 2STNBGN individuals make decisions about whether to carry out a legal name change or not, including how their sense of identity may be related to this decision, and how legal name change and their identity may be related. In order to approach these research areas this thesis was be guided by three research questions:

1. What factors do 2STNBGN individuals consider when deciding whether or not to legally change their name?
2. What do 2STNBGN individuals identify as the challenges/barriers and the facilitators in the legal name change process and how could barriers be addressed?
3. What importance do 2STNBGN individuals living in Saskatchewan associate with legally changing their name?

The purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of 2STNBGN people in Saskatchewan who are contemplating name change and the implications for identity. Furthermore, I seek to

understand the facilitators and challenges in the legal name change process and how these may be involved in decision making.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The participants were recruited by advertising the opportunity to participate in a single interview an hour in length through 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in Saskatchewan and through social media. Organizations were emailed a packet of advertising materials (Appendix A) including Facebook™ and Instagram™ posts and stories, posters that can be posted online or in physical spaces, and any wording required. Eligibility criteria included that participants be transgender, non-binary, or otherwise gender diverse and must have thought about changing their legal name, whether they carried out their legal name change or not. Participants were offered a \$25 honorarium for their participation. Sixteen participants were recruited. The final sample was 15 participants, with one person choosing to withdraw from the study during the transcript checking phase, simply stating they wished to withdraw everything.

Table 1 summarizes the pseudonym which each participant chose for themselves alongside their self-identified gender and pronouns. The participants were a diverse mix of gender identities within the 2STNBGN umbrella with six identifying as binary transgender, two identifying as two-spirit, and the remainder identifying outside of binary gender. Age was collected as part of each interview but is not reported alongside each pseudonym and gender to safeguard the participants' identity. The mean age was 29 years old ( $SD = 6.5$ ) with a range of 18-37 years.

**Table 1***Participant Pseudonym, Gender Identity, & Pronouns*

Pseudonym	Gender	Pronouns
Avery	Non-binary	They/them
Fred	Genderqueer	Any
Grayson	Genderqueer	They/she
Gwen	Genderfluid	She/her
Jackie	Agender	They/them
Lee	Trans Man/Genderqueer	He/him
Lucas	Trans Masculine	He/they
Mally	Genderfluid/nonbinary/Two-spirit	Fluid pronouns
May	Woman	She/her
Nigel	Trans woman/woman	She/her
Ray	Trans man (guy)	He/they or He/him
Red	Trans woman	She/her
Sam	Non-binary	They/them
Steven	Male/Man	He/him
Thunder	Two-spirit	Unknown*

\*Thunder’s interview followed a far less structured progression than the others and pronouns were never specifically requested as a result.

**Materials**

An interview guide (Appendix B) was developed to facilitate semi-structured interviews. The interview guide focused on decision making around whether or not to proceed with legal name change and how identity related to legal name change. The interview guide begins with general rapport building questions followed by more specific questions on identity and participants’ decision making about legal name change. Rapport building questions included: “what are your pronouns?” and “what name do you go by?” Identity questions were constructed to tap into experiences of discrepancy between the ideal, actual, and ought selves and included: “how would you describe who you are to other people?” and “how have you navigated any differences between how you present and how you want to present?” Legal name change questions focused on why the participant decided to change their name or not, for example, “why did you come to that decision?” and on the impact of legal name change, for example, “what impact has changing your name had on your daily life?” Questions and probes targeted the main research questions while allowing unanticipated issues raised by participants to be discussed.

## **Procedure**

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. As outlined in the recruitment materials, potential participants were invited to either email me or fill out a short online questionnaire via a link on the ad to express their interest. The short questionnaire asked the potential participant's name, email, and if they have any questions about the study. Initially, interested individuals through either route were forwarded the consent form (Appendix C) to allow them to review it before coming to the interview, provided with answers to any questions they may have, and asked to provide potential times that would work for them to schedule the interview. However, after recruitment began it became obvious that the questionnaire was being filled with fake responses and a phone screening was implemented to ensure that potential participants were legitimate 2STNBGN people living in Saskatchewan. Once the phone screening was approved by the Ethics Board participants were asked to provide a phone number for a short screening call in the initial email. The screening calls followed the Screening Protocol (Appendix D) and confirmed an interview date that worked for the participant. Once participants had passed the screening call, they were emailed the consent form and a confirmation of their interview time and date.

Participants took part in an hour long semi-structured interview about their experience with changing their name and how this experience affected their identity. At the beginning of each interview the consent form was reviewed, and participants were asked to choose a pseudonym. Some participants were unsure what pseudonym they should choose, in these instances I gave some suggestions for the participant to choose from. Pseudonyms were not assigned, given that the interview was about their name and gender it was important that the participants had a say in choosing a pseudonym that reflected their gender. Verbal consent was recorded at the beginning of each interview after reviewing the consent form. The interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom. Zoom was chosen because it is easy to use, has a built-in recording function, and remote interviewing allowed for province wide recruitment. Online interviews are convenient for participants and may be more comfortable for 2STNBGN participants who might be experiencing gender dysphoria because they had the option of keeping their camera off. In addition, researchers who examined the use of online interviews found no differences in data quality and richness or in participant willingness to disclose sensitive information compared to in-person interviews (Krouwel et al., 2019; Guest et al., 2023). Once

interviews were concluded the participant was offered a resource sheet (Appendix E) and I forwarded the honorariums via e-transfer in a timely manner, except in one case where the participant refused an honorarium.

Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai, an automated transcription service. The transcripts were read and checked against the audio recording for accuracy. Once transcripts were checked, participants were given the opportunity to review and provide any edits to the transcript that they wished to make. Transcripts were forwarded to participants as they were ready, and participants had two weeks from the date their transcript was sent to review and return it with any changes. Participants were asked to sign and return a transcript release form (Appendix F) with their transcript. Emails stating that they agreed to the transcript with no changes were also accepted as expression of transcript release. Reminders were sent at one week before the deadline and 48 hours before the deadline to return the transcript. Participants were informed that non-response constituted transcript release in order to facilitate a timely start of the analysis phase. The limited time to return changes allowed the analysis of the transcripts to begin in a timely manner.

### **Analysis Plan**

The transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clark's (2022) general procedure for reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Braun and Clarke outline 6 high level steps to thematic analysis including: familiarization; coding; creating themes; further developing themes; refining themes; and writing the report. Initially, I read transcripts and conducted a first round of structural and descriptive coding to identify sections of the transcripts and topics that may be relevant to each research question (Saldaña, 2013). Structural coding involved taking large sections of each transcript and organizing them according to which research questions each section related to. Descriptive coding involved applying high level labels to describe what was contained in large or small sections of the interview. For example, when participants talked about their coming out story this section of the interview was coded as "coming out story" or when participants gave their gender and pronouns this was coded as "gender." Second, I conducted a systematic round of coding using in vivo, process, emotion, and concept coding to describe participants' experiences and meanings (Saldaña, 2013). In vivo coding is the practice of using participants' own language as codes where appropriate; process coding involved using gerunds to describe both observable activities and conceptual actions; emotion coding involved labelling

emotions that a participant recalls or experiences or the researcher infers; and concept coding involved coding for broader meaning within the data. The second stage of coding was carried out on the sections identified as applicable to each research question in order to answer the three research questions and on any other descriptive groupings that seemed important aside from the research questions. All coding was carried out in InVivo™, a software program designed for qualitative data analysis.

For the third step in Braun and Clark's (2022) guide I considered how the codes I created evoked similar meanings across participants and generated initial themes based on similarities and differences. The third stage involved writing initial theme descriptions and an overall analytic direction which was shared with the thesis committee. Fourth, I further developed the emerging themes by checking them against the data and codes that each theme was meant to represent. This stage included checking that each theme had a clear central concept, clear boundaries, enough data to support it coherently, and that the theme conveyed a concept important to the data set and research questions. Developing themes required that one early theme be abandoned as the data did not coherently support it and led me to change my understanding of several early themes based on how these themes were represented in the data. The fifth and sixth stages overlapped heavily, and I defined and named the themes as I wrote the analysis, continually returning to the coded data to check that my understanding made sense. After outlining the names and basic definition of each theme I proceeded to select quotes that represented the themes. Once I selected enough quotes to sufficiently support and describe each theme, I wrote the analysis around the quotes. It took several iterations of editing to develop the detailed analysis. The first iteration was descriptive of each quote and theme and the second iteration involved adding more in-depth analysis of each theme.

To ensure that the analysis and findings are trustworthy I engaged in practices recommended by Braun and Clarke (2022) for a high-quality RTA. First, I ensured that the analysis is well documented with the complete transcripts from the interviews, documented coding, and that themes are evidenced with data. Second, I worked with an experienced supervisor with whom I discussed the analysis as it proceeded. I also communicated with my thesis committee about the direction of my analysis early in theme generation where we came to consensus on how the analysis should proceed. Third, I allowed time to develop the analysis

iteratively, following completion of data collection, the analysis took place over several months during which time I moved between the data and themes to develop robust themes.

### **Positionality**

I position myself as an outsider to the trans community but an insider to the queer community overall. I have a place in the 2SLGBTQ+ community as a gay, genderqueer identifying person, but I am not transgender and have not experienced physical gender dysphoria. I also have not attempted to change my name or gender markers, although I understand the process for doing so within Saskatchewan. My unique position as both an insider of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and a genderqueer person without trans experience offers unique benefits and challenges. One benefit is that since I am an insider participants may feel confident using terminology and talking about experiences that are unique to the queer community because they know I will understand it. My experience also comes with two challenges, I may not understand terms that are related to transitioning because I do not have firsthand experience and if I feel I understand the terms or experiences I may not ask follow-up questions that may illicit more detail. In order to benefit from participants feeling they can safely express their experiences without losing detail I attempted to ask follow-up questions to clarify experiences and terms that I perceived as important, even if I had an understanding of the term or experience already.

I also position myself as a progressive feminist who prefers to engage in research that has an immediate and clear purpose. Feminist research tends to focus on centering disempowered groups to understand the struggles and insights of these groups, leading to an understanding of what actions can be taken to empower people and alleviate inequalities (Willsher & Goel, 2017). I am drawn to research that has the potential to address social injustices rather than primarily contributing to theory. I believe that social research can be conducted in a way that directly impacts the social issues and empowers people who are marginalized, and that research has the power to advocate for change. This is the main reason why I chose to study legal name change in Saskatchewan, and because I was interested in advocacy, I chose to focus the interviews on experiences with the legal name change process, including the barriers and facilitators in the process. My role in bringing issues with the legal name change process to the forefront of the interviews through the recruitment materials and phrasing of interview questions is undeniable. One of the most important motivators for my research is that it should create evidence that can



be used to address social injustices related to 2STNBGN individuals' experiences with the legal name change process.

### **Analysis**

Through the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, four main themes were constructed to make sense of the data including: the 2020 awakening; the importance of one's chosen name to identity; deciding whether to pursue a legal name change; and the impact of a legal name change (Figure 2). These four themes represent the points most salient to the experiences of 2STNBGN individuals contemplating a legal name change in Saskatchewan as relayed by participants in this study. I will explore the themes in detail, relating the participants' experiences with legal name change to self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) and the importance of an accessible legal name change process for 2STNBGN people.

**Figure 2**

*Thematic Structure Map*

<b>The 2020 Awakening: Moments of Gender Discovery in Isolation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Stories from Lockdown: Relief from Having to Present Gender</li><li>2. Finding 2STNBGN Support: Navigating Online Communities and Engaging Close Friends</li><li>3. 2STNBGN Characters and Media: Awakening and Affirming Gender Through Representation</li></ol>
<b>“Oh, I was Expecting a Man!”: The Importance of Chosen Names</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Choosing a Name that Brings Gender Joy</li><li>2. Names Express Overall Identity</li><li>3. “That Just Feels Like Me”: Realizing you are Looking at your Chosen Name</li></ol>
<b>Barriers and Benefits: Deciding Whether or not to Pursue a Legal Name Change</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. “They try to make it difficult”: Barriers and Facilitators in the Legal Name Change Process</li><li>2. “Truly, it feels like they don’t want you to do it”: Is Legal Name Change Worth the Hassle?</li></ol>
<b>You have Changed Your Legal Name, so Now What?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ensuring Recognition by the Right Name</li><li>2. Legal Recognition of One's Name Improves Mental Wellbeing</li><li>3. Legal Recognition of One's Name Improves Self-Confidence</li><li>4. Socially and Legally Sanctioning Gender Diverse Identity</li></ol>

**The 2020 Awakening: Moments of Gender Discovery in Isolation**

The 2020 awakening was first identified as a topic of interest in the interview with Red, a trans woman, when she shared her story of realizing her gender during the pandemic:

*Like a lot of people, I realized my gender during the pandemic. In my case, I had been hanging out in a Discord server that was full of LGBT folks for several years even before the pandemic. And there was a number of trans women in there. One of them posted a link to a series of Twitter posts. The Twitter posts were all about less obvious signs of gender dysphoria. One of them in particular was that if you find it difficult to buy clothes for the gender you think you are, and you're not really sure why that could be a sign of gender dysphoria. That one, that was kind of the last straw. That was what kind of did it.*

*I had been in denial about my gender for several years at that point. So that was kind of the first thing, the first real crack in my denial. So, I ended up having something of an identity crisis for the next few days. Difficulty sleeping, just kind of freaking out. Eventually some of the trans women in [the discord server] were talking about trans women things, and I took the opportunity to just oh so subtly ask if, what it was like for them when they realized they were trans. And of course, they saw through me immediately and kind of helped me navigate the process of coming out to myself. At which point I was finally able to relax enough to sleep properly. The following Saturday, which was just a couple days later, [...] I slept in, I had a dream in the morning about just standing in my bathroom, just as a girl, wearing feminine clothes and putting on makeup and just kind of existing. And that dream made me so happy.*

Red outlines several key points that define the 2020 awakening as a theme, starting with the assertion that like many people she realized her gender during the pandemic. Second, Red identified that it was not simply the pandemic which led to her gender awakening, the circle of trans women who she was connected with online contributed by talking to her and helping her with the initial steps of coming out to herself. Red also identified a dream where she experienced gender euphoria while existing as a girl and doing feminine things. This feeling of deep happiness when her gender and presentation are aligned is what gender euphoria feels like for 2STNBGN people.

Red's assertion that the pandemic and her gender realization were linked led me to ask participants who came out during the 2020s about how the pandemic may have impacted their gender realization. There were two reasons why I felt the impact of the pandemic on gender realizations needed to be explored further. First, Red's interview occurred about two thirds of the way through data collection and some earlier participants who had realized their gender in the 2020s shared similar experiences. Second, when Red laid out her experience, I could directly relate to it. I realized my own genderqueer identity during the fall lockdown in 2020 when I was first introduced to a nonbinary person. Moving forward, for the last third of the interviews I specifically asked participants who mentioned realizing their gender in the last few years about how the pandemic may have impacted their realization.

Gender awakening during the pandemic was not as sudden and straight forward for all participants as it was for Red. The best example of a slower awakening is Fred, who is trans and

genderqueer. Fred specifically pointed out that the pandemic led to many peoples' self-discovery but specified that they do not think they went through quite the same self-discovery as other 2STNBGN people they know:

*I know a lot of people went through self-discovery during COVID. And I decided on the label genderqueer during COVID. But I don't think that my self-discovery really happened during that time. It was just kind of me thinking I kind of want to have a label for myself, within the queer community, because that's just what makes me feel more comfortable. Because I was like, I'm not a girl. I'm not a boy. I don't have a word for that. And I, I didn't love the word non-binary. And so I went on the queer wiki. [both laugh] I looked through different gender identities, and I saw genderqueer. And I was like, oh, it's another word for non-binary basically, but I feel really connected to the word queer.*

Fred feels that they did not fully discover themselves during the pandemic because they did not realize their complete trans identity, and only changed their gender label to genderqueer. Fred realized their gender identity in stages rather than having a clear moment of full awakening, showing that gender realization can occur differently across individuals.

As described by Red and Fred and supported by research, the pandemic was a key time of self-discovery for many 2STNBGN individuals (Ruprecht, et al., 2024). Ruprecht and co-authors (2024) carried out a thematic analysis of interviews with LGBTQ+ youth about mental health during the pandemic. Among their key themes were shifts in time and living conditions, meaning that during the pandemic people experienced more free time and more isolation at home. As a result of having free time to reflect on their identity and not having to present themselves at school many of the youth realized their LGBTQ+ identity and came out.

Ruprecht and co-authors' (2024) research was predominantly focused on mental health outcomes thus their findings overlooked key themes regarding gender discovery during the pandemic displayed in their participants' quotes. Framing the 2020 awakening as an event worthy of its own analysis gives attention to the neglected topic of gender discovery during the pandemic, as this is an area which has not been specifically identified in the literature. Participants in my study described how lockdowns and remote work during the pandemic provided a safe environment to explore gender presentation and how online exposure and connection to other 2STNBGN people moved individuals to realize their gender identity.

**Stories from Lockdown: Relief from Having to Present Gender.** Within the 2020 awakening theme, the participants identified that the pandemic removed societal pressure to present themselves according to their assigned gender, which created room for exploration with gender presentation. Spending time in isolation during lockdown and working remotely meant for many people that there was no need to prepare to look presentable in person. For 2STNBGN people who had not realized their gender identity this meant they did not have to present in a way that fit with their assigned gender.

Lee, a trans man, described how the pandemic made him feel like he did not have to perform:

*I do know that I'm not alone in being someone who started realizing that about myself after the lockdown. It was like a flood of people who are all starting to realize these things about themselves during lockdown. And I think a big part of it was it was the first time in any of our lives, that we didn't have to go places and perform anything. We didn't have to present to people, we didn't have to look a certain way. You didn't even have to shower if you didn't want to because you weren't going to leave your house anyway. I think that lack of needing to be presented to any group of people, even people who you know, or people that you like, really just allowed a lot of people to bring up those thoughts of, hey, something's different in here.*

Lee thought about his gender and identity a lot during the pandemic because he was released from having to perform his assigned gender. Similar to Lee, Ray, a trans man, also found that lockdowns gave him the freedom to explore his presentation:

*Part of it was just not having to be around other people as much. So then there's not really pressure to act a certain way because I spent most of my time just in my room on my computer. So it didn't really matter if I was dressing weirder or tried to do a haircut by myself, because I probably wasn't going to see anyone other than my grandma for like the next five months. [The time I attempted a haircut] it was unfortunate because I ended up actually going to visit family that next weekend [when] they just like showed up unplanned. And they were like, 'what did you do?' And I was like, 'I don't know, I didn't think I was seeing anyone for the next five months I thought it would grow by then.' So probably the chance to just spend a bunch of time with myself, without any pressure to be*

*like, oh, I'm going to be going out today, I guess I better try and look a certain way that I've been told to look.*

For Lee and Ray, the lockdowns created a juxtaposition between being in lockdown while having freedom to explore gender internally because there was no need to look presentable. Relating to Ruprecht's study (2024), Lee and Ray experienced shifts in time and living conditions in the form of more free time coupled with isolation from their school and unsupportive family. Shifts in time and living conditions also contributed to a sense of freedom from the gendered social norms that individuals normally experience while acting in society (Bem, 1983), likely for the first time in their lives. The time, space, and freedom from gendered norms allowed Lee and Ray to consider their gender and to explore their presentation, ultimately leading to the realization of their trans identities. Further, in terms of self-discrepancy theory, the societal shift in how individuals were expected to present their gender may represent a restructuring of the ought self where gender is concerned. Recall that the ought self is not an internal aspect of an individual but the expectations that other people place on the individual (Higgins, 1987). When the pandemic changed living conditions so that individuals no longer had to present their gender in public regularly, the assigned gender roles that a person *ought* to perform were loosened.

In addition to shifts in time and living conditions, the pandemic also changed how people presented their faces in public by requiring protective masks. For Sam, a non-binary person, they experienced the freedom to grow out their beard because wearing masks became the new normal:

*Actually, I really am thankful for the pandemic [...] for wearing masks, like I was just starting to grow a beard, and just flirting with the idea of having my beard actually be hair instead of just shaven all the time. And then masks happened. And I was like, oooh, so I started growing it out, because I was like, well, nobody can see it anyway. So I don't have to be afraid of somebody being like, 'that's, a girl with a beard, let's get them' or something. It's okay, nobody has any idea [I have a beard]. And so I got really comfortable with my presentation, in a space where I could choose who knew, and who didn't.*

In this case, the pandemic through isolation and masking gave Sam the ability to control who could see their beard as it grew in. Control over who knows an individual's gender identity is key for 2STNBGN people. As Sam mentioned, they feel the need to hide their beard because they

felt at risk of experiencing microaggressions including misgendering, strange looks, and inappropriate questions (Nadal, 2013; Wesselmann et al., 2022). DuBois and co-authors (2023) published a study on 26 2STNBGN peoples' experiences with masking in the U.S. during the pandemic. The researchers found that trans masculine and non-binary people did not like masking because their facial hair was covered, resulting in more frequent misgendering. In contrast to Dubois' study, Sam had a different experience and found that masking was gender affirming because it allowed them to hide their beard while it grew out and control who knew that they had a beard. One possible reason why Sam found masking affirming is that they were in the early stages of growing a beard when it looked less established and would not allow them to pass as a masculine person. In contrast, the participants in Dubois' study were diverse, including trans masculine people who had more established beards that they wished to show off to indicate that they were a man or masculine (Dubois, et al., 2023). Prior to the pandemic, a 2STNBGN person would have had to explore changing their presentation while continuing to go about their public life, meaning that it is more difficult to pass and leaving them vulnerable to the experience of microaggressions. For example, Sam was worried about being recognized as "a girl with a beard" during the awkward stage of growing their beard and was able to use masking as protection to escape notice and avoid being subjected to violence. When lockdowns made it socially acceptable to stay at home and cover your face in public, 2STNBGN people were given a chance to explore their presentation without public scrutiny.

The pressure to present as your assigned gender on a daily basis does not offer 2STNBGN people much freedom to experiment with presentation. Previous research has identified a societal belief that gender always matches appearance (Lind, 2023) and that people work to present their gender in a way that is congruent with their assigned gender as a result (Engelhardt, 2023). When people present themselves in public, other people will make binary gendered assumptions based on presentation (Bem, 1983) which makes it difficult for 2STNBGN people who are discovering their gender to experiment with how they present. When the pandemic removed the pressure to present based on assigned gender, 2STNBGN people found they had the time to both reflect internally on gender and the space to explore how they physically present themselves. For many 2STNBGN people this time and space facilitated the realization that they were not comfortable with the outward presentation associated with their assigned gender. This is not to say that 2STNBGN people discovered their gender in isolation,

but rather, when they were exposed to 2STNBGN community or media they had the space to explore their gender identity and presentation.

**Finding 2STNBGN Support: Navigating Online Communities and Engaging Close Friends.** According to the participants, having the time and space to explore gender and gender presentation did not lead to gender discovery on its own. Being connected to examples of 2STNBGN identity through online community or friends played a key role in gender discovery during the pandemic. Ray provided an example of how finding queer communities on Reddit™ led to his gender discovery:

*I thought I was agender when I was in university. [I was] just looking through memes on Reddit, [...] it has like, really tight little communities, especially for the ACE (asexual) and agender [community]. They just have like very good communities there. So then when I [saw] the memes that bounced over from other subreddits I'd be like, 'oh, what's, what's transgender? I've never heard of that.' [...] And then I actually looked into it and was like, 'oh, wow, this is not at all what I had originally thought.' And was like, 'I actually relate to a lot of the things that they're saying, that's weird and unexpected.'*

Ray did not realize that he was trans or even know what being transgender meant before he discovered transgender memes on Reddit™. As previously established, Ray felt that the pandemic had given him the time and space to discover his gender identity, however, it was being on Reddit™ and finding examples of what it meant to be trans that led to his transgender awakening. Ray's experience is similar to previous research on 2SLGBTQ+ identity development. Craig and McInroy (2014) carried out a grounded theory exploration of the role online media played in LGBTQ identity development and found that online media<sup>10</sup> helped youth explore identity and find people with similar experiences. Additionally, Brownstone and co-authors (2022) pointed out that many of the trans individuals in their study on eating behaviours sought out supportive communities online during the pandemic. Returning to Red's quote which opened the 2020 awakening theme, she also stated that she found examples of gender dysphoria on Twitter (now X) and talked with other trans women on Discord. Red and Ray provide examples of how 2STNBGN people explore details about what it means to be gender diverse online, Red through Twitter descriptions of gender dysphoria, and Ray through

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<sup>10</sup> In Craig and McInroy's (2014) study, online media included social media and networking, web-based TV, news, and websites.



memes on Reddit™. Red and Ray recognized that they related to the online communities describing gender dysphoria and what it means to be transgender, which led to their gender discovery. These findings build upon Craig and McInroy's (2014) findings that online media supports LGBTQ identity exploration. In my study, the participants shared that finding relatable experiences and 2STNBGN community online was intertwined with their gender awakening.

In addition to finding relatable experiences and community online, having a supportive friend to safely explore gender identity with can also contribute to gender discovery. An example is Gwen who identified as a straight boy before being exposed to a gender non-conforming friend and slowly realized her identity as genderfluid:

*I'd never once considered it until I was 23. And my best friend [who was] identifying as a woman at the time. And now they're kind of non-binary. [...] I was with them when I thought I was a straight boy. [...] And they would playfully call me girl a lot [...]. And I thought, oh, this is cute, you know, it means we're really close. But there was something in my head that really liked the way she did it. And the way that made me feel, and it was kind of almost an overnight thing. And [...] one night, they were saying good night, they used a masculine term. And I was like, hang on, what if you use a feminine term just right now as a favor, and they used it, and I kind of swallowed my own tongue. And they thought it was really cute. And you know, from there, they were more than happy to, you know, switch progressively to the [feminine] terms.*

Having a supportive 2STNBGN friend discovering their identity around the same time helped Gwen to realize her gender identity was not that of a man as she had been assigned. Gwen's friend triggered her gender discovery by supporting the switch to feminine pronouns and gendered terms, encouraging Gwen's exploration of her gender identity. Similarly, Lucas, a trans masculine person, had other trans people in his life who showed him how to come out:

*And then having some counseling support and other trans people in my life, I felt like I had a bit more of a blueprint, maybe for things that I could do. Since then, I feel like I've been presenting more and more masculine you know, wearing mostly men's clothing, shorter hair.*

The trans people in Lucas' life helped show him how he could explore his gender identity and presentation to express his trans masculine identity.

Gwen and Lucas' similar experiences point to the importance of having 2STNBGN friends and supporters who can show you the way. The importance of having queer friends has been identified by researchers studying coming out in the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community (Klein et al., 2015; Robertson, 2014). In Klein and co-authors' (2015) photovoice study of LGBTQ coming out, youth identified that having friends who were going through similar experiences supported their coming out. Additionally, Robertson (2014) carried out a qualitative study of cisgender male gay youths' identity development and found that exploring gay identity was supported by having role models including gay friends and partners. Similar to Robertson's participants, Gwen had a 2STNBGN friend who supported her in discovering and exploring her gender identity. In addition to finding community online and having supportive friends, representations of 2STNBGN identity in movie and comic characters also contributed to some participants' gender awakening.

**2STNBGN Characters and Media: Awakening and Affirming Gender Through Representation.** In the 2020's we are seeing more examples of gender diversity showcased in media than ever before. Two participants described how they connected to representation of trans characters in media. Red described how Real Life Comics by Mae Dean depicted the main character (also named Mae Dean) coming out as transgender in 2020:

*There is a webcomic called Real Life Comics, it goes back to the 90s. The author of this webcomic, who is now named Mae Dean, came out as trans in an absolutely, incredibly resonant comic series about what was that? Summer 2020, 2021, something like that. And many, many trans people had their realizations as a direct result of reading Mae's coming out sequence.*

Red points to how Mae's coming out story during the 2020 lockdowns contributed to many 2STNBGN people realizing their gender. An article by Stained Glass Woman (Doc Impossible, 2023) elaborated on the impact of Dean's coming out story and refers to a conference presentation on the topic developed by Zoe Wendler and Jamie Gardener in 2023. Wendler and Gardener provided an overview of several comics depicting gender discovery and discussed how the lockdowns contributed to gender discovery. Similar to other supporting research (Ruprecht et al., 2024; Brownstone et al., 2022), the lockdowns sent 2STNBGN people searching for shared identity online while creating an environment that allowed space to explore gender, leading people to consider parts of their identity which were buried (Doc Impossible, 2023). This

conclusion is in line with the experiences described by the participants of my study who discovered their gender identity during the pandemic and described how the pandemic gave them time to reflect on gender and the space to explore their presentation. This time and space combined with antecedents like Dean's trans coming out comics led to an increase in people coming out during the pandemic (Doc Impossible, 2023). Red further described how seeing gender dysphoria represented in Dean's comics made her realize she may be experiencing dysphoria:

*Probably in retrospect, that was kind of the first time I ever kind of realized that I was feeling gender dysphoria is when I read [Mae Dean's coming out] sequence. But I kind of shoved it back under the rug for another year and a half.*

In Red's experience, the time and space the pandemic provided did not lead to her gender realization in isolation, rather, exposure to Dean's representation of gender dysphoria was the key experience that Red related to and which led to her ultimate gender awakening.

Mally, a genderfluid/nonbinary/two-spirit person, also described how they saw their experience represented in the movie *Nimona* (Quane & Bruno, 2023), a film about a shapeshifter fighting for acceptance in a world that does not understand what it is like to be different:

*So [pause] I feel like if I were to describe my gender as characters, it would be characters like Nimona she's a pretty new one. But, shape shifter. Yeah. Like that. And the whole [idea] what would happen if you don't shape shift? Like I would die?*

When *Nimona* seeks acceptance as a shapeshifter she is labelled a monster and forced to hide her true self, ultimately her rejection by society pushes her to the edge of suicide. *Nimona* is a painfully accurate story of what it is like to be gender diverse, in particular transgender, while anti-trans sentiment is rising. As established in the introduction, multiple provinces in Canada and dozens of States have introduced legislation to limit the rights of trans people to access gender affirming care and name themselves. The story of *Nimona* is a representation of how it feels to be gender diverse in provinces like Saskatchewan that limit trans and gender diverse peoples' autonomy over their bodies and gender expression. Research has shown that we will lose trans and gender diverse people to suicide because of the laws being enacted across the U.S. and Canada (Perez-Brumer et al., 2015; Raifman et al., 2017; Crosby et al., 2016; Scheim et al., 2020).

Trans and gender diverse characters like Mae Dean and Nimona play an important role in counter-acting anti-trans sentiment given that the participants, researchers (Allen et al., 2020), and the media (Jones, 2022) have noted the recent rise in people identifying under the 2STNBGN umbrella. When we consider the increase in 2STNBGN people in the context of the pandemic it becomes clear that the pandemic itself played a role in providing the time to reflect on gender identity and the space to explore presentation. For many 2STNBGN people, discovering their gender is followed by a process of redefining their identity, which often involves choosing a new name.

### **“Oh, I was Expecting a Man!”: The Importance of Chosen Names**

Through conversations with participants about their name and gender identity, several themes were identified that showed the important role names play in expressing and affirming identity. According to Lind (2023), names are performative speech acts and the act of changing one’s name is a way of performing gender and expressing underlying identity. Names can bring gender joy, express other aspects of identity, and many participants shared a moment of realization about their chosen name.

**Choosing a Name that Brings Gender Joy.** Names can communicate gender to others and when the correct gender is communicated, names can create feelings of gender euphoria in the place of dysphoria. Several participants shared stories of how their chosen name has helped affirm their gender or given them an experience of gender euphoria once they began using it. Mally, who has not chosen a name yet but strongly desires to change their name, described what they hope that their chosen name will express about their gender: *“I’m hoping for something more androgynous so people don’t look at me and hear my name and immediately think oh, girl. Just girl. That’s it.”* Mally, who presented on the feminine side, has a strong desire for their name to express that their gender is multifaceted, showing that they identify outside of the gender binary.

For Avery, a non-binary individual who has completed legal name change, gender joy from their androgynous name is a frequent experience. Even though Avery goes between presenting on the *“femme side of androgynous to high femme,”* they experience gender joy regularly when their name is perceived as masculine:

*Gender-wise, every now and then I will email people at work and set up zoom meetings, and they’ll join the Zoom call. Every now and then they’re like, ‘Oh, I was expecting a*

*man.' And I'm like, that's kind of the point. I have noticed I present very femininely and I have a very feminine voice. But if I'm strictly emailing people, they make their own assumptions about my gender and it relieves a little bit of that gender dysphoria and stress for me.*

In addition to being perceived as masculine based on name when interacting online, Avery also experienced gender joy when their name is mistaken for their masculine partner's name:

*My partner's very masculine presenting. And if we're out in public, and my name is on an account or an order, they will assume it's him half the time. [...] It's just everybody else gets to make their own assumptions. And that's what I like about it.*

For Avery, their masculine name is fulfilling its purpose by making others assume that they are not a woman. This creates moments of gender joy in Avery's day to day life, which are reinforced by the fact that they are consistently recognized by their chosen name because they have completed legal name change. Being recognized by your chosen name is an example of a gender affirming antecedent which as Austin and co-authors (2022) pointed out are strongly connected to feelings of gender euphoria. Avery has chosen a more masculine name in contrast to their feminine presentation which means their moment of gender euphoria is linked to being perceived as defying binary gendered norms. Avery's experience is in line with previous research, as Garrison (2018) carried out interviews about gender identity with binary transgender individuals and non-binary transgender individuals. Garrison (2018) found that many non-binary individuals wish to resist being classified as a man or a woman, and often achieve this by presenting their gender outside of the established binary norms. Avery, as a nonbinary individual, feels gender euphoria by deviating from gender norms through the contrast of their name and presentation.

May is a trans woman whose experience contrasts Avery's because she has not been able to legally change her name. Instead of moments of gender joy brought on by a name that is accurately communicating her gender, she was faced with continuous moments of gender dysphoria when their legal name was required. May described an encounter where her birth name poorly communicated her gender:

*SaskTel literally wouldn't let me into my own account, because they're like, 'you don't sound like you're the name of the account.' I was like, 'no, I actually am please let, that's me, let me pay my bill.' It was affirming because my voice training is working. But, ah,*

*it's frustrating, because then the name [doesn't] match. And [my chosen name] is not exactly the most feminine name. But, I mean, it's definitely a different name. And you can kind of make [a feminine] association rather than an absolute masculine name.*

May has transitioned and changed her presentation to feminine through voice training, meaning that there is misalignment between the gender she is presenting and the gender that her legal name communicates.

Sam's experience is different from Mally, Avery, and May because they have chosen to keep their birth name but have a different chosen middle name:

*I've always hated my middle name. I have multiple reasons. But like, gender is one of them. It's a very gendered middle name. [...]. And I don't like that. As a non-binary person, it just doesn't make sense to me to have a name that is so very, very feminine. Even if it's not the name that I use regularly and go by. So, I have considered several times changing it.*

Sam acknowledged that they do not have to navigate day-to-day interactions using their middle name, however, having a strongly gendered middle name conflicting with their non-binary gender identity causes them to feel uncomfortable. When asked why they have not considered changing their first name Sam stated in part: *"I've never felt upset with my first name."* Sam's birth name is usually identified as a gender-neutral name, which accurately speaks to their non-binary gender identity. Having a name that accurately communicates one's gender was a critical part of participants' considerations when choosing a name.

As shown through examples from Mally, Avery, May, and Sam, participants who chose a new name chose one that aligned with and expressed their gender identity. In line with self-discrepancy theory, choosing a name that expresses one's gender identity (the ideal) helps to bring the way others perceive their gender (the actual) closer to their gender identity. However, based on the participants' stories, gender dysphoria is an internal process. For Sam hiding their middle name is not enough, they would rather be able to change it to accurately reflect their gender. This demonstrates that the discrepancy is felt internally, not just when others perceive that their middle name is the wrong gender.

**Names Express Overall Identity.** In addition to expressing and affirming gender, names can express a person's overall identity. Choosing a name for yourself provides self-determination over how you communicate who you are to the world. Some participants used this opportunity to

communicate about specific aspects of their identity. For example, Lucas, a trans masculine person stated:

*I think [my name] speaks to a lot of my interests as a person, like I'm really interested in stories in mythology, like, folktales these kinds of things, and yeah, it was kind of fun to choose a name that had some personal significance to me.*

Lucas's name speaks to who he is at a deeper level than simply expressing the right gender, it shows others a bit about who he is and affirms his own understanding of his identity.

More than half of the participants described a special connection between their name and identity beyond gender. Even Sam, who prefers to go by a single letter for their middle name, described the special meaning that their middle name communicates about their identity:

*What does it say about me? It says that I have purposefully chosen something. It says, I think it's kind of cool. I think it's kind of different you don't often see one letter names, right. And, and like everybody I've ever known with a one letter name has been kind of, a little weird, but in a nice way. And I think that's kind of something that I really resonate with is it's a little weird, but in a hey, that's individual and cool, kind of a way instead of in a 'who does that?' kind of a way, you know.*

Sam associated an expression of uniqueness with their choice to go by a single letter for a middle name. Sam was the only participant who had chosen to change their name to be a single letter.

Sam also stated that: *"the more that I've thought about my first name, the more I feel like, it fits me very well."* Sam later elaborated on the intentional choice to keep their birth name:

*I definitely consciously picked keeping it the same. So it's not that I'm not just keeping it by default. Right? I thought about it, in the same way that I strongly think that people should all think about their gender? You know, if somebody is cis, they should have thought about it and decided, yes, that makes sense for me to be cis. [...] And I went through the same process with my name as I did with my gender. It's just with my gender. It was no, that's not true. Whereas with my name, it was like, yeah, yeah. Okay, that's true.*

Sam consciously chose to keep the first name they were given. Beyond the fact that their first name is not related to gender dysphoria, Sam thought about whether their birth name represents who they are and decided that it represents their gender and broader identity accurately.

In contrast, Fred described how using a name that they feel strongly disconnected from leaves them feeling exhausted:

*When I have to say my name is at the doctor's office or at the pharmacy [...] I have to tell them my dead name. And it's just like every time I just feel so exhausted afterwards just to tell a random stranger, a name that isn't mine. And when I make like a purchase online with my credit card, I have to write in my dead name. And I've been trying to like change the way I think about it, but I would rather it just not be there. Like when I, when I buy something online, I feel like I'm like stealing someone's money. Because it's not my name.*

Fred felt disconnected from their dead name to the point that it does not feel like their name when they have to use it. Fred's name does not speak to their gender or identity and they have disconnected from the name to shield their identity. Although Fred shared the most extreme example, feeling a disconnect from a birth name that does not represent who you are was a common experience among participants. Society tends to reserve naming rights for parents while children and adults alike are expected to accept their birth names as representative of their continuous identity (Lind, 2023). However, this assertion by society that we should have a continuous and unchanging identity overlooks the fact that identities can and often do change over the course of life (Lind, 2023). This is apparent in the stories told by participants about how changing their name is significant not just for their gender but for their overall identity.

**“That Just Feels Like Me”:** **Realizing you are Looking at your Chosen Name.** Five participants who had chosen a name experienced a key moment where they knew that it was their chosen name. Participants described either seeing a name stand out from other options or feeling a deep connection to a particular name. Lee described seeing his name for the first time and knowing immediately that it was his:

*I remember it quite well. I was scrolling really fast. And it just caught my eye like something shiny in the corner of your eye. [...] And it was like that kind of feeling. I was like, “oh, what's that?” And I had to go look at it. And I was looking at it. And I just thought that's it. That's me, that feels like me. And I can't describe it better than that just feels like me. It's kind of like when you choose different pronouns. It's like, that just feels right. It just feels like me.*

Lee described how he saw his name and it drew his attention, making him look closer and he knew instantly that it was the name that represents his identity. Lee likens the experience to how



choosing different pronouns “*just feels right.*” Lee is describing this moment of realization as a gender euphoric experience by comparing it to choosing his pronouns, but the name also speaks to his identity through the phrase “*it just feels like me.*” Lee’s experience seems to be at a deeper level than simply choosing a name that accurately expresses his masculine gender; he was looking at a list of presumably masculine names and found the one that speaks to who he is as a person, inclusive of his whole identity.

Nigel described a different key moment of realization that took place after her chosen name had been on the list of options for a while:

*I started thinking about it more. And I started realizing that almost at every stage, when I would think of changing my name, [name] was always in the mix. It was always like, oh, yeah, [name], kind of thing. And then I really sat down with it, and was like why? Why does it resonate so much? And then once I started, [thinking of] like the people that have influenced me in my personal life, and like growing up and different people that I've known. And I just realized I just absolutely loved the name. And I thought it kind of fits.*

Nigel spent longer thinking about her chosen name than Lee and when she finally considered all of the options closely, she realized that her name had always been on the list. Rather than seeing her name for the first time and realizing it was hers, Nigel went through a slow process of thinking about names that culminated in her key moment of realization.

Regarding choosing your name, Nigel’s experience was slow and thoughtful in contrast with Lee’s whose experience was quick and unshakable. These experiences show us that choosing a name is an individual process, bound together by the euphoric moment where they connected to their name. Both Lee and Nigel exemplify how finding their chosen name was gender euphoric and, at a deeper level, related to their overall identity. Their overall identity includes aspects of personality, interests, ethnicity, and other aspects that make them a unique person. For example, Lee chose a name that reflects his heritage: “*I was [looking at] European names because I was very conscious that I didn't want to use a name that was from a culture I'm not a part of.*” Both participants took time to consider names that could express their gender identity, but only connected with the one that could express their whole identity, which supports the idea that being gender diverse is one facet of a 2STNBGN person’s identity (Skelton et al., 2024). The moment of realization and finding your chosen name is where the identity work occurs and an individual connects their overall identity and their chosen name. Once a person has

chosen the name that fits their whole identity, the decision making process about whether to go through with a legal name change begins.

### **Barriers and Benefits: Deciding Whether or not to Pursue a Legal Name Change**

When describing how they decided whether or not to proceed with a legal name change, many participants weighed the challenges of the legal name change process against the benefits of obtaining a legal name change. The benefits of a legal name change included ensuring recognition by your chosen name coinciding with the previous theme, reducing misgendering, misnaming, and feelings of gender dysphoria. This section will describe the barriers and facilitators that participants identified in their legal name change experience and explore how participants made decisions about whether they should pursue legal name change.

**“They try to make it difficult”: Barriers and Facilitators in the Legal Name Change Process.** Participants were asked to describe the barriers and facilitators they had experienced or that they anticipated if they had not completed a legal name change. Many participants were eager to offer up their experiences of the barriers as part of their opening narrative about their experience with legal name change, indicating that the challenge of the process was at the forefront of their awareness. Table 2 briefly describes each barrier and facilitator. Table 3 and Table 4 summarize the specific barriers and facilitators experienced by each participant, respectively. Overall, participants identified 13 barriers and six facilitators. The facilitators identified mainly worked to address the barriers or intricacies within the legal name change process, meaning these are not true facilitators but mitigators. For example: the Trans Sask name change guide and the trans health navigators assist with overcoming how overwhelming and difficult the name change process is; knowing a notary helps reduce the cost and challenge of finding a notary; and knowing someone who has completed a legal name change helps overcome the unclear instructions of the name change process. Participants identified many barriers including: the cost; unclear communication/instructions from eHealth; the publication requirement in the Saskatchewan Gazette; and the requirement to get a CRC. The number of systematic barriers indicates that this process is perceived as extremely difficult, and these challenges may dissuade people from attempting to change their name. For 2STNBGN people, the barriers in the process mean that they must decide whether it is worth having their chosen name, which affirms and communicates their gender and overall identity, legally recognized or not.

**Table 2***Description of Barriers and Facilitators in the Legal Name Change Process*

Barriers	Description
Cost	Between the cost of the application, replacing all your ID, police check, and notary, legal name change can cost \$200-300 (or more).
Overwhelming task	Participants were unsure where to begin the legal name change process because the task felt overwhelming.
eHealth is unclear and unresponsive	There is a lack of clear information on eHealth's website, so many participants reached out to eHealth with questions. The answers came slowly and were often not clear. In one instance eHealth lost the applicant's documents.
Process difficult to understand	There are a lot of steps to the legal name change process which are not clearly described by eHealth, making the process difficult to understand. In addition, the name change form is not available online and must be requested by contacting eHealth. The most difficult requirement is that the CRC be obtained within 14 days of the application being notarized and submitted.
Publication requirement	Saskatchewan requires publication of all name changes and many participants reported that even if they requested an exemption it was denied, so they had no choice but to consent to (and pay a fee for) the publication of their birth name alongside their new name.
Born out of SK	Being born in another province or country requires that one's legal name be updated within the jurisdiction of birth first and a new birth certificate be submitted. For individuals born outside of Canada in countries hostile to 2STNBGN people they may be unable to update their birth certificate and must request an exemption through the courts.
Parents are unsupportive	For individuals less than 18 years of age, they must have signed approval from BOTH parents/guardians, unless one parent/guardian has sole custody. If one parent is unsupportive, youth must wait until they are 18 to request a name change as an adult.
CRC	A CRC is required, and some participants did not feel safe going to get the CRC or felt it was invasive and a transphobic requirement.
Forms ask unnecessary information	The legal name change form has sections for circumstances around changing your name, such as if you are also changing a spouse or child's name. These sections are often unnecessary and contribute to confusion.
Sign off of a spouse required	The legal name change form requires that a married person have the sign off from their spouse. For participants who are separated, but not legally divorced, they either have to wait until the divorce is legally final or request a signature from an ex-

	partner that they may not be on good terms with. It was also perceived as an odd requirement for couples who are on good terms.
Fear of transphobia	Participants were concerned about encountering transphobia at all stages of the process where it may be necessary to reveal their gender or obvious that they are gender diverse (such as a notary or eHealth official who must see the forms with their gender incongruent birth name)
Online process is inaccessible	For some participants, accessing information about the application online is not accessible due to disability.
Racism	One participant experienced overt racism while accessing related ID services and this acted as a barrier to pursuing a legal name change.

Facilitator	Description
Trans Health Navigators	A trans health navigator program at Trans Sask which evolved from a pilot program. The navigators have lived experience as 2STNBGN people and are knowledgeable about legal name change and gender affirming care. Several participants mentioned accessing or encountering this service, with the intention to access it later.
Trans Sask Name Change Guide (Trans Sask, n.d.)	Trans Sask’s online name change guide was mentioned several times as a clear outline of how to complete the legal name change process that provides information specific to 2STNBGN people.
People who have legally changed their name	Some participants knew other 2STNBGN people who they could ask about the process.
Other supportive people	Some participants mentioned having friends, family, or partners who had not legally changed their name but who would provide support through the process.
Knew a notary	Some participants knew a notary or had a connection to a notary who was able to notarize their documents for free, reducing costs and minimizing the amount of coming out required.
Support from eHealth	One participant mentioned that they left blank a space for their father’s name and eHealth accepted the application, even though it was unclear if this section could be left blank.

**Figure 3**

*Barriers Identified in Each Participant's Experience with Legal Name Change*

Barrier	Lee	Fred	Grayson	Thunder	May	Steven	Sam	Avery	Jackie	Ray	Nigel	Mally	Lucas	Gwen	Red
Cost	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X		
Overwhelming task	X	X	X							X	X	X	X		
eHealth unclear and unresponsive	X			X	X	X								X	X
Process difficult to understand	X			X			X	X						X	X
Publication requirement	X				X				X					X	X
Born out of SK	X			X	X										
Parents are unsupportive	X	X	X							X		X			
Police check					X		X								X
Forms ask unnecessary information	X													X	
Sign off from others required								X			X				
Fear of transphobia		X	X	X											
Online process is inaccessible				X										X	
Racism				X											

**Figure 4**

*Facilitators Identified in Each Participant's Experience with Legal Name Change*

Facilitator	Avery	Fred	Grayson	Gwen	Jackie	Lee	Lucas	Mally	May	Nigel	Ray	Red	Sam	Steven	Thunder
Trans Health Navigators			X		X				X	X		X			O
Trans Sask Name Change Guide (Trans Sask, n.d.)	X		X		X		X			X		X			
People who have legally changed their name	X	X			X						X				X
Other supportive people		X	X	X		X		X							
Knew a notary	X	X				X									
Support from eHealth												X			

*Note.* O indicates that a facilitator was described as unhelpful.

**“Truly, it feels like they don’t want you to do it”: Is Legal Name Change Worth the Hassle?** Several factors influenced participants’ decision making about legal name change. As identified in the literature review, misgendering and misnaming are common experiences among 2STNBGN people that can degrade self-confidence and identity congruence (McLemore, 2015). Fewer experiences of misgendering can improve 2STNBGN peoples’ wellbeing (Nadal, 2013; Wesselmann et al., 2022) and as a result, 2STNBGN people may wish to pursue a legal name change to protect against misgendering and other microaggressions (Restar et al., 2020). When deciding whether to legally change their names, participants weighed the negative impacts of misgendering and misnaming in their day-to-day lives against the barriers in the legal process. Most of the participants decided that struggling through the legal process was necessary in order to ensure that they are recognized by the appropriate name and that instances of misgendering and misnaming are reduced in settings where a legal name is required.

Lucas described why it is becoming necessary to have the legal name change for settings where a legal name is required, but identified that the complex process and costs are holding him back:

*Not having the legal name change is becoming more frustrating. [...] Now that I've been transitioning for about a year and a half, and on [hormone replacement therapy], I'm finding it more and more uncomfortable to have to use my legal name in situations like picking up prescriptions, anything government related. And now the main thing holding me back is just the logistics and the cost of going through [the legal name change] process.*

Lucas echoes three other participants who had decided to change their name but were being held back from proceeding with the application. Gwen, Grayson, and Nigel, were all in the same position as Lucas, they were ready to change their name but had not started the application due to the perceived barriers.

In addition to struggling with the cost and complexity of the legal name change process, Grayson was also held back by unsupportive family:

*I've always wanted to change my name. And I assumed I would as soon as I became a legal adult, but for reasons that were unforeseeable to me, that was not the case. And I've struggled with getting a name change since mostly due to the cost. And kind of the overwhelming amount of things you have to change. Because obviously, as you get older,*

*there's a lot more things in your name that you have to change. [...] Being in an unsupportive environment, I still live with my parents, and they are not a fan.*

Grayson identified the same concerns as Lucas around cost and how overwhelming the process is, then went on to state that living with unsupportive parents is delaying their legal name change. Although Grayson has been past the age of 18 for a few years, and legally allowed to change their name on their own, having a lack of support from family is one of the factors preventing Grayson from changing their name. In a previous study, transgender youth understood the difficulty their parents have using their chosen name as an expression of grieving for their child (Morgan et al., 2023). Parents of transgender youth have also described feeling a sense of grief and loss while applying to legally change their child's name (Katz-Wise et al., 2022). In addition, parents may resist a name change because they feel concerned for the safety of their child or concerned that their child does not have the ability to know their true self and the ability to make such a decision (Morgan et al., 2023). Based on Grayson's account, it is unclear why their parents were unsupportive of their legal name change.

Unlike Grayson who took into account their family's attitude and made a choice, Lee had no choice but to delay his name change due to his unsupportive father:

*I had already come out to my parents, and I [asked] them if I could change my name for my 17th birthday. And that would be like my birthday gift that year. Because when you're under 18, you're required to have both parents' signatures in order to legally change your name. My mom was okay with it. But my dad said no. So I had to wait another year until I was 18.*

Despite the fact that Lee was ready to change his name at 17, he was forced to wait because the legal name change process requires the signed consent of all parents or guardians that share custody. While some other barriers considered by participants are difficult, but possible to overcome, the requirement of both parents' signatures is an immovable barrier. The requirement for the consent of both parents to change one's legal name before they are 18 is not a consistent requirement across Canada. For example, in New Brunswick, a person over the age of 16 can apply for a legal name change without the permission of their parents (Lecic & Zuker, 2019). This demonstrates that there is a preference in Saskatchewan to maintain policy barriers in the legal name change process to protect "parental rights" over the youths' right to self-expression,



for example, through the use of the not withstanding clause to enshrine the pronoun policy into law.

Mally, Fred, and Thunder were all aware of the barriers in the legal name change process but were also delayed in moving forward because they had not decided on a new name. Thunder described the back and forth about choosing a family name with their extended family:

*I'm thinking, okay, well, could I change it to the matriarch name, instead of the patriarch name of your family? And my brothers and cousins are saying 'change it to the patriarch name? Because that's what we have.' And the aunties and the grandmothers are saying, 'no, no, change it to the matriarch name. Because that's what we have.' And so I have not picked a side of patriarch or matriarch. I'm actually wanting to go with the grandparents' name on the patriarch side.*

Thunder has a multitude of names to choose from and family members who were all providing input on what they should choose, complicating the decision process. Even with a large supportive family it is not always easy to decide what one's legal name should be changed to.

Thunder was also the only participant who described experiences of racism when requesting that their ID be updated. Thunder described an incident that happened in another province when attempting to update their drivers license:

*I said to the issuer that I wanted to update my ID because it had incorrect information about my height, it had some incorrect information about my sex marker, and I wanted it to match my actual birth records. So we go in there and instead of, you know, getting this done, they decide to be discriminatory towards me. Based on how I physically look, they assumed that I had psychiatric problems. They assumed that I had disabilities and they assume that I was like basically incompetent. And that maybe I shouldn't be allowed to have an ID, like a driver's license. And it was [pause] kind of stunning, [...] by the end of it, they yelled after us [...] that they were going to get a medical investigation done on me.*

Although it is not stated here, Thunder is two-spirit, an Indigenous gender identity. Thunder's story highlights the racism and discrimination that impact gender diverse Indigenous people. The intersection of Thunder's gender identity and Indigenous background means that they have a harsher experience with the system that oversees legal name change than a gender diverse person of settler origin. Taking an intersectional lens through qualitative research helps to illuminate

these disparities that are often overlooked in large quantitative studies, recognizing that experiences with the legal name change process among 2STNBGN people may differ based on other aspects of identity. For example, Scheim and co-authors (2020) conducted a quantitative study with a large sample on access to legal name change and their data did not seem to highlight any disparities in access to legal name change based on ethnicity. However, Thunder's experience suggests that racism may limit access to legal name change beyond the challenges that 2STNBGN people of settler origin experience.

Lee pointed out that the legal name change process seems more difficult than it needs to be:

*I genuinely think they just don't want you to legally change your name because they find it annoying to change it for you. [...] I really did feel like they do everything in their power to discourage you from actually pursuing it.*

The complexity, cost, and other barriers inherent in the process are beyond what seems necessary to ensure that legal name change is a secure yet accessible process for people who require it. The complex process required of 2STNBGN people and others who wish to change their name contrasts with the ease with which people going through marriage, divorce, or widowhood can change their last name as a part of the legal marriage, divorce, or death process (eHealth, n.d.). At these other moments of change in peoples' lives updating one's legal name to represent that change is so easy that it is often overlooked. For 2STNBGN people and others who wish to represent their gender change, the process is so difficult that it feels like they should not be pursuing it.

Three participants decided that the legal name change process is not worth completing right now, including Jackie, who prefers to be called by their middle name, Sam whose middle name is a source of gender dysphoria, and Ray whose name is gender neutral in pronunciation. Jackie weighed the toll that being called their first name takes on their wellbeing against the cost and complexity of proceeding with a legal name change:

*I actually have never gone through a name change. [...] I've used [my middle name] pretty much my whole life. [...] It didn't really cause me much issue other than having to listen for my legal first name, at doctor's offices and such beforehand. [...] Ever since my gender update, hearing my legal first name has caused me a lot of dysphoria. And so I've worked a bit harder at getting it changed at places. So like banks and stuff like that it*

*matches my driver's license, I will say SGI is actually pretty darn good about gender stuff, which, like, I know, changing to the X is really easy, but even putting down like, first initial and then my middle name, I've had that on my driver's license for like a decade, like before, my gender update even. And so being able to be like, here's my government issued photo ID that says, first initial middle name and giving that to like the banks and things like that has let them update it. A good chunk of that not, everything is updated, but more and more [it bothers me]. So I have really considered changing my legal name, even just switching my first and last name. So I get called my preferred name, more reliably, at places, things like doctors offices where it's like 50/50 if they read that the note about preferred name or not. And right now I've settled on not just because it is a fuck ton of work, and a chunk of money. And they've already been using my middle name for a long time. And so it's in 90-95% of my life. It's just there. It's only a few places where using like a legal first name is required and fewer yet places where they aren't willing to budge and at least put a preferred name.*

For Jackie, because they prefer to be called their middle name, they have the option of having their ID read the first letter of their first name and full middle name, which can be used to request that service providers use their middle name. Although instances of being called their first name are hurtful, these instances are rare, and Jackie has decided that the difficult legal name change process is not worth it because they can minimize the amount they experience misgendering by using their more gender neutral legal middle name. Sam similarly decided not to change their legal name because their legal first name is gender neutral and suites them while their middle name is easily hidden because most scenarios do not require their full legal name.

Ray had a different decision-making experience but made the same decision as Jackie and Sam:

*I decided not to get a name change. [...] I have a very gender-neutral name. So [name], like it's usually spelled with the [extra letters] that I just drop if it's not like a legal form that I have to fill out. So for the most part, everyone just assumes it's a masculine name, which is nice. I guess probably a big part of it is that I, my family is not very accepting of anything LGBTQ+. So honestly, in a big way, I think just keeping the name that, like my parents gave me is kind of a way to like, make peace with them, a tiny bit. Also, I'm pretty indecisive, I don't think I would be able to come up with a different name. [laughs] Like I*

*can't even decide if I'd want a tattoo or not. Maybe once I'm like, decisive enough to figure out other more permanent changes, then I decide on a proper name change.*

Ray points out that he has a gender-neutral name that sounds masculine enough that it is not a continuous source of gender dysphoria for him. In addition, Ray sees keeping his name as a peace offering to appease family members who are unsupportive of his transition. Finally, Ray is indecisive about what their chosen name would be and has not really considered it because of the indecisiveness and unsupportive family who may not use a different name anyway. Ray was the only participant who did not get to the point in the decision-making process of looking into the name change process and weighing the barriers and benefits in his decision. Because Ray was indecisive about his chosen name, had an unsupportive family, and did not experience gender dysphoria associated with his birth name he has not considered a legal name change to the point of looking into the process.

Having unsupportive family affected Ray's decision differently than Grayson. Grayson desired a legal name change despite having an unsupportive family. Although Grayson did not point to gender dysphoria or a better identity fit as motivators of a legal name change they did state that: *"having that document will somehow make it better [...] and I'll be one step closer to who I want to be."* Grayson described how having ID with the right name on it will bring their actual identity closer to their ideal identity. Grayson is experiencing some dysphoria or disconnection from their birth name which has motivated them to want to change their name legally, overcoming any desire to appease family, while Ray does not experience dysphoria associated with his name. It is also important to note that Grayson is living with their parents while Ray is living away from his family, meaning he is removed from disapproval and free to be himself while Grayson is not.

Overall, Jackie, Sam, and Ray had varying combinations of gender-neutral names and found different ways to avoid the part of their name that causes dysphoria coming up frequently. These three participants contrast with the others who all experienced gender dysphoria and frequent misnaming that was more difficult to overcome without a legal name change. Taken together, the participants are describing two factors that contribute to decision making about legal name change: to what extent your name causes gender dysphoria and how difficult the legal name change process is perceived to be. The extent to which a name causes gender dysphoria depends on how mismatched the person's gender and the gender implied by their name are, how

frequently they are misnamed, and how much intrinsic value having a gender congruent name has for different individuals. The way that participants weigh the costs versus the benefits of a legal name change to make their decisions calls to mind the basic tenets of cost benefit analysis (Sunstein, 2000). Cost benefit analysis states that when humans make decisions, they will weigh the costs and benefits associated with the options before them and choose the option that maximizes benefits while reducing costs. For decisions about legal name change, the costs of the overall process may vary based on whether the individual can access a free notary and how many pieces of ID they intend to change, however, the person's means to overcome the costs and the perceived benefits of legal name change fluctuate to a greater extent. Sometimes, as in the cases of Sam, Jackie and Ray, individuals do not experience enough gender dysphoria associated with their birth name to motivate a legal name change. In either case, when people were able to hide the part of their name that caused dysphoria, they often decided that changing their name was not worth it because the perceived benefits did not outweigh the costs. All participants regardless of their decision engaged in weighing the amount of gender dysphoria associated with their birth name against the barriers in the legal name change process and personal factors, such as whether they have family support, when deciding whether to proceed with legal name change.

### **You have Changed Your Legal Name, so Now What?**

Both participants who have legally changed their name and who intend to legally change their name associated many effects with completion of legal name change. The first effect that participants described was that they were (or would be) more often recognized by their chosen name. As a result, this section will then explore participants' experience of being recognized by their chosen name and what this recognition contributed (or could contribute) to improved mental well-being and self-confidence. Finally, the majority of participants were clear that the legal name change process serves to validate and socially sanction their gender and overall identity but does not change that identity as the identity work was done when they chose a name.

**Ensuring Recognition by the Right Name.** Completing a legal name change helps ensure that 2STNBGN individuals are named and gendered correctly according to their chosen name. Recognition is ensured in many areas of a person's life including when accessing services that require ID and when interacting with one's family and friends. Fred identified how a legal name change would ensure that they are recognized by the right name:

*I think that I would like to have something concrete that says this is who I am. [...] It just feels like an argument getting shut down, like all future arguments getting shut down. And I'm somebody with a lot of anxiety about the future. And I have to think about everything that I say before I say it, and just to have that whole chunk of a thing that could become an argument just shut down before it happens? I feel like that will make me happier in my life.*

Fred described how having something concrete that states their name will shut down any future arguments over what their name is. Fred is talking about validity that comes with having your name on a piece of ID. Having ID provided by the government that states the correct name gives legitimacy that is hard for others to argue with, particularly in places like a doctor's office or a bank. It is possible that the name and gender listed on an individual's ID act as a way of reinforcing the ought self and the gender role that the individual was assigned. All future arguments are shut down because the ought gender role that is implied by their ID is brought into alignment with their ideal gender identity and actual gender presentation.

Mally expressed that they did not feel confident introducing themselves with a name that is not their legal name:

*Most adults, if you say, 'hi, my name is blank.' They'll refer to you as that, they'll call you that. No second thoughts. If they find that you have different first name, it'll just be like, 'Oh, okay.' But [...] when I was younger, and like this one girl, she kind of like went through different cycles of names. Like one day, she would be like, Kristen, and next day Shana. Or completely different names. And people would always kind of make fun of her for that behind her back. And so I kind of still have that feeling, that I'll look ridiculous if I introduce myself with a name that isn't like my legal name.*

Mally described how they have observed others being ridiculed for changing their name suddenly, without the authority that legal ID provides. For Mally to have confidence in announcing their new name they feel it is important to have the legitimacy of a legal name change behind that announcement.

Lee shared how his name change will ensure that the right name is used at different institutions, and he will not have to experience misnaming anymore:

*Now all of my legal documents are going to say the right name. And when I go somewhere like, a walk-in clinic or something, they'll say the right name. And my bank*

*will say the right name. [...] Because like I said before, [my birth] name is dead for me. So hearing that name, as though it's supposed to be mine is sad, it's a little bit sad for me. So I'm just really excited to pretty much not ever need to think about that name ever again. Because once my name is legally [name], then everything can just say [name]. And I don't have to think about it anymore. I don't have to get a little bit sad whenever I get an email from my bank, and they've got the wrong name on there. Or when I go to the doctor.*

Lee described how having his name on legal documents will lead institutions such as the doctor's office and the bank to recognize him by his chosen name. Recognition by one's chosen name in these institutions leads to less misnaming and fewer negative feelings as a result of being misgendered (Restar et al., 2020). There is also a level of comfort in having one's identity legally and socially sanctioned which will be discussed in more detail throughout the rest of the analysis. Lee's experience is common, as many participants described that accessing various services became easier after a legal name change, and this ease of access is linked to improved mental wellbeing. Improved access to services and easier navigation in society has previously been associated with legal name change in the literature. For example, the work of Hill and co-researchers (2018) and Crosby and collaborators (2016) who found that a legal name change correlated with improved mental wellbeing, high income, and better access to services including housing and healthcare. As previously established, these correlational findings do not allow for a causal conclusion about how a legal name change may affect these perceived outcomes and given the correlational nature of my qualitative findings I cannot state that there is a causal link with any confidence.

**Legal Recognition of One's Name Improves Mental Wellbeing.** Participants described how they perceived their mental wellbeing was (or could be) improved when they are recognized by their chosen name. A legal name change reduces the chance of hearing one's dead name and experiencing gender dysphoria, which participants linked to an improvement in mental health. Returning to the basic tenets of self-discrepancy theory, mental health is improved when there is more congruence between an individual's internal gender identity and the gender which they are perceived as.

Avery described the perceived effect that changing their legal name had on their mental wellbeing:

*When I was going by [name] but hadn't legally changed it, keeping track of which doctors' offices I had said, please call me [name]. Remembering to say that, you know, if I answered the phone, [name] speaking, and whoever's calling me didn't have that name. They had my legal name. It was just, it was exhausting. And it was a headache. And I had days where I would just give up and give my legal name because it wasn't worth it. And just, you know, I get so much joy from the fact that my driver's license says [name], you know, there's definitely an improvement in mental health and, less shame? Giving my legal name before it was always, like fill out this form and I'm kind of like, 'do you need this to match ID or can I put whatever I want?' And now it's like, I don't care. My ID is what I want.*

Since changing their name legally, Avery has seen a great reduction in the amount of stress they experience managing who knows their legal name. It is now straight forward to give their legally recognized chosen name, rather than figuring out if each situation requires their legal name or if they can use their chosen name, meaning that they experience fewer instances of misnaming. Again, the tenants of self-discrepancy theory seem apparent in Avery's experience. By completing a legal name change, Avery does not have to worry about having a legal name that differs from their preferred name. Legal name change settles the debate so that 2STNBGN people no longer need to think about whether it is ok to use their chosen name when accessing a service. In addition, their ID no longer reminds them that they were assigned a different gender with a role they ought to perform.

Nigel similarly recognized the importance of legal name change for her mental wellbeing:

*I don't think people realize how important it really is. And I I've been lucky enough that I've been able to use my name, socially where, where it matters kind of to me personally, but I know that that legal name change is going to matter personally to me, [emotional] when I get to a hotel and I have to show them my ID in order to check in, that I'm going to be so much more proud of it and I'm not going to feel like shit for the rest of the night. Having to defend myself or you know, explain everything, it's going to be just incredible for my mental health. And having the support of an ID that has my actual legal name on it and I know it's legal having that support just in my purse is enough for me that if I'm*



*having a bad day or something like that, that I know that's there. [...] Just that feeling and that self-worth that is backed up by the name, it's gonna be huge.*

Nigel describes how having her ID match her name will improve her mental wellbeing, just by knowing that an ID with the right name is there to support her and provide legitimacy. Legal name change represents a form of social and legal legitimization that brings emotional ease once one's name and identity are aligned. This alignment between legal name and identity and the link between alignment and a sense of self-worth and euphoria may be explained by the principles of self-discrepancy theory. As the discrepancy between actual (the current legal state), ideal self (who they want to be perceived as), and the ought (who society says they should be through their ID and assigned gender) is reduced, there is less identity dissonance experienced and people can be more comfortable in their identity (Higgins, 1987).

Similar to Avery, Nigel's anticipated improvement in mental wellbeing is strongly tied to reduced misnaming. During her interview Nigel told a story about checking into a hotel where she had given her chosen name and the staff nearly refused her at check-in because her ID did not match the name on the reservation:

*I was checking in late and then they wouldn't let me check in because [...] that time I had booked it under [chosen name] and so when I got there and then I was like oh shit actually. It's [birth name]. And here's my ID and then the reservation didn't have my [birth] name on it. And so [...] it turned into a thing and then I felt like I had to kind of defend myself, [...] I felt like I had to sell them on understanding transgender.*

If Nigel had been able to complete her legal name change, instances like having the wrong name on a hotel booking and having to explain being transgender would not happen. Because of the mismatch between Nigel's chosen and legal names, her mental wellbeing is undermined by a discrepancy between her gender and the gender that others perceive of her based on her legal name. Resolving this discrepancy and the associated dissonance seemed to contribute to improved mental wellbeing across the interviews.

Fred also stated that a legal name change would have an impact on their mental wellbeing:

*I think that it will be [pause] a lot of weight off of my, [laughs] my chest. Like, I have struggled with my mental health basically my whole life. And there's a lot of factors that go into it. But hearing, my birth name, it very significantly affects me whenever someone*

*refers to me like that, like I'm thrown off for a whole day [laughs] from being referred to like that.*

Fred perceived that misnaming had a direct negative impact on their wellbeing by contributing to gender dysphoria, which could be ameliorated by being recognized by their chosen name. Fred has not begun a physical transition, so their body presents more femininely and appears incongruent with the masculine gender they communicate through their chosen name. At one point in the interview Fred recognized that one thing holding them back from legal name change is that they find it difficult to confidently present as masculine unless a legal name change is accompanied by hormones and surgery to transition their body:

*“I'll be more confident to be like, ‘my name is [name] and I have proof.’ But also, without it being paired with testosterone and surgery, then I'm less confident to tell people that I have a masculine name.”*

For Fred the positive impact of a legal name change on mental wellbeing is about being recognized by a name that gives them gender euphoria. But their experience highlights the need for gender affirming care alongside a legal name change; there must be congruency between the gender of Fred's name and the gender their body presents. Incongruency between the gender of their name and body may limit Fred's ability to pass as a man or masculine person, forcing them to have to explain the incongruency. Fred's experience is in line with previous research, as Lind (2023) found that congruency between physical presentation and the gender expressed by a person's chosen name is key to the successful acceptance of that name by others. Given that a legal name change is a more permanent and defining change than announcing a chosen name, congruency of bodily gender presentation may be even more important for successfully changing one's legal name. Past commentators have also criticized how wellbeing research tends to position being out as the ideal state which improves wellbeing among transgender people (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019; Garrison, 2018). In agreement with the literature, Fred's experience illustrates that the benefits to wellbeing associated with changing one's legal name may also depend on whether one's bodily presentation aligns with their gender.

**Legal Recognition of Name Improves Self-Confidence.** The third perceived impact of legal recognition of one's chosen name is that participants felt that their self-confidence was (or would be) improved. Improved self-confidence came from the understanding that participants

would not have to explain their name, ask to be called a different name, or silently suffer misnaming because they now have the assurance of their chosen name being on their ID.

Lucas described how not having a legal name change can undermine their confidence:

*Right now, I don't love pulling my ID out, you know, I'm generally trying to hide it from the people that I'm with, even though most of the time they're familiar with my old name, but I do meet new people, I don't really want it to come up, like even things like sending e-transfers. I feel like I have to kind of like, explain to people like you're gonna get it from this other name, just ignore it. And don't worry about it. And those things do I feel undermine my confidence? Even if no one says anything.*

Actions such as pulling out his ID or sending money, actions which most people take for granted, undermine Lucas's confidence. The undermining of Lucas's self-confidence comes from feeling the need to explain why his ID is not congruent with the name he has chosen for himself, especially with people who do not know him that well. This speaks to how Lucas may choose to carefully manage who knows about his gender identity, and how having an ID that is incongruent can undermine his ability to confidently do so. This experience supports the idea established in the literature that coming out is a carefully managed process among 2STNBGN people (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019).

Sam shared the same feelings as Lucas:

*Whenever anything comes up that somebody needs my middle name for [anything], yeah, my confidence plummets. Absolutely. Because I'm like, Oh, crap. They know my middle name now. You know. Yeah, it would make a difference. Not as big of a difference as if it was a first name, but it would make a difference.*

Even though Sam chose their birth first name, having their birth middle name come up for any reason undermines their confidence in a similar way to Lucas. Sam would rather that their middle name not come up due to the dysphoria that it causes. Even though a middle name is more easily hidden than a first name, the incongruence between one's middle name and gender identity can lead to reduced self-confidence in situations where their middle name is required.

Mally also feels the need to hide their name and would like a name that they could be proud of:

*At the moment, I do not like my name. I absolutely hate my name. I've always hated it. Ask anyone in my life I've never liked my name. But if I had a name that I actually liked,*

*I'd be, happier to introduce myself as that. I would be putting that on everything. I would have like shirts with my name, I would have like, put my name on the back of a chair, like a director's chair.*

Mally does not feel a sense of pride in their name. Choosing a legal name that accurately represents their gender would give Mally confidence to share that name because it speaks to who they are and legitimize its use.

Avery, in contrast to Lucas, Sam, and Mally, has changed their name:

*I: [has] legal name change had an impact on on your confidence levels?*

*P: Yeah. Especially with the first name [pause] hard to put into words but you know, introducing [myself to] people and having them say, "oh, that suits you." Never gets old?*

Having successfully completed a legal name change, Avery sees the impact that having their chosen name legally recognized has on their self-confidence. Similar to the impact on mental wellbeing, the impact of legal name change on self-confidence is strongly tied to being recognized by the right name. In addition, the impact on self-confidence is also related to the increased congruence between a person's name and their identity once their chosen name is legally recognized. Increased self-confidence was broadly felt across the interviews with eight of the participants specifically stating that legally changing their name would increase their self-confidence.

**Socially and Legally Sanctioning Gender Diverse Identity.** Both participants who had decided to legally change their name and who had decided not to pursue it at the time of the interview stated that a legal name change would not influence their identity. For example, Fred, who has a chosen name, responded to a question about the impact of legal name change on their identity by stating:

*No, I don't think it would have an impact on the sense of who I am. I think that I know who I am. And it would impact the way other people see me. It's kind of like a social process rather than an internal [process] with the actual legal change. Like choosing my name, and socially coming out with it, that felt a lot internally but like, legally changing, it will be mostly for my interactions with other people.*

Fred states up front that legal name change would not have an impact on their internal sense of identity. Legal name change is about ensuring that other people recognize 2STNBGN people for who they are. Fred even states that legal name change is more of a social process to ensure

recognition while choosing a name was more about working on who they are inside, meaning that the internal identity work took place when choosing a name. Looking at this example from a self-discrepancy view, the legal name change does not affect Fred's internal sense of self but rather brings the external view of self in line with their internal sense of self.

Sam is less certain than Fred about the impact of legal name change on their identity, but made a similar conclusion:

*You know, I don't know about that. It might. I don't think I would know about that until I've done it. But like, it seems to me that, you know, I know who I am. And who I am is not that name. It's not that it would impact so much who I am as a person as having things aligned with who I am as a person.*

While Sam says at first that they would have to go through a legal name change to see what impact it would have on their identity, they follow-up by pointing out that they have a strong understanding of who they are. Rather than altering who Sam is, legal name change would ensure that their name corresponds with who they know themselves to be. Sam is pointing out that they have already figured out who they are, and a legal name change is about ensuring others' perceptions align with their self-perception. Because Sam is non-binary, aligning the perceptions of others with their own may require a restructuring of the ought self as society does not easily recognize and accept openly non-binary individuals.

Lee agrees with Fred and Sam on whether a legal name change would impact his identity, stating:

*I don't think so. Because my sense of who I am, has been [name] for a quite a long time, like I said, probably like three years-ish. And getting it changed legally is just so that the government knows. Like, now the government knows that [name]. [...] I'm just now saying, "hey, you guys have to realize, you guys have to recognize this too now."*

For Lee, legal name change does not impact who he is, he determined that when he found his chosen name. Legal name change is about telling others who he is and ensuring the government must recognize his identity. Lee's statement points to the importance of legal sanctioning of name changes. As Lind (2023) points out, choosing a new name is a performative act of claiming the identity and gender associated with that name. For the government to grant a legal name change based on this performative act is a legal sanctioning of 2STNBGN people's right to claim gender diverse identities. When governments refuse to allow legal name change for gender

reasons or make the legal name change process prohibitively difficult it sends a message that the social power will not support and does not allow people to claim gender diverse identity. Throughout Fred, Sam, and Lee's interviews we see a consistent message that a legal name change is about communicating who you are to the world and ensuring you are recognized by your chosen name, not about discovering their identity. A legal name change serves to reduce the discrepancy between the internal self and the external perception of self, and to socially validate peoples' right to claim 2STNBGN identity.

Mally held a different position compared to the majority of participants. When asked if legal name change would impact their identity Mally said: "*I think so. Yes. Because I feel like it'll be a final piece that really clicks in.*" Mally seems to state that legal name change would have an impact on their sense of identity. A possible explanation for why Mally felt this way is that Mally is in the position where they have not yet chosen a name, but strongly desire a name change because it causes them gender dysphoria. They have not experienced the self-determination over their identity, nor the felt gender euphoria that other participants experienced when choosing their name. Based on the experiences of Fred, Sam, and Lee it is possible that if Mally was asked whether legal name change would impact their identity after choosing a name, their answer would be no.

When asked if legal name change impacted his sense of self, Steven, who completed his name change about ten years ago, responded:

*Steven: Um, I'd say yes. Because it made me more secure in that sense of self.*

*Interviewer: Right. Okay, not that it changed your sense of who you are, like, before you were changing your name versus after, but it just made it more secure.*

*Steven: Yeah.*

The impact that legal name change had on Steven's identity was not that it helped him realize his gender or that it changed his outlook on his identity, rather, it served to socially validate his right to assert his gender as a man. Steven's statement, much like Fred, Sam, and Lee's experiences re-enforces the claim that going through the legal name change process validates and socially sanctions 2STNBGN identity. There is a sense of security in knowing that 2STNBGN identity cannot be taken away because legal name change provides a level of legal protection that prevents individuals or organizations from challenging 2STNBGN peoples' gender diverse identity. Returning to the earlier idea that ID may represent the ought self, it seems that a legal

name change may also represent a restructuring of the ought self because the gendered expectations for the individual have changed and are better aligned with their ideal gender.

Nigel downplayed the importance of a legal name change through the course of the interview. For example, she stated: “*Sorry, the government but I don't care what [...] this card says. Everybody calls me [name], the people who I know, the people who matter to me, they all know it.*” Nigel appears to flaunt her disdain for the ought gender expectations placed on her by stating that the validation of her peers is more important than having her trans identity legally recognized. However, when asked about the anticipated impact of legal name change, Nigel allowed herself to get emotional and recognized that a legal name change would be hugely impactful:

*I think it's going to have a massive impac-impact. [...] I think I've kind of downplayed the legal [name change by] just putting it off for myself, because I [...] have been using it socially so much. [...] Getting a birth certificate that says [name] on it is going to be monumental. And getting an ID that has my face and my name on it is [becomes emotional] I, well, yeah. It's gonna do something like this. Like that's gonna be fucking amazing. [voice is lost in emotion]*

Even though Nigel spent most of the interview denying how important legally changing her name would be, by the end she recognized the significance of legal name change for her identity. Nigel is overcome with emotion and euphoria at the thought of having an ID that reflects her name and gender identity.

In section two of the analysis which focused on the importance of chosen names and gender joy, I noted that many participants who had chosen names experienced joy when they found a name that accurately represented their gender and identity. In this section, I outlined that the majority of participants established that legally affirming their chosen name does not contribute to the development of their identity, meaning that choosing a name is the more salient process for one's identity. Even Mally, Steven, and Nigel who stated that legal name change may be important for their identity do not fully refute the idea that the identity work is mainly associated with choosing a name. Rather, these participants draw attention to how a legal name change provides legitimacy, social sanctioning, and protection to 2STNBGN identities and helps to bring the ought self into alignment with the actual and ideal selves.

## Conclusion

This study examined gender diverse people's experiences with legal name changes in Saskatchewan. From my reflexive thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews, four overarching themes were constructed: the 2020 gender awakening, choosing a name, legal name change decision making, and the impact of legal name change. My analyses revealed the thoughtful process of finding a name that reflects the person's gender identity and how impactful a chosen name can be for an individual's identity. My research underscores how legal name change supports gender presentation and protects the right of 2STNBGN people to claim their gender identity, indicating the importance of an accessible legal name change process.

The basic tenets of self-discrepancy theory showed up throughout the participants' descriptions of their gender awakening, journey to find a chosen name, and their experiences with legal name change. Overall, choosing a name that expresses one's gender and identity is about making internally felt gender identity congruent with external gender presentation. In addition, legal name change supports congruency between identity, presentation, and gender expectations by ensuring recognition by the right name and legally sanctioning the 2STNBGN person's right to claim and perform gender diverse identity. It seems that reducing the discrepancy between internally felt gender and gender presentation may be a way of reducing gender dysphoria. However, I would not suggest based on this study that gender dysphoria and a discrepancy between the ideal self and actual self be conflated. Indeed, quantitative research has treated gender dysphoria and ideal/actual discrepancies as separate concepts (Kennis et al., 2022). The relationship between gender dysphoria and self-discrepancies would be best explored with a mixed method study that combines validated questionnaires with an interview guide that is designed to understand gender dysphoria, using self-discrepancy theory as a theoretical guide.

While the basic tenets of self-discrepancy theory could be used to interpret various aspects of the participants' experiences, it was more difficult to discern if the participants felt a discrepancy in their identity. When asked questions designed to illicit experiences of self-discrepancy, participants tended to provide simple yes or no answers which provided little interesting material for analysis and indicated that the participants may not have understood their own experiences as a discrepancy in their identity. Using self-discrepancy theory to interpret the data also proved challenging, it was late in the analysis that some aspects of self-discrepancy theory were identified in the themes, such as the view that ID acts as a representation of the



ought self. In addition, some scholars may argue that my framing of a persons' gender identity and how they are perceived as an ideal-actual discrepancy may not fit within the theoretical framework of self-discrepancy theory because the perception of others is not an internal feeling. I argue that it contributes to internal feeling that one is not perceived as one would like to be, creating a discrepancy. Overall, self-discrepancy theory provided a useful framework for understanding the participants' experiences with decision making about whether to pursue a legal name change, however it likely is not the only identity theory which could contribute that understanding.

The participants shared stories about how being able to legally change their name has affected (or would affect) their self-confidence and mental wellbeing. Participants all agreed that legal name change helps to build confidence and improve mental wellbeing. It was through their narratives that congruency between identity and presentation emerged as a potential mechanism for improving confidence and mental wellbeing. Legal name changes ensure recognition by the individual's gender congruent name, which in turn creates confidence that they will be gendered correctly, leading to confidence in their identity and improved mental wellbeing. Although a legal name change provided confidence in their gender diverse identity, participants were clear that it does not change their identity. Rather, the identity work is done when choosing a name and the legal name change serves to validate a person's identity and their right to exist as a gender diverse person.

With the positive impacts of legal name change in mind, it is not surprising that all but one of the participants expressed that they would like to legally change their name. However, three of the participants who would like to change their name had chosen not to pursue it at the time of interview. Participants decided whether or not to pursue legal name change by engaging in a cost-benefit analysis (Sunstein, 2000) to weigh the perceived benefit to them against the perceived barriers inherent in the legal name change process. Those who had decided not to pursue a legal name change shared that their names did not cause significant amounts of gender dysphoria, or that it was easy enough to hide the part of their name that did, and they were satisfied with the rest of their name. Those who had decided to pursue legal name change felt that their birth name caused them an unbearable amount of gender dysphoria.

The perceived barriers present in the legal name change process presented challenges for many participants. Many of the barriers uniquely deter 2STNBGN from changing their names

which speaks to how society restricts individuals' ability to redefine their identity. Western naming practices specify that names are to be given at birth and that individuals do not have the agency to rename themselves based on their identity (Lind, 2023). It is perceived as socially unacceptable to rename oneself for identity purposes, and people are expected to have a continuous identity throughout their lives (Lind, 2023). However, it is perfectly acceptable to change a name for the purpose of letting others know who we are related to, and it is socially sanctioned to the point that updating our names to communicate who we are related to is expected and built into other social processes such as marriage and the passing of a spouse.

The Saskatchewan legal name change process is more difficult for 2STNBGN people than for the average person. By making the process difficult for 2STNBGN people, legal names that do not accurately convey each gender diverse person's gender identity are kept attached to 2STNBGN individuals. Sinclair-Palm's (2017; 2023) work in the education system described how keeping a trans person's birth name attached to them even after a legal name change, is a form of structural violence that risks harm to trans people based on their gender identity through misgendering and discrimination. Building upon this work, I contend that by keeping unwanted legal names attached to 2STNBGN people through the publication requirement and a challenging legal name change process, the Government of Saskatchewan perpetrates a form of structural violence against gender diverse people. 2STNBGN people in Saskatchewan are not encouraged to have agency over how their identity is defined and are not offered equitable access to legal name change which should be accessible to support their wellbeing and their ability to perform and claim gender diverse identity.

Several recommended changes to the legal name change process have emerged from this study. First, the publication requirement should be removed for 2STNBGN people with an exemption process that takes the lead from Ontario and Quebec where only a short form stating that the name change is for gender related reasons is required (Service Ontario, 2023; Directeur de l'état civil, 2023). Removing the publication requirement protects 2STNBGN people from being outed and removes a permanent connection to their birth name. Second, eHealth should update the legal name change form, make it available online, and work to make the instructions clearer. Third, the Government of Saskatchewan and eHealth should explore opportunities to allow individuals who are 16-18 years of age to request legal name change without the approval of both parents. Finally, eHealth should work with advocacy groups, such as Trans Sask, to

address other barriers in the legal name change process that uniquely affect 2STNBGN people. These changes support equitable access to legal name change for 2STNBGN people.

### **Limitations & Future Directions**

There are four limitations to the current study that I will discuss. First, only white and Indigenous participants<sup>11</sup> came forward to take part in the study. As non-Indigenous people of colour did not choose to participate in the study, their experiences were not accounted for. It is likely, based on previous research, that people of colour would have different experiences with legal name change at the intersection of race and gender identity (Crosby et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2018). There is a need to focus on the experiences of people of colour as Canada continues to become more ethnically diverse (Statistics Canada, 2021), therefore their experiences are important to inform the legal name change process in Saskatchewan.

Another future direction would be to repeat this study with an Indigenous lens, focusing on naming practices among Indigenous 2STNBGN community members. Indigenous identity was not a focus of the interviews, and I chose not to probe further when participants brought it up. Although Indigenous identity was not an analytical focus, the work of Depelteau and Giroux (2015) points to a separation between the two-spirit movement and other LGBTQ+ movements in Canada which warrants giving two-spirit identity special attention. Lastly, looking at how Indigenous people have been discriminated by the legal system we can inform policies, such as The Name Change Act (Government of Saskatchewan, 1995), and bring attention to how the Canadian legal system has systematically erased Indigenous identity (Friedland, 2016).

The second limitation of this study is the single interview format. A second round of interviews or a mixed methods approach may have allowed for a deeper analysis to contribute to developing an understanding of the way that 2STNBGN people make decisions about legal name change. Findings such as the 2020 awakening could have been explored in more detail as the effects of the pandemic, social isolation, and remote settings on gender identity, gender presentation, and gender norms were not fully explored. Future research should attend to the effect of social isolation on the full gender identity spectrum, including the experiences of cisgender men and cisgender women and the role of the pandemic in altering their gender expression.

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<sup>11</sup> Ethnicity was not formally collected but could be inferred from the interviews. The three Indigenous participants mentioned their Indigenous identity during the interview.

The third limitation is that participants were self-selected volunteers. It is possible that those who volunteered may have had the most to say about the process because they experienced more difficulty with legal name change than the average person. Any potential participants who had an easier time with the legal name change process or who felt that changing their name was not very impactful or necessary may not have volunteered. The study mainly attracted people who were planning to change their name but were having a difficult time starting on or completing the process. However, three participants who had completed the process, two who had decided it was not worth it, and one who was not interested in changing their name volunteered for the study, representing a broad range of decisions about legal name change and progression through the process.

The fourth limitation is that this research does not contribute to unravelling causality issues around legal name change and its outcomes. As identified in the introduction it is unclear in findings from previous studies (Crosby et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2018; Russell et al., 2018; Scheim et al., 2020) about 2STNBGN name changes whether improved mental wellbeing, better socio-economic status, and better access to health care are outcomes of legal name change or if those with these attributes are more likely to be able to complete legal name change. The participants of this study felt that their mental wellbeing and self-confidence were improved after a legal name change but this does not resolve the causality issue. Utilizing a pre-post design to study the link between mental wellbeing, self-confidence, and recognition by chosen name may help determine if a legal name change causes improvement in these areas.

A final next step for this study is to return to the 2STNBGN community in Saskatchewan with the findings to gather input before proceeding with further dissemination. When this study was designed in consultation with Trans Sask, a promise was made that the results would be returned to community for input before any publications are finalized and that findings would be publicly available. In order to facilitate the timely completion of my thesis requirement this promise was separated from the thesis, but it is essential that I return the findings to community by gathering feedback on the analysis and findings. I anticipate that feedback from community may affirm or alter some of the findings and inform what information should be included in a briefing document. Returning the findings to community both honours the participants who contributed to this research and recognizes the struggle that 2STNBGN people face when applying for legal name change in Saskatchewan.

Based on previous research and my findings about the 2020 gender awakening, there are more people than ever who are coming out as 2STNBGN (Allen et al., 2020; Jones, 2022). However, the legal name change process in Saskatchewan has not kept current with the changing times, rather, the process is uniquely difficult and discriminates against 2STNBGN people by restricting access to legal name change. When legal name change is possible, 2STNBGN people are allowed access to legal and social sanctioning of their renaming which supports their right to claim and perform gender diverse identity. By making the legal name change process challenging and through the publication requirement, the Saskatchewan government commits an act of systematic violence (Sinclair-Palm, 2017) against 2STNBGN people that results in misgendering, microaggressions, and continued harm. However, there is a path forward; by coming together with the 2SLGBTQ+ community in true consultation about how to improve access to a key process for 2STNBGN people, the government can work to make the legal name change process equitable. My thesis thus contributes to the discourse of supporting 2STNBGN peoples' right to claim and perform their gender identity and advocates for an end to systemic discriminatory policies. To best support 2STNBGN people, actions should be taken to reduce barriers and improve access to the legal name change process so that 2STNBGN people can decide to change their names based on the benefits they perceive rather than deciding not to change their name because the process is arduous.

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## Appendix A Advertising Materials

### A. Advertisement Poster. Sent out in Facebook™, Instagram™, and regular poster sizes

**PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY ON:  
GENDER-DIVERSITY BASED LEGAL NAME CHANGE**

Participants will be asked to take part in a **one hour interview** discussing the ways in which names (given and/or chosen) relate to identity, and the factors that play a role in decisions to change or keep given names. Participants will be **compensated** for their time.

**You are eligible to participate if you:**

- Identify as transgender or gender diverse
- Currently live in Saskatchewan
- Have thought about legally changing your name in the past, whether or not the name was changed.

For more info or to participate:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCInterview>

You can also email John:  
[john.malyk@usask.ca](mailto:john.malyk@usask.ca)

Interested in the findings? For more information about a community conversation and findings summary:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCEmailList>

For more info or to participate:



With the support of TransSask



This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board



### B. Post Materials and Instructions

This document contains optional text to use in social media posts, email distributions, and replies to questions regarding the Gender-Diversity Based Legal Name Change study. Please note these copies are



optional and can be customized based on your organizational brand and social media policies. These examples are to help facilitate easy distributions.

Distribution of the provided materials can be circulated through methods other than mentioned in this document.

**Template email:**

- Attach to the email PDF document titled, "***Name\_Change\_Study\_Poster***"
- Use the optional messaging:

Opportunity to participate in research! A research team at the University of Saskatchewan is conducting a study on decision making about whether or not to apply for a legal name change and how this relates to identity. They are currently seeking participants who identify as transgender or gender diverse and are considering or have considered changing their legal name. Participants must be currently living in Saskatchewan. Honorariums will be offered for participating in the study. For more information or to express your interest in participation, click this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCInterview>. Those interested in participating in a community conversation about the findings of this project or receiving a project summary can join the mailing list here: <https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCEmailList>.

**Template response to questions about the survey:**

- Reply to email or social media comments with questions using this message:

*Hello,*

*Thank you for reaching out about the Gender-Diversity Based Legal Name Change study. This project is being conducted by researchers at the University of Saskatchewan. You can reach out to John by emailing [john.malyk@usask.ca](mailto:john.malyk@usask.ca). They will be happy to answer any questions or discuss any concerns you may have.*

*Thanks and have a good day.*

## Advertising on Social Media:

### *Instagram Post*

- For the post image, use the PNG document titled ***“Instagram\_Post”***.
- If you like you may add the survey link to your bio or link tree.
- If possible, you can also share your post to your story after sharing it and embed the link to the contact form in the story:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCInterview>.
- Use the following text in the body of a post:

Opportunity to participate in research! A research team at the University of Saskatchewan is conducting a study on decision making about whether or not to apply for a legal name change and how this relates to identity. They are currently seeking participants who identify as transgender or gender diverse and are considering or have considered changing their legal name. Participants must be currently living in Saskatchewan. Honorariums will be offered for participating in the study. Copy this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCInterview>, or email John at [john.malyk@usask.ca](mailto:john.malyk@usask.ca) for more information. Those interested in participating in a community conversation about the findings of this project or receiving a project summary can join the mailing list here:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCEmailList>.

### *Facebook Post*

- Please download and post the PNG document titled, ***“Facebook\_Post”***, and post it to your Facebook with the following text in the body of the post:

Opportunity to participate in research! A research team at the University of Saskatchewan is conducting a study on decision making about whether or not to apply for a legal name change and how this relates to identity. They are currently seeking participants who identify as transgender or gender diverse and are considering or have considered changing their legal name. Participants must be currently living in Saskatchewan. Honorariums will be offered for participating in the study. For more information or to express your interest in participation, click this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCInterview>. Those interested in participating in a community conversation about the findings of this project or receiving a project summary can join the mailing list here:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCEmailList>.

### ***Blog/Website post***

- If feasible, feel free to use any of the attached images that best fit your layout. You can also use the following text:

Opportunity to participate in research! A research team at the University of Saskatchewan is conducting a study on decision making about whether or not to apply for a legal name change and how this relates to identity. They are currently seeking participants who identify as transgender or gender diverse and are considering or have considered changing their legal name. Participants must be currently living in Saskatchewan. Honorariums will be offered for participating in the study. For more information or to express your interest in participation, click this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCInterview>. Those interested in participating in a community conversation about the findings of this project or receiving a project summary can join the mailing list here: <https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCEmailList>.

### ***Poster***

- Please print the PDF document titled, "***Name\_Change\_Study\_Poster***", and display throughout your agency.
- **Note the poster is in landscape and should be printed and displayed in landscape.**

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Guide**

Hello, welcome to the interview. My name is John, I use he/him or they/them pronouns, I identify as gay, genderqueer, and I'm not trans. We are going to talk about how you decided whether or not to change your legal name and how changing your legal name might link to your identity. This project is for my master's thesis and I became interested in doing these interviews when I was working on the TransID clinic as a program evaluator. When I was hearing from the participants and the people running the program I became aware that there is a lot of work and advocacy needed to make the process of changing one's legal name more accessible. My motivation for conducting this project is to advocate along with trans and gender diverse people for improvements in the process.

During the interview, I am going to ask you to talk about what made you decide to change your legal name or not. You can choose not to answer any questions by saying "pass." You may also opt to end the interview at anytime during the interview by saying "stop", in which case we will stop the interview and I will delete the recording.

\*Go over the consent form with the participant\*

\*Begin recording\*

Given everything we have gone over, do you consent to participate in the interview?

I'm interested in hearing about your experience with legal name change, how you made your decision, how name change relates to your identity, and any other details you feel are an important part of the story. Starting wherever it makes sense to start, tell me the story of your name change!

How do you identify your gender?

What are your pronouns?

What name do you go by?

    What lead you to choose this name?

    What does this name say about who you are?

    Tell me about the importance, if any, that you attach to your name.

What does being (insert participant's self-described gender identity) mean to you?

    How would you describe who you are to other people?

    What role does being (insert participant's self-described gender identity) play in your sense of who you are?

    What role does your name play in your sense of who you are?

    Do you consider yourself a part of any broad social categories?

How do you express your gender identity?

How have you navigated any differences between how you present and how you want to present?

What about how others want you to present?

Has your name played a role in negotiating any differences?

Have you thought about changing your legal name?

Have you changed your legal name?

Why did you come to that decision?

Were there facilitators/barriers in the process that you encountered or that stopped you from changing your name?

What impact has changing your name had on your daily life? (or what impact do you think it would have – for those who have not yet)

What impact has changing your name had (or what impact do you think it would have) on your mental health?

Life satisfaction?

Sense of self?

Confidence?

Is there anything else you'd like to bring up that we haven't touched on?

\*End recording\*

Debrief and questions.

Offer resource sheet.

Confirm etransfer.

## Appendix C Consent Form



### ***Participant Consent Form***

**You are invited to participate in a research study entitled:** Transgender and Gender-Diverse Individuals' Experiences with Legal Name Change and Identity.

**Student Researcher:**

John Malyk  
MA Student, Psychology and Health Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
[john.malyk@usask.ca](mailto:john.malyk@usask.ca)

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:**

Dr. Karen Lawson  
Professor, Psychology and Health Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
[karen.lawson@usask.ca](mailto:karen.lawson@usask.ca)  
306-966-2524

**Purpose and Objective of the Research:**

To understand decision making around whether or not to proceed with a legal name change and how this decision relates to a person's sense of identity.

**Procedures:**

You are invited to participate in a one-on-one interview approximately one hour in length. The interview will take place via Zoom and will be video and audio recorded in Zoom and transcribed using Otter.ai. You may keep your video turned off during the recording if you wish. You can also ask to stop or pause the recording at anytime without giving a reason. The researcher will review the consent form with you and you will be asked to provide recorded verbal consent at the beginning of the interview. The interview will focus on why you decided to or decided not to proceed with a legal name change, including how this decision impacted your sense of how the legal change relates to your identity. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role going forward.

After your interview, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit. You will have two weeks from the date the

researcher sends you your transcript to reply with your changes. A reminder will be sent 1 week and 2 days before the deadline if you have not responded prior to this. If the deadline is missed it will be assumed that you consent to the use of the transcript as is.

**Funded by:** This project is not funded.

**Potential Risks:** It is possible that you may feel upset or frustrated when discussing the legal name change process or your other experiences with name change. The interviewer will offer you a resource sheet at the end of the interview.

**Potential Benefits:** The information that you provide about your experience may help us to advocate for change to reduce barriers in the process used by the province of Saskatchewan when for trans and gender diverse people to apply for legal name change.

**Compensation:** You will be compensated a \$25 honorarium for your involvement in the study. The honorarium will not be contingent on your completion of the interview, however you must show up to and consent to take part in the interview to receive an honorarium. The honorarium will be awarded after the Zoom call via etransfer to your preferred email address.

**Confidentiality:**

The data and results will be written into a thesis report and may be presented at conferences or published in journal articles. Direct quotations may be used in the preparation of reports and presentations, however any personally identifying information (your name, age, etc.) will be removed and will not be published. A pseudonym which you may choose will be used alongside quotes.

An infographic will also be posted on our lab website at the completion of the research if you wish to review a summary of the results. Our lab website can be found here: <https://research-groups.usask.ca/reproductivepsychology/index.php>

Please note that although we will make every effort to safeguard your data, we cannot guarantee the privacy of your data, due to the technical vulnerabilities inherent to all online video conferencing platforms. The researcher will attend the interview from a private area of their home or office that will not be accessible to individuals outside of the research team during data collection. It is recommended that you also attend from a private area in your home or office.

By agreeing to participate you also agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the interview.

Zoom will be used to audio and video record your interview and the recording will be handled by Zoom according to their [privacy policy which you can view by clicking here](#). Otter.ai will be used to transcribe your interview and the transcript and audio file will be handled by Otter.ai according to their [privacy policy which you can view by clicking here](#).

**Storage of Data:**

All data will be saved to the USask managed OneDrive and will not be saved to Zoom's cloud storage. Zoom's servers are located in Canada, therefore no data will be routed outside Canada by Zoom. The researcher will upload the audio file from your interview to Otter.ai for automated transcription. Otter.ai stores its data on cloud-based services on US servers, meaning that audio files and initial transcripts are vulnerable to search and seizure by US authorities according to US law. In order to mitigate this vulnerability, audio recordings and initial transcripts will be deleted from otter.ai immediately after the transcript has been downloaded, meaning the audio file and transcript will only be in Otter.ai's possession for less than 24 hours. You can view Otter.ai's [privacy policy by clicking here](#).

The data will be stored for a minimum of five years following publication on the University of Saskatchewan's secure OneDrive Cloud storage and a backup will be kept on the Principle Investigator's password protected University of Saskatchewan computer. The research devices will be secured by passwords and only accessible to the research team while it is being collected and analyzed. Once at least 5 years have passed the data will be destroyed permanently and beyond recovery.

A master-list of participants linking participant names, pseudonyms, and emails will be kept to facilitate transcript release. The list will be stored on the University of Saskatchewan's secure OneDrive Cloud in a folder that is separate from the data. The list will be deleted once data collection has finished and all transcript releases have been processed.

Any personal information collected as a record of honorarium payment will be stored separately from the data by the PI and may be kept for 7 years in case the University of Saskatchewan is subjected to a financial audit. Once at least 7 years have passed the information will be destroyed permanently and beyond recovery.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary and you can participate in only those discussions that you are comfortable with. If you wish to skip a question or prompt you may do so by saying "I'd like to pass." You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, without explanation or penalty of any sort. You can withdraw by saying "I'd like to stop." Should you wish to withdraw, the interview will be stopped and your interview recording and any transcript created will be immediately deleted. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until 1 week following the deadline to submit any changes to your transcript. After this, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Follow up:**

Anyone interested in attending a conversation with the community about the findings of the research or in receiving a summary of the findings may leave their contact information here: <https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/LNCEmailList>. The summary will also be posted on our lab website at the completion of the research. Our lab website can be found here:



<https://research-groups.usask.ca/reproductivepsychology/current-projects/legal-name-change-study.php>. We anticipate that the conversation will take place in early 2024 and the summary of the results will be made available in summer 2024

**Questions or Concerns:**

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office: [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca); 306-966-2975; out of town participants may call toll free 1-888-966-2975.

**Oral Consent:**

I read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it.

---

*Name of Participant*

*Researcher's Signature*

*Date*

## **Appendix D**

### **Phone Screening Protocol**

Hello [name provided by email], I'm calling to complete a short phone screening to ensure you are eligible to participate in our study on legal name change in Saskatchewan. It will take about 5 minutes. Is now a good time?

Great!

Before we start I just want to give you a few details about the study and what your participation would involve. It will be a 1 hour interview on Zoom during which we will talk about your experiences with legal name change and your identity. There will be a \$25 honorarium offered to those who engage in the interview.

\*Talk through the questions\*

1. What is your age?
2. Are you currently living in Saskatchewan?
3. How do you identify your gender?
4. For how long have you identified as [insert participant's gender label]?
5. Have you thought about changing your legal name before?
6. What motivated you to consider a name change?
7. Have you started the process of legal name change? (if yes, did you complete the process?)

## **Appendix E**

### **Participant Resource Sheet**

Trans Sask's Name Change Guide: <https://www.transsask.ca/name-change-guide/>.

Counselling at Out Saskatoon: <https://www.outsaskatoon.ca/counselling/>

Kids Help Phone crisis support:

Call: 1-800-668-6868 or

Text 'help' to 686868

More information: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/urgent-help>

To talk to a mental health professional in Canada:

Call: 1-866-585-0445 or

Text 'wellness' to 741741

More information: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help.html>

**Appendix F  
Transcript Release Form**



**TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM**

**Transgender and gender diverse individuals' experiences with legal name change and identity.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with John Malyk. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to John Malyk to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher