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Marital Naming Plans among Students at Four Evangelical Colleges

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Abstract: Despite increasingly egalitarian gender roles in the United States, when the wedding bells ring for heterosexual couples, husband and wife still commonly emerge sharing the man's last name. Largely missing from previous studies of marital name change is the influence of religion. We examine the marital naming plans of 199 students from four Evangelical colleges. Nearly all these students planned to marry and more than 80% planned to follow the traditional naming pattern for their gender. Bivariate correlations and logistic regression models reveal that private prayer and more literal views of the Bible correspond to plans for a traditional marital surname. Yet, only a small minority of students evoked religious language to justify their surname choice. Gender roles, identity, and tradition were dominant themes in their explanations. Whether recognized or not, personal religiosity and the model of marriage cultivated in religious families guide the marital naming intentions of Evangelical students. Thus, religion operates as an invisible influence shaping ideals of marriage and family within Evangelical subculture.

Keywords: marital names; marriage; evangelicals; college

1. Introduction

“It is my privilege to introduce to you for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. [insert male name here].” These are the closing words of countless church weddings for generations in the United States. Although, like church weddings, the practice of U.S. women taking their husband’s last name remains common, it is now far from universal.

Marital naming conventions hold important implications for individuals and societies. Surnames trace descent and speak to patterns of familial and societal authority. Changing attitudes toward marital surnames in heterosexual marriages is a subject of substantial research. Known correlates to progressive marital naming views include gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender ideology. Remarkably little previous research delves into the influence of religion and religious contexts in shaping marital naming choices. It is a striking omission given the association of religion to issues of gender, marriage, and family [1–4].

The purpose of this study is to explore marital name change plans among students at four Evangelical Christian colleges. Evangelicals have been on the front lines of culture war battles over marriage and family [5]. Local churches and parachurch organizations like Focus on the Family are recognizable proponents of Evangelical ideals of marriage and family. Evangelical colleges and universities are foundational to the Evangelical subculture. While surveys of college students on the topic of marital name change are common, no previous research looks within Evangelical colleges specifically. We extend prior research by concentrating on the marital naming plans of students in Evangelical colleges and examining a wider array of religion variables.

2. Marital Naming Patterns

The social expectation placed on women to take their husband’s surname has a long history. Until overturned by a Supreme Court ruling in 1975, many states had laws that required women to adopt their husband’s surnames at marriage. Even without a legal requirement, the adoption of a husband’s surname remains the most common naming option for brides in America [6–10]. More than nine out of ten U.S. women take their husband’s last name at marriage [7,8]. Nearly three-fourths of American adults agree that it is generally better if a woman changes her name when married and half believe that marital name change for women should be legally required [11]. Even college students show remarkable consistency over the past two decades in their marital naming intentions [12].

Varied explanations have been put forward for why American women continue to take their husband’s last name. Some see it as a drift toward more conservative values in the society as a whole [13]. Others contend that empowered to choose a surname at marriage many women choose their husband’s surname as a matter of convenience or tradition [14,15]. In essence, the maiden name is no longer a political issue. One journalist memorably summarized the decision-making of contemporary women: “[W]hich name do you like the sound of? What do you feel like doing? The politics are almost incidental...in a mundane way, having the same name as your children is easier.” [16].

Over the past two decades, social scientists strived to understand the surname choices people make, particularly women. Gender, ethnicity, education, and gender role ideology consistently appear as

influences on marital naming choices [7,8,10,11,14,17–22]. Only a handful of studies on marital naming considers religion, and even fewer employ more than one or two religion variables. These studies yield mixed results. In a random sample of adults from one Midwestern state, church attendance was negatively associated with tolerance for a woman keeping her maiden name at marriage [20]. In other studies, church attendance showed no relationship to marital naming choices [8,9]. Similar conflicting findings surround religious traditions. Some find Catholics to favor traditional marital surnames [15,18], whereas others find no difference among Catholics, Protestants, and persons with no religious preference [20]. In one other study, people who favored more literal readings of the Bible held more traditional attitudes toward marital name-change, even when controlling for numerous sociodemographic variables [11]. No study has tested whether literal views of the Bible actually predict marital naming choices however. Furthermore, none of the aforementioned studies have focused specifically on Evangelicals, despite the cultural and political prominence of this segment of American Christianity.

3. Gender and Marriage among Evangelicals

Evangelicals, also referred to as Conservative Protestants, often are seen as vocal proponents of traditional views on marriage and family. Evangelicalism is a branch of Protestant Christianity that emphasizes salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the authority of Biblical scripture, and the centrality of evangelism. More than a quarter of American adults are counted as Evangelicals [23,24]. A dominant discourse within Evangelicalism is an essentialist view of gender in which men and women are inherently different [25]. Men and women are understood to inhabit separate spheres in social life, with men filling public and provisionary roles and women overseeing domestic responsibilities. This language of divinely-ordained gender differentiation features prominently in the Conservative Protestant dialogue on gender and family [2,25,26]. It is a view maintained and reinforced through places of worship, religious education, publications, and relationships with co-religionists [2,25,27,28].

Correspondingly, compared with adherents to other religious traditions, members of Conservative Protestant denominations report more traditional views of gender, including support for a patriarchal family structure [29] and agreement that there are proper roles for men and women in society corresponding to the public and private spheres [30,31]. Gender role ideology for Evangelicals is couched in a language of headship and submission in which leadership and authority in the family are ascribed on the basis on gender. These concepts, however, are not interpreted uniformly—traditionalists endorse the patriarchal order of *wifely* submission, while other Evangelicals use the language of *mutual* submission to describe marriage as a non-hierarchical partnership [32].

Despite these ideological distinctions, for both traditionalist and egalitarian Evangelicals, family life operates according to a pragmatic egalitarianism in which decision-making and domestic work are a function of who has the most time, opportunity, and expertise in a particular area [2]. Although there are exceptions to this pragmatism—chiefly in childrearing—utilizing a language of submission and headship is largely symbolic. By assigning familial headship and authority on the basis of gender, Evangelicals on either side of the divide simultaneously identify themselves with the values of a distinctive religious subculture and solidify men's role in the family. Subject to the same economic

shifts as other Americans, most Evangelical families are now dual-earner couples that depend on the economic provision of both the male and female partner to support the household. Enacting a traditional script ensures that men continue to play a central role in the family through spiritual provision and leadership even as their role in breadwinning wanes [33].

Given these findings, how might young Evangelicals view and talk about marital naming choices? Based on the traditional gendered scripts prominent in Evangelicalism, we expect marital naming plans among students in Evangelical colleges to reflect this tradition. Specifically, we anticipate that both young men and young women on these campuses will favor the male surname for marriage and that religious influences will shape surname choice.

4. Research Setting

College campuses are popular sites for studying marital naming patterns [12,19,22]. College serves as a formative setting in which a young person sharpens long-term goals and preferences related to work and family [34]. This maturation process entails the development of attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding gender roles [35]. Young adults' place in the life cycle—prior to marriage and childbearing—and the identity formation that takes place during the undergraduate years together provide a unique opportunity to analyze marital naming choices as they reflect the social and environmental factors that influence personal aspirations and expectations.

Young adulthood is also a time of religious transition for many marked by a decline in aggregate levels of religious belief and practice [36]. Evangelical colleges stand out as a startling contrast to this developmental trend. Students at Evangelical colleges show high levels of religiosity [37,38]. Attitudes toward marriage and family in these settings likewise favor tradition. In a study of nine U.S. Evangelical colleges, researchers found “a sizable percentage of students continue to support traditional concepts of marriage and female roles” ([37], p. 95). Over half of those sampled agreed that a husband has primary responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of the family; more than two-thirds agreed that a woman should put her husband and children ahead of her career. Among female students surveyed at a separate Evangelical college in the Midwest, the majority preferred a complementarian view of gender—a position that advocates male headship and female submission as complementary roles established by God for the operation of family and society [39]. While this ideology argues for equality of worth between men and women, it states that men and women have differing and unequal roles. Hence, Evangelical colleges, like Evangelical churches, are an organizational context in which ideas about gender, marriage, and family get reinforced. We step inside this organizational context to examine the marital naming plans of students.

5. Method

We surveyed students enrolled in introductory sociology courses at four colleges affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU), an international association of 119 intentionally Christian colleges and universities. To belong, schools must have a Christian mission, Christian curricular and extra-curricular programming, and hire only professing Christians as faculty and administrators. We partnered with sociology faculty at four CCCC schools: one in the West, one in the Midwest, one in the South, and one in the Northeast. The schools ranged in size from 1500 to

3400 students. The theological and denominational backgrounds of all four colleges place them squarely within the Evangelical Protestant tradition.

A web-survey was administered between 7 February and 5 March 2011. The survey had questions on marital naming plans, religion, family background, and demographics. Cooperating faculty sent the survey URL to students in their introductory sociology courses. At our prompting, faculty sent two email reminders to students roughly two weeks apart. The survey was restricted to unmarried students aged 18 and older. In the end, 199 students completed the survey. Because these students represent a convenience sample, we are unable to generalize to any larger population. Nevertheless, this snapshot of students permits us to examine perceptions of marriage and marital roles in a unique religious context. In keeping with prior research and given the prevailing values of the Evangelical subculture, our study centers on monogamous heterosexual marriages.

Our dependent variable comes from the question: “If you marry, do you plan to...” Response options included taking a spouse’s last name, hyphenation, keeping one’s last name, taking a spouse’s last name while keeping a birth name as a middle name, other, and “I do not plan to marry.” Our analysis begins with a simple frequency distribution by gender for all of these response options. For subsequent analyses, we created a dichotomous variable to distinguish respondents who plan to follow the traditional naming pattern for their gender (*i.e.*, women who plan to take their husband’s last name and men who plan to retain their surname from birth, coded 1) from those who do not (coded 0).

We employ a wider range of religion variables than considered in previous research on this topic. We inquired about religious service attendance at age 12 and at present. The first is a measure of religious socialization. The second is a common marker of public religiosity. Both variables had a nine-point scale from 1 = never to 9 = several times a week. Two other variables pertain to private religiosity. The survey asked respondents, “About how often do you pray?” There were seven response options, which we coded from 1 = never to 7 = several times a day. Another question asked, “Outside of attending religious services, about how often do you read the Bible?” We treated these options in similar fashion with 1 = never to 9 = several times a week or more. In addition to variables of religious practice, we include measures of religious belief and self-perception. A customary belief measure is biblical literalism. Students selected a statement indicating their personal beliefs about the Bible from a list of four ordered options ranging from “The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends” to “The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects.” Higher values indicate more literalist orientations. Finally, to gauge respondent’s perception of their religiosity, we asked, “How religious do you consider yourself to be?” Students chose from four options: not at all religious (coded 1), not very religious (coded 2), somewhat religious (coded 3), and very religious (coded 4).

Demographic and family background characteristics serve as control variables in our statistical analysis. Building on previous research on marital naming choices, we control for gender (1 = female), race (1 = white, Non-Hispanic), age (in years), college, mother’s last name (1 = mother had same last name as father), mother’s level of education (from 1 = less than high school diploma to 5 = graduate degree), mother’s employment status during respondents’ childhood (1 = homemaker), and parents’ marital status (1 = divorced). In addition to these customary control variables, we add two others. We test perceived family expectations regarding marital names (for a comparable variable in a study of offspring surnames, see [40]). A question on the survey asked: “If you marry, what does your family

expect you to do?” Response options included taking a spouse’s last name, hyphenation, keeping one’s last name, taking a spouse’s last name while keeping a birth name as a middle name, and other. We created a dichotomous variable to differentiate respondents who believe their family expects them to follow the traditional naming pattern for their gender (coded 1) from those who do not (coded 0).

Respondents were 73% young women and 27% young men. The majority was White (72%). As would be expected for introductory courses, students tended to be young. The average age was 19.59. The number of respondents varied considerably across the four CCCU colleges due to differences in the number of introductory sociology classes being taught and class sizes. Over half (56%) were from the Northwest CCCU college, 24% were from the Midwest college, 11% were from the South college, and 9% were from the Northeast college. Respondents were religious. Median values indicated that they attended religious services weekly, read the Bible about weekly, and prayed daily. They held orthodox views about the Bible as well. Three-fourths (74%) believed that “the Bible is perfectly true, but should not be taken literally, word-for-word”, while 17% supported the view that the Bible “should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects”. In terms of self-identification, 36% of these students considered themselves very religious and another 46% described themselves as somewhat religious. By and large, respondents came from traditional families. Less than a quarter (22%) had divorced parents. For 35%, mom was at home for part or all of their childhood. The marital surnames of parents followed traditional gender scripts. Nine out of ten respondents (88%) had mothers who took her husband’s last name. Equally telling, 83% of respondents believed that their families expect them to follow the same tradition if they marry.

We present our findings in three stages. First, we describe the marital naming plans of female respondents and male respondents in our sample, and we compare these stated intentions to the results of previous studies based upon students at non-religious colleges. Second, we test the relationship between religion and marital naming plans using bivariate and multivariate analysis. We report correlation coefficients and logistic regression models, which regress plans to follow the traditional naming pattern (yes/no) on religion variables and control variables. Third, we consider students’ explanations for their marital naming plans. An open-ended survey question asked respondents to explain in their own words their planned naming choice: “Why do you plan to use the last name you do, if you marry? Briefly explain.” One hundred and eighty-nine respondents (95% of the total sample) did. We conclude our analysis with thematic coding of these qualitative responses.

6. Marital Naming Plans

Table 1 displays the marital naming plans by gender for our sample. Among female students, 81.4% reported that they would change their last name to that of their spouse. A hyphenated name, cited by 9.0% of female respondents, was the most prevalent alternative. Approximately five percent said they would take their spouse’s last name and keep their family surname as a middle name. Another 3.4% of female respondents selected “other”. A text-box in the survey allowed respondents to clarify what other naming option they would pursue. Several female respondents indicated that their choice of a marital surname would depend on their spouse’s last name or how her first name would sound with his last name. Only one female student planned to keep her surname from birth. One other female student said that she did not plan to marry.

Table 1. Marital Naming Plans of Respondents.

Marital Naming Plan	Female Students (<i>n</i> = 145)	Male Students (<i>n</i> = 54)
Change last name to that of spouse	81.4%	7.4%
Hyphenate	9.0%	7.4%
Retain surname from birth	0.7%	85.2%
Take spouse's last name and keep birth name as middle name	4.8%	0%
Other	3.4%	0%
Do not plan to marry	0.7%	0%

The young men in our sample were spread across fewer response options. Eighty-five percent of male respondents planned to retain their surname from birth when married. Seven percent planned to hyphenate their name. An equal percentage said they would change their last name to that of their spouse. Not a single male student in our sample planned to use his last name as a middle name or use some other surname option. All planned to marry.

We see in Table 1 the high emphasis placed on heterosexual marriage in the Evangelical subculture. Only one student out of 199 selected “I do not plan to marry”. When they do marry, over 80% of men and women in our sample planned to stick with marital naming tradition. Male respondents and female respondents expect to share the husband's last name. There was no statistically significant difference between men and women in this regard (Chi-Square = 0.39, $p = 0.53$).

It is difficult to know whether Evangelical students in our sample are any more or less likely to follow traditional marital naming customs than are students at non-religious colleges and universities. No national data on college students' naming intentions exist. The best that we can do is to compare our findings to previous studies conducted at other colleges and universities. In a 1990 random sample of students at a small residential college in the Midwest, 81.6% of female students planned to take their husband's last name, if they married, and 7% planned to hyphenate their name [19]. These percentages are very close to the percentages for female students in our sample, in which 81.4% planned to take their husband's last name and 9.0% planned to hyphenate. Male students at the same Midwestern college and at a large Eastern university were even more prone to traditional marital naming [12]. In 1990, 97.9% of men interviewed at the small Midwestern college planned to keep their family surname, if they married; sixteen years later on the same campus, 96.9% of men interviewed gave the same response [12]. A 2006 convenience sample of 369 students from a large Eastern university found that 100% of male respondents planned to keep their birth surname, if they married [12]. By comparison, 85.2% of men in our sample intended to keep their birth surname when married. It is important to note that neither the small Midwestern college nor the large Eastern universities were identified as religious. While it is risky to make comparisons across samples collected in different ways and at different points in time, the limited evidence that we do have counters our expectation that Evangelical students are dramatically more traditional in their marital naming plans. When it comes to marital surnames, tradition seems to be popular on religious and non-religious campuses. Next we consider the role of religion in upholding marital naming traditions on Evangelical campuses.

6.1. Religious Influences

Table 2 is our first look at potential religious influences on marital naming choices. We test for significant zero-order correlations for each religion variable in relation to a respondent's plan to follow with the traditional naming pattern for her/his gender. In this highly religious sample, church attendance is not significantly correlated with plans for a traditional marital surname. Neither is private Bible reading. The only religious practice variable that is significant is prayer ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). Respondents that pray more frequently are more likely to say that they plan to follow the marital naming convention for their gender. Biblical literalism is also significant ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$). More literal views of the Bible correlate with taking a traditional marital surname. Self-rated religiosity ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) is significantly correlated with plans for a traditional marital name as well.

Table 2. Religious Influences on Plans to Follow Traditional Marital Naming Pattern.

Religion Variables	Correlation with Plans for Traditional Marital Surname
Church attendance at age 12	0.10
Church attendance	−0.06
Prayer	0.18 *
Bible reading	0.08
Biblical literalism	0.21 **
Self-rated religiosity	0.20 **

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (Pearson's Correlation Coefficients).

Table 3 tests the influence of religious variables on plans for a traditional marital name when controlling for family background and demographic characteristics. We build upon our bivariate findings by testing only the religion variables that had a significant zero-order correlation with traditional marital naming plans. We test the influence of prayer, Biblical literalism, and self-rated religiosity in separate models, since these three religion variables are significantly correlated with one another and including all three in the same model would violate a regression assumption. We present our results as odds ratios. Values greater than 1.0 indicate increased odds of following a traditional naming pattern, while values less than 1.0 denote reduced odds of following this pattern. Model 1 regresses plans for a traditional marital name upon prayer and control variables. More frequent prayer is associated with a greater likelihood of following a traditional marital naming pattern (odds ratio = 1.39, $p < 0.05$). In Model 2, Biblical literalism shows a similar effect. More literal views of the Bible significantly and strongly predict support for a traditional marital surname (odds ratio = 2.99, $p < 0.05$), holding constant other family and demographic influences. Adding the control variables renders self-rated religiosity non-significant. The correlation between self-rated religiosity and traditional marital naming plans observed in Table 2 seems to be explained away by other characteristics.

Table 3. Religious, Family, and Demographic Influences on Plans to Follow Traditional Marital Naming Pattern.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Religion</i>			
Prayer	1.39*		
Biblical literalism		2.99 *	
Self-rated religiosity			1.63
<i>Family</i>			
Mother changed name	5.86 ***	5.66 *	6.37 **
Mother education	0.87	0.95	0.92
Mother at home	1.13	1.62	1.10
Divorced parents	2.18	2.73	2.54
Family expects traditional naming	20.33 ***	19.88 ***	17.36 ***
<i>Demographic</i>			
Female	0.47	0.82	0.72
White	1.71	1.88	1.50
Age	0.94	0.92	0.88
Northwest college ^a	1.47	1.32	1.51
Midwest college ^a	3.61	2.49	3.63
Northeast college ^a	0.40	0.45	0.40
Constant	0.09	0.01	0.28
N	197	182	197

Logistic regression odds ratios; ^a Contrast category is South CCCU college; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Most of the family and demographic control variables are not significantly related to traditional marital naming plans in our sample. Mother's education, mother's employment, divorced parents, gender, race, and age were not statistically significant in any model of Table 3. Differences in marital naming plans across the four colleges also did not appear significant in Table 3. Two control variables did stand out. Respondents whose mother took her husband's last were over five times more likely to say they would follow the same tradition in their marriage. An even stronger relationship existed for family expectations and plans for a traditional marital surname. Respondents who believed that their family expected them to adhere to traditional marital naming customs were 17 to 20 times more likely to state that would follow this pattern.

6.2. Student Explanations

Three dominant themes emerged for why most students intend to adhere to marital name change custom: gender roles, identity, and tradition. Although only five students (one man and four women) mentioned God or the Bible directly, students' comments illuminate the foundation religion provides for guiding individual choices. We describe each theme and provide representative examples below.

Gender roles stood out as a prevalent theme guiding students' marital naming plans. Nearly a quarter of students referenced gender roles in their explanations. Men and women are inherently different, respondents contended. Furthermore, the success of marriages and societies depends on men

and women playing their gender-specific roles. These ideas about distinct male and female roles align with a complementarian gender ideology, which Colaner and Warner found to be prevalent in another Evangelical college [39]. Illustrated in the following comments, male students claimed a dominant position, ordained by God, as the provider in marriage, while female students championed their future role as the devoted and dutiful wife.

“Because I am the man in the relationship. God has placed me at the head of the household and it’s a huge role. I think it is important for the woman to take the last name of the man because it shows that the two of them have become one.” (male student)

“The man is the head of the household. Woman in the Bible aren’t [sic] mentioned in Genesis that often because the man carries on the last name of the family. When it comes down to it a name is just a name, but not taking your husband’s last name is in a way disrespectful and not submissive.” (female student)

“I plan to use my last name because I am a man and the woman taking the name of the man in marriage is a sign of her acceptance of her role in marriage.” (male student)

Identity was a dominant theme expressed by about a third of students, both male and female. However, different from the idea of preserving individual identity or creating a new shared identity as described above, these respondents linked identity to traditional gendered expectations surrounding marriage. The basis of identity differed by gender. Young men tied personal identity to their family of origin. Extending their family name (*i.e.*, patrilineal descent) was important to them, as we heard in responses such as these:

“My last name means a lot to me and my family. Me, being a male, I have the privilege to pass down my name to my kids and also my wife.” (male student)

“Because my name means a lot to me and it is part of my identity and I would like to keep my name going. I also believe it shows who I am.” (male student)

These comments draw attention to a patriarchal orientation that assumes male lineage and masculine identification. The explanations of these young men reflect the way in which patriarchy both shapes and normalizes their choice to keep their name upon marriage.

We heard something different from the young women in our sample. For many, identity after marriage was defined in relation to a husband rather than a family of origin. Sacrificing their family surname was a marker of this natural transition. They invoked religious language to justify the transition. They spoke of “becoming one” with a male spouse, which is a reference to biblical passages such as Matthew 19:4–6 that describe God’s intent for a man to leave his father and mother and unite with his wife to become “one flesh”.

“I think that it is important for me to commit to my future husband by taking his last name. I also believe it’s important for the whole family, husband, wife, and children to have the same name. Husband and wife are called to become ‘one flesh,’ and for me the last name is a part of that.” (female student)

“I want to use the last name of my spouse because I want to show that I’m committed to him and it represents the oneness of our marriage.” (female student)

Tradition was a third recurring theme in students’ explanations. Tradition is a common reason given for marital name change by women [22]. Religion seems to accentuate the importance of tradition in this regard [15]. The appeal of tradition was evident within the highly religious sample of students in our study. More than 30% alluded to tradition as guiding their plans for traditional marital name change. Students referenced cultural norms and familial expectations. Several poignant examples were:

“I plan to change my last name when I get married to that of my spouse’s because it is tradition. My mother did it, my grandmother did it, my great-grandmother did it, *etc.* I think it is nice and traditional for the woman to change her name.” (female student)

“It has always been that way. It is just tradition that she will take my name and respect the tradition of my family. Why alter the tradition?” (male student)

“I just feel that it is the ‘norm’ in our society and I would feel weird if I didn’t take his last name when we got married.” (female student)

Even in the absence of explicitly religious language, these students reveal the religious influences at work in their decision-making. They plan to marry a spouse of the opposite sex and follow traditional naming practices. They justify their support for marital name change on the basis of gender roles, identity, and tradition. Their responses hint at shared moral boundaries governing gender, marriage, and family. Moral boundaries defining appropriate patterns of behavior are a hallmark of American Evangelicals [41]. In line with their Evangelical upbringing and present location in Evangelical colleges, students articulate values, morals, and ideals of their subculture.

7. Conclusions

Marriage and family are contested terrain in American society. The purpose of this study was to examine marital naming plans among students in Evangelical colleges. Changing views on marital surnames in heterosexual marriages has been a topic of research for several decades. In an extension of previous research, we focus more directly on religion and religious context. Our survey of 199 introductory sociology students at four Evangelical colleges across the United States makes clear the ubiquity of heterosexual marriage in the Evangelical subculture. Only one out of 199 students did not plan to marry. Marriage is an anticipated rite of passage for these students. Choosing to attend an Evangelical college may be an intentional step toward this rite. Finding a spouse may not be in the promotional materials, but it is a selling point for these colleges.

When the wedding does arrive for these students, they plan to follow the naming pattern of their parents and larger society. Male and female respondents in almost equal percentages planned to follow a traditional naming pattern when married. Surprisingly, based on limited comparison data, students in our sample did not appear more traditional in their marital naming plans than students at other non-religious colleges. Like the desire to marry, husband and wife sharing the man’s last name is a tradition that continues to appeal to many students. Our interest was whether religious beliefs and behaviors make patrilineal descent more appealing to students at Evangelical colleges. We tested a

wider range of religious influences than considered in previous research. Our findings singled out two religion variables as important to students' marital naming plans: prayer and view of the Bible.

Students in our sample who reported praying more frequently indicated an intention to follow the marital naming custom for their gender. This is an interesting finding that contrasts the conflicting results over religious service attendance in previous studies. Unlike church attendance, prayer is a measure of private religiosity. Prayer connects an individual to God in a personal way. The influence of prayer then rests heavily on how individuals conceive of God and the will of God. For Evangelicals, the conception of God is as an authoritative presence who acts to ensure that humanity follows divine ideals [42]. These ideals include a gendered order to reality. Evangelicals who pray regularly might be understood as being most invested in upholding the created order. Consequently, it may be that young men in our sample are praying for someone to take their last name, while young women pray for a name to take. Our survey data do not tell us the content of prayers. Given the nearly unanimous desire to marry among these highly religious students, it is not an unreasonable speculation.

A belief in the gendered order of reality likewise helps explain the significance of Biblical literalism in predicting marital naming plans for students at Evangelical colleges. Students in our study who stress the inerrancy of Christian scripture envision a future for themselves in which they take a traditional marital surname. The relationship between view of the Bible and traditional marital surnames is significant and strong, even when controlling for other influences. Our findings in this regard are a logical extension of previous research that shows literal views of the Bible associated with more traditional views of gender [25,43,44] and more traditional attitudes toward marital name-change [11]. Our findings on Biblical literalism are important for another reason. They demonstrate that differing beliefs about the Bible have implications even within a single religious tradition. Evangelicals as a religious category have a strong emphasis on the authority of Scripture, but the views of Evangelical individuals are not uniform. Beliefs about the Bible, in particular, are a salient feature shaping individual's opinions within and across religious contexts.

What is perhaps most notable in our findings is the absence of religious language in students' explanations of their marital naming plans. Most of these highly religious young adults did not directly attribute their preferred marital surname to God, the Bible, or their churches. Instead, we see evidence of an invisible religious influence guiding these students' marital name-change decisions. Regnerus developed a typology of religious influence to account for the ways that religion impacts the sexual beliefs and practices of American teens [45]. One of the most common forms of religious influence in the lives of teens is what he called "invisible religion" ([45], pp. 194–96). In contrast to "intentional religion" in which individuals recognize and articulate the ways that religion directs behavior, invisible religion refers to the way that religion can guide human thought and action unbeknownst to an individual. A teen may explain her decision to postpone having sex by mentioning concern for her reputation or a desire not to disappoint her parents. These are not explicitly religious reasons, but her behavior does align with religious norms. The comments we heard from students regarding their marital naming plans similarly reflect religious origins. Concepts of gender roles (*i.e.*, headship) and identity (*i.e.*, becoming one) were prominent in students' explanations. Young men expected to keep their surname at marriage because "I am the man". Young women willingly planned to take on a male surname as a sign of "becoming one". Tradition is appealing to these students. In all of these

ways, the explanations speak to an understanding of gender and family promoted within the Evangelical subculture.

Regnerus pointed to religious families as a prominent source of invisible religious influence [45]. Here again, our findings concur. Students in our study came, by and large, from religious families. Their choice of an Evangelical college speaks to their religious heritage. Not coincidentally, the family of origin for these students conformed to traditional patterns. Mother and father were married and shared the same last name. This model of family life molds students' expectations. Mother's surname was significantly related to plans to follow a traditional naming practice, even after controlling for other religious and demographic variables. As modeled by their parents, these Evangelical college students expect to marry and they expect to share the husband's last name. The belief that one's family expects such a naming pattern increases the propensity for a student to say that this is their intent. It is so taken for granted that some students don't perceive a choice. "I've never been taught that there was another option", wrote one female respondent. Through religious families, religious ideals for marriage and family get passed on. These ideals are formative. They do not come exclusively from prior religious socialization however. Present religious practices and beliefs are formative for individuals as well. Taking past socialization into account, private prayer and view of the Bible still stand out as significant predictors of marital naming plans in our multivariate analysis. Religious socialization past and present elevates the influence of religion, even if invisible.

We acknowledge limitations in our study. Our sample is not representative of all college students or all students in Evangelical colleges. More detailed analysis across religious traditions represents a fruitful direction for additional research. Likewise, we acknowledge the limitation of cross-sectional data for testing implied causal relationships. We argued that religion is a source of worldview that helps shape how individuals understand gender and marriage, but we recognize that these realms of social life and human identity are likely mutually reinforcing. Disentangling the causal order of religion, gender, and marriage is not something we can accomplish in this study. We hope future research will. Given the focus on heterosexual marriage in our study and others, another useful extension of this research will be to explore surname choices within same-sex marriages.

Although we cannot generalize from our convenience sample to all CCCU schools or all CCCU students, our findings suggest that traditional views of marital naming are common on these campuses. Like family, peer groups are powerful agents of socialization. The small, residential colleges in our study pride themselves on fostering tight-knit campus communities. Students become part of a campus culture with shared beliefs, values, and practices. These shared ideals guide individuals, as seen in regard to student religiosity. At a time in life when many young adults distance themselves from religion [36], students in our sample remained devout. We believe similar socialization occurs for gender and marriage on these campuses. By surrounding an individual with others who embrace more traditional views of gender and marriage, Evangelical colleges presumably lead students to conform to traditional gender scripts. The vast majority of students surveyed plan to follow traditional marital naming customs. Consequently, it may be hard for the minority who desire an alternative marital name to find a like-minded mate among their classmates. Future research should explore peer expectations as well as differences between religious colleges and non-religious colleges in the choice of marital surnames. Our guess is that many progressive-minded students in Evangelical colleges end up

adhering to custom. In this way, Evangelical colleges work in tandem with Evangelical churches to perpetuate traditional ideals of marriage and family.

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Author Contributions

Kevin Dougherty designed the study, coordinated data collection, and conducted statistical analysis. Melanie Hulbert participated in data collection and conducted qualitative analysis. Ashley Palmer created the survey instrument. All three authors contributed to writing the manuscript.

Abbreviations

CCCU: Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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