

By Jaira Wilsey

Keeping a Name for Professional Reasons

A significant number of interviewee women shared stories centered around keeping their maiden names at marriage for a variety of personal reasons. Many based their choice around feministic beliefs, loyalty to past family members, or avoiding legal name changing hassles. A good portion of the interviewees kept their names for these reasons in addition to keeping their names for professional reasons. A central issue discussed in most of the interviews revolved around publishing and professional ease. If a woman published a work prior to marriage and changed her name when she was married, how would she be related back to that work? Lauren Leverenz was one of many examples of a woman keeping her surname for mainly professional reasons. She stated:

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... 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 in tact.

She expresses trouble socially, with people in realms other than the professional, calling her by her husband's last name because they were unaware of her kept maiden name. When asked about why she didn't hyphenate, she replied that that would be even more confusing than taking on her husband's name, and that she would still end up changing all legal documents and works in her name. Kelly Douglass had similar beliefs regarding her choice to keep her name in her second marriage (she had taken her husband's name in her first marriage). She said, "I'm in my job, and people have to, you know, I want people to remember me, I'm in the same career that I was in marriage for the first time, and it's important in my work that people remember me... so you know on a professional level it was easier for me".

Both Hillary Hutchison (a woman who kept her name), and William Wilsey, her husband, agree that keeping Hutchison as a last name was validated by her professional life. She got married at age 30, and by that time she already had a significant amount of work in her name, as well as contacts around the United States who knew her by her maiden name. Bill stated

She was a working professional and all of her business contacts knew her as Hillary Hutchison, and at the time she felt like it would be easy for her professionally if she would keep her last name. So, it made it easier for her and she made the choice to do that. When she quit working it had just been so long, she decided to keep it.

Other interviewees expressed similar feelings, explaining how they personally identified with their given name, or that their husbands' names was too overbearing or cumbersome for them professionally. Some express underlying discomfort from extended and even immediate family members about their choices, but at the time of marriage it was important for these women to keep their names in order to succeed professionally. Schooling (like college, law school, or medical school,) also played a large part in women keeping their surnames. People in academic institutions associated the women's work as well as their person with the surname they had at those times. Difficulty with changing names stemmed not only from the legal procedures, but also from fear of a disconnect from professional work and professional life in general.

