

By Daphnee Chabal

## INFLUENCE OF ATTACHMENT TO A NAME AND ITS MEANING IN LAST-NAMING PRACTICES

The focus of this essay is on the attachment to one's name and the name's personal meaning. Personal attachment to family names can be a factor that influences last-naming practice in society. As a diverse range of people have been interviewed, this essay will allow us to see patterns in one's decision concerning last-naming practices, when it involves the theme of attachment. Many individuals often feel a deep, personal attachment to their last name.

Lilly Martin, one of our contacts, feels so: "I liked my last name and it was my identity..."

Often, this connection between last-name and identity is the main reason to keep one's name when getting married. Mary Pechauer stated: "I can't be Mary Undland. That's just not who I am. I'm still trying to figure out who Mary Pechauer is. And so I needed to stay with that..."

Keeping one's name can be one of the main indicators of one's attachment to it even if, as we will see later on in this essay, there are other motives. One of our contacts, a Mia Ives-Flores, when talking about her mother, makes a strong case about the need to keep a distinct identity: "She's not adopting her husband's identity just because they're married, you know, she's her own person and my father's his own person."

Renee Yoelin-Allen's husband wanted to give her his name, so did his family. The way she described was that it was more of a necessity to hold on to her name than a choice: "I knew I couldn't be Allen, that this was not me, I couldn't be Renee Allen. [...] My husband wanted me to take Allen but he understood that was not going to happen."

When a surname is your parent's, it often has a heavy connotation to them: They are an inheritance, they carry history. Joyce Norton-McCornick expressed clearly this side of one's attachment to their last name: "...it really keeps me in touch with my past and my family."

Luke Terra, who created a new last name with his wife, acknowledges the significance of last names in terms of family history: "...the generations that I came from are important, and last names are the primary way that that's signified."

The family history may trace back to ethnic origins like Renee Yoelin-Allen's maiden name, Yoelin. She has the name of her ancestors, who came from Russia three generations ago. Similarly Monica Spoch Spana confessed:

"... I like being able to tell people that Schoch is a German name and Spana is originally a Polish name and when that family came through Ellis Island they shortened the name at the recommendation of the clerk."

When the family name is an old one, and is part of history in the broader sense, it contributes to one's attachment to this name. For example, both our contacts Marcia Dobson and Malcolm Perkins-Smith retraced their family history and discovered that both Dobson and Perkins were names of people who travelled on the Mayflower. This motivated them to keep their family names.

Because a family name is carried on through generations, continents, and history, people are attached to it. They feel it is more than just part of one's identity. Indeed, it is part

of one's cultural heritage. As Jesse Yancey-Siegel states it: "I am happy to represent both sides of my family.... I feel like my last name carries a lot of history."

However, the fact that the last-name and the identity are connected to one's family can alternatively sometimes lead people to reject their last-name. Gail Murphy-Geiss explains:

So for me I didn't think of it as my father's name, I thought of it as my name. So by the time I would have kept it, it would have been maintaining a piece of my self. I know though that, you know, people whose fathers are abusive or neglectful or leave the family and sometimes they'll change their name to their mother's name because that parent has stayed with them and that's become a more meaningful relationships. Because they want to change their identity, they want to distance themselves from that guy.

We have several contacts who fit this description and have, or had a desire to change their identity in order to distance themselves from their family and thus redefine themselves. Monica Spoch Spana said that her partner: "...had no attachment other than that it was signalling to other people that we were all part of the same family."

Catherine Smith, in a relationship with a woman, shares Gail Murphy-Geiss' claim. She said:

It's important to know that I also feel slightly disconnected from my last name because my father's parents and his side of the family are not supportive of my relationship with Mandy. [...]we both are a little bit hesitant to support a last name that doesn't necessarily support us...

Personal and familial reasons may lead someone to be attached and proud of his/her last name. On the contrary, these same reasons may lead someone to feel detached from it and be more willing to give it up. Other different aspects play an important role attachment to last names, including aesthetic reasons. For instance, Catherine Smith explains why she prefers the name of her partner to her own as partially a matter of uniqueness: "...my last name is Smith, obviously, and it's very common, very generic, and I hold no attachment to it."

Similarly, Lilly Martin's used the example of "Smith" as a relatively undistinguished last name: "It's not like a name like Smith, where there are just so many of them."

And Renee Yoelin's: ... definitely, I like how unique the Yoelin is and Allen is not unique and I didn't like that at all.

And in Catherine Smith's humorous words when she expressed the implicit attractiveness of having a unique last name:

I joke and say I have last name envy, her last name is Steponowski, it's definitely a mouthful but she has strong relationship to her heritage, to her background, and to her last name.

One of our contacts, Malcolm Perkins Smith, explains another way to achieve the practice of a unique last-name by having a hyphenated last name. He says about his parents:

...they just maybe wanted to get rid of a normal name--a common name--and make it a little more uncommon, which is kind of what they were trying to do with both of our first names. You know, Smith and Perkins, like I said before are pretty generic names. But anything with a hyphen is all of a sudden the other side of the spectrum.

This practice can increase the attachment to one's last name by making it unique. This has been done by some of our other contacts. Renee Yoelin-Allen proudly admitted: "It is a mouthful to say that I created Yoelin-Allen because it's one of a kind; I know there is no one else on the planet who is named Renee Yoelin-Allen."

Amanda Udis-Kessler shared the story of both her mother and herself, and explained how this solution was appealing to them:

"I hyphenated my name, my mother hyphenated her name also, which I'm not sure why because my parents were separated. I was her role model! Only two people in the world ... share this particular last name."

Obviously, the aesthetic of a last name may more or less affect one's attachment to it and one's willingness to keep it.

Jo-Anna McCort said: "It's a much nicer sounding name than Fischman in my ears. And...I think it...flows. I think it's pretty with Jo-Anna."

This is actually influenced by the condition of her name, which Marley Ferguson Hautzinger said she was "unfortunate enough" to have, leading her to become more practical than sentimental when talking about this practice:

Ferguson Hautzinger was my name [...] That's I learned to spell as a little kid. Eighteen letters. *You counted. My full name is 28 letters....* you're not carrying around your entire lineage because you have an infinite number of last names, so you're dropping part of your lineage no matter what.

It is interesting to include Kayla Hunt, whose nickname and not last-name is an inconvenience, which induced to consider giving up on her last name:

...things would have been a little better if I had changed it because my last name isn't all that great, it's Hunt, and my nickname is Kiki, so really stupid name, Kiki Hunt."

However she did not. There are some emotionally charged reasons to be attached to a name you very want to hold on to. Pride is one of them. Jesse Yancey-Siegel explains: "...my dad comes from a Jewish family and my mom comes from a southern family, and both have very strong traditions of pride and passing names down."

Jo-Anna McCort was also influenced by her family as: "I was born with the last name McCort [provides spelling], of which my family was very proud."

To Renee Yoelin Allen, keeping her name was a chance:

"I wanted to keep Yoelin because I had a difficult childhood [...] My brother, sister and I had this thing, we were going to be this whole new Yoelins, we were not going to be the people who came before us but we were going to be healthy and that is why I kept it."

Lastly, Freda Hawyer Pachter did not "get rid of part of my identity [...] just for the sake of my mother's feelings."

A patriarchal attachment to lineage is a cause of regret, and influences the last-naming practices. Tomi-Ann Roberts remembers a reason why she kept her name:

...my American grandfather took me on his knee, and he literally said to me, "the Roberts name ends with you." [...] So that story always stuck with me, and it's still true that the Roberts name ends with my sister and me, because our children don't have our last name.

Joseph Loyaconobustos' family on his father's side did not approve of his feminist mother and of the fact that his sister and he would have combination of his mother's and his father's last name as a last name. However:

“...they sort of jumped on board as they saw that their last name was still somewhat incorporated in our last name”.

Patriarchal lineage is, in Lisa Mueller's views, tradition. She states:

“For generations, women had taken the names of their husbands without really considering it just as a matter of...*Yeah, just as a matter of tradition.* Tradition. And it never, it wasn't an issue. And it appealed to my sense of individualism, I think at that time to, you know, to maintain my individual identity.”

As people feel more and more attached to their last-name, and as they have the choice to keep it or to change it, create a new one or to take their spouse's, feminism contributes to the rejection of imposition and confirms individuality.

Mary Pechauer confessed:

“I think the pattern of my behavior is that I do like to challenge assumptions and so he was making an assumption and so my initial natural reaction was to challenge that assumption. And he said, "Why wouldn't it be if we got married?" and I said, "Well, would you change your name to Tom Pechauer?" and he said no and I said, "Well, there you go." And he was “so...well that makes perfect sense to me!” He didn't challenge me at all, had never understood it as an assumption.

Sarah Smith-Han recalls the point of view of her mother:

“...my mom has a pretty common last name, her maiden name is Smith, so it's not like she was trying to preserve the family name. There are lots of Smiths out there. Rather she did not want to give up her own name for my dad's name which is a unique name, Han. So for her I definitely think it was a feminist choice.”

Lastly Carrie Ruiz defines tradition in her own way:

“I would have a huge problem switching to my husband's last name. That's a form of possession.”

The last point of this essay is that attachment to one's last name can be shown through the creation of a new last name. It is not a traditional attachment as we have seen in this essay: it is the importance given to people by the notion of family and unity. As a hyphenated last-name is long, impractical and often ignored in America (the second component of a hyphenated last-name is often the one which is acknowledged). The second generation is facing the problem of potentially having three, maybe even four last-names. By creating a new last-name, a family can be united and bound together with one name, which they are attached to as it is their own and their own only.

Andrea Lucard says:

“I think, actually, it's a funny sort of satisfaction that we have, which is that nobody else has [can't hear] last name. And we have a family identity that is the Lucard family. Mostly we talk about it in derogatory ways, I mean we'll say "You know, we're late because we're the Lucards," or "The house is messy

because we're the Lucards."

Luke Terra nostalgically recalls:

"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."

In conclusion, as we take a close look to the role of attachment in the last-naming practices, we can find a diverse range of motivators. Attachment can be motivated by personal reasons, history, uniqueness, feminism, and induces people to try to preserve this last name and hold on to it. Attachment allows people to move away from tradition and have the possibility to choose what their name would be, acknowledging it as part of their identity, which is an omnipresent theme in this research.