BAREFOOT ON THE BEACH:
THE DESTINATION WEDDING AS DISCURSIVE CULTURAL PRACTICE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

ENGLISH

AUGUST 2013

By

April H. Ching

Dissertation Committee:

Cynthia Ward, Chairperson
Paul Lyons
Candace Fujikane
Glenn Man
Vernadette V. Gonzalez

Keywords: Destination, Wedding, Media, Hawaii, Tropical, Tourism, Travel, Intimacy, Relationship
Abstract

The phenomenon of the destination wedding denotes a cultural shift in the way Americans assign meaning to the wedding ritual as a whole. Traditionally, the wedding was seen as a ritual rooted in community and performed in adherence to overall societal conventions. However, contemporary couples increasingly see the wedding as a ritual in service of addressing the historical conflicts inherent in it: the discourses of society and the individual, marriage and romance, industry and consumer. This dissertation tracks the variety of ways in which the tension between these discourses has been manifest in the practice of the wedding throughout its historical trajectory and shows how it can be seen as a way society and couples have addressed shifting social relations and changing social identities as shaped by popular media. Couples increasingly use media to negotiate the wedding experience; the commercial white wedding practice is re-contextualized by their production of, and interaction with, industry media. The destination wedding mitigates the tension between discourses constructing marriage by incorporating the discourses of intimacy as well as that of tourism. The destination wedding is sold by the industry as an escape, escape from the social, familial, and financial pressures of a large wedding. But it is also framed as a tool for building intimacy. Rather than promoting an individual escape, the destination wedding offers the image of an escape by a couple, in order to create a shared identity in a liminal space. The tropical beach is the ideal location sold by the industry for the wedding away because of its own discourse and ideology as an iconic tourist destination. For American couples the iconic beach location is Hawai‘i. Its construction by the tourist and wedding industries represents the conflation of the
competing discourses of the wedding as a social imperative, travel as an escape, and romance—as epitomized by the image of a tropical paradise. The increasing popularity of the destination wedding demonstrates an attempt by couples to negotiate and even change the meaning and purpose of the wedding ritual; and, as a result, the wedding itself is taking on new meaning.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................ iv
List of Figures .................................................................................................................................... v

## Introduction: Destination Weddings

- Methodology ............................................................................................................................. 3
- Outline of the Project .................................................................................................................... 6

### Chapter 1. The White Wedding: Ideology, Iconography and Industry

- Romance, Marriage and Media before the Eighteenth Century ........................................... 17
- Romance, Marriage and Media in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century ......................... 24
- Romance, Marriage and Media, from the Twentieth Century to the Present ......................... 30
- Individualization and Intimacy ................................................................................................ 45
- Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 65

### Chapter 2. Destination Wedding: From Scandals to Sandals

- Elopement and the Tourist Industry .......................................................................................... 70
- The Destination Wedding Escape .............................................................................................. 75
- Tourism, Travel and the Destination Wedding ........................................................................... 89
- The Tropical Destination Wedding ............................................................................................. 102
- The Iconography of the Tropical Destination Wedding ............................................................. 105
- Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 113

### Chapter 3. Barefoot on the Beach: The Iconography of the Hawai‘i Destination Wedding

- The Construction of an American Wedding Destination ......................................................... 125
- The Iconography of the Hawai‘i Destination Wedding .............................................................. 138
- Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 149

Notes .................................................................................................................................................. 152
Works Cited .................................................................................................................................... 155
List of Figures

Fig. 1. Special Travel Issue: Cover. Martha Stewart Destination Weddings and Dream Honeymoons. 2010.................................................................................................................................11

Fig. 2. Queen Victoria in her white wedding dress.................................................................28

Fig. 3. Wedding tableau: It Happened One Night...........................................................................36

Fig. 4. Claudette Colbert as the bride Ellie Andrews in It Happened One Night..................36

Fig. 5. Disney’s Cinderella and her Prince Charming.................................................................41

Fig. 6. Grace Kelly at the altar......................................................................................................42

Fig. 7. Princess Diana and Prince Charles..................................................................................51

Fig. 8. Kate Middleton and Prince William................................................................................62

Fig. 9. Sandals Resorts advertisement: “Escape Together”......................................................81

Fig. 10. Special Travel Issue: Cover. Martha Stewart Destination Weddings and Dream Honeymoons. 2009.................................................................................................................................108

Fig. 11. Lū’au: Robert Louis Stevenson, Lili‘uokalani and King Kalākaua.........................117

Fig. 12. Royal Hawaiian Hotel gala, 1927..................................................................................120

Fig. 13. Travel Magazine advertisement: “Pleasureland for the Tourist”...............................121

Fig. 14. Destination wedding photomontage: April Mancuso and Kerisimasi Reynolds.................................................................142
Introduction: Destination Weddings

The growing trend toward the destination wedding for contemporary American couples is evident. Industry statistics for 2012 show 350,000 destination weddings, representing 24% of all American weddings: an increase of 4% over the past four years alone. The growth of the destination wedding industry parallels and is fueled by this movement, with a substantial escalation in the number of businesses, media publications, websites and blogs devoted to the subject during the last decade. The destination wedding market now accounts for at least $16 billion in annual spending.\textsuperscript{2}

The destination wedding has become a cultural phenomenon that can be seen as an alternative to, and re-contextualization of, traditional American wedding practices, which remain epitomized by the “white wedding” and the 1950s social conventions it reflects. The typical bride and groom are older and less influenced by or financially dependent upon their parents than their 1950s counterparts. Traditional roots are deemphasized. The importance of religion in weddings and abstinence before marriage has diminished, downplaying the significance of the role of the neighborhood church as a wedding site and the couple’s family pastor or priest as officiate. Brides and grooms, as well as their guests, are now less likely to have remained living where they grew up. All of these factors increase the appeal of a “wedding away.”

With the coining of the term weddingmoon in the mid-’90s by Sandals Resorts, an early innovator in the destination wedding market (Mead 209), consumers began to accept the notion of a “wedding away”—“away” from neighborhood communities and toward distant venues—as a fashionable alternative that did not carry the taboo sting of
elopement. With tourist facilities in Jamaica, St Lucia, Antigua and the Bahamas, Sandals Resorts promoted the iconic image of the increasingly popular wedding destination: the faraway tropical island and the tableau of the bride and groom alone on a pristine beach. Indeed, this image has popularized the notion that “romance is a tropical island,” whereby couples imagine an escape both from the commercialism of the tourist and wedding industries and to a location where they produce romance for themselves, aided by their surroundings.

If the tropical island has become the destination wedding ideal, Hawai‘i has been sold to American couples as the epitome of the ultimate romantic paradise. A uniquely American destination, Hawai‘i is both exotic and familiar—a tropical island away, but neither culturally or linguistically too far. While the destination wedding in general and the Hawaiian destination wedding in particular may be regarded as cultural practices that evolved “naturally” from earlier wedding practices as an adaptation to changing demographics, they in fact represent a combination of discrete and often contradictory discourses and practices that themselves have historic trajectories accompanied by changing iconography. The burgeoning phenomenon of the destination wedding denotes a cultural shift in the way Americans assign meaning to the wedding ritual as a whole: traditionally, it was seen as a ritual rooted in community and performed in adherence to overall societal conventions, whereas contemporary couples increasingly see the wedding ritual in service of addressing the conflicts between the discourses of society and the individual, marriage and romance, industry and consumer. Simultaneously, as brides and grooms increasingly use media to negotiate the wedding experience, the commercial
white wedding practice is re-contextualized by their production of, and interaction with, industry media.

**Methodology**

While much scholarship on the discourses surrounding wedding and travel paints them as hegemonic practices subjecting consumers to deliberately constructed ideology with the intent to minimize agency, my own approach takes seriously Lawrence Grossberg’s warning, presented in “Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy: Is Anybody Else Bored with the Debate?” of one potential pitfall of any project in cultural criticism: how to reconcile the realities of the political economy of consumption and the human frameworks of agency and freedom of choice. This is the crux of any project undertaking a look at culture, but it may be particularly relevant to the wedding, a ritual that has become saturated with consumption, as commercial vendors vie to fulfill consumer expectations, themselves promoted by vendors’ media, of how to construct “the best day of your life.”

Grant McCracken contends that the argument against consumption and its negative effects is “both familiar and widespread. It says modern Western societies, driven by the engines of marketing and materialism, have developed a soul-destroying obsession with consumer goods. It says these goods have turned us away from high culture, from real spirituality, from the ideals of self. We all know the argument well enough to sing it by heart” (3). It is McCracken’s view, however, that rather than destroying the self, consumption constitutes an important medium though which
individuals *construct* the self. “Consumer goods,” he says, “are one of our most important templates for the self” (3) and give individuals choice in how they construct themselves, including definition of their gender, age, class and lifestyle. If we accept this argument, the relationship between consumer industry and individuals seeking agency becomes much more interrelated, much more reciprocal.

Barry Richards, Iain MacRury, and Jackie Botterill explore this mutuality in *The Dynamics of Advertising*, a study of the ways in which advertising has changed over time and become increasingly attached to the politics of daily life. In terms of the relationship between advertisers and social actors, these authors consider advertising to be a kind of public conversation, an exchange of symbols, images, words and phrases. Although at one level it is a one-way communication—from advertisers and their agencies to us the public—in another, deeper sense it is a place where popular culture is in communication with itself, and is therefore being both reproduced and changed. (3)

This two-way exchange comes about as advertising professionals, “the new cultural intermediaries” (4), look to the signs generated by popular culture and choose from among them those which might be useful in constructing the advertising message. Advertisers may change the nuance of the signs they pick up, altering inflections or combining signs to feed the ad back into popular culture. Cultural values are then re-infused with new energy as popular culture responds. This process is part of the “constant negotiation and sharing of meanings which comprises popular culture” (Richards, MacRury and Botterill 4).
Modern popular culture reflects and feeds this cycle, particularly through the role of new Internet tools such as blogs and social media. The production of media by consumers as well as by industry highlights the reciprocity between advertisers and social actors. As more destination brides and grooms blog about their experiences producing and living the destination wedding, the industry responds to these blogs and testimonials as well as to more traditional industry statistics. Attention to the reciprocity between the wedding industry and the consumer will help to re-envision cultural practices as a negotiation between actors rather than strictly as an imposition of ideology.

In embarking on a discussion of the discourses of wedding and tourist practices, I am mindful of the various effects and meanings that the slippery concept “discourse” takes on in the different contexts in which it is employed: it may include a narrative, a framework, an image, an object. I align my definition with that of Maarten A. Hajer, who sees discourse as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices” (44). In this sense, I take discourse to mean both the actual objects of media production concerning, for example, the wedding and travel, and also as what David Howarth views as “historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects” (9). The destination wedding encompasses a variety of seemingly contradictory discourses such as individualism and individual identity, community and society, intimacy, consumerism, anti-consumerism, authenticity, romance and marriage. As cultural practice it highlights the changes
wrought both in social convention and in romantic tradition, ushering in a new valorization of individuality and the couple.

This shift reflects changes in the underlying discourse surrounding marriage in general. And while the core of this project is not marriage per se, cultural assumptions about the institution of marriage are encoded in the wedding as a cultural process and continue to influence the wedding ritual, as do brides and grooms themselves. Formal marriage has always been a contested practice, rife with competing discourses related to society and the self. Since at least the Middle Ages the discourse of marriage as a tool for integrating couples into the social order has been in tension with the discourse of romantic love as the actualization of individual contentment. Tension between discourses, borne out by the tradition of the formal American white wedding, is increasingly addressed by the destination wedding as escape. The destination wedding, particularly the Hawai’i wedding as an exemplification of tropical paradise, is constructed by the wedding industry as well as by couples themselves as an escape from social dictates that accommodates intimate relationships, individualism and a valorization of the couple.

Outline of the Project

The wedding as an American cultural practice is defined by the distinct and contradictory discourses that practice encompasses. In an analysis of culture these webs of discourse need to be carefully explored, mapping out individual strands for discovery and then placing each in context. This dissertation will trace the cultural context of the white wedding through its defining discourses of romance, marriage, individualism and
media production and elaborate on the historical trajectory of these discourses and their role in shaping the wedding as practice. The work will then trace the development of the destination wedding through the inclusion of another discourse: travel, its history, its iconology and ideology, particularly that of the beach, and the relationship between travel and the wedding. For Americans the ideal destination is Hawai‘i, owing to its own discourse as an American tourist destination, its ideology as a place of welcome and its iconography depicting a tropical paradise. The final chapter of the project will analyze Hawai‘i as emblematic of a destination wedding mecca and its relationship to the American tourists who flock to its shores.

Chapter 1. The White Wedding: Ideology, Iconography and Industry

Modern wedding ideals emphasize romance, both in courtship and in marriage, but the notion of romance as first expressed in the Middle Ages through courtly love poetry emerged as a discourse in opposition to that of medieval marriage, “representing at least a theoretical alternative to the repressive character of officially sanctioned marriages among the aristocracy” (Shumway 13). The tension between the counter-discourses of romance and marriage continued to manifest throughout the history of the traditional wedding, shaped by popular media such as courtly love poetry in the Middle Ages, the fairy tale in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the romantic novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the film and wedding industries in the twentieth century. The white wedding, solidified as cultural practice in post-war 1950s America, has also become an exercise in conspicuous consumption in which brides, at least for a day, are
able to live out the “happily-ever-after” fairy tale “Cinderella.” Media representations of royal weddings, beginning with Queen Victoria’s well-publicized wedding in 1840 to Prince Albert in which she wore a formal white wedding gown, fueled the fairy tale image of the “romantic marriage” and its promise of a happily-ever-after integration of the bride into a patriarchal social order. The “fairy tale” nature of these expectations for marriage has become increasingly apparent, especially as social relations have radically changed from the 1960s to the present. Values have changed, but the white wedding ritual itself is enduring: as Katherine Jellison’s work *It’s Our Day: America’s Love Affair with the White Wedding 1945–2005* argues, “Americans guaranteed the survival of the white wedding into the 21st century by amending the ideology that supported it and reinterpreting the functions the rite served” (5). Nonetheless, dissatisfaction with the iconography and ideology of the white wedding, specifically family pressures and obligations, and pressure on the bride to create a bridal identity combined with the level of conspicuous consumption it demands, has led to couples seeking alternatives that are themselves the product of competing discourses.

**Chapter 2. Destination Wedding: From Scandals to Sandals**

The traditional white wedding can be seen as a ritual designed for the integration of couples into an established social order, emphasizing the cohesion of community, while the discourses of travel and tourism have long been considered these practices as rituals of escape from society. Through travel, the individual acts to break free of everyday social conventions for the purpose of self-discovery. Previously a “wedding
“away” meant elopement, and elopement meant scandal. Travel away from home, family, church and friends violated the ideology of the traditional wedding: the spectacle of the virgin bride passed from one male protector to another. Nevertheless, commercial wedding industries grew up around common destinations for weddings away such as Gretna Green in Scotland; Elkton, Maryland; and Las Vegas, Nevada. More recently, Sandals resorts popularized the *weddingmoon* and established the tropical paradise as the ultimate wedding destination. Tropical tourism has always had its own iconology and tropes, centered on the idea of an individual’s encounter with nature uncorrupted by civilization, but it has found special resonance for brides and grooms, who can imagine themselves in an Edenic setting enacting the isolation of Adam and Eve and constructing their identity as a couple in tropical paradise, barefoot on the beach. Modern destination weddings refocus the experience from one of integration into the established social order to one designed to integrate the couple into intimacy, where witnesses are not only optional but are often excised from the fantasy in a ritual that emphasizes private relationship over display.

**Chapter 3. Barefoot on the Beach: The Iconography of the Hawai‘i Destination Wedding**

Hawai‘i is emblematic of a destination wedding location in that it offers the iconography and tropes of a tropical paradise: white sand and palm trees bordered by blue sea. The Islands have historically been sold as a paradise for the American consumer, open for tourist pleasure. And though Hawai‘i’s iconography depicts the isolated paradise
of the tropical island, it is an always-already tourist-saturated paradise. Wedding industry offerings in the Islands often mask this dichotomy, selling tropical island tropes such as flowers, Hawaiian music and the Hawai’i tourist experience to their destination wedding clientele not only as an authentic encounter in paradise and an escape by the couple from any potential integration into social conventions inherent in the practice of the white wedding but also as proof of an authentic Hawaiian wedding experience.

An analysis of the industry shows the variety of ways media and consumers combine the discourses of marriage, romance, travel and tropical tourism in the Hawai’i destination wedding. Couples shape the practice of the destination wedding through their interaction with other couples, the wedding industry and their guests via the Internet while planning, sharing and memorializing their experiences, and through their negotiation with the industry in the form of selective consumption and testimonials, thus, ensuring that the practice continues to meet changing needs as social relations change.

The Hawai’i destination wedding posits, in the tableau of the couple on the beach, an isolation that promises to build intimacy and an identity as a couple outside the home community, a chance to perform romance through the experience, and an assumption of a meaningful experience over that of a wedding production driven by consumption. Hawai’i’s touristic offerings characterize the Islands as a unique blend of the “exotic” and an ‘ohana Americans can call home.
Fig. 1. Special travel issue: Cover. *Martha Stewart Weddings: Destination Weddings & Dream Honeymoons* 2010. Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Inc. Print.
Chapter 1

The White Wedding: Ideology, Iconography and Industry

The traditional “white” wedding in the American imagination today has its iconographic roots in the conservative and patriarchal conventions of the post-war 1950s. In 1948, Millicent Fenwick's influential guide, Vogue’s Book of Etiquette, detailed for its readers the “indispensable” essentials for every wedding: “1. A religious ceremony; 2. A father, brother, uncle, cousin, or other male relative, to give the bride away; 3. A best man for the groom; 4. At least one attendant for the bride; 5. A ring for the bride. And, if possible, 7. A reception, no matter how small, which need only entail a wedding cake and a drink in which to toast the bride” (166). The requirement of a male figure to “give the bride away” signified the social expectation of female dependency on male “protectors”; the ring for the bride, but not necessarily for the groom, further symbolized his ownership of her. And, though not specifically included in Vogue’s list of essential elements, the white wedding gown, the eponym of the white wedding, was a token of the bride’s virginal “purity,” to the extent that any suggestion of deviation from the social script against premarital sex, including any previous marriage, was enough to deprive the bride of the social right to wear such a gown.

The iconography as well as the ideology of the 1950s concept of the white wedding is encapsulated in Walt Disney’s 1950 Cinderella, the rags-to-riches story of a young girl rescued from poverty and low social standing by her Prince Charming,
culminating in a lavishly royal wedding featuring a white gown and the assurance of eternal bliss. As summarized by Chrys Ingraham, the story goes, “Once upon a time, in a land far away, a handsome prince met a beautiful maiden, swept her off her feet, married her in a perfect white wedding ceremony, and carried her away to a land of fairy tales and dreams where they . . . lived happily ever after. This is the dominant romantic fairy-tale story line” (160). The promise of the fairy-tale story is that the performance of an elaborate and romantic wedding spectacle will guarantee a happy-ever-after life and marriage. In accepting the ideology of the white wedding, women were expected to comply with societal expectations of integration into a social order of role-based gender relations. The white wedding functioned as a cultural and ideological tool designed to integrate brides and grooms, but especially brides, into the prescribed social conventions lived out in marriage.

In ensuing decades it became increasingly clear that the performance of a white wedding, and indeed, conformity to the social ideals it espoused, did not by any means guarantee happy-ever-after marriages. The promise is, indeed, a fairy tale. The performance of a white wedding does not guarantee happiness, and the breakdown of the assumptions posited by the fairy tale reveals the tension between the discourse of romance as an ideal for loving relationships and the discourse of marriage as an institution. The social context for marriages has changed dramatically through the decades since the 1950s due to a number of factors, including the sexual revolution, changes in gender relations, and women entering the workforce in ever-increasing numbers. Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s characterized the 1950s traditional marriage
as harmful to women and symbolic of everything wrong with role-based relationships. Indeed, critics still decry elements of the white wedding ritual. Contemporary scholarship on the wedding from the late 1990s can be seen largely as a critique of bridal traditions and romance. In her 1999 book *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*, Ingraham concludes, “What the white wedding keeps in place is nothing short of a racist, classist, and heterosexist social order” and asks, “Is that what you planned for your wedding day?” (23). Likewise, Jaclyn Geller’s *Here Comes the Bride: Women, Weddings, and the Marriage Mystique* heavily critiques what she calls the relationship industry and the American fascination with weddings and even marriage as opposed to singlehood. Instead, she calls for a radical dismissal of the institution of marriage altogether, arguing, “We must stop repeating the absurd mantra, ‘It’s not OK to be single,’ and adopt the more aggressive stance that ‘It’s not OK to be married’” (72).

Despite tensions between mid-twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century values, however, the white wedding ritual itself endures: as Katherine Jellison points out in her study on the persistence of the white wedding, *It’s Our Day: America’s Love Affair with the White Wedding 1945–2005*, “[r]umors of the white wedding’s imminent demise . . . were greatly exaggerated” (4). In fact, the popularity, and expense, of the American white wedding have remained undiminished into the twenty-first century. Arguing that the white wedding industry has adapted to the demands of a changing consumer demographic, Jellison claims that “Americans guaranteed the survival of the white wedding into the 21st century by amending the ideology that supported it and reinterpreting the functions the rite served” (5).
The same dynamic of amendment has existed for centuries as participants, particularly women, have redefined marriage through their participation in it and their consumption of media representations that challenged prevailing social values. Two very influential social texts, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, were the fairy tale genre and the modern, media-disseminated royal wedding. While Cinderella has come to epitomize conservative patriarchy, to the aristocratic women who first adapted oral folk tales into a literary genre, the Cinderella tale proposed the possibility of love before marriage, and to women whose marriages were arranged to benefit their families economically, the idea of marrying for love was radical. Today, we assume that love and romance are self-evident reasons for entering marriage, but the history of marriage can be seen as a struggle to bring together these two seemingly mutually exclusive discourses. Any union of the discourses of romance and marriage was ideological, as exemplified by the 1840 wedding of Queen Victoria, whose marriage for love was consumed by popular audiences around the globe. The appeal of British royalty held the same fantasy appeal for Americans as the Cinderella fairy tale—romance: glamour, economic security and a happy ending. And, as the iconography of Victoria’s wedding spread, both middle- and upper-class Americans became enamored with the white wedding. Bolstered by other widely publicized royal weddings, the wedding industry began to promote the idea that every woman deserves to perform as “queen for a day” and, in within the bounds of proper societal expectations for etiquette, should use whatever means at her disposal to do so.
In the present day, tension between the discourses of romance and marriage can still be felt in the contrast between the romance and anticipation of the wedding and the challenge of creating a lifelong relationship. The focus of the wedding has shifted from the integration of the bride into the established social order to individual satisfaction, and older, more financially independent brides and grooms are aware that the romance of a wedding day isn’t automatically followed by a happily-ever-after marriage. Romance, which can be defined as a powerful desire between two people, continues to be an important focus of the wedding ceremony, but increasingly it is intimacy, the actions undertaken in relationship for the purpose of sustaining emotional connection, that is considered necessary in marriage. Couples’ reshaping of traditions often incorporates elements designed to promote intimacy and an identity as a couple that will endure beyond the wedding day. Brides and grooms shape the practice of the wedding even as social conditions change over time, negotiating changing demographics and power relations, largely through their participation in popular media and their reciprocal relationship to media.

Media representations in popular culture are appealing in that they provide alternative models with which to identify. Because popular representations of relationships in media are generally fictional, they may reflect but also challenge the norms of the time and present new ways of understanding relationships. An analysis of the media that has long existed alongside marriage demonstrates the ways in which it has been used both to market the ideology of marriage and the ways in which couples,
particularly women, have used media to create counter-discourses or design alternatives to role-based marriage or to shift its underlying ideology altogether.

From the Middle Ages to the present, the discourse of romance, encompassing the passion, uncertainty and idealization of the love object expressed in courtship, and the discourse of marriage, as an institution for the economic benefit of the family and community, have been in conflict—especially as played out in the context of married life. Romantic love before marriage does not automatically translate into romance or personal contentment in marriage. An equally important element in the historical trajectories of both romantic love and marriage is the rise of individualization and the growing importance of personal choice and freedom. The move toward individualism in an increasingly capitalist society gave rise to the idea that who one loved and who one married was a matter of personal choice; that social identity was individual, not based on family relationships; and that the marriage relationship should bring some level of personal satisfaction as a result of an intimate connection with another individual.

**Romance, Marriage, and Media before the Eighteenth Century**

Most scholars of European marriage practices\(^6\) agree that before the eighteenth century, marriage was primarily an economic arrangement organized to suit both the families involved and to further benefit the greater community, and that romantic love had little connection to the business of marriage. David Shumway points to pre-eighteenth-century marriages as patriarchal and practical agreements. Marriage was an institution driven by the desire of families to make alliances and produce heirs who
would continue the family legacies (Coontz 6). In many cases, marriages were largely arranged by parents, while the actual brides and grooms had little sway (Shumway 12). Men were generally given control over any property held by the bride or inherited from her family after marriage, though exceptions to this rule existed. Thus, the institution was patriarchal in nature, heavily role-based, and women were decidedly subordinate to men, with few legal rights and most often a narrow purpose—to keep the home and produce children. The notion of personal satisfaction, or the fulfillment of individual desires, was not a priority, particularly for women. And, while the hope of couples may have been to come to a companionate existence in private, each was bound to a strictly prescribed gender role with little or no formal room for the personal satisfaction of either party. In *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, Niklas Luhman describes early marriage: “What was considered important is not living out one’s own passions, but rather a voluntarily (and not compulsorily or slavishly) developed solidarity within a given order” (130). Marriage in this context was a social arrangement in which the woman’s wishes were “ultimately irrelevant” (Shumway 13). The discourse of marriage as a social institution and the discourse of romance as boldly felt passion were contradictory, a contradiction that was perhaps the natural outcome in a system of social conventions that claimed women as property.

By the twelfth century, however, romance and its accompanying passion began to be seen in newly emerging discourses, such as the notion of courtly love, which involved an extravagantly stylized expression of love for an idealized other. Defined as formalized passionate romantic feeling, courtly love was expressed through poetry, gifts of flowers
and other tokens of affection, and feats of valor. The central tenet of courtly love was that it was deliberately unconsummated; indeed, this bar to consummation was considered a precondition of romance: without the possibility of physical consummation, the lover was forever idealized, never allowed to fall from grace as a result of more intimate association. Thus, the discourse of courtly love arose in opposition to that of conventional aristocratic marriage. David Shumway, in his discussion of love and its social evolution, identifies courtly love as “a counterdiscourse representing at least a theoretical alternative to the repressive character of officially sanctioned marriages among the aristocracy” (13, emphasis added). For aristocrats caught in marriages strategically arranged for political and economic gain, courtly love became an alternative outlet by which to achieve some measure of personal satisfaction through an expression of romance.

Consumed by the eager elite, literary depictions of love in poetry and song, the media of the time, demonstrated the changing discourse of love. The treatise by Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, contained his famed “rules” of courtly love which emphasized that such love is private, unattainable and to be undertaken even if one or the other of the lovers is married to another; says Capellanus, “Marriage is no real excuse for not loving” (184). So defined, the paradigm for poems of courtly love was one of chivalry, whereby a male lover extols the virtues of a specific lady. Formalized works of courtly love such as the poems of French troubadours, which migrated to England and encouraged the genre of formal courtly prose with its themes of idealized passion, brought forth an important alteration to previously held beliefs such as that women, “who
had been assumed to be corrupt and corrupting, came to be idealized, and love was idealized in the process” (Shumway 13)—as long as the rules of fidelity and chastity were adhered to. This is not to say that women were no longer subsumed as property into a patriarchal structure, nor that a continuing discourse of the corrupting and even dangerous nature of women did not exist in parallel with the idealizing tradition, but that love, specifically the love of women, became a new and attractive and at least literarily transformative possibility, at any rate for the nobility. It remained, however, for the most part unattached to the notion of marriage.

Social historians discuss a change in social relationships towards the increasing possibility of companionship, if not romantic love, in the form of companionate marriage. By the seventeenth century marriage functioned as a relationship with an emphasis somewhere between property relations and passionate love. Keith Wrightson makes this argument in his work English Society 1580–1680: “The picture which emerges indicates the private existence of a strong complementary and companionate ethos, side by side with, and often overshadowing, theoretical adherence to the doctrine of male authority and public female subordination” (92). Men and women became increasingly more likely to attempt a companionable relationship with their spouse, even if the marriage was an arranged one. Though companionate marriage was a “new form of marriage” (Shumway 17), it did not necessarily mean a love match or equal standing between partners; however, it did signify a desire on the part of couples to achieve a marriage based on “temperamental compatibility with the aim of lasting companionship” (Shumway 17). A companionate marriage in the seventeenth century was not a marriage based on romance,
but affection between partners was the hope, and perhaps even the norm, and it provided slightly more equity between partners—at least in private. At home, husbands and wives likely worked for a companionate existence, regardless of strict guidelines governing the public treatment of women. Though strictly defined roles for men and women remained strong, the idea that couples might choose their own partners and strive for lasting companionship was a novel one that added affection, if not passionate love, to the patriarchal system. By the latter years of the seventeenth century, then, the notion that brides and grooms would choose for themselves whom to marry became more common, but this did not yet mean that men and women sought a partner for love and intimacy over the practical considerations of financial security, temperament and family connections.

In the late seventeenth century a new form of literary media arose that presented a challenge to the discourse of marriage as a strictly role-based institution demanding strict adherence to social norms, particularly confining for women: the literary fairy tale. Fairy tales were often reformulated by aristocratic women and offered a sense of empowerment in the telling as well as the opportunity to shift the content of the tales in opposition to the expected discourse surrounding the prescribed rules of behavior. The tales, which often were based on oral folk stories, were fantasies that often included magic, escape, fairies, heroes, heroines, and morals for proper behavior. In her master’s thesis Cinderella Tales and Their Significance, Kristen Friedman notes that “the origin of fairy tales and folk tales is a much debated and discussed topic, with differences for each explained in many scholarly works” (2). However, she emphasizes the importance of the literary forms
which blossomed in the French court circles of Mme Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy in the 1690s as central to the development and dissemination of tales, bolstered by the popularity of the tales by Charles Perrault, first published in the 1670s. Unlike the vast majority of other literary genres, the fairy tale was in large part created and deployed by women. Jack Zipes, in his *Fairy Tale as Myth: Myth as Fairy Tale*, emphasizes that in terms of literary origins, “It was not Perrault but groups of writers, particularly aristocratic women, who gathered in salons during the seventeenth century and created the conditions for the rise of the fairy tale” (18). As Zipes describes the context:

> It was within the aristocratic salons that women were able to demonstrate their intelligence and education through different types of conversational games. In fact, the linguistic games often served as models for literary genres such as the occasional lyric or the serial novel. Both women and men participated in these games and were constantly challenged to invent new ones or to refine the games. Such challenges led the women, in particular, to improve the quality of their dialogues, remarks, and ideas about morals, manners, and education and at times to oppose male standards that had been set to govern their lives. (20–21)

The fairy tale arose as a means by which to create personal satisfaction and empowerment outside the strictly prescribed roles for women of the time, and, at the same time, engender a medium for some forms of societal critique, through the manipulation of the tale. Thus, the elite women telling the tales could restructure the stories to ensure that the primarily female protagonists gained control over their own
destinies through the strength of their own wit. Friedman argues that the emphasis on the mental strength of women and their ability to control their destinies was a reaction to the belief, accepted at least by men, in the inferiority of women with regard to intellect.

Women had traditionally been seen and in many cases continued to be seen as giving way to their passions and incapable of intellectual pursuits. Patricia Hannon, in her work *Fabulous Identities: Women’s Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France*, describes this thinking: “Women’s inferior position in the marriage hierarchy results from their identification with the body as opposed to the mind, which, since Plato and Aristotle, had been equated with men” (11). She also notes that in the thinking of the day, this condition for women was considered “resistant to any genuine transformation” (12), at least in the minds of men. In fairy tales constructed by women, however, transformation of this thinking was readily available. Because the fairy tales were fictional and came from an oral tradition, they were easy to manipulate according to the motive of the teller. The conteuses, as the female tellers of these tales were termed, could reward protagonists as they wished and punish villains according to their judgment, with little concession to the realities of the mundane world. The central attraction of the tales as counter to current discourse was their inclusion of romantic love between a man and woman leading to marriage, rather than the acceptance of an arranged match. For the aristocratic women who first turned oral folk tales into a literary genre, the Cinderella tale proposed a radical idea: the possibility of romance and love *before* marriage. Thus, the formulation of fairy tales by women provided a discourse that challenged the status quo and imagined new ways of defining relationships.
Women often wrote down their tales and used them as social critiques to discuss the roles they were expected, by men, to occupy. In doing so, they became active participants in the dissemination of tales that, once spread to the middle and lower classes through cheap editions, became an indelible staple of entertainment, socialization and acculturation. This is not to say that these women were able to change the gendered hierarchy that existed in their times, but that they used the power they had within the confines of their society to drive a discourse that was women-centric and counter to the mainstream received wisdom. Thus, the formulation of fairy tales by women provided a discourse that challenged the status quo, imagined new ways of defining relationships and introduced the possibility of love before marriage. The fairy tales told in the salon era provided the context for what would later be transformed into the most influential fairy tale in terms of courtship and wedding ideals, “Cinderella,” Disney’s version of which would have a lasting effect on the perception and even nature of romance, love, weddings and marriage.

**Romance, Marriage and Media in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century**

By the eighteenth century, as the political, religious and economic upheaval of the Enlightenment took hold, marriage came increasingly to be defined, as Stephanie Coontz phrases it in *Marriage, a History*, as “a private agreement with public consequences, rather than as a public institution whose roles and duties were rigidly determined by the family’s place in the social hierarchy” (147). Men and women were still sharply segregated by gender roles, and choosing a mate was still likely to be based primarily on
a consideration of character, wealth, social station, temperament and values. However, a
growing emphasis was placed on the special relationship that could exist between
husband and wife, which led to the idea that love should be a more prominent
consideration in the choice of partner. The emphasis on the private relationship between
husband and wife meant that “property and alliance became less important motives for
marriage” and “desire and choice came to predominate. Rather than an outlaw passion
lurking on the outskirts of marriage, romance became the gatekeeper of marriage”
(Spurlock 288). Rigid roles existed within that private agreement, and the institution of
the love-based marriage was not created overnight, but changes that defined marriage as a
private agreement led to an amendment in ideology that meant couples could generally
celebrate the freedom to choose a love match with the assumption of greater affection in
marriage.

The change of marriage from public institution to private agreement was reflected
in the development of the literary form of the novel in the latter half of the eighteenth
century, a genre that was directed primarily toward the newly emergent middle-classes,
and women in particularly, as they explored new social roles and possibilities. Shumway
notes that narratives of romantic love before marriage challenged the idea that practical
considerations should be paramount in the choice of mate and helped to spread the
progressive notion of falling in love *before* marriage, of being in love and marrying
expressly for that reason (21). Though these novels were not about marriage per se,
ending like fairy tales with the wedding and not venturing into wedded life, they re-
conceptualized romantic love and, with their new focus on marrying for love, turned the
idea of developing love after marriage, if at all, on its head. Novels such as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, published in 1740, focused on women finding love through some combination of intelligence, virtue and creative strategy deliberately employed in order to change their particular circumstances. The widely read tale detailed the journey of Pamela Andrews, a beautiful 15-year-old maidservant who thwarted her master’s attempts to seduce her and thus, by increasing her desirability, eventually became his wife. Her virtue, or premarital chastity, was thus rewarded by marriage to a wealthy man of higher social standing. Originally written as a conduct book, the novel was hugely popular and provoked controversy over its suggestion that a maid could use her beauty to entice her betters into marriage to achieve upward social mobility.

Popular media with themes of women finding romance, such as the romantic novels of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë in the late 1700s to the mid-1800s, helped create new hope for happiness in the choice of a marriage partner; at the same time they generally followed the formula of classic fairy tales and romantic comedies, by ending with a marriage that promises future happiness, stopping short of depicting married life. Austen’s novels reveal the fine negotiations needed to correctly match marriage partners, with the specter of romantic love often intruding in the process. As with *Pamela*, Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* charts the progress of a household worker who finds love with a member of the aristocracy. Unlike Pamela or Cinderella, the classic romantic heroine, Jane does not rely on her beauty, which initially is described as almost non-existent, but insists on a fundamental equality with Rochester. Confronting him directly though he is
her employer, she makes it clear she expects to be treated equally despite the difference in their material circumstances. Says Jane, “I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal,—as we are! (359).” Jane’s willingness to speak her mind despite her lack of money or position drives the plot in a radical direction that bypasses the rescue narrative. As much as they are concerned with romantic love, these narratives also deal realistically with the conflicts that remained between love and the real need for women to secure marital, and thus, financial, security in order to survive in society.

The valorization of romantic courtship and love before marriage in nineteenth-century Victorian culture was encapsulated by the royal wedding of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert in 1840, a highly publicized media spectacle that came to epitomize the white wedding for future generations. The romance of the occasion was highlighted by the fairy-tale nature of the twenty-year old queen’s story—Victoria was said to have married for love. The romance of the British royal wedding was irresistible to the general public in Britain and even more so in America. The infatuation with the royal romance sparked the invention of the white wedding and the beginning of the conspicuous consumption surrounding it. Media worldwide reported on the lavish royal ceremony and its accompanying protocols, such as engraved invitations, male and female attendants, an elaborate wedding procession—and the sumptuous white dress.
It is the view of scholars who explore the history of the wedding in relation to consumer culture that among the trappings of the white wedding the wedding dress is paramount. Societies admiration of the white dress, which Victoria chose even over royal purple attire, inaugurated the romantic tradition of wearing white for the wedding. Dresses women had formerly worn for marriage were usually “occasion” dresses, often black so as to suit funerals, weddings, other religious functions and Christmas parties.
alike. Victoria’s choice of heavy silk satin and English Honiton lace from Devonshire was meant to showcase British workmanship; the elaborate execution of the dress, requiring over 200 craftspeople and nine months of labor, was widely publicized. The color white, traditionally worn by unmarried girls who were presented at court, signified the virginity of the queen as well as the sexual conservatism of the Victorian era. It also came to suggest that the wearer could afford a dress meant to be worn only once—at the most significant occasion in a young woman’s life. As the elite subscribed to the iconography and ideology of Victoria's wedding, the upper class led the way popularizing the white bridal dress.

Fashionable weddings of the day were already beginning to resemble what would become the white wedding in that the bride received a ring, invitations were sent out, and an elaborate dinner was celebrated. However, like the much smaller middle class celebrations of the time, these celebrations were prepared for and celebrated at home and organized by family and domestic servants, without the solicitation of wedding professionals. In her work on weddings and consumption, Carol McD. Wallace notes that consumer desire for the white wedding dress opened the door for dressmakers and designers as commercial vendors, providing outside professional services for the wedding (27). Media advertising for dresses initially encouraged brides to choose dresses that could be retooled for future wear, but vendors quickly recognized the value of endorsing the wedding dress as a single-use product. The notion that the wedding dress could be considered a symbol of the importance of the wedding ritual and should be valued as resonant of the wedding tradition spread widely throughout the latter years of the
nineteenth century and began to take over even among the middle class. In her book *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition*, Vicki Howard notes, “The once-worn gown was on its way to achieving iconic status in 1900 when trade writers called it ‘the most important dress she will ever have occasion to wear’” (159). The idea of the “most important dress” led to the promotion by media that the wedding day would be one of the most significant days in a woman’s life and that it would be the portal to her future happiness as a wife.

**Romance, Marriage and Media, from the Twentieth Century to the Present**

By the twentieth century the notion of romance coupled with marriage had firmly taken hold, and the idea that couples would marry for any other reason had begun to seem a moral contradiction. The contested discourses of romance and marriage drew closer as couples began to consider marriage as an endeavor which was meant to tender personal satisfaction as well as financial security. At the same time, it was throughout this century that the wedding industry came into being and weddings were increasingly surrounded by consumer rites. Howard points to the fact that “just as consumer capitalism touched almost every aspect of American culture by the 1920s, the rite of marriage also began to enter mass consumer society” (2). A wide-ranging variety of businesses became cultural producers, introducing new goods such as the white wedding dress, wedding invitations, the trousseau and services such as the gift registry and bridal salon. The industry was geared primarily toward women as consumers—toward the bride who would wear the white dress—and this focus on women also marked an opportunity for women in
business like never before. Many female entrepreneurs created bridal salons, designed wedding accoutrements and helped to define what the industry would become. Women as wedding entrepreneurs had the opportunity few women had at the time to work outside the home in a lucrative profession.

The inclusion of businesswomen in rise of the industry was positive in terms of proto-feminist ideals, but the industry’s drive to create “romantic tradition for sale” still upheld role-based gender norms. While the wedding industry created a sense of empowerment through “purchasing power” for women, the marketing of a women-centric industry as beneficial to women elided the true power relations still present in marriage and masked the patriarchal hierarchy of gender relations. Women still had little freedom under the social conventions of the period, and commercial traditions invented by the wedding industry—particularly the ring, symbolizing male protection, and the gift registry, designed to supply a woman with the household tools she would need as a homemaker—became ideological tools that cemented gender relations, keeping women’s “place” in the home while bolstering sales. The focus of wedding advertising was on romantic courtship and the romantic tradition for purchase as the “proper” way to transfer a woman from one male protector to another mirrored the happily-ever-after fairy tale in that its culmination was the wedding. Neither the fairy tale nor the discourse surrounding the white wedding extended to marriage. Values espoused by the wedding industry increasingly posited the ideological view that the romance and love central to the “once-in-a-lifetime” wedding day would “naturally” extend the romance and love into marriage and a lifetime of happiness.
The ideological underpinnings of what would become the white wedding did not speak to the actualities of negotiating relationship in marriage nor the reality that a lavish wedding day is not enough to foster happiness or a meaningful relationship if a loving and companionate relationship is not present. The emphasis on the importance of companionship was left to, among other things, the powerful new medium of film. In the 1930s and ’40s a new genre of films that Stanley Cavell calls in his study of comedy in this era, Pursuits of Happiness, “remarriage comedy” began to articulate an emphasis on building relationships, rather than ending with the wedding. Cavell argues that the farcical nature of remarriage comedies reinforces marriage by reshaping the institution as adventure, as is patently the case in the popular 1934 film It Happened One Night. Says Cavell:

> It is the premise of farce that marriage kills romance. It is the project of the genre of remarriage to refuse to draw a conclusion from this premise but rather to turn the tables on farce, to turn marriage itself into romance, into adventure, [. . .] to preserve within it something of the illicit, to find as it were a moral equivalent of the immoral. (186)

Remarriage comedies left the heavily formulaic Cinderella narrative behind and discussed the link between romance and marriage with a twist: the negotiation of the private relationship was paramount.

One of the most famous of the “remarriage” comedies, Frank Capra’s It Happened One Night starring Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert, became the first film to win all five major Oscars at the 1934 Academy Awards ceremony: best picture, director,
actor, actress and screenplay. The comedy, though it deals with marriage and remarriage in a slightly different way from Cavell’s prototype, is a classic farce of the Depression era in that the protagonists are thrown together and overcome conflict and misadventure, falling in love along the way, and end happily ever after. Claudette Colbert’s character, heiress Ellie Andrews, is already married when the picture opens, though not to the leading man. She is married to King Westley, a man her father deems inappropriate. Her father tries to separate the two, but Ellie runs away. She meets Clark Gable’s character, reporter Peter Warne, who blackmails her for an exclusive story of her marriage and threatens to tell her father where she is if she refuses. Ellie chooses to give him the story, and the two travel together, representing themselves as married and enduring one mishap after another. By the time Ellie and Peter are separated by a final misadventure, they realize they are in love. Though a series of mixed messages almost derails their love, everything comes together, her father pays off King Westley and Ellie and Peter marry.

The adventure in *It Happened One Night* is in Ellie’s slightly scandalous escape from her spectacular society wedding (arranged to formalize her previous marriage to King) into the arms of Peter, but also in the twist of placing her quasi-married relationship with Peter above the elaborate wedding ceremony pre-arranged for her. Throughout her time with Peter, Ellie realizes that a marriage without a relationship will not be enough to create a happy ending, so instead of doing the “proper” thing and allowing her father to send her off appropriately, she does that which brings happiness, taking a trip with Peter in furtherance of the relationship in a plot movement that anticipates the destination wedding. The result of the prevalence of remarriage comedies
and their effect on the American ideals of romance was to promote marriage by encapsulating the couple’s relationship as one in which the adventures, or misadventures, of romance will never fail to be present. Because the daily life of marriage is rarely portrayed, the importance of the institution in remarriage comedies is muted, while the couple’s relationship in the (re)making keeps all its romantic glory, all the mutual loathing and all of the adventure. The actualities of forging a relationship between two people have their happy ending in a union, but, as in *It Happened One Night*, when the hero and heroine run from a public white wedding to a private getaway at a camping cabin, the wedding is an element rather than the entire focus. The excitement of romance outside marriage as portrayed in farce perpetuates the notion that love is to be inevitably linked with marriage, but it is the formulation of a companionate relationship that is ultimately the necessity, even if the road to happiness is rocky.

At the same time that the genre of the remarriage comedy was arising in the ’30s and ’40s, a parallel but essentially opposite cinematic genre, that of the doomed or unconsummated romance, had reached new heights of popularity. Dramatic films ending in the doomed romance emphasize the importance of romantic love, whatever the cost. Shumway calls these films the “most romantic” (130) kind of film because they invest heavily in the portrayal of the romantic relationship. Films of this genre prize romance to the exclusion of the elaborate wedding. Unlike the remarriage comedies of the Depression era, they portray a relationship which can only exist outside marriage—that of undying love. *Casablanca* (1942) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) are both works that “leave us with a powerful sense of missed opportunity, a powerful sense of a love lost
that would have flourished” (130). Viewers are left with the potent possibility that Rick and Ilsa may meet again in *Casablanca* and rekindle their passion. Until then, in the “if” and “someday,” each must hold the exquisite memory of the star-crossed love and misery they share. Likewise, in *Gone with the Wind* Scarlett is left to ponder the possibility that somehow she will again get Rhett back. Shumway calls what happens to the protagonists of these films “the most powerful of romantic situations, since, unlike in death, both subjects remain conscious of their love and of their suffering” (130). Each holds their longing and love for the other indefinitely as the films affirm the timeless romance.

The valorization of romance and portrayal of love in the remarriage comedies and doomed romance films of the ’30s and ’40s challenged the discourse purporting that a wedding day would bring lifelong happiness in marriage by focusing on the romantic relationship as the essential element for a happy ending. However, even as these films revealed the tension between the discourses of romance and marriage, their occasional portrayals of wedding ceremonies nevertheless boosted the burgeoning wedding industry and helped solidify wedding products as essential to the celebration, formalizing commercial wedding tradition. In *It Happened One Night*, Ellie declines pride of place in the spectacular wedding designed for her, but audiences still get to see her on the arm of her father in a long, white body-hugging satin wedding gown with a sweetheart neckline nearly off the shoulder, walking down the aisle trailing a long satin train and with arms laden with flowers to an equally lavish altar replete with tall candles and a large cross. The wedding tableau reveals a host of attendants and an entire robed choir providing music for the occasion, rounding out the sumptuous display.
Displays of luxurious weddings in film reinforced the idea that the white wedding was the “right way” to marry. Katherine Jellison argues that the formation of commercial wedding tradition in the beginning of the twentieth century is one of the first markers of what made the white wedding the American way to marry. Its deployment became a way for families to show their status as Americans; and many families desired for their daughters, the daughters of immigrants, rural farmers, those caught in the Depression, and others; to be seen as authentic citizens. To give commercial wedding traditions a sense of cultural history and permanence, advertisers rearticulated the definition of tradition. In the wedding market, tradition no longer meant that which was passed down
from generation to generation, but that which previous generations, with generally more modest weddings, now desired for their children. In ceremonies amongst the middle class, the newly minted wedding template of the large formal church wedding quickly replaced the simpler family wedding at home where brides and grooms simply wore their best and shared cake, and perhaps a meal, with close friends. Businesses of the wedding industry capitalized on notions of tradition and either invented “traditions” or elaborated on older customs in an attempt to trade on nostalgia. As Howard notes, brides adopting the traditions of the newly created wedding industry effectively “set higher standards of consumption and naturalized the lavish formal white wedding” (2). The publication and wide distribution of the official wedding photographs of society’s elite, dressed in white, displaying the gifts they received and dancing at lavish receptions, ushered in the white wedding for the middle class. Less wealthy women made white dresses for themselves in spite of the difficulty in managing the easily stained fabric, enlisted family and friends to prepare more elaborate receptions, and made much effort to marry “properly.”

Proliferating etiquette books outlined not only proper dress but also behavior so that brides could be certain to wed with class, not simply style. *Vogue’s Book of Etiquette* and other women’s media of the day worked to solidify consumerism itself as a tradition in American wedding culture. Magazines such as *American Peterson’s Magazine* and *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* also detailed fashion and wedding etiquette and had a powerful effect in shaping what was, and was not, necessary for an authentic wedding. With the media-driven allure of elitism, soon even middle class weddings had become more formal and increasingly costly. Even if less wealthy brides could afford only a
selection of the trappings of the white wedding, they almost certainly knew about and followed American consumer fantasy. Thus, the white wedding became a class marker and a marker of upward mobility.

Specialty bridal magazines also appeared and acted as both guides to etiquette and purveyors of wedding fantasy. *Brides* magazine appeared in 1934, *Modern Bride* in 1949, by which time an American wedding contained clearly defined elements such as the white dress, the male figurehead to give the bride away, a bridal ring, attendants and a reception. Department stores, which had spearheaded the development of the bridal salon in the early 1900s, were quick to create a new consumer experience whereby a woman could not only shop for her bridal gown, her trousseau and her attendants’ dresses but also register for bridal gifts and purchase every item necessary to set up house as a wife. Commercial romantic tradition promoted marriage as that which naturalized the structure of gender relations with its depictions of weddings and married life in America. And Jellison notes that this was a trend even throughout the lean years at the beginning of the twentieth century and into World War II, during which war-era advertising promoted the formal white wedding and its underlying idealization of happy husbands in the arms of happy housewives as seemingly necessary to create the stable home front and the freedom for which the men were fighting (11). The effect of this message was to democratize marriage and also to cement the gender-based roles of breadwinner husband and homemaker housewife. The ideology of marriage was highly patriarchal and intended to integrate both bride and groom into expected societal conventions. A young woman
was expected to move from her father’s house to her husband’s and exchange the role of
daughter for that of wife, under the protection and authority of a provider husband.

In the years after the war and into the 1950s, hosting a lavish white wedding
ceremony demonstrated arrival into the American dream of material success, as
“[w]edding traditions began to embody gendered ideas of consumer democracy and
family ‘togetherness’” (Howard 34), and a new “cult of marriage” entered into the
national discourse. The high priestess of the cult of marriage could be said to be
Cinderella, as portrayed in Disney’s 1950 version of the classic fairy tale. Jellison defines
the message behind the fairy tale thus: “As in the original Cinderella story, marriage in
the appropriate setting—and to the appropriate man—announced to the world that a
young woman and her family were assuming their rightful place in the American class
structure” (17). Disney’s version of the classic Perrault tale solidified the discourse of
romance into one formula.

In Disney’s rendition of the fairy tale Cinderella is an orphaned noblewoman,
forced to live like a servant/slave on her own estate by her wicked stepmother. When she
obtains, through the magic of a fairy godmother, the proper regalia to meet her station
and through this achieves a royal marriage, she is fit to be restored to her rightful class.
The story as told by Disney holds the romantic elements of love at first sight and the
element of “happily ever after” coming true by means of a sparkling white ball gown and
a white wedding dress. Says Jellison, the ideology of the wedding industry powerfully
mirrored this Cinderella version of the story—“a daughter’s marriage surrounded by the
right accoutrements (provided by the wedding industry) and to the right man (a good
provider) declared to the world that a family with working-or lower-middle-class origins had moved up in the pecking order” (17).

Indeed, the dream could be bought. But this left little room for the woman to act, except within the prescribed roles of girl, bride and then wife. In her article “America’s Cinderella” Jane Yolen describes Cinderella as portrayed by Disney as “a ‘nice’ girl who awaits her rescue with patience and a song” (297) and argues that in the Disney version Americans have adopted, everything that happens to this heroine happens to her while she waits. She is neither able to take action independently nor drive her destiny. Indeed, she waits for her friends the mice to make her a dress for the ball and in her goodness shows restraint, demonstrating an inability to defend herself when her stepsisters destroy the dress. She then waits, sobbing, until a fairy godmother appears to manifest the ball gown and coach that will make her presence in front of the prince possible. Inherent in the narrative is the idea that the prince must have fallen in love with her beauty at first sight, and in the story it is his action of tracking her down—while she waits yet again—that allows the happy ending. This is the ending which permits Cinderella, now ensconced in her happiest dream, to forgive her stepmother and sisters.

Disney’s *Cinderella* both reflected and reinforced the role-based ideals of romance and marriage of the 1950s. The exclamation point on the fairy-tale romance that the Disney film portrays is the white wedding that takes place as the film ends and perfectly reinforces the white wedding as happily-ever-after in the American imaginary. Unlike the ending of the original fairy tale, Disney’s 1950 Cinderella, in her white bridal gown and on the arm of her prince, runs down the palace steps and into a waiting
carriage, which drives off into the blissful future as the two lean together to seal their happiness with a kiss.

Fig. 5. Disney’s Cinderella and her Prince Charming. 15 May 2012. Wedding Bee: A Very Important Date. 21 Feb. 2013. http://www.weddingbee.com/2012/05/15/choosing-wedding-date/#axzz2PqrNSmYb

The 1956 transformation of Oscar-winning actress Grace Kelly by Prince Rainier III into Her Serene Highness Princess Grace of Monaco duplicated the Cinderella wedding and reproduced this narrative, and its patriarchal ideology, for a worldwide audience. As Jellison describes it, “Women’s magazines of the era told and retold the story of how Grace Kelly abandoned Hollywood to become a royal princess, a full-time wife and—within a year of her marriage—a mother” (117). The wedding was a media event, and the image of a young, blond and beautiful Grace Kelly in a lace and pearl bell-skirted gown bowed in submission at the altar was iconic—Grace Kelly embodied the
ultimate princess fantasy of a “regular” girl rescued by a prince and given the chance to become a princess, and the media portrayed her life as inevitably “happily-ever-after.” Media depictions of Princess Grace in the years following the wedding featured a woman content to devote herself to country, children and charity. However, happily ever after may have been much more elusive in reality for Princess Grace, who is purportedly depicted in an upcoming film—Olivier Dahan’s *Grace of Monaco*, starring Nicole Kidman, as the lonely and abused victim of a philandering husband.

For most young women of the fifties, the romance of courtship ended with the white wedding, after which they were expected to remain in the home indefinitely, managing a household. Choices were limited, yet singlehood was eschewed and other family constructions remained suspect. To marry and submit to the now-naturalized construction of the breadwinning father and homemaker mother remained socially essential. Stephanie Coontz argues that the role-based construction was seen as inevitable for families in a modern, industrialized world: “The cultural consensus that everyone should marry and form a male breadwinner family was like a steamroller that crushed every alternative view. By the end of the 1950s even people who had grown up in completely different family systems had come to believe that universal marriage at a young age into a male breadwinner family was the traditional and permanent form of marriage” (229). Coontz describes a “normal” family of the time as that which “consisted of a man who specialized in the practical, individualistic activities needed for subsistence and a woman who took care of the emotional needs of her husband and children” (242). The glorification of the white wedding combined with the sexual double standard of the time meant that women married young, as social conventions prescribed that the good girl maintain her good/pure standing or be considered ineligible for marriage. Like Cinderella, women were expected to be passively good girls. For women of the ’50s under such prescribed expectations, the reality did not live up to the fairy tale, and romantic love remained as much opposed to marriage as ever. Love was deemed necessary in choosing a partner to marry, but once inside marriage strict role-based behavior was expected.
Changes began with the counterculture and feminist movements of the 1960s, when large-scale social, economic and political upheaval fundamentally upended the ideology of the role-based male breadwinner marriage. Feminists began to denounce the role-based marriage itself as patriarchal and harmful to women. Even women who had not personally read feminist critiques of patriarchy were likely aware of the content of publications such as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, and, influenced by new ideas, began to rethink gender roles and expectations. As a result, girls growing up in the ’70s were socialized differently: encouraged to attend college and to find meaningful careers. Happily-ever-after now meant that people could, as Coontz articulates, take “the new values about love and self-fulfillment to their ultimate conclusion: that people could construct meaningful lives outside marriage and that not everything in society had to be organized through and around married couples” (307). More women than ever before were entering the workplace, putting off marriage until completing college, divorcing if dissatisfied with marriage and overhauling sexual standards in light of the legitimization of reliable birth control. Most importantly for the reinvention of marriage, the ability of relatives, neighbors, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, employers and government to regulate behavior and punish nonconformity eroded as society became more closely linked to a system of institutions more concerned with class and financial assets than with conduct in interpersonal relationships. Both men and women were, therefore, to a large extent released from the need to satisfy a set of naturalized, societal expectations driven by family, friends and the wider community when structuring their lives; though some release from social expectations brought new pressures, particularly for women.
Individualization and Intimacy

In their work *Individualization*, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim term this change “institutionalized individualism,” arguing that “in modern life the individual is confronted on many levels with the following challenge: you may and you must lead your own independent life, outside the old bonds of family, tribe, religion, origin and class; and you must do this within the new guidelines and rules which the state, the job market, the bureaucracy etc. lay down” (11). With familial social expectations no longer so carefully prescribed, it was most evidently the role of women, now seemingly freed of previous social constraints regarding conduct, which began to change. Women’s lives became less concerned with maintaining the strict social role of wife and mother and more focused on gaining the education, jobs and economic freedom necessary to compete as individuals in a wider society. The stigmas against illegitimacy, divorce and single parenthood faded, and the patriarchal breadwinner structure of marriage was radically undercut.

As the expectations for romance in marriage evolved, the institution became ever more fragile because, as role-based marriage lost its foothold, its focus became one of personal satisfaction. On one hand, this shift could be seen in a positive light, in that couples were more likely to expect a successful marriage to be a mutual process of negotiation. On the other hand, however, the expectation of an intimacy that would provide happiness and personal satisfaction, when unfulfilled, stressed relationships. Individuals began to see marriage without romance as unable to provide personal satisfaction and, therefore, unsustainable. The solution to ensuring a sustainable
relationship was to emphasize the need for couples to actively “work” on building a
relationship. In his study describing the changes in relationships throughout the twentieth
century, The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern
Societies, Anthony Giddens posits that the goal of modern romantic relationships is for
two individuals to work together to come to a consensus about their behavior within it,
one to the other. Giddens defines the consensus between couples as a “pure relationship,”
a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what
can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another;
and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to
derive enough satisfactions to the individual to stay within it. (58)

According to Giddens’s definition of a pure relationship, each individual in the
relationship is expected to take on his or her part to negotiate the other’s need for
intimacy, autonomy and the romance that leads to personal happiness. The background
for doing such work in a relationship is trust; trust in the commitment of couples to each
other and to the relationship. Says Giddens, “personal ties in the pure relationship require
novel forms of trust—precisely that trust which is built through intimacy with the other.
Such trust presumes the opening out of one individual to the other, because the
knowledge that the other is committed, and harbours no basic antagonisms toward
oneself, is the only framework for trust” (Modernity 96). He also explains that “the
demand for intimacy is integral to the pure relationship, as a result of the mechanisms of
trust which it presumes (Modernity 6), emphasizing intimacy, not romance, as that which
sustains relationships.
Relationships described in terms of intimacy came to prominence the 1970s, when the modern therapeutic discourse of intimacy was developed in marriage psychology to help troubled couples communicate, in an attempt to realign the discourses of romance and marriage and create marital longevity. The discourse of intimacy defines the marriage relationship as one in which both partners can, says Spurlock, “communicate their feelings to one another, rely on one another as confidants, and self-consciously work to preserve their relationship” (288). It was the deployment of this discourse that naturalized what Shumway calls the “romantic marriage” in Western society (133). By this time intimacy had become “for many the most important paradigm for understanding love, courtship, marriage and other relationships, not so much by replacing romance as by coexisting with it, and to a great extent, incorporating it,” says Shumway (133). In this formulation, romance means ever-increasing intimacy. As the discourse of intimacy took hold in American culture, couples began to expect to feel more romantically involved with each other and, equally, more deeply intimate. Modern society began to equate intimacy, alongside a new stress on the individual, with marital longevity. The expectation, which still exists in the present day, became that when each member of the couple performed to the standards of intimacy, the relationship would create a true “happily-ever-after” fulfillment.

This does not mean, however, that romance and marriage no longer had an uneasy relationship. The two discourses do not flawlessly intertwine despite the assumption of intimacy. One example of the remaining challenges to romantic marriage is the assumption of gender equality in a relationship. Gender equality is inherent in the
discourse of intimacy, yet such equality is difficult if not impossible to come by in a society that remains to some extent sexist. Full gender equality is still unrealized, and expectations for a personal satisfaction in marriage that is equal to that of romantic courtship place stress on the institution of marriage. Thus, the realities of marriage as a living institution have historically been and to some extent continue to be in conflict with romance.

Calls for more equitable relationships compared with the old rules of patriarchal marriage during the 1970s seemed to threaten the status of the white wedding as symbolic of the role-based marriage. Couples began to eschew formal religious tradition and live together before or even in lieu of marriage. Marriage was re-scripted as a relationship between two individual people in love, a private commitment rather than a social contract, and intimacy became the new “fix” for what marriage professionals, in the face of increasing divorce rates, deemed the marriage crisis. New flexibility in marriage, however, itself led to vastly higher divorce rates in the ’70s and ’80s, as couples had greater choice about whether or not to stay in an unfulfilling marriage. The notion of marriage became ever more unstable as California became the second state after Nevada to adopt no-fault divorce in 1970 and other states followed suit. Divorce rates more than doubled between 1960 and 1980, which meant that "while less than 20% of couples who married in 1950 ended up in divorce, about 50% of couples who married in 1970 did" (Wilcox).

What is surprising is that all the social and political upheaval of counterculture movements and their aftermath failed to dent the “American bride, queen for a day”
ideology of the white wedding as cultural practice. The tropes of the wedding remained the same though the meanings behind them were reinterpreted and the white wedding remained American tradition. Media bowed to consumer desire, driven by demographic changes, and recast the purpose of the formal white wedding from a means to initiate a young couple into a socially expected role-based marriage to a ritual recast as the opportunity to realize fantasy. The white wedding still provided opportunities for female family members and friends to interact, to bond and to create what the industry termed “once-in-a-lifetime” memories. And not only this; the wedding still remained, as Jellison argues, as way to “project a sense of personal stability, material success, and involvement in the national culture” (5). Baby boomer parents wanted this element of the American dream for daughters, though no longer did either parents or brides and grooms feel that a white wedding meant that these daughters would or should aspire to become full-time housewives. By the 1970s and ’80s a white dress did not necessarily symbolize purity, mark a woman’s virginity or signal her entrance into a solely homemaking role, though for most it remained necessary to the realization of the ritual. A new emphasis on dual-earner households meant that more couples than ever before could afford the trappings of the white wedding, and the continuing emphasis on the practice as a hallmark of middle-class status continued to push conspicuous wedding consumption and emphasize that the white wedding was American tradition—the American way to wed.

By the 1980s the white wedding was cemented as a cultural feature of American society, continuously retooled to outlast all critiques. The wedding industry and its vehicles, including the ever-proliferating array of bridal magazines, cultivated a
Cinderella mentality that ensured that women would marry 1950s style, though the ceremony no longer carried the same ideological baggage. According to Otnes and Pleck’s *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding*, and studies by Vicki Howard and Chrys Ingraham, the institutionalization of romance, alongside increasing consumerism, led to the current practice of the lavish white wedding, which was solidified by the publicity surrounding Princess Diana’s wedding to Prince Charles in 1981.

The world-wide media spectacle that was Diana’s marriage crystallized the Cinderella white wedding, and wedding scholars agree that its royal extravagance determined the ideal look for the “perfect wedding” for decades to come. Diana was a Cinderella for the times. Her bell-shaped taffeta gown, replete with ruffle upon ruffle and heirloom lace; her carriage ride to the cathedral; and the couple’s fairy tale happily-ever-after kiss on the Buckingham palace balcony enchanted audiences, paving the way for the media to sell unprecedented indulgence to brides and groom as a consumer right. And this remained the case even as, behind the scenes, Diana was far from liberated from 1950s traditional values. Feminists critiqued Diana’s submission to the medical exam that certified her virginity and her seeming willingness to embrace the royally prescribed expectations of outdated wife- and motherhood that lingered in the background at the wedding ceremony. Yet these objections had little impact on media commentary surrounding the wedding and the absorption of the world in the luxurious romance of the event. The celebrations demonstrated the ever-present distance between the Cinderella fantasy of the wedding day and the ways in which a woman had traditionally been
enfolded into the realities of marriage. What mattered to media and to brides now was the bridal fantasy, and accordingly weddings of the 1980s became increasingly elaborate throughout the decade. Diana’s well-publicized unhappy marriage and tragic death in 1997 did much to shed light on the assumption of the charmed life of a princess but did little to dent the impact of her wedding day on the trend for lavish ceremonies.

By the 1990s expectation for extravagance in weddings had become the norm. And it was this naturalization that triggered controversy and, eventually, adaptation in the
industry. Brides who were willing to consume the white wedding iconography and the wedding ritual as an American tradition regardless of ethnicity or class insisted on a change in an industry standard based on a Grace Kelly size-6 look-alike. Katherine Jellison speaks to the democratization of the white wedding and notes that while industry purveyors worried that “off the rack” gowns and a multiplicity of sizes would mar the experience of exclusivity in the purchase of bridal gowns and dim the desire for wedding extravagance, the success of the David’s Bridal Warehouse franchise, which first opened in Hallendale, Florida, in 1990, soon made it clear that brides from all income brackets and all sizes expected and were expected to be able to purchase “their” white wedding gown (99). All brides, the industry exclaimed, could afford to marry in white. Today, David’s Bridal even carries its own line of dresses designed by Vera Wang, one of the most famous wedding dress designers, formerly exclusive to haute couture. The stores have been renamed David’s Bridal Superstores and carry, as did department stores of the 1940s and ’50s, not only gowns but also bridesmaid’s dresses, shoes, mother-of-the-bride dresses, flower girl regalia, jewelry and accessories. The democratization of the white wedding meant that the ritual as a commercial enterprise was here to stay.

The wedding as a commercial practice bolstered by the social expectations that drove the desires of the market was evident in films of the day. In 1991, Hollywood released a remake of Elizabeth Taylor and Spencer Tracy’s 1950 classic Father of the Bride, and the two films, though nearly identical in plot, are an illustration of the dramatically different societal expectations for women and the accompanying anxieties concerning the wedding as commercial enterprise in the 1950s and in the 1990s. Both
films are about an upper-middle-class white family, the Bankses, with a soon-to-be-married daughter. In the first minutes of the film, the daughter announces her engagement to the son of a wealthy family, about whom her family knows little. Each of the daughters mirrors the expectations of the times: Elizabeth Taylor’s character Kay is a twenty-year-old who, as the daughter of a successful businessman, apparently neither wants or needs a job and spends her time at leisure—the assumption being that she will marry soon and will then have her profession as a wife. Kimberly Williams’ character Annie is twenty-two and reflects the changing demographic for brides over time, the average age being twenty-three by the 1990s. She is completing a master’s degree in architecture and frequently makes statements declaring her intention to maintain, as her mother does, a fulfilling career separate from her husband’s and to have a marriage that leaves old-fashioned gender relations behind. Indeed, the gift of a blender from her fiancé, which she views as an implicit nod to her supposed future as a 1950s-style housewife, nearly upends the entire enterprise.

What does not vary between the two films is the desire of both these daughters to consume the white wedding in its entirety. In both eras the wedding is an enterprise that is shown to bring mothers and daughters together in a joint project, summon close friends in complicity and allow the bride to revel in creating her dream. The meaning of the wedding as a vehicle for female connection is undiminished in the remake. Also unchanged is the very present worry of both mothers that without this status symbol their daughters will be seen as lower class, both by their wealthier future in-laws and by their community at large. Tradition invented by the wedding industry dictates that the bride’s
family should pay for the wedding, and each mother feels that the proper white wedding will clearly demonstrate the family’s social standing and does not want to see her daughter lacking. Their daughters, likewise, see no problem in asking their families to foot the bill for such an occasion—their indifference a clear indicator of the achievement of upper-middle-class success. The focus on fathers in both versions of *Father of the Bride* exemplifies the wedding as that which breadwinner husbands and fathers must provide to show that such status has been achieved. Jellison reveals that “the social pressures for conforming to the commercialized wedding were enormous for members for the postwar upper middle class” (160). And, as costs mount and each father exclaims over expenses he sees as frivolous and unnecessary, each is prevailed upon to give his daughter what she deserves—not because she herself is necessarily deserving but because she is a beloved middle-class daughter, and this is how middle-class fathers provide for their daughters.

Comparing the treatment of the fathers’ distress in the films provides the biggest glimpse of the change in the commercial ideology surrounding the wedding in the forty-one years between the films. As Jellison frames it, “[T]he audience of 1950 was intended to sympathize with the father of the bride as a sensible Everyman; the audience of 1991 was intended to view the father as an eccentric, an object of ridicule because he does not want to spend several thousand dollars on his daughter’s wedding” (174–75). While Spencer Tracy’s character Stanley Banks balks at the spending, he also largely figures as the voice of reason in what he sees as an inexplicable whirlwind of conspicuous consumption. He relents and provides his daughter with a white wedding, but the
audience is made to feel much sympathy for his position and to identify with him enough to be relieved that, as the man in charge, he is there to keep spending in check. After all, the film implicitly argues, a wedding is no reason to put financial security at risk. By 1991, however, Steve Martin’s character George Banks is made to look completely irrational in his objections, to the extent of breaking down in the supermarket over the packaging of hot dog buns and ending up in jail. His wife frames the situation perfectly when she exclaims, “A wedding is a big deal. Everybody seems to understand this but you.” The film works on the assumption that George is an irrational buffoon because he is initially unwilling to pay more for his daughter’s wedding than he once paid for a house. George’s wife makes it perfectly clear to him: everybody understands the necessity of the ritual trappings. As a middle-class father who loves his daughter, he will need to submit to the cost.

The 1990s had upped the ante for wedding glamour and increased the number of elements considered to be essential to a wedding. Hollywood worked alongside the wedding industry to make it clear that the white wedding itself was a must-have part of the American dream. This understanding worked especially well in the 1991 version of the film because the character of Annie Banks was still young enough to return home between her semesters of education, did not yet have a career of her own, and was not, therefore, expected to pay for the wedding herself. By the late 1990s such a plot would have been much harder to sell. Brides at the end of the twentieth century were generally older and less likely to have a patriarch paying the bill. Rather, having achieved material
success or saved up for a wedding splurge, couples were more likely to foot the bill themselves.

Beginning in the 1990s and continuing through the present day, changes for women have brought new freedoms but also new pressures. While women may feel free from role-based social obligations like never before, they also feel increasingly responsible for obtaining the means to be both financially independent and accountable for their personal happiness. This makes the risk of entering a relationship greater, as both brides and grooms can freely abandon it if either is dissatisfied. However, this is not the only, nor the most important risk: as institutional individualism continues to take hold, the greater risks for individuals fighting through life without the wider networks of community support make relationships, as a port in the storm of life, even more important. As well as a site of possible contestation, marriage has become at the same time a much-needed refuge for both men and women who are fighting through life on their own. American society during the 1990 was increasingly one comprised of individuals responsible for themselves, rather than each other—with the exception of the chosen other(s) of the nuclear family—which placed an even greater emphasis on intimacy. The growing prevalence of media that sought to advise couples on how to relate to one another in order to create an intimate relationship, including women’s magazines, sociological studies and most importantly the contemporary marital advice genre, meant that the discourse of intimacy began to reverberate throughout American culture from childhood through maturity. In her work with four hundred teenage girls in the 1990s, Sharon Thompson found many adolescent girls to be already fluent in the
discourse of intimacy. In her book *Going all the Way: Teenage Girls’ Tales of Sex, Romance, and Pregnancy*, she found that the girls

expected their partners to “work on issues,” “deal with problems,” “talk things out,” discuss pain, alienation, being different or alone or anxious and to be sensitive, responsible lovers. The relationship would last as long as the partners were able to shed a healing or clarifying light on each other’s problems or perhaps even generate new problems to work on.

Other relationships might also involve meaningful talk; the meaningful relationship simply produced the most meaning. This was the sense in which it was true love. (32–33)

In their work on individualization, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim use the example of popular talk shows to illustrate the way in which individuals are required to take full responsibility for their success and happiness. Talk shows reflect the anxiety such responsibility breeds, as guests are meant to be shored up by the realization that they are not alone. This does not mean, however, that they are envisioned as part of a greater community from which they may obtain direct help or support. Rather, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim point out, “the sole advantage the company of other sufferers may bring is to reassure each one that fighting troubles alone is what all the others do daily—and so to reinvigorate the flagging resolve to go on doing just that” (17). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s foundational work on changing relationships, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, thus concludes, “Love therefore, in this context, becomes more important than ever—an antidote to modern living, representing a sort of refuge in the chilly environment of our
affluent, impersonal, uncertain society, stripped of its traditions and scarred by all kinds of risk” (2). Brides and grooms bring two distinct individuals to their union, and each is aware that “everyone’s life is full of risks which need to be confronted and fought alone” (17). This means that marriage becomes a place where individuals battered by life’s troubles may come to recharge for the fight through daily life. Indeed, as Sharon Boden in her work *Consumerism, Romance and the Wedding Experience* argues, “The more individual we become, the more we need a ‘significant other’ with whom to share the hopes and fears, gains and losses experienced through release from traditional norms” (17).

The wedding industry has capitalized on this anxiety and has imposed upon couples a socially understood obligation to make a big demonstration in the form of a white wedding that is metaphorically equal to the level of commitment they expect to enjoy. As the industry poses it, the bigger the demonstration, the more firm the commitment and the greater chance it will last. Carol Wallace argues that the extravagance in weddings that has grown steadily from dream to obligation has become a backlash against statistics reporting high divorce rates. In her view, “flourish may also, at an unspoken level, be a hedge against disaster” (288). She quotes Jeffrey Stockard, the president of the Association of Wedding Planners, who explains, “There’s a thing called a demonstration. The bigger the demonstration, the more the commitment. So the bigger the wedding, the more the kids subconsciously are saying their wedding will work” (288). Pamela Paul, in her book *The Starter Marriage and the Future of Matrimony*, phrases it slightly differently: “In our consumer society it’s almost as if we think that by
spending money on our weddings, we’ll be able to buy ourselves happy marriages” (qtd. in Wallace 288). Wallace argues that buying things to ease anxiety is an American capitalist tradition and that when it comes to the wedding jitters and the drive for “relief from anxiety: anxiety about marrying and anxiety about mounting an elaborate, expensive social production to mark the marriage” (288–9), spending can be a coping mechanism. The widespread white wedding tradition was born out of a desire by the middle class to mirror the consumption patterns of the elite, and modern couples both expect and are expected to consume it all.

The 2002 film My Big Fat Greek Wedding is emblematic of tensions in the ideology underlying the white wedding as a ritual laden with familial expectations and the assumption of conspicuous consumption as opposed to the desire of couples to demonstrate an intimate and individual commitment. The film’s protagonist, Toula Portakalos, played by Nia Vardalos, is single, thirty and, according to her large Greek family, well past her sell-by date. Tired of the assumption that she must live in a holding pattern until ensconced in a strict, role-based Greek-American marriage, she decides to make a change. She looks for opportunities to change her situation and enlists her Aunt Voula and her mother, who show her how to manipulate her father into allowing her to attend college and get a job in her aunt’s travel agency. Along the journey Toula comes into her own, changing her hair and clothes to suit her new self and learning to wear make-up. She catches the eye of the non-Greek schoolteacher Ian Miller, and the two become a couple. The obstacle to her romance is her Greek family, in which no one has ever dated a non-Greek. Her father refuses his consent, but having learned a lesson in
female agency from the family matriarchs Toula continues to see her then fiancé, Ian, in spite of him. Realizing they have no choice, Toula’s family begins to compromise, and the couple prepares for marriage in a Greek family eager to stress their ability to perform an American white wedding. However, what matters to Toula is Ian and their private relationship. Throughout the preparations Toula expresses distress over the wedding details. She exclaims at looking like a “snow beast” in the white lace gown her family has chosen for her and, at a suggestion from Ian on the limousine ride to the reception, nearly runs off to her honeymoon without attending the reception. It is clear that there is a generation gap between Toula and her family, as well as a cultural one. This American wedding that is so important to them means little to Toula or to Ian—for the couple the ceremony is just what they must go through to begin their life together with the good graces of their family intact.

The film gives the clear message that Toula is an individual responsible for creating her own destiny; indeed, she must create it, because no one else will. She is crafty enough to find a way to win her romantic prize, and she is centrally concerned with intimate romance and personal satisfaction. She values her community enough to capitulate to a lavish wedding but makes it clear that she will participate in the Greek community’s version of the American dream on her own terms. The couple’s relationship is paramount for Toula; the wedding production itself, less so. Through Toula’s resigned acceptance of the wedding in the film, the huge dress she wears is shown to be a burden, the matching bridesmaid’s dresses with their ruffles and flounces are seen as garish, and the overload of flowers and even gifts is a thing of the past. In a dramatic change from
Father of the Bride just eleven years earlier, there is no hint in the film of any pressure to maintain social standing. The lavish wedding is clearly something the community values and wants to provide for Toula because they love her, but beyond their personal feelings there is nothing in the film that suggests it would be socially unacceptable for the couple to elope or to run away from the reception, just that it would disappoint immediate family, refusing their gift of a lavish production—a pressure that, in the end, the couple finds too great to resist. However, the reluctance of the couple, with whom the audience is meant to identify, garners sympathy for them in their endurance of the old-fashioned ritual. The film’s emphasis rests solely on Toula as an independent modern woman: her ability to provide both personal and romantic satisfaction for herself. Here, as she overrides family tradition and gets an education, then dates and marries a non-Greek, the new princess bride counts on her individuality and determination to create her happily-ever-after.

Even in such tradition-bound productions as modern royal weddings the shift in social attitudes concerning women and their control over the wedding can readily be seen in a comparative viewing of the royal wedding ceremonies of Princess Diana and Kate Middleton and their accompanying media commentary. Kate Middleton’s wedding to Prince William in 2011 was an example of the performance of the modern princess tale—“regular” girl succeeds and becomes a princess on her own terms. Kate Middleton was a bride who, unlike Diana, designed her own Cinderella day, escaped becoming “Princess Catherine” in the media, and maintains her own identity as Kate while married to Prince William. Princess Diana’s wedding in 1981 made her the star attraction, but
commentators pointed to her performance, her dress and her very demeanor as part of a formal royal line. Twenty-year-old Diana was a spectacle, and the world watched to see how she would comport herself as she was enfolded into the iconology of the royal family. By contrast, media surrounding Kate Middleton’s wedding focused entirely on Middleton’s individual style and choice of dress, her unconventional choice in filling St. Paul’s Cathedral with maple trees to create the sense of an English garden, her beauty and her overall sense of taste.

Kate Middleton was thirty, older than Diana had been, and the sense of the whole occasion as presented by the media is that it was orchestrated by Middleton herself. As a modern bride, even a royal one, her wedding production was reported by the media as her own creation, based on her own wishes and values. Reporting on the wedding between Kate Middleton and Prince William emphasized the industry’s construction of the white wedding as a tool for brides to create a bridal identity through the production of the ceremony: a challenge, according to the media commentary surrounding the occasion, which Middleton met with seeming ease.

The white wedding has always focused on the bride, but a new emphasis on female agency has produced pressure on the bride to create an identity through consumption. The wedding day can still embody the performance of a bride being enfolded into community and marriage. The production of a white wedding is still largely considered a communal event which can place great pressure on couples, but particularly on brides, to undertake its performance and to devote to it all the resources they have at their disposal—time, energy, money and identity—while ensuring that everyone will be happy. Susan Boden terms the traditional bride simultaneously a “project manager” and a “childish fantasizer” (60) and notes that a bride must manage with competence the whole of her wedding, overseeing the construction of her childhood fantasy, “especially [the fantasy] of being the fairy-tale bride/princess” (50). Boden describes wedding planning as it is framed by industry and society:

Typically this involves encouraging the bride to take control of all consumption decisions, evoking themes of agency, choice and self-
responsibility . . . Thus, the wedding becomes a carefully negotiated performance organized by the bride, aided by the industry given meaning by the culture and kept at a secure distance from the unwanted influences of other involved parties. (70)

The industry markets the white wedding as “your special day,” and brides are encouraged to “make it yours,” which while holding out the promise of freedom from stultifying tradition can also create a sense of obligation to discover self through the production of a wedding day. The April 2010 cover of Brides magazine has “Be Yourself!” printed over its signature logo in handwritten cursive, as if written by hand with a black marker. Under this command is the headline for an article inside: “30 tips for creating a day that’s really you.” The article itself encourages “creative customizing” and encourages brides to invent their own traditions based on their identities and family interests. The language of the article leaves no doubt that it is the bride and the couple who are to dictate every detail, sometimes honoring family members by including tokens but always having things non-negotiably individual. Phrases such as “Andrea kept things simple,” “Tara and Jordan stayed true to their outdoorsy nature,” and “Taissa found lots of innovative ways to play with her lemon theme” inspire readers to choose every detail themselves, as these photo-perfect “real brides” have done (Brides Magazine April 2010, 276–278). The article reveals that in fact each of these brides had a wedding planner to assist in bringing her vision to life, yet the sense is that these expert project managers have created a meaningful experience for their guests based solely on their individual
interests. Inherent in the bridal identity is a discourse that continues to posit that the 
wedding, and by extension marriage and wifehood, determines a woman’s identity.

Conclusion

The historic trajectory of the wedding ritual has been shaped, largely by women, 
in response to changing social and economic forces. The meaning of the wedding has 
changed from a practical, material arrangement between families for the good of the 
community where neither the bride nor the groom had much influence on the 
arrangement, to marriage as an arrangement that began to offer women private 
companionship despite continuing patriarchal social norms. The developing discourse of 
romance through the fairy tale and the novel led the way for women to imagine romance 
and companionable suitability before marriage and to push for the chance to choose a 
spouse and marry for love, despite strict role-based ideals concerning marriage. By the 
twentieth century the idea of marrying the spouse of one’s choosing was considered the 
norm, but through the early decades and into the 1950s patriarchal role-based marriage 
left little room for romance or personal satisfaction in marriage. By the later decades of 
the century, the notion of individualism, the rise of the discourse of intimacy, and themes 
of films and other media, as well as the objections of women themselves to patriarchal 
role-based marriage, shifted its terms to include personal satisfaction and the hope of 
romance. The white wedding as a commercial tradition emerging in the twentieth 
century, in a parallel trajectory, was tied to romance and the practice of self-definition 
through consumption. The practice became a way to demonstrate membership in the
middle class more than to mark the transfer of a virgin bride from one male protector to another. As a result of social changes in the 1960s and 70s, the patriarchal underpinnings of the ritual of the white wedding no longer held sway. However, there is new pressure on brides in light of the increased emphasis on consumption and the definition of a bridal identity, and themes of incorporation into the role-based societal norms for producing the wedding remain.

The wedding is still a central feature of American culture, and its meaning will always be fraught with tension as couples negotiate the ritual. The appeal of alternatives to the white wedding such as the destination wedding is not that they will eliminate these pressures altogether; rather, it offers the promise that these pressures can be alleviated by alternatives as the wedding is being recontextualized. The destination wedding shifts the force of meaning inherent in the wedding from the bride to the couple. The wedding away takes pressure off the bride to perform for guests and emphasizes the identity of the couple who more equally participate in the planning, who are more likely to use their finances as an investment in their future together and who more equally share the spotlight as the meaning in the wedding moves towards centering on the bride and groom building intimacy as a couple in order to establish an identity of couplehood. The white wedding still allows couples, and particularly brides, to experience an immersion in the process of planning, purchasing and enacting “wedding” to project a sense of personal stability, material success and involvement in American culture, but the value of the wedding is changing, replacing its meaning as a marker of social standing and the ultimate tie to social convention.
Further social changes in the trajectory toward capitalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries mean that both romance and marriage are difficult to construct in terms of the naturalized alienation inherent in an individualized modern capitalist society. Far from being a traditional rite of passage that unites two families for their mutual economic benefit or even a rite of passage for young adults, the mutable American wedding today encompasses a variety of views of commitment and romance and necessarily reflects a vast array of ways to acknowledge these variations. As the meaning of marriage today reflects a growing emphasis on intimate partnership, and traditional patriarchal structures continue to erode, it is possible for challenges to traditional definitions of marriage to take place and for the wedding ritual to change to accommodate a broadening of the meaning of marriage and relationships.
Chapter 2

The Destination Wedding: From Scandals to Sandals

The meaning of the white wedding ritual has been reconstituted over time by brides and grooms who have amended it to adapt to changing social and demographic values. The underlying ideology of the white wedding, however, still involves the pressures of planning, family and community expectations and conspicuous consumption. More recently, conventional tenets inherent in the white wedding are being further amended by destination brides and grooms in an effort to refocus the ritual as one which centers on the identity of the couple. A destination wedding away from community incorporates the discourse of travel, a discourse of escape from convention for the purposes of individual healing, relaxation or self-discovery. The combination of the discourses of wedding and travel changes the nature of community involvement in the wedding and alters its meaning, if it is present at all, from an ideological tool for the integration of couples into prescribed expectations to support for and corroboration of the couple’s primacy as an individual unit. The wedding industry and the tourist industry posit that in the wedding away, couples will be free from social expectations and at liberty to create an identity for themselves—self-discovery through relaxation and intimate play.

Though the destination wedding combines the discourses of wedding and travel, the two have, until recently, been in opposition; a white wedding meant community and social order, while travel meant escape. Marriage laws restricting the parameters for
marrying gave rise to the first destination weddings in places to which couples could 
elope. The industries that sprouted around elopement destinations were the first industries 
to cater to brides marrying away from home, predecessors of the industries that comprise 
wedding tourism today. Wedding travel, or elopement, with its focus on the individual 
couple as travelers away from home, family and community witnesses, violated the 
underlying ideology of the white wedding ritual as a tool for integration of the couple 
into social norms—travel for the purpose of marrying away essentially meant scandal. 
What may still be termed elopement in our time has lost nearly all stigma as a result of 
the social changes that began in the 1960s and ’70s and is now essentially synonymous 
with the destination wedding, save perhaps for the present-day elopement’s greater 
association with surprise, secrecy or spontaneity.

The wedding itself remains, even as it is reinvented to reflect modern norms. The 
previously oppositional discourses of wedding and travel are being united in the 
destination wedding, to new effect. The destination wedding offers the ideology of escape 
for the bride and groom, marketed as a solution to the community, societal and familial 
pressures of the white wedding based on the pre-existing discourse of travel. In the 
destination wedding the couple seeks to create an identity as a couple that will bolster 
both the romance and the intimate connection in the relationship in the hope that the 
marrige will last a lifetime. Since Sandals Resorts popularized the weddingmoon in the 
1990s, the destination wedding industry has grown, and the tropical island as a backdrop 
for the escape into intimacy from white wedding convention and its inherent 
consumerism has been solidified in the American imagination. This chapter will first
discuss the practice of elopement as the original ritual encompassing the then-contradictory discourses of travel and the wedding, its flavor of illicitness and scandal and the tourist industries that grew in elopement locations. It will then discuss the ways in which the destination wedding recontextualizes white wedding norms through the motif of escape. Lastly, this chapter will broadly discuss the discourse of tourism and the ways in which tourism as a ritual of escape into a liminal context combines these two discourses in the destination wedding.

**Elopement and the Tourist Industry**

Until recently, the practice of elopement was to a greater or lesser extent taboo. Couples, particularly the women, often bore a social stigma for breaching societal norms if they ran away to get married, while legal requirements for marrying likewise followed social expectations for behavior between couples. Legal restrictions such as waiting periods, the public calling of wedding banns, blood tests and specified ages of consent reflected the social expectations for brides and grooms to avoid pre-marital sex or marrying too young or within families, and to notify the wider community so that they might witness the event. Carol McD. Wallace in her book *All Dressed in White: The Irresistible Rise of the American Wedding* discusses the social expectations surrounding weddings:

> Weddings used to be public so that everyone in the community knew that a man and a woman had joined their lives intentionally and willingly.

> Everyone present saw the same thing: the exchange of vows, the groom’s
putting on the ring, the officiate blessing the couple. It was a public event because the newlyweds’ status in the community had changed and everyone needed to know it. (302)

The only socially acceptable way to be successfully integrated into societal conventions was to marry officially and publically. Couples who wanted to marry but could not do so in a public ceremony because the only way they could change their marital status was through a violation of the cultural script were exiled to places outside the borders of convention that were necessarily outside geographical borders as well. In “marrying places” such as Gretna Green, Scotland; Elkton, Maryland; and Las Vegas, Nevada where couples who needed to could escape marriage restrictions, tourist industries grew and remained even after elopement became less scandalous. In the present day, the scandal associated with these locations has all but disappeared, and couples now pursue destination weddings in these places in tribute to their historic associations.

A striking illustration of the stigma of elopement, and its changing intensity, is the 1954 article in the Saturday Evening Post detailing a case of elopement that had taken place in 1919 in South Carolina. A father, Rodney, had shot his eighteen-year-old daughter Nell’s fiancé as the two were running off to elope. The State Supreme Court rendered the decision that the fiancé had no right to take a father’s daughter from home without his permission and that, as a father, Rodney was therefore “within his rights to stop the elopement, even if he used a shotgun” (106). It is difficult to imagine this decision by the court in modern times, when brides may legally marry at eighteen without
any parental consent whatsoever. However, it is striking that even in 1919 Nell attempted the escape from any patriarchal hold despite the possible consequences.

One of the earliest established elopement destinations was Gretna Green in Scotland, which became, from 1754 to 1856, both the site of actual elopements and fodder for the narrative elopements of numerous fictional characters, to the extent that the name became synonymous with elopement in the social imaginary of the British Isles. The Marriage Act of 1754 in England dictated that the age of consent for marrying couples was twenty-one, that marriages required a formal announcement three weeks in advance or the purchase of a license from a bishop, and that all wedding ceremonies must be Anglican, with legal exceptions only for Quakers and Jews. Scotland’s Gretna Green, until 1856, posed no such legal impediments to marriage. As such, the town became a popular destination for those who, for whatever reason, needed a wedding outside the rules, and outside England. The Gretna escape, says Lisa O’Connell in her study “The Gretna Green Novels,”

transgressed national and sexual boundaries, engaged internal colonial relations between England and Scotland, overlapped with popular domestic tourist routes and practices, fermented family conflict, threatened fortunes, unsettled marriage and courtship norms, and heralded a new nexus of romance, commerce and novelty centered on youth. (477)

The transgressive possibility of marrying outside national boundaries and social conventions seized the imagination of the nation, particularly of novelists. Jane Austen’s character Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* runs off with George Wickham to London
but tells Mrs. Forster that they are headed for Gretna Green. It is in this way that the other characters deduce her intentions to elope and are left with some hope that she might be married to a man with honorable intentions, no matter how scandalous the ceremony. O’Connell details what she terms in Austen’s narrative and others the “Gretna Plot,” which is “typically rendered as the flight of young lovers to Scotland to be secretly married without parental approval” (477). The Gretna Plot generally features “a breakneck carriage ride to the Scottish border by a dashing adventurer, often a military officer, and his sweetheart, usually an underage heiress, with her parents or guardian in hot pursuit” (477). In short, Gretna elopements touched on all the social boundaries that elopement typically crossed, demonstrating the reasons for its position as a taboo practice. Whether Gretna Green or elsewhere, however, there has always been a demand for locations to which couples may run, and even when Gretna Green established restrictions elopements continued. And while its original enticements no longer hold true, Gretna Green still holds its reputation as a marrying place today. The original building of the blacksmith’s shop where weddings in Gretna took place has been converted to a small chapel, and Gretna offers destination weddings “steeped in romantic history” in a place affording “a romantic legacy spanning more than 250 years,” says Gretna Green’s website.

In the United States, the town of Elkton, Maryland, has a similar story. As far back as 1913, Elkton became a mecca for eloping couples when neighboring Delaware imposed a four-day waiting period on marriages. Maryland had no such waiting period, nor did it require a blood test, and certain couples’ demand for hurried, non-traditional
weddings was met by the town’s determination to service these couples and create an industry for itself. In a 2004 National Geographic profile of Elkton’s zip code, 21921, Michael E. Long reports that “in 1936 the town issued 11,791 marriage licenses” (126)—as opposed to “just over 100 marriages per year at the turn of the century,” reports Marshall Berdan in his Washington Post article “Elkton, Marry-land.” Anticipating the wedding tourist industry, Elkton made sure brides and grooms could acquire their attire, hairstyling, make-up and the trimmings for their bouquets, etc., as barbers and other venues sold wedding rings and other goods alongside their traditional wares. In 1938, Maryland imposed a two-day waiting period on Elkton’s customers and stemmed the tide of eloping couples travelling to the town for the express purpose of marrying. This, however, did not diminish the reputation of the town as a place to marry, and the town still hosts weddings of travelers near and far, including celebrities.

Until recently Las Vegas, Nevada, was emblematic of the scandal of elopement. Historically, couples who married in Vegas did so because of its lack of regulation: Nevada did not require blood tests before marriage, and from World War II to the present wedding chapels in Vegas have wed impatient couples. Weddings in “Sin City” had the reputation of being short-lived and lacking the power of commitment; they were scandalous elopements, ideal only for those who had already fallen out of society’s favor due to pregnancy out of wedlock, criminal background, questionable heritage, or other transgressions. Today, however, even a Las Vegas wedding is now normalized as a type of destination wedding: less salacious, less likely to be spur-of-the-moment, less likely to have an inherent undercurrent of flippancy. Rather, a Vegas wedding, like those in
modern-day Gretna Green, may be seen as a luxurious and exciting escape to a place steeped in a history of weddings, possessing a wedding culture all its own. The wedding chapels on the famous Vegas “strip” are still the hallmark of marrying in Las Vegas today, and the Vegas.com website advertises, “With hundreds of wedding chapels, Vegas has a plethora of choices. In addition to specialty and historic chapels located within the city, Las Vegas hotel wedding chapels offer visitors a myriad of ways to tie the knot.” Whatever sense of illicitness may remain at the thought of a Vegas wedding has no power for social harm to a wedding couple’s reputations; it is but a spice, a frisson of excitement added to the pleasure of travel and of getting married. Thus it is Las Vegas that most exemplifies the distinction between the elopement and the modern-day destination wedding.

**The Destination Wedding Escape**

The destination wedding offers the ideology of an escape for the bride and groom from integration into the social conventions of marriage and the wedding. The wedding away is marketed as an escape from the communal display of conspicuous consumption inherent in white wedding “tradition” and an embrace of leisure, intimacy and romance. Not all of these escapes are “clean,” without contradiction, without any element of consumption or a negotiation with wedding industry offerings. Nor does the escape of a wedding away guarantee a happy-ever-after married life. But the destination wedding as a cultural practice is moving the white wedding away from its roots as a tool to integrate couples into societal conventions and furthering instead the manifestation of the wedding
as a marker of a romantic relationship and a means by which a couple can build both an identity as a couple and advance intimacy in service of that relationship. The discourse of travel, in combination with the industry’s construction of the destination wedding, sells the wedding away as that which will amplify the significance of the ritual in times where social and demographic changes mean that religion is de-emphasized and couples generally live together before marriage, perhaps far away from the homes in which they grew up.

The destination wedding is constructed by the industry as an intimate ceremony away that allows couples to build their own identity and amplify the meaning of their wedding through travel to a place that may be sacred to the couple, though the wedding itself no longer need be centered on religion or integration into the community. In the destination wedding, couples seek to create an identity as a couple that will bolster both the romance and the intimate connection in the relationship. The problems and pressures of the white wedding, industry advertising promises, can be evaded by escape through travel. The wedding away is a composite of the discourses of tourism and the discourse of weddings, in which the addition of travel allows for the functions of escape. Marrying away redefines the function of the wedding, and the industry posits several modes of escape from convention, all of which, it maintains, enable the couple to define their identity: escape from the pressure to meet communal expectations for maintaining tradition, from conspicuous consumption, and from the work required to produce the wedding.
The cultural practice of the wedding is a negotiation between the individual desires of the couple and societal expectations. As Robert Bellah and his co-authors state in their study of American values, “[M]ost Americans are, in fact, caught between ideals of freedom and obligation” (102). The white wedding has obligations tied to the formation of a “bridal” identity, the expectation that, through the wedding, couples will be enfolded into society and the social anticipation of conspicuous consumption on display in a community event. By contrast, weddings away are often called “destination escapes” in industry media to amplify their difference and mark them as escapes from the pressures inherent in the white wedding. The Knot’s article on the destination wedding, “Destination Wedding Basics: Why Marry Away in a Destination Wedding?” promotes the move away from the traditional with the statement that in a wedding away, “You Call The Shots,” independent of societal pressure. For modern couples the attraction of the destination wedding is that it is an escape from the social pressures that define the white wedding, work, spending and the formation of a “bridal” identity and the maintenance of traditions that signal the integration of the couple into the social conventions of a wider community. Advertisements for destination wedding products reiterate themes such as “Celebrate the moment,” and “It does not take long before that wonderful vacation feeling sinks in” and posit the wedding as “a lifetime adventure” (Destination I do Spring 2010, Brides April 2010). In contrast, typical phrases associated with the white wedding that might be found in any Brides magazine, such as “ever after,” “the most memorable moment of your life” or “timeless elegance,” emphasize the significance of the wedding as a one-time ritual performance of integration into social norms.
The marketing of the wedding as an escape from community obligations signals a shift in identity—from the bride to the couple. The wedding industry restructures the function of community in the wedding through its advertising of the wedding away as an experience which couples can use to both escape tradition and define their identity. The Knot article “Destination Basics” states, “While formal weddings hold meaning for many couples, linking them to traditions of their ancestors and culture, others want the experience to be unique, with a ceremony and location that reflect their true colors.” The article takes the notion of escaping tradition further: not only will a destination wedding offer uniqueness over tradition, it promises, but it will also offer the bride and groom a chance to declare their identity as a couple. Couples use the motif of escape to create an identity through planning together and by choosing which destination most fits their vision of themselves as a couple. Each destination is defined by its own script, constructed and provided by the wedding industry, and couples are encouraged to choose which script best reflects them. Travel, says the industry, enables couples to envision their identity in a new place where they can act out new fantasies—and the possibilities are seemingly endless. Lisa Light’s Destination Bride encourages couples to answer the questions, “What kind of destination would best suit you as a couple? What destination holds meaning for you or reflects your personalities?” and “What is your definition of romance: a beach, a mountain, a castle, a yacht?” (40). The experience is framed as that which prioritizes the couple’s freedom to determine together what characteristics define them and what romance means to them as a couple, prioritizing these values over societal expectations.
In framing the wedding as an opportunity to display the identity of the couple, the industry reinforces the connection between consumerism as an escape from social constraints on the self and the freedom to create identity. In his work on consumption, Grant McCracken posits that consumer goods and the ability to consume them are signifiers of a new freedom. In his terms, “individuals are free to construct the self. We no longer presume to tell people who we must be. Increasingly, we leave them to make this choice for themselves, to choose how they will define their gender, age, class, and lifestyle” (3). The wedding and tourist industries advertise the destination wedding as a chance to define the self, construct an identity as a couple through an escape from convention that will give them the freedom to do so, outside the terms of greater society. In an advertising framework, the destination wedding holds endless possibilities for constructing identity, but also for the excitement inherent of being away from home and the romance of performing one of the epitomized vignettes of romance for oneself. Industry guidebooks such as Fodor’s Destination Weddings assure readers, “Whether you dream of exchanging your vows on a sun-drenched beach with a backdrop of sparkling crystal waters and swaying palm trees, saying ‘I do’ in some of the world’s most exciting cities, or celebrating your nuptials like a princess in the dreamlike ambiance of a fairytale castle—the world is full of choices” (8). Destination weddings are framed in advertising as a chance for couples to demonstrate their identity through a delineation of their priorities, demonstrated by their purchases—are they adventurous, eclectic, desirous of exotic flavor, casual, cultured, or a prince and princess?
In American culture it is individualism, as expressed through consumerism, which is the primary motivator in wedding production. Young-Hoon Kim’s work *The Commodification of a Ritual Process: An Ethnography of the Wedding Industry in Las Vegas* uses an analysis of the Las Vegas wedding industry to speak to the larger themes in American culture. Kim identifies two tenets as central to American culture, individualism and commercialism. He defines commercialism as the drive by the wedding industry to successfully sell the wedding as product (127) and identifies Vegas weddings as a product marked by individualism (143). According to Kim, “Weddings are no longer traditional ceremonies but have become products of the imagination, realizations of one’s most romantic fantasies” (143). His work shows that the traditional white wedding still holds sway, but more than half of the respondents in his study had already experienced this ideal and were disillusioned and disappointed enough by the experience of a failed marriage not to want to repeat it. Respondents then categorized Vegas as their new ideal because of its ability, as the site of a wedding away, to centralize the bride and groom over family and friends. According to Kim, “such an intense privatization of the wedding event emphasizes the ‘individualistic spirit’ governing consumption matters in a postmodern climate” (143). The individualistic spirit and the freedom to consume are at the very heart of the ideology of what it is to be American.

The destination wedding is most commonly advertised by the wedding industry as a ceremony for the couple alone, or for the couple and a few close friends and relatives. The escape from a white wedding at home, attended by the community, to an intimate celebration, even if in the presence of guests, is also a practice in support of the construction
of the couple’s identity. While many destination weddings do include a small guest list, travel in conjunction with the wedding signals a move away from the wedding as a rite of passage to be witnessed by the community at large. Instead, the function of the community as witness is muted by their function as celebrants in support of the couple. An advertising headline for Beaches Resorts for Everyone by Sandals reads “ESCAPE TOGETHER” and adds, in smaller type under it, “with the ones you love” (Martha Stewart 84).
The image portrays a couple dashing out from under a gauzy white canopy while being showered with rose petals by the two couples that flank them. An equal number of men and women figure in the image. The color scheme is tropical green and white, and the ocean can just be glimpsed through the palms in the background.

In the intimateweddings.com profile *Real Weddings: Lindsay and Tim’s Beach Destination Wedding in Mexico*, on February 17, 2009, the bride Lindsay confirms that for her, the best thing about having an intimate wedding was performing an identity of couplehood: “The wedding was truly about having a good time with the people you love, rather than making sure everyone is happy and having a good time. We didn’t have to bother with social graces or going through motions we really weren’t interested in just because it was someone else’s expectation” (Friedrichsen). The destination wedding couple dictates that the ceremony is a ritual about them and that any guests are expected to buy in to this idea, both by expressing pleasure at the opportunity to attend an intimate wedding and by paying for their own attendance, as is the typical expectation for destination wedding guests.

By framing the destination ceremony as an “intimate” wedding “for the couple” and, to a lesser extent, for those few who “really matter,” the industry implicitly promotes the idea that the intimacy of the destination wedding ceremony translates into an escape from the conspicuous consumption inherent in the creation of a larger spectacle—a large community of guests in a white wedding means both an increased budget and decreased privacy. The wedding away is sold as an anti-consumption ritual in the sense that it need make fewer accommodations to fewer people; the reality of a wedding away means that it
is away from the expectation of producing a pageant of conspicuous consumption, a traditional white wedding. Indeed, destination wedding couples often choose travel expressly to avoid paying for the involvement of the whole community in their wedding celebration.

And traditional wedding receptions with the typical number of guests are costly. Statistics from the 2011 “The Wedding Report: Wedding Statistics and Balanced Market Research for the Wedding Industry” at theweddingreport.com reveal that a single guest now adds as much as $186.00 to the overall cost of the wedding and that the average number of wedding guests for weddings overall in 2011 was 138. Wedding blogs reveal a desire by brides and grooms to circumvent the social necessity of such a financial investment in the community beyond themselves. Following a discussion about wedding spending entitled “Why I’ll Never Have a Big Wedding,” the bloggers at “Blond on a Budget” agree that providing for themselves (that is, for themselves as a couple) is more important even than the wedding attendance of parents, siblings and other intimate community members who may be unable or unwilling to fund their own way to a destination ceremony. Wedding blogs often highlight the posts of brides who feel that the desire of the bridal couple to invest only in themselves justifiably overrides the feelings of those who may be left out of a destination ceremony. Blogger Krista summarizes her conviction:

No matter how hard you try to please, there will always be some aspects of everyone’s wedding that one person will find tacky. It might feel like it’s unfair to the people that want to celebrate with the couple, but it’s
probably not intended to make people feel excluded. Destination weddings are generally cheaper than weddings at home, and for people that want a nice wedding on a budget it’s a great compromise.

The destination wedding has become increasingly more popular in the last decade as brides and grooms, now more often paying for their own ceremonies, eye the consumption involved in a typical white wedding and decide that the wedding industry’s depiction of destination weddings as “simple” and “intimate” more accurately defines their wishes. The Knot says that “a growing number of couples are hightailing it away from the traditional formal affair to a casual, intimate occasion in their dream honeymoon spot.” Couples choosing a wedding away demonstrate a desire for a wedding that marks a private commitment, rather than a societal obligation to exhibit the ability to consume to middle-class standards.

The emphasis in advertising on wedding spending as an investment in the lives of the couple redirects the motive for wedding spending away from social tradition dictating the production of a lavish ceremony for everyone. The decision to escape the large-scale wedding in favor of the destination wedding makes a statement that the wedding is no longer about a couple’s status in the community; rather, as Wallace argues in her book on the historical changes in the meaning of the wedding, the new statement is “This is between us . . . it’s not about the rest of you” (302). The destination wedding is a product promising couplehood, romance and intimacy. Wedding blog posts highlight a shift in the way couples make meaning of the money they spend. Destination couples often cite the reason for a wedding away as an investment in themselves, one that both allows them to
celebrate in an intimate ceremony and mark their commitment but also allows for further investment in the future of the relationship. Destination brides and grooms often choose to simplify, both by purchasing only those wedding products which align with their particular wedding vision and also by alternatively using the money they might have spent on a white wedding to provide solely for themselves in other ways, such as saving for the purchase of a house or other large items or for future travel together. On the blog “Blonde on a Budget,” respondent Cait puts it succinctly: “It feels weird to be a girl who doesn’t dream of an extravagant ‘big day’ but I’d also much rather have a house” (Flanders). Though the communal white wedding is far from dead, and Cait here admits that it “feels weird” not to want what she still perceives she “should” want as a bride socialized by the wedding industry, the bloggers’ discussion demonstrates a determination not to be beholden to convention.

Whether or not the destination wedding is actually cheaper depends on the number of guests, the location and the design of the ceremony. Nevertheless, the destination wedding is sold and perceived as being an affordable option, and actual costs are muted by the discourse promoting an intimate ceremony that is an escape for two. When creating a wedding budget, brides and grooms, encouraged by messages from the industry indicating the destination wedding price of “a few thousand dollars,” often relegate travel expenses and resort stays to a separate honeymoon budget, including only the wedding package and location expenses in the wedding budget. As The Knot puts it, “a couple can fly to an all-inclusive resort in Jamaica, get married, and stay for a deluxe weeklong honeymoon for a few thousand dollars, including lodging, meals, drinks, and
airfare. Compare that with your average 150-guest wedding costing about $22,000—which can easily skyrocket to more than $40,000 in big cities—plus a few extra thousand for a honeymoon.” Guests are rarely included in a destination wedding budget, as guests generally pay their own expenses such as airfare, hotel, meals and other costs. This, then, makes even a more inclusive destination wedding package of $2,500 seem affordable compared to the average cost of the white wedding, reported to be $28,082.00 in 2011 (Breslow Sardone). Industry resorts bolster impressions of the affordability of destination weddings by partnering with travel agencies such as www.destinationweddings.com to offer membership benefits such as free honeymoon suites, free guest rooms and free anniversary trips based on how many rooms are booked under a bridal couple’s name at preferred partner resorts. In financially awarding couples for booking blocks of rooms for guests under the couple’s reservation, with no discount for the guests themselves, the wedding travel industry reinforces the discourse of the destination wedding as a financial investment in the couple.

The emphasis on the escape of travel in destination wedding marketing discourse also promotes the wedding away as another kind of escape—an escape not only from the cost of producing a lavish wedding but from the work of planning the numerous details of a “special day.” In constructing the destination wedding as an experience of couplehood, the industry reframes it as offering freedom from the work of staging a lavish white wedding, particularly for brides. The decision to marry away is determined by the couple in the planning stages, and the burden of planning tends to shift from the bride and her female relatives and friends to the couple themselves. Industry media couches a
destination wedding as a more equal experience, loosening gendered expectations for planning and producing the wedding by suggesting that a wedding away will refocus the process of planning for men and women, largely by augmenting the role of the groom. The industry posits an escape for the bride from the burden of planning a wedding alone by proposing an equal escape from traditional wedding planning for the groom. At the same time, destination wedding media suggests that grooms will be more excited about planning a trip than a traditional wedding and that men should be equally part of the experience, helping to plan the location, plan activities for any guests and arrange the attire for male attendants and themselves.

Most destination weddings take place at resorts or private venues specifically designed for weddings with packages, wedding planners and services for guests, so the experience is cast as less stressful, less time-consuming and less bride-centric. The Knot calls weddings away “virtually stress free” and advises readers to “Pop in the classic movie Father of the Bride and you’ll soon understand why destination weddings are so popular. They are almost guaranteed to be simpler (and faster!) to plan than a traditional wedding and reception.” The article informs readers,

Honeymoon-happy resorts and cruise lines around the world have made it easier and more appealing to wed on-site. Many have full-time wedding coordinators on staff who are familiar with that country’s marriage license requirements and who offer wedding packages that take care of all your ceremony essentials (photographer, cake, minister, etc.). You step off the plane and sign the papers; they take care of the rest.
A wedding away is marketed as an experience which offers less work and less stress for the bride and also paves the way for the wedding to be a more egalitarian planning experience and a more meaningful expression of couplehood.

The wedding and travel industries advertise a private getaway, away from the work of fulfilling the obligations of home. Wedding blog posts on sites such as www.theweddingbee.com often decry the stress of producing a lavish wedding, and overwhelmed brides tell stories of abandoning the production altogether for a peaceful, and even doubly meaningful, intimate escape elsewhere. Says BoxerLady, who cancelled her plans for an elaborate white wedding, of her escape,

The day is all about us and we are going to make it that way. We are spending the entire budget on an amazing weddingmoon and I am looking forward to being stress free and getting married against a stunning backdrop. It will be just the two of us and we couldn’t be happier. . . . I honestly feel like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders and now my FI gets what he wanted all along…a beach wedding and then a relaxing two weeks with me.

The destination wedding is thus marketed as an experience which will provide a variety of escapes for the couple, allowing for the creation of their shared identity: the escape from the pressures of performing the traditions inherent in the white wedding, the escape from the focus on a bridal identity to an identity centered on the couple, the escape from social expectations for consumption and an escape from work, both the role-based unequal division of labor inherent in the production of the white wedding and the general
work of creating a large-scale spectacle and hosting the numerous guests who attend it. The addition of travel to the wedding also means the addition of a discourse that has historically meant escape from convention and been counter to the discourse of the wedding with its tenants of social integration. The discourse of tourism in conjunction with the wedding marks a change in the terms of escape and allows the couple to construct an identity for themselves in a liminal space outside social constraints.

**Tourism, Travel and the Destination Wedding**

In the European Middle Ages, early tourism was linked to pilgrimage and the salvation or renewal of the individual soul or spirit. However, travelers also travel for exploration, trade, commerce, profit, education and the knowledge of other cultures, adventure, renewed health and to relieve stress. Tourism, at its inception and far into its development, was primarily the privilege of the elite. In her work *Tourists and Tourism*, Sharon Bohn Gmelch notes that the desire to engage in tourism came to the middle class through an admiration of the practices of the elite lifestyle but was not realized on a large scale in the West until improvements in transportation through steamship and railway in the late 1800s made travel cheaper and more affordable for a variety of passengers. In the 1960s the advent of travel by jet, combined with a rise in the average income, an increase in vacation days granted in the workplace and a substantial increase in the number of private cars, brought about the modern tourist industry, both foreign and domestic (Gmelch 6).
Tourism itself is broadly defined by Nelson Graburn in his “Secular Ritual: A General Theory of Tourism” as “a kind of ritual, one in which the special occasions of leisure and travel stand in opposition to everyday life at home and work” (25, emphasis in original). As opposed to travel for work, immigration, migration or other non-leisure enterprise, tourism is a ritual in which tourists move from one place to another for the pleasure of progressing through the ritual journey. Anthropologist Arnold Van Gannep’s study of rituals, *The Rites of Passage*, distinguishes three distinct stages involved in ritual ceremonies, which have been adopted by travel theorists: pre-liminal rites (rites of separation), the time in which participants are separated from “a previous world” and previous social norms while preparing to enter the cultural rite; “liminal (or threshold) rites,” (transitional rites) where cultural norms are suspended in service of the transition that takes place within the liminal world of the ritual and “the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world”; and post-liminal rites (rites of incorporation) whereby participants are reincorporated into society with a new identity (21). Van Gannep stresses that these “ceremonial patterns” (11) are not rigid and that their expansion and significance vary based on the people participating and the type of cultural celebration involved.

Travel theorists have found the notion of the liminal (taken from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold) fruitful in describing tourism as a mirroring of traditional rituals. Victor Turner’s elaboration of the concept of the liminal is especially suggestive. Working from Van Gannep’s paradigm, Turner developed his foundational definition of the liminal ritual, whereby individuals are symbolically separated from “an earlier fixed
point in the social structure or from an established set of cultural conditions” (Dramas 14). Participants then enter the liminal stage, the dominant focus of Turner’s work and one he calls a stage “betwixt and between” the previous ways of constructing identity, community, or time and the new way of constructing identity, etc., which the ritual experience transforms. Turner understands the liminal as a transformative context. As Graham St John elaborates in his examination of Turner’s work, “Turner understood the *limen* to constitute a universally potent temporality . . . a breach of structure whereby the familiar may be stripped of certitude and the normative unhinged, an interlude wherein conventional social, economic, and political life may be transcended” (5). The liminal context was, for Turner, anti-structural, outside the structured context of everyday experience, “a realm of pure possibility” (Forest 97) where liminal conditions act as “provisional of a cultural means of generating variability as well as of ensuring the continuity of proved values and norms” (On the Edge 162, emphasis in original). In this paradigm the possibility exists for participants ensconced in the liminal to stand outside their own social position and also to formulate a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements. The liminal experience, according to Turner, can “generate and store a plurality of alternative modes for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing those in mainstream social and political roles” (From Ritual 33).

In his earlier work Turner sees the liminal ritual as purely religious, more closely tied to the sacred and cultural celebrations of Van Gannep’s rites of passage, but in later work he develops the concept of the “liminoid” ritual for what Eva Illouz calls “analogous but secular phenomena” (142). In contrast to the sacred religious liminal,
which can be said to “reveal the collective, integrated, and obligatory ritual action of premodernity” (9), explains St John, “the liminoid, on the other hand, occurs within leisure settings apart from work, is voluntary, plural and fragmentary, with liminoidality associated with marginality, conditions for social critique, subversive behavior, and radical experimentation” (9). In postmodern capitalist societies the liminoid is what St John calls an “entertainment genre” shaped by “new media technologies, rationalization, and bureaucracy” (9). In his work on Turner’s definition of ritual, Ronald L. Grimes argues that the liminal and the liminoid are not necessarily mutually exclusive. He notes that the sacred persists in modern societies and argues that “the liminoid is sacred to members of a secular society” (145) and that remnants of liminality are everywhere. The liminoid, then, carries the freedom of liminality which is one of the bases of Turner’s definition, and the boundaries between the two are muted.

Travel theorists have related the term “liminal” to tourism, in which, as Illouz states, “people remove themselves, geographically and symbolically, from the normal conduct of their lives” (142). The ritual of travel includes the pre-travel elements of anticipation, embodying the pre-liminal stage, and the post-travel element of the trip home, embodying the post-liminal, but the ritual centers on the tourist’s time in a liminal space that is completely distinct from the home environment. The liminal space of the destination allows the tourist to experience a change, and tourism is made meaningful both by the undertaking of the journey to this space and by the performance of leisure while there. In his discussion of modern tourism and the ritual imperative it has become in Western culture, Nelson Graburn follows Van Gannep and Turner in describing the
tourist journey as a ritual that includes the pre-travel anticipation and planning followed by the “process of leaving the ordinary, that is the sacralization that elevates the participants to the nonordinary state where marvelous things happen and the converse of desacralization and return to ordinary life” (28). As the discourse of travel has been increasingly incorporated into society as cultural practice since the 1960s, the religiously sacred in social rituals is now muted. Instead, travel to a liminal space outside the ordinary, Graburn argues, is the new sacred ritual in modern times. The sacred element here no longer tied to religion but is the time spent in the nonordinary state, in a liminal space where “marvelous things happen.” Graburn focuses on the contrasts between the home environment and the time spent traveling and argues that tourism is meaningful precisely because it posits an experience different from the ordinary and, as such, becomes the present-day, secular ritual that replaces the historic celebration of holy days, pilgrimages and annual religious festivals. In modern societies the ritual of travel itself is a sacred, though not religious, ritual. The time spent in travel becomes the “sacred/nonordinary” in contrast to the “profane/workday/at home” (27). Time spent at home in the ordinary engenders nostalgia for the sacred and an anticipation of new travel experiences to come.

Dean MacCannell, in his seminal work *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, states that travel “brings the people liberated from traditional attachments into the modern world where, as tourists, they may attempt to discover or reconstruct a cultural heritage, or a social identity” (13). MacCannell notes that travel is a mode of heightening and intensifying experience as well as escaping daily routine and thus gives tourists
access to another order of reality. In the sense that the tourist destination is another order of reality, encompassing leisure and identity formation, the travel destination can be said to be a liminal space. Inherent in the discourse of tourism is the distinction that when away from the daily social contract, a traveler can obtain that which cannot be attained in its midst, and it is this search that drives the journey. Tourism is a performance of leisure that takes the traveler out of the reach of daily social convention, as well as daily obligation, and it is tied to an industry built around accommodating and entertaining travelers. The obligation of the tourist is minimal: to be at leisure and to use the allotted time at his or her own discretion: for self-discovery, self-actualization or individualized pleasure.

In the modern world of global tourism, the destination wedding means travel to a liminal space, which gives couples the chance to perform a recontextualization of the white wedding. In this space a wedding away becomes a newly reimagined ritual of anti-structure that can exist outside societal expectations, even as the tradition of marrying is upheld. It can be seen as a ritual of intimacy, of couplehood identity, one more closely resembling gender equality, which cannot be obtained in a traditional white wedding at home. The ritual of the wedding away mirrors the ritual practice of tourism as brides and grooms become engaged, experience a pre-liminal anticipation of the wedding, plan the ceremony and take the journey to a liminal space for the express purpose of experiencing that which is out of the ordinary. In such a space, time is measured by a relationship to place, to nature and to the self. The discourse of the destination wedding created by both the wedding and tourist industries combines the discourses of wedding and tourism and
posits that the new wedding experience is secular but sacred to the couple as a result of the travel into a liminal space and the intimate play they will undergo there, building intimacy and an identity as a couple in the freedom of a liminal environment.

Brides and grooms enter the liminal space of their chosen destination with the expectation, fostered by the industry, that the time away from home will engender intimacy through the intertwining of the liminal rituals of travel and the wedding. The ideology of the discourse of intimacy suggests that the couple’s time away will solidify their identity as a couple and create a romantic legacy—the legacy of a lasting marriage; a “romantic marriage,” a relationship constructed as one that will bring marital longevity through the personal satisfaction of ever-increasing intimacy alongside romance. The emphasis on intimacy in wedding tourism is a refocusing of the wedding from a bridal/commercial enterprise to one of couplehood/intimacy. In a post-liminal reincorporation of the couple back into society, destination wedding couples are new beings with a new dual identity: that of a “married” couple/spouse and that of a more deeply “intimate” couple as posited by the discourses of intimacy and of the industries defining both wedding and travel. As the destination wedding becomes more culturally prevalent, the recontextualization of the white wedding by couples marrying away is pushed further forward and its ideology is shifted from that of a community ritual centered on the bride to a private or semi-private ritual centered on the couple.

Travel to a liminal destination also opens up the possibility for the formation and transformation of new identities, as well as new social norms, because of the possibility, created by setting, for a ludic sense of play. Liminal spaces, existing symbolically outside
the mundane of everyday life, are often the environments designed for touristic play: amusement parks, resorts, established tourist cities such as Paris and Las Vegas, and beaches. The potentially transformative environment enables a variety of transformative play, fostered by the temporary suspension of strict roles constructed by gender, class, age, and other social categories. The limits of propriety are relaxed. Home and community are left behind, and travelers in these liminal environments adopt the identity of the tourist—an individual free of obligation with a defined space and time in which to embrace individual pursuits without censure. There is a feeling that the playtime in a liminal space is an interlude, a time outside real time. Ordinary roles are suspended as the new roles engendered by tourist play take hold.

The performance of identity in the liminal space is unbounded, offering simultaneously the possibility for adherence to the tourist script and a variability of performances of identity outside social constraints, as well as a more authentic presentation of self through the relaxation of social norms, which is at the heart of the discourse of tourism. The potential for authentic performances of self in a liminal context encourages intimacy, and wedding tourists experience this sense between guest and guest, between each guest and the couple, as well as between the bride and groom. As the rules of propriety governing social behavior are loosened, so too are any roles a traveler may play at home. The liminal space becomes an equalizer whereby gender, age, professional roles, and even class are largely diminished in favor of a feeling of connection between members of a couple and also between each individual and the other tourists they encounter. The very adoption of the uninhibited identity of traveler, as well
as the entrance into the destination space, creates a sense of what Turner calls 
*communitas*, defined by St John as the “(re)formation of affectual relationships with co-
liminars” (7) under liminal conditions. Because of the breakdown in social structure that 
occurs in the liminal space, the participants experience a breakdown in strict social 
boundaries, so that communitas signifies “a relatively undifferentiated community, or 
even communion of equal individuals” (Turner, *Ritual Process* 96). Illouz likewise 
describes communitas as an “intense emotional fusion among members of the same 
group” (143) whereby individuals are released from the strict confines of social status 
and are unbound to share a common experience freeing identity. In Illouz’s study of 
travel and romance, and of romance itself as liminality, her respondents “made it clear 
that they share this anti-institutional experience of the romantic self by insisting that in 
romantic moments they feel more ‘relaxed,’ that they let ‘their guard down,’ and that the 
‘interactions are more genuine,’ and that they can reveal their ‘true selves’” (143).
Individuals together in a liminal space have their own individual motives for travel but 
can also recognize and take pleasure in being a tourist amongst others in the destination 
space. The script provided by the wedding and tourist industries is one of relaxation for 
all as they perform chosen roles simultaneously in the liminal location. Participants play 
the role of “tourist” together, carefully maintaining for each other the performance of the 
role of tourist at leisure as they sightsee, dine, shop, sunbathe and relax.

In his discussion of leisure and performance, *Leisure and Culture*, Chris Rojek 
points out, “In leisure, individuals believe that they have more voluntary freedom to act 
as they please. Of course, this belief may be illusory. The crucial principle is the belief of
social actors that their leisure consists of uses of time and space which are voluntarily chosen by themselves” (165). Freedom is always relative, since even the “freest” leisure behavior involves a degree of role-playing. The seeming freedom involved in travel and role-playing that Rojek points to, though it can be said to be a temporary construction, is alluring for wedding participants in that they are invited by the industry to voluntarily indulge in a tourism that formalizes uninhibited individual identity while simultaneously taking up the voluntary roles of bride, groom, guest, native, bridesmaid, resort guest or simply American on holiday. In an article on the destination wedding, The Knot establishes for its audience that a wedding away will give the bride and groom freedom from duty and the relaxation of inhibitions: “Best of all? You make the rules! Feel free to wear a sundress or shorts (or even a bikini!), go barefoot, carry fern fronds, hire a ukulele band, and toast your love alone on your balcony at sunset—nude! If you can dream it, you can do it” (The Knot). According to wedding advertising, participants can “make the rules,” wear whatever costume they like and take on whatever role they choose, the writer promises, strengthening the myth that brides, grooms and guests are free to adhere strictly to the precepts of tourist indulgence. The tourist industry discourse implies that no constraint will be made on behavior and that individuals will have unlimited flexibility and spontaneity. The reality, however, is that social constraints are simply relaxed. Participants involved give a self-styled, structured performance designed to feel as if anything goes. Wedding parties travel to a liminal space in which a wedding is staged by its main participants wherein the bride and groom uphold the performance under the
pretense that they did not actually arrange it, as the couple and their guests willingly submit to the myth that their actions are not thoroughly scripted.

It is not only through the relaxation of social boundaries and the performance of alternate roles that travel engenders intimacy, however. The liminal space offers the freedom to develop intimacy because it offers the potential to those who choose to travel together of engaging with each other in a more intimate way than would be possible in an ordinary environment. Indeed, travel enhances the notion that the couple and their guests are experiencing intimacy like nowhere else. It is understood that only those who have had the heightened experience of touring together may belong to this new group of intimates; they are more able to perform intimacy in a liminal space without the pressure to conform to traditional societal norms. In his work theorizing intimacy Niklas Luhmann examines the self in relation to others, calling this relationship the “semantics of intimacy,” whereby self-expression is determined by the formation of personal and impersonal relationships. For Luhmann, self-identity is created through the reflexive process of interacting with others. In a condition of liminal ritual created by travel to an environment outside traditional social conventions, self-expression is enhanced by the relationships formed in the tourist space. Couples express themselves individually while simultaneously developing and expressing themselves as an entity. At the same time, couples engage their guests at leisure in the liminal reality. In a wedding party, the couple and any guests have access to a level of self that others back home do not. Away from stricter social norms, travelers develop intimacy and identity through self-expression,
revealing more of themselves than would be possible in an everyday space, and the sense of intimacy is heightened by the exclusivity of the event.

As a result of increased personal insight and closer relationships, those who travel together have the opportunity to alter social status within the interpersonal realm. And even if they choose not to do so, the connection between this couple and their guests is forever altered by the reality that “we have traveled together, and the experience is ours alone.” Those who commit to going away together demonstrate that they have together made such a commitment to separate themselves from ordinary life because they are of value to each other, and in a destination wedding, the guests demonstrate their importance to the couple as well. The community at home, who were not present at the destination, has no insight into the events that occurred in the sphere of play, and those who are insiders can never give the full picture. What happens on the tourist getaway is essentially secret, able to be known only to those who were present. In a destination wedding party only the couple and the few who accompany them have the opportunity to enact such an intimate reveal of self. In community the party will experience the risks of travel, the joys of a new environment and its stresses as an insular group separate from the whole of the sphere outside themselves—the hallmark of intimacy.

Over and above any sense of communitas with guests, however, the discourses of tourism and the destination wedding in combination posit an isolation that enables the establishment of increased intimacy between the couple. The discourse of intimacy assumes that the development of intimacy will lead to the fulfillment of romance in marriage. And the ideology of the destination wedding suggests that the ideal liminal
environment for romance is a natural one, following the romantic sensibility that nature is pure, authentic and anti-institutional. The seclusion of the couple, away from societal conventions, is equated with a more freely open and also authentic demonstration of romance—a voluntary mode of relationship ostensibly free of social constraints. In this sense, the experience of romance through nature defines romance as its own context of liminality. As Illouz argues, the “mode of sociality promoted by romance is organic and anti-institutional rather than contractual or formal” (143). The break from traditional social roles posited by the discourse of tourism implies an increased potential for romantic expression as a result of the heightened emotion that being away elicits. For a wedding away, industry advertising promotes the seclusion of the natural setting and constructs the wedding as anti-institutional; the ritual facilitation of a contractual marriage is muted; and the wedding away framed as “spontaneous,” “casual,” and “relaxed.” In the context of industry advertising, romantic expression is delineated by an implicit association with nature that links romance and travel. Illouz argues that “the association of romance with travel often evokes images of nature, purity and authenticity in which the self is regenerated. Such mental images tap into and recapitulate the romantic utopia, for both romantic love and nature are presumed to represent the most authentic parts of our selves, as opposed to the inauthenticity of urban life” (141). Travel has long been undertaken for self-discovery, and the conception, fostered by images of couples alone in tropical settings, of the destination wedding as a romantic discovery of a couple, one of the other, recasts the wedding as an intimate experience of couplehood.
The Tropical Destination Wedding

The liminal space as a driver of intimacy is most evident in the discourse of tropical paradise tourism, which equates the isolation of travel to a place outside society’s conventions with the performance of romance and the development of intimacy. The industry’s formulation of the tropical paradise is the offer of a playground in which rules and roles are relaxed, but also where an explicit emphasis on Eden and the prelapsarian ideals of gender equality stimulate a sense of romantic play in the couple. Paradise tourism is driven by the seeming possibility of being alone and uninhibited in uninhabited nature, experiencing a place with the interference neither of social obligation nor any non-sensual human contact whatsoever. In defining the culture of a tropical paradise in his book *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing*, Orvar Löfgren posits that “the tropical paradise offers a distinct form of experience—that of being descendants of Adam and Eve. In such lush locales, in the Western imagination, rules need not be followed, food and drink are plentiful, and there are few hardships” (317). Inherent in the construction is the fantasy that the tourist can experience the uninhibited freedom of an isolated paradise, and it is the emphasis on the Edenic nature of the tropics that is particularly seductive. The parallel with the Garden of Eden occupied solely by Adam and Eve implies a freedom from social constraints rarely recognized in other tourist spaces. For Löfgren, “the whole concept of paradise relies above all on the romance of the South Pacific and the tropical beach” (“Global Beach” 38).

The vision of Edenic “paradise” carries with it another freedom from social convention: the assumption of a prelapsarian gender equality existent before the fall. As
Ronald Hendel, Chana Kronfeld and Ilana Pardes argue in their study of the history of gender and sexuality, a modern reading of Genesis 1:27 could “rearticulate the human” and interpret the biblical passage as that which implies that God the maker created, Adam the man and Eve the woman to stand in equal relation to one another. Genesis 1:27 states, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” For Hendel, Kronfeld and Pardes, “The first human(s) is thus called into being as a composite equality in which male, female, and God are related to one another” (76). An Edenic setting, then, is constructed from a fantasy of paradise a composite equality alongside a sense of unlimited freedom.

The idealized image of the beach, white sand meeting turquoise water under a blue sky, is an iconic signifier of paradise in the global imagination. The pleasures of the beach are now universally recognizable and represent the historical transition of the meaning of the beach from health and relaxation to play. In his article “The Global Beach,” Löfgren speaks to the “universalization of the beach experience, the making of a truly global iconography and choreography of beach life” (37). He posits that the beach, with its basic ingredients of paradise—sand, sun and sea—has long tantalized the global consciousness and is an icon in the global imagination. Like any icon, the sand, sun and sea of the imagination obscure the grit between the toes, the water-stained fabric, the sand blown in the eyes, the salt on the skin and the force of the wind. The ideal is unsullied by the reality of the beach. Rather the iconic image of the beach, water and sky emphasizes the caress of the natural elements, sand and sea. As the iconography of the global beach is globally familiar, visitors to any beach have the feeling that it is a simultaneously exotic
yet familiar environment where they are seemingly free to perform any role they choose. Says Löfgren, the beach, with its “bricolage of props…now integrated and globalized, becomes a familiar place to play at being a teenager, a grown up, a tourist” (37). As tourists and other beachgoers enact their performances upon it, the beach becomes the ideal liminal space—an open template that is attractive because there is no set role, no tour guide, no itinerary and only its own parameters governing the way to behave or be seen.

The beach epitomizes a liminal space in the construction of tourist and wedding tourism destinations precisely because of its construction of open-endedness. It exists betwixt and between civilization and the possibilities signified by the open ocean, and its presence as a border allows for a suspension of the social constraints of everyday life. In his analysis of the Australian beach in *Reading the Popular*, John Fiske focuses on the beach as an “anomalous category, overflowing with meaning because it is neither land nor sea, neither nature nor culture but partakes of both” (56). As such a liminal zone, however, it encompasses both the emphasis on an idyllic uninhabited paradise and a structured communitas, alongside which leisure and pleasure are subtly regulated. As in Turner’s definition of a liminal environment, the beach offers the potentiality for unbounded performance while simultaneously “ensuring the continuity of proved values” (Fiske, *On the Edge* 162).

Thus the beach is not completely without ritual, particularly concerning its sexual components, both suppressed and obvious. The dress code on the beach assumes a certain amount of nudity, but a system of unwritten rules exists about the way to look at others in this setting. Taking the term from Jean-Claude Kaufmann’s work on topless sunbathing,
Corps de femmes: Regards d’hommes, Löfgren calls this “ocular competence”: “You have to learn to discipline the ways you look at others in a suitably disinterested way: observing but never starring” (43). The same sense of ocular competence exists in regard to a bride, perhaps particularly to a beach bride potentially surrounded by hotels, beachgoers and other tourists. And a beach bride can assume not only that those fellow beach users have an acceptable level of ocular competence, but also that she will feel secluded and alone, as if her wedding is a private affair, as a result. This is true even if her bridal attire, and that of her groom, is radically different from that of others on the beach. The concept of a white, virginal, pure bride masks but does nothing to diminish the fact that a bride is both admired and desired. However, like the beach, there is a proper way to look at a bride. No matter how revealing her dress, the only socially acceptable way to admit to seeing the bride is as a symbol of pure femininity. Even on a beach, the sexual element of the bride is obscured by the tableau of the occasion. The socially accepted level of nudity on the liminal beach is a far cry from the social conventions that govern the home world, but ocular and other tourist competencies ensure that travel is for pleasure and leaves space for individual pursuits. The global beach in the popular imagination is a place for daydreaming, the potential to experience other worlds, the tropical exotic and the ultimate performance of leisure.

The Iconography of the Tropical Destination Wedding

Destination weddings are largely constructed by the wedding and tourist industries in terms of the iconology of the tropical paradise, and the image of the wedding
couple on the beach is its premier selling point. The image of a couple, alone by the sea, the wind in their hair, sand underfoot, is quickly becoming the iconic vignette of true romance. Gone are the church, parents, audience of extended family, bridesmaids, flower girls, groomsmen, cake, and champagne. Also absent—from the image, at least—are the officiate, photographers, the other tourists, beachgoers, surfers, boaters, hotels and shops. The couple is shown alone. Wedding industry media consolidate the image in such a way that the phrase “beach wedding,” or even the wider designation “destination wedding” inevitably brings to mind the image of the wedding couple on the beach. Guy Cook, in his book *The Discourse of Advertising*, uses the word “fusion” to characterize the relationship of signs in advertising to the cultural sphere. And for the industry, the advantages of this fusion are profound, for the image begins to function as a sign of the product: the encapsulated experience of the destination wedding.

The prevalence of the couple-on-the-beach icon for couples planning a destination wedding of any kind can be seen in the website destinationweddings.com’s headline presenting “Your Dream Wedding in Paradise” to its customers. Though the site is a part of the Destination Weddings Travel Group and is a wedding travel website offering wedding planning services at 1,200 resorts in 42 countries, the explicit offering to clients is “paradise”: most of the destinations offered are oceanside resorts. The focus of the images on the site is the couple, alone in an Edenic paradise. In the case of the iconic beach image, the accompanying discourse touts the notion that true romance no longer involves a community but instead highlights the individualism and isolation of the couple. The destination wedding media analyzed here comment on this cultural practice
and map the context of its increasing significance in American culture. They reveal consumer behavior in light of the destination wedding phenomenon and highlight intimate romance as that which can be purchased, according to the media, in conjunction with the destination wedding as product. Through wedding blogs and testimonials as well as the wedding packages and services offered by resorts and wedding planners, media give a snapshot of the priorities of bridal couples as social actors.

The accompanying iconography of the wedding couple barefoot on the beach depicts a departure from the societal conventions symbolized by the formal white dress and the etiquette surrounding the white wedding. The iconic beach wedding scene, as published on the cover of the first edition of Martha Stewart’s *Destination Weddings and Dream Honeymoons*, features a pristine white sand beach that is absent of footprints save those of the couple depicted in the right half of the frame. The couple faces each other, holding hands. The groom is dressed in a casual white shirt and white cotton pants, is barefoot, and stands gazing into the face of the bride. She, however, while facing him, has her eyes closed as if dreaming. She smiles happily as though to herself. Her casual white sundress is long enough to trail in the sand, and a tulle veil is tied around her head and knotted at the back so that its train blows in the ocean breeze. The veil covers her windblown hair, which hangs loosely down to the middle of her back. Behind the couple in soft focus lie the light turquoise ocean and the sky beyond. Inside the cover the caption for the image reads, “All you need is love—and a simple, romantic dress.” Martha Stewart chose the image of the beach wedding for the cover of her newest publication
venture into the wedding industry, and no less than 20 variations of the image exist inside.

![Martha Stewart Destination Weddings and Dream Honeymoons: Cover. 2009.](image)

Fig. 10. Special Travel Issue: Cover. *Martha Stewart Destination Weddings and Dream Honeymoons*: Cover. 2009.

A Google search for “beach wedding” highlights the iconography of the “bridal couple alone on the beach” image as page after page depicts essentially this same picture. And, in this case, the image speaks for itself. There is no text on the image to describe
what is being sold. It needs no mediation, as it has become part of the cultural script. The entire tableau has become a commodity-as-sign. The equation of the “couple on the beach” image with its underlying signification of romance, individualism and escape is an example of the goal at the very heart of industry advertising—to establish a relationship between the commodity and its meaning-laden sign. Robert Goldman in his *Reading Ads Socially* speaks to the integrated relationship between the two:

> The commodity-as-sign operates when images are allied to particular products and product images are then deployed as signifiers of particular relations or experiences . . . [The] image is then arbitrarily attached to a product which has *itself* been detached from the customary relations of usage formerly associated with it. In this process, the product becomes equivalent to the discrete image . . . and begins to function as a sign of that image, so that when we think of the product we think of the image and when we think of the image we think of the product. (18)

The image is the defining icon for the destination wedding because it signifies a couple who have escaped social convention and traded it for the freedom of the tropics. The empty beach landscape typifies this. The couple, always alone, may be walking hand in hand, leaning into each other or facing each other while holding hands. The two are usually in wedding attire, though often more casual attire than that associated with a traditional white wedding, and the ocean, blue sky and white sand are visible, surrounding the couple. The positioning of the couple in a romantic pose alone suggests
not only the escape of travel but also the seclusion necessary for the two to find themselves and establish intimacy.

Viewers of such a magazine image or ad are meant to identify with, and desire to purchase, the private escape and romance of the couple in the image. In his work The Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual Content Industry, Paul Frosh loosely details a rubric by which images may be judged “romantic.” He argues that though the category has some inevitable slippage, what he calls the “intermediate reproduction of romance” (123, emphasis in original) is depicted in romantic images through the staging of a “romantic interchange” (122–23). For Frosh, these interchanges are depicted as either “playful romance” or “meditative romance” and are determined by four categories: romantic look, pose, setting and conventional symbols. The iconic tableau of a bridal couple on the beach is a perfect example of the meditative romance mode. Here, couples are involved in what Frosh calls the seemingly contradictory “self-absorption (staring into the distance conveys thoughtfulness and daydreaming; closed eyes connote a reflexive and meditative concentration on one’s own experience) and absolute absorption in the other” (128–9). Such couples capture the essence of endless love for the camera in a way that suggests this enactment is free of performativity. Rather, says Frosh, “romance just is—it is not created through ritual social interaction and theatrical self-presentation. The notion of authenticity is therefore central to its ideological force” (129).

The qualities of seeming authenticity and viewer accessibility go hand in hand. Frosh speaks to the portrayal of authentic romance as untainted by performativity:
viewers of a photograph that suggests a natural, authentic moment rather than a performative one are granted the access to imagine that they are witness to a real moment without the mediation of a photographer and may, therefore, more easily imagine themselves as the actors, alone in an island paradise. This is the territory Eva Illouz calls both lifelike and dreamlike. In her work *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Illouz analyzes media to identify the intersections between late capitalism and romance. In this process, she says, “The power of advertising lies not in regimenting consciousness but rather in articulating meanings that bind consumers’ desire to market forces. Romance is one of the most powerful ‘channels of desire’ used by advertisers to make their imagery at once lifelike and dreamlike” (82). Consumption here is decidedly inconspicuous and follows Illouz’s argument that what is being placed before the viewer is the chance to view a spectacle of intimacy, with the expectation that viewers will desire—and become willing to purchase—that intimacy for themselves.

The couple-on-the-beach image is also a powerful reconfiguring of the most iconic image of the traditional wedding, that of the bride alone. The woman as bride is traditionally the personification of a bridal exotic. She is at once idyllically virginal and yet spoken for, unreachable. Her beauty is enhanced by the sense that she is unattainable. Traditional wedding industry publications regularly depict images of the iconic bride alone, to the point of almost entirely occluding the groom. The April/May 2013 issue of *Brides* magazine contains fewer than fifteen images of grooms in its over four hundred pages, apart from the images in the destination wedding advertisements and the one
beach wedding the magazine profiles. In contrast, the beach wedding image suggests that
the bride exists here as a partner to the groom. And it is this partnership that is the
primary focus. Rather than as an iconic unattainable bride, the image situates the woman
as one half of a whole. And the recasting of the woman as partner is largely true even in
images of weddings that do have guests in attendance, though the guests rarely feature in
the iconography. The image of a wedding couple on the beach is centrally that—an image
of a couple. In the image of a beach wedding it is clear that both bride and groom will
participate in the performance of romance as a pair. Not only is the groom nearly always
present in destination wedding media; the layout places him on equal footing with the
bride. This positioning alters the groom’s traditional role of tuxedoed sidekick to the
iconic bride to elevate him instead to partner, showing an equal coupling.

As the tableau of the bride and groom on the deserted tropical beach becomes the
ultimate symbol for romance and intimacy, the beach wedding becomes the construction
of the new destination wedding ideal. This focus on the beach gives rise to the new
importance of the beach itself—both inherently and as the site for the wedding. In
destination wedding media the context of the beach infuses the concept of the destination
wedding. The tie is now so strong that they may be said to be inextricably linked.
Destination publications detailing destinations along with their pros, cons, costs and
charms, such as destination wedding magazines and books like Fodor’s Destination
Weddings: The World’s Most Extraordinary Places to Tie the Knot, inevitably feature the
“bridal couple on the beach” icon on the cover, no matter how many quaint Italian villas,
Mediterranean hot spots or California vineyards they feature on the interior.
Conclusion

The once-contradictory discourses of the wedding and travel combine in the destination wedding and posit a solution to the strident calls to consumption inherent in white wedding production, its bride-centric focus and its persistent ideology of integration into social norms. Marketing surrounding the destination wedding supposes that the destination wedding escape from traditional wedding norms will offer couples the freedom necessary, suspended from social convention in a liminal space, to develop an identity as a couple and an intimacy that will transform both their relationship, building a legacy of sustaining intimacy and also refocusing the wedding itself as a cultural practice of couplehood. The discourse of wedding travel describes the move away from community as able to free couples to perform romance and intimacy, while the destination’s status as a transformative liminal space offers an enhancement of this performance as well as the potential for a transformed identity capable of shifting the wedding’s ideological underpinnings. As brides and grooms create demand for the destination wedding that combines the discourses of escape, romance, intimacy and tourism, they continue to reshape the wedding experience into one that encompasses prelapsarian gender equality, the development of an identity as a couple, an escape from social conventions, travel and the tropics.
Chapter 3

Barefoot on the Beach: The Iconography of the Hawai‘i Destination Wedding

Hawaii is a place the whole world knows and loves. A place of staggering beauty and extraordinary gentleness. A place that offers rest and restoration. A place of unique heritage and culture. A place of Aloha. A place that is American, and yet it is not. This is what most people believe about Hawaii, and this is Hawaii’s brand promise. And Hawaii certainly belongs to the people who love her. (Mak 110)

If the tropical island has become the destination wedding ideal, Hawai‘i has been sold to American couples as the epitome of the ultimate romantic paradise. In the American imaginary Hawai‘i encompasses the discourse of tropical tourism centered on the beach as symbolic of an uninhabited and unsullied paradise that exists outside conventions of time and outside the conventions of civilization. Indeed, in his article on the beach as an icon of global imagination, Orvar Löfgren argues that “the global notion of the beach as paradise began in the cult of Hawai‘i and Waikiki Beach” (38). A uniquely American destination, Hawai‘i is both familiar and exotic, excitingly different yet neither culturally nor linguistically too far. Just as the destination wedding in general and the beach wedding in particular are cultural practices that have been commercially constructed by the discrete and often contradictory discourses of the white wedding, romance, tourism and the tropics, the destination wedding in Hawai‘i draws on a history
of discourse and iconography unique to the most remote landmass in the world. More than any other location, Hawai‘i offers to Americans a “brand promise,” as tourist industry scholar James Mak puts it, of a welcoming unspoiled paradise that is always-already saturated by tourist advertising. At the same time, while the construction of Hawai‘i tourism posits an escape from home and community to a tropical paradise, the idea of possession, ownership and belonging by the “people who love her” also allows Americans to conceptualize Hawai‘i as home. Americans have long been fascinated by what has been historically interpreted as their ownership of Hawai‘i as a romantic paradise rich in cultural history that includes the class prestige of royalty: the American version embodied by Hawai‘i’s kings and queens. As a tourist destination and wedding product, Hawai‘i encompasses the contradictory discourses of the wedding as a tool for integrating couples into middle or upper class following the example of royal society and the tropical paradise as the ideal escape from society and return to nature.

The exotic of the Hawaiian Islands has historically been constructed by visitors to its shores as the quintessential paradise: a place of bounty, lush unspoiled natural beauty, and friendly, accommodating and even royal inhabitants. Captain James Cook’s ship landed in 1778 and the enormously popular journal of his third voyage, published posthumously, followed by other equally popular accounts by writers such as Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson and James Michener, has served to create Hawai‘i as a dream destination. Captain Cook’s journal entries describe his first impressions of Hawai‘i as a place full of life’s luxuries: good food and friendly people, material wealth and healthy trade. His journal entry from January 19, 1778, portrays the island of Kaua‘i
in glowing terms: “As soon as we made sail the Canoes left us, but others came off from the shore and brought with them roasting pigs and some very fine Potatoes, which they exchanged, as the others had done, for whatever was offered them; several small pigs were got for a sixpenny nail or two apiece, so that we again found our selves in the land of plenty” (233). Though Cook’s notion of bounty was based on the exploitation of the inhabitants, his representation of Hawai‘i as a “land of plenty” to be enjoyed captivated his readers. That same year, on November 30, 1778, only a few months before he died, Cook details his welcome on O‘ahu: canoes came out to meet the ship and Cook describes a warm welcome where he received gifts of pigs from a man he perceived to be the King of Hawaiian Islands. Whatever his assumptions, ambitions and achievements concerning Hawai‘i, Cook clearly inaugurated the narrative of the Islands as welcoming, beautiful, bountiful and full of gifts for the newly arrived.

The construction of Hawai‘i as a place of beauty, welcome and belonging was reinforced by prominent visitors who, like Captain Cook, extolled these Island virtues worldwide. In his famous travelogue letters, Mark Twain describes his three months in Hawai‘i, famously calling the Islands “the loveliest fleet of Islands that lies anchored in any ocean” (824). Several decades later in 1889, Robert Louis Stevenson, at the height of his fame, was entertained in Waikīkī by King Kalākaua. Houston Wood describes a picture of the occasion, which he identifies as “one of the most frequently reproduced photographs of Waikīkī” (97). Here, Hawaiian royalty entertain the tourist. The image contains “a picture of Stevenson, Lili‘uokalani and King Kalākaua seated on the floor
together at the head of a lavish display of food, the sort of experience hoteliers would soon be claiming to offer for sale to wealthy travelers” (97).

These descriptions cemented Hawai‘i and Waikīkī in the minds of Americans as luxury playgrounds and set the expectation that visitors to the Islands could expect the same royal treatment as Stevenson. James Michener’s later novel *Hawaii* does this same work, creating expectations of what visitors might experience on a trip to the Islands. A review from the *Baltimore Sun*, on the inside flap of the 1986 reprinting, describes the novel *Hawaii* and its story:

America’s preeminent storyteller, James Michener, introduced an entire generation of readers to a lush, exotic world in the Pacific with this classic novel. But it is also a novel about people, people of strength and character; the Polynesians; the fragile missionaries; the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos who intermarried into a beautiful race called Hawaiians. Here is the story of their relationships, toils, and successes, their strong aristocratic kings and queens and struggling farmers, all of it enchanting and very real in this almost mythical place.

The construction of Hawaiʻi here is as a land mythic in its lush beauty, both its natural beauty and the beauty of its people. Its settlers from all over the world are portrayed, in both the book and the review, as living in harmony—to the extent of intermarrying—and its exoticism is sure to enchant any who arrive on the Islands’ shores. Hawaiʻi is framed as a place of exotic beauty and a set of Islands which welcomes the foreigner, and the welcome is directly tied to Hawaiʻi as a reflection of its history of marriage.

The weddings of royal and high-ranking women to European and American businessmen and missionaries in Hawaiʻi before its overthrow by the United States set the tone for formulation in the American imaginary as a place of welcome and belonging. Prominent marriages of foreigners to Hawaiʻi’s aristocratic kings and queens offered a construction of marriage in Hawaiʻi as a way of solidifying foreigners’ sense of belonging to the Islands by right of affection and political alliance. John Owen Dominis, who was an advisor to the royal family and whose father had been an advisor to King Kamehameha III, married Queen Liliʻuokalani in September 1862 (Liliuokalani 22).
Upon the queen’s death Dominis became prince consort of the Hawaiian Islands. Likewise, Scottish businessmen Archibald Scott Cleghorn married Princess Mariam Likelike, sister of David Kalākaua. When Kalākaua became king, Cleghorn’s daughter, Princess Kaiʻulani, became heir apparent to the Hawaiian throne (Liliuokalani 407). Many prominent men who became the leading oligarchy in Hawai‘i throughout its transition from territory to annexation by the United States to Statehood married advantageously into royal or high-ranking Hawaiian families. Simultaneously, United States military and plantation systems came to power and brought soldiers and plantation laborers to marry into Hawai‘i’s existing population (Rayson 63–131 passim).

Today’s brand image was, long before any formal tourist industry, carefully crafted by businesses interested in capitalizing on the conceptualization of Hawai‘i as a welcoming tropical paradise. In his Creating Hawai‘i Tourism: A Memoir, Robert C. Allen notes that by 1946, “visitors were being encouraged to visit Hawai‘i, largely through the efforts of the Matson Navigation Company aboard the renovated luxury liners, Lurline and Matsonia. Matson also owned the principle tourist destinations in Waikīkī—the Royal Hawaiian and Moana Hotels” (2). These two hotels marked Waikīkī as a luxury resort and recalled for American tourists the glamour of Hawai‘i as a place of royalty. The goal of company executives was to combine the exotic of Hawai‘i with the indulgence of the resort experience. Advertising in this period helped solidify the image of the Islands as a beach paradise. For the visitors who could afford to journey to the tropical paradise, the theme of advertisers was luxury served up with Hawaiian aloha. The famous image of the opening of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel Gala in 1927 depicts the
scene. Here, the predominately white rich are decked out in their finest evening wear and attended by a sea of Hawaiians in tuxedoes—ready to serve with aloha.

Hawai‘i was marketed as a beach paradise for the wealthy who could enjoy its riches outside their hotels as well as inside. Advertisers promoted sunbathing, swimming and surfing as activities that made the tourist proximity to the beach enviable to mainland citizens. Hawai‘i’s beaches became the definitive playground of the day. Societal rules for dress and behavior were relaxed on the beaches, and as the tourist industry emerged,
surfing, as a sport driven by young Hawaiian men, was promoted as the ultimate way to play. As early as 1916, *Travel Magazine* published advertisements for the *S.S. Great Northern* under the slogan “Now it’s Hawaii, Pleasureland for the Tourist” depicting a man surfing shirtless, with the iconic Diamond Head Crater in the background.

Luxury also combined with play in the person of the beach boy, and alongside these hotels, a crew of Hawaiian “beach boys” who could teach surfing and Hawaiian culture to tourists ensured that guests would see the Islands as a beach paradise with friendly and helpful inhabitants. Robert Allen describes the beach boys:

With improbable names such as ‘Splash’ Lyons, ‘Chick’ Daniels, ‘Panama’ Dave,’ and ‘Turkey’ Love, they captured the imaginations and hearts of their customer guests. The beach boys treated the casual tourist with the same attention and respect as that paid the glamorous movie stars and people of wealth who demanded their attention. Their services were many—not necessarily confined to beach activities. They provided towels, umbrellas, lotions, and land comfort areas, but they were most noted for their abilities to teach swimming, surfing, and outrigger canoe paddling.

(16)

The most famous of these was Duke Kahanamoku, a Hawaiian athlete whose five Olympic medals and charming personality won him worldwide fame. With the help of other stars such as Shirley Temple, Bing Crosby and Elvis Presley, all of whose work contributed to this vision, promoters could be certain that Hawai‘i would be seen as a place not only of glamour but of romance.

This was certainly exemplified over the decades of Hawai‘i’s promotion by the release of the blockbusters of Bing Crosby and Elvis Presley, *Waikiki Wedding* (1937) and *Blue Hawaii* (1961). Not only were these films wildly popular; their soundtracks about romance and love in the tropics were chart-toppers, feeding a craze for Hawaiian
music that had begun in the early 1900s. The popularity of these two films also cemented Hawai‘i in the American imagination as a wedding spot. The plot of Bing Crosby’s *Waikiki Wedding* centers on the idea of fashioning Island romance for the mainland visitor and is particularly interesting in that it both works to construct the image of Hawai‘i as a romantic place and at the same time reveals the deliberate nature of that construction. Crosby, as Tony Marvin, is a marketing director who designs a publicity stunt for the fictional pineapple corporation Imperial Pineapple. His idea is to create a mainland beauty contest that will crown an “Imperial Pineapple Girl,” who will then come to Hawai‘i for three weeks and publish her experience of the trip. When the winner, Georgia Smith, played by Shirley Ross, arrives, she finds that her promised glamorous trip to Hawai‘i is proving uneventful, with unromantic company executives drawing her itinerary, and she threatens to return home. Tony is then ordered by Imperial Pineapple executives to romance the girl before she can publish her lackluster impressions. The experience then created for Georgia involves all the romantic glamour that only Hawai‘i, as the movie implies, can offer: exotic black pearls, moonlight serenades, a mysteriously potent Hawaiian drink, an angry volcano, ferocious and friendly locals, a diary depicting the romance of the tourist experience, true love and the lavishly floral Waikīkī wedding.

*Elvis Presley’s Blue Hawaii* is no less spectacular, and its impact on tourist culture was just as significant. The soundtrack to the film includes hits such as “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” “Rockahula,” Elvis’s version of the classic “Aloha Oe,” and the “Hawaiian Wedding Song,” all of which remain prevalent in the cultural landscape today. Elvis’s drink of choice in the film, the mai tai cocktail, has become forever emblematic of
Hawai‘i’s tropical flavor. As Elvis’s character is an Island-born beach boy who dreams of owning his own travel agency and marrying his French-Hawaiian girlfriend, the film reifies the conceptualization of Hawai‘i as a place for tourism, play, love and marriage.

The construction of Hawai‘i as not only a tropical paradise but also a romantic place, and a marrying place, is maintained by the tourist industry today, and the destination wedding, as “a new and growing phenomenon for mainland couples,” makes up a significant portion of the total Island tourist trade, says Frank Haas, marketing director for the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority (Arakawa). In 2004, Lynda Arakawa of the Honolulu Advertiser published the article “More Visitors Tying the Knot Here,” noting that mainland American couples were driving the new surge in destination weddings in the state. These couples lean toward Hawai‘i for its amenities as an American destination and for its successful and prevalent iconology, that of the tropical paradise. Wedding tourism brought in “$605 million in 2003, according to state Department of Economic Development and Tourism officials” (Arakawa), and this sum continues to grow. Resorts and larger hotels receive the largest share of wedding dollars, but couples in the Islands also patronize smaller businesses that do not generally have a share in the tourist economy, such as florists, photographers, videographers and private wedding venues. In recognition of the growth of the destination wedding industry in Hawai‘i and elsewhere TheKnot.com in March of 2004 launched its destination weddings section on their website, and it continues to see ever-increasing traffic (Arakawa). The years following the 2008 recession dampened the market slightly, but the number of weddings is again on the rise. The State Department of Health determined that 15,004 permits were issued to
non-resident couples—of which neither bride nor groom are residents—in 2012 (Office of Health). And these couples increase also tourism by bringing in guests who stay and spend as well, wedding tourists who are not counted in wedding figures based on wedding permits issued. The average number of guests for a destination wedding in Hawaiʻi as of 2011 was 62, according to The Knot (Fraiman). Couples tend to combine the honeymoon with the wedding for a stay longer than the general tourist’s, and guests tend to do the same, often using the wedding as an opportunity for a vacation (Arakawa).

The Construction of an American Wedding Destination

The iconology of Hawaiʻi emphasizes the seclusion of the tropical island, with its signification of an Edenic paradise, while at one and the same time it manages a host of other constructions, emphasizing its exotic location, calling upon various representations of the “Hawaiian heritage” to create a sense of authenticity, nostalgically recalling the resort experience of wealthy steamship travelers catered to by friendly locals. The range of types of weddings offered by the wedding tourism industry in Hawaiʻi evokes the traditional grandeur of Hawaiian aliʻi and monarchs but also emphasizes the minimalist, “informal” and “spontaneous” ceremony. The industry highlights both historical nostalgia and the iconology of inconspicuous consumption at the same time travelers are assured that they can relax while every need is met. Americans have found Hawaiʻi a place to perform new rituals of intimacy using tropes and iconography designed to create an identity as a couple that will become a sustaining legacy of their relationship.
Hawai‘i’s marketing as a romantic American destination, including its iconology, the range of offerings by the industry, the wedding package and ritual practice, shows the variety of ways media seeks to resolve the tensions inherent in the destination wedding: romance and marriage, social and individual, industry and consumer. The iconology of the beach backdrop is a construction that posits an isolation of the couple that allows for the building of intimacy in service of their relationship, while the iconological construction of a tropical paradise and the emphasis on marrying away from community signify the emphasis on personal choice over community expectations. Meanwhile, the presence of brides and grooms on the Internet, planning, determining etiquette, and posting testimonials, “likes” or critiques of the wedding industry, signifies a greater presence of consumers and their concerns in the midst of the ideological framework fashioned by industry product and the potentiality for greater reciprocity between the two.

Specific to Hawai‘i as a destination for consumers is its construction by both the tourist and wedding industries as an American tropical paradise steeped in tropes of Hawaiian culture. Wedding consumers are invited by the industry to immerse themselves in the “cultural” tourist experience of Hawai‘i, its framework built into the American imaginary. Hawai‘i has the pristine beaches and oceans, palm trees and sand under blue skies that so easily enable a tourist industry formulation of the Islands as Edenic paradise, but the industry also offers an expectation of the Hawaiian concept of aloha—an term used as an ideology of welcome by the tourist industry. In 1959 Hawai‘i became “The Aloha State” when it became the fiftieth state in the United States. The Hawai‘i Tourism
Authority takes “aloha” to mean that, as the homepage for the organization states, “The people of Hawaii would like to share their Islands with you” (The Hawaiian Islands, HTA). Tourists and wedding travelers alike enjoy the freedom to imagine that the Islands, the very land of Hawai‘i, welcomes the traveler, and that both the Hawaiian people and Hawai‘i’s settler population do likewise. Tourist resorts located on every island follow this script. Text on the homepage for the Royal Kona Resort in Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i, posits that the first impression of Hawai‘i for the tourist will be one of welcome by the land itself:

Even before you are welcomed to the Royal Kona Resort by the gracious staff you will be embraced by a swirl of salt air—*ha*, in Hawaiian, the life-breath of the islands. You will see it ruffling the fronds of the palm trees that fringe the 12 manicured acres, tossing the waves against the stark black lava rocks at the property’s feet, marching columns of clouds across the uninterrupted expanse of sky. The air here presents you with the perfume of tropical flowers. It is a reminder that you are on the Big Island of Hawai‘i, a reminder to breathe, to exhale, and completely relax.

The tenor of the resort’s text is that the resort will be a place to experience all the qualities of Hawai‘i, where beautiful natural surroundings, manicured resort playgrounds and “gracious” staff join nature in welcoming and serving. A commercial advertisement for Disney’s Aulani, the company’s newest resort in Kapolei, O‘ahu, goes further with its implication that the land welcomes the traveler. The ad features (computer-animated) nature singing a chant in the form of a children’s chorus, which combines with images of
visitors enjoying the resort in an assumption of welcome. First butterflies, then birds, geckos, turtles, hibiscus flowers, dolphins and the Hawaiian reef trigger fish, the humuhumunukunukuāpua‘a, turn or run to the delighted visitors while singing a chant written by Hawaiian artist Kealii Reichel and voiced by the Kamehameha Schools Children’s Chorus. The singing plants and animals and the Hawaiian chant written and sung by icons of Hawaiian culture signify that an interaction with nature is for sale at the resort and that all the inhabitants of Hawai‘i invite visitors to share the Islands. This expectation of welcome to paradise infuses nearly every industry publication.

Hawaiian Island tourist tropes such as tropical flower bouquets, lei, music, shells, tiki torches and Hawaiian-print dresses or shirts provide the construction of Hawai‘i as a paradise, and their use in wedding packages is sold as that which will bring brides and grooms closer both to nature and to what is marketed as the culture of Hawai‘i. The use of these tropes in wedding packages also feeds the market for romance tourism, and both their advertisement and use sell the notion that these elements were used in the service of traditional Hawaiian romance customs that, says the industry, can now be freely and straightforwardly used as the romantic spice necessary to enhance the main dish, the American wedding. On its Hawaiian History page, the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority sells the cultural experience of the Islands to the tourists: “Today, Hawaii is a global gathering place for visitors to share in the spirit of aloha. Beyond the sun and surf of the islands, we urge you to discover the rich cultural history of Hawaii to add even more depth to your visit” (History, HTA). In this way, markers that signify the addition of Hawai‘i and Hawaiian romance to the wedding provide as much of the appeal of the destination as
does the beach. In the same way that the white wedding dress signifies a wedding, these markers act as signs that a “Hawaiian” wedding has taken place. For brides and grooms these signifiers are as important to a wedding that takes place in the Islands as the lush tropical surroundings themselves.

Wedding planners such as Hawaiian Island Weddings, Maui Ministers, Aloha Island Weddings and many others offer services in the Hawaiian language as well as industry-invented “Hawaiian” traditions to sell the cultural imprint of the “authentic” Hawaiian wedding on the American destination wedding. “Hawaiian” romance traditions commonly marketed by the industry include pouring colored sand into glass bottles layer after layer to signify unity and commitment, standing in a “flower circle” made of tropical flowers in the sand while exchanging vows, blowing a conch shell as the bride arrives, playing the “Hawaiian Wedding Song” and holding a “ti leaf ceremony.” According to multiple bridal websites, a ti leaf ceremony can involve placing a ti leaf into the ocean as a gift to ancestors or blessing a lava rock, wrapping it in a ti leaf and then placing it to be “left at the ceremony site as an offering, prayer and blessing which remains steadfast at the place of your marriage, marking the birth of your union” (mywedding.com). Wedding tourists purchase this proof of a cultural experience within the natural surroundings specific to Hawai‘i by choosing these tropes for their individual ceremonies. The beach wedding is a destination ceremony on a beach, but with lei and other tropes present the experience signifies the Hawai‘i archetype: an escape to paradise complete with a cultural exotic.
A parallel discourse embedded in the construction of the Islands as welcoming to Americans is the concept of ‘ohana. Through the concept of ‘ohana as marketed by the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, visitors to the Islands can claim ownership and belonging by way of extended family. The industry posits that couples can escape from family and familial expectations of home yet find a constructed ‘ohana in Hawai‘i with the same values of privacy, nature and intimacy. The phrase “Ohana means family” was popularized by the 2002 Disney animated science fiction comedy Lilo & Stitch, and the word has a popular definition as family that extends beyond biological relatives. ‘Ohana is its own cultural trope, not only of welcome but of belonging, and it is used by the tourist industry to welcome tourists into the ‘ohana of the Islands. Tourists, and wedding tourists, are invited by the discourse of the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority to feel a sense of kinship with the land, and with the people of Hawai‘i through their knowledge and consumption of its heritage—real or as constructed by the industry. “Weddings by Kalehua,” a company by Kalehua Fetheran, a minister and self-proclaimed Bishop for the Hawaiian Islands, offers clients the opportunity to have Hawaiian wedding ceremonies or simply to participate in Kalehua’s defining wedding vision: aloha, truth and responsibility. A testimonial on the website by the newlywed couple Giovanna and Steve describes the cultural traditions they added to their wedding experience for fun and flavor—‘ohana among them: “Our guests really enjoyed learning about the Hawaiian culture and customs, as did we.” They further claim membership in the Islands and as Hawaiians through the experience: “we are proud and honored to call ourselves a part of the Hawaiian family,” says Giovanna (kalehua.net). The inclusion of Hawaiian romantic
traditions invites a sense of inclusion in Hawaiian culture by the tourist industry and marks the experience, both for the couple and their community once back home, as an “authentic” representation of a Hawaiian experience by way of inclusion into the Hawaiian family. And, whether or not these couples gave website testimonials by answering questionnaires or other prompting by the industry, these are experiences they chose to highlight in the telling. In another testimonial on the site, clients Joangel and Sharon Martinez recall their induction into the Hawai‘i ‘ohana in their wedding ceremony with Kalehua: “The best moments were when each of us took a pinch of sand and mixed it together with his family which created ONE family. We also loved the part where we went down to the ocean and presented the gift of Hawaiian ti leaf to our passing relatives.”

Industry advertising likewise plays into the discourse of tourism as that which invites travelers to interact with Hawaiian culture. In a mirroring of the central importance of the constructed authentic as an ideological force in the Hawai‘i tourist experience, unspoiled nature, “real Hawaiian” native customs and unaffectedly welcoming locals feature as important tropes. The resort website at the Royal Kona describes the Hawai‘i wedding as a mix of mainstream white wedding cultural traditions, which the website calls the “modern American Martha-Stewart lace-bouquet wedding ceremony,” and various “Hawaiian” wedding traditions, suggesting to couples that the addition of Hawaiian cultural traditions can make the traditional American wedding unique. The website ignores the reality that these “unique” Hawaiian traditions are universally marketed to destination wedding customers, itself marketing the cultural mix
this way: “There are many more interesting cultural traditions surrounding marriage in Hawaii, and if you’re looking to tie the knot on our beautiful islands, you and your partner can mix cultures for a ceremony that is truly distinctive and unique!” Though much wedding tourism takes place at resort enclaves, Hawaiian culture is marketed as available to be experienced through consumption in the wedding packages offered throughout the industry.

For resort packages marketing the Hawai‘i wedding experience, it is the number and quality of the Hawaiian tropes, in combination with the maximum number of guests, which determines the price of the package. Resorts stage authenticity by marketing packages as more authentically Hawaiian or less, dependent on the addition of more or fewer Hawaiian tropes such as more expensive flowers, hula dancers, Hawaiian music and the like. Most resorts offer set packages for ceremonies and separate packages for receptions. Resorts combine varying wedding and reception packages for customers to cover both the wedding and reception. Choices for wedding locations at resorts generally feature the beach, lanai, banquet room or garden. Smaller wedding venues include Hawaiian tropes in the same tiered fashion but, in contrast to the larger resorts, minimize the emphasis on the reception, staging an authentic Hawai‘i wedding experience as exclusive to the couple, or the couple and minimal guests.

The Royal Kona Resort offers four wedding packages typical of those offered by large resorts in the Islands and, again typically, uses Hawaiian tropes to stage authenticity. The private beach wedding is the “Just The Two of Us” ceremony package for $999, the “Royal Hibiscus Wedding” ceremony for $1,999 includes seating for 10, the
“Royal Lehua Wedding” at $2,799 includes seating for 20 and the “Royal Pikake Wedding” at $3,799 includes seating for 40 guests. All ceremonies include a wedding coordinator, a “private wedding venue with panoramic ocean views,” a “unique Hawaiian ceremony,” and a “keepsake Hawaii wedding certificate” (Royal Kona Resort). The resort does not specify in what way the ceremony will be either “Hawaiian” or “unique,” but the implication is that in addition to an interaction with nature, a cultural flavor is on offer. In the same way, the resort does not provide an image of the wedding certificate so that couples may view the way in which the document can be identified as a keepsake, nor how it will be constructed as a “Hawaii” certificate. The packages are sold on the implication alone.

In addition to these primary tropes, the smallest package includes a two-pound loose orchid petal path and two orchid lei for a “Hawaiian” lei exchange. The resort website promotes this exchange with the suggestion that a lei exchange signals the authentic experience of a Hawaiian wedding—not the tourist version but the local Hawaiian version. “If you and your intended want to go full island-style instead of just holding a regular wedding in Hawaii, here’s a quick primer on the way the real Kama‘aina does it,” it explains, continuing, “Instead of a ring exchange, traditional marriage in Hawaii includes a ritual where the newlyweds stand in a ‘circle of love’ and exchange leis” (Royal Kona Resort). The distinction between “just holding a regular wedding in Hawaii” and including these romantic “Hawaiian” elements is highlighted in both industry images of Hawai‘i destination weddings and privately posted in
testimonials or private websites; likewise, nearly every package offered either by resort or private wedding coordinator includes a lei exchange.

The next package up includes a larger three-pound loose orchid petal path in addition to a “tropical hand tied bridal bouquet” and a “matching grooms boutonniere” (Royal Kona Resort), in addition to the orchid lei for the lei exchange. The third package is both more expensive and more heavily laden with the flavor of Hawai‘i. A “Hawaiian musician” who plays for one hour during the ceremony is included, as well as the three-pound orchid path, bouquet and boutonniere. Lei for the exchange are now the more expensive tuberose for the bride and maile for the groom, and two additional ti leaf lei are added for fathers or groomsmen, along with two additional orchid lei for mothers or bridesmaids. The “Royal Pikake Wedding” upgrades the musician to a “Hawaiian duo,” includes a “Hula lei greeter with up to 30 leis to greet guests upon arrival,” and offers a “twelve-foot orchid strand to decorate the gazebo or bamboo canopy” (Royal Kona Resort). The “Hawaiian” musicians and the “hula lei greeter” not only signify that the cultural markers they employ, music and hula, are authentic, but for the mainland American couple they are also meant to add to the sense that the resort’s descriptions and employment of Hawaiian tradition are accurate and that the people of Hawai‘i welcome them. The sense of a Hawaiian experience is mirrored in the reception packages, which include “Hawaiian centerpieces,” hula dancers as entertainment and the opportunity to hold the reception in conjunction with the tourist production of the Royal Kona Resort Luau.
Smaller venues apply similar industry strategies to construct themselves as destination wedding venues but offer even greater isolation and, in advertising, place a greater emphasis on the discourses of escape, privacy, dodging tradition and building intimacy. These venues also emphasize through website text the purported ease of destination wedding production through wedding vendors who work to provide a product that reflects consumer desires, and the websites of coordinators for weddings at both large resorts and smaller venues are quick to let brides and grooms know that any packages or services they offer can be personalized to the couple’s specifications. Smaller venues are typically private locations designed for small ceremonies and receptions, and many are private homes designed to accommodate couples with a desire for an intimate ceremony rather than one with many guests. The company Above Heaven’s Gate, owned by Captain/Reverend Howie Welfeld, offers beach weddings for two exclusively at a two-story wooden cottage, the “Hobbit House,” complete with round windows and doors, shingles and gables, built especially for the purpose; also included are champagne, cake after the ceremony, and photographs. The site also offers a make-up artist and photographer, a catalogue of tropical bouquets and lei to choose from and even a travel agent working exclusively for the company to make the beach getaway what one groom called in his website testimonial “one stop shopping” for the wedding. The location has grounds sculpted for destination wedding photographs, including a constructed waterfall surrounded by tropical foliage and a parrot to pose on the shoulders of the bride and groom. The experience is designed to be exclusive, private and away from any community whatsoever. “Captain Howie,” the owner, who is also an ordained
minister, hopes to create an experience that aligns the discourses of escape and eluding societal convention or communal interference with those of travel to the tropical exotic for the purpose of building intimacy in an Edenic environment. Photographs of wedding couples draped in lei abound on the website. Common backdrops include the waterfall to the side of the lawn at the Hobbit House, and Hawai‘i’s beaches, most commonly Waimanalo Bay Beach, unofficially renamed by the company as Angels Bay Beach.

Unlike the larger resorts or wedding/reception venues built to accommodate guests, the Above Heaven’s Gate website has altogether de-emphasized the notion of guests. With the exception of a few posted photos depicting guests, accommodation for guests is not mentioned; therefore, the website markets the services at Above Heaven’s Gate as more closely aligning with a reconceptualization of weddings that is, as Captain Howie claims on his website, “a little to the left” (hawaiiweddings.com), denoting an experience that will be “off center” or more liberating than the norm for ceremonies involving wedding coordinators. The company also claims that they are an even more authentic destination wedding provider than their competitors because they offer a more exclusive and private experience. A link on the main page entitled “We’re not for everyone” takes the viewer to a message written by the reverend decrying the traditional destination wedding by bridal companies in the Islands:

Regarding our Hawaii wedding locations, we do not perform our ceremonies at the common “tourist traps” used by the other Hawaii wedding companies. If you would like throngs of tourists pointing their cameras at you, and gawking at your ceremony, then there are many
McWedding companies offering this style of Hawaii Weddings. Certainly they are eager to have your business. Take a peek at Capt. Howie's Favorite Hawaii wedding locations. (Above Heaven’s Gate)

The script invites couples to a beach wedding experience that is atypical, not a “McWedding,” which while “not for everyone” offers a break both from the traditional white wedding and also from the traditional destination wedding service. The website implies, therefore, that there is a standardized destination McWedding, which will be the only kind of service available to consumers if they go elsewhere. By implication the company posits that the beach weddings offered by Above Heaven’s Gate are the real destination weddings. Rather than the typified Hawai‘i wedding, the company markets an experience that is more private, more centered on the couple and their wishes, and more intimate than other companies can provide.

This appeal to those looking for a less conventional experience, though presented as “not for everyone” and “left of center,” is, perhaps ironically, in perfect alignment with the marketing of the destination wedding as an escape from tradition, expectation and convention. Bridal couple Tannen and Peter, in their wedding profile on junebugweddings.com, describe the feeling they hoped to create with their destination beach wedding in exactly these terms: “We wanted our wedding to feel impromptu, surprising and alive, the way you feel when you’re on a stolen vacation.” Describing the wedding day itself, Tannen says,

I also loved the unconventional nature of our wedding. The wedding was truly “ours.” My best friend, Aimee, was ordained... and she wrote an
incredible, unique ceremony. Peter and I wrote our own vows . . . There was no “first dance.” In fact, the first person I danced with was my friend, Dan, who was fresh out of the ocean from an impromptu swim. At one point, I looked around the dinner table, teeming with conversation and laughter, and everyone looked truly happy, lost in the moment. I just remember thinking, “this is what happiness is. (Weber)

The implication of the testimonial is that happiness comes from the freedom to experience the unconventional and that this style of freedom can only be felt away from the staunch societal conventions of home. The pleasure expressed in being outside convention, as well as simply outside at the beach, the happy jettisoning of traditions such as the first dance, and the detailing of an impromptu swim as a marker of happiness on the occasion describe the combination of discourses, escape, travel and romance that inform the destination wedding as a new social ritual.

The Iconography of the Hawai‘i Destination Wedding

The myriad elements that together make up the iconography of Hawai‘i’s image in destination media are made manifest through industry advertising depicting not only the icon of the couple alone on the beach but also other images emblematic of romance, the tropics, intimate play and the Hawaiian exotic. Each ad has a background context situated in a specific historical moment, and that the viewer/consumer infers though ellipsis the message of the ad. Fern Johnson, in her book *Imaging in Advertising: Verbal and Visual Codes of Commerce*, takes the notion further and argues that advertising
moments “have the potential to comment on cultural practices, practices related to broad patterns of consumption, specific products as cultural practices, but also images of social actors and their doings” (72). She considers, “Advertising, taken as a whole, is itself a discourse, meaning both that it is articulated with conventions of practice and that it uses particular discourse elements to structure its meaning potential” (6). This is not to say that all destination weddings, or destination wedding imagery, enlist only the couple as participants, but rather that the iconic image represents what Cook calls an “advertising moment.” Cook defines the advertising moment as comprised of the ad, or industry text itself, and its “accompanying discourse,” or the discourse in which the ad is entrenched but to which it makes no direct allusion. In this sense, destination wedding advertising presents an advertising moment. And this is the case whether the image is one of a couple alone on a pristine beach or a typical photomontage, both of which are employed as the industry’s modern tropical tableau.

The Hawai‘i tourist experience has been constructed, from the industry’s earliest advertising images, as one of play and fun in the sun and the sea in addition to romance, a further reason the consciously lighthearted and less formal destination beach wedding has so easily become equated with the Islands. The tropical tableau includes the couple as well as the scenic and cultural elements that are the hallmark of the Hawai‘i wedding. The “cultural elements” sold by the industry as authentically Hawaiian or local add to the iconography of the wedding framed by the couple alone on the beach incorporating Hawaiian culture; the culture of aloha. In this construction, Hawai‘i is thus posited as not only a place for individual play but also a place for couples to find themselves through
specifically romantic play in a particularly Island space, complete with its own Island culture.

The inclusion of men in destination wedding advertising, unlike the beautifully austere images of brides alone in traditional bridal magazines, provides a framework for images of playful romance, constructed by industry images as a play which is enhanced by the tropical setting. Playful romance exhibited by an image is defined by an emphasis in the image on playful action, such as walking on the beach. “Romance, according to these images, is created by how you act, not by how you are; it is a mode of doing not being,” says Frosh (128). The narrative playfully romantic images create is one in which the couple is engaged in the simple play that is consistently generated by their relationship. The viewer, then, is allowed a glimpse of the couple’s “typical” intimate and romantic action toward each other. This is, says Frosh, “the expression of mutuality as recreation, as doing things together in the world in a voluntary, rule-bound space of play that is nevertheless distinct and secluded from ordinary life” (128).

Images of a couple performing playful romance during a wedding away are depicted in destination wedding media by the photomontage, a common feature of these magazines and websites. In industry advertising images of couples, alone or practicing intimate play, often incorporating cultural elements from faraway destinations, in the company of a select few, abound. Though montages occasionally appear in profiles of “real” weddings in traditional bridal magazines, among industry productions these collections of pictures are unique to destination wedding publications. Montages are designed to tell the complete story of the wedding on a double-page spread and create the
flavor of the experience of a wedding away. Martha Stewart’s magazine *Destination Weddings and Dream Honeymoons* contains a photomontage of the “real” destination wedding of April Mancuso and Kerisimasi Reynolds in Hawai‘i on May 1, 2010, and the montage gives an example of a Hawai‘i wedding that depicts the interplay between the discourses of romance, intimacy, tourist and tropical tropes, consumption, and advertising in a mainstream, mainland publication. The layout consists of nine pictures of the same size, laid out in a grid in the middle of a double-page spread. Five of the nine are of the couple. The first, top right, shows the couple in wedding dress and lei holding hands and gazing together at a point in front of them as if engaged in the ceremony itself. Tropical greenery creates a backdrop. The next shows a playful kiss glimpsed through a translucent silk parasol on lava rock beside the ocean, while the third picture is of the bride cheek to cheek with a flower girl wearing a flower lei. A table setting with tropical flowers in a glass vase alongside an image of the couple smiling and holding a bowl full of cash from their money dance and a Hawaiian sunset complete the second row. The montage closes with shots of the groom lifting up the barefoot bride and swinging her around under a wedding canopy surrounded by tropical flowers, the couple dancing a hula in traditional costume, and lastly, the couple kissing and riding off into the sunset on a white scooter with “love” detailed onto the front and sugar cane fields in the background, alongside the road they travel.
The romantic look in these images is significant. Most commonly the couples in romantic images are gazing at each other, though one or the other in the partnership may be looking at the camera or away, or they may have their eyes closed. They may be kissing. In all cases, the romantic look inherently disavows an audience. Frosh elaborates: “This is what the disavowal of the camera’s presence involves: the lover’s gaze guarantees the seclusion of romance, and its connection to individualism and self-sufficiency, even as it performs itself in the public eye” (123). And this disavowal of the camera’s presence, and indeed the viewing audience for the images, is normalized for modern readers of images. In the montage detailed above, two of the images are meditative and three are playful. Each of these images contains a disavowal. In the first meditative image the couple gazes together at something the viewer cannot see. The exclusion of the officiate from view and the look “in” at the couple in an active, intimate moment provides the seclusion necessary to make the photograph appear romantic. The image can be read as a picture of intimacy and posits the exclusive isolation of Hawai‘i. The couple is together experiencing the pleasure of the moment alone. They are self-sufficient. There is no need for a return gaze. Then, too, the couple stands slightly apart, holding hands. The two are individuals, not, in the moment, embracing lovers. This stands in contrast to the playful image of the couple under the canopy, gazing into each other’s eyes and laughing as he picks her up and swings her around. Viewers read this simple gesture as an iconic romantic motion. The officiate in the background smiling and applauding indicates a successful conclusion of the wedding ceremony. The two show self-sufficiency in their positioning. They face each other and look only at each other,
indicating interest. This is a private celebration, and the couple has eyes and need only for each other—yet the audience is allowed to gaze upon their interaction.

The positioned direction of the gaze in indicating romance is particularly important for the woman. In order for an image to maintain its romance, the photographer must be careful not to construct another type of disavowal: that of the man’s desiring gaze. In his chapter on creating romance in wedding photography Johnson refers to the romantic look, defined by an explicit depiction of a subject feeling romantic that does not include an interaction between the subject and the photographer. For male and female subjects, Johnson states that the look “is not nearly so important for the man who generally is looking at the woman. Having the woman look down or off to the side creates a feeling of feigned disinterest while the man counterbalances that with a very direct and very interested gaze towards the woman” (187). In some sense it is significant that it is the direction of the man’s gaze that renders the image romantic. The deterministic nature of the gaze is undermined, however, by the assumption here that a picture is not romantic if the man feigns disinterest. The acceptable disinterest for maintaining the frame here is the stereotypical feminine coyness, while disinterest from the man, feigned or otherwise, would register as a singularly unromantic act and invalidate the romantic image. The groom in a wedding montage may not feign disinterest, but may still look at the camera or viewer. Textual cues in romantic photographs are still necessitated by the male gaze.

However, photos where one or both of members of the couple look at the camera and away from each other are romantic in the sense that they are rarer and have the charm
of being reminiscent of the snapshot. Seemingly spontaneous images encourage the sense of intimate authenticity that the montage hopes to create in portraying a “real” wedding. The gaze toward the camera by both the man and the woman creates an artless authenticity which gives viewers the sense that they themselves might have taken just such a picture had they been at the event, and they are allowed to experience this feeling because of their involvement as readers of the image, pulled into a spectacle. Thus, the center picture in April and Kerisimasi’s Hawai‘i wedding montage has the groom looking directly at the camera, allowing the viewer in though he is positioned leaning toward his bride, resting his head on hers while she looks down as if speculating on the moment. The photograph is playful and depicts a seemingly candid moment. The ostensibly amateur snapshot is often added to a montage to create authenticity of performance and to document the event for future reflection. Indeed, Frosh argues that “photography itself has become key to the performance of (romantic) intimacy, and especially to its extension in time” (124). Photographs such as these call to attention to the performance, and their seemingly candid nature solidifies the willingness of each participant to act and document their romance.

This is the purpose of the wedding photo in the main. In his work “Domestic Snapshots: Toward a Grammar of Motives,” David Jacobs says that commissioned snapshots are part of an imaging process and require a “self-presentational energy” (11) directed toward the future. The appearance of the self in the frame of the photograph is essentially self-designed to act as a sustaining legacy. Frosh takes this further, stating that romantic photographs are “designed for the future recollection of past intimacy by the
lovers themselves” (55) as well as for their loved ones. These types of playful candid shots in the *Destination Weddings and Dream Honeymoons* montage are romantic in that they fit into the rubric of a romantic image, but they are also powerful in that they perpetuate the myth of “happily ever after” that the subtext of a wedding involves.

The pose of the couple is equally important in that it needs, as Frosh says, “to express actual or desired physical intimacy as a concomitant mingling of selves signified by the romantic look” (124). The underlying narrative of romantic photographs is ultimately physical intimacy. However, the image must be posed in such a way as to convey the elusive spiritual union the couple possesses without undermining it by portraying the physical intimacy of a purely sexual encounter. This is particularly true of the wedding photograph, where sex is an inherent yet unspoken part of the nuptial vows. The emphasis on sex is taken further in destination wedding media because of the tie to the honeymoon market. Montages in Fodor’s *Destination Weddings* often feature romantic hotel suite interiors or elegantly made beds. In this montage, poses of April and Kerisimasi portray physical intimacy in that the bride and groom, in wedding dress, are posing together in six of the nine images and are kissing in two. In every image together the two are holding hands, leaning on each other, or embracing. In the one image of the couple where they are not touching but dancing, the physical intimacy is implied by the movement, which clearly shows synchronization. The two have seemingly practiced specific choreography and are performing together; both in Hawaiian hula dress, both stepping forward with the right foot, both looking down, both holding outstretched decorated hands to the viewer.
In the accompanying commentary, the bride and the author of the article also portray the dance as an adventure the two have chosen to embrace, alongside their adventure of their destination wedding and the even greater adventure that their impending marriage will become. The commentary reads, “’Kerisimasi is Samoan, so we wanted to do something Polynesian for our first dance,’ says April. ‘We hired Nina Kealohi Dodge, a hula teacher, before the wedding.’ Leave it to this life-living duo to take on another challenge before embarking on the greatest adventure of their lives” (36). Leaving aside the implied interchangeability of all Pacific Island cultures, such that the groom’s Samoan heritage can be fittingly celebrated by the performance of a Hawaiian dance, the image is one of playful adventure undertaken by the couple as one entity, bride and groom. Though the image is not particularly sexualized, it is the type of image Frosh calls “pre-coital” because the viewer can see on some level that they will end up in bed—they just aren’t there yet (124). In these frames the pose of the couple is read as pre-coital; the notion is based on pose and not on the fact that they are dressed in wedding attire, as it may historically have been. In this wedding montage all images fit the pre-coital profile and maintain the tension of the pre-wedding night—a paradigm that still exists in the discourse of the wedding though its importance is muted today. The montage on the whole is evidence of a wedding, which still has its underpinnings as a pre-coital ritual intact.

The textual arrangement of the images in the montage is important as well. Not only are they pre-coital; they are designed to give a sampling of what Frosh calls “the scale and connotational contrasts and differentiations along the sex-friendship axis”
(124). The couple can be seen playing together, performing together, sharing the experience of the wedding, celebrating together and leaving together. They are friends and participants, lovers and entertainers. The top left picture of the bride and flower girl also gives dimension to this snapshot of the couple’s relationship. Its inclusion defines the bride, and by extension the groom, as warm, caring, playful and delighted by children. The implication is that children may be a part of their future. The image is significant as well in that readers of the image are invited to read it as romantic even though the groom, the other half of the couple, is not depicted. The white dresses and flowers of the bride and the flower girl visually create a romantic image. Two other images in the montage include someone other than the couple: the single blurry face of a guest in the background of the central snapshot image and the officiate standing behind the couple in the wedding shot. With these exceptions the couple are pictured alone in their own Hawaiian paradise. The lava rocks, the palm trees and the cane fields are all unspoilt, as if the couple were the island’s first settlers.

Viewers are meant to read the visual images, identify with the feeling the image projects, and purchase a like experience for themselves. According to Illouz, in advertising “[t]he goal is to allow the viewer-consumer to penetrate the private intimacy of a romantic moment in which consumption is taken for granted as natural. In contemporary advertisements, the viewer-consumer is not targeted for a rhetoric of persuasion—‘buy me because I will get you love’—but rather is made a voyeur to a spectacle of intimacy and inconspicuous consumption” (84, emphasis in original). The image tacitly advertises the services of florists, bridal shops, photographers, wedding
planners, travel agents, caterers and others but represents romance. That is, the vision of themselves away at a destination wedding in Hawai‘i as a bride and groom, feeling each carefully crafted beautiful moment intimately, completely focused on one another. The setting and other primary participant in the montage is Hawai‘i itself. Tropical lushness infuses every image, and the montage contains all the classic tropes: palm trees, a Hawaiian sunset, the iconic image of the couple on the beach, tropical flowers to set the Edenic atmosphere, lei, traditional costume and gardens. The viewer is able to read the contextual and literal background, which shouts, “Tropical island equals romance.” In nearly all destination wedding media the ocean, the beach and the tropical landscape are the prominent signifiers of romance. In fact, these tropes of the tropical landscape have become a necessary addition to traditional conventional symbols in iconic images of destination romance. Images of wedding rings, flowers, candle-lit tables set for the celebration, invitations and favors all still figure significantly, but in destination media the flowers are more increasingly tropical, the tableau of the table set for merriment incomplete without the ocean in the background, and the iconic repetition of the bride and groom set in tropical paradise.

**Conclusion**

The discursive practice of the destination wedding is reified by the increasing number of couples who make the choice to consume the wedding as a ritual centered on their individual values; brides and grooms use the consumption of a wedding away to invest in a construction of their own identity as a couple, away from traditional standards.
The process is not a perfect one, and vestiges of the pressures of the white wedding still linger, but as the white wedding is reproduced by destination wedding couples it is changed and its values are reconstituted. In a wedding away, individualism, romance, identity, intimacy and inconspicuous consumption are paramount over tradition, community expectations, and conspicuous consumption.

Destination wedding couples choose what to consume based on their identity as a couple, and their choices about what to consume are part of the two-way exchange between consumers and the wedding industry. Wedding industry “products” such as the destination marketed as a secluded paradise, the open-ended nature of the beach, the Hawaiian cultural ‘ohana away from home, and the romance of “couplehood” illustrated in media are bolstered by consumers and given new energy as couples continue to consume them in practice, because they are tied to the couple forming an identity and posit the growth of intimacy that will ensure a lasting relationship beyond the wedding day. The industry picks up cultural signs through testimonials, blog postings and wedding websites and feeds more such intimacy-driven product back to brides and grooms in solidification of the destination wedding industry. The process of ensuring the continuation of the destination wedding as practice is a reciprocal one between the industry and the consumer.

The Hawai‘i destination wedding has special resonance for American couples in that Hawai‘i is a liminal environment, an Edenic paradise away from home, but also an American destination in which to form identity and practice intimacy, aided by the welcoming tourist culture of aloha and ‘ohana. The wedding industries in Hawai‘i are
purveyors of appropriated or invented cultural tropes such as the lei exchange and ti leaf ceremonies, Hawaiian music and décor, that mark the presence of an “authentically” Hawaiian wedding but also welcome American tourists to the Islands as owners who, by right of affection, belong to the cultural ʻohana—ʻohana that encourages intimate play in paradise. Tourists incorporate these tropes into their experience of the Hawaiʻi wedding as markers of authenticity, but look beyond these commodities to another authentic, the authentic desire for a lasting relationship. The tropes may be constructed, but the bridal couples’ efforts to create a romantic marriage is authentic. Destination wedding couples are in search of ways to make the wedding experience one of fun, away from tradition, of inconspicuous consumption that aligns with individual choices and an escape to the freedom of a liminal environment in which to construct an identity as a couple and an intimacy built to last.
Notes

1. Research by XO Group, Inc., creator of the top two wedding websites, TheKnot.com and WeddingChannel.com, cites that 1 in 4 American brides are planning such an event. The Library of Congress’ Business Reference Services webpage on Wedding Industry Statistics states that there is no single formalized statistical source for data on this segment of the wedding industry, and that much of the information is anecdotal and derived from surveys/questions to hotels/resorts, couples, wedding planners and others. However, research by XO Group Inc. is widely used by the wedding industry. Howard Ladd, director of insights for the XO Group, gives the reason for this in the press release accompanying the group’s 2012 wedding survey. Says Ladd, “We are the only source that’s able to provide this level of detail and insight into destination wedding trends. The 2012 Destination Weddings Study offers unparalleled information and understanding of the industry and the decision-making process of today’s couples when it comes to planning the perfect destination wedding” (qtd. in Fraiman n.p.).

2. This figure is given by Susan Breslow Sardone as of Dec. 2011 based on information from the Travel Industry Association of America; Breslow Sardone as of that date gives the percentage of destination weddings as 16% and that the destination wedding market accounts for $16 billion in annual spending.

3. Several sources discuss the average marrying age and changing demographics over time. See Fraiman and Jaeger for the XO Group, Inc. study online, which lists the average marrying ages for 2011: Bride, 29, Groom, 30. Carol McD Wallace’s work All Dressed in White: The Irresistible Rise of the American Wedding states that in the 1950s “the average woman marrying was just over twenty years old” (153).


5. Feminist critics such as Beverly Jones and Judith Brown in their 1968 pamphlet “Towards a Female Liberation Movement,” Robin Morgan in her 1970 anthology Sisterhood Is Powerful, Betty Friedan in her 1963 book The Feminine Mystique, Marlene Dixon in her 1969 article “Why Women’s Liberation: Racism and Male Supremecy,” Helen Sullinger and Nancy Lehmann’s Declaration of Feminism in 1971 and Kate Millet’s 1968 essay “Sexual Politics” all decried the harshness of
the strict confines of the role-based marriage which left women little freedom to
explore personal satisfaction outside the roles of wife and mother.

6. See Lawrence Stone’s “Passionate Attachments in the West in Historical
Perspective” in Passionate Attachments: Thinking about Love. Ed. William
Gaylin and Ethel Person (New York: Free P, 1988); Lawrence Stone, The Family,
Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977);
Richard Adair, Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England
(Manchester, England: Manchester UP, 1996); and David Cressy, Birth, Marriage
and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England
(New York: Oxford UP, 1997) for discussion of the presence and degree of love
in marriage before the eighteenth century.

7. See Carol McD. Wallace’s All Dressed in White: The Irresistible Rise of the
American Wedding, Vicki Howard, Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H. Pleck, and
Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz for scholarship on the white wedding. These scholars
agree that Queen Victoria’s white dress sparked the tradition of wearing white for
weddings, and that the white wedding dress remains the single most important
material element of the white wedding.

8. Alternatives to the white wedding have existed in the margins since the 1920s,
when couples enthralled with the Jazz Age chose dance marathons or the
excitement of extreme locations such as hot air balloons for their weddings. These
marginal alternatives are mirrored today in weddings underwater or while
skydiving or bungee jumping. Likewise, hippie weddings, Vegas weddings and
the weddings of visibly pregnant brides post-1970s were also marginal
alternatives, as are the many varieties of cultural elements that can be added to the
white wedding ceremony. However, these alternatives are what Otnes and Pleck
call variations on a theme—variations that allow couples to show individual style
while remaining solidly within social convention—and these do not alter the
underlying ideology of the white wedding. These are distinct from alternatives
that democratize the white wedding or amend its ideology such as the destination
wedding and, even more saliently, the push for the legal marriage by LGBT
couples, which has marked the national consciousness and challenged the white
wedding as an institution of heterosexual preeminence.

9. Of course Cook’s ensuing experience with Hawaiians on his second voyage to
Hawai‘i, the last voyage of his life, suggest that such representation is the history
of what John Storey calls any terrain of culture, “a terrain of conflict and
contestation” (2). What must be said of Hawai‘i is that it has been a site of
conflict since the first moment outsiders hit its beaches. Though this project does
not deal with the deeper historical significance of colonization, institutionalized
racism and genocide, these have been well documented elsewhere. Houston
Wood’s excellent examination of the production of Hawai‘i for consumption,
Displacing Natives: The Rhetorical Production of Hawai‘i, speaks to the perpetration of these injustices. Haunani K. Trask’s passionate *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i* details the devastating and lasting consequences of Hawai‘i’s colonization, statehood and reworking into a premier tourist destination.
Works Cited

Above Heaven’s Gate: Beach and Waterfall Weddings. “We’re Not for Everyone.” 2013.


   Print.

Aloha Island Weddings. “Hawaii Weddings and Hawaiian Ceremony Packages on

Arakawa, Lynda. “More Visitors Tying the Knot Here.” Honolulu Advertiser. Honolulu,


Beck, Ulrich and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim. Individualization: Institutionalized
   Print.

---. The Normal Chaos of Love. Trans. Mark Ritter and Jane Wiebel. Oxford and


http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=godeylady


*Grace of Monaco*. Dir. Oliver Dahan. Perf. Nicole Kidman, Tim Roth, Frank Langella, Paz Vega, Parker Posey, Milo Ventimiglia, Derek Jacobi. YRF Entertainment. 2013. Film.


http://www.gohawaii.com/statewide/travel-tips/history


http://www.gohawaii.com/


http://www.hawaiianislandweddings.com/maui_weddings/traditional_hawaiian_wedding.html


http://blondeonabudget.ca/2012/02/15/why-ill-never-have-a-big-wedding/


http://www.loc.gov/rr/business/wedding/


http://www.mywedding.com/blog/planning/basic-decision/themes/aloha-spirit-101-intro-hawaiian-wedding-traditions/


Office of Heath Status Monitoring. “Marriages Where Both Bride and Groom Are Non-Residents January to December 2012 Preliminary Vital Statistics By County of


http://www.archive.org/details/travel281619161917newy


http://wedding.theknot.com/wedding-planning/destination-weddings/articles/why-have-a-destination-wedding.aspx


http://kalehua.net/weddingsTestimonials.html


