

By: Erik Laitos

Regrets

Some have come to regret choosing or retaining their last names, or giving certain last names to their children. This may suggest that the feminist last-naming problem has not been solved, and that interventions may at times create new problems while seeking to solve others.

Among the most commonplace trends of regret in feminist last-naming practices is the hyphenation or combination phenomenon, both in favor of and against. Some families, such as the Ferguson Hautzingers, regret the decision to combine their names, as mother Sarah Hautzinger explains:

We put Ferguson Hautzinger because we thought it sounded better, I guess. And that's where we went wrong. Because, first of all, our older daughter [Marley], as soon as she got to school and things...she insisted on using Ferguson Hautzinger all the time. Which we didn't anticipate. We didn't factor in the kid's will!

The unanticipated impact of the child's will in this instance upset the balance the Ferguson Hautzingers had hoped to create with their combined name. This sort of regret is contrasted by those who passed a single name to their children for the sake of simplicity, or to keep peace within the family. The Smiths provide an example:

And to this day now we just talked about it, we regret it. We wish we would have done Wolfe Smith, the combination of both our names without the hyphen where we were kind of a brand new family with a brand new last name...we just thought it was so beautiful, a beautiful way of showing you know two people who fell in love and created a new family. But like I said we kind of backed out at the last minute because I wanted to keep peace with my in-laws.

Beyond the hyphenation or combination trend, a tendency to regret keeping one's married name after divorce, for the sake of simplicity and professionalism, was also apparent. Marcia Dobson, who retained her name after divorce to stay connected with her daughter and professional life, expressed this sort of regret. Upon her daughter's marriage and subsequent adoption of her new husband's name, Marcia became a disenchanted Dobson:

I chose Dobson for simplicity's sake. But I'm not particularly happy to be a Dobson. I don't particularly like the name, and that part of my life is now over. I have always considered myself a feminist, and so I often say my name is Dobson but it's an alias. *I see, let's flesh that out. What do you mean alias?* It doesn't really belong to me. It belongs to a certain part of my history, and that's part of why I keep it. But I've always much more related to both my mother's and my father's name.

The inclination toward retaining maiden and natal names struck true as well. Most adults, like Marcia Dobson, express regret for losing them; while many children, like Marley Ferguson Hautzinger, refused to consider dropping any part of them. Overall, the trend toward regret indicates a loyalty to birth names or, as in the case of the Smiths, to families that are often obscured by administrative simplicity, professional life, or a vain attempt to keep peace with relatives.