

# My name is Dawn



# Porter

When Dawn Porter tied the knot with Chris O'Dowd this summer, she tied their names together, too. Here she tells us why, and we wonder – will it catch on?

**O**n a recent trip abroad, I found myself locked out of my hotel room. “Do you have any ID?” the porter asked. As I reached into my bag, I stopped myself, realising how pointless showing him my ID would be, as the room was under my husband’s name – and that’s different to mine. “I just have to go back downstairs to confirm this is your room,” he said, preparing to leave me at the end of a long corridor so he could travel back down 11 storeys in a lift to check what I was telling him. I fell to my knees (my need to wee

not permitting the wait). “Look at my finger. Look. We are married, I promise. I just didn’t take his name. Let me in, I’ll talk you through every item in my suitcase.” He opened the door. More out of fear, I imagine, than anything else.

The thing is, I haven’t changed my name because I just don’t want to. Most of my school friends couldn’t wait to do it as a part of the ritual of getting married. At school, one friend told me, as we practised our signatures, that she was “keeping it simple”, so it wasn’t hard to change once she’d walked down the aisle. We were 15, and even then I felt strangled at the ►

◀ thought of it. Who will I be when I am 40, if I am not Dawn Porter? How can I spend half my life being called someone else's name, when I haven't even met that person yet? What will my name be when I die?

I am often asked why my surname is so important to me. There is the obvious thing that I am one of two sisters, and if we don't carry it on, Porter is gone. But the truth is, I think it's more personal than that. My name and I have been through so much together. I have spent most of my adult life trying to get people to remember it, to watch my shows, to read my work, to see my name and think, 'Oh, it's *that* girl, her name is Dawn Porter.' Rather than just being 'the girl from that thing I watched last night'. My name and I have worked really hard to get to where we are; my name and I are a team.

My husband, Chris, is fine for me not to be called Mrs O'Dowd; but still, I know he likes the idea that people see us as a unit, a family, a married couple – and so do I. So, for now, I've worked out a compromise that suits us well: I have taken the 'O'. Members of my family think this is ridiculous, but we don't care. I am lucky that I have the option to keep Porter prominent and take a tiny letter that, for me, expresses the unity with my husband that I am proud of. I'm sticking with it. It's a bit of fun, a stage name, if you like. A declaration that I have joined forces with the man I love. Is it on my passport? No. I have the Deed Poll forms on my desk, but I can't bring myself to sign them. I look at my name on my passport and the very thought of changing it makes me feel silly. It wouldn't be my passport if that wasn't the name on it.

“My name and I have worked really hard to get where we are – we're a team”

**W**hen I raised this on Facebook, a friend wrote back: “For the record, I *love* being a Mrs, and I love that my family and I all have the same surname. It's not the Dark Ages; it's nothing to do with my husband subjugating us all to it, so what's the harm? Though if I was made to do it by law, I'd be furious and refuse, obviously.”

When I read this, I wondered if I'm being stubborn, if I care as much as I say I do. Am I just being all 'feminist' about it? The way she described her family had a real team spirit. They are a gang. Will I be missing out on that sense ▶

## THE CELEB NAME GAME

Who switched and who stayed?

“I do...”



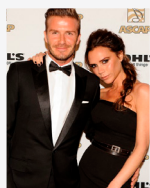
Juliette 'Jools' Norton (now Oliver)



Lily Allen (now Cooper)



Portia de Rossi (now DeGeneres)



Victoria Adams (now Beckham)



Cheryl Tweedy (still Cole)



Sarah Michelle Gellar (now Prinze)

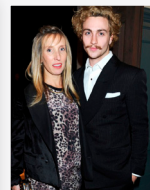
“I do... (kind of)”



Courteney Cox Arquette (before the split)



Eva Longoria Parker (before the split)



Sam Taylor-Wood and Aaron Johnson both changed their surnames to 'Taylor-Johnson'

“No thanks”



Kate Moss (Jamie Hince)



Gisele Bündchen (Tom Brady)



Katie Holmes (Tom Cruise)



Billie Piper (Laurence Fox)



Gwen Stefani (Gavin Rossdale)



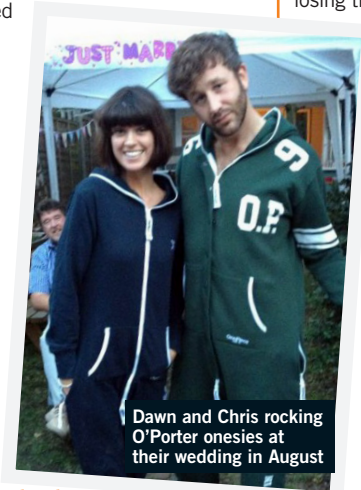
Blake Lively (Ryan Reynolds)

◀ of unity if I stick to my guns? Possibly, and I can't ignore the things I've heard about how complicated it can be to have a different name from your kids. Even though this is in the distant future for me, I find myself worrying about it. And when a friend told me about her experience on holiday recently, I realised I could be in for a shock: she and her child flew out OK, but when they were coming back, they got stopped at the airport and held for 24 hours, because the child's surname on the passport was different from hers.

Twenty-four hours?! How could this happen? I understand the importance of preventing child-trafficking, but why can't children's passports have both their parents' names on them? Surely that would save mothers from being treated like child smugglers at immigration when they return from holiday?

Well, in Spain, that is exactly what they do. People there have two surnames: their father's and their mother's. So why, in the UK, does a woman find that not giving up her identity is a catalyst for stress? You may be surprised to hear that Muslim women in Iran don't change their names. Wives in Belgium, France, Chile and Korea don't always do it, and that's just the start of the list. Is the UK a progressive country? On the matter of surnames, it would seem it is not.

A 19th-century suffragist called Lucy Stone was the first American woman to reinstate her birth name after marriage, saying, "A wife should no more take her husband's name than he should hers." Her followers were labelled Stoners. I may have tweaked my name professionally – found a balance I can handle – but on my death certificate, my birth name will remain. And if the day comes when I am interrogated by customs officials for having a different name from my kids, I'll simply say, "My name is Dawn Porter, and I am a Stoner." That'll shut them up... ☺



Dawn and Chris rocking O'Porter onesies at their wedding in August

“Why does a woman find that not giving up her identity is a catalyst for stress?”

## We asked you: WOULD YOU TAKE YOUR HUSBAND'S NAME?

"I would keep my own surname for work purposes – that's how I'm known, so I wouldn't want to risk losing that recognition.

And I wouldn't choose a double-barrelled name: I think they sound a bit clumsy." *Lindsey, 28, New York*

"I think I'd change my name. It's the norm, so I think my boyfriend would be offended if I didn't. Although if his surname was something very embarrassing, or odd, I would have to reconsider!"

*Emma, 21, Essex*

"It's traditional to change your name and I'd want to stick to that. Some people think it's a sign of losing your independence, but I disagree – no one forces you. It's your decision." *Christine, 27, London*

"My husband and I created our own name: we both took his middle name as our surname. OK, it was partly because he had a *really* bad surname, but it was also because we wanted a family name that was truly ours." *Helen, 35, Oxford*

"I'd definitely keep my own surname. There are no boys in our family, so it would be nice to keep the name alive. I'd consider going double-barrelled if his name sounded nice next to mine." *Jessie, 20, London*

## AND GUYS, WOULD YOU EXPECT YOUR FUTURE WIFE TO CHANGE HER NAME?

"I wouldn't mind her keeping her name if she was the only female in the family. But if we're going to get married in a church, then it would be right to follow the other traditions too, including taking my name. It also makes men feel important. It's a masculine thing."

*Olly, 25, Chichester*

"I'd be happy for her to keep her name. It's the 21st century: a name doesn't change your relationship."

*Deniss, 23, London*

"My sister got married and she and her husband both took her last name, which is unusual. If I met someone and her surname sounded cool, I might think about it, too."

*Jack, 27, London*

"It wouldn't offend me at all if she didn't want to change her name to mine. If the love is there, it doesn't matter. I would consider joining our last names together if the combination sounded nice."

*Femi, 22, London*