

BREAKING THE RULES

By Natasha Johnson



When Pamela Anderson married her first husband Tommy Lee, they had their wedding bands tattooed on their fingers instead of traditional gold bands. When Dawn Porter married her husband, Hollywood actor Chris O'Dowd, last year she took the 'O' of his name and is now known as Dawn O Porter. And when Keira Knightley married her beau James Righton earlier this year, she wore an above-the-knee tulle wedding dress and ballet pumps. So, what is the point of all of these

examples, I hear you ask? The point is that these few examples reveal the increasing trend that many celebrities and non-celebrities alike are embracing, by tearing up the rulebooks on marriage, stepping away from traditions and championing the idea of making their marriage their own unique celebration.

Why break from tradition?

Of course there is nothing wrong with the traditional aspects of a wedding and many of them provide beautiful meaning to the proceedings. As society progresses and modernizes at such a rapid

rate, many couples feel the need to evoke traditional aspects of weddings to keep those historical sentiments alive and to replicate what many brides and grooms before them have done, whilst some maintain the traditions to keep the in-laws happy! But in the same way that society is changing and giving people more freedom of choice than they have ever had, many couples feel that there is no need to hanker for the traditional and that marrying without traditional elements does not mean that a wedding is of any less value

or meaning. And because marriage traditions are just that and have no legal basis, there is absolutely no reason why you can't do away with whatever traditions you want.

Father's day?

So to begin with, let's take a look at the wedding ceremony itself. The average wedding ceremony is steeped in lots of ceremonial traditions and rituals. And it probably comes as no surprise to find that, although many people don't actually know why the tradition exists, they still feel they should follow the trend. A ceremony usually starts with



a beautiful bride and a proud father. This tradition stems from the times when the father was the head of the household and he was the one tasked with giving away his daughter to another family, which is why his permission was sought to marry the bride in the first place. There are many lovely aspects to this, but nowadays it can be seen as an inappropriate or unnecessary way to start a ceremony. For instance, many women do not feel that being given away by their father is an action that represents their current way of living or their way of thinking. Most couples already live

together and in many peoples' reality a father is not really giving away his daughter to anyone, since she is not anyone's to give away! Some women obviously just love the simple idea that their "daddy" is walking them down the aisle and leading them into their new union and that is, of course, understandable.

There are many ways, however, to honour fathers throughout a wedding day, such as letting them make a speech or give a reading during the ceremony. And what about our mothers? Why not allow the very woman who gave birth to the bride-to-be and who is as much a representative of the family as a father is, walk her daughter down the aisle or to have both parents walk their daughter down the aisle? It does certainly give you something to think about.

Don't take sides

Other examples of breaking with tradition during a ceremony include making sure that your wedding guests don't take sides. Isn't a wedding, after all, about the joining of two families and the coming together of friends? So to carry on with what, to some, seems quite a divisive move could be a mistake; why not think of doing away with this tired old custom? There is also the issue of the best man. Many grooms have a best woman, who is usually a daughter or a sister or a close female friend who they would rather support them than anyone else. And, why not? The idea, perhaps, is that all options should be accommodated and not just the traditional ones. And what about facing your wedding guests during your ceremony, or at least standing sideways to them, so that the husband and wife-to-be are facing each other? Unless you are having a church ceremony, which demands that you face the altar, there is no reason why during a civil or other non-religious ceremony that this has to be done. You wouldn't stand with your back to your guests at a party, so why would you do so at your wedding? Hymns can also be replaced with your favourite songs, especially in non-religious ceremonies and vows can be written by yourselves in addition to any that a celebrant, vicar or priest will ask of you.



A great reception

If you really are a stickler for all things traditional, then maybe the wedding reception is where you can dare to make a few changes to the norm. The traditional top table could perhaps become a feature of the past, especially as more and more families are now made up of step-relations. For some it simply is not an easy option to have their parents sitting with them on a top table, when their mother or father's respective partners are forced to sit elsewhere, perhaps with people they don't know. Why have a top table at all? Why not sit with good friends and other relations or - depending on what kind of reception venue you have - you could design seating arrangements in a way that is more inclusive of everyone

Another tradition, which the feminists among the brides will surely agree with are the traditional wedding speeches. Why does the bride traditionally remain silent and not make her own humorous and loving

contributions? More and more women are beginning to take umbrage at this sexist tradition and now pen their own thoughts on why their groom is lucky to have them! And as for the father-of-the-bride speech, again this can be turned on its head and maybe a mother-of-the-bride speech could be substituted, especially if dad has already walked the bride down the aisle.

So when Pamela Anderson had her wedding ring tattooed on to her finger, although the marriage subsequently did not last, at least we can see that the intention at the time was to seal her commitment with a life long symbol of her marriage, making that promise in a unique way. And when Dawn Porter became Dawn O Porter she didn't bend with tradition and discard her own name but looked at different ways to embrace both names and when Keira Knightley donned her short wedding dress and flat shoes, she recognised that beautiful doesn't always have to be traditional.