

Problems and Inconveniences for Interviewee's with Alternative Last Names

By Lara Atkins

Many people who retain their maiden names, create new names or hyphenate last names express some form of problem or inconvenience with their decision.

Problems with Length of Hyphenated and Two Word Names:

Interviewees mentioned length as an inconvenience of two name and hyphenated last names. Long names can cause issues with standardized tests and writing.

Marley Ferguson Hautzinger, a child with two last names, is one of five interviewees who expressed concern with standardized tests. When asked if she had any problems with the length of her last name, she replied: "On Standardized tests, because it doesn't fit."

Similarly, Tessa Allen de Oliveria stated:

Um... I think more than anything it just confuses people. Like, they don't know whether to place me with the "A's" or the "O's" with standardized testing and whatnot. My name can never fit in the allotted bubbles, so..."

Issues with length often lead to the unintentional shortening of the name by teachers, co-workers, and companies. For example, many interviewees with two or hyphenated last names stated that they were often referred to by their husband's surname or a shortened version of their name by people who don't know them personally.

When Lisa Cipriany-Dacko was asked about the advantages and disadvantages of hyphenating her last name, she responded:

There's like lots of disadvantages to it. It's a real pain sometimes because all the time I use my whole name and people just send back Dacko. I even had a lawyer say to me one time "What is your name anyhow? Is it Cipriany, is it Dacko, is it Cipriany-Dacko?" Like it's all my fault that everybody else decides to change it. I think people are just lazy because Dacko is shorter than Cipriany-Dacko. It really bothers the heck out of me when a guy uh, donates to a charity and we have both our names on the check and they say "Mr. Stan Dacko" thank you very much for the donation."

Some children with hyphenated last names chose to shorten their names for convenience:

"...Lots of times I just write P-K and they make me re do it. People just end up waiting for me to finish it," said Julia Pendleton-Knowll.

Marley Ferguson Hautzinger described an experience in which she also shortened her last name for convenience:

Oh, I know when it was a problem! When the librarian got really mad at me because I was sighing in because I just wrote F-H. I was trying to print something really quickly, and she got really mad at me because I didn't fill out my whole last name. I explained that it was 18 letters and we had this gigantic ordeal in the library. And then I wrote the whole thing out for her. As I was leaving she told me, 'It's okay if you just want to write F-H.'

Children with hyphenated and two name last names also expressed concern for the future. Isaac Rowe-Raitin is a child with a two word last name, which he chooses to hyphenate. When asked about marriage and what he would do about future last name decisions, he stated:

I think that would be more reasonable than the other way, than a third last name or adding last name after last name for generations to go. So I'd be more than happy to work something out, it's not something I feel overly passionate about, I just think practically speaking it doesn't make a lot of sense."

Corina McKendry also expressed concern about marriage and hyphenating last names:

"...I like hyphenation but then if you're a kid with a hyphenated last name and then you get married, you have 3 names? What do you do with that? There's no good solution, unless every couple came with their own new name?"

Problems with Institutions

Many interviewees highlighted problems of hyphenated last names at work and with the government:

My first couple years filing my taxes, we had so many complications through the government. *Because of the hyphen?* Yes, I would say I have been married now um, thirteen years and maybe within just the last seven [we haven't had issues]. So half my married life there's always been a problem. And even now, I started working a year ago and legally by law I have to be Wolfe-Smith on you know, all my paper work and my paychecks and my ID badge. Some people still, they're like, "Do I call you Mrs. Wolfe, do I call you Mrs. Smith?" said Jennifer Wolfe-Smith.

Isaac Rowe-Raitin discussed having a problem with registration and the Massachusetts DMV:

Yeah, they didn't make a distinction between that and being hyphenated for any reason, like any actual reason my dad thought it would be easier for registering for things, to have it without the hyphen which is [inaudible] false. *Yeah.* So that's actually been a bigger issue, I hyphenate it now just to make it easier but legally there isn't a hyphen. *Right, so they did kind of the Latin American style of the two last names?* Yeah. Which is really stupid. Because even in Massachusetts, the DMV...can't put a space in your last name, they don't do it, so on my driver's license there's a hyphen even though legally there isn't."

Problems with Retained Maiden Names

Many interviewees who retained their maiden name, or had parents who retained maiden names also expressed problems having different names than their children/parents. These problems usually occurred when travelling or when in hospitals

Sarah Han, whose mother's surname is Smith, discussed issues her family experienced with different last names:

There have been a lot of things that have tripped people up if it's like a credit card company or booking airline flights. And it usually all works out, but we've definitely had difficulties a lot of the time with travel. One time I was in a hospital really sick and my mom was trying to visit me, it was in Honduras and she couldn't get access for a while.

Interviewees who maintained their maiden name also expressed problems with being referred to by their husband's surnames and the assumptions of patrilineal naming practices.

Kayla Hunt, a woman who retained her maiden name after marriage describes a situation in which her father referred to her by her husband's name:

My dad um gave me a check for something soon after I was married with my husband's name on it, and I was like, 'This is not my name.' And he just looks at me and didn't do anything and I said, 'You know this is not my name' and so I said 'Well ok' and I tore the check up and I said 'If you would like to write another check that'd be great.'

Conclusion:

It is important to keep in mind that feminist naming practices are, by definition, nonconventional, which often leads to general confusion when it comes to hyphenated, retained maiden names and two-name last names. Despite the problems that many interviewees discussed, they also stated that the benefits of their decisions ultimately outweighed the inconveniences.

For a final example, Joseph Loyaconobustos, whose parents combined their surnames, stated:

With every decision there will be consequences that will go either way, but I feel that flying in the face of tradition, as well as these minor inconveniences for the sake of being true to your long-standing ideas and retaining that integrity, is much more important in the long run than those minor inconveniences.