

Whose Last Name Should Married Couple Choose?

R.R.S. Stewart

It used to be that when a man and a woman got married, they became one person in the eye of the law. And that person was the man. Even though laws have changed to give married women property rights and custody rights over their own children, society has still convinced women it is a nuisance to keep their own last names after marriage. A person's name is a part of his or her identity. Giving it up shouldn't be taken lightly.

For women, there are many alternatives to that of simply taking their husband's name. My mother kept her own last name; she was Ms. Schmidt before marriage and Ms. Schmidt after. Some women keep their own last names as middle names or hyphenate their last names. Even more egalitarian alternatives exist when the husband considers the implications of his wife's change. I know a couple that decided to take the wife's last name as both their middle names and the husband's last name as both their last names. I know another couple that took equality a step further by adding each other's last names to their own so they each have two last names. A most interesting solution was found by a couple that combined and rearranged their names to come up with entirely new one for both of them.

But those are only three couples out of the many that get married each year. The marriage licenses in many states ask for the woman's name before marriage, the woman's name after marriage, the man's name before marriage, and the man's name after marriage. The licenses are set up this way so both spouses can change their names for free at the time of marriage if they want to. More couples should take advantage of this. So ladies, if you are planning on getting married, please consider whether you really want to change your name – and what you really want to change it to – while you still conveniently have the chance. And gentlemen, before assuming your wives-to-be will change their names, ask yourself if you'd be willing to do the same.

R.R.S. Stewart is a columnist at the Minnesota Daily at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, where she is a senior majoring in architecture with minors in journalism and women's studies. The excerpt is from the article that was published in the Minnesota Daily on April 28, 2004.

From America Now Short Readings from Recent Periodicals (Sixth Edition)
Edited by Robert Atwan Bedford St. Martin's 2005

Writing Directions

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.