

Interviewee: Lauren Leverenz (A married woman who kept her last name for professional reasons)

Interviewer: Hershall Cook

[Introduction and Consent] I know that you kept your own name rather than taking your husband's. Could you elaborate on that decision? Well, really it was because I had already established professional recognition and I had my degrees, certificates, diplomas and certifications all in my maiden name. And if I changed that legally, I would have to go back and change all of the preceding. So you would view this as more of a professional decision than a feminist one? Yes. Absolutely. It was just--I didn't have time to do all that and I didn't really want to spend my time doing that. So I didn't, and I kept my professional names. Plus, everybody knew me as Doctor Leverenz. If I changed my name to something else, I would lose that professional identity. So I didn't want to do that. I wanted to keep my own professional identity intact.

Have there been any unforeseen consequences in keeping your own name? Well, I don't know if it offended my then-husband, but it didn't seem like it at the time. But you never really know what's going on inside someone's head. That's the only thing I've seen that I could say potentially was a problem, but nothing I could say for sure was a problem. You mentioned you were divorced. Do you think that having the same last name would have been more of a uniting focus in the marriage? Instead of providing a symbolic divide with by keeping your own last name. Possibly. But there never was anything said about it, or any implication that that was undesirable. That definitely had nothing to do with us getting divorced. So I don't see any connection--maybe there was one on his end, but it was never verbalized.

Do you believe that keeping one's name is an effective practice in intervening in the whole concept of a woman being erased by marriage? I'm not sure I understand what you mean about the waste and the marriage. In the sense that you would take your husband's name, and that would sort of conform your identity to his. And from there you might become a stay-at-home mother become more reduced than before. I can see that point, that wasn't my motivation, but I could see how somebody could think that. I personally didn't have that thought process. But I think there is kind of a lost identity when you change your name and you're not who you used to be anymore.

That's a good point. Do you think that, as a solution to the whole marriage naming conundrum, that hyphenated names might work as a long-term option? Yeah, I think that could be an option. What I did was I was professionally always Doctor Leverenz and I never changed any of my diplomas or anything. Licenses, anything. But socially, I was Lauren Bennet. People in any other realm that I was in that wasn't professional (like my daughter's school friends), they all knew me as Lauren Bennet or Mrs. Bennet. They didn't call me Lauren Leverenz. So I kind of had both identities--I had a professional identity, and I had a social identity--and both knew of the other, like my friends would know that I went by Dr. Leverenz professionally, and work knew that I was married and that my last name was Bennet for marriage. But technically, I was always Lauren Leverenz. So you could definitely hyphenate, but then I'm still changing my name so I still have to change all my diplomas, all my licenses, all my certificates. Which is just a big pain in the butt. So, frankly, it would be a waste of time. So while that wouldn't be appealing to me personally, I can see how (if somebody didn't have all that they would have to change) it might work...and I know that some people who are in my situation married before they got any diplomas, before they graduated from college. They just used their married name on everything. So it's sort of like wherever you happen to be in the continuum of time when you're getting married, that ends up being which name that people end up using. The people that got married who all are my age pretty much all kept their maiden names. The ones who had already been married before they got their medical degrees and beyond, they kept that name. It's a fairly common practice in medicine, that people just kept the name that they did their MD under. Yeah, because you've already established yourself in the medical community. Right, I didn't want to lose my professional identity.

Did it ever bother you when people called Mrs. Bennet, or did you just write that off? There were always the social people that called me that, so it didn't really bother me. Plus, I had encouraged it by using that name, so no, it didn't bother me. And did you ever consider giving Lauren your name instead of your husband's? No, I never considered that. Any reasons for that? I just thought that that there wasn't a need to be not-traditional with that, so I didn't see the point. [Conclusion and good-bye]