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Marriage in a Culture of Divorce, by **Karla B. Hackstaff.** Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999. 289 pp. $22.95 paper. ISBN: 1-56639-725-1.

This is an important book about the impact of what Karla Hackstaff calls "divorce culture" on men's and women's experience of marriage. Hackstaff defines divorce culture as the belief that "marrying is an option, marriage is contingent, and divorce is a gateway." She argues that divorce culture has transformed our conception of marriage and marriage culture, the belief that "marrying is a given, marriage is forever, and divorce is a last resort." While many couples still accept the premises of marriage culture, they have also adopted the view that divorce can be less destructive than marital conflict and "may even be an affirmative act, serving as a 'gateway' to a more fulfilling life."

Hackstaff seeks to understand the impact of divorce culture on couples' negotiations in marriages, not just whether to end a marriage, but also who has the power to negotiate for what they want in a marriage. She does this through analyzing the talk and comparing the views and experiences of two sets of couples: a cohort of thirteen couples that married in the 1950s and a cohort of nineteen couples that married in the 1970s. Hackstaff analyzes archival interviews (from the University of California-Berkeley's Institute of Human Development) conducted with wives and husbands born around 1928 and married around 1950 (all but one couple still married). She compares them to her own in-depth interviews with a matched sample of wives and husbands born around 1953 and married after 1970.

The 1950s cohort was interviewed several times, so it is possible to see changes in their views over time as they confront the possibility that they themselves will divorce. The 1970s cohort begin their marriages hoping they will endure, but knowing that divorce is a possibility. According to Hackstaff, to deal with the contingency of marriage, the 1970s couples have adopted new marital strategies, the most important being a "marital work ethic," a belief that a happy marriage requires serious work. Couples rely on therapeutic culture in the form of therapy, advice books, and support groups to do the marital work of self-development and intimacy. They work on their communication with each other, and wives seek to enlist husbands in the task of monitoring the quality of the marriage.

Hackstaff makes gender a key part of her analysis and does an excellent job of tracing its relationship to marriage and divorce culture. Marriage culture has provided economic security for women, but at the price of male dominance. Divorce culture, which makes it even easier for men to exit a marriage, can increase men's power in marriage. According to Hackstaff, however, divorce culture has egalitarian elements. Because it allows women to leave relationships when they are not satisfied, it has given women a better bargaining position in marriage. In contrast to the 1950s wives, the 1970s wives who embrace the tenets of an egalitarian divorce culture have more power to set the terms of their marriages. One of the things wives in both cohorts want more of in their marriages, and the 1970s cohort bargains for, is "relational goals" like intimacy, talk, and sharing in a marriage.

Hackstaff's answer to critics who argue that the contingency of divorce culture harms family values is that "contingency is not really new to marriage; rather, divorce culture expands who determines what marriage is contingent upon." Critics also claim that divorce culture promotes individualism, which is thought to threaten marriage. Hackstaff acknowledges this possibility. She effectively argues, however, that individualism has different meanings for men and for women. For wives, it often means not a search for personal independence, but a search for interdependence, for relational goals of mutual sensitivity that can deepen commitment, and for validation in an equal relationship.

Hackstaff uses her data to argue that while divorce culture has many costs—single-mother families become poor, fathers become estranged, and children's lives are at least tem-

porarily disrupted—going back to marriage as the solution to increased divorce rates will not solve the problems of divorce. Marital instability is a cost of gender equality in marriage. Her hope, however, is that the cost is temporary and that divorce culture will result in more equality in marriage and in the equal valuing of relational responsibilities by men, as well as women.

Hackstaff's sample includes some ethnic diversity in the 1970s couples, although not in the 1950s sample drawn from the archival data. Economically, the sample is confined to the middle class. A more diverse sample might have shown other factors to shed additional light on divorce culture. Hackstaff could also emphasize more the role of economics in the thinking of wives about whether to leave marriages. Not only was there a marriage culture that kept women from divorcing, but the fact that there were few ways for women with children to support themselves outside of marriage certainly also discouraged women from divorcing. Today some women still hesitate to divorce because they fear the drastic drop in living standard that will follow a divorce. Hackstaff notes these economic considerations, but could give them more weight in her analysis.

Hackstaff makes a significant contribution to our understanding of marriage and divorce. She provides a rich analysis of larger questions about marriage and divorce, as well as their impact on the negotiations of individual couples. The case studies make for engaging reading. We hear the voices of both husbands and wives and see where their accounts diverge. Hackstaff skillfully illuminates how gender and power work in contemporary marriages. Scholars of marriage and the family and gender relations, as well as the students in their classes, will find this book a valuable resource.