

Surname Change Among Norwegian Men in Heterosexual Relationships

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Main Research Questions

What kind of understandings of family, continuity, gender equality and individuality can be found in the men's accounts of their last name choices? How do the men do gender in their choices? How do understandings of manliness and unmanliness affect their name choices?

Family Norms and Names

- Surname change was closely associated with fellowship in the nuclear family.
- Surnames signified continuity with past generations.
- Some *changers* took their wife's surname to prevent it from 'dying out'.
- Some *changers* experienced negative reactions and conflict with their father due to the change.

Tradition as Norm

- *Keepers* take their choice for granted.
- One group of *changers* claimed that the tradition of male keeping and female changing was both recent and sexist.
- Another group of *changers* re-imagined tradition to include male change by drawing on arguments of continuity and family values.

Norm of Names Connected to the Individual

- For *keepers* their name equalled their identity.
- Some *changers* separated their identity from their own name.
- Some *changers* identified as individuals who made active and rational choice.

Historical background - In the 1800s it became increasingly normal for women to take their husband's surnames, and for men to keep their names, rather than taking the name of the farm. In 1923 this became law, and the law was not gender neutral until 1980. In 2003 the ban on hyphens to combine two surnames was lifted, and it became possible to take the partner's surname as middle name, thus combining the two while keeping the original surname.

Main Conclusions and Patterns



Photo: Anders A. and Ane Lisabeth Odde getting married in Røros 1910. (Røros Museum CC PDM)

47,2% keep their own surnames.

1,5% hyphenate their own with their husband's.

46,6% take their husband's surname

91,2% keep their own surnames.

2,2% hyphenate their own with their wife's.

4,2% take their wife's surname.

- Both male and female change is motivated by the wish to create a new nuclear family.
- Male changers risk negative reactions from their fathers and humorous remarks from other men.
- Male changers talk about their choice as active.
- Surname change is still highly gendered.
- The *keeping* of the birth name is still the option with higher status.
- Norms of gender equality and of men's name keeping meant that obeying one norm may lead to breaking another.

Methods

- Qualitative questionnaires with 100 male surname keepers and 60 male last name changers born between 1924 and 1994 on surname choice.
- Interviews with three male changers.
- A quantitative survey on a representative sample of 172 women and 415 men.

Gender Equality as Norm

- Gender equality were by some seen as everyday practices.
- For many *keepers* gender equality was not an issue. When it was, it meant that *women* should be allowed to keep their birth names.
- For some *changers* choice was separated from gender.
- Other *changers* considered their change as an act of counterbalance against the more common female change.

Name Changing as Norm Breaking

- Unlike female changers *male changers* experienced policing through humour by male friends and colleagues.
- Male change was by some associated with the trope of 'strong wife and weak husband'. According to jokes *male changers* were 'tøfler' ('the women wore the trousers').
- *Changers* used irony and humour to deal with reactions to their choice.
- Humour both confirms and challenges the notion of male change as unmanly.



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