

Interviewee: JenniferWolfe-Smith (hyphenated last name)

Interviewer: Laura DiRusso

[Introduction] My name has always been Jennifer Wolfe and I am an only child, a female so, traditionally with me everything stops. For the Wolfe line, I'm the last one. So when I became engaged and I knew the man I was marrying was open-minded and not very old fashioned, he had no problem with me wanting to keep my identity and then adding on his name. We even talked about, and I remember it was about a month before we got married, just before you go down to city hall to fill out all your paper work...that's where you write down exactly how you want everything spelled with the hyphen. We even talked about coming up with a brand new last name. And he was totally, Brian was totally on board with that and I kind of thought I'd be too, but I still wanted to represent my family, the Wolfe family. So we were going to do it just where we were all going to be Wolfe Smith without the hyphen. But um, we kind of decided just for me to hyphenate it and then leave it at that. And to this day now we just talked about it, we regret it. We wish we would have done Wolfe Smith, the combination of both our names without the hyphen where we were kind of a brand new family with a brand new last name. Yeah, and we even said it now, it would be too hard because there's three kids involved so to change everybody's last names now would be really difficult, but we do regret it we wished we would've combined it and just made a brand new name. I think another part of the reason we didn't do it was because his mother probably wouldn't have been on board with that. It would've caused some tension and being a brand new bride I didn't want to do that with my in-laws and already be, you know like, someone causing trouble [laughs]. Um, but I have to tell you, and of course being a feminist and I have one year towards a Ph.D. in political science, which was predominately a male dominated field, at least when I started. I wanted to be heard and show that I was standing up and being a woman and so it was important for me for my own identity, not just to represent my family and being the last one. But I have to tell you my first couple years filing my taxes, we had so many complications through the government. *Because of the hyphen?* Yes, I would say I have been married now um, thirteen years and probably maybe within just the last seven [we haven't had issues], so half my married life there's always been a problem. And even now, I started working a year ago and legally by law I have to be Wolfe-Smith on you know all my paper work and my paychecks and my ID badge, and some people still they're like, "Do I call you Mrs.Wolfe, do I call you Mrs.Smith?" So even in today's modern days you'd think people are still having trouble, even when they look at my name and mines easy! It's Wolfe-Smith. So it was pretty perfect and even to this day people are like, "Is your husband Wolfe, is he Smith, what are your kids?"

And you know my kids get it. I explained everything to them and they were like "oh can we do that?" They're like "We're going to name our kids, and their middle names' are going to be Wolfe. Just to keep your name going ma!" And Brianna, you know she's twelve and she's like "oh well maybe my husband will be cool with us doing stuff like that too", and I'm glad my kids, especially because I have three girls, are kind of aware and are doing things to have their voices heard as well. *Do they have a hyphenated last name or are they Smith?* They're just Smiths, which is what my husband and I were saying which is like, when you had requested that I do this I was telling Brian, and that's when we were both like, really disappointed that we didn't do the combo name and just have the entire family Wolfe Smith without even the hyphen, and this way it's like we're combing both our last names to create one name. We just thought it was so

beautiful, a beautiful way of showing you know two people who fell in love and created a new family. But like I said we kind of backed out at the last minute because I wanted to keep peace with my in-laws. Like I said, Laura what's that expression?... You know had I realized what I know now it's just more important, what Brian and I wanted than what my in-laws wanted. So no they're just Smith and honestly, like my children totally get that even Gwendolyn who's 5 years old, Laura she gets it. "Mommys a Wolfe-Smith because she has her maiden name and Daddy's name" so she knows, the kids know to them this is not an issue. They don't get why people are always like "Hi Mrs. Wolfe uhh Smith uhh?"... They don't get why people are having so much trouble with it, which I think is awesome because it just brings out the best of who they are and hopefully how we're raising them.

Did you do it for any other reasons, aesthetics, cultural? Any reasons like that? I don't know if this is cultural but like I said for the Wolfe's, I'm it. Like once I'm gone, my last name is gone, there's no one else that carries that last name. I don't know if that's a cultural thing, trying to keep alive a name that's going to die out with me. Unless one of my children decides, if they explain it to their future spouse that they would like to incorporate it, it kind of dies with me and I wanted it to be, I guess on my gravestone I wanted to still represent that, what I was for the last 26 years before I got married. *Do other people have trouble with calling you the proper last name?* Oh it's all the time. So just for easy sake, most time I just go by Mrs. Smith, especially when it's my children involved. Because then, also, I have to say this too. They [teachers] see my last name, a lot of times like schools they're kind of fishing to see if I'm still married or perhaps if I'm re-married they just, they don't get it they don't get the hyphen. Let's say Brianna, if I have a teachers' conference or something. You can see that sometimes they're not sure if Brianna's dad and me are still together, or if there's a new person involved so yeah there's definitely a lot of explaining so when it comes to my kids I'll just really kind of introduce myself as Mrs. Smith and like I said when I'm working too, teachers, colleagues they'll look at my name and go, "oh what do you want to be called?" like this [judgingly] like, "how should we address you?" And it's really not that big of a deal like, all the names are one syllable [laughs]. You know? It's easy.

And, what about Brian's [husband's] parents were they upset or frustrated? Oh yeah, oh yeah. You could just totally tell they were like, "oh his last name's not good enough? Like it's not good enough to be a Smith? Oh you're such a modern woman and what is everybody going to think?" It was absolutely an issue in the beginning. And then my brother-in-law and his wife did the same thing. And that was after us. That was seven years after me and Brian so I'm not the only sister-in-law that did it. *How do you think your choice has affected women?* Well, at first I would've never thought this would've made a difference to anybody but me, but I think now being a mom of three girls, they ask, they ask "Why did you do that?" And not in a bad way they just want to know. And since I told them and they understand they kind of think it's really a cool thing, and I could see like, I can see the wheels turning when they think of things and they're still young, my oldest is twelve but I think she'll re-think their name choice when she does and if she does marry, and I think then she might want to maintain a certain level of her own identity involved as well. So at least for my own three children I do think it's made them realize, "ok I can be a mom, I can be a wife, um I can do all these things but I can still be me." I've been me, especially now a days women are getting married later in life and I'm forty and I've been a Wolfe longer than I've been married. So to me I still connect to myself as Jennifer Wolfe. And now just because I'm married and I've added someone into my life on a permanent basis, same thing that I've added on the hyphen. To me it just makes sense. So for me being a mom of three girls I do

think it allows them to realize "Ok, I can be all these things but I'm still me and I can maintain that."