Introduction

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In a recent crossword puzzle I worked, the clue for a lateral word of five letters was "changes for some with marriage." "NAMES" was clearly the correct answer. Upon reflection, "TITLE" or "CLASS" might have supported the clue and met the space requirements of the puzzle as well, but unlike "NAMES," those words did not immediately come to mind. At the time I presumed that the vague "some" in the clue's text referred to women, the obviousness of it requiring no specific gender reference. Yet it strikes me now that logically the word "some" should refer to men, not women. Tradition, as well as data from recent studies, supports the observation that few men undergo a name change in the process of legalizing a union with a betrothed. On the other hand, a majority of women, not "some," change their surnames upon marriage, have changed them for quite some time, and likely will continue to do so into the foreseeable future. In this case a better clue in reference to women's names might have read "changes for many with marriage."

The act of naming is not a practice traditionally associated with women. In Genesis it is Adam, not Eve, who is directed by God to name the creatures that inhabit Eden. This Judeo-Christian story grants to the male the authority to give names to others, and resultantly, to create identities, establish relationships, and maintain social hierarchies. In patriarchal societies, it is the tradition for girls to be given their father's last name upon birth and for a woman to trade her father's surname for her husband's after marriage. As suggested by the increasing use of hyphenated names and the creation of

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new names by some married individuals and couples, this tradition is in flux.

Naming practices associated with women's first names are driven by custom as well. At birth, given names generally discern between female and male offspring (Paula and Paul, for example). More recent onomastic practices disrupt such gender-specific choices with some parents choosing perceived gender-neutral names, like Morgan and Drew, for their children. These alternative practices apply with greater frequency to the selection of given names for girls than for boys, suggesting perhaps the desire on the part of certain parents to disguise their daughters' gender on future documents (such as school admission papers and job applications). Women's naming options in our time seem to increase in complexity and variety in proportion to the greater opportunities available to them in a changing society.

An interest in women's names is not new to this journal. In recent years *NAMES* has published a number of insightful articles on women's names, including "Emily Dickinson's Placenames" (Nielson and Hallen 2006), "In the Name of Matilda" (Robertson 2005), and "Affirmative Naming in *No Name*" (Leal 2004). Additionally, gender studies that contrast female and male names have appeared in print, among them "Final Letter Compared with Final Phoneme in Male and Female Names" (Barry and Harper 2003).

What distinguishes this current issue of *NAMES* from its predecessors is that it is the first to devote its pages exclusively to the topic of women's names and naming practices. But what exactly does a focus on women's onomastics entail? Variations on Virginia Woolf's series of fundamental questions concerning women and fiction in *A Room of One's Own* (1926) served as inspiration for this issue and may be posed as follows. What do women's names reveal about women and their lives? Traditionally who has held the power to name women? How do women claim (or reclaim) the authority to name themselves? How do women's names

contribute to (or hinder) women's identities? How have women's names and naming practices evolved over time and across cultures?

The articles appearing in this issue respond effectively to these lines of inquiry. Additionally, they represent various disciplines and fields of study, including history, social theory, literary criticism, and cultural studies. In "A Flock of Doves: U.S. Women's Colleges and Their Names," Beth DiNatale Johnson and Christine De Vinne examine how names mark gender and affiliation at institutions associated with the education of women. In "Social and Cognitive Factors in Women's Marital Naming Choices," Laura K. Scheuble and David R. Johnson explore recent surname trends. The matriarchal power to bestow or to withhold names in the Ojibwe culture is the focus of Eileen Quinlan's "Ritual Circles to Home in Louise Erdrich's Character Names." Finally, Lynn Westney traces the process by which women's names get attached to specific culinary dishes in "From Courtesans to Queens: Recipes Named for Women."

This issue on women's names would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of a number of people. Foremost, I must thank my co-editor, Christine De Vinne, who was gracious enough to listen to an idea of mine over dinner in June 2006 when academic business brought us both to Daytona Beach, Florida. She agreed to share the responsibilities and labors of such a venture (I could not have undertaken this project alone) and the seed for this special topics issue was planted. On behalf of Christine De Vinne and myself, I would like to thank the current Editor of *NAMES*, Ren Vasiliev, who provided us the opportunity to substitute briefly for her fine stewardship. Generously she shared her expertise and knowledge with us, responding to our many questions throughout the process.

The timeliness of our focus was validated recently when Christine and I sought publications on women's names for the book reviews section of this issue. Unfortunately none

were located in time. Thus we encourage current onomasticians who research women's names and naming practices to continue their endeavors and hope this special issue inspires new scholars in this field of inquiry. We would very much like to review your future books.