

Interviewee: Tomi-Anne Roberts (Kept last name for career and family reasons. Felt that having a hyphenated first name was reason to not hyphenate last name)

Interviewer: Katy Stetson

[Info & consent] Good IRB! Keep going! [consent] I do. I'm a psychologist so I'm used to this kind of thing. *Okay, let's begin. Can you begin with your last name story?* Yeah, well I was married for 18 years. I've been divorced for about six now. I have a very strange first name that's hyphenated - Tomi-Anne - so when I got married, shortly after, well I was still in grad school, I was like, okay, I can't hyphenate my last name too, cause that had been my thought going in to it. I also, my friends and I in grad school had said, if we publish something before we marry, that's going to be a game changer in terms of changing our last name because when you're in academia you want your published work to be easily searchable and findable, and it was like - oh my gosh, if you published under one name and all of a sudden you changed your last name and take your husband's last name, now you're going to have a totally different last name - and how are people going to find you in the search engines, looking for your article? So A. that; and B. I remember being very little, and my father's father - my American grandfather - took me on his knee, and he literally said to me, "the Roberts name ends with you." And I remember being like, "wow!" because there were only daughters. *Were you the youngest?* I was the oldest grandchild of all granddaughters. And then it was like, there's not going to be any other grandchildren, and he literally said, "The Roberts name ends with you." And I remember being like totally appalled, and not asking my parents to explain what that meant, and all this stuff. 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. But it was definitely the fact that I had published an article in grad school under the last name Roberts, the fact that I remember my grandpa saying this to me, and the fact that I had a hyphenated first name - all conspired to be like, okay, you're not even going to come up with some kind of hybrid - you're going to keep Roberts. So that's my story.

You said early on, when talking about your hyphenated first name, you couldn't do the hyphenated last name. Would you have thought about doing it otherwise? I absolutely would have. Back in the '80's, that was super popular as a choice along feminist minded couples - the hyphenated last name.

What was your reasoning behind that? Was it because it was your identity, or being strong as a female? What was your feminist motivation? What is it that you agreed with in that movement? Well, you know, I did my undergraduate at Smith College, an all-women's college, and I, you know, I have a vivid picture in my mind of my dad mowing the lawn with this ERA t-shirt. ERA was the equal rights amendment. It just had like the sentences, the words of the equal rights movement. I was not a person who had to choose feminism as a way to defy my parents, I just like, I was from an all-daughters family of totally progressive parents, who just never even, like it was just the air I breathed. It was just the way I was. So it wasn't until I got to Smith and I met other students who were like, you know, defying their parents and that kind of stuff, that I even thought of feminism as a sort of choice. It seemed like obviously who I am. And so, I've always

called myself a stealth feminist. I feel like I just, I don't have to scream, I don't have to shout, I just do research, and I start petitions, and I just sneak up on people. You know I have a pretty conservative friend out here who's the staff assistant of psychology - she's one of my closest friends - like, she doesn't have to be like, "oh, I'm a feminist!" to sign your petition, all she has to do is see American Apparel's ads and like, Boom! So I don't really think I ever was like, "oh, I'm making this radical choice!" to not just strictly take, at the time, my husband's name. That was just obvious to both of us. Like, we're going to do something. And then I was like, "Oh, I'm not going to hyphen."

I assume that's made it easier in a divorce? Absolutely! Yeah, but it doesn't -you know, like - no sooner are you married than you start getting letters addressed to Mrs. [inaudible]

And then you have children? Oh yeah, and then, the Elementary school is completely confused, they can't figure it out, like, you know. It's incredible that it's still like that to this day, when it's so common that moms don't necessarily - you're a mom, you don't need to have the same last name as your kids - you birthed them! But institutions need you to have the same last name; they get so confused.

You've nailed a lot of this so far - When you asked me that, [inaudible] and then I remembered what my grandfather said. *It's amazing how that sticks with you. You've gone through all of these bullet points; let me just double check. Is it fair to assume that it's not institutionally accepted? Can you go over other cons?* Oh, my gosh - there are a lot of cons. Yeah, yeah, I mean, I think, maintaining in the eyes of institutions a connection to your own freaking children is the biggest con. You know, and that is just odd. And, I guess, to me, another con is like, this isn't my name - this is my dad's name! It's still a man's name that you know, I'm proudly carrying, or whatever. So my grandfather, and my father. Another con for me - looking back, I wish I could have done something like, you know, totally change everything: up and taken my mother's last name or something, and done some kind of matrilineal deal. But, I would say the two cons are the problematic connections to your own children by schools and doctors' offices and blah, blah, blah. You know I've been a single parent for so long, and no one ever believes me when they say, "Who's the insurance holder?" ME. Like, I'm assumed to be a dependent on the insurance plan, but no - I'm the holder of the policy and my two daughters are my dependents. Often times that'll just go around and around, especially because I'm the insurance plan holder and then my two daughters have a different last name. So institutions are the big problem, and then the second con would just be like, what really have I accomplished?

Did it ever bother you that their friends would call you "Mrs. ..." Oh yeah, it's so funny, because in the West, I think it's easier in the west. We just have a much more informal style, and so it's perfectly acceptable for children in the West to be told by an adult, "you can call me by my first name, " and for the child to do it. But I don't think in the South, or in like, Old New England - no way! You know, I'm from the Northeast as well, and it, oh my gosh. *Where are you from?* I'm from upstate New York. And my mom, you know, taught public high school for thirty years. She was Mrs. Roberts. You know, and it's like, it was obvious that my friends had to call her that. So

in the West it's a little bit easier, it's just, it's not - it happens all the time, it bugs you, but I don't think it happens nearly as much to us in the West as it does in other regions of the country. Like, that kind of loss into this Mrs. [blank] so and so. The place where it happens to me every single day is at Safeway. But instead, they say Mrs. Roberts! And so then it's really funny. So my boyfriend and I will be like checking out at Safeway, and they'll look at my receipt and they'll say, "Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Roberts." *How does he feel about that?* He loves it, he just dies laughing - he thinks it's so funny. So it happens there.

If you and your boyfriend are to marry, would you consider any change of last name – for either you or him? No, not at all. And in fact, even the very institution of marriage is something that I'm just I'm questioning its value a little bit more. I'm also starting to see, like, right now I'm exploring whether or not I can add, like that my boyfriend and I can be domestic partners. Because, I want to add him to my insurance. He doesn't have any insurance - he works from home. He freelance writes. Like, oh my god, the inequities are unbelievable. If we were to get married, never mind the name change, but if were to get married, I think like, instantaneously he'd be added, um, we'd have a family plan. I think I might pay forty bucks more a month in premiums. But for us to get certified as domestic partners, which is what has to happen for all gay couples in this community, it's over \$100 more in premiums per month for me to add him. And my reasons for not wanting to get married are totally distinct and unique and feminist, and they're not about not being able to get married. So it's really just opened my eyes to so many of the problems for same-sex partners.

Oh - I guess there is probably the question of like, do some people have a different name for their children than they have for themselves? I mean, I just never even considered - I don't know why, it was like oh, the girls have their dad's last name. So I wasn't as radically feminist as I might have thought of myself. It just never dawned on me. [Project Info] I guess, like, consciousness wise, I only went so far. I only, I never really thought about that.