

Interviewee: Corina McKendry (When marrying her wife, they both kept their last name. When having children, Corina decided to give her children her wife's last name, partly because Corina is the biological mother.)

Interviewer: Sophia Carmen

[Intro & Consent] *What is your last name story? Where did you get your last name?* From my dad. It's McKendry. *What did you and your partner do when you got together, are you married?* Yeah we're married in California. We just kept our own last names, it's actually funny, I was thinking about this when you emailed me last week. The long part of the story is my sister and I, when we were younger, we used to say 'we're never going to change our last name' and we were very, in our 10 year old way, very militant about it, 'we're always going to be Mckendrys' and our grandmother Mckendry said one time 'well then how are you going to show that your families are coming together?' and she wasn't really happy about that, but my sister and I were very committed about it. And then, I did keep my last name, and so did she actually, she's straight, she's married also, and she's a Mckendry.

But when I got married, we, I dunno, vaguely talked about it, but then whose last name do you pick? Do you pick a new last name? And part of it, my partner is a veterinarian, so name recognition is really important, because half your career is based on your reputation. So for her, changing her last name would be a big, huge pain in the butt because she has a drug enforcement agency license and her veterinarian license, and we were in California then, and so it made it a big pain in the butt for her, and I was like 'well I don't really want to change my last name.' I was in grad school so I didn't have tons of name recognition, and once you've been out and publishing as an academic, then you don't want to change your last name because your identity is your publications, right? I just didn't really feel like it [Laughs].

But our kid actually has her last name. And, we actually talked much more about that because for one, our names are horrible hyphenated because we both have three syllable last names, it's so long it would just be mean. So we weren't sure what to do, but I actually kind of, I am the birth mom, I decided we had to go with my wife's last name. Part of it was this queer parenting book that I read. They were talking about different last naming practices, hyphenating, changing names, and they basically made this argument that the worst possible thing you can do is give your kid the birth parent's name. Because being a biological parent is already socially recognized, and so if the other mother is neither biological parent nor has the same name, these two things we automatically have broader social recognition around, they will have neither, right? I found that really compelling. Because at some point, I realized my last name versus someone else's last name, it's all just some man's last name. Who really cares what your last name is, because it's just some dude's last name. Once you think through it, it's just my dad's last name and his dad's dad, so who cares.

*How old is your kid?* She's 3.5, and then I'm pregnant and due in April. We're going to give her the same last name. My wife really wanted to give our next kid my last name as a middle name, but I think we should give her a cooler middle name. My ideal would be if we had both come up with a last name we wanted to change it to, I was thinking at one point, let's change both of our last names to your mom's maiden name, but her mom's grandma's husband whose name it is is an abusive alcoholic, so I don't want his name, you know? *Do you see any sort of alternative to patrilineal naming practices?* I don't, the way it's done isn't that great. And sometimes my wife

and I wish we shared the last name, it's indicative of a family unit in our culture. But I'm not going to change my last name, I guess I could because I haven't published too much yet, but it'd be weird, I'm 36 so I've had my name for a really long time and it'd be confusing. I mean, 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? I knew someone, when he got married, him and his wife changed their last name to Pow! with an exclamation mark. I'm sure you know this, but California law recently changed a year or two ago so that men can change their last name when they get married as easily as women can, which is pretty great.

I know lesbian couples when one of them has changed their last name, and I always kind of like it, 'that's neat,' but whose name do you change it to? I remember some friends of mine when I lived in California had a kid, and they did the same thing as me, giving the kid the non-birth mom's last name, and one of my friends joked that they gave the kid the dad's name. Because the way it happens to be, and can often be, is that if there's something of a butch-fem relationship, it's usually the more feminine woman who has the babies. So it's a whole bigger debate about, is butch-fem relationships anything like heterosexual relationships? And I don't think it is, but that's a whole other issue. Are you perpetuating some pigeon holing of a relationship into a heteronormative thing, even though it's not internally. Have you come up with any solution to naming practices? *Well, I'm not sure there is any good solution but it's been interesting to hear everyone's different stories. So what you hoped for in choosing this name is to kind of give your daughter a connection to your wife?* Well they're connected in real life, in things that matter, but in terms of social recognition of connections. I mean, worst came to worst I could always do a blood or DNA test. But what we've found is people don't actually tend to question if you say you're someone's mom. When my wife takes my daughter on the airplane, no one questions it, they actually look pretty similar so people assume that she's her biological kid. Here's the different ways that society recognizes mothers: you have the same last name, you gave birth to the kid, so it's just a way of establishing and making sure that that was clear.

And I think it was actually helpful for my wife's parents as well. My parents are kind of into biology, 'Where'd you get that gene? That must be from your grandpa,' they're really into that, and so they don't care what the kid's last name is. But for her parents, who used to be super conservative and Catholic, they've come a long way, but I think it was helpful for them in terms of really feeling like she is their granddaughter as much as their biological grandkids, so I think it actually made a difference in terms of her family's recognition. I mean they love me, it's all good, but it was helpful. [Thank you & goodbye]