

Interviewee: Monica Schoch-Spana (Has hyphenated name of both her parents' since college. Before she only had her father's name. Her wife took her hyphenated name)

Interviewer: Amy Rippe

*[Read consent, Monica agrees to consent] Could you explain your LNS? Did you choose to take your hyphenated name later on?* I chose to take it later on. My mother's maiden name is Schoch and my father's last name is Spana and when she married she took the last name Spana. My mother used Schoch as a middle name, but didn't hyphenate it. It was my junior year in college and I had taken a number of anthropology classes including a kinship course. I also had a feminist awakening over the years at college and thought after learning about this kinship system that you could actually preserve knowledge of the mother's line so, I thought, why didn't I do that? So I legally changed my name to Schoch-Spana. I was an undergrad. ]

*After you changed your name did you feel like your hyphenated name better represented your background and history or it was more of a feminist choice?* It was more of a personal thing for me. I wanted to recognize my mother's family and I also wanted to have my last name be a teachable moment for people. You know, hyphenated names are common, but they're not the norm so it often opens the door to explaining where the name comes from. So I should also tell you that after taking those anthropology courses I had created, in my mind, a whole elaborate system of how this naming system that preserved both the mother and the father's last name could be sustained over time. When I made a legal request to change my name, you have to go before a judge and give a reason. In my files, I couldn't find it for this interview, but I explained my reasoning. For me it was both a personal thing and a public act or teachable moment to let people know that there are ways, alternate ways of representing who you are, your family, and where you come from. And that you preserve knowledge of that matrilineal relationship.

*Did your parents and friends, family support your decision to change your name?* Yeah, as a joke my mother sent me a little birth announcement card [laughs] of the new name, so that was a funny joke, but she was very supportive. I think my dad was a little hurt. He made some off hand remarks like, "Oh isn't my name good enough for you?" So, he was never unsupportive, overtly unsupportive, but I think deep down he was a little hurt that I had to go and mess with my last name. But as far as friends, ya it's funny, I went to Bryn Mawr College, which was an all women's college. People thought it was really cool. They wrote about it. I can't remember if I was invited to write about it in the school newspaper, but somehow it was written up in the school newspaper so I remember I was checking out a book at the library and I was using my library card with my new name and the librarian was like-- you're the one, I read about that! So yeah, I only got positive things relative to the name. [inaudible]

*Were there any unforeseen consequences to changing your name?* I think because both last names it gets down to logistical stuff. So it was easy because my old last name and my new last name both started with "s" so you know, it was still in the same order alphabetically. I did decide to put Schoch before Spana as opposed to Schoch after Spana because to me it sounded better. [...]

*And Schoch is your mother's maiden name?* Yes. So I decided it really doesn't matter what order it's in, it just matters that they are both there. I had to change, after I legally changed it...I had to file you know, with social security. There were some bureaucratic hurdles I had to jump

over, but I don't remember them being extraordinary. It was my mother's sister, my Aunt Pamela, who is an attorney that helped me put together my paper work that made it easy for me. [...] *Yeah, I understand it's quite a process to actually get it passed. How long do you think approximately did the whole process took? [...] Are you married or have you been married?* Well now, you see that gets interesting too because, I don't know if Sarah mentioned to you, but i'm a lesbian and I have a female partner and we had a ceremony together. Her name is Donna. We had planned to have children and so Donna said, "I'm going to take your last name." So she used to be Donna Slaughter, but she legally changed her last name to my last name--Schoch-Spana--because anticipating that we were going to have children, she says, "I just think it's important as our family unit that we all have the same last name." And Slaughter was her father's last name and she didn't really have a good relationship with him so she had no emotional attachment to that last name. For her it was more important that we all, as a family, had the same last name.

*Ok, so that made it easier to go one way.* We do have a son who's twelve year old and in the state of Maryland there's something called second parent adoption, which means that you can have two legal parents of the same sex. So I'm the bio-mother, Donna adopted Leo, so we all have the same last name. Donna wanted us to have the same last name as Leo because she didn't want there ever to be any question raised that she wasn't Leo's mother. And having the same last name meant that people understood her to be his legal mother, his so-called real mother.

*Did you consider adding Donna's last name onto your last name?* No... in fact, to be honest I actually felt a little weird that Donna was taking my name, you know? Because I was trying to break with the system where you where...someone had to give up their name, right? And she was giving up her name when she partnered up with me, but you know, there was just an individual set of circumstances. But, I thought personally when she was going to do it that it was my name--I had the attachment to the name and she had no attachment other than that it was signalling to other people that we were all part of the same family. [...] I supported her because it was important to her, and I see now, that it did make a difference. And it did make it easier, socially easier for us to be seen as a little family unit because we all had the same last name. But originally, like I said, when I had put the documents together and explained to the judge why I wanted to do it I had thought about a naming system so that if the world had the same naming mechanism like me--the mother's last name and the father's last name--and then you had two people married and then you had four last names, what would you do? Well I thought what you could do is if the child born was female then that child would take the two matrilineal names from the father and the mother and that would be her last name. And if the child was male he would take the patrilineal names. Everyone would have the same last names, but you would have the preservation of the male line and a female line. So ya, I had some system worked out, [...] Once you take a kinship class [laughs] then you start to think there are different ways of doing things.

*How old did you say your son was?* He's 12 now. *Ok, does he ever express interest in taking on Donna's last name too? And does he know his biological father?* We used an unknown donor and even before we had Leo, Donna changed her name so Leo has only known both his mothers as having the same last name. And I haven't gone into a long explanation for him about the name. He does know that the name comes from my parents, but he's never asked why. It hasn't been an issue for him. I think, well, because we all have the same last name that's all he cared about and we really haven't set down the complexities of the name.

*Yeah [laughs], I realize twelve years old isn't really the age you typically think about stuff like that. Yeah, and at his school there are actually a lot of people with hyphenated names so it's nothing that unusual for him whereas for my generation (I'm almost 50), you know it's more unusual for my generation. He doesn't have the same well, it's not stigma, but he doesn't have the same preconceptions about what it means. But it's funny that people here at the office, who don't know it's my mother and my father's last name, think that I took Donna's last name. And I explained to them, "No, I took my mother's last name and Donna took my new last name," but it's funny--they try to be very respectful of my relationship with Donna, but many of them just assume that we must have taken each other's last name. [...]*

*As a class we came up with a few questions, a segment about in the future--where do you think all of this will lead? And how effective do you think your name has been in keeping women's matrilineal heritage being erased? I think it's funny because the family structure in the United States... well, it's always been different across different family structures, but I think there's more willingness to talk about it and willingness to market how one uses, constructs, and changes their last name. So there's a lot of variation out there, I think more than there used to be. I think that's come around to the view that the variation makes people think that there isn't just one way of honoring where you come from. And so, I still think it's a little odd personally, when women marry and drop their name [...] I find that to be exceptional. [...]*

*But you think it's weirder or like, the popular thing to do is not the most sensible? Yeah...well you see the problem is you know, bureaucratic systems only setup or handle things one way, so at least the variation keeps alive the proposition that there isn't just one way. I think more broadly...that there was a brief moment in time when more women were willing to hold onto their own last names when they married in a heterosexual marriage. It seems like there has been a swing back to a traditional way of doing naming, but I don't have any evidence to go on that. [...]*

*Would you say, based on other lesbian/gay couples and heterosexual couples you know, that the number of the couples keeping names versus hyphenating and joining names is becoming more equal between heterosexual and gay couples? Well all I have to go off really is the children's parents in Leo's school that we've interacted with. So there's one lesbian couple, who both took a piece of their last name and created a new last name for their children. And there's a heterosexual couple...the man and the woman each took the other partner's last name for that new mix upon the children. But I have also seen professional women that have kept their own name, but when they have had children in a heterosexual marriages have given the children the father's last name. I'm not sure of the reasoning behind that, but I've seen a little bit of everything at Leo's school. And just to be honest, it's a private, secular school and it's got a very progressive agenda at this school so there's a focus on diversity and celebrating difference. So I guess I've just about seen every permutation of last names at Leo's school. I don't know what else other people are doing, but yeah, I'm trying to think of some other lesbian friends that have children and what they've done. [...] Going back to our child, Leo's middle name is Adams...Adams is Donna's mother's last name--her family name and so we gave Leo the Adam's family name as his middle name. That was one way we tried to inject Donna's female line into Leo's name. I forgot about that.*

*So she wasn't exactly attached to her dad's last name? No, her father divorced her mother when she was about three and didn't play a role in her life and so she didn't really care about her old last name. [...]*

*I can't think of anything else...is there anything you feel like you want to add on?* Well I tried to look at your questions to see if there's anything... You know I liked my last name when people asked me about it because it isn't just to explain the fact that I felt it was important too to add my mother's name. I see a little note on one of your questions about sort of ethnic heritage. 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. ...and that there's a history to that. There's an ethnic dimension to the name so I think because my name's not like Smith Wilson, there aren't any other Schoch-Spana's out there except for Donna and Leo, so people are all so curious about my name and I'm happy to talk about it, which I think is important. And people are like...oh I should say too that an old friend of mine from college who teaches at Barnard College, she just added her mother's last name. She says you know, she was telling me I admired the fact that you did that long ago, I didn't want to feel like I was a copy cat or anything, but I did really feel like that was a good thing to do. So she legally changed her name a few months ago...

*Is she in a partnership or married to someone?* She is in a lesbian partnership and so her birth name was Becky Young and what she did was add her mother's maiden name, Jordan, so she goes by Becky Jordan Young. *So many variations! [thanking her for interview].* It's actually kind of fun to talk about it.