

Interviewee: Luke Terra (When getting married, his wife and he decided to create a whole new family name to pass down to children, as signifier the of creation of a family.)

Interviewer: Sophia Carmen

[Intro & Consent] *What is your last name story?* My wife and I are CC grads, we met at CC and got married a couple years after graduating. And as we approached our wedding, we were starting to think about what we might do for our last name, and for family reasons neither of us felt particularly connected to our own last names, and we didn't really like the notion of her taking my last name, it didn't feel appropriate. Her family name didn't feel like the right choice, and as we were talking about what kind of options we had, like combined or hyphenated names, but those all didn't feel right for us. And then we started talking about creating a new name, and that felt perfect. We felt like, as we were getting married and starting a family, that our name signified the creation of our new family. *How did you go about deciding on the new name?* We asked friends for advice, we thought of lots of different name possibilities, and actually it was kind of tricky because names often hold signifiers of cultural background or family history, and we didn't want to take on an identity that wasn't ours. So we were trying to pick a name that was neutral enough that we didn't feel false, but also one that had meaning that was significant and meaningful to us. I think it was my wife who suggested Terra, and as soon as that came into the picture, it was done. It was exactly what we wanted. For us, the meaning of the word felt perfect, it means 'earth,' 'soil,' and all of that, it seemed like a really appropriate way to ground a family. It didn't feel like it held any overt cultural implications that we would feel false adopting, and it's not a very common name, so it seemed like the perfect name for us.

*What did your parents or family think of your decision?* They were all supportive. My dad was a little bit bummed about it, but I think that that had as much to do with the inelegant way that I brought it up to him. He was totally supportive, he was just a little bit sad. My mom remarried and has a different last name now, so didn't really feel any familial connection to the last name. My wife Megan's mom had her last name changed a number of times over her life, as had Megan's, so changing it wasn't new at all. *Do you guys have any children?* We do, we have two kids. *So you do you see your decision as effective? If your children were to get married, what do you see them doing?* That's a good question, I don't know. When we first mentioned it to our kids that that's what we had done, it was kind of a no brainer to them, it made sense. They don't have a lot of experience thinking that girls taking the boy's last name is normal, so it didn't phaze them at all. What they think about it as they grow up and start thinking about marriage, that's hard, I'm not sure what they'll do. But for us it was great.

*Did you base your decision off of any role models?* We did know a few folks who did kind of create names by combining names, but we didn't know anyone who had just chosen something completely new. We did feel like folks in our circle had experimented with alternatives. We just felt like picking a new name was right for us. *How effective do you think your choice is in feminist goals of women not being erased from history? Would you consider your decision to be*

*motivated by feminism or was it more of a personal choice?* Yeah, I think in part it was motivated by feminism. It came from not feeling like it was appropriate for my wife to just take my name, or me to take hers, we didn't like what that symbolized. That part of it initially came out of feminist impulse for both of us, and then in terms of the solution to it, that was more about what fits for us personally as a couple. But the initial conversation was for feminist concern. *Do you have anything else you want to add?* In terms of your core question about whether these kind of alternatives to naming practices help women not disappear in the marriage process, I think there are a lot of alternatives to patrilineal naming practices, and I feel like among the folks that I was friends with as I was getting married, finding alternatives was the supported idea.

The only sadness I have is that family is really important to me, and the generations that I came from are important, and last names are the primary way that that's signified. When our kids had projects at school about where your name comes from and where your family is from, it's fun for them but it's also something that doesn't have the kind of connection that a lot of other folks have. So it's not a decision without consequence, but If a woman takes a man's name when they get married, it's not like that is without consequence either. All the options have repercussions. The awkward moments we were going to have in life were far more preferable to the notion of her becoming part of my family and only that, that one-directionality. *What do you hope for for the future of your name Terra?* That's a good question, honestly I've never thought about that. But to be honest, I do hope that our name means something to our kids. But that said, I totally want for them to feel empowered. It's hard for parents to think about that moment of having to let go, but when either of my kids have a partner and they are making that decision, of course I will be the first to support whatever they decide. [Thank you & goodbye]