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# **Cultures of Complaint in Japan and the United States**

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## Abstract

Complaints are a ubiquitous but understudied feature of life in modern societies. This paper discusses the consequentiality of culture for complaining. It is a first step in generating a theory of why and how people complain that aims to serve as both a tool for cross-cultural analysis and an index of power within social relations. Data for this study are contrasted examples of complaints in Japan and the United States. At the level of national culture, there are obvious, stereotypical differences: the U.S. is a culture of complaint; Japan is a culture of restraint. Analysis of interview data collected from comparable subcultural groups (dual-income, middle-class parents of young children) finds, however, that expected cross-cultural differences in complaint are less significant than the observed similarities. Japanese female respondents in particular initiated complaints more often and complained more aggressively than hypothesized, suggesting that the salience of emic cultural categories, such as *yome* (bride) and *shujin* (master) is diminishing. I theorize that this emergent gender equality of complaints is a manifestation of the global, postindustrial, gender culture that is gradually trumping national and local cultures as the primary determinant of the "what," "why," and "how" of complaint. This theory suggests that gender-based power differences will continue to decline in Japan.

The squeaky wheel gets the grease — American colloquialism  
A nail that sticks up gets pounded down — Japanese proverb

Complaining is among the most common activities in modern societies. Legal complaints, medical complaints, complaints about relationships, about work, about the economy, about the government, about traffic and weather fill daily conversation, the newspapers, and the television talk shows. Bureaucracies exist to handle complaints, committees are established to look into them, counselors and doctors treat them, police respond to them, lawyers argue them, workers vent them, spouses harbor them.

Despite this ubiquity, there are few studies of complaint as a generic category of human activity.<sup>1</sup> My purpose here is to draw attention to the consequentiality of culture in complaint and the possibility of using complaint as an index of domination and a basis for cross-cultural studies. I consider the cultures of complaint in Japan and the United States. Indicative of the similarities of family life in two affluent, postindustrial consumer societies, the "what" of Japanese and American couples' complaints are predictably similar.<sup>2</sup> Respondents in both groups had complaints about housework, child care and parenting, spousal communication and intimacy, and expectations for marriage. Some of these portrayals of why and how people complain defy cultural stereotypes. Inspired particularly by these exceptions to cultural norms of complaint, I propose an outline of a general theory of complaint. In this theory, why people complain or do not complain and the forms that complaints take are determined by both local (emic) and global (etic) dimensions of culture, which are instrumental in shaping notions of fairness, calculations of risk, and appropriate self-image.

*Random House Webster's College Dictionary* defines complaint as both "an expression of discontent, regret, pain, censure, resentment, grief, faultfinding, or lament" and the cause of those expressions. It sets out bodily complaints and legal actions as types. As a verb, complaining is synonymous with protesting, grumbling, whining, and accusing. To complain is to be ill natured, surly, mean-spirited, objectionable, or spoiled. Complaining can also imply standing up for what is right, defending the weak, and speaking the truth in difficult circumstances. Thus, in English, complaining has connotations of both selfishness and righteousness. Tolerance of complaints implies a social order open to modification.

Japanese words that are translated into English as complaint also express dissatisfaction. *Kenkyusha's New Pocket Japanese-English Dictionary* supplies several revealing examples. *Fuhei o iu* means to express a sense of unfairness. *Kujô*, which translates as complaint, grievance, or objection, is comprised of two characters that mean suffering/pain (*ku*) and emotion or circumstances (*jô*), indicating the connection between states of affairs, feelings, and the act of complaint. The most common word for complaint, *monku*, consists of two characters, the first rendered in English as word or sentence and the second as phrase or sentence. This speaks volumes about traditional Japanese notions of complaint: saying anything at all expository could be interpreted as a complaint. '*Monku aru ka?*' (You have any complaints/anything to say?) is a common question by which superiors intimidate their subordinates. The expression *kuchi o dasu*, to speak out, mention, or give vent to, generally connotes impudence. In Japanese society, one is to know one's place and accept the social order as it is, trusting in the judgment and benevolence of superiors. If subordinates complain to superiors, it is often taken as an explicit criticism of an implicitly just social order.

Connotations of selfishness and insubordination notwithstanding, Americans and Japanese do complain. Often it takes the form of griping. According to communication theorist Tamar Katriel (1991; 38), complaining and griping are "functionally comparable." Both are plaintive speech that requires an audience. They have, however, different audiences and goals. Griping is ritualistic, repetitive, plaintive speech aimed at reaffirming group solidarity. For example, a group of men griping about their wives or a group of women griping about their husbands is reaffirming its members' shared gender identity. In Japanese, this kind of plaintive speech is called *guchi*, a kind of grumbling to sympathetic friends that soothes hurt feelings when action is deemed impracticable.

Complaints are defined as plaintive speech directed to the person the complainer deems responsible for the offense or to one who is able to do something about it. In contrast to gripes, the object of complaint is not group solidarity, but the reaffirmation of the relationship of a person or people to culturally sacred objects (Katriel and Philipsen 1981) or, as Vaughan (1986; 14) puts it, to "bring self-concept and the identity bestowed by the relationship into harmony." As the following examples show, in the U.S., the culturally sacred object is the true self. In Japan, it has long been the preservation of the system of ascribed social roles.

### **Cultural Patterns of Complaint**

Distinct cultures have identifiable principles and a high degree of coherence within, if not across, historical periods (Sewell 1999). The U.S. culture of complaint sanctions plaintive expression; in Japan, it might be better to speak of a culture of noncomplaint. The contrasting stereotypical images are of egotistical Americans and egoless Japanese. Consider how these images hold up when we compare

Japanese and American student radicals of the 1960s. Although the students were making similar complaints against the establishment in both countries, the organizational style of the students' protests reflected their different cultural legacies. Where American students in Students for a Democratic Society and other groups emphasized free speech and the voluntarism of "doing your own thing," the organization of groups of Japanese student radicals was characterized by "deference to formal authority and unwillingness to challenge it; consensus decision-making procedures that carry high expectations of subsequent participation; indirect and ambiguous means of expressing dissent; and high levels of commitment and loyalty to the group" (Steinhoff 1992; 222-23).

As with organized radical disaffection, so with personal distress. Consider how cultural differences in complaint are manifest in the treatment of psychological complaints. Therapies in the U.S. stress the importance of finding or recovering an authentic self. Americans like to believe that they achieve selfhood autonomously. Social scientists, from Philip Slater in *The Pursuit of Loneliness* to Robert Bellah et al. in *Habits of the Heart*, have called attention to the damaging effects of this ethos of therapeutic individualism on commitment and social responsibility. Everyone in the U.S. has the right to complain; consequently, relationships are not premised on expectations of enduring consensus maintenance.

The contrast with Japan could hardly be more marked. Native Japanese therapies, such as *Naikan* (introspection) and *Morita* therapy (named after its creator) operate out of cultural assumptions in which the self cannot exist independently. Psychological distress is the result of breaks in the chain of empathy and dependence on others. Native Japanese therapies compel patients to reflect upon how it is good to be dependent on others' perceptions of us and that we exist by and large in proportion to the extent to which these dependency relations are realized (Lebra 1976). Self is a location within social structures, and the self ideal is uncomplaining fulfillment of relatively inflexible social roles (Rohlen 1974; 96, 118).

The stereotypes of dependent Japanese and autonomous Americans can also be seen in the realm of legal complaints. The American notion that unfair treatment gives people the right to complain dates to the colonial period and sparked the Revolutionary War of 1776. Our cultural preference for providing access to universal rules of law as means of dispute resolution has spawned a volume of legal complaints so large that it threatens to swamp the courts. Legal representation is now a commodity advertised on television, and the proliferation of court TV programs is an indication that a strong rights consciousness and an adversarial approach will continue to characterize dispute resolution in the United States.

Access to law in Japan has long been highly restricted. Japanese justice emerged from feudal arrangements that emphasized obligations, rather than rights, as paramount. Even when a cause was just

and eventually recognized as such by high authority, attempts to bring legal complaints were deemed a treasonous insult to the divinely sanctioned system of hereditary power. The price of such impudence was frequently ostracism (*murahachibu*) or death.<sup>3</sup> In modern times, access to law has remained limited. Bureaucratic control of the size of the legal establishment keeps the costs of bringing suits prohibitively high. This barrier is buttressed by a cultural ideology of the nation as a harmonious family within which Western-style justice is not needed. Given the high costs to both purse and reputation, formal legal confrontations are relatively rare in Japan. Instead, a particularistic system of mediation, in which age, gender, social position, and other traditional indices of power are brought to bear, swings into action when civil plaintiffs are unable to reach compromise on their own. The result is preservation of the social order, even at the expense of the constitutional rights of individual citizens.

Though by no means an exhaustive account, the preceding parallel examples are sufficient to establish the stereotypical differences exhibited by Japanese and American complainants, be they militant students, patients undergoing therapy, or perspective litigants. In the American case, complaint is a cultural tool that is used extensively for personal ends. But in Japan, as legal scholar John Haley (1982) once said about litigation there, complaint is more like a ceremonial sword: kept on the mantle, it is viewed as a symbol of ultimate sanctions, but seldom if ever taken down and used. Americans strut their egos in public. Japanese egos are exercised mostly in the narrower confines of the mind, and even bold social revolutionaries, neurotics, and angry victims practice the cultural ideal of self-restraint and reserve. Even social misfits do not want to be the nail that sticks up.

Stereotypical though they may be, cultural preconditions inflect the process and style of introducing and carrying out complaints. The structural inequality of hierarchy makes confrontation less possible in Japan than in the egalitarian United States. Ultimatums that lead relationships to rupture are easier to deliver and more accepted in the U.S. Exit is less commonly recognized as an option in Japan, and, in any case, language use conventions and social interaction norms mitigate against demanding immediate satisfaction. Consequently, Japanese take a relatively long-term view. They tend to introduce complaints obliquely, negotiate differences in a slow, roundabout way, or, if the risk of proceeding with an issue is perceived as too great, ignore it altogether and hope it will fade with the passage of time. In Japan's culture of empathy, people are obliged to put themselves in the position of those to whom they would complain. Indeed, complaints should not happen because ideally they would have been anticipated and dealt with preemptively. But Americans are quick to complain at the first hint of unfairness and demand immediate resolution with a directness that Japanese find unsettling. The *ad hominem* style common in the U.S. makes for volatile negotiations. In the U.S. culture of complaint, no one is obligated to be a mindreader. The disgruntled are obliged to speak out, if they can, and a certain level of conflict is accepted as a sign of a healthy social order.

These stereotypes of complaint point also to culturally specific notions of virtuous exchange: morality. Japan's stereotypical morality is rooted in leader-benevolence-for-follower-loyalty relations in which there is *amaeru-amayakasu* (exchange of indulgences) reciprocity. Virtue is consequently defined as rolefulfillment. In contrast, American moral ideals presuppose exchanges unmediated by structural inequality. Virtue here is self-fulfillment. These culturally differing notions of virtue are lenses through which the meaning of plaintive feelings are interpreted. Although this may indeed be an accurate overview, closer to the ground, the differences are somewhat less clear-cut. My interview data at times challenge the stereotypes, and these exceptions point toward ways in which local cultures are becoming increasingly homogenized by rising global cultural influences.

### **Cultures of Complaint in Family Life**

Based on the examples presented in the preceding section, one could reasonably hypothesize that Japanese people would make fewer complaints than Americans. One might also reasonably assume that such complaints as they may make might be expressed obliquely in comparison with forthright Americans. Moreover, one would also expect greater gender equality in the distribution of American complaints. Conversely, given their more rigid gender hierarchy, such Japanese complaints as are exhibited should come less often from women and more often from men. Although it is hard to disagree with these suppositions, it is also difficult to lend them whole-hearted support. Cross-cultural analysis is messy, and despite the apparent clarity of the "big picture," we must avoid the tendency to essentialize, especially when analyzing the manifestly varied realms of families and spousal relations.

### **Sample and Methods**

Fourteen couples, nine Japanese and five American, were recruited as subjects using a process known as "snowballing from multiple starts" (Vaughan 1986, 198). The Japanese couples are part of the sample assembled for my dissertation research, which consists of thirty-three dual-income couples whose youngest child is under age ten. All reside in Toyama Prefecture. The American couples were recruited specifically for this paper. They reside in the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

The couples were interviewed together in their homes. In approaching people for interviews, I simply told them that I was studying work-family compatibility in dual-earner couples with young children. I did not specifically ask about complaints, nor did I encourage my respondents when complaints emerged. The interviews were guided by a list of topics, such as how they typically spend time on weekdays and holidays, who does what around the house, and how the children are cared for. I wanted my questions to be subordinate to the respondents' concerns, because my goals were to let the respondents talk about what they thought was important in their work and family arrangements and tell

me about it in their own terms. However, it is also clear that the topics on my list fell mostly within the wives' purview. With the husbands as a captive audience, the interview was an opportunity for wives who were so inclined to engage in a complaining ritual. As it turned out, few of either gender passed up the chance.

Interviews took place in the respondents' native languages and were tape recorded. The taped portion lasted about two hours, although I frequently stayed longer. I made notes on what was said before and after taping, either as we talked or from memory just after leaving. Later, I transcribed the tapes, simultaneously translating the Japanese interviews into English.<sup>4</sup>

There were important similarities and differences in the two samples. They were alike in age (38.4 years for the U.S. men, 38.6 years for the Japanese men, 37.4 years for the U.S. women, 36.8 years for their Japanese counterparts), number of children (2.4 in the U.S., 2.3 in Japan), the age of the youngest child (3.6 in U.S., 4 in Japan), and average household income (\$103,000 in the U.S., \$110,000 in Japan). All the couples might be categorized as middle class. At least one partner in each couple had some college education, with a preponderance of the respondents in both samples being college graduates.

In addition to these similarities, couples in both countries shared the modern challenge of trying to integrate their notions of a good enough family life with the demands of their jobs. They live in strikingly similar circumstances. Work regimes, as measured in hours worked, are almost identical. Both countries are modern, bureaucratic, industrial societies with consumption-driven lifestyles fueled by advertising, high per capita incomes, and easy consumer credit. In both, the service sector is the largest part of the economy, and women make up roughly half the workforce. In consequence, gender roles are seen as changing, and the articulation of work and family is problematic for both groups of families.

The major difference between them was that the American couples had a variety of occupations, including general contractor, stock broker, police officer, nurse, accountant, insurance claims agent, and logistics manager, but the Japanese couples selected for inclusion in this paper were all public officials. In seven of the nine Japanese couples, both spouses were educators, most of them high school teachers.<sup>5</sup> In one couple, one spouse was a teacher and the other a public official. The remaining couple were both local bureaucrats. There is less overt gender discrimination in Japanese public officialdom than elsewhere in the society. Salaries and working conditions are nearly identical for men and women. Because the Japanese spouses were close in age, their salaries also tended to be very similar. The gender wage gap was more pronounced in the American sample and not always to the husband's advantage.

In sum, the two samples are broadly comparable subcultural groups, similar in most respects (middle class, from the dominant racial group, numbers of children, education, income), but different in

their cultural ideals. Sugimoto (1997) has suggested that this sort of cross-cultural comparison of subcultural groups emphasizes similarities. Thus, only cultural differences that are really significant tend to remain. If we take nations as the unit of analysis (as in the previous section on cultural patterns of complaint), the tendency is to emphasize differences.

When people have problems integrating work and family, and most respondents had some degree of difficulty, there is risk of great emotion being involved. Work and family relationships are major determinants of identity for most of us. When my respondents talked about work and family, they invariably described, in some detail, both their ideal visions and the realities they perceived. The gaps between these two and between spouses on these issues were fertile grounds for the emergence of complaints.

### **Examples of Complaint in Japanese and American Families**

Even without conducting interviews, one could easily imagine the sorts of complaints spouses might make and why they might make them. In fact, the complaints that I heard from my subjects are old news, at least in the United States. Lee Rainwater and associates (1959) and Mirra Komarovsky (1964) found women in working-class couples complaining about the division of household labor and child rearing and their husbands' failures to communicate. Lillian Rubin (1976, 1983, 1994), Diane Vaughan (1986), and Deborah Tannen (1990) show that these complaints persist across time and social class, with husbands also complaining, although perhaps less often. In Japan, wives' complaints would seem to have a somewhat shorter history. However, as in so many other areas, the modernization of complaint in Japan has been swift. Older generations of women tended to gripe among themselves. Today, as a consequence of far-reaching changes in family form and gender culture, Japanese wives are far more likely to raise issues directly with their husbands, although this trend has roots that go deep into Japan's agricultural past.<sup>6</sup> But at the same time, Japanese men are in general reluctant to acknowledge that gender culture is changing. This may, in part, explain why Japanese divorce rates are higher now than at any time in the post-World War II period. Edited collections in which dozens of couples lay bare their feelings toward each other, such as *He Says, She Says* (Tsukijishokan 1994) and *Men Talk of Divorce* (Chugoku Shimbun 1998), illustrate Japanese wives' increased power to complain and how the new gender order seems threatening to many Japanese husbands.

In my interviews, subjects of both nationalities and genders complained about housework, about child care and child rearing, about spousal communication and intimacy, and about commitment to marriage. In practice, respondents seldom differentiate these overlapping categories. For people who have children, child care and housework are two sides of the same coin, and spousal communication and intimacy are often the same thing, especially for women. For the couples involved in these

relationships, all these pieces are parts of the same puzzle, and it is very hard to keep the categories from overlapping. Nevertheless, in what follows, I try to corral similar complaints into mostly homogeneous herds. In presenting these examples of complaint, I rely on one couple from each country whose conversation clearly dramatizes some aspects of the respective cultures of complaint, while leavening the mix with examples from and comments on other interviews to give a sense of how typical these pivotal examples may be.

*American Complaints about Spousal Communication and Intimacy.* The transition from being partners to being parents was a turning point for intimacy in both samples. Decreasing intimacy and increasingly difficult communication went hand in hand with childbirth. Motherhood and its demands pushed husbands down a few notches on the list of wifely priorities. Couples referred to fathers as feeling "left out" as mothers became consumed with child care. Some Americans, who were far more likely to have actually witnessed a birth, said that the experience leads to a natural decrease in intimacy. Japanese men, though not likely to have seen a birth (men are generally not allowed in delivery rooms, though some clinics now encourage their participation) also seemed to think that motherhood and female sexuality were difficult to reconcile. In addition, the arrival of children complicates and diminishes communication between spouses.

Bob Post (age thirty-nine), a self-employed contractor, and his wife, Mary (age thirty-seven), a nurse, have three children, two older boys and a girl (ages ten, eight, and six) who are all active in sports.<sup>7</sup> The gap in their spousal communication was illustrated when their middle-child, Peter, came home during the interview. He had been to an amusement park with a young friend and his parents. Now he was making a quick stop at home to change clothes in preparation for going out to dinner and sleeping over at the friend's house. Bursting through the door, Peter flies past where we sit at the kitchen table, in a rush to get changed. "I don't want to keep them waiting!" is his breathless greeting. Bob says, "He pulled a fast one on me. He's supposed to be grounded, but I didn't know it." Mary explains that she had grounded him for failing to do his homework. "We don't communicate very well." And she adds, "I haven't even talked to him [Bob] about it. He [Peter] wouldn't do his homework this week, so I grounded him for the weekend. And I doubt that he remembers. But maybe he does."

Peter seems to know about the gap in communication. Now changed, the boy charges toward the door, flinging "Good-bye!" over his shoulder, but he is called back to the kitchen. For the next three minutes, he is on the hot seat as his parents prompt him to recall and recognize why he is in trouble. While shuffling toward the door, Peter plays mom and dad against each other, using the interview, the waiting friend and parents out in their car, and a combination of cuteness, guile, and temporary amnesia to escape. His parents beckon him back. Peter says the waiting friend and his parents are timing him. Bob and Mary gently try to extract a confession. Peter is unwilling to come clean and makes a self-

conscious attempt to confuse the issue. Finally, Peter is allowed to leave, but is warned that more will be said about the matter later. When we return to the interview, Bob says, "Where were we? Oh, yeah. Communication. Well, there you go. Nothing better than a living example." His wife elaborated:

I don't talk to Bob about anything that goes on in our day here. I don't think you even know...do you know the names of their teachers or where their classes are, or what homework they have, or.... We don't communicate anything of day-to-day matters.

Anxious to show that "our day here" includes him, he interrupts her to recite the teachers' names. While grudgingly impressed, she continues with her complaint.

I think for me it's...we're like ships in the night. You know? I come home, and he's rushing and grabbing someone for baseball or football. And "Why aren't they ready?" and "Get their water," and, you know, you don't have time to even say, "How was your day?" I mean I'll usually ask Bob, "How was your day?" "Fine." He doesn't ever elaborate unless, well, hardly ever.

He: I don't bring work home.

She: He never talks about work.

He: It's too ugly.

She: And that's usually where I'll start if we sit down. If we have dinner together, which lately we haven't. That's about as far as it will get.

Their work schedules and the affairs of the three children are taxing. Time is tight, and the house is noisy and chaotic with the three children in perpetual motion. Bob has two houses under construction and is also working on his own home after work. (The kitchen is undergoing a major refit; there is sawdust at our feet.) He complains of deadlines, having to deal with inspectors, picky buyers, making runs after work to buy building material for the next day. Both say that they have more conversation with workmates than with each other.

When I ask them if they talk about home life at work, laughing, Bob says, "All the time. That's pretty much all...our home and our sex life is all we talk about." He explains closeness to his buddies this way.

It's easy since we all know each other. We've all gone to school together. So we're, we've been friends together for quite a long time. So we all know each other's wives and each other's friends and so it's easy to communicate cause we're, whadoya callit? We have a lot to talk about.

Mary agrees that intragender communication is easier. Like Bob, she thinks that distinct male and female styles of communication are essential to being a man or a woman. "Of course we talk about [home life] at work. I mean, we're women. We kind of do a little man-bashing. I work with some ruthless women. One of them is really firm." At this, Bob characteristically interjects, "Have you felt her?" Mary laughs him off. Her co-workers, she continues, come to work to gripe about their husbands. Noncommunication between spouses is normal.

If a woman has something going on at home, I don't think too many women tell their husbands what they tell their girlfriends. I know they don't. I don't sit and talk with Bob on the telephone. I can sit and talk with Pam [a close friend] on the phone for two hours about anything from what we've watched on TV or about our children. Or I'll talk to her about him! It's easy to talk to her because we're more....we're all girls, you know. And to sit down and try to talk to him [Bob].... First of all, I don't think he'd be interested in what I have to say for two hours. But a girlfriend and I can go to coffee and do that and we can listen to each other or cry on each other's shoulders, and that's what we do. Girls bond with girls a lot easier. Women sit and talk with other women about what they are doing, and you don't want to sit and listen to all that. Would you? I'll start talking about people at work and you don't have time for that.

He: I hate gossip though. See? I am antigossip. I am not like that at all.

She: Hum. So I think that's why women talk to women.

What for him is gossip is bonding for her. This is an example of Katriel's (1991) griping ritual. Like the Japanese wives to be introduced, Mary and her friends engage in ritualistic complaints that reinforce their shared identity as women. Bob gripes with his workmates, too, but if his wife were to try to talk with him in the same way, he would probably call it gossip. Likewise, Mary says Bob would not want to listen to what she has to say. Bob and Mary trivialize communication across gender lines as either gossip or something the other would not want to hear.

Other American couples in this study, although not complaining about communication as clearly as Mary did, hinted that they too had had similar problems, but had found technical solutions. For example, Larry and Kim Green, a financial services company employee and his editor wife, told me that they had recently begun making lists of what they needed to do and assigning tasks so that, in Larry's words, "nothing blows up because nobody did anything about it. We've got to keep ourselves aligned." For Larry, list making is a "tool" for creating solutions. Unless there is a proposal attached, Larry doesn't want to hear complaints. Kim also finds list making useful, but as much as a site for listening and blowing off steam as a way to set priorities or divide up labor. "We are a work in progress," says Kim. "Holding hands, or maybe not. But at least within hailing distance." Friends since high school, they both

see close communication and the ability to tolerate dissent as the glue in their relationship. Neither talks about family life much at work.

Another couple, Frank and Babs Snowden, relies on faxes and phone calls to maintain contact when Frank's job forces him to travel.

Like Frank and Larry, Neil Peters, a police officer, does not talk about family at work, but his wife, Diane, a health care professional, does. In their interview, it was she who complained about communication. Paradoxically, when sympathetic co-workers of the same gender are willing to lend an ear, there is greater likelihood that a spouse will complain about communication at home being inadequate.

The importance that spouses place on cross-gender communication contributes to the distance between spouses and has repercussions for physical intimacy as well. Mary describes sex as less important to her now than earlier in her marriage. She justifies it by saying that she is beat by the end of the day and they are not together much at other times.

You know, it would be a lot better during the day. Spontaneous sex is much better than that planned bedtime thing. But that doesn't happen. Unless we go on vacation! We have a great time on vacation! When we don't have kids, I think we do a lot better. That's because it's just the two of us. We'll talk all about our children, but yet we'll do, kinda be more like when we weren't with kids. Being with kids has changed me. I mean having children has changed me.

For Bob, Mary's orientation toward mothering is a choice she has made. He says, "Well it's your priority." But for Mary, choice isn't the issue. Having children changes the structure of spousal relations: moms shift their focus to the kids, which "leaves dads craving the attention they used to get." Eventually, dads will also adjust to the kids, but Mary says the pace of change is different. Her only choice is in how to respond to the imbalance children create.

Q: So you think it's your role to balance that?

She: Oh, in my relationship with him, it's my role to balance that. If we're doing well or not well, I can...if we're not doing well, I can change that. If we're doing well, I can maintain that. I feel like I do that.... Women do that.

Maintaining a balance between things that are changing at different speeds is women's work for Mary. Seeing gaps and "lacking" as leading to divorce, she appeals to him to recognize the work she does to keep the family together. She also reveals that there is a gap between her version of what she

would like Bob to do and what he actually does. He responds to her appeal for validation and change with a veiled complaint of his own: the nostalgic refrain from an old Hank Williams song.

She: Men and women change at different speeds. I think that's why they get divorced. You know? There's lacking for both of us. There's my lacking for a partner, and there's his lacking for a partner in his way that he wants a partner. And for me, I want a partner that's a father for my kids and to be my partner...

He [interrupting her, singing as he gets a beer from the fridge]: "Why don't you love me like you used to do? How come you treat me like a worn out shoe? My hair's still curly and my eyes are still blue. Tell me why don't you love me like you used to do?"<sup>8</sup>

She: As you can tell, he has a hard time with seriousness.

He: I think laughing is healthy, that's all.

Laughing it all away, avoiding "serious" communication and the realignment of meanings and identity that accompany it, precludes the possibility of self-realization through interspousal relations. Bob's redneck, lyrical style of complaint doesn't register as serious with Mary, but neither does she recognize the distance she puts between herself and her husband by referring to the children as "my kids." The practical outcome for this American couple is retreat into gender identity formed in spite of the conjugal bond.

*Complaints about "Komyunikeshon" between Spouses in Japan.*<sup>9</sup> Work and the demands of children cut into spousal communication in Japan, too. But as in America, complaints about communication there are more a function of gender norms than national culture. Hideo Tanaka (age forty-five) and his wife, Sanae (age forty-three), are both teachers. Their marriage was arranged, and they have five children ranging in age from six to sixteen. He is a weekend rice farmer raised in a three-generation extended family household, as was his wife. With their children, they share a large farmhouse with his elderly parents, although they generally live apart, his parents occupying the downstairs rooms. There is a separate kitchen upstairs. Sanae agreed to the marriage on the condition that she not be involved with the farmwork. We started our conversation downstairs in a Western-style room reserved for meeting guests, though later we ate dinner sitting around a low table on the floor in the upstairs kitchen, where we talked late into the night over wine.

When I asked them about how becoming parents had changed their relations as a couple, there was a long silence as they looked at each other. While I was trying to read their expressions, Hideo burst into hearty laughter and then said,

Well it's hard to say. But it's certain that we don't go out to the movies as we once did. Since the children were born, we've been to the movies only two or three times in the last sixteen years. When we go to a restaurant, we always choose one that will be

appropriate for the children. The other day, we went out for lunch, just the two of us. Usually, with the kids, they dominate the conversation, jabber, jabber, jabber, you know. Most of our talk is directed at the kids, keeping them in line, you know. There really isn't any spousal conversation. But on the other hand, when we went out as a couple last Saturday, we didn't know what to talk about. [He laughs]. At least I felt that way. Now, everyday we have the chance to face each other like this and talk one on one; however that's usually the same time that we start eating. [She is laughing softly in the background.] Before that, there are ten or fifteen minutes when we are waiting for the rice to get done. I wonder what to talk about.

The daily routine is harsh and affords little time for personal talk between the two of them. Hideo tells me a story about another couple he knows. The wife talks with her husband two to three hours each day. This seems strange to Hideo. "What do they talk about, I wonder? My wife and I can't imagine. I mean, we simply have no time or energy." Their daily routine, described in detail earlier in the interview, is arduous. Sanae said that she gets up as early as 3 A.M., cutting back on sleep to prepare for her classes or to have a couple hours of free time. She collapses after dinner each night, sometimes too exhausted to remove her clothes. Hideo tells me that this other couple has different hobbies and thus conversation about hobbies is not interesting to the wife. He can't believe dissatisfaction could occur over such a minor thing.

How does Sanae feel about the level of conversation in her marriage? She repeated my question as if it had never occurred to her to think of such a thing. (This was a show of reserve. I learned later that she has clearly given such matters a lot of thought and had even threatened divorce on two occasions to motivate him to be more involved at home.) Then finally, with an embarrassed chortle, she replies,

I have sort of forced myself to become used to this pattern. "This is good enough," I have convinced myself to say. Things have changed in stages, and I have just gone along with the flow of events. Now, if you ask, I have to say, "Well, I guess there is some dissatisfaction." We don't talk about work. It's strange, since we are both teachers, but we don't talk about education.

Be it traditional extended household or modern nuclear family, lack of spousal communication in Japan is a virtual epidemic. Typical were the comments of another woman, whose salaryman husband's job-related travel and long hours keep him from home. She told me, "I want more time for us to talk. He's not really here that much, and while he is gone, there are all these things concerning the house and the kids that have to be resolved." When I apologize for taking up their valuable free time together, she says, "It's all right. This is a kind of stress relief for me. What I want is a situation where serious grown-

up talk is possible: things outside the kids and household affairs. I bet everyone tells you this, don't they?"

In fact, wives' complaints about communication do plague the majority of contemporary Japanese marriages. In 1998, NHK, Japan's public broadcasting network, aired a program in which gender differences in spousal communication are clearly articulated. One segment shows an evening of remotely videotaped conversation between Yoshida Shigeo (age thirty-six), a civil servant, and his wife, Yuko (age thirty-two), edited down to a ten-minute piece of film. They have an infant daughter, Ayano (age six months). Before the tape is shown, Yuko complains to the fifty Tokyo area couples in the studio audience, "Everyday it's just me and the baby, so I feel lonely. There just isn't enough time, and I guess that's why we don't talk as much as we used to." Her husband, however, doesn't think they talk any less now, although he admits that they spend less time together now that Ayano is there. The videotape is supposed to settle this dispute. Along with the fifty couples in the audience (sitting segregated by gender), a panel of five "experts" made up of a lawyer, a writer, and three entertainers serves as a kind of jury.

The tape begins with Shigeo arriving home from work. Yuko, who is taking child care leave, is there with the child. He changes his clothes and grabs the television remote control. They talk about their daughter's health. She has a rash. Yuko says, "You could give Ayano a bath before dinner." But he declines, saying, "Oh, that's okay." (Eventually, Yuko will do it herself.) They watch TV during dinner, the two of them sitting side by side so they can both see the tube and the baby, who is before them in a baby-minder. Yuko's attempt at conversation draws only a minimal response.

She: Today, when I got on the train, a young person gave up their seat to me.

He: How old?

She: A little older than me. About your age. [He looks at her for the first time. She gestures, imitating how the person offered her the seat], "*Dôzo*" [Have a seat], they said.

He: Maybe Ayano was cute, or maybe you were cute.

She [Sort of laughing]: Both of us were cute.

He: How you talk!

She: Somehow, I could feel... It was such a modern thing to do.

He [Ignoring her? To the baby, who is babbling]: Just a minute. I'm eating (and will play with you later.) Do you want some rice?

She: Do you give up your seat?

He: Huh? [He is not paying attention.] No, never.

She: I bet you fake being asleep. That's not good.

He: There aren't such people.

She: People with children early in the morning?

He: Um [staring off toward the TV, which is showing baseball].

After dinner, Yuko bathes Ayano and puts her to bed. When she comes back to the living room, Shigeo is reading the paper. She cleans up the kitchen. He tries to surf the web. They go to bed at ten o'clock. They were together for two hours and fifty minutes. In that time, their conversation time was forty-eight minutes. She spoke to him thirty-six times, he to her twenty-five times, mostly about the child. He spoke to the child twenty-eight times; she talked to Ayano eleven times.

Following the tape, the experts offer comments to the Yoshidas about their communication. One points out that TV may be getting in the way; perhaps they should not sit side by side. Another has a wonderful theory that conversational output is governed by an annual quota: if you talk too much in the early months, you can't say much later. Mr. Yoshida grins broadly at this easy justification. No one says the idea is strange, but Yuko reiterates that she wants more adult talk. She wants to know what is happening in the outside world.

Sociologist Ito Kimio says Japanese men's failure to communicate is learned behavior. In Japanese companies, communication is structured by hierarchy and tends to be highly formulaic. Much time and effort are spent mastering workplace communication styles. Far less time is devoted to talking to women and children. In addition, Japanese men widely share the belief that their wives understand them even without conversation. In 60% of Japanese households, spousal communication consists of silence or of only the wife speaking (Ito 1996; 64-66). According to the NHK program, 61% of Japanese wives are dissatisfied with their spousal conversation. The reasons are the following: not enough conversation, husband won't listen, conversation is meaningless or boring, and conversation leads to conflict.

Why doesn't conversation develop? A woman in the audience shares her experience: "If we talk about children or taking care of our elderly parents, etc., my husband onesidedly says things like, 'That's your department, isn't it? I don't tell you about my problems at work, so you shouldn't tell me about problems at home.'" Another wife says, "I want to have more couple time, want to increase conversation. But my husband doesn't like it. He says, 'Why are you bringing that up now? What are you some kind of junior high school kid? Talk? What do you want to say?'" The majority of the men laugh in recognition and agreement. They seem to think that talking to women should be confined to courting. But while wives are understandably upset at the lack of validation their attempts at conversation receive, for husbands, too much spousal communication after marriage is inconvenient. As one man put it, "She talks too long. If she goes on like that, all my relaxation time will be taken up."

The male norm of silence in marriage as "good enough" communication is strong. Mr. Yoshida justifies his level of participation in spousal conversation by reference to this dated masculine ideal that he is still trying to realize, despite the negative consequences for his marriage.

Well, actually, my father was a craftsman, and I remember him teaching me that a man should not blabber, but should keep quiet and devote his energy to doing his job well. That notion remains somewhere in me. I understand it mentally, but my emotions get the better of me when she talks too much. I say, "That's enough!" And my wife's eyebrows rise up a bit, and I can tell she is angry. I try to follow up and soften the blow, but I am too late.

Unlike the scene quoted by Tannen (1990; 229-21) from Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, in which husband, Bennett, batters his wife, Isadora, to the floor with silence, the husbands I interviewed did not use silence to purposefully inflict pain on their spouses. But they did often feel that a man who talks too much dilutes his power and authority. So did their wives. Toshio Arisawa, a self-admitted patriarchal type, was humorous in his response to his wife Tomomi's complaints about his less-than-involved attitude. Because they both have the same jobs, she wants him to be more of a partner at home. "If I just come home, drink, and fall asleep, she complains [*bubububu monku o yutteiru*], but if I can endure her complaints, I can make it through somehow. [We all burst out laughing at his openness.] I do feel some remorse, but it's at the level of the consumption tax: about 5% [big laughs all around]." When I ask him if he knows about the government's campaign to get men to play a fuller role at home, he says he appreciates and sympathizes with the "new family" perspective. "Those principles are better. But theory and practice are different! The theory makes my position difficult, eh? I have to do more, but I am still looking for a way to excuse my selfishness! All I can do is ask her to forgive me."

Forgiving their husbands is part of a woman's role. Like Mary Post, who enables Bob's problem with "seriousness," Sanae Tanaka played a part in Hideo's lack of communication because she holds that "A man should be stern, have some severity," a demeanor that is not easily compatible with loquacious conversation. It seems that communication, with its multiplicity of details, is feminine.

And what about Yuko Yoshida? In the end, she is seen as having no complaint. The consensus opinion of the experts and others in the studio is that her problem will be resolved in the fullness of time if she can summon the patience to wait. This group communication ritual, mediated by a panel of experts, concludes the complaint by placing it within the framework of the common sense of a wife's role. The program ends with a final survey question that affirms the level of communication that wives are supposed to be happy with. In response to the question, "What words make a wife feel better?" the

top votegetters are "It tastes good, It looks good on you, I am sorry, Congratulations!" As if that is all she needs to hear, the totals sum to 100%!

*Summary.* Complaints about spousal communication are often associated with the arrival of children. But spouses in both cultures are in reality split into separate spheres long before children arrive; there is a gap across which it is difficult to talk and into which attempts at intimacy fall. Cross-cultural similarities were strong here. Women in both samples were unreserved in expressing dissatisfaction with spousal communication. They wanted their husbands to take more interest in the domestic sphere, into which they wished that he would bring "adult" conversation about the outside world. However, few men seem able to perform this conduit function. The situation is particularly dire in Japan, where there are strong societal assumptions that communication is not needed between spouses and a customary belief that silence is a form of communication. Like Sanae Tanaka, who has trained herself to think "this is good enough," American wives, such as Mary Post, retreat into a role conception in which it is their job to balance the relationship. Women want to be part of their spouses' worlds, but find themselves thwarted by men who don't talk about their work. So they find solace and make up for the affirmation they miss by griping with other women. Communication itself, especially "rapport-talk" (Tannen 1990; 74-77) comes to be seen as part of the female, domestic sphere.

Husbands, too, suffer under such arrangements. Defining communication as wifely territory isolates a man from his children and their lives. But on an even more fundamental level, men become excluded from the home by their stubborn adherence to masculine codes of silence, which their wives often support. The meaning of spousal conversation is thereby devalued. What a wife has to say about the children or the household loses value, and many men withdraw because they don't see themselves getting anything out of conversational exchange. They wall off large areas of their lives as "too ugly" to talk about and define the sort of communication their wives have as "gossip" or something only immature schoolchildren do. Thus, the gap widens, and couples become, in Lillian Rubin's (1983) telling expression, "intimate strangers."

Culture inflects these Japanese and American couples' complaints about communication; however, the more notable pattern is one of a cross-cultural gender division of who talks and what they talk about. It is hard for women to complain, especially in Japan, where the format (indirection, empathy, sublimation of individual wants to the demands of one's social role) works to diminish complaints. Therefore, it is significant that they complain as much as they do. This is clear evidence of women working to change the rules for their roles, an expression of a gradual convergence in speech forms. Unlike English, however, Japanese does not have an egalitarian form of address, and differences in male and female speech, far more pronounced than in English, are likely to inhibit cross-gender

communication for the foreseeable future. Without this communication, it will be difficult to realize ideals, such as those implicit in the notion of the companionate marriage.

*Complaints about Equality, Loyalty, and Prosperity in Marriage.* Married for fourteen years, Makoto (age forty-seven) and Kiriko (age forty-five) Maeda are educators. Both work in postsecondary institutions. He is an economist and she is a linguist. We talked at the dining table in their home, a Western style house in a new development of similar and probably expensive homes. This is unusual for Japan, where class-segregated neighborhoods are rare, and old and new homes often stand side by side. In the yard was a small plastic slide and other toys for their three-year-old son. A baby grand piano, played expertly by their eleven year-old daughter, stands in the room off the dining area.

Mr. Maeda and I sat having a drink at the dining table in the fading light of the summer evening. Kiriko at first joined the conversation from her station in the kitchen and later sat with us at the table. Their young son, Toru, played quietly while we chatted. Makoto is the first son of local farmers, but his becoming a professor created a succession problem for the family farm. Kiriko, like her mother before her, works. She saw her mother's talents constrained by old-fashioned ideas about a woman's place and wants to avoid being held back in her own life. Her dream of self-fulfillment led her to decide, while she was still young, that she wanted to marry a man who could be an equal partner in raising the family. She prefaces her remarks by saying that she has never told her husband what she is about to say and then reveals herself:

I decided before I married that I would marry a researcher. My reasoning was that I wanted to have my own work, but knew that I couldn't carry on with it if my husband would not/could not help with raising the children. I thought I wanted to be a researcher, and so another researcher seemed to be the best match. I never thought of marrying a doctor and never tried to arrange it so that I would meet one. I had heard that if one is a doctor's wife, you can't work, so that held no attraction for me. Even if it means never having to worry about money, your role in life is predetermined, and I didn't want that. So from the start, I limited myself to researchers. And I am glad now that I did. When we got married, we didn't have much income, and that was tough. But we worked hard at what I wanted to do, and it has led to income. We never really tried to work for money, but just worked at what we wanted to do and the money followed. Naturally.

The flaw in her plan, however, was that she married a first son from a conservative rural area. Although Makoto felt that he and others of his generation had been democratized and were no longer patriarchal types in the mode of their fathers and grandfathers, this pace of progress toward marital equity was insufficient for Kiriko. During the interview, he claimed household expertise in areas such as cooking and cleaning, but she refuted many of his assertions as overstatement or posturing. He doesn't

cook as often as he says, doesn't know how to dress the children properly (according to the school dress code for that season), doesn't even take care of his own clothes. Although she admits that he did more of the household work early in their marriage, after the children came, he reverted to helplessness. "Why did you change?" I ask. "I wonder," he says. "That's the problem with Japanese men, right there!" she retorts. Their helplessness is feigned, she says, because when mothers aren't around, they seem to manage well enough. This duplicity is interfering with her career. But his career has gone well. In part as a result of her diligent support, he became a full professor at age Forty-two. She, too, is proud of his accomplishments and shares in his social status. But she resents being regarded as just his secretary. A fifty-fifty partnership is her notion of marriage.

Kiriko thinks her life is harder than that of the other wives in the neighborhood. Many don't work, so their free time is spent with each other. She, however, devotes her spare time to her research, her priorities evident in the stacks of books and papers lying about the house.

Kiriko has more roles than she would like. She is saddled with chores by virtue of her husband's traditional ways and demands. On an overnight outing to an organic farm attended by the Maedas, the family of one of his colleagues, and my family, she was the one who did all the organization, made the phone calls, planned the menu, collected the money. Later in the evening, slightly oiled by alcohol, she griped to me that she doesn't think he appreciates her contributions sufficiently and that their marriage has been full of fights because he gives only lip service to equality when what she wants is a real commitment to it. He has more loyalty to his job than to her, and he still behaves like a patriarch. She had hoped for more from him and even characterizes his university job as part-time to justify her complaints that he doesn't do enough family work.

Makoto, for his part, reminds her, "Just because it is summer vacation at the university doesn't mean we are playing games up there." In addition, it should be noted that he is more than willing to let her tell her side. He endures her complaints cheerfully and, indeed, enjoys the discussion. It is hard to imagine a real Japanese patriarch tolerating such wifely freedom of speech in front of a stranger.

Unlike the other couples in this study, Steve (age forty-four) and Gloria Smith (age thirty-nine) are newlyweds. It is his third marriage and her second.<sup>10</sup> Each has one child from previous marriages, and they have a baby daughter together. Gloria tells me I've come at a good time: it's the end of the weekend when Bill (seven), Steve's son, has to go back to Nancy, his birth mother — a time of stress. "This is the core of us. This is the core of us," she repeats. We talked at the dinner table of their rented suburban home with a view of the valley lights and the mountain beyond. At first, the children were there, but after dinner, Bill went to his mother's house, and Heather (four years) and Susan (six months) were asleep. Steve and Gloria say they are happy together, but as we sat over coffee, it was clear they

have some issues around money, mostly in regard to Nancy. Gloria says, "We're lucky we found each other, but when it comes to finances, we don't have our feet on the ground."

The three children are costly. Child care and rent are about the same, each running roughly \$1600 a month. Gloria works for an insurance company, and Steve is a clerk for a securities firm. Combined they make about \$83,000 a year, but after taxes, this doesn't quite cover their expenses. Money is tight; it has a chokehold on their dreams.

Steve's relationship with his ex-wife is, for Gloria, the source of their problems. She hammered away at this theme repeatedly during the evening and was clearly distressed by the time we reached the end of the interview.

In response to Gloria saying this is a good time to see who they really are, Steve agreed.

He: There's no issue with Bill's mother at this time of the month because there's no payment going back and forth. So I don't have to deal with her this time. It's just a drop-off and that's that.

She: Uh, well. Yeah. That's how you see it.

He: That's how I see it.

She: I see it as an ongoing problem.

As she talks, it becomes clear that the marriage is not working out as she imagined. Income is tight; rent and child care are expensive. They would like to buy a house, but prices in their area are so high that even cashing out Steve's considerable 401K retirement plan leaves them with too much debt to service.<sup>11</sup> Moving to a cheaper area is complicated by the divorce settlement, which prohibits Steve from taking Bill out of the county, and by Gloria and Steve's respective commutes. Nancy's continuing influence is felt in other ways, too. Her job as a paralegal, unlike Gloria's job at the insurance company, does not allow any flexibility. Bill, says Gloria, spends eleven hours a day in "the most expensive care you could possibly find" in a very expensive suburb. Gloria's children are in much cheaper, co-op care, but parents have to contribute labor twice a month. Steve pays half of Bill's day care, but does not, it seems, have any input into decisions about who will provide the care.

She: Bill got us for \$850 in September. His mother, his mother is the source...

He: ...is the source really, of our, of any sort of problems that we have because Gloria doesn't like the way that I have dealt with her.

She: We fight over her. You know what? That woman is sucking our money. Last month she got \$850 out of us. I resent that.

Gloria also resents Nancy's refusal to meet her. Gloria says if her ex-husband remarried, she'd certainly want to see who her child would be spending time with, but Nancy has snubbed Gloria twice, once when they were in the same room. For Gloria, this exclusionism, which she darkly suspects is based on class or "blood," is hard to swallow. She also has evidence that Nancy is teaching Bill class and racial prejudice, epithets, and homophobia. She is angry because Nancy browbeats Steve at every opportunity, even in front of Bill. Nancy, Gloria says, is mean and spiteful, refusing to even let Steve in the house. Despite being manipulated, Steve is unwilling to get angry. He would prefer to give Nancy the benefit of the doubt. When he offers explanations for Nancy's behavior, Gloria's frustrations explode. "Look how he defends her!" she cries. "You give her way too much slack!" Gloria thinks Steve should show more backbone, stand up to Nancy and her bullying. She says that he holds the key to ending Nancy's extortion by showing her that he is not afraid to let Bill see them argue. Her complaint is that he needs to remember whom he is married to.

Look, it's not your problem. You've had a lot of her anger, and it's time for you to purge yourself and say, "Okay, that's her anger and that's what has to do with her and her anger and this is what is really at issue with me and my son." And be able to separate her anger from your son. And what's going to affect your son and what's not going to affect your son. You need to say to her, "No, Nancy. This is not going to affect your son. You may hear me say 'No,' but it's not going to f--- him, it's not going to traumatize him, in any way." We don't have any money to spare, but the first of the month when you showed up with the check for \$375, Nancy started raving, "\$375!! What the....[imitates Nancy raving about money]...in front of Bill. And so you just go, "Okay, okay!" and write her out a check for \$675 even though she's not entitled to the other \$300 [half the preschool fees] until the fifteenth. She's not entitled to it period! It's not her money. It's your job to pay half the child care and to her \$375. It's not her job to handle your finances. She's not your wife. I'm your wife!

She tells Steve that he could pay the child care directly, on the due date, just like any other creditor. He can take control of his relationship with Nancy. This would help resolve an issue that they fight over. Gloria says it also affects Bill. Her own children are in cheap care, "But Bill's a 700 to 900 dollar a month kid. And I take it out on him." Nancy's use of Steve's concern for the boy to manipulate Steve is leading Gloria to do the same in order to save their marriage. It particularly bothers her that she is able to deal with *her* troublesome ex-husband, but Steve's inability to deal with Nancy threatens her vision of their future together.

She: You always say [slowly and with passion], "Bill's my son." You say, "Bill's my son."

He: That's right.

She: You don't say, "Nancy's out of line." You say, "Bill's my son."

What really bothers Gloria is that her wages are subsidizing Nancy's lifestyle at the expense of her own dreams of having a happy marriage and owning a home. She is quite upset that Nancy still has a hold over Steve and that he is not willing to stand up to the woman who has caused him so much pain. There is a huge gap between what she had envisioned for their life together and what she sees. After recounting again how much Bill costs compared with the costs for her *two* children, and how irresponsible she thinks Nancy is for leaving her child in day care for so many hours per day (which exacerbates the costs), she gets close to the breaking point.

She: When we first got married, we're like, "Okay, let's save money and buy a home and yada yada." Save money!!? We don't make it paycheck to paycheck. We take money out. We cash advance! Don't we? We've been doing that for the last three months.... It drives me crazy. I can't sleep at night because I get...you know, you start to wonder why you should get up and go to work. WHY?

He: What do you mean, why [irritated at her childishness]?

She: Why am I going to work today?

He: You know why you're going to work today. You have to go to work....

She: So I can pay Nancy?!

The very meaning of her life and their marriage is at stake in this conversation, and she wants him to know it and do something to show that he is committed to their life together first and foremost. She says he should tell Nancy to "f--- herself," that he should take her back to court and rewrite the divorce agreement. Steve is not enthusiastic about doing this. He wants assurances that Gloria will stand beside him if he does so. Gloria wants Steve to understand that love is not enough, that a marriage needs some fiscal stability.

She: But guess what? You're out of money. You know that little pad you had? The reason you signed that divorce agreement with Nancy is because you had that cushion of money from when your folks died. That money is gone. I am paying her now. It's coming out of my pocket.

He: So we sue her, not just me.

She: It's affecting me.

He: Isn't that right, though?

She: I do the finances

He: *We* take her back to court, not just me.

She: And you need to do the finances next month so you can see for yourself. You don't make enough money to live and pay Nancy what she wants.

*Summary.* Gloria Smith and Kiriko Maeda drew a bulls-eye around the complaint that many other women in this study just gestured at: marriage must be a partnership in which spouses' levels of mutual commitment are a measure of the merit of the marriage. Although the issues are different, both of these women feel shortchanged. Their complaints are attempts to bring the reality of their marriages into line with the images they have of themselves and their goals for married life. Imbedded in their complaints we find their ideal notions of masculinity: partner, protector, and provider.

In Japan, marriage is a relationship of "complementary incompetence" (Edwards 1989) in which two incomplete people can become full-fledged members of society only through their union. This notion of marriage carries with it a rigid gender division of labor. Like many modern Japanese women, Kiriko Maeda objects to a version of marriage that makes her out to be incompetent in the public sphere. Nor does she subscribe to the theory that men are incompetent at home. The vision of selfhood she is trying to realize is complex and demands that her husband share her dreams just as she shares his. Her complaints are part of Japanese women's "quiet revolution" (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 1998), a well-documented bid by Japanese women for economic and social independence, that paradoxically seeks to achieve these goals while preserving cherished ideal notions of femininity.

The part of Gloria Smith's marriage dream that is not being realized is a degree of affluence and comfort that she had expected would accompany her marriage to Steve. She compares herself to Nancy and finds that she has less influence with Steve, less money, and less self-esteem as a result. His reluctance to assert himself is costing her money and causing her to lose sleep. Complaining to him, and it was clear she had voiced the same concerns to him before, is her strategy for getting him to acknowledge the rules she had thought they were playing by when she married him.

*Complaints about Housework and Parenting.* It is probably not an overstatement to say that, where two adults share the burdens of child care and housework, there will be complaints about the division of this labor. Stalled though the American gender revolution at home may be, it is miles ahead of Japan. And yet both the Japanese and American men shared similar versions of the same complaint. As they see it, their wives are overly involved with children and housework. To them, the ideology of modern motherhood is the basis for female hegemony in the home, setting standards for housework that make it hard for men's contributions to count while making mothers too soft on children.

Take Frank Snowden (age forty-three) for example. He has a demanding job as a logistics expert in the transportation industry that requires frequent travel. He complained repeatedly over the course of the interview about what he sees as his wife, Babs's (age thirty-eight), neurotic commitment to her roles as mother and housekeeper. She is also employed full-time, as a bookkeeper at a small, family friendly firm close to home. We talked at the dining table of their immaculate, ranch-style home in the

suburbs of San Francisco. Although Babs and Frank have two sons, aged five and ten, there was no sign of them in the living room: no toys, no destruction. Everything was dust-free and in place, flower-filled vases intact. While we talked, Frank brought us glass after glass of ice water on the very warm California afternoon. The pool shimmered invitingly in their backyard with its dozens of roses in full bloom. Frank renovated this house and even put in the pool by himself. He is clearly a craftsman and proud of his "skill set," which includes the professional acumen that has earned him repeated promotions in his firm. A project on the East Coast has kept him from home for much of the year, allowing him to come home only every other weekend. He fears his absence may be hurting his family and says,

If they continue to put me on the road, I going to have to draw the line. Ah, the thing that hurts me the most being gone is to watch her kind of burn out. Sometimes I put a lot of the responsibility for her burnout on her because she doesn't get the help that she could have if she really looked for it.

Later, he continued with the same theme.

He: If she wants some free time, go do it, and I'll pick up the slack in anything. But she has a hard time organizing herself to do things for her.

She: I know

He: And, you know, she has to learn to do that.

She: Yeah. I agree. But yeah. There's just a lot of responsibilities keeping the house up, and grocery shopping, and cleaning, and laundry, and the boys. Very active boys, too. [She laughs.]

He: You could also teach them to help you clean.

She: Yeah.

He: And they don't.

She: I know. I know I need to be more stricter with that.

He: Yes.

In her "more stricter" and his criticism of her inability to organize either herself or their sons' labor, he is hitting on her intelligence, something she may be insecure about.<sup>12</sup> In the course of answering my question, Frank's observation, "she has a hard time organizing herself to do things for her," is couched in terms of concern for his wife, but can also be taken as a subtle complaint about her home management skills. "You could also teach them to help you clean" is a more open critique of Babs's performance as a mother. Frank thought that she was too soft, indulging the kids too much. As we will see, his concern for the children is genuine; however, it is also mingled with a complaint about her making *his* job as a parent more difficult. Again, they address each other directly, all but ignoring me.

He: I wish they had some more respect for you.

She: Yeah, yeah.

He: I mean, you let 'em trod on you and that's not good.

She: No.

He: But then it also makes it a little harder for me because I have to come in and wield the hammer on 'em sometimes. You always call me: "Do this to them now." Why don't you turn around and. [He laughs as she cuts him off.]

She: No, no. I do sometimes. You would be surprised, cause I *am* here.

He: Aaaaw [tone of slight resignation and disparagement].

Then, in response to her question about how he thinks the kids should be parented, he replies with a blast about the perils of permissiveness. This social commentary is aimed at both of us. At the end, Frank segues back to complaining overtly about Babs. Rather than speaking abstractly, he is once again pointing a finger at her.

And I, with regard to discipline, I think the kids need a level of discipline and they need a level of structure. I have seen any number of kids that don't have the structure and they don't have the discipline and uh, you know, it might be easy for the parents up front. But it gets real hard, and I am looking down the line to when they get to be teenagers, you know. I want to have some degree of respect from them and understanding that there are bounds out there. That they can go so far, but they cross this border, and they know they are in trouble. And that's why I want to provide something consistent. And sometimes that's where we get into little arguments is, ah, she lets 'em go way beyond the bounds...

She: Sometimes.

He: ...and sometimes they take advantage of her and do things...

She: Yeah.

He: ...that I call 'em on the carpet for.

Babs, it seems, lets the boys get away with not doing their chores. Frank says that they "know there's no consequences." Babs disputes this. She says she sends them to their rooms, spansks them, or screams at them, but she also says she is afraid of her temper. Frank then offers advice. "All you need to be is consistent. That's all you gotta be. Look 'em right in their beady eyes and tell 'em." The interview about their life together becomes an opportunity for Frank to initiate a management review of Babs's parenting.

In the Post household, too, Mary's failure to utilize child labor is grounds for her husband to complain that she is too soft. It starts with him good-naturedly complaining to me that my questions about who does what at home are biased in favor of his wife.

He: How come there's no questions there that say, "Who built the house? Who keeps building the house? Who remodels the house? Who upgrades everything? Who puts her pantry in?" [She is laughing.]

She: How come [laughing]?

Q: We know now.

She: Yeah [laughs]. Now, honestly, you have to be honest. Before you were remodeling, did you clean house? ... [five seconds of silence] I mean, I don't snivel and bitch about it. But did you clean house?

He: Yeah.

She: No! The only thing that makes me mad, and I am going to say it for the record: nobody picks up after themselves! Not him, not my kids. My mom came over here and helped me clean this house yesterday. Look at it! I went to work today. This bugs me. [The implication is that when she is not there, everything falls apart.] I come and I have to go through each room because not one person picks up.

He: Now, okay. Listen: nothing out here is mine.

She: Ah... [she tries to respond.]

He: Just listen! [She laughs.] The reason it doesn't look like this when you're here is because you follow them around and pick everything up that they...

She: All day long!

He: Get them to do it!! You won't get them to do. You'd rather do it yourself because it's easier for you to do it yourself than argue with them to get them to do it. Okay?! So you're constantly following these kids around cleaning up after them. Why would they ever do it themselves?! They have their own little built-in maid. Okay?!!

She: I understand that.

He: Well, *I* don't clean up after them.

She: And it doesn't bug you that it looks like this.

He: No.

She: And you don't think about me coming home to this? No, you don't. That's all I am saying. When I work all day, I'd like to come home and just find it kind of picked up.

He: Sorry [somewhat sincerely offered].

She: I have no...I...

He: I am not going to follow them around and [She is laughing and sighing]...

She: But my mom does come over and she cleans.

He: She follows them around, too, and cleans up after them.

She: Yes, she does. That's where I learned that bad, nasty habit [laughing].

Like Bob and Mary, Frank and Babs differ when it comes to standards for cleanliness. She feels that the house should always be spotless. She wants Frank to pick up more often. Frank says the house is clean. The problem is not effort on his part. "She has this immediacy need," he says. "She has to have it done right then." To which she replies, "That's who I am. I should be more patient, but...." It is

clear that Babs's identity is at stake. Frank wants her to be somebody else. Babs tries to fend off his challenge, without driving him away. It is a difficult balancing act.

Asked what he would like Babs to do, Frank returns to the theme of her obsession with housework.

He: And if I could have her do anything, it would be to relax and enjoy life a little bit. [This is said as if she doesn't.] And to not be so anal with regard to her house and other things like that. Because she's going to end up killing herself. I learned the hard way that stress is a real destroyer. [He had heart bypass surgery three years before the interview.] Maybe she thinks I am too laid back at times, but if you don't engineer your life to try to find some moments for the self-solitude...

She: Yeah.

He:...and for doing things that you like to do. I mean, leave a couple plates in the sink...and go out and sit around and have yourself a glass of wine and look at the flowers.

She: Yeah [contrite].

He: There's nothing wrong with that.

She: No.

He: But you don't do that. You agree with that, but you don't do that!

She: I know.

He: And if you don't, it's going to do you in! [He is quite excited, but does not see the irony of his excitement and the links between his own zealous intensity for "engineering" life and his heart condition.]

She: No. I mean, I know it's bad; maybe I know. But I like to live in a clean environment.

He: Well, when you are laying there in the hospital, you can be trusting that I will be keeping this place clean [said with deep cynicism].

When she tries to claim that she actually can't be spending so much time on the house in view of how she has to rush around with work and taking the kids to school and sports, he tells her, "I want you to sit down with a check sheet and mark the time you spend doing certain activities and tell me how much time you put in." When she later says she sometimes fails to get the boys to make their own beds and doesn't get around to it herself either, Frank exalts, "Yeah!"

In these scenes from the interview with Frank and Babs, a style of complaint common to my American interviews is repeatedly seen. Responses to questions began in an objective vein: factual reporting. But soon this tack runs its course, and, using my presence as a pivot, one spouse swings the focus around to the other spouse. Objectivity is a pretext for complaints. It's as if they are saying, "This isn't personal. It's just a fact, so don't get mad." Personal preferences and feelings of discontent are cloaked, at first, in a tone of balanced analysis.

In addition, we can get a sense of the gap between their self-ideals and current self-images. Though Frank talks authoritatively about the need to relax and make time for solitude, his approach to it betrays his type A personality. One is left with the sense that his prescription for Babs is an act of self-projection. Babs is caught in a difficult position. She has tried hard to live up to Frank's contradictory expectations for a wife and merge them with her own feelings about motherhood. On the one hand, he has a rigid expectation of sternness and consistency, but this is now mingled with a newfound concern for health and relaxation. Babs, as a consequence of her upbringing, believes that moms should be "soft." Yet she has become the kind of person who does things immediately. Now he is asking her to stand in for him as the source of sternness in the children's lives while being careful to be moderate and protect her health. Perhaps out of concern for *his* health, she simply says, "Yeah," instead of pointing out the near impossibility of his prescriptions. She has become "anal," but it is no less difficult to become less so. That change, even positive change, has painful costs is also clear in how Japanese respond to complaints about family work.

Kiyoshi and Haruka Yamamoto are both high school teachers in a provincial Japanese city. Like the Snowdens, they live in an affluent rural suburb. Their new home stands on land that Kiyoshi's father gave the couple as a wedding gift. They had one five-year-old son, Masakazu, at the time of the interview. Both are university educated, and Haruka, the wife, has a master's degree in anthropology. Their salaries are roughly equal, as are their job duties, although they work at different schools.

The slender and stylish daughter of a mercantile family, Haruka complained about her husband's failures to help with the child and the house and blamed his laziness on the fact that he, like Makoto Maeda, is a first son. That is, he has been indulged from birth, raised in the knowledge that he would eventually become head of the household. Yet Kiyoshi is not the stern and severe patriarch of old, nor is he a distant, awe-inspiring father figure. Nevertheless, after dinner, he lies on the sofa while Haruka cleans up the kitchen. It makes her feel like he is not holding up his end. By her own admission a "plain-speaking person," Haruka finds fault with the rural upbringing that has left her husband ill equipped to help with even the simplest household chores. Should they have a second child (and I have since learned that they have), she says he cannot take child care leave because "That time is for taking care of the child, but he can't do that: can't cook, can't take care of the child. So the child can't be left alone with him all day." She says he lacks the desire to learn the necessary skills and she "explodes" periodically at him for leaving the house completely up to her. Like Mary Post, Haruka says she and her female co-workers gripe at work to each other about their husbands. "They say, 'My husband doesn't help,' 'My house is like that, too,' 'That really tees me off.'"

Kiyoshi's humble defense is that Haruka has not led him to believe that she hopes he will learn family work skills. In any case, he says he is a prisoner of historical circumstances. In his youth, "male

children didn't help out in the kitchen. That's just how it was." Six of the nine Japanese husbands in this study and, indeed, most of their wives as well cited history as the basis for their behavior. Even when husbands were sufficiently active in domestic activity, they and their grateful wives felt keenly that they were bucking tradition. Some worried about criticism from older neighbors and parents.

If some American husbands thought their wives too soft on their children, in Japan, it was the wives who complained that their husbands were bad parents. At one point, Haruka lamented that her son complains "clearly" that his father won't play with him. "This guy's 'looking after the child' is just being beside him," she says. "Simply being there isn't minding the child." Her notion of minding the child involves engaging with him in some activity, "facing the child, talking, drawing something together." As she talks, Kiyoshi frequently interjects mumbled qualifications to her comments on his performance. He expresses dissatisfaction that he is expected to live up to child care norms set by mothers and points to motherhood as setting the bar too high.<sup>13</sup> Asked to compare the number of hours they each do family work, she responded with thirty-five hours a week, to which he replied, "It's because you're around that he is dissatisfied. I don't spend as much time with him. Anyway, I spend about an hour a day with the boy and a bit more on weekends. Maybe ten hours a week"

Kiyoshi shares Haruka's belief that motherhood is special. "There are some things that only women can do — mother stuff. At some times in a child's life, only mom's hugs are good enough," he says. Haruka also feels that because she is with Masakazu more, her anger is a more effective sanction against bad behavior.

Keiko Kawakami told me that motherhood means being able to "read the child, to know and anticipate his moods and wants. My husband can't do that." Her husband, who got high marks for his other contributions to the housework, readily agreed with her. But Mr. Tobita, a conservative farmer's son whose wife's soft-spoken yet exasperated and highly symbolic complaint about his household skills was "If only he would pick up his socks," resented his wife's close bond, saying that she had become "possessed by the children."

Responding to her complaints that he doesn't pitch in and is insensitive to how much she needs help, Kiyoshi gripes about the fixity of gender roles and how this places the problem beyond his control. From his point of view,

Half of it is that the roles are determined. What can I do? My feeling is that I should help as much as I can, but if I try to help, my efforts don't meet her expectations for how the work should be done nor for how much should be done. I am doing some, but she does too much. That's a factor, too. Little by little I want to increase the things I can do. It won't be as much as she wants, but I have come along in my own way and feel that I have made at least some progress. I know she isn't satisfied with that. But I think

that there has been an increase in the things I do. Of course, in my mind, theoretically, I know that I should be able to do everything. But I can't and I haven't been able to do it all.

Kiyoshi's intentions are good, and, indeed, his notion of incremental progress was shared by many men in the Japanese sample. Some said movement toward gender equality was an inevitable outcome of democratic and individualistic trends in Japanese society. All were confused about how to proceed, how to achieve the new cultural ideal of companionate marriage. Women, however, tended to see this confusion as male foot-dragging, an attempt, whether conscious or not, to perpetuate the status quo for another generation. It is hard not to agree when you hear men like Makoto Maeda. Reflecting on a period early in their marriage when his work in a Tokyo think tank made him largely absent, he says, "If you're not there at night, that's big, you know. I mean, even if you're just sitting around and drinking, you know, at least you are there; you'll talk to them." Haruka Yamamoto tries to subvert the dominant paradigm by teaching Masakazu how to do things around the house "so he will know that he can do those things, too. I don't want him growing up thinking that someone will always do them for him." Clearly, her ideal is something more than just being there.

*Summary.* Like the Snowdens, the Yamamotos had plenty of complaints. But they expressed them differently. The Snowdens frequently and easily used the second person singular and addressed each other directly. Their conversation resembled Katriel's "communication ritual," an open, frank exchange of feelings wherein people sit down and focus on issues between them. They referred to me only when the spouse was being unresponsive, when they sought outside validation, or when they wanted to move away from a topic that threatened to become too hot. In contrast, the Yamamoto's used the interviewer to mediate complaints and seldom looked at each other. They often spoke as if the spouse were not present, employing "ocular empathy," not looking at each other, to avoid confrontation. The more delicate emotional constitution of the Japanese respondents and their expectations of sympathetic treatment meant that the Yamamotos had to exercise more care in their complaints. Public expression of complaints about a spouse is an effective way to punish one's spouse. However, one must also consider the consequences of making such declarations of discontent.

Purposes differed, too. Both men wanted their wives to be less compulsive and consumed by their mother roles. Frank ostensibly wants Babs to be less anal about the house for her own sake; however, Kiyoshi wants Haruka to be less intensive and demanding about motherhood, to lower the bar, so that what he does contribute can be recognized. Both couples, however, complain in their own ways as part of the process of negotiating the minefield of change to reach a shared interpretation of what ideals and practices of parenting and housework should be.

## **The How of Complaint in Japan and the U.S.**

Americans are inclined to complain directly and openly to those they think can do something about their problems. This type of speech is so common that it has achieved the status of a communication ritual. Sitting someone down and telling him or her how you feel, making a frank presentation of your views, is part of this country's long history of individual free expression. The recent advent of television shows devoted to public performance of such rituals confirms the image of the United States as a nation of (obnoxious and not very articulate) squeaky wheels.<sup>14</sup>

Japanese, by comparison, are stereotypically wary of too much speech and have a weak tradition of dissent. Empathy, harmony, and reserve are the watchwords of Japan's cultural code. Buddhist traditions, founded on the principle that life is suffering, are the bedrock of Japan's national character. People commonly deal with frustration by soldiering cheerfully on while saying, "It can't be helped." Words like perseverance and endurance are national mantras. In addition, plaintive speech is suppressed by the demands of hierarchy. Preservation of the social order, and the individual identities that are rooted within it, requires restraint. Japanese are not schooled in the ways of confrontation, conflict, and complaint, but instead practice conflict avoidance. They are a nation of nails who keep their heads well down.

In the comparison of subcultural groups, middle-class, dual-income couples with small children, Americans such as Gloria Smith, Frank Snowden, and Mary Post, were unambiguous, even brutally frank, in presenting their complaints and demanding recognition of their feelings. There were moments of drama, strong emotion, and even profanity. There was also abundant laughter to dissipate the tension. Plaintive Americans initiated complaints to elicit from their partners responses that they could internalize to support their inner images of themselves. Initiators wanted their partners to confirm the initiator's notion of how the relationship should be. When they offered suggestions, such as Frank's idea of using a check sheet or Gloria's plan to take Nancy back to court, it was less in the spirit of solving a problem than to prove their point of view to be better. "Agree with me so that I can feel good about myself" was a common, if not often spoken, message. Women in these interviews, with one important exception that I shall address below, gave as good or better than they got. Men's perspectives were not necessarily dominant, nor did husbands attempt to prevent their wives from raising issues, though some, Bob Post is a clear example, interrupted frequently. Men were also more inclined to try to take the discussion to a less "serious" level or go off on a tangent. All in all, the Americans behaved and complained in ways that were not unexpected.

Japanese couples displayed more complaint than hypothesized. Moreover, women tended to be the initiators. Although men like Toshio Arisawa and Makoto Maeda were conservative, even patriarchal, it was compassionate conservatism informed with an understanding (that some might say is emblematic of Japanese patriarchy) that one must embrace change to control it. They could not stop and did not try to keep their wives complaints off the agenda or out of the interviews. As a group, they complained less and with less intensity than the Americans (certainly there was no profanity), but they still complained a surprising amount.<sup>15</sup> The Japanese women were more reserved than the Americans, but not so reserved as their own mothers. Even Haruka Yamamoto telegraphed her complaints through me and avoided looking at her husband. It might have been different if they had been alone. Addressing me obliged her to pitch her concerns in a medium level of politeness. This subtlety is mostly lost in the translation, but was characteristic of almost all the Japanese interviews. Furthermore, the Japanese couples took turns, each having a chance to say his or her piece. There was much less interruption than in the American sample. They did not attack over and over again, nor did they push for immediate capitulation. Instead, they sought to negotiate incremental changes within the existing framework of social roles. They wanted cautious progress and used the opportunity afforded by the interview to put issues on the table. In tandem with power derived from wage earning, the widespread notion of marriage as companionship gives women grounds to complain. To the extent that men have bought into the ideal of companionship and love as the basis for marriage they have to give an ear to what their wives say on this subject. Wives wishing to nurture companionship are not likely to be too strident in demanding change.

In many Japanese marriages, women do not yet feel able to complain as freely as some I presented here. Gender-based oppression in Japan is still widespread, and women who are not employed outside the home seldom communicate their unhappiness in ways that might provoke retaliation. Instead, they send signals in other ways, such as not preparing dinner or spending their husband's money on frivolous things. Husbands, too, register dissatisfaction nonverbally by not coming home immediately after work, say, or filling their weekends with hobbies. These are clear signals of complaint in traditional marriages.

### **A Brief Outline of a Theory of Complaint**

Exceptions are essential to the development of theory. In my discussion of how Japanese and Americans complain, I noted that Babs Snowden was an exception: although criticized harshly by her husband, she did not make counter complaints or defend herself. Haruka Yamamoto, too, seemed to be something of an outlier: more strident and vocal than Japanese women are supposed to be. In fact, Babs and Haruka seemed to have exchanged cultural scripts. In least squares regression, the data points

signified by these subjects could be dismissed as outliers. But my goal is to draw a theoretical line that "fits" all the cases, and, in so doing, outline tentative answers to the questions posed at the outset of the paper: the consequences of culture for complaint, and the notion of complaint as an index of power within a society.

Interviews conducted for this paper show that there are etic (universal) and emic (culturally specific) motives for complaints. The etic dimension has two parts. First, complaints arise in the context of exchange: people complain when they think they have been shorted, when someone is not holding up his or her end of a deal. A complaint is a way of negotiating limits to power that all sides will see as legitimate. This is a prerequisite to the maintenance of social order. A complaining ritual is a process of negotiating mutual understanding of power's limits that is often aimed at preserving or expanding the boundaries of the self-identity as a domain of action. Second, the person complaining must perceive the risk of complaining to be worthwhile. For the benefit to outweigh the cost, there must be a probability that, if the demand implicit in the complaint is met, or even if it is not, the plaintiff will not suffer unacceptable consequences. If at least one of these two conditions is not met, complaint is not likely.

The emic dimension is composed of particular cultural expectations for exchange and calculations of risk. Cultures have their own terms of exchange that are closely linked to notions of what is moral (Lakoff 1995). Complaints reflect overdue charges on the ledger of moral accounts. Individual perceptions of the fairness of an exchange and estimation of the risks of bringing a complaint may be idiosyncratic or even pathological, but will largely reflect mainstream cultural norms.

Companionate marriage and egalitarian spousal relations have a longer history in the United States than in Japan. In Japan, a hierarchy in which men nominally dominate remains the publicly acknowledged basis for marriage. Furthermore, this hierarchy is a necessary prerequisite for the leader—follower exchanges of benevolence and loyalty that underlie Japanese institutions as varied as marriage, corporations, government bureaucracies, baseball teams, and flower arrangement schools. The risk of challenging hierarchies is that such challenges threaten the social order upon which social exchange depends. That some Japanese wives in this sample did complain is evidence of their increasing power. Those who do the same work as their husbands can risk demanding a more equal share of power. Less dependent on their husbands' benevolence, their sense of self and their notion of self care is expanded. Thus, the emic cultural grounds for complaint are converging in Japan and the U.S. The notion that individuals exist as locations in a hierarchy is giving way to a competing conception of individuals whose identity is based also on some measure of autonomy. The economy of complaint is, thus, an increasingly globalized free market in which an emerging hegemonic global gender culture based on the U.S. model is deregulating the terms of exchange, and, consequently, devaluing emic assessments of risk and fairness.

In addition to emic and etic dimensions, the evidence presented here indicates that there is a third element of importance. In both countries, complaints are "modernized" via mediation through the mass media. Television and radio in Japan and the U.S. provide real-time examples of the variety of ways to complain. They also are forums where, in call-in programs, home dramas, and court TV, cultures of complaint are reconfigured. These portrayals act as a catalyst for reconstituting notions of fair exchange and acceptable risk. They elaborate models of what the legitimate limits of power should be, and they indicate when the duty of self care demands that those limits be renegotiated. Japanese and U.S. women seem to increasingly take their cues to complain from these public discourses, which incorporate feminist notions.

In the light of this theorizing, Haruka Yamamoto's "unJapanese" complaints are motivated by (1) her feeling that she should not have to do the "second shift" alone because she and her husband have the same job; she is on the cutting edge of Japan's new gender morality and, as such, is a harbinger of things to come, and (2) her position is strengthened within her marriage by the facts of her educational achievement and the class background of her natal home. Once she might have hid her advantages to preserve her subordinate position from which she could exert leverage and receive benevolent treatment from her husband. Now, however, with the support of female co-workers who share a similar culture of complaint, she can risk exploiting her advantages to achieve a more equal division of power and labor in the household. It is not yet clear whether her husband will join her on the road to equality or allow her to assume de facto leadership in order to himself become subordinate and, thus, become the beneficiary of the care that traditional terms of exchange dictate.

What, then, are we to make of Babs Snowden? Why doesn't she complain? She does not hold a feminist gender ideology. Indeed, Babs likes inequality in her marriage, for it provides protection. Listening to Frank complain reaffirms her notion of who her true self is. She doesn't think she is being shorted, despite having both full-time work and motherhood on her plate. The feminine culture of which she is a part informs her that her life is normal. She may be tired, may be overworked, but these are labors of love. Why would she risk doing without them? If she complains, the risk to the social order, as she conceives it, is greater than the dubious benefits to self-interest that a successful complaint might bring.

In sum, whether and how people complain or do not complain depends on a complex equation in which feelings of fairness and self care for one's identity are balanced against risks to the larger social order that sustains and nurtures the self and the relationships within which it is constituted. Complaints signal that a gap, large and painful enough to justify the risk of complaining, exists between expectations and perceptions, between cultural moral ideals and the experiential realities of the complainer (Hochschild 1983; 218-22). These expectations and ideals are durable, but not immutable. As the

circumstances from which they arise grow more similar, Japanese and U.S. dual-income couples complaints about parenting and the division of labor should become increasingly alike, though historical embeddedness means that variation will not disappear completely. From the evidence produced here, it seems that, in the realm of spousal relations at least, an examination of who complains, why, and how they do it can be a reliable indicator of the ebb and flow of gender power within a society. These speculations based on a small sample may not amount to a classical theory, one that can predict complaint, but it is an interpretation of events worthy of further testing.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Although I do not consider them here, there are numerous books on the topic of how to write complaint letters. They point to the social importance and socially constructed nature of complaints: we have to be taught to complain properly. Expectations about how one should complain are probably social class specific. Proper complaints can be considered a form of social capital. The social constitution of cultures of complaint and complaint resolution is also an explicit concern in anthropological studies of law, critical legal studies, and the sociology of law.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Mathews (1996; 11) calls Japan and the U.S. "parallel representatives of 'late modernity'".

<sup>3</sup>The righteous, such as the famous Forty-Seven *Rônin*, were allowed to die with honor, that is, via disembowelment by their own hands.

<sup>4</sup>Private relations between spouses and details of family life are things we might not want strangers to know all about. Japanese and their language are famously "inscrutable," vague, or ambivalent. Fortright Americans are equally renowned for claiming to have carefully thought out positions on issues that do not really exist. It is not out of line, then, to ask how I know my respondents were telling me the truth. The fact is, I do not know. I was aided in doing and evaluating the interviews by my own experiences in Japan (thirteen years) and America (twenty-nine years). Respondents could easily tell that I was familiar with the areas where they live and the languages they speak. They knew that I know a lot, but certainly they could hoodwink me if they thought it necessary.

I made the interviews as informal as possible. Afterwards, respondents in both countries told me they felt the experience had been beneficial and enjoyable. Day-to-day family matters are not the sort of thing people think of as secrets, and many respondents were enthusiastic about the opportunity to talk about themselves and their lives. In any case, although people may fudge on some points, it is hard to lie about your home life while in your own home and even harder to lie about it as a couple. There may have been some duplicity. Certainly there was some holding back. However, no one refused to answer any of my questions despite me explicitly telling them that they were free to do so or to discontinue the interview at any time. Interviews were supplemented by observations and, in some cases, prior and subsequent interaction with the couples and their family life. In the end, the question "Did they tell the truth?" is, as Ezra Vogel (1971; 287) wrote about his own study of middle-class Japanese families, less important than "What truth did they tell?"

<sup>5</sup>All teachers in public institutions of learning in Japan are employed either by the prefectural board of education or the national ministry of education.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Gail Lee Bernstein's 1983 portrait of Haruko Utsunomiya and her husband, Shôichi.

<sup>7</sup>Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of the subjects.

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<sup>8</sup>The next line, which he does not sing, goes, "Ain't had no lovin' like a-huggin' and a-kissin' in a long, long while. We don't get nearer, farther, closer than a country mile."

<sup>9</sup>The concept of communication itself is a Western import. Native words that translate as communication, *hōdō*, for example, have connotations of "report" or "broadcast."

<sup>10</sup>At least one spouse in three of the five American couples was a divorce survivor. As far as I could tell, none of the Japanese in this study had experienced a divorce.

<sup>11</sup>Since this interview was done, they have succeeded in buying a home.

<sup>12</sup>He has a university degree in business, but she left school to marry him. At the end of the interview, she turned to him and said, "See, I didn't sound too bad now, did I?" as if they had discussed how they would handle the interview prior to my arrival.

<sup>13</sup>Wives' standards often included the words, "*kichinto*" and "*chanto*," which are vague expressions meaning "just so," "just right," or "the way it's supposed to be."

<sup>14</sup>The people who appear on shows like those of Jerry Springer and Jenny Jones are, it seems, bent more on release of feeling and display of outrage than in search of genuine resolution.

<sup>15</sup>I should perhaps not be surprised by this. Japanese have high expectations for human relationships, and these tend to breed abundant dissatisfaction. Japanese workers, for example, are reported to be the least satisfied in the industrialized world.

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