Nevertheless, these interviewees still valued enduring love. Indeed, there is evidence from studies of college students that from the 1960s to the 1980s young people became more "romantic," seeing love as a crucial prerequisite for marriage (Simpson, Campbell, and Berscheid 1986:366-67). Furthermore, these college students also regard love as necessary for sustaining a marriage. Among my interviewees, those who were married used the prevalence of divorce as a cautionary lesson. Rather than assuming that they themselves would divorce, they talked about what they must do to avoid it: work on their relationships, keep growing together, share a commitment to Christ, and, of course, "communicate."

More surprising, these interviewees persistently employed a mythic sense of the word love in which real love must last forever. Thus, without in fact believing that love does last, and while recognizing the fragility of contemporary relationships, they spoke as if love that ends could not have been "real" love in the first place.13

For these middle-class Americans, what is "real" love can only be decided after the fact. A self-employed businessman, married twelve years, sees marriage as a lifelong commitment, sanctioned by God. For him love is not real love unless it is enduring. A vignette about a man tempted to leave his wife for a woman he loves more led him to argue that the man cannot know "which is real love...until it's tested." Love must be "tried, have difficulties come into the relationship. That's when you find out
what really love is. What he's experiencing is the exciting part of love, of a love relationship. He feels good; he's excited; he's turned on. He maybe feels younger or whatever." [#35, p. 63] But this is not "real love."

A very different man—divorced and remarried, non-religious, a socially adroit, thirty-two year old real-estate broker proud of his "communication skills"—made exactly the same distinction between infatuation, which feels like love but does not last, and love, which may feel like infatuation, but is enduring. Describing his early relationships, Thomas DaSilva said,

I had about four or five relationships prior to [my first marriage] with women I had considered myself to be in love with. I had this image of this ideal love that was perfect, that was made in heaven, and that nothing could touch it, and everything was going to be fine. [510-513]

But when those relationships failed, it was evident that they had not really been love. And when his marriage failed, rather than concluding that love can die, he simply revised his conception of what love was. By examining in detail how this smooth salesman redefined love, we can see more precisely why mythic love remains plausible even in the face of contrary experience. We will see how even one who thinks himself
thoroughly disillusioned reproduces a mythic understanding of love because "love"
defines not a unique feeling but a unique structural slot in his life.

True Love

Thomas DaSilva's youthful image of love combined idealistic expectations of
married life with a "purely glandular" excitement. "I just felt physically, you know, I felt
this rush. A feeling I couldn't even describe. It was overwhelming." He also thought
of love as missing someone when they were gone. "All of a sudden when I was taken
away from somebody, or they went away, I wanted to be back with them. That was
love." [#17 539-545] Love was also acting like husband and wife:

Man's function is to put bread on that table, take care of the wife, protect the
wife. Her job is to make sure that she runs the household properly. She raises
the children. She basically does what you say.... [527-530] Love was when that
happened and everybody smiled and was happy with it. [534-535]

When he married, he was certain that his marriage would last. "It was great.... I
was elated. I am going to provide for this person. I'm going to go out and set the world
on fire." [585-587] "I'd see people being a certain way, and I'd say, 'Boy, they're in for
trouble. Look how great we are. Aren't we wonderful.' It just appeared to me while I
Swidler, Talk of Love

was married to my first wife that, boy, we had the ideal relationship. This was perfect."

[650-653]

After the crushing breakup of that marriage, Thomas DaSilva moved temporarily into a new pattern of relationships—one not oriented toward marriage, and one that made no use of the idea of love:

How can I explain this? I didn't make any differentiation between being friends and having a sexual relationship. In fact being friends with someone led to sexual relationships and sexual relationships led to being friends. I felt, you know, that I made a lot of good friends in that kind of situation, and I would talk about it in that sense. I don't think the subject of marriage came up too often. The three or four times it came up were people who felt that they wanted to get married, and I had to tell them that I didn't. [852-861]

Thus during a period when he had temporarily banished thoughts of marriage, he needed a new framework for thinking about relationships. He replaced the ideal of love with friendship. Friendship allows intimacy, but has very different structural characteristics than does marriage: it is not exclusive; it grows or declines, but is not all-or-nothing; and it requires no decisive choice or commitment.
Despite his disillusionment, however, this energetic bachelor retained an ideal of "love," precisely, I would argue, because he still envisioned the possibility of marriage. He did not preserve the content of his earlier beliefs about love, but he reopened the structural slot "love" had occupied.

I think what I was looking for was "what is it that I am looking for?" In the back of my mind I was thinking that I would know it when I saw it. At that time I was still believing largely in the sense of "I'll know it when I see it. It'll hit me and I'm not looking for it particularly. I'm just going about what I do normally."

[865-870]

What then was the "it" he was looking for—this something so special that, although it could not be described, he would know it when he saw it? His original image of love had proved false. Neither passionate emotion, traditional marital roles, nor happiness-ever-after had worked. But disappointment did not end his quest for "it." He had given up the specifics of his original ideal of love, but not the structural shape of the love myth. He was still searching for a unique, exclusive, special "it"—because only such a love could correspond to the institutional properties of marriage.

Thomas DaSilva ruminated about whether there is "one right person" for each person. But after dismissing the idea (more decisively than the young lawyer could bring
himself to do), he described his second wife, Melinda, in just such mythic terms. He had transcended the ideal of one right person:

I had this narrow thing I was looking for before. And all of a sudden I became aware of the fact, jeez, there isn’t anything in particular to look for except that you want to find a person…. All of a sudden that concept of a single person started to dissipate. It went away. All of a sudden, I said, jeez, that’s kind of silly. You could take seven, eight, nine, or ten of these people and you know that you could be married to any of these people and have a marriage that is a good one, maybe different from your other one. [890-901]

But despite his experience that "as I got to know more and more women, I liked them all," the quest for someone mythically special did not disappear, even though "They were all so different in different ways. I liked this about this person. I liked that about that person."

Q. So then what was it like when you met Melinda?

Melinda was so different than anybody I had ever met before. I was struck immediately by Melinda, but I was so guarded about that. "Wait a minute now. Where have you ever seen it like this before?"
Q. How was she different?

She was so damned perfect. [925-932]

Love had certainly acquired new meanings. "Infatuation" was still enjoyable, but Thomas DaSilva had developed a more mature, realistic view of love. He and Melinda "had a lot of things in common about what we liked and didn't like." They found that "our families were very similar in a lot of ways." He had changed, so that he liked her independence, the fact that she would not expect him always to take care of her. "I could cry with her. I could be other things than what I was able to be with other people. She was able to be the same with me." [963-965] Indeed, he explicitly contrasted his new sense of what love was with his earlier conception of love. "I felt that it wasn't a lonely feeling when I was away from her as much as it was a feeling like I can get more out of my life with this person with me.... I know that with this person my life will be fuller because there are so many things here that we can do and work at." [946-952]

Thomas DaSilva adapted his conception of love to experience. After divorcing, dating many women, and thinking, he had come to value equality, emotional sharing, communication, "working at" things together. He had stopped thinking that there was "a single person" he could be married to. But the underlying structure of the love myth
reasserted itself with compelling force as he talked about the woman he did in fact marry.

Actual love stories, of course, do not always end in marriage. That is what makes novels, movies, or TV dramas exciting. But it is the structure of marriage as an institution that makes the love myth plausible. Even where lovers are separated, the mythic story asserts that there is one right person. Even if fighting for that person fails, there is a decisive choice in which the hero finds out what she or he really wants. Even when love stories are about relationships outside of marriage (or about the loss or rediscovery of love within a marriage), they embody the ideal of a single, exclusive love, a unique relationship to one other person, a heroic fight against obstacles, and the possibility of an all-or-nothing certainty about that choice.

My argument is that the features of the love myth—an exclusive, unique passion, a decisive choice that expresses and resolves identity, a struggle to overcome obstacles, and a commitment that endures forever—correspond neither to personal experience nor to the observations people make of others they know. But its power is also not an illusion. Rather, the love myth accurately describes the structural constraints of the institution of marriage. These constraints affect those who marry and those who divorce or remain unmarried, as long as they are implicitly or explicitly asking of every relationship whether it is the "right" relationship—one that is, or could be, or should be a marriage.¹⁶
Swidler, Talk of Love

LIFE STRATEGIES
What can we learn about culture more generally from this analysis of the culture of love? Although the domain of love is a specialized one, the relationship between institutional constraints and cultural meanings that we have found here has wider implications. By examining how people organize action around institutional demands, we can develop a broader understanding of what reproduces cultural meanings, how people use culture to construct lines of action, and what sorts of “realities” culture actually describes.

Cultural Persistence

This chapter has shown how images of romantic love continually resurface even among people who consciously disavow them. When cultural understandings persist in this way, culture critics have argued that a dominant ideology holds people in its thrall, either because of manipulation by the culture industry (Gitlin 1983; Thompson 1990) or because the ideology is so hegemonic that no one can envision an alternative. But if ideological hegemony means the unthinking acceptance of dominant views, that is clearly not the case here. If it were, researchers should not find widespread cultural dissent (see Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 1980; Mann 1970), such as the rebelliousness of the working-class London boys in Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labor* (1977) or the skepticism Americans express about the availability of the "American dream" (Mann

As our analysis of love has shown, criticism alone will not dislodge contested culture. Middle-class Americans are sharply critical of the romantic love myth. In fact, they insist that such beliefs are dangerously misleading (see Illouz 1997:158-160). And they counter the romantic love myth with an alternative, prosaic-realistic imagery.

But if the love myth is not hegemonic, if respondents are not brainwashed by popular culture, why does mythic love persist? I have argued that the institutional features of marriage make mythic love plausible, even when people reject it as a guide to ordinary experience. Let us examine this claim more closely.

Mythic love is regenerated because, while the prosaic view is more truthful as a description of experience, description is not the only or the most important use to which cultural meanings can be put. Culture does not describe external reality so much as it organizes people's own lines of action.

Two cultures of love persist, neither driving out the other, because people employ their understandings of love in two very different contexts. When thinking about the choice of whether to marry or stay married, people see love in mythic terms. Love is the
choice of one right person whom one will or could marry. Therefore love is all-or-nothing, certain, exclusive, heroic, and enduring. When thinking about maintaining ongoing relationships, however, people mobilize the prosaic-realistic culture of love to understand the varied ways one can manage love relationships. Prosaic love is ambiguous, open-ended, uncertain, and fragile.

The institutional demands of marriage continually reproduce the outlines of the mythic love story. Neither hidden ideological hegemony nor brainwashing by mass culture is necessary. Indeed, the institutional properties of marriage may explain why dramas of love retain their popular appeal.

Evidently people can live quite nicely with multiple, conflicting ideas about the world (and with huge gaps between beliefs and experience [see Swidler, 1992; Schlozman and Verba, 1979]). Criticism of a dominant ideal will not eliminate it as long as it still provides a useful guide to action. Thus students of ideology would do well to examine the institutional encounters that lead people to reproduce even discredited parts of their worldviews. After all, it was Marx and Engels (1970:60) who said, that the true communist does not seek "merely to produce a correct consciousness about an existing fact" but rather seeks to "[overthrow] the existing state of things." Only if we understand better how people actually use ideas to organize action can we understand why some ideas are enormously resilient while others fail to take hold.
It is not quite correct to say that mythic love describes the institution of marriage. Rather it describes the inner contours of individual action (and feeling) oriented to marriage. The basic structure of the love myth corresponds to, and helps organize, the lines of action individuals construct when deciding whether to enter or leave a marriage (or relationship modeled on marriage). People learn to ask themselves whether their feelings for another person are "real love"—love that can be exclusive, certain, life-transforming, and enduring. They thus reconstitute the institutional characteristics of marriage as intrapsychic states. The love myth answers the question, "What do I need to feel about someone in order to marry [commit myself to] him or her?"

Culture develops capacities for action, and culture proliferates where action is problematic. Recently problems of "structure and agency" (Giddens 1981; 1984; Archer 1988; Sewell 1992) have preoccupied sociologists. Many scholars have pointed out that social structure is itself constituted by culture and that culture exists only when it is enacted in concrete forms, so that no firm line can be drawn between culture and structure (Williams 1973; Sewell 1985: 1992; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997; Boli and Thomas 1997). But I would like to depart to some extent from this current conventional wisdom. From the point of view of individual actors, some parts of the social world stand as obdurate structures with their own reality, while other arenas are
left to be organized by individual action. (It might be better here to say 'organized by actors,' acknowledging that actors and repertoires of possible actions are themselves institutionalized, so that actors may be tribes, nations, or families, not just individuals. In the contemporary West, the individual person is constituted as "the actor." This is one of the core institutionalized realities Americans must organize their action around.) Marriage is an institution persons may accept or reject, seek or avoid. But its structure is at least provisionally fixed, from the perspective of individual actors. Courtship, however, the process of finding a person to marry, is something the individual has to do on his or her own. She cannot simply apply for a license, go before a judge and have it done. While both individual choices and institutional structures are cultural, the way they are cultural differs greatly.

Love and marriage provide a perfect example of this relationship between culture and institutions. Individuals, I have argued, live their lives by developing strategies of action that provide them with a basic life organization. An institution like marriage solves many problems of life organization simultaneously. In general marriage settles one's living arrangements—with whom one shares a household, and usually income and expenses; one's sexual obligations and opportunities; with whom one socializes; who will care for one if one is sick. Marriage defines a life-partnership, a unit that produces joint rather than purely individual goods. Marriage changes one's public status (and sometimes one's name) and it defines a unit in the larger social world.
Marriage is thus an institution that settles, or at least redefines, important elements of one's life organization. But at the same time, forming a marriage is left almost entirely up to individual initiative. There is no institutionalized path to marriage as there is for finding a college or career—fill out an application, take a test, be called for an interview, wait for a letter of acceptance or rejection. Even matchmakers, families, or brokers who arrange marriages can only introduce people to each other, not actually arrange the marriage itself. Thus it is up to individuals to form marriages, to link their life strategies to the institutional structure marriage provides.

The culture of love flourishes in this gap where action meets institution. In order to marry, individuals must develop certain cultural, psychological, and even cognitive equipment. They must be prepared to feel, or at least convince others that they feel, that one other person is the uniquely right "one." They must be prepared to recognize the "right person" when that person comes along. In addition, people must mobilize the psychic energy to make the life changes that marrying involves, from sharing money and living arrangements to sharing such things as a social identity, a dinner hour, a kin network, or children.

Love, then, is the quality of "rightness" that defines the particular, unique other that one does marry; it is the emotion that propels one across the gap that separates single from married life; and it is "commitment," the psychological concomitant of the all-or-
nothing, exclusive, enduring relationship constituted by a marriage. The popular culture of love both prepares persons for and helps them to organize and carry through the aspects of marriage that depend on individual action.

In more general form, I am arguing that culture is elaborated around the lines of action institutions structure. As we saw in describing settled and unsettled lives, people consume and create more cultural "stuff," that is, they elaborate more self-conscious symbolic meanings when their lives are unsettled, when they must construct new lines of action. In this sense culture provides complements or reciprocals to institutional structures. The aspects of institutional life that are firmly structured do not require cultural elaboration. Individuals instead develop cultural supports for lines of action that link them to institutions. The culture of love flourishes because, while marriage is institutionalized, the process of getting married (or deciding whether or not to leave a marriage) and—in the contemporary period, the procedure for staying married—is not. As marriage has become more fragile, no longer fully settling the lives of those who rely on it, a second culture of love, prosaic realism, has blossomed alongside the old. This new love culture helps people be the kinds of persons, with the kinds of feelings, skills and virtues that will sustain an ongoing relationship.

Thus people create more elaborated culture where action is more problematic. As institutions constrict discretion, they reduce the need for cultural elaboration. So those
who are anxious about maintaining enduring relationships actively consume "love
culture." They buy self-help books on love, watch Leo Buscaglia, attend Marriage
Encounter weekends, visit therapists and marriage counselors, and read The Road Less
Traveled.\textsuperscript{17} Other aspects of social life, such as receiving payment for the work one has
done or keeping others from taking one's possessions are the focus of enormous cultural
and ritual elaboration in societies without formal governments and legal institutions, but
they are much less culturally elaborated in our own.\textsuperscript{18}

Culture then flourishes especially lushly in the gaps where people must put
together lines of action in relation to established institutional options. Culture and social
structure are thus, in the widest sense, reciprocal. People continue to elaborate and
shore up with culture that which is not fully institutionalized.

What Culture Describes

The sociology of culture has often run aground on the problem of what culture
describes, or, to put it differently, what makes culture plausible. It is clear that culture is
in some sense "about" the world, and that a culture that no longer fits the world around it
may be discarded. But what kind of "fit" do cultures have to their world?
The culture of love I have described does fit. But it does not directly fit experience or observation of the world. Rather it describes persons' own organization of action, an organization of action which is simultaneously culturally constructed. That organization of action is, in turn, constrained by the external world, but it does not correspond to it feature for feature. Think of an actor as like a hiker making her way up a mountain, with culture as her description of the path she takes up the mountain. The mountain's topography will certainly affect the path she pursues. She will pay attention to a boulder she must cross or go around, to steep or flat places, to openings in the trees. But other features of the mountain that do not directly affect her path may be irrelevant. She may misconstrue the larger shape of the mountain, yet well describe her own path.

Of course, thinking of culture as "description," even description of our own organization of action is clearly inadequate. Culture also describes (and helps to constitute) the personal capacities and resources the actor will use as she follows her path. Thus her knowledge of the strength of her legs, the energy she brings to the task, even her ability to jump over boulders is integral to her organization of her own line of action.

Culture then describes our own organization of action. And multiple cultural meanings remain in suspension as long as we have many kinds of action to organize. The fact that as descriptions of the world, or even of our own experience, such cultural
meanings may be contradictory or incomplete does nothing to undermine their plausibility. As long as cultural meanings help people mobilize the internal and external supports they need for action, the culture is "true." It is in this sense that both the insurance executive and the successful lawyer found it true that there was one right person different from all the others. The woman Thomas DaSilva married was different in a different way than other women were different because she filled that slot in his life for which there could be only one, unique occupant. The lawyer kept his belief in "one right person" even though he knew "it couldn't be true" because he found the one person who became uniquely right in the sense that, as another businessman said, "she is the one I did marry, so this is the only one that really counts."

For these men, as for most respondents, "real love" remains mythically enduring because love that does not last is, in retrospect, not real love. That is, the belief that real love lasts forever does not describe the world. My interviewees would be the first to insist that love dies all the time. But the culture of love does not describe the world. It describes the line of action my interviewees are trying to sustain. And that line of action involves keeping themselves and their partners committed to an enduring relationship. And here "love" serves as the all-important term for cultivating that set of feelings, that reading of one's own psyche and the psyche of another, that internal propagation of firm decision and perpetual vigilance that can sustain a marriage. Love describes reality, but
its reality is the internal contour of our own action. We take into account features of the
world as those features impinge on or structure our own lines of action.

Sources of Cultural Coherence

I began this book by insisting that culture is not organized into unified systems,
but that people keep on tap multiple, often conflicting cultural capacities and world
views. But in this chapter we have seen that culture can sometimes be more coherent
than it might appear at first glance. Even though experts on love offer multiple,
competing kinds of advice (and many people listen indiscriminately to all of them
[Lichterman, 1992]) and beliefs about love range from practical homilies to transfiguring
inspirations, consistent themes can be discerned beneath the chaos. But where does this
"consistency" or coherence reside? I have argued that institutions provide coherence
because many persons shape their action around the same institutional constraints. They
then resonate to very similar cultural formulas. Standard institutional dilemmas produce
coherent cultural strands, even when each individual's world view taken as a whole may
seem incoherent. Coherence resides in the cultural supports for particular lines of
action, and consistent patterns appear in the culture of many individuals when the all
confront similar institutional constraints and organize action around those constraints.
The effects of marriage on the culture of love provide one of many examples of how culture can be structured from the "outside-in." Even when individuals are confused about what they believe, when their culture contains many inconsistent beliefs and strikes a cacophony of discordant notes, the effects of culture can sometimes be quite coherent. But to understand why culture can have systematic effects even when it is not systematic in the minds of individuals, we must examine sources of cultural coherence operating outside individual psyches.
NOTES

1. In the 1950s American psychologists and sociologists identified a "romantic complex" (Waller and Hill 1951) which they believed damaged marriages by creating unrealistic expectations. Later research, however, failed to find that young people believed in romantic love as a basis for marriage. It found, instead, that people sought to marry on the basis of companionship, compatibility, and shared values. However, the romantic-love complex does seem to be part of marriage systems under which people arrange their own marriages (Goode 1959). There is, by now, an enormous social-psychological literature on love (see Berscheid and Walster 1978; Walster and Walster 1978; Rubin 1973; Rubin, Peplau, and Hill 1981; Kelley 1983; Skolnick 1987; Hazan and Shaver 1987; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Most of this work focuses on why couples choose one another and on the attempt to predict marital stability (people like similar backgrounds and values, but perhaps complementary personality types; equality in the resources spouses contribute to a marriage), but tells us little about the cultural meanings of love. Eva Illouz's (1997:215-265) innovative study of romance shows how the ideology of "romance" as a utopian sphere separated from practical concerns can operate precisely to select partners who share cultural capital—as when a couple discover that they both love poetry and quiet walks in the woods.

2. Of course internalized schemata “inside” people’s heads always interact with external cultural representations, so in this sense it is misleading to counterpose a subjective cultural “interior” against “external” contexts. My point is that both internalized schemata and public cultural representations are too multiple, too disorganized, and too fluid to structure experience and action. Rather, as will become clear below, external contexts of action provide the structuring that both internalized cultural schemata and the teeming world of public culture lack.

3. Watt (1957) also argues that the love story founds the novel as a literary form, so that Paesela is the first true novel. See, however, the analysis in McKeon (1987), who traces the "origin" of elements of the novel form both earlier and later than Watt's classic treatment.

4. The love story works out very differently in France, where love remains tragic and extra-marital (think of Madame Bovary, Nana, or The Red and the Black, such films as "Les Enfants du Paradis," the many comedies about extra marital "avventure." One potential explanation for this difference is that for the French bourgeois virtue never
supplanted aristocratic prestige, so that tragic lovers signal their true superiority not by winning an ideal spouse, but by throwing everything away for love. See Lamont 1992 for continuing resonances of these aristocratic values in French conceptions of individualism, honor, honesty, and love.

5. In love stories with happy endings the individual succeeds in overcoming opposition; in less happy stories (anti-bourgeois novels like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*), society can destroy love. Indeed, society is condemned precisely because it can destroy the ultimate symbol of individual personhood, bourgeois love. In both kinds of stories, individuals preserve (or lose) their selves by loving not in obedience to social convention, but in defiance of it.

6. Synthesizing the social-psychological literature on love, Susan Sprecher and her co-authors (Sprecher et al. 1994:352-353) offer a remarkably similar description of the romantic love ideology:

   The belief that love should be a basis for marriage can be considered one component of a larger constellation of beliefs that can be called the romantic ideology. Other beliefs associated with the ideology of romanticism include love at first sight, there is only one true love, true love lasts forever, idealization of the partner and the relationship, and love can overcome any obstacles.

7. Eva Illouz (1997:77) describes the cultural attempt to blend romantic and prosaic understandings of love:

   Paradoxically, at the same time that the distinction between intense but ephemeral romantic experiences and long-term, effortful relationships was being sharpened, the terms of this distinction were becoming less intelligible, because the new ideal of marriage and love prescribed that fleeting and intense pleasures should and could be mixed with domestic models of love based on compatibility and rational self-control.

   Illouz emphasizes how understandings of love were reshaped by the marketing of leisure pleasures and new commodities in the early twentieth century. I am struck by the ways the contrasting vocabularies of love are not blended so much as held in awkward tension.

8. As Lenore Weitzman (1985) has pointed out, changes in divorce and divorce law actually redefine the institution of marriage. Traditional divorce law assumed that
spouses bound their fates together socially and economically (Prager 1982), while the new, no-fault divorce laws build in the assumption that spouses remain autonomous actors, with responsibility for maximizing their individual interests, despite the interdependencies of marriage. The substantial disadvantage divorced women suffer under the new laws may, however, indicate that women, at least, still organize their lives in some measure as if marriages were permanent and sacrificing for the relationship made sense.

9. This absence of a heroic myth of origins for individual marriages is particularly striking, since any relationship develops stories, memories, images that strengthen the solidarity of the relationship. In addition, there is a certain social-structural truth to the love myth’s insistence on the lovers’ willingness to struggle against social obstacles. Young people do have to leave their families of origin and establish a new bond when they marry, a move often greeted with ambivalence by the families they leave. Indeed, in his study of a small Midwestern town, Herve Varenne (1977), sees just such a story of rebellious love as paradigmatic of the voluntarism of American culture. A young woman rebels against her family, insisting on marrying a boy her parents dislike, in order to establish the individuality that allows her to replicate just the kind of family in which she grew up. Such rebellion is central to American culture, both within and outside of the love story (Bellah et al. 1985). Nonetheless, for the people I studied, the heroic drama of love had shifted its focus away from a struggle with external obstacles, and toward the struggle involved in maintaining the relationship itself. Those couples who had dramas of heroic rebellion to tell might have cast their stories differently on occasions which accented their mythic, rather than their prosaic understandings of love.

10. Hervé Varenne (1977:163-187) describes a very different American love story—“tragic,” fraught with conflict—but with a remarkably similar ending. Despite marrying a man her parents strongly disapproved of, “Sue” stood by her choice and ended up “happy” even with a husband who had a broken marriage, drug use, and a wild lifestyle in his background. If I had interviewed Sue during her marriage to “John,” I might well have heard a story almost as prosaic as the others I was told. Varenne argues that the terms “love” and “happiness” reconcile the need of the individual to have a unique individuality on the basis of which to establish social commitments with the need to be or become a member of a community.

12. Illouz (1997:196-197) explains "the continuing coexistence of these two equally powerful repertoires of love, the 'organic' and the 'contractual'" as a "result of a structural contradiction between marriage as an institution of social reproduction and marriage as a unit for the expression of the individual's emotions." But my interviews suggest that while the duality Illouz describes is real, she has the institutional anchors of the two understandings of love reversed. People emphasize the prosaic, "contractual" love that one has to work at when describing their ongoing day-to-day relationships, while the "organic" metaphor of a once and for all commitment is mobilized when describing decisions about "social reproduction"--whether to form or stay in a marriage.

13. The first quotation is from a Shakespeare sonnet; the second from an Everly Brothers song.

14. Simpson, Campbell, and Berscheid (1986:364, 366, 368) report that the largest shift has been among women. In 1967 just under 25% of college women reported that they would not marry a person who "had all the other qualities you desired...if you were not in some with him," while almost 65% of men answered no to the same question. In college-student surveys in 1976 and 1984, on the other hand, the gap between men and women had nearly closed with more the 80% of both women and men saying they would not marry without love.

15. In an interesting study of soap-opera romance, Harrington and Bielby (1991) point out that the ideal of life-long commitment persists in American popular culture. They suggest that in the soap-opera world, as among my interviewees, the "modern" ideal of personal fulfillment is seen as compatible with enduring commitment, or indeed, that real commitment provides the challenges and satisfactions that lead to personal growth. While soap-opera plots recognize "modern" aspirations for individual fulfillment, they show the "traditional" solution of putting one's relationship first as the desirable outcome.

16. Despite a rising age at first marriage, about 90% of American women eventually marry (Cherlin 1992:10-11), and even among those who divorce, most eventually remarry (Cherlin 1992:28). And the aspiration to marry is nearly universal (Goldscheider and Waite 1991:14). But one implication of my argument is that those who truly abandon hope of marriage, or of a marriage-like commitment, may also stop thinking of love in mythic terms.
17. By the mid-1990s, M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled* (1978), had enjoyed more than 500 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, a mind-boggling figure. It is heavy on terms like "discipline," "responsibility," and "commitment," as well as ideas of separateness, individual boundaries, and spiritual growth.

18. It is instructive to look at "stateless" societies--those without formal government. In such societies elaborate ritual continually reinforces marriage bonds and other kin obligations and alliance structures. Without constant cultural work, obligations and ties can unravel or fade away. In our society, on the other hand, a marriage continues to exist legally until positive steps are taken to dissolve it. See Jane Collier, *Marriage and Inequality in Classless Societies* (1988) and Karen Paige and Jeffrey Paige, *The Politics of Reproductive Ritual* (1981).