PATRONYMY AS TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED AND ENFORCED
Patriarchal Practice? Analysis of Marital Naming Practices and Plans

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Women’s Studies

by
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Summer 2010
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

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I dedicate this to four exceptional friends. First, this is for my mother and first best friend, Lolita Finzel, who always encouraged me to follow my dreams. The final product may not result in fame, or a million dollars, but it’s a labor of love that would not have been possible without your love and encouragement. Second, this is for my husband, Kevin Webb, who has shown me that deep and enduring love exists outside of romance novels. Your support, friendship, and absolute belief in me, even during the moments when I struggle to believe in myself, humble me. Finally, this is for Jenna Stephenson and Christy Arrington, the feminist sisters of my heart. Your intellect, compassion, patience, and generosity awe me. It hardly seems possible that we have only known each other for two years. No matter the distance that separates us, I know our friendship will endure.

Thank you.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Patronymy as Taken-For Granted and Enforced Patriarchal Practice? Analysis of Marital Practices and Plans by Melissann L. Herron Master of Arts in Women’s Studies San Diego State University, 2010

This thesis investigates the experiences of womyn who defy traditional marital naming practices by keeping their names at marriage (“keepers”), as well as the types of conversations couples have about marriage and patronymy and its alternatives. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with 18 keepers and 10 engaged couples (20 individuals interviewed with their respective fiancés), I attempt to privilege the voices of those who have rarely been included in scholarship on patronymy: keepers as deviators from tradition, engaged couples in the process of making marital naming decisions, and men who are almost wholly excluded in prior scholarship.

The interviews contribute crucial new information, most notably that keepers face such hostility from family, friends, husbands, and strangers as a result of their non-traditional practices that they often use their husbands’ names to mediate that antagonism, and that engaged couples, while often politically and religiously liberal, possess rather static views of family and gender. The interviews with engaged couples in the process of making decisions demonstrate both that many couples do not consider alternatives to patronymy viable and that those who may be open in other realms are limited in this area by traditional notions of what constitutes a family, by hegemonic definitions of masculinity, and by devotion schemas (Blair-Loy, 2003) that shape their desires and choices.

Overall, this thesis provides insight about the prevalence of patronymy today and its entrenchment as a cultural norm that insidiously perpetuates inequality and gender oppression. Its inclusion of a theoretical framework through which to view the results, as well as future work on patronymy, is the most unique and perhaps vital contribution of this thesis.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language’s Transformative Powers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronymy: Historical and Legal Overview</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Practices</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming and Identity</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors Affecting Womyn’s Marital Naming Practices</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions and Misperceptions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized Motherhood and Patronymy’s Perpetuation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-Sex Couples’ Naming Practices</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: STUDY 1, KEEPERS</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results &amp; Analysis</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Reasons for Keeping</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Maintenance/Lack of Identification with Husbands’ Names</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to Maintain a Connection to Birth Family</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education as Consciousness-Raising</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Name as Professional Identity?</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate Ideologies</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Views of Marriage</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism and Keeping or Feminism versus Keeping?</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Hostility and Boundary Maintenance</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joking</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile Comments from Strangers and Acquaintances</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucratic Red-Tape</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands’ Reactions</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gate-Keeping Changers</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish Womyn: Separation of Self from Family</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational Use</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: STUDY 2, ENGAGED COUPLES</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results &amp; Analysis</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and Partnership</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Recognition</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Family</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static Views of Family</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage versus Pseudo-Marriage</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Struggles: Masculinity in Modern Times</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Children</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A INTERVIEW GUIDE, STUDY 1, KEEPERS</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B INTERVIEW GUIDE, STUDY 2, ENGAGED COUPLES</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people who need to be acknowledged here. This project would not have come to fruition without my participants, and to them I am forever grateful.

The success of this project also hinges on my incredible committee, Esther Rothblum, Anne Donadey, and Patricia-Geist Martin. Esther, your patience, speedy replies, and advice have been invaluable; you have encouraged me to conduct research and publish from the start, and I intend to repay you by publishing like mad in the future. Anne, you have not only been a wonderful second reader but a mentor throughout my time at SDSU; I hope I am one day as effective and compassionate a mentor and professor as you. Patricia, I want to thank you for guiding me through my first research project and for being a truly interdisciplinary scholar. This has been a long and laborious process, and it would not have been possible without each of you; your time, energy, and expertise are greatly appreciated.

I also want to acknowledge a number of others, who have made this project and my success possible. First and foremost, I must acknowledge Susan Cayleff, who has encouraged my growth as a scholar, researcher, and graduate teaching associate throughout my time here. I hope to work with her for many years to come. Bonnie Scott welcomed me to the department and has offered invaluable advice, Huma Ghosh taught me that when I think I have reached my limits, I need to push a bit—or a lot—further to reach my full potential, and Teddi Brock, well, without her none of us would survive. Also, Pam Libed, you have a way of encouraging me to keep going when I think I have reached my limit, and I thank you for all your gmail support!

I also want to thank Mary Blair-Loy, who welcomed me into her sociology of gender class at UCSD and helped me to develop a sociological lens through which to interpret my findings. I look forward to beginning the doctorate program in sociology in the fall.

I want to thank my amazing cohort. There’s no way around it; we are the best cohort that ever existed! In all seriousness, much of my success stems from being surrounded by people who truly support me, who want to see me succeed and thrive. Being surrounded by such a strong academic community is a gift and a more unique one when that community
supports you in and out of the classroom. I also want to acknowledge Kali Donovan, the honorary member of our cohort. His kindness, intellect, and open heart and mind awe me.

I must thank my family, whose love and support allows me to trudge ahead, even when the path ahead is rocky and terrifying. I am eternally grateful to you.

Last but not least, I have to thank the one “person” who will not read this. Thank you, Ziggy, for following me around and keeping me company during the many hours of writing—and cuddling with me when I was too tired to write another word.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of second wave feminism, a movement that called attention to the exploitation, exclusion, and silencing of womyn and worked to eradicate sexist laws and expand womyn’s opportunities in all spheres of society (Freedman, 2002). As a result of the many efforts of feminists who advocated for womyn’s legal and reproductive rights, as well as access to higher education and political representation, U.S. womyn possessed more rights by the 1980s than ever before in history. However, with perceived and actual gains, came such intense backlash (Faludi, 1991) that some scholars today suggest that there has been a gender stall since the early 1990s (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2007), not long after second wave feminism ground to a halt after state legislatures failed to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2005).

As such, instead of seeing increases in womyn’s rights at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries as might be expected, scholars instead discovered that egalitarian trends stalled in the 1990s. Interestingly:

The flattening of the gender trend lines cuts across almost all segments of society: working-class and middle-class; black, white, Asian, and Hispanic; mothers with young children and mothers with older children only, women in mid-country “red” states and women in coastal “blue” states - all groups experienced major gender setbacks during the 1990s. The breadth of this reversal suggests something fundamental has happened to the U.S. gender structure. (Cotter et al., 2007, n.p.)

At a time when womyn seemed closer to the brink of equality than ever before, conservative attitudes and sentimental desires to return to traditional gender and family roles gripped the nation and halted progress on many fronts, something that many so-called “post-feminists” ignore when insisting that men and womyn have achieved equality today.

Changes in womyn’s marital naming practices are one of the many areas where concrete setbacks and attacks on gains made in the 1960s and 1970s are apparent. Both first and second wave feminists battled, inside and outside of courtrooms, for womyn’s right to keep their names and identities throughout their lifetimes. In fact, some of the earliest womyn to vote were jailed when they protested government mandates that they could only do so
using their husbands’ names (Stannard, 1984). Second wave feminists recognized that patronymy, or the practice whereby womyn take their husbands’ names after marriage, is a patriarchal naming practice (Boxer & Gritsenko, 2005; Suter, 2004) that enforces traditional family roles, with the expectation that womyn subsume their identities under their roles as wives after marriage. Feminists argued that this expectation, quite literally reflected in the loss of womyn’s birth names and their assumption of the title Mrs. after marriage, reflects inequity and institutional (marriage) oppression of womyn insofar as men (who have never been defined as husbands or fathers foremost) are neither expected to sacrifice their names nor take on a new title after marriage.

Few people today know many (and likely no) married womyn who kept their names, something that was more common in the late 1970s and 1980s. As a result of feminist challenges to legal misinterpretations and unjust laws that forced womyn to take their husbands’ names after marriage, womyn finally possessed the right to keep their birth names in all 50 U.S. states by the mid-1970s (Miller & Swift, 1976; Stannard, 1984). While masses of womyn did not take advantage of this newfound right, many did, just as many began using the title Ms., a title, like Mr., that does not indicate marital status (Atkinson, 1987). Second wave feminists were hopeful that changes such as these would lead to positive transformations of patriarchal language systems and the institution of marriage (Miller & Swift, 1976). This led second wave feminist Ellen Goodman to write optimistically:

I guarantee you that the first generation of women who grow up without scribbling “Mrs. Paul Newman” all over their notebooks “just to see what it looks like” is going to think we [the feminists who fought against mandatory name change for women] were mad. It is a very odd and radical idea indeed that a woman would nominally disappear just because she got married. (qtd. in Emens, 2007, p. 767)

Goodman, like other feminists, found her hopes dashed by setbacks in this area (like others) beginning in the 1990s. While there are no numbers to indicate how many womyn kept their names in the late 1970s and 1980s, scholars (Boxer & Gritsenko, 2005; Goldin & Shim, 2004; Hoffnung, 2006; Noack & Wiik, 2008; Valetas, 1993) clearly report that the number began falling by the early 1990s so that by 1994, a mere 10 percent of U.S. womyn kept their birth names after marriage (Brightman, 1994). Out of this 10 percent, five percent hyphenated, two percent retained their birth names, and three percent chose other alternatives (collectively referred to as “keepers”). A more recent report estimates that today somewhere
between five and seven percent of womyn keep their names (Gooding & Kreider, 2009), possibly indicating further declines, although (for a number of reasons) scholars still find Brightman’s the most reliable and informative study on womyn’s marital naming practices.

Declines in the number of womyn keeping their names, like other stalling gender trends, likely reflect the increasing conservatism of more recent years (Boxer & Gritsenko, 2005; Goldin & Shim, 2004; Suter, 2004). However, when a practice that clearly perpetuates gender oppression by awarding only one sex with permanent names (Vahed, 1994) goes unquestioned not only by the public but largely by scholars as well, it is clear that it constitutes a deeply ingrained cultural norm. In the United States, as in much of the world, patronymy is taken for granted as a normal marital practice and falls within the family domain where inequities are often perceived as natural (stemming from essentialist notions of men and womyn’s roles within families). Even the most enlightened people fail to question why womyn today should take their husbands’ names or to note that there is something inherently unjust about assuming womyn lose nothing in sacrificing their names but that this would be somehow damaging for men. Twenge (1997) noted her perplexity with this after she interviewed a number of womyn, most of whom planned to take their husbands’ names and found that, “The custom of male names appears to be well entrenched; some of the womyn here felt no more need to explain it than they would explain why they eat with a fork and knife” (p. 427).

While it is not inherently problematic that womyn take their husbands’ names at marriage, it is far from meaningless in a society where there are real social costs for womyn who keep their names or men who change theirs (Dodge & Suter, 2008; Emens, 2007; Etaugh, Bridges, Cummings-Hill, & Cohen, 1999; Fowler & Fuehrer, 1997; Miller & Swift, 1976; Scheuble & Johnson, 1993, 1998, 2005; Snyder, 2009; Suarez, 1997). After all, in a truly equitable society, there would be a variety of naming practices, all of which would be equally valued and none of which would privilege one sex over the other.

Binion (1991) explains the importance of studying patronymy in writing that the system goes relatively unchallenged even by womyn who keep their names since they almost always go on to give their children only the fathers’ names, a practice that leads to public criticism of these womyn as outsiders to their own families (Crittenden, 1999).
She writes:

The social messages are clear in either context. If a woman changes her surname to that of her husband, she is his possession; if the children bear only the father’s surname, they are his possession. While some analysts of family gendering practices may perceive the surname issue as relatively unimportant, it seems to me that this is a fundamental, definitional, and ubiquitous familial gender injustice. (p. 453)

I agree with Binion. Patronymy is a practice that perpetuates cultural inequality, and it is crucial to study it outside the domain of the family, where it is all too easy for people to see their “choices” as personal, meaningless, and anything but political. Within the family, a domain clearly shaped by the institutions of marriage and motherhood, ideas of men and womyn, of husbands and wives, of fathers and mothers, shape what is deemed normal, what is dismissed as traditional, with no exploration of how such norms and tradition perpetuate gender oppression. Moving away from patronymy, “a naming practice that embodies and perpetuates the values of patriarchy” (Suter, 2004, p. 60), toward more gender egalitarian practices may drastically alter society for the better, something I believe should be a fundamental objective of a womyn’s studies scholars.

In working toward this goal, it is crucial that more researchers (including those within the field of womyn’s studies) study patronymy and that they do so through a feminist lens that clearly problematizes post-feminist rhetoric that patronymy cannot possibly be a site of male privilege since womyn can now legally choose to keep their names after marriage. Framing work, as some scholars have done, as if womyn choose to keep or change their names in isolation, rather than as part of a culture where their partners, families, friends, and/or even strangers, are likely to exert pressure on them to conform to patriarchal naming practices clearly ignores power dynamics and constraints on womyn’s abilities to deviate from social norms. Thus, researchers need to focus on providing more thorough examination of choice, along with more in-depth analysis of the degree to which embedded power dynamics within the linguistic system and the institutions of marriage and motherhood affect the ways in which people interpret those choices.

This is not something that previous researchers have failed to do altogether by any means. However, while there has been much scholarship on the numbers of womyn keeping
versus changing their names today and the factors that affect womyn’s practices, there has been less focus on limits placed on womyn’s choice to “choose” alternatives to patronymy.

Of course, social constraints on womyn’s choices certainly influence womyn’s marital naming practices, but few scholars have utilized a particularly feminist lens to interpret their data or perhaps feel the numbers speak for themselves. Some of my critique, perhaps unfairly, stems from disciplinary differences. While many of the social scientists pursuing this research tend to focus more on quantitative studies that reveal trends and patterns with little commentary on how this connects to gender oppression or harms womyn, womyn’s studies scholars (who have not pursued this research at all) tend to reject notions of objectivity and insist that scholars have a stake in using their research as a form of activism to end oppression (Boxer, 1998). This is not to say that scholars studying patronymy do not think it is oppressive; from reviewing the literature, I can say with almost absolute certainty that they too feel patronymy is unjust. However, in a way to preserve objectivity and avoid making value judgments, they have often failed to fully explore the limits of womyn’s choice to defy patronymy as well as to connect their findings to a larger body of work on gender, power, marriage, and the family.

Whatever my critiques of some previous scholarship on patronymy, I owe a great debt to those who have come before me. I am only able to pursue my research because of important scholarly revelations from these researchers such as the low and possibly falling number of womyn keeping their names and the negative public perceptions of these womyn as radical feminists, lesbians, anti-family, and even as “bitches” (Murray, 1997). Much of this work has been, as previously mentioned, quantitative. Added to the quantitative data are qualitative data that provide crucial insight into how individual womyn feel about patronymy. In general, both qualitative and quantitative work have provided a great deal of important information about patronymy and its prevalence in U.S. (and international) society. However, it has often tended to focus on married (most often White) womyn’s experiences and to exclude men altogether. Researchers utilizing both types of methodologies have also neglected to go beyond asking keepers why they keep their names to exploring how this small group of womyn’s deviance from the norm affects their lives, something that may be of import in understanding why so few womyn “choose” to keep their names after marriage.
In this work, I attempt to address some of these gaps in research, while clearly building off of and contributing to previous work on patronymy. In an attempt to delve more deeply into the experiences, plans, and perceptions of those who have often been left out of work on patronymy, I utilize qualitative methodology. In using semi-structured interviews, I hope to privilege individuals that have often been marginalized (womyn who kept their names specifically in the context of discussing this deviance and engaged couples in the process of making marital naming decisions). Significantly, the nine research questions I attempt to answer in this thesis are divided into two results chapters, corresponding to two separate qualitative studies I conducted between March 2009 and January 2010. While I initially planned to only utilize my interviews with engaged couples, I felt that the data I discovered in my interviews with keepers (Study 1) revealed important information that framed the results of my interviews with the engaged participants.

In Study 1, I interviewed womyn that kept their names and asked them a variety of questions in the hopes of better understanding people’s reactions to their non-traditional practices, as well as to allow them to speak to their own experiences and perceptions. The five research questions I address in this study are: (1) What reasons do womyn give for retaining or hyphenating their names? (2) Do keepers perceive their choices as non-traditional, resistant, and/or feminist? (3) Do keepers face obstacles to keeping their birth names or feel pressured to take/use their husbands’ names? (4) Do keepers (who want to or have children) give or wish to give their children their birth names? and (5) Do keepers situationally use their husbands’ names? Each of these five questions builds off previous work on patronymy, clearly responding to other researchers’ questions when applicable, while also contributing new information. In particular, this study attempts to move away from focusing exclusively on others’ opinions of keepers by allowing them to address why they kept their names, how they perceive their choices, and the kind of support and/or resistance they face as a result. Of course, my hypothesis was that they faced quite a bit of resistance, but as a feminist scholar studying gender oppression, I recognize that it is just as important to study progress as it is to study regression and sites of privilege/oppression, and I went into this endeavor open to the idea these womyn may not necessarily face resistance, that perhaps people were more accepting of non-traditional choices even if they did not themselves make them.
In my second study (Study 2), I went in an entirely new direction by exploring the plans and attitudes of couples in the process of making marital naming decisions. Prior work (Mills, 2003; Suter, 2004; Twenge, 1997) has suggested that engaged couples likely have little to no serious discussion of alternatives to patronymy, but no work has empirically explored the validity of this assumption. Moreover, while married womyn’s/couples’ retrospective insights are quite valuable, there is something to be gained by talking to people currently in the process of making these decisions, especially in light of evidence that increasing numbers of womyn are taking their husbands’ names since the early 1990s (Goldin & Shim, 2004; Gooding & Kreider, 2009). I investigate four research questions in Study 2: (1) How do couples define marriage? (2) How do engaged couples discuss their marital naming options and for whom do they consider changing/keeping? (3) Do couples agree on naming decisions, do they compromise, and/or does this topic cause tension in their relationships? and (4) Are engaged couples willing to consider non-traditional naming options for their children (if they have any)?

Here, it is significant that I not only interview engaged womyn but I also interview their male fiancés. Prior work has almost wholly excluded men, which makes it difficult to get a clear picture of why patronymy remains such a dominant practice. Excluding men also fails to provide pathways for change as it places the burden for changing or keeping on womyn insofar as researchers are not considering the possibility of men changing their names after marriage. If we, as researchers and as feminists, want to see change, we need to utilize a more egalitarian research design. In this case, I interviewed couples together in an attempt to understand the ways they communicate about naming practices, as well as how they view marriage more broadly. Of course, I understand the power of patronymy as an insidious cultural norm, but again I want to be open to change, to the possibility that these men may support their wives’ deviance from the norm or that they may want to change their names themselves, as well as to any progress in how couples view marriage today.

In the next two sections, I more thoroughly describe my personal lens for conducting this research by describing why I avoid using, when possible, a patriarchal linguistic system to describe problems with a naming system. I also define key terms, before moving on to describe my positionality and providing a brief overview of the chapters to come.
LANGUAGE’S TRANSFORMATIVE POWERS

As readers will have already noted, I alter the spelling of the Standard English words woman and women so that they read “womon” and “womyn.” While some argue that feminists have larger concerns than terminology (Hoff-Sommers, 1994; Lee, 2006), it seems problematic to discuss the injustice of one sex losing their names at marriage without complicating the terminology in which “the female becomes an appendance [sic] to the root word of man” (Vahed, 1994, p. 70). This attempt to deviate from patriarchal language began with second wave feminists, many of whom shared feelings of frustration, anger, and a yearning for something more but did not possess the language to name their experiences. Friedan (1964) called attention to this in the introductory chapter (“The Problem That Has No Name”) of her now famous book, The Feminine Mystique.

Perhaps because of their inability to articulate their experiences, many second wave feminists critiqued the patriarchal linguistic system with its sexist use of “man” to refer to all people, its use of “generic” masculine pronouns, its tendency to refer to adult males as men but patronize adult womyn as ladies or girls, its use of Miss and Mrs. to categorize womyn but not men by marital status, and more. While men’s experiences were everywhere, in supposedly neutral or generic words like mankind, in books where the characters were referred to using the generic he, womyn were excluded, lumped together with men who consciously excluded them in ways that made womyn’s experiences quite different than men’s. These feminists saw the word man “as an exclusively male term, implying that women are a subset of men, or a deviation from the norm” (Tolden, 2008, p. 5) and began using alternative spellings for the word women, arguing that they had a right to label themselves in less sexist ways rather than be compelled to use patriarchal language to refer to themselves. U.S. feminists preferred the term womyn while British feminists went with the spelling wimmin (Battistella, 1995).

In this paper I use alternative spellings of sexist words. I do so because I agree with Vahed (1994) and other feminists that language itself is not neutral but instead “it is about naming and owning things, it is about understanding social issues, it is about clarifying and structuring our world and it is a process by which we negotiate, construct and change the nature of our social experience” (p. 68). Changes in the linguistic system may influence people’s perceptions and possibly transform our sexist society (Miller & Swift, 1976), and, at
the very least, alternative spellings call attention to the sexism inherent in traditional spellings and in much of our linguistic system where “there are three male words for every one female word in the dictionary” (Vahed, 1994, p. 67).

I strongly believe the ways in which researchers frame work on marital naming affect the ways in which readers perceive possibility for change. In addition to using womyn for women and womon for woman, this paper refers to womyn’s birth name rather than womyn’s “maiden” name or surname. Many researchers not only use “maiden” name but fail to contextualize that use within a framework where womyn have long been dichotomized into virgins or whores. Because only womyn possess maiden versus married names, this terminology provides no opening to discuss alternatives by which men too could “choose” a married name different from their birth name. Less obviously, surname is derived from father’s name or family name and privileges patronymy or the idea that everyone in a family should share a man’s name (Fowler & Fuehrer, 1997).

Just as feminists encourage researchers to examine their positionality, future researchers need to consider why they often frame their research in patriarchal rather than egalitarian ways. As DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2007) write, “Language is more than a tool used to transmit information or a mirror to reflect reality. Language structures people’s understanding of reality” (p. 107). Of course, researchers too are constrained by a limited set of linguistic options, and it can become difficult to critique master narratives without utilizing their own vocabulary, but in critiquing social norms, hidden power dynamics, it is essential to use more egalitarian terminology—in my case, even if that terminology is not Standard English. As Renegar and Sowards (2003) wrote, “If language can shape human existence so drastically, it stands to reason that conscious changes in our language, the creation of new vocabularies, may create drastic social change” (p. 337). Here, I believe scholars’ use of terminology that does not privilege or normalize patronymy may go a long way toward opening the door for social change.

Additionally, when only a small group of researchers are focusing on womyn’s marital naming practices, it is crucial to transparently and thoughtfully define key terms. Controversy over trends relative to womyn’s marital naming practices frequently stem from authors’ differing definitions of key terms, in this case what constitutes a traditional/conventional or nontraditional/unconventional choice. For the purpose of this
thesis, traditional means womyn take their husband’s last name (even if they keep their own as their middle name or add a second last name but generally use their husband’s name), while nontraditional means womyn maintain their birth name after marriage, both partners take the wife’s name, the womon or both partners hyphenate, or the couple merges names (so that Smith and Wythe become Smythe for instance) or decide on an altogether new name for both partners. (Of note, though, a system where only womyn suffer the difficulties of hyphenation does not defy embedded linguistic inequalities between the sexes). In referencing womyn that make nontraditional naming choices, I refer to them collectively as keepers and use the terms hyphenators (womyn that hyphenate their birth names with their husbands’ names) and retainers (womyn that keep their birth names with no alternations after marriage) to differentiate when necessary.

**POSITIONALITY**

Many scholars assert that researchers possess a responsibility to acknowledge their own positionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), recognizing that the notion that one can be removed from one’s work ignores the reality that knowledge is co-constructed and that the researcher possesses power. Given that the number of scholars focusing on marital naming practices is relatively small, one could argue that those adding to the small body of knowledge about patronymy have an obligation to be transparent about their own interests and to clearly situate themselves within their work.

My initial attraction to this topic was very personal. As my partner and I began seriously discussing marriage, I found myself torn between outside expectations, a kernel of desire to take his name in order to “feel married,” and the feminist knowledge that names and language are not neutral but are always situated within a patriarchal context (Vahed, 1994), in this case institutionalized marriage (and, as will be discussed later, motherhood). While I currently attend a liberal university and live in a busy, western city, I grew up surrounded by conservatives and earned my bachelor’s degree from a small, Christian college in Tennessee. No one I knew violated the norm of giving up her name for her husband’s when she married, and few were sympathetic to the tension I felt between my feminist ideology and my imminent entrance into the patriarchal institution of marriage. Over and over again, I heard snide comments and jokes and earned sideways looks when I said I wanted to keep my birth
name. Everyone was confused. After all, why get married if I wanted to be separate from my husband? What was the point? Gradually these comments fueled an increasingly professional interest in studying patronymy, for better understanding why so many felt such a vested interest in what seemed like a highly personal, if non-traditional, decision.

In December 2008, after completing my first semester in the master’s program in womyn’s studies at San Diego State University (and spending a semester reading and writing about patronymy), I returned to Virginia to get married. On both personal and professional levels, I was no longer surprised by people’s confusion or lack of understanding of my choice to keep my name. Even the most liberal people told me how fortunate I was to have met a man who would let me keep my name, who would want to hyphenate our (future) child’s name, who would even be willing to hyphenate his own name should we decide that is best some day. While I thought my studies on the topic made me immune to people’s hostility, I was still stunned when a salesman grilled me days before my wedding, “Why are you keeping your name? Are you famous or something?” It is unlikely that I will ever speak to this man again, so I suppose he will never know that his outrage only validated my research. Against the backdrop of public opinion that names do not really matter, the fury in his voice spoke to the truth: womyn who keep their own names disrupt patriarchy, and that disruption is to be punished.

In the year and a half that has passed since my wedding, I have begun to understand the real consequences for womyn who deviate from the standard practice of adopting their husbands’ names when they marry. While I now realize that no amount of research on patronymy will ever make me immune to others’ hostility, I also know that keeping my name has fewer costs for me than it does for a number of other womyn. I am privileged to have the kind of support, from my husband, my newfound feminist friends, and the womyn’s studies department, that allows me to pursue research on a topic that makes many people uncomfortable and angry—when they do not dismiss it outright. This is crucial because, while I feel that more people need to question the ways they participate in a system that oppresses womyn, I am fully aware that few others have the academic or ideological resources on which I can draw. As such, both personally and professionally, I am invested in changing the system so that the power of awarding only one sex with permanent names (Vahed, 1994), obscured by tradition and everyday practice, becomes more evident. For
myself and for others, I want to uncover the insidious ways that power functions to privilege men in the seemingly private domain of the family and work toward change, something to which I, a feminist scholar, aspire.

Before moving on, I do want to acknowledge that my research primarily examines heterosexual unions rather than considering those involved in gay and lesbian relationships. On the most basic level, the government has (in nearly all cases) stripped lesbians/gays of their right to marry, which makes large-scale observation of their marital naming practices difficult. Beyond that, the power dynamic between a married man and womon (in particular in relation to their choice of names) differs from the dynamic between two members of the same sex. Obviously the institution of marriage is problematic for a number of reasons beyond patronymy, with its exclusion of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals one of the most notable. Here, it is worth mentioning that what little literature exists about same-sex couples’ naming practices suggests that few couples choose to take one another’s names, largely because of the feeling that doing so may perpetuate the same kinds of problematic dynamics inherent in heterosexual unions where one partner is asked to sacrifice identity (Clarke, Burns, & Burgoyne, 2008; Suter & Oswald, 2003). It would certainly be interesting to study this more in depth, something I would like to do in the future.

In the following chapters, I explore the data that emerged from the two qualitative studies I conducted. I begin by reviewing extant literature on patronymy which allows me to situate my own work within an existing framework and clearly indicate where I contribute to scholarship on this topic. I then move into my two results chapters. Starting with Study 1, a study that explores keepers’ experiences as (presumed) cultural deviants, I discuss my methodological approach, clearly detailing the measures and procedures utilized. I then move into Study 2, a study that investigates engaged couples’ conversations about marriage and their marital naming plans, providing the same methodological detail. In both chapters, I allow participants to speak for themselves through the liberal use of quotes, but I also provide analysis and interpret their experiences through a feminist, scholarly lens. Following the two results chapters, a discussion chapter links the two studies together and, by drawing on feminist and sociological scholarship on gender, marriage, the family, and power, builds a much-needed theoretical framework for understanding my results and the persistence of
patronymy today. Finally, I conclude with my personal insights (from completing this thesis) and some implications for future study.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

While public discourse tends to indicate that patronymy is a meaningless relic of a patriarchal past, the relatively small group of scholars focusing on patronymy tends to strongly disagree (Arichi, 1999; Atkinson, 1987; Augustine-Adams, 1997; Boxer & Gritsenko, 2005; Choi & Bird, 2003; Dodge & Suter, 2008; Duggan, Cota & Dion, 1993; Emens, 2007; Etaugh, et al., 1999; Forbes, Adams-Curtis, White, & Hamm, 2002; Fowler & Fuehrer, 1997; Gooding & Kreider, 2009; Johnson & Scheuble, 2002; Kline, Stafford, & Miklosovic, 1996; Miller & Swift, 1976; Murray, 1997; Noack & Wiik, 2008; Scheuble & Johnson, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2005, 2007; Stafford & Kline, 1996; Stannard, 1984; Stodder, 1998; Suarez, 1997; Suter, 2004; Twenge, 1997; Valetas, 1993, 2001). They note that only in a society where patronymy is a deeply ingrained and likely unquestioned cultural norm (Lebell, 1988; Mills, 2003; Twenge, 1997) would 90 to 95 percent of U.S. womyn take their husbands’ names at marriage (Brightman, 1994; Gooding & Kreider, 2009; Scheuble & Johnson, 1995). As Suter (2004) writes, naming practices today “represent one of the insidious ways patriarchy continues to perpetuate itself” and reproduce “itself in micro-level, seemingly private, everyday life experiences” (p. 84).

Most prior work on womyn’s marital naming practices tends to fall into one or one of several categories including: (1) historical and legal background of womyn’s marital naming practices, (2) international naming practices, (3) connections between womyn’s identity and their names, (4) factors affecting womyn’s marital naming practices, (5) perceptions of womyn who choose non-traditional names, (6) commentary linking the lack of keepers to womyn’s role as mothers, and to a much lesser extent, (7) investigation of the naming practices of same-sex couples.

PATRONYMY: HISTORICAL AND LEGAL OVERVIEW

People began adopting last names in the eleventh century (Stannard, 1984). Gradually, it became customary for womyn to assume their husbands’ names after marriage,
a practice related to coverture where a man gained the right to his wife’s property as well as her paid and unpaid labor after marriage; a wife had a legal obligation to obey her husband and could be disciplined (physically) if she violated her duties. “Essentially, husband and wife were regarded as one, and that one was the husband” (Snyder, 2009, p. 563).

Regardless of customs emanating from the institution of marriage, religious injunctions, and a variety of laws that ensured womyn’s identities were subsumed under their husbands’ following marriage, English common law dictated that a womon had the right to retain her birth name following marriage. As such, when Lucy Stone, a nineteenth-century American abolitionist and suffragist, decided to revert to her birth name 14 months after marrying Henry Blackwell, the lawyers she consulted assured her of the legality of such an action (Stannard, 1984). Stone, who declared, “A wife should no more take her husband’s name than he should hers. My name is my identity and must not be lost” (Lucy Stone League, n.d.), was startled by legal opposition to her decision. Despite the legality of reverting to her birth name, when womyn in Massachusetts were permitted to vote for school board members in 1879, Stone was told she could register in her husband’s name only (Stannard, 1984).

Stone was denied the right to vote, and this decision ended up in newspapers across the nation. As a result of the publicity surrounding this decision, Judge Robert A. Earl, deciding a court case completely unrelated to womyn’s marital names, offered his opinion in Chapman v. Phoenix National Bank:

> For several centuries, by the common law among all English-speaking people, a woman, upon her marriage, takes her husband’s surname. That becomes her legal name, and she ceases to be known by her maiden name. By that name she must sue and be sued, make and take grants and execute all legal documents. Her maiden surname is absolutely lost, and she ceases to be known thereby. (Stannard, 1984, p. 116)

Although what Earl issued is known as a dictum, meaning an opinion that has no bearing on the case and hence should not be treated as law, his opinion led courts around the country to misinterpret English common law, preventing the increasing numbers of womyn (primarily feminists at that point) who wanted to keep their birth names from doing so.

As Stannard (1984) points out, at the same time U.S. womyn were challenging this misinterpretation and being told that their names legally changed following marriage, English courts were recognizing that womyn could keep their names even if this violated custom. She adds that the earliest womyn permitted to vote were actually arrested when they insisted they
should be allowed to do so under their birth names. Later, states such as Maryland and Maine passed watchdog laws that required the marriage bureaus to report names of newly married womyn to the registrar of voters, which then cancelled their registration, informing these womyn that in order to vote, they had to reregister using their husbands’ last names. In addition to such measures to enforce womyn’s compliance with patronymy, courts twisted decisions about womyn having to use their first names into reasons that womyn had to use their husbands’ last names when signing legal documents, etc. (Stannard, 1984).

The few cases in favor of womyn’s rights to use their birth names after marriage never made it into legal anthologies/references or the press, an interesting omission as cases denying womyn these rights were highly publicized (Stannard, 1984). Eventually, starting in the 1970s, states began permitting womyn to use their birth names (Miller & Swift, 1976). However, as Stannard explains, this gradual process occurred through a series of court cases won on the basis of common law; whenever womyn challenged regulations on the basis of equal rights grounds, they lost. Thus, while womyn eventually won the right to their own names, courts never recognized that denying womyn the right to use their birth names after marriage was an infringement of the fourteenth amendment. Instead, courts eventually recognized that they had misinterpreted laws and began permitting womyn to keep their names as a result. Stannard (1984) writes:

> England, with its greater acceptance of eccentricity, managed to tolerate Lucy Stoners [as womyn who kept their birth names following Lucy’s Stone’s decision came to be known] without violating its common law. But American judges, to force a few wives to conform to custom, turned common law inside out. (p. 127)

Snyder (2009) writes that today’s laws continue to violate the fourteenth amendment of the U.S. constitution but in very different ways. Only eight U.S. states, including Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, North Dakota, Louisiana, and most recently, California, recognize a statutory right for men to take their wives’ names at marriage (Porter, 2007; Snyder, 2009). Louisiana is a unique case insofar as the state’s law, based on French civil law rather than English common law, mandates that all people must legally keep their birth names throughout their lives; this does not mean that womyn cannot use their husbands’ names socially however (Augustine-Adams, 1997).

In the remaining 42 states, men must advertise in a newspaper, petition the court, and pay hundreds of dollars in fees—all hurdles womyn wishing to assume their husbands’
names do not face. While most states’ legal default (the easiest legal course of action) is for womyn to keep their birth names after marriage, social norms, pressures, and poor perceptions of womyn who keep their names and men who change them severely limits couples’ naming options (Emens, 2007; Snyder, 2009). Despite society’s insistence that womyn who change their names create confusion and make things more difficult, in fact, a womon who changes her name must contact nearly 30 separate organizations and agencies in order to do so. Keeping is technically far easier, but the confusion, prejudice, and hassles womyn face as a result makes changing seem “easier” and “better” to most. In fact, Miller and Swift (1976) long ago pointed out that:

Any married couple who agree that the wife will keep her name are in for harassment, no matter how legal their stand: family, friends, the Internal Revenue Service, state and local agencies like motor vehicle departments and voter registrars, hotels, credit agencies, insurance companies are all apt to exert pressure on them to conform. (p. 10)

While some might have expected this to change with time, Emens (2007), a contemporary lawyer and legal scholar, refers to “desk clerk law” to explain how desk clerks at courthouses, who have their own prejudices and warped perceptions, tend to misinform womyn of their rights, exerting pressure on womyn to take their husbands’ names despite the legal ease with which womyn should be able to keep their birth names.

Snyder (2009) asserts that there is no reason that custom should serve as a justification for continuation of a status quo that violates the fourteenth amendment. She explains that if equal protection issues could be decided on the basis of tradition, then discriminatory laws, including interracial marriage statuses, would never have been stricken down. She adds that forcing people, through law or social norms that are discriminatory toward those deviating from the customary or “normal,” robs them of power. She relates this to Nazi Germany where Jews were forced to add Sarah and Abraham (Emens, 2007) to their names so that they were readily identifiable as Jews, especially important when Jewish first or last names did not appear sufficiently Jewish enough already. Yet another example of forced naming, of course, is U.S. slaves who were either required to take their masters’ last names and/or to change given names as they were sold again and again. Additionally, the U.S. government forcibly replaced indigenous names with Anglicized versions, leading to the loss of indigenous names and culture (Augustine-Adams, 1997). Given an obviously problematic history of forced naming, it is surprising that so few recognize the severity of
legal restraints on men’s choices and social restraints on womyn’s choices that continue to limit all individuals’ ability to name themselves without consequence.

INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES

While patronymy is a common practice outside of the United States, it is not universal. In Indonesia, for example, many people do not have last names and go only by given names (Indonesia, n.d.). Although scholarship on international naming practices is sparse (and it is outside of the scope of this work to review the practices of all nations), a brief overview of international naming customs is helpful in framing discussion of patronymy in the U.S. Above all, it is crucial to recognize that patronymy, while seemingly “normal” and almost beyond reproach in many societies, is far from customary in others.

Although it is relatively rare for both partners to keep their names after marriage, this is customary in most Muslim nations (as well as for the Kongo of Zaire), although children in such societies tend to be named after their fathers alone (Augustine-Adams, 1997; Clarke et al., 2008). In Korea too womyn keep their names but give their children their fathers’ names alone (Hoffnung, 2006). Similarly, womyn in Italy, Belgium, and Luxembourg legally keep their names after marriage; in each of these countries, it is most common for womyn to use their birth names and their husbands’ names together. Few womyn go by their birth names only, perhaps because the law in Italy and Belgium stipulates that children must be given their fathers’ names; thus, for womyn to share their children’s names, they have no choice but to use their husbands’ names (alone or with their own) (Valetas, 2001).

In the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Ireland, 85 percent or more womyn use their husbands’ names. The laws in these nations differ, however. In the United Kingdom, for instance, marriage does not legally affect spouses’ names, and there are no regulations on which last names parents can give their children. In Sweden and Finland, a married couple can choose a common name to use and pass on to their children or keep their names and give children one of their last names (Valetas, 2001). In 2004, France passed a law allowing parents to give their children either parent’s name or both, although all siblings must have the same name (Fouquet, 2004), limiting couples’ options. Additionally, in France (Fouquet), like Germany (Kulish, 2009), when two individuals with hyphenated names marry, they must choose only one part of their name to
hyphenate with a partner’s (to create a new hyphenated name) or choose one of their names to use officially.

In Denmark, Greece, Portugal, and the Netherlands, most womyn use their husbands’ names; in Portugal, as many as 30 percent keep their names while in Denmark about 13 percent use birth names with another 13 percent using both their birth and husbands’ names. In the Netherlands, only four percent keep their names (Valetas, 2001). In Switzerland, children must take their fathers’ names and womyn can keep their names only if both partners take that name or if a womon hyphenates or uses her birth name followed by her husband’s name (Kinnard, 2008). In Japan, married couples must share the same last name. Although Japanese men may choose to take their wives’ names, this is very rare, making it difficult for womyn to keep their birth names after marriage. Arichi (1999) explains that with Japanese society’s intolerance for cohabitation, many professional womyn who want to keep their birth names after marriage must choose between love and identity maintenance. As expected, most Japanese womyn feel that such a “choice” is very problematic, and 98 percent of Japanese couples use men’s last names as their family names (Augustine-Adams, 1997).

In Norway, a country ranked number one in 2004 according to the United Nation’s gender empowerment measure (the U.S. was ranked 14), 20 percent of womyn keep their birth names after marriage, a figure that has fallen since the 1980s. Since Noack and Wiik’s (2008) data on Norwegian naming come from a survey carried out in 2003, they could not comment on whether a 2003 law allowing couples to hyphenate their names affected couple’s naming practices. In China, a nation with values and traditions very different from liberal Norway, the government is in the midst of a campaign to convince the Chinese population that girls too can carry on family names (Dodge & Suter, 2008). They hope that persuading people that girls are as valuable as boys will lead to fewer gender-selective abortions of female fetuses and rebalance their population before a crisis emerges (likely since 70 percent of abortions in China are of female fetuses). This campaign, largely carried out through billboards, contrasts some of their policies. For instance, exceptions to the One Child Policy permit some couples to have two children but only if the first is a girl (the same is true if the first child has a disability, perhaps implicitly indicating the worth of a female child in China; Dodge & Suter). Additionally, in order to prevent further abortions, families that have only girls are paid $200 a year; people over 60 living in the countryside are also
rewarded if they have only one child or two girls (unfortunately indicating that one male child is equal in worth to two girls).

In Liechtenstein, Malta, and Cambodia womyn must bear their husbands’ last names (Augustine-Adams, 1997). In contrast, in Spain, as in many Latin American countries, womyn add their husbands’ names to their own but retain their birth names. Valetas (2001) estimates that 77 percent of Spanish womyn use only their birth names, with four percent using only their husbands’ names, and 17 percent using both names. Spanish and many Latin American children receive the first of their father’s (their father’s father) and the first of their mother’s (their mother’s father) names. Thus, while these societies come closer than most to allowing both men and womyn equal continuity of names, womyn’s names are always lost in the following generation (when children marry and pass on only fathers’ names), something that Stodder (1998) finds problematic.

NAMING AND IDENTITY

While only a small group questions patronymy or its potentially negative effects, critics tend to share the belief that womyn’s names reflect their identities, including early feminists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Lucy Stone (Clarke et al., 2008, p. 422). Indeed the significance of patronymy as a practice worthy of analysis rests on the assumption (verified by scholarship) that womyn identify with their birth names and hence lose part of themselves in sacrificing their names at marriage. While many dispute this connection between identity and naming, it is worth considering why so many assume womyn have no connection to their names and lose nothing when changing while stating emphatically that if men changed their names they would suffer—as if they too would lose part of themselves if they took their wives’ names.

Intons-Peterson and Crawford (1985) first studied this issue with a sample of 56 introductory psychology students (half female and half male) and 209 faculty, staff, and graduate students at that same institution (114 female and 95 male). Their data clearly contradict the traditional perception that womyn identify less with their birth names than men; in fact, 86 percent of the undergraduates (male and female) identify some or a lot with their birth names. In contrast to the high percentage of womyn who identify with their names, only 46 percent of undergraduate students feel that womyn identify with their names; instead
of underestimating male’s identification, respondents overestimate, with 96 percent assuming
men identify with their names (compared to the 86 percent who do). This is a significant
difference, and undoubtedly part of the reason womyn assume that other womyn identify less
with their names than men is that they are surrounded by womyn who sacrifice their names
(and identification with them) at marriage as if it is meaningless and not a sacrifice.

Additionally, while more than half of the undergraduate respondents believe that their
identities would alter with last name changes, only 11 percent of undergraduate females (and
92 percent of undergraduate males) prefer to retain their birth names. About two-thirds of
both groups sampled felt it was “psychologically easier for females than for males to change
names” (Intons-Peterson & Crawford, 1985, p. 1157), something that again contradicts the
number of womyn who strongly identify with their birth names. Moreover, the authors note
an interesting difference between single and married students: almost a quarter of the married
womyn report little to no identification with their marital names, whereas almost no
unmarried graduate womyn report low birth name identification (p. 1165). Clearly the
graduate womyn’s identification with their birth names is based upon the fact that they grew
up with those names and feel they are part of their identities, something that is very different
than womyn assuming husbands’ names at marriage. This is an important distinction since
some critics, feminist and otherwise, question the difference between womyn keeping their
fathers’ names or taking their husbands’ (another man) names at marriage. What this
argument ignores, as Emens (2007) writes, is that “what was her father’s name is now her
name, and has been for her entire life” (p. 780). Certainly, with womyn strongly identifying
with their names but assuming that others do not (and hence that they are abnormal), the
social pressure to change their names after marriage more than likely leads some to suppress
this identification. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why so many womyn with clear ties to
their names sacrifice them at marriage.

In fact, identification with birth names is a leading reason for keepers’ non-traditional
naming practices. In Hoffnung’s (2006) study over half her sample linked their non-
traditional naming practices to a desire to maintain their identities. A number of other studies
confirm that many womyn, including some changers, strongly identify with their birth names
(Augustine-Adams, 1997; Boxer & Gritsenko, 2005; Choi & Bird, 2003; Duggan et al., 1993;
Emens, 2007; Fowler & Fuehrer, 1997; Gooding & Kreider, 2009; Johnson & Scheuble,
Most scholarship on womyn’s identification with their birth names focuses on keepers who explain their non-traditional practices in terms of an unwillingness to sacrifice their identities, which they often see as interchangeable with their names, at marriage. Fowler and Fuehrer’s (1997) in-depth study of five keepers, for instance, provides a lot of commentary about keepers’ feelings that their names are part of, or at least symbolic of, their identities. The authors explain that there is a price for not denying this connection and adhering to patronymy. They write that the “unwillingness to become a different person after marriage defies what is typically expected of women […] who are expected to be identified by their husband’s name and wear the title ‘wife of’ (‘Mrs’) at all times” with their identities “presumed to be derived primarily from their roles as wives and mothers” (p. 319). The difference between womyn who reject or suppress such identification and those who do not may have something to do with the fact that only 17 percent of keepers, compared to 89 percent of changers, hold conventional views of marriage (Kline et al., 1996), including the belief that marriage means becoming one (“one flesh” in the Bible). This is explored further in future sections, but perhaps here it is worth questioning whether the difference between many womyn’s choices stems from some womyn’s higher valuation of their identities and others’ higher valuation of traditional definitions of marriage where a womon becomes a wife and a man remains first and foremost a man, as in the traditional wedding vows “I now pronounce you man and wife.”

**FACTORS AFFECTING WOMYN’S MARITAL NAMING PRACTICES**

While the scholarship on patronymy is sparse, a number of studies have focused on the factors affecting womyn’s marital naming practices and dividing keepers from changers. While no single factor can explain womyn’s choices (which are in fact quite complex), these data are useful in framing any study on patronymy.

One of the earliest studies on patronymy (Brightman, 1994) found that womyn who keep their names after marriage tend to be younger and more highly educated and financially secure. While age affects choice, it tends to be that womyn who marry later make more non-
traditional choices than those who marry at a very young age (Hoffnung, 2006; Noack & Wiik, 2008; Scheuble & Johnson, 2007). However, womyn over 40 make fewer non-traditional choices than those 39 and under (Brightman, 1994). Although scholarship differs on how age affects choice, this tends to be because some scholars fail to recognize that womyn marrying before the mid-1970s could not legally take their husbands’ names and that it was not even until the 1980s that most womyn became aware of legal changes that permitted keeping in all 50 states (Hoffnung, 2006). Thus, it makes perfect sense that greater numbers of womyn under 40 keep their names today because it was illegal or perceived to be illegal for womyn marrying pre-1980s; however, those who marry today are more likely to keep their names if they marry at 30 than at 18. This may relate to the finding that education affects choice.

Education is in fact the number one predictor of non-traditional choice. The number of keepers jumps from five percent with a high school diploma, to nine percent with an associate’s degree, to 15 percent with a bachelor’s degree, and 21 percent with a post-graduate degree (Brightman, 1994). It is possible that education serves as a mediator between childhood socialization and adult experience (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998). Although girls may be socialized to believe that normal womyn keep their names when they marry and may be surrounded by womyn who did just that, in college they are more likely to be exposed to more gender egalitarian values as well as to encounter professors who kept or hyphenated their birth names. Additionally, since a desire to maintain professional identity is a leading reason womyn give for keeping their names, it is probably that one of the reasons a 30-year-old is more likely to keep her name than an 18-year-old is because she is also more likely to have earned one or multiple degrees and established herself professionally before marriage. Womyn who publish (for instance in academia) or are high achievers may have a greater desire to keep their names so that their accomplishments are not lost or perceived as secondary to their husbands’ (Brightman, 1994). The fact that womyn who attend more prestigious universities are much more likely to keep their names than those who attend lower-status colleges (Hoffnung, 2006) may also demonstrate that those who achieve under their birth names are more likely to want to keep them. Additionally, womyns’ mothers’ educational achievements affect their choices; Noack and Wiik (2008) find that a one-level
increase (from a bachelor’s to a master’s degree for instance) in mothers’ education results in a 15 percent jump in the likelihood that their daughters will keep their names at marriage.

Boxer and Gritsenko (2003) write, “Gender identity issues are always difficult to separate from womyn’s complex forms of participation in other communities” (p. 8), pointing out the importance of studying or at least recognizing that womyn’s race, class, nationality, and generally complex social locations affect their practices. Despite this, most studies tend to utilize 90 to 100 percent White samples and often ignore class and nationality altogether. A few studies, however, reveal that womyn of color and immigrants are more likely to keep their names than White womyn (Hoffnung, 2006; Twenge, 1997). Gooding and Kreider (2009) report that Asian and American Indian womyn are more likely than White or Black womyn to keep their names. Additionally, they find that while 15 percent of Hispanic womyn keep their names, only 5.9 percent of non-Hispanic womyn do so. Further work is needed on this topic, but it may be that immigrant and other womyn born outside the United States wish to keep their names as a method of preserving heritage, a common reason womyn give for wishing to keep their birth names (Hoffnung, 2006; Twenge, 1997). It is also possible that these womyn come from countries where patronymy is not the norm. More research is needed on why more Black than White womyn (Twenge) make non-traditional choices, but the fact that Black family structures often include a female head-of-household (Collins, 2000) may help explain this difference.

In addition to race, ethnicity, and nationality, class affects choice, although this too tends to be ignored by many scholars. Gooding and Kreider (2009) report that five percent of womyn who make 10 to 39 percent of their husbands’ incomes keep their names while 8.8 percent of womyn who make 100 percent or more of their husbands’ incomes keep theirs. In couples where the wives are sole breadwinners, 11.3 percent keep their names. This is a finding that may support some scholars’ supposition that naming practices reflect power dynamics in couples (Boxer & Gritsenko, 2003; Miller & Swift, 1976; Suter, 2004) and is certainly worth exploring.

A host of other factors are said to affect practice. Hoffnung (2006) finds that changers, compared to keepers, are more likely to have mothers who did not attend college, to be mothers themselves, and/or to be Catholic. While changers have children earlier than keepers, Hoffnung finds that both groups value motherhood equally and that, in fact, more
changers than keepers agree they could be completely fulfilled without children. Twenge (1997) finds that womyn who possess feminist attitudes and instrumental personality traits are more likely to keep their names, although Scheuble and Johnson (2007) report that fewer keepers list feminism as a reason for their decisions than might be expected. This may relate to Suter’s (2004) finding that some womyn reject keeping because they directly relate it to feminism, which they perceive to be anti-home, anti-family, and anti-tradition; possibly keepers avoid describing their non-traditional choices in terms of feminism in order to avoid an even worse perception of their deviation from the norm.

Scheuble and Johnson (2007) note that womyn who lived in larger cities at the age of 16 are more likely to keep their names, perhaps related to more liberal values. Noack and Wiik (2008) also report that womyn living in larger cities are more likely to keep their names; additionally they find that keepers are more likely to hold liberal values. Significantly, they report that keepers are far more likely to favor egalitarian work and family roles than changers.

Gooding and Kreider (2009) report that womyn living in the Northeastern or Western United States are nearly twice as likely to use a non-traditional name than womyn living in the South. This finding does not contradict Scheuble and Johnson’s (1995) notation that more womyn in the South use their birth names as middle names, as this is a patriarchal practice that is highly prevalent and perhaps even expected in some parts of the Southern United States. In fact, Scheuble and Johnson’s (2007) definition of traditional versus non-traditional has evolved over time, and they now note that those womyn who drop their names altogether and those who retain their birth names as a middle name tend to share characteristics and self-identify as traditionalists. As such, the relegation of a birth name to a new middle name is not classified as non-traditional.

Womyn who occupy professional or management positions are 1.2 times more likely to use a non-traditional name (Gooding & Kreider, 2009). Keepers also have higher rates of cohabitation and tend to view their names as important to their self-concept (Scheuble & Johnson, 2007). Additionally, Goldin and Shim (2004) find that a religious ceremony is associated with a lower probability that a womon will make a non-traditional choice. Scheuble et al. (2000) confirm this, finding that those married at home or in some other location are twice as likely to make non-conventional choices than those married in a church.
Goldin and Shim also report that womyn with occupations in the arts, media, and writing are much more likely to keep their names. Interestingly, they find that a groom with a Ph.D. is more likely to marry a womon who retains her birth name, while grooms with patrimonial suffixes like III, Jr., or Sr. are less likely to do so. Womyn with prominent fathers-in-law are less likely to keep their last names while those with fathers-in-law in the arts or academia are more likely to do so, suggesting that brides’ in-laws strongly affect their marital naming choices. Certainly, those who have passed on a patrimonial suffix may not want to risk a keeper giving their grandchildren a non-traditional last name, and prominent fathers-in-law may perceive their own names as more important than their daughters-in-law and want their names to be their son’s family’s “family name.”

In addition to focusing on the factors that affect womyn’s choices, many scholars focus on the differences between keepers and changers themselves. Kline et al. (1996) report that traditionalists value faithfulness, religion, ceremony, family heritage, and rules governing family relations. They also note that traditionalists believe that womyn should take their husbands’ names following marriage and endorse traditional naming practices (Fitzpatrick, 1988). As such, Kline et al. point out that it is likely that adherence to traditional ideology shapes womyn’s naming practices, something that Suter (2004) confirms. Because they include 42 changers, 24 retainers, and 44 hyphenators in their sample, Kline et al. are able to definitively assert that keepers (retainers and hyphenators) differ from changers in a number of ways. For instance, changers feel that patronymy is a tradition that is an inherent part of marrying and forming a family; in contrast, retainers value continuation of their professional and personal identities, and hyphenators value passing on family heritage and practicality. Hyphenators’ reasoning tends to be similar to both retainers and changers, while retainers and changers reasoning differ greatly.

Additionally, while hyphenators and retainers discuss their naming decisions with family, friends, and future husbands, changers often report that their decisions were never a topic of discussion. Obviously, discussing deviance from patronymy is not simple in a society with such negative perceptions of keepers, and this may explain why keepers report that their fiancés questioned (prior to marriage) their desire to get married, made sarcastic comments, and/or joked about their desire to retain or hyphenate their names (Kline et al., 1996). This also leads to the unanswered question of how many changers wished to keep
their names but felt the consequences were too severe to risk deviating from the norm. Certainly the fact that Kline et al. report that some hyphenators explain their choice as a compromise adds to the complexity of a situation in which womyn alone struggle to balance a need to demonstrate love and commitment to their husbands and families with a desire to maintain personal and professional identity, preserve heritage, retain ties to birth families, etc. Foss and Edson (1989) add to this discussion with their finding that womyn who take their husbands’ names place relationships first and perceive their husbands as having higher status, while keepers value preservation of their identities and equality in marriage, and hyphenators tend to see their relationships as embodying both their autonomous identities and their relationships (with hyphenating a way to balance competing demands).

The situation is complex, and womyn in today’s society (particularly during such a conservative time) face enormous pressure to conform to traditional models of marriage where womyn’s identities, at least partially, are subsumed under their husbands’. Because girls in the United States, as in much of the world, are socialized from birth to believe that one of their primary functions in life is to become wives and mothers, it makes sense that so many womyn continue to place relationships above maintenance of self regardless of their own feelings on the matter (which they rarely even discuss).

**PERCEPTIONS AND MISPERCEPTIONS**

Murray (1997), in a convenience sample of thousands of individuals from Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana, found that keepers are perceived very differently from changers, a finding supported by a number of scholars (Atkinson, 1987; Boxer & Gritsenko, 2005; Emens, 2007; Etaugh et al., 1999; Forbes et al., 2002; Hoffnung, 2006; Kline et al., 1996; Miller & Swift, 1976; Mills, 2003; Scheuble & Johnson, 1998, 2005, 2007; Suter, 2004; Twenge, 1997; Valetas, 1993). Keepers are viewed as unattractive, independent, feminist, poor potential wives and mothers, young, well-educated, likely to work outside the home, self-confident, outspoken, and unlikely to cook or attend church (Murray, 1997). They are also viewed as more agentic and less communal (Etaugh et al., 1999). Some of these perceptions are accurate as keepers do tend to be better-educated, younger, and potentially feminist, but most of these ascribed characteristics have no basis in fact. Some, such as the
perception that keepers are poor wives and mothers, may prevent many womyn from considering non-traditional naming options. Moreover, Murray’s finding that many men described keepers as “bitches” (p. 177) adds to the evidence that keepers are perceived very negatively by many and that there is a very real social cost to defying patronymy.

Through a random sample of 935 adults residing in a Midwestern state, Scheuble and Johnson (1998) examined the attitudes of respondents toward womyn’s choices to keep their birth last names after marriage, allowing them to report that a number of factors affected participants’ tolerance. Increased or high tolerance correlated with larger city size, Democratic or Independent political affiliation, and greater income (for womyn only). Decreased or low tolerance correlated with Catholic identification, regular church attendance, older age, smaller city size, Republican political affiliation, and adherence to conservative values.

Their finding that city size affects marital naming choices helps explain Noack and Wiik’s (2008) finding that a disproportionate number of womyn in Norway’s three largest cities keep their names; if people in larger cities are more tolerant of non-traditional choices, then keepers living in large cities may face fewer social costs as a result of their non-traditional practices. Biblical injunctions that a man and womon become one after marriage with the man the patriarchal “head of household” may help explain Catholic and Christian intolerance of non-traditional naming practices that place a greater emphasis on equality and autonomy after marriage.

Scheuble and Johnson (1998), similar to Stafford and Kline (1996), find that a large proportion of respondents feel that keepers are less committed than changers. Many also feel that womyn who take their husbands’ names are more in love with their spouse than those who keep their birth names after marriage (Stafford & Kline, 1996). While Scheuble and Johnson’s study sheds new light on factors affecting tolerance and reveals that people are slightly more likely to agree than disagree that it is acceptable for womyn to keep their birth names after marriage, the problem with their study is that they define approval of naming practices through “tolerance.” Tolerance is a term that rarely equates to approval; for instance, people are “tolerant” of many groups. Racists often claim they are tolerant of people of color, but they are still racist. Even the most tolerant individuals may not approve of non-traditional practice, especially if they relate it to a lack of commitment and/or love for
one’s spouse (Crittenden, 1999; Forbes et al., 2002; Twenge, 1997). It is possible my understanding of the term “tolerance” differs from Scheuble and Johnson’s, but it is worth stating that in an equitable society people would accept all practices—not just tolerate them all the while perceiving those who keep their names in generally derogatory ways.

Moreover, their finding that womyn’s tolerance for non-traditional practice is unrelated to said womyn’s own practices (meaning that they say it is okay for other womyn to keep their names but have no intention of doing so themselves) only further complicates the situation. It may be that womyn want to keep their names but recognize that this is often perceived as a rejection of their husbands, or they may accurately perceive that keeping their names will result in society’s view that they are poor wives and mothers (Atkinson, 1987; Murray, 1997). In a culture that often defines womyn foremost in terms of their roles as wives and mothers, this wide-scale perception may explain the low numbers of womyn who keep their birth names after marriage.

Interestingly, in direct opposition to people’s views of female keepers, people view men who hyphenate their names as highly committed to their relationships and partners (Forbes et al., 2002). In fact, they are often viewed as more committed to their relationships than traditional men. Thus, while male hyphenators’ violation of cultural norms is not necessarily viewed positively, men’s willingness to take their wives’ names (possibly perceived as his giving in to demanding, feminist womyn) seems to signal that they love their wives all the more because they are willing to sacrifice their names and, according to Forbes et al., their masculinity. It is interesting that men who choose to hyphenate their names after marriage are viewed by other men as more feminine and less masculine; certainly if men perceive changing as emasculating, then it makes sense that so few choose to change their names after marriage, something that severely limits womyn’s own choices (Emens, 2007; Snyder, 2009). What is even more fascinating is society’s insistence that marital naming practices are meaningless when men who make the same decisions as womyn and change their names after marriage are seen as less masculine. Obviously something is at play when men are viewed negatively for adhering to the same standards to which womyn are expected to abide.
INSTITUTIONALIZED MOTHERHOOD AND PATRONYMY’S PERPETUATION

In *Of Woman Born*, Rich (1976) explains that the two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other, are “the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control” (p. 13). Hence, while only womyn with children experience motherhood, institutionalized motherhood affects all womyn, whether mothers or not. Rich writes that patriarchy depends upon the institution of motherhood, and, in a heterosexist society, marriage between men and womyn.

Because adults tend to provide girls with dolls from a very young age, girls grow up learning/knowing the importance of their future role as mothers. Yet, not all girls become mothers. In “Feminism and Marriage: To Be or Not to Be Mrs. B.,” Choi and Bird (2003) write, “In 1992 when I had to have a hysterectomy my mother greeted this news with despair because, she said, ‘No man will ever want you now that you can’t have children’” (p. 449).

When a womon’s value stems from her function as mother, womyn without the ability or desire to have children become inherently less valuable. Again, language reflects differing valuations placed on men and womyn (Vahed, 1994) based on the societal norm that values womyn first and foremost as mothers. As Rich (1976) writes:

> Women’s status as childbearer has been made into the major fact of her life. Terms like “barren” or “childless” have been used to negate any further [female] identity. The term “nonfather” does not exist in any realm of social categories. (p. 11)

More than just the expectation that womyn are to become mothers, they are expected to put this function above all others. Hence, their role as mother (and wife) takes precedence over individual identity. In fact, womyn are taught that “real” love, both for their children and their husband, must be unconditional, must be selfless, and must be all-consuming.

Throughout history womyn who expected more have been labeled mad. Many scholars and authors address this very issue in articles and novels. In Plath’s (1971) novel *The Bell Jar*, her main character is (ironically) literally institutionalized as a result of her inability to conform to the institutions of marriage and motherhood. Plath, herself aware that marriage and motherhood are problematic institutions, writes in a published journal entry (1982):

> [I] must never become a mere mother and housewife. Challenge of baby when I am so unformed and unproductive as a writer. A fear for the meaning and purpose
of my life. I will hate a child that substitutes itself for my own purpose: so I must make my own. (p. 327)

Despite writing this, Plath’s initial inability to get pregnant terrified her—she felt she had no purpose if she could not reproduce; furthermore, marriage to Ted Hughes seemed to stifle her. Her greatest work, *Ariel* (1965), was produced after she and Hughes separated. In a letter to her mother, Plath writes, “Every morning, when my sleeping pill wears off, I am up about five, in my study with coffee, writing like mad. […] Terrific stuff, as if domesticity had choked me” (cited in Rich, 1976, p. 231). For Plath, though, freedom came too late; shortly after finishing the greatest work of her life, she killed herself. Plath did not differ from other womyn in struggling to maintain an autonomous identity. Instead, she differed in recognizing the difficulties involved in doing so within a society that sees womyn as valuable not for their individual work, however great, but foremost for their role as mothers and wives. Plath felt she had failed in these roles and even though she was succeeding on an individual/professional level, that failure consumed her and led to her suicide.

Sometimes failure to understand institutionalized marriage results in criticism of feminism. For many womyn, feminist achievements meant they could do more; they could, for instance, obtain professional positions and establish themselves in fields previously closed to womyn. However, while womyn entered the workforce in record numbers, middle-class womyn (lower class womyn and many womyn of color had long been expected to work) gained little relief from traditional household duties (hence the development of the “second shift”). Chrisler (2008) argues that womyn define standards by ideals when it comes to (heterosexual) motherhood and marriage. For instance, many “modern” womyn expect their relationships to be equal, particularly in the areas of household chores and parenting labor. While a lot of womyn experience frustrations when their expectations are violated, they do not talk about their experiences with other womyn; in particular frustrations and anger related to motherhood are silenced because “to violate the conspiracy of silence or the motherhood mystique is to risk being labeled a bad mother” (Chrisler, 2008, p. 4). In a society that bombards womyn with images of “perfect” families, the feeling that one is alone in feeling anger towards one’s children or anger that the mother, and rarely the father, sacrifices personally for the sake of her children, prevails. In patriarchal societies womyn’s value hinges on their roles as wives and as mothers, and institutionalized motherhood ensures that womyn remain under patriarchal control—frequently even when womyn feel they are
acting on free will. This seems particularly true when it comes to patronymy, one of the many tools of patriarchy.

Scheuble and Johnson (1998) find that tolerance toward non-traditional practice, however high it may be for “childless” womyn, sharply decreases when children are added to the equation. They explain that people highly value family identity (through the use of a “family name”) and protection of children from any negative consequences of having parents with different last names (despite the fact that with our high divorce rate, many families have different names today). A number of studies confirm/discuss society’s preference for parents with children to share a traditional family name (Clarke et al., 2008; Dodge & Suter, 2008; Emens, 2007; Goldin & Shim, 2004; Intons-Peterson & Crawford, 1985; Kline et al., 1996; Lebell, 1988; Noack & Wiik, 2008; Scheuble & Johnson, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2002; Stafford & Kline, 1996; Suter, 2004; Twenge, 1997; Valetas 1993, 2001).

Stafford and Kline, for example, find that 83 percent of men and 85 percent of womyn prefer that children be given their fathers’ last names. Johnson and Scheuble (2002), looking specifically at what names keepers give their children, report that even in this group, 90 percent give their children the fathers’ name alone. This is problematic in light of their finding that mothers’ non-traditional practices do have a positive effect on their daughters’ own choices (Scheuble & Johnson, 1995). Certainly, this effect demonstrates that womyn’s non-traditional choices may lead their daughters to be gender conscious and possibly feminist, but if womyn do not give their children their own names, this sends another message—that their fathers’ names—and hence men—are more important.

Additionally, as Valetas (2001) comments, “As a rule, women tend to adapt so as to have the same name as their children either by changing names entirely and using only their husband’s name or by using both names” (p. 4). Given the power of the institution of motherhood and normative support for a definition of the mother as self-sacrificing or selfless (Chrisler, 2008; Rich, 1976), few womyn are willing to be the odd one out, the one family member that does not share a “family name.” Certainly those that do are labeled poor wives and mothers (Murray, 1997) precisely because they are seen as rejecting their family by keeping a part of themselves separate. No one questions why, if there has to be a family name, men do not take their wives’ names. Few, even among keepers, decide to hyphenate their children’s names, let alone give them the mother’s name alone. Largely as a result of a
culture that socializes womyn to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers, patronymy remains traditional; it remains a symbol of love and commitment, not just to one’s husband but to one’s children as well. As a result, not only do most womyn take their husbands’ names at marriage, but many womyn who keep their names at marriage switch to their husbands’ names following the birth of children (Goldin & Shim, 2004), perhaps as a result of society’s decreased tolerance toward their non-traditional choices.

SAME-SEX COUPLES’ NAMING PRACTICES

The naming practices of same-sex couples who marry or enter into other legally-recognized partnerships (such as civil unions or domestic partnerships) have been largely ignored by scholars. This is most likely due to two factors: 1) relatively few U.S. states or nations recognize such unions, making large-scale studies difficult, and 2) scholars focusing on patronymy may consider the naming practices of same-sex couples devoid of the kind of gendered meanings that exist in heterosexual unions. The lack of data on same-sex couples’ naming practices is troubling, however, given that increasing numbers of nations are legally recognizing same-sex unions (Badgett, 2009). Additionally, gays are already marginalized without such a large number of scholars failing to even mention that same-sex couples may also marry and face the decision of whether to change or keep their last names, and there is no evidence to corroborate the theory that same-sex couples’ naming practices are denuded of gendered meanings. In fact, as Clarke et al. (2008) explain, name changing “is only made meaningful as a gendered practice in relation to hierarchically organized masculine and feminine roles in heterosexual relationships” (p. 423). They relate this to housework, asserting that while lesbians may not be typical “housewives,” they do not escape womyn’s gendered relationship to household and family work (p. 423). They go on to explain that there is no guidance on naming other than heteronormative practices, and, they argue, no reason to assume that naming loses its gendered meaning simply because both partners are of the same sex.

In considering same-sex couples’ naming practices and their meanings, it is helpful to have a basic idea of the number of gay and lesbian changers. Emens (2007), who acquired data from Rothblum and Elder on couples who formed civil unions in Vermont the first year the status was available, estimates that about six percent of couples share part or all of their
last names, indicating that one or both partners changed their names after legally committing to one another. She notes sex-based differences: seven percent of female couples compared to four percent of male couples share names in some manner, something that may be attributable to socialization and cultural expectations. However, she could not provide specifics as to whether couples sharing a name chose new names (possibly merging) for themselves or took one partner’s name (something that scholars should certainly consider studying in the future). Following sharing a name, hyphenation was the next most common practice; in general, both partners hyphenated, with less than one percent hyphenating only one name.

Two other studies on same-sex naming practices shed additional light on practices and factors affecting couples’ decisions to keep or change their name(s), although neither provides information on the number of changers versus keepers today. Suter and Oswald (2003), the first scholars to study lesbians’ naming practices, gathered data from an Internet survey of 16 lesbian respondents in current same-sex relationships. Their sample was primarily White with one African-American and one Arab-American respondent; respondents’ relationships had lasted an average of nine years at the time of the survey, indicating clear commitment and sufficient time to have considered and possibly discussed naming options.

Suter and Oswald (2003) found that four of the 16 lesbians changed their names. Changers reported less education and greater connection to parents and siblings; they were also younger. The primary reasons participants gave for changing were a desire to demonstrate their family status to outsiders and their families, a desire for people to recognize both partners as parents, a desire to create distance from families of origin, and a yearning to express love and commitment to each other through sharing a name. Of the four, three shared through one partner taking the other’s name and one by creating a new name.

The 12 keepers’ reasons for not changing included respect for their family of origin, a strong feeling that their names were part of their identities, professional success, a dislike of partners’ names, disagreement about what new name to take, a feeling that name-changing was irrelevant to lesbian couples, and a belief that keeping names promotes equality. There was also some indication that explaining a name change would be inconvenient as it may be
socially unacceptable; this is in direct opposition to the large number of heterosexual womyn who change their names because they consider keeping inconvenient and socially taboo.

Clarke et al. (2007) draw heavily on Suter and Oswald’s (2003) study to further explore how 30 individuals (16 couples including two couples where only one partner participated) in committed same-sex relationships in Britain explain their naming practices. They note that due to recent legislative changes, same-sex couples entering into civil partnerships have the same naming choices as heterosexual couples who marry; significantly, while heterosexual men have to apply for a name change when they marry, the same is not true for gay men entering into civil partnerships with their male partners. It is worth questioning the differences in social acceptance for gay and heterosexual men who choose to change their names, something future studies may consider. Regardless of the options open to them, it is clear that few people in same-sex relationships choose to change their names. Clarke et al. found that only one of the 16 couples changed their name, although others reported considering name-changing or being undecided.

Significantly, in relation to Suter and Oswald’s (2003) finding that same-sex couples find name changing irrelevant or socially unacceptable, Clarke et al. find that couples tended to be uncomfortable talking about this subject, something they indicate may be related to a recognition that changing is incompatible with society’s expectations. The authors add that some couples are clearly uncomfortable with the visibility of their gay/lesbian relationship that sharing a name would create; moreover, some participants were simply unwilling to deal with the confusion (including the idea that a partner is a sister rather than a wife) that such name changing would generate. Of those considering name change, part of the problem was in deciding who would change without social conventions to guide the decision; more than once, changing was described as indicative of love or commitment.

Because there is no social convention guiding the practice, participants were more likely to refuse to change because they liked their own names or disliked their partners’, because they wanted to maintain personal and/or professional identity, to avoid complication and hassle, and/or to resist heteronormativity. The degree to which a desire to resist heteronormativity and avoid criticism from a community that is sometimes already resistant to the idea of gay marriage affects same-sex couples’ rejection of changing is something that future researchers will have to pursue; it is clear, however, that this desire affects decisions.
In Clarke et al. (2007), 20 of the 30 participants reported that they would absolutely not change their names; of those considering name change, most indicated hyphenation would be the most acceptable option since neither partner was willing to sacrifice his/her name. It is apparent that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in committed same-sex relationships share heterosexuals’ connections to their names; unlike heterosexuals, however, social convention and expectation that they should change does not lead them to reject the connections to their birth families, identities, etc. (Intons-Peterson & Crawford, 1985). Moreover, when they do consider changing, the process is more difficult because one partner is not necessarily more likely to compromise as in heterosexual unions where womyn tend to be the only ones to change their names.

The following two chapters explore the results of the two studies I conducted. The first study, Study 1, focuses on the experiences of keepers as deviators of patronymy, and the second study, Study 2, focuses on the conversations and plans of engaged couples in the process of making marital naming (and other) decisions. In reporting my findings, I clearly make connections to much of the work referenced in this chapter in order to build off of previous work and contribute to scholarship on this topic.
CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: STUDY 1, KEEPERS

In this chapter and the one following it, results and discussion of two qualitative studies on patronymy are presented. A detailed overview of the methodology utilized begins each chapter and frames the data that follows.

METHODOLOGY

Both data sets are gleaned from semi-structured interviews: in the first study, 18 interviews with womyn who retained or kept their names following marriage, and, in the second study, 10 interviews with engaged couples in the process of making marital naming decisions. In these interviews, participants provided narratives about patronymy. As a feminist researcher, I focus on allowing interviewees to speak for themselves (for instance, by relying heavily on quotes from the interviews), whilst recognizing that narratives “draw on taken-for-granted discourse and values circulating in a particular culture” and hence cannot be taken as truth or as a window into an “essential self” (Riessman, 2008, p. 3).

In short, while I recognize the importance of participants’ experiences, perceptions, and opinions, I also note that narrative analysis requires close interpretation and an understanding that narratives cannot simply be taken at face value. They must be deconstructed and placed within a socio-cultural context. In the case of research on patronymy, it is crucial to recognize that participants, while reflecting on their opinions of traditional/non-traditional practices and/or how the expectation that womyn should take their husbands’ names at marriage affects them personally, live in a society where it is a normative, expected practice and are shaped by a culture that sees a married womon as “Mrs. His Name.”

While there are a variety of ways to accomplish narrative analysis (each with advantages and disadvantages), I utilize thematic analysis to present and interpret the results of the interviews. As such, I analyze the data by looking for common themes and patterns.
focus on both the content and the context of the interviews. In short, unlike some positivist researchers, I utilize a feminist framework that recognizes that researchers and their methodological choices are value-laden and often depend on the creation of relationships between participants and researchers (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004, 12). For example, in many interviews, participants asked questions about my relationship with my husband; without doubt, some related to and others were put off by my status as a “keeper.” I know that this and other parts of my social location (in particular that I am a scholar in a womyn’s studies department) affected the way participants related to me and the experiences they chose to share with me; in the interviews with couples, I believe my sex may have come into play in my interactions with men (something that is expanded upon in future sections). Thus, while I focus primarily on the content, I recognize that knowledge and “data” are co-constructed by researchers and their participants (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004; Pillay, 2005), rather than “objective” and value-free, and this recognition affects the way I interpret data.

Before describing the methods employed in Study 1 below, it is helpful to briefly frame the focus of the study itself. Study 1 focuses on the communication surrounding womyn who keep their names following marriage. Because participants fall into the tiny minority of womyn (10 percent or less) who defy patronymy, focusing on how they communicate about their non-traditional practices has the potential to add to scholarship. Understanding if and how they differ from changers, if they face obstacles to using their birth names, whether they perceive their practices as resistant/feminist, and whether they face hostility in a society that expects womyn to take their husbands’ names following marriage will expand research on patronymy and possibly shed light on why patronymy remains a normative practice in 2010.

**Sample**

The sample was largely recruited through third parties, for example, through e-mails to colleagues, family, and friends that described the study’s goals and stipulated that any womon currently living in the United States who kept her name following marriage to a man was eligible to participate. Following this, possible participants were recruited through e-mails that described the study and asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed, in person if they were local or over the phone if they lived outside of San Diego or found it
more convenient. E-mails stated the names of the third parties that had provided their contact information and clearly articulated that they were under no obligation to participate. Additional interviewees were gleaned through snowball sampling, insofar as participants were asked whether they knew of others who also retained their names after marriage at the conclusion of each interview. Altogether, this resulted in interviews of 18 womyn that retained or hyphenated their names after marriage (referred to collectively as keepers).

While I recognize the limitations of a non-representative convenience sample, I believe this study offers insight about a relatively small group of womyn. Additionally, although each interview provided new data, after about 15 interviews, saturation was achieved; essentially, the womyn were expressing similar feelings, perceptions, and experiences, and less and less new information was ascertained in additional interviews. Although the womyn share some characteristics, including that each of them had earned at least a bachelor’s degree and many had earned advanced degrees (for instance, doctoral and law degrees), it is unlikely this would be any different in a larger, random sample given that research shows the higher a degree a womon earns, the more likely she is to keep her name (Brightman, 1994; Gooding & Kreider, 2009).

Beyond educational achievement, the group was fairly diverse. Of the 18 keepers, five womyn hyphenated their birth names with their husbands’ names (none of their husbands hyphenated), and 13 retained their birth names. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 56. Three were womyn of color, and three were born outside of the United States (in Asia, Central America, and Europe) (countries not listed to ensure confidentiality). Additionally, participants lived in various U.S. states including California, Texas, Vermont, and West Virginia; many grew up in other regions of the country, or, in the case of the three aforementioned participants, outside of the United States.

**Procedure**

Because this study began as a collaborative project for a graduate class, I conducted the interviews and research with my classmate Jenna Stephenson. While we began this research together, the results in this study differ largely from previous work on the subject, which was limited more to the discipline of communication (because our graduate class was listed under San Diego State’s communication department). Much of my analysis in this
work utilizes more of a womyn’s studies/sociology lens, while still drawing from the field of communication (since the study focuses on the communication surrounding womyn’s non-traditional practices). Jenna Stephenson gave consent for me to be sole author on future work on this topic; additionally, in cases where my results draw from our collaborative work on this topic, I clearly stipulate this.

After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in March 2009, we began sending e-mails to possible participants with a description of our study and our expectations of participants. We explained that we would be conducting interviews that would last about 30 minutes (more or less depending on their responses) and that the purpose of the research was to expand scholarship on patronymy and help reveal their experiences as a small group of womyn incompliant with this practice. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, we set up times most convenient for them. Because so many of our participants lived outside of California, 14 of the 18 interviews occurred over the phone. In the case of each interview, one or both of us (depending on availability) conducted the interview, taking copious notes (but not tape-recording) throughout and asking questions to capture their thoughts through exact wording whenever possible. If either of us had questions about interviews the other conducted alone, we e-mailed or called participants and asked for clarification to ensure accuracy.

Interviews primarily took place over the phone, but those that did not were conducted in participants’ offices, where they felt most comfortable. At the beginning of each interview, we asked for participants’ verbal consent. IRB stipulated that we did not have to get written consent since the interviews were not recorded. In each interview, we read the following:

This research study is being conducted by Jenna Stephenson and Melissann Herron, and we are graduate students at San Diego State University. This study is being conducted to examine the dialogue surrounding womyn who make nontraditional marital naming choices and is intended to help open the minds and broaden the understanding of our society. We would like to interview you, and interviews will last no longer than 60 minutes at a time. We would like meet you in a location convenient to you if you live in San Diego or on the phone if distance is a factor. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. Your information is confidential, and we will assign you a pseudonym that only the two researchers have access to. The main incentive to participate is to broaden others’ understanding of womyn’s decision to make nontraditional naming choices. Should you have further questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research feel free to conduct the IRB at
Before beginning, we were clear to emphasize that if anything we asked made participants uncomfortable they were free to withdraw from the study and/or end or pause the interview. Also, as we described in the verbal consent, we explained that the results would remain confidential as only we knew their real names and contact information. To ensure this, they were assigned pseudonyms early in the study and referred to (in our paper and discussions) by these. Because this is a study on naming (where their names themselves matter), we attempted to use pseudonyms that reflected participants’ cultural backgrounds, as well as choose pseudonyms that were the same amount of syllables (particularly last names) as their actual names. All interviews are stored in a locked file cabinet.

After interviews were finished, we made sure that participants were comfortable with what they said. We also asked if they had questions or concerns and provided additional contact information should they wish to contact us in the future. For those participants interested in receiving a copy of our results, we gathered e-mail and/or physical addresses so we could send them our data once the study was complete, important since a goal of feminist research is to add not only to scholarship but to the community from which we draw our participants.

**Measures**

Interviews were semi-structured, ensuring that there would be enough data to answer the research questions while allowing participants to expand on their experiences and introduce new lines of inquiry as applicable. The interview guide fell into three broad categories: consent/confidentiality, background/demographic information, and marital naming practice reflections. We began by obtaining verbal consent, explaining the measures that would be taken to ensure confidentiality, and asking participants whether they had a pseudonym they preferred for us to use (no one did). Next, we asked background questions that we hoped would allow us to understand the type of womyn that keep their names (if indeed such a “type” exists). Finally, we asked questions that addressed their non-traditional practices, such as whether they faced obstacles to keeping/using their birth names. The interview guide with our original 16 questions is located in *Appendix A*. 
Our goal was to answer five research questions: (1) What reasons do womyn give for retaining or hyphenating their names? (2) Do keepers perceive their choices as non-traditional, resistant, and/or feminist? (3) Do keepers face obstacles to keeping their birth names or feel pressured to take/use their husbands’ names? (4) Do keepers (who want to or have children) give or wish to give their children their birth names? and (5) Do keepers situationally use their husbands’ names? In particular, while keeping is obviously non-traditional, it is important to scrutinize how keepers themselves perceive the experience of keeping their birth names and whether they personally perceive keeping as non-traditional or resistant. While previous work has focused on why womyn keep their names and what factors affect their practices, most scholarship fails to address keepers’ experiences (beyond negative public perceptions) and the way they perceive their own decisions to keep their names.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

In conducting this study, I am attempting to answer the five aforementioned research questions. My hypothesis, from the literature review and my own experience as a keeper, is that society declares one “right” choice for womyn, to take their husbands’ names after marriage, and that womyn who deviate from this norm are punished. Hence, as I present data throughout the following sections, I focus on the participants’ experiences as “keepers,” looking both at how they perceive their decisions to keep their names and whether they face obstacles or hostility as a result of their deviation from patronymy. In presenting these data, I rely heavily on quotes and narratives from the participants, but I also clearly interpret their experiences through a scholarly feminist lens. In order for my work to contribute to a larger body on patronymy, it is essential that these womyn’s experiences be placed within an established framework on the subject—with notes as to how my data add to this field and if/when it answers other researchers’ questions or responds to their calls for future work.

In the following sections, I focus on five themes I extrapolated from the 18 interviews. The themes themselves correspond to the research questions, as applicable, but also veer off in new directions when the data support it. As mentioned, data are presented along with analysis, allowing me to frame Study 2, a study that focuses on engaged couples in the process of making marital naming decisions.
Participants’ Reasons for Keeping

Much current work focuses on the factors affecting and/or possibly predicting womyn’s non-traditional naming practices. These factors, such as education, age, race, and income, are discussed in-depth in the literature review. While my desire is not to deeply explore womyn’s reasoning for keeping their names (as other scholars have already done so) in this work, I do feel it is important to provide some discussion of why the participants’ kept their names after marriage since this provides a lens through which to better understand my sample. It also allows the participants some voice in the process since a number of womyn dedicated a large part of the interviews to what often sounded like “justifying” rather than merely explaining their non-traditional choices. It quickly became clear that while these womyn had a variety of diverse reasons for keeping their names, they shared a perception that they were often interrogated about their choices. Lauren Breintman, for instance, explained “I never gave it [keeping my name] a lot of thought, but, as I started getting resistance, I started feeling the need to justify it.”

While I only explore the four most common reasons the womyn gave, I do want to note that it is very clear that these womyn had a variety of reasons for initially choosing to keep their names—and a variety of reasons for sticking with that choice even when they faced the resistance to which Lauren referred. Their names mean a lot to them but for very different reasons; additionally, equally if not more important than the reasons themselves are some of the insights they provide into why other people think they kept their names, which often radically differ from their actual motives.

This theme corresponds to my first research question, “What reasons do womyn give for retaining or hyphenating their names?” The reasons, and in some cases, justifications, the womyn gave fall into four sub-themes: (1) identity maintenance and/or lack of identification with husbands’ names, (2) desire to maintain a connection to birth family, (3) education as consciousness-raising, and (4) birth name as professional identity.

**IDENTITY MAINTENANCE/LACK OF IDENTIFICATION WITH HUSBANDS’ NAMES**

Throughout work on patronymy the most common reason womyn give for keeping their names is a desire to maintain their identities (Augustine-Adams, 1997; Boxer & Gritsenko, 2005; Choi & Bird, 2003; Duggan et al., 1993; Emens, 2007; Fowler & Fuehrer,
1997; Gooding & Kreider, 2009; Intons-Peterson & Crawford, 1985; Johnson & Scheuble, 2002; Kline et al., 1996; Miller & Swift, 1976; Murray, 1997; Noack & Wiik, 2008; Scheuble & Johnson, 1998, 2005, 2007; Scheuble et al., 2000; Stafford & Kline, 1996; Stannard, 1984; Suter, 2004; Twenge, 1997; Valetas, 1993). My work supports this finding as all 18 (100%) of my participants mentioned and/or agreed that their names are connected to their identities, although this was not necessarily all of the womyn’s primary reason for keeping.

In response to why she kept her name after marriage, Maria Lopez stated, “I identify with the person Maria Lopez,” and Candy Woods said, “I really like having my name. I was Candy Woods for a long time before I got married.” In the latter case, Candy married in her mid-30s and felt that her age factored into how strongly she identified with her birth name. Unlike womyn who marry very young, Candy had established herself personally and professionally under her birth name, making her less willing to compromise in order to please her husband or others.

Charity Bel-Lyddinger, who took her husband’s name the first time she married, described a sense of empowerment and a feeling of being “back again” when she returned to her birth name after her divorce, indicating a loss of identity in taking her husband’s name and a sense of regaining her true self after returning to her birth name. Given this, she refused to take her second husband’s name, wanting to maintain her identity and not lose herself again. Beth Wells-Owens attests to this desire to avoid losing oneself as she said, “When I got married, I didn’t want to lose my identity! Wells is my birthright!” In our society, only men are supposed to view their names as their “birthright,” so Beth’s statement is actually quite radical, although I do not believe she perceived it as such.

Overall, my participants’ responses diverge somewhat from other scholars’ exploration of keeping as a way to maintain identity insofar as they not only kept their names to avoid losing themselves but felt that taking their husbands’ names would be unnatural, something of note in a society where 90 percent of womyn take their husbands’ names and where this is usually seen as the “best” and most “normal” choice. Farha Anwar-Khan often receives letters addressed to “Farha Khan.” While this does not necessarily upset her, she says, “That oddness I feel. It is peculiar for womyn to take their husbands’ names. Even 25 years ago, I thought that was odd. It’s not you!”
Alessandra Hernandez-Garcia noted that she feels embarrassed to introduce herself by her hyphenated name, explaining, “It feels fake.” Several times, she said her husband’s name does not feel like part of her identity. Alessandra, like many other womyn, hyphenated her name as a sort of compromise (Stafford & Kline, 1996); in this case, it was the only way she could share a name with her child, who, like most, has only her father’s name. Of course, she could have given her daughter her name or a hyphenated name, but she said this did not seem like a viable option. While she connects her name to her identity and is a keeper as a result, her willingness to make this non-traditional choice does not link to a willingness or desire to completely defy patronymy. While I explore most womyn’s inability to defy institutionalized motherhood as a separate theme, it is important to note here that a womon who clearly feels unconnected and uncomfortable hyphenating her name and frequently gives in and uses one name or the other—whatever is easiest for others—complied (partially) with patronymy solely to share a name with her child (she kept her name in her first marriage, in which she and her husband did not have children).

Those who hyphenate are perhaps most aware of a feeling of “oddness” or disconnect associated with using their husbands’ names since they use both names. Given these participants’ responses, it seems probable that many changers share this disconnect but that the normative support they receive for conforming to the norm takes precedence over a feeling of losing their identities, although that is a researchable question that should be pursued in future work. It is also possible that many hyphenators would use their birth name solely if not for a desire to share a common name with their children, particularly in a society where womyn tend to do the majority of care work for their children. This may be why the largest percentage of keepers are hyphenators (50 percent of keepers hyphenate or 5 of the 10% making non-traditional choices) (Brightman, 1994) and why that group is most likely to switch names rather than use one name consistently (referred to as situational use and explored further in my final theme; Scheuble & Johnson, 2005).

**DESIRE TO MAINTAIN A CONNECTION TO BIRTH FAMILY**

Five participants (28%) said they kept their names as a way to maintain a connection to their birth families/families of origin. Candy Woods, Charity Bel-Lyddiger, and Carolyn Charis all listed this as a reason secondary to identity maintenance. Candy said, “My last
name is my father’s last name, and I like being part of my family.” She also went on to
describe her grandparents as “real people,” to whom she felt a strong connection; in her case,
her father-in-law had changed his last name in order to found a department store so she felt
her husband’s name “had no history” and was even less willing to consider taking his name.
She both felt a connection to her own name and infused names with meaning, as a way to
preserve lineages. Since her husband’s father had broken his lineage, taking his name simply
did not make sense as it was not infused with the same historical meaning as her own.

Carolyn Charis said she kept her name largely because it is “dying out. There are not
many people with the name Charis left.” Like Woods, she infuses the name with historical
meaning and describes this as a reason for keeping her name. However, she did not give or
consider giving her children her name, meaning the name has no continuity beyond her,
making the idea of keeping to preserve heritage somewhat illogical. Additionally, the
preference for male children largely stems from the idea that female children marry into other
families whereas male children are able to preserve the family name, making patronymy a
reason for gross injustice in many parts of the world—not just in less obvious ways but
leading to widespread female gender-selective abortions in China for instance (Dodge &
Suter, 2008). If womyn gave their children their names, or could see it as optional, perhaps
such injustices would decrease. Certainly China has attempted to stop female infanticide and
abortions by posting billboards that indicate female children can in fact carry on the family
name; of course, to many, this is radical, but perhaps change will come with a transformation
in the way people perceive male and female children. The idea that one gender marries into a
family and that another preserves heritage by carrying on the family name will almost always
lead to preference for male children, particularly when language like the family name “dying
out” is utilized to describe a family with only female children.

Charity Bel-Lyddiger, who took her husband’s name in her first marriage but kept it
to preserve her identity in her second marriage, discussed a sense of belonging to her family
again. She said, “I was leaving that life and wanted to honor my own family name.”
Returning to her birth name was a way to re-establish a connection with her family, which
goes back to the idea of a womon marrying into another family and losing that connection in
taking her husband’s name at marriage.
For two other womyn, Leslie Patterson and Lillie Logan, the desire to maintain a connection to their families of origin was their primary reason for keeping. Leslie said that she is the last in her family with her name so keeping is important; more than this, though, is her desire to maintain a connection with her father, who died when she was very young. Although all other womyn with hyphenated names are given pseudonyms for both names, Leslie only provided her birth name in the interview, saying, “Really, it’s just me.” She took her husband’s name as a way to reward him for being so understanding about her desire to maintain her connection to her father but is very uncomfortable using his name. Perhaps she, like other hyphenators described in the prior theme, feels that another name is “fake.” Certainly she does not use her husband’s name on a regular basis.

Lille Logan is perhaps the most complex keeper. As a child, she and her siblings were severely abused by their father. She grew up sure that she would take her husband’s name when she married as a way to get rid of her father’s name and her connection to him. However, as part of a large family (she has five siblings), her connection to her siblings was stronger than her distaste for keeping her father’s name. When it came down to it, whether it had originated as her father’s name or not, it was now her name—her identity. While identity maintenance is hence a large reason for Lillie’s decision to keep her name after marriage, the connection to her siblings is a stronger reason. She said, “I never thought beyond my last name. When you grow up in this circle of eight people, it’s all about family.” Her later envisioning of her name as hers and not her father’s defies public opinion that names are meaningless because a woman takes a man’s name, her father’s or her husband’s, regardless of whether she keeps or changes and is an important reminder that without rules governing womyn’s behavior, more womyn would probably keep their names. Certainly 86 percent of womyn strongly identify with their names (Intons-Peterson & Crawford, 1985); this is a case in point of a woman who did not allow anyone to dictate her decisions.

**EDUCATION AS CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING**

A number of womyn described growing up with no idea that womyn kept their names after marriage (and many of them did in fact grow up when womyn did not have the legal option to keep their names). Charity Bel-Lyddinger, for instance, said she grew up scribbling the last names of boyfriends on notebooks. “It was what you did. It wasn’t even a question.”
It was only after she was already married that womyn began to keep their birth names and the public became aware this was an option. Faith Lynd said she was also unaware it was optional to keep her name when she married the first time. Since the womyn were 54 and 59 respectively at the time of the interviews, they did in fact grow up at a time (the 1950s and 60s) when womyn did not possess the legal right to keep their names after marriage. Obviously both the legal right to keep and an awareness of keeping as a viable option are necessary pre-conditions for keeping. With these conditions met at the time of their second marriages, both womyn kept their names when they remarried.

Mary Davidson also commented that her initial choice to take her husband’s name was typical of the time and credits it to “foolish immaturity,” saying she too grew up scribbling “Mary Thomas” (Thomas is her husband’s last name) all over her notebooks. This was a time, she reminded me, when womyn were expected to become nurses or teachers; keeping her name would have been completely radical and did not seem like a good or desirable option. However, after several years of marriage, she felt like she “wanted Davidson back but wasn’t ready to get rid of Thomas,” so she hyphenated her name. In the end, she decided to go back to her birth name alone. This decision stems from her choice to enroll in college at a later age and reflects both a growing consciousness of other options as viable and a desire for her birth name alone to appear on the diploma since she was the first Davidson to graduate college. While she also kept her name as a way to maintain—or get back—her identity, she explained her choice to her husband in terms of educational achievement alone. She said, “He was bemused by me. He was feeling this strange new wife he didn’t understand.” While she admitted that she deceived her husband in telling him her wish to take back her name was due solely to a desire to graduate under her birth name, this white lie of sorts was meant to be loving, to keep her husband from feeling like she was rejecting him (by not using his name anymore), important to her since he was already struggling to understand the changes that accompanied the independence and sense of empowerment fostered by her return to school. (While I explore husbands’ reactions to participants’ nontraditional choices in a separate theme, it is important to note that deception seems to be a common way keepers deal with angry husbands’ or attempt to prevent hurt feelings.)
Both Gabrielle Harris (age 41) and Jessica Mickelzio (age 28) are young enough to have grown up aware that keeping is a legal choice. However, both were raised in a culture where changing was (and remains) the norm; hence, neither expected to keep their names. For both womyn, education was the primary factor that allowed them to perceive other choices as legitimate and desirable. Gabrielle said, “My desire to keep my name developed over time, particularly in college and grad school,” and Jessica said, “After taking a few womyn’s studies classes, I began to question why the womon is always forced to change her name.” She said she changed her mind after her “consciousness was raised.”

This theme is very important because, whether participants said that their non-traditional choices were related to education or not, other studies have shown that college-educated womyn are significantly more likely to keep their names (Brightman, 1994; Gooding & Kreider, 2009). Only five percent of womyn with a high school diploma keep their names whereas over 20 percent with a post-graduate degree do so. Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) notes that education serves as a mediator between childhood socialization and adult experience; certainly girls grow up expected to marry (in our heterosexist society) boys and take their names. It is customary, even today, for little girls to “practice” their first names with the last names of the boys they like starting at a young age. With few models of alternatives to patronymy, most girls grow up excited to marry and take on a new identity. Unlike boys who know their names are permanent, girls are taught that they are only borrowing their names (Vahed, 1994). Thus, socialization plays a major part in the perpetuation of patronymy. Possibly one connection between higher educational achievement and nontraditional practice stems from the fact that college education serves as a disruption of early socialization with more gender egalitarian values. Jessica’s statement that her “consciousness was raised” in college probably applies to almost all of the womyn given that they all grew up with normative support for changing their names, and, sometimes, with no awareness of legal or viable alternatives. Not only are they most likely exposed to more gender-egalitarian values and alternative ideologies in college, but college is also a place where young womyn are more likely to meet female professors who retained or hyphenated their birth names. Hence they both gain an awareness of keeping as an option and are exposed to womyn who defied patronymy with their non-traditional practices; for many young womyn, college may be the first place they meet a keeper. Certainly, this was my
experience, and it makes sense since professors, with their higher educational achievement, are bracketed in the group most likely to keep their names after marriage—and perhaps to share their reasons for doing so with students. Without doubt, hyphenators force others into awareness that it is possible for womyn to keep their names after marriage; unfortunately, unless retainers tell people that they kept their names, they are probably assumed to have taken their husbands’ names. Regardless, education is a major form of consciousness-raising for young womyn today and very possibly the greatest predictor of non-traditional marital naming practice.

**Birth Name as Professional Identity?**

The womyn in this study are not only highly educated, but they also tend to work in high-powered professions such as law or academe. In fact, all but one of the womyn work outside the home as professionals (94%); a quick profile of the womyn, for instance, reveals that three are lawyers, four are professors, one is a reporter, one is a small business owner, and one is the director and founder of a non-profit organization. Others work as teachers, guidance counselors, researchers, and so on. Several of the womyn indicated that a desire to maintain their professional identity led them to keep their birth name, although this was not a primary reason for anyone. In fact, 12 of the 18 womyn (66%) said it was more convenient to keep their birth names after marriage because they were already established professionally and did not wish to disrupt this or confuse others by suddenly changing their names. For several womyn, including the four professors, a college instructor, and Ph.D. student, keeping was easier due to publications listed under their birth names prior to marriage—and a desire to see their own, rather than husband’s, name in print.

Lawyer Beth Wells-Owens makes several interesting points. First, she said that born in 1959, she grew up expected to be a teacher or nurse, not a lawyer, so once she finished law school, it did not make sense to “be traditional just to be traditional.” Having already disrupted one tradition, it was not logical to adhere to a tradition she did not agree with merely to conform to social norms. While maintenance of her professional identity and pride in her achievement (in obtaining a law degree) made keeping convenient, she clearly articulated, “I didn’t do it for professional reasons.” She emphasized this due to a feeling that people, including her ex-husband, only see her choice as viable due to her more elite
profession. She primarily kept her name due to a feeling that it was her identity, not because she was a lawyer, and feels frustrated that so many people simplistically reduce her choice to a professional one. Fellow lawyer, Caydi Simmons, describes “getting funny looks sometimes” when people find out she kept her name. She said, “At first people are kind of weird about it, but probably because I’m a lawyer, people are more understanding.”

When my fellow interviewer, Jenna Stephenson, and I first considered this data, we were perplexed. However, after some time, we labeled these womyn “special womyn” because, due to their high-powered professions, people seem to give them more license to keep their names. Of course, most often, this tolerance only extends as far as the court room or classroom and ends in family situations where the womyn are expected to use their husbands’ names socially, if not legally. In reconsidering the data, I later relabeled these participants “exceptional womyn” because they seem to be the exception to the rule. In general, as will be described later in detail, keepers face a shocking amount of hostility. In professional situations, however, the hostility seems to be mediated by people’s belief that it is tolerable, if not necessarily acceptable, for womyn who have entered non-traditional or more elite professions to use their birth names professionally.

Insisting that keepers’ choices can be reduced to their professions alone is a way to prevent these womyn from seriously disrupting the social order or patronymy. All of them articulate a feeling that their names are their identities in interviews. However, it is unlikely that they discuss their reasons with people often, especially given hostility faced in situations where they are perceived as wives rather than professionals. In short, if all womyn suddenly declared their names were their identities, patronymy could not continue as a hidden site of male privilege. However, by allowing a small group of highly educated, career womyn to be “exceptions” to the rule by deeming them exceptional womyn, this male privilege remains invisible and patronymy continues relatively unchallenged, even by keepers, who often find it easier to allow people to believe their primary reason for keeping relates to their professions (since this results in less hostility). Furthermore, many of the womyn in our study admitted they were often perplexed by others’ insistence that it was okay for them to use their names professionally but not socially. While these womyn may be exceptional as professors or lawyers, they are expected to be “normal” wives and mothers at home. As such, these womyn, deemed exceptional by society because of their education and/or professions
are not so exceptional after all. It appears that a society that mandates patronymy eventually wears the majority of keepers down so that all but two (88%) of the womyn in our study eventually became situational users, switching between their birth names professionally and their husbands’ names in situations involving their husbands and/or children. This problematic, and, in my opinion, forced situational use is described in more detail in my final theme, situational use.

**Alternate Ideologies**

With 90 percent of U.S. womyn changing their names after marriage and with very negative perceptions of keepers, it is clear there is a strong expectation for womyn to take their husbands’ names after marriage and risk of censure or social exclusion for deviating from this norm. Hence, given keepers’ violation of social norms and dominant ideology that stipulates that a womon becomes “Mrs. His Name” after marriage, it is not surprising that so many view keepers as non-traditional and feminist.

While their naming practices are non-traditional, it is important to remember that womyn have a diverse array of reasons for keeping their names, rather than simply assume womyn kept their names due to liberal or feminist attitudes. In fact, my second research question, “Do keepers perceive their choices as non-traditional, resistant, and/or feminist?” attempts to address this gap in present research by considering how keepers view their own choices rather than how others perceive keepers’ choices. In my opinion, this question is crucial as it gives participants voice to agree and/or disagree with assumptions that have been made about them publically and in many scholars’ research.

The answer to this question is incredibly complex, far more so than I hypothesized. None of the womyn think that their choice to retain or hyphenate their names is a cultural norm, and all recognize that keeping is a major deviation from tradition. However, the womyn do not necessarily connect their non-traditional choices to feminism or a possession of a more liberal or alternative ideology outside of this one deviation. I note this because, while keeping is a deviation from patriarchal practice, it may not be all/most keepers’ intention to upset an unjust system or even their belief that the system is unjust. This theme is, however, labeled alternative ideologies for a reason: the keepers in my study tended to attempt to redefine marriage in less patriarchal terms. Their views of feminism, explored in
the second sub-theme below, are quite a bit more complex, although their ability to redefine marriage stems from feminist gains over the last few decades.

**DIFFERENT VIEWS OF MARRIAGE**

Kline et al. (1996) note that only 17 percent of name-retainers compared to 89 percent of changers (with hyphenators falling somewhere in the middle but much closer to retainers than changers) hold conventional views of marriage. Fowler and Fuehrer (1997) further report that some womyn keep their last names in order to challenge conventional notions of marriage. In my study, no one said they kept their names solely, or even mostly, to challenge the status quo. However, it is interesting to note that many made statements that clearly indicate they feel that patronymy is problematic and unjust and that this factored into their decision to keep their names. The fact that all 18 (100%) of the participants said they felt that their names were their identities is in itself a radical view in a society where only men are presumed to feel a strong connection to their names and awarded permanent names as a result (Vahed, 1994).

Beth Wells-Owens, quoted earlier as saying, “When I got married, I didn’t want to lose my identity. Wells is my birthright,” also added, “I didn’t change. I added you [her husband] to my life; I didn’t change my life.” Although she is the one participant who did not identify as a feminist, her statement is a feminist one. The notion that a womon need not radically change her life after marriage is somewhat radical. Traditionally, during a wedding, men and womyn are pronounced, “man and wife,” meaning that a married womon is expected to place her role as wife above her personhood whereas a man’s role changes little—he remains, first and foremost, a man, an autonomous human being. This led Lassiter (1983) to state that womyn are presumed to be “more married” than men, taking their husband’s name and using the title Mrs. The choice to keep one’s name challenges, whether intentionally or not, the traditional definition of a wife. Without doubt this leads to the hostility described in theme three.

Before moving onto my second sub-theme, I want to consider a few womyn’s views on patronymy and the connections between these more liberal views and their choices. Jessica Mickelzio said she does not believe that anyone should have to change their names when they marry, whether controlled by the law or social mandates.
She said:

If you have a conversation with your partner, and it’s a conscious choice to take
the other’s name, than that’s fine, but most of the time I think it’s just seen as an
automatic thing that the woman has to be the one to change.

She explains her choice in terms of a growing feminist consciousness in college and
graduate school. She went on to make several comments that clearly showed an awareness of
marriage as political and patriarchal. Her comments about the cause of resistance are quite in
line with my own thoughts.

It shouldn’t be so hard for a man to change his name. That is probably one reason
men don’t do it. I think a lot of resistance stems from the belief that men pass on
the family name, and that it in some way, it is less manly to marry someone who
keeps her own name or for a man to hyphenate his own name. Somehow it’s like
they feel emasculated or something.

Essentially, she clearly recognizes the problems with institutionalized marriage and sees the
many ways in which women and men’s choices are limited by social mandates and
prescriptions defining “good wives” and “real men.” Good wives are expected to take their
husbands’ names and to give them to their children. Real men are expected to marry women
who take their names and preserve their own heritage by passing on their names to any and
all future children.

Due to her unwillingness to conform to these prescriptions, Mickelzio not only kept
her own name but insisted that any future children have her name. In this unique case, her
husband, who wants them to share a name, is actually going to take her name so that he can
share a name with their future children. It is interesting that when she took this stronger
stance, her husband decided to change his name; the desire to share a name with their
children is the same reason the majority of women take their husbands’ names. However, it
is likely more complex. People already assume that Jessica took his name. In changing his
name, he preserves his masculinity in all situations but intimate ones involving family and
old friends. Strangers and friends he makes later on are unlikely to know that the family
name he shares with his wife is actually her name, and it seems unlikely he would share this
information given its association with a loss in masculinity and increase in femininity
(Forbes et al., 2002). Jessica’s statement that social acceptance of keeping will come only if
more women keep their names or more couples make non-traditional choices is likely spot
on. While Jessica’s choices show her ideology in action, it is likely that many women and

couples who agree with her are simply unwilling to deal with the social pressure to comply with patronymy—or, even more likely, to not consider any option other than the norm.

Jessica was certainly the most articulate in describing her feeling that patronymy perpetuates injustice, but 12 others made similar statements (for a total of 67 percent of participants). It is not possible or, from my conversations with them likely, to say that the other six would disagree, but the topic never came up in conversation and, to avoid leading participants, I did not ask. Similar to Jessica, for instance, Lauren Breintman felt the practice was unjust because it traces back to when womyn were “literally the property of their husbands.” She said it is an “archaic tradition” but that people rarely consider the decisions they make that perpetuate inequality. She asked, “Why would you want to perpetuate this tradition just because it’s always been done?” In a short but to-the-point discussion about this, Farha Anwar-Khan explained, “Marriage is defined in very hierarchal and heterosexual ways. When you define it that way, it’s a package deal.” She went on to explain that marriage is an institution and that keeping is a political choice. Likely the way many keepers differ from changers is in their awareness that marriage is an institution rather than a meaningless way to legitimize love. Certainly, many of my participants’ statements adhered more to feminism than mainstream or dominant ideology, something I consider in the following sub-theme.

Feminism and Keeping or Feminism versus Keeping?

A number of studies show that keepers are presumed to be feminist (Atkinson, 1987; Etaugh et al., 1999; Forbes et al., 2002; Fowler & Fueher, 1997; Hoffnung, 2006; Mills, 2003; Murray, 1997; Scheuble & Johnson, 1993, 1998; Twenge, 1997), although there are also scholars who indicate surprise that such a small percentage of their samples (of keepers) identify as feminist (Scheuble & Johnson, 2007). In this study, I found that participants frequently asserted feminist tenets to explain their choices, for instance, saying that they kept their names to maintain their autonomous identities or that it just did not make sense to them that a man should have a permanent name and not a womon. Others said it just seemed natural or that, as they became educated about inequality, keeping their names seemed like the only viable option. Even while asserting such feminist ideology, almost no one related
their decision to feminism directly, and many womyn were hesitant to embrace the feminist label.

Unfortunately, this is one area where my results are a bit skewed. Seventeen of the 18 womyn (94%) responded affirmatively to the question, “Do you consider yourself a feminist?” Several of the womyn clearly understood what feminism meant and felt comfortable with the label. However, out of the 17 womyn who identified as feminist, only four (22% of the sample) clearly identified as a feminist in everyday life. Others expressed confusion over the meaning of the label and/or appeared hesitant to claim it. The reason I say the study is skewed here is that both of the interviewers, Jenna Stephenson and myself, are womyn’s studies master’s students, something the participants knew. It was clear our positions as part of a feminist department and their presumption that we were feminists colored their views; while I cannot prove it, I feel the majority of these womyn would not have said yes or would have been more open about their hesitancy had we been part of a mainstream department.

In fact, despite claiming, however hesitantly, the feminist label, no one clearly said, “I kept my name because I am a feminist.” Jessica Mickelzio provided additional insight here, saying, “Unfortunately there is a very negative connotation to the word feminist, and if you say that’s why you’re doing it, people get very upset.” Going back to my earlier theory that these womyn are permitted some leeway because of their status as “exceptional” or high-powered professional womyn, there is no tolerance for womyn who keep their names in order to defy patriarchy. In short, it is one thing to deviate from the norm and something else entirely to say that the norm is unjust or wrong and insist that is why you refuse to comply with it. Patronymy, as a method to perpetuate patriarchy, relies on both men and womyn complying with it without question. While keepers’ deviation from the norm demonstrates that it is possible for some to refuse to conform, it is questionable if serious change can occur without this tiny group clearly taking the stance that it is wrong to expect womyn alone to sacrifice their names—and to these womyn, their identities—at marriage.

However, in a society where feminists are demonized as liberal, radical, man-hating, lesbians, it is perhaps too much to expect these womyn to openly say that their choices are connected to feminist ideology or a feeling that the present system is unjust. Despite the fact that most womyn keep their names for feminist reasons, it is clear that few are willing to risk
being further ostracized by connecting their ideology or the label feminist to their non-traditional practices. In fact, Leslie Patterson speaks to this. When asked if she was a feminist, she said, “Um, um, yeah,” making me think she would not have agreed had she not felt it was the expected answer. She then went on to say that people assume she is “a hyper-feminist,” and that she is trying to make a political point, which is why she adamantly said politics and feminism had nothing to do with it. Trijskin Redmond too insisted that she is “not interested in making a political statement,” although she perceives keepers who give their children their names as doing just that.

As Farha Anwar-Khan said, “There’s always politics behind names!” In this case, as people already facing enormous hostility, keepers may have more reason than most to distance themselves from such politics by chalking up their choice to any reason other than the idea that patronymy is unjust or that they are feminists. I find this very frustrating, something that is perhaps best explained in exploring something Lauren Breintman said. She explained, “I did not keep my name because I am a feminist. I am a feminist because the idea of keeping my name seemed like the only logical choice.” Essentially, only a feminist ideology makes keeping a rational choice in a society where there is not only strong normative support for womyn who change their names after marriage but a great deal of hostility aimed at those that do not change their names. After all, if they did not possess at least some feminist ideology, it is likely that even those who feel strong connections to their names would later decide to take their husbands’ names as a way to navigate such intense hostility (described in detail in the next theme). Perhaps Lauren’s statement that her family saw her choice as “yet another one of [her] Femi-Nazi tendencies” demonstrates why all but those strongly invested in feminist ideology are willing to both claim the feminist label and connect it to their non-traditional choices.

Here, it is important to note that Suter (2004) previously remarked that researchers need to question how living through progress in increasingly conservative times (a paradox of sorts) affects womyn’s choices. In fact, Farha Anwar-Khan, who is from Asia, said that she is not surprised the trend is shifting toward more womyn today taking their husbands’ names. She says society is “going conservative now” and that while people think of the United States as very liberal, she has had “to make a cultural adjustment to the backwardness of America.” While patronymy is practiced in much of the world, the U.S. has undergone a
transformation since the early 1990s; egalitarian trends have stalled, making some scholars question whether this is the end of the gender revolution (Cotter et al., 2007). Cotter et al. explain that “something fundamental has happened to the U.S. gender structure” (n.p.). Without doubt, the fact that fewer womyn today are keeping their names than in the late 1970s and 1980s supports the idea of such a gender stall and may go a long way toward explaining why keepers face the sort of hostility that causes them to distance themselves from feminism. More, the fact that Suter (2004) found that many womyn change rather than keep their names in order to distance themselves from feminists who they perceive as anti-family and anti-home is yet another factor that has to be considered. While they are likely to be perceived as feminists whether or not they say they are, keepers are more likely to be tolerated if they do not openly rail against patronymy. Unfortunately, as a result, patronymy goes largely unchallenged as the right and normal practice for all womyn, with keepers’ choices often reduced to either professional choices or, because of the tiny percentage willing to connect their choices to feminism, dismissed as radical and feminist—with all the negative connotations and none of the good ones.

Social Hostility and Boundary Maintenance

I began this study with the hypothesis that keepers face enormous pressure to conform to patronymy, but only in speaking with the participants did I realize the extent and severity of this pressure. In response to my third research question, “Do keepers face obstacles to keeping their birth names or feel pressured to take/use their husbands’ names?,” I discovered that all 18 (100%) of the participants did in fact face obstacles to keeping their names and/or face pressure to use their husbands’ names. Interestingly, the participants themselves often initially responded that they did not face obstacles; as the interviews progressed, however, they listed one obstacle after another and often seemed distressed to realize the cumulative effect of this hostility on their resolve to use their birth names in all situations. For most womyn (89 percent) this hostility led directly to situational use, or the use of their husbands’ names in situations where they face the most hostility, although that is discussed separately in the final theme and results largely from the institution of motherhood which I discuss in the fourth or following theme.
In a separate paper, Jenna Stephenson and I delved deeply into the ways in which keepers navigate this hostility. In this chapter, I focus mostly on highlighting the types of hostility the womyn face, with some notation of how they deal with and, in some cases, diffuse it. The theme is significant insofar as it highlights the reasons so few womyn keep their names, and, in my opinion, demonstrates that keeping is simply not a viable choice for most womyn, often times, including the tiny minority that deviates from tradition and decides against changing their names after marriage. I provide more discussion of this later. Below, I categorize the types of reactions, and often hostility, the womyn face as a result of their non-traditional marital naming practices into five sub-themes: (1) joking, (2) hostile comments from strangers/acquaintances, (3) bureaucratic red-tape, (4) husbands’ reactions, and perhaps most important, (5) gate-keeping changers. Since prior work has focused on people’s perceptions of keepers’ choices rather than on how keepers perceive others reacting to their choices, this theme should add quite a bit to scholarship on patronymy as a site of gender oppression.

**JOoking**

Ten of the 18 womyn (55%) mentioned joking at some point in the interview. Many of these womyn found that others made fun of their choices to keep their birth names or used humor as a way to make seemingly innocuous negative comments, while other participants made light of their choices and the hostility they faced themselves.

Lauren Breintman said that after she told some of her friends that she was participating in this study, they joked, “Is it a paper about womyn who don’t love their husbands?” She also relayed that people often humorously ask if she refused to change her name because she feels like her marriage will not last. In both cases, friends’ and strangers’ comments sting as Lauren loves her husband and finds it insulting and hurtful that people question her love for and commitment to her husband and marriage simply because she chose to keep her birth name after marriage. Candy Woods, who described similar comments and jokes about her choice, said, “With the high divorce rate, it’s almost a superstitious belief that a common name keeps a couple together.” Her comment is quite insightful as there does seem to be a common perception of keepers as less committed and loving (Murray, 1997; Stafford & Kline, 1996); obviously these womyn are aware of this perception, and it often
leaves them feeling defensive and hurt. In Lauren’s case, there is no way to write off her friends’ comments as insensitive but harmless; given that they know previous jokes and comments have upset her, it is obvious that their continuing use of humor is meant to indicate their disapproval, despite the fact that their comments obviously cause her pain.

For other keepers, joking is a way to relieve tension or make light of hostility. Lillie Logan knew her husband’s family disapproved of her choice to keep her birth name. As a result, she feared that the wedding might be a source of tension, something she obviously wanted to avoid on her wedding day. Instead of being introduced as “man and wife,” something she found offensive, she and her husband decided to try to diffuse people’s irritation with her choice to keep her name by playing with words a bit. They were pronounced “womon and man,” instead of “man and wife,” something that clearly poked fun at tradition. It is very likely this only further upset her husband’s family, however, leaving her to sign cards and mail with their first names only as a way to avoid dealing with the issue. Also, while frustrated with it, she has given up correcting her husband’s family and now allows them to refer to her by her husband’s name in conversation and correspondence. In the interview, she attempted to make light of this and say it did not upset her, but her frequent pauses and the tone of her voice left me uncomfortably aware that this was a source of upset for her and not a topic on which she was comfortable dwelling.

Candy Woods and Beth Wells-Owens also made light of the hostility they face. Candy described annoyance with the many people who simply ignore her choice to keep her name and refer to her by her husband’s name; however, she said, “I don’t make a big deal about it.” Beth relayed even greater frustration with the “unfairness” of people’s attitudes and reactions to her keeping (including their refusal to use anything but her husband’s name) but said, “If you get really sensitive about it, it will drive you crazy!”

Clearly participants have learned to make light of their choices, even when they describe great angst about people’s hostile comments and jokes. Beth’s comment makes it clear that these womyn have developed what might be termed a thick skin. After enough comments—and the other and, many times, more intense forms of hostility described in the following four sub-themes—they too have come to trivialize their choices. Clair (1998) writes, “To frame the situation as though it is a trivial matter may reduce the anxiety associated with assertively challenging the status quo” (p. 91). It seems like participants’
tendency to make light of or trivialize their choices may in fact be a sort of coping mechanism, something that allows them to go on challenging the status quo without going mad. Unfortunately, it is possible their tendency to trivialize their choices legitimizes others’ negatives perceptions and tendency to dismiss their choices as unimportant, particularly when hostility leads the participants to give in and switch names when the situation becomes too difficult.

**HOSTILE COMMENTS FROM STRANGERS AND ACQUAINTANCES**

While it is perhaps more hurtful when friends make jokes or negative comments about keepers’ choices than when strangers do, keepers often described being “stunned” or “shocked” when those who did not know them became hostile about what seemed like their highly personal choices to keep their names. Caroline Yasley described a situation that “amazed” her. She and her husband pulled up to a hotel, and she went to check in. Her husband had made the reservations under his name, so the desk clerk referred to her as “Mrs. Franks,” at which point she said her name was Caroline Yasley. The clerk, puzzled, said, “I thought you were celebrating your wedding anniversary?” with no immediate comprehension of how she could be married and possess a different name than her husband. When she explained, the man became very angry and spat, “Oh, you’re one of those!” Although it had been years since this incident, Caroline still found this situation very upsetting; she was so surprised she simply took the key the clerk offered without responding to his antagonism. While she understood her husbands’ family’s anger about her choice and had gotten “used to it,” this stranger’s reaction caught her completely off guard.

Lauren Breintman too shared a very painful and upsetting incident. Right before her wedding, she was interviewing an older woman for an article she was writing (she is a reporter). She already knew the woman’s husband’s last name when she asked the woman her name for the record. At this point, the interviewee said, “You know my name is Karen Miller,” leaving Lauren to explain that she was about to get married and planned to keep her own name and wanted to respect that other womyn might have done the same rather than assume they had taken their husband’s name. The woman became irate. She angrily yelled, “Shame on you! It’s just not the way you do things. My husband would’ve never stood for that!” Lauren, like Caroline, was so shocked that she was “stunned speechless.” Although she
said she later wished she had responded to this angry stranger, at that moment she was simply not capable of responding to what seemed like a stranger’s incomprehensible rage about a choice that had nothing to do with her.

While this lack of response means that commenters face no consequences for their hostility and may leave them feeling like they were “in the right” so to speak, as I relayed in the introduction, I have faced a similar situation. When I was about to get married, I placed a wine order for my wedding. The salesman, who had, up until this point, been quite pleasant, asked me what my new name would be. When I explained that I planned to keep my birth name, he demanded, “Are you famous! Why are you keeping your name?,” indicating I only had the right to keep my name if I were some famous author or actress (something that supports my earlier theory of exceptional womyn who are permitted to keep their names due to their high-powered or elite professions). As someone already working on this research, I had more resources than most to respond, but I too was caught off guard and stunned. I did not respond to him at the time, but he did contribute to my desire to continue this work by making me wonder how many other womyn faced such hostility from strangers. In fact, all 18 of the womyn (100%) described hostile or snide comments from strangers.

Mary Davidson and Alessandra Hernandez-Garcia both found that people responded negatively to their hyphenation and sometimes refused to call them by anything other than the second last name, which they assumed correctly were their husbands’ names. In the end, the womyn came to expect hostile and angry comments from strangers; it simply became the norm, although the degree of the rage sometimes left them stunned. Obviously, this is problematic in a society where all too often people insist that keeping is a legitimate choice and that the small number of womyn who choose to keep their names just proves that it is an illogical or impractical one. Clearly when strangers feel such an investment in the status quo that they respond with hostility to keepers’ practices, names are not meaningless and there is something serious going on that makes keeping a choice only for those willing to face serious antagonism on a regular basis.

**Bureaucratic Red-Tape**

Miller and Swift (1976) long ago argued that any woman who chooses to keep her name will face “harassment” from all sorts of state and local agencies from credit companies
to motor vehicle departments (p. 10). Thirty-four years later, this still seems to be the case as nine (50%) of the participants described facing bureaucratic red-tape.

Farha Anwar-Khan said she took her husband’s name for U.S. tax purposes since, at the time, a couple had to share a name by law. Mary Davidson described frustration that when she initially hyphenated her name (she later went on to use her birth name solely), it ended up being “horribly misspelled and was too long to put on computer forms.” She also relayed that in New York she had no problem reclaiming her birth name, but when she moved to Virginia, the state and the department of motor vehicles simply refused to permit her to use her birth name legally without a name change. Since this cost $250 in court, she decided against changing it legally. Although she uses her birth name socially and wherever permitted to do so, she expresses frustration with what she terms “bureaucratic hassles.”

Trijskin Redmond described going to her husband’s work to visit him one day. The company requires all visitors to have an ID badge made at entrance. When she told the woman making the card her name, the woman “flipped out,” demanding “Why do you have to be so difficult? Why can’t you just be Sandy like your husband?” Trijskin found this “insulting” and upsetting. Yet again, she faced a stranger’s hostility, although in this case she responded to her attacker: “I see no reason to change it [my name].” However, this woman made visiting her husband a stressful event for Trijskin.

Beth Wells-Owens found that trying to convince the DMV to allow her to change her name when she married the first time was “like beating [her] head against the wall!” She says it was a bit easier when she remarried eight years later. Her biggest problem now is that people do not know how to file her name. Because they don’t see it as one name (as it is meant to be), they cannot decide whether to file it under W or O and get angry when she disturbs their filing system. Alessandra Hernandez-Garcia reports the exact same thing. “People get confused and angry. Do they file it under H or G?”

Some work has shown that people get upset and sometimes angry when they meet someone androgynous and cannot determine their gender. It may be that this is a similar situation. People do not know how to deal with womyn who upset the “natural order,” even if it is as simple an issue of how to file their name. If, however, more womyn (and with radical progression, men) hyphenated their names, it is likely people would come to perceive this as normal and no longer feel confused or enraged. Unfortunately, a situation Alessandra relayed
made me less than hopeful that such change will occur anytime soon. She recently spoke to a young female teller at the bank who was engaged and considering hyphenating her name. Seeing Alessandra’s hyphenated name, she asked her how that was working out for her. Alessandra, who mentioned feeling “tired” of correcting people, dealing with angry people, and finding forms too long for her whole hyphenated name, told the womon that it was “not going well” and generally discouraged her from hyphenating. Of course, this womon could go on to hyphenate her name, or decide to retain it and not add her husband’s name, but if keepers’ experiences remain so negative that they discourage others from keeping, it seems unlikely that real change will occur. In fact, it is possible and, I would argue, likely that unmarried womyn exposed to keepers may be turned off by the negativity they see others experiencing and that this may be a factor contributing to the decrease in the number of womyn keeping their names since the late 1980s.

**Husbands’ Reactions**

It is interesting to note the womyn’s husbands’ reactions to their non-traditional naming practices. Since this was not an actual interview question, I cannot speak to each participant’s feelings on the topic. However, a number of participants mentioned their husbands at some point in the interview, although how this topic came up and how they discussed their husbands varied widely.

First, it is interesting to note that only two participants described husbands who truly understood their choices and supported them without question. Farha Anwar-Khan was raised by a feminist mother and “grew up thinking womyn ruled the world.” She was practically a feminist from birth and said she and her husband had little discussion about her decision to keep her own name. She remarked, “I’d be surprised if a couple had to discuss it since they should understand each other and respect one another’s ideologies.” This, however, seems to be one of the few areas where men and womyn possess radically different ideologies, perhaps because they are socialized to have very different expectations about the meaning of marriage and their roles as husbands and wives. As such, Farha was in the minority when it came to husbands who truly comprehended, let alone, shared their wives’ perspectives on the topic.
A few men were described as being “understanding.” It was clear that the participants found their husbands remarkable because of how widely they differed from other men; much like a father who is congratulated because he shares childcare (when it should be expected that he do so), these men were seen as exceptionally committed or understanding because they tolerated their wives’ choices. Lillie Logan’s second husband is “supportive” of her decision to keep her name and “won’t mind” if she gives her children her last name as a middle name as long as they have his last name only. Maria Lopez tried to get her husband to hyphenate his name, wanting them to share a common name, but he said, “I’m not asking you to take my name, so why does it matter?” Although they both kept their names and gave their children hyphenated names, it was clear she wished he could have understood her desire to share a name with him, something he made no attempt to do. To him, hyphenation was simply not an option (something that may tie into socialization and hegemonic masculinity). Leslie Patterson also describes an understanding husband. In fact, he was so sympathetic to her desire to keep her name as a way to maintain a connection to her deceased father that she hyphenated her name as a reward. At work, where she is known only by her birth name, people refer to him by her name when he visits—since she is married, they assume she took his name. She said, “He’s not petty at all. He didn’t mind. He doesn’t correct them.” It is very possible that he does not mind, but it is also likely that he capitalizes on the fact that people assume his wife took his name rather than face embarrassment and possible emasculation by admitting his wife kept her name.

Two participants, Caydi Simmons and Alessandra Hernandez-Garcia, described their husbands joking about their choices a lot. Caydi and her husband dated for seven years before marrying. At first, she thought she would take his name, but later she realized it was too much a part of her identity to change it. When she shared this with her husband, he “got quiet for a while,” but now they joke that maybe he will take her name. It is clear, however, that such a thing is a joke since there is no real consideration that he will do so in a society that clearly offers no support or room for such a deviation from tradition. Alessandra, on the other hand, actually does not know how her husband feels “because he’s the kind of guy who jokes a lot.” She seemed uncertain about whether her decision upset him but did not want to pursue the topic. If we think of keepers as redefining marriage, we have to question how
much they are doing so when it is easier not to discuss their choice than to openly share their feelings on the topic.

Beth Wells-Owens discovered that her first husband was only comfortable about her choice if he could explain it to others in terms of her profession as a lawyer. This upset her since she said her profession had nothing to do with her choice, which was entirely about identity maintenance. Her second husband was supportive but “did express concern about children’s names.” She agreed to give the children his name only, although this creates a lot of issues with the school system which often fails to recognize her as a mother as a result. Lillie Logan described her first husband as being “pissed” that she did not want to change her name. She was not alone in this. Gabrielle Harris said, “I feel a lot of ownership in my name.” Although she describes her husband as very progressive and as “somewhat of a feminist,” she said, “he was not very happy about it, not at all” and that it is “a little sticky point.” She went on to share that she made most of the reservations for their honeymoon, so when they arrived at the hotel, they found champagne and flowers with a card that was addressed to “Mr. and Mrs. Harris.” Her husband “was not too thrilled about that!” For this couple, her choice to keep her name is a constant source of tension.

Perhaps the most interesting situation is a story told by Lillie Logan. Lillie has two sisters, one who took her husband’s name and one who did not. The first is interesting because she is a famous soccer player who wanted to keep her name but did not because she felt that “it is the job of the woman to submit in this situation.” Lillie, who thinks of her sister in terms of her birth name and as part of the Logan family constantly has to apologize to her irate brother-in-law for sending mail addressed to Megan Logan. Lillie’s other sister kept her name but hid this from her husband for some time. Lillie commented, “For a while, it was like a woman having some strange affair with a name.” Again, in order to not face a possibly hostile reaction, a keeper deceived her husband about her non-traditional choice.

Clearly, keepers’ husbands react very differently to their choices. Often, the womyn do not openly share their opinions or attempt to explore their husbands’ feelings on the topic as yet another coping mechanism. Keepers’ lives are often difficult. It is one thing to face hostile friends and strangers and another to allow this situation to create a hole in their marriage. My finding is that Farha’s comment about couples not needing to discuss the topic because of a shared ideology is far from the truth. Very few of these couples share ideologies
when it comes to patronymy or more non-traditional views of marriage. There is little room for men to deviate from patronymy without being viewed as more feminine and less masculine (Forbes et al., 2002), and so it is little surprise that they often react poorly to their wives’ decisions, joke about them as a way to not have to face the situation, or expect to be viewed as extremely supportive since they tolerate choices that make them look bad. It is very possible that some men do share their wives’ ideologies and support their decisions to keep their names; likely in a more equitable society, more men would not only support their wives’ decisions but decide to take their wives’ names or hyphenate. At present, it seems like few men fall into such a category. Because work on patronymy has almost wholly excluded men, I am very interested in interviewing engaged couples and exploring how couples do or do not discuss this issue and whether couples seriously consider non-traditional choices for men, womyn, and children before submitting to the social norm or before wives’ keep their names but face hostility and lack of understanding from many, often including their husbands.

**Gate-Keeping Changers**

Nearly all of the participants (83% or 15 out of 18) described other womyn as their biggest obstacles to keeping their names, a result that was initially quite startling. While many of these antagonistic womyn were strangers or friends, participants most often described angry mothers and mothers-in-law.

Mary Davidson, who largely became a keeper in order to graduate college under her birth name, said, “My mom is still pissed that I am using my maiden name.” Jessica Mickelzio relayed how excited she was to tell her mom she was engaged. Her mother responded immediately how wonderful it would be for her daughter to take her husband’s more common and easier-to-spell name. However, after Jessica told her mother that she planned to keep her name, her excitement quickly became bewildered hurt when her mother started furiously yelling, “What? Why wouldn’t you change it? What’s wrong with you? Don’t you want to be identified with your husband?” Jessica’s upset here was clear. She simply could not understand why her mother would not support her decision, a feeling shared by Mary and others. Partly as a result of her mother’s anger, she decided against telling her grandmother she was keeping her name, noting “She would probably have a cow.”
Farha Anwar-Khan too experienced hostility, although in this case from her mother-in-law. Although the woman gave her some leeway since she and her husband were already pushing the boundaries with an interreligious marriage, Farha could tell her mother-in-law disapproved and commented, “She [my mother-in-law] was like hmmm…” Caydi Simmons too relayed that her mother-in-law “sometimes has a problem with it. She doesn’t like it.” Despite the knowledge that her daughter kept her name, Candy Woods’ mother continues to address letters to her by her husband’s name, frustrating her, something Beth Wells-Owens notes feeling as well when both sets of in-laws (her ex-husband’s and her current husband’s) refuse to address her by her birth name.

In addition to their mothers and mother-in-law, participants discussed other womyn (i.e., changers) as being hostile. Faith Lynd, who kept her birth name and hyphenated her children’s names, described feeling that her choice threatens other womyn, saying that they might think she thinks “they were wimping out” in taking their husbands’ names, something she declaratively stated “is not the case.” She says she has a vague sense that older womyn, in particular, “sort of look askance” and are judgmental about her choice. Lauren Breintman concurs with Faith, remarking, “It’s like my choice threatens them [changers].” Again, Lauren’s startling confrontation with a woman who shouted at her that her husband would never have “stood for” her to keep her name left her speechless; it is far from the only incident of such hostility, although perhaps the most extreme.

Lauren’s situation and Faith’s feelings that other womyn feel judged by keepers initially puzzled me. After all, in a patriarchal society, there is some expectation that the greatest source of hostility comes from men, not womyn, and especially not keepers’ own mothers. However, after completing my interviews, I discussed this situation with Dr. Anne Donadey, my second thesis reader. She suggested that perhaps changers regret their choices and respond with hostility as a result and said that they must know there is something wrong with the system if they react so strongly. In pondering this, I realized that changers do feel judged. In keeping their names, keepers demonstrate that it is possible (if difficult) to defy tradition, and whether they mean to or not, indicate to others that they think there is something problematic about a system that only permits men permanent names. Blair-Loy (2003) discusses something similar in her work; in looking at an executive woman who works part-time, something more than frowned on by corporations, she found that she
experienced something like hostility from men who did not see part-time work (as a way to balance work and family) as a serious option. Some of the problems the men may have had with this woman is that, in defying norms surrounding the corporate workplace where complete devotion is expected, the woman implicitly demonstrated the possibility of change. In short, despite people’s general consensus that patronymy is the only logical or right choice, keepers’ actions show that patronymy is not inevitable.

In considering this, a comment Faith Lynd made is helpful. She explained that she married right at the time when women were finally permitted to keep their names in all states. “It was a big statement one way or the other. At that point in history, it gave it meaning because you had to actively make a decision.” Here, Faith explains that while women have historically lacked a range of choices, when states changed their laws to recognize women’s right to keep their names in all U.S. states, women could no longer take their husbands’ names and claim that there was no other option (It’s important to note here that while women lacked the legal right to keep their names in many states up until the 1970s, some women used their birth names socially. The fact that it went from a pseudo-choice to a legitimate choice is what Faith is discussing here.). Strong normative support for one practice certainly makes non-traditional naming practices more difficult and perhaps less viable for many women, but the fact that there is a choice is crucial. Many changers may not have ever met anyone who kept her name before, and when they are suddenly faced with a woman doing so, it may be very shocking.

While it is certainly not always true, I believe that coming into contact with keepers, whether their own daughters or otherwise, makes changers reconsider their own decisions. I am not positing one right choice here, but a woman who changed her name without thought but still feels connected to it may react angrily because it may seem unfair that another woman gets to keep her name. Other women may be enraged because they feel that keepers are judging their choices, although this simply was not the case in the majority of interviews. Regardless, keepers call into question the legitimacy of patronymy, and women turn out to be its greatest supporters—the “gate-keepers” of the practice so to speak.

The reasons that women are the gate-keepers of patronymy are far more complex than can be explored in this chapter. However, to look a bit further, Farha Anwar-Khan made an interesting point. She explains that when a U.S. woman (a changer) marries and has
children “she becomes the mother of the son. She’s no longer the outside of the family.” She now has an investment in seeing her son’s name (now hers) continue. Farha added, “We still tend to define the family in very patriarchal ways.” In this patriarchal society where patronymy is the norm, the mother has shared a name with her husband and children (and may have felt forced to take her husband’s name in order to share the name with her children) for many years. Quite possibly, while the name felt odd for some time (as described by participants earlier), the woman will have worked to make it her own, and after 20 or 30 years, may have succeeded. When her son marries a woman who refuses to take on the family name, this woman’s own choice is called into question. She may not only feel judged and threatened, but she also sees her family’s name as rejected and lost. Likely this goes a long way toward explaining why mothers-in-law respond so negatively to their sons marrying keepers; it also may explain why they sometimes do not care as long as their grandchildren get their father’s and not their mother’s name. Like for their sons, this seems to be the line that cannot be crossed—maybe they will tolerate womyn keeping their birth names but there is just no room for a woman to pass that name on to her children.

Adding to this complexity, keepers’ own fathers tend to be incredibly supportive of their choices. This is not quite so puzzling. While their fathers-in-law see their names as rejected and may fear them dying out when their sons marry keepers, womyn’s own fathers benefit when their daughters keep their names. They retain their connection to their daughters and see their name continued. Beth Wells-Owens, for instance, said that her father never had a problem with her choice but that as he only has one son “he saw it as insurance that his name would be carried on,” presumably if his son died or did not have children. Maria Lopez said that when she told her father she was keeping her name he smiled and “gave me a high-five.” Maria, a strong feminist, felt very uncomfortable with her father’s reaction, understanding that he supported it because he saw it as a perpetuation of his own name. In considering this, Jenna Stephenson and I labeled keepers “vessels” to carry on their own family names. Of course, since they almost never give their children their names, this rarely results in the name going beyond their own generation, but it is an interesting result. Here, we find that many men are supportive, particularly keepers’ fathers, and most womyn are hostile to the point that keepers find themselves submitting and using their husband’s names
with their mothers and mothers-in-law or in situations with other womyn who create enough tension that it seems easier to give in then insist that their choices be respected.

**Selfish Womyn: Separation of Self from Family**

This, and the last theme, situational use, are themes where participants provided a wealth of data but had little lens through which to interpret it. As such, while letting the participants speak for themselves, there is more analysis and interpretation included; beyond the necessity of this for comprehension, these two themes are crucial parts of my contribution to scholarship. Neither have been explored in-depth nor in qualitative studies by scholars, and both turn out to provide a window into why patronymy remains the normative practice 40 years after womyn gained the legal right to keep their names.

For this theme, the title itself explains society’s views of keepers and a source of great angst for them: because so few keepers pass on their names to their children, keepers are seen as “separate” from their families. If a womon is married and has two children and all three of her family members have the name Johnson while she has the name Henderson, people see her as the anomaly. They feel that she cannot be committed to her family if she symbolically distances herself from them (Crittenden, 1999); there is no recognition that there is little room for womyn to pass on their names or for men to take their wives’ names and create “family names” in that way.

In this study, 12 of the 18 participants (67%) have children. Ten of those 12 (83% of the sub-sample) gave their children only their father’s names, while two (17%) hyphenated their children’s names. Of the remaining eight womyn, most plan to or wish to have children, but their ideas for what names they will give them remain largely unformed. Without the pressure from husbands or families that other participants relayed feeling when they were pregnant, they have no way of predicting what their choices will be. Only Jessica Mickelzio, whose husband plans to take her name, feels sure she will pass on her name to her children, but she clearly indicated that this will be a huge source of tension for her husband’s family. While she seemed quite sure of her choice, and I do not want to second guess her, I do have some doubt that she will pass on her name to her children or that her husband will take her name. This doubt stems from the fact that she has hidden her choice to keep her name from her husband’s family, fearing their reaction. If she thinks their reaction to her keeping her
name is going to be bad, I cannot begin to imagine their reaction to their son changing his name and their grandchildren getting their mother’s name only. I also see her husband’s unwillingness to step up and tell his family that his wife kept her name and that he supports her decision as somewhat ominous.

Of the 12 womyn with children, three hyphenated in order to share a name with their children. Farha Anwar-Khan and Alessandra Hernandez-Garcia both indicated their primary reason for hyphenating rather than just retaining their birth names stemmed from their wish to share a name with their children. Neither womon considered giving her children her name. Farha said, “If I’m going to work so hard to make those babies…they would be Khans!”

Alessandra’s case really points to how a womon’s desire to share a name with her child serves as a method of forcing her to comply with patronymy, whether completely or partially in the case of hyphenation. In her first marriage, she retained her name; in her second marriage, despite feeling incredibly uncomfortable with a hyphenated name that she perceived as “fake,” Alessandra added her husband’s name to her own. She said, “I probably would not have hyphenated if I hadn’t been pregnant at the time.” She seemed thrown when I asked her if she had considered hyphenating her child’s name or giving the child her name. She said, “I didn’t think about it,” clearly indicating that for her, like most womyn, it just was not an option. Charity Bel-Lyddinger really did not consider keeping her name in her first marriage, primarily because she planned to have children, but when she later remarried and her children were grown, she felt like there was no longer an issue. Since a “good mother” is expected to share a name with her children, patronymy tends to prevail without consideration of alternatives.

Beth Wells-Owens described her husband as supportive of her choice to keep as long as the children got his name only; she “did not make a big deal about it.” For her and other womyn, there seemed to be some feeling that their husbands had already tolerated their non-traditional choice to keep their names and that it was unfair to push the envelope any further. Gabrielle Harris’s situation is a testament to this. She actually took her stepfather’s name at the age of 10 as a way to feel connected to her mother who had taken her new husband’s name. Despite what seems like an experience that would have led her to give her children her name, her husband’s displeasure about her choice to keep her name led her to give her children their father’s name alone as a way to compromise and avoid further tension.
Interestingly, her children are not happy about this. Her older daughter frequently says she wants her mother’s name, and most recently her five year old daughter said, “I just want to be Megan Harris!”

Gabrielle is in a predicament. Her children want her name, not their father’s, but her husband is already angry she kept her name and would be furious if she suggested changing their daughters’ names. He perceives it as her choice to separate herself from her family but would not consider changing his name to share a name with his children (if they took their mother’s name)—a choice he deems perfectly logical for his wife. Gabrielle said that having a separate name from her children is often inconvenient insofar as she does the primary caregiving for them. When she picks them up from school or takes them to the doctor, for instance, people make a big deal about it. At her daughter’s preschool, they have a directory of all the families and it “drives [her] crazy” that the directory lists their family as “Mr. and Mrs. James Miller (Gabrielle).” The school leaves no room for womyn to keep their names and creates enough obstacles to demonstrate disapproval of deviation from tradition. Beth Wells-Owens, who gave her children their father’s name to please her husband and did not initially see it as a problem, shares Gabrielle’s frustration with school systems. She says that although the school knows she has a hyphenated name and that she is her children’s mother, “In their minds, they cannot accept I’m a mother and not an aunt!” While she found this confusing, it is clear that the school knows she is her children’s mother; she just does not fit their definition of a “good mother” who shares a name with her children, and they make this clear by making things difficult and tense.

Obviously there is a reason that people deliberately make it difficult for keepers who do not share a name with their children. Carolyn Charis says that people often call her by her husband’s name. Usually she corrects them, but when it relates to her children, it is often easier to just call herself Mrs. Grayson so as to not confuse people or deal with their snide comments. When I asked Carolyn if she had ever considered giving her children her name or a hyphenated name, she seemed stunned. After a moment, she made an insightful comment, “Basically, in our society children take their fathers’ names. It would be nice if it were more optional—if it wasn’t so automatic.” She, like Gabrielle, conveyed a feeling that it does not make sense to give children their fathers’ names when mothers are expected to do so much of the care giving and, of course, give birth to their children. However, like in the case of
Gabrielle and the other nine keepers who gave their children their fathers’ names, it was clear that there was little discussion or consideration of any other practice. Trijskin Redmond reaffirmed this; she said she strongly identified with her name but always thought she would change it when she had children. However, when she had her first child, she realized her connection to her name was too strong to change it. Although she says, “I sometimes regret that my daughter doesn’t have my name,” she never considered any other option for naming her children since she knew her husband and his family would not have been open to it.

Interestingly, Alessandra Hernandez-Garcia provided surprising commentary about the one couple she knows where the children have their mother’s last name. She said, “Yes, I know of one couple, but that only happened because she’s in charge of that relationship.” She described this couple’s relationship as “unequal” and commented that it is not fair that the man (the father) was not consulted about giving the children only their mother’s name. However, she made no connection to the millions of children, including her own, who only have their fathers’ names—with no consultation of the mothers who frequently spend much more time caring for them than the fathers who pass on their names to these children. Yes, this lack of consultation does indicate an unequal relationship or power distribution, but in almost all cases, it goes unrecognized. It is ironic that the only time anyone mentioned the system as truly problematic it was when a man was disadvantaged. The male privilege inherent in patronymy goes largely unquestioned even by keepers; doubtlessly this is why patronymy remains the norm.

In considering the importance of this theme and the way the institution of motherhood (Rich, 1976) serves as a major form of control of womyn, including keepers, I want to look at Crittenden’s (1999) anti-feminist critique of why happiness eludes the modern womon. I feel her statements actually represent mainstream ideology quite well and demonstrate why keepers are demonized as selfish womyn or are viewed as “bitches” by many (Murray, 1997). Crittenden writes:

> It may seem trivial, but in its way the name issue reflects most deeply our loss of understanding of what marriage is about. It also underscores, with every new introduction, the schizophrenia of the modern woman’s identity. ‘Hello, I’m—‘ Who? If a woman keeps her maiden name she will in fact set herself apart from being Mrs. His Wife, but she will also set herself apart from her own children, who may be puzzled why she doesn’t have the same name as them. […] The woman doesn’t simply appear distinct “in her own right”; she appears separate
from her own family, as if she’s drawn a line between herself and them, one that is drawn over and over with every new introduction: ‘This is Mr. Serbia, Junior Serbia, Sally Serbia, and oh yes, over here is Ms. Bosnia-Herzegovina. She’d like the UN to formally recognize her independence’. (p. 91-92)

Critten (1999) blames feminism for confusing womyn and making them feel like they should retain complete autonomy after marriage, when in fact (she argues) this leads to misery. She also misleads readers by insisting that the majority of womyn today keep their names, something she argues directly leads to unhappiness and divorce. Her overarching idea is that marriage must mean two becoming one (like in the Bible) and that the name connecting the family must be the man’s.

She trivializes womyn’s desire to keep their identity and depicts keepers as selfish bitches who wound their husbands and children with their insistence on separating themselves from their families. Nowhere in her work does she consider that maybe men are selfish, that perhaps they should consider taking their wives’ names. She goes on to say that keeping is a decision “that causes a constant inner split among the womyn who make it” (p. 92), which is one of the few things on which we agree. Yes, keeping causes a sort of schizophrenia, but this is because of society’s insistence on patronymy. If, in fact, keeping were a legitimate choice and “meaningless” then some men would take their wives’ names, more couples (both men and womyn) would hyphenate, and so on. As it is, because of intense hostility, womyn find themselves constantly forced to switch names, most often in situations involving their children. This situational use is incredibly problematic, and I argue in the following theme, damaging to womyn. However, it does not indicate, as Crittenden and others argue, that womyn should stop being selfish and take their husbands’ names. Instead, it clearly demonstrates that patronymy is a site of oppression where society seeks to control womyn’s behavior and force them to comply with patriarchal tradition.

Additionally, it is important to remember that while 98% of keepers give their children their father’s names (and likely nearly 100% of changers), some deviate from this tradition. In my study, two participants (or 17% of the sub-sample of mothers) gave their children hyphenated names. Both Maria Lopez and Faith Lynd retained their names and gave their children hyphenated names, meaning that both they and their husbands share part of their children’s names. This seems like a much more equitable choice, and while I don’t want to argue that one choice is wrong and another right, other keepers’ statements above that they
wished to share a name with their children strongly indicate that womyn want to give their children a hyphenated name (or theirs) but simply cannot defy the strong pressure to conform with patronymy in this case. Given the definition of a “good mother” and the pressure it puts on womyn to take their husbands’ names to share a name with their children, it seems likely that change will be slow; however, it also seems probable that if more womyn saw it as optional to give their children their names or hyphenated names, a much larger percentage of womyn would keep their names. Certainly, my study shows that institutionalized motherhood serves as one of the primary methods of social control of womyn, whether keepers or changers, and this is obviously quite problematic.

**Situational Use**

Situational use, or keepers’ switching between their husbands’ names and their birth names, is included as a separate theme since it needs to be discussed in-depth and corresponds to my fifth research question, “Do keepers situationally use their husbands’ names?” However, examples of participants situationally using their husbands’ names have been included throughout the chapter as they applied to other themes. In all, 16 of the 18 participants (89%) situationally used their husbands’ names.

Jessica Mickelzio shares an e-mail account with her husband on which they are listed as Jessica and Trevor Dibbs (something Charity Bel-Lyddinger also did). While she told her husband that he needs to tell his parents her last name is not Dibbs, he has yet to do so in order to avoid surefire upset and tension with his Mormon family that Jessica describes as “old school” and says “probably will not understand.” Jessica also refuses to tell her grandmother that she did not take her husband’s name, sure that she will not support this decision. As such, her grandmother writes checks to her using her husband’s name. Since this is not the name on her bank account, Jessica actually has to take her marriage certificate into the bank in order to cash checks. In her case, her desire to avoid hostility leads to situational use that causes quite a bit of inconvenience and stress.

Maria Lopez also notes that her family sends mail addressed to her husband’s name and that she does not correct them because she “doesn’t want to make a big announcement.” In the interview, this seemed to mean she wanted to avoid creating tension among people she suspected would not support her choice. She does differentiate, however, between people of
an older generation whom she is less likely to correct or tell since “they are probably set in
their ways” and younger people who may be more open to her choice. She said, “With the
younger generation, I’m more enthusiastic about talking about it because it might influence
their decisions.” Her statements seem to support my earlier analysis of gate-keeping changers
insofar as she feels like older people, particularly older womyn who changed their names, are
unlikely to understand or support her decision, whereas she feels like younger womyn who
have not yet changed their names may be more receptive of her choice, possibly because they
have yet to make a choice about which they feel the need to defend.

Lillie Logan’s husband’s family is not open to her choice because of “traditional and
religious reasons.” Her mother-in-law introduces her by her husband’s name. Her husband’s
grandmother addresses cards to her and her husband using his full name, making her a “Mrs.
His Name” without even a first name of her own. Although Lillie said she understands this
because the womon lost her husband, it was quite clear this was not the case. She said, “If
she wants to call me that, and it makes her happy, I’m fine with it.” While I do not doubt that
some keepers may be fine with switching, Lillie paused numerous times while telling this
story, and her tone changed drastically. As this was a phone interview I conducted with Jenna
Stephenson, I found myself glancing uncomfortably at her during these tense moments and
captured her look of discomfort. Lillie’s frustration with her husband’s family members’
refusal to call her by her own name was clear. Like Jessica, she describes her husband as
supportive, but like Jessica, she too is left to flounder with no support from her husband who
refuses to step in and speak to his family. While I understand these men do not want to create
tense situations or face hostility themselves, I cannot help but note that they are not
particularly supportive when they allow their families to treat their wives in this manner
while clearly aware of the way it makes the participants feel. If men are unwilling to correct
their families and leave their wives to deal with hostile in-laws who they do not want to
offend, then situational use becomes an almost inevitable tool keepers must employ to make
family situations bearable.

Gabrielle Harris too relays a similar situation. In order to avoid tension at her
wedding, she was introduced by her husband’s name, something she was not completely
comfortable with but which did not cause a great deal of upset. However, she admits that
when someone refers to her by her husband’s name, “It just doesn’t sound right,” something
she does not tell her husband for fear of upsetting him. Here, she feels like she has to situationally use and not tell her husband how much it upsets her in order to keep her marriage intact.

Leslie Patterson, like Jessica Mickelzio, receives checks and letters addressed to her husband’s last name, although in this case his family is perfectly aware she kept her name. She says, “His family doesn’t accept it.” As a result of the checks she receives in her husband’s name and to avoid the inconvenience of taking her marriage certificate to the bank every time she cashes or deposits a check, she actually had to put her husband’s name on her bank account. In this case, her husband’s family’s refusal to honor her choice forced Leslie to situationally use her name, although not willingly. Their lack of acceptance paid off.

Alessandra Hernandez-Garcia describes people’s refusal to use her whole hyphenated name, which she too finds burdensome. In the earlier theme, I explained that she only added her husband’s name since she was pregnant at the time and wanted to share a name with her children. As a result of years of annoyance, she tells her students that they can use either last name because she assumes they will not remember both names or get confused over the order. She has learned to expect little of people when it comes to honoring her choice. Beth Wells-Owens attempts to get people to honor her use of her birth name, but, like other hyphenators, finds that people strategically drop the first name assuming (usually correctly) that the second part of the name is the husband’s. Mary Davidson, who eventually stopped hyphenating her name and reclaimed her birth name, described this as incredibly “irritating.” In this case, people’s desire to call a woman with a hyphenated name is not about simplicity; if it was, they would not always attempt to discover the woman’s husband’s name and use that name. Instead, it is about forcing women to conform, and in all but two of the cases, women did situationally use their husband’s names as a way of avoiding people’s hostility or because it did not seem worth it to continue correcting them. Years of people’s poor behavior taught them that the path of least resistance was a much easier course of action.

My interest in women’s situational use and hence the inclusion of the question came from Scheuble and Johnson’s (2005) quantitative study which revealed that keepers are very likely to situationally use their husbands’ names with more than half of hyphenators doing so. They suggested that researchers “need to examine whether situational last name use is a choice on the part of the woman who do it and went on to question whether “situational last
name use is forced upon some womyn in a society that values patriarchal naming practice” (p. 150). This research clearly indicates that situational use is in fact forced upon keepers who would prefer their choices to retain or hyphenate their names be honored. The amount of hostility womyn face clearly reflects society’s valuation of patronymy and demonstrates that keeping is simply not a respected choice. In a society where the tiny minority of womyn who feel strongly enough about their names to defy this patriarchal norm are so severely punished for doing so that they constantly have to switch names, it is not surprising that more womyn are taking their husbands’ names than in the past. Patronymy is the only socially acceptable choice and, as Fowler and Fueher (1997) point out, “In most cultures it is difficult for an individual to choose to break social norms and to live with the consequences of such deviance” (p. 316). For these keepers, the consequences of their deviance lead directly to situational use. As a final note before moving onto the next chapter (Study 2), while their study is invaluable, it is possible that Scheuble and Johnson’s study grossly underestimated the number of keepers who situationally use. Certainly, when I asked directly, “Do you situationally use your husband’s name?,” most keepers said no. However, they went on to list one occasion after another where they had to do this, whether at their children’s school or with their families, and often became quite upset to realize the answer to this was actually yes. Pairing qualitative work with quantitative work is more likely to accurately reveal the number of keepers that situationally use their husbands’ names, something that would further work on this topic.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:
STUDY 2, ENGAGED COUPLES

This chapter, like the one before it, presents results and analysis of a qualitative study on patronymy. Again, the methodology is described prior to the findings.

METHODOLOGY

As in Study 1, the data for Study 2 is gleaned from semi-structured interviews, though in this case interviews with 10 heterosexual (male, female) couples engaged to be married. The study focuses on how couples discuss the meaning of marriage and their marital naming options. Because so few womyn or men deviate from patronymy and given the hostility I discovered keepers face (in the previous study), I want to understand if and how engaged couples discuss the possibility of non-traditional practices. I also want to explore their reasoning for either adhering to or deviating from traditional naming practices. I believe that a study that examines the way couples communicate about patronymy may reveal much about why patronymy remains normative and if we can hope to see change. Certainly, given people’s negative reactions to keepers’ practices and the greater number of womyn taking their husbands’ names since the early 1990s, it is important to explore how and if couples discuss anything other than traditional naming options before marriage and the meaning behind this.

In the following three sub-sections I discuss the methods employed in Study 2, including a description of the sample, procedure, and measures. Results and analysis follows.

Sample

Participants for this study were recruited in three ways. First, I sent e-mails to colleagues, family, and friends that described the study’s goals and stipulated that any couple currently engaged to be married, comprised of a male and female partner, and living within driving distance of San Diego was eligible to participate. Second, I put an ad on Facebook with the message, “Engaged? Interested in participating in a thesis study on couples’ marital
The first method, recruitment through third parties, elicited four responses from couples, primarily from graduate students at San Diego State University and the University of California, San Diego (where one or both partners were graduate students); the Facebook advertisement resulted in the recruitment of two couples. Finally, the snowball method resulted in four additional interviews. Altogether, I recruited and interview 10 couples, or 20 individuals, over the course of about four months (September 2009 through January 2010).

Again, given time constraints, this study is limited in its utilization of a non-representative convenience sample. However, given the specific focus of the study, I believe it does offer some insight into the values and practices of a small group of engaged couples. Furthermore, beyond the fact that all 20 individuals were engaged, the sample is very diverse in terms of race, educational background, professional status, political affiliation, and ideology, among other descriptors. Before moving on to describe this diversity, I do want to note one interesting similarity; the participants’ family compositions were strikingly similar. Sixteen participants (80%) were raised by parents who are still together, two (10%) by divorced parents, one (5%) by a single mother, and one (5%) by a variety of family members.

The participants’ races vary fairly widely for a sample of this size; thirteen of the participants are White, three are Biracial (Filipino/White, Hispanic/White, and Filipino/Chinese), one is Columbian, one is Filipino, one is Chinese, and one is Mexican-American. Five (50%) of the couples are comprised of two White individuals, while one is comprised of a White man and a Hispanic-White woman, one of a Filipino man and a Filipino/Chinese woman, one of a White man and a Chinese woman, one of a Mexican-American man and a White woman, and one of a Columbian man and a Filipino/White woman.

Furthermore, there was some variability in terms of birth country with 80% of participants born in the United States and another 20% born outside of the country. Two participants (one couple) were born and primarily raised in Israel (in the United States to attend graduate school); one was born and raised until about the age of five in the Philippines
before moving to California, and another was born and raised until the age of eight in China before moving to Utah. While a surprising number grew up in Southern California (13 or 65%), two were born in the United States but lived in other countries (in South America and Europe) for a number of years during their adolescence. One grew up in Texas and Washington and another in Oregon. Also, while many spent much of their early lives in Southern California and/or live here now, participants are remarkably well-traveled with a number spending a great deal of time in other countries. I note this because I think one’s perceptions of marriage and political philosophy and ideology may be affected by exposure to more than one region of the country and/or world. At the time of interview, all 20 of my participants lived in Southern California, between Los Angeles and San Diego. This was deliberate since I required face-to-face interviews and deemed distances greater than two hours away from my home too far for a thesis study.

Participants’ ages ranged from 23 to 35. Their political affiliations varied widely with eight (40%) not affiliated with any party and the other 12 participants falling into three categories: Democrat (six or 30%), Republican (three or 15%), or Independent (three or 15%). They also varied in terms of religion. Eleven (55%) are Christian (with varying denominations) two (10%) are Jewish, and the other seven (35%) either said they have no religious affiliation or that they are agnostic.

While their educational backgrounds varied widely from no college to bachelor’s and law degrees, the sample included nine (45%) graduate students. Three of these were social science master’s students, one was a social science doctoral student, and six were doctoral students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields; all attended San Diego State University or the University of California, San Diego. This similarity is not surprising given that many of my connections and my friends and colleagues’ connections are to higher education; while this is a similarity, graduate students varied widely in what they intended to do with their degrees from working in public relations to becoming a writer to professorship or research/industry careers. The other 11 participants’ job titles included, among others, loan officer, photo retoucher, registered nurse, lawyer, contractor, horse trainer, dance instructor, and production manager.
Procedure

After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in June 2009, I began e-mailing family, friends, and colleagues about my project. By September, I had received the names of a few possible participants but was still struggling to find enough people to conduct the study, which motivated me to put an ad on Facebook. Once I had collected the names of a number of engaged individuals, I began sending e-mails to possible participants with a description of my study and my expectations of participants. I explained that I would be conducting interviews that would last about 45 minutes (more or less depending on their responses) and that the purpose of the study was to expand scholarship on marriage and to explore how and if couples discussed certain decisions, including but not limited to their marital naming practices. A number of people responded to my initial e-mail but decided not to participate. Additionally, some people were interested in participating but could not meet the criteria since their partners (males) had no interest in being interviewed. In these cases, I explained that I was interviewing couples together (in the same location, at the same time), and interviews where only one partner was willing to be interviewed did not fit my research goals/design. Since the purpose of the study is to add to scholarship and to the community from which I am drawing (in this case people about to marry), I offered to send them a copy of my results when the study was complete.

Once participants (both members of couples) agreed to be interviewed, we began setting up times most convenient for them. All interviews were conducted in person, a requirement of the study since I feared I would miss crucial non-verbal communication between partners if I interviewed them over the phone. I met all of the participants in San Diego, but the locations differed. Some participants felt most comfortable being interviewed in their homes while others preferred to be interviewed in semi-public locations (restaurants and coffee shops) or in their offices.

At the beginning of each interview, I again explained the purpose of the study and reminded participants that I would be recording and transcribing their interviews. I then asked them to read over and sign the IRB-approved consent form. As applicable, I answered questions about the form before signing it myself. I also made it clear that if, at any point, they wished to stop the interview or withdraw from the study, they had only to let me know and I would return their signed forms to them. I also assured them that the results would
remain confidential as only I would know their real names and contact information. To ensure this, they were assigned pseudonyms (after rejecting my offer to pick their own) and are referred to them in this chapter and elsewhere by these names. Again, I assigned first and last names that are the same number of syllables as their own first and last names and attempted to use pseudonyms that reflect participants’ cultural backgrounds as applicable. All interviews and consent forms are now stored in a locked file cabinet to which only I have access.

At the conclusion of interviews, I asked participants if they had any questions and whether they felt uncomfortable with anything they said. I also reminded them that my contact information, as well as that of the IRB, was included on their copy of the consent form. For participants interested in receiving results, I gathered contact information so that I can send them my data once the study is complete. A number of participants, particularly those in the process of completing research of their own (graduate students) were very interested in seeing these results; it is also worth noting that several of these students were motivated to participate because they personally understand the difficulty of recruiting participants and/or feel research is important. Given that they self-selected to participate, it may be that this empathy or shared belief in the importance of research partially explains why 45% of my sample ended up being students in the process of completing master’s or doctoral programs.

Throughout the interview process, I transcribed interviews in their entirety to ensure I did not overly focus on one particular thing and miss something that seemed peripheral but could turn out to be significant. In completing the results section that follows the next sub-section, I again utilized thematic analysis in order to find recurrent patterns or themes in the data.

**Measures**

Interviews were semi-structured, ensuring that there would be enough data to answer the research questions while allowing participants to expand on their experiences and introduce new lines of inquiry as applicable. The interview guide fell into four broad categories: consent/confidentiality, background/demographic information, participants’ views of the meaning of marriage and their anticipated marital naming practices, and, if they
planned to have children, how they intended to raise them and what/whose last names they anticipated giving them.

After obtaining consent, I asked background questions that I hoped would give me some insight into the “type” of people that make particular decisions (for instance, does their label as traditional or non-traditional lead to a traditional or non-traditional marital naming practice?). I then asked questions about their views on marriage before specifically focusing on whether they intended to comply with patronymy or deviate from it in some way. I ended by asking them whether they planned to have children, and, if so, their views on how they should be raised (for instance, should a parent stay home, and, if so, which one) and which/whose name(s) the children would be given.

The interview guide with my original 24 questions is located in Appendix B. It is worth noting here, however, that I rarely asked all the questions. As I proceeded, I discovered that participants often answered questions before I asked them or had little to say on a topic. As such, I excluded some questions when it was obvious they were not applicable and often included additional questions (such as how couples split housework) to gain more data when it became apparent that some people had little to say about patronymy. This is explored further in my results.

The goal of this study was to answer four research questions: (1) How do couples define marriage (2) How do engaged couples discuss their marital naming options and for whom do they consider changing/keeping? (3) Do couples agree on naming decisions, do they compromise, and/or does this topic cause tension in their relationships? and (4) Are engaged couples willing to consider non-traditional naming options for their children (if they have any)?

Given my prior work (Study 1), I wanted to know how and, indeed, if, couples discuss their naming options. Prior work has examined the reasons womyn keep or change their names, but no scholarship has focused on couples in the process of making these decisions, something Suter (2004) notes is crucial. Certainly work that retrospectively examines the reasoning and meaning behind certain practices can be valuable, but it is also important to note that 20 years after one is married, it may be difficult to remember whether a conversation about the decision ever occurred. In Study 1, for instance, I often found that participants could not remember the year they married; if they could not remember this, then
it is a stretch to hope that anyone will remember all the specifics of whether conversations with one’s partner occurred and if and how they affected one’s decision. Also, given that research has largely ignored men’s experiences, I wanted to see if any men considered non-traditional options for themselves and whether they were open to such options for their future wives and/or children. This particular information is extremely important because it better allows us to understand how patronymy functions and whether progress is occurring, something I want to ensure I am open to as a feminist scholar studying gender oppression.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

This study provided a wealth of data, much of which I did not expect to discover. It was much easier to find recurrent patterns and themes in Study 1 because all the participants kept their names and could speak to that experience. In Study 2, the only obvious commonality the 20 participants share is their status as engaged individuals. In conducting thematic analysis and interpreting the data from these 10 interviews, I had to be much more diligent about looking beneath the surface and attempting to make connections because the participants often jumped around from topic to topic in interviews and sometimes gave contradictory answers, especially in cases where their responses to my questions upset their fiancés (something that I explore a bit below).

Additionally, as I mentioned in the previous section, I sometimes discovered that participants’ answers to my questions were overly simplistic, meaning that without further probing some interviews would have been completed within a mere 15 minutes. For instance, in my first interview, Sally Russell said she had decided to change her name with no discussion of alternatives, and both partners clearly indicated any decision other than a traditional one was immoral. This eliminated the need for me to ask questions about whether they would be open to non-traditional naming options for their children and made their answers to many of my questions apparent. As I result, I added questions about their division of household labor and attempted to probe further into why they feel womyn’s marital naming practices tie into morality, something that is explored in the second theme below.

In short, these interviews were often quite heterogeneous, and interpreting them was a somewhat chaotic process as a result. This is not surprising given that these individuals are in the process of forming (marital/couple) values and that their thought processes and value
systems are not necessarily complete. This very chaos provides insight into patronymy itself as clear connections were made between naming and patriarchal definitions of marriage and family, something that helps explain why patronymy is perpetuated even by people who identify as liberal, even by couples who attempt to split their housework evenly, even by people who deeply love each other and respect one another’s ideologies in nearly every other arena.

While I attempt to let the participants speak for themselves and liberally quote them in this chapter, I do so while interpreting their experiences and perceptions through a scholarly lens and situating the data amongst other literature on patronymy and marriage and the family. Delving beneath the surface and exploring how participants perceive patronymy, looking specifically at the ways they adhere to it unquestionably and the ways they see it as problematic and/or plan to deviate from it, provides crucial insight into why patronymy remains a social norm and whether we can expect to see that change in the near future.

In the sections that follow, I categorize the results into two themes: (1) Marriage and (2) Static Views of Families. Throughout these major sections and the sub-themes under each, I clearly indicate how the themes connect to and answer my research questions.

**Marriage**

Before delving into their particular views on patronymy and their marital naming plans, I asked participants to define marriage and to tell me why they wanted to get married. I wanted to understand how they viewed marriage and their engagement rather than assume I understood their reasoning. I also wanted to see if partners shared the same views on marriage, something that I believed to be of import in understanding these couples’ values and how they relate to one another. This also permitted individuals and couples to feel more at ease and to open up before I asked questions about patronymy, something I feel led them to be more open about their particular views regardless of whether they felt I shared them (important since this is a touchy topic for some). Below, I categorize their views on marriage and their reasons for wanting to marry into three sub-themes: (1) love and partnership, (2) social recognition, and (3) creating family. Most couples fit within at least two of these categories and many within all three. Collectively, these sub-themes correlate to my first research question, “How do couples define marriage?”
LOVE AND PARTNERSHIP

Not unexpectedly, all 20 participants (100%) said their affection for one another was an important reason they became engaged. They gave a number of different definitions of marriage that speak to this, some of which are shared below. David Freedman described marriage as:

An intended life-long friendship between two people with like minds, hopefully with somebody who complements you and makes you better, improves on your weaknesses and who kind of balances you.

Luis Ramirez said:

To me, it’s a symbol, like when I think of us in the future, I think of us as an elderly couple, who are only going to get separated by death.

Emily Alpay noted:

I’d define marriage as a partnership between two people, so basically you have two lives come together to be one. Instead of one and one makes two, it’s more like one and one makes one. You share everything. You’re literally bringing your lives together and making a life together, so you have to have a very strong partnership and a lot of the same core values.

Ethan Jabol commented:

I would consider it two separate lives coming together as one to pretty much start a new life almost as if you were reborn.

Each of these definitions is representative of the larger sample insofar as participants all tended to define marriage as a partnership with someone about whom they deeply cared and with whom they shared values.

While the interviews tended to be quite different in other areas, I do want to note that couples tended to give similar definitions of marriage and to view it more romantically. It is also worth noting that the idea of “two becoming one” came up often and was a traditional view most shared. This notion, while romantic, depends upon the successful merging of two people’s lives and goes back to Biblical views of marriage where “man and wife” become “one flesh.” Because two autonomous people cannot literally become one or share every value, this conception of marriage is dependent on compromise. I wondered again who compromises in marriages today since womyn have historically been expected to be “more married” (Lassiter, 1983), to be the ones who give in when there is conflict or tension in their relationships. I was interested to see if this was the case for the couples I interviewed.
SOCIAL RECOGNITION

A second, and often primary, reason couples decided to marry was for social recognition. To many participants, marriage was an outward sign of their commitment, much like wearing a wedding band. When I interviewed Megan Payne and Sebastian Townsend, they explained that since they had already lived together for several years, they had already been “kind of married” for some time. As such, Megan said, “The marriage kind of seals it for the rest of your family and friends.” Sebastian added, “It’s mostly for everybody else.” Megan went on to explain, “It’s like, ‘We’re official now.’” This couple is excited to get married, but they see marriage more in terms of something that leads to social recognition of their commitment to one another.

Carson Frang commented, “I think of it [marriage] more as a formalization of your commitment to someone and just putting them first in your life, something you would probably have done already, but just making it clear to the world.” Carson’s comment offers insight: people might explain their decision to marry in romantic terms, but one of the main reasons people in relationships marry is to gain social recognition and approval of their relationships, to show the rest of the world that they are committed to one another. In marrying, they separate themselves from other couples who may love each other but, in not marrying, lack society’s recognition of their relationships. This connects to participants, 100% of whom plan to wear wedding bands, since this traditional jewelry nonverbally communicates to the rest of the world that they are married and “off the market” as Maddy Tate put it.

CREATING FAMILY

In a society that promotes marriage as the goal of healthy individuals (who are assumed to be heterosexual and able to marry) and which provides strong normative support for individuals who marry, marriage is often perceived of as the logical conclusion of a successful dating venture, supposedly the goal of any normal individual. Sally Russell, for instance, said:

I’ve been dating since 1987 and by now, I should know what I want and what I’m looking for in a person, and he [Daniel Wallace] met all of those. All the boxes were checked, so that was good.
Vanessa Lizerson spoke to this logical succession of events. She said:

- I believe in monogamy, so it’s sort of like engaged, married, this is the man I want to be with for the rest of my life.

None of the participants critiqued the idea that marrying is the only rational choice for people in a good relationship, and all believed marriage most strongly symbolized commitment between two individuals. Here, at least, there was no critique of traditional conceptions of marriage.

Beyond this was the traditional patriarchal view of marriage as a method for establishing a family. Eight of the ten couples (80%) definitely wanted children and the other two were considering the possibility. For many, their decision to marry centered on the idea that they would then have children and establish nuclear families. For instance, Maren Adler and Aaron Dobrin decided to marry after 12 years of dating because they had begun discussing the possibility of having children, and, as Aaron explained, marriage “seemed like the first step in that direction.” Aaron defined marriage as “a commitment to be together, to raise children and a family together.” Others agreed with this definition. Megan Payne commented that marriage “kind of stabilizes things for when you have kids,” and Katelyn Baclayan defined marriage as “building a family and a life together.”

The notion of creating family through marriage is very traditional, and regardless of their political or other ideologies, participants seemed to adhere to the idea of one right or natural succession of events: dating, engagement, marriage, children. Given their desire to gain social recognition of their relationships and given that there is still strong normative support for having children after marriage (and stigma surrounding out-of-wedlock children), their lack of critique is not unexpected. After all, not many study marriage (as I do), and each of these participants is firmly grounded in a culture that tells them that there is a “normal” life course. My goal here is not to say that marriage is problematic in itself. Obviously other scholars have offered extensive critiques of marriage as a patriarchal institution, and it is not my intention to say that these couples should not want to marry or see it as a way to legitimate their relationships. I myself am married and believe in the possibility of changing the institution of marriage for the better. On the other hand, I do want to point out that people’s desires are formed by the societies in which they live. In a world in which marriage was not normative, for instance, it seems unlikely that a couple that had successfully and
happily dated and lived together for 12 years would feel the need to marry in order to have children. Additionally, the idea of marriage being the way people form families leads directly to the belief that a family is formed when two people marry and become one, in which case the man remains a man and the woman becomes “Mrs. His Name.” In short, this view of marriage validates the idea of the need for one family name, in most societies, the man’s. I saw this most clearly in my interview with Maren Adler and Aaron Dobrin where she explained, “I thought I would change my name. I just feel that as a family, I mean the whole point of marriage is to be a family.” For Maren, a “family” shares a name, and this view leads to the sort of hostility that keepers in Study 1 faced. I explore this further in theme two below.

**Static Views of Family**

In the last 50 years, there has been some shift in terms of men and women’s roles in society. Women have made progress in many areas including higher education and the workforce. Today, there is less perception that a woman’s place is to be a housewife, for instance, and many women pursue careers and expect their husbands’ to take on more domestic and childcare responsibilities. My participants reflect these shifts as eight of the ten couples (80%) felt they did or would (five couples do not live together) share household labor. There was also a belief that men and women would share, although not necessarily equally, childcare and that this did not need to be the sole responsibility of women/mothers.

Of note, six of the couples made roughly equal incomes. Out of these, two couples were comprised of doctoral students in STEM fields with a third couple comprised of a doctoral student in a STEM field engaged to doctoral student in a social science field where neither partner’s income exceeded $30,000. One couple was comprised of a master’s student making little income and a male partner between jobs (who obviously made nothing at the time of interview); the other two couples made roughly equal pay, although that amount differed from under $30,000 per person in one couple to roughly $90,000 each for another. I note this because Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) report that equal pay (or women making more than their male spouses) is a precondition for egalitarian marriages. However, given that participants are not married, do not necessarily live together, do not have children at the moment, and self-reported with their partners present, it is impossible to predict
whether their beliefs that they share or will share housework will correlate to actual practice in the future. Moreover, none of the 10 men identified as feminist, and in a study that looked at married male and female feminists, Blaiseur and Allen (1995) noted that even people deeply committed to feminist ideology, aware of gender injustice and how marriage and motherhood can be oppressive institutions for womyn, struggle to put their ideology into action. While many of the participants certainly advocated more egalitarian ideology, such as the belief that men and womyn should be equal, they often did not connect this to (some of) their beliefs about appropriate family formations such as the notions that the most legitimate relationships are those between married individuals, that a “good mother” should stay at home with her children, or that a committed wife should take her husband’s name. Thus, while I believe these couples reflect the progress that has occurred over the last several decades, I believe that much of their conceptualization of marriage and family demonstrates less change that might be expected. I explore this in the three sub-themes below: (1) marriage versus pseudo-marriage, (2) men’s struggles: masculinity in modern times, and (3) his children.

**Marriage versus Pseudo-Marriage**

Today, cohabitation is so common that one traditional couple felt that their choice not to live together before marriage made them “non-traditional in today’s terms.” Altogether, five (50%) couples did not live together before marriage, something that each of them noted to be deliberate and of import to them.

When I asked Carson Frang why he and Heng Chang had decided to marry, he said:

I guess we just kind of reached that point where we were very comfortable with each other, and we didn’t want that stagnation point where you’re in that kind of pseudo-marriage for a long time where you are kind of living together but you’re not completely committed. I have some friends who keep floating on in that type of business.

Carson’s statement startled me because his belief in the superiority of marriage over living together seemed very much at odds with what I would expect for a couple that is politically liberal and agnostic. Here, his belief in marriage over cohabitation had nothing to do with religion but instead centered on a traditional view that marriage proves commitment more than cohabitation, which is often perceived as transient. Of the other four couples
choosing not to cohabitate before marriage, two identify as agnostic or not religious and
share Carson and Heng’s more traditional views on this particular aspect of marriage.

For the other two couples, their decision not to live together before marriage very
much centers on their religious beliefs. Both are Christian and traditional. In the case of Leah
Leviah and Ian Brown, they actually just moved in together due to Ian’s house going into
escrow, but they brought in a roommate to make the situation acceptable. Although they were
about to marry at the time of interview, and not moving in together was not practical given
Leah had already found their new home and Ian had nowhere else to go, Ian was not pleased
with the situation. Leah said, “I personally thought it was more practical than he did,” to
which Ian responded, “In general, I would sacrifice ease to adhere to tradition,” making clear
that tradition means a lot to him. Sally Wallace and Daniel Russell too felt that tradition and
religion were worth occasional frustration or impracticality. It was essential to them that they
not live together before marriage, something they see as more likely to lead to a successful
and enduring relationship.

While I am not attempting to compare the quality of marital and non-marital
relationships, I think it is worth noting that many people adhere to traditional notions of
marriage even when they are not traditional in terms of religion or politics, something of
which scholars studying marriage should be aware. Whether they lived together or not, many
couples shared traditional notions of family and marriage, something that I explore in the
sub-theme below entitled men’s struggles: masculinity in modern times. The findings in this
sub-theme correlate to research questions two and three, “How do engaged couples discuss
their marital naming options and for whom do they consider changing/keeping?” and “Do
couples agree on naming decisions, do they compromise, and/or does this topic cause tension
in their relationships?”

**MEN’S STRUGGLES: MASCU LINITY IN
MODERN TIMES**

We live in a time of both progress and increasing conservatism (Cotter et al., 2007;
Suter, 2004). Suter (2004) said scholars should consider how this paradox affects womyn’s
marital naming practices, but I actually found that this contradiction creates quite a quandary
for men as well. On the one hand, none of these men felt, as their grandfathers and perhaps
fathers may have, that womyn are incapable of success or that they should not work. Many of
the men were engaged to highly educated, independent womyn, and there seemed to be some appreciation of this. For instance, Luis Ramirez said of his fiancé Emily Alpay, “She doesn’t need me, she wants me. I feel like it’s important that we don’t need each other; we want to be with each other.” His statement demonstrates some transformation of the institution of marriage insofar as he respects Emily more because he sees her as a capable, autonomous being in her own right.

On the other hand, Luis often joked about wanting to stay home and take care of future children. He has a son from a previous relationship and because he was not an involved parent, he yearns to be more involved in rearing children should he and Emily have them in the future. I liberally quote from the interview with the two of them below because I think this interview is very representative of the paradox that I found throughout the interviews.

When I asked Emily and Luis if they would want one of them to stay home and care for future children, Luis responded:

> It would be important to me. I wouldn’t want to work, and I’d stay home and raise the kids. Just kidding once again. I do want to share that, the way I feel it should be for both parents. […] If we do have kids, I would want to be a big part of their life because I never got to experience that being a father. So, yes, I would like to be 50-50.

Emily asked him if he thought they could split things evenly if he worked full time, to which he said:

> Yeah, I would like to work full time. I feel it is my, I don’t know if it’s the whole macho thing, but I’ve been raised that the man provides. You know, at the same time, if she worked, and she made more money than I did, I wouldn’t be bitter or hurt, as long as I feel like I’m doing my part and working fulltime.

Emily remarked, surprised, “See I didn’t know that. Because you always joke around that you’d want to be home, I always thought you were serious.” Luis explained:

> I always joke around. I mean who wouldn’t want to stay home? But in reality, if I’m getting married, I’m going to be the head of the household, I do need to work. It’s my responsibility. And I want to make sure my son gets those values. Your job as a man is to provide.

This exchange is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. First, it was quite clear that Emily and Luis had not discussed many of my questions prior to the interview, and only in hearing his responses did Emily realize that Luis’s frequent jokes about wanting to stay home should they have children did not represent an actual intention to do so. This is significant
because it seems that many couples, even those quite close to their wedding dates, are not discussing important topics prior to getting married, something that seems likely to lead to conflict later.

Perhaps more interesting, I believe Emily was quite relieved to discover Luis planned to work full time. It was clear she wanted to be the one to care for her children, and her ability to do so depends on one of them bringing in sufficient income to care for the family. Of course, not all womyn share Emily’s desire to stay home after the birth of children, but it is hard to see change if only one parent can logistically stay at home with children (in order for children to have health insurance, for instance). Moreover, Luis’s jokes about staying home made me wonder how many men today yearn to more evenly share childcare, even to stay home with their children as so many womyn do, but do not because they are raised to believe that the definition of a man and good husband/father is one who provides. Plus, we see here the idea of fathers having a responsibility to model values for their sons, in this case hegemonic definitions of masculinity—patriarchal notions of fathers as providers and heads of the household.

Two other men joked about staying home as well (meaning this independently came up in 30% of interviews). As is usually the case when one doesn’t know people well, it was difficult to tell whether their jokes represent actual desires to stay home and are a way to cope with non-normative desires or if they in fact just found the subject funny. Either way, it is problematic that men either view other men or themselves staying home as humorous or do wish they could be primary caregivers for their children but feel that it is incompatible with being a good husband and father—a man that provides, that is, as Luis said, the head of the household.

The phrase “head of household” came up in one other interview. Daniel Wallace said:

When I say that at work, the feminists thing, no I believe head of household, stuff like that, it doesn’t mean, like when I say, “Oh, yeah, I’m going to make decisions for the family,” I think a lot of people take it like, “well, you’re controlling or you’re that,” as opposed to understanding that it’s a group thing, but when it comes down to a final decision, the man may make the difference. I mean it doesn’t mean you aren’t going to take opinions into account.

Of course, this couple was in no way representative of my sample at large. However, I do want to make note of them because I have discussed more subtle forms of gender oppression throughout this work, and here we clearly see a man who states that his role as a man and
husband is to make final decisions, although he will take his wife’s opinions into account. He also believes that womyn should take care of the home and that, while womyn should be free to work if they wish, the domestic sphere is their responsibility, although he added that he helps. Oddly, given my background and my internal objections to such blatant sexism, I liked him; it was clear that he and his fiancée shared this much more traditional and perhaps not so outdated ideology. Nothing he said or expected upset her; after years of dating, she was glad to have found someone who matched her so well. And this couple, while not reflective of the sample as a whole, was not alone in their more sexist practices.

Despite their much less traditional ideology and lack of religious background (in contrast to Sally and Daniel’s Christian tenets), Hunter Hart and Vanessa Lizerson split housework in much the same way. Their interview was quite perplexing insofar as things simply did not seem to add up at first. In response to my question as to whether he believes womyn should do more domestic work, Hunter said:

I kind of look at it like yeah, the housework should be done by the girl if she’s home all day, but I wouldn’t expect her to go outside and dig a trench. In the same token, I need to do the dishes every once in a while; they’re my dishes too, they’re my laundry too. I get the house just as dirty as she does.

In his case, he, like Daniel, helps with the occasional housework and does the more traditional outside work such as maintaining the yard. Of course, this means that Vanessa does all the inside work which needs to be done on a more daily basis.

Initially, given his response, I assumed that Vanessa did more work because she was home more, but Hunter admitted they work similar hours (full time). Here, she literally takes the second shift, and what finally became clear was that his belief was that she should work more because she makes less money. In comparison to his $70-100,000 annual earnings, Vanessa earns about $15,000 a year. She might work the same amount of hours, but there is some expectation that she must contribute more domestically since she contributes less monetarily. This was initially perplexing because Hunter joked so much throughout the interview in response to my questions about naming, child care, and housework, that it was difficult to understand his mindset. He was a very friendly man, and perhaps this explains the roundabout way he justified their division of housework. In 2010, fewer men are open about blatantly sexist attitudes, so it is difficult to get honest answers without probing questions and looking beneath the surface. This is probably exacerbated by the fact that I am a womon in a
womyn’s studies department, and there is probably some expectation that I do not approve of such sexism. Unlike Daniel’s fiancée, Sally Russell, who identified as anti-feminist, Vanessa identified as feminist. It is somewhat surprising that she is engaged to marry someone whose expectations and beliefs seem very much at odds with feminism, but as I found throughout the interviews, couples do not always share ideologies, and many men and womyn have more traditional beliefs when it comes to marriage and family—beliefs that do not necessarily carry over into other areas of their lives.

This was particularly clear when it came to patronymy, a topic that many men felt uncomfortable discussing. Perhaps the most apparent case of this tension between men being more liberal or progressive in much of their ideology but adhering to a very traditional definition of family came up in my interview with Katelyn Baclayan and Ethan Jabol. The couple clearly respected one another, split housework evenly, and shared a more gender egalitarian ideology; in fact, given that Ethan works from home, it was very likely that he would spend more time at home with their children. When I asked about patronymy, Ethan said he wanted them to share a name and he preferred they share his own. I asked him why this was and whether it would be acceptable for them to take Katelyn’s name instead if this was her desire. Ethan responded:

I mean I may sound like I’m unreasonable, but it’s almost emasculating a little bit for a man to just have his name taken away even though, at the end of the day, if you break it down you can say that it’s just a name, but at the same time the role I foresee myself playing [a role] in the family as a father, as someone to protect her when she needs it. And, again, I’m not saying she can’t take care of herself, but if the time ever did occur, I foresee something, that’s the image I project, a man. And she takes my name and we share together, and I’m pretty much, spreading myself almost.

In reviewing this passage, it is obvious that Ethan is aware that it is not fair to ask womyn to give up their names, but at the same time he sees taking his wife’s name as emasculating. Again, like with men staying home with their children, defying traditional family roles/values is incompatible with many of these men’s definitions of masculinity. In most areas, Ethan seems very progressive, but here, he cannot see beyond patriarchal definitions of his role as a husband and father. Even though he consciously knows that Katelyn is a womon capable of caring for herself, he lives in a society that tells him that his job as a man and as a husband is to protect her, and somehow all of this ties into an inability to see any valid alternative to patronymy.
This idea of hegemonic masculinity and definitions of good men as those who pass on their names came up in a total of seven (70%) of my interviews, sometimes more subtly and sometimes more bluntly. I should note that it is possible other interviewees felt similarly, but I did not probe if the topic did not arise. Additionally, this is a place where some male participants may have opened up more had I been a male interviewer and/or had they not known I kept my birth name after marriage. In a few interviews, this topic created some tension between men with these sorts of beliefs and womyn who could not comprehend them. In my interview with Leah Leviah and Ian Brown, Leah said that she was taking Ian’s name because, although she would like to take a second name (add his on to her own), “I think you have to pick your battles, and that’s just not one that’s, I mean I’d rather just pick another battle instead of starting off on that foot.”

Leah had some desire to keep her name but it was outweighed by a wish to avoid conflict. The conflict this would have caused became apparent in the conversation following my question to Ian about whether he would have minded if Leah had wanted to keep or hyphenate her name. Ian responded:

I, um, I always expected her to take my last name. We haven’t talked about it in tons of detail. I don’t know how I ultimately would have felt. I think, I think I feel like I’m making a huge commitment that she’s going to be the most important thing in my life and you know, I will, do anything for her and so, because it’s traditional, um, that’s not the reason I expect her to take it, but I feel it’s part of the equation that we’re each giving up something.

At this point, as clichéd as it doubtlessly sounds, the tension could have been cut with a knife. Leah, clearly upset, demanded, “What are you giving up?” Ian clarified, somewhat haltingly, “I’m, well, I should say I’m taking on responsibilities.” Leah, who recognized that this argument was irrational, asked caustically, “So do you get my last name then?,” to which Ian responded, “You’re taking on responsibilities too, but I think we’re taking on different responsibilities.”

In the awkward silence that followed, I explained that 90 percent of U.S. womyn take their husbands’ names and that very few men consider alternatives. Leah interrupted me and said:

I think it would be great to be the Breviah family [merging their names]. I would almost rather him not care and me just take it rather than him care so much because maybe I’m contrary. I always expected I would take my husband’s name
until I got engaged, and then it’s kind of hard giving up your name because it’s symbolic of who you are up until that point.

Although Leah said that maybe she was contrary insofar as what upset her most was Ian’s unwillingness to consider anything other than patronymy, this made perfect sense to me. She could not understand his idea that they were taking on different responsibilities, but like in the case of Vanessa and Hunter, it seemed to me that this had something to do with money. As a lawyer, Ian makes much more than his fiancée (who is in a master’s program but will never make anything close to equal to his pay) and they both expect that she will stay home with future children. As such, he contributes much more financially and believes this different responsibility justifies his expectation that his wife should take his name. Of course, he never put this into words, and I doubt it is that simple, but it does seem to connect with Luis’s belief that men should provide and Daniel’s arguments that men are the head of the household and should make final decisions with their wives “cleaving” to them. Although Ian respects Leah and does not feel womyn should necessarily have to stay home with their children (though this is an expectation for his own wife) or hold other blatantly sexist beliefs, in this area, in his conceptualization of what it means to be a man, a husband, and a father, he cannot see beyond patronymy.

In the case of Maddy Tate and David Freedman, Maddy is hyphenating her name, something she said initially made David quite uncomfortable. He largely explained this in terms of simplicity, but much of it was a desire to adhere to traditional definitions of family. In fact, when I asked what the couple intended to do with their names, David laughingly responded, “I’m keeping my name.” In fact, in all 10 (100%) of the interviews, men either joked about non-traditional options for themselves or other men or expressed clearly that they would be uncomfortable changing their names. This varied from men who felt uncomfortable but were willing to consider non-traditional options for their wives to men who thought that anything other than patronymy was ridiculous and emasculating. It is significant that all 10 men view changing their names as a joke, emasculating, or a stripping of their identity but tend to see no problem with womyn changing their names (whether or not they necessarily expect that). When I asked Maddy if she and David had discussed him hyphenating his name along with her, she responded:

Well, I’d assume he would not want to do that, so I didn’t even…I knew it was already, that he was already bothered that I wanted to hyphenate rather than take
his name completely, so I mean that was already a stretch, so I didn’t want to argue about something else. It’s not the traditional way to do it, and also I have a brother who can kind of, hopefully, carry on the family name I guess. But no we definitely did not discuss that.

Not surprisingly, when I asked David how he would have felt if Maddy had wanted to keep her name rather than hyphenate he said:

I think we’d have to come to some sort of compromise. Because it’s like, you’re joining, and you have to have some sort of common name.

As I explained in theme one, the idea of family centers around the notion that a family must share a name—hence the notion of a “family name,” a phrase I try to avoid precisely because it perpetuates the belief that to be a family one partner must take the other’s name, something that almost always leads to patronymy as the only legitimate choice. Before looking more at how notions of family names and the institution of motherhood limit womyn’s options to keep their names, I do want to point out that David expected Maddy to compromise. And this is something she did implicitly in not asking him to hyphenate although she thought that would be a nice option; just like Leah, she did not want to push the envelope too far. When it came down to it, many of the men expected their fiancées to bend when it came to this topic, and all the compromise came from womyn. (There was no consideration of non-traditional options for men, and the belief that the family had to share a name, meant that womyn had to give in.) Perhaps it cannot be called compromise when men get their way without giving anything up, so in this case, it is more of a sacrifice—of identity or happiness—on womyn’s part.

**His Children**

This sub-theme correlates to my fourth research question, “Are engaged couples willing to consider non-traditional naming options for their children (if they have any)?” to which I largely discovered this was not even a topic of discussion. I begin by discussing the three couples who were considering, although somewhat tentatively, non-traditional naming options for their children before moving into a discussion of how this topic rarely comes up for womyn due to institutionalized motherhood and conceptions of families as people who share one name.

Overall, seven (70% of the couples) of the participants planned to take their husbands’ names at marriage. In this category, I include two womyn who plan to add their
husbands’ names to their own but use their husband’s name socially. As I explained in the literature review, a name on a birth certificate or license means nothing if no one knows it, and regular use of one’s husband’s name falls into traditional practice. In the case of the other three womyn, two planned to hyphenate and one to keep her name.

In three cases (30%), womyn were considering non-traditional options for their children. One of these cases was unique insofar as Luis Ramirez expected his and Emily Alpay’s children to have both names because this was normative in Columbian culture; it was not, therefore, non-traditional for him. Moreover, Emily is still somewhat uncomfortable with the notion of adding on a name rather than just changing hers as everyone in her family has taken their husbands’ names. Admittedly, it was interesting to see the idea of making a non-traditional naming choice come from a man utilizing an alternative cultural lens; this may be something future scholars may want to study.

As Emily pointed out, however, Luis only signed one of his two names, and although Emily will probably add Luis’s name and their children will probably have both parents’ names, it was clear that U.S. cultural values had rubbed off on Luis. In explaining his use of one name, Luis admitted to being “Americanized.” While symbolically non-traditional, their naming practice for their child is likely to adhere more to patronymy than to Columbian culture; even there, though, the mother’s name is dropped when a child marries and the father’s name alone is carried on.

In a second case, Vanessa Lizerson’s desire to hyphenate her child’s name (and her own) is something that makes her fiancé, Hunter Hart, very uncomfortable and edgy. He said, “We haven’t really hashed it out yet.” Jokingly, he added, “It’s going to get messy when we do.” From my research on this topic, womyn tend to compromise. Vanessa really wants to see her family name passed on due to its uniqueness and the feeling that it is “dying out.” However, only time will tell if she will be like most other womyn and give in or if she will stand firm and insist in sharing a name with her children. Given that she does all the housework unquestionably and that Hunter became so agitated in discussing this topic, I have to admit I am doubtful that her children will end up with hyphenated names.

The final case of a couple planning something different than the norm for their children was quite unique and somewhat hopeful as it was the only case that seemed truly non-traditional. Heng Chang and Carson Frang were very liberal compared to the other
couples I interviewed. Both were quite laid back. While they admitted to being traditional in some aspects, they seemed very non-traditional to me. For instance, they both had engagement rings, something Carson said annoyed people who found this deviation from the traditional unacceptable. He commented, very laid back, “We’re just bulldozing a few expectations.”

Not only was Carson completely fine with (and even somewhat expectant of) Heng keeping her name (which is traditional in her Chinese culture) but the couple planned something non-traditional for their children, although they had not decided what that would be quite yet. Heng said, “I think if we have two kids, we can name one one way and one the other way.” Carson responded, “Yeah, that sounds cool. Then both family names go on.” When I asked whether he would be upset if they only had one child and it had Heng’s name, Carson said, “No, I don’t think so. In the end, a name is just a name, it seems kind of secondary to it’s your child and you’re influencing its life and that’s the important part.”

His idea that their child’s name was “just a name” was completely radical and somewhat unrealistic, something about which Heng quickly commented. She explained that while they had wanted to have a more non-traditional destination wedding, Carson’s traditional, Catholic father had insisted on a more traditional ceremony. She said, “Now we’re conforming.” While Carson laxly said that he did not think giving a child Heng’s name would be “that big of a deal,” Heng disagreed, noting that his father would be very upset. She said, offering me some insight into how patronymy is perpetuated by even the most liberal people, “I say we take the path of least resistance when it comes to naming our child.”

Although Carson responded that they had to name their children according to their own desires and that “making a few people grumbly isn’t that big of a deal,” I could see that Heng thought he was being impractical. Sadly, I agreed. He clearly had little understanding of the investment people have in the perpetuation of patronymy, and Heng’s statement about taking the path of least resistance was amazingly representative of this sample insofar as womyn were rarely willing to cause upset by insisting that they keep their names or pass them on when this distressed others (something that led to situational use in Study 1). Perhaps this is related to the fact that girls are socialized to give in to please others (Chrisler, 2008). I do not want to say there is no hope, however. Carson, not socialized to compromise and accommodate when conflict arises, may not realize the extent of resistance he will face
in deviating from patronymy, but his belief that they should name their children what they want is crucial if we are to see change. In fact, it may be that change depends on men like Carson’s more liberal ideologies insofar as men, with their greater privilege, have more ability to challenge the system and instigate change, something womyn are either unwilling or unable to do in general when it comes to this patriarchal practice.

In the seven cases where people planned to give their children the fathers’ names, it was clear that institutionalized motherhood serves as a major controlling force of womyn, something I noted in my findings in the previous chapter. For instance, although Maddy Tate thought it would be nice if her children had her name, she did not even bring this topic up to David Freedman. This stems from two things: (1) Although she likes her name, she thinks “that sounds weird,” and (2) she knows David is somewhat upset about her desire to hyphenate her own name and does not want to upset him further by asking him to hyphenate their children’s names. It is very problematic that Maddy feels weird in liking her name, but it is not surprising. In a culture that tells womyn they are supposed to take their husbands’ names, she feels like she is strange for wanting to keep her name, and this prevents her from feeling she has the right to upset David by insisting on something it seems other womyn do not even consider.

In fact, out of the 10 couples in this study, six (60%) did not even consider anything other than traditional naming practices for their children, so Maddy’s feeling that she is odd in wanting her children to share some part of her name makes sense. Truthfully, it was quite difficult to talk to most couples about patronymy because they had spent almost no time considering non-traditional options (for themselves or their children). Much of this traces back to the idea of a family formed by individuals with one name, the man’s. Maren Adler, who felt the whole point of marriage was to be a family and hence did not consider keeping her name, explained:

I mean two names is confusing, and it doesn’t last, so it wouldn’t make a difference in that I would keep my name for the next generation. So one name should be chosen, and the tradition, as I said we’re sort of traditionalists, is to choose the man’s name.

Interestingly, Maren is a doctoral student and falls into the category of womyn more likely to keep their names, but she does not even consider this. What is significant here is that her lack of consideration is directly connected to the institution of motherhood. She feels that
a family should share a name, and she feels that giving her child her name as well as Aaron’s will make no difference since it will not continue into the next generation. Of course, she does not read literature on the topic, so she is unaware of the idea of biphenation, or a system for ensuring that womyn’s names are not automatically dropped with the next generation when couples choose non-traditional naming options for their children (Stodder, 1998). Our society has ensured that womyn are unaware of the viability and perhaps superiority of non-traditional practices in continuing male and female lineages.

Emily Alpay spoke to the inability of society to comprehend anything other than patronymy. She said it’s “kind of weird” for womyn to keep their names. She said:

I mean my family is the Alpay family, so we’re going to be the Ramirez family. I just don’t understand. What do they call themselves, the Jones-Smith family? I don’t know what they call themselves and then are they two separate [rather than one family unit]? I think, for me, it’s another way of showing that we’re one unit. But that’s just my personal preference. Maybe they’ve worked it out in their own way that they’re still committed and whatever, but for me it’s one way for us to identify ourselves as a unit.

Here, it is not that Emily feels that womyn should not keep their names, she just cannot quite see them as normal and subtly questions their commitment to their husbands, something that occurred quite frequently. This stems directly from the notion that individuals are supposed to marry, have children, and form families with the same name. Her inability to fully consider nontraditional options, even though that is normative for her Columbian fiancé, stems from an inability to conceptualize two people with different names as a family.

This inability, common for my participants, leads directly to the perpetuation of patronymy, with little discussion of non-traditional naming practices for men, womyn, or children. This, along with couples’ almost unfailingly traditional views of marriage, provides little room for progress or deviation from traditional naming practices. The path of least resistance is the one most often chosen, with people often blind to the fact that other paths, though perhaps relatively untraveled, exist.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Today, a small but growing number of scholars pursue research on patronymy. Prior work provides a great deal of information, but there are notable gaps in the scholarship on this topic. I attempted to fill these gaps by exploring the experiences of keepers, as well as by investigating the types of conversations engaged couples (men and womyn) have about patronymy and/or alternatives. The two previous chapters detailed the results of two studies I conducted to better understand patronymy and to contextualize it in today’s paradoxically progressive and conservative society (Suter, 2004). In this chapter, I connect these two studies and discuss the implications of my findings. In doing so, I attempt to address one final gap in previous work: the lack of theoretical exploration of patronymy. While, for instance, scholars recognize that womyn’s marital naming practices “can be understood as a barometer of gender ideology and women’s standing in society” (Noack & Wiik, 2008, p. 517), little effort has been made to explore connections between patronymy (and defiance of it) and scholarship on gender, marriage, the family, and power. In this chapter, I draw from feminist and sociological work to build a framework for perceiving and exploring patronymy as a cultural norm that continues to seamlessly perpetuate gender oppression among even the most liberal people.

Given that much of this work discusses the problematic nature of patronymy, it is important to begin with an exploration of why it goes relatively unchallenged despite widespread belief (or at least articulation) that gender inequality is unacceptable. We see public outcries against discrimination in the workplace and higher education, for instance, but patronymy, a case where one sex is awarded permanent names and another expected to give them up (Vahed, 1994), produces no such outrage (Mills, 2003). In fact, as Study 2 demonstrated, it does not even produce a great deal of discussion amongst engaged couples and certainly not the kind of intense debate that would occur if people aptly saw this as a site of male privilege. In fact, one of my most notable findings was that the liberal and agnostic
people I interviewed in Study 2 were just as likely to define marriage and family in
traditional ways as people who were very religious and conservative. They may have been
more open to ideas such as sharing housework more evenly, but all 10 couples fell into at
least one of the following “traditional” categories: (1) they believed in the superiority of
marriage over cohabitation, (2) they believed that people should not live together before
marriage, (3) they felt that families should share a name, (4) they defined marriage in terms
of the formation of a family (having children after marriage), and/or (5) they believed
womyn were more naturally suited to childcare, even if they planned to try to share
parenting.

As such, even people who clearly articulate more gender-egalitarian values outside of
the domain of the family have more traditional, and, yes, gendered views of marriage and the
family. Of course, people’s views, beliefs, and values are not just gendered here, but, as
Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) explain, gender is most obvious in families and
intimate relationships where it is seen “ideologically as a reasonable and legitimate basis for
the distribution of rights, power, privilege, and responsibilities” (p. 23). The reason
patronymy is not seen as inequitable even by seemingly progressive people is because they
see gender as a reasonable basis for awarding permanent names. In short, the only reason
womyn are expected to give up their names at marriage is because they are womyn. This is
not seen as oppressive because people’s gendered lenses justify the idea that womyn, or more
aptly, wives, lose nothing in sacrificing their names at and identities at marriage, whereas
men would find this psychologically damaging (Intons-Peterson & Crawford, 1985) and, as
my work shows, emasculating.

The reason gender is perceived to be a legitimate basis for the distribution of rights,
power, and privilege in families has everything to do with people’s views of men and womyn
as essentially different and the meanings they infuse into being a “good” wife and husband.
As Risman (2004) explains, because men and womyn see themselves as situated differently
from the “opposite sex,” the social structure itself is rarely perceived as oppressive (p. 432).
Gender’s power hence rests upon the widely accepted belief that men and womyn are
essentially different and that such difference is a natural human condition rather than a man-
made creation (Blair-Loy, 2003; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Risman, 2004, 2009; West &
Zimmerman, 1987). Because people, for instance, falsely believe that men identify with their
names more than womyn (Intons-Peterson & Crawford, 1985), and because the cultural
definition of a family is a “unit” with one name (i.e.-the Jones family), people tend to see it
as natural that womyn should give up their names when they marry and to feel that womyn
who keep their names are being unnecessarily difficult and selfish (Crittenden, 1999). This
was apparent in interviews with engaged couples who tended to either question the
commitment of womyn who kept their names or wonder how two people with different
names formed a family without a shared name.

Removed from the institution of marriage with its normative definitions of what a
husband and a wife should be, the practice of males alone possessing the right to pass on
their names and maintain permanent identities throughout their lives becomes obviously and
unequivocally unjust. Because the practice cannot be removed from the institution of
marriage or divorced from the gender structure, however, few people perceive of patronymy
as oppressive, instead arguing that while men alone keep their names, this reflects a natural
difference between the sexes from which only unnatural womyn deviate. For this reason,
womyn who keep their names are seen as less committed to their marriages than traditional
womyn, something that is hardly shocking in a society where the very definition of “womon”
is often synonymous with selfless (Chrisler, 2008; Rich, 1976). This idea of womyn being
selfless, accommodating, and pleasing certainly shaped the womyn in my study who
constantly compromised to avoid tension. Keepers gave their children their fathers’ names or
hid their reactions to hyphenated names to avoid upsetting their husbands. Many engaged
womyn avoided the topic of non-traditional naming for themselves or future children (as in
the case of Leah and Maddy described in Study 2) in an effort to avoid upsetting their
fiancés. Komter (1989) explains that invisible power, or “the implicit values, beliefs, or
preconditions that precede behavior” (p. 207) “can be used to prevent issues from being
raised” (p. 189), something that is clear in the case of the numerous womyn in both studies
who did not bring up important issues or gave in as a result of fear of pushing their
husbands/partners away or creating tension in their relationships. They were taught early to
accommodate and “compromise,” and here ideas of what it means to be a good wife and
mother contribute to their avoidance of confrontation. After all, in a society where so few
womyn keep their names, it may seem radical and even unfair to ask a man to hyphenate
children’s names so both parents’ names are reflected or for a newly engaged womon to tell
her fiancé she is keeping her name, let alone ask him if he would consider taking her name or
hyphenating.

In the end, patronymy, as a cultural practice that perpetuates inequality, depends on womyn for its continuance. Womyn today have the legal right to keep their names after marriage, but only a tiny minority takes advantage of one of the last legal rights granted to womyn (Stannard, 1984). Yet power, far from being exercised through force, is most often endowed with legitimacy that rests on a set of cultural values, norms, and beliefs (Binder, Blair-Loy, Evans, Kwai, & Schudson, 2008, p. 9). I would argue that the cultural values, norms, and beliefs that lead to the perpetuation of patronymy with little question of it as an oppressive practice tie into the seemingly natural and taken-for-granted cultural assumptions that womyn should define themselves primarily as wives and mothers. Blair-Loy (2001, 2003) provides a useful theoretical framework through which to examine and make sense of the prevalence and import of patronymy as a largely unquestioned cultural practice. She (2001) develops the concept of schemas of devotion or “ordered, socially constructed, and taken-for-granted framework for understanding and evaluating self and society, for thinking and acting” that are “partially internalized” and which “specify that which we are invited or compelled to devote ourselves to, body and soul” (p. 689). Blair-Loy (2003) focuses on what she calls the work devotion and family devotion schemas, both of which endow womyn with different material and ideological resources. The family devotion schema, despite challenges from second wave feminism, is deeply entrenched, and, I believe, shapes the very meaning of what it means to be a “good” wife and mother, something that helps explain the actions of womyn in both studies—womyn who, in order to comply with definitions of good wives and/or mothers, sacrificed self again and again, “compromising” in ways men are never expected to do or who simply could not see an alternative to patronymy as viable.

Blair-Loy (2003) explains that the types of family relationships prescribed by this schema, such as womyn’s primary devotion to their families and belief in the necessity of intensive mothering, are typically perceived of as rooted in essential/biological sex differences that make “gendered family relationships seem natural, inevitable, and taken-for-granted” (p. 52). This traces back to Risman’s (2004) notation that because men and womyn fail to see themselves as similarly situated, differences are rarely perceived as oppressive. Patronymy is rendered natural by a cultural model that defines the very meaning of a worthy
life in terms of a calling toward family. Womyn symbolically prove their love for and commitment to their husbands by taking their names after marriage; when they have children, they pass on this name to their children, uniting the family under one name—the man’s. Womyn who keep their names, regardless of their reasons, clearly value self more than this schema permits (something we see in that all 18 keepers connected their names and identities, something that only men have historically been permitted to do) insofar as the rejection of men’s names implies some degree of rejection of normative conceptions of the institution of marriage that subsume womyn’s autonomous identities under their roles as wives and mothers.

Yet, it is problematic to simplistically assert that 90 percent of U.S. womyn unthinkingly conform to normative definitions of marriage and family. Certainly, it is possible that there are many legitimate reasons for some womyn to change their names after marriage. However, in a postgender society, more womyn and men would discuss patronymy and alternatives with an open mind, something that I largely did not see in my interviews with engaged couples. In such a society, it is doubtful that such a large percentage of womyn would all choose the same “option.” It seems more likely that some womyn would take their husbands’ names, some would hyphenate, some would create new names, and, more importantly, many men would take their wives’ names as well. If the creation of a family name remained desirable, gender would not be the criterion for deciding whose name to use, and, crucially, children would grow up with symbolic proof that men and womyn’s names and identities are equally as important—something that would be reflected in their own names (which would mean the eradication of a system where children are named after only one parent—their fathers). This is significant since Binion (1991) noted the reflection of both parents’ names and identities in children’s names instills children with a sense of justice at an early age.

Unfortunately, we do not live in such a postgender society, and, as Blair-Loy (2003) explains, family decisions, which may feel like and which are certainly labeled individual choices, “are actually highly structured by cultural schemas and the institutions they define” (p. 161). In this case, the family devotion schema defines the institution of marriage as one where good wives take their husbands’ names and good mothers give their children their fathers’ names. Thus, devotion schemas, like master narratives (Nelson, 2001) help create
individual desires and “powerfully reinforce interactional and institutional patterns” (p. 177). As a result, patronymy remains a cultural practice that is rarely perceived as oppressive; it is part of a family devotion schema that demands womyn define themselves first and foremost in terms of family. While womyn may feel that they take their husbands’ names because they want to, this desire cannot be divorced from the gender structure or the institutions of marriage and motherhood. Without claiming that womyn exhibit false consciousness, it is important for scholars to recognize and begin critiquing public discourse and scholarship that labels marital naming practices “free choice” without recognizing the constraints that make traditional practices seem normal and lead to a taken-for-granted definition of a good wife as a woman who, instead of selfishly prioritizing her own identity, defines herself first and foremost as a wife (and mother). As Wendell (1990) explains:

> Even where the circumstances present many choices, it is often the case that our knowledge, our ability to judge, and our desires have been so distorted and manipulated by social influences as to make a mockery of the idea that we choose freely. (p. 17-18)

Her point is that people’s desires are influenced and shaped by the society in which they live. In U.S. society, little girls grow up scribbling Mrs. His Name all over their notebooks. They are taught from birth that they are borrowing their names, that being married means taking their husbands’ names. It is little wonder, then, that so many womyn feel they are making a free choice when they change their names; likely, many womyn do “want” to change their names because they have been socialized to romantically feel married after they take their husbands’ names and look forward to buying monogrammed towels with their family’s initial (the letter of the male and now the female’s last name) after the wedding. Beyond this are the negative connotations of keepers as anti-family and uncommitted (Suter, 2004) and the hostility that keepers face. Name change is clearly not a free choice, and it needs to stop being framed as one.

Given the salience of the family devotion schema and the fact that people dislike facing the discomfort of questioning their own choices, it is no surprise that the keepers in my study viewed changers (so other womyn) as one of their greatest obstacles. Although they may not necessarily see their choices as resistant or feminist, keepers’ prioritization of self calls into question the naturalness of the gender structure with its assignment of permanent
names based on gender. Keepers, no matter how well society manages to contain them, challenge the inevitability of patronymy and imply the possibility of change.

Gerson and Peiss (1985) argue that studying the intersection of boundaries makes possible the unveiling of normative as well as deviant behaviors and permits an assessment of change and stasis in the system of gender relations. In challenging normative beliefs that families require womyn’s complete devotion to husbands and children, and thus a submersion of individual identity under roles as wives and mothers, keepers possess the potential to alter the status quo. If, however, their interaction with changers is one of antagonism, this potential may be undermined. For those with a strong sense that patronymy is unjust, this hostility may not result in as much stress; however, the womyn in my study, while articulating a feeling that patronymy is “archaic” and “odd,” tended to state that it was easiest to take the path of least resistance and use their husbands’ names in situations that resulted in hostility. As a result, as I explained in chapter three, 16 out of the 18 womyn (88%) situationally used their birth names (switching to their husbands’ names depending on context) as a way to mediate this hostility. This is important because if even the small group of womyn who dare to keep their names end up compliant with patronymy, there is relatively no change to the status quo/gender order. Not only does this mean that the number of keepers is actually far lower than 10 percent but it also means that today’s youth are less likely to see living examples of alternatives to patronymy, something that I think is crucial if we are to see greater numbers of young womyn keep their names at marriage.

Obviously keepers violate the family devotion schema, but, despite their violation, this schema remains salient for keepers as well; perhaps more effective than hostility, joking, and trivialization is people’s snide comments that they must not be as committed to their families, that they are not good wives and mothers. In a society where girls are socialized to believe that womyn are called to marriage and motherhood and where many womyn find (or are expected to find) fulfillment through this “calling,” there is little more painful than the message that their choice to keep their names, to separate themselves from their families, not only makes them selfish and unloving but also demonstrates that they are not good wives and mothers. Not only did the keepers tend to situationally use their husbands’ names most often in situations involving their children, but all but two of the mothers in the study gave their children the father’s name only, meaning that they alone possessed a different last name.
Most felt they had little choice to do otherwise. This is not surprising given past studies that indicate that while people might label themselves “tolerant” of nontraditional naming practices, they strongly feel that womyn with children should take their husbands’ names and give their children their fathers’ names (Scheuble & Johnson, 1998; Twenge, 1997), hence uniting the family under a man’s name. This traditional view of a family as a group of individuals that share a name—the husband’s—was clearly articulated by many of the engaged participants I interviewed, as well as demonstrated (as mentioned earlier) by womyn in that study who did not bring up the topic of non-traditional naming for themselves or their children because they felt their husbands would not be open to it and did not want to create conflict. Again, Komter’s (1989) theory of invisible power applies. As he writes, “The ideological underpinnings of inequality in marital power that are confirmed by means of invisible power do not reflect accidental beliefs and opinions, but express cultural and societal hegemonic values about womyn, men, and what is appropriate and natural” (p. 207). Here, according to hegemonic views of marriage/family, it is not natural or appropriate for womyn to keep their names, a belief that even keepers buy into when they feel they have already strayed so far from the norm that asking their husbands to hyphenate their children’s names would be madness.

Gerson and Peiss (1985) discuss domination and negotiation, with domination referring to the manner in which womyn are oppressed and either conform or resist and negotiation to the way men and womyn bargain for resources and privileges. Here, as Sewell (1992) later argued, Gerson and Peiss assert that everyone has some control of resources and hence participates in negotiation to some degree; however, the scholars assert that because of a lack of structural power, womyn possess fewer resources with which they can negotiate, experience fewer situations where they can establish negotiation, and receive fewer advantages from such negotiations. Given their argument that negotiation can lead to structural boundary changes—that arguably can challenge, and perhaps change, the gender order—it is clearly problematic that womyn have less power to negotiate for resources and privileges. Certainly, much work currently focuses on this problem, but there is also growing recognition that womyn are not a homogenous group with equal access to resources. Womyn occupy a variety of social locations, some of which afford them great power; in fact, as
research on intersectionality shows (Collins, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991; Risman, 2004), some womyn are more privileged than some men.

However, given that womyn as a group do experience limited access to structural power, those who possess more access to resources, material and virtual, may have more ability to redraw structural boundaries, and, thus, to more obviously change social structures (such as gender) and institutions (such as marriage). As I discussed briefly in Study 1, all of the keepers possessed at least a bachelor’s degree and many possessed graduate and professional degrees and worked in high-powered professions like law and academe. The one engaged couple in Study 2 who openly considered non-traditional naming for their children (with two others considering it but with circumstances that make it more likely they will adhere to patronymy) were doctoral students, both of whom will also most likely end up as professors. As such, these individuals possess more resources (Gerson & Peiss, 1985; Sewell, 1992) with which to bargain/negotiate and perhaps have more power with which to exercise the kind of agency that might lead to structural change.

While they are often labeled bad wives and mothers as a result of their nontraditional practices, many keepers do in fact apply ideological resources (from their high-powered professional statuses and educational achievements) to the family devotion schema, hence allowing them to feel that they are equally as committed to their families as changers. This relates, once again, to Blair-Loy’s work. The female executives she studied were able to transpose schemas onto new situations, hence reinterpreting social structures, due to their greater access to resources (material and ideological). In Gerson and Peiss’s (1985) terms, these womyn possessed greater power to negotiate and more ability to redraw structural boundaries.

If, as Sewell explained, structures are “sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social actors” (p. 19), then it makes sense that keepers are empowered by greater resources to alter the family devotion schema while at the same time constrained by the schema’s well-entrenched expectation (if not mandate) that womyn devote themselves body and soul to their families. People have the power to act against structure (Risman, 2004; Sewell, 1992), but they are also endowed with differing kinds and amounts of resources and hence possess varying ability to effectively transform society. Because structures are “laden with differences in power” (p. 20) and womyn tend to possess
less structural power than men (Gerson & Peiss, 1985) overall, they have less power to challenge the status quo unless they are particularly resourceful.

This disparity in resources may partially explain the difference between those who keep their names and those who change them. Certainly many changers are highly educated and work in high powered professions, but perhaps keepers possess different ideological resources (possibly connected to access to more gender egalitarian values) that empower them to reject a major cultural norm. Here, it is also worth returning to my earlier notation that in some cases in Study 2, men who earned significantly more than their fiancées seemed to feel that this was a justification for their expectation that these womyn take their names after marriage. Obviously, class factored in here. While I did not see race as a factor affecting womyn’s choice in either study (and the studies were not large enough to generalize), it is noteworthy that nationality did supply an unexpected resource—a womon in study 1 and a man in study 2 both came from nations where patronymy was not the norm, and this affected their expectations and choices. Clearly, the ability to see viable alternatives to patronymy through an alternative cultural lens makes a difference.

Unfortunately, whether womyn choose traditional or nontraditional marital naming options, normative definitions of what it means to be a good wife (and mother) strongly influence womyn’s choices, first in ensuring that few question the status quo and second by leading even those who defy it to situationally use their husbands’ names in order to navigate hostility and people’s outright refusal to call them by their birth names (particularly in situations involving their children). Keepers challenge the family devotion schema and the institution of marriage but the degree to which they can effect change is questionable given the many forces that coalesce to force situational use. Yet, these womyn possess resources that cannot be discounted; if indeed “old gendered norms are losing their currency” (Risman, 2009, p. 24), then it is possible the boundaries these womyn cross may eventually lead to some erosion of social mandates that wives should subsume their autonomous identities under their roles as wives and mothers.

However, large-scale social transformation is unlikely to occur without a coalition of men and womyn working together to eradicate patronymy with social justice in mind. Unfortunately, while there are clearly alternatives to patronymy (such as biphenation which was discussed in the literature review), few alternatives appear to be viable, and none are
given the same normative support as patronymy. Men and womyn alike police the boundaries of marriage and the family, ensuring that despite progress in other areas, people gravitate toward traditional definitions of what constitutes a family and what defines “good” wives and mothers. In both Study 1 and Study 2, I found that people discussed change and stasis in terms of womyn’s practices, with no consideration of non-traditional practices for men. This puts the burden of changing the gender structure and the institution of marriage on womyn alone despite the fact that men possess more resources and privilege and therefore have more power to effect change.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Carson Frang idealistically and unrealistically asserted that he and his fiancée, Heng Chang, planned to “bulldoze” expectations and give their children whatever names they chose. While Heng more practically recognized the resistance they will face as a result, it may be that it takes dreamers like Carson to begin to effect change. However, since both men and womyn will eventually face resistance to deviation from patronymy, it will also take courage, persistence, and a change in people’s gendered conceptions of what constitutes an appropriate family. In the process of effecting change, womyn will have to face hostility and refuse to situationally use their husbands’ names (unless it is truly a choice and not the path of least resistance), and men will have to deal with people’s perceptions of them as less masculine, which means clearly sacrificing privilege. In all honesty, this may put an unfair amount of responsibility on people who may not be prepared to face social consequences for deviating from patriarchal naming practices, but change cannot occur until people refuse to accept gendered conceptions of wives as “more married” (Lassiter, 1983) and stop expecting womyn to be self-sacrificing and self-effacing. There will be costs, but social justice and change require all of us to face discomfort and for those of us with more resources to utilize them in transforming society for the better.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Patronymy, as a cultural norm, perpetuates inequality. Few womyn or men consider alternatives, and those who challenge the norm by keeping their names face a great deal of hostility as a result. The previous chapter provided a detailed theoretical framework for perceiving patronymy as a patriarchal practice that insidiously reflects male privilege and a higher valuation of men than womyn. This framework is essential because there has been little effort to connect prior work on patronymy to theory on gender, marriage, the family, and power and because much prior work has failed to contextualize marital naming practices within a society where womyn’s (and men’s) choices are so narrow that the idea of “free choice” is laughable. In this case, hegemonic views dominate, meaning that, as Komter (1989) writes, “Public opinion and the prevailing cultural climate make actions performed by subordinate groups appear to be springing from their free will, whereas in fact they reflect a necessity resulting from existing relationships of dominance” (p. 191). The previous three chapters detail the ways in which marital relationships reflect such inequality through an expectation that womyn alone should subsume their autonomous identities under their roles as wives and mothers. My interviews with engaged couples demonstrated that this patriarchal expectation remains relatively unchanged despite progress in other areas, something that reflects rather static views of family among both very traditional and very liberal individuals.

Completing this research was both personally and professionally thrilling. As a keeper, I obviously have a stake in changing the system. As a womyn’s studies scholar, I have a responsibility to work toward changing a system that leads to the oppression of womyn. As Boxer (1998) writes, “From the beginning the goal of women’s studies was not merely to study women’s position in the world but to change it” (p. 13). I see my work as a kind of activism. Not only do I show that patronymy is not some meaningless and harmless practice that continues despite womyn’s free choice to choose alternatives, but I also feel that interviews (often unintentionally) served as consciousness-raising sessions for many participants. Keepers, despite their intentional decision to keep their birth names, discovered
the degree to which hostility forces them into situational use, something that caused many of them discomfort and upset. Interviews also forced engaged couples to semi-openly discuss non-traditional practices even if they had not previously done so. While this occasionally appeared to cause tension between partners, I believe that tension is positive if it leads people to have important conversations and be more aware of power dynamics in their relationships before marriage.

Perhaps one of the most troubling things I discovered in conducting this research was how likable male participants were even when they clearly possessed sexist and anti-feminist views of marriage and the family. I expected to like men like Carson Frang who were relaxed and mostly open to feminist ideals and non-traditional practices, but I was startled to find men like Hunter Hart and Daniel Wallace equally amiable. Of course, this makes perfect sense. Hegemonic views of marriage and the family affect everyone, liberal or traditional, feminist or anti-feminist in so many ways that even the friendliest men often feel justified in expecting their wives to make sacrifices they personally would be completely uncomfortable and/or unwilling to make. And many men were consciously aware of this paradox, something I discussed in depth in Study 2, but their limited views of masculinity and what constitutes a good husband and wife prevented them from seeing beyond traditional views of the family.

Given the degree to which womyn alone make sacrifices or accommodations in order to prevent tension in their relationships and/or protect their fiancés/husbands, change will depend on men’s sacrificing of their privileged positions. This is not simply true for men like Daniel and Hunter who are clearly sexist (they also expect their fiancées to do all the housework for instance) but also for those men who casually say they are keeping their names and it is their fiancées’ free choice to change or keep their names but they would like it if these womyn took their names.

Womyn are particularly attuned to what is not said, what is felt, and they tend to try to protect the men they love. I cannot help but wonder, is it not time for relationships to be equitable enough that both partners compromise equally (or at least some)? Is it not time for men to consciously recognize the ways in which they influence their partners’ decisions instead of mindlessly insisting womyn have the choice to keep their names (with no recognition of how limited womyn’s choices are)? Is it not time for men to decide that true love means not expecting something of their wives that they are not willing to do
themselves? Is it not time for keepers’ husbands to respect their choices enough to explain them to their families instead of allowing their wives to be railroaded into situational use? More than anything, I wish I lived in a world where love was not so infused with gendered meanings that it tends to mean blind and all-consuming sacrifice of self for womyn and little on the part of men.

Of course, some keepers’ husbands were supportive, and regardless of whether men were open to non-traditional choices or not, it is unfair to issue blame so freely given that these men too are shaped by the cultures in which they live. I too am married, and I recognize the ways I also face inequity as a result of social expectations that womyn be more married (Lassiter, 1983). However, what separates me (and perhaps a few of the keepers in my study) is the possession of a very different ideological resource to which most womyn lack access. I am isolated and in some sense protected from dominant ideology insofar as I possess an alternative, feminist ideology and am surrounded by others who do so as well. If the number one predictor of an equal marriage is having friends that have one (Belkin, 2008), then my husband and I fall into a small group of people who are surrounded by people who consciously choose partners willing to work toward equality even when it means sacrificing male privilege. The ability to see an alternative here, just like with alternatives to patronymy, makes all the difference, and it is unfortunately something that few womyn or men experience. Since I recognize the privilege inherent in possessing such a resource, I am not blaming men for expectations that are normal, if unjust, any more than I can blame womyn for sacrificing self even when they clearly recognize the injustice of doing so. After all, we all live in a society that clearly defines the meanings of wives and husbands, of mothers and fathers, and we are all boxed in to some degree or another. Moreover, it was generally obvious that engaged couples deeply cared for one another, and I feel that with viable alternatives, more people would choose options that demonstrate that they value one another’s personhood rather than place a higher value on men’s identities. In this case, keepers would not face intense hostility or deceive their husbands about the reasons they keep or the disconnect they (hyphenators) have from their husbands’ names.

I do not believe the solution is simplistic, but I do believe there is possibility for change, and I want to briefly touch on a few scholars that have discussed viable alternatives to patronymy. Many of my participants, like people at large, may be more open to non-
traditional alternatives if they see them as practical rather than utopian. When I presented hyphenation of both partners’ names and the children’s names as the most equitable option, the number one concern people had was, “But, what happens when two hyphenators marry? That’s illogical!” A recent law in Germany that limited the number of names a person can take (to no more than two separated by a hyphen; Kulish, 2009) speaks to this concern. Emens (2007) and Stodder (1998) both write extensively on the subject of how to implement more egalitarian naming practices, and I want to briefly review some of their points since I do not want to detail all the ways that patronymy is a problematic practice and leave people hopeless, with no viable or practical alternatives.

Emens (2007) discusses several alternatives to patronymy. First, she notes that it is important that people be informed about traditional and non-traditional practices, something she argues does not currently occur. While most are well-informed of conventional practices, she points out that people may be unaware of alternatives such as hyphenating and merging. She points to New York as a best case status-quo example of a state that works to make people more aware of their options. (New York is one of the few states that currently allows men to take their wives’ names without a legal name change). In New York, marriage licenses clearly state both partners’ options on the form and ask couples to make a decision (meaning that couples have to consider both traditional and non-traditional options, at least superficially, before choosing). Even in this case, however, forms ask for the “father’s name” and “the mother’s maiden name” (p. 857), something that implicitly indicates that most womyn take their husbands’ names (and hence have maiden names). Additionally, desk clerks in this state, like most, seem uninformed of the law and sometimes inaccurately inform people that, for instance, couples must apply for a name change if they want to merge their names.

Emens’s (2007) greatest contribution is her discussion of a more radical system where the default is hyphenation for most couples and biphenation for couples who already have hyphenated names. Essentially, then, unless couples indicate otherwise, their marital name becomes their birth names hyphenated; the order would be randomly generated by a computer or decided by a clerk who would flip a coin. In the case of two hyphenators marrying, their new name would be a combination of one part of each of their names, randomly generated as well. While people would still have an option, hyphenation would be
presented as a norm, and there would be paperwork and well-informed clerks to explain how hyphenation works and the importance of it as a more equitable naming practice. Clearly, the government would be taking a stand that womyn’s names are equally important as men’s and framing the law in a way that allows couples to see the practicality and “normalcy” of non-traditional alternatives to patronymy.

Stodder (1998) also advocates for biphenation, which he defines as a naming system with hyphenated names in a fixed order, with a sex-based rule prescribing which name is dropped (so that men and womyn’s names are passed on equally as often). His model is based on Spanish tradition where womyn keep their names after marriage, but deviates insofar as it allows for equal continuity of men and womyn’s names (instead of only male names carrying on into future generations). He does not describe biphenation as a choice, but rather a legal mandate. While this seems extreme, a number of nations have laws stipulating that womyn cannot keep their names or pass them on to children; instead, of calling for gradual change (that is not occurring), Stodder’s model enforces a more egalitarian system that places equal value on men and womyn’s names, something that will lead to an end to patronymy.

In the end, practical and egalitarian alternatives to patronymy exist, and it is important to discuss them as well as focus on why patronymy is a problematic practice. This thesis has added crucial information to scholarship on patronymy. First, there is little discussion of alternatives to patronymy and no discussion of deviation from the norm for men. Second, patronymy is so deeply entrenched that men, and perhaps surprisingly, womyn police the boundaries of this patriarchal practice, ensuring that womyn who deviate from patronymy face harsh punishments. Third, even keepers are largely unsuccessful at defying patronymy, which demonstrates the degree to which hegemony shapes people’s actions and prevents change. Fourth, since people’s gendered perceptions of men and womyn, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, allow them to perceive patronymy as a reasonable practice, it is there that scholars need to focus in order to create pathways to change. If we can reveal the ways that patronymy is a site of hidden male privilege and gender oppression, it will be more difficult for patronymy to go unchallenged by the masses.

With clear evidence that men and womyn strongly identify with their birth names, it is crucial that scholars continue studying patronymy. In doing so, scholars need to utilize
egalitarian frameworks, avoid the use of phrases and language that privilege patronymy (such as maiden name or surname), clearly complicate the notion that compliance with patronymy is a free choice, and connect their findings to scholarship on gender, marriage, the family, and power in such a way that patronymy is seen as a meaningful site of gender oppression. This thesis is the first work on patronymy within the field of womyn’s studies; given this field’s focus on studying and ending gender oppression, it is important that more womyn’s studies scholars prioritize the study of a practice that affects so many womyn’s (and men’s) lives. Finally, while I recognize that my study is not representative of all married couples in the U.S., I do feel it provides crucial insight that furthers study on patronymy, and I hope scholars pursuing this topic in the future will consider some of my findings in framing their research questions.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE, STUDY 1, KEEPERS
Confidentiality Statement:
1. Do you have a pseudonym you would like us to use for you?
2. Would you like a copy of the final paper when we are finished? If so, how should we send it to you?

Background Information:
3. Race?
4. Age?
5. Profession?
6. Age at marriage(s) or year of marriage(s)?
7. Do you consider yourself a feminist?

Marital Naming Practice(s):
8. When did you marry? Are you still married? Was this your first marriage?
9. Why did you choose to keep your birth name? If you were married before, did you make the same naming decision then or a different one? Why?
10. How did you come to this decision?
11. How did you tell your partner? How did he react?
12. Have there been obstacles to keeping your own name? If so, what has been the biggest obstacle in keeping your own name?
13. Did you experience pressure or resistance from your family when you decided to keep your own name? If so, what kind of dialogue did you have?
14. Do you alternate using your birth name and your husband’s name depending on context? If so, in what situations?
15. Do you have any struggles or anticipate having any struggles with the naming of your children? If so, what are the circumstances? If you do have children, do they have their father’s name, your name, or a hyphenated name?
16. Is there anything we didn’t ask that you think we should know?
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE, STUDY 2, ENGAGED COUPLES
Confidentiality Statement:
1. Do you have pseudonyms you would like for me to use for you?
2. Would you like a copy of the results when we are finished? If so, how/where should we send it to you?

Background Information:
3. Age?
4. Date that you got engaged and wedding date, if set?
5. Race/Ethnicity?
6. Region of origin?
7. Highest Level of Education?
   - If college, what field did you earn degree(s) in?
8. Profession?
9. Political Affiliation?
10. Religion?
11. If you have siblings, how many?
12. Who raised you? (Both parents, parents divorced, grandparents, etc.)
13. Where did you grow up?

Marriage:
14. How would you define marriage?
15. Why did you decide to get engaged?
16. Do you consider yourself a traditional couple? Liberal, nontraditional, feminist?
17. Do you plan on wearing wedding rings? One partner, both? Why or why not?
18. How have you discussed your naming options? Specifically, what options have you considered (for yourself and your partner if applicable)?
19. Have you discussed naming options with friends and/or family members? If so, how have those conversations gone?
20. Do you think you’ll agree on one naming option and if so, will this involve a compromise or sacrifice for one partner? If so, which one?

Children:
21. Do you have or plan on having children? (If so, proceed.)
22. If so, who would be the primary caregiver for the children? Would one parent stay home with the child(ren)? Would both parents work?

23. How have you named or how do you plan on naming your children? If you haven’t discussed it, thinking about it now, what do you expect you’ll do?

24. If you have trouble coming to an agreement on how to name your children, will one of you compromise or make a sacrifice? If so, which one?