

Individualism and Marriage: Ideal Types for Making Sense of the Relationship between Self and Sacrifice

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Published online: 13 July 2017
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Abstract The question of how the individual and group relate is one that has long interested social theorists. Changes in family form and structure in the contemporary West resituate this question in a contentious public debate regarding how the prevalence of new family forms may contribute or be deleterious to the well-being of individuals and families. Sociological discourse on marriage and the family generally tends to mirror this debate by dichotomizing individualism and commitment and self and marriage, resulting in an obfuscation of our understanding of the forms and styles in marriage. In order to clarify and advance this discussion, we show how individualism and commitment are mutually required in a modern world. We follow this by outlining a logically-derived typology that, along with a committed individualist and a group conformer, includes two intermediate types: a self-regulator and a relationship negotiator. We empirically demonstrate the utility of these types by showing how they correspond with the ways that interviewees talk about marriage in six local congregations, and we suggest various social factors that may particularly impact the development of local marriage cultures. These types provide a theoretical frame for understanding how individualism and commitment are intertwined and require each other.

Keywords Marriage · Self · Individualism · Dualism · Local culture

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Scholars have drawn attention recently to the high value Americans place upon both individualism and marriage. In so doing, they observe that these are “cultural models” that are not only in tension with one another, but in contradiction, since one insists on the priority of the self, while the other places primacy upon a person’s obligations to others (Amato 2004; Bellah et al. 2007; Cherlin 2010; Hackstaff 2010). In other words, individualism and marriage are often implicitly imagined by family scholars to be poles in an unresolved, or unresolvable, dualism, where at best, the models of individualism and of marriage uneasily coexist in contemporary marriage. This dualism, while not uniform among those who study the family, is widespread and has significantly influenced U.S. research on marriage and family.¹

We contend that these scholars are correct about the co-presence of schemas of individualism and marriage in marriage discourse and action, but that the dualistic assumption that underlies these categories results in an undertheorized account of how the tensions and oppositions between individualism and marriage are approached, dealt with, and creatively managed in social life. Supported with evidence from the marriage literature and original qualitative data, we maintain that cultural schemas of individualism and marriage are not always drawn on separately or in a situation-specific manner, but instead are combined in patterned ways in contemporary marriages and in the local discourses and cultures that support them.

We proceed by first showing that strongly dualistic conceptions of individualism and marriage inhibit theory and analysis that would shed light on actual empirical instances of marriage discourse and action in local cultures. We then draw from theory that examines tensions between group belonging and the constitution of the self in modernity in order to theorize mechanisms that allow individuals and groups to creatively manage competing interests in the self and investment in the group. We use these mechanisms to show how individualism and commitment are not necessarily always opposed, but rather, can be related to and constitutive of one another in complex ways. We construct a set of ideal types that describe the ways in which people intertwine the competing pulls between individuals’ desires and the requirements of marriage. In between the poles of a “committed individualist” and a “committed-communalist,” we posit two intermediary types, the “self-regulator” and the “relationship negotiator.” These ideal types are used analytically to separate distinct approaches to intertwining tensions between individualism and commitment and marriage, allowing for a more nuanced understanding than many theories of marriage provide. We use six case studies of U.S. Christian congregations² in order to show the wide variety of marriage cultures that exist even among religious communities. The ways in which people talk about marriage in these local settings are much more complex and less dualistic than the descriptions of contemporary marriage models in the literature may suggest. Many cannot talk about the self except in relation to their marriage, and they cannot discuss their marriage without referencing self-autonomy. Our contribution to the literature is useful because the logical construction of the ideal types allows us to analytically distinguish those intertwining patterns of self and commitment as they are visible in local marriage cultures. In addition, marriages are situated within a particular local culture that tends to value similar aspects of marriage or

¹ More nuanced approaches include Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 2013, 2015) and Giddens (1991, 1993).

² Religion is one of two major social institutions (the other is law) that historically have provided significant support for marriage in the United States (Cherlin 2010); therefore in religious settings we can potentially see models of marriage more purely than in many other settings. In addition, unique ways in which American Christianity has valued both marriage and individualism is a smaller picture of the larger U.S. culture. It results in a setting where tensions between these two cultural models are heightened, potentially generating—and allowing us to view—a broad range of ways in which individualism and marriage combine.

individualism, and are associated with or reflect social characteristics—e.g., denominational affiliation, social class or ethnic background—and we show how these may be salient in helping these cultures originate and endure.

Contemporary Marriage in the Late Modern West

In recent decades, rates of cohabitation and divorce have increased (Coontz 2004) and marriage practice has become more oriented around individuals' needs and desires (Giddens 1993). In this context, sociologists have sought to make sense of how Americans reconcile the seemingly incompatible values of individual autonomy and self-expression with the institutional and communal characteristics of marriage (Amato 2004; Cherlin 2004; Bellah et al. 2007; Cherlin 2010; Hackstaff 2010), especially as many people acknowledge that although marriages do not always last, they expect their own marriages to be permanent (Arnett and Schwab 2012; Baker and Emery 1993).³

One influential example of this work is found in Robert Bellah's (Bellah et al. 2007) book, *Habits of the Heart*, in which he and colleagues describe two models of married life in the United States. One is the *therapeutic*, strongly emphasizing human well-being, self-expression, empowerment, and the freedom to sever commitments that hinder these values. The other, the *obligation* model, prioritizes the needs and requirements of the couple over the individual. A strong moral sense pervades these marriages with talk of duty and responsibility.

Bellah and his colleagues follow De Tocqueville (2003) by viewing individualism as an encroachment upon society and seeing marriage and the family as defenses against this. The therapeutic and obligation models each fall on one side of a dualism between the individual and society and the self and the group. Acknowledging that "individualism is inside the family as well as outside of it" (Bellah et al. 2007, 90), the authors attempt to explain how couples' discussions of *why* they are married can result in confused-sounding rhetoric. For instance, they cite an example in the interview of a married man, Ted, who "oscillated between the idea that it might in some larger sense be *wrong* to leave his marriage and the simple idea that he and Debby would stay together because they were *well-suited* to each other" (Bellah et al. 2007, 109 emphasis added). They make sense of this rhetoric using a dualistic approach: They draw a sharp contrast between the therapeutic and obligation models, and claim that "most Americans are, in fact, caught between ideals of obligation and freedom," where obligations can be used to "justify enduring relationships" (Bellah et al. 2007, 102). But they go no further than that. The assumption seems to be that since these two impulses seem contradictory, there is no logic that can stitch them together. Therefore, there is then no need to look for specific patterns that blend individualism and commitment.

By conceptualizing individualism and commitment as essentially dualistic, Bellah and his colleagues neglect the fact that scholars have often discerned logics in even apparently contradictory discourses and behaviors (Giddens 1991; Becker 1999; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Gallagher 2003), and that such patterns also can exist even though they are in logical contradiction (Pugh 2013), since people do not always think or behave logically.⁴

³ Because of this perception of marriage as something that will last, we use "marriage" as shorthand for a "lifelong marriage commitment" throughout this paper.

⁴ Other marriage scholars are less dualistic in their approaches, but their work has not been widely discussed or used in the U.S. literature on the family (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2013; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2015).

Similarly to Bellah, Andrew Cherlin's theorization of marriage in the United States continues to rely on a conceptual dualism between individualism and commitment to make sense of marriage and divorce rates historically.⁵ While Cherlin's work is helpful when comparing marriage patterns cross-nationally, he assumes that local marriage processes mirror those we see historically at the level of society. Cherlin thus describes macro-level trends of people marrying and divorcing, labels the philosophical impulses under these actions as polar realities—marriage and individualism, respectively—and concludes that these impulses exist side by side in *individuals* as elements of a cultural toolkit which they draw upon situationally, “flip-flopping from one to another [marriage to individualism] as they go about their lives,” though he does not specify how or why (Cherlin 2010, 9). We do not see individualism and marriage requiring each other for mutual formation, or have any sense of how this formation might happen.

We are wary of assuming that the micro mirrors the macro, because when these macrolevel historical models of contemporary Western marriage are applied to how cultural schemas and beliefs lead to *individual* action and patterns of local groups (Swidler 1986, 2013), they may neglect important aspects of social life. The pieces of individuals' cultural toolkits are often constructed not directly from broad, macrosocial reality, but come from local networks and the small group settings in which they are embedded (Becker 1999; Smilde 2007). However, we do not privilege micro interactions in and for themselves. Instead, we seek to contextualize the micro level within meso levels of social life. Meso-level social configurations do not necessarily have the same architecture as either micro or macro levels (Archer 1995; Stacey 2005). The concept of emergence allows us to think about how various social factors may interact and create an entity that is entirely new, unique, and qualitatively different, and which cannot be reduced to underlying strata (Danermark et al. 2001, 60; Sayer 2010). Each couple in a marriage relationship can move in and out of various local cultures—some of which, such as religious communities, are also marriage cultures with particular shared views on what a marriage should look like and how to help people achieve that marriage (Duncan 2011). These local marriage cultures are themselves situated in broader cultural worlds. Thus, macro patterns are constituted by greater variety at local—both micro and meso—levels than Cherlin's and Bellah et al.'s analyses assume.

In short, the work of family scholars that identify macro trends is important, but is incomplete and may be read as replicating old debates and thin thinking about individualization. For these reasons it is important to study marriage discourses in the multiple social contexts in which they are embedded, and to examine empirically how a focus on large-scale trends might obscure their constitutive processes happening at more meso levels. In expanding the macro-level theories of families regarding the self and the group, we look at classical scholars and their work on individualism and the group for insights on how the self and group rely on each other in mutual constitution rather than existing in an uneasy dualism. Rather than this being a case of one or the other, individualism and commitment are necessary parts of each other in modernity. Instead of being an impediment to the development of self, marriage is part

⁵ Cherlin builds on the chronological progression seen by earlier family scholars, adding the contemporary individualized or expressive marriage to the *institutionalized marriage* and the *companionate marriage* (Burgess and Locke 1945; Cherlin 2004; Cherlin 2010). In the individualized marriage, commitments are not tied to economic security or strong gender roles and there is instead a shift from *roles* to *self*. People “look inward to see how they are doing” and pursue personal growth throughout adulthood (Cherlin 2010, 90). In this model of marriage, each individual is free to sever ties that apparently lack the ability to help them grow or achieve personal fulfillment, similar to Hackstaff's (2010) conceptualization of divorce culture where marriage is a contingent option and divorce is a gateway.

of a modern social world that has constructed selves and continues to support the growth of individual expression. They require each other.

Towards a Non-Dualistic Theorization of Individualism and Marriage

In order to develop a more adequate framework for analyzing local marriage cultures, we prioritize a concept of the self as socially embedded, rather than atomistic. Moreover, we contend that individualism itself, at the degree that we witness it today, is a modern phenomenon that is incapable of succeeding had it not been for particular articulations of group life. Pushing beyond the assumed dualism between individualism and commitment has a long lineage in sociology. We take inspiration especially from George Herbert Mead and Georg Simmel's theories of individualization in the modern West and apply their insights to conceptualize the relation of individualism and marriage in a manner that moves beyond dualism.

Arguing that the self is never completely free of the group, Mead describes processes of primary and secondary socialization, in which society becomes part of an individual's psyche (Mead 1934). Self, as that which can be an object to itself, arises in social experience. As a child grows, she begins to internalize and incorporate group demands. In what is essentially primary socialization, through internal conversations with these "generalized others," the child is able to become a human person: one who is able to relate in socially acceptable ways and to present herself as an individual in the midst of other individuals (Mead 1934, 140). After a self has arisen, it provides for itself its social experiences; so we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self, such as a hermit. However, it is impossible to conceive of a self *arising* outside of social experience, without the formational and generational powers of society. When a self remains in society, secondary socialization continues on. In a relationship such as marriage, the partner can become incorporated into the personality of the self as a permanent mental visitor. Not only is the individual's personality dependent on the formation of the social group at large, but also upon the particular person with whom they have partnered. Each decision is weighed as it potentially affects another person, as much or even more than the individual. Mead shows us that it is not only the anonymous others of our society that we rely on as individuals, but also the particular person with whom we partner.

In a similar vein, Simmel (1903) maintains in "The Metropolis and Mental Life"⁶ that individuals and groups are mutually constituted. Simmel argues that the nature of social interaction determines the personality and nature of the individual. For example, city dwellers, responding to the intense requirements placed upon the emotional life by the "swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli," developed a "blasé" attitude and a protective shell (Simmel 1903, 325ff). This was particularly visible when the city dweller was contrasted with those who lived in a small town where a "slower, more habitual, and more smoothly flowing rhythm" allowed for more feelings and emotional relationships (Simmel 1903, 325). Citing this and several other characteristics of "modern" personalities, he contends that these qualities take their shape in people because of the more frequent and more intense interactions they have with others (Simmel 1907).

Simmel (1908) makes a related point in "Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality," that also is important for conceptualizing marriage. He directs our attention to how, in modern societies, even small groups like dyads or triads can act as mediators between the individual and broader society. In order to withstand the domineering pressure that modern society imposes upon the individual, smaller intervening groups provide an

⁶ Simmel (1907) makes a similar argument in *The Philosophy of Money*.

opportunity for individual expression: “[T]he lone individual cannot save himself [sic] from the totality: only by surrendering a part of his absolute ego to a few others, joining himself in with them, can he preserve his sense of individuality and still avoid excessive isolation, bitterness, and idiosyncrasy” (Simmel 1908, 262). This self-preservation happens in small groups, as the most elementary stage of social organization is a small group in which individual agency is severely limited. Simultaneously, an individual self gains agency and “peculiarity and individuality” as a result of the division of labor within each small group (Simmel 1903, 332).

In these small groups, such as a family (or, in our case, a marriage), the individual can distinguish himself or herself from the partner, while at the same time the group acts as an “individual” with the broader society around it. Families are buffers: protective units that constitute individuals by their norms (as they are also constituted in interaction with the society surrounding them), but also, importantly, provide a space for individual self-development in a more restrictive setting than society writ large. According to Simmel, it is within smaller groups that individuals’ personalities, and the exercise of their individual freedoms, are allowed to flourish. At the same time that small groups allow for individual development and flourishing, our modern economic context requires groups to have individualized members in order to thrive (Simmel 1971).

Thus, this classical understanding of individualism allows us to argue for a non-atomistic construction of individualism where both groups and the individual require and mutually constitute each other. The individual is formed in the group, and the group needs individuals in our modern context.

A Word on Expressive Individualism: Marriage and the Self

Some may argue that the dominant variety of individualism has changed from utilitarian in the 1800s to expressive individualism today, and that the classical articulation of mutual constitution relies on an older version of individualism. Simmel, however, engaged with different types of individualism on a qualitative and quantitative scale. Expressive individualism champions the importance of uniqueness, personality, and the adequate expression of emotions. Modern indices of emotional health indicate that the locus of identity and authority is situated less in institutional locations and more in the self (Turner 1976). When expressive individualism is prevalent, people privilege *feeling* something and freely expressing that feeling. This has been noted in the rise of therapeutic culture (Rieff 1987) and in emotivistic “I feel” claims, which cannot be negated or refuted by others (MacIntyre 2013, 11).

Contemporary scholars also help us understand the role of expressive individualism in marriage in order to further our argument about the intertwining of each (Giddens 1991; MacIntyre 2013; Turner 1976). Cherlin claims that this self-focused, therapeutically-inclined expressive individualism is dominant in marriages in the United States (Cherlin 2010). Others suggest that while expressive individualism is undoubtedly present in American marriages, its deployment is varied (Giddens 1991). Many people guard their power of choice as an indication of the self-as-authoritative (Taylor 1989), but the paradox of eternally keeping one’s options open is that it necessarily closes opportunities that require commitment, such as may be found when one chooses a marriage (Schwartz 2004). Similarly, while authenticity is an important factor in legitimating one’s beliefs and commitments in expressive individualism, people can do this *both* through appealing to the self and by appealing to a tradition or mode of belonging (Hervieu-Léger 2000). In other words, expressive individualism is often empirically

present in, and coherent with, the social contexts and groups to which people belong, such as marriage cultures (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2015).

Some scholars see this apparent tension as “postfeminist” family discourse that is caught between the nostalgic desire for a “traditional” gender order and a feminist support of non-marital family forms (Aune 2006; McRobbie 2004; Stacey 1990). Bellah or Cherlin might refer to it as a tension between the ideal marriage and its obligations and the therapeutic belief in individual satisfaction and growth. We want to incorporate that tension into a particular cultural logic of practice that becomes settled out in patterned ways—both within relationships and in marriage culture. Similar to Giddens’ treatment of the “ideal pure relationship,” the ideal types that we present below are *closer* to lived experiences and yet are still ideal types (Giddens 1991).

Data and Methods

Sample and Generalizability

Our data instructs our ideal types, which were developed as a logical construction, in two ways. First our interviews elucidate how the ideal types manifest in real marriages. Second, we use the ideal types to show how local congregations, as local settings, create distinct marriage cultures that intertwine individualism and marriage in specific ways. We show how characteristics such as denomination, social class, and ethnic background shape this patterning.

The data used in this paper is drawn from the Marriage and Divorce, Conflict and Faith Study, which consists in a sample of 26 congregations drawn from the population compiled by the Northern Indiana Congregations Study (NICS) (Snell et al. 2009). Our sample was purposively drawn so as to explore patterned variation in local marriage cultures. It was limited to mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and Roman Catholic churches due to the limited number of non-Christian congregations in the NICS. For this paper we drew on participant observation and interview data from six churches that we visited during regular worship and where we interviewed nine pastors and 74 congregants for a total of 83 interviews. Congregants were recruited through pastor recommendation and announcements at church. We used this strategy in order to elicit frequent attenders, who are best positioned to accurately represent congregational culture. Sixty percent of those interviewed were women, which is consistent with the higher religiosity of women in general (Walter and Davie 1998). Descriptions of the congregations are in Table 1.

We chose these religious groups to investigate marriage patterns because Christianity in the U.S. provides a rich and important location to examine the intersection of individualism and marriage. As Cherlin and other scholars have observed, religion is a major social institution that historically has provided significant normative and practical support for marriage in the U.S. while also incorporating the tenets of expressive individualism (Cherlin 2010). And this social institution matters for a majority of Americans. Eight in ten Americans claim a religious identity while only three percent claim atheism, and 43 percent of adults attend church at least monthly (Hout and Smith 2015). Because religious groups invest in marriage and because most Americans are religious, congregations give us natural settings where we are likely to see patterned orientations to individualism and marriage.

We look at the congregation level—at groups of voluntarily associating individuals that compose and maintain particular orientations toward life, including what good and appropriate marriage relationships look like—because congregations are settings where individualism and commitment are negotiated at a local level. This combination results in settings where dynamics of negotiation

Table 1 Descriptors of the six congregations

Location of local culture	Size	Ethnicity	Class	Interviews	Common type (Male / Female)
Life Church	100	Non-latino, white	Working class	<i>N</i> = 10 3 men 7 women	1 RN* (0 M, 1F) 8 SR (2 M, 6F) 0 CC
Bethlehem Church of Christ	75	Non-latino, white	Working class	<i>N</i> = 7 2 men 5 women	7 RN (2 M, 5F) 0 SR 0 CC
Willow Street Church	200	Non-latino, white	Middle class	<i>N</i> = 22 10 men 12 women	10 RN (4 M, 6F) 12 SR (5 M, 7F) 0 CC
St. Linus Catholic Church	7000	Non-latino, white	Middle class	<i>N</i> = 17 11 men 6 women	6 RN (3 M, 3F) 8 SR (6 M, 2F) 3 CC (2 M, 1F)
St. Mary Catholic Church	1400	Latino	Working class	<i>N</i> = 15 6 men 9 women	3 RN (1 M, 2F) 9 SR (2 M, 7F) 3 CC (3 M, 0F)
Iglesia del Gran Pastor	75	Latino	Working class	<i>N</i> = 12 6 men 6 women	3 RN (2 M, 1F) 5 SR (3 M, 2F) 4 CC (1 M, 3F)

There were no Black respondents in our sample

*RN Relationship-Negotiator, SR Self-Regulator, CC Committed-Communist

and co-constitution are heightened, allowing us to view cultural models of marriage more purely than in other settings.⁷ Many studies of marriage that actually think about individual marriages only partially contextualize these relationships within the most relevant settings (Bellah et al. 2007; Cherlin 2010). Our data here, though limited to congregations, begins to explore this variation by looking at local churches as a unit and the effects of various factors that may be important, such as denomination, social class, and ethnic background. These factors can impact congregations as they try to define for their members what marriage is and to help these marriage relationships.

Because our argument is that individualism and marriage are negotiated in patterned ways, not just selected separately in different social settings, showing this patterning in a subpopulation should be sufficient. However, the exclusion of non-religious groups means that there may be more fine-grained distinctions or other types that we have not identified here. Therefore, this is a middle-range theorization and our study results in a “moderatum” generalization: one that is moderate in scope and has the potential for building future hypotheses (Payne and Williams 2005, 39).

Analytical Process

Data was coded using ATLAS.ti in an iterative process. Primary coding consisted of categorizing responses about divorce and resolution of marital conflict. Upon seeing patterns in how

⁷ Though our data comes from congregations in the Midwest of the United States, it is hasty to assume that they would be more conservative than congregations in other regions. Catholic churches in the Midwest are not more conservative in terms of religious beliefs than their counterparts in the North and South regions (Konieczny 2013) and mainline and evangelical Protestant churches are only slightly more conservative (Chaves 2004). Thus it is probable that what we see here may have similar parallels in other areas of the United States.

respondents articulated their views of the self in relation to the marriage, our secondary coding paid particular attention to what respondents saw as the ultimate purpose or goal of their marriage and the tools, practices, and resources used to accomplish them.

There are two analytical sections that follow. The first is a presentation of four logically constructed ideal types that show the relationship between individual and marriage. We constructed a set of Weberian ideal types, which are “mental constructs that...state a logical extreme,” abstracting from reality so that they ultimately can then be used to formulate causal models (Jary and Jary 1991, 224). The logical, as opposed to empirical, construction of ideal types makes them useful as tools to analytically distinguish particular traits, while recognizing that the types themselves are not always isolated in empirical reality (Zubrzycki 2002). Described at length in the next section, our four types are the committed individualist, the relationship-negotiator, the self-regulator, and the committed-communalist.

We then ask: How might local marriage cultures, characterized with this ideal-typical schema, be produced in congregations by factors including denominational belonging, class position, and ethnic background of the congregation? We analyze the patterning of meso-level marriage culture in six congregations by plotting the position of each of the coded interviews upon a graphic representation of our ideal typical schema of marriage cultures. The ideal types help us pull apart variables that we know are related to the quality and the character of marriage, such as social class, race and ethnicity, and gender, surface patterns in local marriage cultures. We discuss patterns in regards to denomination, class, and ethnicity, and suggest possible mechanisms for these.

Ideal Types: A Framework for Analysis

Developed as a logical construction, we provide a 2×2 table to represent our four ideal types. These types, in specifying possible ways which individualism and commitment are combined, show patterns in how the opposing impulses are resolved by co-constitution of the relationship and self. We do this using Bellah’s categories of “obligation” and “therapeutic” marriages (Bellah et al. 2007, 93–94). Along one axis are the *relationship goals*, such as a goal of developing and maintaining community or fulfilling individual needs. Along the other axis are the *tools* used to accomplish that goal. These are strategies of commitment (obligation) and of developing autonomy (therapeutic). Instead of seeing, as Cherlin did, religious marriages as a throwback to an earlier chronological period—that of companionate marriages—we see more variation and more mixture even within religious contexts (Cherlin 2010). In this way, our work incorporates the macro-historical marriage model of these scholars and builds on it, expanding it into the local level, and providing new mid-range theories. This two-by-two table thus results in four ideal-types: The *committed-communalist*, the *relationship-negotiator*, the *self-regulator*, and the *committed individualist* (Table 2).

The committed-communalist is the most embedded and committed to the relationship as the individual self is dissolved into the group. The goal of committed-communalists is to develop community and they do so by following through on their commitments. On the other end, the committed individualist is the most concerned with finding fulfillment through the practice of utilitarian and expressive individualism, leading him or her to refrain from true commitment to a group. In the middle, obligation and autonomy are mutually constitutive but in differing ways. The self-regulator uses the tools of therapeutic culture in order to achieve the goal of community—personal growth allows obligations to be better fulfilled. The relationship-negotiator uses commitment and obligation to further individual growth—it is within the structure of obligations and commitment that personal growth occurs.

Table 2 Analytic framework: The relationship of individualism and commitment

	Goal of relationship	
	Develop community	Fulfill individual needs
Tool used to accomplish goal		
Commitment/ Obligation	Committed-communalist	Relationship-negotiator
Autonomy/ Therapeutic	Self-regulator	Committed-individualist

The Committed Individualist

The committed individualist is one for whom the maintenance of any relationship would be subsumed under expressive and utilitarian individualistic desires. It is illustrated most closely by what Giddens (1993) describes as the “pure individualist” or how Bellah describes the classic utilitarian individualist: “No binding obligations and no wider social understanding justify a relationship. It is only as the expression of the choices of the free selves who make it up. And should it no longer meet their needs, it must end” (Bellah et al. 2007, 107).

Regarding the goals and the tools used for accomplishing goals, the committed individualist, as a purely conceptual ideal type, would use their autonomy to fulfill individual needs, or therapeutic tools to accomplish therapeutically framed goals. In pursuit of self-fulfillment and expression, a committed individualist might use counseling to reflect on inner feelings and to develop a deeper sense of self-awareness, unconnected to a desire to strengthen or build up relationships or commitments. This ideal typical individualist puts the self first and avoids commitments that could detract from the individual’s freedom. None of the respondents in our data sample clearly fit the ideal typical committed individualist, but Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) give a description of modern individuals who are “addicted to love,” and this illustrates the thinking of a committed individualist: “I am what matters: I, and You as my assistant; and if not You then some other You” (12). Each partner is replaceable as it is a tool for the self-development of the committed individualist. Our lack of empirical examples is perhaps to be expected as we are dealing with Christian churches, who, though they support individualism, also highly emphasize community and the golden rule of being careful how you treat others (Ammerman 1997). We might find this to be a more frequent type in local cultures where religion is not salient.⁸

The Relationship-Negotiator

Like committed individualists, relationship-negotiators have a sense of a permanent, core self that is not entirely amenable to willed, conscious efforts at changing it—“you are who you are.” However, they see flexibility in connections and relationships, which means that they hold on to and use the option of ending a particular relationship when it stands in the way of personal growth. Even though the self is more important than maintaining a relationship, a committed relationship can be a means of achieving self-fulfillment. Thus, the question of continued togetherness is contingent upon whether or not a spouse is able to contend with the fixed reality of the other’s individual disposition currently.

⁸ This does not necessarily mean non-religious groups, though some might be that way. Future applications of these types might in fact find something similar to what we have found here among the many atheists and secular humanists who value a moral system and community (Ecklund 2010).

The goals of marriage relationships are self-expression, self-actualization, and self-care, but, contrary to how the committed individualist pursues these same goals, the relationship-negotiator does so by using the tools from a structured framework of support, obligation, and permanent commitment with a compatible partner. The emphasis is on finding the correct person, which requires self-knowledge and maturity, gained through experience. External support is helpful in shoring up a potentially fragile relationship, but should not cross the line into authoritarian and moral claims on when a marriage should be given up; this remains the sovereign choice of the individuals within the relationship. The obligations of their commitments help manage what they should expect from their relationship and support therapeutic goals, providing structure within which to develop what they consider to be their best self. Relationship-negotiators see their approach as being realistic, practical, and aware that the messiness of human life does not always fit into the ideal vows spoken at marriage.⁹

Marie, 54, an art teacher and married mother of four, describes her successful marriage as a matter of luck and compatibility rather than of work, commitment, or obligation:

It's dumb luck: you know, James and I've pretty much grown together instead of growing apart. You know, sometimes it's just luck. [We] have pretty similar viewpoints about some very important things and one of them is parenting style...It just worked out that way.

The secret to their marriage is not changing the self but sharing similar viewpoints from the beginning, leading to less *need* for negotiating what their relationship should look like.

The Self-Regulator

In contrast to committed individualists and relationship-negotiators who prioritize the self, self-regulators see the ultimate purpose of their marriage relationships as building community. The obligations in their lives are their top concerns and goals and the marriage is given higher priority than the self. The relationship is non-negotiable and the self is the malleable aspect. One of the most efficient ways of managing the self is through therapeutic practices and tools. Instead of changing an unpleasant situation, the self-regulator is more likely to work at changing negative emotions, redefining the situation, and developing therapeutic capacities for dealing with the situation as it is. They seek to change themselves.

The self-regulator is the other half of the relationship-negotiator, showing how intertwined individualism and commitment can be. For the self-regulator, therapeutic individualism is used in the service of marriage, and for the relationship-negotiator, the marriage commitment is used in the service of the self. Bellah and his colleagues are right to declare that therapeutic language and culture has penetrated deeply into American culture, but we provide additional nuance to how the therapeutic may be used in service of what they label the “obligation” model. We observe that personal growth is seen to bolster their ability to fulfill their roles and

⁹ In a certain way, relationship-negotiators are strongly akin to what Cherlin describes as the modern American ethos or attitude toward marriage, which he calls expressive or individualized marriage. However, instead of his conceptualization of marriage and individualism as two cultural schemas that people use situationally, relationship-negotiators' individualism is fully integrated into their marriage relationship. Marital obligations and the benefit of love and support can provide structure that bolsters personal growth, but if a conflictual relationship cannot be adequately negotiated, it is terminated. Cherlin points out that this strong emphasis on choice can lead to more ended relationships because a vigilant self-carer should always be watching for these places where a relationship no longer grows them, and thus this type may be more accepting of no-fault divorce than other types.

obligations. The self-regulator believes that along the way of sacrificing their selves and interests for the good of the relationship, they may be able to find true happiness; but should one's happiness appear to conflict with the needs of the relationship, the relationship comes first. Therapy and a strong self are means to that end. What is surprising is that self-regulators will use therapeutic tools to *decrease* their individual needs, rather than fulfill them.

Self-regulators seek to mold themselves into good partners. Julianne, a 46-year-old, married mother of four describes aligning her disposition with her situation. Though her initial impetus is to be a stay-at-home mother, the economic situation required that she work. Julianne reimagines the benefit for her family due to this need for her outside work:

When I'm doing all of those Suzie Q Housemaker, that is when I just feel like, ahh... I'm the best version of myself...For me that's when I'm at home all day every day doing those things and yet I can't lament that that's not my life, that there is something redeeming, I tell myself, in the fact that my children have a mother who is educated, who can do this [work] so that they too can have the education that we value for them.

The situation cannot be changed, and instead Julianne fits her narrative to the situation and regulates her own desires to match what is available in her marriage relationship. Other-awareness is a chief virtue for her and other self-regulators; whereby being cognizant of the needs and requirements of others, she can respond by shaping a pliable, flexible self to match.

The Committed-Communalist

The committed-communalist is also a responder, but the self is even more fluid and pliable than it is for the self-regulator, and the commitment is even more fixed. The end goal or purpose of a relationship is the development and strengthening of the relationship itself. The committed-communalist takes it even further than other types and works to dissolve or eliminate individual needs and desires in order to fuse with the partner in the relationship, and does this by fulfilling obligations out of strength of will. The relationship between the couple becomes a distinct entity, and committed-communalists exchange their individual identity for a married one. The needs of the relationship (and the other) are front and center, which necessarily includes the joint project of childrearing. Exemplifying the schema of self-dissolving is Eric, a 48-year-old father of two:

When you get married, you start moving one seat further in the back of the bus...I think there's a lot of maturity that has to be developed that I still struggle with...putting yourself last or not at all...Your main focus is the children and it seems like you have to make a conscious effort a lot of times and bring it to the forefront.

By sheer force of will, Eric maintains an other-focus and seeks to dissolve himself, his desires and needs, into the identity and needs of the family relationship. The virtue of maturity is described as a matter of being able to sacrifice your own desires and to put yourself last. By focusing on duties, commitments, and responsibilities, the committed-communalist can keep a tight rein on aspects of the self that get out of line. Experience is perceived as needing control instead of expression, and the individual is cast aside rather than elevated. Eric's example also hints that there may be a temporal dimension to these types and that among an individual person there may be change over time; having children may require committed parents to move from the more self-focused types to the other-focused types.

Committed-communalists may deal with conflict by putting up with it, swallowing their objections, and adjusting their own behavior to accommodate the other. Obligation and duties

provide the bulk of the tools used, and the relationship is centered on self-imposed tasks and fulfilling roles or functions. The closer the committed-communalist is able to complete those tasks and fulfill those roles, the more successful as a person the committed-communalist feels. The committed-communalist is much more closely related to Bellah's "obligation" model of marriage than is the self-regulator.

Ideal Types in Analysis: Explaining Patterns in Local Cultures

In this analysis, we show how individualism and commitment are combined and how particular patterns are supported and maintained in meso-level marriage cultures—in this case, religious congregations.¹⁰ The typology can be applied to individuals in marriage, and it also can be used to refer to the dominant or recessive trends in local cultures, such as congregations. As these are ideal types, they are descriptive constructs that isolate particular sets of characteristics that constitute cultural forms. These forms can be found in marriages as well as in local cultures. They can be identified in religious group cultures, such as the ones we study here, in congregational discourse, sermons, assumptions that underlie the written and spoken language, as well as behaviors.

Thus, these types are aspects of congregational cultures that individuals may or may not accept wholesale, but rather, they may accept or reject their various components, thereby situating themselves in relation to them. We graphically represented the overall position of each congregant (which can be seen in Figs. 2, 3 and 4 and are discussed in more detail below) to reveal the heterogeneity or homogeneity present in each setting, and in Fig. 1 we show the relationship of each marriage culture to each other. We know that denomination, class, and ethnicity matter for a number of different outcomes in religious congregations. Here we show that these variables matter for the production of local religious cultures that lead to particular styles of marriage among the congregants.

Marriage Types and Denomination

Local cultures are variegated and the individuals within each culture do not perfectly align. In the subsequent sections and figures, we recognize this heterogeneity while emphasizing trends. We show closeness or distance of each congregation from the ideal typical forms. In some local religious settings, the orientation towards marriage and individualism is strongly connected with the denomination's theological stance toward marriage. We see this in one conservative church, Life Church, an Assembly of God congregation, where interview responses clustered around self-regulation, and in one liberal church, Bethlehem United Church of Christ, where when we plot the interviews in a graphical representation, the dominant type was the relationship-negotiator.

At Life Church (see Fig. 2), we talked with the pastor and nine congregants and found a dominant model of self-regulating present in the interviews and services of this Pentecostal, white,

¹⁰ Previous scholars have established that commitment and individualism are integrated in some circumstances where it is not about jumping back and forth between two different types (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2015; Giddens 1993). Our work, then, is to establish more pure types of individualism and commitment in order to see how congregational forms contribute to these cultures.

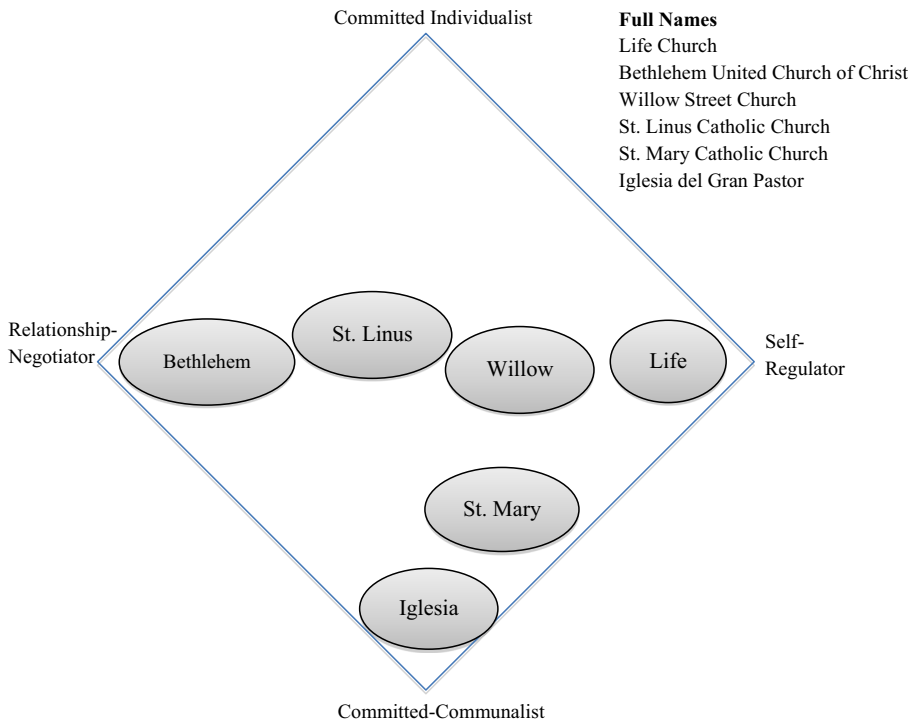


Fig. 1 Overview of the six congregational marriage cultures and where they cluster regarding the ideal types

working-class congregation of about 100 regular attenders. Nearly all (eight of nine) had strong self-regulatory tendencies, while one respondent displayed a mixed approach incorporating both relationship-negotiation and self-regulation. Life Church as a marriage culture seeks to instill “family values” into those who are part of the community by accentuating obligation-based goals of building strong families, loving and respecting one’s partner, and modeling Christ’s love for the church; but they seek to accomplish this by providing congregants with therapeutically-based tools and resources for the struggles that come with marriage.

For Life Church members, the goal of marriage is partnership, not self-fulfillment. Lucy, a 25-year-old stay-at-home mother of two, described it this way:

You shouldn’t look to your spouse for happiness. I think you should be happy on your own...You’re in it for a partnership, not “I’m going to marry him because I think he’s going to make me happy the rest of my life.” That’s not true. [If you’re unhappy] go to counseling; you need to work on yourself.

Happiness is not rejected, but is disentangled from the marriage relationship and set in the realm of self-work. If unhappiness is impeding the creation of a strong marriage, then therapeutic self-work and counseling are important as they can help one be a better spouse through self-regulation. Life Church members do not expect that these obligation-based goals will be accomplished by willpower alone, but by an active reshaping the self, until it is natural to put the relationship first.

Life Churchers incorporate therapeutic tools to assist in the goal of commitment in part because of theological beliefs about the innate differences between men and women. They

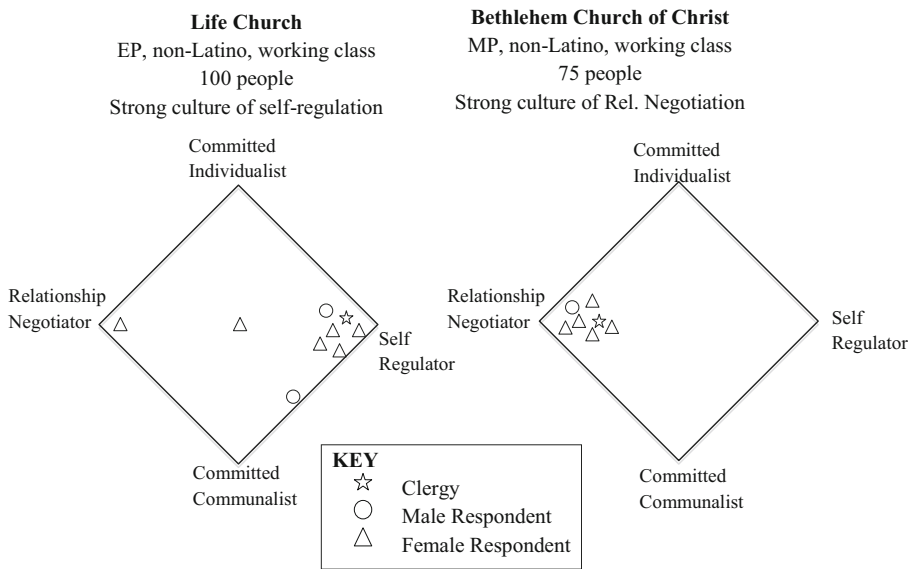


Fig. 2 Graphical representation of interviewees' positions at Life Church and Bethlehem Church of Christ: The importance of denomination

believe that these differences can be tricky to understand and misunderstandings can lead to relationship breakdown. To counteract this, they use focused counseling, gender-specific information and the use of self-knowledge for supporting the commitment is common among conservative Christian groups (Gallagher 2003; Griffith 1997):

I [the Pastor] always try to have my wife with me [in counseling a couple]...My wife and I have been very, very open with each other about...how men think, how women think, how men react, how women react. And she's able to communicate with the wife and say, "You know what, it doesn't make sense to us, but here's really how men think."...And to help them to understand the "why" behind what their wife does or "why" behind what their husband does kind of gives a different perspective and helps them to help that person.

This new perspective allows them to "help" the other person, revealing an other-focus supported through self-work, indicative of self-regulation.

Bethlehem Church of Christ provides another example of affinity between theological views and marriage culture, but instead of a local religious culture of self-regulation, Bethlehem, a Mainline Protestant congregation of 75 working-class white attenders, advocates relationship-negotiation (see Fig. 2). A prominent banner hanging on the outside of the church says "Don't put a period where God has put a comma," indicating openness and a focus on self-growth. In interviews with the pastor and seven attenders, they consistently described how self-growth happens through commitment, and consequently the marriage relationship does not have the same level of priority as at Life Church. Sermons infrequently touch on marriage; instead, the focus is either on self-growth or neighborhood and community relations. When asked about marriage relationships, congregants at Bethlehem emphasize marriage as being about the well-being and flourishing of the individuals. The support and structure that the marriage relationship

can provide helps these congregants achieve these goals. For instance, the structural strength of the wedding vows serve as resources for transforming a conflict-heavy relationship into something worth keeping, as Pastor McDaniel says:

[Conflict] might be a time to come back to vows too, you know, “Let’s talk about what’s your commitment to this relationship? Why are you in this relationship?” And maybe vows are a concrete way of connection: “What do those words represent for you? Um, and here you are in the middle of the worst of times, um, how do those promises that you made to each other help you feel some strength together to approach this? You made those promises with a bunch of people around you and with the blessing of God so those haven’t gone away presumably. What are the resources around you?” Some of them are spiritual.

These marriage vows, however, are only resources rather than complete obligations. The structure can help stabilize a relationship and let the individuals within it flourish, but if they constrain or limit self-growth, the marriage must not be upheld “at all costs,” says Pastor McDaniel: “Keeping those vows sometimes means getting divorced...for the well-being of the individuals and even for the relationship sometimes.” The only authority for determining if a marriage is going to continue or not comes from the people within that marriage.

Bethlehem belongs to the United Church of Christ, a mainline denomination that supports marriage without having the same strict guidelines about or disapproval of divorce that are found in other, more conservative denominations (Wilcox 2004). Thus Bethlehem and the conservative Life Church represent religious marriage cultures that adhere to different ideal types, and this variation can be explained by the denominational stances on marriage, divorce, and relationships. Life Church easily fits into the “obligation” model of marriage Bellah outlines and with which he and his colleagues associate so closely with religious marriages. Bethlehem Church, with its prioritization of the individual over the group, aligns more with Cherlin’s description as a slide in religious marriages toward looking like secular marriages. These two churches serve to demonstrate the variety *within* religion regarding marriage and orient us to expect these sorts of perspectives on marriage and the self, illustrating how theological orientations can support both individualism and marriage in different ways.

Marriage Types and Social Class

While denomination certainly can impact local marriage cultures, our data suggest that we cannot assume that there is a direct linkage between these two at all times. Another factor that appears to support particular types is social class. In two of our cases, the Evangelical Protestant Willow Street Church and St. Linus Catholic Church, middle-class culture links with the ability in these marriage cultures to nourish two different models of marriage—both relationship-negotiation and self-regulation. We did not find this pattern at any of the other churches, which are all working-class, and we found very different cultures at the two Catholic parishes, which vary by social class, suggesting that middle-class values of egalitarianism, choice, and professionalism may be shaping the particular patterns that we see at these two churches.

Willow Street (see Fig. 3) is a moderate Protestant church with about 200 middle-class congregants. The two pastors talk about the goals and tools of marriage in a way that claims aspects of both self-regulation and relationship-negotiation. The nine men and 13 women (including a pastoral couple) we interviewed were split between relationship-negotiators (10)

and self-regulators (12).¹¹ At Willow Street it is important for all to “agree and disagree in love,” as their vision statement says, and instead of striving for a monolithic marriage culture, Willow Street *fosters* the ability to hold differing beliefs in tension among its members.

In this marriage culture we see evidence of middle-class values of choice in such a way that there is constant recognition and validation of the differing beliefs and values of congregants surrounding the style of marriage. Rather than one overarching model of marriage, congregants described their own particular view of marriage and added “but there are a lot of various ideas here.” Pastor Grace Dollard adds to this, saying: “We want to be very supportive of people going through struggles in their relationship. But we would say, ‘Before you throw out the relationship, except in cases of abuse...are there ways to work at reconciliation?’” Reconciliation with an unfaithful partner may be a daunting task, and not all of the congregants agreed with that perspective, acknowledging sometimes people are not good life partners or fall out of love. The pastors echoed this by emphasizing self-awareness, which, as it grows, reveals the expectations both partners have for their relationship. Like relationship-negotiators, this clear picture of the relationship beforehand is important; but like self-regulators, maturity is looking soberly at oneself for areas of growth, which can reach back and strengthen the marriage itself.

Thus, the tenets of expressive individualism and knowing oneself become integral to bolstering the commitment. Willow Street Church actively engages in maintaining a marriage culture that does not give in to either the individual or to the relationship. Self-regulation is expected to happen alongside relationship-negotiation between compatible, committed adults. Pastors employ both therapeutic and obligatory tools as they strive to help congregants maintain a marriage relationship that provides room for individual self-flourishing along with a strong commitment to each other. No doubt in some local marriage cultures there are definite conflicts and competing ideas that are unresolved such as in the congregations in Penny Edgell Becker’s (1999) study, but it is important to realize it is not individualism fighting against commitment but rather competing understandings of how commitment and individualism are related.

Likewise, St. Linus Church (see Fig. 3) is a mixed-type church of both relationship-negotiators and self-regulators. It is a Roman Catholic parish with theologically moderate congregants (about 7000) who are generally middle-class professionals. Our respondents did not cluster around one type, but showed considerable variation. Out of 15 interviews, five were relationship-negotiators, seven were self-regulators, and three were committed-communalists.

At St. Linus, the purposes of marriage relationships ranged from self-focused to other-focused and respondents included helping your spouse get to heaven, providing a good place for children, and helping you develop your best self through the struggles involved. In order to pursue these various goals, there were multiple methods and tools employed, including obligation-based tools, such as finding support in the concrete community of the parish or taking advantage of sacraments that bind the congregant to his or her commitments, and therapeutic-based tools, such as pursuing counseling to determine whether the situation is negotiable or if the couple is indeed incompatible and should separate.

The priest suggests that getting rooted in the parish provides strength for the marriage. This community orientation differs from the other Roman Catholic parish in our sample, who went

¹¹ Men and women equally used other-focused and self-focused orientations to marriage, encouraging our conclusion that this mixture of types was due to a local marriage style rather than gender differences.

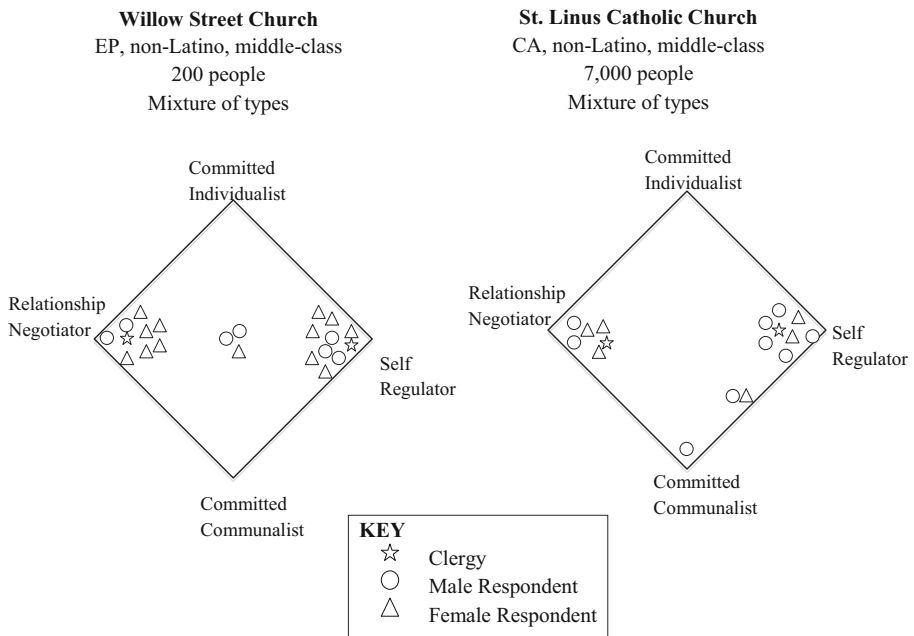


Fig. 3 Graphical representation of interviewees' positions at Willow Street Church and St. Linus Catholic Church: The importance of class

further and said that that being married in a religious ceremony and following the tenets of the faith is “not a technique you know, of saving a marriage, it’s the actual glue.” For St. Linus, which has more moderate congregants and a mixture of different types, the sacraments can be helpful therapeutic-like tools, but they are not seen as being as powerful in allowing for self-dissolution as they are in the more conservative Roman Catholic church of St. Mary. Sacramental marriage provides something additional and stronger to the otherwise fragile commitment, it can provide the means for both self-regulation as each partner receives the sacrament, and for relationship-negotiation as the sacrament of marriage is made between two partners.

In St. Linus there are various ways of making sense of the relationship between marriage and individualism, of conceptualizing the methods and tools used to move towards those goals, and similar to what we see at Willow Street, this mixture can be understood as an offshoot of the middle-class ethos present at these.

Marriage Types and Ethnicity

With the two remaining churches, St. Mary Catholic Church and Iglesia del Gran Pastor, we find that denomination and class are not sufficient to explain their marriage culture. There is more similarity between these two churches, which are both Latino congregations, with most of the members being first-generation immigrants from Mexico, than between these churches and their denominational or class pairs in the other four that we have discussed. Ethnic gender ideologies color how individualism and marriage are understood. The Latinos at St. Mary and at Iglesia del Gran Pastor cherish family obligations and self-sacrifice, clustering between self-regulation and self-dissolving, which is consistent with Mexican-American views of familism (see Fig. 4) (Ehlers 1991; Hirsch 2003; Mirandé 1997; Welland and Ribner 2008).

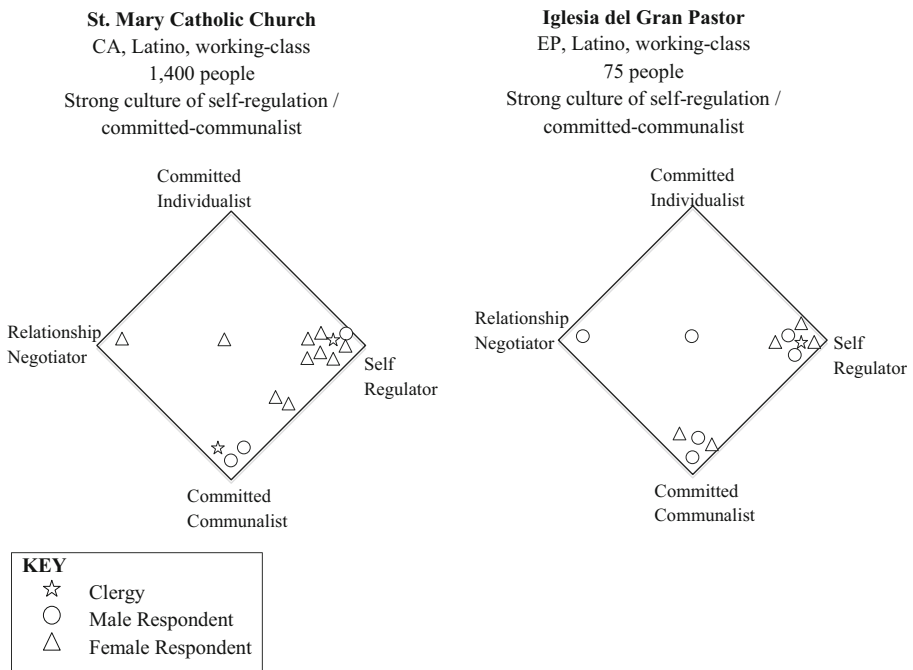


Fig. 4 Graphical representation of interviewees' positions at St. Mary Catholic Church and Iglesia del Gran Pastor: The importance of ethnicity

St. Mary, the second Catholic congregation in our study, is home to 1500 members, the majority who are first-generation immigrants from Mexico, and strikingly reveals that denomination is not sufficient to explain marriage culture. While there is great diversity within Catholic parishes in the United States broadly (Konieczny 2013), in this particular instance, the familism present at St. Mary underlies an overwhelming presence of self-regulation and self-dissolution compared to St. Linus. The presence of self-dissolution at St. Mary may reveal how an immigrant population distrusts or is reluctant to accept a dominant cultural therapeutic ethos. The priests, who through their education and backgrounds are more familiar with therapeutic approaches to bolstering marriage relationships, corroborate parishioner interviews where the necessity is on dissolving the needs of the self for the sake of the relationship.

In the fifteen interviews we conducted with congregants and two priests, thirteen were classified as committed-communalists or self-regulators. We consistently heard a reluctance to share marital issues with other people. One woman describes her experience of trying to reach out for advice or understanding regarding her spouse: "One time I tried to consult with his mother, my mother-in-law. She told me, 'You married him. Now you put up with him.' And so I learned in that moment not to complain to anyone." Her lesson was that her relationship problems were not the task of others, such as her mother-in-law, to solve. This internal orientation for solving problems, rather than an external one, aligns with the self-regulation and self-dissolution approaches.

As we mentioned, the priests at St. Mary have more experience with therapeutic approaches to dealing with violence and conflict, and they encourage members to look to

counseling for family difficulties, especially in cases of alcoholism or domestic abuse. The priests' efforts in this regard were met with resistance, as instead of following 12-step programs, the congregants preferred *juramentos*, vows or oaths, which were formally written-out promises to refrain from drinking for a period of time, such as a year. This method of fixing relationship difficulties relied on strength of will and commitments, central in self-dissolution.

Iglesia del Gran Pastor, an Apostolic church, serves mainly first-generation Mexican immigrants to the United States and has a mixture of self-regulation and self-dissolution (see Fig. 4). The pattern of types within this church is surprisingly similar to that of St. Mary, and the ethnic similarities to both of these churches suggests that Mexican-American familism and self-sacrifice are underlying this local marriage culture. In our twelve interviews, ten are self-regulators or committed-communalists.

Immigrant Mexican-American churches deal with traditional gender roles, as the Mexican-American pastor at Iglesia del Gran Pastor says:

Many Latinos come from traditional cultures where the man is the authority of the household. The women often work only in the house. But when they come to the U.S., often the woman has to get a job. Now both partners are working, and the wife often neglects her *trabajo doméstico* [housework]. That can lead to a lot of problems in the marriage.

As such, Latino pastoral leaders in the United States seek to make sense of this approach to marriage and family in Biblical terms. The pastor continues:

In the Bible, men and women are co-equal. They are both equal with one another, but they have different responsibilities. In Ephesians 5:22 it says that the man is the head of the house. He is the *jefe* [boss], the authority of the house. He is in charge of discipline. He is the boss. The woman is in charge of the maternal things in the house. She cooks. She cares for the children. She washes clothes. A lot of women who come to the U.S. stop cooking and washing clothes. They forget about their maternal role. A woman *se someta* [submits] to the man. And he submits to her role as a mother. She cannot take his jobs and he cannot take her jobs. They are co-equal, but they work in different parts of the house.

Congregants attested that having a marriage relationship work without God is difficult “because people are selfish.” Having a “strong connection with the movement of the Spirit,” and trying “to follow God” are given as reasons why only one couple in the church has been divorced: “If they are very committed, then they do not divorce.” Indicative of self-dissolution, this push to submit the self according to gender-delineated roles comes from a reliance on God and Biblical teaching, rather than counseling, as in self-regulation.

The self-regulation and self-dissolution approaches that we saw in both the Mexican-American congregations are seen as based on sexual ethics that shape gendered responsibilities within a marriage, and these approaches are not seen as universally appropriate. One married woman in our sample suggested that this should be changed:

We also have to educate the man, and ourselves too, us in our communities. Most of the time, the woman is an object that the man buys when he gets married. The man who falls in love her—she becomes an object, his property in marriage. He thinks he can have what he wants, when he wants it. I'm lucky that my husband, even though he's Hispanic, is very sensitive. He's patient. The majority of Hispanic men are not like that. They're very brusque. He wants what he wants when he wants it. So both sides need to be educated.

The preponderance of respondents who placed the relationship above the self and relied on either therapeutic or strength-of-will approaches to achieve this goal does not mean that this is seen as the preference, but merely the current state of this marriage culture.

Class may also be important to understanding the presence of this marriage culture, but it is specifically the intersection of working-class, first-generation immigrants, and a Mexican heritage that seems to be in play here. As we can see with the other working-class churches in our sample, Life Church and Bethlehem, social class was not sufficient to explain the variety of marriage cultures there.

Thus, our empirical investigation confirms the importance of placing particular interviews within a context—the local marriage cultures that inform, support, and maintain particular orientations toward the self and commitment. Not only are marriage and individualism intertwined in patterned ways, but they show up in particular meso-level locations in patterned ways. Employing our data in this way shows the diversity of meso-level variance in religious settings—which at the macro level are all too often painted as monolithic and homogenous.

Conclusion

We have argued that sociological understandings of the relationship between individualism and marriage commitment need to take into account, and make use of, classical sociological insights about the co-constitution of individuals and groups—and that the failure to do so has had contemporary repercussions for the discipline. Our aim in this study has been to show that models of marriage, especially at more meso- and micro-levels of analysis, should incorporate, rather than separate, the individual and the group. While we can see broad trends of growing individualism within marriage, applying these trends to particular contexts requires discretion. In particular settings, individuals are in the process of constructing their own lives in the midst of many factors. What we have argued for, and what we provide in our logically-constructed ideal types, are ways of understanding the mutual constitution of the individual and group. A person cannot be a particular personality if it were not for the socialization that occurs within a group. And groups, such as modern marriages, require individually distinct members. This mutual constitution is shaped by marriage cultures, such as may be found in religious settings. In these settings, by accepting therapeutic approaches to self-discovery and actualization, many religious communities in the United States promote both individualism and marriage commitments.

This paper has examined how people engage the contradictory elements of modern marriage. Marriage is characterized by a paradox, and in many cases, it is not a case of either the self or the commitment, but of both in particular ways. For instance, the relationship-negotiator commits to marriage with the hope that it will be a better way of being an individual, and the self-regulator actualizes the self in the belief that this self-growth will directly contribute to the marriage relationship. By using qualitative data, we have shown the nuance in local marriage cultures that is missed when relying on macro-level historical data. By choosing congregational data, we are able to examine settings that historically have been important for the support of both the individual and commitment to others. At the meso-level, we see mutual constitution of individualism and solidarity, and our analytic framework, where obligation and autonomy are integrated together in marriage in different ways, shows that it is not simply an option of either individualism or solidarity, but almost always an issue of both, in particular ways.

Though our analysis does not delve deeply into questions of gender, power, and authority, other scholars, such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), have discussed individualization

and gender. These scholars show that women in Western societies now show more freedom than previously, when they were encouraged to rely on self-abnegation and self-sacrifice for their value (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 56; Loscocco and Walzer 2013). We have added to this by showing that attachment to one's family can and does happen *through* individual self-awareness and agency. A more in-depth analysis can continue this line of investigation, but a preliminary reading of our data shows that while women tend toward attachment to the marriage (we labeled 24 of the 45 women in our sample as self-regulators and an additional five as committed-communalists), there are still a number of partners where the woman was more focused on personal growth and the man was oriented toward the other (six female partners out of the 23 couples interviewed). Simmel believed that the strongest way to maintain individuality in a small group was either to lead it or to be partially outside of it (Simmel 1908); perhaps these women see themselves as the family's leader or with their personal identity existing separately from the marriage relationship. These questions have direct connections to authority and power, suggesting that there is an affinity between a greater focus on the self and increased power for women within marriages (Loscocco and Walzer 2013). How this comes to be is outside of the scope of our paper. Further analysis could look at connections between types and women's power and position in the relationship.

This framework will also be useful for case studies showing processes in marriages, or in larger studies investigating variation within marriage cultures to understand networks, gender, race, or class. The benefits of this framework may be most pertinent for studying marriage cultures in religious settings and other similarly oriented moral communities that are interested in marriage preservation, such as post-divorce support groups and certain kinds of singles groups. For instance, a similar study of the co-constitution of self and group can be made in local cultures with conservative gender roles (Gallagher 2003) or in settings where marriage is highly valued but economic realities may deter people from marrying (Edin and Reed 2005). This framework can also be extended beyond investigations of marriage to see if these ideal types are exhaustive or if there might be others, especially in non-religious contexts. Though religion continues to be a salient aspect of social life for many in the United States, we recognize that because of our data limitations we might find different patterns in the non-religious population. Additional research is needed to see if this ideal-typical schema is exhaustive or if it needs other additions.

Our national debate regarding individualism and marriage swings between poles that view individual autonomy and freedom from commitments as a basic right or as a contribution to societal breakdown. When we realize how individualism and commitment are mutually required of each other, we can begin to identify places and marriage cultures that incorporate and support these in ways that contribute to human flourishing. Since our framework builds on theories of self and the collective, it can bolster our conceptualizations of how marriages are constructed and function, as well as how marriage cultures promote and support particular approaches. It could also be applied to legal, political, and rhetorical conceptualizations of family and marriage, contributing to a new way of discussing what a "good" family and marriage look like, and the plurality of ways in which families may actually thrive.

Acknowledgments We would like to thank David Smilde, Becca Hanson, and the anonymous reviewers of *Qualitative Sociology*. We would also like to thank Omar Lizardo, Elizabeth McClintock, Rory McVeigh, Christian Smith, Erika Summers-Effler, as well as the participants of the Research and Analysis in Sociology of Religion workshop at the University of Notre Dame for their feedback and comments. Funding for this research was provided by The Institute for American Families, the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame, and by the Jack Shand Research Grant of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

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