Shaping the Discourse of Gender-Neutral Pronouns in English: A Study of Attitudes and Use in Australia

By

Mari Lund Eide

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Department of Foreign Languages

University of Bergen

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Abstract in Norwegian

Denne oppgaven undersøker holdninger til kjønnsnøytrale pronomen og pronomenpreferanse, samt bruken av kjønnsnøytrale pronomen blant et representativt utvalg av unge voksne Australiere. Oppgaven tar for seg rekke ulike uavhengige variabler og undersøker hvordan disse påvirker holdninger, erfaringer med, og bruk av de kjønnsnøytrale pronomenene *they, zie, ze, xe* og *ey.* Forskningsdataen ble samlet ved hjelp av en nettbasert undersøkelse distribuert i Facebook-grupper hvorpå to ulike statistiske tester ble brukt til å avgjøre signifikansnivået eller innflytelsen av hver variabel på holdninger, erfaringer og bruk. Deltakerne i spørreundersøkelsen var hovedsakelig unge voksne mellom 18-30 år. Undersøkelsen hadde 136 deltakere, hvor 104 fullførte hele undersøkelsen. Den innsamlede dataen viser at utvalget generelt viser stor villighet til å bruke kjønnsnøytrale pronomen dersom de blir oppmuntret til det. Mange rapporterer også at de velger å bruke det kjønnsnøytrale pronomen *they* i situasjoner der hensikten er å unngå å avsløre noens kjønnsidentitet eller anta noens kjønnsidentitet, men også når de omtaler individer med ikke-binær kjønnsidentitet. Bruken av *ze, zie, xe* og *ey* er mindre utbredt. Analysene viser også at variabler som utdanningsnivå, språklig bakgrunn og bosituasjon ikke påvirker deltakernes holdninger til kjønnsnøytrale pronomen i signifikant grad. Analysene viser derimot at det å ha en ikke-binær kjønnsidentitet (og til en viss grad kvinnelig kjønnsidentitet) er assosiert med mer positive holdninger sammenlignet med å ha en mannlig kjønnsidentitet. En ikke-binær kjønnsidentitet er også assosiert med mer bruk av kjønnsnøytrale pronomen. Opplevelse av å ha en sterk mannlig- eller kvinnelig kjønnsidentitet var assosiert med lavere villighet og faktisk bruk av kjønnsnøytrale pronomen, men ikke utelukkende med negative holdninger. En binær kjønnsdefinisjon var derimot assosiert med negative holdninger. Interesse for, og engasjement i diskusjoner rundt kjønnsrelaterte tema var assosiert med positive holdninger, og høyere bruk av kjønnsnøytrale pronomen. Yngre deltakere rapporterte mer villighet, og faktisk bruk av *they* som kjønnsnøytralt pronomen enn eldre deltakere. Høy utdannelse var ikke automatisk assosiert med mer bruk av kjønnsnøytrale

pronomen, og deltakere fra urbane strøk rapporterte ikke mer bruk enn deltakere fra rurale strøk.

Det overordnede målet med oppgaven var også å bruke funnene til å få innsyn i diskursen rundt kjønnsnøytrale pronomen i Australia og hvilke tanker, meninger og ideer som preger og former denne diskursen i dag. Derfor kan slike funn også bidra til å skape en dypere og bedre forståelse for hvordan kjønnsdiskursen i et samfunn er i endring, samt også endre forutinntatte antakelser om hvilke holdninger og verdier som eksisterer blant enkeltgrupper i et samfunn.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Aim and scope

For most English speakers, choosing which pronoun to use is an uncomplicated and automatic process; they use *he* when referring to a male individual and *she* when referring to a female individual. However, not all language users identify as male or female, thus neither as *he* nor *she.* Therefore, in recent years, language users might have found themselves in situations where they have been encouraged and expected to use a variety of gender-neutral pronouns to avoid implying the binary gender distinction that *he* and *she* invoke. By encouraging speakers to consider their choice of pronouns as a conscious and deliberate action, the automaticity of pronoun use is challenged. In situations where a gender-neutral pronoun is suggested and encouraged as a replacement for *he* or *she,* speakers might also find that their choice of words becomes a politicized action, as it might ultimately express their stance on a range of moral issues such as "do I respect people's right to choose their own pronoun", "do I acknowledge the existence of more than two genders", and "am I comfortable with using a gender-neutral pronoun, and if so, which one?"

This is also where the fascination for the topic of gender-neutral pronouns lays; that the replacement of one small word with another has the potential of invoking personal reflections of this kind, as well as potentially stirring disagreement among language users. Furthermore, my interest is also tied to the fact that language users have introduced neologisms to function as personal pronouns, thus adding another layer of complexity to our choice of pronoun in interactions with others. Consequently, the use of gender-neutral pronouns in English today are not only challenging the traditional pronominal system in a complex way, it also shows that the pronominal system has the potential of being subject to a fast paced change. This thesis seeks to capture this ongoing change by using Australia as its social and cultural context for surveying which attitudes, beliefs and thoughts different groups of language users express towards gender-neutral pronouns. The thesis also seeks to examine some of the

factors that might influence people's willingness to use, and their actual experience with gender-neutral pronouns. Lastly, an overall aim of the thesis is to add nuances and insight to how the contemporary discourse surrounding gender-neutral pronouns is being shaped in Australia, and how this might also be affecting the current gender-discourse.

1.2 Thesis structure

The introduction chapter that follows, Chapter 1, will outline the discourse of gender-neutral pronouns in modern times, focusing on factors that have affected and shaped this discourse historically as well as today. Chapter 2 will outline the choice of variables that were included and considered in the survey, as well as outlining the hypotheses made. Furthermore, Chapter 2 will present, reflect upon and problematize the methodology of this project, particularly with respect to using an online survey as a data collection tool, as well as outlining the process of using Facebook to distribute, and recruit participants. This chapter will also present the procedure in which the data was collected. Chapter 3 will present the survey findings, and provide a discussion of these in relation to the hypotheses and research questions outlined in the introduction. Finally, Chapter 4 will present the shortcomings and limitations of the research, and suggest and reflect upon potential improvements for future research. Furthermore, the final chapter will also present and reflect upon some of the possible conclusions that we can draw from the data collection and the reflection and discussion provided in the thesis.

1.3 Shaping the discourse of gender-neutral pronouns in English

This section will attempt to outline how the discourse of gender-neutral pronouns in English has been shaped throughout modern times. It will start by giving a brief historical account of the discourse surrounding the *generic* use of gender-neutral pronouns before moving to the feminist movement and their relevance in shaping this discourse. The main focus of this section however, will be on exploring some of the forces that seem to be influencing and shaping the

current discourse surrounding this language phenomenon. This discussion will particularly focus on how gender-neutral pronouns are the enabling the representation of non-binary gender-identities. Furthermore, it will also attempt to locate where and how gender-neutral pronouns are used today, as well as presenting some reactions, opinions and beliefs surrounding the current discourse in English speaking countries around the world, before ultimately focusing on Australia.

1.3.1 A brief historical account

The lack of a gender-neutral pronoun in English has a history of being avidly debated among grammarians as well as lay people for centuries (Baron 1981). Many language users have expressed frustration over the pronoun gap in constructions where the antecedent opens up for, or requires a generic pronoun instead of a gender-specific one (Baron 1981). Traditionally, generic *he* has been used in these constructions, such as "Everybody loves his mother". Alternative constructs have also been, and still are fairly common, such as "he/she", or "he or she" constructions, illustrated by: "Everybody loves his/her mother", or "Everybody loves his or her mother" (Baron 1981). However, these constructions may be considered awkward and unnecessarily complicated by some language users. Language users have therefore frequently resolved to using the traditionally plural pronoun *they* with singular antecedents, such as in "Everybody loves their mother" (Baron 1981; McConnell-Ginet 2013). This use has had a long tradition in English, occurring among lay people as well as in the works of William Shakespeare, Jane Austen and Virginia Wolf (McConnell-Ginet 2013).

A range of neologisms have also been invented throughout the times to fill the pronoun gap in English. Baron's article from 1981 lays out a historical overview of these neologisms, listing examples such as *ze, thon* and *hisser* as examples of words that have been suggested throughout history. Apart from *thon,* which was taken up by *The Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary* from 1889 to 1964, as well as making an appearance in *Webster's Second* in 1934, none of the other pronouns have been particularly widespread and used (Baron

1981). Baron concludes that gender-neutral pronouns have failed to catch on, and along with thinkers and linguists before his time, Baron (1981) predicts that singular *they,* along with generic *he* are the two only candidates likely to occupy the role as the default gender-neutral pronouns in English. However, although he deemed neologisms as failures, Baron nevertheless predicts that the efforts of the neologists would persist (Baron 1981). As later sections of this thesis will point out, neologisms have not disappeared from the current discourse on gender-neutral pronouns.

1.3.2 Feminist movement and neutralization reforms

While the early discourse surrounding the need for a gender-neutral pronoun in English was driven by practical incentives, the feminists of the 1970s took the debate to a political level. Rather than concentrating on neologisms, this debate mainly focused on promoting singular *they* to fill the pronoun gap that generic *he* had been occupying.[1] The second wave feminists met resistance among both lay people as well as grammarians when they advocated for replacing generic *he* with singular *they* as a part of removing male-bias in the English language (Curzan 2014; Pauwels 1998). Nevertheless, this use did catch on in both written and spoken English, and several studies have documented that singular *they* today occurs as a common replacement for generic *he* both written and spoken contexts (Curzan 2014; Strahan 2008). This use is today considered acceptable by a range of style manuals as well, such as the *Associated Press Stylebook* (Berendzen 2017). Furthermore, a range of English dictionaries accept using *they* to refer to a singular antecedent today (Oxford dictionary 2018). Hence, Ann Bodine (1975), an early feminist scholar who criticized and questioned the implications of using generic *he* as a default gender-neutral pronoun, was right: the English pronominal system did respond to social pressure when approving singular *they* as a replacement for generic *he*. For an extended discussion on singular *they* as a generic pronoun, see Cameron (1995), and Pauwels (1998).

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[1] Although the feminists concentrated on singular *they*, some still advocated for neologisms to fill

1.3.3 The current discourse of gender-neutral pronouns

The creation of a gender-inclusive language was an important aspect of women's empowerment and visibility in society (Pauwels 1998). The current movement however, which originated among transgender and queer activists and linguists in the 1990s does not exclusively focus on how language enables the representation of the female gender, but a range of gender-identities (Zimman 2017).[2] These communities have actively promoted the use of gender-neutral pronouns as a way of diminishing the gender-dichotomy implied by the existing pronominal system (Gustafsson Sendén, Bäck, and Lindqvist 2015). Wayne (2005) outlines the most common arguments within this movement, claiming that the current English pronominal system still upholds a gendered bias as it lacks a gender-neutral pronoun to express a gender-identity outside the male/female binary. Therefore, Wayne (2005:86) also argues that the current English pronominal system prevents trans, queer or gender non-conforming individuals self-representation, thus enabling instances of mis-gendering that might cause negative psychological implications for these individuals.[3] The current movement's main focus is therefore centered around the ideas that transgender, queer, gender non-conforming individuals should be entitled to exercise pronoun preference, or pronoun freedom.

This movement has also been accompanied by another language development that might have had positive implications for the movement as a whole: the emergence of politically correct language. Language sensitivity has gained momentum in overall society since the language trend known as politically correct language emerged in the 1990s (Cameron 1995). This development is best described as an increased expectation to conform to certain language considerations, particularly when referring to individuals representing stigmatized minority groups (Cameron 1995). It is reasonable to argue that the

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[2] The terms *transgender, queer, gender non-conforming* and *non-binary* will be all be used and understood in a broad sense throughout this thesis, and as ways of referring a range of gender-identities and practices outside the male and female binary (Stryker 2008).

[3] It should be noted that not all transgender individuals prefer a gender-neutral pronoun to a binary one. Stryker (2008:22) points out that many transgender individuals have made strong efforts to attain a different gender than "the one assigned to them at birth". Therefore, applying the appropriate gendered pronoun to them is also an important part acknowledging their new gender status.

focus on politically correct language has increased language users' awareness around, and expectations to deploy gender-inclusive language in public and formal discourses, as well as in informal interpersonal interaction (Cameron 1995). Language *inclusiveness* and *sensitivity* are two important components of exercising politically correct language, and they are also relevant when attempting to understand how language users' stance on pronoun preference has been shaped.

The list below contains contexts in which singular *they* frequently occurs in contemporary Australia (Strahan 2008). Collected from a number of written and spoken sources, this overview proves that singular *they* is not only used generically in Australia, but also when pronoun considerations are deliberately made by the speaker:

1) Singular *they* is used when gender is not relevant for the context.
2) Speakers might use singular *they* because they might find the *he/she* construct is clumsy and awkward.
3) Some might use singular *they* as a deliberate non-disclosure of a referent's gender, even though the speaker might know the referent's gender identity.
4) Singular *they* is used when a speaker/writer is unsure about, or does not know the gender of the referent, and therefore chooses to exercise discretion around assuming their gender.

While examples 1) and 2) illustrate a use of singular *they* that lacks a political or social motivation behind it, it is reasonable to argue that examples 3) and 4) have exactly that. In both these examples, singular *they* seems to be used when a speaker or a writer exercises caution and discretion around revealing, implying or assuming someone's gender. Hence, this might indicate that speakers do exercise inclusiveness and sensitivity when choosing a pronoun. However, it might be challenging to prove that this occurs as a direct result of the 21st century society's expectations deploy politically correct language.

1.4 Locating usage of non-binary pronouns

It seems like an increased focus on language sensitivity and inclusiveness has to a certain extent normalized the right to exercise pronoun preferences. These claims are supported by the fact that gender-neutral personal pronouns are now common in a range of written and spoken contexts in English speaking countries. This section will locate some of the sources of this use, exemplified by style manuals and institutional guidelines, the media and popular culture, and lastly, the field of queer linguistics. Not only do these sources show which contexts gender-neutral pronouns occur in, they also illustrate situations where language users might be expected or encouraged to use gender-neutral pronouns. Furthermore, as these developments can be considered fairly recent, they might also provide us an insight into how the discourse surrounding gender-neutral pronouns is currently being shaped.

It should be mentioned that the current use of gender-neutral pronouns in English is dominated by singular *they,* while neologisms are less common and less used (Hord 2016; Crawford and Fox 2007). Furthermore, studies are inconclusive with regard to *which* neologism seems to be more common or preferred in the transgender and queer communities (Hekanaho 2017). Nevertheless, the sections below will focus on examples where neologisms as well as singular *they* are currently used as personal pronouns*.*

1.4.1 Style guides and guidelines for gender-inclusive language

In 2017, *The Associated Press Stylebook* approved the use of singular *they* as a non-binary personal pronoun for the first time (Berendzen 2017). According to an article published by the *The Poynter Institute*, an American educational institution for journalism and media training, this decision was a result of years of questions from editors, journalists and reporters on how to correctly refer to non-binary individuals (Hare 2017). However, the AP stylebook still recommends a limited use of *they,* and encourages writers to use "the person's name in place of a pronoun, or otherwise reword the sentence whenever possible". Furthermore, the style guide specifies that writers ought to "explain in

the text that the person prefers a gender-neutral pronoun" (Hare 2017). The use of neologisms such as *xe* and *ze* are also discouraged in the new edition. This is justified by claiming that the use of gender-neutral pronouns in general might be confusing for readers, including the use of singular *they* as a personal pronoun (Morgan 2017). Paula Froke, the lead editor of the AP Stylebook, defended the new entry's limitations with the following statement to the Australian news channel SBS: "We don't, among our own staff, want to open a floodgate. But we recognise the need for it, so we want to open it a bit" (Morgan 2017).

Other "gatekeepers of language", such as government institutions (Curzan 2014), do however present language users with other gender-neutral alternatives than singular *they.* The guidelines for inclusive language published by The Victorian Government in Australia list *zie* and *hir* as examples of alternative pronouns to *he* and *she* (Victorian Government 2016). These pronouns are also listed as examples of gender-neutral pronouns in a new human rights law suggested by New York City government. This law, issued by The New York City Commission on Human Rights states that "intentional or repeated refusal to use an individual's preferred name, pronoun or title because they don't conform to gender stereotypes" might lead to fines, depending on the severity of the violations (New York City Government 2016). In other words, this law does not only make strong recommendations to language users to use a gender-neutral pronoun if requested to, but also presents them with material sanctions if they fail to do so.

1.4.2 Non-binary pronouns in the media

Gender-neutral pronouns, and particularly singular *they,* have sparked headlines in a range of online English newspapers on multiple occasions in recent years. In 2014, a *New York Times* article addressed that Facebook recently had put together an extensive list of 50 possible gender terms for their members to choose from, as well as offering *they/them* pronouns in addition to *he* and *she* (Ball 2014). Singular *they* also enjoyed media attention when it was awarded the word of the year in 2015 by the *American Dialect Society*, emphasizing that it has been "recognized by the society for its emerging use as a pronoun to refer to a

known person, often as a conscious choice by a person rejecting the traditional gender binary of *he* and *she*" (American Dialect Society 2016).

Non-binary actor and characters who prefer gender-neutral pronouns have appeared in recent TV productions as well. In the HBO show *Billions*, the actor Asia Dillon appears as Taylor Mason, one of the first gender-fluid TV-characters ever. Both Dillon and Mason prefer the pronoun *they/them,* a preference that also newspaper articles seem to respect when promoting the show. One example is the UK newspaper *The Huffington Post*, which consistently referred to Dillon as *they* throughout an article about her gender-fluid identity (Wong 2017). However, in other instances, Dillon has been referred to as *she.* This happened in a recent article in *The New York Times*, whereupon their incorrect pronoun use sparked reactions among the newspapers' readers. Among other written responses to the newspaper, a Public Editor piece criticized the fact that *The New York Times* does not yet have clear, nor written guidelines as to which pronoun is to be used if an article refers to an individual who is gender non-conforming (Spayd 2017). The newspapers' associate head editor for standards, Phil Corbett, elaborated on the matter by stating that gender-neutral pronouns are to be avoided wherever possible, to avoid causing confusion among readers, simply because they might be unfamiliar with such use (Spayd 2017). However, Corbett also stated that the newspaper should not "propose a pronoun that the person (in the story) rejects or is offended by". In cases like these, Corbett says, writers and editors are to seek his approval (Spayd 2017).

Although some newspaper guidelines, like *The New York Times'*, seem to be unclear as to how to deal with individuals who do not use or prefer *he* or *she,* other newspapers are explicit. *The Washington Post* is one of the English-language newspapers that have included singular *they* as their default gender-neutral pronoun in their style manual. Hence, in articles where a referent is gender-non-conforming, *they* occurs (American Dialect Society 2016). This use occurred for instance in a recent article where gender non-conforming Dana Zyym is interviewed (Andrews 2016).

1.4.3 University guidelines for gender-inclusive language

Guidelines for inclusive language are also found on webpages of universities around the English-speaking world. At Monash University and University of Queensland, two Australian universities, students and staff are specifically advised to respect the broad variety of gender-identities they might encounter at and around campus by respecting their pronoun preferences. On their home pages, *they* is listed as an example of gender-neutral pronouns that staff and students could use (Monash University 2017; University of Queensland 2017). Similar guidelines are also common for a range of American universities, such as the American University, MIT and Cornell University (CBS News 2015). Some universities have also started allowing individuals to indicate which pronoun they prefer when registering as a student. Already in 2009, The University of Vermont allowed their students to pick their preferred pronouns. In 2015, Harvard University and Ohio University followed. Among the alternatives students could choose from at Harvard, pronouns such as *they* and *ze* were listed (CBS News 2015).

Little research exists to confirm whether, or to what extent these recommendations or expectations are being met at college and university campuses in English speaking countries, however, news sources are available to confirm that they have sparked controversy. At the University of Tennessee, outrage was caused when the Diversity Office on campus recommended their students to use their peers' preferred pronouns (Murray 2015). The Diversity Office was later shut down as their funding was cut, or allegedly relocated to other campus services (Culligan, 2016). In Canada, the psychology professor Jordan Peterson has caused controversy by refusing to use gender-neutral pronouns such as *they, ze* or *zir* (Murphy 2016). In a BBC article, Peterson, who has lashed out against the 'tyranny' of the politically correct culture on multiple occasions, says that he will not be controlled to conform to expectations to use gender-neutral pronouns. In interviews, he compares this type of linguistic control with the ways of authoritarian regimes (Murphy 2016). The professor's statements and policy have sparked outrage among staff and students; however, experts disagree whether Peterson could face legal sanctions and penalties for his refusal to use gender-neutral pronouns (Murphy 2016).

1.4.4 Non-binary pronouns in queer linguistics

There are many examples of queer academics and scholars that use gender-neutral pronouns in their publications, particularly when referring to other queer scholars who prefer gender-neutral pronouns. One example is the scholar Levi C.R Hord who deliberately and consistently deploys gender-neutral pronouns in all of their publishing. In one article, they use the non-binary pronoun *sie* throughout (Hord 2016).[4] In this publication, *sie* was not only deployed when referring to individuals whose gender-identity is known to be non-binary, but also to scientists that commonly are referred to as *he* or *she,* such as Sigmund Freud (Hord 2016)*.* Queer publications like these are examples that neologisms are used, and also accepted in academia today.

1.5 Current research

The examples above show that language users do encounter encouragements and expectations to use an individual's preferred pronoun in both written and spoken contexts. Furthermore, they also illustrate how avidly and frequently debated the topic of gender-neutral pronouns currently seem to be. Lastly, these examples show that many language users and gatekeepers of language are currently attempting to enable and facilitate the right to exercise pronoun preference through a number of measures. However, little research is available to prove whether English users do use gender-neutral pronouns, or to which extent this use occurs. Furthermore, to my knowledge, no surveys have been conducted on language users' attitudes towards the use of gender-neutral pronouns in English.[5]

A Swedish study by Gustafsson Sendén, Bäck and Lindqvist was conducted after the gender-neutral pronoun *hen* was added to Swedish in 2012.

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[4] Hord themself uses the non-binary pronoun *they.* Individuals in this thesis will be referred to by non-binary pronouns if this is preferred or encouraged by the referents themselves. In other instances where a pronoun preferance is not known or encouraged, individuals will be referred to using *he* or *she.*

[5] Hekanaho (2017) is the only scholar that has published/is in the process of publishing findings within this research field.

As the first of its kind, the study surveyed Swedes' attitudes to, and uses of *hen* over a period of three years. The study considered the impact of a range of independent variables on attitudes and use, such as gender, age, modern sexism, political orientation, interest in gender issues, strength of gender-identity and so forth. Time was also considered as a continuous variable. Variables such as having conservative, right wing political views and sexist attitudes were strong predictors for negative attitudes and less frequent use. A strong gender-identity was associated with negative attitudes and infrequent use, whereas interest in gender-issues was associated with positive attitudes and higher use. In the analysis where use of *hen* was considered, older masculine participants reported lower use, whereas younger, feminine participants reported higher use. However, gender was not a stronger predictor for attitudes or use when interest in gender issues and gender identity were included in the analysis. Time was a significant predictor for positive attitudes, but it did not contribute to an increased use of *hen.* In summary, the study concludes that attitudes improved over time, and also the use of *hen* increased, thus suggesting that although language reforms face criticism initially, attitudes seem to normalize over time, thus claiming that implementation of a gender-neutral pronoun in Sweden was successful (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015)

1.6 Research gap

There are however a range of considerations to be made when comparing a study of Swedish language attitudes and use to English. Firstly, the Swedish study was conducted after *hen* was already implemented as the default gender-neutral pronoun, thus, the Swedish study did not consider potential resistance towards implementing a gender-neutral pronoun, or the participants' relative stance on pronoun preference. In contemporary English however, no default gender-neutral pronoun has been formally implemented, and several candidates are currently circulating, and are being used as personal pronouns in spoken and written contexts. Secondly, the Swedish study considered a fairly narrow use of *hen,* not distinguishing between the different contexts in which a gender-neutral pronoun might occur, such as when the gender-identity of the person in question

is being intentionally disguised, or when speakers are attempting to avoid making assumptions about someone's gender. Further, it did not distinguish between using *hen* as a generic pronoun, and when it's purposely being used as a non-binary pronoun in contexts where the individual referred to prefers this to *han* or *hon,* which are the Swedish equivalents of *he* and *she.* Lastly, the study did not discuss how an increased use and acceptance for gender-neutral *hen* might enable the Swedish language's representation of non-binary gender-identities even though four per cent of the participants indicated a gender-identity outside the male/female binary in the 2015 survey (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). For these reasons, a range of other variables were included in the survey of singular *they* and gender-neutral neologisms in the present study, in which Chapter 2, which follows, will elaborate on. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1) What attitudes and experience with gender-neutral pronouns do English users in Australia express?

2) Which factors seem to affect language users' attitudes to, and experience with gender-neutral pronouns?

2.0 Methodology

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part will focus on describing the structure of the survey questionnaire used for data collection as well as outline the variables considered. Then hypothesized findings will be presented. The latter part of the chapter will outline the characteristics and qualities of the web-based survey as a research tool, as well as addressing Facebook's role in reaching the desired sample for this study. This section will also outline some of the participation incentives that were considered in the process of designing and crafting the survey.

2.1 Survey structure and variables

Before proceeding to examining each variable considered in this survey, it should be noted that some of the variables included in the survey were taken from the 2015 study on the gender-neutral pronoun *hen* in Swedish. The reason for this overlap is the variables' significance for documenting and probing attitudes and use of *hen.* The significance of these variables in the Swedish study sparked an interest to test them in a different social and linguistic environment. These variables include age, gender, interest in gender issues, and strength of gender identity (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). A range of untested variables were also included in the survey. These variables include: urban-rural divide, level of education, ties to Australia, linguistic background, definition of gender, level of accept and respect for pronoun freedom, and the expressed need for a gender-neutral pronoun in English. The survey also distinguishes between the use of gender-neutral pronouns in a range of settings, specified in detail below.

One might argue that assessing the same variables as the Swedish study would have provided a better basis for comparison of the two studies. However, the variables that were omitted, political orientation and sexism, are both variables that have been assessed in several previous studies on gender-inclusive language (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). Therefore, omitting these

created space for new, untested variables that might predict use and attitudes. More space was also allocated to questions measuring use and attitudes related to several gender-neutral pronouns. In general, more questions were allocated to measure the use of singular *they* than the neologisms *xe, zie, ze* and *ey.* This is due to the fact that singular *they* has gained a foothold as the most common gender-neutral pronoun in English used in a variety of contexts (see section 1.4 for details.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the Swedish study performed a multiple hierarchical regression analysis where the strength of each variable on attitudes and use was measured (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). This study utilizes slightly different statistical methods to measure how the variables interact with or affect use and attitudes. Hence, the results will not be completely comparable to the results that the regression model used by the Swedish researchers yielded.

2.1.1. Willingness and experience

The first section of the survey was dedicated to measuring the use of singular *they* in contexts where language users might exercise discretion around revealing, or assuming a referent's gender. The second section addressed willingness and use of singular *they* as well as neologisms in contexts where a referent identifies as having a non-binary gender identity. The items on willingness aimed to measure participants' level of willingness to use a gender-neutral pronoun if specifically encouraged, or asked to. The question items related to experience and use measured whether participants had experienced being encouraged to use gender-neutral pronouns, as well as their actual use of gender-neutral pronouns. The last question of this section was an open-ended question allowing respondents to mention examples of other gender-neutral pronouns they have come across. All of the questions concerning willingness, experience with, and use of gender-neutral pronouns in section one and two were phrased as "yes/not sure/no" questions.

2.1.2 Attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference

The third section of the survey contained items measuring participants' attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns and their relative stance on pronoun preference. As mentioned above, neither of these variables were considered in the Swedish study on *hen.* All of the statements in this section were reversed question items, meaning that participants were presented with one positive and one negative statement on the same topic (see Appendix 1 for details and exact formulations). These questions measured the participants' attitudes using a six-point scale with alternatives ranging from "strongly disagree to strongly agree", including a "no opinion" and a "not sure" alternative.

2.1.3 Gender-identity and definition of gender

The remaining two sections of the survey asked the participants to state their opinions on a range of issues related to gender and gender-identity, as well as collecting some personal information. Social gender, or gender-identity was chosen as an independent variable in the survey rather biological gender. This decision was made based on the findings in the Swedish study on *hen,* where gender-identity proved to be a much stronger predictor for attitudes and use than biological gender (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). The Swedish study on *hen* found that older and more masculine participants were associated with negative attitudes and lower use, whereas younger, feminine participants were associated with positive attitudes and higher use. This is consistent with some previous research on gender-inclusive language that concludes that women are more positive to gender-fair language than men (Sarrasin, Gabrial and Gygax 2012).

However, it should also be noted that other findings on gender as a predictor for attitudes to, and use of gender-inclusive language are more inconsistent. According to some research, males and females do not display different attitudes towards gender-inclusive language, but claims that the differences lie in how they adjust to it, with women being more adaptable (Koeser and Sczesny 2014). When it comes to which attitudes individuals with gender-identities outside the binary display, Gustafsson Sendén et al (2015) refer to Rubin and Greene (1991) who found that androgynous genders, here

interpreted as non-binary gender-identity, display more positive attitudes towards gender-inclusive language and also more frequent use.

It should be noted that even though gender-identity was significant in the Swedish study on *hen,* it was not considered one of the strongest predictors for determining attitudes and use (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). This might be related to the fact that the researchers only examined the impact of male and female gender-identities and not non-binary gender-identities, although eight participants indicated a gender-identity outside the binary after the last round of data collection. However, this sample was deemed too small to indicate any patterns in attitude and use. Since the survey in this project specifically targeted samples representing transgender and queer communities, a clearer pattern is expected to appear, thus perhaps enabling a slightly different assessment of the significance of gender-identity than the Swedish study did.

In addition to assessing the significance of participants' gender-identity, the survey also assessed participants' understanding, or definition of gender as a variable, something that was not included in the Swedish study. This variable aimed to measure whether participants who define gender as a binary system express different attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns than the participants who understand and define gender as a continuum.

2.1.4 Strength of gender-identity and interest in gender issues

The survey also asked the participants to indicate the strength of their gender-identity, and whether they expressed interest in gender-issues. According to the Swedish study from 2015, the strength of participants' gender-identity was a stronger predictor for attitudes than for instance gender alone. In other words, having a strong male or female gender-identity was associated with more negative attitudes and less frequent use of *hen* (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). Furthermore, interest for gender-issues was associated with a positive attitude and higher use of *hen* (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015).

2.1.5 Age

The Swedish study on *hen* reported that younger individuals displayed more positive attitudes to, and reported more frequent use of gender-neutral *hen* (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). These findings corresponded with the researchers' initial hypothesis where age was expected to be a predictor for positive attitudes and more frequent use of *hen.* This hypothesis leaned on the assumption that people, adults in particular, prefer the status quo over changes, thus appreciate stability and predictability (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). It is therefore reasonable to claim that younger individuals also will express somewhat more liberal attitudes to changing the English pronominal system than middle-aged adults. This assumption is supported by the fact that younger people are generally more prone to challenge current systems and express more liberal attitudes than adults (Eaton et al 2009). Furthermore, as outlined in the introduction, non-binary gender expressions are more common and accepted today. Consequently, younger generations have grown up with, and been exposed to a more liberal discourse surrounding non-binary gender-identities than middle-aged adults. Therefore, younger language users might be also more open to using gender-neutral pronouns as well.

2.1.6 Level of education

Studies conducted on the educational effect on attitude shaping show that education does affect people's opinions on political and social matters. Therefore, it is also reasonable to assume that level of education might affect people's opinions and attitudes on linguistic phenomena as well. Ohlander, Batalova and Treas (2005:783) claim that since education seems to increase people's tolerance for heterogeneity, it contributes to increase people's capacity to have compassion with those who are different from themselves. As a result, as people undertake education, disapproval of non-conforming individuals diminishes while support for civil liberties increases. Furthermore, these changes in people's values and beliefs seem to be permanent.

These findings are relevant when making assumptions about the attitudes of university educated language users as a group. Based on the researched referred to above, it is reasonable to claim that this group will display fairly liberal attitudes to the use of gender-neutral pronouns, or pronoun freedom in general. This is true for the following reasons: Firstly, based on the assumption that education seems to generate liberal values and increase tolerance, it is reasonable to assume that educated people are more likely to support acts of exercising personal choice, such as the right to exercise pronoun freedom.

Secondly, since the LGBTQ community has gained momentum as a political and social movement on university campuses over the last decade, it is likely that people that have recently undergone education, or are currently being educated at a university are more familiar with the current discourse surrounding pronoun preference. This is particularly expected to be true for people who study, or have studied at universities that have official guidelines that specifically encourage the use of gender-inclusive language (for a detailed outline of university guidelines, see section 1.4.3). These people might have encountered expectations to respect pronoun preference in a range of university settings. One example is 'ally training programs' arranged by universities and colleges that aim at raising awareness, breaking down barriers, and encourage more supportive attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals (Worthen 2011). Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that universities might be important arenas for fostering acceptance for LGBTQ groups and issues (Worthen 2011:335).

However, studies on college students' attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals have also shown that even though university campuses are considered to be "liberal meccas" (Gumprecht 2003), LGBTQ students still report fear of, and encounters with violence, discrimination and abuse related to their sexual orientation or gender-identity (Worthen 2011). In her research on college students' attitudes towards LGBTQ students, Worthen (2011;2012) refers to several cases over the last decades where LGBTQ students have committed suicide as a direct result of repeated discrimination and bullying experienced on American college campuses. In other words, research specifically targeting college students' attitudes to LGBTQ individuals shows that higher

education is not exclusively associated with liberal supportive attitudes on issues such as sexual orientation and gender-expressions.

Lastly, since the LGBTQ community's advocacy for pronoun freedom does not exclusively occur in physical spaces such as college or university campuses, but to a large extent in online spaces as well, one cannot assume that higher education is the only way language users are exposed to a liberal discourse on gender-neutral pronouns. Hence, claiming that people that have not undertaken a college or university degree will display less liberal attitudes towards the use of gender-neutral pronouns in English might be problematic.

2.1.7 Urban-suburban-rural divide

The survey asked the participants to state their origin and current living situation to see how that might influence attitudes and use of gender-neutral pronouns, particularly considering the potential significance of an urban-rural divide. However, in order to adapt the question items to the uniqueness of the Australian demography, its large suburban population had to be included as an alternative, thus, an "urban-suburban-rural" divide is a more correct label for this variable.[6] Because suburban areas tend to be closer to metropolitan areas than rural, they might share more characteristics with urban areas (Gordon et.al 2015). Based on these facts, the suburban population was grouped with the urban in the final analyses of the survey data, thus separating these two groups from the rural group.

According to Doderer (2011), urban areas have been home to large LGBTQ populations on a global basis since the 1950s. This author claims that this pattern is related to the fact that an urban lifestyle better allows, and enables full self- realization of the queer individual, and allows individualism and difference, as opposed to rural areas, where "social and familial control" has traditionally

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[6] This decision was made after assessing a recent demography report from a collaborative research group based at The University of Western Australia, The Planning and Transport Research Centre (PATREC), which concluded that 89 per cent of Australia's population is considered to be urban. However, a study of sixteen large cities conducted by PATREC concludes that around 77 percent of this urban population lives in neighborhoods classified as suburban. Thus, the majority of Australia's urban population should in fact be classified as suburban (Gordon et al. 2015).

been more prevalent. Further, urban spaces have also been the battleground on which queer communities have resisted "the normativity of sex, gender and heterosexuality", by subtly, or loudly expressing queer dress styles, habits, language, as well as engaging in community building and political action (Doderer 2011:432). Today, pride marches are one example of a common, urban expression associated with the LGBTQ communities around the world. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that urban populations might display more liberal attitudes on issues related to preserving and expressing diversity than rural populations do.

2.1.8 Ties to Australia and linguistic background

The categories "ties to Australia" and "linguistic background" were included in order 1) to be able to exclude non-residents and non-citizens from the final analysis of the findings, but also 2) to be able to identify whether speakers' cultural- and linguistic background were predictors for attitudes and use of gender-inclusive language. A census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) showed that 26 per cent of Australia's population, or 6,163,667 people, were born outside Australia (ABS 2017). Although 23 per cent of these six million are British or New Zealanders, these numbers also include a significant Asian-born population as well. When including the amount of Australians with at least one overseas-born parent, this number increases to include 50 per cent of all Australians.

These numbers are significant when researching emerging and changing discourses in Australian society, as the diversity they express is likely to affect speakers' attitudes, beliefs and opinions, as well language habits. Given this diverse nature of Australian society, it was crucial that the survey attempted to measure how different origins, cultures and languages might shape the Australian discourse. Thus, the question on linguistic background focused on capturing the diversity of languages spoken by the participants. The alternatives listed were "Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Greek, Italian, Hindi and Other." These alternatives were selected from an overview of the top ten languages spoken in Australia according to the 2016 Census of Population and

Housing. This census showed that there are over 300 different languages spoken in Australian homes, of which 21 per cent of Australians (both Australian-born and overseas-born) speak a different language than English at home (ABS 2017).

2.2 Hypotheses

After considering previous research as well as the untested variables, the following hypotheses were formulated. These hypotheses seek to examine both some broader tendencies tied to willingness, experience and attitudes surrounding gender-neutral pronouns (H1 to H3), as well as examining how each of the variables listed above might influence these (H4 to H7).

H1: Use of singular *they*: It is expected that respondents will report more experience with using singular *they* in situations where they exercise caution around revealing, or assuming someone's gender, than when it is used as a non-binary pronoun for referents who do not identify as male or female.

H2: Attitudes towards *they* vs. neologisms: Participants will in general display more willingness to use singular *they* than neologisms (apart from perhaps those participants who report having a non-binary gender identity).

H3: **Possible correlation between attitudes and use:** There will not necessarily be a correlation between participants' willingness to use gender-neutral pronouns and their reported experience, or use. Thus it is expected that even though participants will display high willingness towards using gender-neutral pronouns, they will not necessarily report a high use.

H4: Age and level of education: It is anticipated that both familiarity, and experience with using gender-neutral pronouns will be highly influenced by the participants' age and the social roles that might involve. Younger people are expected to display more positive attitudes and report more frequent use. This is particularly expected from respondents who have been enrolled in a university

where they might have been exposed to liberal values tied to preferred pronoun use.

H5 Urban-rural divide: When considering the urban-rural divide as a predictor for attitudes and use, negative attitudes and infrequent use are expected among participants who live in rural areas, and who report rural origins. Hence, participants who live in suburban and urban areas are expected to display more positive attitudes, as well as more frequent use.

H6 Gender identity and strength of gender identity: Having a non-binary gender-identity is expected to be a significant predictor for both high willingness and frequent use for both singular *they* as well as neologisms. In comparison to this group, respondents that report binary gender-identities are expected to display less willingness and lower use. It is predicted that participants with a strong male or female gender-identity will display the most negative attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference, be less willing to use these pronouns, and report less frequent use.

H7: Attitudes to pronoun preferences: It is expected that participants' understanding, or definition of gender will be a significant predictor for attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns. A definition of gender as a continuum rather than a binary system might be a predictor for positive attitudes on issues related to gender-neutral pronouns. These participants are expected to be in favor of exercising pronoun preferences, thus acknowledging gender-neutral pronouns as appropriate alternatives to *he* and *she.* On the other hand, an understanding of gender as a binary system will be associated with negative attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference.

2.3 Web-based surveys and Facebook distribution

This section will outline some of the reasons behind choosing a web-based survey to obtain data, as well as justifying the choice of Facebook as a distribution platform. Hewson (2015) stresses that one of the most apparent

advantages of web-based surveys as research tools is the researcher's ability to obtain extensive quantitative data from a large sample in a short time. Furthermore, this method also enables the researcher to reach a geographically dispersed audience, as well as respondents far removed from the researchers in a cost-effective way (Sue and Ritter 2007; Van Selm and Janowski 2006). If posted on multiple pages simultaneously, web-based surveys have the potential of gathering numerous responses from a broad and diverse audience within hours (Sue and Ritter 2007). Qualtrics was the survey software used for data collection. This is a frequently used survey tool known for its user friendliness (Hewson 2015).

As mentioned, the desired sample for this project was a representative sample of young Australian adults between the ages of 18 to 30. Choosing Facebook as the distribution platform further enabled an easy access to a large and diverse sample as it is the most frequently used social medium in Australia with twelve million daily active users (Social Media News 2017).[7] Facebook is also home to a range of pages and groups that represent various populations and interests, thus also some of the sub-samples that were actively targeted for this project (see section 2.7 for details, as well as Appendix 2). Moreover, in addition to being the most frequently used social medium in Australia, the rapport *Digital In 2017 Global Overview* shows that Facebook is by far the largest social medium for smartphone users in Australia per 2017. Although this rapport does not contain specify data for Facebook log-ins, it shows that 57 per cent of Australians use smartphones when accessing social media sites (We Are Social 2017).[8] Choosing Facebook as a distribution platform then, does not only facilitate easy access to a diverse and large sample, it also facilitate access through multiple devices, thus enabling an efficient data collection.

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[7] Facebook has seventeen million active, monthly users in Australia. This equals 70 per cent of the Australian population (Social Media News 2017).

[8] McInroy (2016:90) argues that particularly marginalized youth, including LGBTQ youth, might be more comfortable using a mobile phone instead of other devices, like a shared computer, when taking an online survey. Using a smartphone might feel more private, hence safer, as the screen is smaller and more shielded from the participant's surroundings.

2.4 Addressing potential sampling errors

As claimed in section 2.2 above, a majority of Australians visit Facebook daily. This suggests that in theory, the population(s) targeted for this survey would be able to discover the survey link at numerous points when browsing the site, thus increasing the survey's chances to efficiently reach its desired sample. However, it is problematic to assume that a survey will automatically reach all Facebook users, thus generating a representative sample of *all* young Australian adults. Firstly, the survey might not reach all the indented groups, secondly, some groups might purposely ignore the survey. Consequently, some groups might end up being overrepresented in the sample compared to others. These challenges are commonly referred to sampling errors, as they imply that only parts of a population have been surveyed rather than the whole population (Groves, Presser and Dipko 2004; Van Selm and Janowski 2006). This section will attempt to address a few common sampling errors in survey research, such as non-response, low response rates and survey sabotaging. These will be discussed as to how they might threaten the validity of the data collection for this project, as well as how they might be avoided in the survey distribution.

2.4.1 Non-response

The populations or groups that a survey fails to target, or that choose to not participate in the survey are commonly referred to as non-respondents (Manzo and Burke 2012). Groves et al (2004) emphasize the importance of identifying the circumstances in which non-respondents contribute to sample errors. In this particular research project, it would be fruitful to reflect upon some of the reasons why some Facebook users might choose to ignore the survey link, and whether these non-respondents share similar characteristics or differ from the participating groups. This is particularly relevant if some groups are underrepresented in the sample to such an extent that it might constitute a threat to the validity of the data that the survey generates (Manzo and Burke 2012).

Non-response as a potential sampling error might be challenging for the surveyor to overcome, as there might be a number of reasons why some participants, or groups choose to not participate in the survey. Furthermore, it is challenging for the surveyor to identify all the circumstances in which non-respondents might contribute to sampling errors. Some of the non-respondents might share similar motives for not participating in a survey - some might end up as non-respondents due to difficulties understanding the survey questions (Gideon 2012), while others might represent groups that have low, or no interest in the survey topic (Groves et al 2004). Some might not have an opinion on the survey topic (Sue and Ritter), or wish to take a firm stance on all of the questions in the questionnaire, others might have concerns regarding the confidentially of the information they are providing (Manzo and Burke 2012). Some might simply not usually take surveys they are exposed to on Facebook.

Section 2.5 below outlines how sparking interest in the survey topic was important to diminish the impact of non-response in the sample. Furthermore, this section also outlines how question phrasing was also an important component of enabling participation, thus diminishing non-response as a result of unclear or difficult questions. Providing participants with a "No opinion" alternative and a "Not sure" alternative in the survey ensured that participants were able to express potential non-attitudes, as well as expressing insecurities or doubt on all of the survey questions. Lastly, potential anonymity concerns were addressed throughout the survey invitation as well as the survey questionnaire.

2.4.2 Low response rates

Extensive literature on survey research points out that low response rates seem to be one of the most common challenges for surveyors (Padayachee 2016; McPeake, Bateson and O'Neill 2014; Manzo and Burke 2012). Low response rates might cause sampling errors as the survey fails to reach out to enough participants, thus threatening the reliability of the data collected (Manzo and Burke 2012). Low response rates might be tied to number of factors (see Padayachee 2016 and Manzo and Burke 2012), however, this section will largely

focus on how survey saturation and anonymity concerns might contribute to lower this survey's response rates.

Wright (2005) claims that one reason why surveys struggle to recruit participants might be tied to the fact that people receive a lot of survey invitations and have therefore become increasingly desensitized to them. Furthermore, McPeake, Bateson and O'Neill (2014) point out that completing questionnaires is frequently part of people's professions, and that many therefore avoid participating in optional surveys when invited to. Manzo and Burke (2012:327) claim that low response rates also might be tied to people's reluctance to be reached in a "hyper-connected time", thus refusing to participate even though they are reachable.

Overcoming "survey saturation" might seem challenging. However, there are some tangible solutions available that might assist the surveyor in catching recipients' attention, such as improving the survey's visibility. One potential challenge that might generate low response rates in this particular project is that distribution on Facebook might cause the survey to drown in the abundance of other posts and updates as rapidly changing visual impressions and incoming notifications might cause potential respondents to simply miss, or overlook the survey link. Therefore, each Facebook group administrator contacted in this project was asked to pin, or prioritize the post that contained the survey invitation and link, so that it stayed at the top of their page or group wall although new posts were added. This way, the survey invitation would be the first thing members saw when visiting the Facebook group or page, even though the invitation was posted hours, or days ago.

Respondents' concerns regarding anonymity and confidentiality might also have a negative effect on both response rate, as well as the completion rate of the survey (Manzo and Burke 2012; Sue and Ritter 2007). Therefore, it is crucial that the surveyor takes these concerns into account when designing, and conducting the survey. A range of Qualtrics settings contributed to conceal participants' IP-address and other technological traces that might reveal their identity. This was emphasized in both the questionnaire and the invitations distributed to the respondents (see Appendices 1 and 2).

Repeated promises of anonymity and confidentiality might also affect the respondents' honesty when answering questions: faced with a computer screen instead of an interviewer, respondents might express themselves more honestly (Sue and Ritter 2007). However, this is not to say that anonymous online methods automatically mean all participants provide honest answers. Sue and Ritter (2007) still claim that a common survey error stems from respondents' desire to provide answers that allow them to be seen in a positive light (social desirability bias). However, it is challenging for the surveyor to identify whether participation is motivated by social desirability, Sue and Ritter (2007) however suggest that a social desirability bias can be avoided by repeatedly stating that participation is anonymous, thus that surveyor is unable to identify each individual participants based on the information they provide.

2.4.3. Survey sabotaging

Lastly, duplicated or multiple responses as a result of active sabotage might generate sampling errors (Sue and Ritter 2007). This was avoided as Qualtrics settings prevented participants from taking the survey multiple times from the same device. This means that if participants wished to submit more than one answer, they would have to access the survey link through a different device. In other words, participants would have the opportunity to submit multiple answers, but it is reasonable to argue that since these actions would require participants to actively find, and log on to another device to submit their answers multiple times, it is unlikely that a significant amount of participants would go through this process to sabotage the survey.

2.5 Creating participation incentives

As briefly mentioned above, surveyors do have the possibility of creating participation incentives that might better facilitate efficient recruitment and

participation from the population they are surveying.[9] The following section will outline the incentives that might be relevant for this particular survey, and discuss these with regard to how they might interact to lower barriers for participation while at the same time provide participants with incentives to click on and complete the survey. The following incentives will be addressed in relation to how they might affect respondents to click on the survey link: the content of the survey invitation, and the interest in the survey topic. The remaining incentives will be discussed in relation to how they might affect respondents' progression and completion of the survey: the questionnaire design and formatting, and the question phrasing.

2.5.1 Survey invitations

The survey invitation is the researchers' first point of contacts with potential participants, and thus the chance to sell the survey as a valuable activity for participants to engage in (Sue and Ritter 2007). A compelling survey invitation might therefore influence prospective respondents' chances of progressing through the survey (Manzo and Burke 2012; Albaum and Smith 2012). Appendix 2 shows the survey invitation that was distributed to Facebook groups and pages. This invitation attempts to capture the recipients' interest through a personal approach, where the recipients are encouraged to share their personal opinions and feelings on the survey topic. Including questions at the start of the survey had the purpose of intriguing the recipient to both continue reading, as well as click on the survey link. Manzo and Burke (2012) mention personalization of the survey invitation as an effective way of increasing a survey's response rate. Although the invitation did not address anyone by their name or title, its salutation should still be considered personal, as "Hi there" is a fairly oral greeting that usually occurs in informal settings. Moreover, the phrase "I need your opinion on this", as a continuation of the personal salutation might build rapport with the recipients, as the researcher is appealing directly to each individual participant. Use of the personal pronoun "your" reinforces an informal

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[9] The literature on survey research is inconclusive with regard to pointing out one single factor, or a combination of factors that might increase participation incentives (Albaum and Smith 2012).

and personal bond between researcher and recipient. The importance of participating was made clear by emphasizing the missing research on the topic of gender-neutral pronouns; it also stressed the importance of the recipients' role in changing this by sharing their opinions, thus contributing to new insights on the topic.

The survey invitation also emphasized the ease and importance of participating (Sue and Ritter 2007) by stressing the survey's short time commitment of 5-6 minutes. Furthermore, the invitation informed the recipients that accessing the survey was possible through computers, smart phones and tablets to further emphasize the convenience of participation.

Lastly, the survey invitation contained a few other elements that might affect the decision to participate. Among these was the promise made to the participants that the participation was anonym and that the information they provided was confidential.

2.5.2 Interest in survey topic

Albaum and Smith (2012) claim that interest in the survey topic is an internal factor that might affect an individual's decision to click on and complete a survey or not. This is supported by Groves et al (2004) who found that participants responded at higher rates to surveys on topics of their interest.

As Chapter 1 outlines, discussions on gender-neutral language and other topics related to the representation of gender-identity have occurred more frequently in the public discourse in the recent years. Therefore, the survey topic is likely to function as a participation incentive in itself as it deals with a current (and perhaps also controversial) topic that might interest a range of groups and populations. Furthermore, as the survey is related to language use and communication in every-day situations, participation might feel relevant for a number of groups and populations, as they might wish to express their opinions on these matters. The survey's universal relevance might therefore facilitate participation from the general public and not only people who already are familiar with, and interested in the topic of gender-neutral pronouns. Thus, it is also reasonable to assume that non-response will not be caused by low interest

in the survey topic. In fact, Groves et al (2004) argue that participants with an interest in the survey topic will not be overrepresented among the participants unless there are no other positive incentives of participation. It is therefore reasonable to argue that although interest might be an important factor affecting some recipients in their decision-making process of whether to click on and complete the survey, other recipients might click on and complete the survey for other reasons, such as its short time-commitment, or sense of the importance of contributing to the research, thus not resulting in a skewed sample.

2.5.3 Questionnaire formatting

Extensive research has concluded that survey formatting might affect participation positively or negatively (Sue and Ritter 2007; Wagner 2010; McInroy 2016). Among other things, Wagner (2012:28) stresses that if the questionnaire looks professional, participants are more likely to respond to it seriously. Implied in this is that a survey ought to avoid spelling errors or formatting inconsistencies to ensure sincere responses. Other researchers focus specifically on how the visual layout and the formatting can affect participation in web-based surveys. Web-based surveys that look like paper questionnaires could have a positive effect on participation (McInroy 2016; Manzo and Burke 2012). Moreover, Sue and Ritter (2007) suggest that surveyors should be careful with the use of colors as they might generate different associations for people.

The factors outlined above were all considered in designing a user-friendly and professional web-based questionnaire before the data collection commenced. A standard black on white format was chosen to make the survey resemble a paper questionnaire. Furthermore, consistency was maintained throughout by using the same text font and size for questions and explanations. These were all in bold. Bold and italics were also chosen for clarity and emphasis in both the survey invitations, in the welcome, and end-of-survey texts, as well as for examples (see Appendix 1 for exact formulations and details). The piloting phase focused on discovering spelling errors to ensure a professional impression of the survey (for further discussion see section 2.7 on distribution procedure).

2.5.4 Survey questions

How questions are phrased, presented and organized might function as incentives for participants as they progress through the survey questionnaire (Gideon 2012; Johnson and Christensen 2010). This section will present some of the factors taken into account when phrasing and structuring the questions in the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of both "yes/no/not sure" questions and items based on the Likert-scale, ranging from "strongly disagree", to "strongly agree". These questions also had a "no opinion", and a "not sure" alternative (see Appendix 1 for exact formulations and structure of the questionnaire and its questions).

Gideon (2012) stresses the importance of avoiding jargon and professional concepts when phrasing questions as this might lead to confusion and alienation of the participants, thus resulting in non-response. For this reason, a definition of gender-neutral pronouns was provided early in the questionnaire. Furthermore, all the different sections of the questionnaire were introduced by an introductory text, which explained the context of the upcoming questions. The introductory texts also contributed to creating a clear structure for the questionnaire, as they separated questions on different topics, and grouped questions on similar topics together (Gideon 2012; Sue and Ritter 2007). This contributed to creating a coherent impression of the survey, thus potentially also preventing break-off rates as participants can proceed through the survey in a logical manner.

Gideon (2012) also emphasizes the fact that the surveyor should respect the fact that the targeted population consists of busy individuals, and that complicated, long questions might be considered a burden. In his view, survey questions should be short and to-the-point, and not lengthy and complicated. This is supported by Johnson and Christensen 2010, who emphasize the importance of formulating questions that are easy to understand, and that "make sense" to people. However, although concise questions are encouraged, Gideon (2012) also claims that if necessary, surveyors may present the participants with questions set within scenarios. This was an important part of designing and phrasing the question items that measured the use of gender-neutral pronouns. These items asked participants about their language behavior in both past and

future situations. Presenting the participants with situations in which gender-neutral pronoun use might occur was therefore a way of imagining future behavior, as well as recalling past behavior.

2.6 Survey distribution process

This section will outline the procedure followed in conducting the survey, with particular focus on the distribution process, and Facebook as a distribution tool and platform. This section will also outline the procedure of selecting and contacting Facebook groups. Lastly, a short description of the sample demography will be provided.

2.6.1 Ethical considerations

The data collection was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines presented by The Norwegian Center For Research Data, who confirmed that a formal ethical review was not required, as the survey did not register any personal information that might reveal the participants' identity. Written consent to collect and publish the survey data was not sought from each participant as consent was implied by the participants' choice to take, and complete the survey after reading the information provided on the welcome page.

2.6.2 Piloting phase

Before initiating the official data collection, several test rounds were completed, in which twelve native- and non-native English speakers provided feedback on their experience with the survey design and content. According to Wagner (2010), test rounds are encouraged in survey research to better enable the researcher in revising the survey before commencing data collection. According to his work, the fresh eyes of survey testers might discover issues that the researcher has overlooked, such as mistyping, awkward wording and ambiguities (Wagner 2010). The piloting phase for this project resulted in a

range of alterations – particularly of the wording of questions, examples and explanations, as well as the order in which the questions were presented. The feedback was received through establishing a personal message thread in which the survey testers shared their feedback.

2.6.3 Selecting and contacting Facebook groups

As section 2.3 above outlines, the survey targeted a wide pool of Facebook groups in order to reach a diverse and representative sample. Therefore, a number of groups based in three different Australian states were targeted in the distribution process. These groups include student societies, sports clubs, buy and sell groups, and groups with religious foundations. Furthermore, groups representing other linguistic backgrounds than English, as well as a number of small LGBTQ interest groups were contacted (for a full overview of the groups contacted, see Appendix 3). Furthermore, participants older than 35 years old were also included in the sample in order to enable a comparison between younger and older participants. However, these were not actively targeted in the same manner as many of the other desired subsamples. None of the selected groups had more than 2000 members, as a precaution to avoid an overrepresentation from big groups, as this might facilitate sample errors.

The distribution procedure followed a similar pattern throughout the 30 days of data collection: group administrators were contacted through a personal message in the chat or messenger function on Facebook in which they were asked to post the survey invitation in the group they administered. In total, 27 Facebook group administrators were contacted. Five of these administrators allowed the survey link and invitation to be posted in their group forums by the researcher, whereas two administrators chose to post the survey link themselves. The remaining group administrators declined or ignored the invitation message (see Appendix 3 for an overview). In the groups where access was granted and approved, the survey link and invitation were posted (see Appendix 2 for details on survey invitation). This made the survey accessible for all the group members. The administrators who ignored the survey invitation, but did not explicitly decline it were contacted again after a short period of time

with a follow-up message. The result of the distribution was a sample of n = 136. The survey's completion rate was 77 per cent, equivalent to 104 completed surveys.

2.6.4 Sample demography and tendencies

Before proceeding to presenting and discussing the survey results, a few remarks regarding the sample demography should be made. Almost all the survey participants were Australian citizens *and* residents. Only two participants indicated that they had no ties to Australia. These two participants' answers were omitted from the final analysis. The participants' language backgrounds seem to be mainly English, with only nine participants stating a different language background than English. Fifty-nine participants were males, whereas 33 were females. Nine participants stated a non-binary gender-identity. Eighty-four of the participants were between 18-30 years old, while 20 ranged from 30 and above. In other words, the survey managed to reach an ideal sample consisting of mostly younger participants. Most participants seem to have grown up in suburban areas, and still live there. Eight participants indicated that they had moved from rural areas to an urban area, and 8 from suburban to urban areas. Most of the participants, 80 in total, seem to have undertaken some form of higher education. This means that 24 participants have not undertaken any form of higher education after completing upper secondary.

3.0 Discussion of findings

This chapter will present the findings from the online survey conducted and a thorough discussion of these. The first section of the chapter will address and discuss the predictions made in H1 to H3, while the second section will discuss the predictions made in H4 to H7. The third section of this chapter will address and discuss other findings that were not predicted through hypotheses.

It should be noted that the results presented and discussed in section 3.1 will include participants who did not complete the survey, hence, tables and figures in this section will contain answers from participants who at one point left the survey. Therefore, in each table, the "total" might refer to a varying number of participants, as the questions on willingness and use were the first questions that the participants encountered when starting the survey. As sections 3.2 and 3.3 address questions and variables that occurred towards the end of the survey, these sections will only present answers from the participants who completed the survey.

3.1 Testing H1 to H3

H1 to H3 all sought to establish an overview of tendencies tied to willingness, experience and use of gender-neutral pronouns. These results will be presented in tables and figures below. In addition to this overview, some of the comments provided by the participants in the free text response will be referred to as well, in order to elaborate on certain findings.

3.1.1 Testing H1: Use of singular *they*

The tables 3.1 to 3.5 and figures 3.1 to 3.3 below will present an overview of the participants' use of singular *they* when 1) avoiding disclosing someone's gender identity, 2) avoiding assumptions of someone's gender-identity, and 3) used as a non-binary pronoun.

Table 3.1: *Use of singular they to avoid disclosing gender-identity*

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	62	71
Not sure	4	5
No	34	39
Total	100	115
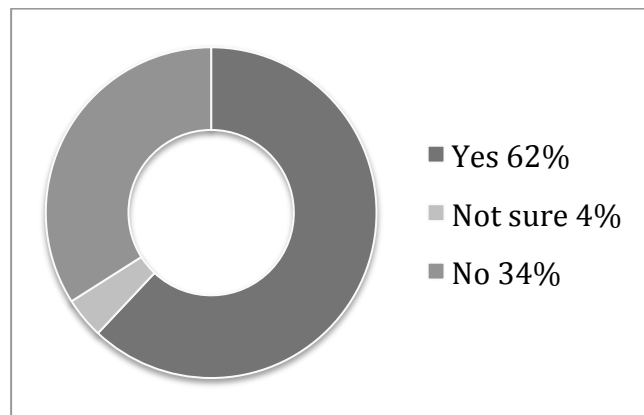
Figure 3.1: *Use of singular they to avoid disclosing gender-identity*

Table 3.2: *Repeated use of singular they to avoid disclosing gender-identity*

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	40	45
Not sure	10	12
No	50	57
Total	100	114

Table 3.3: *Use of singular they to avoid assumption of gender-identity*

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	65	74
Not sure	3	4
No	32	69
Total	100	114
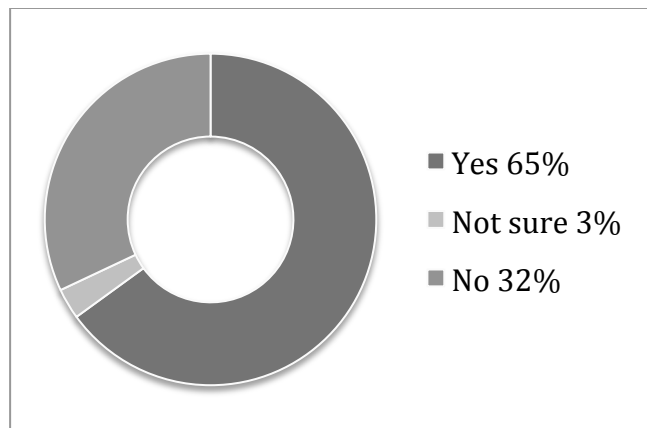
Figure 3.2: *Use of singular they to avoid assumption of gender-identity*

Table 3.4: *Repeated use of singular they to avoid assumption of gender-identity*

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	50	57
Not sure	9	10
No	41	47
Total	100	114

Table 3.5: *Use of singular they as non-binary pronoun*

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	41	46
Not sure	8	9
No	51	56
Total	100	111
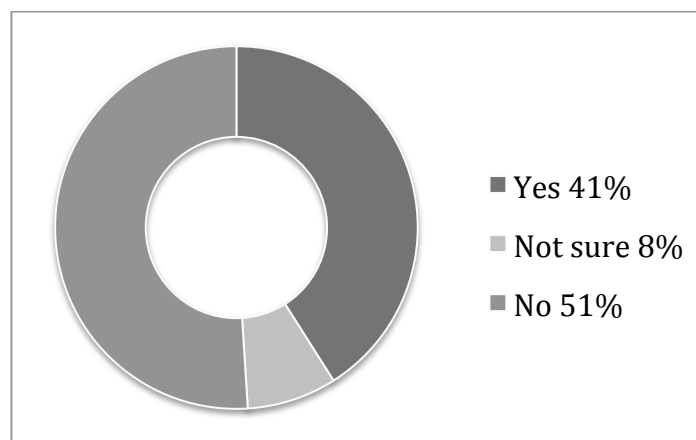
Figure 3.3: *Use of singular they as a non-binary pronoun*

H1 stated that it was expected that respondents would report more experience with using singular *they* in situations where they exercise caution around revealing, or assuming someone's gender, than when *they* is deliberately used as a non-binary pronoun for referents who do not identify as male or female. Tables 3.1 and 3.3, and fig. 3.1 and 3.2 show that over 60 per cent of the participants report having used singular *they* when avoiding disclosure or assumption of someone's gender-identity. Furthermore, table 3.2 shows that 40 per cent report that they have used singular *they* to avoid disclosing someone's gender-identity multiple times, while table 3.4 shows that 50 per cent report that they have used *they* to avoid someone's gender-identity multiple times. In comparison, the observations in table 3.5 and fig. 3.3 show that 41 per cent have

used singular *they* as a non-binary pronoun when referring to a non-binary individual. These results show that language users seem to use singular *they* in a number of ways. Hence, this seems to confirm the role of singular *they* as the multi-purpose gender-neutral pronoun that Strahan (2008) outlines (for details, see section 1.3.3). Furthermore, the results in table 3.2 and 3.4 also suggest that a large portion of the participants have repeatedly used singular *they* to exercise caution around people's gender-identity, particularly when avoiding assumption of gender-identity. As the survey did not measure the repeated use of singular *they* as a non-binary pronoun, there is no indications as to how frequent this use is in comparison. Nevertheless, H1 is still supported as the results above indicate singular *they* seems to be more commonly used in situations where people exercise caution around assuming or revealing others' gender-identity, compared to when it is consciously used as a way of referring to individuals with a non-binary gender-identity.

Although these findings give insight into some of the ways Australians might exercise awareness around gender-identity in communication they do not give an impression of *all* the techniques commonly used to exercise language sensitivity and inclusiveness. For instance, we can not assume that the participants who answered *no* on these questions never deploy any other techniques to exercise caution around gender-identity, just because they do not use singular *they* in these instances. Some might have answered *no* because they are not conscious of their own gendered pronoun use, others might avoid using pronouns at all in these instances. Hence, we cannot use these results to make assumptions about all Australians' behavior and habits in situations where they caution and awareness around gender-identity is being exercised.

3.1.2 Testing H2: Attitudes towards using *they* vs. neologisms

Table 3.6 and fig. 3.4 and table 3.7 and fig. 3.5 below contain an overview of findings related to participants' willingness to use singular *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun compared to their willingness to use neologisms.

However, before addressing and discussing potential differences, it might be fruitful to examine some of findings tied to attitudes to gender-neutral

pronouns and pronoun preference. Fifty-six per cent of the participants report that they think a gender-neutral pronoun should be added to English, while 38 per cent think this is unnecessary. Sixty-seven per cent report that they think people should be able to choose a different pronoun if they do not identify as a *he* or *she.* Only 17 per cent think that *he* and *she* are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person. Seventy-four per cent think that others should accept and respect someone's preference to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of *he* and *she.* Contrastingly, 20 per cent disagree with this. These findings indicate that participants seem to display overall positive attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference. The findings below however, might provide insight into whether the participants are more or less likely to use singular *they* compared to neologisms.

Table 3.6: *Willingness to use singular they* as a non-binary pronoun

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	77	85
Not sure	9	10
No	14	16
Total	100	111
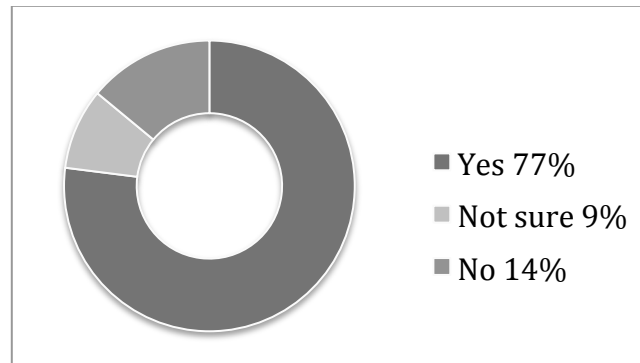
Figure 3.4: *Willingness to use singular they as a non-binary pronoun*

Table 3.7: *Willingness to use neologisms* as *non-binary pronouns*

Answer	%	Count
Yes	54	58
Not sure	8	9
No	38	51
Total	100	108
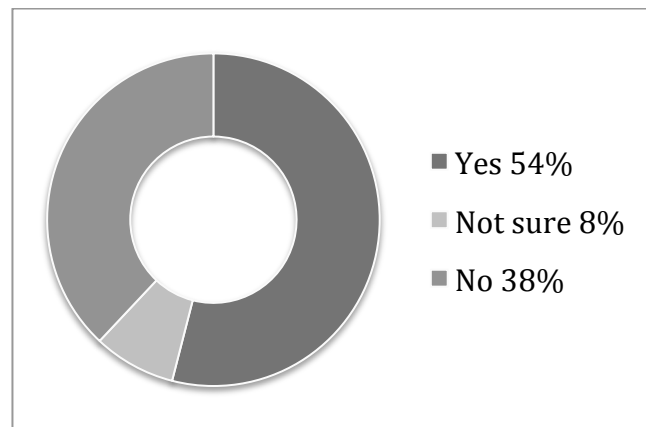
Figure 3.5: *Willingness to use neologisms as non-binary pronouns*

H2 predicted that participants would generally display more willingness to use singular *they* than neologisms. As the results above indicate, participants seem to hold overall positive attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preferences. Table as 3.6 and fig. 3.4 show, 77 per cent of the participants would be willing to use singular *they* instead of *he* or *she* if specifically asked to. However, as table 3.7 and fig. 3.5 show, this share is reduced to 54 per cent when participants were asked whether they would be willing to use the neologisms *xe, zie, ze* or *ey*. These findings also show an increase of *no* answers from 14 percent to 38 per cent when comparing willingness to use *they* to the willingness to use neologisms.

These findings correspond somewhat with the preliminary results from a PhD study in progress by Laura Hekanaho. Her preliminary survey results indicate that 69 percent found the use of singular *they* acceptable, whereas [10] 34% of her participants[11] found the use of neo-pronouns such as *ze* and *xe* acceptable. 49 per cent found this pronoun use unacceptable (Hekanaho 2017). With such a high acceptance rate, it might be possible to argue that singular *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun seems to have fulfilled the prophecy made by early scholars in the field, such as Bodine (1975) and Baron (1981), who both predicted that *they* would be the only gender-neutral candidate to achieve widespread acceptance. McConnell-Ginet, a contemporary linguist supports these predictions claims: "if gender-neutral reference to specific individuals does become widespread, my guess is that it will come through widening uses of *they*" (McConnell-Ginet 2013:25).

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[10] It should be mentioned that this approval rate refers to singular *they* when combined with a plural verb, similar to how *they* is used generically. When presented with the alternative of combining singular *they* with a singular verb, such as "they works", 90 per cent of the participants in Hekanaho's study found this unacceptable. Thus, this might confirm the theory that *they* is accepted because the current use corresponds with traditional grammatical rules.

[11] Hekanaho's sample consists of 75 per cent native English speakers as well as 16 per cent Finnish speakers and five per cent Swedish speakers.

An examination of two of the comments left by the participants in the free text response might assist us in interpreting some of the reasons behind the reduced willingness to use neologisms as gender-neutral pronouns:[12]

> To clarify the refusal to use ze etc.: It would too unnatural for me to use those pronouns, so I would default to either they or just using the person's name rather than go to the effort of reshaping language instincts. I'm sure if this request came from a close friend or similar, my opinion would probably change (10).

Although this participant states that they would consider using a neologism as a gender-neutral pronoun if the request came from a friend or a family member, they still suggest that the act of using a neologism would feel "unnatural" or "artificial" – describing it as an act of "reshaping" their language instinct. These notions are also repeated in another participant's comment:

> I would prefer a gender neutral singular pronoun that doesn't include rare letters like z or x. I prefer the idea of 'ne' or 'se' or 'thi' as they would flow more naturally in English language and may be more easily accepted (11).

This participant's unwillingness to use the neologisms presented in the survey seems to stem from a combination of the unusual spelling, or letter combinations that the neologisms have as well as their pronunciation. Furthermore, this participant suggests that different spellings would result in more "natural sounding" pronouns, suggesting that this might increase their chances of getting accepted. Scholars within the field of queer research have also pointed out that neologisms that look and sound like other familiar words might have a greater chance of getting accepted: McConnell-Ginet (2013) points out that neologisms such as *ey* might have potential to become more widely embraced because of its similarity to *they.* And although this scholar acknowledges that the success of neologisms is not easy to foresee, as changes in pronominal systems are complex and slow processes, she still predicts that some neologisms (without specifying

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[12] All free text responses can be found in Appendix 4. The free text responses included in this text are numbered according to the order they occurred in the material collected.

which) might have the potential to "beat out *they*" in the future (McConnell-Ginet 2013:25).

To my knowledge, no research exists to confirm whether these tendencies are representative for other speakers of English as well. However, the preliminary results from Hekanaho's (2017) survey on non-binary pronouns also indicate that some American English speakers are reluctant towards using neo-pronouns because they find them "artificial", "not organic", and "forced". This notion is also expressed by one Australian survey participant, who says the following about the chances for a new gender-neutral pronoun to become accepted: "Maybe better if a new pronoun be added organically, though everyday conversation etc." (6).

Free text responses like these add nuances to the numbers provided in the tables and figures above, thus they might contribute to an understanding of some of the reasons why language users seem to display slightly higher willingness to use *they* over neologisms. However, although we can confirm that a discrepancy exists, we cannot say that the participants are *unwilling* to use neologisms, as 54 per cent of the participants indicated a positive attitude towards using neologisms. Furthermore, because this question, and all other questions on neologisms only presented participants with *xe, zie, ze* and *ey* as alternatives, we cannot make any assumptions about attitudes towards other neologisms that function as gender-neutral personal pronouns, such as *fae.* Indeed, some participants stated that they had encountered *fae,* as well as other gender-neutral pronouns than the ones presented in the survey, such as *per, hen, ne, ke, zhe* and *co*. Therefore, while it is possible to confirm that participants seem slightly more positive towards using *they* than neologisms, this result is only valid in comparison with the four neologisms included in the survey, but not all neologisms that currently function as gender-neutral pronouns among Australian speakers of English.

3.1.3 Testing H3: Relation between willingness to use and actual use of gender-neutral pronouns

The following section will present findings related to participants' experienced encouragement to use singular *they* versus neologisms, and the participants'

actual use of these. The discussion section will refer to these findings, as well as fig. 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 which are presented and discussed above in section 3.1.2.

Table 3.8: *Experienced encouragement to use singular they*

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	33	37
Not sure	2	2
No	65	72
Total	100	111
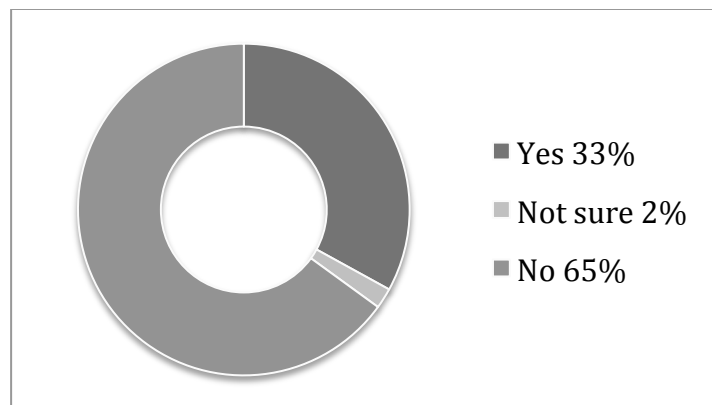
Figure 3.6: *Experienced encouragement to use singular they*

Table 3.9: *Experienced encouragement to use neologisms*

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	10	11
Not sure	1	1
No	89	96
Total	100	108
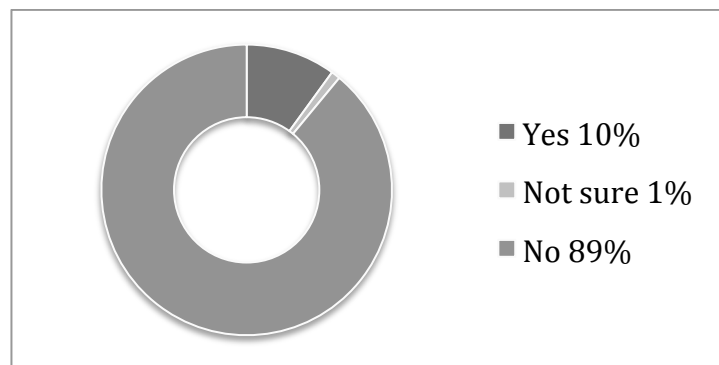
Figure 3.7*: Experienced encouragement to use neologisms*

Table 3.10: *Use of neologisms as non-binary pronouns*

Observed values	%	Count
Yes	6	7
Not sure	3	3
No	91	98
Total	100	108
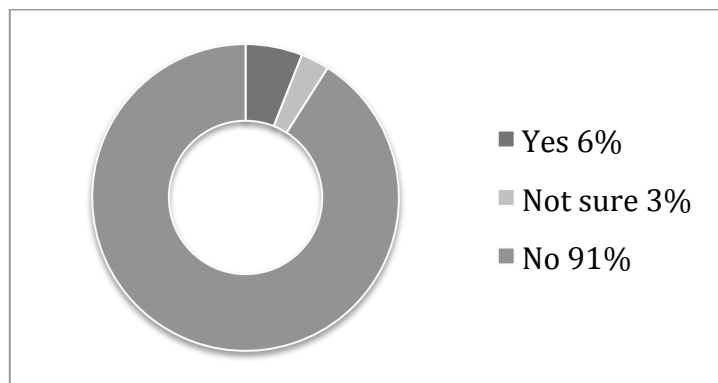
Figure 3.8: *Use of neologisms as non-binary pronouns*

H3 stated that there would not necessarily be a correlation between participants' willingness to use gender-neutral pronouns and their reported experience with, or use of these. Thus it was expected that even though participants would display high willingness towards using gender-neutral pronouns, as discussed in section 3.1.2, they would not necessarily report much experience with, or use of them. Table 3.8 and fig. 3.6 show that 65 per cent of the participants have not been in a situation where someone asked them to use *they* when referring to, or talking about them. Table 3.9 and fig. 3.7 show that 89 per cent report that they have not been asked to use neologisms in this manner. As discussed in section 3.1.2 above, a large majority of the participants (77 per cent) reported that they would be willing to use singular *they* instead of *he* or *she* if asked to. However, 41 per cent report that they have actually used singular *they* in this manner (fig. 3.3). Table 3.10 and fig. 3.8 show that this share is

reduced to 6 per cent when examining the same question measuring experience with neologisms, and that 91 per cent report that they have not used any of the neologisms listed.

As 41 per cent report that they have deliberately used singular *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun, it is reasonable to claim high willingness is related to more use. Thus, the findings related to singular *they* indicate the predictions made in H3 cannot be supported. However, the findings related to willingness and actual experience with neologisms indicate that willingness does not predict use, thus confirming the predictions made in H3. Therefore, H3 is only partly supported.

There are many possible explanations as to why the participants might report more experience with the use of *they* than neologisms. These tendencies might particularly be related to how frequent and common these pronouns are used in transgender and queer communities. Levi Hord (2016) has examined and compared the use of gender-neutral language in English, Swedish, French and German, and found that singular *they* seemed to be the single most preferred pronoun among 34 per cent of their survey respondents, consisting of transgender, non-binary, agender, genderqueer and gender non-conforming participants. According to Hord (2016), neo-pronouns were only preferred in small numbers (ranking at 1 to 2 per cent each). These findings correspond with Hekanaho's (2017) preliminary survey results, which show that 82 per cent of her non-binary sample only use singular *they.* Furthermore, 12 per cent indicated that they use a neologism, and 7 per cent of these also use *they.*

Based on the findings above, it is reasonable to argue that singular *they* is more popular and frequent than neologisms among English speakers who prefer gender-neutral pronouns. This might assist us understanding why more survey participants report more experience with using *they* compared to neologisms, as it is more likely that they have encountered singular *they* than neologisms. This might also explain why the share of experienced encouragement to use *they* is higher than the one for neologisms.

3.2 Testing H4 to H7

While H1 to H3 focused mainly on proving some main tendencies related to participants' willingness, experience and actual use related to gender-neutral pronouns, H4 to H7 sought to investigate which variables these. The following section will present these results, and provide a thorough discussion of H4 to H7. The Chi-square test was the statistical test used to measure the different variables' significance for *willingness* and *use* of gender-neutral pronouns, whereas the Mann-Whitney U test was applied to the Likert-scale questions measuring *attitudes* to gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference. For each hypothesis, the p-value that these two tests generated will be presented in order to confirm or reject the hypotheses made in section 2.2. A p-value of .05 or less indicates a significant difference between the groups compared. All insignificant results can be found in Appendix 4, as well as findings that were omitted for space considerations.

3.2.1 Testing H4: Age and level of education

Tables 3.11 and 3.12 below contain the results of *age* as an independent variable for willingness to use, as well as actual use of singular *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun. Table 3.13 contains results for age as an independent variable on the statement "*People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of he or she*".

Table 3.11: *Age and willingness to use singular they as gender-neutral pronoun*

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Yes	70	11	81
Not sure	4	5	9
No	10	4	14
Total	84	20	104

Table 3.12: *Age and use of singular they as a gender-neutral pronoun*

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Yes	39	5	44
Not sure	9	0	9
No	36	15	51
Total	84	20	104

Table 3.13: *Age and attitudes towards pronoun preference*

Observed values	18-30	30+
Strongly disagree	5	2
Disagree	5	4
No opinion	7	1
Agree	18	6
Strongly agree	46	7
Not sure	3	0
Total	84	20

H4 stated that younger participants would display more positive attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns as well as report more frequent use. The Chi-square test indicated a strong significant difference between the observed values in table 3.11 (p= .005). Thus, the younger participants seem to report more willingness to use singular *they* than participants over 30 years old. Performing a Chi-test on the values in table 3.12 resulted in a significant difference between the younger and the older participants as well (p = .02), indicating that the younger group report higher use of singular *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun compared to the older group. However, the Mann-Whitney U test indicated that

the difference between younger and older groups were not quite statistically significant (p= .058). This was the only result on attitudes that approached significance level. For the remaining tables and findings on the effect of age on willingness, use and attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns, see Appendix 4.

The results above indicate that the two groups do not seem to differ much as initially predicted, as there were only one result indicating a slight difference in attitudes. Furthermore, the two groups only seem to differ in their willingness to use singular *they,* as well as their reported use of *they,* but not neologisms (see Appendix 4). Therefore H4 is only partly supported with respect to the influence of *age.*

However, H4 also predicted that younger and *educated* participants would report more frequent use of gender-neutral pronouns as well as display more positive attitudes. When examining the results of *level of education* as an independent variable for attitudes, willingness and use, only one observation indicate a significant differences between the groups. Table 3.14 below shows the observations the use of *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun (the remaining results for this variable can be found in Appendix 4).

Table 3.14: *Level of education and use of singular they as a gender-neutral pronoun*

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Yes	12	28	4	44
Not sure	0	4	5	9
No	12	23	16	51
Total	24	59	25	104

The Chi-square test resulted in significant differences between upper secondary and graduate levels (p= .01) as well as strong significant differences between undergraduate and graduate levels (p= .004), thus indicating that participants who have completed upper secondary and undergraduate education report more experience with using *they* than the participants who have completed graduate education. However, since level of education does not seem to predict any other attitudes or behavior related to gender-neutral pronouns,

the findings in table 3.14 are not sufficient to support the predictions made in H4 further.

The results above do however indicate that both age and level of education seem to influence the use of singular *they.* This suggests that examining q combination of these might be fruitful in assist us in adding nuances to the findings. When studying which age group the participants representing upper secondary and undergraduate groups, who also reported higher use of singular *they,* belong to, the majority seem to fall in the age category 18-30. The majority of the participants in the graduate group however, who reported lower use of singular *they,* seem to fall in in the 30+ age group. These tendencies suggest that the use of singular *they* might be influenced by combination of age and level of education. Thus, not only does this indicate that the use of singular *they* seem to be more common among younger Australians, it also seems to be more common among young Australians who currently are enrolled in university studies. On the other hand, this use seems less common among older students, or students that have graduated. This supports the predictions outlined in 2.5.5 and 2.5.6, claiming that an increased use of gender-neutral pronouns might be tied to the increasingly liberal and inclusive campus culture today.

Due to space limits, these results will not be discussed in light of any other variables. Furthermore, it is not possible to say anything about the relative strength, or the impact of each variable tested when using Chi-square or the Mann-Whitney U test. These methods cannot prove whether one variable has a stronger impact on for instance use of singular *they* than others – thus it is not possible to prove whether *age* is a stronger predictor for the use of singular *they* than *level of education.* Therefore, the suggestions made above, that a combination of variables should be investigated in some instances, are not speculating as regards to the relative strength of a variable's impact.

3.2.2 Testing H5: Urban-rural divide

The tables below contain the significant findings related to the *urban-rural* variable. Table 3.15 contains findings related to experienced encouragement to use neologisms, while table 3.16 contains findings related to the use of neologisms. Table 3.17 contains findings related to attitudes to pronoun preference. The remaining, non-significant observations tied to the impact of the rural-urban divide can be found in Appendix 4.

Table 3.15: *Origins and experienced encouragement to use neologisms*

Origins	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	9	2	11
Not sure	0	1	1
No	80	12	92
Total	89	15	104

Table 3.16: *Current living situation and use of neologisms*

Current	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	5	2	7
Not sure	3	0	3
No	89	5	94
Total	97	7	104

Table 3.17: *Origins and attitudes to pronoun preference*

Origins	Urban-suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	17	7	24
Disagree	25	4	29
No opinion	5	1	6
Agree	22	2	24
Strongly agree	15	1	16
Not sure	5	0	5
Total	89	15	104

H5 stated that less positive attitudes and less frequent use were expected from participants who currently live in rural areas, and who report rural origins. Hence, participants who grew up and live in suburban and urban areas were expected to display more positive attitudes, as well as more frequent use. Applying the Chi-square test on the observations in table 3.15 indicated a significant difference between the participants with rural origins and the participants with urban or suburban origins on the question if they have been specifically asked to use a neologism when referring to, or talking about someone (p= .04). This is caused by the fact that larger share of participants from rural areas (2 of 15) have experienced this than the participants who report urban or suburban origins (9 out of 89). Furthermore, applying the Chi-square test to the observations in table 3.16 showed that there is a tendency that a larger share of participants who still live in rural areas have used neologisms, compared to the participants who live in urban and suburban areas. However, according to conventional criteria[13], this finding is not *quite* significant enough to indicate more than a tendency rather than a significant difference (p= .054). Table 3.17 shows the only observations related to attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference that resulted in significant differences between participants with rural and urban-suburban origins (p= .01). This refers to the statement "*Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it and use it*".

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[13] This thesis will follow the criteria set by Social Science Statistics' online Mann-Whitney U test calculator. See reference list for details.

When examining the findings above as well as the findings related to the urban-rural variable in Appendix 4, it is clear that the participants from both rural and urban-suburban areas do not differ much in their attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference, nor in their willingness to use *they* or neologisms to refer to, or talk about non-binary individuals. Furthermore, even though there seem to be tendencies that some participants from rural areas, and who still live in rural areas have more experience with neologisms than participants from urban and suburban areas, this share is so small that it is problematic to assume that these tendencies are representative for the rest of the population.

Nevertheless, these findings should be addressed. When examining the demography of the two participants with rural origins who report having used neologisms, one participant reports that they still live in a rural area, whereas one reports that they have moved to an urban area. The participant who grew up, and still lives in a rural area also has a non-binary gender-identity. It is reasonable to assume that fact might contribute to the participants' experience with neologisms - both in terms of having experienced encouragement to use these as well as actual use. It is however challenging to prove this correlation without any sources to confirm these assumptions. The extended discussion of the relation between gender-identity and use of gender-neutral pronouns provided in section 3.2.3 might still offer some insight into this.

Of the two participants who currently reside in a rural area that have experienced encouragement to use neologisms, one of these participants reports that they grew up in a suburban area, and currently resides in a rural area. Based on this information, it is not possible to make any assumptions whether growing up in a suburban area result in more experience with neologisms, as H5 predicted. The other participant who reported encouragement to use neologism is the participant with non-binary gender-identity referred to above.

Although the findings related to the *urban-rural* variable do not seem to support H5, it is nevertheless interesting to reflect upon *why* this might be the case. As mentioned above (and outlined in detail in section 3.2.2), H5 was influenced by the assumption that participants who reported rural origins and currently reside in rural areas would display more negative attitudes and report

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less experience with gender-neutral pronouns than the participants from urban and suburban areas as transgender and queer communities traditionally have been, and perhaps are more visible in urban-suburban areas than in rural areas. Therefore, it was assumed that not only would participants from urban and suburban areas be more likely to have encountered people that have encouraged them to use gender-neutral pronouns, as well as having used them. However, it is important to consider the fact that people nowadays are not only exposed to other people, ideas, values and beliefs in physical spaces, but in online, virtual spaces as well. Thus, as long as people have access to the Internet, or social media, they have the potential to be exposed to the same information regardless of where they reside. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that the traditional rural-urban divide perhaps does not influence people as much anymore.

3.2.3 Testing H6: Gender-identity and strength of gender-identity

This section will first present the findings related to the variable gender-identity and then proceed to present findings related to the variable strength of gender-identity. It should be noted that the question on gender-identity was a free text response, and that three participants failed to state their gender, or seemed to have misunderstood the question, and therefore provided an invalid response. These three participants' responses have been omitted from the final analyses (therefore n=101). Furthermore, the nine participants who indicated a gender-identity other than male or female have been collapsed into the category "Other", which thus represents a range of non-binary gender-identities.[14]

Table 3.18 below shows the results for gender-identity and willingness to use neologisms. These were the only observations related to willingness where the Chi-square test indicated a significant difference between females and males (p= .04), suggesting that females reported higher willingness to use neologisms than the male participants. The Chi-square test also indicated significant differences between females and non-binary genders (p= .006), as well as

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[14] It should be mentioned that by conventional criteria, a sample of nine participants is considered particularly small when performing a Mann-Whitney U test. However, the results should still be considered valid as the answers provided by nine non-binary participants seem to be consistent throughout.

between non-binary genders and males (p= .001), indicating that participants that reported non-binary gender-identities are overall more willing to use neologisms than the binary genders.

Table 3.18: *Gender-identity and willingness to use neologisms*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Yes	23	21	9	53
Not sure	6	3		9
No	30	9		39
Total	59	33	9	101

The tables 3.19 to 3.21 below show observations for gender-identity as an independent variable for the participants' experienced encouragement to use of singular *they* and neologisms, as well their actual experience with using singular *they* and neologisms. When performing a Chi-square test on the observations in table 3.19 it resulted in strong significant differences between female and other genders (p= .0001) as well as between male and other genders (p= .0005). This indicates that the non-binary participants report more experience with being encouraged to use singular *they* than the binary genders. Testing the results in table 3.20 did not result in a significant difference between male and female participants (p= .1). However, the difference between the non-binary and the binary participants was strongly significant (p= .0004 for females vs. other and p= .0003 for males vs. other). Hence, participants that reported a non-binary gender-identity also reported more experience with using singular *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun. A Chi-square test performed on observations in table 3.21, showing the participants' use of neologisms did not result in significant difference between males and females (p= .4). Both groups reported low uses of neologisms. The difference between females, males and non-binary genders on the other hand, was strongly significant (p= .0005 for females vs. other, and p. = .0002 for males vs. other). Like with singular *they,* the participants who reported a non-binary gender-identity also reported more experience with using neologisms as gender-neutral pronouns.

Table 3.19: *Gender-identity and experienced encouragement to use they*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Yes	6	2	3	11
Not sure	1	0	0	1
No	52	31	6	89
Total	59	33	9	101

Table 3.20: *Gender-identity and use of singular they*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Yes	20	13	9	42
Not sure	8	1		9
No	31	19		50
Total	59	33	9	101

Table 3.21: *Gender-identity and use of neologisms*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Yes	2	1	3	6
Not sure	1	1	1	3
No	56	31	5	92
Total	59	33	9	101

The tables 3.22 and 3.23 below will present the findings related to differences in attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns as well as pronoun

preference with gender-identity as an independent variable. Table 3.22 contains the results on the question *"English needs a gender-neutral pronoun"*. The Mann-Whitney U test indicated that there were no significant differences between males and females, or between females and non-binary participants. However, there is a significant difference between males and non-binary participants (p= .03), where the latter group report more positive responses to this question, thus displaying more positive attitude to adding a gender-neutral pronoun to the English language. Table 3.23 contains the results on the statement "*Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary".* The Mann-Whitney U test resulted in significant differences between males and females (p= .005), as well as between males and non-binary genders (p= .01). There was no significant difference between females and non-binary genders, thus we can conclude that male genders generally agree more with this statement than females and non-binary genders.

Table 3.22: *Gender-identity and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns 1*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	12	1	1	14
Disagree	13	7		21
No opinion	5	5		10
Agree	17	12	3	32
Strongly agree	11	8	5	24
Not sure	1			
Total	59	33	9	101

Table 3.23: *Gender-identity and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns 2*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	7	8	5	20
Disagree	11	11	3	25
No opinion	8	7		15
Agree	14	7	1	22
Strongly agree	15			15
Not sure	4			4
Total	59	33	9	101

Table 3.24 below contains the results on the question "*People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she".* When performing the Mann-Whitney U test on these findings, it resulted in similar results as the analysis above, with significant differences between males and females (p= .02), and between males and non-binary genders (p= .01). There was no significant difference between females and non-binary genders on this statement; thus, females and non-binary genders seem to display more positive attitudes towards choosing different pronouns than *he* or *she,* thus also pronoun preference. Table 3.25 below contains results on the question "*He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person".* The Mann-Whitney U test resulted in significant differences between females and non-binary genders (p= .02), as well as between males and non-binary genders (p= .002). However, there was no significant difference between males and females on this statement – overall the majority of both males and females seem to disagree with this statement, thus indicating positive attitudes towards pronoun preference.

Table 3.24: *Gender-identity and attitudes to pronoun preference 1*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	13			13
Disagree	5	5		10
No opinion	6	2		8

Agree	16	9		25
Strongly agree	18	15	9	42
Not sure	1	2		3
Total	59	33	9	101

Table 3.25: *Gender-identity and attitudes to pronoun preference 2*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total	
Strongly disagree	15	12	8	35	
Disagree	20	13		33	
No opinion	8	4	1	13	
Agree	6	2		8	
Strongly agree	9			9	
Not sure	1	2		3	
Total	59	33	9	101	

Tables 3.26 and 3.27 below contain results on the question "*People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun in stead of he or she*" and "*Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it*". On the first statement, the Mann-Whitney U test resulted in significant differences between males and non-binary genders (p= .009), whereas there were no significant differences between males and females, or between females and non-binary genders. Thus, females seem to agree with this statement slightly more than males. On the second statement, the Mann-Whitney U test resulted in significant difference between males and females (p= .004), and between females and non-binary genders (p= .003). The difference between males and non-binary genders was very significant (p= .0002). These results indicate that males agree more with this statement than females and non-binary genders. Further, it also shows that even though fewer females than males agree with this statement, they still reported more negative responses than non-binary genders. Overall, females, and non-binary genders in particular seem to think that pronoun preference is something that ought to be accepted and respected.

Table 3.26: *Gender-identity and attitudes to pronoun preference 3*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	7	1		8
Disagree	8	3		11
No opinion	5	8		13
Agree	15			15
Strongly agree	21	21	9	51
Not sure	3	0	0	3
Total	59	33	9	101

Table 3.27: *Gender-identity and attitudes to pronoun preference 4*

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	9	7	7	23
Disagree	12	13	2	27
No opinion	3	3		6
Agree	15	9		24
Strongly agree	15	1		16
Not sure	5			5
Total	59	33	9	101

H6 predicted that having a non-binary gender-identity was expected to be a significant predictor for both high willingness and frequent use of gender-neutral pronouns. In comparison, respondents with binary gender-identities were expected to display less willingness and lower use. The findings presented in tables 3.18 to 3.21 above indicate that participants that have a non-binary gender-identity overall reported higher willingness and more experience with using non-binary pronouns than males and females. They also show that females seem more willing to use neologisms than males, but that there are no

differences between the binary genders in their experience with using both *they* as well as neologisms. Tables 3.22 to 3.27 also confirm that participants with a non-binary gender-identity also display more positive attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns as well as pronoun preference, particularly compared to males, who overall display more negative attitudes. Furthermore, these findings also show that females are overall more positive towards both gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference than males, although they are still slightly more negative than the non-binary group.

These observations correspond with the Swedish study that found that female genders were associated with more positive attitudes towards *hen*, as mentioned in section 2.1.3. The comments provided by the participants in the free-text response might add more nuances to these findings, as they show that the *male* participants seem to have made the majority of negative comments on gender-neutral pronouns or pronoun preferences. One participant said that "This whole "xe" "schlee" thing is a symptom of the stupidity of PC culture and shouldn't be indulged" (18), while another expressed: "I think it's ridiculous the whole thing" (4). A third male participant said "Can everyone just harden up" (5), while a fourth claims that "there are far more important matters in this world (...) than mentally ill people who can't decide what gender they are" (16). No female participants expressed views like in the free text response. Thus, this suggests that not only do males seem to hold more negative attitudes than females on the topic of gender-neutral pronouns, but they might also have a stronger need to express these opinions.[15]

However, as mentioned, the results above only do not indicate a difference between males and females in relation to the use of gender-neutral pronouns. Thus, these results are not as consistent as in the Swedish study on *hen* with respect to binary gender-identities as predictors for use. The findings on non-binary gender-identity as a predictor for use and attitudes on the other hand, might add nuances to previous research. The Swedish study on *hen* did not for instance consider the impact of having a non-binary gender-identity although 8 participants indicated a non-binary identity in the 2015 data collection (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). The findings presented above prove that having

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[15] See Appendix 4 for full responses

a non-binary gender-identity is a predictor for attitudes towards and use of gender-neutral pronouns among Australian English speakers, particularly when examining the use of neologisms. Although the Mann-Whitney U test does not indicate the strength, or the relative impact this variable, these findings still add new nuances to the understanding of gender-identity as a determinant for use and attitudes of gender-neutral pronouns.

The differences between the binary- and non-binary genders can to a certain extent be explained with help from queer research. As mentioned in section 1.4, Crawford and Fox (2007) claim that neologisms have not had much success outside in queer and transgender communities. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the binary genders' low use of these might stem from the fact that they seldom encounter or use them. Furthermore, Stryker (2008) explains that the practice of using gender-neutral pronouns works better *within* transgender communities because most people understand the practices of using neologisms. Outsiders however, might feel confused (Stryker 2008). This "pronoun confusion" is illustrated by a scene in the Netflix show *One day at the time,* where a group of queer teenagers introduce themselves to the mother and grandmother of the house they are visiting using both *ze/zir* and *they/them* pronouns. This introduction sparks the reaction "huh and what?" from the mother, implying that she has never hear about the pronouns the teenagers use to introduce themselves (One day at the time 2017).

It is possible that confusion around gender-neutral pronouns can lead to more negative attitudes toward pronoun preference, as well as lower use among binary genders compared to non-binary genders. Furthermore, it is also reasonable to claim that the nine non-binary participants' positive attitudes to, and experience with gender-neutral pronouns stem from the fact that they prefer gender-neutral pronouns themselves, or are members of communities where gender-neutral pronouns are commonly accepted and used. As the survey did not ask the participants to specify their preferred pronouns, or whether they had friends or acquaintances in the LGBTQ community who prefer gender-neutral pronouns, it is not possible to speculate further whether these assumptions are correct.

H6 also predicted that participants that reported a strong male or female gender-identity would display more negative attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns, and report less frequent use than participants who do not have a strong sense of their own gender-identity. Findings show that 73 per cent of participant the stated that they have a strong male or female gender-identity while 23 per cent indicated that they do not have a strong male of female identity. 9 per cent do not identify as neither male or female. The significance of this variable on attitudes was tested using the statement *"I have a strong male or female identity"*. In the analysis, the categories *strongly disagree* and *disagree* were collapsed into *not strong male/female identity.* The categories *strongly agree* and *agree* were collapsed into *strong male/female identity.*

Tables 3.28 and 3.29 below contain findings related to the participants' willingness to use singular *they* as well as neologisms with strength of gender-identity as the independent variable. The Chi-square test yielded significant differences between the participants who reported a strong male or female identity (p= .02) and the participants who did not report a strong sense of male or female identity (p= .005), indicating that the latter group is more willing to use both singular *they* and neologisms as gender-neutral pronouns compared to the group that reported a strong male or female gender-identity. Tables 3.30 to 3.32 below contain findings related to strength of gender-identity and the participants' experience with and use of gender-neutral pronouns. These findings resulted in significant differences between participants, indicating that participants who do not have a strong male or female identity report more experienced encouragement to use singular *they* (p= .01), as well as more experience with using singular *they* (p= .005) and neologisms (p= .001).

Table 3.28: *Strength of gender-identity and willingness to use singular they*

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total	
Yes	23	55	78
No		13	13
Total	23	68	91

Table 3.29: *Strength of gender-identity and willingness to use neologisms*

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total
Yes	18	37	55
No	4	32	36
Total	22	69	91

Table 3.30: *Strength of gender-identity and experienced encouragement to use they*

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total
Yes	13	23	36
No	9	52	61
Total	22	75	97

Table 3.31: *Strength of gender-identity and use of they*

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total
Yes	16	27	43
No	6	42	48
Total	22	69	91

Table 3.32: *Strength of gender-identity and use of neologisms*

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total
Yes	5	2	7
No	17	72	89
Total	22	74	96

Tables 3.33 to 3.35 below contain findings related to strength of gender-identity and attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference. Table 3.33 contains results on the question *"English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she",* and table 3.34 contains results on the reverse statement *"Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English in unnecessary".* Both questions resulted in significant differences between participants with a strong male or female identity and participants who did not report a strong sense of male or female gender-identity (p= .03 and p= .04). Table 3.35 contains results on the statement "*Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it".* This was the only statement related to pronoun preference that resulted in significant differences between the two groups (p= .01). For all of these findings, the categories *strongly disagree* and *disagree* were collapsed into *disagreement,* whereas the categories *strongly agree* and *agree* were collapsed into *agreement.* The remaining results on attitudes towards pronoun preference can be found in Appendix 4.

Table 3.33: *Strength of gender-identity and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns 1*

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total
Disagreement	3	29	32
Agreement	19	38	57
Total	22	67	89

Table 3.34: *Strength of gender-identity and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns 2*

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total
Disagreement	16	30	46
Agreement	4	31	35
Total	20	61	81

Table 3.35: *Strength of gender-identity and attitudes to pronoun preference*

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total
Disagreement	18	33	51
Agreement	3	34	37
Total	21	67	88

As mentioned above, H6 predicted that participants that reported a strong male or female identity would also display the most negative attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns, as well as report more infrequent use than participants who did not report a strong sense of a male or female gender-identity. The results above related to willingness to use and reported use of gender-neutral pronouns confirm some of the predictions made in H6. These predictions are supported by the significant findings related to attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns. However, the findings related to attitudes towards pronoun preference are not as consistent as the findings on willingness, experience and use. They do not indicate significant differences between the two groups on all statements related to attitudes. H6 is therefore partly supported with respect to attitudes.

As mentioned in section 2.1.4, the Swedish study on *hen* found that the strength of participants' gender-identity was a stronger predictor for attitudes than for instance gender-identity alone. In other words, having a strong male or female gender-identity was associated with less frequent use of *hen* (Gustafsson Sendén et al 2015). Although the findings above correspond somewhat with the findings from the Swedish survey, we have seen that the impact of gender-identity alone seems to indicate more significant differences related to attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns than the strength of gender-identity did. This discrepancy is interesting as well as peculiar, as one should expect participants with a strong sense of a male or a female self, thus perhaps also strong feeling of being a *he* or a *she* also might lack an understanding of how it feels to *not* identify as a man or a woman, thus *not* supporting pronoun preference. Nevertheless, the results presented above do not confirm these assumptions about Australians with strong male and female gender-identities. Consequently they might also

assist us in debunking preconceived opinions or ideas about what might determine attitudes towards gender-inclusive language.

3.2.4 Testing H7: Gender definition

When examining the data for the variable *gender definition* it is evident that the reverse items *"I believe there are only two genders: male and female"* and *"I believe there are more genders than male and female"* did not yield entirely consistent results. 32 per cent of the participants disagree with the statement that there are only two genders, while 19 per cent agree with this. 58 per cent believe that there are more genders than male and female, while 32 per cent disagrees with this. Thus, the participants seem to be somewhat divided in their definition of gender.

When controlling for the variable *gender definition* on attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns as well as pronoun preference, the Mann-Whitney U test resulted in extremely significant differences (p= .00001 and p= .00008 on all observed observations), indicating that the participants' gender-definition is extremely significant for their attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference (see Appendix 4 for all results tied to this variable).

Table 3.36 and fig. 3.9 below show that the majority of participants who *disagree* with the statement "*I believe there are more than two genders than male and female*" seem to *agree* with the statement that "*Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary*". Similarly, table 3.37 and fig. 3.10 show that the majority of the participants who agree that "*English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she*" disagree with the statement that "*There are only two genders: male and female*". Lastly, table 3.38 and fig. 3.11 show that the majority of participants who have a binary understanding of gender seem to agree with the statement "*Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it and use it*", whereas the majority of participants who have a continuous understanding of gender seem to disagree with this statement.

Table 3.36: *Gender definition and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns 1*

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q12	Agreement w/statement in Q12	Total
Continuous gender definition	8	47	55
Binary gender definition	24	7	29
Total	31	53	74
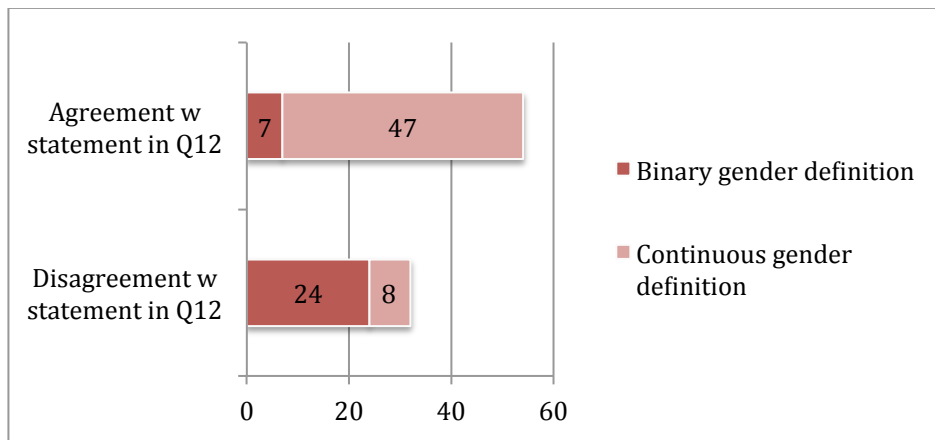
Fig. 3.9*: Gender-definition and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns*

Table 3.37: *Attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns 2*

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q13	Agreement w/statement in Q13	Total
Binary gender-definition	5	25	30
Continuous gender-definition	39	10	49
Total	44	35	79
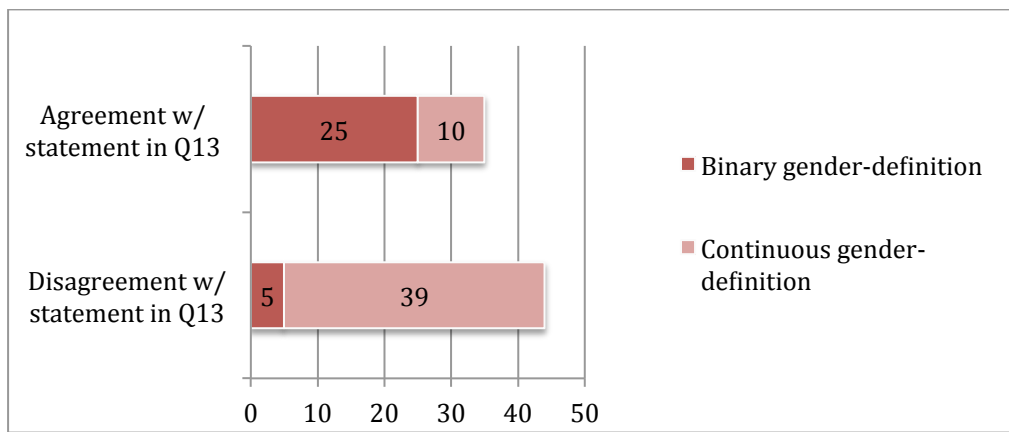
Fig. 3.10*: Gender definition and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns*

Table 3.38: *Gender definition and attitudes to pronoun preference*

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q17	Agreement w/statement in Q17	Total
Binary gender definition	4	26	30
Continuous gender definition	45	10	55
Total	49	36	85
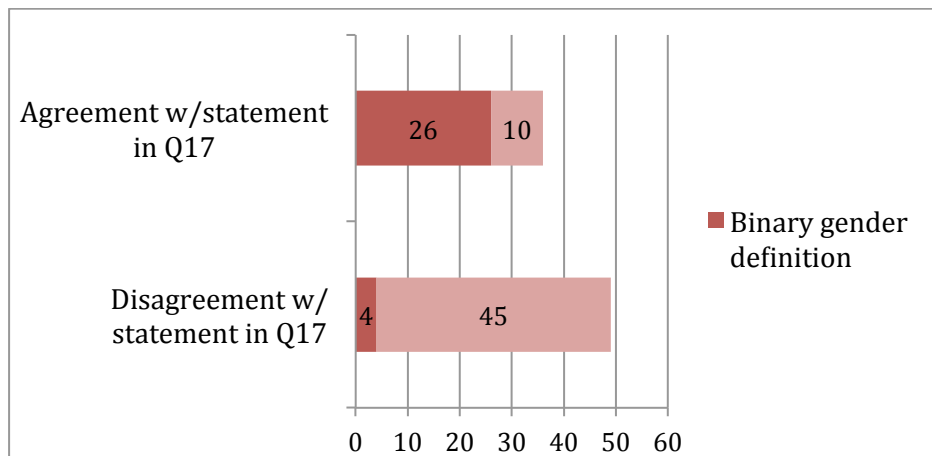
Fig. 3.11: *Gender definition and attitudes to pronoun preference*

H7 stated that participants' understanding, or definition of gender would be a significant predictor for attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns, and that the participants who define gender as a continuum rather than a binary system would display more positive attitudes on issues related to gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference than the participants who understand gender as a binary system. The findings presented above as well as the findings in Appendix 4 allow H7 to be supported.

It is reasonable to assume that by acknowledging the existence of several gender-identities other than male or female influences the likelihood of

supporting pronoun preference. As discussed in section 1.3.2, pronoun use is tightly related to the idea of self-representation. Supporting the right to exercise pronoun preference then, or supporting the idea of adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English, might therefore be seen as an expression of supporting trans- and non-binary gender-identities' right to self-representation. Furthermore, it is also possible to claim that not supporting pronoun preference, or the idea of adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English are expressions of refusal to acknowledge the existence of non-binary gender-identities. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that the findings above give insight to which values or beliefs that contribute to influencing or shaping attitudes towards gender-neutral pronouns. This adds interesting perspectives on how the current gender-discourse in a language community might contribute to shape attitudes towards certain language phenomena. Furthermore, since *gender-definition* was not considered in the Swedish study on *hen,* these findings might add to the understanding of predictors that could be included in future research on gender-neutral pronouns.

3.3 Other findings

3.3.1 Testing language background

When applying the statistical tests to the observations related to language background, they indicated no significant differences. Thus, language background is not a significant predictor for attitudes to, or use of gender-neutral pronouns. This might be related to the fact that only 10 participants indicated a different language background than English, and that these represented different linguistic backgrounds, with 4 participants who indicated a Mandarin, Cantonese or Vietnamese background, and 6 participants in the "Other" category. As the categories only contained a few participants each, they did not make up a large enough sample to compare to the participants with English backgrounds. However, with a larger sample from each language community, a comparison would be possible – and potentially result in interesting differences between the different linguistic backgrounds.

3.3.2 Interest and engagement in gender-related issues

The significance of the variable *interest in gender-related issues* was measured using two statements: "*I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important*", and "*I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues*". The first statement measured the participants' relative interest in gender-issues, whereas the second measured their level of engagement in such discussions. For the first statement, the category *not interested* represents all participants who either *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* with the statement "*I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important*". The category *interested* represents all participants who *strongly agreed* or *agreed* with this statement. For the second statement, the category *engaged* represents all participants who *strongly disagree* or *disagree* with the statement "*I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues*". The category *not engaged* represents the participants who *strongly agreed* or *agreed* with this statement. The relevant findings for both these statements will be presented in the tables below. The findings related to willingness to use, and experience with gender-neutral pronouns will be presented first, followed by findings related to attitudes. Following this, the discussion below will aim to examine some tendencies related to both statements, rather than each individual statement.

Tables 3.39 to 3.42 below contain findings related to the statement "*I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important*" and willingness to use gender-neutral pronouns as well as the actual use of singular *they.* The Chi-square test indicated that participants who are interested in gender-issues display more significantly more willingness to use singular *they* as well as neologisms (p= .01 and p= .0007) than the participants who do not express such interest. Furthermore, this group also report more use of singular *they* (p= .003). The remaining findings related to this statement can be found in Appendix 4.

Table 3.39: *Interest in discussions on gender-issues and willingness to use singular they*

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Yes	12	58	70
No	6	6	12
Total	18	64	82

Table 3.40: *Interest in discussions on gender-issues and willingness to use neologisms*

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Yes	4	44	48
No	13	20	33
Total	17	64	81

Table 3.41 *Interest in discussion on gender-issues and use of singular they*

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Yes	3	37	40
No	15	20	35
Total	18	57	75

The tables 3.42 to 3.44 below contain findings related to willingness to use, and the actual use of gender-neutral pronouns where the statement "*I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues*" was used as an independent variable. These findings seem to indicate that participants who more often engage in discussions on gender-issues also report that they have experienced encouragement to use singular *they* (p= .007) as well as neologisms (p= .006) when referring to, or talking about someone who does not identify as a man or a woman. Furthermore, these participants also report more use of neologisms than participants who do not engage in discussions on gender-issues (p= .02)

Table 3.42: *Engagement in discussions on gender-issues and experienced encouragement to use singular they*

Observed values	Engaged	Not engaged	Total
Yes	28	8	36
No	30	30	60
Total	58	38	96

Table 3.43: *Engagement in discussions on gender-issues and experienced encouragement to use neologisms*

Observed values	Engaged	Not engaged	Total
Yes	10	0	10
No	48	39	87
Total	58	39	97

Table 3.44: *Engagement in discussions on gender-issues and use of neologisms*

Observed values	Engaged	Not engaged	Total
Yes	7	0	7
No	50	38	88
Total	57	38	95

The tables 3.45 to 3.47 below contain findings related to interest in gender-related issues and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference. In the analyses of these findings, the categories *strongly disagree* or *disagree* were collapsed into the category *disagreement.* Similarly, the categories *agree* or *agreed* were collapsed into the category *agreement.* Testing the significance of interest in gender-related issues variable resulted in differences between both groups on all statements measuring attitudes. However, for space considerations, only three tables are included in the main text to illustrate this tendency (p= .006, p= .004 and p= .01). Table 3.45 contains findings on the

question *"English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she"*, Table 3.46 contains findings on the statement "*People should be allowed to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she"*, and Table 3.47 contains findings on the statement "*People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun in stead of he or she"*.

Table 3.45: *Interest in gender-issues and attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns*

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Disagreement	13	16	29
Agreement	5	46	51
Total	18	62	80

Table 3.46: *Interest in gender-issues and attitudes to pronoun preference 1*

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Disagreement	11	9	20
Agreement	8	53	61
Total	19	62	80

Table 3.47: *Interest in gender-issues and attitudes to pronoun preference 2*

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Disagreement	8	6	14
Agreement	9	57	63
Total	17	66	80

As opposed to the findings presented above, none of the findings related to attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns or pronoun preference resulted in significant differences between the participants that engage in discussions on gender-issues. The tables for these findings can be found in Appendix 4.

The findings presented above seem to indicate that an interest in gender-issues does not seem to determine participants' experience with gender-neutral pronouns to the same extent as engagement in gender-issues does. There might be a number of possible explanations for this tendency. One being that it people who engage in discussions on gender-related issues might have encountered individuals who have a non-binary gender-identity that prefer a gender-neutral pronoun. Examining the answers provided by the nine participants who stated a non-binary gender-identity shows that eight out of nine participants report that they often engage in discussions on gender-related issues. It is possible to speculate that if people that have non-binary gender-identities are well represented in forums where gender-issues are discussed, it is also likely that the other groups represented will meet expectations to use gender-neutral pronouns in discussions or interactions with these individuals. This might assist us in explaining why the findings above indicate that *engagement* in discussions on gender-issues seems to be a predictor of experience with gender-neutral pronouns, particularly with regard to experienced encouragement to use neologisms as well as the reported use of these.

However, although it might be useful to examine the impact of *engagement* on some findings this variable does not explain findings related to willingness to use gender-neutral pronouns, or attitudes related to gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference. As the observations above indicate, having an interest in gender-issues seems to determine willingness better than whether participants are actively engaged in such discussions. Furthermore, interest in gender-issues seems to be a more important predictor than engagement in discussions on gender-issues when examining findings related to attitudes. Overall, these inconsistent findings do not enable us to speculate whether interest in gender-issues or engagement in debates on gender-issues alone is more or less important. However, combining the findings related to these two statement into a single variable might be fruitful. That way it is possible to claim interest and engagement in gender-issues overall are important predictors for attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns and pronoun preference, willingness to use gender-neutral pronouns, as well as actual experience with gender-neutral pronouns.

4.0 Conclusion, limitations and future research

4.1 Conclusion

The survey results presented and discussed in Chapter 3 have given insight into how gender-neutral pronouns are used, perceived and thought about by a range of different groups in Australian society. Firstly, we can conclude that Australians seem to display an overall positive attitude towards using gender-neutral pronouns if encouraged to, and that they generally seem to support individuals' right to exercise pronoun preferences. Secondly, we have seen that more participants were familiar with, and have encountered singular *they* than neologisms, which seem to be more restricted to certain groups, such as among non-binary individuals. Singular *they* on the other hand, seems to behave like a multi-purpose gender-neutral pronoun in a range of contexts within several groups.

Although some of the hypotheses outlined in the introduction were not supported by the findings, they still contribute to debunking and disproving some of the stereotypical opinions, or preconceived ideas we might have about certain groups, their attitudes and behavior - for instance that a university degree automatically results in more liberal attitudes to gender-neutral pronouns compared to those with no university education, or that people from urban and suburban areas are more likely to display liberal attitudes than people from rural areas. Insights like these might point researchers in new directions when considering which variables to assess in their research on social or linguistic phenomena, thus perhaps also guide them away from stereotypical assumptions about a group, or groups of people.

In addition to providing insight into forces, ideas and behaviour that are currently shaping the discourse of gender-neutral pronouns, the findings also provide insight into how Australians practice language sensitivity and inclusiveness in interactions with others. As the findings indicate, many participants do seem to exercise caution around choosing a pronoun in interactions with others, and when choosing a gender-neutral pronoun they are also deliberately avoiding *he* and *she.* Not only are these actions challenging the

idea of an exclusively binary pronominal system, but perhaps also the traditionally binary representation and understanding of gender as well, as they allow and enable representation of other gender-identities than male and female. It is therefore possible to argue that acceptance and use of gender-neutral pronouns expresses an individual's understanding of gender as a continuous construct rather than a binary one. If these thoughts and actions are repeated among several language users, they might eventually also contribute to change the prevailing, or traditional discourse of gender from a binary one to one centered around ideas of gender as a continuous and fluidic construct. This supports Zimman (2017:90) view that "language is one of the primary fronts on which gender is negotiated". Therefore, examining attitudes to and use of gender-neutral pronouns then, might also be a way to tap into the current gender-discourse in a society.

Future research projects then, could consider conducting a comparative study of two or more English speaking countries. This expansion might provide insight the practices and discourses surrounding gender-neutral pronouns in other societies as well, thus potentially enabling a comparison of the gender discourses in several societies. If the current discourse of gender-neutral pronouns is contributing to rocking the binary boat in Australia, perhaps this is currently taking place in other societies as well?

In the future it will also be interesting to see whether English language users will settle for *one* gender-neutral pronoun or whether several alternatives will continue to persist. In this process it is also interesting to see which role the neologisms will play, and whether one, or several of these might gain a foothold among English speakers, and aspire to compete with singular *they* in frequency and popularity. No matter what the future holds for gender-neutral pronouns in English, there is no doubt that the binary pronominal system is in the process of being challenged, and with it, perhaps our ideas of gender as well.

4.2 Limitations and future research

4.2.1 Problematizing variables tested

The variables chosen for this research project had to be limited for a number of reasons: firstly to avoid a lengthy questionnaire, and secondly due to space considerations. However, limiting the number of variables automatically results in potential research limitations that ought to be addressed. Firstly, the choice of variables only allowed the thesis to contrast and compare a limited number of groups. This sparked an interest in other potentially interesting variables that could have been included, such as participants' political stance, religious affiliation and sexual orientation. As pointed out by one participant, asking which pronoun participants prefer would also have been interesting (12). Nevertheless, the variables included in the survey can still contribute to enlighten future researchers on which groups might be more or less useful to compare and contrast in future research on gender-neutral pronouns.

Secondly, the survey could have included more questions on potential factors that might motivate and decide participants' attitudes, willingness or use of gender-neutral pronouns. Based on the current findings for instance, we are not able to speculate whether the participants' answers are influenced by increased expectations to use politically correct language, or to the fact that transgender and queer groups overall are more visible and have gained more acceptance and respect in modern Australian society. Concrete questions measuring participants' stance on politically correct language, or their ties or attitudes to transgender and queer communities might have been fruitful to include to enable a discussion on these issues. The discussion managed to show significant differences between many of the groups tested, but tapping into more of the underlying reasons behind their attitudes and behavior, could have resulted in an even more nuanced and insightful discussion. This illustrates how important a thorough and reflected planning process is in survey research, thus how the early stages of the research might both enable and restrict the researcher and their discussion and conclusions. Designing and crafting a survey is therefore a process that requires a patient and thoughtful researcher, and the ability to think ahead.

Lastly, since the survey did not distinguish between written and spoken contexts, it also failed to document whether this might affect how gender-neutral pronouns are used. Future research should consider distinguishing between the use of gender-neutral pronouns in written and spoken contexts, as well as examine whether other contextual factors affect use – such as whether people always use someone's preferred pronoun to refer to them, even when they are not there.

4.2.2 Problematizing a quantitative approach

This section will address some of the methodological limitations of this study, particularly the choice of a quantitative data collection, and potential research limitations that this might have resulted in. Wagner (2010) argues that qualitative approaches could potentially be more appropriate when researching complex constructs as they have the potential to access richer and more in-depth information from a sample than quantitative approaches do. As quantitative approaches like survey research provide largely superficial information about a sample's attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, it is reasonable to argue that a quantitative approach is inadequate when studying a complex construct such as gender-discourses (Wagner 2010). A qualitative approach on the other hand, such as in-depth interviews with a considerably smaller sample could potentially provide more nuanced findings.

However, a quantitative approach still allows researchers to draw conclusions about social phenomena from a wider and more diverse pool than qualitative approaches (Wagner 2010). It is therefore reasonable to argue that the choice of a quantitative approach was appropriate, as the survey's wide reach did provide insight into people representing different backgrounds, thus also a wide range of opinions, experiences and habits related to gender-neutral pronouns. Alternatively, a mixed method could have been feasible, for instance combining the quantitative survey with in-depth interviews with a smaller sample. However, time-constraints prevented the opportunity of incorporating more qualitative elements into this project. Therefore, time and energy were rather spent on planning and designing a thorough quantitative tool, which

incorporated one free text response for participants to add comments. As seen in Chapter 3, these comments added depth and nuances to a number of findings. Future surveys on gender-neutral pronouns or other similar topics might benefit from including several free text responses like these in order to enable the researcher to access more in-depth information from their sample.

4.2.3 Problematizing Facebook distribution

Lastly, the flaws of Facebook as a distribution platform should be addressed. Because even though the survey distribution was successful and resulted in a relatively large sample, it still failed to reach the majority of the groups contacted, as the survey invitation was never opened by a number of group administrators. The reasons behind this are unclear – perhaps the survey invitations drowned in the abundance of other messages that the group administrators got, or maybe it was purposely ignored.

Failure to obtain the group administrators' approval to post the survey link affected the sampling in two ways. Firstly, it led to a slower distribution, thus making the distribution phase more time-consuming than initially predicted. Secondly, it affected the sample's diversity, as groups representing other linguistic and cultural backgrounds than English and Australian were particularly underrepresented in the sample. Only two of these group administrators, representing Indian and Italian populations, accepted the survey invitation. The reason for this pattern is not clear, but the failure to reach these groups resulted in a sample consisting of a majority of English speaking participants, thus preventing a comparison between different cultural and linguistic groups.

Surveyors could overcome this in future projects by contacting public or open groups only, so that the distribution process will not be limited or slowed down by non-responding group administrators. Furthermore, it might be fruitful to utilize other platforms simultaneously as Facebook in order to maximize participation from certain cultural and linguistic populations, like for instance WeChat, a social medium site frequently used by Chinese youth.

However, using Facebook should still be considered an adequate distribution platform for surveys for many reasons. Not only does it provide access to a large and diverse sample, it also enables the surveyor to create a forum for feedback and questions, as well as enabling participants to share their opinions and thoughts on the survey directly with the researcher. Facebook distribution also reduces the social distance between the surveyor and the participants by allowing the participants to put a face on the research. This might function as an incentive in itself for participation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this anonymous survey. This is a chance for you to voice your opinion on issues related to the use of gender-neutral pronouns in English, a topic where little research previously has been done.

The answers you provide will be part of a Master's thesis in English linguistics, which will be published in 2018, on www.bora.uib.no. **The survey only takes 5-6 minutes to complete.**
You may go back and revise your answers at any point before submitting them. To do this, press the button marked PREVIOUS PAGE

Click *NEXT PAGE* to start the survey

The first part of the survey will ask you about your experience with using the gender-neutral pronoun *they* as an alternative to *he* **or *she* in the <u>following situations</u>:**

Sometimes people find themselves in situations where they avoid using *he* or *she* about a person because they want to be discreet about, or avoid revealing their gender (see example 1). Other times, *he* or *she* might be avoided because people don't want to make assumptions about someone's gender (see example 2).

1) "My partner just called to say that they'll pick me up later"

2) "Does your friend like beers, or are they more of a wine person?"

1 **Have you been in a situation where you used *they* instead of *he* or *she* when referring to, or talking about someone because you didn't want to disclose their gender?**

　　◯ Yes (1)

　　◯ Not sure (2)

　　◯ No (3)

2 Have you been in a situation where you used *they* instead of *he* or *she* when referring to, or talking about someone because you didn't want to assume their gender?

○ Yes (1)

○ Not sure (2)

○ No (3)

3 Have you repeatedly (more than 3 times) found yourself in situations where you have avoided using *he* or *she* because you didn't want to disclose someone's gender?

○ Yes (1)

○ Not sure (2)

○ No (3)

4 Have you repeatedly (more than 3 times) found yourself in situations where you have avoided using *he* or *she* because you didn't want to make assumptions about someone's gender?

○ Yes (1)

○ Not sure (2)

○ No (3)

Some people prefer a gender-neutral pronoun as their personal pronoun because they don't identify as a man or a woman, thus neither as a *he* or *she.*

The next questions will ask about your experience with using *they* as a personal pronoun when referring to, or talking about people who don't identify as a man or woman.

In these situations, the pronoun might be used in the following way:

"Kim is coming soon, they just called to say they'll be late"

5 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use the pronoun *they* instead of *he* or *she* when referring to, or talking about someone?

○ Yes (1)

○ Not sure (2)

○ No (3)

6 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use the pronoun *they* when referring to, or talking about them?

○ Yes (1)

○ Not sure (2)

○ No (4)

7 Have you ever used *they* to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman?

○ Yes (1)

○ Not sure (2)

○ No (3)

<u>Other gender-neutral personal pronouns</u>: The words *xe, zie, ze* and *ey* are also examples of gender-neutral pronouns that are currently being used as alternatives to *he* and *she.*

The next questions will ask about your experience with using *xe, zie, ze or ey* as personal pronouns when referring to, or talking about people who don't identify as a man or woman.

This use is illustrated by the example below:

"Kim is coming soon, zie just called to say zie will be late"

8 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use either *xe, zie, ze* or *ey* in stead of *he* or *she* when referring to, or talking about someone?

    ○ Yes (1)

    ○ Not sure (2)

    ○ No (3)

9 **Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use *xe, zie, ze* or *ey* when referring to, or talking about them?**

    ○ Yes (1)

    ○ Not sure (2)

    ○ No (3)

10 **Have you ever used *xe, zie, ze* or *ey* to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman?**

    ○ Yes (1)

    ○ Not sure (2)

    ○ No (3)

11 **If you have come across, or have experience with using any other gender-neutral pronouns than the ones listed in directly above, please state which one(s) in the box below:**

The questions in the following section will ask for your opinions on:

1) statements related to gender-neutral pronouns
2) statements related to gender-issues

For each statement, choose the alternative that best matches your opinions and beliefs.

12 English needs a gender-neutral personal pronoun in addition to *he* and *she*

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

13 Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English in addition to *he* and *she* is unnecessary

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a *he* or *she*

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

15 *He* and *she* are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

16 **People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of *he* or *she***

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (6)

○ Not sure (5)

17 **Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it**

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

18 I believe there are more than two genders than male and female

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

19 I believe there are only two genders: male and female

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

20 I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

22 I have a strong male or female identity

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

23 I don't identify as a man or a woman

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

○ Not sure (6)

The last part of the survey will gather some personal information. Remember that this is an anonymous survey, and that all of your answers are confidential. Neither the researcher, nor anyone else will be able to identify you based on the answers you provide.

24 **Which language you usually speak at home?**

○ English (1)

○ Mandarin, Cantonese or Vietnamese (2)

○ Arabic, Greek, Italian or Hindi (3)

○ Other (4)

25 **What is the highest level of education that you have completed?**

○ Lower secondary (1)

○ Upper secondary (2)

○ Undergraduate studies (3)

○ Graduate studies or higher (4)

26 **Where do you live now?**

○ In an urban area (city) (1)

○ In a suburban area (2)

○ In a rural area (country) (3)

27 **Where did you grow up?**

○ In an urban area (city) (1)

○ In a suburban area (2)

○ In a rural area (country) (3)

28 **What are your ties to Australia?**

○ I am an Australian citizen and resident (1)

○ I am an Australian resident, but not citizen (2)

○ Neither of the options above apply to me (3)

29 **Please state your age**

_____

30 **Please state your gender**

_____

31 **Would you like to add any comments?**

_____

Do you wish to submit your answers now?

 By clicking *NEXT PAGE*, your answers will be **submitted.**

If you wish to **go back and revise** your answers**, click *PREVIOUS PAGE***

Remember that the information you have provided in this survey is confidential, and that your participation has not left any digital or personal traces that can be linked to your identity.

Feel free to contact the researcher at mari.eide@student.uib.no if you have any questions.

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix 2: Survey invitations

Hi there! I need your opinion on this:

How do you feel about using a gender-neutral pronoun instead of *he* or *she*? Do you think that people should be allowed to choose their own pronouns? Do we need to add a gender-neutral pronoun to English?

I'm a Master's student in English linguistics at the University of Bergen, Norway who's currently writing a thesis on Australians' attitudes towards, and use of gender-neutral pronouns, and other issues related to gender and language.

Your opinion is very important for this project, and participating will contribute to new insight on a topic where little research has been done.

The survey is completely anonymous, and participation will not leave any digital or personal traces that can be linked to your identity. The survey only takes 6-7 minutes to complete, and it can be accessed through a computer, smart phone or tablet.

Click on the survey link below to complete the survey:

https://melbpsych.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9EtEsifEOSMBoQ5

You must be over 18 years old to participate, and reside in Australia.

Thanks for participating

Mari Lund Eide

Appendix 3: Overview of selected Facebook groups

Name of group	Members	Initial response to invitation	Follow up message sent?	Result	Remarks
Townsville City One Buy Swap Sell	794	Ignored	No	Survey not posted	
Marong Fotball Netball club	854	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
Murrumbeena Fotball Netball Club	378	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
Indians in Cranbourne/ Pakenham and surroundings	484	Accepted	Not needed	Survey posted	
AUUCCC	//	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	Number of members not available
Vietnamese Student Society Sydney	337	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
Malaysian Food Lovers	414	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
Lebanese Students in Australia	586	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
New Greeks in Sydney	388	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
Sydney Italians	1283	Accepted	Not needed	Survey posted	
Job opportunities for international students in Sydney	960	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
Christian Surfers	410	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
Bentleigh buy/swap/sell	710	Declined	No	Survey not posted	
St. Kilda Women's Football	452	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
RUSI queer collective	761	Accepted	Not needed	Survey posted	
Spaced out LGBTQ community	181	Accepted	Not needed	Survey posted	

Vietnamese Community	231	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
Greek businesses	1700	Declined	No	Survey not posted	
Melville buy/sell/swap group	1851	Accepted	Not needed	Survey posted	
Vintage buy/sell Perth	1400	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
PIS (Political Interest Society)	1240	Accepted	Not needed	Survey posted	
RMIT MBA student association	678	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
University of Melbourne Catholic Society	267	Accepted	Yes	Survey posted	Posted by group administrator
Sunbury Football Netball Club	46	Accepted	Not needed	Survey posted	Posted by group member
University of Melbourne Vegan Club	823	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
UWA Squash Club	522	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	
University of Melbourne Tennis Club	720	Ignored	Yes	Survey not posted	

Appendix 4: Tables of results

This appendix includes tables of results for findings that were not included in the main text. The findings below were omitted from the main text because 1) performing a statistical test did not indicate a significant difference between the groups compared, or 2) of space considerations. Each table is introduced by the question or statement of which it contains results on. The p-value that the statistical tests yielded can be found directly below each table. Where three groups have been compared, the p-value for each comparison will be stated below. The free text response comments are also provided at the very end of this appendix. All comments that only contained a "No" response (to the question "Would you like to add any comments?") or "Thank you" have been removed for space considerations.

Age

Q6 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use the pronoun they when referring to, or talking about them?

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Yes	32	5	37
Not sure	2	0	2
No	50	15	65
Total	84	20	104

p= .3

Q8 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use either xe, zie, ze or ey in stead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone?

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Yes	46	10	56
Not sure	8	1	9
No	30	9	39
Total	84	20	104

p= .6

Q9 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use xe, zie, ze or ey when referring to, or talking about them?

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Yes	9	2	11
Not sure	0	1	1
No	75	17	92
Total	84	20	104

p= .1

Q10 Have you ever used xe, zie, ze or ey to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman?

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Yes	6	1	7
Not sure	3	0	3
No	75	19	94
Total	84	20	104

p= .6

Q12: English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Strongly disagree	9	5	14
Disagree	17	4	21
No opinion	7	3	10
Agree	30	4	34
Strongly agree	20	4	24
Not sure	1	0	1
Total	84	20	104

$p = .1$

Q13 Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Strongly disagree	17	3	20
Disagree	22	5	27
No opinion	11	4	15
Agree	19	4	23
Strongly agree	11	4	15
Not sure	4	0	4
Total =	84	20	104

$p = .7$

Q14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Strongly disagree	8	5	13
Disagree	8	2	10
No opinion	4	4	8
Agree	23	2	25
Strongly agree	38	7	45
Not sure	3	0	3
Total =	84	20	104

p= .06

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Strongly disagree	32	6	38
Disagree	30	3	33
No opinion	7	6	13
Agree	6	2	8
Strongly agree	6	3	9
Not sure	3	0	3
Total	84	20	104

p= .1

Q17 Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it

Observed values	18-30	30+	Total
Strongly disagree	21	3	24
Disagree	23	6	29
No opinion	5	1	6
Agree	21	3	24
Strongly agree	10	6	16
Not sure	4	1	5
Total	84	20	104

p= .2

Level of education

Q5 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use the pronoun they instead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone?

Answers	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Yes	18	44	19	81
Not sure	3	4	2	9
No	3	7	4	14
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .7
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .8
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .9

Q6 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use the pronoun they when referring to, or talking about them?

Answers	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Yes	10	21	6	37
Not sure	0	2	0	2
No	14	32	19	65
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .1
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .3
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .4

Q8 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use either xe, zie, ze or ey in stead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone?

Answers	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Yes	15	30	11	56
Not sure	2	5	2	9
No	7	20	12	39
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .6
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .5
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .7

Q9 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use xe, zie, ze or ey when referring to, or talking about them?

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Yes	3	5	3	11
Not sure	0	1	0	1
No	21	49	22	92
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .6
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .6
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .8

Q10 Have you ever used xe, zie, ze or ey to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman?

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Yes	1	5	1	7
Not sure	1	2	0	3
No	22	48	24	94
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .6
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .4
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .7

Q12: English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Strongly disagree	3	6	5	14
Disagree	4	12	5	21
No opinion	3	4	3	10
Agree	8	18	8	34
Strongly agree	6	14	4	24
Not sure	0	1	0	1
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .7
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .1
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .3

Q13 Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Strongly disagree	7	13	4	24
Disagree	5	16	8	29
No opinion	1	3	2	6
Agree	6	15	3	24
Strongly agree	4	7	5	16
Not sure	1	1	3	5
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .8

Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .2
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .4

Q14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Strongly disagree	2	4	7	13
Disagree	3	5	2	10
No opinion	1	5	2	8
Agree	8	14	3	25
Strongly agree	10	25	10	45
Not sure	0	2	1	3
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .5
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .2
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .5

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Strongly disagree	7	19	12	38
Disagree	7	18	8	33
No opinion	4	7	2	13
Agree	3	5	0	8
Strongly agree	2	4	3	9
Not sure	1	2	0	3
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .5
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .2
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .1

Q16 People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of he or she

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Strongly disagree	2	3	2	7
Disagree	3	3	3	9
No opinion	1	6	1	8
Agree	6	11	7	24
Strongly agree	12	29	12	53
Not sure	0	3	0	3
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .4
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .3
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .9

Q17 Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it

Observed values	Upper secondary	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Strongly disagree	7	13	4	24
Disagree	5	16	8	29
No opinion	1	3	2	6
Agree	6	15	3	24
Strongly agree	4	7	5	16
Not sure	1	1	3	5
Total	24	55	25	104

Upper secondary vs Undergraduate: p= .8
Undergraduate vs. Graduate: p= .2
Graduate vs. Upper secondary: p= .4

Urban-rural divide

Q5 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use the pronoun they instead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone?

Current	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	75	6	81
Not sure	9	0	9
No	13	1	14
Total	97	7	104

p= .5

Origins	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	67	14	81
Not sure	9	0	9
No	13	1	14
Total	89	15	104

p= .2

Q6 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use the pronoun they when referring to, or talking about them?

Current	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	33	4	37
Not sure	2	0	2
No	62	3	65
Total	97	7	104

p= .4

Origins	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	29	8	37
Not sure	2	0	2
No	58	7	65
Total	89	15	104

p= .1

Q7 Have you ever used they to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman?

Current	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	40	4	44
Not sure	9	0	9
No	48	3	51
Total	97	7	104

p= .5

Origins	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	35	9	44
Not sure	9	0	9
No	45	6	51
Total	89	15	104

p= .2

Q8 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use either xe, zie, ze or ey in stead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone?

Current	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	52	4	56
Not sure	8	1	9
No	37	2	39
Total	97	7	104

p= .7

Origins	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	45	11	56
Not sure	8	1	9
Not	36	3	39
Total	89	15	104

p= .2

Q9 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use xe, zie, ze or ey when referring to, or talking about them?

Current	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	10	1	11

Not sure	1	0	1
No	86	6	92
Total	97	7	104

p= .9

Q10 Have you ever used xe, zie, ze or ey to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman?

Origins	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Yes	5	2	7
Not sure	3	0	3
No	81	13	94
Total	89	15	104

p= .4

Q12: English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she

Current	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	13	1	14
Disagree	21	0	21
No opinion	8	2	10
Agree	32	2	34
Strongly agree	22	2	24
Not sure	1	0	1
Total	97	7	104

p= .7

Origins	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	13	1	14
Disagree	19	2	21
No opinion	9	1	10
Agree	30	4	34
Strongly agree	17	7	24
Not sure	1	0	1
Total	89	15	104

117

p= .6

Q13 Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary

Current	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	18	2	20
Disagree	25	2	27
No opinion	14	1	15
Agree	22	1	23
Strongly agree	14	1	15
Not sure	4	0	4
Total	97	7	104

p= .4

Origins	Urban-suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	14	6	20
Disagree	23	4	27
No opinion	15	0	15
Agree	19	4	23
Strongly agree	14	1	15
Not sure	4	0	4
Total	89	15	104

p= .6

Q14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she

Current	Urban-suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	13	0	13
Disagree	9	1	10
No opinion	8	0	8
Agree	22	3	25
Strongly agree	42	3	45
Not sure	3	0	3
Total	97	7	104

p= .8

Origins	Urban-Suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	13	0	13
Disagree	8	2	8
No opinion	8	0	8
Agree	22	3	25
Strongly agree	35	10	45
Not sure	3	0	3
Total	89	15	104

p= .1

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person

Current	Urban-suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	35	3	38
Disagree	31	2	33
No opinion	12	1	13
Agree	8	0	8
Strongly agree	9	0	9
Not sure	2	1	3
Total	97	7	104

p= .8

Origins	Urban-sub	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	30	8	38
Disagree	30	3	33
No opinion	12	1	13
Agree	7	1	8
Strongly agree	8	1	9
Not sure	2	1	3
Total	89	15	104

p= .3

Q16 People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of he or she

Current	Urban-suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	7	0	7
Disagree	8	1	9
No opinion	7	1	8
Agree	22	2	24
Strongly agree	50	3	53
Not sure	3	0	3
Total	97	7	104

p= .6

Origins	Urban-suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	7	0	7
Disagree	8	1	9
No opinion	7	2	9
Agree	22	1	23
Strongly agree	42	11	53
Not sure	3	0	3
Total	89	15	104

p= .2

Q17 Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it

Current	Urban-suburban	Rural	Total
Strongly disagree	22	2	23
Disagree	28	1	29
No opinion	5	1	6
Agree	23	1	24
Strongly agree	15	1	16
Not sure	4	1	5
Total	97	7	104

p= .8

Gender-identity

Q5 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use the pronoun they instead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone?

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Yes	16	10	9	35
Not sure	2			2
No	41	23		64
Total	59	33	9	101

Males vs. females: p= .2
Females vs. others: p= .2
Males vs. others: p=.1

Q9 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use xe, zie, ze or ey when referring to, or talking about them?

Observed values	Male	Female	Other	Total
Yes	6	2	3	11
Not sure	1	0	0	1
No	52	31	6	89
Total	59	33	9	101

Males vs. females: p= .4
Females vs. others: p= .052
Males vs. others: p= .08

Strength of gender-identity

Q9 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use xe, zie, ze or ey when referring to, or talking about them?

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total	
Yes	3	8	11	
No	20	67	87	
Total	23	75	98	

p= .7

Q14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total	
Disagree	1	19	20	
Agree	22	46	68	
Total	23	65	88	

p= .07

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total	
Disagree	20	49	69	
Agree	1	15	16	
Total	21	64	85	

p= .2

Q16 People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of he or she

Observed values	Not strong male/female identity	Strong male/female identity	Total
Disagree	1	14	15
Agree	20	53	73
Total	21	67	88

p= .2

Gender definition

Q14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she + Q18 I believe there are more than two genders than male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q14	Agreement w/statement in Q14	Total
Binary gender definition	18	11	29
Continuous gender definition	3	53	56
Total	21	64	85

p= .00001

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person + Q18 I believe there are more than two genders than male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q15	Agreement w/statement in Q15	Total
Binary gender definition	8	14	22
Continuous gender definition	54	3	57
Total	62	17	79

p= .0001

Q16 People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of he or she + Q18 I believe there are more than two genders than male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q16	Agreement w/statement in Q16	Total
Binary gender definition	16	12	28
Continuous gender definition	0	55	55
Total	16	67	83

p= .00001

Q12 English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she + Q19 I believe there are only two genders: male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q12	Agreement w/statement in Q12	Total
Continuous gender definition	9	46	55
Binary gender definition	22	7	29
Total	31	53	74

p= .00001

Q13 Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary + Q19 I believe there are only two genders: male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q13	Agreement w/statement in Q13	Total
Continuous gender definition	39	11	50
Binary gender definition	5	23	28
Total	44	34	78

p= .00001

Q14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she + Q19 I believe there are only two genders: male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q14	Agreement w/statement in Q14	Total
Continuous gender definition	3	54	57
Binary gender definition	18	10	28
Total	21	64	85

p= .00001

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person + Q19 I believe there are only two genders: male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q15	Agreement w/statement in Q15	Total
Continuous gender definition	53	4	57
Binary gender definition	8	13	21
Total	61	17	78

p= .00008

Q16 People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of he or she + Q19 I believe there are only two genders: male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q16	Agreement w/statement in Q16	Total
Continuous gender definition	0	55	55
Binary gender definition	16	11	27
Total	16	66	82

p= .00001

Q17 Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it + Q19 I believe there are only two genders: male and female

Observed values	Disagreement w/statement in Q17	Agreement w/statement in Q17	Total
Continuous gender definition	46	11	57
Binary gender definition	4	24	28
Total	50	35	85

p= .00001

Language background

Q5 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use the pronoun they instead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone?

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Yes	74	7	81
Not sure	8	1	9
No	12	2	14
Total	94	10	104

p= .7

Q6 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use the pronoun they when referring to, or talking about them?

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Yes	35	2	37
Not sure	1	1	2
No	58	7	65
Total	94	10	104

p= .09

Q7 Have you ever used they to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman?

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Yes	40	4	44
Not sure	9	0	9
No	45	6	51
Total	94	10	104

p= .5

Q8 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use either xe, zie, ze or ey in stead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone?

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Yes	52	4	56
Not sure	8	1	9
No	34	5	39
Total	94	10	104

p= .6

Q9 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use xe, zie, ze or ey when referring to, or talking about them?

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Yes	11	0	11
Not sure	1	0	1
No	82	10	92
Total	94	10	104

p= .4

Q10 Have you ever used xe, zie, ze or ey to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman?

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Yes	6	1	7
Not sure	3	0	2
No	85	9	94
Total	94	10	104

p= .5

Q12 English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	13	1	14
Disagree	18	3	21
No opinion	9	1	10
Agree	33	1	34
Strongly agree	20	4	24
Not sure	1	0	1
Total	94	10	104

p= .2

Q13 Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	17	3	20
Disagree	26	1	27
No opinion	13	2	15
Agree	20	3	23
Strongly agree	14	1	15
Not sure	4	0	4

Total	94	10	104

p= .3

Q14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	12	1	13
Disagree	7	3	10
No opnion	8	0	8
Agree	23	2	25
Strongly agree	41	4	45
Not sure	3	0	3
Total	94	10	104

p= .5

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	33	5	38
Disagree	31	2	33
No opnion	12	1	13
Agree	7	1	8
Strongly agree	8	1	9
Not sure	3	0	3
Total	94	10	104

p= .5

Q16 People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of he or she

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	7	0	7
Disagree	8	1	9
No opnion	7	1	8
Agree	22	2	24
Strongly agree	47	6	53
Not sure	3	0	3
Total	94	10	104

p= .7

Q17 Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it

Observed values	English	Other	Total
Strongly disagree	21	3	24
Disagree	25	4	29
No opnion	6	0	6
Agree	23	1	24
Strongly agree	14	2	16
Not sure	5	0	5
Total	94	10	104

p= .1

Interest in gender issues

Q6 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use the pronoun they when referring to, or talking about them? + Q20 I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Yes	4	30	34
No	15	38	53
Total	19	68	87

p= .06

Q9 Have you been in a situation where someone asked you to use xe, zie, ze or ey when referring to, or talking about them? + Q20 I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Yes	2	8	10
No	18	60	68
Total	20	68	88

p= .2

Q10 Have you ever used xe, zie, ze or ey to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman? + Q20 I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Yes	0	7	7
No	18	59	77
Total	18	66	84

p= .1

Q13 Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary + Q20 I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Disagreement	3	40	43
Agreement	15	17	32
Total	18	57	75

p= .00068

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person + Q20 I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Disagreement	8	54	62
Agreement	8	6	14
Total	16	60	76

p= .01

Q17 Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it + Q20 I find discussions on gender-issues engaging and important

Observed values	Not interested	Interested	Total
Disagreement	3	43	46
Agreement	16	18	34
Total	19	61	80

p= .00034

Q5 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use the pronoun they instead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone? + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Disagreement	Agreement	Total
Yes	44	32	76
No	8	6	14
Total	52	38	90

p= .9

Q7 Have you ever used they to refer to, or talk about someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman? + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Disagreement	Agreement	Total
Yes	32	11	43
No	35	22	57
Total	67	33	100

p= .1

Q8 If specifically asked to, would you be willing to use either xe, zie, ze or ey in stead of he or she when referring to, or talking about someone? + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Disagreement	Agreement	Total
Yes	35	19	54
No	21	15	36
Total	56	34	90

p= .5

Q12 English needs a gender-neutral pronoun in addition to he and she + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Do engage	Do not engage	Total
Disagreement	16	16	32
Agreement	40	16	56
Total	56	32	88

p= .09

Q13 Adding a gender-neutral pronoun to English is unnecessary + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Do engage	Do not engage	Total
Disagreement	35	12	47
Agreement	17	16	33
Total	43	32	75

p= .07

Q14 People should be able to choose a different pronoun if they don't identify as a he or she + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Do engage	Do not engage	Total
Disagreement	12	9	19
Agreement	41	25	62
Total	54	34	88

p= .7

Q15 He and she are the only appropriate pronouns to use when referring to, or talking about a specific person + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Do engage	Do not engage	Total
Disagreement	42	26	58
Agreement	10	6	16
Total	52	32	84

p= .9

Q16 People should accept and respect that some people prefer to use a gender-neutral pronoun instead of he or she + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Do engage	Do not engage	Total
Disagreement	11	5	16
Agreement	44	29	73
Total	55	34	89

p= .6

Q17 Although someone prefers a gender-neutral pronoun, they shouldn't expect others to accept it, and use it + Q21 I rarely engage in discussions on gender-related issues

Observed values	Do engage	Do not engage	Total
Disagreement	34	17	51
Agreement	19	18	37
Total	53	35	88

p= .2

Comments from free text response

1: Should give your definition of gender at the start to clarify the response you want.

2: Gender indentity is important for people who identify other than male or female & discrimination against people who identify other tan male or female can cause psychological damage

3: I feel like there are 2 gender but a variety of sexual orientations.

4: I think ridiculous the whole thing. Even transgenders belongs to one sex.

5: Can everyone just harden up

6: Maybe better if a new pronoun be added organically, though everyday conversation etc.

7: If someone asked me to use a particular pronoun I would make the attempt to do so. At the same time I think that its unreasonable to take offence at the assumption of gender and corresponding pronoun use if you have not made your preferences clear, as 98% of the time the assumptions are valid.

8: Gender (social) should not be confused with sex (biological)

9: I think gender should be abolished and we shouldn't mix up the terms for gender and sex. We should make people comfortable with themselves and they should be allowed to express themselves however they wish, but there's no need to insist on gender neutral pronouns since there are only two sexes. Gender is a construct that should be destroyed

10: To clarify the refusal to use ze etc.: It would too unnatural for me to use those pronouns, so I would default to either they or just using the person's name rather than go to the effort of reshaping language instincts. I'm sure if this request came from a close friend or similar, my opinion would probably change.

11: I would prefer a gender neutral singular pronoun that doesn't include rare letters like z or x. I prefer the idea of 'ne' or 'se' or 'thi' as they would flow more naturally in English language and may be more easily accepted.

12: I don't know whether English *needs* a singular neutral pronoun in the sense that it would enrich the langiage and help everyone to communicate more clearly, but I would very strongly like it if there were one. I'm also curious as to why you ask respondents to state their genders but not their preferred pronouns.

13: I think English needs a gender-neutral personal pronoun in addition to he and she, and that that word already exists as 'they/their'. I don't think we need to create a new gender-neutral word nor should it be necessary to adopt these words that people come up with.

14: Interesting study. Made me realise a lot more discussion required on this topic.

15: I usually default to 'they' regardless of gender

16: There are far more important matters in this world than placating the wishes of mentally ill people who can't decide what gender they are. Vagina= woman (she). Penis = Man (he). And if you have genitalia removed then you should be called by the pronoun you were at birth. Psychological help is better for these people than being pandered to.

17: Just don't force people to use the alternate pronouns. Otherwise, I'm not bothered by people's personal inclinations.

18: This whole "xe" "schlee" thing is a symptom of the stupidity of PC culture and shouldn't be indulged. Instead of obsessing over crafting an identity people should work instead on developing a personality. Anyone who views gender as the lens through which to view the entire world would likely be the most tedious and narrow-minded individual you could hope never to meet. Stop obsessing about pronouns and try and find happiness in your own life, it's a much more useful way to spend your time, I promise.

19: What's wrong with they and it for gender neutral pronouns