

By Johana Goyes Vallejos

What's in a name?

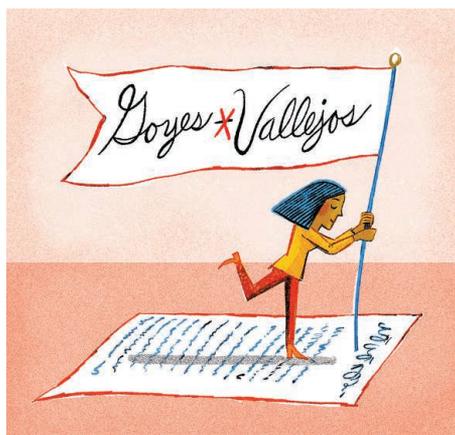
“ think it is ready to submit,” one of my Ph.D. committee members said. I was incredulous; the manuscript overflowed with red ink. But she was my biggest fan and my harshest critic; if she said it was ready, then it must be true. Now I needed to ask the question that had been nagging me since I began to work on the manuscript: “How should I publish my name?” “However you want,” she replied. “It is time for people to understand that Latin American scientists have two last names.”

Since I moved to the United States to pursue my Ph.D., my colleagues have had trouble pronouncing my first name, let alone my two very Hispanic-sounding surnames—my father's first and then my mother's, as is standard in most Spanish-speaking countries. And English-language publishing systems are often not designed for two last names. Using just one surname or connecting them with a hyphen, as many Hispanic scientists publishing their work in English do, would certainly make matters “easier.” But easier for whom? Growing up, I never met anyone whose last name was hyphenated. I have always been proud to use my two surnames, honoring both of my parents and my cultural heritage.

Still, I worried that I would face a career-long battle to publish my name as I want it. Should I just get over it and use a hyphen? Yet the support from my mentor, who was born in the United States and whose name fits the “standard” first-name last-name format, gave me courage. I decided I would publish my paper using my two surnames—no hyphen.

When the “last name” box showed up during the submission process, I typed my two surnames, with a space, holding my breath while waiting to see whether the electronic system would allow it. Submit. No warning popped up. Victory. I had to reassure the editor that, yes, those are indeed my two surnames, but several months later the paper was published with my name in its authentic form.

Since then, the path hasn't always been as smooth. In one instance, a colleague offering feedback on a manuscript went through all the citations of my previous work—in which I had (correctly) listed myself as “Goyes Vallejos, J.”—and added a hyphen. When I mentioned that I do not use the hyphen, he replied, “Yeah, that is not going to fly. You will be mis-cited for the rest of your days. Mark my words, you will have to call me and apologize



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for not following my advice.” An editor-in-chief made a similar comment, stating, “You decide how your name should be spelled, but the options are your two surnames with a hyphen or just one of them.” I refused and ultimately published without the hyphen. Still, in the journal's table of contents, my name appears incorrectly as “Vallejos, J.G.” And because other researchers sometimes cite my name incorrectly, my metrics—for example on Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar—vary greatly, which could affect future job prospects and promotions.

“Two last names are too much for ‘them’ to handle, and they will butcher them anyway,” my Latin American friends say when explaining why they hyphenate or use a single last name for their publications. I support their decisions to publish as they choose. But those of us who decide to maintain our heritage in the form of our names also deserve support. This is not an isolated issue for Latino and Hispanic scientists; it also affects members of other groups whose names do not conform to a “first-name last-name” norm. And insisting on being able to present our names as we choose is not “picky” or “capricious.” It is a matter of respect for our identities as scientists and as citizens of the world.

Simple steps from the community can make a big difference. When in doubt, ask scientists how they would like to be addressed. When you cite their work, check their previous publications, their ORCID account, and their web pages. Next time you add a paper to your reference manager, double check the author line to ensure the system has imported it correctly. Above all, make sure researchers from all backgrounds have the opportunity to claim their identities and feel validated in their workplaces. ■

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