



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Spitzname: What's The Point? An Exploration of the Social
Significance of Nicknames in Adulthood

verfasst von | submitted by

Taylor Rene Dube

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 656

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium CREOLE-Cultural Differences and
Transnational Processes

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Peter Schweitzer

Abstract (English)

Despite their ubiquity, nicknames have received limited academic attention in anthropological research. While given names and surnames are governmentally regulated in Austria, nicknames are informal and unregulated, resulting in high flexibility on how they are used and what they express. This qualitative study, conducted in Vienna between 2024-2025, explores how Viennese residents aged 24-45 use nicknames and how naming practices engage with concepts of identity, autonomy, gender, and social relationships. Drawing on ten semi-structured interviews, the study reveals that nicknames function as both tools and symbols of identity. The findings suggest that individual identity is flexible, yet this flexibility is often constrained by the difficulty to shed rigidity of externally ascribed identities—which I term the you-identity. At times, when the internally and externally ascribed identities are not aligned, individuals must negotiate conflicting identities. Nicknames serve as markers of intimacy, mechanisms of belonging and exclusion, and expressions of gendered and cultural norms. By centering the experiences of the named rather than the namers, this research contributes to the anthropological literature on naming and identity, offering new insights into the flexibility and construction of identity in everyday social interaction.

Abstract (German)

Trotz ihrer Allgegenwärtigkeit haben Spitznamen in der anthropologischen Forschung bislang nur begrenzt Aufmerksamkeit erfahren. Während Vornamen und Nachnamen in Österreich gesetzlich geregelt sind, ist die Verwendung von Spitznamen informell und ungeregelt. Dies lässt eine hohe Flexibilität in ihrer Verwendung und ihren Bedeutungszuschreibungen zu. Die vorliegende qualitative Studie aus dem Zeitraum 2024 bis 2025, untersucht, wie Personen mit Wohnsitz in Wien im Alter von 24 bis 45 Jahren Spitznamen verwenden und inwiefern Namenspraktiken mit Identität, Autonomie, Geschlecht und sozialen Beziehungen verknüpft sind. Basierend auf zehn semi-strukturierten Interviews zeigt die Studie, dass Spitznamen sowohl Werkzeuge für als auch Symbole von Identitätskonstruktionen sind. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass individuelle Identität grundsätzlich flexibel ist. Diese Flexibilität wird jedoch häufig durch extern zugeschriebene Identitäten („you-identity“) eingeschränkt, welche starr und schwer abzulegen sind. Manchmal, wenn die individuelle Identität mit den extern zugeschriebenen Identitäten nicht übereinstimmt, müssen Individuen diese Widersprüchlichkeiten ausverhandeln. Spitznamen bringen Intimität, Mechanismen sozialer Zugehörigkeit und Ausgrenzung sowie geschlechtsspezifische und kulturelle Normen zum Ausdruck. Indem die Perspektive der Benannten statt der Perspektive der Benennenden in den Mittelpunkt gestellt wird, leistet diese Studie einen neuen Beitrag zur anthropologischen Literatur über Namenspraktiken und Identität und bietet neue Einblicke in die dynamische Konstruktion von Identität in alltäglichen sozialen Interaktionen.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was a labor of love, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have dedicated so much time to a topic that kept my interest and passion ignited. There were many people whose direct and indirect support was invaluable in achieving this goal. While I know the power of a name, it is simply not possible to acknowledge every person who has contributed to my success. If you think you had an impact, you did. Thank you.

A heartfelt thank you to my interlocutors, Anna, Amela, Amon, Elliott, Kristóf, Miriam, Mirjam, Sara, Una, and Yi. Thank you for your openness, for your willingness to share your stories and experiences with me and for allowing me to share them with others.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What all academic research ultimately seeks to do is understand. We want to understand how things interact, what they *mean*. What could the study of nicknames possibly contribute to academic discourse? What questions can be answered through the exploration of nicknames? Nicknames offer a window into understanding identity and the various factors that contribute to identity construction. Identity is complex and multifaceted with numerous influences. Nicknames offer a unique lens through which to explore identity because they are unregulated and contextually sensitive. Nicknames are not bound by the rigid rules and bureaucratic regulations of given or surnames. This lack of rigidity provides an opportunity to study identity in a way that previous academic literature has not yet explored. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to explore the relationship between nicknames and identity, and the various factors at play by exploring how nicknames are embraced, negotiated, or rejected. Diverging from previous literature, I shift the focus from the namers to the named. While some literature on nicknames does exist and is referenced in this thesis, most academic work on the topic of personal names has been dedicated to given names and surnames and their naming practices. As such, this thesis builds on the foundations of previous research on personal names, to understand how nicknames are used in contemporary society, particularly in conjunction with given names.

I remember as a child, around the age of 10 or 11 years old, I learned the etymological meaning of my name. Taylor, the cutter of cloth. I remember being less than enthused by the meaning. Really? Cutter of cloth? I searched site after site, hoping to find a different, more exciting meaning of my name, to no avail. Meanwhile my sisters had names with meanings like “God is my judge”, “people of victory”, “defender of mankind”, “princess”. And then there was me, the cutter of cloth. The etymology of Taylor comes from the occupational surname for a tailor. I always found this literal meaning of my name profoundly disappointing. Taylor just means tailor. It felt so mundane, particularly in comparison to the grandiose meanings of my sisters’ names. While I liked my name, the way it sounded, that it had the letter y, a less common letter in names, I disliked the meaning, which in turn impacted the way I felt about my name. I wanted to be a protector of mankind, or a name that denoted strength, wisdom, nobility. Perhaps this is why I clung so tightly to the story of how I

was named and asked my parents time and time again to tell me the story, which I will tell you now.

I was named after a river. While my mom was pregnant with me, from Monday to Friday, my parents would drive for over an hour to their offices. On these drives, they would discuss potential names. My mom suggested the name Alexandra, but my dad was not so sure about it. Each commute, they passed the Taylor River and each time she would think, “That’s a pretty name.” It was not the first time she had heard the name. When my mom was in her teens, she loved a book by an author named Taylor Caldwell¹. My mom told me, “I loved that I didn’t know if the author was male or female [...] I thought that was such an elegant formal name. [...] I thought it cool to connect you to a writer.” And despite my mom being particularly enamored with the name Alexandra, my parents chose Taylor. I always loved hearing the story of how I was named, I loved that there was a story, that I had a story. I loved the association with a place, a river, that there was a sign I could point to and say, “There it is” [there I am]. To this day when I drive across the Taylor River, it stirs something in me, a sense of grounded identity and belonging. This association, unlike the meaning of my name (I mean no offense to the tailoring profession), made me proud. But the Taylor River was not the only guiding influence. Taylor also happened to be the maiden name of my maternal great-grandmother. The closest I ever came to knowing Ruby Alice Taylor was seeing her name on the printed-out pages of our family tree. And while I never met her and know little else about her beyond her name, I feel more connected to my great-grandmother, than to the other distant and deceased relatives. Ruby Alice Taylor, known to me only by her full name and never simply “Ruby”, and the Taylor River allow me to see myself in my family history and in the world. Through them, I can see my story. It is more than just a name, it is a history, and a home. It grounds me in a locality and in my family history. These associations contribute to my sense of self, to the construction of my identity. It connects me to people and place, moving beyond myself to create a greater sense of self by binding me to others. But what I was named was only ever half the story.

I also took great pleasure in hearing the story of what I *was not* named. As I mentioned, Alexandra was a top contender. My mom really loved the name, she

¹ Taylor Caldwell is the pen name; the author’s legal name is Janet Miriam Caldwell.

thought it was beautiful, but she could not manage to convince my dad of the name. I was nearly Taylor Alexandra, but that ultimately was not chosen either. Despite not being named Alexandra, there is a sense of connection to the name, to the near miss. My younger sister born two years later would become the *real* Alexandra. I always felt this name provided a sense of something shared between my younger sister and I, despite not being shared at all. Afterall, Alexandra was never *my* name. But in the almost, we, my sister and I, were almost different people. The name is hers, but my story is part of hers, I became Taylor so she could become Alexandra. Is this overly poetic or melodramatic? Maybe. But names help to define identity. In English, “My name is Taylor” is interchangeable with the phrase, “I am Taylor.” A name is not simply something that is, that belongs to us, it *is* us. To paraphrase René Descartes, I am named, therefore I am. This aligns closely with the work of N. Scott Momaday’s essay *The Man Made of Words* (1976) where he writes, “My name is Tsoai-talee. I am, therefore, Tsoai-talee; therefore I am. The storyteller Pohd-lohk gave me the name Tsoai-talee. He believed that a man’s life proceeds from his name, in the way a river proceeds from its source.” While I made the connection between Descartes and the power of a name prior to becoming familiar with Momaday’s essay, his words provide a powerful affirmation of the idea that names sources from which identity flows.

The names we use reaffirm our identity, repeatedly, day in and day out. We are constantly defining ourselves and affirming our identity, constructing who we are, in part by defining who we are not. As a child, I along my sisters and friends, would play a game, a thought exercise. We would suggest alternative names for ourselves and each other, musing about which name might “fit” us if we had not been given the names we were. A name would be suggested, and a discussion would ensue, with either harmonious agreement, “Oh yeah, that fits!” or incredulous naysaying, “No way! She is *not* a Monica!” Whenever I played this game or when my parents would tell me the story of my name/could-have-been name, I always had the same thought, “I am *not* an Alexandra. *Maybe* I could be an ‘Alex,’ but Alexandra is not *me*.” By exploring the name I was not given, there is an exploration of self “I could have been an Alex, but not an Alexandra.” My identity constructed by both what I *am* and what I *am not*. I realized throughout these thought exercises the names that felt like they “fit me” were always gender neutral. Not a single classically feminine name ever felt like it fit. Jennifer? No way. Elizabeth? Definitely not. Mary? I think you get the picture. But

names like Riley, Jamie, or Casey were names with which I could more closely envision myself being named. My parents told me that their decision to give me a “gender-neutral name” was very intentional. My mom explained that the decision to give my sisters and I gender neutral names or names with gender neutral nicknames was based on a desire to eliminate a gender bias. My mom explained that she had envisioned the ability for any of her daughters to write their name on a resumé without worrying about being passed over for an interview because of gender². My mom also expressed that she did not like “overly feminine names” because she found them limiting. The more familiarized I became with naming research, the more curious I became about my own relationship between my name and my identity. Had my parent’s naming practices, particularly this example of gender-neutral names impacted my own conceptualization and construction of my identity?

Upon reflection, I have come to realize that the thought experiments I engaged in as a child and adolescent were grappling with the complex topic of identity, that some 15 years later would develop into the topic for my research. Names, or rather nicknames, became the focus of my research in a very organic way. In the summer leading up to the course that would prepare me for writing my thesis, I spent months thinking about what my topic should be. The pressure was on to decide, but the topic was evading me, like grasping at smoke, until a lunchroom conversation with a few colleagues at work reignited a topic I had playfully toyed with as a child, names. As I began to explore names as a research topic, I thought about my own name and nicknames. I thought about my friends and family, my university and work colleagues, and people whose names I know, but had never met. The more I thought about names, the more I found myself thinking about the seemingly obvious “truths.” I identify with my name and conceptualize a name as something that fits or does not fit. *Is this true for others?* I had never stopped to think about the connection between my name and identity, but there it was looming: *Why do I identify with my name? What influences whether I identify with my name or not?*

As I engaged with literature on naming practices, which I will refer to in detail in chapter 2.5, I learned that the chosen name was deeply enmeshed in the identity of the namers, which in a western context were most often the parents. Which made me

² In the United States, it is uncommon to add a photo or demographic information, like gender or age to a resumé or curriculum vitae (CV).

wonder, *how does a name become ours when it is so deeply rooted in the identities of others?* As I began familiarizing myself on the literature available on personal names, the connection between names and identity was seemingly so obvious that previous literature failed to properly explore the connection. A great deal of the literature that exists on given names, surnames and nicknames, focuses on the naming practices of those who decide the names, rather than the identity of the one who bears the name. While an exploration and understanding of the influence, relevance, and importance of naming practices and the role of the namers and their identity is undoubtedly important, there seems to be a rather large gap in the literature. To focus academic attention on the names, naming practices, and namers leaves a rather essential piece of the puzzle unsolved. What do people do with the names they are given? It is for this reason that I set out to explore the relationship between names and identity and it is the connection between names and identity that led me to nicknames.

During the period of my research collection, I came across an Instagram post that said, “Bob is my nickname. Robert is my nicholasname.” At first, the post and its play on words made me laugh. I found it simultaneously humorous and topical, but this post reignited a question that had fallen by the wayside as I poured over literature on names. Where did the term *nickname* come from? In my high school English class, my teacher invited an etymologist to start each session. We learned about the prefixes, roots, and suffixes of words to help us better understand the sum of its parts. Now, all these years later, etymology was coming back around, and the benign Instagram post had me thinking again about the linguistic history of the word nickname. It turns out, nickname has nothing to do with the name Nicholas or the derivative form (i.e., nickname) of the name Nick. Nickname is derived from the Middle English word *ekenname*, formed by combining the words “eke” meaning “also” or “in addition,” and the word *name*, coming from the Greek word *onoma* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In an Instagram post, the Merriam-Webster dictionary also explained how the sound of the word changed over time. See Figure 1 (merriamwebster, 2025).

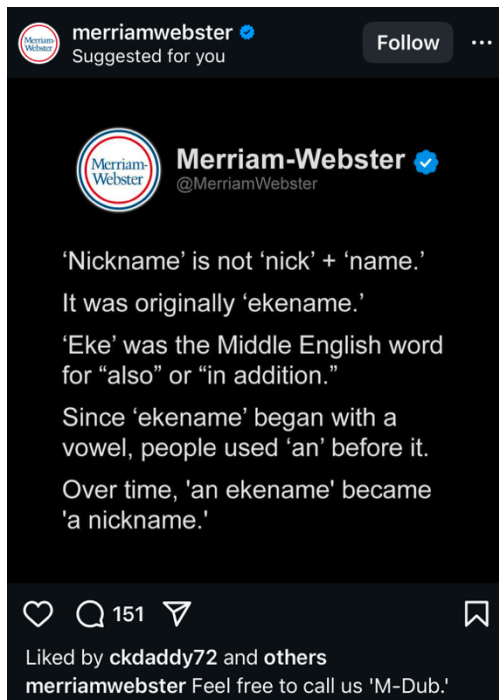


Figure 1: Instagram post by Merriam-Webster on the etymology of nickname (merriamwebster 2025)

An ekename was used as a secondary or unofficial name in the late Middle Ages, and over time, the word changed, first to “nekename” and finally “nickname” as it is used today (Oxford English Dictionary 2023; Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary). Through the etymology of the word nickname, we gain important insight into the historical context of the word; in part it aids in defining what a nickname is and makes clear the fact that nicknames are not merely diminutives of full given names, but additional names and are not a new development, but rather a phenomenon that have been present in social practices for hundreds of years.

In chapter one, I introduced the topic of names, situating myself in my research and introducing the reader to the motivation for choosing the topic of nicknames for a master thesis. As anthropologists, we are tasked with paying particular attention to our positionality. That I knew my interlocutors in some form beyond strangers allowed me a smoother entry into a deeply personal topic, names, stories about relationship dynamics, and identity. Madden (2010) suggests that ethnographic analysis is an exercise of actively making meaning from our data, which he argues requires that we be attuned to the reflexivity and positionality. To make meaning from the data, I had to look not only at the relationships I had with my interlocutors, but also, my own relationship, understanding, and curiosity about my name and nicknames. Nicknames are not simply interesting for interest’s sake. In chapter one I set the stage for my

argument that nicknames are worthy of academic pursuit because they can offer insight into complex concepts such as identity, gender, and belonging and to enable us to better understand, which as I have said at the outset, is the ultimate goal of academic research.

Chapter two introduces the theoretical framework that this research relies on for its exploration, drawing on key theories and concepts from anthropology, specifically identity (see Elias 1987; Eriksen 2010 [1995]; Jenkins 2014; Aldrin 2016; Finke and Sökefeld 2018; Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Included in this chapter is a literature review, presenting a snapshot of the existing academic literature on personal names and nicknames. The foundational literature on personal naming and naming practices acts as an entry-point, allowing for literature on nicknames to be understood in conjunction with names and not apart from them. While this thesis approaches the topic of nicknames through an anthropological lens, the assembled literature is interdisciplinary, drawing on sociology, linguistics, and onomastics. Chapter three moves to the methodology, where I explain the methodological approach this thesis utilized, arguing for the value of qualitative research methods and the advantages of semi-structured interviews. I argue this approach is particularly useful for an exploration of nicknames and identity and has more to offer in this case than would a quantitative study. The methodology chapter will also present a description of my participants, an explanation of how the data collected was analyzed and ultimately synthesized. In chapter four, I present the results of my research. The chapter begins by defining the terms used throughout the paper, which were determined through a combination of previous literature on the subject and the answers provided by my interlocutors. The chapter then moves to a presentation of the results through a narrative retelling of each interview. Chapter five synthesizes the results into themes and presents the overall findings of the thesis and details what this research offers to academic discourse on personal names and identity. This chapter presents a critical discussion on how the flexibility of nicknames offer a unique exploration of the flexibility of identity and the relationship between identity, preference, and autonomy, through reflections on the public and private self, gender, and mechanisms of exclusion and belonging. In the final chapter, the research is summarized, highlighting the contributions and the limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future research.

Ultimately, this research will explore the flexibility of identity through nicknames. Using the concepts of identity, private versus public self, gender, and mechanisms of belonging and exclusion, this study explores how an individual's interaction with nicknames, whether a nickname is embraced, negotiated, or rejected can better explore the flexibility of identity. This thesis aims to contribute to the academic discourse on nicknames and identity through an anthropological lens.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theory and key concepts that establish the framework for this thesis on nicknames. The key concepts of identity (Chapter 2.1), the public and private self (Chapter 2.2), gender Chapter 2.3) and belonging Chapter 2.4) will be explored in the following sub-chapters. I first define identity, drawing on the postmodern and linguist post-structural approach to understanding identity as a continuous process that is socially constructed and flexible (Elias 2001; Eriksen 2010; Edwards 2009; Jenkins 2014; Aldrin 2016; Finke and Sökefeld 2018; Edwardes 2019). The second subsection explores the concept of gender and gendered processes, particularly as it pertains to names and nicknames (Butler 1993; Blount 2015; Pilcher 2017). The final subchapter, I present the concept of belonging (Eriksen 2010; Garde and Meyer 2009) drawing on assimilation theory (Gordon 1961; Alba and Nee 1997; Sue and Telles 2007) laying the groundwork for a discussion of names as mechanisms of difference and belonging (Finch 2008). These four key concepts set the stage for my argument that nicknames and names are not only reflections of one's identity but can be employed as a tool to define and influence identity as well as. While the concepts will be organized into sub-chapters for clarity, keep in mind the interwoven nature of these topics, particularly as it pertains to names. We cannot so easily categorize the influences on or of a name into neat theoretical or conceptual boxes. Gender is not removed from a conversation of identity or sense of belonging, someone's sense of belonging may impact their identity, and vice versa. I will describe in the following pages how these concepts do not stand on their own but are interconnected and interdependent and how they can be employed to better understand names and nicknames.

2.1 Identity

Identity is a concept that several disciplines, psychology, sociology, linguistics, and anthropology to name a few, have sought to explore and define. It is an ambiguous concept and despite being a relatively new concept of interest in anthropology (Finke and Sökefeld 2018) has become a major focal point for the discipline. Because identity is a concept explored in several disciplines, it receives both the benefit of unique perspectives which contribute to the overall understanding and the hinderance of complexity, creating a cacophony of arguments which can make it challenging to find

consensus on not only a definition, but an approach for analysis. Adding to the complexity is that even within the field of anthropology there is an “unclear distinction between identity and related concepts such as self, personhood, and individual, all of which have their own usages and largely separate traditions of scholarship in anthropology” (Finke and Sökefeld 2018, 1). In his book *Small Places, Large Issues* (Eriksen 2010) switches seamlessly from the term self, to identity, to personhood within a single paragraph. It can be challenging to determine when the terms are being used to explore the same or similar ideas and when they are drawing a hard line of differentiation between identity and self, or personhood and individual. For the purposes of this thesis, I do not limit the literature presented to those which strictly use the term *identity*. I do not argue terms such as identity, identification, self/selfhood, and person/personhood, individual can or should be used interchangeably, however, I argue that each term offers insight into the phenomena of identity and are supplementary rather than contradictory terms. By drawing on literature that utilizes a variety of terms, I present a more robust understanding of identity. Rather than limit this research to a singular disciplinary perspective or framework, I draw on the work of Bucholtz and Hall (2005), who presents a sociocultural linguistic perspective on identity, a framework which synthesizes the key work on identity drawn from various disciplines. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) define sociocultural linguistics as “the broad interdisciplinary field concerned with the intersection of language, culture, and society” (586). The interdisciplinary approach to identity, as stated by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) is not intended to disappear the differences amongst the disciplines or disciplinary perspectives. Instead, this interdisciplinary approach showcases the “full range of work” that has been done on language and identity and provides a framework for how multiple disciplines can be employed simultaneously. An interdisciplinary perspective offers a comprehensive toolkit for analyzing identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). As names are part of the human language, I argue that a linguistic perspective is appropriate for this research.

Identity at the most basic level is a tool of differentiation that helps us to determine “Who’s who’ and ‘what’s what” (Jenkins 2014). Identity is formed through the determination of similarities and differences (Jenkins 2014; Simmel 1910). But identity is not merely differentiation or classification. Identity is “embedded in practice” (Finke and Sökefeld 2018, 2). Identity is influenced by external forces and as such is

always social (Jenkins 2014). Anthropology's understanding of selfhood is intrinsically linked to the group as a "socially defined phenomenon, created by both the impression of the group upon the individual and the expression of the individual upon the group" (Edwardes 2019, 27). While Jenkins (2014) and Edwardes (2019) argue identity is always social, Elias (2001) differentiated between individual identity and social identity. He called this the I-we balance, the individual I-Identity and the social we-Identity. Despite this differentiation, the ability for one to perceive themselves as unique individuals, separate from the group is only made possible because people live in society with others (Elias 2001). While there may be disagreement on if or how to further divide identity into subcategories, the authors cited above agree that identity is not a fixed, static concept, but a socially constructed, flexible, continuous process (Elias 2001; Eriksen 2010; Jenkins 2014; Aldrin 2016). Eriksen says that "identity is not fixed, is not 'innate' but is fashioned in the encounter between an individual and a social situation" (2010, 286). It is not only the other person(s) involved, but the situation as a whole, the circumstances, the environment. There are many influences that could impact the social situation which in turn could impact one's identity. Through this, we can understand that individuals do not have a singular identity, but a multitude of complementary, contextual social identities (Eriksen 2010). We can be different things to different people in different circumstances (Jenkins 2014, 17). Identity is a process which is never settled (Jenkins 2014). Despite the flexibility of identity in different circumstances, the flexibility and malleability of identity does not seem to detract from an individual's sense of security in their own identity (Aldrin 2016). Identity is consistent, despite remaining flexible. This "durability and change" of identity as I will explain, is also relevant when studying nicknames.

It is long understood in the field of onomastics that names and identity are intricately linked (Aldrin 2016). Personal names "serve as anchors for individual and communal identities" (Schweitzer and Golovko 1997) The interconnectedness of names and identity has been taken for granted as self-evident and not received a proper examination in academic study. Names and nicknames are more than surface level and by taking the time to explore the interconnectedness of names and identity, we have a deeper, richer understanding of ourselves, others, and social practices, which in turn influence the world and society in which we live. It is not enough to say names are identity are linked; we must dig deeper.

Like identity, names are in essence a form of identification and classification. They are tools that can help differentiate one individual from another. Not Kristóf, but Amon. Not Anna, but Sara. But names are not merely classificatory. They can reveal significant personal information about an individual, such as ethnicity or gender (Finch 2008). You may even be able to determine someone's first language or religion by their name. A nickname may hint at an individual's interests or skills. Nicknames, like identity, are also flexible. An individual may use a nickname in one situation, but a completely different name or nickname in another. I may be called Taylor in one situation, but Tay in another, all without threat to my overall sense of who I am. My identity is both flexible and secure enough to be both Taylor and Tay. Names and name systems should be understood as variable and changing, not as static, fixed, or constant (Ainiala and Östman 2017). It is the flexibility of identity and names make them the perfect pairing. The theoretical approach of identity as flexible is well suited to the study of nicknames (Aldrin 2016) and nicknames lend themselves well to an exploration of identity. Aldrin (2016) argues that there has been little investigation into how the relationship between name and identity develops over time, in different contexts, and in various stages of life. My thesis aims to investigate exactly that, but focusing on nicknames specifically, as they are better suited to explore the flexibility of identity.

According to Elias (2001) the I-we identity "forms an integral part of the social habitus of a person." The name is comprised of two parts, the forename (given name) that acts as a marker of differentiation, indicating a person is a unique individual, and the surname that indicates that individual is part of a group. A name works simultaneously to identify who a person is in their own eyes and who they are in the eyes of others (Elias 2001). The differentiation between the I-Identity and we-Identity should not be understood as two completely independent aspects of identity. Elias argues like Jenkins (2014) that the identity is always social, the I-identity cannot exist without the we-Identity (Elias 2001). There are also many "we's". We differentiate ourselves from others in various social sub-groups, such as the family or the nation state (Elias 2001). According to Elias (2001) both the I-identity and the we-Identity are flexible with the possibility to change.

Identity is complex because it not singular or static. As described above, identity is highly contextual, what influences an individual's identity in one social environment,

may be irrelevant in another. Names, like identity, influence and are influenced by numerous external forces and too are highly socially contextual. As noted by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity is too complex a concept to be contained to a single analysis. The same can be said of names. This thesis cannot present a comprehensive investigation of identity and names; I will invariably miss an important aspect or influence, but it is not the aim of academic work to address every aspect in a singular work, but rather to contribute. Instead of attempting to explore every factor that may influence or contribute to identity as it pertains to names, I explore the themes identified through the data collected from my interlocutors; names as fixed and flexible, names and gender, the use of names in the private versus professional spheres of life, and names as mechanisms of belonging or differentiation. While it cannot cover everything, this thesis contributes new insights to a topic that has garnered little academic attention and offers suggestions for further explorations of (nick)names and identity.

2.2 Public and Private Self

Above we have defined identity as flexible, subject to social context, and that individuals can have a multitude of complementary (social) identities (Eriksen 2010). We can be different things to different people in different circumstances (Jenkins 2014, 17). One such circumstance that has been addressed by anthropology and particularly in the criticized role theory, is the distinction between the public and private persona (Eriksen 2010). One criticism of role theory is that the self cannot be divided into pieces, separated into roles, but as Eriksen (2010) notes, different social relationships require different behavior “tailored to fit” the various situations. We adapt our behavior based on the social context. Much like behavior, names or nicknames are used to fit a certain social context. Eriksen wrote that the flexibility of the public and private self does not often result in problems for the individual, but can cause “conflicting expectations from different persons [...] Which status between two mutually exclusive statuses ought one to choose when one is forced to?” Eriksen (2010, 57). This is also the case with names and nicknames. If your family usually calls you one name, but your friends another, what happens when you find yourself in a social interaction where both names are used? My interlocutors provided examples of how they navigated such conflicts.

Public and private may refer to a sphere, setting, or activity, but the importance is in the differentiation of activities which occurs in public versus private (Van Gunsteren 1979). There are different expectations for behavior (Van Gunsteren 1979). The public sphere, there is an expectation that access is granted to all members (Van Gunsteren 1979). In contrast, in the private sphere, access is determined subjectively by the owner of the sphere (Van Gunsteren 1979). The conceptualization of the public and private spheres can be applied to the study of nicknames. A given name is commonly used in the public sphere, it is generally accessible, while a nickname may be exclusive to the private sphere, although it does not have to be. My interlocutors described utilizing their names and nicknames differently in different social contexts, which is why I have chosen to address the public/private dichotomy. The public/private dichotomy is intimately connected to the concept of identity and should be understood as a supplementary in the presentation of my theoretical framework.

2.3 Gender

An investigation of names without gender would leave out a rather critical part of the discussion. Research conducted by Alford (1988) suggests that “gender is the characteristic most commonly conveyed by a name—more often than any other feature of the child or the child's family” (Lieberson et al. 2000, 1251). Names are embedded in their social contexts (Lieberson and Bell 1992; Finch 2008; Aldrin 2016; Ndlovu and Völkel 2023) and both gender and naming is deeply connected to the social and cultural context (Rossi 1965; Hagström 2012; Reisæter 2012; Palsson 2014). Some naming systems follow an open system, like in the United States, where there is significant flexibility in a chosen name (Blount 2015). There are some restrictions, such as curse words or numbers and cultural constraints or norms that are followed but are generally more open to creativity (Blount 2015). Conversely, fixed systems have far more rigid rules for names. Germany, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland are examples of fixed systems, all of which have a governmentally approved list of names for males and females (Blount 2015). “The Icelandic Personal Names Register contains a list of 1,712 male names and 1,853 female names. Only the names on the list can be used for Icelandic citizens” (Blount 2015, 622). Even in countries where gender distinction in personal names is not mandated like the United States, as Blount (2015) asserts, gender distinctions are often maintained. Quoting Alford (1988) Blount (2015) asserts that gender is the foremost piece of information that personal names carry.

According to Pilcher (2017) “the display of individuality and connectedness through personal names is a *gendered* process” which can be explored through such naming practices as the naming of newborns, the renaming of forenames by transgender people, the change of surnames at marriage, and the naming of children’s surnames (2017, 812). Although it is not universal, many cultures engage in gender-specific naming practices (Blount 2015). According to Butler (1993), through the naming of a child, children are “brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender.” Butler (1993) views naming as not only an initial boundary setting, but the repeated impression of a norm. One such norm, is that of gender. I choose to use the term gender rather than sex, because names are reflective not only of the biological sex at birth, but the gendered practices, norms, and expectations of society. But it is not only practices, norms, and expectations which names must engage with, names can also be regulated by a government. In Austria, a child’s given³ name is deemed an act of parental responsibility as dictated by federal law (Oesterreichgvat - Österr. Digit. Amt, n.d.). The given name of Austrian children must follow certain regulations:

- the chosen given name(s) must not be detrimental to the child's welfare (i.e. is not allowed to be ridiculous or offensive).
- at least the given name of the child must correspond to the sex.
- only two (simple) given names with a hyphen may be joined or combined (e.g. the registration of Karl-Franz-Heinz would have to be rejected as uncommon).
- compound or hyphenated first names are first names that must be used in this form in all official documents and in dealings with authorities and cannot be used in abbreviated form.

(Oesterreichgvat - Österr. Digit. Amt, n.d., translated using DeepL).

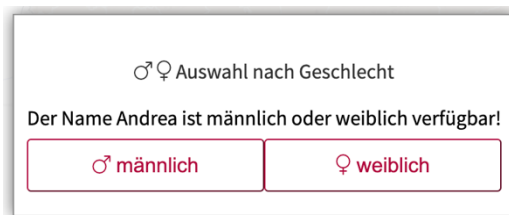
The second requirement of Austrian naming states that the given name should correspond to the gender of the child. The page which displays this information is only provided in German and the term used is “Geschlecht”. In German, there is some ambiguity when translating Geschlecht into English. Geschlecht can refer to either sex

³ I used the term given name rather than first name. The reasoning will be explained in a later chapter.

or gender. In academic literature, the term can be differentiated by adding an adjective, “biologisches Geschlecht” to refer to sex and “soziales Geschlecht” to refer to gender. But the website did not differentiate, leaving room for interpretation. I chose to translate Geschlecht to sex as it is a decision that occurs within 40 days of birth, where a child’s sexual organs are used to determine their gender category. In a Western context, the child’s genitalia at birth determines the sex category, male/female, that they are placed into, and the name is typically aligned with their sex category. Babies born with penises get “boy’s names” and babies born with vaginas receive “girl’s names.” I present this not as a confirmation of the gender binary, but to highlight the assumption that this requirement makes, that names reflect sex which reflect gender and gendered practices. By naming a child Karl as in the example provided on the website, there is an assumption that Karl’s sex is male, and his gender is also male. In some ways, Austria engages in both a fixed and open naming system, fixed in some of its regulations, like that a name must align with sex at birth, while being more open than the Icelandic system as, to the best of my knowledge, there is no such list from which a name must be chosen for citizens.

While not all cultures mandate gender distinct names, research indicates that names follow a “very strong cultural norm” of being sex-specific (Pilcher 2017, 813; see *also* Palsson 2014; Blount 2015). However, even when gender specific names are typical, the categorization of names as a traditionally masculine or feminine name may vary by culture. A name in one context may be assigned to a specific gender where the same name in a different cultural context maybe be assigned to the opposite gender. In the United States, Andrea is a name commonly given to girls and you would be hard-pressed to meet a boy named Andrea, but in Italy, Andrea is a primarily masculine name. In the U.S., the name Jan is associated as a female name, where in Germany and Austria, it is a male name. Despite being a traditionally feminine name in one cultural context and a traditionally masculine name in another, the names follow the gender distinction expected of the respective cultural context. In some instances, names may fall outside the sex-specific categories, even within the same cultural contexts. Some names are androgynous, gender-neutral or names that are applicable to both sex-based categories within the cultural context. This is the case with my name Taylor, in the U.S. context, or Andrea in the Austrian context. Figure 1 below was taken

from Statistics Austria (retrieved January 2025), which states that the name Andrea is available for either male or female.⁴



♂ ♀ Auswahl nach Geschlecht

Der Name Andrea ist männlich oder weiblich verfügbar!

♂ männlich ♀ weiblich

Figure 2: Gender selection by name retrieved from Statistics Austria (Stat. AUSTRIA, n.d.)

But androgynous names are not static. A name is not considered androgynous and there it remains frozen as such in the respective social context for the rest of time. Androgynous names change with society, as society's taste fluctuates, so to, does the relative androgyny of a name,

In the case of androgynous names, parents are dependent on the names that other parents are giving their children. An androgynous name that is used for daughters but no longer for sons is an oxymoron. The problem for "the boy named Sue" is not the inherent nature of the name, but rather that not enough boys have the name Sue at the same time." [...] If parents had an equal disposition to use androgynous names for their sons and daughters, this would increase the chances for a relatively stable level of androgyny. Due to chance factors that affect the gender makeup of the name, instability can develop such that the disposition to use the name for one sex progressively declines with each successive decline, ad nauseam. However, instability is even more likely when the disposition of parents toward androgyny is affected by the sex of the child. Note, this does not mean that parents must have an equal disposition to using the name for either sex. The key is that the number of parents inclined toward using the name for their daughter is equal to the number disposed toward giving the name to their son (Lieberson et al. 2000, 1251).

Lieberson et al., (2000) consider "unambiguous androgynous names" to include names where "each gender comprises at least one-third (and hence, no more than two-thirds) of the children bearing the name". Some androgynous have phonetic patterns that are not strongly associated with a specific gender, for example some names have certain endings that can be understood to be a girl or a boy's name, but "androgyny rarely occurs among names with a strong gender-specific association"

⁴ Choose by gender – The name Andrea is available for male or female! (My translation, 2025).

(Lieberson et al. 2000, 1267). Naming practices are influenced by social norms, and Lieberson et al. suggest that androgynous names rarely remain at equal levels of usage amongst both sexes. The disposition towards giving daughters an androgynous name is higher than for sons (Lieberson et al. 2000). Androgyny, they argue, is “largely an unstable state: the names display a certain pullback in the usage for one sex if the other one begins to take off. Either the male or the female usage of the name may gain a certain level of acceptance, but rarely do they both achieve a similar level” (Lieberson et al. 2000, 1274). The instability of androgynous names and their tendency to gravitate towards one gender or another rather than remaining neutral emphasizes the deeply ingrained nature of gender in social practices, particularly naming practices.

In this way, given names construct, display, and reproduce gender and aid in the continuous “performance and accomplishment of gender” throughout the course of life (Pilcher 2017, 812: 814). While Pilcher states that evidence suggests choices for both forenames and surnames “are normative”, not only displaying gender, but reproducing the patriarchal gender order (Pilcher 2017, 819), names can reflect an intentional lack of adherence to female/male and masculine/feminine categories (Pilcher 2017, 815). In choosing a gender-neutral name, namers resist the normative sex-based name categories, participating in “contradictory embodiment”, or “aspects of embodiment that are perceived to be abnormal or irregular” (Pilcher 2017, 814; see also Connell 2009). Pilcher argues regarding personal names, when normative expectations of the intersection of “bodies, sex category, gender, and forenames” are not met, the result is “*contradictory embodiment*” (Pilcher 2017, 814). Connell argues that “womanhood or manhood is not fixed” but also should not be considered as purely external impositions of social norms, as “people construct *themselves* as masculine and feminine” (Connell 2009, 6). The examples of contradictory embodiment provided by Pilcher (2017) refer to conscious or creative choices in naming practices, whether in an effort for a name to have gender neutrality, as was the motivation for my parents, or as “tools of resistance to the doing of sex and gender as binaries, as well as a means of disrupting the normative gender order” (Pilcher 2017, 819). While contradictory embodiment may certainly be a show of mild or strong resistance to the status naming quo, Pilcher fails to consider, for example in the instance of migration, where a name meets the normative expectations of their ethnic identity and culture, but not the dominant culture.

According to Pilcher, an individual's femininity or masculinity can be disrupted if they or others perceive them to have "a gender-wrong forename" (2017, 814). Citing research by Figlio (2007), Pilcher references a U.S. based study which found that middle school-aged boys with "female-typed names" were more disruptive than boys with more traditionally male names (814). To explain this discrepancy in behavior, Pilcher applied Thorne's (1993) concept of "gender contamination" in which Thorne claims that "tomboys" benefited from association with masculinity, while boys are "contaminated" with their association with "the less advantaged population (814). Androgynous names result in more favorable outcomes for women and girls, as "the advantaged have a greater incentive to avoid having their status confused with the disadvantaged" (Lieberson et al. 2000, 1285). Additionally, research (Coffey and McLaughlin 2009) suggests that girls with names typically associated as boys' names, may gain some advantage through the gender association, "like an increased likelihood of studying science and mathematics" (Pilcher 2017, 814). This exemplifies the way in which names embody gendered practices, not merely a sex categorization.

As Austria is a country that mandates a gendered naming distinction in personal names, it further supports an exploration into unregulated nicknames. Nicknames are in some ways representative of open systems, subject to cultural constraints, yet not regulated in a fixed way, freed of any governmental restrictions. Do nicknames follow gender distinctions as Blount (2015) suggested is common in open systems? Or might nicknames have the potential to move beyond the restrictive gender binary enforced by governmental naming regulations. Nicknames offer a unique place from which to study the intersection of gender, names, and identity.

2.4 Mechanisms of belonging and exclusion

In his discussion of identity, Elias (2001) differentiated between the individual and the group. This differentiation identifies an individual as unique and different, in contrast to a group which has some commonality, some measure of sameness. Inherent in this dichotomy is the establishment and acknowledgement of difference or sameness. You either belong to a group, or you are excluded from it based on an established metric. An individual can be a member of several groups which can vary in size, from a nuclear family to a nation (Eriksen 2010). Belonging and exclusion are central experiences in our everyday lives (Garde and Meyer 2009). Experiences of exclusion range from less

to more serious consequences, from the exclusion from a sports team to the exclusion from a country (Garde and Meyer 2009). The establishment of groups and therefore the mechanisms of belonging and exclusion are not inherently positive or negative, but it is necessary to explore and reflect on how those mechanisms are implemented and enacted.

As noted previously, names provide a significant amount of information about a person and can be indicative of ethnic identity (Sue and Telles 2007). Through this symbolic display of identity, names can be mechanisms of exclusion and belonging, situating individuals within or outside of the boundaries of the dominant group (Sue and Telles 2007; Reisæter 2012; Palsson 2014). Particularly for those with ethnic backgrounds that differ from the dominant culture in which they live, names can be a marker of difference. Those in the position of naming have a decision to make. They can continue the naming tradition of their ethnic identity, adapt to the naming patterns of the dominant culture, or attempt to accommodate both. Sue and Telles (2007) used classical and contemporary theories of assimilation to explore the naming practices of Hispanic parents who gave birth in Los Angeles County in 1995.

Assimilation is a concept that has been rife with conflict in academic discourse, plagued by ethnocentric connotations (Glazer 1981; Alba and Nee 1997). Classic assimilation theory presented by (Park and Burgess 1921) present the process of assimilation as an unconscious one. They argued that assimilation happens with such ease that the individual is unaware of how one has become part of the group. But this ignores the very conscious practices of individuals adapt to the dominant social culture, through such examples as naming or through loss of language. Classic assimilation theory suggests that the longer the immigrant group spends in the new country, the more assimilated they become, and more likely to “leave their traditional cultural markers behind” (Sue and Telles 2007, 1336). In the context of names, classic assimilation theory assumes that the immigrant group is less likely to choose ethnic names their children the more time they spend in the dominant culture. The relationality between names and language in the context of assimilation is of extreme relevance. Loss of language is often a biproduct of assimilation and names as we have already discussed, are important elements of language.

Conversely, contemporary assimilation theory suggests that immigrant groups can maintain their ethnic identity “allowing the persistence of certain ethnic markers” (Sue and Telles 2007, 1410). Sue and Telles’ (2007) findings suggest a different type of assimilation is occurring, one which combines the classic assimilation theory with contemporary theory and suggests that while the old culture declines in some ways, it persists in other ways. I employ their theoretical approach to assimilation but with the caveat to address and acknowledge the power imbalances inherent in the classic assimilation theory. Assimilation according to Eriksen (2010) may be enforced or chosen. Classic assimilation theory is forced while the assimilation theory proposed by Sue and Telles (2007) addressed the element of choice. I employ their theory of assimilation to explore how my interlocutors personal and social identity may be influenced by the concepts belonging and exclusion and what if any adaptive actions are taken to negotiate these mechanisms.

2.5 Literature Review

Various disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, linguistics and onomastics, have deemed the study of names worthy of academic investigation. Scholars have emphasized that names are not merely “arbitrary symbols” (Leslie and Skipper 1990) but are deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts (Ndlovu and Völkel 2023) and are part of “historic systems” (Blount 2015). Names serve as indicators of identity, status, and social relationships (Leslie and Skipper 1990; Finch 2008; Palsson 2014; Ndlovu and Völkel 2023). The socio-cultural functions of names are further highlighted by their role in expressing individuality and social connectedness (Finch 2008; Palsson 2014). Finch refers to the ability of names to reflect both individuality and connection as “the dual dimensions of personhood” (2008, 712). The concept that names are representations of personal and social identity was addressed by Elias (2001).

Names are deeply ritualized and are found in the in/formal rituals of daily life. Upon meeting someone new, one of the very first actions taken is the exchange of names. While the practices that come with name introductions may vary, a handshake (or the pandemic-era elbow bump), a bow, a hug, a nod of the head, a smile, the exchange of names are consistent. Although names, influenced by language and culture, take on various forms, functions, and usages, they are a typological universal, found in all human languages around the world (Ndlovu and Völkel 2023, 1). Personal

names serve a functional purpose, to differentiate us from others (Habibli 2023), to facilitate social interactions with others (Ndlovu and Völkel 2023, 2) while also acting as markers of identity. Think of your name for a moment, what information could a person draw upon hearing it? Aceto states that names are “correlated with one or more socially constructed components, such as language, kinship, social status, ethnicity, nationality, spirituality, or gender.” (2002, 582). A single word packed with meaning.

Names are everywhere. Yet, the omnipresence of names has, according to Palsson (2014), ironically rendered their importance invisible. Despite being a subject that transcends disciplinary boundaries, with contributions from anthropological (Bodenhorn and Bruck 2006; Palsson 2014; Ndlovu and Völkel 2023), sociological (Rossi 1965; Leslie and Skipper 1990; Skipper 1986; Skipper et al. 1990; Lieberman and Bell 1992; Sue and Telles 2007; Finch 2008), and onomastic (Holland 1990; Wikstrøm 2012; Hagström 2012; Reisæter 2012) perspectives, names, and in particular personal names have been understudied in academic discourse. Their social significance stares us in the face, yet we take them for granted as something that simply *is* (Palsson 2014, 619). It is this, Palsson argues, that has excluded personal names from “the theoretical and analytic scrutiny” that they are due (Palsson 2014, 619). Other scholars (Holland 1990; Finch 2008; Pilcher 2017) share Palsson’s incredulity, puzzled by the lack of focus personal names have garnered despite names’ social significance. The anthropological perspective is particularly lacking considering their entanglement with identity and social relations, favored topics among anthropologists. Nicknames account for a minute percentage of the already under researched area of personal names. This thesis answers the call that other academics have made and illuminates yet another understudied area of personal names. This literature review aims to synthesize the existing research on the social significance of names and nicknames, drawing on a diverse range of studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of their roles in identity construction and social interaction.

2.5.1 Foundational Literature on Personal Names and Naming Practices

Personal names in contemporary Western societies hold a very prominent positionality in daily life. Names are omnipresent and used in both written and spoken language. Names are used by friends, family, acquaintances, strangers. It is often one of the first pieces of information we give to or receive from someone. Names offer a deceptively

large amount of information about a person. Beyond their functional use as a label, “arbitrary symbol” (Leslie and Skipper 1990), or tool of reference, they offer a significant amount of demographic information, acting as identifiers of class, gender, ethnicity, occupation, education, language among other social and culturally relevant information (Finch 2008; Palsson 2014; Pilcher 2017). Not only does a name identify where an individual is situated in a social context, it also offers insight into the tastes, preferences, family histories of the namers. Research has seldom focused on the identity of the named and instead focused on the influences on naming practices which leads a namer to choose a specific name or the names themselves.

According to Ndlovu and Vökel (2023) most personal names are not new words, rather they are formed from pre-existing words in a language, and their meanings are socially constructed within the culture with which they are derived. Ndlovu and Vökel (2023) suggest that the cultural influence on the meaning and functions of personal names is displayed through such examples as “their use or non-use (e.g., name avoidance or taboo, honorific forms), naming and name change practices (e.g., at birth or marriage)” (Ndlovu and Vökel 2023, 2). One such example of the cultural influence on the meaning of personal names is exemplified by the name Kevin. In the United States, Kevin is a relatively common name which in Austria and Germany conjures specific associations with lower socio-economic status, referred to as “Kevinismus” or “Kevinism” (Wanshel and HuffPost 2015; Pribyl 2008). In the United States, this negative association with the name Kevin is not present, emphasizing that role of culture in the construction of name’s meaning.

Some literature has focused on how the named individual engages with their name (Hagström 2012; Wikstrøm 2012; Reisæter 2012), particularly addressing how names can act as mechanisms of belonging or exclusion, but the majority of the literature on personal names has primarily focused on naming practices and their influencing factors. Some scholars have focused on the names themselves, examining taste through etymological and phonemic patterns and the influences and practices behind naming preferences (Lieberson and Bell 1992). In this way, names are rooted in the naming practices which produce them (Palsson 2014). Studies of names and naming practices have explored the topics of social relationships (Rossi 1965), taste (Lieberson and Bell 1992), identity (Finch 2008; Hagström 2012), and mechanisms of exclusion and belonging (Sue 2007; Wikstrøm 2012; Palsson 2014). Much of the

research by these authors has focused on how names and their practices are rooted in the identity and social connections of those who do the naming, rather than those who bear the name.

Rossi's (1965) study of naming practices in middle-class Chicago families focused on the role of kin in naming. She found the major influences on naming practices to be kin relations, birth order, and gender (referred to as sex in the study). The study found that children were overwhelmingly named for relatives, 62 percent of the children in her study were named for a relative, while only five percent were named for non-relatives (Rossi 1965, 513). Of those named for relatives, children were most often named for a consanguineal lineal relative⁵ within two generations. Children were less likely to be named after an affinal relative⁶, such as a mother-in-law. Rossi's study found that for those born in the 1920 and those born in the 1950s, there was no difference in the prevalence of children named for kin. What she did discover had changed, however, was that the type of relative sons and daughters were named shifted away from the naming practices which followed gendered lines.

In the 1920s, boys were likely to be named for a paternal relative, while girls were more likely to be named for a maternal relative. However, in the 1950s sons were less likely to be named after their paternal kin and likewise, daughters were more likely to be named for their paternal grandmothers and aunts than in the 1920s. This points to a disruption in the previous trend in which a child was named according to paternal or maternal lineage based on their gender. That this change happened over time supports the need for continued study and exploration of names. It is not enough to study something once to understand it. It required constant revisiting over time to explore what has (not) changed and what the impetus for the change might be.

In the study, gender also played a role in the likelihood of being named for a relative, with girls being less likely than boys to be named for a relative. According to Rossi, this discrepancy can be explained by gender roles, that while "women play the more crucial role in family and kin activities," "men are the symbolic carriers of the temporal continuity of the family. [...] it is the son who is important for the social prestige and perpetuation of the family name (1965, 503-504). As a result of their gendered social roles, boys' names tended to be more traditional, while girls' names were often

⁵ A consanguineal lineal relative is a blood relative, or a relative through birth as opposed to marriage, such as parent to child.

⁶ An affinal relative is a relative related through marriage.

more “fashionable” and had a higher variance. Additionally, Rossi found that birth order dictated the likelihood that a child was named for a relative. The study indicated that first-born children were more likely than later-born children to receive a relative’s name, 78% of the time for first-born sons and 61% of the time for first-born daughters (Rossi 1965). Rossi’s work formed a foundation from which much of the literature on naming practices has been built, particularly concerning how naming, family relations, and gender interact.

Like Rossi (1965), Lieberman and Bell (1992) explored naming practices, however, Lieberman and Bell focused on how names are influenced by social taste. They looked at various factors such as education, race, the etymological origins of names (were the names French, Greek, or Biblical in origin, for example), and phonemic patterns (the “schwa” sound in U.S. American English, as in Jessica [Jess-i-kuh] or long “ee”, as in Stephanie [Steph-an-ee]). Similarly to Rossi’s study, Lieberman and Bell (1992) found that daughters are more likely than sons to be given unique (less traditional) names. Lieberman and Bell classified unique names in several ways, 1) as names that had no history of use in the nation, for example a name of French origin for a US American, 2) an invented name, in that it had not been documented on a list of names, for example, Vanessa, and 3) diminutive names that were formed from a standard name, Lisa from Elizabeth (1992, 548). Lieberman and Bell, like Rossi, found the same connection of girl’s names with fashion, while boys’ names were rooted in tradition.

Their study also explored the impact of social class on naming patterns, finding substantial differences between classes, particularly influenced by the mother’s education. Their findings indicated that class differences manifest in preferences for certain sounds, biblical origins, or imagery associated with names, and patterns which reflected class-based gender roles. The study also examines the naming patterns of U.S. black American girls, noting significant differences from white naming patterns that are not explained by educational differences. These differences are speculated to be influenced by broad social changes and attitudes toward maintaining a distinctive black culture. The data indicates that underlying cultural and structural conditions drive taste choices. The findings of Rossi (1965) and Lieberman and Bell (1992), both widely cited in the literature on naming practices, can be used to ask similar questions about nicknames, such as how taste may influence nicknames or the role of gender in

nicknaming practices or new questions, like what nicknames can offer to the discussion of identity or autonomy.

As names are given, the naming practice and the way in which names are decided is an essential element. However, I find it curious that so much literature has focused on the namers and the names themselves but have paid little attention to those that bear the name. As argued by Finch, Palsson, and others the duality of names, as expressions of individual identity and social relationships, is demonstrated through the naming practices of the namers. However, in failing to include the named person, the relationship between names and identity cannot be fully explored. A name may be given, but that name is transferred to another and with it, the ownership of that name. In Finch's study, it is not the child's individuality and connectedness being understood, but the parents. If, as Palsson (2014) says, names are rooted in social/family relationships, could it be that the child's name and therefore individuality and identity is not just rooted in the social/familial relationships of their namers, but utterly determined by them? Their identity in this way is like their names, given. Yet individuals seem to express ownership over their name. At what point does the name shift from expressing the namer's identity to that of the named? The current literature lacks the exploration of how individuals experience their name, identify with it, and engage with it over time. This gap limits the discussion of identity and social connectedness to the namers and omits the crucial perceptions of the one who bears the name. This gap in the literature on personal names sets the stage for the research question at hand.

This research sets itself apart from previous literature on personal names by centering the voices that research has predominantly left unheard and by focusing on nicknames rather than given or surnames. Following the example of literature on personal names, this research sets out to understand how adults get their nicknames, from whom they get them, how they engage with them, and in which contexts they embrace, negotiate, or reject a nickname. Furthermore, this study explores how nicknames are used by adults to express identity and individuality, and how they can be indicators of social connection or social distance. Ultimately, this study seeks to explore how the individual bearing the name experiences their name and how their name influences their identity and autonomy over their identity, particularly when the

practices from which they received their name are steeped in the identity and social connections of others.

Personal names play an important role in our daily lives and how we communicate, in both formal and informal contexts. Names serve a functional purpose, as a point of reference and differentiation, marking a person as a unique individual, and simultaneously anchoring a person in their social-cultural contexts, in the social relationships and social realities of their lives (Finch 2008). Finch, referencing the work of Norbert Elias (2001) discusses the relationship between names and identity, as names can be representative of both what Elias refers to as the “I-Identity” and the “we-Identity”, where people can be identified as an individual or as part of a group, and perhaps, one more so than the other (Finch 2008, 711). Finch explains Elias’ (1991) assertion that a name combines the “I-Identity” through the given name (I-Identity) and the “we-Identity” through the surname (we-Identity). Finch argues however, that as given names and surnames are both given by the parents, a person’s name is “fundamentally rooted in kinship” (Finch 2008, 721).

A name, she argues, has two dimensions, it is a marker of individuality and one’s social positionality, “indicating my location in the various social worlds I inhabit.” (Finch 2008, 709). Finch describes the dual dimension of names as “individuality and connectedness,” something that both distinguishes us from others and “roots” us in our social relations, “...the marking of a child’s individuality remains central to the selection of children’s forenames [...] the process of naming a child therefore roots the statement of a person’s individuality within family relationships.” (*Finch 2008, 721*). Can the same be said for nicknames? What function do nicknames serve in society? Keeping in mind the influence of language and culture on names, this study takes into consideration demographic, linguistic, and cultural influences. My research suggests that identity can be understood beyond the binary of duality of individual, “I-Identity”, and group “we-Identity”, introducing a third identity, which will be discussed later.

2.5.2 Identity as flexible

Despite the interconnectedness of names and identity which Aldrin (2016) states has “long been considered self-evident in onomastic literature,” identity is often viewed as complex and difficult to define. Research on the topic of naming and identity has been conducted through a primarily binary lens, identity as personal, what Norbert Elias (2001) refers to as the “I-Identity” and identity as social, what Elias calls the “we-

Identity". Elias (2001) argued that given (first) names are expressions of the "I-Identity" or expressions of uniqueness and individuality while surnames are expressions of the "we-Identity", conversely marking one as part of a social group and emphasizing sameness. Other scholars such as Finch (2008) and Wikstrøm (2012) have challenged Elias' (2001) binary approach to naming and identity, contesting the assertion that the given and surname can be neatly detached from one another and assigned to either the personal or social identity. Instead, each scholar offers a more complex and nuanced understanding of the way in which names contribute to or influence identity. Finch (2008) asserts that because the given name is "bestowed by parents upon their children," given names and their practices are rooted in kinship and are therefore part of the "we-Identity" as well. This challenges Elias' understanding of given names as singularly contributing to the "I-Identity". Conversely, Wikstrøm's (2012) research suggests that one's surname can also be connected to personal identity, not only social identity and social relationships, as Elias had suggested. One of Wikstrøm's respondents explained her reasoning for wanting to return to her maiden⁷ name. She said, "it is my Thai name that really is me." The respondent expressed feelings of individuality and identified with her Thai maiden name more so than her married surname. Her sentiments about her maiden name highlight the complexity of identity, particularly as it pertains to names. While her maiden name may in some respects root her in her social "we-Identity" of her Thai culture and all the family relations connected to it, her positionality in Norway shifts the significance of her maiden name crossed into the realm of the "I-Identity". In this way, her change in positionality shifted the role her maiden name had in her identity construction from heavily social, to individual identity. Her "I" identity changing and morphing as a result. Rather than the maiden name as a representation of solely the social "we-Identity," it moves beyond the binary confines, into a symbiotic co-construction.

The maiden name highlights the complexity and intersectionality of naming practices, particularly as it pertains to the exploration of identity and gender. In the United Kingdom and United States, in heterosexual marriages, surname practices typically follow gendered lines. In the UK, approximately 90% and in the U.S., 94% of women, changed their surname to their husband's surname. Their children also typically receive the husband's surname (Pilcher 2017, 816). Referencing a

⁷ A maiden name is the surname prior to marriage.

comparative U.S./Russian study by Boxer and Gritsenko (2005), Pilcher suggests that “(heterosexual) women” change their name as a symbol of family connectedness, to mark a new stage of life, or “as a pragmatic means” to indicate the family unit and avoid confusion (Pilcher 2017, 817). Pilcher argues that this supports the arguments of previous work indicating surnames are linked to “the display of connectedness and affinities, of ‘We’ identities” (Pilcher 2017; see *a/so* Elias 2001; Finch 2008). Research indicates that women who choose to keep their surname “do so for reasons either of continuity of professional identity, longevity of their birth surname, feminist ideology or some combination of these” (Pilcher 2017, 817). Interestingly, name changes in the United Kingdom are predominantly women reverting to their surnames post-divorce (Pilcher 2017, 817). Both instances of renaming, the change to the husband’s surname, and the reversion to the maiden name, highlight the flexibility and fluidity of identity. It points to the fact that identities can change with names. Additionally, I posit that the decision to revert to the maiden name may suggest that the married surname post-divorce no longer accurately aligns with the “I-Identity” creating tension and perhaps a crisis of identity, which can be relieved by a return to the name before marriage, and in a way, a return to oneself. If so, this would also support Wikstrøm’s assertion of the surname as an indicator of the personal, “I-Identity”.

The work by Finch and Wikstrøm exemplifies that the given and surname are not two pieces of a whole that can be divided into either the “I” or the “we” identities. The given and surname are parts of a whole, the I as part of the we and vice versa. However, missing in the contributions of Finch (2008) Wikstrøm (2012) and Pilcher (2017), is a discussion of the flexible nature of names. Postmodern and linguistic post-structural theories view identity as a socially constructed and contextually flexible process (Aldrin 2016, 4). This theoretical perspective understands identity as “something we *do*” or a “continuous *process*” (Aldrin 2016, 4). This theoretical approach is particularly relevant for studying nicknames, which are informal, unregulated, flexible, and are, as Mickiene and Baranauskiene suggest, “highly context-sensitive” (2023, 93). Aceto (2002, 584) notes that nicknames “often indicate the emergence or creation of a new social identity” which supports the postmodernist and linguistic post-structural theoretical approach to identity as a flexible continuous process. Where official names can only be changed through bureaucratic systems,

nicknames can be changed at will and as Aldrin (2016, 7) argues, nicknames may be better suited to exploring the “flexible nature of identity” than official names.

Bodenhorn’s (2006) work on Inuit naming practices suggests that names contribute to individual identity, and furthermore, the selves associated with those names can be considered several persons (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2009). “But we are not simply talking about Maussian personae in the sense of an actor playing different roles [...] we are talking about multiple personal essences; you are not simply playing different persons; you *are* different persons” (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006, 151). In this way, whether representative of the individual identity, the social identity, or the prescribed identity, names can be tools of presenting as different people, not merely a different role.

Manning (1974) who studied nicknames in the British West Indies, found that nicknames were associated so closely with an individual's identity that they could “find their way into news stories, radio and TV broadcasts, wedding announcements, appreciation acknowledgements, court proceedings, and even obituary and memorial notices” as well as being listed in the telephone directory (124). This exemplifies not only the relationship between nicknames and identity, but also the way in which the informal nickname can be woven into more formal aspects of life, despite remaining outside the confines of the legal and bureaucratic systems.

2.5.3 Names as mechanisms of exclusion and belonging

Sue and Telles (2007) explored the naming practices of Hispanic parents in Los Angeles County in 1995. The authors found that U.S.-born Hispanic parents invoked the naming process to effectively maintain their “ethnic origins” while simultaneously assimilating to the dominant U.S. culture. Ethnicity according to Eriksen (2010) like identity, is complex. It is multi-layered and “occurs when cultural differences are made relevant through interaction (Eriksen 2010, 277). Eriksen explains ethnicity as defined by Moerman (1965) and other anthropologists must be understood as “an aspect of a relationship, not as a property of a person or group.” (Eriksen 2010, 277). Ethnicity is then cultural differences of one group made evident through the interaction with another group. Sue and Telles (2007) investigated how naming practices impact and are impacted by immigration and assimilation, particularly the gendered process of assimilation. The study considered the linguistic properties of the most popular 500

names, exploring gender differences and parent's attitude toward socio-cultural assimilation through naming practices. The study looked at names that were translatable into Spanish or English, coding names by if the names had an equivalent in English (Michael) or Spanish (Miguel) respectively or if the name was considered native in both languages (Andrea). Their finding that U.S.-born Hispanics were "much more likely than immigrant Hispanics to give sons translatable English names" could be indicative of rapid assimilation, or alternatively, a new type of assimilation "bridging" the old and new culture. Where the old culture declines in some ways, it persists in other ways (Sue and Telles 2007, 1410).

The findings suggest that translatable names can bridge the gap between the "mainstream and traditional cultural practices" (Sue and Telles 2007, 1410). However, yet again, gender played a role. Daughters were more likely than sons to have American names. Sue and Telles (2007) looked to the work of Rossi (1965) and Lieberman and Bell (1992) to explain the gendered practices, i.e., sons as "carriers of the family line" and the gendered naming practices in which fathers play a larger role in naming their sons and mothers in naming their daughters. The authors suggest this provides only a partial explanation and does not fully explain the discrepancy (Sue and Telles 2007, 1410). Additionally, they offer that sociology of immigration may help fill in the gap, as the findings suggest the immigrant parents "feel a stronger need to protect their daughters compared to their sons" which may contribute to a lower likelihood of daughters receiving an ethnic name, fearing that discrimination or stigmatization could limit the possibility of upward mobility (Sue and Telles 2007, 1411).

Similarly, Palsson (2014) explored how names situate people in social space beyond their classificatory role, both personifying and embodying. Beyond the traditional purposes and functions of names, Palsson engaged with themes of social and symbolic capital, kinship and lineage, categorization, and power. Power is particularly important in Palsson's discussion of how indigenous naming practices clashed with Canadian bureaucratic policies, emphasizing the not only the regulatory aspect of naming practices, but the way through which names and their naming systems can operate tacitly and explicitly as "technologies of differentiation and belonging" (Palsson 2014, 627). Sue and Telles' (2007) theory of assimilation and Palsson's (2014) understanding of technologies of differentiation and belonging both point to the role that names and practices can reinforce the status quo of the dominant

culture and highlight the complexity and intersectionality that names and their practices inhabit.

Reisæter (2012) explored mechanisms of exclusion and belonging by examining how immigrants experienced Norwegian naming standards. Reisæter investigated how adults (in the case of adult name changes) or parental naming practices were influenced by a desire to continue traditional naming practices or to adapt to Norwegian naming standards. The study suggests the respondents place the link to family history as highly important, and that any alterations to one's name has a practical and mental impact on one's sense of self. Additionally, the findings indicated that immigrants try to both – officially or unofficially – maintain the tradition of their country of origin's naming practices and adapt to Norwegian naming practices. This supports the work done by Sue and Telles (2007) that explored classic and contemporary assimilation theories and ultimately suggested that the assimilation theories converge, resulting in the old culture declining in some ways while persisting in others (Sue and Telles 2007, 1410). In addition to considerations of kinship, Reisæter explores some practical and bureaucratic reasons for certain naming decisions. The themes of integration/assimilation, bureaucratic clashes, and fashion/taste addressed in the article are echoed in the works of other authors (see Sue 2007; Palsson 2014, Lieberman and Bell 1992).

2.5.4 Nicknames: Structure and semantics

There is no formal ceremony or regulatory process for the creation and bestowal of nicknames. Typically, nicknames are given or received in a “serendipitous” way (Manning 1974, 124). There is no formal paperwork, just a spontaneous moment of exchange. In essence, nicknames are an additional (remember the etymology of eke) or alternative name to the given name. Like personal names, the meaning of a nickname depends on the socio-cultural context. Most often, nicknames are created and maintained by people within the nicknamed individual's social circle, friends, family, and individuals from their different social contexts (Aceto 2002, 582). Nicknames can be employed in daily conversation when speaking to and about a person. Like given and surnames, nicknames distinguish individuals from others and provide additional “culturally significant” information (Manning 1974, 132). Aceto (2002) distinguishes nicknames from pseudonyms, regarding the role the nickname bearer (the nicknamed) has in the naming process. According to Aceto, nicknames

reflect certain descriptions or social relations that the nickname giver (the nicknamer) ascribes to or emphasizes about the nicknamed, while in the case of pseudonyms, the nicknamed makes this decision (Aceto 2002, 583).

Nicknames can be internally or externally derived formations (Aceto 2002). Internally derived nicknames are creations based on the original name that share phonetic or semantic similarity with the given or last name (Aceto 2002, 582). Alex as nickname for Alexander is an internally derived nickname. Conversely, externally derived nicknames attribute certain qualities or characteristics, such as physical attributes, personality traits, certain behaviors, or other individually, culturally or socially relevant descriptors (Aceto 2002, 583). Additionally, some nicknames may not have a direct relationship to the nickname bearer and may instead be an arbitrary attribution.

A significant portion of the literature on nicknames suggests that nicknames are associated with childhood (Aceto 2002; Manning 1974; Skipper et al. 1990; Leslie and Skipper 1990; Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023) and nicknames that originate in childhood have the potential to “stick” and may follow an individual beyond adolescence and into adulthood (Aceto 2002; Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023). In their study on nickname usage amongst Lithuanian youth, Mickiene and Baranauskiene (2023) found that nicknames were less common in their university aged respondents than pupils, however, when asked if nicknames were specific only to young people, 81.1% of pupils and 86.1% of university students responded negatively (91). Additionally, their findings indicated that pupils’ motivation for nickname use were usually related to external attributes, internal attributes, and metaphorical nominations, while university students were more likely to use situational aspects (Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023, 93), indicating that the shift of environment from school to university changes how nicknames are created. This presents new evidence to suggest that nickname creation is not limited to childhood. While nicknames may often originate in childhood, (see Manning 1974; Aceto 2002) the literature suggests that nicknames have the potential to “stick” and may follow an individual beyond adolescence and into adulthood (Aceto 2002, 582, see *also* Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023). Manning (1974) argues that nicknames can occasionally be gained in adulthood, though it is uncommon. I challenge this

suggestion, offering that new insights may indicate nickname creation in adulthood is perhaps less uncommon than previous literature has indicated.

Nicknames like given names, are most often “assigned” rather than chosen by the individual (Aceto 2002). Even more so, Aceto argues that nicknames are “often assigned to individuals against their will,” introducing the concepts of power and autonomy. This leads to a question at the heart of naming studies, *who has the power to name?* Aceto argues that even if nicknames “stick”, it is rare for the recipient of a nickname to use said nickname self-referentially. My research seeks to determine if this is indeed the case for respondents.

According to Alford, “It appears that abusive or derogatory nicknames are more common than neutral or positive nicknames” (1988, 82). Overwhelmingly, the research on nicknames has defined them as often holding negative connotations (Morgan 1979; Aceto 2002). This was surprising to read, as in my cultural context and social sphere, nicknames were used with exceptional frequency and “abusive or derogatory nicknames” were a rarity. It begs the following questions, 1) has there been enough studies done on nicknames to draw the conclusion that they are more often negative than neutral or positive, and 2) if it was true, has that perhaps changed? The findings by Mickiene and Baranauskiene (2023) in their work on Lithuanian youth offer a counter to the existing literature, suggesting that contemporary nicknames reflect a confirmation of social inclusion, identity, and friendship rather than to be derogatory or abusive (Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023). The survey data suggests that nickname use is associated with group inclusion, building “unique identities, friendships, close relationships and mutual communication rules” and that assigning a nickname is a “value-based process” (Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023, 92).

2.5.5 Gender and nicknames

Aside from age, the literature also suggests that boys/men are more likely than girls/women to be known by nicknames (Manning 1974; Holland 1990; Leslie and Skipper 1990; Smith 1970), however, there has been next to no contemporary literature which attempts to confirm or dispute this notion, although Klerk and Bosch (1996) is one such investigation. In their study of South African adolescents, Klerk and Bosch’s primary data found almost no gender difference in having a nickname or not, although in their conclusion they assert that their findings suggest that males (89%)

were more likely than females (73%) to have nicknames, particularly in single-sex schools, which indicated 93% and 95% respectively. Although their data suggests boys are more likely to have a nickname than girls, in light of previous research, such a statement is misleading, presenting nicknames as if they are a uniquely male experience (Klerk and Bosch 1996).

Prominent literature asserts that nicknames are more commonly established in childhood and that boys are more likely than girls to have, give, and use nicknames. Much of the literature, even more recent studies from the early 2000s, cites literature from the 1950s and 1970s when discussing the factors of age and gender. I argue that nicknaming literature lacks contemporary data, leaving academics in the field unable to certify the validity of these statements. This is the gap in the literature to which I aim to contribute.

This thesis explores the flexibility of identity through the use or non-use of nicknames. I build on the foundational theory of Elias' (2001) "I-Identity" and "we-Identity" and Finch (2008) and Wikstrøm's (2012) contributions that both the given and surname influence and are influenced by both the *I* and *we* identities theorized by Elias, introducing a third identity in the exploration of names, the *you*-identity. I define the *you*-identity as an identity created for an individual by others, one that is ascribed to an individual and may or may not align with either the *I* or *we* identities. Nicknames offer a unique opportunity to explore the dynamic nature of identity and the many influences on nicknames and nicknaming practices.

This study aims to contribute to the limited literature on nicknames and follow the work of Aldrin (2016) to provide theoretical and empirical evidence for the relationship between names and identity, which Aldrin (2016) states has long been stated as self-evident but lacks substantiation. This exploration into nicknames in Vienna serves as an initial study, as this thesis cannot comprehensively attend to all the anthropological influences at play with nicknames. Nicknames, like given names (see Palsson 2014; Sue and Telles 2012; Reisæter 2012), are mechanisms of both exclusion and belonging. According to Mickiene and Baranauskiene (2023) nicknames express solidarity and friendship which helps to form "a distinctive identity and a sense of belonging to a particular group," but can also be used to "offend, humiliate and hurt" others (Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023).

As someone who has interacted with nicknames all my life, my own experience was that nicknames were overwhelmingly signs of affection and a symbol of closeness rather than predominantly a show of power. Not only was the literature on nicknames limited, but I was surprised to read much of the academic literature on nicknames associated nicknames with degradation and power and as something linked to childhood, not adulthood. The use of nicknames as tools of oppression was a stark opposite to my initial research question, namely, can nicknames offer autonomy where given names cannot? What possible conclusions could be drawn from the literature on nicknames? While one such answer I hypothesized could be that the use and function of nicknames had changed significantly over time, resulting in a major discrepancy between what the literature of the 50s and 70s suggested compared to today, my research set out to first understand if my own culturally specific positionality and understanding of nicknames was incorrectly determining a definition of nicknames as positive rather than negative. Part of my research set out to define what a nickname is and how people in Vienna aged 24-45 define nicknames today.

As my interlocutors are Viennese residents from various backgrounds and some with citizenships outside the EU, I was curious if they used nicknames to circumvent mechanisms of exclusion. I suspected that some may use a nickname instead of their given name when their name was challenging for others to pronounce or marked them as “other.” Name changes are common practice in Hollywood and pop-culture. One such example is the actress, writer, producer, and showrunner Mindy Kaling, who shortened her name from Vera Mindy Chokalingam, “because emcees for these comedy shows would have trouble pronouncing it, and then they'd make a joke about my last name.” (Gross 2020). I hypothesized that my respondents might implement a similar approach when faced with mechanisms of exclusion. This thesis explores nicknames by building on the foundational work on given names (see Rossi 1965; Lieberman and Bell 1992; Sue and Telles 2007; Finch 2008; Hagström 2012; Palsson 2014; Reisæter 2012, Wikstrøm 2012). Using the themes introduced by these authors, this thesis explores if the influences that their previous research suggests exists for given names, also influence nicknames, and provides the opportunity to contribute new insights and influences on nicknames not yet addressed by literature on given names.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In the following chapter and subchapters, I outline the advantages of the anthropological methods employed herein and what they can offer to the study of nicknames. This chapter will not only explain the methods of data collection and data analysis were used, but why, justifying why the employed methods were favorable over other methods for an exploration of the flexibility of identity and the relationship to nicknames. As part of the overall methodological approach of this research, I have included a literature review which presents a brief introduction to the foundational literature on personal names, given names, surnames, and nicknames. I chose to add a literature review because while we all have some understanding of names and nicknames, it may be the first time engaging with them in an academic sense. To understand this study, it is useful to reflect on the existing literature as an entry point to the discussion. Additionally, the literature read in advance of my data collection helped me to establish some preconceived themes to analyze in my research, taking a deductive approach to data collection. While not part of this chapter, the literature review was an important aspect of this thesis' overall approach to the research.

3.1 Research Design

Bronislaw Malinowski is broadly credited with establishing fieldwork and participant observation as essential to the field of anthropology. The introduction of his book, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, reads as a “how to” manual for anthropologists, arguing for a scientific approach to anthropology, with a clear process. Ethnography should include extensive time in the field and participant observation rather than theorizing based on “biased” secondary sources (Malinowski 2014, 34-35). Malinowski argued that fieldwork was a necessity and accused other anthropologists of producing facts “out of complete obscurity” (Malinowski 2014, 30). Malinowski’s rejection of the “armchair anthropologist” ushered in a new approach to anthropology, the influence of which remains to this day. Malinowski stressed three main “principles of method” 1) possess scientific aims, 2) live amongst those you would study and 3) apply methods of collection. Malinowski’s second principle entailed fieldwork. It meant going to a “remote” place where the anthropologist must live amongst locals. The “field” then was much more clearly a place, but the field has always been an imagination of the anthropologist’s creation:

Ethnographic fields do not exist beyond the imaginings of the ethnographer. [...] One of the first commitments one makes as an ethnographer is to make a field; we must engage in this particular and disciplined form of place-making we call fieldwork. The construction of an ethnographic field allows for an investigation of the socialization or enculturation of a particular space. [...] An ethnographic field provides an interrogative boundary to map on to a geographical and/or social and/or emotional landscape that is inhabited by a participant group (Madden 2010, 39-40).

The field is imagined by the anthropologist/ethnographer⁸ to provide focus and establish the boundaries of what is inside or outside the scope of the research. As anthropology has progressed, the “field” has become less synonymous with place, particularly with the introduction of anthropology at home, digital anthropology and urban anthropology. Due to the nature of my topic, my field and fieldwork differ from the traditional Malinowskian conceptualization. Anthropological fieldwork entails participant observation, one of the elements of which is interviews. The field I *imagined* borrowing the term from Madden (2010) was not a place to which I could go, like a community hall, where the same group of people congregate. My field was defined by place and age (Viennese residents between the ages of 24-40). The entire city of Vienna would have been far too large a field site, but as my interlocutors were based all around the city of Vienna, not all of whom were part of the same social circles, I needed to establish a more flexible, more abstract conceptualization of my field. In one sense, my field was wherever my interlocutors were, each formal and informal interaction an opportunity to listen for how others interacted with their (nick)names. I listened for if someone used a nickname that my interlocutor had expressed not liking to me in our interview or the incorrect pronunciation of a non-German name by a colleague. I observed the body language, and conversations that followed those interactions.

By relying heavily on interviews, my research diverges from the Malinowskian conceptualization of “fieldwork” and participant observation, but that is not to say that I have not conducted participant observation. Interviews themselves are a mainstay of anthropological and ethnographic methodology and a major element of participant

⁸ Ethnography is a methodological approach within anthropology, “a form of non-fiction writing that is based on systematically gathered data from fieldwork and other relevant secondary sources. From the combination of research and writing ethnographers build theories about the human condition.” (Madden 2010, 34).

observation. According to Skinner, the interview is “a *part of* participant observation and not *apart from* participant observation.” (2012, 35). Additionally, my research incorporates participant listening (Nesbitt 2002; Forsey 2010). Forsey made a case for the importance of listening, that “listening is at least as significant as observation to ethnographers” and that “above all else, what ethnographers do is listen” (2010, 563). With this, Forsey’s aim is not reduce or attack the importance or relevance of visual description to anthropological or ethnographic work, but to point out the visual bias in Western and scientific culture, about which Forsey asserts there is “a good deal of consensus” (2010, 560).

Instead, my field was mobile; it was where my participants were. My “field” was a conference room, a café, my living room, the online meeting rooms where my online interviews were conducted. My fieldwork in some ways differed from that of traditional anthropological fieldwork, but the aims remain in line with those outlined by Malinowski,

“This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world. We have to study man, and we must study what concerns him most intimately, that is, the hold which life has on him. In each culture, the values are slightly different; people aspire after different aims, follow different impulses, yearn after a different form of happiness. In each culture, we find different institutions in which man pursues his life-interest, different customs by which he satisfies his aspirations, different codes of law and morality which reward his virtues or punish his defections. To study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behaviour and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realising the substance of their happiness—is, in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man.” (Malinowski 2014, 63-64)

This quote is particularly applicable to my research and is precisely what I argue has been lacking in the literature on personal names up to this point. We can study names and nicknames, we can explore the functional role they play in social relationships and bureaucratic organization, but to truly understand their influence, role, and power, we must explore how the named themselves understand and value nicknames. It is not enough to study naming practices because how one is named is only half the story. As such, I chose to conduct my research using semi-structured, qualitative interviews to hear firsthand how the named interact with their name.

Snape and Spencer (2003) explain that qualitative research methods are particularly appropriate for research questions that aim to understand or interpretate

complex, contextually embedded social phenomena. Qualitative research aims to provide “an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world, by learning about people’s social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Snape and Spencer 2003). My research was particularly interested in the social realities, experiences, and history of my interlocutors through an exploration of names and nicknames. With the name and nickname as a focal point, I engaged with complex concepts, such as identity, the public/private dichotomy, gender, and belonging. Nicknames were the social phenomena of focus through which to learn about the social world of my interlocutors. The complexity of the topic at hand and the nature of my research question, made clear to me that a qualitative method of data collection and analysis was best suited for the aim of my research.

3.2 Data Collection

My interlocutors were Vienna residents aged 24 to 45, including seven females and three males. At the time of the interview, four interlocutors held Austrian citizenship, five were Viennese residents with citizenship from other European countries, and one Viennese resident was from a non-EEA⁹ country. Five of the interviewees had master's degrees, four held bachelor's degrees, and one interviewee had a double bachelor's degree in progress at the time of the interview. Data was collected through ten semi-structured, qualitative interviews of about one hour, and took place online or in person. All interviews were recorded, and notes were taken in a field diary. All interviews were conducted in English with all participants possessing academic or business-level English. The sample was gathered through my personal and professional network, through an Instagram post seeking interviewees or word of mouth. Conducting interviews with personal contacts with whom some level of connection or relationship had already been established, allowed me to dive deeper into certain topics. This also enabled me to ask questions that would not have been otherwise possible, either because the questions might have been too personal for a stranger to ask or because I had personal knowledge about them that allowed me to pursue specific lines of questioning. The way that I recruited my interlocutors also meant that they self-selected as interviewees, leading those who had enough interest in the topic and were already willing to share information on their names to participate.

⁹ A country not part of the European Economic Area.

My interlocutors are representative of a highly educated portion of Viennese residents. As previously mentioned, education is a strong influence on taste (Lieberson and Bell, 1992), thus the lack of educational variance among participants in this study limits the discussion of taste in the context of nicknames. Despite this limitation, it provides a potential avenue for future anthropological studies of names in Vienna where the level of education is considered and thus a deeper discussion of taste in the context of naming can be had.

As noted above, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in not only the questions asked, but also the sequence in which they are asked. I had a list of fixed questions which were intended to broach the topics of identity, social connection, autonomy, and taste. The questions intentionally focused on all aspects of the name; given, middle (when relevant), surname, and nicknames. While I did have a list of fixed questions, I employed a more flexible approach to the semi-structured interview in which the sequence of the questions or the phrasing was not the same in each and some questions I chose not to ask at all. The flexibility of this method allowed me to tailor each interview to the individual. As a result of the flexible, conversational approach, some questions were created in real time during the interview in response to a story or theme the interviewee had introduced. I chose to question my interlocutors about all elements of their name to explore the different roles and influences each element of their name had on their identity and to compare these formal, regulated names with the informal, unregulated nickname. I felt it necessary to first learn from my interlocutors what their full name (given, middle and surname) meant to them to better understand a nicknames role. The list of interview questions can be found in the Appendix.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis used both an inductive and deductive approach throughout the research, which Madden (2010) describes is the task of ethnographic research, to find the middle ground between bottom-up and top-down. The interview questions were established through a deductive approach; by using the existing literature and theory on names and nicknames, I was able to identify areas of interest for the research. At the same time, the semi-structured, open question format of the interviews allowed for an inductive approach in that my interlocutors could tell me information about their name(s) which they deemed important or worth sharing. The themes which echoed

the literature or common themes noted across interviews provided guidance on later interviews. The data collection and analysis in this way were cyclical, each influence the other and engaging in both an inductive and deductive approach. The first step of the analysis drew on the field notes, identifying preliminary themes that occurred in the notes from each interview. This analysis occurred throughout the data collection, and if a theme identified in a previous interview was mentioned, a note was made in the field diary, for example, I would write and circle “respect” or “identity” after a quote which either implicitly or explicitly referenced the theme.

After this analog version of thematic categorization, the data was analyzed using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti. Each interview was automatically transcribed using software, and mistakes or inaccurate transcriptions were corrected during a detailed transcription and coding process. Using a qualitative data analysis tool, the data was analyzed using thematic coding, identifying and categorizing recurring themes in the interviews. This research employed a deductive approach, using themes addressed in previous literature on given names as the foundation for building. The thematic coding analysis indicated nicknames as indicators or cultivators of social closeness, the influence of the environmental context on nicknames, the division of the personal and the professional spheres, and the flexible versus fixed nature of nicknames. These themes align with the broader academic discussions on autonomy, taste, identity, and social connections in the context of naming. While reading through the transcripts, common themes found across interviews were coded and categorized. Codes included “mechanism of exclusion”, “mechanism of belonging”, “identity”, “gender”, “respect” and so forth. Some codes were later grouped together, like “easy”, “short”, “common” or “spelling” and “pronunciation.” A close reading and re-listening of each interview from the beginning to the end was conducted. This provided further support and relevant quotations for themes identified in the earlier stage of analog analysis, as well as the identification of new themes.

Following the detailed transcription and coding analysis, each interview received a secondary close reading that focused on specific highlighted sections that addressed the relevant themes. From these sections I extracted direct quotes that highlighted the themes identified throughout the interviews. In the presentation of data collected, each interlocutor and their interview are presented as its own chapter. The chapters are a

non-linear retelling of each interview, highlighting the thematically relevant conversation and leaving out redundancies or parts that though interesting, were not relevant to the overall findings. This way, the results section of this thesis enables each interlocutor to speak for themselves, in their own words, before synthesizing and analyzing the results in the discussion. I have chosen to present the results in this way. To avoid speaking for my interlocutors, instead presenting the findings in a way that enables them to speak for themselves before conducting my own analysis, allowing for a co-construction of meaning and knowledge making. This design allowed for an in-depth investigation and analysis of the use of nicknames in adulthood and how nicknames are used. The analysis of the qualitative data presented in this thesis compares and contrasts the naming practices of given and surnames with nicknames, offering new insight into how and why nicknames are used in adulthood, how they are created, and what makes a good nickname.

One limitation of this study is that the naming and nicknaming practices themselves could not be directly observed. Instead, I had to rely on my interlocutors' perceptions, and the retelling of their experiences without the possibility to observe how they and those who used their names interacted with the names. There could have been some nuances and interactions that the interlocutors themselves were unaware of that an outside observer may be able to pick up on and thus offer further insights on this topic. It is important to note that my interpretations are situated and partial (Haraway 1988). Despite this limitation, the goal of the study was decidedly to platform the experience of the named, which has been limited in previous literature on naming.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the ten semi-structured interviews conducted with my interlocutors, Viennese residents aged 24 to 45, using the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 3. To preserve the voice and stories shared with my, the findings are presented through a narrative retelling of each interview. By presenting each interview as a subchapter, the individual story and narratives of each person are preserved, maintaining the contextual richness of their experiences. Each interview explores how nicknames are embraced, negotiated, or rejected, and how these practices intersect with identity, autonomy, and social connection. The presentation of the interviews that follow serve as the foundation for the thematic synthesis and theoretical analysis that will be explored in the discussion chapter. The interviews are not presented in the order in which they were conducted, but rather in a way in which links the various themes that emerged during the data analysis. Additionally, the interviews are non-linear retellings of each interview are not presented in their entirety. Instead, I have highlighted the thematically relevant conversation and left out redundancies or parts that though interesting, were not relevant to the overall findings.

Before I introduce the findings presented through the individual narratives, it is important to first align the terminology that will be used. As is the case with the concepts of identity (the self, person, personhood, etc.,) discussed in Chapter 2.1, the terminology used in the academic discourse of names lacks consistency. To avoid confusion, I have clarified the terminology. Literature on names has used different terms to reference the same concept. For example, Palsson (2014), uses the terms “personal names” and “surnames” while Rossi (1965), Sue and Telles (2007), and Finch (2008) all use the term “first name”. Following Austrian naming practices, it is clear what is meant by first name and last name/surname. The first name, as the word describes, precedes the middle and last name, and the middle, as the name describes, is sandwiched between the first and last name. Using the Viennese architect Otto Koloman Wagner, as an example: First name: Otto, Middle name: Koloman, Last name: Wagner. However, not all my interlocutors have names that follow this naming structure. In the following sub-chapter, I will outline the terminology used throughout the remaining sections of this thesis, terms that were derived from both the existing literature and the interviews with my interlocutors. The terms defined take into consideration the lived experiences and linguistic contexts of my interlocutors. As will

be explained below, establishing terms that could be understood across cultural contexts was essential to capture the nuances of my interlocutor's experience with their personal names and explore the relationship between these names and their identity.

4.1 Defining Naming Terminology Informed by Interlocutor

In this thesis, I use the term *personal name* to differentiate anthroponyms (person's name) from toponyms (place names). I use the term personal name to reference a part of a person's name, either the given, middle, or surname or these parts combined, referring to both the given and surname as the personal name. In the Austrian context, the Vorname (first name or given name) is the part of a person's name that identifies them as an individual and expresses social identity (Aldrin 2016) while the last name (Nachname/Familiennamen) is the categorization into a particular kinship group (Blount 2015). The last name, family name, surname are often used interchangeably in English. The difference between surname and family name is slightly more nuanced. According to (Hanks and Parkin 2015) "descriptive, non-hereditary bynames—typically derived from locations, relationships, nicknames or occupations—gradually became fixed within family groups and passed down to subsequent generations." The surname was previously a way to further distinguish an individual from others, through description of physical or behavioral features, occupational reference, geographic location, relationships to others, or as it is understood today (Hanks and Parkin 2015). Hereditary surnames as we understand them today, names that are shared and passed down, gradually came into use between the 11th and 14th centuries.

While my research was conducted in Vienna within the Austrian context, not all my interlocutors had names which followed the naming conventions common in Austria. For two of my interlocutors, Kristóf a Hungarian citizen, and Yi, an Austrian citizen with Chinese origins, the name that identifies them as an individual is displayed last while the name that situates them within a group is displayed first. To once again use our Austrian architect as an example, in Austria, he would be Otto Wager, while in China or Hungary he would be Wagner Otto. Kristóf and Yi were my fifth and seventh interviews, respectively. In my prior interviews, I had been using the terms "first name" and "last name" when speaking with my interlocutors. However, these terms led to confusion during my interviews with Kristóf and Yi and required we use different

terminology to ensure we were discussing the same part of the name. In Hungarian and Chinese naming practices, the surname typically precedes the given name, making the terms “first” and “last” names not only confusing during the interview, but inaccurate in their contexts. To use the terms first and last name in my results and discussion would both ignore the cultural nuances which make this research and findings so rich and limit the clarity of the analysis. For both these reasons, I employ the term *given name* when referring to the name intended to mark an individual as unique. However, as noted in the decision to use the term given name, for my interlocutors Yi and Kristóf, the term last name was inaccurate when trying to describe the name which refers to a name shared with a group. Therefore, I avoid using the term *last name* for clarity. Furthermore, in our interview, Kristóf explained that in Hungary, names denoting group connection can be a name referring to family connection, or have meanings related to place or occupation. The term *surname* has been selected for this research over *family name* as it is broader and can encompass the various types of shared names, such as names connected to family, patronymic/matronymic, occupational, descriptive and nickname-based, or toponymic and locational names.

Scholars debate how to define a nickname, particularly whether to include diminutives of given names in the definition (Holland 1990). In his work on coal miners, Skipper explicitly excluded derivatives of a person’s given name in his definition of nicknames, instead defining nicknames as “a name which is substituted for or used alternatively with a person’s given name” (1986, 134). This thesis defines nicknames as an alternative or substitute for an individual’s given name (Skipper 1991), including diminutive forms that an individual uses for themselves or is used by others. This definition therefore would include the surname as a nickname if used in such a way, as well as nicknames used to reference a person’s characteristics, traits, occupations, or social relations. This definition emerged from the descriptions and answers provided by my interlocutors throughout the interviews. Holland posed the question, “Can we exclude short names [derivative nicknames] from a study of nicknaming practices in a particular group without first asking whether the members of that group consider them to be examples of nicknames or not?” (1990, 266). I say definitively, we cannot.

Finally, I introduce and define the term *preferred name*. The history of the term preferred name is associated with the trans and non-binary community and was used

to create more inclusive spaces by providing the possibility for records and documents to reflect a name that an individual chose, as opposed to the name given at birth with which the individual no longer uses or identifies (and typically corresponded to a gender they do not identify with), also referred to as a *dead name* (Lieberth 2020, 17-18). In the early 2000s, the University of Vermont implemented a project that allowed students to provide a “preferred name” in the records system (Beemyn and Brauer 2015). This option was used by trans students as well as non-trans students (Beemyn and Brauer 2015). According to Beemyn and Brauer (2015, 10), of the students who noted a preferred name, “in many cases, they entered a nickname or a shortened form of their name).” Furthermore, Beemyn and Brauer argue that the term *preferred name* is more appropriate for students “who seek to change their name in information system because they go by a nickname” but for trans students this term “often feels trivializing” and for the trans community the term *chosen name* is more appropriate (2015, 8). My interlocutors shared stories in which the name they were called depended on the environment and the people in that environment. While it was a choice of what they were called, it was indeed a *preference*. As Beemyn and Brauer (2015) have suggested, the term *preferred name* is appropriate terminology in the context of nicknames. However, I take the definition of “preferred name” one step further. A preferred name is not a synonym for nickname but rather a flexible, fluid term and can change depending on the context. For example, my interlocutor Miriam described that at work, her preferred name has predominantly been Miriam (given name), while amongst friends it is Mimi (nickname). Yet both Miriam and Mimi are her preferred names. In this way, the preferred name is neither the given name nor the nickname but rather the name that an individual expresses as preferred in the environment or circumstance. It is the environment that dictates the preference.

At the outset of my research, I anticipated that the use of nicknames could enable individuals to exercise autonomy and choice over their identity. Unlike given names which in the Austrian context are bestowed on an individual by someone else at birth, I theorized that nicknames, like the nickname Alex for Alexandra, could present an element of choice that the given name did not. You are *given* a given name, but perhaps you can choose your nickname. My findings indicate that this is partially the case, but nicknames, like given names are often ascribed once again by others rather than by the individual who bears the name. Autonomy through naming, I

discovered, was not found through nicknames, but through *preference*, and preference was context dependent. One of my interlocutors, Una, who had many nicknames, expressed that choosing her own nickname (Luna) offered her “control” as she was the person who initiated its use. She compared the nickname Luna to the many unsolicited nicknames she had received from her grandmother, “I didn’t go up to my grandma and say, ‘Can you call me UNICEF?’” When Una spoke of “Luna” it evoked discussions of control, power, and autonomy which were not present when discussing other nicknames she had been given by others. The nickname Una chose herself in addition to providing autonomy, anchored her in her social connections, as the nickname was the name of her father’s store L’Una (which was in turn named for her). While Una found autonomy through her chosen nickname, she also described instances in which she exercised autonomy through the use of her given name in context-specific instances.

At work, Una exercised her autonomy through her preference to be called by her given name, while in her private sphere, her nickname provided autonomy. The power of preference is perhaps most evident through the nicknaming practices of Amela, who in both her professional and private spheres adamantly refuses to be nicknamed. Through active resistance of nicknames, Amela exercises autonomy over her naming preferences. My other interlocutors described similar examples in which they asserted their preference for a name which further highlighted the importance of preference in the practice of nicknaming. Preference was influenced by various factors which will be described in more detail later. Prior to my interviews, I had predicted that individuals would experience feelings of autonomy through the rejection of their given name in favor of a chosen nickname, but I failed to anticipate the power of preference. The exercise of preference for the given name was also a way to exercise autonomy and construct identity. Individuals exercise autonomy through preference and choice, the choice to continue using a given name or instead a nickname. As a result, I include an additional term, *preferred name*. Having sufficiently defined the terms that we will discuss, I move now to the results, the narrative retelling of the interviews of each of my interlocutors. While each interview shares the nuances of individual experience, I introduce each interlocutor in an order intended to build a layered understanding of the interaction between nicknames and identity, particularly the flexibility of nicknames

and identity and the influential factors of environmental context, gender, and belonging and differentiation.

4.2 Mimi is Me, Me

Mimi grew up being called Mimi. She received the nickname because when she was young, she was unable to pronounce the “r” in Miriam. She always went by Mimi, up until she finished her studies and started working. Driven by a desire to be taken seriously at work and concerned that “Mimi” would not command the same respect, she started going by Miriam. Her closest friends would continue to call her Mimi, but to her colleagues and clients, she was Miriam. She spoke of Miriam and Mimi, and how they were different. Miriam, she told me, tries to be very professional, she works too much, and has the impression of Mimi that Mimi is not so professional and, particularly in a work context, will not be taken seriously. Mimi on the other hand, has an easier time accepting help from others, is not so professional, and is loud and funny and laughs very loudly. Mimi, she said, “feels a bit more home.” She spoke of the way her oldest friends and mom call her Mimi in a warm way, and how that makes her feel, heart warmed. She was known at work as Miriam, until a new colleague, also named Miriam, joined the team. The “other Miriam” did not have a nickname, so she started using her nickname, Mimi, in the office. But when she became part of a serious project, she asked her colleagues (although she told me it was a “strict” decision) to call her Miriam, particularly in front of clients. She expressed concerned that if people called her Mimi, particularly compounded by her “high voice” and being a woman at a construction site, she would not be taken seriously.

About six months before our interview, she made a decision. She said to me, “it was [...] a very clear decision [...] I thought no, I want to call myself Mimi again and I will introduce myself as Mimi.” I asked her what brought this spontaneous, but definitive decision. She said, “Maybe there is a connection of not having so much fun and Mimi for me is a very fun name. [...] Maybe that was a way of bringing a little bit more fun into life.” Mimi, after all, knew how to laugh loudly. Within the same social context of her office, she fluctuated between Miriam and Mimi back to Miriam and back again. At times because of her own desire to be taken seriously, or external factors, like her colleague having the name, and ultimately, back to Mimi because as she told me, she has “always identified more” with Mimi. Her flexible use of her names was not

exclusive to work. When she began dating her boyfriend, she introduced herself to him as Mimi, but because he loved the name Miriam, he called her by her given name. She described the oddity of someone so close to her referring to her by her given name, “Close people always call me Mimi.” The more time he spent with her family and friends, the more frequently he used her nickname, but never in conversation *with* her, only when speaking *about* her. When he spoke to her parents, he would refer to her as Mimi, but when it was the two of them alone, he would call her Miriam. All the people Mimi met through him also referred to her as Miriam, not Mimi. She told me that to only be known as Miriam to her boyfriend’s friends felt like “being someone totally different.”

I asked her if she used her given name for any other reason outside of work and the desire to be taken seriously. She introduces herself as Miriam at times to create a bit of distance. When meeting someone for the first time that she did not feel very connected to, or not interested in, she would start with Miriam. Only after some form of connection had been established, whether it developed quickly, or more slowly, would she offer her nickname as an option, a bridge to friendship. I asked her when the last time one of her particularly close friends called her Miriam, “Never. I think she never did. Never” I asked her how she would feel if this friend called her Miriam instead of Mimi or one of the nicknames, she had for her, “Weird because I could not find a reason why she would do that.” Like she said, people close to her call her Mimi. Her mom also calls her Mimi. Always, except for when she calls her “*Miriam*.” Mimi said the name with a tone that I recognized immediately. The tone that tells you you’ve done something wrong. She confirmed this recognition later in the interview, talking about the tonality of how someone says your name, the way a parent says your name “with this strictness [...] where you always know you’ve done something.” Mimi also twice described how it was not just the name used, but the way someone said her name, once when she spoke of how her grandfather called her Mirle and his comforting voice and the other when speaking of how her boyfriend would call her Miriam and look her in the eyes. She talked about the many senses that are activated by a name. The way it sounds, the way it looks on the page, the fluidity of the name. She took my pen and wrote her name in my field journal, displaying the fluidity of each letter, how they connected (see Figure 2).

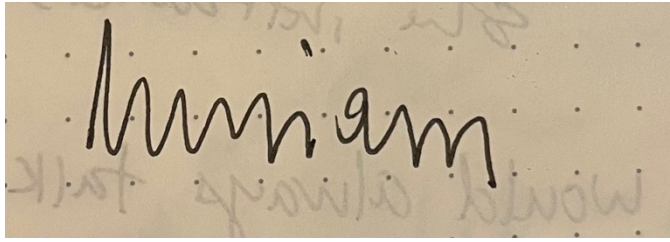


Figure 3: Miriam's name in her handwriting documented in my field journal

A good nickname, Mimi told, should be short and fun. Despite what she told me seems to be an Austrian nicknaming requirement; a nickname does not need to have a story. On the countryside she said, there is always a small story to a nickname, a guy who drinks a lot of coffee, they might call him Coffee. Or you drink a lot, and they call you “Saufig” (from the German word *saufig*, which means easy to drink). Nicknames are something that comfort you and offer a feeling of home, she said. Nicknames can be created out of what in German she said is called “*verniedlichung*”, the –chen, –lein, and –li, –i, that is added to the end of words to make them “cute”. In English, the same is done with an –ie, or –y, Josh becomes *Joshie*, Tom, *Tommy*, Alexandra, *Ali/Allie/Ally/Lexi*.

4.3 Una, The One and Only

Una’s mom was the driving force behind her name. Her father wanted to name her a traditional and “very Serbian name, Milica,” but being born just after the end of the Balkan wars, Una’s mother did not want her to experience discrimination based on her “nationality or ethnicity” that would have been displayed through her name. Una described how her mom chose a more “universal” name that provided neutrality within the historical, socio-cultural context in which she was born. With the name Una, “you cannot know if I’m Croat, if I’m Bosnian, or Serbian.” She discussed the effectiveness of how her name masks her cultural positionality through the story of a panel she participated in with people her age from the Balkans about the war. A Bosnian participant said to her, “Yeah, but you’re Una. We cannot tell if you’re ours, or theirs, or somebody else’s.” This highlights the role names play in situating people within contexts and how names can be used as mechanisms of belonging “ours” or differentiation “theirs or somebody else’s.”

While universality/neutrality played a role in how she was named, Una was also named after the River Una, where she spent her summers growing up. She described

the connection she felt with the river, calling it a safe space and taking time to describe the river, how it can be quite dangerous and powerful, but also beautiful. Its proximity to her grandparents added an additional layer of connection. As the first grandchild in her family and is the only child of her father, she was nicknamed “Una, the one and only.” She described how her name, in her words, defined her personality, how the association of being named “one” and the nickname of “Una, the one and only” fueled her sense of competitiveness, driving her need to be number one. This nickname as “the one and only” was connected to her positionality in her family, not to the uniqueness of the name itself, as she told me that Una is not an uncommon name in the Balkans. She described not liking her name when she was younger, finding it old fashioned and not a name that “popped out.” Perhaps the nickname of the one and only which, as she said, defined her personality did not align with a common name. But her nickname as the one and only took on new meaning for her when she moved to France at the age of ten. For the first time, she experienced people not being able to pronounce her name properly, “In France, I really did become one and only at the end of the day.”

She spoke of her experience assimilating into French culture, “I came to another country and I’m going to adapt. It’s on me.” But she also expected the people around her to adapt, “at least for my name.” In her description, Una expressed that the individual is expected to shoulder most of the assimilation and cultural adaptation process but suggests that assimilation is not just about the individual adapting to the new culture, but also, the new culture adapting to them as well. For her, that meant pronouncing her name correctly. After having lived in France for several years, once she felt integrated into the culture and her community and after becoming fluent in French, she recalls a moment where she finally actively resisted the mispronunciation of her name. “I had six different courses, six different lectures. Every one of them would make the same mistake for the first introduction.” She said that at each lecture, she had to correct their mispronunciation, “I just got fed up.” When the teacher called her name once using mispronunciation, she stayed silent. He called it again. And again, she did not answer. On the third, she raised her hand and firmly said her name correctly. She described the energy in the room, the reaction of her class indicating to her that she “had made some sort of statement.” It was not a singular mispronunciation, but the repeated mispronunciation that caused her frustration. It was the desire for

people to pronounce her name correctly she said, that made her uninterested in using a nickname self-referentially. She said she did not want to use a nickname to make it easier for people to pronounce, she wanted them to pronounce her given name correctly. Interestingly, this is the exact opposite of my hypothesis. Instead of using a nickname to bridge the cultural gap, Una exercised preference for his given name to actively resist the mispronunciation of her name. Her active resistance to the mispronunciation of her name somewhat supports the definition of assimilation theory offered by Sue and Telles (2007). She actively assimilated in some ways, for example through language, yet Una's instance that her name be pronounced correctly could be described as the maintenance of her ethnic identity (Sue and Telles 2007). However, Sue and Telles (2007) example of this bridge between the old and the new culture was through the use of anglicized Spanish names (Miguel becomes Michael), which in some ways could be viewed as more of a compromise of both cultures, whereas in Una's case, her maintenance of her identity was maintained through a fierce insistence on the correct pronunciation and resistance to mispronunciation, requiring ongoing, active resistance.

When she moved to Vienna, she no longer had the issue of people mispronouncing her given or surname. The familiarity of Balkan names due to the high migration from Balkan countries resulted in her name finally being pronounced correctly. However, with the familiarity of pronunciation, came a new worry. "I have an *ić* [itch] name at the end of the day, and this is something that was never a problem in France." Despite the way she views herself, her influences and identity as both French and Balkan, because of the bias against Balkan residents, Una introduces herself as French, "I'm born in Serbia, but raised in France."

When I asked Una about the occasions or environments in which nicknames are used, she replied, "Nicknames are quite an intimate affair. I wouldn't call someone that I am not very close to by a nickname." Nicknames, according to Una are reserved for relationships which have established a certain level of intimacy and "sign of love." She expressed that nicknames are an exchange, where one person offers a nickname, expressing closeness, the recipient of the nickname offers the space to be called by a nickname. One of Una's more frequently used nicknames is a nickname she gave herself, Luna. In response to my question of which contexts she uses her self-ascribed nickname in she said that she associates Una with strength. To her, Una is "like a

whiskey. You know? [...] But Luna is like the moon. It's more feminine, it's more sensual, it's more soft." She described her daily energy being more "aggressive" and characteristics that are more often associated with a "masculine energy." As far as she described, the creation of the nickname itself had nothing to do with creating a more feminine identity, but it does seem to be something she appreciates about this secondary identity. She described each name as if it allowed her to step into and out of feminine or masculine energy. Each conjuring different emotions and representing alternative characteristics which she could embody, deploying her different identities as she deemed fit. Her nickname originally came about in part to protect her identity and data online. However, she noted that the online and offline worlds began to merge. Despite presenting herself offline as Una, she noted that after connecting online, some people would refer to her as Luna or ask her about her name when they met again offline. Despite the offline and online worlds colliding, she intentionally keeps her personal/social media spheres separate from her professional spheres. "At work I am strictly Una."

Una shared with me that in the months before our interview, she had started to think about changing her surname to that of her stepfather. The change was prompted by the bias she faced with her Balkan last name in Vienna. Una discussed concern that her surname would make her unattractive in the job market. She spoke of the role of technology and growing use of AI (artificial intelligence) in job screening and how her name might limit her opportunities. It was not only getting her foot in the proverbial door that she worried about, but it was also future career prospects. Being a woman in a male dominated industry, she expressed concern that her name and country of birth moved her "lower and lower" on the scale. Rather than changing her surname completely from her father's surname to her stepfather's surname, she considered hyphenating it, allowing her to maintain her Balkan identity while adding a surname that is representative of the French identity that she also feels. Changing her surname in this case would reduce the exclusionary effects of her name in Vienna, while also representing her multicultural identity. This supports the assimilation theory suggested by Sue and Telles (2007). One hesitation to this solution was the implication it would have when she was ready to marry, as she anticipated changing her name yet again. For her, to have her father's surname, stepfather's surname, and partner's surname

was “a lot of last names at the end of the day.” This exemplifies the role that name change at marriage can have on identity (Pilcher 2017).

4.4 Kristóf, But You Can Call Me Christoph

Living in Vienna and working at a multicultural, international company where the company language is English, Kristóf hardly hears his name pronounced correctly. Most often, his name is anglicized or germanized to Christoph, but that does not bother him. The pronunciation is similar enough and he likes that his name is international and is so similar in English, German, and Hungarian. He is so accustomed to the mispronunciation of his name in Vienna, that he described the surprise he experiences when someone gets it right. And usually, they are Hungarian too.

Kristóf’s mom wanted him to give him a less traditional name, while his father hoped to continue the Hungarian tradition of giving his son his name, as his father had given him, and his father’s father. They found a compromise in Kristóf. The name, Kristóf told me, means “the bearer of Christ,” which pleased his religious family and fulfilled Kristóf’s mom’s desire for a less traditional name. He likes his name because he finds it unique, yet international. It is different enough to set him apart, but not so different that he sticks out. He described having a given name that “works well in [...] a more intentional environment,” while at the same time enjoying that his last name was “distinctly Hungarian.” He told me, “It kind of carries an, I don’t know, an identity. I wouldn’t say I’m like, super patriotic. I mean, I left the country after all. But still, I think this like, you know, this notion of belonging to, uh, to this, this, this group of Hungarians and being a Hungarian, I think I like that my, my family name carries that.” He liked that his given and surname identify him as Hungarian, but at the same time do not “hinder [him] in everything.”

But he did not always like his name. He told me that as a child he asked his parents why they gave him such a long and difficult name to pronounce, the rolling r in Hungarian particularly difficult to pronounce, especially for children. His nieces and nephews had difficulty pronouncing his name, that’s how he became Tóf Tóf. Kris, or Chris in English, would have been a common diminutive form, but Kristóf does not like that nickname. He was not sure exactly why, even as he paused to think about it more deeply and I kept bringing the question back around. There was just something about the name he did not like. So, no one calls him Kris. His nieces and nephews enjoyed

word play and had a habit of abbreviating longer words with the second half of it, “Tomate” Kristóf explained, became “Mate” and thus Kristóf became Tóf. But Tóf just did not have the right ring to it. The melody was not right. It was missing something, it needed another Tóf, thus Tóf Tóf was created.

Other than the nickname he acquired from his nieces and nephews, Kristóf said he does not have many nicknames. While his friends from school refer to each other by their surnames, he is the only one in the group who goes by his given name. He’s not sure how, when, or why his friends started using their surnames as given names, and he could not pinpoint why he was the only one this rule did not apply to. They also have some gamer nicknames that they use, but that’s about it. Even though he does not have many nicknames himself, he said that nicknames are a sign of a relationship. “You don’t really allow people you are not close with to call you by a nickname.” Nicknames are not to be used by strangers or acquaintances, to do so would be disrespectful. He said that nicknames move you to “the next level” of a relationship. When I asked him how an acquaintance might start using a nickname, how they might get to that next level, he described how nicknames can be transferred through mutual social relationships. Kristóf described how group dynamics or social interactions can influence if and when a nickname is used. He gave the example of a newcomer to a group of friends, the newcomer upon hearing the others in the group refer to Kristóf by his nickname would then be invited to do the same, “So [a nickname is] not like this ceremonial thing. It’s just like, okay, if you are within that circle and you hear someone calling me like that, you are entitled to [as well].”

I asked Kristóf what he thinks makes a good nickname. It was as if he had read the literature on nicknames prior to our interview, “It either can stem from the real name. So, some deviation alteration or some form. [...] or it can come from another aspect. So, I do think that nicknames can be easily acquired [...] And that’s strictly from your, from your, your real-real given name and, um. Um, yeah. So, I think it just like in the end, it has to be short and has to have some very easily recognized connection to you. So, it’s like personal.” Again, I asked him about the nickname Kris. He said in general. Kris is a good nickname, it’s short, but he does not like it for himself. Conversely, Tóf is short, but it’s too short. The stress is not in the right place.

As the interview reached its end, I opened it up to Kristóf to share anything he felt was important that we had not spoken about yet. He said that in reference to our earlier conversation about his given name being international, he was not sure if his mom had the goal that his name be international, it could be coincidence, but he knows that when he and his then fiancé, now wife have children, he wants to give them an international name. Having already discussed it, he shared that for them, the name plays a big role. They want their future child to have an international name that would work well in both Austria and Hungary, to avoid burdening their child with a name that is difficult for others to spell in various life contexts, such as when at a bank or over the phone. By choosing a name that works well in both the Austrian and Hungarian contexts, Kristóf and his wife are consciously bridging the two cultures, which supports the assimilation theory suggested by Sue and Telles (2007).

When it came to the topic of surnames, Kristóf leaned in a less traditional direction. At the time of the interview, Kristóf and his now wife were not yet married, and so the topic of surname change was top of mind. Luckily, he said, they were on the same page. He had no expectation that his wife would take his surname, in fact he felt quite strongly that she should keep her surname. “Why [should she change it]? It somehow signals to me that, okay, you belong to me or something? No, no, no, just keep your name. It’s yours.” He said he would consciously not follow these traditional surnaming practices, not out of a lack of respect for tradition, but rather as a reflection of his own world view.

When asked about the surname naming practices for their potential children, he did not express an explicit wish for his children to receive his surname. He said they had not delved too deep into the topic, but that he thinks his wife would likely be open to their children receiving his surname because it is the “default” that children receive the father’s surname. What he voiced as important for him regarding the surname of his children was that they have a connection to their Hungarian heritage. While they both have a Hungarian surname, he noted that his surname easily identifies him as Hungarian, whereas his wife’s surname could “pass” as German. This is a reaffirmation of what he said he liked about his own name, that his given name is international, yet his surname connects him to Hungary. His views on naming practices

are both an affirmation and rejection of traditional gendered naming practices noted by Pilcher (2017).

4.5 Anna, Anna: Same Name, Different Sound

“I think my parents just liked the name Anna,” Anna told me when I asked her if she knew the story of how she was named. She said that because her parents did not know her gender, they had also picked out a boy’s name, Kilian. She does not like this name, she said, because the name resembles the word “killing.” Other than her assumption that her parents chose her name purely because of takes, she does not know much more about why the name Anna was chosen, “I guess my parents like easy names, not so unique names, because my siblings’ names are also quite common.” In Anna’s family, the middle name is reserved for the godparent’s name, which in her family, was a role to be filled by an aunt or uncle. By the time Anna was born, her sister had already been named for her only Aunt, so Anna’s godparent was her uncle, but because her parents “didn’t want to give [her] a boy’s name” as a middle name, a different name was chosen. Again, she chalked the decision up to taste, saying that they chose her middle name “because it sounds nice” before qualifying that she was not sure about the decision of her middle name either. Although she was not sure of the story, she told me she’s glad she was not given her uncle’s name,

“That would be weird for me. I know there's people out there who have a name of mixed genders, especially, I think it's quite common if you're a guy that your middle name is Maria. I think that is quite common, but for women, I actually don't have an example. So, I'm glad I have a different middle name. [...]. but, I also don't care about my middle name very much. I just go by Anna.”

Anna’s parents chose to follow gender naming patterns over the family naming tradition. She said, “For my parents it was either female or male. So, it was very clear”, girls get girls names, boys get boys names. She says when she was born, gender was not as big of a topic as it is today, now that things have shifted, she views unisex names as more common, but she finds there to be fewer unisex names in the German language than in English.

As with all my interlocutors, I asked Anna to say her full name for me at the beginning of the interview. When she spoke her name aloud, she said her given name with an American intonation followed by her middle and surname with a German

intonation. In the American English pronunciation of Anna, the first “a” is pronounced similarly to the “a” sound in the word cat with a shorted “a” and the second syllable is a schwa sound, the (uh) at the end, (/ˈænə/ (AH-nuh)). Knowing Anna speaks German; I asked her how she would pronounce it in German. “Oh” she said and swiftly pronounced it with the German intonation, with a longer and more open first “A” sound, like in the word “father” with the final syllable pronounced as an “ah” rather than “uh” sound, (/a/, AH-nah). She started anglicizing the pronunciation of her name in recent years because she started speaking English more often, both in a professional and private context. She said she changes the pronunciation to “make it as easy as possible” for the other person and that the anglicized pronunciation is “more international.”

Anna likes that her name is short and common. “If it's common, it's easy. Everybody knows this name. Also, like in different countries, it's very common. So, I never have to explain it,” her name is clear and does not lead to misunderstandings. However, as the pronunciation is different depending on the country, she says she tried to adapt. During a trip to the U.S., Anna said sometimes her names was misspelled, as Ana instead of Anna. When it comes to misspellings, Anna said she does not care if her name is misspelled on a Starbucks coffee, but for official documents, or at work, it matters that her name is spelled correctly. Anna likes that her name is common and easy, but she also wishes that she had a more unique name. In elementary school she said, there were about four Anna’s in her class. She wants a name unique enough that she feels special, but not so unique that it always requires explanation. Her last name, she said, is also a very common name, “My name is not unique at all. My first name is common. My middle name and my last name.” Her name was nothing she ever had to explain to anyone, “and nobody had to ask twice.” Coming from a small town, Anna said she understands why common names are so frequent, because a unique name would result in being made fun of.

She described how her name “sounds so German,” that it easily identifies her as German. Anna expressed that she is sometimes she’s afraid that because of her name, people assume she is “so very Bavarian” and “traditional.” She does not want to be associated with farmers, because as a child, people at school were bullied for living on a farm or whose parents were farmers. She’s afraid that because her name

sounds quite “countryside-ish” that people assume she has a countryside mindset, that she is “a little bit behind,” living life at a slow pace. She said living life at a slow pace is not bad, it’s just different from the way she lives her life, “I don’t have anything against being German or being from the countryside. Um, but I know what others might think about Germany, Bavaria, countryside and so on. So, I’m afraid they will...categorize me.”

Anna said that a good nickname is shorter than the given name. Anna is not a name with a shorter version, at least that she had ever heard, she told me. With four Anna’s, not having a derivative of the name became a challenge. “Usually,” she told me, “if there’s more than one person with the same name, in a class, you would come up with shorter names, like, for example, if there’s Maximilian, then one of them would be Maxi, the other one would be Maximillian, and then maybe the third one is Max. For Anna, that doesn’t really apply.” With Anna, she said, usually you had to use details about the person or use the surname to specify who was being referenced. She described the experience of being in class and hearing her name and needing to look around thinking, “which one?”

Growing up, Anna did not have any nicknames. It was not until she was older that she received her only nickname from a friend, Anna Banana, “because it rhymes,” she told me laughing. As far as using nicknames for others, she said that she usually respects whatever the person introduces themselves as, but there were some exceptions. Her brother for instance, received a nickname from Anna. As a child, when people did not know her name, she would have them guess, giving them the hint that her name was a palindrome (a word spelled the same forwards and backwards, like racecar). The nickname she gave her brother was his name spelled backwards. While Anna backwards is still Anna, David would be Divad. A good nickname, Anna said, should be a shorter version of the name to make it easier, faster, and more convenient, “which isn’t the case for my nickname, but it’s fun.”

One of Anna’s closest friends goes by her nickname instead of her full name. Anna has always called her friend by her nickname as a result, but when she wants to be more serious, or be playful and joke with her, she calls her by her given name. Using the given name in these contexts, Anna explained, expressed the need for them to pay attention, “Listen up. This is important. What I have to say.” She said she also

uses nicknames, specifically *verniedlichung* (adding an *-i* to the end of a name) for her friends when she wants to express sympathy or affection. If a friend expressed a worry or concern about a situation she might say, “Don’t worry, Maxi.” The diminutive form makes the situation or a person cuter, she explained. Anna also expressed that nicknames can be used when being mean, “maybe also, like in a funny way.” Anna also described a time when she started calling a friend by a nickname because of the influence of other people. Anna has a friend with a double-barreled name, a given name which consists of two parts, for example Mary Jane. Anna used to call her friend by her double-barreled name, until she realized that all her friends’ other friends called her only by the first part of the double-barreled name.

Sometimes, she said, surnames can be used as nicknames. She gave the example of a friend who she still refers to by his surname, “I still call him by his last name, because this is just how I got to know him. People saying only his last name.” While she continues to call this friend by the same nickname, she has a different friend who stopped using the diminutive form of his name out of a desire to be taken seriously, expressing that the nickname was outdated. “I think nicknames can change. And it’s fair to ask a person from time to time, ‘Do you still want me to call you a nickname?’ Because that nickname might arise, like during kindergarten, elementary school. So, like very early on.”

I asked Anna about the circumstances in which she might change her name, what the reason might be. She said, “I like the concept of getting married and changing your last name [...] sometimes I’m like, no, I’m gonna keep my name. But other times I think it’s really nice [...] having a real bond with somebody and you’re getting married, and then you share your name [...] but [...] at the same time, that wouldn’t change my identity and my personality. So, it’s like, okay, why should I change my name then? [...] sometimes I’m unsure”

4.6 Yi Comma Pan

Yi was born in China. Yi explained that in China, names are made up of three names: the surname, the first given name and the second given name. He clarified that the second given name is not the equivalent to a middle name, but is a given name with two parts, like Anna Maria or Hans Peter. Although Yi does not have a second given

name, his name follows other traditional Chinese naming practices. Directly translated, Yi, he told me, means discipline. It is common for parents in China to name their children words which would sound prominent or motivating, like Dragon, the Sun or Red, red being a popular color in China and having culturally specific positive meaning. His surname though, has no meaning.

Yi moved to Vienna from China at the age of seven. He (or at the time more so his mother) kept his name and did not Westernize it. He said that he has many friends from China, Japan, and Korea, who changed their name to a more Western name “for many reasons.” He discussed the challenges of his Chinese name in Austria, how it sometimes causes confusion for others, uncertainties of spelling or pronunciation, challenges he said, that a name like Lukas would not experience. He also said Yi is not a name that people can assume the gender, creating the potential for further confusion. Despite the potential confusion his name poses, Yi feels quite comfortable with his name, finding it easy to pronounce, and when people ask about it, he uses his name as an icebreaker.

Yi, as he noted, is not a common name in Austria. When he moved to Austria at the age of seven, he enrolled in school. In China, his name is said as Pan Yi, because the surname is displayed first, and the given name follows. In Austria however, the given name is displayed first, and surname follows, making his name Yi Pan. His mother, not knowing the structural differences of naming in Austria wrote Pan in the space indicating the first name. The cultural difference in naming practices, in this case the display of names created confusion and a mistake in the school forms, that ultimately led to Yi being referred to by his surname, Pan, as his given name for the entirety of his primary school years. Friends and teachers called him Pan. Even to this day, to his school friends, he is Pan.

After high school, Yi began his mandatory military service in Vienna. While he was able to correct the mistake, making it clear that Yi was indeed his given name and Pan his surname, still he was referred to as Pan. As he explained to me, the military uses surnames to refer to its members, and so despite the correction, he was once again, Pan. At the end of his military service and start of university, he began introducing himself as Yi. Yi told me that how people refer to him (Pan or Yi) is connected to the point in his life that he met them. When I asked him if he had a name

that he preferred he told me that he cannot say which name he prefers, but that his surname connects him to those early years at school and his time in the military. At one point, he said that he asked his friends who still called him Pan to instead call him Yi, but the change was “strange” and proved too difficult for his friends to make the switch, “I actually, I left the identity for them there as Pan as my first name.” He tried once to get his school friends to call him Yi instead, but they resisted the change, expressing that it would be “strange”, he suggested it is a “psychological change” that “somewhere in their minds just to reconnect this name with another whole new identity.” As a result, Yi remained Pan to old friends and became Yi with new friends. It seemed to work for him, but he explained that when his old school friends and his new friends are in the same room “there is massive confusion” for them when it comes to his name.

So, Yi lived as both Pan and Yi. At home though, the bureaucratic mistake made no impact. His mother calls him “son” as is common in China. In Austria, he explained, it’s common that children refer to their mother as “Mama”, while mothers refer to their children by their names. But in China, a parent would not use the child’s given name but instead call them “son” or “daughter”. For a parent to use the full name, is an indication that the parent is upset, “if they would use the name then you may realize that you’re in trouble. [...] Because then they’re going to use the full name and then you know you messed up.”

Although he is often asked about his name in Austria, how to spell it, where it comes from, the meaning, he says he understands. He said questions like this “indicates that people to have a conversation with me, or to want, or that they want to know more about my identity and of course, there are people like they try to make a joke out of it because they cannot really accept different names or different cultures or whatever, because yeah, people are different. But I don’t really feel offended in this case. I just have a laugh about that because I experienced that as a, as a young kid as well.” He navigates the questions about his name with understanding and humor, “sometimes I would jokingly say that my Western name is Peter” a reference to the well-known fictional character, Peter Pan.

Yi does not have many nicknames himself he said, aside from Peter, but he said the use of nicknames is “pretty standard” to him. He has many friends with the same name, so one might be called Max and another Maxi, or he calls a friend named

Lukas, Luki. Sometimes the nickname he has for his friends is completely unrelated to the name, "sometimes you just g[e]t nicknames which were developed during the younger ages." Nicknames, Yi said, are a sign of relationship to some degree. He said that if he used a given name to refer to one of his friends that he usually called by their nicknames "it would feel strange" because with nicknames he expresses closeness. To switch to their official name would be a "step back" and a "sign of distancing." Yi said that nicknames are associated with a funny situation, a funny story, or good memories, "where people can link this nickname to the situation."

I asked Yi about his perceptions and feelings about his name, what it means to him. He responded,

"I think a name is [...] more or less a signature of a personality or of an identity. [...] quite standard in the sense people cannot link my name to certain big events or great events. [...] It might be outstanding within the group of Austrians on the list, for example, [...] To be honest, I enjoy the status that my name is different than other names. Because this fact somewhat brings people one step closer to me because people would get curious."

Yi enjoys that his name is less common in Austria, using it as an opportunity to stand out and make connections with people. When it comes to the meaning of his name, he tries to represent the word discipline, working to "turn [his] name into reality, or the meaning into reality." He described how the drive to be disciplined is part of his character and identity. I asked him about his experience with his name in China. Where in Austria his name is less common and he stands out, in China, the naming practices change his experience. He told me that in China, it is common to find "millions of the same surnames, but you cannot or it's not that easy to find the same [given] names." He said that the characters used for names in China could change, so even if the names were the same, the characters may be different. After our interview, Yi sent me the Chinese characters for his name, 潘毅, 潘 for Pan and 毅 for Yi.

Yi and his mother do not share the same surname. In China, he said it is common that wives keep their surname, instead of the western practice of the wife taking on her husband's surname. However, the children take on their father's surname. In thinking about his own approach to the surnaming practices in the future,

Yi expressed uncertainty. He expressed liking the idea of his future wife taking on his surname, but that he would not force it. He said that the choice of her surname would be her decision and that the surname of the children would be a decision that should be made together, just as the given name would be. Although he said it would be “great” if his future wife decided to take his surname, he considered that if he were to end up with a “Western” woman, it might be unusual for her to take his surname, imagining a Western face with a Chinese surname. He described how it might cause confusion for others, hearing someone on the phone introduce themselves with the last name Pan but show up with a face that they might assume would not match the name.

4.7 Amon, “I’m happy I’m a hybrid”

Amon grew up in Austria to an Indian father and an Austrian mother. “Amon, as you can see is not an Austrian or German name. It’s not an Indian name. People are asking me, ‘What is Amon for a name?’ and I say, there is, at least my information of history, the Egypt God of Sun, Amon-Ra or Amun-Re.” While he may share his name, Amon was not named for the God of Sun. Amon’s name is a merger of his parents’ naming preferences. His mother wanted to call him Ahron, a Jewish name and his father wanted to name him Aman, a Hindi name. His mother’s name preference was based on taste, she simply liked the name Ahron, while his father wanted a name that reflected their Indian culture. Amon’s maternal grandmother discouraged her daughter from naming him Ahron. Having lived through the Second World War, Amon described his grandmother’s fear of if history were to repeat itself, having a Jewish name could put him in danger. Heeding her wishes, his parents decided to merge the two names that they both liked, Ahron and Aman, and so his name, Amon, was chosen.

Amon told me that it was important to his father that his and his brothers’ names were “universal” and could be used in both an Austrian and Indian context. His parents met in Russia, and for Amon his name reflected not only his two cultural backgrounds, but also his parents’ international life. “I’m also happy that I am a hybrid. That I can represent the best of both cultures. [...] I can celebrate Christmas and Diwali. I can eat Austrian food and Indian food. [...] I know the specialties of both cultures.” Amon’s appreciation for his name extends beyond the role it plays in bridging his cultural identities.

Amon likes his name because it's unique. In the age of the internet, names play a prominent role. Having a unique name on the one hand, means that his username is always available, but on the other hand, he said it makes him traceable. "I have a twin brother [...] and you can find thousands and thousands" of results for his name, "but with Amon [Surname] you just find me" he said. The uniqueness for him is then a double-edged sword, where the price of ease is a lack of anonymity. Amon also likes the family history behind his name, that his name came about from the merger of his parent's preferences. The fact that his name is featured in the name of a metal band that he likes is also something that he enjoys about his name. But it's not all positive associations for Amon. He may share his name with the God of Sun, but there is a famous Austrian he's not happy to share a name with, Amon Göth. Amon Göth, an Austrian Nazi officer and commandant of the Plaszow concentration camp in Poland, was tried and hung for war crimes (Lewis 2024). He became known as an historical figure through the book *Schindler's Ark* (1982) and later the 1993 film adaptation *Schindler's List* (Lewis 2024). This association was not something he liked, and although the intentions behind his parent's naming decision was not intended to invoke this figure, the name itself is a connection to a darker side of Austria's history. Despite this, we spent considerably little time on this topic, and it is far from the most memorable or important thing that Amon shared with me about his name.

Amon's and his twin brother's given name are quite similar. He said this is common in his family, that the children have names that resemble or rhyme. He told me how the given names and nicknames of his cousin brothers (male cousins) and cousin sisters (female cousins) rhyme. While their given names are more of a beginning or slant rhyme, Amon and his twin brother's nicknames follow the familiar naming pattern of rhyming, both ending in -i that I have come to recognize as common in the German speaking world. Amon's nickname is Moni, but this nickname is rarely used anymore. When Amon was in school, he was told that Moni is a nickname for Monika, and at that age, he did not want to be called a girl's name. He stopped going by Moni after primary school as he switched to high school, he introduced himself as Amon, and that "fixed the issue" he said laughing. He decided that for new people, he would introduce himself as Amon but did not have the expectation for old friends to stop calling him Moni. Nowadays he says it does not bother him, so there are a few people that call him Moni or Mona, but most people, including his school friends, call

him Amon. He said the switch was not hard because he was not mad if his old friends kept calling him Moni. Other than that, he told me, he does not have other nicknames.

He went on to share with me the many nicknames his twin brother has and how each nickname builds off the previous. The diminutive form, the diminutive form and a rhyming word, a play on words that creates a new nickname, and this cycle of naming that plays and builds off the previous, displaying the role of rhyming and sound in nicknaming practices. Knowing that he does not often use a nickname himself, I asked if he uses nicknames for other people. "Yes, sure." he told me. He asks people how they want to be referred to and he respects that choice. Amon shared that he thinks nicknames come from life events, actions, behaviors that they are known for, for quicker communication or to make the name more personal. Offering a nickname to someone, Amon said, is a "sign of trust." But he says, nicknames can be used to avoid confusion, when for example there are many people who share the same name in one environment. In his high school class, there were three Thomas', so they needed a way to distinguish them. One was called Thomas, one was referred to by his surname, and the third a diminutive of the surname. So, a nickname can be used for practical reasons as a distinguishing label, or for emotional reasons, to create or sustain relationships.

During our interview, Amon drew a distinction between judgement and assumptions/associations. He said he does not judge people by their names, "but of course you assume something." Amon spoke of an Indian friend with a typical Austrian name and how the name does not conjure the image of an Indian man wearing a turban. He asked his friend why he had an Austrian name, and his friend explained that his parents wanted them to be easily integrated into Austrian culture. Though Amon did not elaborate further, in thinking about the definitions of the word judgement and assumption. Judgements are about making a decision, more action is involved, while assumptions are somewhat passive, you already have information that subconsciously influences thoughts and beliefs.

I asked what Amon thought his name said about him. "It does not sound rough." Letters not only in the way they sound, but the way they look matters. The visual element of a name, the edges of an A in contrast to the roundness of an O and how these letters and sounds can be symbolic of softness or harshness of character. Even

with the same letter, the type face or handwriting, can convey different meaning, for example the upper-case **A** and lower-case **a** in this font (Arial) have very different visual appearances.

4.8 Amela, Call Me by My Name

Amela was named by her sister, “She thought it was pretty.” To her knowledge, her parents had planned to give her the name of her paternal grandmother, following the tradition that a grandchild be named for a grandparent, a tradition that she said that she was not sure was specifically Balkan or one that is shared in other parts of the world. She was not sure why her parents ultimately went with Amela instead, but she suggested it was because her mother did not want the other name, so they took her sister’s suggestion. Her boyfriend at the time of the interview (her now husband), was named after his paternal grandfather’s, a name she says he hates. She thinks younger generations are less likely to engage in this naming practice, “I mean, I love my parents, but I would not name my child after them.”

Amela does not consider her name particularly “cool.” She gave the example of the daughter of Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively’s daughter, named James. She thought this name was “super cool and bold” to have such a “let’s say masculine name for a woman.” She does not find her name to be bold, but she is upset by people mispronouncing her name. Her name is pronounced Ah-meh-**la**, with the emphasis on the final syllable. Sometimes people pronounce her name by drawing out the vowel with the emphasis on the second syllable, “Ah-**may**-la.” Some colleagues call her Ah-**may**-la she said, visible annoyance overtaking her, rolling her eyes with a smile and saying, “I’m like ‘ugh’ but OK.” But the mispronunciation of her name to Amelia really angers her. She described an instance where a colleague continuously mispronounced her name, “I told her, like 1000 times and she always called me Amelia. For me that was [...] disrespectful [...] I think it triggers the same, ‘Why don’t you listen? And why don’t you take me [...] seriously?’”

Before I could ask a follow up question she said, “And I just want to say, and I also don’t like when people try to make nicknames out of it.” Her in-laws, when speaking to her now husband, call her Lala. She expressed absolute incredulity at this name, “I’m like what the- ?!” Her in-laws never called her this nickname in front of her, only in reference to her, because her husband told them that she does not like the

nickname. “But they can’t help it, but at least they don’t do it in front of me” she told me smiling. Again, she expressed incredulity at a nickname she had received, “Or some people used to say ‘Oh, hi Amil!’ or something like that and I’m like “what the-like...? And then I think from these types [of nicknames], my general hate for nicknames kind of was born.” She gave the example of a colleague who everyone refers to by his nickname, except her, “He always jokes that ‘Oh Amela and my mom are the only people who call me [by my given name].” She said she’s not sure what she is projecting by using his given name, maybe, she mused, that she also wants to take him seriously.

She tries to respect people’s wishes of what they want to be called, “It’s just really hard for me if a nickname sounds really childish. I mean a bit judgy, but do you know what I mean?” She went on to list several examples of colleagues that she refers to by their nicknames because they expressed a preference. Her inclination would be to use their given names, but if someone has made it clear that they prefer a nickname, she prioritizes that out of a sense of respect. She says that for her, if someone would call her by a nickname, she would feel like they do not take her seriously and so she connects the given name with respect for not only herself, but others. In this way it is her expression of mutual respect and reciprocity. She likes to be taken seriously and met with respect; she told me. She said that she felt bold names and titles offer more respect. People offer more respect and reverence to someone who says they are “Doctor So and So” and she has a feeling it is the same with names.

Amela said that some years ago she did some research on her surname and found out that the -ić ending means “son of” although she was not totally certain. She said she did not have any particular feelings towards her surname, no string feelings of liking or disliking it, but similarly to her given name, what is important is that people pronounce it correctly. “Especially I think living in Austria, where people really tend to pronounce it or write it wrongly and so on. I think this is then where my identity to my name got even stronger.” She gave the example of going to the doctor’s office where her name is mispronounced. Instead of the -ić, they pronounce it –ik (ick). She said that her first thought in this moment is that with the number of Balkan people living in Vienna, the pronunciation should be familiar, “You should know how to pronounce it.” The message she receives, she says is, “you and your name. It’s not worth for me

trying to even pronounce it correctly.” In speaking about her experience with her surname living in Vienna, she said her surname can be a signifier of difference.

Amela talked about the association of identity and names. She associates her identity more with her surname than her given name, considering the change of a surname at marriage. “Being the strong feminist woman” that she says she hopes to be, she started to question this surnaming practice. She said of her surname, “that’s me. That’s my identity. I can’t suddenly me Amela ‘Whatever’.” She expressed not being willing to give her surname up, “Everything I am, I did as Amela [Surname]. So, all of my memories, all of my accomplishments is what I connect also with my name. And the thought of me suddenly changing that – um - triggers the feeling of just also putting myself on hold. And like forgetting that part.” She told me that her mother and sister both changed their surnames and expressed regret, Amela does not want to “make the same mistake.” She expressed way in which a person’s success is shared through the surname, telling me that in Bosnia when someone is successful, people say, “Ah that is a successful [surname].” If she was to change her surname she said, the success she achieved would be attributed to someone else, a different family, and that would not be her, it would just be her “on paper.”

As she reflected on whether she had always felt the same way about her name, she said that her wish for people to pronounce her name correctly started as she entered the workforce. She started at the company she is at now at 21 years old, one of the youngest employees. She expressed the connection between age, more so youth, and respect. She spoke of how with each role, it became more important for her to position herself to be taken seriously. “Maybe,” she mused, “someone from Austria with a classic Austrian name wouldn’t feel it, but if you have a slightly different name then you have to do additional work [to be taken seriously].” She spoke of the role of not living in her home country, how here in Austria, her name creates a “different starting point” when it comes to conversations with new people. Amela said that for her, when someone does not pronounce her name correctly or write it correctly, she sees it as an attack on her heritage, but the number of Viennese residents with a Balkan background and surname, most people know how to pronounce it. With some mispronunciations at work where the wrong syllable is stressed, she says she does not mind, “it depends on if I like the person or not – no I’m joking” although I think there was a hint of truth behind her statement. The stress on the wrong syllable is “not

something that changes [her] name completely” and correcting this minor detail is not a fight she deems worth fighting.

4.9 Sara, Spelling Matters

Sara loves her name, she always has, she told me. Her dad had heard the name in a movie and upon confirming it was a Muslim name, decided that if he had a daughter, he would name her Sara. Her mom, she told me, had no say in the matter. Although when Sara's brother was born later, her mom was the one to decide his name. Sara told me that she loved that her name was short and international, the name gives no indication to where she is from. Like Una and Amela, Sara has an *ić* [itch] surname. She told me she “dreaded” having to say her name aloud in Vienna, that she disliked that people could tell immediately where she was from and wanting to hide it. She noted the bias Balkan migrants face in Vienna, the negative connotations and associations of not being “the best example of integrated citizens in Austria.” It's a stark contrast between her given name and her surname. Like Kristóf, Sara described the experience of her given name being international and masking her ethnicity, while the surname marks her as irrefutably from the Balkans. Kristóf displayed his Hungarian surname proudly, while Sara dreaded saying it in Austria and Una considered altering it to distance herself from the associated stereotypes.

Sara spoke of how her last name is constantly mispronounced in Austria and how on her official Austrian documents, like her university diploma, because some Bosnian characters do not exist in the German alphabet, her name was spelled without the Bosnian characters that indicate the proper pronunciation. This was also the case for Amela, who told me that in Austria, the *ć* becomes a *c*. This adaptation is not a straight-forward 1 for 1 solution, the letters are not interchangeable because they are indicative of completely different phonetic sounds. A single letter changes the surname. The same is true for Sara's given name in the context of Bosnia. I have a sister named Sarah, with an “h”, and so being aware of the different variations in spelling, I asked Sara how she felt about the name with or without an h. She told me that she liked the name Sara visually, but also that in Bosnia, Sarah would be pronounced differently, in essence making it a different name, like Taylor and Tyler.

Discussing her nicknames, Sara taught me about the 7th case in Bosnian, which changes her name from Sara to Saro when she is being referenced. According to what

I learned from Sara and Amela, there are no clear rules as to which names change according to the 7th case. For Sara, she becomes Saro, while Amela would remain Amela. She did not like the name Saro and because the rules of grammar seemingly lacked a clear explanation, she rejected being called Saro and instead instructed others to refer to her as Sara. She told me that in Bosnian, the possessive case, “Sarah’s house” would also change her name in a way, but that this was a clear grammatical rule that applied to all names. Through the rejection of Saro, she aligns and affirms her identity as Sara.

Sara told me that she did not have any nicknames growing up, aside from the nickname her father called her, “son” which she told me is a common nickname father’s call their daughters in Bosnia. But “in the last 9 or 10 years” she started receiving nicknames. She said that no one calls her exclusively by any of her nicknames. Instead, her nicknames are employed by certain people in specific contexts at certain times. One of her nicknames, Sari, takes on a common nickname construction in Austria, by adding an “i” to the end, similar to the “y” sound in English. The second builds on this nickname, changing Sari to Sari Bari which the literature indicates is also common. The creation of nicknames through the compounding of parts of a nickname was also noted by Amon as he discussed some of his brother’s nicknames. My family uses a similar nickname to Sari Bari for my sister Sarah, Sarah Barah (pronounced as Bear-uh). This rhyming and repetition that occurs in some nicknames could suggest the importance of sounds and phonemic patterns on nicknaming practices. It was also the case for my interlocutor Anna, who told me one of her nicknames was Anna Banana, which is also a common nickname for Anna in English.

Sara also indicated a nickname she was given that she dislikes, Sarkan. She shared that she instructed her friends not to use this nickname for her, as she really disliked it. “It just sounds like some old fat dude eating kebab or something.” I asked her how she indicated to her friends that they should not call her Sarkan, and she told me she took the direct approach, “Stop calling me Sarkan.” From what I inferred, her friends respected her wishes, but Sarkan was occasionally invoked to tease her, which Boxer and Cortés (1992) argue can be effective in creating bonds. In her description of a time when one her best friend wished her happy birthday and called her Sarkan, she said “I had to laugh.” This exemplifies the way that play, and teasing can positively

affect relationship bonding, when the teasing invoked “nipping” rather than “biting” (Boxer and Cortés, 1992). It likely also requires that her friends are typically respectful of her wishes, otherwise this overt choice to call her after a name she has requested not to be called might have resulted in stronger negative emotions. The established safety and respect perhaps offering the possibility for this kind of play.

When it comes to using nicknames for others, Sara says nicknames for her are indicative of affection. In a work context, she uses people’s given names, unless they introduce themselves with their nicknames. For some relationships, like close friendships Sara said that the nature of the relationships warrants or even may require the use of a nickname, as a given name could be seen as too serious or formal. In this way, nicknames offer closeness, while given names would create distance. As we returned to a discussion of her given name, Sara shared a recent experience regarding her name. She had attended a conference where the language being spoke was English. She introduced herself by pronouncing her name in the anglicized way, “S-AIR-uh” rather than the Bosnian and German pronunciation, where the r is emphasized. But she noticed that a fellow attendee, despite speaking in English, pronounced her name as she would have in her native language. This struck Sara as powerful and she noted it was a turning point for her, vowing to make more of an effort not to adapt the pronunciation of her name in the future. The correct pronunciation of her name contributes to her self-acceptance of where she is from.

4.10 Mirjam the Great “Das Rechte Masse” (The Right Amount)

Mirjam's name was chosen together by her parents. She said the influence of her grandparent's religiosity and the Jewish background of her great-grandparents before the Second World War contributed to the decision to some extent, although she is not sure how much. Her name, she told me, is of the things she is most confident about. She likes it because it’s neutral, not difficult to spell, and she likes the length. Neutral, in the sense that it allows her to experience the world with fewer assumptions about her or her name. Some names she thinks are very connected to the countryside or are indicative of the social class the family comes from. She likes that her name does not allow for any assumptions, “I *think*” she qualified with a chuckle.

Mirjam’s middle name is the given name of her paternal great-grandmother. She said she liked her grandmother’s surname more than the surname she has now.

"I was thinking if I would ever get married to just take this name. Because you can choose. So, I could go back." I asked more about this. She would rather keep her surname, unless it was a very pretty name. On the one hand she expressed a desire to keep her surname not wanting to participate in the history of women changing their surname at marriage but also acknowledged that for her a name change could symbolize "the chance for a completely new identity", a new start. She would make exceptions if the name was beautiful. She explained that how the names, her given name and the potential surname sounded together would matter to her and influence her decision. If it sounded harsh or if it is soft. She gave the example of her name, given, middle, surname, tapping her finger on the table as she said, "it has [...] some kind of rhythm." Not just the sound, but the visual of how it is written, with long-short-long, noting, "So it also looks nice, but I'm also a designer, and we are weird about this." She also likes that her name was not so common, "there were not too many Mirjams." But that because her name is spelled in a less common way in Austria (Mirjam vs. Miriam), she often had to explain the spelling, which she found annoying.

Some people she said are "super strict" about misspellings and mispronunciations of their names, but she does not mind that much. Unless the mistake is so egregious that it is not even her name anymore, like, or if the mistake is on an important document. One thing that she does find particularly ridiculous is that people correct her on the pronunciation of her own surname, telling her that she's mispronouncing it. They argue that she says one of the vowels too long. She said that people also do not pronounce Mirjam the same way as Miriam, though they are pronounced the same way, just with different spellings. They tell her she's pronouncing her given name wrong as well.

Just before our interview, Mirjam had returned from a semester abroad in China. "You get a Chinese name and that is a bit awkward because you're a grown up it's your name. Suddenly you get a new name. It's like, what do I do with this? Is this me? And then it's like sometimes a version of your name that sometimes it sounds similar." She felt lucky she said, because she was able to use her middle name, but the pronunciation was different. The emphasis was on a different syllable. Mirjam told me she was not sure how she felt about getting a new name, but she realized once she arrived that a Chinese name was "really appropriate" and necessary. A colleague told her that her middle name is a Chinese name for them, "I was really happy because,

yeah, it's still me. [...] my friends don't use it, but I use it wherever I sign. Um, and it's in my documents, so it is definitely me. And that felt really good not to have a completely random name." For Mirjam, her name was an important element to feeling like herself. She told me that the name is something that everybody knows about you, it's accessible and so even if someone knows nothing else about you, they often know your name. "I think it somehow; it does define people [...]. You know that idea that you think, oh, that person really is a ... I don't know. [...] there is definitely like a character. I think if you imagine the name, it comes with the character. As for her, she says she's comfortable with the character of Mirjam. Once again, she spoke of the neutrality of the name Mirjam. There are very strong names, she said, names that hold expectations. Like the name Amadeus, from Amadeus Mozart, would hold certain expectations. Mirjam, she said is not too exciting, not too big, but "das rechte masse."

Mirjam has had several nicknames over the course of her life. All the nicknames she has she received from others. She said likes that she can tell what period of her life she met people in based on what they called her and enjoying being reminded of the times in her life, the "past versions" of herself. Mimi, she told me, was one of her first nicknames and one that she had for a very long time until she made the decision to change it, "I think it's really hard to get rid of [...] nicknames." For her, the nickname Mimi was connected to someone "really small and tiny", and she did not want to be so tiny anymore. At 17, she moved to Vienna and did not know anyone, and she told me she thought, "yes, this is my chance" and so, she got rid of her nickname. During her bachelor's degree, she received the nickname Miri from a friend, which she said she liked and used during her studies. One nickname she disliked however, was "Lil". Like Mimi, for her, Lil had a connection with someone small. "The name says something about you" she said, and she did not want to be called little. She later moved to Sweden, where she returned to being called Mirjam, and "kept it that way." Mirjam explained that the change of her name preferences always coincided with a change of environment. New environments offered her the opportunity to "define again" who she wanted to be." Where an official name change would require money, Mirjam said nicknames allow you to modify your name, to "make a choice about something that you did not choose in the beginning" which feels "empowering."

The switch to Mirjam came with a seriousness and a calmness, but also that there is continuity in the name Mirjam. Some names she said, "I don't want to go back

[to]. It's just not me anymore." One nickname she said she really likes, she received from her dad, Mirle. She expressed wanting to introduce herself with this name at times but not being "brave enough" to do so because it questioned if she would be lying.

Mirjam says she has not given others many nicknames, but she has used them. She listens to how they are introduced by themselves and by others and thinks that when it comes to giving a nickname, "you should maybe ask if that's okay." She said that nicknames required a deeper level of friendship and for a nickname to be given or received by someone who was not very close would cause discomfort.

4.11 Elliott, Embracing the New Without Shedding the Old

Elliott was named after her paternal great grandfather. Her parents went out to dinner during the early days of the pregnancy. In the U.S., some restaurants have tablecloths that the diner can draw on. As they ate dinner, Elliott's parents wrote a list of potential baby names on the tablecloth. Ultimately, they decided on Elliott. Elliott thinks that they wanted to choose a family name. She said that they knew once they had decided on her name, that they would name her Elliott and call her Ellie. She grew up being called Ellie until she was 18, until she went to college, and she started asking people to call her Elliott. She did not want to switch over completely to Elliott, she said. She wanted the people who had always called her Ellie to keep calling her Ellie, but to new people, she would be Elliott. She said the switch to Elliott was something she thought about because she liked her given name. In her final year of high school, she experimented with going by Elliott. At the beginning of the school year, one of her teachers was taking attendance and making notes of anyone who had a preferred name other than their given name. When he called Elliott's name, she said she did not indicate that she wanted to be called by a nickname, so initially he called her Elliott. But as the year went on, he started to call her Ellie, she thinks because he heard others referring to her as Ellie. At first, she said that he would still call her Elliott, but she noticed that he would almost blush when he called her Elliott, as if he was calling her the wrong name. Eventually, she said, he called her Ellie. This made her realize that if she wanted to be called Elliott, she would need to completely switch, otherwise people would "feel awkward" calling her Elliott. She decided to fill out all her college applications using

Elliott, not indicating her nickname, Ellie. The decision to go by Elliott in college marked the beginning of a significant shift.

In discussing her decision to start going by Elliott, she said that she felt like she gained a lot of confidence her senior year and Elliott embodied that confidence that symbolized a new start. The name felt cool to her. She liked that it was more individual, “you don’t really meet many female Elliotts” and she liked this aspect. She said that she liked that the name plays with gender. She likes names that are more ambiguous, and she likes that her parents chose to give her a name that is “typically a boy’s name.” In comparing Ellie to Elliott, she said “I think, Ellie to me doesn’t necessarily feel super feminine I don’t think. I think it feels more youthful. [...] it’s almost like sort of more like a maturity thing.” She said that college and the decision to be called Elliott offered her a clean slate and an opportunity to reinvent herself in a sense. It was a sense of confidence, she said, Elliott having the confidence to do things that Ellie might be scared to do. A sense of boldness and self-assuredness, less self-doubt. She said she did not anticipate the impact her name would have on her. She described her experience of going home on Thanksgiving break in November and everyone at home was calling her Ellie. She said hearing the name again created a sense of nostalgia and caused her “to have a little bit of an identity crisis.” Being called Ellie “was a totally different feeling” that she was not expecting. She expected it to be “less poignant” she said. Ellie brought her a sense of comfort and the relationships that she had with those who called her Ellie. She said that having people who knew her well call her Ellie after being away at college with people who did not know her well calling her Elliott reaffirmed her decision to continue being called Ellie by those who had always known her by this name. Elliott explained that it was not a dissatisfaction with the name Ellie that drove her desire to change her name, “I wasn’t necessarily shedding Ellie [...], I was just excited about the possibility of Elliott.”

Elliott explained that there were a few friends at her college that knew her as Ellie. They asked if they should call her Elliott and she replied, “Yeah, that would probably be easiest.” The switch was “a little bit weird” she said but expressed the odd feeling of referring to someone differently than everyone else, like the example of her high school teacher calling her Ellie. But when a family friend that she had known since she was 10 years old joined her at college, she decided to tell her friend to continue calling her Ellie. Her friend called her Ellie when speaking with her, but when speaking

about her to someone else, would call her Elliott. The roommate of her family friend also called her Ellie. I asked her if there was anyone else that she was introduced to as Elliott, but who called her Ellie unprompted. Her roommate started calling her Ellie sometimes she told me. She asked her if she could also call her Ellie sometimes, to which Elliott said yes. Talking about names Elliott said, “A name is so internal, but it’s also external.”

Elliott said something that is important to her is connecting people from different parts of her life. Two friends, one from her school days and one from college, live together but refer to her by Ellie and Elliott respectively. The names each uses reflect the names she introduced to herself as. Elliott went on to share how as her social circle grows, meeting friends' partners or friends of friends, people falling into “Ellie people” and “Elliott people.” She expects to be called Ellie by the partner of a friend who knows her as Ellie, and vice versa for Elliott. Because of her desire to connect people from different times in her life, she often finds herself in the situation where people refer to her differently than the majority of people in that specific context, leading them to ask her what her preference is. This is a difficult question for her to answer because she says, “Ellie and Elliott both feel comfortable to me.” Usually, she defers to whatever is easiest. But it is not only others that refer to her differently. When it comes to self-talk, Elliott says that she refers to herself as Ellie. Whether negative or positive self-talk, she refers to herself as Ellie, “You got this Ellie” or “Ellie you need to calm down.” But if ever telling others a story in which she references her self-talk, it switches back to Elliott. Unless she is with “Ellie people” in which case, the self-talk remains as Ellie.

In Austria, she says there is more of a reaction to her name being a “boy’s name” than she experiences in the U.S. From her understanding she said, the names are more gendered than in the U.S., “If they recognize the name in the first place [...] then they usually say ‘Oh’” her voice rising an octave, with a furrowed brow, shrugged shoulders and an expression of surprise on her face, displaying the reaction she is typically met with. She says it is usually “out of a place of curiosity as opposed to judgement or something.” From her personal experience, she said it seems to be the case that in Austria there are gender-neutral names or fewer names that “defy our stereotypical conception of a gendered name.” For Elliott, that her name “plays with gender a little bit” is one of the things she appreciates about her name. She said it gives her some sense of satisfaction that people’s conception of gender is “tripped up”

when they hear her name. Elliott says that the idea that boys should be named boy names and girls should be named girl names is a “notion based off a certain idea, a certain fixed idea about gender.” And her name displays that this does not have to be the case. Overall, Elliott described very little push-back or challenges with her name in Austria. As Elliott is not a commonly known name in Austria, sometimes it was mispronounced, but she says that she finds the way people pronounce her name in Austria endearing, “Elli-ote”. She can tell when someone “makes an effort” to pronounce her name in an American accent and for her, the slight difference in pronunciation is not an issue for her. What she does notice, but again, does not mind is the experience of people being cautious or conscientious about how they use her name. Because of the association of Elliott with a boys’ name, she says she gets people double-checking with her about her pronouns. She said that in certain contexts with some people she has the sense that there is some trepidation about using her name, sensing that people sometimes worry that they might be dead naming her, using a name given at birth and associated with an incorrect gender identity.

Elliott described the naming process from the other side, describing what it is like to use a name as a reference for someone else. She expressed how referring to someone by the name that they want to be called is a sign of respect. She also noted how a name can influence the identity construction of another, “When someone tells me their name, for me it becomes sort of more...I guess it becomes how I think of them in my brain and then to call them by a nickname I make that switch in my brain and there is something different being expressed there.” As she spoke about her own decision to change her preferred name, she did not address the more rigid aspect of identity construction, but in both her telling of the challenge that others had in using a new name for her and in her own understanding and constructions of others’ identities, there is less flexibility. She presents the “switch” that must be made in relation to others that was not present in her description of her own name change.

I asked Elliot about any negative experiences she had with nicknames. When she was younger, she told me, her babysitter would call her “Smelly Ellie with a belly full of jelly.” At first, she did not like the nickname, but it grew on her because it came from a place of endearment, she said “it became wholesome because it was coming from her from a place of love, and I felt that.” Elliott said the name felt like she was being teased at first, but she grew to like it.

“I think what makes a nickname best is when it comes out naturally, for both parties [...] I want to be someone who nicknames [...] but I don’t gravitate towards nicknaming people. So, I feel like when it’s forced, it’s not a good nickname.” Nicknames are often an expression of love or compassion and representative of the way people relate to each other and how they feel about each other. She said, she feels something different when her mom calls her Joe instead of Ellie, or her friend calls her El instead of Ellie, that signals something to her. The few people that she has given nicknames or referred to by a nickname came about through sports. For sports she said, “something quick and snappy to refer to someone as, so like, the one syllable” are needed on the field. The use of nicknames in sports led her to share her experience on her college frisbee team.

“Are you familiar with the college culture, frisbee names?” she asked me. I did not, but I was about to. At her college, each frisbee team member is given a frisbee nickname. On her college frisbee team, she was known as “Kazoom” and was given it ceremoniously at the end of her first year at a naming ceremony. The older players on the team decide on names for the first year frisbee players. There is a spreadsheet where the brainstorming starts. In the weeks before “Appreciation” the event where the naming happens, people gather and debate what each person’s nickname should be. She was told there was some sort of controversy around her nickname though she does not remember the details. Her nickname, Kazoom, is because she would often “whip out a Kazoo” at their games and the zoom comes from being “speedy on the field.” There is a big event that all leads up to the frisbee players getting their name and from that point on, they are referred by their name on the frisbee field. Who names the players is also significant, Elliott told me, a social and popularity element to who is named by whom. The players get a shirt with their nickname on it, and everyone cheers and there is a “big unveiling” of the name. The frisbee name is not exclusive to the field, it was also used at various social events, on the bus to games, and around campus, though she said frisbee friends might also call her Elliott in the dining hall.

We rounded out the interview by talking about her surname briefly. She did not have too much to share about it, aside from the fact that some people mispronounce it. Her dad always tries to get her to “be diligent about correcting” the mispronunciation, but she says she thinks people sometimes take it personally to be corrected. When it comes to the pronunciation of her given name and surname in Austria she does not

mind if the pronunciation does not sound like it would with an American accent, “I don't really care that it sounds Austrian because the person saying it is Austrian” or from other countries other than Austria, she added.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Each person has an individual story and experiences that are personal and, in many ways, unique to them, but what anthropology seeks to do is to uncover the connective thread in these individual experiences. This discussion analyzes and synthesizes the common themes identified in each interview to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of nicknames in identity construction and social connectedness among Viennese residents aged 24 to 45. While this research focuses on nicknames, given names and surnames are also intentionally explored. Addressing multiple elements of a name in one study is challenging and, in some ways, limits the depth of the exploration. By addressing multiple elements of the name. (given, surname, and nickname), this research engages in a broader analysis, comparing the various elements and dedicating attention to multiple aspects, rather than focusing singularly on one, which would allow for more in-depth analysis. However, by addressing multiple elements of a name, the interconnectedness of the elements of a name is highlighted, thereby offering a more accurate depiction of the way in which each element of a name interaction with each other and can play different roles in their symbolic meaning. This is particularly important as nicknames are often machinations of the given or surname. I argue that research on nicknames cannot be fully understood in isolation, nicknames have an intrinsic link to given names and in some cases, to surnames that must be considered. By exploring the various names (nickname, given name, surname) this thesis offers a robust understanding of the phenomena of nicknames themselves, as well as an exploration of the flexibility of identity. To discuss nicknames in isolation would be to limit the discussion and understanding of the role nicknames have, how they are created, established, and used, and how they contribute to identity construction. As a result, the discussion and analysis conducted in the following pages addresses several elements of the name in an effort to best understand nicknames as tools and symbols of identity.

As noted by Madden (2010), “ethnography is not description for description's sake, it is description and analysis coming together to answer questions and build theories, which in turn can respond to future ethnographic issues and generate future ethnographic theories.” (Madden 2010). In the following pages, I will endeavor to analyze the stories and descriptions of my interlocutors in an effort to respond to current and future ethnographic issues and theories. This research provides ample

ethnographic contribution to the themes and concepts of identity, gender, and mechanisms of belonging and exclusion. The findings of this research suggest that like nicknames, identity is flexible. Names are both symbols of identity and tools that can be used to reinforce or shape identity. The name on its own is a symbol but becomes a tool through interaction and use. The interaction between the named and the namer requires that the two parties embrace, negotiate, or reject the name or nickname and as a result, the meaning embedded in the symbol. It is through this interaction with names that individuals construct and maintain identity. Names, and nicknames in particular, provide a clear example of the complex, multifaceted, and flexible nature of identity. An individual's self-ascribed identity, the I-Identity as Elias (2001) calls it, may be aligned or in opposition to the ascribed identity from the individual's social relationships. That an individual can have several names simultaneously and can adapt to the use of different names depending on the social context or even negotiate or accept a nickname to which they do not particularly like or self-identify with, is evidence of this flexibility. There are a variety of factors that influence if and how an individual embraces, negotiates, or rejects a nickname and thus, their various identities. Gender, social relationships and cultural and environmental context, and relationship closeness are the major influences on nickname usage identified through the research. Additionally, as it pertains to names and identity, it is ultimately the act of asserting preference that provides individual's the most significant autonomy over the construction and maintenance of their identity. The discussion will explore the implications of these findings, comparing them with existing literature on given names and surnames, and addressing the broader theoretical and practical significance of nicknames. Each theme supports the ultimate finding that the flexible and fixed nature of nicknames offer a unique insight into understanding identity and how the duality of nicknames as both a symbol and tool influences the construction and maintenance of identity.

5.1 Nicknames and Identity: The plurality of personhood

Names play a crucial role in the intricate process of identity construction. Names find themselves at the intersection of who I am according to me and who I am according to you. In addition to the ways in which a nickname can influence an individual's identity, Aldrin argues that nicknames can "also contribute to the social identity of the name giver" (2023, 7). In this way, a nickname belongs to two people, the named and

the namer, offering a shared identity. Aldrin suggests that nicknames contribute to the social identity of the name giver through an expression of power, as nicknames display power relations, enacting power through the decision of how others should be identified (2023, 7). Significant literature has addressed the theme of power in relation to naming, addressing the question of who has the power to name people (see Finch 2008; Rossi 1965; Palsson 2014; Sue and Telles 2007; Reisæter 2012; Hagström 2012; Pilcher, 2017) and places (Palmberger 2017; Capdepón 2020; Light and Young 2014; Verheyen 1997). The question of “who has the power to name?” is relevant to the study of nicknames, as my data suggests that nicknames like given names are not self-imposed, though they can be negotiated or rejected altogether, as exemplified by Amela. By exercising preference, individuals can exercise autonomy over not only their name, but their identity. As evidenced through the stories of my interlocutors, the importance of exercising preference varied. Amela vehemently rejected her nickname, while others like Elliott and Yi were more willing to adapt to the preference of others. As Aldrin (2023) suggests, power relations are undoubtedly present in naming practices and must be considered, however, nicknames also have connective power. My data indicates that in the years since the work presented by Skipper (1986, 1990) the role nicknames play in society and social relationships has changed. Much of the literature has identified nicknames as a way to degrade, rather than connect, yet my research indicates nicknames are overwhelmingly used as a means of social connection and intimacy. This is further explained in chapter 5.3.

In the descriptions of their nicknames, the concepts of personal and social identity as described by Elias (2001) emerged when discussing the topic of identity. In some ways, nicknames represented the “I-Identity,” boasting an individual identity and personhood as “me,” as was the case with Una’s nickname that she gave herself, Luna. In other instances, nicknames, like some of the nicknames that Luna’s grandmother had given her over the years, did not seem to hold the same weight in relation to personal identity, instead, the nickname was a symbol of the social relationship she had with her grandmother, more so influencing the “we-Identity.” However, I argue in accordance with the assertions by Finch (2008) and Wikstrøm (2012), that nicknames, like given names and surnames, do not fit neatly into the categorization proposed by Elias (2001). Instead, I argue that nicknames further point to, not only the duality of personhood as suggested by Finch (2008), but rather a plurality of personhood.

As noted previously, Finch (2008) like Elias (2001) suggests that names are expressions of the duality of identity, a marker of the individual, personal identity and locating an individual within a social context, the social identity. Elias (2001) focuses on the formula of a name, the [given name] + [surname], which together form the overall identity. The given name is the reflection of the individual, what he refers to as the “I-Identity” through which a person can identify as an individual, though he argues the I is always influenced by the social (Elias 2001, 184). The surname, on the other hand is a reflection of the “we-Identity” through which an individual identifies as a part of a group. Finch expands on Elias’ understanding of the social influence on the I-identity by highlighting the role of parental identity and family (Finch 2008). Finch (2008) argues that as both given names and surnames are given by the parents, a person’s name is “fundamentally rooted in” the social, “we-Identity” (Finch 2008, 721). In this way, the naming practices of the name givers, which literature on Western cultures points to is most commonly parents, and the social identity engrained in the names themselves play a major role in the “I-Identity” formation. Both Elias and Finch argue that the given name is not simply *either* social *or* individual, but a machination of both simultaneously and to varying degrees. Both the I-Identity and we-Identity are evident in the given name.

Nicknames and naming preferences contribute to academic understanding of identity and naming that previous research on given and surnames fails to address. Firstly, nicknames and preferred names display the flexibility of identity. My interlocutors described that the name that they were referred to by varied by environmental and social contexts and stage of life. Despite being called different names in different circumstances, my interlocutors did not describe this as being disruptive to their identity. Instead, they described an ability to navigate the various names rather seamlessly across contexts, with some, like Mirjam and Mimi, referring to a given name and a nickname as different versions of themselves, which is in line with the suggestion of Aldrin (2016). Secondly, nicknames and preferred names introduce an element of autonomy and choice that is not present with given and surnames that are bestowed upon an individual. The choice is not only “What do I want to be called?” (internal individually ascribed) but also, “What do *others* want to call me?” (external, ascribed by others) and “What will I allow others to call me?” (negotiation). My interlocutors described flexibility in their own conceptualization of the

identity, using their given name in one context and seamlessly transitioning to the use of a nickname in a secondary context. Additionally, their identity is not disrupted upon the decision to use a preferred name that diverges from a currently used name, as with the decision to start once again using the given name after years using a nickname. Despite their own flexible constructions and understanding of identity, my interlocutors often described the challenge an expression of preference through a name change presented for others. My interlocutors described how their requests to use a new name were often met with resistance, receiving responses that it would be too difficult or “strange” to start calling them by a new name. This reoccurring resistance is what led me to the conceptualization of a prescribed identity through naming practices. Identity is not only our understandings of who an individual is in relation to themselves or others, but through referential naming, a prescribed identity is received, a person’s identity as created by others. These two perspectives may or may not be aligned, “in onomastic studies, this means that the name-giver, name-carrier, and name-user may hold different views of identities connected to a certain name” (Aldrin 2016). I define this as “you-identity”.

You-identity, compared to the I and we identities, is not entirely fixed, but far less flexible. Many of my interlocutors described waiting to change their names until a shift of their environment (the shift from elementary school to high school, high school to college, college to work, a move to a new city, etc.,) because of the inflexibility of their you-identity. My interlocutors said that it was easier to have people continue to refer to them as they always had, rather than enforcing the desired change. Yi and Elliott told me that they tried to have people use their new preferred name without a change of environment but, ultimately, they just went for the path of least resistance. Despite voicing a clear preference, their identity was flexible enough to be referenced by a less desirable name without impeding their own sense of self. This further bolsters the idea of individual identity as flexible. Conversely, Amela expressed an unwillingness to accept a you-identity that did not align with her I-identity and we-identity. It is important to note that an individual has many you-identities. How one is referred to or perceived by others, changes depending on the party involved. You may have multiple overlapping you-identities. Additionally, the you-identity can be further divided, the you-identity when being spoken *to* and being spoken *about*. For example, Amela consistently reaffirms her preference for her given name and adamantly rejects

nicknames. Amela represents her individual and social identity. As many (most) people refer to her by her given name, Amela is also an example of her you-identity, which in this case is aligned with her i-identity. However, her in-laws refer to her by a nickname when speaking about her while she is not around, but by her given name when speaking to her. Due to Amela's firm rejection of the you-identity they have created for her, they must negotiate their identity for Amela (you-identity) with Amela's individual identity (I-Identity). That her in-laws continue to use a name for Amela when speaking about her, despite receiving clear feedback that she does not like the name and does not want to be referred to by it, indicates the fixed nature of the you-identity. Though my interlocutors expressed the importance of respect in naming, the evidence suggests that respect is not always a powerful enough reason to adapt the you-identity. It could be argued that Amela's unwillingness to be called by the unwanted nickname is evident of her own inflexible identity, that is not to say she is inflexible, but perhaps less flexible than my other interlocutors. As with most concepts described within this research, it is not a binary. One is not either flexible or inflexible, flexibility is rather a spectrum, ranging from more to less flexible and subject to change based on various external factors, such as time and environmental context.

The you-identity, as stated, may or may not align with the I-identity of an individual. The name used to reference an individual by others becomes representative of the identity of the individual person and to change their name would be to change one's understanding of who a person is. When the I-Identity and you-identity align, there is no conflict. However, when the I-Identity and you-identity misalign, the identities are at odds until the two parties establish an agreed upon name (it could be the namer's preference, the named's preference, or a new nickname that satisfies both the named and the namer).

The you-identity can be aligned with the I-Identity by the named indicating or reasserting their preferred name. For example, Elliott expressed the preference to be called by her given name rather than her nickname, Ellie. However, the expression of preference alone is not enough to contest the you-identity. Naming, as Una eloquently put it, is an exchange. Preference must be asserted by the referee and accepted by the referrer. In some cases, a preferred name brings the you-identity into alignment with the I-Identity, but in other cases, it requires the persistent assertion of preference to be successful. In some ways, preferred names may represent the only true act of

autonomy when it comes to naming, yet its power is limited as it requires that others accept the name for the name to be enforced. Conversely, the I-Identity can be realigned with the you-identity when an individual engages with the flexibility of their I-Identity. Again, despite Elliott expressing a preference for her given name, there were certain circumstances that she allowed people to call her Ellie, bringing the two identities into alignment.

Additionally, a name contributes to the named's I-Identity and you-identity, but it also defines *who the namer is to the named*. When a nickname is given, it not only influences or defines the you-identity (who I am *according* to you) and the I-identity (who I am according to me), but it helps define the relationship between the named and the namer (we are friends, co-workers, family). My interlocutors described the use of a nickname as an indicator of closeness. Several described negative emotions associated with a close friend suddenly and unprompted using a different name to refer to them. Yi said that this would be an indication of social distancing and likely indicate a rift in the relationship. As a preferred name differs by context, the name used indicates something about the relationship. I argue, giving a nickname or using a name that is not preferred by the named in and of itself is not an exercise of power. It is the prioritization of the namer's preferences over the named's preferences that is an exercise of power. When the you-identity that has been created and assigned to an individual does not align with the named's I-Identity and active resistance or opposition to the name is ignored, this is an exercise of power. This was discussed by my interlocutors through their discussions of "respecting" what someone asks to be called. Nicknames move beyond the conceptualization of names representing a duality of personhood (see Finch 2008; Elias 1991; Wikstrøm 2012) instead exemplifying the plurality of personhood.

5.2 Flexible and Fixed

In a discussion of given names, Blount (2015) noted that "while most people keep them for a lifetime, names can be dropped, added, or altered, an indication that they no longer reflect the bearer correctly or appropriately." In Vienna, changes to given and surnames is a bureaucratic process, that requires filling out forms and fees. Unlike given names, nicknames can change without bureaucratic intervention. Like given names, nicknames can be kept for a lifetime, or change. There are no formal or legal hoops to jump through to change a nickname and there are no limitations to how many

nicknames a person can have. Nicknames are informal and, in this sense, flexible. Yet, while they are easy to accumulate and can be changed without formal processes, according to my interlocutors, nicknames can also be difficult to shed. Mirjam, in discussing her decision to stop using her nickname and instead use her given name said, “I think it’s really hard to get rid of [...] nicknames.” Those who had previously known her as Mimi found it difficult to instead call her Mirjam. Like Mirjam, Elliott shared a similar experience of attempting to shed her nickname, Ellie, and instead go by her given name. In her recollection of asking her high school teacher calling her Elliott, she addressed the way in which the name used by one namer can be influenced by other namers in the social environment. As Elliott’s teacher originally called her Elliott as requested, over time, the influence of Elliott’s peers use of her nickname Ellie resulted in him too using the nickname, despite Elliott’s clear request to use her given name. Conversely, Elliott’s friends’ college that knew her as Ellie asked if they should call her Elliott. This suggests that perhaps what is stronger than the desire for the identity and identification of the named to remained fixed is the social pressure to confirm and to align with the group. Names are an interaction between two parties. It is not only the named negotiating and navigating the rules and norms of social relationships, but also the namer. This is perhaps best exemplified through the story of Elliott’s family friend, who called her Ellie when speaking with her, but Elliott when speaking about her to someone else. Mimi described her boyfriend at the time of the interview negotiating her name in a similar way, calling her Mimi when talking about her to Mimi’s parents and Miriam when talking to her.

Like Mirjam and Elliott, Amon used a change of environment to rid himself of a nickname. During primary school, Amon was called Moni. Switching schools, moving from primary school to high school provided the opportunity to decide his preferred name where he introduced himself as Amon. Despite using the name Amon in his new social contexts, he said that he did not expect his old friends to stop calling him Moni. That some friends still call him Moni supports previous research that nicknames established in childhood and adolescence can stick with us in adulthood (Aceto 2002; Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023). That most people, including his school friends, call him Amon suggests that there are external influences that impact if a nickname remains fixed. Based on our interview, I am unable to state these influences, but through my interviews with others I can hypothesize that Amon’s name preference and

social expectations contributed to his nickname being less frequently used in his long-standing friendships.

Yi similarly described navigating the resistance of others to use a different name than they were used to. He expressed that his request was ultimately, unsuccessful. He requested that his friends who had known him as Pan call him Yi, but that they could not or would not make the adaptation, “Somewhere in their minds just to reconnect this name with another whole new identity [...] I think it’s not quite easy.” Yi negotiated this conflicting identification by accepting the name Pan by his school friends and introducing himself as Yi in other, new social contexts. Yi’s desire to use a different name as well as his ability to accept the use of a name that is not his preferred name exemplifies the flexibility and fluidity of his identity. Conversely, his friends’ resistance and inability to adapt to his preferred name shows the rigidity of the prescribed identity. While in Yi’s case, neither name was what he described as a nickname. At the outset of my research, I failed to recognize the challenge that external factors (how others reference an individual) would have on not only the identity of an individual, but also the ability to exercise autonomy through the use of a nickname. A person may express changes to their identity and individuality over time, but it is often difficult for others to let go of the vision they have of someone.

Several of my interlocutors, for example, Yi, Elliott, and Amon, expressed apathy toward enforcing their new preferred name with those who had always known them as something else. When met with resistance or faced with the knowledge that others would find it challenging or too difficult to change, they often sacrificed the affirmation of their changing identity. They did not express frustration, on the contrary, they expressed sympathy for their friends and family who would have to adapt to a new name, acknowledging the understandable challenge of change. This supports the theory of identity as flexible for individual identity (Aldrin 2023) but presents new evidence that identity as prescribed by others is less flexible.

Demonstrating the flexibility of their identities, Elliott, Yi and Amon all continued to be referred to by names that were not their preference. The data provides several examples of the adaptive approach that my interlocutors exercised to maintain a previously used name in one area of their life, while changing it in other. This solution allowed individuals to exercise autonomy over naming preference in certain contexts,

while maintaining the social relationships already established. To accomplish this, the name changes often coincided with a change in environment. Yi, Amon, Elliott, Mirjam, and Mimi all gave examples of how they used a change of environment to introduce a new naming preference. For Amon it was the transition from elementary school to high school that provided him the opportunity to use a different name, while for Yi and Elliott, it was the transition into university/college, for Mirjam a move to a new city, and for Mimi the transition into the work force. In recounting the experience of moving to Vienna, “This is my chance” she said to me, a chance to shed her nickname and introduce herself by her given name. the difficulty in shedding a name once it is given. Mirjam expressed that for her, names were associated with periods in her life and even personified them as past versions of herself, but versions that she expressed not wanting to return to. The personification of different versions of herself resembled the way Mimi spoke of fun Mimi and serious Miriam as two different people. Mirjam’s categorization of names into specific life stages was echoed by Yi, who said he could organize people into the time in his life they met based on which name they called him. Amon also noted the way periods of life and changes of environment impacted nicknames, as it was his experience that only his primary school friends called him by his nickname, and that he used his transition to high school as an opportunity to shed his nickname. This ability for my interlocutors to navigate different names for themselves dependent on the context and relationship further bolsters the theory of individual identity as flexible and exemplifies the influence names have on complex social relationships and identity construction.

While some of my interlocutors accepted or negotiated non-preferred names, Amela flat out rejected any name other than her preference. This demonstrates that prescribed identity, the you-identity, the identity that one creates for another person, can also be influenced. I have argued it is more fixed than it is flexible, but I stop short of arguing that it is entirely inflexible. Like the named, the namers may also find themselves somewhere in the spectrum of the embrace or rejection of a name. Others can accept or negotiate a changing you-identity. Amela’s in-laws continued using their nickname for her when Amela, but never when she was present. Amela’s firm rejection of the nickname, of the you-identity that they had prescribed forced her in-laws to negotiate the construction of the you-identity they had created for Amela. The flexibility of the you-identity is also exemplified by the example of Elliott’s childhood friend or

Mimi's boyfriend using different names in certain social contexts, although the data suggests that Elliot's friend and Mimi's boyfriend negotiation of the you-identity resulted from the social pressure to conform to the name used by other namers, rather than pressure by the named themselves.

In this way, nicknames and identity are both fixed and flexible. The data suggests that the nicknames and identity of the named are flexible. The namers are also flexible in their use of nicknames for others and the construction and maintenance of the you-identity of others, but less so. My interlocutors often described that while they were ready to move on to a new name and identity, their social relations were often tethered to the name they had always associated with that person. Namers are often described as slow to change their constructions and understandings of who someone is, even as they asked to. That several of my interlocutors described using a change of environment as an opportunity to shed names that they no longer preferred emphasizes that the you-identity is more fixed than it is flexible, while also showcasing the ways in which the named negotiate the at times conflicting I and you-identity to maintain harmony with the social we-identity.

5.3 Nicknames: A marker of closeness

The data also points to the role of nicknames as a tool for establishing and signaling closeness. Nicknames, like given names are contextually dependent, and the use or non-use of a nickname can be representative of social belonging or exclusion. Nicknames, like names, are embedded in the social contexts. The use of a nickname is dependent upon the interpersonal relationships between those in communication (the named and the namer) and indicate meaning (closeness or distance) and expression emotions (dis/respect, in/formality) (Ndlovu and Vökel 2023, 3). Nicknames can be used to express friendliness or solidarity (Rodney 2012, 73). Offering that someone call you by a nickname or giving someone a nickname signal friendship (Rodney 2012, 73). A reference is not a relationship between the (nick)name (carrying a certain meaning) and the nicknamed person but rather a link between the addresser and the addressee (Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023). Based on the interviews with my interlocutors, it seems likely that this is partially true. In accordance with the latter half of this statement, several of my interlocutors noted that the deliberate use of a nickname or given name could be used to create and

maintain closeness or distance and signifies a link between the named and the namer. Kristof's argument that "You don't really allow people who are not close friends or relatives to call you by nicknames. It's somehow, you know, a respect thing," and Una's description of nicknames as an "intimate affair" are strong examples of how nicknames are used to establish, maintain, and indicate closeness. Playfulness and love are examples of closeness. As she spoke about her grandmother, Una described how for the two of them, nicknames were a way of showing love and expressing playfulness. The nicknames Una's grandmother gave to her were, whether tacitly or overtly, used to solidify their social connection. Kristof's assertion that anyone can use a given name, but a nickname is reserved for the closest relationships. Mimi expressed that nicknames have a comforting quality, "because only people that know you very well would call you by your nickname. Sara said she uses nicknames to show affection, while Yi expressed that nicknames are a sign of a relationship.

Conversely, Mimi described intentionally using her given name Miriam, depending on the context to create distance. By first introducing herself as Miriam, she maintains a level with distance, and only later if she decides she wants to, offers her nickname as an invitation for connection. Mirjam also indicated that she would "feel very uncomfortable" giving someone a nickname unless they "were really good friends." It speaks to the "intimate affair" of nicknames that Una referred to. Nicknames involve a reciprocity that reflects the underlying social dynamics at play. When asked about using nicknames for others, Anna, Mirjam, Una, and Amon all expressed the themes of respect, consent, and preferred names, saying that they respect what people introduce themselves and would not use a different name unless prompted. However, Searle's (1971) assertion that a reference is not a relationship between the (nick)name (carrying a certain meaning) and the nicknamed person oversimplifies the relationship between a nickname and the named person and fails to consider the way in which a reference impacts the identity of the named person. I argue there is a clear relationship between the named person and the name, just as there is a relationship between the namer and the name, and of course, the named and the namer. The name itself is one such indication of the relationship between the named and the namer. My interlocutors described how the name was an indication of relationship closeness.

Once the shift has been made from given name to nickname, assuming a change of preference was indicated, reverting to the given name was described as

atypical. Yi expressed that for a close relation to switch from a nickname to the given name would be symbolic distancing. Mimi could not fathom a situation which would lead her best friend of years to call her Miriam. However, should the name be precipitated by a request by the named, this signals a shift in the named's identity rather than a shift in relationship or a signal of distancing. Elliott described her choice to start going by her given name again as "maturity" rather than a shedding of Ellie or the relationships associated to the nickname. However, as noted, the majority of those who chose to once again use their given name rather than a nickname were often still referenced by their nickname by those closest to them. This offers further evidence for the differing roles nicknames and given names have in social relationships and connection. While the relationship between the named and the namer is displayed through a nickname, I disagree with Searle's (1971) assertion that references are not a relationship between the nickname and the nicknamed. My data confirms that the relationship between the nickname and the nicknamed is relevant. Were this not the case, there would be no reason for an individual to reject any nickname from close relations, but this is not the case. It lacks a nuanced understanding of identity, and it's influences and fails to consider individual taste. For example, Sara's rejection of the nickname Sarkan despite it coming from several close friends, exemplifies that the nickname itself does play a role on the nicknamed.

Many of the nicknames by interlocutors shared were, as literature as suggested, were establish in childhood and followed them through adulthood (Aceto 2002, 582, see *also* Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023). However, Sara, Mirjam, Anna, Amela and Kristóf all gave examples of nicknames they acquired in late adolescence or adulthood. Although, in the case of Kristóf, he received his nickname from his niece and nephew (children), and as previous literature has linked nicknames as a youth phenomenon (see Aceto 2002; Manning 1974; Leslie and Skipper 1990; Mickiene and Baranauskiene 2023), this is not a strong example of adult nicknames as something that occurs outside of youth.

5.4 The Personal and Professional Spheres

The use of nicknames as indicators of closeness was closely linked to the separation of the personal and the professional spheres. The personal sphere, encompassing the private life, was associated with informality and closeness. My interlocutors were much more likely to use nicknames for others or be called a nickname by others in the

personal sphere, while the professional sphere was more frequently associated with words such as “serious” and “respect”, and the given name was more likely to be used. Mimi, Una, and Amela expressed that the reason they chose to use their given name in a work context was because they considered given names more professional. Amela expressed that for her, nicknames cannot be taken seriously and emphasized that she found that nicknames “sound childish.” Amela expressed an explicit “general hate for nicknames” which seemed very much connected to her desire to be taken seriously as a person. She shared that she feared that her age would impact her being taken seriously at work and stated this was exacerbated by the fact that her name is not “classic Austrian.” Amela does not use a nickname to navigate the “technologies of differentiation” of the naming systems (Palsson 2014, 627) as I had posited might be the case for residents whose names pose a challenge, whether because of pronunciation or marking them as “other.”

While Kristóf does not use a nickname as a technology of belonging, he does engage in adaptative strategies that ease differentiation. Reisæter (2012) described how some immigrant parents try to both maintain tradition (using traditional names) and adapt to their new environment (through names that are easier for others to pronounce). Kristóf enacted similar practices, maintaining tradition and his identity through the retention of his given name, yet simultaneously adapting to his new Viennese environment by not only allowing, but introducing himself as “Christof,” the Austrianized version of his name, rather than the Hungarian pronunciation of his name. In the case of Amela, her personal taste and individual values (the desire to be taken seriously) do not align with the use of a nickname. In stark contrast to the adaptive strategy enacted by Kristóf, Amela expressed deep frustration that even after correcting people, they still manage to mispronounce her name. Although she did not express this herself, I wonder if the additional factor of gender, being a woman in a male dominated industry, played a role in not only her preference for her given name, particularly in the professional sphere, as it did with Mimi.

Mimi, in addition to using her given name to create distance, like Amela, used it to present herself as more professional. Mimi shared that being a woman in a male dominated field, particularly when at a work site, impacted her decisions to use her given name at work for many years. She expressed feeling like “Mimi” and “Miriam” are two different people. Mimi accepts help, is not so professional, laughs loudly, and

“feels more home,” while Miriam tries to be very professional, and works too much. In our interview, Mimi spoke about “Mimi” from the perspective of Miriam, she said, “And somehow Miriam has the impression of Mimi that Mimi is not so professional, and Mimi will not be taken seriously, especially in a work context, and that's why I changed it.” She spoke of the intentional decision to have her colleagues refer to her as Miriam, particularly in front of clients and on construction sites because she told me that she thought she would be more accepted and appreciated as “serious Miriam,” than “not so professional Mimi.” Her decision to starting using her nickname in the professional context could potentially be connected to her increased experience and having been with the same company for several years. Perhaps, the serious and respect she once felt needed to be conveyed by her name is now conveyed through other means.

For Una, she was very clear that her given name is to be used in the professional context. While the use of her nickname was reserved for the private sphere, it sometimes marked the separation of the offline and online worlds. Despite describing a flexibility in her preferred name, she shared that Una was more commonly associated with her offline persona, while Luna was her online persona. Using the username Luna allowed her, she said, some anonymity, as she had a public social media profile with at one point, approximately 30,000 followers. The use of an online nickname also further separated the personal and professional spheres, as the nickname would be unknown to her colleagues. While mentioned in the context of taste (what he liked or did not like about his name), Amon also mentioned anonymity, or rather, the lack thereof when it comes to his given name. He said that because of the uniqueness of his name, he is “fully traceable” online. When signing up for an account, providing his name as the username requires no 1's, no dots, or dashes. A convenience in some ways, and a burden in others. Anna also noted the convenience of her easy name, the downside of which is having a common name.

Aceto (2002) argues that nicknames are rarely used self-referentially, however, both Mimi and Una use their nicknames self-referentially, dependent upon the social context. While Una uses her nickname self-referentially online, Mimi uses her nickname in both the private and professional spheres. While Mimi for many years only used her given name in the professional context, in our interview she stated that she had recently made the intentional decision to once again go by Mimi in both spheres. This data suggests that nicknames are not limited to references used by

others, but are also used self-referentially, as nicknames can be the individual's preferred names, even if only in specific contexts. The separation of the personal and professional spheres, the personal sphere associated with closeness and intimacy, and the professional sphere with distance and seriousness, was echoed throughout the series of interviews. The insights offered here by my interlocutors highlight the role nicknames play in navigating relationships and social contexts.

While my interlocutors described the importance of respecting the choice of the named, expressing that they respect whatever the person introduces themselves as, they also spoke of the social pressures that influence which name is used. Mimi described how her ex-boyfriend always called her Miriam instead of Mimi, despite meeting her as Mimi. The more time he spent with her family and friends, who always referred to her as Mimi, the more frequently he used her nickname, but never in conversation *with* her, only when speaking *about* her. When he spoke to her parents, he would refer to her as Mimi, but when it was the two of them alone, he would call her Miriam. Anna and Elliott also gave examples of how the name used or introduced changed as a result of other social influences. For Anna, it was like Mimi, everyone used a nickname for her friend except for her, until she succumbed to the influence of others. Another example of this is Elliott's high school teacher calling her Ellie instead of Elliott despite her never having asked him to. Like Mimi's ex-boyfriend, Elliott's best friend from home in navigating the different social dynamics, called her Ellie when speaking to her and Elliott when speaking about her to others. While (nick)names are a link between the named and the namer, when the dynamic is more than two people, the third role is a less active role of hearing the name, but which influences naming practices and referential decisions. This exemplifies the power of social context on naming and nicknaming practices as well as the role of interpersonal relationships.

5.5 Mispronunciations and phonemic variation

Names are part of language and are embedded in the social and cultural contexts of the society in which they are found (Ndlovu and Völkel 2023). As such, names can be indicative of ethnic identity (Sue and Telles 2007) and as such a clear symbol or marker of belonging or not belonging to a group. Through this symbolic display of identity, names can be mechanisms of exclusion and belonging, situating individuals within or outside of the boundaries of the dominant group (see Sue and Telles 2007;

Reisæter 2012; Palsson 2014). For those with ethnic backgrounds that differ from the dominant culture in which they live, names can be a marker of difference. This was the case for several of my interlocutors. In line with Sue and Telles (2007) work on assimilation theory, names are both symbols of difference and tools for negotiating that difference. How individuals interact with their name is indicative of the negotiation of mechanisms of belonging and exclusion and ultimately, identity. The work by Sue and Telles (2007) suggests that names can be utilized to embrace the dominant ethnic culture (classic assimilation theory) or negotiate or reject the dominant ethnic culture in favor of the traditional ethnic identity (contemporary assimilation theory), my research suggests that the named can likewise use their name to embrace, negotiate, or reject the dominant ethnic identity. One such way that my interlocutors' names impacted their experience with the dominant culture was in the pronunciation of their names.

Eight of my ten interlocutors described instances where their names (nickname, given, or surname) were either mispronounced or spoken with a phonemic variation resulting from an anglicization or germanization of the pronunciation. The mispronunciations garnered varying reactions from my interlocutors. For Amela, the size of the mistake impacted how she received it. She considered being called Amelia very disrespectful as she felt it was a completely different name, while a phonemic mispronunciation of her name, where the name was in essence still the same, but the emphasis was on the wrong syllable she found to be "annoying but okay." When describing situations of her first name being mispronounced, she expressed annoyance. But her experiences with her surname invoked an emotion that moved beyond annoyance. It was still an issue of respect, but her surname provided others with a marker of her Bosnian identity that her given name did not. Amela, Sara, and Una, all of whom have an *ić* surname expressed the frustration that despite the number of Viennese residents with Balkan backgrounds and the familiarity with the *ić* as a sound, their surnames are so often mispronounced. Both Amela and Sara described the dread and frustration of visiting a doctor's office for exactly this reason while Una gave the example of experiencing her surname at the bank. For Sara and Una their surnames stood in stark contrast from the given names, which they described as international and universal, respectively. Where their given names allowed them an ability to traverse borders, their surnames made their ethnic identity clear.

Amela's description of her interaction with her name and others mispronunciation came across as a steadfast determination to be respected. She was not as accommodating or accepting of an incorrect pronunciation as Kristóf who had become so used to the germanized pronunciation of his name that when I used the Hungarian pronunciation (to the best of my ability) upon seeing him again after our interview, he stopped in his tracks, confused to hear his name pronounced the Hungarian way in that social context. In each of their stories of insisting that others pronounce their name correctly, there was an air of pride and rebellion. In their rejection of the mispronunciation of their names, they reject the mechanism of differentiation by making the "unfamiliar" familiar.

Meanwhile, Anna and Kristóf were largely unphased by the use of phonemic variations of their names. Anna even introduced herself with the anglicized version of Anna, while Kristóf said he expects to be called the German equivalent of his name, Christoph. Like Anna and Kristóf, Sara described previously adapting to the phonemic patterns of whomever she was speaking to, but at the time of our interview, she had recently started insisting that others use the Bosnian pronunciation of her name. The shift from acceptance/negotiation to rejection of the mispronunciation of her name is noteworthy. By rejecting the mispronunciation of her name, she exercises her autonomy over her name and identity. She said that the correct pronunciation of her name contributes to her self-acceptance of where she is from. This in turn has an impact on her overall identity.

Pronunciation of a name, particularly a "wrong" pronunciation, was often linked to a discussion of interactions with the people who spoke a language that was different than the interlocutor's primary language. Anna, Kristóf, and Sara each described their names as international. They described how having a name that was known in multiple cultural contexts reduced friction or challenges that my other interlocutors described. Kristóf had become so accustomed to hearing his name pronounced in a German or anglicized way, that my efforts to pronounce his name in the Hungarian way following our interview always took him by surprise. Anna was so used to the anglicized pronunciation that she introduced herself at the outset of our interview with the Americanized pronunciation, much to my surprise. Inherent in the sub-text of the "internationality" of a name is acceptance and belonging. Those with names that were self-identified as "international" expressed the ease of navigating multi-cultural

contexts, living in a city they were not from, or traveling to other countries. Conversely, Una, Amela, and Elliott have names that are less ambiguous and have the potential to be identified and linked with a specific cultural or national context.

5.6 Nicknames and Gender

In connection to names and naming practices, gender, like identity, is a topic that is perhaps so obviously intertwined that it seems, in many, ways self-evident. But gender and naming go beyond the obvious, it is not merely about the given name. Gender also impacts (nick)naming practices and preferences of the named. Mimi's decision to use a given name at work was not only about creating distance or maintaining a separation between the personal and private sphere. For Mimi, her decision to use her given name was driven largely by her desire to be taken seriously at work. At work, Mimi was known as Miriam, until a new colleague, also named Miriam, joined the team. The "other Miriam" did not have a nickname, so Mimi started going by her nickname in the office. When she became part of a serious project, she asked (although she told me it was a "strict" decision, so perhaps asked is too gentle a word in this case) her colleagues to call her Miriam, particularly in front of clients. She expressed concern that if people called her Mimi, particularly compounded by her "high voice" and being a woman at a construction site, she would not be taken seriously. The role gender plays in her occupation, namely that it is a male dominated field, influences her naming practices. It points to the role gender and environment can play in (nick)naming practices.

Amon's nickname from school, Moni, is a typically feminine nickname for the name Monika in Austria. He shared with me that he did not like this nickname at the time because of its association as a girl's name. That Amon expressed not liking his nickname because it fell outside the normative naming patterns which assume the name is congruent with their sex, is in line with the Pilcher's (2017) assertion that given names (re)produce binary sex categories and gendered identities. Amon's nickname, which he perceived as feminine or in the words of Pilcher "gender-wrong" is an example of contradictory embodiment. By changing his preferred name with his change of environment when he started attending high school, he realigned himself with normative gendered naming practices. Sara also described the name Sarkan as being contrary to her gender identity, "it sounds like some old fat dude." The example of Sara's nickname from her father, "sine" (Son), is an interesting contradiction, as it

does not follow the sex-based categorization of naming. In this case, sine is not unique to Sara, as it is a commonly used term of affection in Bosnia. In this case, the cultural context in which the intended use as a term of endearment has moved away from the literal meaning of “son” is what situates the nickname outside of the sex-based categories. The examples of Amon and Sarkan offer examples of how the binary of sex-based categorization which has been identified for the given name (Pilcher 2017) can also be applied to the nickname.

Although we were speaking in hypotheticals, in imaging how he might handle the surnaming practices when he gets married, Yi expressed that he liked the idea of his wife taking his surname. However, he described the potential confusion that could arise for others, were he to marry an Austrian woman who looked visibly “Western”. He painted a scene in which a bank employee, hears an Asian surname and imagines a specific picture of who his client would be, but instead show ups with a face that they might assume would not match the name. This suggests that the socio-cultural expectations that names align with an ethnicity be a stronger influence than the gendered surnaming practices in Austria where the woman is expected to take on the surname of the husband. Amon’s example of his Indian friend with a turban and an Austrian name suggests a similar conclusion that there is a strong relationship between names, ethnicity, and societal expectations of naming practices.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis argues that nicknames, like identity are both fixed and flexible and introduces a third conceptualization of identity in the realm of naming, adding the you-identity to Elias' concepts of the I-Identity and we-Identity. The analysis explores the interaction of nicknames with the concepts of identity, public and private spheres, gender, and mechanisms of belonging and exclusion. Although nicknames can be representative of both the individual, personal I-Identity, who I am to me, and the social we-Identity, who I am in relation to you, my interviews revealed that nicknames also reflect an identity constructed by others – an external identity imposed by another person, which I term *you-identity*. How you-identity significantly impacted individuals' engagement with their nicknames and preferred names was a novel and key finding of this research.

While given names must adhere to certain governmental standards, nicknames are unregulated. Most studies on anthroponyms have focused on the naming *practices* of given names and surnames, focusing on what influences *how the namers name* rather than how the *named engage with the name* they were given. This study shifts the focus to the named and how a name influences identity. This study explored the social significance of nicknames among Viennese residents aged 24 to 45, with particular attention paid to the role of nicknames in identity construction and social connections. Building on the literature on given names, this study provides new insights into the contemporary use of nicknames in adulthood. The research set out to ask the question: How do individuals embrace, negotiate, or reject nicknames and what does a nickname reveal about identity? This research provides evidence that identity is flexible, and nicknames are both a tool for the construction and maintenance of identity as well as a symbol of the constructed identity. This research expanded on previous work on identity, namely Elias' I-identity and we-identity, offering a third externally ascribed identity, the you-identity. The findings indicated that nicknames are flexible and unregulated, allowing individuals to express their I-identity in an informal manner. A key theme addressed by my interlocutors was that nicknames while easy to get, were difficult to shed. The flexibility of individuals to use and engage with multiple nicknames is juxtaposed by the predominantly fixed perceptions that namers have of the named. Individuals could navigate several names and in many ways several identities, while namers found it challenging to call someone by a new or

different name. This exemplifies the complexity of social dynamics and identity. As much as we have our own perceptions of our identity, others have a perception of our identity. We are not just who we are to ourselves (I-Identity) or who we are in a group (we-Identity), we are also who we are as ascribed by others through social perceptions and relationships. This external perception of an individual, a commonly fixed external identity is what I have termed the you-identity. At times the I, we, and you-identities are aligned and experience no friction, but when these identities are at odds, the lack of flexibility of the you-identity can present a challenge to the i-identity and at times, impact an individual's autonomy over their own identity. The named must attempt to construct and maintain their own identity, while navigating the challenges that come when their i-identity contradicts the you-identity ascribed to them by others. This further supports the concept of identity as co-constructed and presents an interesting opportunity to study how namers understand the world through naming and identifying others. Nicknames do not offer the level of autonomy over one's identity that I had anticipated at the outset of my research. Nicknames, like names, are typically given and it is the exercise of preference that determines autonomy. Nicknames present an interesting example for how identity is co-constructed, particularly when the flexibility of i-Identity clashes with the rigidity of the you-identity. The duality of nicknames as both flexible and fixed underscores the tension between personal i-identity and social constructed you-identity. As well as being flexible, identity is complex and multifaceted and as such, the discussion of identity includes other significant, key concepts. This research focused on the key themes of identity, gender, and mechanisms of exclusion and belonging.

Considering the Austrian government regulation that names given to children should be in alignment with their sex at birth, to not address gender would leave a rather important aspect of the discussion unaddressed. This research found that like given names, nicknames tended to follow gendered practices. Additionally, how my female interlocutors interacted with their names and if and when a nickname was used was highly connected to gender. Finally, names and nicknames are tools of exclusion and belonging. My interlocutors repeatedly described using a name or nickname to either create distance or closeness. A nickname was repeatedly described as both a tool for establishing closeness and a symbol of closeness. Nicknames are highly contextual, with individuals often reserving nicknames for the personal sphere while

using given names in the professional sphere. This is situated between the concepts of identity and belonging. By reserving nicknames for specific contexts and people, individuals exemplify that the use of nicknames is a tool for creating a context-dependent identity. By using one name at work and another for friends, an creates clear identities. If for example a colleague was offered to use a nickname, it symbolizes a shift toward a more personal and close relationship and sense of belonging to special group for which that nickname is reserved. As with identity, nicknames are used as both a tool and symbol, a tool to establish and maintain social relationships, as well as a symbol of those relationships. Environment influences the choice and connotations of preferred names. The results of this study suggest that nicknames have moved beyond the derogatory purpose literature suggested they once had in society (see Morgan 1979; Alford 1988, Aceto 2002) and are instead a way through which individuals can connect with others, express and shape their identity and autonomy. It also provides evidence to contradict the assertion that nicknames are primarily a youth phenomenon. Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of nicknames social function, offering insights into their impact on identity and social connections.

As this research is, to the best of my knowledge, the first anthropological research on nicknames in Vienna, and one of few contemporary studies on nicknames, there are many opportunities for future study. Future research could explore the flexibility of nicknames with a larger data set, to further explore the arguments made in this thesis. Additionally, the role of taste and education on nicknaming practices could be explored. A longitudinal study of how preferred and nicknames fluctuate and evolve over time would offer insights not into only nicknaming practices, but the flexibility of I-identity and the inflexibility of you-identity. This thesis sets the stage for future contemporary research on nicknames and the flexibility of identity. Further areas of research on nicknames and identity could explore the role of social class, education, and taste.

I conclude this research the same way I began, by reflecting on my own personal interest with the topic. As I spoke with my interlocutors or shared the preliminary and later the results of my research with friends and colleagues, I was pleasantly surprised that despite the arduous task of writing a thesis, I remained enthusiastically engaged with the topic. My curiosity, passion, and interested never waned. I had decided early in the planning of my master's thesis, before even selecting

my topic that it would be my goal to write about something that people would want to read. I did not want to write a thesis that only my supervisor and myself read. I wanted the time I spent in pursuit of my master's to not only contribute to a larger academic discourse but be a piece of writing that my friends and family would want to read, not just out of obligation or support, but genuine interest. Whether or not I have accomplished that, only time will tell, but what I can say is my experience has convinced me that something about this topic makes people want to share their stories, me included.

As a resident of Vienna, but a non-EU citizen, I occupied an ambiguous position as both insider and outsider. Like my interlocutors, I too have a name and nicknames and stories and experiences connected to those names. The ambiguity of my insider/outsider status provided me enough insight to develop relevant questions yet enough distance to be open to other realities. To avoid speaking for my interlocutors, I presented the findings in a way which enables them to speak for themselves before conducting my own analysis and allowing for a co-construction of meaning and knowledge making.

As an anthropologist, my role is to listen, not to speak. As my interlocutors shared their stories with me, I was fascinated. Each time I ended an interview or reflected on the notes, transcripts, or recordings, I was brimming with newfound fascination and joy. What I also found myself feeling during the interviews, was a yearning to share my experience with my names with my interlocutors. When they shared a story, I wanted to commiserate with them on the shared frustrations or laugh with them about the oddities. When Mimi told the story of the way her mother said her name when she was mad, I could hear my own parent's voices saying mine and the familiar feeling of trouble brewing. As Elliott spoke about the role nicknames held on her college frisbee team, my own sports nicknames flickered in my eyes. When Kristóf shared the nickname he received from his nephews, I thought of my own nickname from my nephew. I have always enjoyed talking, but it was more than just wanting to talk. I wanted to share my own experiences with my interlocutors who had shared so much and been so open with me. I found that I was not alone in this wish. Many friends and colleagues who knew I was writing my thesis asked me about the topic and the results of what I found. It usually garnered a similar reaction. First there was usually

incredulity upon hearing the topic, no one hid their surprise well that nicknames could be a topic worthy of academic discussion or a master's thesis.

However, as I explained how nicknames were linked to identity, to gender, to a sense of belonging or exclusion, their furrowed brows and puzzled frowns turned to smiles and knowing eyes and then their own stories. I cannot think of a single time when one of these interactions did not lead to someone sharing their own story of their name or nickname. I always found this encouraging, that I picked a topic that people were interested in and was a topic that felt accessible to anyone and everyone. Nicknames are not so niche that you must feign interest in while having no idea what the person is talking about. Everyone can be an expert on this topic in their own way. This speaks to the universality of the role that names and nicknames play in our society. The story may be different, but everyone has a story to share about their name, an experience, positive, negative, neutral or somewhere in between. And these stories are rich with meaning and are valuable tools to better understand social phenomena. My interest in the social significance of nicknames is rooted in my lived experience and in many ways helped to form the foundation of this research. At times throughout this writing process, I have questioned my decision to take space to write about my own experience, worried that I center my own voice and experience too much rather than highlighting the stories and contributions of my interlocutors. But names are personal, and this topic is personal to me. To keep myself out of it completely I think would be a mistake and ignoring the lesson that anthropologists before me have shouted from the roof top, the lesson to recognize and acknowledge one's own positionality in the field.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How did you get your name? Is there a story to how you got your name?
2. How do you feel about your name?
 - a. Have you always felt this way about your name?
 - b. What are some memories/experiences you have had with your name?
3. What do you think your name says about you?
 - a. What do you want your name to say about you?
4. Do you have any nicknames? Is there a story to how you got your nickname?
5. Who uses nicknames for you? When do you use nicknames for others?
 - a. What purpose do nicknames serve for you?
 - b. Why do you use nicknames?
 - c. Have you ever given a nickname to someone else? Can you tell me the story?
 - d. If you don't use nicknames, why not?
6. What do you think makes a good nickname?

Names of participants

All interviewees provided explicit consent to their names being used for the purpose of this thesis.

No.	Name	Interview	Interview date	Notes
1	Mirjam	In-person	Jan. 13, 2024	Austrian citizenship
2	Anna	In-person	Jan. 14, 2024	German citizenship
3	Kristóf	Online	Jan. 15, 2024	Hungarian
4	Amela	Online	Jan. 17, 2024	Bosnian citizenship* Austrian citizenship acquired after our interview.
5	Sara	In-person	Jan. 17, 2024	Bosnian citizenship
6	Una	Online	Jan. 24, 2024	French, Bosnian, Serbian
7	Miriam	In-person	Jan. 24, 2024	Austrian citizenship

8	Yi	Online	Jan. 25, 2024	Austrian and Chinese
9	Amon	In-person	Feb. 7, 2024	Austrian and Oversea Citizen of India
10	Elliot	In-person	Jan. 22, 2025	U.S. American