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Choices/Opinions

In traditional last-naming practices, the father's last name is passed along to the children and his spouse. However, recently society has seen alternative last-naming practices including hyphenating the mother's and father's last name, creating a new last name, having the mother keep her last name, and many more. As researchers of these newer trends, we asked what factors influenced people's choices? And how did their choices reflect their opinions.

Because our sample had such variety, our participants' choices and opinions vary drastically from each other. One factor that influenced choice was easiness. For example, Isaac Rowe Raitin has two last names but chose not to hyphenate them. At some points in his life, he chose to go by only one of his last names. He explains, "I was working at an Elementary school and the two word last name would have confused the hell out of the kids." So, for the sake of his students, he chose to simplify his two last names to just be one for a while.

Another example is Mia Ives-Flores. Mia's parents each kept their own last names, but gave her and her sister a hyphenated name. Mia explained:

I used to just go by Flores for a while 'cause I thought it was easier but I think when I get married I would also like to hyphen it but only keep my father's name so it's not like two hyphens, you know... I think keeping a hyphenated name when you get married is a little much, especially for kids.

Mia's choices in the past and in the future have been influenced by what is easier for other people.

Although some people may not consider convenience to be a factor in their choice, it appears that practicality is becoming even more of a factor with time. For families with hyphenated names, people generally agreed that they would not continue to add to the hyphenated name when they have children because it would only add to confusion. So, as last-naming practices continue to stray from the traditional paternalism, convenience will become a greater factor in decision-making.

Even though there are certainly common factors in decision-making, it is certainly difficult to draw a general conclusion because there is so much variety. However, we can conclude that opinions, in regards to last-naming practices, are based upon personal choice. Joseph Loyaconobustos, who combined his last name with his wife's, speaks about personal choice:

I think the main notion that I personally express about the whole lineage structure is that it should ultimately come down to personal choice rather than the way of patrilineal last name lineage falling down heavily on tradition. And I feel that whatever your choice is, it should be made for both a personal take as well as a consideration of the name you will give your children and that they will most likely have for the rest of their lives.

According to Joseph, decision-making should be based upon both personal choice and easiness. Marley Ferguson-Hautzinger elaborates on a similar opinion to Joseph's. She says:

I think it hurts my generation. I think that the argument that...it's irresponsible on the parents' part, which I guess it is, but I think that names are really personal so that their children should be able to figure it out on their own.

Marley is a child with a hyphenated last name. She provides an opinion about how personal choice and easiness should be the basis of decision-making.

As last-naming practices are straying more from traditional practices, choices regarding last names will be made more often. How people make these choices and what their opinion is will be changing, too. But, as our research shows, parents do take into account what the effects will be on their children. Although our participants' choices and opinions definitely vary from each other, one thing they have in common is that their choices are personal. Therefore, as the future brings changes to last-naming practices, there should not be a norm for decision-making. Instead, decisions should be made based upon personal choice.