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Making a Name: Women's Surnames at Marriage and Beyond

Claudia Goldin and Maria Shim

Throughout U.S. history, few women have deviated from the custom of taking their husband's name (Stannard, 1977). The earliest known instance of a U.S. woman who retained her surname upon marriage is Lucy Stone, the tireless antislavery and female suffrage crusader, who married in 1855. In the 1920s, a generation after her death in 1893, prominent feminists formed the Lucy Stone League to help married women preserve the identity of their own surnames. But until the late 1970s, almost all women, even the highly educated and eminent, assumed their husband's surname upon marriage. When prominent women who married before the 1970s wished to keep their maiden names as part of their professional image, they sometimes used their maiden names as their middle names, like the U.S. Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sandra Day O'Connor.

Ordinary observation suggests that during the past 25 to 30 years, the fraction of college graduate women retaining their surnames has greatly increased. But the basic facts concerning women's surnames as a social indicator have eluded investigation because none of the usual data sets contains the current married and maiden surnames of women. This article seeks to estimate the fraction of women who are "keepers" and the factors that have prompted women to retain their surnames.

We use three complementary sources—*New York Times* wedding announcements, Harvard alumni records and Massachusetts birth records—to examine patterns of surname retention. The *New York Times* and Harvard alumni records include college graduates almost exclusively. But because non-college graduate women retain their surnames with far less frequency than college graduate women

■ *Claudia Goldin is Henry Lee Professor of Economics, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. She can be reached at ⟨cgoldin@harvard.edu⟩. Maria Shim graduated in the Harvard University class of 2001 and is currently working in San Francisco, California.*

(less than one-third as often, according to the birth record data), our concentration on the latter is deliberate. Each data set we use covers a select group of women and contains data on their surnames at particular life cycle moments. The *New York Times* gives surnames at the moment of marriage. The alumni records for Harvard undergraduates give surnames at marriage and beyond, while the Massachusetts birth records reveal a mother's surname at the moment of her child's birth. Thus, part of our task is to resolve differences in estimates from each of these sources and to extrapolate from these groups to all college graduate women.

A woman who keeps her name at marriage may not retain her name throughout her married life. The arrival of children, for example, might lead her to change her name to avoid the possible confusion of having two last names in one household. We have found, however, that among the Harvard class of 1980, in which 52 percent of women kept their names upon marriage, just 10 percent reverted to their husband's names subsequently. We discuss the details of this sample later.

We begin with a brief overview of the legal, social and economic changes that led more women to keep their surnames at marriage. We find that the fraction of all U.S. college graduate women who kept their surnames upon marriage rose from about 2 to 4 percent around 1975 to just below 20 percent in 2001. It seems likely that the fraction of women "keeping" their maiden name rose sharply in the 1970s and 1980s, but declined slightly in the 1990s.

Legal, Social and Economic Change in the 1970s

Custom was largely responsible for the preponderance of women who did not keep their surnames at marriage. But the legal, social and economic institutions supporting this custom began to shift in the 1970s: the laws that pressured women to take their husband's names changed; the appellation "Ms." became acceptable; the age at first marriage rose; and the number of advanced academic degrees received by women increased.

Under common law, a married woman is not compelled to take her husband's surname, yet the laws of various states have deprived women of rights, such as retaining their driver's license and voter registration, if they did not assume the surname of their husband. It was not until 1975, for example, that the Supreme Court of Tennessee in *Dunn v. Palermo* (522 S.W. 2d 679) struck down a law requiring that a married woman register to vote under her husband's surname. The court cited the state constitution's adoption of common law under which, with few exceptions, an individual can choose any name. By the mid-1970s, these legal restrictions were generally overturned or ignored (for example, Augustine-Adams, 1997).

Back in 1855, Lucy Stone bore the appellation "Miss," which was otherwise reserved for unmarried women. For many decades, most women who retained their maiden name also retained the title "Miss." The appellation "Ms." solved the obvious social problem of what to call a married woman who retained her surname. Although, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the use of "Ms." dates from

1952, the term did not gain much notice until the appearance of *Ms. Magazine* in 1972. Usage spread rapidly, but there was initial resistance. In 1984, the *New York Times* (May 24, 1984, p. C10) reported of Gloria Steinem's fiftieth birthday party, "that proceeds from the . . . dinner will go to the Ms. Foundation . . . which publishes Ms. Magazine where Miss Steinem works as an editor."

Not until June 20, 1986, did the *New York Times* (p. B1) announce: "Beginning today, the *New York Times* will use 'Ms.' as an honorific in its news and editorial columns. Until now, 'Ms.' had not been used because of the belief that it had not passed sufficiently into the language to be accepted as common usage. The *Times* now believes that 'Ms.' has become a part of the language and is changing its policy. The *Times* will continue to use 'Miss' or 'Mrs.' when it knows the marital status of a woman in the news, unless she prefers 'Ms.' 'Ms.' will also be used when a woman's marital status is not known."

The age at first marriage among college graduate women increased substantially with cohorts born after 1950. Cohorts born from the 1930s to 1950 married within a year or two after college graduation. In the 1950 cohort, for example, more than 50 percent married before they turned 23 years old. But for those born in 1957, just 30 percent married before age 23 and less than half the cohort had married by the time they were 25 years old. Between the cohorts born from 1950 to 1957, the median age at first marriage among college graduate women increased by two years. The median college graduate woman born in 1950 married in 1973; the median college graduate woman born in 1957 married in 1982. Median age at first marriage for the 1965 birth cohort was about 26.5 years.[1]

At the same time that the age at first marriage rose, the fraction of college graduate women continuing their education in professional and Ph.D. programs began to soar. For example, in the mid-1960s, the ratio of first-year female law students to female B.A.'s was 0.5 percent. By 1980, it was 3.3 percent—a nearly seven-fold increase. In the field of medicine, the ratio of female first-year medical students to female B.A.'s was 0.4 percent in the mid-1960s; by the early 1980s, the figure had tripled to 1.2 percent (Goldin and Katz, 2002). Among Ph.D.'s granted (excluding those in education), the increase from 1970 to 1990 was about 1.7 times. For Ph.D. programs, the increase has continued beyond the early 1980s, whereas in law and medicine the ratio of female first-year students to female B.A.'s has remained at about the level achieved in 1980.[2]

The Pill—the female oral contraceptive—began to diffuse among young single women in the late 1960s and early 1970s, even though it had rapidly spread among *married* women within a few years after its federal approval in 1960. The reason for the later diffusion of the Pill among young unmarried women concerns a set of

[1] Estimates of age at first marriage are from the Current Population Survey, Fertility and Marital History Supplement, 1990 and 1995. See also Goldin and Katz (2002). The age at first marriage is from 1995 data, thus the fraction married is truncated at age 45 for the 1950 cohort and at age 38 for the 1957 cohort. The potential bias is to understate the median age at first marriage for the younger cohort.

[2] It should be noted that the fraction of (U.S. native-born) women who completed at least four years of college was fairly stable at 25 percent by age 35 for cohorts born from 1950 to 1960, after which it began a meteoric rise to today's level of around 35 percent (De Long, Goldin and Katz 2003).

restrictive laws and social norms, both of which changed in the late 1960s (Goldin and Katz, 2002).

Armed with the Pill, a young woman could minimize the unintended pregnancy consequences of sex and delay marriage. She could plan an independent existence at an early age—one not defined solely by marriage and motherhood. She could enter an advanced degree or professional program with far greater assurance that an active sexual life would not jeopardize her studies. By increasing the age at first marriage and allowing more women to continue with their studies, the Pill was one important cause of the increase in surname retention.

For all of these reasons, one would expect college graduate women to have retained their surnames to a far greater extent beginning sometime between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Taken together, these factors suggest that more women found themselves in a situation where they had already "made a name" for themselves in a profession, business or among friends and colleagues before marriage. Like the brand names of consumer goods, women elected to keep their surnames to protect the value of their contacts, publications and professional goodwill. A greater number of women might also have kept their surnames as a means of preserving their personal identity (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000), along with their professional one. Davis and Robinson (1988) offer some supporting sociological evidence on how women versus men defined their identities within marriage across the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, there was both a greater incentive for women to keep their surnames and doing so became easier both legally and socially.

The social pressure for women to change their names upon marriage has lessened, but still exists. Yet the act of marriage is not enough to accomplish a name change. A certificate of marriage simply enables the woman to change her name without filing further legal documents. There is no single place in the U.S. government that stores your "legal" name. Rather, the new bride must write to various authorities to change her name on, for example, her driver's license, vehicle title, voter registration, U.S. passport, bank records, credit cards, medical records, insurance forms, wills, contracts and, most importantly, Social Security and Internal Revenue Service documents. To make the process less cumbersome, "bride name change kits" tailored for each state are sold on the Internet.

Levels and Trends in Surname Retention

The data sets we have compiled, when used in tandem, can reveal the levels and trends in surname retention from 1975 to the present. We first discuss data from wedding announcements in the *New York Times* from the mid-1970s to 2001; then data from Massachusetts birth records from 1990 to 2000; and finally data from the Harvard class of 1980. Each of these data sets presents the researcher with problems of selection and coverage, which we will discuss as they arise.

Evidence from the *New York Times*

Wedding announcements are typically submitted by the couple to the *New York Times* and then selected by the staff. The announcements generally provide information on the bride's and the groom's undergraduate colleges as well as their advanced degrees and schools, their occupations, parents' occupation(s), place of marriage and who officiated at the ceremony. Announcements in the *Times* are mainly about couples whose families reside in the greater New York City region and who are sufficiently prominent or newsworthy to merit inclusion. The *Times* sample is therefore skewed toward more prominent families independent of where the couple went to college.

The data come from the "society page" of the Sunday Style Section of the *Times*. We compiled two types of samples: a time-series sample containing data on surname retention from 1975 to 2001 and two cross-sections, containing all available information on every marriage announcement in 1991 and 2001. The time-series information was recorded from marriage (not engagement) announcements for eight weekends; specifically, every sixth weekend beginning with the first weekend in February and ending in December. (Beginning in 1995, marriage announcements appear only in the Sunday edition of the *Times*.) This procedure created a data set of 250 to 300 marriages per year and almost 7,000 for the 26-year period. For the cross-section data sets, we collected variables on announcement date, names and ages of bride and bridegroom, religious or civil nature of the ceremony and the place, occupations and education of bride and bridegroom and occupations of both sets of parents.

The reason for using 1991 and 2001 as the basis for the cross-section data is that it was not until 1989 that announcements routinely gave the age of the bride and groom, and age is an important factor in determining whether a woman will change her name. We stopped the data collection in 2001 because by 2002, the *Times* altered its coverage in ways that made comparability to previous years more difficult. For example, it expanded its coverage to include "commitment" ceremonies of single-sex couples, and over the late 1990s, it appears to have broadened the selected couples by race and ethnicity. More important for our coding, the announcements changed their format to one that is often more chatty and personal. A substantial fraction of them are now impossible to code with respect to surname retention by the bride, which is the main focus of our investigation.[3]

In writing an announcement, the editor uses information provided by the couple regarding education, occupation and type of ceremony. Other material, including the surname the bride will use after the wedding, is gathered by a *Times* fact-checker *after* the announcement is selected for inclusion. In our count, brides are coded as "keepers" if they stated they would retain their surnames socially and/or professionally. All others are deemed "changers"—those taking the groom's surname, those hyphenating their names and those for whom no information is given (they either chose not to provide the information or the writer

[3] For another article using the *Times* data to explore "nonconventional" names, see Scheuble, Klingemann and Johnson (2000).

chose not to include it). The "no information" category is often a large fraction of the total, and we have found that it almost always consists of women who changed their name.

Table 1 provides the categorization of name-keepers and changers from the *New York Times* data. The basic story is that the fraction keeping their surnames was 2 percent in 1975 and 4 percent in 1976, but increased to about 10 percent by 1980 and then to 20 percent by the mid-1980s. A plateau of around 20 percent was maintained for about ten years. The fraction increased once again after 1998, and the latest data show that about 33 percent of brides will keep their surnames. However, interpreting these data raises a number of questions.

We attempted to get a feel for how the *Times* collected this information and what changes have occurred over time by direct communication with Robert Woletz, the current Society News editor.[4] For example, Woletz said that beginning in 1999 *Times* fact-checkers explicitly asked the couple if the bride was keeping her surname for all functions or just "professionally." This change does not seem to have had much influence in our data, since the broad trends of "keepers" are given by those who keep their surname for all functions. Clearly, not too much should be made of year-to-year variation in this data, and even the broad trends must be interpreted with care.

Second, we classify those whose announcements did not reveal name change or retention information as "changers." The large variation over time in the fraction of announcements that gave no information on surname retention should not be too disturbing since writing styles differ among those crafting the announcements, and there is turnover in the position of "wedding announcement writer." It seems clear to us that the vast majority of those with no information given in the announcement were changers and this is probably true even for couples who did not offer such information to the fact-checker. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the relatively small share of those who felt strongly enough to keep their surname seem unlikely to have held back from telling the *Times* about it. Also, we matched a few of the brides to our data from the Harvard class of 1980, and those whose announcements did not reveal anything about their surname after marriage were unanimously "changers."

Third, we are fairly confident that the rise in "keepers" from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s and the flattening of that trend in the 1990s both reflect real phenomena; as we will see, it is confirmed by the other data sources. However, we

[4] According to Robert Woletz, Society News editor of the *New York Times* (personal correspondence with Goldin), inclusion in the *Times* reflects the "newsworthiness" of the wedding. Woletz also informed Goldin that the "fact checker" asks the couple if the bride will retain her maiden name socially or professionally or if the bride will change her name to that of her future husband or if the bride (and groom) will hyphenate their names. Some couples report to the fact checker that they have not thought seriously about the issue. In that case, the writer uses an oblique reference to "the bride" and "the groom." The information provided by Woletz is relevant to the *Times* in 2002 and for several years before. Woletz did not know what previous procedures had been. Woletz would not comment on the relative numbers of submitted and accepted announcements nor on the possibility that "newsworthiness" changed over time.

Table 1
Keepers and Changers in *New York Times* Sample: 1975 to 2001

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Keeps surname			*Changes surname*				
Year	*For all functions*	*Only professionally*	*"Keepers" (1) + (2)*	*Hyphen surname*	*Take husband's surname*	*No information listed*	*"Changers" (4) + (5) + (6)*	*Number of observations*
1975	na	na	0.020	0.005	0.377	0.598	0.980	204
1976	na	na	0.040	0.023	0.364	0.572	0.960	173
1977	na	na	0.069	0.000	0.328	0.603	0.931	204
1978	na	na	0.098	0.000	0.392	0.510	0.902	153
1979	na	na	0.093	0.005	0.252	0.650	0.907	214
1980	0.078	0.012	0.090	0.000	0.213	0.697	0.910	244
1981	0.061	0.024	0.086	0.004	0.318	0.592	0.914	245
1982	0.074	0.026	0.100	0.000	0.258	0.642	0.900	229
1983	0.093	0.048	0.141	0.011	0.256	0.593	0.859	270
1984	0.122	0.057	0.179	0.022	0.367	0.432	0.821	229
1985	0.143	0.121	0.264	0.004	0.468	0.264	0.736	231
1986	0.108	0.118	0.226	0.018	0.570	0.186	0.774	279
1987	0.096	0.092	0.188	0.018	0.401	0.393	0.813	272
1988	0.105	0.119	0.224	0.018	0.412	0.347	0.776	277
1989	0.172	0.027	0.199	0.021	0.620	0.160	0.801	332
1990	0.208	0.003	0.211	0.032	0.668	0.090	0.789	379
1991	0.201	0.003	0.205	0.014	0.597	0.184	0.795	293
1992	0.190	0.004	0.194	0.061	0.706	0.039	0.806	279
1993	0.220	0.000	0.220	0.048	0.560	0.173	0.780	336
1994	0.167	0.009	0.176	0.027	0.421	0.376	0.824	330
1995	0.213	0.000	0.213	0.034	0.456	0.297	0.788	320
1996	0.177	0.000	0.177	0.038	0.550	0.235	0.823	260
1997	0.163	0.000	0.163	0.019	0.504	0.314	0.837	258
1998	0.184	0.000	0.184	0.041	0.461	0.314	0.816	245
1999	0.209	0.055	0.264	0.034	0.464	0.238	0.736	235
2000	0.259	0.079	0.339	0.017	0.456	0.188	0.661	239
2001	0.237	0.089	0.326	0.032	0.465	0.177	0.674	1315

Note: na = not available; the information on professional versus for all functions was not taken for those years because the fractions keeping were very small.
Source: New York Times Time-Series Data Set, 1975 to 2001, described in the text. The data sample is much larger in 2001 because all of the entries for the year were used, not just the sample of eight weekends used for the other years.

are less certain as to whether the increase in keeping starting around 1998 reflects a real phenomenon, rather than some change in how the *Times* was selecting the weddings that it would cover. We will return to this subject as we discuss the other data sources.

Finally, it is instructive to use the *Times* data to estimate the rate of keepers in the general population. After all, *Times* weddings are not representative of those of all college graduates. *Times* brides are older than the average college graduate bride and are disproportionately from the eastern United States, graduates of elite private colleges and universities and possessors of advanced degrees. Our approach

here, using the detailed cross-section data for 2001, is to calculate an ordinary least squares linear probability regression in which the dependent variable is whether the woman kept her name. The independent variables are the bride's age, college characteristics and advanced degree, as shown in Table 2. The coefficients from the regression appear in column 1. When multiplied by the means of the *Times* 2001 data, given in column 2, they produce the results in column 4. The sum (given in the last row) is 0.323, meaning that about 32 percent of college-age women kept their surnames upon marriage in 2001 (about the same as the 2001 cell in column 3, Table 1). However, column 3 presents the independent variable means for the relevant U.S. population. Multiplying these means by the coefficients in column 1 has the effect of weighting the variables by the national averages. The resulting estimate, summed in the last row of column 5, is 0.185, meaning that 18.5 percent of college graduate women in the United States kept their names after marriage in 2001.

Looking more closely at the table, the most quantitatively important factor in the adjustment is age. Whereas 26 percent of all brides in 2001 were between 20 and 24 years, just 5 percent of those in the *Times* were. It is possible that the *Times* data are biased downward because of a selection on family background characteristics that are not observable to the researcher. It should be noted that we could not adjust for region since too few of the couples were from outside the east, and this bias could go in the opposite direction.

Evidence from Massachusetts Birth Records

Massachusetts is the only state (of which we are aware) that has publicly available birth records that include information on mother's surname, father's surname, parity (number of births to the mother) and mother's education and age, among other variables. Such data are available from Massachusetts since 1987. Various other states also have publicly available birth records, but do not have the actual surname of the mother and, instead, list only her "maiden" name. We use publicly available Massachusetts birth records for 1990, 1995 and 2000. We matched the parents' surnames (using, at most, the first five letters of each name) to determine whether the mother had a surname different from that of the father. All parents in the sample were legally married prior to the birth of the child. We looked only at first births.

An unmistakable aspect of the Massachusetts data, graphed in Figure 1, is the decrease in the fraction of "keepers" during the 1990s.[5] This finding holds for all college graduates and also for those who continued beyond their B.A. Whereas 21 percent of college, graduate (white, U.S.-born) women having their first child at 25 to 29 years were "keepers" in 1990, just 13 percent were in 2000. For those with more than four years of college, the decrease was from 29 percent to 20 percent.

A more detailed analysis of these data brings out some additional findings. At

[5] We have omitted mothers under 25 years old, because they were a small fraction of the college graduate group. For example, among white, U.S.-born, first-birth, college graduate women, 4.9 percent were under age 25 in 1990, 3.3 percent in 1995 and 2.1 percent in 2000.

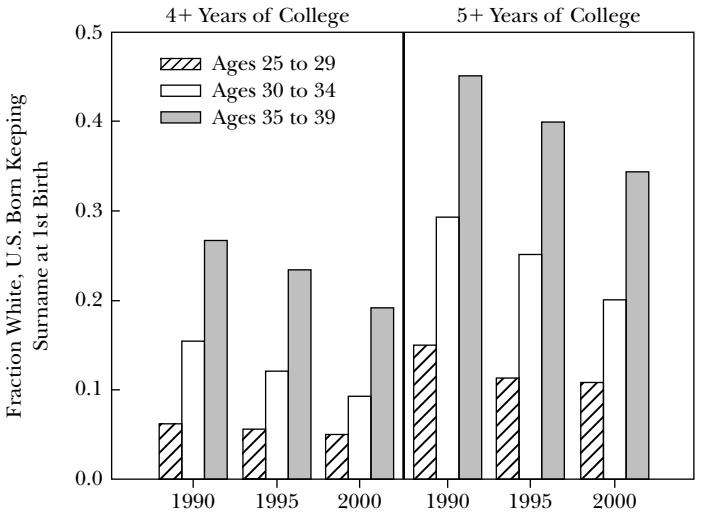
Table 2
"Nationalizing" the *Times* 2001 Cross-Section
(Dependent Variable for Col. (1): Keeps surname at marriage)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
		Means of independent variables		*Computation of predicted values*	
Variables	*Coefficient*	*Times 2001*	*U.S.*	*Times 2001 (1) × (2)*	*U.S. (1) × (3)*
Constant	0.450	1	1	0.450	0.450
Bride characteristics					
Ages 20 to 24	−0.492	0.0478	0.259	−0.0235	−0.127
Ages 25 to 29	−0.347	0.409	0.420	−0.1419	−0.146
Ages 30 to 34	−0.211	0.372	0.107	−0.0785	−0.0226
Ages 35 to 39	−0.0492	0.104	0.074	−0.0051	−0.0036
Ages 40 plus (omitted)	0	0.0672	0.043	0	0
Ivy league college	0.158	0.271	0.014	0.0428	0.0022
"Top 25" liberal arts college	0.145	0.0805	0.010	0.0117	0.0015
"Top 25" university	0.0924	0.128	0.0575	0.0118	0.0053
"Seven sisters" college	0.182	0.0414	0.003	0.0075	0.0005
M.A.	0.0422	0.296	0.35	0.0125	0.0148
M.B.A.	−0.0291	0.0821	0.05	−0.0024	−0.0015
J.D.	0.109	0.15	0.03	0.0164	0.0033
M.D., D.D.S., or D.V.M.	0.241	0.0606	0.015	0.0146	0.0036
Ph.D.	0.134	0.0566	0.03	0.0076	0.0043
Number of observations	1,255	1,255			
Predicted values, Σ (4) or (5)				0.323	0.185

Notes and Sources: The column (1) coefficients are from a standard OLS regression where the dependent variable is 0 or 1 depending on whether the woman kept her surname at marriage. Colleges are categorized using the 2001 *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, and the categories are unique; for example, the "top 25 universities" category omits the Ivy League institutions. The "top 25 universities" (minus the Ivies) are CalTech, Carnegie, Duke, Emory, Georgetown, Hopkins, MIT, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Rice, Stanford, UC Berkeley, UCLA, Virginia, Chicago, Michigan, North Carolina, Vanderbilt and Washington University. The top 25 liberal arts colleges (excluding the "seven sisters" that were in the top 25) are Amherst, Bates, Bowdoin, Carleton, Claremont-McKenna, Colby, Colgate, Davidson, Grinnell, Hamilton, Haverford, Middlebury, Oberlin, Pomona, Swarthmore, Trinity, University of the South, Washington and Lee, Wesleyan and Williams. The "seven sisters" school category includes Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Sarah Lawrence, Smith, Wellesley and Vassar, although most are no longer single sex, and one (Radcliffe) merged with Harvard University in 1972. Professional and graduate degrees are not mutually exclusive; that is, a woman could list both an M.A. and a Ph.D. or an M.D. and a Ph.D., although it was usual for the bride to list her highest post-baccalaureate degree.

For the U.S. means in column (2), the age distribution for "married within the year" is derived from the percentage ever married in the Current Population Survey January 2002 for all college graduate (B.A. or more) women. The derivation implicitly assumes that the distribution of the age at first marriage does not change over the period considered. For the distribution of institutions we use data for 1997/1998, when there were about 1.184 million B.A.'s produced. The fraction in the "top 25" universities includes a somewhat wider group (it includes the top 30 in *U.S. News and World Report* excluding the Ivies) than that defined in the *Times* data set. The *Times* weddings are disproportionately those from the greater New York City area, and we could not, in coding the colleges and universities, include a broader list than the "top 25" including the Ivies. In creating a "nationalized" mean we have tried to include institutions that are similar in their student body to those we coded for the regressions. Data for advanced degrees come from the *Digest of Education Statistics, 2002,* on-line. Ph.D.'s and professional degrees issued to women in 2001 are divided by B.A.'s in 1995; M.A.'s issued to women in 2001 are divided by B.A.'s in 1998.

Figure 1
Fraction of Massachusetts Mothers Keeping their Surname at the Time of their First Birth: By Year, Age and Education



Source: Massachusetts birth records. See text.

the beginning, this article explained its focus on college graduates by stating that those who are not college graduates are more likely to be "changers." According to the Massachusetts birth data, college graduates, relative to those without college, were two to five times more likely (depending on age) to retain their surnames at the time of their first birth, although such estimates are biased downward because the college graduates have a higher fraction without first births, and those who married and never had a first birth were more likely to keep their surnames upon marriage.

An unexpected finding from the Massachusetts birth records concerns the surnames of (U.S.-born) African-American women. The (unadjusted) mean for married college graduate African-American women at the time of their first birth (at age 30 to 34 years) was about 34 percent in the late 1990s, or almost double the fraction for the comparable group of white women. Perhaps more surprising is that the fraction keeping their surnames at the time of their first birth was about the same for those with no college, whereas that figure is extremely low among white women. As in the case of white women, we limit these samples to women who have not had a previous birth to eliminate the possibility of prior children from another father and thus that the woman has a different surname from the current father, but the same surname as some of her children.

Although the Massachusetts birth records include all births that occurred within the state and to parents whose official residence is in the state, certain biases still exist when using these data to estimate surname retention. For example, some mothers elect to be known in the hospital by their husband's surname even if they use their own surname in both social and professional circumstances. While we have no estimate for how often this occurs, there are two other biases for which we

can make a plausible adjustment. One issue in using birth records is that 18.6 percent of all ever-married college graduate (white) women who were age 38–43 years in 2000 had not had a first birth, according to the Current Population Survey Fertility Supplement 2000. If the fraction of "keepers" among these women was equal to that for women in the oldest age group of mothers, then the corrected fraction would add more weight to the oldest age group.[6] We also assume that 12 percent of "keepers" at marriage revert to their husband's name after having their first child, a finding from the Harvard class of 1980 study (see below). In this way we attempt to transform the fraction of women who retained their surname at their first birth into one at the time of marriage.

Using these two adjustments, the fraction of name-keepers among college graduates across all ages was 23 percent in 1990, 20 percent in 1995 and 17 percent in 2000. The fraction in 2000 is quite similar to the datum we computed from "nationalizing" the *New York Times* data. The decrease in surname retention in the 1990s found in the birth data differs from that revealed in the *Times* data. Data from Harvard Alumni Surveys confirms the decline and reinforces our sense that selection into the *Times* data changed in the 1990s.

Evidence from Harvard Alumni Surveys

Data for all women in the Harvard classes of 1980 and 1990 were collected from the Harvard archives. The classes of 1980 and 1990 were chosen because the majority of the members of the former married in the late 1980s and those of the latter married in the late 1990s, a decade of a high, but possibly declining, fraction of women who kept their surname. Both classes have sufficiently long histories to allow us to observe whether life cycle transitions, such as having children, affect the decision to retain one's name. Information from the five-year reunion class books of 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000 was gathered for the class of 1980 and from the class books of 1995 and 2000 for the class of 1990. The class books are compiled by the Harvard Alumni Association, which sends questionnaires to graduates of the class, requesting information on their current name, address, occupation, graduate or professional degrees, spouse or partner name, date of marriage, occupation and education of spouse or partner and children with their dates of birth. When an individual did not respond to a questionnaire, information was imputed when such information was clearly factual. For example, if a woman stated in 1995 that she had been married in 1989 but did not respond to the 1990 questionnaire, we filled in that information. There were 603 graduates in the class of 1980 and 696 in the class of 1990. Across the entire two decades, 487 women of the 603 who graduated in 1980 responded to at least one of the five-year surveys.

Table 3 summarizes the results for the class of 1980. Of those who responded, 390 reported to have ever married, and of this total group, 52.3 percent did not

[6] The reweighting implicitly treats the cross-section of women who had a first birth in a year as if it were a cohort of women. Those who had never had a first birth by age 40 are added in, and the fraction of "keepers" among the women who delayed child bearing to 35 to 39 years is attributed to those who never had a first birth by age 40.

Table 3
Name Changing through the Life Cycle: Harvard Class of 1980

A. Respondents who did not change surname at marriage

Marriage interval	*Percentage not changing in interval*	*Number married in interval*	*Number not changing in interval*
Before 1985, after 1980	38.3	107	41
Before 1990, after 1985	58.2	153	89
Before 1995, after 1990	57.1	91	52
Before 2000, after 1995	56.4	39	22
All years, 1980 to 2000	52.3	390	204

B. Surname change after marriage and after childbirth

Marriage interval	*(1) Number not changing after marriage*	*(2) Percentage changing later, among (1)*	*(3) Number with children, among (1)*	*(4) Percentage changing later, among (3)*
1980 to 1995	182	10.4	142	12.0

Source: Harvard Class of 1980 Data Set. See Data Appendix.
Notes: Part A: The survey closest to the time of marriage was used for the surname information. The number of observations is the "flow" of individuals into the "ever-married" state. Part B: The marriage interval does not include the last survey so that those who retained their name at marriage could have time to alter that decision.

change their last name to that of their husband's in the alumni survey nearest their marriage year.[7] Those who married closest to college graduation had the lowest rate of surname retention: 38.3 percent of those marrying before 1985 did not change their surnames. For all subsequent survey years, the fraction keeping their names was about 57 percent.

The Harvard sample allows us to see the effects of life cycle transitions after marriage. The vast majority of women in the Harvard class of 1980 who retained their surname upon marriage continued to do so even after childbearing. Of those who did not change their surname upon marriage, about 10 percent changed subsequently (as shown in part B of Table 3). Within this group, 12 percent of those with children later changed their surname; just 5 percent did among those who did not list any children. Therefore, women with children have a higher tendency to take their husband's surname even if they did not do so at marriage. But the fraction that changed their surname after marriage is low, even among those with children.

Data from the Harvard Class of 1990 enables us to see if Harvard College women followed the downward trend in name retention that we found in the

[7] The marriage rate among the group is higher than these data would imply, (390/487) = 80 percent, because some women responded in 1985 but not after, and most who married did so after 1985. By using the data from the last alumni survey, we compute that the marriage rate to 2000 was about 85 percent, which makes it comparable with other populations of highly educated women.

Massachusetts birth data. Mean years from graduation to marriage for those who married up to ten years out for the Harvard class of 1980 was 4.81 and was 5.24 for the class of 1990—a modest increase. However, we find a large decrease in the fraction of women who retained their surname comparing the two classes. From those in the class of 1980 who reported being married by 1990, 44 percent retained their surname. In the 1990 sample, of those who reported being married by 2000, only 32 percent retained their surnames—a sharp reduction.

Correlates of Name Retention

What distinguishes women who retain their surnames from those who change? A major possibility concerns whether the woman has already "made a name" for herself. Women with advanced degrees, occupations in the arts and writing and longer careers before marriage would appear to be more likely to retain their names. More traditional individuals, perhaps as indicated by a religious ceremony, would be less likely to retain their surnames. Family expectations and peer effects might matter, as well. We will see that all of these reasons come into play. We emphasize that we are looking at the *correlates* of name change and that we are not claiming to identify a causal relationship.

The *New York Times* Cross-Section Data Sets: 1991 and 2001

To explore the correlates of name retention, information was collected from *all* marriage announcements in the *New York Times* in 1991 and 2001. As previously noted, the typical announcement contains education, occupation, age and family background information for both bride and groom and the religious nature of the ceremony. Across all weekends in 1991, there were 1,958 marriage announcements, of which 91 percent gave the bride's age; in 2001, there were 1,315 announcements, of which 95 percent gave the bride's age. (We do not know why the number of wedding announcements decreased during the 1990s and whether the *Times* published fewer announcements or fewer couples of the desired prominence submitted their announcement.)

Couples in these announcements form a distinctive stratum in society. Almost all graduated from college. In 1991, 49 percent of brides graduated from one of the top 25 universities or top 25 liberal arts colleges as ranked by the 2001 *U.S. News and World Report,* a figure that rose slightly to 52 percent in 2001. In 1991, 49 percent of the brides had a post-baccalaureate degree like an M.A., Ph.D., J.D., M.D. and M.B.A. or were pursuing one—a total rising to 65 percent by 2001. The median age of the bride (among first marriages) was 28 years in 1991, rising to 30 years in 2001. In 1991, first marriages were 97 (96 in 2001) percent of the total for brides and 91 (92 in 2001) percent for grooms. Religious ceremonies were performed for 92 (89 in 2001) percent of the weddings. About three-tenths of the religious ceremonies were Jewish and one-fifth were Catholic, higher than national averages, but not surprising given the location of the *New York Times*.

We have estimated an ordinary least squares linear probability regression where the dependent variable is whether the bride kept her surname.[8] Three groups of variables are included in Table 4—those concerning the bride, the groom and the ceremony.

Across the two years, 1991 and 2001, the fraction of women listed in the *Times* as keeping her surname at marriage increased (although, as we have noted, it probably did not increase in the nation as a whole). The age at first marriage rose considerably, and the fraction with advanced degrees also increased. But the changes in the observables are insufficient to explain the increase in "keeping."

A religious ceremony is associated with a lower probability of keeping one's surname. Relative to the base group (civil ceremony), a Catholic ceremony is associated with an 8.8 (14.3 in 2001) percentage point decrease in the probability of "keeping," and the effect is 8.5 (8.4) percentage points for a Jewish ceremony. Mixed religious ceremonies, as well as those for non-Western religions, had an equal effect as the base civil ceremony group in 1991, but were more like a Protestant ceremony in 2001.

Brides in their mid-twenties had a much lower probability of "keeping"—about 12 to 14 percentage points relative to brides older than about 30 years in 1991. The gradient of "keeping" with respect to age was greater in 2001 than in 1991 if one includes the youngest age group, which in 2001 was just 5 percent of the sample. Overall, a bride with an advanced degree had an increased probability of keeping her surname of about 14 percentage points in 1991.[9] An M.A. degree was associated with a 9 percentage point decrease in 1991, less in 2001. Interestingly, M.B.A. degrees were about equal to the base group of no advanced degree. Brides with occupations in the arts, writing and the media had an 18 percentage point increased probability of "keeping" in 1991 (10 percentage points in 2001). Each of the effects just mentioned is consistent with a desire to keep one's surname, once one has "made a name."

Graduation from an Ivy League school or a top-25 liberal arts college is associated with an 11 percentage point increase in 1991 and 14 percentage point increase in 2001 relative to any college or university ranked below number 25 in its class. Graduation from a "seven sisters" college is associated with an 8 percentage point increase in 1991 and a 16 percentage point increase in 2001. Graduation from other top universities has no effect relative to the base group.

Conditional on the bride's characteristics, few of the groom's observables like age, university or advanced degrees are associated with the bride's name retention, and we have included only those variables that were statistically and quantitatively

[8] The main results are robust to the estimation procedure and are almost identical to those from a "logit" regression.

[9] The increased coefficient on M.D., D.D.S. and D.V.M. is largely due to the inclusion of the group claiming to be keeping their surnames "professionally." The coefficients for the professional and Ph.D. degrees are all about 0.10 if one includes those "keeping" professionally as "changers."

Table 4
Correlates of Keeping One's Surname at Marriage: *New York Times:* 1991, 2001

	(1) 1991		(2) 2001		Means for cols.	
Variable	*Coeff.*	*S.e.*	*Coeff.*	*S.e.*	*(1)*	*(2)*
Dependent variable: Bride kept surname at marriage					0.190	0.324
Ceremony						
Catholic	−0.0879	(0.0377)	−0.143	(0.0478)	0.190	0.207
Jewish	−0.0851	(0.0353)	−0.0835	(0.0450)	0.306	0.298
Protestant	−0.0533	(0.0344)	−0.0992	(0.0452)	0.361	0.291
Other religion or mixed	−0.0284	(0.0463)	−0.0939	(0.0550)	0.0643	0.0996
Bride						
Ages 20 to 24	−0.129	(0.0572)	−0.413	(0.0759)	0.114	0.0478
Ages 25 to 29	−0.143	(0.0523)	−0.285	(0.0531)	0.559	0.409
Ages 30 to 34	−0.0244	(0.0537)	−0.169	(0.0528)	0.229	0.372
Ages 35 to 39	0.0362	(0.0606)	0.00178	(0.0618)	0.0671	0.104
Ivy league college	0.110	(0.0243)	0.136	(0.0307)	0.203	0.271
Top 25 university	−0.00353	(0.0299)	0.0844	(0.0390)	0.105	0.128
"Seven sisters" college	0.0754	(0.0311)	0.164	(0.0636)	0.0981	0.0414
Top 25 liberal arts college	0.114	(0.0336)	0.131	(0.0474)	0.0795	0.0805
J.D.	0.151	(0.0271)	0.115	(0.0365)	0.139	0.150
M.D., D.D.S., or D.V.M.	0.134	(0.0441)	0.229	(0.0541)	0.0446	0.0606
Ph.D.	0.147	(0.0506)	0.128	(0.0555)	0.0344	0.0566
M.A.	0.0912	(0.0240)	0.0330	(0.0286)	0.174	0.296
M.B.A.	0.0242	(0.0318)	−0.00984	(0.0472)	0.0948	0.0821
Bride occupation in arts[a]	0.180	(0.0265)	0.101	(0.0316)	0.136	0.190
Groom						
Ph.D.	0.196	(0.0416)	0.0258	(0.0559)	0.0513	0.0566
M.A.	0.0417	(0.0306)	0.123	(0.0329)	0.174	0.182
Uses patrimonial suffix	−0.0902	(0.0319)	−0.114	(0.0484)	0.0852	0.0725
Constant	0.232	(0.0589)	0.468	(0.0606)		
R^2	0.142		0.152			
Root mean squared error	0.365		0.435			
Number of observations	1,773		1,255		1,773	1,255

[a] "Occupation in the arts" includes artist, actress, dancer, also writer, editor, producer or director for some form of the media and architect.
Source: New York Times Cross-Section Data Sets: 1991 and 2001.
Notes: Omitted ceremony is "civil" and the omitted age group of 40 years plus. College categories are the same as in Table 2. "Uses patrimonial suffix" is a dummy variable equal to one if the groom was listed as a Jr., Sr. or with any Roman numerals following his name.

important. In 1991, a groom with a Ph.D. was more likely to marry a woman who retained her surname. Grooms with patrimonial suffixes like Jr., Sr. or III were about 10 percentage points less likely to marry a woman who retained her surname. In another regression we included information about the groom's father and found that having a prominent father-in-law diminished the probability of a bride's keeping her surname and that having a father-in-law in the arts or academia increased it. The effects just mentioned suggest that the bride's in-laws—the importance they place on names, their wealth and their nontraditional views—exert an independent impact.

Table 5
Correlates of Changing One's Surname: Harvard Class of 1980

Variables	*Coefficient*	*S.e.*	*Means*
Dependent variable: Woman changed surname after marriage			0.502
Woman's characteristics			
M.A.	0.0371	(0.0702)	0.253
M.B.A.	−0.160	(0.0900)	0.128
J.D.	−0.117	(0.0755)	0.223
M.D., D.D.S., D.V.M.	−0.234	(0.0843)	0.170
Ph.D.	−0.263	(0.0906)	0.115
Homemaker ever	0.190	(0.0935)	0.102
Arts/writing ever	−0.115	(0.0873)	0.121
Family characteristics			
Husband has Ph.D.	−0.204	(0.0765)	0.164
Children	0.212	(0.117)	0.820
Years to child/10	−0.127	(0.0896)	8.049
Years to marriage/10	−0.0977	(0.0715)	6.941
Constant	0.634	(0.0970)	
R^2	0.158		
Mean squared error	0.468		
Number of observations	305		

Source: Harvard class of 1980 data set.
Notes: Only women who were ever married and gave their year of marriage are included. Means for the years variables are not divided by 10. Advanced degrees refer to any and some women report more than one. "Children" is a dummy variable and indicates that at least one child is reported with a birth date, although the child could be a stepchild or an adopted child. "Years" means since graduation, June 1980. "Arts/writing" includes artists, photographers, writers, journalists, actresses, and so on. "Homemaker ever" and "Arts/writing ever" indicates that the woman listed one of these occupational groups during one of the four surveys. "S.e." is standard error.

Harvard Class of 1980 Data Set

We have also investigated the correlates of retaining one's surname using the Harvard class of 1980 data. The dependent variable here is a bit different from that in the *Times* data and is whether the woman *changed* her surname at marriage or any time thereafter, as reported in the reunion or class books from 1985 to 2000; that is, we include as "changers" women who kept their surname at marriage but subsequently changed it while married. In the sample given in Table 5, about 50 percent changed their name at some time after marriage. This sample includes only women who gave the date (or year) of their marriage. The women who did not give their date of marriage form a discernibly different group. A far lower fraction had children, and fewer earned advanced degrees. The correlates included are the presence of an advanced degree, whether the husband has a Ph.D., the presence of children, years from graduation to the first child's birth, years from graduation to marriage and if the woman was ever listed as a "homemaker" or in the "arts."

As in the *Times* data, the most important correlates concern the woman's characteristics: having an advanced degree and the time to marriage and to a first child. A Ph.D. or an M.D. is associated with a reduction of about 25 percentage points in the probability of changing one's name. Each year of marriage delay is

related to a 1 percentage point decline, and each year of delay in having children is related to a 1.3 percentage point decline.

The husband's observable characteristics are not very important, with the exception that women who marry men with Ph.D.'s tend to retain their surnames, a finding that is similar to that from the *Times* 1991 data. However, in other regressions not shown here, using both the *Times* and the Harvard data, we found no meaningful interaction effect of bride-Ph.D. and groom-Ph.D. The effects, rather, are independent. Women with Ph.D.'s value the surnames under which they have published or were known, in a similar manner to writers and artists. But a groom with a Ph.D. may live in a place that is more accepting of a wife with a surname different from his.

Using the point estimates, the predicted probability that a woman from the Harvard class of 1980 would change her name after marriage if she did not have an advanced degree, married soon after college and had children a few years later was 0.846; the actual figure in the data is 0.79. At the other extreme, the predicted probability she would change her name after marriage if she had a Ph.D., married a Ph.D. ten years after graduation and had no children was 0.069; the actual figure in the data is 0.059. The quantitatively most important components in explaining these large differences are those concerning whether the woman "made a name" for herself before marriage.

Conclusion

A shift among college graduate women to keeping their surnames after marriage began sometime from the mid-1970s to early 1980s. The marriage announcements from the *New York Times* society page reveal a sharp increase in the fraction retaining their surnames from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s and then a plateau to the late 1990s. But although the *Times* data yield a further increase in name-keeping in the late 1990s, the two other data sets we use show an unambiguous decrease. Because one of those data sets—the Massachusetts birth records—contains the full population of women who had a birth in Massachusetts, we are fairly certain that no selection issues severely bias the trend. A comparison of the Harvard class of 1980 with that of 1990 reinforces the conclusion we reach from the Massachusetts birth records. The current share of college-educated women who keep their surnames at marriage appears to be a shade under 20 percent.

The reason for the decrease in surname-keeping in the 1990s is not clear. A number of correlates suggest that name-keeping should not have decreased; for example, the age at first marriage has not reversed its trend upward. We can only speculate about the social factors that have caused surname-keeping to decrease. Perhaps some women who "kept" their surnames in the 1980s, during the rapid increase in "keeping," did so because of peer pressure, and their counterparts today are freer to make their own choices. Perhaps surname-keeping seems less salient as a way of publicly supporting equality for women than it did in the late 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps a general drift to more conservative social values has made surname-

keeping less attractive. The increase from the 1970s is far easier to explain: Women began to "make a name" for themselves and more often insisted upon retaining their name at marriage.

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