# Introduction

## *Watershed in the Meaning of Marriage*

WHEN I was selecting earrings for my wedding, I was not thinking about my research. Nevertheless, it was inevitably an occasion for the expression of marital meaning. When I remarked that a particular pair was a bit too expensive, the salesperson tried to convince this reluctant spender by saying, "Yeah, but these are for once in a lifetime." Then acknowledging the times, she added, "hopefully"—an adverb that ever on the threshold of marriage nods in the direction of divorce. This was neither the first nor the last time that I heard such trailing adverbs. While the "once in a lifetime" signaled the enduring ideal of "marriage as forever," the qualification by the salesperson conveyed the doubt that attends marriage in a context of widespread divorce.

While rising divorce rates have been a concern in the United States in many periods (Riley 1991), a new tipping point[1] was reached by the 1970s, when divorce overtook death as the primary means of marital dissolution.[2] We no longer assume that a mother is a widow when she says in an ad, "He's crazy about my kid. And he drinks Johnnie Walker." When as many, if not more, marriages are expected to dissolve as endure in a generation's lifetime, the social context changes for everyone.

### MARRIAGE CULTURE TO DIVORCE CULTURE

A numerical tipping point in divorce rates is only one sign of a larger *qualitative* change in meaning that I refer to as the "marital watershed" of the 1970s. In part, this marital watershed refers to the decline of "marriage culture."[3] Marriage culture should be understood as a cluster of beliefs, symbols and practices, framed by material conditions, that reinforce marriage and deter divorce. It is constituted by three beliefs that reflect a stance toward marriage *and* divorce: marrying is a given, marriage is forever, and divorce is a last resort. These beliefs are expressed through people's talk. A husband reveals his belief in "marriage as forever" as he asserts, "Like I told people when I got married that this was going to be my one shot at it win, lose, or draw." These beliefs are also echoed in consumer culture. An advertisement for engagement rings

asks, "Is two months' salary too much to spend for something that lasts forever? A diamond is forever."[4] Although challenged, marriage culture remains a potent cultural force. We are in the midst of contesting ideologies today.

The "marital watershed" also refers to the emergence of "divorce culture." Divorce culture, framed by material conditions, should be understood as a set of symbols, beliefs, and practices that anticipate and reinforce divorce and, in the process, redefine marriage. Divorce culture encompasses three key beliefs: marrying is an option, marriage is contingent, and divorce is a gateway.[5] A television commercial for *Korbel* champagne reflects the terms of divorce culture when it pans a wedding reception and a toast to the bride and groom; as it focuses on two guests raising their glasses in the back of the room, one man whispers to another, "I give the whole thing two months." The champagne's quality, the ad suggests, will endure longer than the marriage.

Divorce culture is not just about more numbers representing divorce behaviors,[6] but about the emergence of alternative *meanings*. Cohabitation, domestic partnerships, gay and lesbian marriages, serial marriage, and parenthood outside of marriage, all contribute to the diversification of relationship ideals; however, divorce is the most widespread challenge brought to marriage in recent decades. One need not be divorced to talk the terms of divorce culture, nor do the married necessarily talk the terms of marriage culture. As Riessman (1990) demonstrated in her study of divorced women and men, many ex-spouses still believe in "marriage as forever." At the same time, as this study shows, many first-time married[7] spouses believe that "marriage is contingent." More than marital status, membership in a particular generation predicts whether a spouse talks in terms of marriage or divorce cultures. Those married in recent generations are increasingly talking and reproducing the terms of divorce culture. Moreover, gender ideologies consistently inform "marriage talk" and "divorce talk"[8] across generations.

## The Challenge of Gender Equality

Like divorce culture, gender equality challenges the status quo in marital meanings. In the last few decades, the ideology of gender equality has increasingly contested the reigning ideology of male dominance in marriage.[9] Along with divorce, the rise of equality changes the power dynamics in marriage. Although attempts to incorporate gender equality into marriage are hardly new, the challenge of gender equality has never been so widespread.

Because feminism, increasing numbers of women in the workplace, and divorce have "developed hand in hand" (Coontz 1992, p. 168), rising divorce rates have often been blamed on women. Increased participation in the labor force has provided women with economic alternatives to entering a marriage, staying in a marriage, or accepting the power dynamics in a marriage.[10] In addition,women have been found to be more approving of divorce than men (Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981). Moreover, women are the primary initiators of divorce (Kitson with Holmes 1992). Although notions of "equality" have varied among feminists, critics of the recent women's movement have focused on the notion that equality emphasizes individual rights and have characterized feminists as individualistic.

Most basically, individualism is the belief that the individual comes first—before others or society. Consequently, divorced women have been more easily perceived as self-interested individualists abandoning "marriage as forever." I have been puzzled for some time by implicit and explicit claims that *women's* individualism is causing divorce. Women, who are frequently the primary parent and provider for children after divorce, have never struck me as particularly individualistic; by shouldering relational responsibilities their actions seem more self-sacrificing than self-interested. Individualism seems a more pertinent characteristic of the numerous uninvolved fathers.[11]

Although we need to attend to men's individualism, we still need to ask whether women are becoming more individualistic. Some are. I will argue, however, that because we proceed from a history of male-dominant marriages, individualism does not *mean* the same thing to women and men. For men, putting the self first remains a way to sustain male dominance in marriage. For women, putting the self first is a way to counter male dominance in marriage.

Defining equality inside or outside marriage is enormously problematic. Equal to whom? According to what standard? Still, for more than a century gender equality has been expressed through two main and competing strains of thought.[12] There is, first, equality that minimizes differences between the sexes and emphasizes individual rights. This version of equality aims to secure for all women the independence that has always been more available to white men, including political rights and economic opportunities. This is "rights equality." Second, there is "relational equality." This is equality understood as equity, which challenges rather than embraces the white masculine standard. This version of equality recognizes gender and racial difference and would have us revalue ideals and practices associated more often with white women and people of color (Collins 1990). These ideals include responsibility, interdependence, and

relationality. While relationality will vary by class and race or culture, it is most generally "a stance which emphasizes expressivity and takes others into account not as 'other' but as important in themselves" (M. Johnson 1988, 68).

Both strains of gender equality contest male dominance and are apparent among the members of recent generations, in particular the generation that came of age in the 1970s. I am not the first to argue that the high divorce rate reflects the introduction of gender equality into a marriage (M. Johnson 1988, 261; Goldscheider and Waite 1991). For example, Goldscheider and Waite (1991, 14) argue that some part of the high divorce rate "reflects the working out of the sex-role revolution." They document increasing egalitarian attitudes among young adults of the 1970s and they show how a family background of divorce predicts egalitarian practices, particularly among men. However, aggregate statistics of individuals' responses leave some questions unanswered. What does women's independence *mean* to wives and husbands? How does gender equality influence the power dynamics in a marriage? My research reveals these meanings and illustrates the microdynamics of gender equality and divorce culture within marriages. The rise of gender equality has contributed to divorce, not because women are too individualistic, as some scholars emphasize, nor because gender equality is inherently destabilizing in marriage. Rather, it is the *transition* to gender equality that unsettles institutional arrangements, including marital commitments. Gender equality (whatever the context or definition) has rarely been achieved with ease, or finality. And today we see more wives asserting their visions of marital relationships.

## The Impulse for the Research

While I have never been divorced myself—a fact that people find curious when they learn that my research is on divorce culture—I am a child of divorce. I vicariously experienced the decline of stigma in my white, middle-class surroundings from my kindergarten to high school years. The divorce of my parents by 1960—before stigma and other disincentives lost their power to deter divorce—meant that I was alert to both enduring and dissolving marriages. During my elementary school years, peers who had divorced parents were few and far between; explanations concerning where my father lived or my mother's different last name were required. By my high school years in the early 1970s, many more peers had divorced parents and such explanations were unnecessary. The stigma I sensed in my early years had all but vanished by adulthood. Further, by the late 1970s, I had witnessed and embraced feminist critiques of marriage and

had practiced "living together." My derivative experience of "divorce and marital alternatives suggested to me that the meaning of marriage an divorce had changed significantly in my life span—extending beyon those who divorced. The impulse for this research, then, was my initi sense that there were important differences in the meaning of marriag and divorce for those who came of age in the 1950s and their "bab boom" children, such as myself.

## The Research Project

My study of married couples grew out of the literature on divorce, rathe than that on marriage. Most of the literature on divorce observes tha everyone's life is touched by divorce in one way or another. Despite th frequent appearance of this truism in the divorce literature, the majorit of research projects have in fact focused on the implications of divorc for the divorced population or the children of divorce. I was curiou about the meaning of this "prevalence" for those other than the divorcec I assumed that widespread divorce affected people whether they wer single, married, divorced, cohabiting, remarried, a child of divorced o married parents, a grandparent with reduced contact, a teacher who doe not know which home address is relevant, or an employer who must gar nish wages for child support.

Unlike many scholars of marriage and divorce, I was not primaril interested in predicting divorce. To my knowledge, no one had explore the *meaning* of divorce for the married. I wanted to discover how peo ple talked about, constructed, and interpreted divorce in the context o marriage.

My central questions were: How are wives and husbands shapin and being shaped by a new marital context marked, above all, by a hig divorce rate and demands for gender equality? Would gender make difference? Has prevalent divorce similarly affected the meaning o marriage for women and men? Would generation matter? Would cou ples married before and after the 1970 watershed construct differen meanings?

To shed light on the shifting meanings of marriage and divorce, I inves tigated two generations of married couples.[13] I analyzed in-depth, longi tudinal interviews conducted in 1958, 1970, and 1982 with wives an husbands born around 1928 and married around 1950. I collected th archival data at the Institute of Human Development at the University o California, Berkeley, during the fall of 1991. I compared these interview to my own in-depth interviews with matched wives and husbands bor around 1953 and married after 1970.

I refer to these two groups as the '50s couples (or Older generation) and the '70s couples (or Younger generation), respectively. Both generations were primarily middle-class people—although class backgrounds varied. Because of racial/ethnic limitations in the original archival data, the '50s spouses were 85 percent European-American and 15 percent African-American.[14] Among the '70s spouses, 62 percent were European-American, 15 percent were African-American, 15 percent were Asian-American, and 8 percent classified themselves as bi-racial. I analyzed interviews with 26 individuals in the Older generation (12 couples and 2 former spouses for comparative purposes) and I conducted interviews with 34 individuals in the Younger generation (17 couples). (See Appendix: Methodological Notes for more information on the samples.)

I interviewed the '70s wives and husbands separately at a place of their convenience. I asked what was good, surprising, bad, disappointing, challenging, and hopeful in their marriage. I asked for the story of their relationship. I asked about sex, work, leisure, gender, parenting, and fairness in the marriage. Because I wanted to discover and not presume whether, when, and how divorce might be relevant to them, I waited for the respondents to bring up divorce and then pursued their lead. After the in-depth individual interviews, I conducted a joint interview with each couple in their home, asking more about their family backgrounds and the ups and downs of their marital lives. (See Methodological Notes for more information on the interviews.)

Although I also interviewed various "experts" on marriage and divorce and analyzed symbols that had emerged in popular culture by the 1990s, the culture of divorce is apparent, above all, in the talk of married couples from the Younger generation.

## The Power Dynamics of (Re)constructing Marriage

To analyze beliefs about marriage and gender, I looked for patterns among two generations of married couples. How did '50s couples talk about divorce and gender equality as the decades proceeded? Were they primarily reproducing or contesting "marriage as forever"? How did they construct male dominance, if at all? Were '70s spouses constructing "marriage as forever," too? How did '70s spouses' marital ideologies interact with their gender ideologies? Did these ideologies matter in the power dynamics of the relationship?

First, I found some spouses who can be described as traditionalists—that is, they believe in "marriage as forever," that men should have the final say in marriage, and that the breadwinner-homemaker division of labor in marriage is most desirable. These spouses eschew the trends

toward easier divorce and gender equality. Avoiding these trenc becomes more difficult for the '50s spouses over time, and is most di ficult for the '70s spouses. The power dynamics of traditional couple are partially set by the belief in male dominance, yet a traditional mai ital ideology means that wives' power is located in the institutional bas of marriage, which theoretically guarantees that husbands will honc their commitments.

Second, some spouses are trying to introduce notions of gender equa ity based upon relational responsibilities and interdependence, even a they aim to maintain "marriage as forever" and "divorce as a las resort." They are trying to reconstruct it by divesting marriage of its his torical association with male dominance. However, because of the legac of gendered work in families and society—enduring occupational seg regation, pay differentials, and the division of labor in housework an child care—this pattern is not easy to sustain. Such couples resemble th "near peer couples" described by Schwartz (1994); spouses can aspir to gender equality, but lack the social resources to achieve it. This ca tip the balance of power in favor of men.

Third, a few spouses express support for male dominance, but als believe marriage is contingent and conditional. Marriage becomes cor tingent, then, on the conditions set by the husband. Such a pattern c beliefs represents a male-centered model of marriage because it advance men's power and options in a marriage. It represents a "cautionary tale for women. A wife caught in such a marriage must abide by her hus band's terms or risk being left by him. While some wives still suppor male dominance in marriage, such wives are most likely to also viev marriage as forever, not as contingent.

Finally, there are some wives—and husbands—who support marriag as contingent and believe in gender equality. These spouses represer new dynamics that have emerged in marriage with the rise of divorc culture and gender equality. They talk in terms of optional and contir gent marriage, and they portray divorce as a gateway. They are mor likely to talk about "rights equality"—that version of gender equalit based on individual independence rather than about explicit notions c equity or interdependence. This dynamic can represent a "cautionar tale" for husbands; if wives cannot secure independence through mai riage, they can pursue it through the divorce option. Yet, if marriage i explicitly contingent upon independence and equality, there are implic relational contingencies as well.

Spouses in both generations only approximated these patterns Indeed, there is great variation within each generation. However, th analysis of the '50s and the '70s couples revealed that belief in marriag

culture and male dominance are on the decline, while beliefs in gender equality and divorce culture are on the rise.

## Overview of the Book

The first chapter previews the changing cultural meanings of divorce and marriage for the two generations by looking at the points of greatest contrast between the '50s couples and the '70s couples. Three key changes are apparent: 1) divorce culture and egalitarianism are on the rise among the '70s spouses; 2) while among the '50s couples it was the wives who took care of or monitored the marriage's well-being, among the '70s couples a full-blown "marital work ethic" is espoused by both wives and husbands; 3) finally, it is the '70s spouses who actively *reproduce* divorce culture.

In Chapter Two, I depart from marital stories to describe the social, demographic, legal, and economic conditions that have been necessary for the rise of divorce culture. I address the cultural influences conventionally associated with marriage culture: religion and male dominance. I also discuss the newer cultural influences associated with divorce culture: therapeutic culture and gender equality. I argue that since the women's movement, therapy has become more women-centered. I show how gender equality and therapeutic ideals are shaping the redefinition of marriage and divorce, within a culture of divorce.

In Chapters Three through Six, I return to the longitudinal data on the '50s couples, married over 30 years by their last interview. In Chapter Three, I analyze how spouses' "talk" about marriage, divorce, and gender changes over time. The prevailing patterns reflect the traditional terms. The '50s wives and husbands are both more likely than the '70s spouses to support male dominance and marriage culture, and more likely to perceive gender equality as an issue relevant to the "public" sphere, rather than to marriage. The '50s spouses certainly register the rise of divorce culture over time, but they do not *reproduce* divorce culture to the same degree as the '70s spouses. Moreover, '50s wives, more than husbands, are *thinking* divorce, suggesting discomfort with the marital bargain of their times.

Beginning in Chapter Four, I explore case studies of '50s couples who depart from the prevailing pattern of traditionalism. The Dominicks of Chapter Four reveal the power dynamics that emerge when male dominance is sustained and divorce culture enters into the husband's marriage talk; the wife "thinks" divorce, but marriage culture beliefs leave her powerless to produce change. This pattern is virtually without reward for wives. The Hamptons of Chapter Five initially believe in marriage culture

and male dominance, but over time become increasingly egalitarian in their ideology and practice. Marie Hampton's enduring belief in marriage culture keeps the marriage going until Henry Hampton's talk of gender equality increases. Finally, the McIntyres of Chapter Six represent the turn toward egalitarianism and divorce culture among the '50s couples. The McIntyres' marriage, like that of the Hamptons, reveals the difficulties of changing ideologies midstream; however, their changes are more sweeping and more gratifying than the Hamptons'. Martha McIntyre's belief in divorce culture empowers her to assert her marital ideals; Michael McIntyre chooses to respond to her change. In short, wives are changing more quickly than husbands, but, in general, neither wives nor husbands of the Older generation are changing as fast as the Younger generation.

Chapter Seven explores perceptions of the '50s era. The '50s spouses' retrospective accounts of marriage are informed by contemporary practices. The younger group's constructions of marriage in the 1950s reflect well-known stereotypes of the era, which is, by and large, their parents' generation. From the viewpoint of the '70s spouses, divorce in the 1950s was not simply a *last* resort, but *no* resort. The '70s spouses tend to "locate" marriage culture in the past and divorce culture in the present, and in so doing they reproduce the terms of divorce culture.

In Chapters Eight through Eleven, I analyze data from in-depth interviews with the '70s spouses, who were born in the early 1950s and married in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Chapter Eight describes the '70s spouses' increasing divorce stories and divorce anxiety, as well as strategies used to contend with divorce culture. Central among these strategies is the "marital work ethic"—a belief in the need to work on marriage in a culture of divorce. The proportions of those who support gender equality and reproduce divorce culture are greater in the Younger generation. Gender equality has become an issue within the "privacy" of the home as much as in the public world of work. Chapter Nine illustrates how the Clement-Leonettis and the Walkers rely upon external social commitments to bolster gender relations within their marriages. The Clement-Leonettis employ therapy toward the end of a gratifying and equal marriage. The Walkers show how religious commitment can advance marital work and egalitarianism. Chapter Ten looks at the Greens and shows how a '70s couple sustains traditional beliefs of male dominance and marriage culture in a social context challenged by new ideologies. The Greens face a different marital context than the '50s traditionalists; they are surrounded by and must contend with the countercurrent of divorce culture. Finally, I address how the blend of male dominance and divorce culture is generally imputed to other's beliefs and lives rather than one's own.

In Chapter Eleven, I address how matched wives and husbands are more likely to hold different beliefs among the Younger generation. I begin by discussing the Nakato marriage, where the husband is changing faster than the wife. I argue that this is less problematic for marriages than the reverse; paradoxically, he can use his power to advance gender equality. In most cases, however, wives seem to be changing faster than husbands (Hochschild with Machung 1989). As the Kason-Morris marriage illustrates, tensions plague such asymmetry. While the power of a husband who believes in male dominance and divorce culture is amplified, so, too, is the power of a wife who believes in equality and divorce culture. Because wives like Roxanne Kason-Morris are on the increase, '70s wives are more likely to say, perhaps to *do,* what '50s wives only *thought.* Until the social context affirms wives' marital visions, the power of divorce culture will be crucial for wives who seek to redefine marriage. In the final chapter, I discuss the promise and problems of divorce culture for women, men, children, and society.

# 1 Marriage and the Construction of Ideology

## *From Marriage Culture to Divorce Culture*

In their classic article, "Marriage and the Construction of Rea ity: An Exercise in the Microsociology of Knowledge," Berger and Kel ner (1964) provided a detailed and insightful portrait of how marit "realities" are constructed over time. Marriage is described as a "dramat act in which two strangers come together and redefine themselves. Socially constituted selves inevitably change as the spouses' once separa social circles gradually merge. Marriage entails constructing and object fying a shared subworld embedded in the private sphere and serves t siphon off surplus, potentially disruptive energy. In Berger and Kellner account, the narrowing and stabilization of personality brought about b marriage is described as "functional" in a society that rigidly controls coı duct and often requires geographical and social mobility.

Three decades later, feminist researchers immediately perceive tw problems: the invisibility of gender power relations and an artificial spl between private and public spheres. Feminist research on marriage ha revealed how power relations influence the constructions of selves in th service of marriage; historically, becoming a wife and becoming a hu band have not meant the same thing. Bernard's (1972, 1982) classic anal sis of "his" and "her" marriages was one of the first works to portra the disjuncture in spousal experiences and highlight the legacy of ma dominance in marriage. Patricia Zavella's (1987), Miriam Johnson (1988), and Hochschild's (1989, 1997) books are more recent analyse revealing gender power relations. In these and other works, femini researchers have also challenged the idea that the construction of ma riage occurs within a bubble called the "private sphere," apart from th influences of the wider society, by uncovering the multiple ways in whic social structures—from the economy to the legal system—enter into ma ital and family dynamics (Ferree 1990; Lopata 1993; Thorne and Yaloı 1982). In recent years, however, feminists have affirmed Berger and Kel ner's theoretical orientation by increasingly taking a social constructioı ist approach in the study of gender and families (Thompson and Walke

1995; West and Zimmerman 1987). Rather than just focusing on macrosociological structures that subordinate and victimize women, feminists are analyzing the ways in which women actively create, contest, and resist microsociological structures of dominance in a variety of contexts (Gerson and Pleiss 1985). This book reflects Berger and Kellner's social constructionist approach toward marriage, but also brings feminist insights to bear upon marital dynamics. Spouses concurrently construct heterosexual marriage and gender as the following accounts of the Stone and the Turner marriages suggest.[1]

## THE '50S STONES: CONSTRUCTING TRADITIONALISM

Katy and Evan Stone are a white, upper middle-class couple enjoying an intensely gratifying marriage by their 30th anniversary in 1982.[2] Indeed, Katy Stone apologizes for making her marriage sound like a "Doris Day movie plot" at this time. When Katy is asked how she would explain the high divorce rate, she asserted:

> This isn't going to be a popular answer. I think it's because the roles are pretty badly messed up. And, for a gal to get the same salary for her to be able—when she is on her own, be able to have equal job opportunities and things, I have no problem with that. But in a marriage—my mother said something that was just neat [. . .]* 'Somebody has to be the boss, and it really is better if it's the man.' And I think that says it in a nutshell. I think marriages that really try to be equal in a way that there is a total partnership that one is not really stronger and in authority over the other, I don't personally feel that works that well, and I think that most women are longing for a strong man. I think most women when they get out of line would love to be told in a loving but firm way to sit down and shut up. That's the way I feel . . . .

In this passage, Katy *interprets* the rise of "gender equality" as a cause of divorce. She has also made sense of the trajectory of her own self-development and her marriage. Because Katy and Evan Stone were interviewed in 1959, 1971 and 1982, we can trace the evolution of their marriage. It has not always been "a Doris Day movie plot."

Like many couples married in the 1950s, Katy Stone refers to parents when asked what encouraged or discouraged her initial marriage to Evan. Katy explains that when she was 24 years old in 1952, her parents invited her to their beachfront vacation home, along with family friends and their marriageable son. "This was," she says, "a plan worked out by my

*Ellipses within brackets indicate omitted text; ellipses within quoted copy indicate a pause in speaking.

father, who unquestionably thought I was getting along in years and should be married." Katy and Evan announced their marriage three months later.

Evan credited the "era" with propelling him into marriage.[3] When asked about the influence of his parents' marriage, Evan says: "I don't think I really thought about it too much. [. . .] I grew up in an age where we did things 'cause they was to be done. I mean, I went to school because it was supposed to be done, I got married because it was supposed to be done." Evan's talk about entering marriage reflects the talk of his generational peers. This is "marrying as a given."

In 1959, after seven years of marriage, Katy Stone discussed her initial, difficult years as an Air Force pilot's wife. During Evan's leaves from the service, she'd discovered, with each visit and each pregnancy, that sex and affection were separate for him and awkward for her.[4] She confided, "I was fond of him, but I was hurt. But the philosophy of the Air Force housewife is 'You make your man happy.'" She had relied heavily on the support of the other Air Force wives in his absence. When he returned for good, she missed the support of the wives and was "frightened" to have him home all the time.

Upon Evan's discharge from the service, Katy "did a snow job on him" so he would pursue a promising sales job. She wanted him to be independent from his family and the family business, to build confidence. She wanted to redefine family ties for the sake of the marriage. She describes their relationship coolly, in terms of "fondness," and then asserts her resolve regarding the marriage: "We were fond of each other in spite of strains which had never been discussed, and I made up my mind I was going to do everything to make this marriage work."

*Katy's Marital Monitoring*

In addition to redefining family ties, to make the marriage work, Katy lowered her expectations and worked to secure her husband's affection. She noted in 1959: "Intellectually he has all the good ideas in the world, but it's old pedestrian me who has to plan the picnics, the beach parties, tracking in the sand, etc. Gradually he has become much more comfortable with the [children]. He and I are on a very frank basis now. We're both very fond of each other. He has learned to be more affectionate. I have learned to expect less from him than I did at first." Regarding his affection, Katy admitted that "it wasn't easy for me to beg for attention, but I've learned to do it in ways that aren't humiliating to either of us." Katy would hint of her upcoming birthday—by remarking that she felt old or by prompting the kids to convey the fact—to avert his forgetfulness, his guilt, and her sense of being neglected.

In these passages, Katy describes the work of monitoring a marriage, which is basic to the production of her eventual "Doris Day movie plot." While this marital monitoring is neither as explicit nor as salient as it will become among the '70 couples, its elements are apparent and it is, above all, wives' work. Monitoring partly entails "kin work," or the conceiving, creating and maintenance of kin ties (di Leonardo 1987, 442–43).[5]

Monitoring a marriage also means doing "emotion work." This entails inducing or suppressing "feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild 1983, 7). Katy was clearly suppressing her expectations of Evan. She also tried to induce a "proper state of mind" in him by actively attempting to redo or remake her gender for her husband: "And I said [to Evan], 'Let's make me the kind of woman you'd like to be married to, what would she be like?' And he was laughing, and said, 'she'd be attractive, physical-wise.' When we were first married, physical appearance was very important to him; now it has taken much of a back seat. [And he continued] 'She'd be able to keep her mouth shut, but also know how to ask the right questions and bring people out. . . .'" Katy reports a history of being a leader: "I just had long habits of competence and with anybody but a person of Evan's temperament I could have gone on and been a bossy lady to my lack of satisfaction."

In a supplemental interview three years later (1962), Katy is still working to keep her "mouth shut." She has been emotionally depressed. She feels excluded and "empty." Complying with Evan's ideal reveals an internal struggle:

> Basically, Evan and I have changed roles. He's the one with the confidence now and I am without it. I've always known he's had to win his confidence by his own achievements and not what I could do for him. But in spite of knowing this I felt terribly excluded because he's not one to talk things over easily. But then he never has been. He took me on no trips except one. A man and his wife and Evan and I went to a meeting. The man and I [sat together] and got into a discussion about some [current events] and I was feeling good being included again and was having a fine time till all of a sudden Evan turned around and said "you talk too much." I was chagrined at his criticism of me. [. . .] Evan has told me he feels I monopolize conversations when we're out to a social gathering and don't give the other people a chance to talk and *I've gotten so self-conscious and so uncertain that I don't feel like me anymore. I feel empty—I don't know who I am anymore* [emphasis added].

After ten years of marriage, Katy has managed to reverse the roles, yet her very identity is at stake in her attempt to approximate the image of the good wife.

The image of the wife, particularly in white, middle-class culture, has historically and legally implied "inequality, taking a back seat, economic dependence, being a provider of personal service, and loss of self" (M. Johnson 1988, 41). Katy's talk reveals that there is nothing "natural" about a wife's subordination; rather, it emerges through a process of social construction. As Bernard (1982, 39) observed, "It involves a redefinition of the self and active reshaping of the personality to conform to the wishes or needs or demands of husbands." This is Katy's struggle as she works to suppress her assertive voice. At this time, Katy and Evan share the ideology of a male-dominated marriage, but their practices, particularly Katy's practices, fall short.

*Katy's Divorce Thoughts*

Despite these difficulties, Katy was not thinking or talking divorce in 1962. Only nine years later, in 1971, does she toy with the thought of divorce and the appeal of independence. All five children are teenagers, and her husband is facing maximum career demands. After 19 years of marriage, Katy reviews her imaginative experiment with independence from marriage.

> I think this last year when I sort of pulled away and I sensed that he was kind of struggling and he was sort of pulling away, I became . . . you know, quite disenamoured with the whole thing and I just went through a little period of all my little feeling sorry for myself times, that I just felt, "Well, I'm really independent, I could just pull away from this without a look back." Well it was a great thought while it lasted. [. . .] but these were not serious—these were not really thoughts that I really believed inside, but they were—they were *there* which they hadn't been for many, many, many years.

Although Katy was miserable in 1962, she only begins to think about divorce in the 1970s, as the divorce rates approach a "tipping point" in society at large.

Katy never does pursue divorce. She contains her distress by minimizing its prevalence over time: "You know you're always going to have the percentage of times when what you need they're not able to give." If her needs cannot be met now, they will be at some future point. This is Katy's compensation, and a vital underpinning to the belief that "marriage is forever." It is a belief in reciprocity beyond the "give and take" in any one moment of a marriage; it suggests that the sacrifices will be worth it. It is also a belief that erodes as the Younger generation scrutinizes the gendered nature of "give and take" within marriage.

The privileged context of an upper-middle-class marriage may suggest that Katy must rationalize her disappointments and stay in the marriage

for financial reasons. Yet, more than most wives, Katy could be financially independent because she has an inheritance. She asserted that she "never was interested in anything else other than marriage." Minimal employment experiences before marriage and raising five children were likely deterrents to divorce. She explains, "I'm strictly a one-man woman and I—having a happy husband and happy kids, you know—that's real important to me." She is not only deterred by her marital ideals, but also by her gender ideals: "Evan is [the] one that is that strength between us, where he is definitely—he is male and I'm a female." She repeatedly remarks on Evan's "total masculinity." Katy yearns to be comfortable in a heterosexual, male-headed marriage; she doesn't link the lack of emotional sustenance to the structure of power in the marriage.

*Evan's Divorce Thoughts*

Evan Stone did not have thoughts of divorce in 1970, but by 1982 he admitted to considering divorce around 1973–74. His family was "crumbling," partly because of his intense involvement in his work.[6] When asked what prompted thoughts of divorce, he declares: "That I wasn't the boss." Like many '50s spouses, by the 1970s Evan verbally supports women's equality at work in the public sphere; however, in marriage there has to be a boss.

When Evan is asked what he likes least about his wife, he jests that "she's female." After relatively cautious responses to his female interviewer, he "quit beating around the bush" and asserted: "Oh gosh, she walks a very delicate line. [Interviewer: Between?] Between being a wife and at the same time not being dependent. She has to be her own person, but I probably can't express that. I want her to be independent and yet be a wife. I don't want her whining or whimpering. I want her strong, but at the same time I want her as a wife." Evan's difficulty articulating support for Katy as a strong person, and dissatisfaction with this strength in a *wife,* epitomizes the catch-22 situation that exists for many women, especially strong women. He wants her to be "independent" without losing the characteristics attributed to "traditional" wives: dependence, submissiveness, and subordination.

*Turning to Religion*

The Stones draw upon religion to solidify their gender and marital ideologies. While Katy had always believed in God and had been Protestant, by 1982 she reports "finding Jesus" as her "personal savior" back in 1974. Katy was initially influenced by two of her children, who began going to church with neighbors; then Evan went. They were

drawn to a neighborhood church and soon after, they "found Jesus," drawn by fundamentalist tenets more than by organized religion.

Katy explains how the scriptures taught her to be open to what Evan needed. The Word helped her to understand "how God laid down the male and the female" and, therefore, she "stopped being good" in areas such as household financial responsibilities and making sure things got done, so that Evan could be good in them instead. She reports that "the Lord was really talking to me through the Bible, saying 'drop back, let him make decisions, he needs your respect'"—a lesson for her marriage that she learned "in the nick of time." Katy's religious commitment augments her monitoring of the marriage and legitimates her emotion work—that is, suppressing her competence and bolstering Evan's authority.

Katy's efforts, as well as finding the Lord, helped Evan realize his authority as husband. Evan acknowledges that it was Katy who monitored and steadied their marriage when it was at its most vulnerable. The "needs" to which he refers below include his needs to be the head of the household and his need to realize his masculinity in work without her interference: "And I just thank the Lord that she was able to recognize in our marriage needs that I had, and was able to meet those needs. In other words, when things were getting a little shaky, why, she'd take the steps to keep our marriage together."

He knows Katy is happy because "we are able to communicate now, and share." Evan adds that "gradually, as time has gone along, I've become more of a proper husband and father, and taken responsibilities that I should." Later in the interview, referring to the Bible he reiterates: "I found the healing from my family in there, the healing for my concern about the world in there, I found the . . . my function as a father image and a helper to people in the scripture."

By 1982, the Stones' practices align with their ideals of a male-dominated relationship, marked by the terms of marriage culture. Constructing the marriage of their dreams has been a process of persuasion, conversion, and above all, Katy's monitoring. Paradoxically, this religiously anchored, male-dominant marriage is not without feminist and therapeutic elements. Bolstered by religious tenets, Katy has drawn on a traditional institution that validates relational concerns; it is a strategy that not only reflects a nineteenth-century inclination to credit women with "moral superiority," but also a twentieth-century strategy of trading control of the household for relational and emotional concessions from men.[7] Katy has worked to be "the kind of wife" Evan would like her to be—a wife who affirms his dominance.

Ironically, by the time Katy and Evan forge the 1950s ideal of a male-headed family, the ideal has lost its hegemonic grasp in the greater society.

As for other '50s couples, for the Stones "marrying was a given," marriage was presumed to be "forever," and divorce only a "last resort." This last resort depended upon Katy monitoring the marriage and reconstructing herself for Evan. Male dominance and marriage culture are nearly hard-wired for them. Their divorce talk is telling in this regard. Echoing Katy's explanation for widespread divorce in 1982, Evan asserts: "it's hard for me to see a marriage surviving when woman becomes the dominant force."

By 1982, the Stones construct ideologies asserted by half of the '50s couples: marriage culture and male dominance. The Turners, in contrast, are among the third of '70 couples who challenge the old terms and forge new marital meanings through innovative strategies in a new marital era.

## THE '70S TURNERS: RECONSTRUCTING MARRIAGE IN DIVORCE CULTURE

Nick and Mia Turner defy all the "sequences" associated with "marriage culture": they were lovers, then friends, then roommates, then lovers, and finally they married—not because anyone proposed, but because their friends were asking them if and when they were going to get married. For the Turners, marrying was experienced as an option. Married for ten years by 1992, they were raising three children, including a daughter from Mia's first marriage. This was Mia's second and Nick's first marriage. Mia is Japanese-American and Nick is African American.[8] Both spouses are college educated, middle class, and work full time.

Describing their marriage, Nick Turner succinctly states, "it's *not* a symbiotic relationship." He describes a period before their marriage when Mia withdrew from the relationship. His attitude was, "Fine. Bye. She's not interested. I got to take care of myself." Nick emphasizes "independence" and "options," talking the language of divorce culture as he addresses marital tensions between Mia and himself: "But I guess my basic view or philosophy is, there's *a way to work this out.* If it doesn't work out, then it doesn't work out. *There are some other options.* The last thing I want somebody to tell me is that 'no, this door is closed on you, you can't use this door.'" Nick's "basic view" means he is willing to "work" and flexible enough to look for options within the marriage. Still, he wants doors, including the divorce gateway, to remain open. The option to marry, to stay, to leave, also punctuate Mia's talk about marriage.

When I asked Mia Turner what is good about her marriage, she initially says, "everything." She elaborates that it is good "sexually," provides "emotional support as far as career-wise, [. . .] there's no really set

role of who does what, you know, everyone does everything." The latter represents the egalitarian model of her marriage; the Turners share work and home responsibilities. Next, Mia asserts that "independence" is good, but when she immediately adds "even though I'm married," she begins to convey the idea that her independence is possible not because of, but in spite of, being married. Part of being independent is the freedom to make decisions, she explains: "When I have to make a decision . . . I think of as a couple, but I also think of myself, I would say first—what is good for *me*—and I know if I make that decision that it'll fit right in. Not that I run over him or anything, but it's nice to know that you can do that." When Mia explains that she does not "run over him," but "it's nice to know that you can do that," she implies that her aim is not to dominate, but to avoid being dominated.

When I ask Mia about the biggest surprise of her marriage, she offers a typical repartee of divorce culture, and then conveys her amazement that Nick puts up with her independence: "One of the surprises is that it's lasted this long. [Laughs.] No really, it's like I feel like 'who is gonna put up with me?' You know? Because at this point in my life, it's like, you take me like I am or else forget it, because I'm not going to be in the same situation as I was *in my first,* where I did everything to please a person and lost myself, you know. So I'm just going to be the bitch I am and you take me, or else you're gone." Mia's individualism is clearly a reaction to her experience with sacrifice and subordination in her first marriage. She refuses to "lose" herself again.

In Mia's view, the problem in her first marriage was her husband's "traditionalism." She complained that "it was mainly, you know, the place of the woman's at home." Being a housewife was "not me," according to Mia. Her first husband "went into a rage" about the lack of cleanliness in the house when she was bedridden. When he raised a cooking pan at her, she says, "it was the excuse that I needed." As Mia tells it, "it really wasn't violent, it was a fit of temper, but it was enough." Mia pursued divorce and now her marital commitment is contingent upon happiness defined as an equality rooted in independence.

*Individualism and/or Relationality?*

Mia Turner repeatedly equates independence with "happiness" and views this equation as a criterion for marriage and divorce. When I ask about any divorces that should have been, Mia suggested her parents should have divorced, rhetorically asking: "Why stay together if you're not happy?" Mia explains that marriage "put a stop" to her father's adventurousness in his younger days. For Mia, individual happiness, rather than obligations or children, justifies marital endurance.

As Mia recounts the divorces she has witnessed, we learn that she gives advice consistent with her belief in "divorce as a gateway." When her sister-in-law was trying to decide whether to divorce, Mia not only provided support, but successfully advocated divorce: "I was always encouraging her, you know, 'Hey, this is your lease on a new life. Do whatever you feel is right! [...] It's like these things happen, you know. Are you happy?'"

Mia's speculation about her parents' marriage, her advice to her sister-in-law, and her own divorce account suggests that Mia is a clear-cut individualist—she believes that one's self and happiness should come first. Individualism clearly informs her marital and gender ideologies; in fact, it serves to bridge these ideologies. Marriage, divorce, and de-gendered roles are all rooted in and contingent upon individual choice or rights equality and personal happiness.

Yet, several contradictions suggest that happiness means more than independence and personal happiness to Mia—that Mia harbors *relational* concerns. While individualism is a stance that puts the self first, relationality emphasizes expressivity and attunement to the needs of others. Relationality, rather than individualism, informs many a '70s wife's ideal of marriage. Rights and relational equality are easier to sever in abstract theory than in actual practice. Three aspects of Mia's interview suggest this ideal: her story of an unexpected divorce, the Turners' own brush with divorce, and Mia's marital disappointments.

### *An Unexpected Divorce*

Despite a remarriage based on independence and de-gendered roles, Mia retains an "image" of successful marriage that leaves her open to what I call the "unexpected divorce." Such divorce stories reveal a new "structure of surprise": the unexpected divorce represents the dashed hope that marital endurance is predictable. Mia states:

> And then this couple, I saw socially [...] they were like the only high school couple to still be together. [...] I kind of thought that was a good, you know, marriage, they have two kids, you know, a beautiful home, he's in computers, you know, she didn't have to work [slight laugh]. [...] But um ... *shocked all of us when they got divorced.* [...] For me it was something because, you know, all these years, and you're talking about maybe 20 years, [...] and they had two kids and um ... I thought it was sad only because the kids were beautiful and we just thought like "wow, they have everything going for them."

With the exception of the marriage's longevity, the reasons for Mia's shock were puzzling. After her first marriage, Mia repudiated the bread-