

Hyphenated Children

By Kira Osborn

Several interviewees discussed hyphenated last names that were bestowed upon them by their parents. Most commonly the format is Father's Name – Mother's Name but on occasion the order was rearranged for phonetic reasons. The children who carry these names often stated that it was the mother's idea because she did not want her children to only receive the father's name, for fear of her identity being erased. However, this 'solution' presents several problems down the line.

Identical twins Maria and Kenzie Mulligan-Buckmiller were interviewed for this project and their case is quite similar to the situation that many hyphenated children face. Kenzie explained,

Well, our last name is Mulligan-Buckmiller and our mother's name is Mulligan and our father's name was Buckmiller. When they got married our mom decided to keep her maiden name so she's just Molly Mulligan and our father kept his name. They hyphenated our name to equal parts but in pre-school they cut off Mulligan so it's just Buckmiller.

Many hyphenated children shared the same story that school systems, and often society as a whole, have made the choice for them to remove one part of their name. While this frustrated some, others felt that they were now unburdened by the length of their names. They respect their parents' choices but they regret that their parents did not think of the complications that would arise down the road. Many of the interviewees were interested in the alternative last name options that this project examines and several said that they would potentially consider creating a new name with their spouse when they are married. Malcolm Perkins-Smith said that this was not something that he was seriously considering but he acknowledged that eventually he will need to find a solution.

Conflicts include choosing the order of the names, and not having a common family name. In regards to the order of names, Courtney Blackmer-Raynolds explained in her interview that her parents placed her mother's name second because it, "just sounded better that way." The problem was that because her mother is addressed as Raynolds, as is her older sister, Courtney's dad would also be mistakenly called, "Mr. Raynolds," creating tension in the family. Courtney shared that this is often resolved with laughter and a quick correction.

The problem with having children whose names are different for their parents is the lack of unity, according to many of the interviewees. However, Courtney explained that she and her sister enjoyed the choice to choose which name to go by. She says that her sister is known as Lisa Raynolds, which she is jealous of because she identifies more strongly with her maternal side of the family. However, she likes how Courtney Blackmer sounds and she has used her father's name through high

school. Courtney highlighted the benefits of being able to choose the name which represents which part of your family you feel most connected to, as well as the strong attachment that you can develop to a name that you are personally invested in.