

By Laura DiRusso

Visibility via Names: feminism

After hearing stories from real women and their experiences with last naming practices, it is clear that women today want to be seen in society. While some feel an attachment to their family name, others want to keep it to make a name for themselves in society. Lastly, patrilineal practices that still exist today often trump women's visibility.

Here I have found some examples of women who felt that they kept their name in order to feel part of their family, or they had some sort of familial attachment to their last name.

Andrea Lucard feels that she has a connection with her children after birth, and for that reason wants them to take on her name.

And I had decided that I wanted my children to have the same last name as I did. And that was very much based out of a feeling that I was going to bear them within my body for a nine plus months and I was going to nurse them, and I wanted my relationship with them to be visible with respect to our names.

Jesse Yancey-Siegel talks about how her parents' backgrounds affected their decision to hyphenate the family name. Both parents felt the significance of passing down their tradition and background to their children.

In terms of my name, my dad says my brother and I got a hyphenated last name because neither my mom nor him could "win," he told me jokingly. More seriously, my dad comes from a Jewish family and my mom comes from a southern family, and both have very strong traditions of pride and passing names down. Also, my dad's brother does not plan to have kids so he wanted to ensure that his name was passed down. My mom's two sisters are more traditional and both took their husband's names and so did their kids, so my mom wanted to make sure Yancey was passed down.

Another common theme was that many women felt their name signified their own identity, and keeping it meant still having that. While some were for professional reasons, others were because they felt their last name was a part of who they are.

Megan Druss talks about how she likes her name, and would never want to become someone famous without it.

I really like my name. Megan Druss has a good ring to it. I think as somebody who wants to pursue a career that leads somewhat with fame I think having a nice-sounding name has a lot to do with it... I like the connection to my family and I don't really feel like I want to become somebody famous or important without like, my past connected to it. You know, I want people to know Megan

Druss of the Druss family not as like, whomever I'm marrying into.

Anne Goodman James talks about how important her identity is to her, and how it often feels “taken away” once you’re married and it’s been changed.

It just feels like it takes my identity away, and I think when you...once you have children, you often become known as Travis' mom or Sarah's mom or something like that, which you get used to, but still it's like your identity's gone.

Mary Pechauer provides a case where she is still trying to find herself with her own last name, and can't imagine doing that with someone else's.

I can't be Mary Undland. That's just not who I am. I'm still trying to figure out who Mary Pechauer is. And so I needed to stay with that and I knew he wasn't going to fight it and it wasn't going to be an issue

Jae Salinas keeps her last name for professional reasons.

And, because I'm in social media, all of my handles that I've created before were tied to my last name and I would've had to change everything. And it wouldn't have been that big of a deal, but I had already created a personal brand with the last name I was given at birth.

Another reason many women felt they wanted to keep their surname was because last names almost always come from a patrilineal line in some way or another, and women recognize this.

Andrea Lucard feared taking her husband's last name and losing her own identity.

And at the same time was uncomfortable with changing my name to my husband's. That it felt to me like it was too easy to subsume my identity within his, and then the identity within whatever children we might have into the identity with his family.... I wasn't happy with the idea that I was going to become him.

Jennifer Wolfe-Smith says it makes sense that she adds the hyphen, because she's adding someone into her life.

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.

Corina McKendry talks about her realization that all names come from some sort of patrilineal line.

Because at some point, I realized my last name versus someone else's last name, it's all just some man's last name. Who really cares what your last name is, because it's just some dude's last name. Once you think through it, it's just my dad's last name and his dad's dad, so who cares.

Carrie Ruiz believes each name should belong to each person separately.

I am married, but I would never change my name to my husband's name. He has his own last name... I think that it's both cultural and also because I would have a huge problem switching to my husband's last name. That's a form of possession.

The last common theme I found when looking at the idea of feminism was women's visibility in society. For some, last names made women feel erased, and for others it made them feel more empowered.

Lisa Cipriany-Dacko

I think people are just lazy because Dacko is shorter than Cipriany-Dacko. It really bothers the heck out of me when a guy uh, donates to a charity and we have both our names on the check and they say "Mr. Stan Dacko thank you very much for the donation". He had nothing to do with the charity donation [laughs] it's like you just don't even exist.... It really bothers me when we [women] do all the work and the man gets the credit.

Monica Schoch-Spana is optimistic about the last naming process in the United States, and has faith that it's beginning to take a new route other than the traditional patrilineal way.

I think it's funny because the family structure in the United States... well, it's always been different across different family structures, but I think there's more willingness to talk about it and willingness to market how one uses, constructs, and changes their last name. So there's a lot of variation out there, I think more than there used to be. I think that's come around to the view that the variation makes people think that there isn't just one way of honoring where you come from. And so, I still think it's a little odd personally, when women marry and drop their name [...] I find that to be exceptional. [...]