

# Keeping Her Surname as a Middle Name at Marriage: What Predicts this Practice Among Married Women Who Take Their Husband's Last Name?

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Data from 60,223 clients of MissNowMrs.com were used to identify predictors of women retaining their premarital surname as a middle name when changing their last name to that of their husband after they were married. Among women who changed their last name to that of their husband, 18 % kept their former last name as a middle name. We identify four significant predictors of women keeping their surname as their middle name: education, marital age, race, and region of residence. As their education level increased, women were significantly more likely to keep their surname before marriage as a middle name. Marital age had a curvilinear relationship with this naming choice. African Americans were significantly less likely than whites to use their birth name as a middle name while other women of color were significantly more likely than whites to follow this practice. The birth surname as middle name pattern was most common in the South, suggesting a regional cultural influence.

KEYWORDS Marriage, middle name, maiden name, marital name

## Introduction

Despite changes in norms and values in the occupational and familial roles of women, little has changed in societal expectations for the last name women take at the time of their marriage. In the US, over 90 % of women still follow the traditional pattern of changing their last name to that of their husband when they marry (Brightman, 1994; Gooding and Kreider, 2009; Johnson and Scheuble, 1995), signaling the persistence of gendered practices in marriage. The bride completely dropping her former last name is by far the most common pattern in these marriages, but in a small proportion (about one in five) the woman retains her former surname as a middle name (Johnson and Scheuble, 1995). This practice may indicate a compromise between the strong normative expectation of

taking their husband's surname and her desire to maintain her own identity and link to her family of origin. Researchers have examined predictors of and reasons for women retaining their birth surname as a last name when they marry (Abel and Kruger, 2011; Goldin and Shim, 2004; Gooding and Kreider, 2009; Hoffnung, 2006; Kerns, 2011), but little research has focused on the prevalence of women keeping their birth surname as a middle name at the time of marriage. Even less is known about what factors explain this naming practice.

Our study examined factors that predict this naming pattern among a large group of women who used the services of MissNowMrs.com to assist them with the bureaucratic and legal steps required for a marital name change. Focusing only on women who took their husband's name as their surname ( $N = 60,223$ ), we compared wives who completely dropped their premarital surname with those who kept it as their middle name. The factors we examined include the woman's age at the time of marriage, the region where she lived, whether or not she was a US citizen, her race and ethnicity, and her educational attainment.

## Literature review

In the US, about 7 % of women have a different surname than their husband (Gooding and Kreider, 2009). This finding is consistent with historical patterns of name-change expectations for women at the time of marriage. The US, influenced by legal traditions brought over from England, adopted the custom and legal expectation of women having the same surname as their husband (Suarez, 1997). Although brides in the US are not legally required to take their husband's last name as their own, it is still the tradition for women to do so.

The focus in the research literature has been on the characterization of marital naming choices as traditional/conventional and nontraditional/nonconventional (Etaugh et al., 1999; Forbes et al., 2002; Gooding and Kreider, 2009; Hoffnung, 2006; Johnson and Scheuble, 1995; Kerns, 2011; Scheuble et al., 2000; Scheuble et al., 2012). Traditional surname choice at the time of marriage is defined as a woman changing her last name to that of her husband. Nontraditional choices include brides keeping their birth surname, hyphenating their last name with their husband's, and creating a new last name. This study focuses on the marital naming choice which is a compromise between the traditional and nontraditional: the bride taking her husband's surname as her own but retaining her birth surname as her middle name.

Only two studies have examined the prevalence of women using their premarital surname as a middle name. Johnson and Scheuble (1995), in a study based on a representative sample from the US, examined predictors of brides making a nontraditional marital name choice as compared to taking their husband's surname and completely dropping their own birth surname. Among the women who changed their last name to that of their husband, the findings showed about 25 % kept their former surname as a middle name. All other nontraditional naming choices combined — keeping her last name, hyphenating, using two last names, creating a new name — were chosen by less than 5 % of the married women in the sample. A more recent study (Hoffnung, 2006), using data from a convenience sample of 126 women from the US, found that 17 % of these women either planned to or used their birth surname as a middle name when they married.

Despite increased acceptance by the public of egalitarian treatment in laws, work, and family (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Thornton and Young-Demarco, 2001), it is still normative for women to change their last name to that of their husband when they marry. For both men and women the traditional practice for them is to receive the last name of their father at birth. This patrimonial pattern extends to marriage, where the wife is expected to take the name of another man — her husband — when she marries. One of the consequences of the application of a system of patrimony is that men will have the same surname throughout their life, while women's surnames will change if they marry (Lebell, 1988), resulting in a gendered pattern which treats husbands' and wives' surnames very differently even though both began with their father's surname. The median age at first marriage for women in the US is slightly under 27 years (US Census Bureau, 2010), so, when a woman marries, she has had her father's last name for about one-third of her life and has likely experienced important life events with that surname, including graduation from educational institutions and establishing a career. Although the bride is still carrying a male surname at the time of marriage, her birth surname is one that she may view as an important part of her self-identity (Foss and Edson, 1989; Laskowski, 2010; Twenge, 1997).

Only a small percentage of brides in the US maintain their birth surnames at the time of marriage. Gooding and Kreider (2009), analyzing nationally representative data from the American Community Survey of native-born women, found that 93 % of these women had the same surname as their husband. Similarly, Johnson and Scheuble (1995), analyzing data also from a nationally representative random sample, found that less than 6 % of the women retained their birth surname when they married. In contrast, Maceacheron (2011) reports that 16 % of women ( $N = 28,680$ ) who married in Hawaii in 2006 retained their birth surname and an additional 5 % hyphenated their last name with that of their husband. This difference may reflect a US regional or cultural difference since regional effects on marital surname choice have been found in other studies (Gooding and Kreider, 2009; Johnson and Scheuble, 1995). Cultural differences also may affect these findings since these data included women who originated from countries outside of the US. Other researchers have also examined marital surname using nonrandom samples and report that anywhere in the range of 10–30 % of women kept their birth surname as a last name when they married (Goldin and Shim, 2004; Hoffnung, 2006; Kopelman et al., 2009; Lillian, 2009; Scheuble et al., 2000).

The background factors that predict why some women elect to keep their premarital surname as part of their name have received limited empirical attention in the literature. Although the data we were using contained no information about the motivations for the name choice, we can draw inferences about motivations by examining social and demographic factors that have been found in the literature to affect women's last name choice at marriage. The extant research on a bride's last name choice primarily focuses on maintaining identity and the role of cultural expectations as explanations for the surname choice.

Foss and Edson (1989) gathered data from a convenience sample of three groups of women and found women taking their husband's last name were concerned with the importance of the relationship first, cultural expectations, second, and issues having to do with the self, last. In contrast, for women who did not change their surname, the main focus was on the self, followed by importance of the relationship, with cultural expectations ranked last. The importance of the self and the relationship were valued equally by brides who hyphenated their surname with that of their husband. The importance

of cultural expectations ranked third for these women. In a similar study, Mills (2003) distributed an e-mail questionnaire to British feminist academics ( $N = 36$ ) in order to examine the reasons for last name choice at marriage. Women who changed their last name to that of their husband did so to show a sense of belonging with the husband's family, while others saw it as a valid choice because they felt no identification with their own birth surname. Women who added their husband's name on to their own name did so because it was a compromise that preserved some aspect of their former identity. In another study focusing on the meaning of marital surnames, Laskowski (2010) interviewed 23 women who kept their surname after marriage and found that the reasons for retaining the birth name included maintaining identity, keeping ties to the birth lineage, and demonstrating a balance of power in the relationship.

These studies of identity and naming, although not based on random samples which limits their generalizability, all found that women making nontraditional naming choices were more focused on their individual identity as compared to their counterparts. Women who kept their premarital surname as a middle name and changed their surname to that of their husband were striving to maintain their own identity while simultaneously following traditional expectations regarding marriage in the US.

## Predictors of keeping premarital surname as a middle name

### *Education*

Education has been a consistent predictor of women making a nontraditional last name choice at the time of their marriage. We expect that women with higher levels of education compared to those with lower levels of education will be more likely to retain their premarital last name as a middle name. Researchers have found this education effect in other studies (Gooding and Kreider, 2009; Hoffnung, 2006; Johnson and Scheuble, 1995). Johnson and Scheuble (1995) found that brides with higher levels of education were significantly more likely than those with lower levels of education to maintain their birth surname as their last name (data for this study came from a nationally representative sample of married persons and their married children). Hoffnung (2006) also found a relationship between education and a bride keeping her birth surname (these data came from a content analysis of the *New York Times* and survey data from 126 college-educated married women). Gooding and Kreider (2009), using data from a weighted, stratified, random sample, found that higher educational attainment increased the odds of women retaining their birth surname as their last name when they married. Although no research has examined this relationship among women who kept their birth surname as a middle name compared to dropping their premarital surname altogether, we expect the relationship to be in the same direction with higher education leading to a greater likelihood of keeping their birth surname as a middle name.

### *Citizenship*

Marital naming norms and practices vary substantially among countries. Valetas (2001) examined marital naming practices in European Union countries and found important differences in patterns among countries. In Germany, Great Britain, Austria, France,

Ireland, Sweden, and Finland, brides' last name choices were most like those in the US, with the majority of women taking their husband's last name as their own. Women in Spain deviated the most from the US pattern with only 4 % of women changing their last name to that of their husband. In non-European countries, marital naming practices and norms also vary substantially. In some Asian countries (e.g. China and Korea) wives keep their birth surname when they marry, but in Japan a single family surname is required by law. The most common pattern in Latin American countries, where multiple surnames represent the norm, is to append the husband's surname to the wife's name, although the common practice is that she continues to use her premarital surname (Arichi, 1999; Kidder, 2014; Lauderdale and Kestenbaum, 2000; Noack and Wiik, 2008; Tirosh, 2010). In this study, we focused on brides who married in the US, although our dataset contained information about whether or not the bride was a citizen of the US. Unfortunately, the dataset had no information on the country of origin of those who were not US citizens. We expect, based on what we know about naming in other countries, that overall non-citizens would be more likely than US citizens to retain their birth surname as a middle name at marriage.

### ***Marital age***

Several research studies have examined the relationship between marital age and keeping one's birth name as a last name and found that those women marrying at later ages were significantly more likely to retain their birth surname as a last name than those marrying at younger ages (Goldin and Shim, 2004; Gooding and Kreider, 2009; Hoffnung, 2006; Kopelman et al., 2009; Maceacheron, 2011; Scheuble et al., 2000). The longer women lived in adult roles with their own surname, the more we would expect them to identify with this name in their everyday life; an explanation which is consistent with the findings of a marital age effect in these studies. We expect this same process to operate in affecting women's decision to retain a part of their adult identity by keeping their premarital surname in some capacity, such as it becoming a middle name.

### ***Ethnoracial effects***

Race and ethnicity may have an effect on a woman keeping her birth surname as a middle name when she marries because they comprise an indicator of cultural and historical differences. Gooding and Kreider (2009) found that both Native American and Asian-American women were more likely to use a nontraditional last name at the time of their marriage as compared to whites. Hoffnung (2006) compared whites and women of color to examine differences in last name choice at the time of marriage. She found that women of color were more likely to make a nontraditional last name choice than white women. Based on this research, we expect women of other races, as compared to white women, to be the most likely to maintain their surname as a middle name when they marry.

### ***Region in the US***

Johnson and Scheuble (1995) analyzed data from a national sample of women in the US and found that women in the Southern region (US Department of Commerce, Economics,

and Statistical Administration, 2010) were substantially more likely than women in other regions to keep their premarital surname as a middle name. Anecdotal evidence from wedding forum website discussions and posts suggests that, in the South, there is a historical cultural tradition of women keeping their birth surname as a middle name when they marry (Holway, 2013; Q+A Ask Carly, 2014; Thomas, 2013). Consistent with this evidence, we expect to find that Southern women will be more likely to follow this practice than women in other regions.

## Hypotheses

- (1) Women with higher levels of education will be more likely than those with lower levels of education to retain their surname as a middle name at marriage.
- (2) Women who are citizens of the United States will be less likely to keep their surname as a middle name when they marry than women who are not citizens of the United States.
- (3) As marital age increases, women will be more likely to use their surname as a middle name when they marry.
- (4) Women in the South as compared to women in other regions of the US will be more likely to use their surname as a middle name at marriage.

## Methods

### Sample

Data for this study came from a sample of 60,223 women who utilized the services of MissNowMrs.com; a business that assists people making a surname or middle name change at the time of their marriage. Last name changes included dropping their birth surnames completely and changing their surname to that of their husband, dropping their middle name and using their birth surname as a middle name along with their husband's last name, and other name-change variations. This sample excluded women who did not change their surname at all when they married. The data used here came from the years 2008–2012. The majority of the women using the service took their husband's last name, dropping their own surname completely (76.5 %).

- 16.3 % changed their last name to that of their husband but retained their former surname as a middle name
- 4 % hyphenated their birth surname with that of their husband
- 1.5 % combined their last name with that of their husband without a hyphen, and
- 1.4 % took a new last name that was not their husband's.

Although the sample is not necessarily representative of all marriages during this time period, the distribution of marital naming patterns in this sample was very similar to that observed in other, more representative, studies.

### *Dependent variable*

The dependent variable was constructed to contrast those keeping their premarital surname as a middle name and changing their last name to that of their husband (coded as 1) with those changing their last name to that of their husband and dropping their premarital surname completely (coded as 0). This analysis focused only on these two groups of women. In these marriages, 82 % of women took their husband's surname as their last name and dropped their own surname, while 18 % retained their surname as a middle name.

### *Independent variables*

Five independent variables were included in the analysis. Education was measured in six categories ranging from some high school education (1) to an advanced degree (6). Overall, this was a well-educated group of respondents with about 6.0 % having a high school education or less, 17.5 % having some college education, 8.0 % having an associate's degree, 44 % having a bachelor's degree, and 25 % having an advanced degree. The woman's US citizenship status at the time of marriage was measured in two categories (0 = not a US citizen, 1 = yes). Less than 1 % of the women were not US citizens. Age was measured in years and ranged from 18–75 years with a median age of 28 years. This is comparable to the median age at first marriage for women in the US, which is about 27 years (US Census Bureau, 2010). The ethnoracial variable consisted of four categories: white (91.3 %), African American (4.1 %), Asian (3.3 %), and other (1.2 %) which included Hispanic women. The final independent variable, region where the bride lived, was coded into nine US Census Bureau (2013) regions. The specific states in each region are listed in Appendix A. Table 1 presents the descriptive information for all the variables in the analysis.

TABLE 1  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR VARIABLES IN THE MODEL

|                            | <i>N</i> | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------------|----------|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Birth as middle name       | 108,123  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.1753 | 0.38023        |
| Education                  | 73,284   | 1.00    | 6.00    | 4.6548 | 1.19540        |
| Citizen of US              | 116,256  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.9905 | 0.09725        |
| Age at marriage            | 116,018  | 18      | 75      | 29.45  | 6.367          |
| White                      | 75,014   | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.9127 | 0.28226        |
| Black                      | 75,014   | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.0414 | 0.19932        |
| Asian                      | 75,014   | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.0334 | 0.17970        |
| Other race                 | 75,014   | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.0124 | 0.11083        |
| New England                | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.0682 | 0.25204        |
| Mid-Atlantic               | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.1672 | 0.37315        |
| East North Central         | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.1118 | 0.31510        |
| West North Central         | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.0489 | 0.21562        |
| South Atlantic             | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.2256 | 0.41800        |
| East South Central         | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.0345 | 0.18250        |
| West South Central         | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.1020 | 0.30262        |
| West Mountain              | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.0732 | 0.26043        |
| West Pacific               | 116,073  | 0.00    | 1.00    | 0.1687 | 0.37448        |
| Valid <i>N</i> (list-wise) | 60,223   |         |         |        |                |

### Analysis method

We used logistic regression analysis with name choice as the dependent variable. The dependent variable was dichotomous (kept surname as a middle name and changed last name to husband's (1), dropped surname and changed last name to husband's (0)). The data assumptions of the logistic regression statistical procedure were met by our data. The model included a dichotomous outcome variable where each woman could fit into one of two categories, we also had five independent variables that were assumed to be linearly related to the log odds of the dependent variable. All independent variables in our model were entered into the model simultaneously so the effect of each independent variable was adjusted for all independent variables included. Logistic regression coefficients estimated the effect of each independent variable on the odds of keeping the birth surname as a middle name and the statistical significance of these effects (Menard, 1995).

### Findings

Table 2 presents the logistic regression model estimating the effects on name choice of education, whether or not the woman was a US citizen, age of the woman at the time of marriage, race, and region in the US where the woman lived. We focused on the odds ratios (ORs) to interpret the effect of each of the independent variables. For each increase in educational attainment category, women were 1.5 times (OR 1.532;  $p < 0.001$ ) more likely to keep their premarital surname as a middle name, indicating a strong relationship between educational attainment and this naming choice. The effect of marital age was

TABLE 2  
LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES ON KEEPING SURNAME AS A MIDDLE NAME (0 = NO, 1 = YES; N = 60,223)

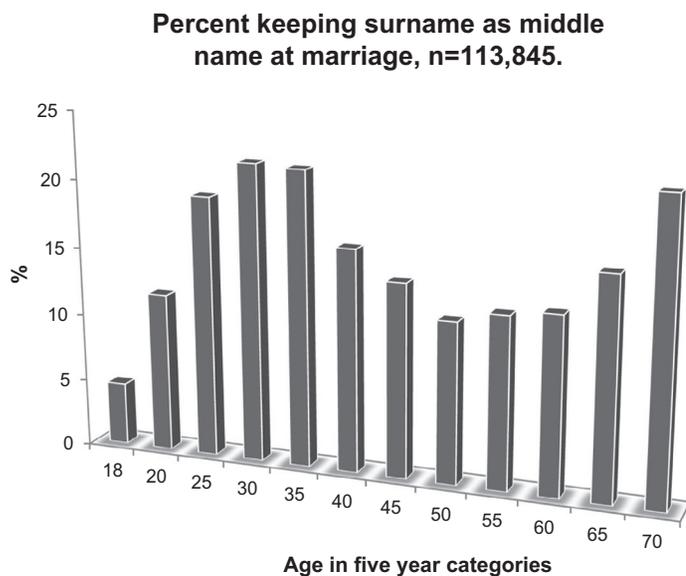
|                                   | B     | Odds Ratio | Sig. |
|-----------------------------------|-------|------------|------|
| <i>Education</i>                  | 0.43  | 1.53       | ***  |
| <i>Citizen</i> (0 = no, 1 = yes)  | -0.10 | 0.91       |      |
| <i>Age</i>                        | 0.20  | 1.22       | ***  |
| Age squared/100                   | -0.20 | 1.00       | ***  |
| Age (1 = 60+) (0 = 59 or younger) | 1.91  | 6.76       | ***  |
| <i>Ethnoracial group</i>          |       |            |      |
| White (reference)                 |       | 1.00       |      |
| African American                  | -0.52 | 0.59       | ***  |
| Asian American                    | 1.00  | 2.72       | ***  |
| Other race                        | 0.52  | 1.68       | ***  |
| <i>Region</i>                     |       |            |      |
| West North Central (reference)    |       | 1.00       |      |
| New England                       | 1.00  | 2.73       | ***  |
| Mid-Atlantic                      | 0.55  | 1.73       | ***  |
| East North Central                | 0.39  | 1.48       | ***  |
| South Atlantic                    | 1.71  | 5.53       | ***  |
| East South Central                | 1.96  | 7.06       | ***  |
| West South Central                | 1.44  | 4.24       | ***  |
| West Mountain                     | 0.65  | 1.91       | ***  |
| West Pacific                      | 0.74  | 2.10       | ***  |
| <i>Constant</i>                   | -8.06 | 0.00       |      |
| <i>Nagelkerke R sq.</i>           | 0.13  |            |      |

\*\*\*sig. at  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*sig. at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*sig. at  $p < 0.05$ .

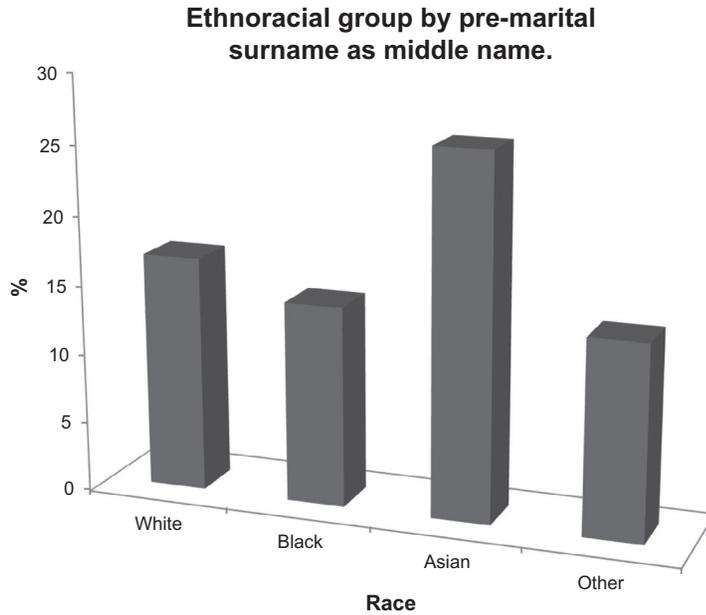
also significant but more complex and appeared to show a nonlinear pattern. To permit estimation of a curvilinear relationship in the logistic regression model, we included both age at marriage and age at marriage squared in the model. The relationship was curvilinear as shown by the significant effect of the age-squared term in the equation. Because of the nonlinear pattern observed, which could not be reproduced only with the linear and squared terms, we also included a dummy variable for women marrying at 60 or over in the model, which was also statistically significant (OR 1.911;  $p < 0.001$ ). This shows that, in addition to the basic curvilinear effect of age at marriage, marrying at over 60 nearly doubled the odds of this middle name choice. This can be more clearly seen in Figure 1 which shows this pattern. The percentage of women keeping their surname as a middle name peaked when they married between the ages of 35–39 and then declined until around marriage at age 50 when it again began to rise. Those in the age group of 70 or older at marriage were as likely to use this naming practice as those between the ages of 30–39.

The next variable included in the analysis was the ethnoracial category with whites treated as the reference group. African Americans were 41 % less likely than whites to retain their surname as a middle name (OR 0.593;  $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, Asian Americans were 2.7 times more likely (OR 2.72;  $p < 0.001$ ) and Hispanic women and women who selected other race were 1.7 times more likely to keep their surname as a middle name when they married (OR 1.679;  $p < 0.001$ ). This pattern is shown in Figure 2. Asian Americans were more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to keep their premarital surname as a middle name.

The final variable in the model was the women's region of residence. We used the detailed census definitions of regions and examined nine regions with West North Central as the omitted (reference) category. Women in every other region were significantly



GRAPH 1 Percent keeping surname as middle name at marriage.

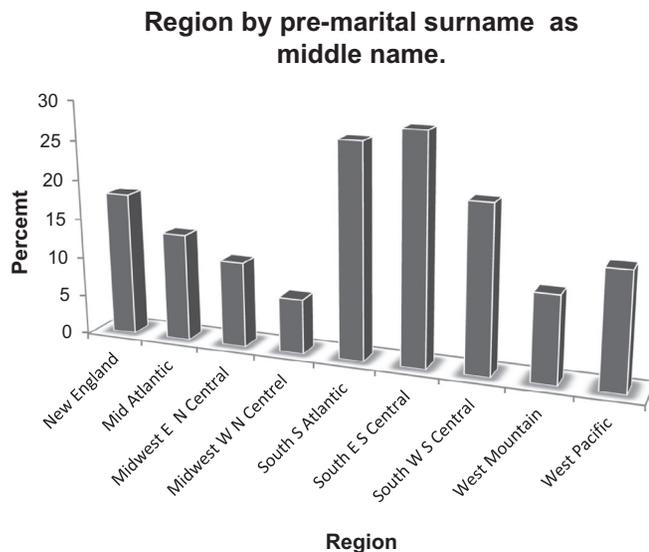


GRAPH 2 Ethnoracial group by pre-marital surname as a middle name.

( $p < 0.001$ ) more likely to retain their surname as a middle name than women in the West North Central region. The greatest differences were among women in the three Southern regions who were substantially more likely to keep their surname as a middle name. These varied from being seven times more likely in the East South Central region to 4.2 times more likely in the West South Central region. This is evidence of a strong effect of being from the South. Smaller, but still significant, regional effects were found for New England and the West Pacific regions, in each of which use of the middle name pattern was over twice as likely as for those found in the West North Central region. Figure 3 depicts this regional pattern as observed in these data.

## Discussion

Naming decisions for women at the time of their marriage can involve a balance between traditional norms and self-identity. Previous research has focused on the nontraditional option, women retaining their birth surnames as a last name at marriage, and the normative option, changing their last name to that of their husband. Women also have the option of balancing these sometimes conflicting expectations by retaining their premarital surname as a middle name. As found in previous research, this choice may serve as a balance between maintaining their own identity and assuming a new identity with their husband (Foss and Edson, 1989; Laskowski, 2010; Suter, 2004). Little empirical research has focused on this naming pattern and we add to this literature by examining predictors of women retaining their birth surname as a middle name. Our findings are consistent with those from previous research examining the percentage of women keeping their surname as a middle name. Sixteen percent of the women in our sample retained their



GRAPH 3 Region by pre-marital surname as a middle name.

birth surname as their middle name when they married, as compared with 25 % in the Johnson and Scheuble (1995) research and 17 % in the Hoffnung (2006) research. As hypothesized, women with higher levels of education were more likely to retain their birth surname as a middle name as compared to those with lower levels of education. This is consistent with previous research on women who kept their birth surname which found a similar pattern (Gooding and Kreider, 2009; Hoffnung, 2006; Johnson and Scheuble, 1995). Well-educated women are more likely to have an occupation where they have established an identity and consequently do not want to lose their tie to their occupation. Also, women with higher levels of education are more likely to have been exposed to other women in the academic setting who have made a nontraditional last name choice. It has been found elsewhere that more education leads to greater exposure to gender role myths and increases egalitarianism (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Davis and Greenstein, 2009).

We also tested the relationship between being a US citizen and keeping one's birth surname as a last name, hypothesizing that women who were US citizens would be less likely to keep their birth surnames as a middle name than their counterparts. This hypothesis was not supported. In part, this may reflect that less than 1 % of the women in the sample were non-US citizens. Since we do not know the country of citizenship for the non-US citizens, it is also possible that the majority of the noncitizens in our sample came from countries which practice the same naming norms as the US. It is also possible that the bride dropped her birth surname to aid in assimilation to a new country or to underscore the importance of following normative behaviors within the US (Nelson and Otnes, 2005).

Because our sample contained women from a wide range of ages at marriage, we were able to examine the effects of the age of the woman at the time of marriage on middle name choice across a broad range. As hypothesized, women who were older when they married were more likely to keep their birth surname as a middle name and this

relationship peaked for women who married in their 30s and then declined until around marital age 50, then increased again. An unexpected finding was the increase in keeping one's birth surname as a middle name for women who were 70 years or over when they married. We believe that this pattern may reflect women who remarried after the death of their spouse and, because they had carried their previous husband's surname for many years, wanted to retain this part of their identity. It is also likely that these women had children with the last name of their deceased husband and keeping this name in some way was important for continuity with their children's name. Keeping their surname as a middle name and taking their new husband's last name represents a link between past and current identities and also satisfies cultural expectations. Unfortunately, we cannot test this directly as there was no information on previous marriages or children in the database used for this study.

We also examined the effect of race and ethnicity on use of premarital surname as a middle name. We hypothesized that whites would be the least likely to use their premarital surname as compared to other races and ethnicities. There was support for this hypothesis with the exception of African American women who were less likely to use this naming pattern. Consistent with the findings from previous research (Gooding and Kreider, 2009), Asian Americans were the most likely to keep their premarital surname as a middle name. In some Asian countries, women keep their birth surname at marriage (Lauderdale and Kestenbaum, 2000), which may reflect the desire of these women of Asian origin to follow both US and Asian traditions when selecting a marital name. African American women may be the least likely to keep their premarital surname as a middle name due to their low rates of marriage and the significance of marriage as a social unit (Bank, 2012; Edin and Kefalas, 2011). These women may want to establish their family as the important social unit and consequently give up their premarital surname in order to demonstrate that they are indeed a married couple.

The last variable we examined was the US region of the marrying couple. As hypothesized, women in the South were substantially more likely than women in the rest of the country to keep their birth surname as a middle name. This finding is consistent with research examining women keeping their birth surname as a last name (Johnson and Scheuble, 1995) and with popular press articles (Holway, 2013). We expect that this represents the continuation across generations of a Southern subcultural expectation which may have its origins in landed families and strong ties to family name found in the agricultural South.

Future research should focus on motivations for women keeping their birth surname as a middle name when they marry. This decision may represent a compromise between adhering to normative gender role expectations and maintaining one's identity. More empirical attention is needed to determine the rationale for these marital naming decisions. Because of the unusual pattern noted in the South and, to some extent, in New England, further historical research is needed to examine the origins and persistence of this naming practice more closely.

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## Appendix A. States included in each region and percentage of women from each region

| New England        | Mid-Atlantic       | East North Central | West North Central | South Atlantic |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 6.70 %             | 16.60 %            | 11.10 %            | 4.80 %             | 22.50 %        |
| Maine              | New York           | Wisconsin          | Missouri           | Delaware       |
| New Hampshire      | Pennsylvania       | Michigan           | North Dakota       | Maryland       |
| Vermont            | New Jersey         | Illinois           | South Dakota       | DC             |
| Massachusetts      |                    | Indiana            | Nebraska           | Virginia       |
| Rhode Island       |                    | Ohio               | Kansas             | West Virginia  |
| Connecticut        |                    |                    | Minnesota          | North Carolina |
|                    |                    |                    | Iowa               | South Carolina |
|                    |                    |                    |                    | Georgia        |
|                    |                    |                    |                    | Florida        |
| East South Central | West South Central | Mountain           | Pacific            |                |
| 3.40 %             | 10.20 %            | 7.40 %             | 17.40 %            |                |
| Kentucky           | Oklahoma           | Idaho              | Alaska             |                |
| Tennessee          | Texas              | Montana            | Washington         |                |
| Mississippi        | Arkansas           | Wyoming            | Oregon             |                |
| Alabama            | Louisiana          | Nevada             | California         |                |
|                    |                    | Utah               | Hawaii             |                |
|                    |                    | Colorado           |                    |                |
|                    |                    | Arizona            |                    |                |
|                    |                    | New Mexico         |                    |                |