Ethnologies

ethnologies

"I-Do" Feminism Courtesy of Martha Stewart Weddings and HBC's Vow To Wow Club

Inventing Modern Matrimonial Tradition with Glue Sticks and Cuisinart

Sidney Eve Matrix

Volume 28, Number 2, 2006

Les noces en vrai
Wedding Realities

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/014983ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/014983ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)
1708-0401 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Matrix, S. E. (2006). "I-Do" Feminism Courtesy of Martha Stewart Weddings and HBC's Vow To Wow Club: Inventing Modern Matrimonial Tradition with Glue Sticks and Cuisinart. *Ethnologies*, *28*(2), 53–80. https://doi.org/10.7202/014983ar

Article abstract

This article examines the wedding gift registry as a newly invented tradition and part of the increasing commodification of everyday life and its rites of passage. The research involves both a deconstructive discursive analysis and a critique of the visual rhetoric in advertisements promoting registries for the newly engaged. To consider the cultural context within which marketing for wedding gift registries is proliferating, the author begins with the stories of two connected figures, both lifted from national newswires. Then she argues that the escalating trend of the wedding registry gains momentum because of its placement between these two conjoined images, namely: the spectre of the scandalous and hysterical "runaway bride" and her sister, the hip and paradoxical "I-Do Feminist."

"I-Do" Feminism Courtesy of *Martha Stewart Weddings* and HBC's *Vow To Wow Club*

Inventing Modern Matrimonial Tradition with Glue Sticks and Cuisinart[1]

Sidney Eve Matrix
Queen's University, Kingston

Preface

Part 1: The Runaway Bride, A Cautionary Tale

> "The list of things I needed to get done and no time to do it made me feel overwhelmed." Jennifer Wilbanks to Police Investigators (Hart 2005)

Once upon a time, in 2005, there was a bride named Jennifer whose lavish wedding for 600 guests required such an enormous mountain of weddingwork that it engulfed her. After buying a bus ticket, Jennifer disguised herself by cutting off her hair, and ran away under cover of darkness. For three days, she dashed across the United States to Las Vegas and New Mexico, while anxious relatives and friends searched fruitlessly, pleading on national television for her safe return. Eventually Jennifer turned herself in by calling 911 to falsely report she had been abducted and assaulted by "Mexicans." The media reported that Wilbanks had suffered a nervous breakdown and her elaborate ruse resulted in criminal charges ("Bride wanted to be perfect"). More importantly, the blanket news coverage of her cautionary tale was a catalyst for scores of women to speak up in the media, sharing their

1. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers at *Ethnologies* for their helpful editorial direction. Part of this research was presented at The Canadian Women's Studies Association and The Cultural Studies Association of Canada annual meetings, where I received encouragement and feedback from audience members, for which I am very grateful.

experiences of extreme anxiety and depression surrounding planning the ideal wedding (Tolin 2006). Social expectations for nuptial celebrations have raised the bar impossibly high and responsibility is largely placed on the bride's shoulders, these women testified. The hysterical runaway bride was a tragic figure with whom many women identified.

Jennifer's story was newsworthy because it was an exception to the dominant view of weddingwork as a natural, normal, delightful activity for women. Stressed-out brides sympathetic to Jennifer Wilbanks' experience repeatedly identified the media as the culprit in establishing unattainable and unreasonable standards of perfection in matrimonial minutiae. In the wake of the runaway bride came a wave of public protest concerning the pressures of wedding planning. But those dissident voices were drowned out by the deluge of popular wedding publications that are in the business of manufacturing and normalizing DIY (Do-It-Yourself) perfect wedding rituals as pleasurable and fun. Therefore, despite the protests of her supporters, Wilbanks was vilified, pathologized, and criminalized in the media as an exceptional bridal failure. A week later, news surfaced that the runaway bride had sold the rights to her story to a TV movie production company, and her fiancé wanted to plan another wedding. A year later however, Jennifer Wilbanks sued her ex-fiancé, accusing him of running off with the money her story had generated (Lateef 2006).

Apparently the cautionary tale of the scandalous and hysterical runaway bride is excellent fodder for a made-for-TV movie because it reflects the interests of mass audiences ("Runaway bride has TV deal"). And, as critics of mass media including John Fiske have explained, in order for any popular film to resonate powerfully with viewers as mass entertainment, it must tell a story that contains elements of both domination and resistance — it need be a tale of subordination to cultural forces and of creative, courageous efforts to seek freedom and agency (Fiske 1989: 23, 25). Having successfully orchestrated extensive, elaborate wedding and enormous gift registry arrangements to meet the expectations of two wealthy Georgia families, then slipping away in the night and dashing to Las Vegas — only to be rescued and reunited with her fiancé, whose love and commitment remained intact — Jennifer's experience seems to fit the bill exactly.

It is not hard to understand that the story of an anti-bride who barely survives her own wedding, but emerges a vilified celebrity,

contains enough melodramatic promise for TV producers. On one level, the spectre of the runaway bride warns other newly engaged women that elaborate weddings are exceptionally emotionally and physically demanding. However, on another level, once the story is fed through the media spin cycle and various experts weigh in, a subtle narrative shift occurs: Wilbanks' tale operates to warn women that weddingwork must be approached correctly and with the help of industry specialists (such as caterers, event planners, and gift registry sales associates) if they don't want to turn out like the hysterical, deviant, and scandalous runaway bride.

Part 2: The "I-Do" Feminist, An Exemplary Tale

> We seem to have passed into a new phase… the era of the "I Do" feminist. Women are not only embracing marriage, which in theory could have been obsolete by now, but manicuring to hyper-perfection the very domestic idyll their mothers rallied to escape (Editorial by journalist Alexandra Jacobs in *The New York Observer,* 2001).

Commenting on a trend she observes in popular media involving detailed coverage of ever-increasingly lavish weddings and newlywed lifestyles of the rich and famous, Alexandra Jacobs speculates on the process whereby these spectacular nuptial events become idealized as the norm. For the middle classes, and even among third generation feminists, Jacobs notes that extravagant wedding celebrations (complete with extensive gift registries) are increasingly widespread, perhaps in response to weekly detailed reportage of celebrity weddings and homes in tabloid news. As part of this trend, Jacobs notes a seeming irony: the image of the princess bride, the rhetoric of domestic bliss, and the ideologies of feminism are often connected in mainstream media and advertising. We have entered the era of the I-Do Feminist, Jacobs writes, a bride who expresses her freedom of choice and liberation from patriarchy and its traditions of coverture by (paradoxically) eagerly embracing (what appear to be) classic heteronormative and hyperconsumerist rituals of the white wedding and housewifery.

Whether self-professed feminists or not, Jacobs continues, more women appear to be planning extravagant weddings than ever before. This trend causes Jacobs to speculate: are we evolving backwards? For large numbers of young and newly engaged women today, Jacobs observes with dismay, white wedding dreams and princess bride visions are the norm and the ideal. And in order to achieve these goals, the

contemporary bride needs to enlist the services of many professionals, from florists to printers, from musicians to seamstresses — at considerable cost, and all this just for the big day itself. To realize the rest of the utopic vision of wedded bliss, the happily-ever-after element wherein couples cocoon in their lavishly decorated homes and enjoy shared homemaking duties, the I-Do Feminist needs the financial participation of her friends and family, a process facilitated by the gift registry.

Introduction: Media Analysis

Inspired by the stories of the runaway bride and the I-Do Feminist, this article considers the influence of popular wedding industry advertising rhetoric on brides, in an effort to understand the seemingly paradoxical proliferation of extravagant weddings and elaborate wedding gift registries — a trend Alexandra Jacobs describes as devolutionary. If wedding planning is the cause of enormous stress for many brides, and if as journalist Anne Kingston suggests, "the role of wife is perceived as a straightjacket that an increasing number of women refuse to don," then what could explain the increase in lavish white weddings complete with enormous registries of housewares that Jacobs observes among sophisticated, modern profeminist women (Kingston 2005: i)? In this analysis, I borrow insights from cultural studies theorists to investigate how wedding industry advertisements successfully capture brides' attention and inspire these expansive and expensive parties.

As many media scholars have observed, the most compelling popular culture texts (whether they be films, books, or ads) always present to audiences a narrative about the struggle to maintain one's individuality vis-à-vis hegemonic traditions and rituals. Masses of spectators will routinely identify with pop culture productions that feature characters negotiating between rebellion and conformity to the status quo and expectations of others. Accordingly, advertisers seek to convince their audience that consuming their products will help in the difficult process of balancing our competing needs for the comfort of belonging and for the exhilaration of freedom from social networks and their conventions.

In the case of ads marketing wedding commodities and services, rhetoric representing the tug of war that many brides feel between tradition and innovation is placed front and centre. This is evident as wedding marketers mobilize contested ideologies about sex and gender

roles to grab spectators' attentions and identifications. Ads present a range of representations from the nostalgic and romantic fairy-tale visions of princess brides, to modern profeminist rhetorics of weddings that reflect marital equity and women's liberation from patriarchy. The most effective ads combine both bridal visions/versions, explicitly appealing to consumers who see themselves as a "modern traditional" woman/wives, or put differently, who identify with the discourse of I-Do Feminism.

This discourse inspires and reflects cultural shifts in consumer trends, in popular opinion regarding heterogender roles, in women's social status, and concerning the function of marriage in modern lifestyles. The I-Do Feminist can (allegedly) have her white wedding cake and eat it too: she can safely perform the time-tested rituals and age-old traditions that hopefully will lend stability, certainty, and significance to her wedding (and marriage, and identity as wife), while at the same time she can demonstrate her modernity and liberation by flexing her individual purchasing power (otherwise known as the bridal buying binge).

This marketing discourse presents I-Do Feminism as the ultimate *choice* a modern woman can make; it grants a bride permission and freedom to selectively participate in wedding activities which are still arguably overtly sexist, oppressive, and objectifying, while claiming that the act of choosing is itself a demonstration of her agency. This paradox is the key to a successful advertising campaign, since as Stuart Hall suggests, for any ad to resonate with spectators, the consumer must believe that the product will deliver two overlapping pleasures: the satisfying reassurance and comfort of *conformity*, and the exhilarating excitement of *resistance* to the powers that be (1981: 238).

Moreover, as Salon.com journalist Amy Benfer observes in her piece, "I Do, sort of", for feminist-minded women "marriage has become so taboo that getting hitched has come to seem like rebellion" from the status quo, not from patriarchy, but from the dictates of feminist ideology (Benfer 2001). This logic is not far removed from what *New York Times* reporter Lisa Belkin observed in her piece "The Opt-Out Revolution," which tracked the trend of well-educated feminist careerists leaving the paid workforce to become stay-at-home moms and homemakers. Like the I-Do Feminists, these opt-out women also described their decisions to enact traditional gender roles as a form of resistance to overly prescriptive feminist politics (Belkin 2003).

Therefore, the emergence of the I-Do Feminist is not only quite possibly a *trend* (as suggested by Jacobs) but more importantly a *motif* used in popular media to encourage women to express themselves by participating in hyperconsumerism without guilt or shame.[2] Discursively, the motif instructs/invites brides to immerse themselves in wedding planning, promising that the experience will be a pleasurable, satisfying, interesting and creative opportunity.

More importantly, retailers utilize the motif of the I-Do Feminist within a discourse that reclaims and retrofits domesticity and housewifery as part of the hip consumerism that connotes a modern and upwardly mobile lifestyle. Advertisements advise modern brides that they can opt for a white wedding with all the trimmings, without worrying that they are buying wholeheartedly into traditional sex roles — because they are concurrently exercising their empowered individuality and *feminist freedom to choose* by shopping. Understanding how contradictory viewing pleasures (resistance/conformity) co-operate, it is not only paradoxical but also predictable that these marketing messages appear in wedding magazines which instruct female readers that they can enjoy exploratory, selective participation in the nostalgic feminine mystique without fear of permanent entrapment in what Betty Friedan (1963) called "Occupation: Housewife."

The discourse of the I-Do Feminist, a product of mass media, has a lot in common with the figure of the happy housewife featured in 1950s and 1960s women's magazines as analyzed by Friedan. Hegemonic but largely mythical, within the diegesis of contemporary wedding magazines (what Naomi Wolf [1995] calls the world of "Brideland") we find representations of contemporary brides negotiating the complex tension between *plaisir* and *jouissance* in the perfect Vera Wang dress, the perfect Martha Stewart-esque hand-tied pew-bow, and the perfect stainless steel Cuisinart blender — as well as the resiliant traditions connecting weddings and marriage to patriarchy.[3]

---

2. A similar point is made by Leslie Rabine (1994) in her work on advertisements in women's fashion magazines. Rabine suggests that the most successful advertising discourses will acknowledge and appeal to female consumers' contradictory desires for independence and conformity.
3. Roland Barthes (1975) explains that *plaisir* is the pleasure of conforming to the status quo, while *jouissance* is the pleasure of resisting it. For a more detailed analysis of the connections between pleasure, conformity, and heterogendered rituals see Adams (1997).

Wedding Magazines

When deciding how to self-present at her wedding, even the most traditional bride is less likely to turn to her mother or family than to look to popular wedding magazines for inspiration and instruction. This is due in part to the fact that these publications are essentially catalogues of advertisements that inform the reader of the fashionable products, services, and trends appropriate for her wedding year and season. The magazines operate as a form of cultural pedagogy, serving as manuals for a heterogeneous audience from various classes, religions, political persuasions, geographic regions, and, increasingly, sexual identities. Predominantly collections of photographs, the visual economy of wedding magazines transmits to its audience an image repertoire —and through the lens of these publications, a bride can imagine her own version of the perfect big day. Conversely, they also act as frames, making it difficult for a woman to envision her wedding in any way significantly different from or outside the boundaries of the available range of products and services — wildly alternative wedding celebrations, fashions, and rituals are firmly located in the *space off*.[4]

Selling invitations, dresses, photography, and housewares, the magazines encourage women to engage in a narrative about the fairy-tale wedding in which they star as princess bride. The magazines often acknowledge that this bridal fantasy is just that, a playful escape from the realities of everyday life for a modern working woman. Part of the pleasures of engaging in bridal magazines then, are the joys of imagining oneself inhabiting a utopic world where formal gowns, limos and attendants, gorgeous flowers, and delicious food are abundant.[5] As many cultural theorists including Douglas Kellner have explained, taking pleasure in popular culture texts is not the same thing as being committed to their prescriptions, and desiring or purchasing commodities is not evidence that the consumer is thoroughly duped into believing the marketing rhetoric of these material goods (Kellner 1983: 3). In a similar vein, cultural theorist Mica Nava explains,

> The buying of commodities and images can be understood both as a source of power and pleasure for women (it has indeed given them a

4. The phrase "space off" is from Teresa De Lauretis (1987), describing those marginal spaces left outside the field of official representations.
5. These comments on the pleasurable fantasy of imagining oneself in the wedding utopia were inspired by Iris Marion Young's (1990) work on the role of fashion and costume in identity formation.

> sense of identity, purpose, and creativity) and simultaneously as an instrument which secures their subordination…. Consumerism is a discourse through which disciplinary power is both exercised and contested (1992: 166-8).

Thus those who buy *Martha Stewart Weddings Magazine* likely take pleasure in and simultaneously struggle with and resist its dominant discourses. Either way, however, wedding magazines strongly encourage women to take wedding planning very seriously; instructing brides that every detail of the event speaks volumes to guests, reflecting her good taste and breeding. Not surprisingly, wedding magazines are oft-cited as a double-edged sword, inspiring brides' imaginations while simultaneously rousing anxiety about hyperperfect celebrations — yet therein lies the contradictory nature of the most compelling and seductive popular culture texts.

Of course another reason accounting for the popularity of wedding magazines is that part of this rite of passage is a liminal period when the bride is not exactly single but not yet married; as a result, the familiar cultural pastimes of browsing catalogs and shopping are surely reassuring, and the identity "consumer" is likely well-worn for most women (Schor 2003: 183). The bridal magazine, like all women's popular literature, is understood as a female cultural space within which different visions of womanliness (in the case of *Brides* or *Weddingbells*, it is different types of brides and their signature events) are considered, consumed, and negotiated.

As many feminist theorists have observed, women's magazines connect the purchase of beauty and household commodities to the achievement of ideal womanliness and femininity, and by extension to marital success and happiness — and certainly wedding publications are no different.[6] The marketers behind magazines such as *InStyle Weddings* and *Modern Bride* advertise all the materials required for a Do-It-Yourself lavish white wedding through appropriating and co-opting feminist rhetorics of freedom, choice, empowerment, equality, and liberation.[7] In the process of selling engagement rings, formal frocks, and honeymoon packages, these publications also sell ideologies about

6. For feminist research on magazines, their advertisements and audiences, see Naomi Wolf (1991), Jean Kilbourne (1999), Angela McRobbie (2000), Joke Hermes (1996).
7. For another analysis of the appropriation of feminist rhetoric to sell "modern brides" traditional white wedding dresses, see Walker (2000).

the good life, and the requisite consumer rituals to guarantee happily ever after — a message that has not changed significantly since the first issue of *Brides* was published in 1937. Each issue delivers the promise that investment in an elaborate wedding, expensive honeymoon, and long gift registry will deliver a high quality of life filled with autonomy, happiness, and leisure; wedding ads cite the powerful mythos of the American Dream to sell commodities that are only weakly connected to these kinds of satisfactions (Jhally 2003: 251).

Many of the women interviewed in the media surrounding the Runaway Bride story coverage pointed to Martha Stewart in particular as the culprit behind wedding mania. This attests to the brand dominance of *Martha Stewart Weddings,* widely regarded as the quintessential manual for lavish white weddings. Of course popular culture discourses promoting lavish nuptial celebrations have circulated in mass media since the early 1900s, but until mid-century they were out of reach for all but the most economically privileged. As Cele Otnes and Elizabeth Pleck demonstrate in their study of American wedding history, it was not until the 1950s and the boom in marriages that the extravagant wedding began to be promoted to mass audiences as their entitlement and the norm (2003). In the 1980s, the mass mediated wedding of Princess Diana and Prince Charles in the United Kingdom fueled popular interest in big weddings. By the 1990s, trendsetters in the wedding industry such as Emily Post, Vera Wang, and Martha Stewart published how-to books giving advice and instruction on catering, floral design, decoration, stationary, etiquette, fashion and beauty, home design, and numerous other aspects of planning a wedding. Soon after, in the pages of the newly launched *Martha Stewart Weddings* magazine, the lavish formal white wedding appears mythified and mainstreamed as *itself* a tradition for *all* brides to emulate and enact. Part of the discourse of the I-Do Feminist emerges in *MSW* in the form of rhetoric of the modern traditional bride whose desire for an expensive dream wedding is represented as her natural and unalienable right.

Martha Stewart Weddings

Because of its predominance in the wedding magazine market, I will consider *Martha Stewart Weddings* in some detail. As industry insiders attest, this magazine has exerted a powerful effect on the design of wedding advertisements, and together with its sister publications (e.g.,

Martha Stewart Living, Blueprint) it has popularized a discourse of co-ed domestic chic — a key ingredient in the promotion of wedding registries. When considering the marketing rhetorics in *MSW* advertising, it is worth noting that its spokesperson Martha Stewart is a highly controversial business tycoon who is often blamed for igniting a backlash against women's liberation (Kingston 2005). Martha Stewart has been vilified in the media for many reasons, including her perfectionism and entrepreneurism (Cohen 2005).

However, recent feminist scholarship has considered the positive cultural impact of Martha Stewart as a celebrity and female entrepreneur on public opinion — situating her body of work within a genealogy of female advice columnists and domestic experts (Leavitt 2002). Still, for a self-identified feminist to engage in and admit to enjoying domesticity, or to intentionally plan a traditional white wedding, two of Martha Stewart's central preoccupations, there is quite likely a confrontation with guilt and shame — considering that generations of feminist activism have protested and condemned the sexism of both practices (Befner 2001).

And yet, debates about the possibility of feminist and egalitarian marriages have been part of feminist discourse since the first wave of the women's liberation movement, so clearly there is some groundwork for and much interest in popular representations of wedding rituals as a form of female empowerment.[8] Although historically, feminism has been torn over whether feminist marriage is possible, Martha Stewart and the marketers featured in her publications suffer no such angst, and instead appropriate feminist rhetorics of agency and empowerment to package and sell white weddings.

In order to do an effective rhetorical analysis of the ads in *Martha Stewart Weddings*, it is useful to contextualize the publication in relation to the larger Martha Stewart Omnimedia (MSO) design philosophy. MSO promotes the cult of domesticity, emphasizes pleasure in activities that bind family, and espouses quality of life through cultivating beauty and savoring the very best of everything. Martha's trademark is cooking and crafting, she is the queen of the glue gun and the Cuisinart — and her many magazines are filled with projects to make and bake, especially

8. Debates about the possibility of feminist and egalitarian marriages have been part of feminist discourse from the first wave (e.g. Lucy Stone) through the second wave (e.g. Simone de Beauvoir).

holiday souvenirs which authenticate the celebratory experience, and none more important than those which mark rites of passage.[9] Martha Stewart's signature approach to wedding planning and design reflects her brand's emphasis on the importance of traditions, old and new. The modern traditional woman/bride is the ideal target audience for MSO, a refined consumer who appreciates the importance of family, community, health, quality, and ritual. Martha Stewart's work is connected to the I-Do Feminist motif insofar as she supports a DIY utilitarian individualism, instructing audiences that homemaking, connoisseurship, and discriminating consumption are powerful and important skills required for marital bliss and a happy home (Wajda 2001).

Like all Martha Stewart magazines, the pages of *MSW* are dominated with soft focus photographs showing the detailing of all the good things that make a wedding distinctive. Industry insiders have commented that there is a noticeable reverberation throughout the world of wedding magazines. The image repertoire and photographic techniques used by MSO have inspired marketers, retailers, and publishers to follow suit and soften the edges of their commercials, creating a more enchanted dreamworld effect. Through the lens of *MSW,* the equation is clear: perfect weddings lead to perfect marriages, perfect lifestyles, and marital bliss with lasting power. This focus on details, achieved through the close-up shot, operates as part of the instructional mandate of the MSO magazines: the *MSW* publication is intended to be an encyclopedic manual for wedding event planning, and seemingly no minute moment of the wedding day is overlooked.

In the editorial content of *Martha Stewart Weddings* it should come as no surprise that weddingwork is women's work. And because Martha strategically rejects convenience and celebrates the creative process, all of these cooking and crafting projects require time, practice, and specialty tools for assembly. Brides are encouraged to immerse themselves in the delightful details of wedding planning as a form of pleasurable self-indulgence, and as a way to communicate to friends their ethic of care, taste, and style. *MSW* emphasizes the sense of pride and satisfaction that will result from devoting countless hours to

9. For more on the commodification of women's rites of passage by magazine advertising, see my essay on the marketing of the high school prom (promoted as a dress rehearsal for one's wedding day) to 'tween girls by many of the same companies who advertise in bridal magazines (Matrix 2006).

manufacturing crafts to decorate potentially dozens and perhaps hundreds of place settings. *MSW* opts to leave the mind-numbing monotony of these tasks outside the frame, instead stressing the importance of *process* — reflecting the MSO philosophy. *MSW* teaches readers that the time spent enacting the rituals of wedding crafting is as crucial to the success of the wedding as are the final products themselves. Involving other women in assembling crafts and cooking together will guarantee the significance of the wedding event — a nostalgic and sentimentalized reference to women's nineteenth century craft circles (Beecher 2001). In the event that time is short, each issue of *MSW* includes a detailed vendor list at the back of each magazine, directing readers to the retailers who sell materials and tools for creating these fantasy projects, and perhaps more practically, to the professional caterers, florists, and decorators who have gained Martha's seal of approval.

Ideally, the modern traditional I-Do Feminist has the lifestyle management skills and economic privileges that enable her to delegate weddingwork successfully rather than follow in hysterical Runaway Bride Jennifer Wilbanks' footsteps. Whether a bride opts for the DIY approach or not, the popularity of browsing through images of Martha Stewart's time-consuming wedding crafting projects in *MSW* is evidenced by its profitable sales figures. Reading popular women's literature is, as Janice Radway observed, itself a ritual that affords busy females an opportunity for leisure, inspiration, and privacy (Radway 1984). Taking some time out for quiet reflection surrounded by beautiful photographs, whether it involves actually wielding a glue gun and length of ribbon or just reading about the leisurely fun that other nimble-fingered women have doing so, might (in theory) be an attractive option for busy stressed-out brides.[10]

Figuratively escaping into the world of Martha Stewart can be pleasurable, but enjoyment might depend on whether the spectator views the world of *MSW* as a fairy tale, a magical place where the idealized vision of The Good Life is achieved with ease — or whether she sees it as a realistic ideal. Because most spectators probably fall somewhere in between these two reading positionalities, or fluctuate

10. For many accounts of the way that MSO inspires readers and audiences to take time off to think, relax, be creative, and read (rather than engage in housework) see Diane Tye (1997).

between them, *Martha Stewart Weddings* (and the Martha Stewart persona, brand, and philosophy) inspires many love-hate testimonies from its audience. It remains the case that, even though *MSW* contains beautiful photos, helpful advice, heart-warming stories, informative how-to's, and encouragement to readers to take time off from stressful planning to enjoy family rituals, women constantly accuse Martha Stewart of causing wedding mania and, by extension, inspiring extreme levels of bridal anxiety.

From the numerous first-person narratives in books like *The Conscious Bride: Women Unveil Their True Feelings About Getting Hitched* and *What No One Tells the Bride*, it is apparent that once a woman becomes involved in the process of planning a lavish white wedding, there is a powerful cumulative effect of the media and marketing messages that together suggest her identity as a woman and wife is on the line (Nissinen 1998; Stark 1998). The uninterrupted stream of representations of the happy bride enjoying the planning process for a fairy-tale wedding can oppress those women who find the mountain of details in a DIY lavish celebration oppressive and overwhelming.

Self-help literature proliferates on bookstore shelves with titles such as, *I Do but I Don't: Walking Down the Aisle without Losing Your Mind* (Wicoff 2006), *Emotionally Engaged: A Bride's Guide to Surviving the "Happiest" Time of Her Life* (Moir-Smith 2006), and *Going Bridal: How to Get Married Without Losing Your Mind* (Robbins 2003), each acknowledging that putting on a big wedding is enormously challenging. This attention reflects the popular interest in Jennifer Wilbanks' nervous breakdown and nighttime flight. Yet these difficulties, anxieties, and challenges do not appear within the world of *MSW*, where perfect weddings are exclusively represented. Martha Stewart publications make event planning look easy — if you have purchased all the ingredients, tools, and followed the instructions with precision.

Beyond weddings, MSO encourages a philosophy of rational, refined, conscious consumerism as part of the activities of lifestyling. *MSW* is filled with advertisements for housewares, and it directs readers how to design and live the post-nuptial good life through careful consumer choices. All MSO publications encourage women to imagine themselves as affluent and influential, and provide step-by-step advice on how to demonstrate this to others. Through *MSW* modern romance, marital success is linked to the necessity of surrounding oneself with beauty,

not just for one special wedding day, but with Martha Stewart Everyday®. Within this ideology, a lavish white wedding is *the* opportunity to demonstrate a couple's personal style, identity, values, and good taste. It is also the appropriate moment to acquire the "good things" required for a Martha Stewartesque lifestyle, namely expensive kitchen accessories and luxury housewares (via a gift registry).

MSW gives modern I-Do Feminist brides permission to indulge in the guilty pleasures of romantic, nostalgic, fetishized housewifery. In fact, it turns tradition into a fashion, instructing brides to invest (literally) in traditions for the sake of doing so, and to incorporate rituals — such as white wedding costume, a trousseau of kitchenware, and bouquet tossing — without critically analyzing their historical significance (Kingston 2005: 42ff). Ignoring any uncomfortable meanings that might be associated with these wedding acts, *MSW* is concerned instead with explaining how to assemble or purchase and incorporate them into the celebration. The magazine is filled with ads and complimentary copy working to weave commodities into the fabric of everyday life, lending them cultural significance (Jhally 2003: 251). And perhaps the best part is that readers are encouraged to participate in the democratization of wedding shopping and let someone else pick up the tab for some of these "good things" via the reinvented tradition of the wedding gift registry — to which I now turn.

Love at First Set: Discourses of Domestic Fetish and the Wedding Gift Registry

The most common complaints about the ritual of wedding gifting appearing in wedding etiquette and advice columns (another element of wedding magazines) usually involve accusations of greed resulting from couples who commit the ultimate wedding invitation sin: asking guests outright for very specific gift items or even worse, for money. These acts are widely considered by wedding professionals and merchants to be in extreme bad taste. Thus with tedious regularity, numerous magazine advice columns feature letters allegedly sent by wedding guests to complain that they have been asked for cash (Raskin 2006). Predictably the wedding expert's reply will advise that if the motivation behind asking for cash is to ensure the couple receives a truly useful gift, then the correct form is most certainly to establish a wedding gift registry.

Through a registry, brides are likely to receive the desired housewares without appearing greedy and vulgar; it is a method to ensure that the modern traditional bride is an active agent while appearing neither too aggressive nor naïve. In this case, advice columns popularize the I-Do Feminist motif, featuring a strategy for the bride to communicate clearly to guests her (material/monetary) needs and desires, albeit in appropriately feminine code (pre-shopping/scanning). The registry is sold to brides as a way to negotiate established traditions and social expectations concerning gender and wedding etiquette, simultaneously enabling her independent voice and choice, while opting to let corporations like Sears and William Ashley mediate between the newly-engaged couple and their family/friends.

Thus wedding advice columns are evidence of the operation of an I-Do Feminism mythos, effectively inoculating readers (presumably and primarily brides) against feeling guilty about their desire for upscale emulation and joy in conspicuous consumption. As Roland Barthes explains, (bourgeois) cultural myths such as the I-Do Feminist gain ideological power through a kind of vaccination effect; by injecting the magazine with a brief and gentle acknowledgement of the materialism and hyperconsumerism involved in (and inspired by) a lavish white wedding, the advertisers/publishers then reassure readers that a gift registry is the proper solution to protect modern brides from this awkward issue (Barthes 1972). Outside the space of the advice columns, this inoculation logic extends through ads promoting acquisition of housewares such as one for Krups coffeemakers that reasons, "It's your wedding, there's no harm in asking." Brides are encouraged to indulge in the harmless guilty pleasure of assembling a gift registry as a way to protect against charges of greed. Moreover, the process of asking for a coffeemaker is sold to brides as part of their soon-to-arrive power as someone's wife, a rhetorical strategy otherwise known as "power domesticity" (Kingston 2005: 101).

While still a small chunk of the Canadian retail market at an estimated $350 million, the registry business has grown enormously in the past five years, and is expanding to all kinds of stores and services. It represents big business in the United States retail market, generating $6 billion of the $55 billion spent on nuptials each year. In Canada it is the case that about 85 per cent of the betrothed establish at least one wedding gift registry. Interestingly, this is a reinvented tradition, since in the past wedding registries were primarily the domain of high-brow

department stores, where brides and their mothers would register for gifts like silver, crystal, and fine china patterns. From the early 1900s, North American department stores held "Bride's Jubilees" to attract newly-engaged females to their merchandise — though it was common practice that a woman would have accumulated a trousseau of household goods for her home before leaving her family (Otnes and Pleck 2003: 32). In the 1930s, advertisers in *Brides* magazine encouraged women to set up "hint lists" at department stores, to organize gift giving (Wallace 2004: 144).

Today, gift registries are no longer just for the elite, nor are they solely the bride's responsibility, with many retailers suggesting that this reinvented tradition accurately meets the needs of the changing demographics of the newly engaged. With dual-career couples waiting until they are older to get married, and a growing number of second marriages, it is reasoned more likely that brides and grooms already own a toaster and a blender and a cappuccino maker (Guttierez 2005). This creates an opportunity for advertisers to press the registry as an exceptionally important part of wedding event planning, so that couples can meet their unique needs for specific items, "filling in" their kitchens, or more likely, "trading up." As Cuisinart suggests, (only) by doing so, outfitting the home with quality highly stylized brand name appliances, can couples "savor the good life" and enjoy rituals of breakfast in bed and intimate cocktails — because as the ad states, "after all, marriage *is* all it's cooked up to be!" Mature, rational (and affluent) couples are encouraged to give their romantic relationship a firm foundation in well-outfitted domesticity through smart registry choices. Registry ads promote the discourse of the "new home" built with status goods, as Linens-N-Things ads implore:

> Live in Luxury.… Choose from our highest thread count sheets, luxurious down comforters, designer bedding and from the latest towel and bath colors. Everything you will need to relax and enjoy your new bed and bath.

The gift registry rituals encourages buying/assembling a "new home" as a foundation for the luxurious married lifestyle, but like other invented traditions, it is really about legitimizing heterosexual marriage in light of social anxieties about its demise (Hobsbawm 1983). Symbolically, the "new [married] home" built with the best brands is promoted as a status symbol that newlyweds are entitled to — indicating their

investment in the institution of marriage. Of course from a marketing perspective, the new home rhetoric is merely a useful way to sell newer and pricier bed and bath products to consumers who may already own these items — thus connecting this consumer ritual to the values of permanence, quality, tradition, investment and commitment, maturity and luxury — and perhaps most important, to the faith and love binding the newlyweds.

Getting Grooms Involved

> The best marriages are built on trust, communication, and a full stomach (Advertisement for Canadian Tire's CelebrationStation Gift Registry®).

One of the ways that the discourse of I-Do Feminism communicates its (strategic) departure from tradition is by explicitly involving men in the wedding preparation process, most obviously in the co-ed labor of assembling the gift registry. No longer are women solely responsible for housework, these ads suggest, the modern traditional couple is equally invested and interested in cooking, cleaning, and the comforts of domesticity as a lifestyle. Images of househusbandry and housewifery in registry ads from Canadian Tire and other department stores feature happy smiling couples who delight together in the cookware, furnishings, and appliances accumulated via wedding registries. A recent editorial in Canadian magazine *Weddingbells* explains this changing role of men in "egalitarian" wedding prep in a feature titled "Groom-o-lution".

> Another modern man's job: organizing the registry. Today, 90 percent of brides and grooms claim to have equal say on the items to be included in the wedding registry. In the 80s, men were far more concerned with sporting the right amount of stubble than with which china pattern would coordinate best with their table linens. Savvy retailers were wise to lure men into the act. (Do you really think it's coincidence the primary means by which items are added to a registry today is through a scanning *gun*?) Once a narrowly focused list of gravy boats, napkin rings and bathroom towels, registries are now brimming with a wide range of big-ticket items like camping equipment, power tools and home entertainment components, all thanks to the man's input (*Weddingbells* 2005).

This is part of a discursive pattern wherein the rhetoric of equity is borrowed from feminism and co-opted to discuss consumer trends, as it

was in a provocatively titled feature, "It's becoming a man's world" from *The Toronto Star*'s Shopping section. There journalist Surya Bhattacharya "reports" that, "gender equality has reached the 'bridal' registry and men are demanding more than just china, crystal. Aspiring brides will have to make some space on their registries for the groom's swag" (Bhattacharya 2006). Appropriating the language of liberation to sell material goods is not a new advertising strategy (nor is instructing women that the way to a man's heart is via his stomach), but what is relatively novel at this particular cultural moment is its wide-scale application in the process of re-gendering the gift registry/trousseau praxis.

The "modern" registry is about "rewriting tradition," according to Canadian Tire's CelebrationStation®, where it is allegedly "easy to bend the rules" of heterogendered hegemony by registering for kitchen appliances, as is evident from ads featuring a bride in a white gown posed smiling with her arms wrapped around a coffeemaker, while her groom lovingly cradles a food processor. Exactly what rules are being bent here? Perhaps it is new to see men fetishizing cookware, but certainly the (astoundingly resilient) image of the happy housewife is less than innovative. Humourous, paradoxical, ironic, playful, and disturbing (as the best pop-culture texts always are) these wedding registry ads combine new, old, and contradictory ideologies about sex roles while promoting I-Do Feminism and the good life via domesticity and hyperconsumerism.

Moreover, the increasing domestication of husbands (incidentally, not far off from the recent media discourse of "cocooning," now described in Canadian Tire registry ads as "hiving") is also reflected in and inspired by the ever-expanding roster of programs on the Food Network TV and its target audience of male viewers. More men are cooking, or at least more men are *watching* cooking on Food Network programming including "Boy Meets Grill," "Throwdown!" and "Guy's Big Bite;" more men are witnessing male and female culinary celebrities wield their professional kitchen gadgetry to impress friends with their epicurean talents. Not surprisingly, this trend is linked in the media to more grooms coveting nice cookware and kitchen tools, and more men likely to know exactly what pricey knives, top-quality pots, and high-tech appliances they want.

As a result, gift registry marketing featuring predictable items such as tableware, appliances, and cookware now predominantly advertises the stainless steel versions of these items, as well as barbecues, knives, and other housewares designed to appeal to male consumers. And the complimentary copy that appears in women's magazines (and in the Shopping section of newspapers) describes these items as *cosmopolitan, handsome, powerful,* and *sturdy*. This trend is evident in following text from *The Toronto Star* editorial feature (which could have come directly from a print ad for William Ashley):

> Appliances at William Ashley include espresso machines like the Auto Espresso, $697, from the Switzerland-based Bodum series. The handsome steel-and-chrome plated machine does more than pour a humble cup of java. It includes a warming plate to pre-heat your espresso cups and a reservoir for fresh water that can be replaced with your preferred bottle of mineral water (Bhattacharya 2006).

Within the popular discourses on pro-feminist/egalitarian registries, advertisers promote a range of consumer practices to correspond with different modes of masculinity; this includes designing ads appropriate for men who do not have a *preferred brand of mineral water*, in other words (to borrow phrasing from popular culture discourse) for those who see themselves more *retro-* and less *metro-*sexual. Registry marketing thus suggests that more traditional men will enjoy scanning items such as plasma televisions, massage chairs, and mini-fridges into the registry. To further involve grooms in this aspect of wedding planning, there have emerged numerous "alternative registries," for honeymoon travel, spa treatments, monthly liquor delivery subscriptions, mortgages, stocks and bonds, home electronics, power tools, camping gear, and sporting equipment. Predictably, this is an opportune moment for Canadian Tire and Home Depot to participate in the marriage marketplace. Spokespersons for these companies advise that couples might scan practical gifts onto their registries such as barbecues, garden furniture, and for the ultimate in romance: Weed Eaters, cordless drills, and lovely large trashcans.

A gift registry at Canadian Tire contains similar items to Home Depot's, but the marketing approach is slightly different. Canadian Tire's multipage wedding registry ads read like infomercials, with two thirds of the adspace dedicated to dispensing basic domestic advice. The discourse dominating these ads revolves around established tradition, the value of home and hearth, and trusting in timeless rituals, thus

capitalizing on the same ideologies currently responsible for the success of Martha Stewart. Couples shopping at Canadian Tire should trust that by registering for the best brands of appliances and cookware they are guaranteed to enjoy the very best that life has to offer. The best brands of pots and pans, toaster ovens, and drill bits are built to last, just like a solid marriage, and just like the durable and dependable Canadian Tire itself — a national institution.

The rhetoric of marital entitlement predominates within these magazine ads which include photographs and item numbers for appliances and housewares (to faciliate easy registering) but do not specify any prices, sending the message that money is no object since the betrothed have earned the right to, and are owed, happiness (at any price). In the mythical world of Brideland, newly engaged modern traditionals should focus on romance, enchantment, and fun — worrying about the cost for the best brands is so old fashioned. In this fairy tale of happily ever after and marital utopia, housework is shared, romantic, even a kind of sexual foreplay (as many couples are pictured in ads dressed in loungewear, staring lustily at each other, posed surrounded by their wedding gifts).

The Politics of Entitlement in Bridal Gift Registry Advertisements: Welcome to the Club at HBC

A playful, enchanted dreamworld is exactly the aesthetic of The Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC's) "Vow to Wow Club" marketing campaign. These multipage ads sell the gift registry to newly engaged couples by borrowing the rhetoric of I-Do Feminism and citing the same ideologies of entitlement, nostalgia, and nationalism used by Canadian Tire. Shamelessly emulating Target's "Club Wedd" bridal registry ads, the Bay's registry uses an identical color palate and campy *mise en scène* to encourage the newly engaged to take up the scanner. Advertised using nationalist rhetoric, HBC promises that as a member of the "Club" registrants will be *rewarded* for choosing to join the HBC "family" and participating in this all-Canadian department store chain (now foreign-owned). From coast to coast, the ads suggest, everyone has access to this national pastime (shopping). We are all invited to participate in the rituals of lavish wedding planning. Herein active consumer citizenship is connected to patriotism, even democracy, and the HBC gift registry serves the public good.

At Target and the Bay, getting married is always a riotous occasion, and ads picture the newlyweds being goofy while surrounded not by family and people they love, but by the fetishized luxury items they lovingly scanned. This carnivalesque climate is reflected in the popular news media, echoed and amplified by spokespersons for registry companies. For example, at Home Outfitters (part of the HBC chain), a representative working a table at a wedding trade show admits:

> Brides come into the store and they grab the scanner and run around zapping the bar code on their favourite things. Mostly they head for the cool stuff like fondues and chocolate fountains which were very big last year. No one cares about function, they only care about form. They want stuff that is stylish and don't really care what it does. Anything stainless steel is hot, anything contemporary urban (Jager 2006).

Noticeably absent from the Target and HBC ads are scenes of a kitchen, the traditional setting in which to display housewares, thus insinuating that hip married lifestyle is as much about travel and fashion as it is about Cuisinart. Moreover, as Jaclyn Geller observes, these ads "assure the bride-to-be that while learning the art of home management, she will not become a household drone" (2001: 159). Instead the ads seek to connect commodities to the achievement of a happy satisfied social existence. We should fall in love with our material possessions, they seem to suggest, perhaps especially considering that so many marriages fail, and human relationships are fragile and often disappointing — but our brand name products will always be there for us (Jhally 1997).

The playful approach to gift registries evidenced throughout ads from Canadian Tire to HBC emphasizes the necessity of approaching wedding planning with a sense of humour, joy, and fun. This strategy is likely designed to offset the potentially overwhelming details of decoration and dress as described in *Martha Stewart Weddings*; oddly enough, many retailers (and magazine editors) represent the registry planning work as a leisurely way to take time out from the stress of wedding preparations. To get caught up in the process of making a wish list is to be distracted from the doubts, fears, and anxieties that normally accompany the identity shifts and major life transition of tying the knot — or so retailers promise. Keeping one's eye on the prize, that enormous collection of gifts forthcoming, is a way to get beyond wedding mania.

As Paul Willis observes, wedding rituals are part of the culture of everyday life, one of the social activities that transmits values, maintains communities, shapes identities, and affords individuals an opportunity for symbolic creativity (2006: 565). For these reasons, women entering the commercial space of Brideland (wedding magazine ads) quickly confront an array of discourses reassuring brides that the work of planning a wedding (including registering for gifts) is highly significant at the individual, community, and wider historico-cultural levels.

Conclusion

By focusing the reader's attention on the wedding day celebration and the happily-ever-after glow of newlywed existence (and never exploring the ups and downs of married life or the mundane realities of housekeeping), publications like *MSW*, *InStyle Weddings*, and *Modern Bride* deliver a monthly dose of romance fiction to female audiences. Ien Ang calls this process the "deliberate fictional bracketing of life after the wedding," which involves a "fantasmatic perpetuation of the romantic state of affairs" (2006: 561). Ang then asks what possible reasons women, and feminists in particular, would have for choosing to consume this literature in such enormous quantities — speculating that although it is likely connected to women's struggles for empowerment, it is in fact quite misguided (561).

Through the consumerist activities of reading wedding magazine ads and establishing wedding registries, newly-engaged women (and some men) are encouraged to develop their identities, communicate their social standing, and set their future goals based on accumulation of material goods. Their choice to marry almost seems incidental compared to the importance placed on other decisions regarding decorations and appliances for the wedding and new household. Soon-to-be newlyweds should aim high, advertisers instruct, for example as Wusthof (maker of "the world's best knife") clarifies: "Professional chefs and cooking enthusiasts worldwide settle for nothing less, nor should you." The message is clear: never compromise, not in life, not in the search for a mate, and certainly not when registering for gifts. Advertisers normalize this discourse of entitlement such that those getting married are encouraged to ask for the most expensive, the best, the most distinctive gifts. And wedding guests should understand that by investing

in a Krups coffeemaker, they are helping the happy couple achieve the good life, and welcoming them into the national community of shoppers (or what Bridget Jones called "the smug marrieds"). Once upon a time not too long ago (mid-nineteenth century), giving a couple a practical wedding gift might have been interpreted as an insult — insinuating that the family could not sufficiently provide for the bridal trousseau. Today, as Carol McD. Wallace explains, the wedding gift-giving practice is a way for guests to communicate their support for and approval of the marriage — so newlyweds register for basics and luxury commodities alike (Wallace 2004: 47).

Through the reinvented tradition of the wedding registry, retailers utilize the motif of the I-Do Feminist to reclaim and retrofit housewifery as hip consumerism and part of a modern and upwardly mobile lifestyle. The fantastic representations of domestic hyperperfection and glimpses of happy-ever-after married life featured in gift registry ads operate to both offset and amplify the drudgery, anxiety, and financial stress involved in wedding planning. These popular culture texts help women imagine their post-wedding life in idealized terms — a seductive vision. Bridal industry marketing appeals to women's dreams of a life filled with equity, security, love, beauty, and happiness — encouraging them to accept that a lavish white wedding is the first step toward achieving these fulfillments. Thus by registering for Jamie Oliver cookware or at the even more groom-friendly Home Depot, and opting for a deluxe wedding with all the trimmings, the reassuring message to modern-traditional brides is that they are setting the foundation for a successful marriage.

This approach to DIY weddings encourages women to experiment with event planning and the domestic arts, to develop their unique taste and style as wife and homemaker, to exercise their feminist values, and to playfully negotiate established traditions and discourses of heterogendered normalcy. Such pleasurable negotiations, as Christine Gledhill observes, are usually conscious acts of holding together two opposites, such as conformity and individualism, because both are true — however paradoxical it might seem (1988: 64). For these reasons and others, a magazine such as *Martha Stewart Weddings* and ads for the good (married) life by Canadian Tire and HBC inspire modern profeminist women to embrace and invent traditions, plan elaborate

weddings, and assemble detailed gift registries — although as the cautionary tale of Jennifer Wilbanks confirms, the process of navigating this strange world of Brideland remains extremely challenging for many brides.

References

Adams, Mary Louise. 1997. *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press.

Ang, Ien. 2006. "Feminist Desire and Female Pleasure." In John Storey ed., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*: 522-531. Harlow (UK): Pearson Prentice Hall.

Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.

———. 1975. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Beecher, Mary Ann. 2001. "The Mythical Making Martha." *American Studies* 42 (2): 113-124.

Belkin, Lisa. 2003. "The Opt-Out Revolution." *The New York Times Magazine*, October 26. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/26/magazine/26WOMEN.html

Benfer, Amy. 2001. "I do - kind of: 'I won't' feminists go up against 'I did, but I have a good excuse' feminists in a holier-than-thou battle over what it means to walk that aisle." *Salon.com*, Aug. 15. http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2001/08/15/i_do/index.html

Bhattacharya, Surya. 2006. "It's becoming a man's world." *The Toronto Star,* January 28, M03.

"Bride wanted to be perfect." 2005. *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, June 23, 032.

Cohen, Emily Jane. 2005. "Kitchen Witches: Martha Stewart: Gothic Housewife, Corporate CEO." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38 (4): 650-678.

De Lauretis, Teresa. 1987. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington (IN): Indiana University Press.

Fiske, John. 1989. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Geller, Jaclyn. 2001. *Here Comes the Bride: Women, Weddings, and the Marriage Mystique*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Gledhill, Christine. 1988. "Pleasurable Negotiations." In D. Pribram ed., *Female Spectators*: 64-89. London: Verso.

Gutierrez, Lisa. 2005. "Not Your Mother's Bridal Registry". *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 8. http://www/jsonline.com

Hall, Stuart. 1981. "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular." In Raphael Samuel ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory*: 227-249. London: Routledge.

Hart, Ariel. 2005. "Bride-to-Be Admits Making Up Kidnap Story." *The New York Times Online* May 1. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/01/national/01bride.html

Hermes, Joke. 1996. *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*. Cambridge and Oxford (UK): Polity Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric, ed. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jacobs, Alexandra. 2001. "Love, Honor, Obey and... Oh." *The New York Observer*. February 13. http://www.observer.com/20060213/20060213_Alexandra_Jacobs_homepage_observerclassics.asp

Jager, Rebecca Field. 2006. "Brides Seek Cool Stuff: Younger Set Fascinated with Stylish Novelties, Not Basic Housewares." *The Hamilton Spectator*, January 18, G14.

Jhally, Sut, producer. 1997. *Representation and the Media*. Film, Media Education Foundation.

———. 2003. "Image-based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture." In Gail Dines et al. eds., *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*: 249-256. London: SAGE.

Kellner, Douglas. 1983. "Critical Theory, Commodities and the Consumer Society." *Theory, Culture and Society* 1: 1-23.

Kilbourne, Jean. 1999. *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising*. New York: Free Press.

Kingston, Anne. 2005. *The Meaning of Wife*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Leavitt, Sarah. 2002. *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice*. Chapel Hill (NC): North Carolina University Press.

Mason, Ann and Marian Meyers. 2001. "Living With Martha Stewart Media: Chosen Domesticity in the Experience of Fans." *Journal of Communication* 51: 801-823.

Matrix, Sidney. 2006. "Cinderella Goes to the Prom: Constructing Rituals of Youth Culture through Teen Media." *Canadian Children's Literature Journal* 32 (1): 8-40.

McRobbie, Angela. 2000. *Feminism and Youth Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Moir-Smith, Allison. 2006. *Emotionally Engaged: A Bride's Guide to Surviving the "Happiest" Time of Her Life*. New York: Hudson Street Press.

Mungin, Lateef. 2006. "'Runaway bride' says ex ran off with the money." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. October 10. http://www.ajc.com/news/content/ metro/gwinnett/stories/2006/10/09/1010METBRIDE.html

Nava, Mica. 1992. *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth, and Consumerism*. London: SAGE.

Nissinen, Sheryl. 2000. *The Conscious Bride: Women Unveil Their True Feelings About Getting Hitched*. Oakland (CA): New Harbinger Publications.

Otnes, Cele and Elizabeth Pleck. 2003. *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding*. Berkeley: The University of California Press.

Rabine, Leslie. 1994. "A Women's Two Bodies: Fashion Magazines, Consumerism, and Feminism." In Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss eds., *On Fashion*: 59-75. New Brunswick (NJ): Rutgers University Press.

Radway, Janice. 1984. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill (NC): University of North Carolina Press.

Raskin, Rhona. 2006. "Ask Rhona Raskin: Your friend is under no obligation to follow couple's tacky gift demand." *Winnipeg Free Press*. April 26: D3.

Robbins, Li. 2003. *Going Bridal: How to Get Married Without Losing Your Mind*. London: McGraw-Hill.

"Runaway bride has TV deal" 2005. *Winnipeg Free Press*. June 17: 20.

Schor, Juliet. 2003. "The New Politics of Consumption: Why Americans Want so Much More than They Need." In Gail Dines et al. eds., *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*: 183-194. London: SAGE.

Stark, Marg. 1998. *What No One Tells the Bride: Surviving the Wedding, Sex After the Honeymoon*. New York: Hyperion.

Tolin, Lisa. 2006. "From blushing bride to bridezilla: How to keep from descending into madness." *The Guardian*, February 22: 13.

Tye, Diane. 1997. "Is It A Good Thing?: Martha Stewart and Homemaking." *Canadian Folklore canadien* 19: 39-62.

Wajda, Shirley Teresa. 2001. "Kmartha." *American Studies* 42 (2): 71-88.

Walker, Lisa. 2000. "Feminists in Brideland." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19 (2): 219-230.

Wallace, Carol McD. 2004. *All Dressed in White: The Irresistible Rise of the American Wedding*. New York: Penguin.

Weddingbells editorial 2005. "Groom-o-lution." 21 (1): 136.

Wicoff, Kamy. 2006. *I Do but I Don't: Walking Down the Aisle without Losing Your Mind*. Cambridge (MA): DaCapo.

Willis, Paul. 2006. "Symbolic Creativity." In John Storey ed., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader:* 523-530. Harlow (UK): Pearson Prentice Hall.

Wolf, Naomi. 1995. "Brideland." In Rebecca Walker ed., *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*: 39. New York: Anchor.

———. 1991. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*. New York: Morrow.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Bloomington (IN): Indiana University Press.