

Advertising Love:
Personal Ads, Product Advertisements, and the Consumption of Romance

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late nineteenth century, representations of romantic love have been deployed in support of consumption, serving to link a particular model of romantic love – one dependent on and constituted through the purchase and use of consumer goods – to a particular economic system – consumer capitalism. This dissertation considers how love has been used in attempts to sell consumer goods; how cultural ideals of romance, love, and marriage are related to the values of consumption; and to what degree individuals' beliefs about love and marriage adhered to the value system of consumer culture.

Advertising is a logical place to begin an inquiry into the relationship between consumer culture and romantic love. It is one of the most visible manifestations of the values of consumption; in fact, it is sometimes described as the language of consumer culture.¹ Yet advertising is not limited to the marketing of goods; it is also used for the marketing of the self. Specifically, personal ads provide a window into how individuals adopted that language to their own goals; these ads frame the individual search for love in the rhetoric of consumption, and they are a site where individuals are active participants in both selling and consuming: advertising themselves as desirable, while at the same time describing the attributes of the type of partner for whom they are in the market. A comparison of personal ads to commercial advertisements that relied on representations of love suggests some of the ways that people rejected, accepted, or refashioned the

¹ Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

values of consumption as they looked for love within consumer culture. In other words, examining personal ads provides an opportunity to consider whether everyday people bought the models of love that consumer culture was trying to sell. The content surrounding ads in advertising-supported media (here, magazines, television, and the internet) is also a valuable source at which to look for the expression of the values of consumer culture and is considered here just as it originally appeared: alongside the advertisements, adding to the chorus of messages that, in one way or another, virtually all existed in support of consumer capitalism.

This dissertation makes two major contributions to the study of consumer culture. First, it reads newspaper personal ads as representing the voices of consumers, as a site where the beliefs of individuals living within consumer culture are heard. Second, it juxtaposes those beliefs against the meanings of product advertisements, magazine articles, and television programming to chart the uneven but steady progress of consumptive romantic marriage as a dominant cultural ideology. From consumer culture's beginnings in the late nineteenth century up through to the present day, representations of romantic love and marriage in commercialized popular culture have become increasingly sympathetic to and reflective of the values of consumer culture. Over the same time period, individual desires have also gradually grown more in line with consumer culture's messages. The following chapters chart two main developments over time to trace the expansion of the values of consumption through American culture. First, I examine the breadwinner/homemaker model of marriage, which was intended from its inception to position the married couple as a unit of consumption. Representations of this model, and acceptance of it by individuals, grew over the course

of the century, to the point that the belief in men's responsibility to support their families, and the accompanying identification of women as consumers, held strong even in the face of undeniable changes in married women's participation in the paid workforce. Second, I consider the significance of compatibility or shared interests in dominant conceptions of romantic love. The notion that spouses should enjoy each other's company was a new one in the early twentieth century and, over time, has come to signal the importance of shared consumption tastes.

The economic needs of consumer capitalism demand that individuals perceive of and experience emotional states, such as falling and/or being in love, through acts of consumption. The messages of consumer culture insist that people can find love if they purchase the right products and can hold onto love by doing the same. The act of consuming is presented as being akin to the experience of falling in love – recognizing “the one,” having one's needs met perfectly, and feeling completed are just some of the tropes used both in advertising and in representations of romantic love. Since consumer culture first began to take hold in the United States in the late nineteenth century, the models of romantic love and marriage presented as ideal by commercialized popular culture have relied on a conception of the married couple as first and foremost a unit of consumption. These models insist that the marital relationship, and various specifically gendered responsibilities, be comprised, fundamentally, of acts of consumption. A comparison of the social meanings of consumer culture to the personal ads published by individuals searching for love reveals that, over time, individual ideas about romantic love have grown to resemble the models put forth by consumer culture. Over the progression of time from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first, individual

conceptions of the meaning and purpose of love have become increasingly concerned with consumption behaviors and, overall, infused with a consumerist mindset.

Advertising Love traces the development of consumer culture's ideology around romantic love, and the ways individuals interacted with that ideology, by examining commercialized popular culture and personal ads from five different time periods. It begins with a chapter on the 1890s, the decade often noted as marking the emergence of modern day consumer culture. Chapters on the 1920s, 1950s and 1980s follow; each of these three decades were periods during which the values of consumption received especial valorization in American culture as well as times during which mainstream ideals of marriage were in flux. Finally, it concludes with a chapter on the early twenty-first century. While jumping through time and examining discrete decades does not allow the complete story of the development of these trends to emerge, it does provide the opportunity to note change over time in a way that would otherwise be difficult in a project of this scope. Considering time periods from the 1890s through the present day exposes the historical roots behind the reality in which we live today and reminds us that widely-held cultural beliefs about love and marriage, and the role consumer goods play in both, are not timeless, universal truths. Rather, they are determined by the economic and cultural contexts in which they exist. The messages of consumer culture regarding romantic love were, in some ways, unchanging from one time period to the next: the way to find love and have a successful marriage, advertisements have always promised, is to buy the proper consumer goods. The specifics of the model of romantic love presented as ideal by commercialized popular culture *have* changed, however, and the trajectory is one that, on the whole, brought cultural ideals of love and marriage more in line with the

values of consumer culture as time went on. The desires and values of individuals, as evidenced through the personal ads placed in newspapers, likewise generally follow a trajectory towards greater acceptance of the values of consumer culture.

Chapter One examines the messages of the popular women's magazine *Ladies' Home Journal* and its enormously influential editor Edward Bok throughout the 1890s, a time period during which the transition to a consumer culture, while rooted in earlier moments, was gaining decided momentum. The *Journal* was one of the first cultural sites to identify women as consumers and to instruct them in this new role, and the magazine's perspective on all issues, including its idealized version of marriage as a relationship between a breadwinner husband and a homemaker wife, took the values of the nascent consumer culture as its foundation. This marital arrangement was intended to support the development of consumer culture by identifying men as earners and women as consumers, each of whom engaged in their respective duties out of a sense of responsibility undergirded by the love spouses were expected to share. Yet the personal ads published during this time period reflect the older values that Bok and his *Journal* were working to displace. Individuals who placed personal ads during the 1890s articulated an earlier model of marriage based on shared productive labor, suggesting that the individuals living their lives at the dawn of modern consumer capitalism were not yet fully determined by the promotion of consumption in such early vehicles as the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

Chapter Two looks at the 1920s, a key decade for the questions with which this project is concerned for several reasons. The twenties were the heyday of mass-market magazines, which grew up along with the advertising industry; post-WWI affluence and

advances in technology and manufacturing spurred a dramatic rise in the consumption of consumer goods; and new opportunities for commercialized leisure, relaxed sexual standards, and changing ideas about the meaning and purpose of marriage led to a “revolution in manners and morals.” The breadwinner/homemaker ideal expanded in the twenties to the ideal of a companionate or modern marriage in which spouses not only loved each other and worked together (he by earning money, she by shopping/housekeeping) to form the basic consumption unit, but also enjoyed each other’s company. This decade also saw the earliest attempts at target marketing, as publishers and advertisers developed different publications for, and advertised different types of goods to, middle-class and working-class audiences. Chapter Two considers the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, which was targeted to middle-class women, and *True Story*, a magazine aimed at working-class women. Advertisements in both magazines promised readers that the purchase and use of consumer goods would provide access to the exciting world of modern marriage described in the editorial features. Differences in the two publications suggest that marriage and consumption had different meanings based on class position, giving weight to the overall argument of this project, namely, that cultural ideals about romance and marriage are determined by the needs of consumer capitalism. The personal ads published during the twenties indicated that some individuals were beginning to accept and internalize the values of consumer culture, demonstrating a desire for the fun, modern marriage presented in popular culture as well as placing increasing importance on the possession of material goods like automobiles.

Chapter Three turns to the 1950s, a decade that saw spectacular growth of the American consumer economy, as wartime production facilities were reconverted to

produce consumer goods for civilians in a concerted effort to avoid another economic depression. Cultural representations of marriage showcased a return to the breadwinner/homemaker model after the disruptions of depression and wartime, and many of the sources considered here – magazines for both white and African American readers, as well as various programs and advertisements on television, an enormously influential addition to the media landscape – promised that consumption was the way to achieve domestic stability. The 1950s marriage was, in many ways, the pinnacle of the breadwinner/homemaker model, even though by this time married women's employment rates, in all socioeconomic and racial groups, gave the lie to the notion that women were never more fulfilled than when staying home caring for their husbands and children. Some representations of marriage in the fifties began to introduce the concept of personal compatibility as an important factor in marital success. Advertisers first recognized African Americans as a distinct audience worthy of targeting during the fifties, and differences between representations of marriage in white and black publications hinted at differences in the economic realities of the two groups. The personal ads placed by both whites and blacks during the fifties revealed that, in some ways, individual desires reflected the values of consumer culture more than ever before, as signified by advertisers' widespread acceptance of the breadwinner/homemaker ideal. At the same time, some individuals were searching for relationships that were not defined by consumption, articulating a desire for personal compatibility that was, at that time, not tied to consumer goods.

Chapter Four focuses on the 1980s, a decade unparalleled for its widespread cultural valorization of ostentatious wealth and conspicuous consumption. While the

emphasis on consumption in popular culture resembled the fifties, in the realm of romantic relationships the eighties broke new ground. In magazines, television programming, and advertising, the dominant model of marriage was shifting, as cultural producers were forced to acknowledge the reality that the majority of married women worked outside the home. Representations of dual-income marriages became more common, but they were not accompanied by substantive changes in other aspects of gender roles. Husbands were still expected to support their families, and wives were still assumed to be the consumers and homemakers. The existence of gay and lesbian couples also received increased acknowledgement by late in the decade, as a result of a number of factors (including feminism, the LGBT movement, and the AIDS crisis). By the 1980s, the emphasis on compatibility as an important element of romantic love was widespread, but compatibility began to be considered not just in terms of personality or behavioral traits but in regard to consumption tastes as well. Personal ads from this decade demonstrated a decided shift towards acceptance of the values of consumer culture. Many individuals, both straight and gay, expressed a desire for compatibility that was more in line with the operations of consumer culture, namely, defined by shared purchasing tastes and practices. Ad placers in the eighties also generally expressed a more consumerist mindset, as evidenced by the long lists of desired qualities that were typical at this time, which read like shopping lists.

Chapter Five considers the notions about consumption and romantic love that circulate in today's American culture, deploying particularly a close reading of the popular television shows *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* and the advertising that airs alongside them, supplemented by other television, print, and online sources, before

turning to consideration of the impact of online dating on the questions that are central to this project. In the early twenty-first century, the quest for compatibility and complementarity has been subsumed within a narrative of choice that likens the search for love to shopping for products in a myriad number of ways. The *Bachelor* shows appear as nothing more than advertisements for this particular version of romantic love, which is inherently dependent on viewers' intrinsic conception of themselves as consumers and as neoliberal citizens, operating according to a calculus of risk and profit. The phenomenon of online dating likewise encourages users to conceive of themselves as being consumers first and foremost. In terms of the questions taken up by this project (how are individual ideas about romantic love related to the models presented by consumer culture, and do individuals buy the messages about romantic success that consumer culture is trying to sell?) and the finding of previous chapters (that personal ads have historically been a site where some individuals have challenged the romantic models offered by consumer culture) the growth of online dating, and the concurrent disappearance of most print personal ads, appears to be a negative development. In the early twenty-first century, online dating sites have taken over the individual searches for love that used to find expression in the classified pages, reformulating them entirely within the idiom of consumption and equating the search for a mate with the search for consumer goods. Internet dating sites exist for the sole purpose of making a profit, and the experience of filling out an online profile results in one's desires being mediated and limited by the site's designers, as opposed to the relatively free self-expression enabled by traditional newspaper personal ads. Online dating represents a further encroachment of the values of consumer culture into the emotional lives of individuals.

This analysis brings together two related fields of study that heretofore have remained largely distinct from one another: histories of consumption, advertising, and mass-market magazines in the early twentieth century, and histories that examine various facets of the changes in public and private behavior in the realms of leisure and intimate relationships during the same time period.² Some texts from the latter group do examine the relationship between the concurrent development of consumer culture and of new standards for courtship, love, sexuality and marriage. For example, Elaine Tyler May's study of divorce records found that in 1920, tensions around consumption, and around the expectations for marriage presented in popular culture including magazines and movies, were a major factor in the decision to file for divorce for both women and men; in her history of courtship, Beth Bailey notes that the shift from "calling," where women controlled men's access to the home, to "dating," where men (and their money) controlled women's access to the public world of leisure, was related to the development

² Consumption, advertising, magazines: Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies' Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Ad-Man in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996); Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Erin Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). Leisure and intimate relationships: Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: A History of Courtship in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

of a consumer economy. None, however, directly takes up the question of advertising's association with those changes. In his massive study of early-twentieth-century magazine advertisements Roland Marchand found that, during the interwar decades, ad creators perceived themselves to be "apostles of modernity," intent on selling the new and modern – both literally and figuratively – to a sometimes resistant public.³ In addition to such facets of modernity as industrial progress, a faster pace of life, and new conditions for social relations, advertisements also presented – and, through those representations, helped to construct – a changed emotional landscape, including a new romantic style and idealized versions of modern marriage. My reading of advertisements draws from the insights of Judith Williamson, Erving Goffman, Roland Marchand, and Michael Schudson, who all argue that advertisements provide valuable information about the historical context within which they were created: dominant ideology, systems of social power, widely held cultural beliefs, and the reigning values of capitalism are all visible within this powerful language of consumer culture.⁴

A 2010 *New York Times* opinion piece on the effect of the economic recession on marriage rates claimed that "modern marriages are based not on the economic benefits of playing specialized roles but on shared passions."⁵ This sentiment is not a new one; commentators of various stripes have been insisting on the importance of keeping romantic love and its supposed ultimate realization, marriage, separate from the market for well over a century. Yet, in a consumer culture in which the pursuit, achievement,

³Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, xxi.

⁴ Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978); Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*; Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*.

⁵ Justin Wolfers, "How Marriage Survives," *New York Times* Oct. 13, 2010, p. A25.

and expression of love are inextricably linked to the consumption of products, is such a separation even possible? Furthermore, an argument that marriages in the 21st century are no longer based on economic benefits seems naïve at best. Yes, certainly, it has been a common argument, for more than a century, that marriage – or, indeed, long-term partnerships of any kind, legally recognized or not – should be based on “shared passions.” Yet at a time when women still only earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by men, when married couples receive numerous monetary benefits (including the ability to file taxes jointly and take advantage of a spouse’s health care benefits), and when even couples who don’t wish to or don’t have the legal right to marry find that cohabitating can be the only way to make ends meet in the face of a global recession, it’s not a stretch to argue that economic considerations still, as always, play a central role in the structure of relationships that are “supposed” to be solely based on romance.⁶

The economic dimensions of emotional relationships go beyond such practical concerns, however. A central belief of this project is that the representations of romantic love that dominate mainstream American culture work to support consumer capitalism. Michael Schudson, noting the ubiquity of advertisements and their claims to “buy me and you will be happy,” asks, “What does the repetition of these messages over and over again do to the minds and characters of people?”⁷ In this dissertation I ask a similar, more focused question. Advertisements tell us constantly that the way to find love is through consumer goods. What does the repetition of this message do to the minds and *hearts* of

⁶ Figures on women’s earning compared to men’s, National Committee on Pay Equity, “The Wage Gap Over Time,” <http://www.pay-equity.org/info-time.html> accessed 4/1/2013.

⁷ Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 6.

people? What is the relationship between the culture of consumption, of which advertising is perhaps the most visible expression, and dominant constructions of love in American culture? Sociologist Eva Illouz argues that since the turn of the century, “consumption and romantic emotions have progressively merged, each shrouding the other in a mystical halo. Commodities have now penetrated the romantic bond so deeply that they have become the invisible and unacknowledged spirit reigning over romantic encounters.”⁸ This project is an attempt to acknowledge and make visible the connections between consumption and romance.

⁸ Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 11. Though Illouz, as a cultural sociologist, approaches the topic from a very different angle, her book takes up the same basic issues that concern me here. She argues, “the modern definitions and practices of romance are intertwined with... consumer capitalism” (2); her primary concern is with analyzing romantic love as an arena in which the social divisions of capitalism are played out.

CHAPTER ONE

A New Model of Marriage: The *Ladies' Home Journal*, Edward Bok, and the Growth of Consumer Culture in the 1890s

“That perfect union on which God smiles and the angels sing hallelujah of gladness and content.” (*Ladies' Home Journal* editor Edward Bok describing marriage, 1890)

“Young American lady wishes position as housekeeper for a gentleman; object matrimony.” (Personal ad, 1892)¹

Introduction

The sentimental portrayal of marriage offered by *Ladies' Home Journal* editor Edward Bok in 1890 bore little resemblance to the utilitarian relationship described by the young woman placing a personal ad in hopes of finding a husband in 1892. The gulf between these two depictions of the meaning and purpose of marriage tyified the time, and offers an illuminating glimpse into the central question with which this project is concerned: the relationship between the messages of consumer culture, specifically those related to romantic love, and the structure of beliefs held by the individuals who lived within and were surrounded by that culture. Did individuals believe, as advertisers would have them, that the way to find love was, ultimately, to buy the proper consumer goods? Was love itself seen as a kind of consumer good? That is, was the framework provided by advertisements, and the popular culture productions within which the ads appeared, the same framework used by individuals to make sense of the meaning and place of love

¹ Edward Bok, editorial, *Ladies' Home Journal* (hereafter *LHJ*) Oct. 1890, 10; *The [San Francisco] Morning Call*, June 5, 1892, 6.

in their lives? A comparison of the messages of commercialized popular culture and personal ads placed by individuals searching for love and/or marriage can begin to address such questions, suggesting that the nascent consumer culture of the late nineteenth century worked to obscure the economic basis of marriage while that basis remained at the forefront of individual beliefs. While the main focus of this project involves a consideration of how romantic love and consumption have been connected in American culture throughout the *twentieth* century, it begins with the 1890s, a period when the key elements examined here – consumer culture and modern marriage – began to take shape.

Scholars often characterize the 1890s as the decade which marks the emergence of modern-day consumer culture. As the development of industrialization gave rise to ever more efficient production techniques, manufacturers produced increasingly greater amounts of goods, until supply exceeded demand. This looming crisis of overproduction prompted business and political leaders to develop new methods of distribution. Branded, packaged products replaced the bulk goods to which retail customers were accustomed; manufacturers employed their own salesmen to distribute products to retailers, cutting out the wholesalers who had traditionally fulfilled this function; and advertising became a way to educate consumers about new products, employing new techniques of market segmentation and targeted promotion and attempting to supercede the role of advisor formerly held by the small shopkeeper. The increasing presence of advertising, and of mass retailers such as departments stores and chain stores, in the lives of Americans encouraged them to view themselves as consumers, with needs that could

be met by branded goods.² The creation of mass-market magazines in the late nineteenth century was a pivotal moment in the development of modern-day consumer culture, as magazines such as the *Journal* were intended from their inception as vehicles for advertising.³ Indeed, national advertising developed hand-in-hand with the mass-market magazines it supported, and the concerns of advertisers were always a key influence on the messages of these magazines.⁴ In 1890, advertising pioneers were sowing the seeds of the American advertising industry that would ultimately dominate both the business world and the cultural landscape. Cyrus and Louisa Knapp Curtis had begun the advertising-supported *Ladies' Home Journal*, one of the earliest iterations of

² On the development of consumer culture in the late nineteenth century, see Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1985); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Books, 1989). For the perspective that consumption has played a role in all phases of American history, see for example Lawrence B. Glickman, "Born to Shop? Consumer History and American History," in Glickman, ed., *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

³ Richard Ohmann identifies the emergence of these advertising-driven, middle-class monthly magazines, and their role in middle-class culture in the decades around the turn of the century, as a crucial moment in the solidification of the national market, the development of mass culture, and the creation of a consumer society. Matthew Schneirov argues that because they were the only medium to reach a national audience on a regular basis, and because they claimed to address a general public rather than specific subcultures or interest groups, popular magazines purported to represent "America itself." Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996); Matthew Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America, 1893-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). On the role mass-market magazines played in the development of consumer culture, see also Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies' Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Ad-Man in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁴ On the development of the advertising industry, see Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

commercialized popular culture, seven years previously, and they had just hired the young editor, Edward Bok, who would make it the most widely-read magazine in the nation within a decade. Victorian ideals of behavior and morality still structured the dominant cultural conception of marriage. A thorough understanding of the currents that shaped ideas about love, marriage and consumption in the twentieth century must consider the moment when those currents were just beginning to shift.

To that end, this chapter examines two main sets of sources: personal ads published in newspapers from across the United States and the advertisements and editorial features that appeared in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The personal ads are read as evidence of individual Americans' values and desires regarding marriage, while the magazine is considered for its role in conveying the values of the newly developing consumer culture, specifically as those values related to romantic love and marriage. The *Journal*, as a woman's magazine, was from its founding centrally concerned with love and marriage (both, after all, allegedly being the purview of women). The *Journal's* frequent editorials on marriage, as well feature stories with romantic themes, together presented a particular model of marriage as both inevitable and of crucial importance in the lives of readers. As depicted by the *Journal*, marriage depended on gendered expectations about the proper behavior and ideal qualities of each spouse. The magazine presented romantic love and marriage as purely emotional concerns, elevated above the crass realities of such issues as money or the marketplace. Yet an undercurrent also existed, in which articles and editorials worried that financial concerns negatively affected the marital relationship. The specific presence of advertisements that referenced love and marriage in attempts to sell products further weakened the magazine's apparent

message that marriage should be based on love, not economics. An examination of the writings of *Journal* editor Edward Bok, published both in the magazine and elsewhere, reveal that Bok was perpetually focused on presenting a model of marriage that would bolster the development of consumer culture, characterized by a husband who worked to earn the income that would support his wife in her housekeeping and her purchase of consumer products for the home. In the end, the schizophrenic nature of the *Journal's* stated and implied messages – that love was most important at the same time that money mattered – showed that, in the 1890s, consumer culture had not yet become hegemonic, and struggles over its meanings and operations were in evidence.

The *Ladies' Home Journal* was a major influence in the development of consumer culture, and as such it has received considerable scholarly attention. Historians Helen Damon-Moore and Jennifer Scanlon, in particular, have focused on the role that the magazine played in the gendering of consumption and the various ways that the *Journal* worked to solidify the cultural identification of women as the nation's primary consumers. Damon-Moore examines the *Journal* alongside the men's/family magazine the *Saturday Evening Post*, also published by Cyrus Curtis, to argue that the two magazines worked together in the early years of the twentieth century to elaborate a gender system wherein men earned while women consumed. Scanlon considers the *Journal* from 1910-1930, focusing on the production of the magazine and close readings of the fiction to identify how the magazine defined American womanhood in narrow terms, emphasizing domestic work and consumption. This dissertation's examination of the *Journal* and the conclusions drawn here differ from and expand on previous studies in several key ways. First, focusing on the magazine's representation of romantic love and

marriage as opposed to its overall message allows for a more nuanced look at the ways message makers called upon emotions to promote the values of consumer culture. Second, reading the contents of the *Journal* alongside and against the voices of individuals, captured in newspaper personal ads, makes it possible to make some basic connections between text and audience. Although it is impossible to know whether specific ad placers read the *Journal*, Americans of the 1890s lived in a culture in which the messages of consumer culture were becoming more visible. Because those messages relied heavily on manipulating conceptions of love and marriage to support consumption, as the following analysis shows, the individual beliefs about love and marriage visible in the personal ads must be read within the context of those other cultural models that were circulating at the same time. Finally, while Damon-Moore locates the development of the husband-as-earner/wife-as-consumer model in the simultaneous publication of the *Post* and the *Journal* in the first decade of the twentieth century, consideration of Edward Bok's writings to men as well as his work as editor of the *Journal* reveals that model was already operational by the 1890s.

Models of marriage in personal ads: the expression of pre-consumption values

The personal ads of the 1890s expressed a model of marriage that was rooted in pre-consumer culture 19th century America, wherein the relationship between husband and wife was understood to be primarily an explicitly economic one. While the model of marriage presented by the *Ladies' Home Journal* expressed the values of the nascent consumer culture, the hundreds of personal ads surveyed here provide a glimpse into the way individuals conceived of marriage. These ads were published in a wide range of

newspapers, both large and small, from various regions in the U.S., including the Mid-Atlantic (Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.), the Midwest (Kansas City, MO, Omaha, and St. Paul), the South (Atlanta and Maysville, KY), the Southwest (Fort Worth and Salt Lake City), and California (Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Francisco). The individuals who placed these ads were pursuing love and marriage through an avenue that had been available since the publication of the first newspapers but which grew increasingly common. By and large, the men and women whose voices were captured in these classified pages did not seek the models of love and marriage presented to them in the popular culture ever more present in their lives.. Marriage was seen as a utilitarian institution, an arrangement by which a man and woman could join their respective labor in order to support the needs of their family, rather than as a complex emotional and physical connection.

Marriage was of central importance in the lives of many late nineteenth-century Americans, as reflected in the regular presence of personal ads in the newspapers of the 1890s, as well as in the large percentage of them (over 80%) that explicitly stated an objective of marriage. At a time when Victorian notions of propriety still held sway in many facets of American cultural life, the very fact that so many individuals chose to publish personal ads, hardly a respectable way to meet a mate, spoke to how important marriage was to them. Yet gendered notions of respectability did likely play a part in the disparity between ads placed by each sex. Men placed more than three-quarters of the personal ads published in the 1890s, a division more uneven than in any of the later decades; throughout the twentieth century, the breakdown held steady at about two-thirds men and one-third women. While the concerns expressed by male and female ad placers

were often different from each other, they only sometimes reflected the gender divisions stressed by the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Romantic love, an integral part of the model presented by the magazine, was rarely mentioned in the personal ads. The individuals who placed personal ads in the 1890s predominantly focused on the economic transactions that formed the basis of their model of marriage, to the exclusion of concerns about romance and love.

Indeed, romance barely appeared in these ads. In a way, the personal ad, flatly stating the ad placer's goal of matrimony, took the place of all of the romance that was supposed to occur during the courtship and engagement period, according to the new cultural models beginning to circulate. Placing a personal ad in a newspaper in search of a spouse flew in the face of this model of the proper procession from two strangers to husband and wife. One of the most striking aspects of the personal ads of the 1890s is how many of them were simple and basic in their composition. Unlike the personal ads of the later decades of the twentieth century, many ad placers included few, if any, details about themselves or qualifications they sought in respondents. "Wanted – By a Christian gentleman, the address of a Christian German lady with the intention of marriage"; "Wanted, a gentleman correspondent over forty. Object matrimony"; "Wanted, to meet respectable young lady. Object, matrimony"; "Middle-aged lady desires to meet elderly gentleman; object matrimony"; "A lady would like to correspond with a respectable gentleman"; "Gent of 31 wishes lady acquaintance; object, matrimony." Ads like these filled the classified pages of 1890s newspapers, suggesting that for many individuals,

marriage was seen as a utilitarian institution rather than fulfilling intimate relationship.⁵ Likewise, the infrequency with which references to love appeared indicated its relative unimportance to ad placers. Only 3% of ads placed by each sex mentioned love, including those composed by women who “would marry for love” or “will change name for a good man’s love” and by men whose object was “home, happiness and love,” who sought a “lady who would love him better than his money,” or who promised to be “a kind and loving husband.” It is, of course, possible that the lack of emotional elements in the personal ads of the 1890s is due to ad placers’ discomfort with expressing intimate personal details in a public forum. The lack of a mention of love did not necessarily mean that ad placers didn’t hope to fall in love with a respondent and then marry, or to find love within their marriages, but the infrequency with which love was mentioned relative to other issues does suggest that it was not the most important factor for many.⁶

While personal ads of the 1890s did not articulate a clear conception of romantic love, some did hint at a notion of personal compatibility that would become an increasingly important part of cultural conceptions of romantic love over the course of the twentieth century. This early iteration of compatibility was expressed through a focus on personality traits and characteristics, and the ads that mentioned them stood out as being unusually informative, either about the ad placer her/himself or about the type of mate she/he sought. Such individuals described themselves as “honest, sober, economical,” as “temperate, refined, educated, industrious, honorable,” as an “intelligent,

⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 16, 1891, 2; *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*, July 1, 1891, 3; *Salt Lake Herald*, Mar. 1, 1896, 8; *San Francisco Call*, Oct. 3, 1896, 13; *The [Washington, D.C.] Evening Times*, Jan. 31, 1898, 3; *Saint Paul Globe*, July 12, 1898, 7.

⁶ 15 of the 527 ads placed by men (2.8%) and 5 of the 157 ads placed by women (3.2%). *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 18, 1894, 21; *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 10, 1895, 21. *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 1, 1895, 18; *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 18, 1894, 21; *San Francisco Call*, Oct. 29, 1899, 17.

go-ahead woman,” or as “literary and domestic.” They sought spouses who were “good, honest, sober,” “of good moral character,” or “of gentle and loving disposition.” Rather than pursuing the kind of heady yet generic love described in cultural productions such as the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, these ad placers hoped to build relationships with potential mates based on specific, identifiable, and often prosaic qualities. Others sought commonality in religion, ethnicity, or nationality, qualities that would become less important to dominant constructions of love over the next century but which still, in their mundane-ness, stood in contradiction to the model offered by the *Journal*.⁷

Romantic love found infrequent reference in personal ads of the 1890s, but a casual perusal of the classified pages demonstrated how important financial matters were to those seeking spouses. Marriage has always, of course, been an economic relationship as much as, if not more than, an emotional one, as attested to by centuries of traditions such as the transference of bridewealth and dowries. The inclusion of financial details in the personal ads reveals that monetary concerns continued to structure individuals’ expectations of marriage in the 1890s. In addition to the ads that included a general mention of financial security, some ad placers, more frequently men but also women, explicitly advertised their wealth in an attempt to attract the interest of potential mates, in ads such as “Tall, middle-aged bachelor, worth \$100,000, with ample income, good

⁷ *The [San Francisco] Morning Call*, June 21, 1893, 4; *San Francisco Call*, Feb. 14, 1897, 13; *The Saint Paul Daily Globe*, July 13, 1890, 15; *San Francisco Call*, Feb. 20, 1898, 12. *The Morning Call*, Aug. 12, 1890, 6; *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, June 5, 1892, 10; *San Francisco Call*, Mar. 15, 1896, 10. For commonality in religion, ethnicity, and nationality, see, for example: *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Feb. 28, 1892, 10; *Saint Paul Daily Globe*, Mar. 10, 1892, 7, and *San Francisco Call*, Oct. 29, 1899, 17 (Protestant); *Evening Times* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 28, 1898, 6 and *Atlanta Constitution*: Feb. 10, 1895, 21 (Catholic); *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*, Sept. 15, 1891, 3 and *San Francisco Call*, July 19, 1896, 12 (Jewish); *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 16, 1891, 2 and *Kansas City (Mo.) Journal*, Jan. 17, 1898 (German); *Saint Paul Daily Globe*, Nov. 27, 1893, 7 and *San Francisco Call*: Oct. 6, 1896, 12 (Scandinavian); *San Francisco Call*, Oct. 16, 1896, 13 and *Evening Times* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 28, 1898, 6 (Irish).

home, servants, horses and carriages, desires correspondent with view to early marriage”; “Young widower, 27 years of age, fairly good looking and possessing \$10,000, desires to meet young lady of prepossessing appearance; object matrimony”; and “A middle-aged widow, worth \$50,000, income \$5,000, would marry.” Ads like these took the focus on financial status to another level, quantifying the ad placer’s assets and thereby reinforcing the emphasis on financial status as a crucial factor in the search for a spouse.⁸

Expectations about the household responsibilities to be performed by each spouse were closely related to the desire for financial security, and this was one area where the values expressed by ad placers appeared to be aligned with the values of consumer culture. The *Journal* believed that the husband should provide financial support for his wife and that the wife should oversee the housework in return, both as her wifely duty and as a way to stake her claim to her husband’s income. Most of the personal ads that mentioned each spouse’s contribution to the household economy articulated the same breadwinner/homemaker model. Some men included mention of their homes as indication that they would be able to support their future wives’ domestic pursuits, while others explicitly offered their financial means in exchange for domestic labor, such as the “busy business man” with a “large salary” who would “marry loving, sincere woman, good housekeeper.” One man even promised that he “would devote time and money to making good wife happy.” Women emphasized their housekeeping skills, and some even explicitly advertised as housekeepers, with hopes that marriage would follow: “Young American lady wishes position as housekeeper for a gentleman; object matrimony.” Others were clear about their expectations of their husband, like the “American widow of

⁸ *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 27, 1892, 23; *San Francisco Call*, Apr. 4, 1897, 14; *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 10, 1895, 21.

good reference” who sought “an honorable elderly gentleman matrimonially inclined; must be able to support a wife; object a good home.” While the personal ads seldom touched upon the emotional aspects of the gender roles presented by the *Journal*, the economic/work aspects of those roles found frequent expression.⁹

Indeed, the ads’ overall focus on the “breadwinner” portion of the breadwinner/homemaker model was simultaneously their point of greatest similarity to and greatest departure from the messages of consumer culture. Although the breadwinner/homemaker model in fact formed the basis for the version of marriage presented by Bok and his *Journal*, he and his contributors expended great effort to emphasize instead the importance of the love that a married couple shared. This sleight of hand worked to redirect readers’ attention away from the economic foundation of marriage and to link emotion with consumption in ways that were not always obvious. Taken at face value, then, the magazine content of this decade suggested that the shift towards a cultural conception of marriage as a relationship based on romantic connection, rather than economic dependency, was well underway by the late nineteenth century. However, the personal ads examined here did not reflect that shift, an indication that many Americans could clearly see the continued primacy of economics in the marital relationship even as consumer capitalism took hold. Financial status was the single aspect that mattered most to ad placers in the 1890s. Half of all men and almost 60% of women included information about their own and/or their desired mate’s status. Not surprisingly, given that these ads were published at a time when few women had access

⁹ Men mentioning homes, see *Atlanta Constitution*, June 17, 1894, 21 and *San Francisco Call*, Aug. 13, 1899, 17. *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 3, 1899, 8. *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 24, 1895, 14. Women mentioning housekeeping skills, see *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 18, 1894, 21 and *San Francisco Call*, Apr. 12, 1896, 12. *The [San Francisco] Morning Call*, June 5, 1892,, 6. *San Francisco Call*, Mar. 20, 1898, 12.

to employment opportunities of any kind and even fewer were able to support themselves, men's financial security was more frequently mentioned both by women, seeking husbands with the ability to support them, and by men, hoping to present themselves as desirable prospects. Men described themselves as "well fixed" or "wealthy," while women stated simply that they "would like to meet a middle-aged man of means" or "desire[d] the acquaintance of some honorable gentleman of means." Close to half of all female ad placers included mention of their desired mate's financial security, and a third of male ad placers mentioned their own financial security. For both sexes, men's financial status was by far the single most frequently mentioned detail besides the objective of marriage.¹⁰

Most commonly, ad placers mentioned financial security as a desired quality in a potential mate, but a notable subset of these ads framed the issue directly as a request for financial assistance. Gender differences in ads seeking financial assistance exposed the ways men and women were situated differently in the economy of the late nineteenth century. Since men were expected to be able to support a wife and family through some sort of work, it could not have been easy for a man at this time to admit that he needed financial help. Male ad placers who sought financial assistance thus usually framed it as an investment in a business or, less frequently, as help to develop an invention: "Gentleman, 38, neat appearances, in nice business, would like to meet a maiden or widow with means willing to assist and increase business; object matrimony." Women, on the other hand, were almost never able to support themselves and their families and were not, as a general rule, expected to be able to do so. Female ad placers'

¹⁰ *The [Washington, D.C.] Times*, Feb. 5, 1899, part 2, 15; *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 18, 1894, 21; *San Francisco Call*, July 25, 1897, 12; *San Francisco Call*, June 9, 1895, 12.

straightforward requests for financial assistance thus demonstrated a relative lack of embarrassment about their position of need, relative to their male counterparts: “Young widow would like to form the acquaintance of gentleman who will assist her financially; object, matrimony.” These ads in particular illuminate the fundamental economic relationship at the core of marriage. It seems likely that for many of these individuals, their need for financial help was more pressing than their desire to find a spouse. Yet both men and women subsumed their search for financial assistance within their larger stated objective of matrimony. For both sexes, the best way to achieve financial security was to marry.¹¹

Some ads that mentioned financial status stood as a counterpoint to the more common occurrence of one party (usually the man) being more financially secure than the other. About 10% of ad placers of each sex described both themselves and their desired mates as having means, such as the “widow... with ample means, refined and cultured” who “desire[d] to meet a gentleman of means” and the “widower... worth \$15,000” who “wishe[d] to marry refined lady with equal cash value, object, home, happiness, and love.” While these ad placers did not reject the notion that financial security was important, as evidenced by their inclusion of such details in their ads, they were attempting to conceive of a more equal status between spouses. This may have been to ward off the specter of “gold-digging,” but it may also have been an attempt to set the stage for a different kind of partnership. Indeed, the widower searching for a woman with wealth equal to his own was one of the few ad placers who directly

¹¹ Male ad, *Atlanta Constitution*, May 6, 1897, 8; female ad, *The [San Francisco] Morning Call*, July 24, 1892, 6.

mentioned love as an objective. Perhaps it was only through letting go of the idea of a wife's economic dependency that a love-based marriage could even be imagined.¹²

Every once in a while, an ad placed by an individual seeking a spouse was published in a section of the classifieds other than the personal or matrimonial sections. Perhaps more than any other single element of the personal ads examined here, the placement of these ads exposed the economic realities of marriage at the end of the nineteenth century. The miscategorized ads placed by men looking for wives appeared in the "help wanted" sections, while those placed by women looking for husbands appeared in the "situations wanted" sections. In other words, male matrimonial ad placers were seen as prospective employers, while female matrimonial ad placers were seen as prospective employees.¹³ Of course, it is impossible to know whether it was the ad placers themselves, or newspaper employees, who chose the section in which the ads appeared. Regardless, this division between husband/employer and wife/employee reflects the conception of marriage seen widely elsewhere, wherein the husband earned the money that supported the family and the wife worked within the home (or, in wealthier families, oversaw the work of those whom she in turn employed) in return for being provided for by her husband. While cultural productions like the *Ladies' Home Journal* worked to imbue the marital relationship with romantic meaning – and, of course, while many individual wives and husbands may have in fact experienced loving connections to each other – this economic reality was nevertheless at the base of most marriages.

¹² *San Francisco Call*, June 25, 1899, 12; *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 1, 1895, 18.

¹³ For examples of miscategorized ads placed by men, see the *Omaha Daily Bee*, Feb. 8, 1890, 7, and the *Morning Call* [San Francisco], Feb. 27, 1894, 4; for those placed by women, see the *Washington Post*, Feb. 9, 1891, 3, and the *San Francisco Call*, July 25, 1897, 12.

Love, marriage and consumption in the *Ladies' Home Journal*

During the 1890s, Edward Bok's *Ladies' Home Journal* participated in actively reshaping American culture. Intended first and foremost to be a vehicle for advertising, the *Journal* worked to promote consumption to its readers and, in so doing, was a major actor in initiating a cultural shift towards an eventual acceptance of the values of consumer culture. This shift, which would gather momentum in the early decades of the twentieth century, would ultimately affect nearly every aspect of life for Americans, from the rhythm of their days, to how they conceived of the meaning of work and leisure, to the relationships among family members. Changes in the meaning of marriage were a fundamental part of the shift to a consumer culture.

The *Journal's* portrayal of romantic love and marriage during this time was far from uniform. Representative of the cultural moment in which they were produced, the discussions and depictions of the proper relationship between husband and wife were often contradictory, at some moments promoting a new conception of marriage that was rooted in consumption while at others clinging to an older model that was organized around production. The *Ladies' Home Journal* of the 1890s foreshadowed – and helped to bring about – a radical change in the cultural meaning of marriage. By the early twentieth century, a new model of modern marriage supplanted the nineteenth-century model of an economic partnership between spouses. In this new model, romantic love replaced the productive labor that had previously been the bond between husband and wife, while the economic partnership was now between the individual (particularly the

wife-as-consumer) and the market. This transition was not a smooth or easy one, and the contradictory representations visible in the *Journal* reflect the contested nature of the major changes beginning to disrupt American life.

The early producers of commercialized popular culture strove to imbue the marital relationship with emotional significance that could then be tied to consumption, so that the way a wife expressed love for her husband was through the purchasing of goods for the household, while for his part the husband expressed love for his wife by working outside the home, to earn the income that would enable her consumption. Bok and his *Journal* contributors labored to separate the romantic sentiments that were supposed to define the marital relationship from economic concerns, creating and elaborating upon a new structure of feeling while attempting to obscure the fact that the needs of consumer capitalism were driving the changes. They sought to highlight a model of marriage that was love-based and to minimize any economic basis. Their inability to fully do so exposed the reality that, indeed, the new model of modern consumer marriage was still dependent on economics, even if the emphasis had started to shift from production to consumption. The magazine's dependence on advertising revenue likewise kept economic concerns, and the promotion of consumption, fully visible.

In editorials and articles, the *Journal* presented a model of romantic love that was elevated, noble, and genteel, unsullied by the crass concerns of money or sex. Men were expected to respect women and not to seek physical intimacy before marriage, while women were advised not to expect their beaux to give them gifts or take them out to entertainments. The cover of the February 1893 issue featured an illustration of a well-

dressed woman reaching for an envelope – presumably a valentine – from the outstretched hands of the chubby Cupid flying above her head, and indeed the love described by the *Journal* was sublime and ethereal, as though it came from above (see Fig. 1.1).



Fig. 1.1: Ethereal love on the *Journal* cover, February 1893

The *Journal* described love as “unselfish, sympathetic, reverential.” The engagement period when, according to the narrative presented by the magazine, romantic love between future spouses came to full flower, was “a time as penetrated with sweet, tender,

shifting sentiment as the perfect pearl is suffused with the colors of the rainbow... a revelation that is sacred and perfect each day, like the mystery of the sunrise or the shine of the stars in the deep vault of Heaven.”¹⁴ The regular inclusion of refined poetry and songs on the topic of love further reinforced the emphasis on its proper expression, through flowery language and lofty sentiment.¹⁵

The *Journal* was conflicted about the relationship between romantic love and financial considerations. On the one hand, the magazine regularly suggested that love was more important than material wealth, as in an article on “How to Marry Well” that warned, “to be rich is not everything.” Edward Bok related a story in his editorial column about a woman, left a million dollars by her deceased husband, who lamented that “money is a mockery when your heart longs for companionship!,” while many other features stressed the significance of love and companionship above all else.¹⁶ Yet, on the other hand, there were hints that the version of love presented as ideal by the *Journal* was not the only version circulating in American culture. An article by well-known Presbyterian minister Charles H. Parkhurst lamented “the tendency, so conspicuously operative among us, to degrade marriage to the level of commerce.” In a similar vein, a song published the following year bemoaned the fact that “the good old love match days are by, [when] love was love... and hearts were never sold,” and contrasted that idyllic

¹⁴ For the *Journal*’s model of romantic love see Ruth Ashmore, “Side Talks with Girls,” *LHJ* Feb. 1892, 16; Ashmore, “Love, Friendship: Which?,” *LHJ* June 1895, 16; and Helen Watterson Moody, “What It Means To Be Engaged,” *LHJ* Feb. 1899, 15.

¹⁵ Love poetry and songs, see, for example, Eugene Field, “A Valentine,” *LHJ* Feb. 1892, 13; Field, “Be My Sweetheart,” *LHJ* March 1894, 15; Willard Spenser, “A Dream of Love,” *LHJ* June 1893, 9-11.

¹⁶ The Duchess, “How to Marry Well,” *LHJ* Mar. 1890, 6; Bok, Editorial, *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 10. Features stressing significance of love and companionship include Allan Eric, “A Man’s Idea of a Good Wife,” *LHJ* Apr. 1890, 8; Mrs. Edward P. Foster, “My Idea of a Model Husband,” *LHJ* Sept. 1890, IV; John Lambert Payne, “The Secret of Happy Marriages,” *LHJ* Mar. 1893, 8; Ruth Ashmore, “The Profession of Marriage,” *LHJ* Apr. 1897, 18.

past with the present day when “the millionaire takes off your fair ladie [sic]” and “fair maids sell themselves, all for a title high.”¹⁷ Both Parkhurst’s article and the song lyrics voiced a concern that the importance of romantic love was waning, taking a backseat to financial considerations as affection became something that was bought and sold. For the most part, the magazine labored to construct a unified picture of love as civilized and refined. The very mention of a focus on material wealth supplanting romantic considerations was thus noteworthy, as the image conjured up by the song lyrics momentarily disrupted the *Journal*’s portrayal of romantic love and belied its insistence that material concerns had no bearing on the arena of love and marriage.

The *Journal* presented romantic love and marriage as virtually inseparable, thereby linking the first feelings of love to the unit of consumption that husband and wife would become, although discussions of love and marriage often avoided consideration of its more practical aspects. Bok and others used similar language to describe marriage, as, for example, “that perfect rest which comes in the union of two souls intended from the beginning the one for the other, ...that perfect union on which God smiles and the angels sing hallelujah of gladness and content.”¹⁸ Any given issue might include features addressing yet-to-be-married girls, engaged women, newlywed brides, and long-married wives, and this multifaceted address further underscored the connection between the first stirrings of love, the subsequent courtship, the wedding day, and marriage.¹⁹ The articles,

¹⁷ Rev. Charles W. Parkhurst, “The Young Man and Marriage,” *LHJ* Nov. 1896, 15; Willard Spenser, “Wake Up! Cupid,” *LHJ* June 1897, 12-13.

¹⁸ Bok, editorial, *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 10.

¹⁹ See, for example, the October 1890 issue, which contained an editorial addressing unmarried girls, on the qualities most likely to attract a man (Edward Bok, untitled editorial, *LHJ* Oct, 1890, 10); an article instructing newly-married women to attend to their beauty routines when their husbands were not at home

editorials, fiction, and advertisements together painted a picture of marriage as inevitable; especially important for women; and dependent on gendered expectations about the proper behavior and ideal qualities of each spouse.

The assumption that all of its readers were, or planned to be, married was evident throughout the pages of the *Journal*. An advertisement for a stationery firm suggested to readers, “When You Get Married, let us furnish your wedding invitations.” The “when”, rather than “if,” made clear the centrality of marriage to women’s lives, at least in the magazine’s estimation, as did the many articles addressed to brides and wives.²⁰ A script for a party skit published in 1899 reinforced the emphasis on marriage found throughout the pages of the *Journal* over the course of the decade. The skit comprised a series of fourteen recitations to be given alternately by a man, then a woman, then a man, and so on. In turn, each speaker explained why he or she was single, giving various reasons, including standards for a prospective mate that were too high, a desire to escape the constraints of marriage (for women, not “to be a slaving wife”; for men, not to “give up all the pleasures that a single man may claim”), an inability to choose between several love interests, and a lack of interest on the part of members of the opposite sex. The final speaker, a woman, explained that she wasn’t married only because she hadn’t yet been asked, at which point all the men proposed in unison and the women accepted. Then, according to the stage directions, “each lady takes the arm of the gentleman facing her, and all walk off to the music of the wedding march.” The concerns voiced by the

(Felicia Holt, “Curl Papers and Husbands,” *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 5); and an article on celebrating wedding anniversaries (Florence Howe Hall, “Wedding-Day Anniversaries,” *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 6).

²⁰ C.E. Houghtaling advertisement, *LHJ* Feb. 1895, 17. Articles addressed to brides and wives include Ruth Ashmore, “For the Brides of June,” *LHJ* June 1891, 9; Christine Terhune Herrick, “The First Year of Married Life,” *LHJ* June 1892, 2; and Mrs. Burton Kingsland, “The Rules of a Happy Wife,” *LHJ* July 1895, 8.

participants were likely real ones for some readers, who worried about whether they could find a man who would live up to their expectations, or about whether they would meet a man who would want to marry them, or about the work that would be required of them once they married. Yet all of these concerns were invalidated and summarily dismissed in the abrupt resolution of the skit, which only served to emphasize the importance of marriage.²¹

According to the *Journal*, marriage proved even more important for women than for men. Beyond mere survival, women also depended on their husbands' incomes to access the new world of consumer goods that was becoming increasingly available at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet once again, the *Journal* worked to obscure the economic realities at the heart of women's dependence on marriage with a focus on the emotional realm. The model of marriage presented by the magazine centered around a woman's innate need for romance, which would be met through her relationship with her husband. Her love for her husband was the driving force in her life, and being a wife was her most important work. Regular features on weddings demonstrated the importance of marriage to the magazine's conception of American womanhood, including articles on floral arrangements for the wedding ceremony, where the ceremony should take place, how the church should be decorated, bridal fashions, wedding etiquette, the proper makeup of the bridal trousseau, and celebrating wedding anniversaries.²² After the

²¹ Beryl Foster, "Why We Never Married," *LHJ* Nov. 1899, 9.

²² Floral arrangements: "A New Bridal Bell," *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 8; C.F. Klunder, "Flowers for the Bridal Hour," *LHJ* June 1891, 9; "Flowers at June Weddings," *LHJ* June 1892, 2. Location of ceremony: Howe Hall, "In Church, or at Home?," *LHJ* June 1891, 3; Helen Jay, "Planning a Home Wedding," *LHJ* June 1893, 18. Bridal Fashions: Isabel A. Mallon, "June Brides and Their Maids," *LHJ* June 1891, 25; Mallon, "Going-Away Gowns for Brides," *LHJ* June 1892, 23; Mallon, "The Art of Dressing the Bride," *LHJ* March 1894, 17. Wedding etiquette: Ada Chester Bond, "The Etiquette of Bridals," *LHJ* June 1891, 9. Trousseaux: Isabel A. Mallon, "Belongings of a Bride," *LHJ* June 1891, 9. Celebrating anniversaries:

wedding, the *Journal* promised women that they would find happiness in marriage to a good man. One column described what the ideal marriage would offer the bride: “Man respects and honors her womanhood, is willing to labor and make sacrifices for her happiness, bids her cheerfully to be a coworker, an honored guest of public life, when occasion demands, and loves her, not for what she has, but for what she is.”²³ Elsewhere, the magazine emphasized the importance of marriage to women’s lives in less practical, more romantic ways. A poem titled “Womanhood” told the story of a woman of 25 who looked with “happy longing as the years before her stood” because “her heart had found its double – settled now no more to roam.” She dreamed of a “happy home life” where she “could sit in silence, sit and love her life away,” where “the strong arm is protector” and “where the sorrows born of living flee at touch of husband’s kiss,” a “home where two shall build their heaven, loving ever perfectly.” Features such as these encouraged readers to expect that marriage would be their path to happiness.²⁴

In other ways, however, the magazine suggested that finding a husband, achieving true love, and thus potentially accessing that chance at happiness, might not be so easy. This doubled perspective, while seemingly contradictory, was one that would remain constant throughout the messages of twentieth-century consumer culture as well, and its function appeared primarily to be to convince media consumers that they depended on the advice and consumer goods they received through those sources in order to avoid the potential pitfalls outlined therein. Throughout the decade, readers were cautioned not to

Florence Howe Hall, “Wedding-Day Anniversaries,” *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 6; Mrs. Van Koert Schuyler, “Milestones in a Married Life,” *LHJ* June 1894, 19.

²³ Vera Bernardiere, “American Girls and Titles,” *LHJ* Feb. 1893, 8.

²⁴ Ella S. Elliott, “Womanhood,” *LHJ* June 1892, 4.

assume that the path to true love would be straightforward. One such article warned, “Do not *fall* into love, but *walk* into it with your eyes wide open. Then there will be fewer divorces.” Others held up unattainable standards, claiming, “true love is both kindled and sustained by the union of natures seemingly opposed to each other, but which are really and essentially complementary,” or insisting that “the very continuance of love in marriage” depended on “justice, patience, honesty, sincerity, and magnanimity.”²⁵ The *Journal* also repeatedly explained what readers should do in order to become the kind of woman that a man would want to marry, and the resulting list of behaviors and attributes was daunting. The magazine advised the reader to be frugal, pious, even-tempered, true; to be thoughtful and considerate and selfless; to attend to man’s comfort, to honor her husband by respecting herself, to “act as you think he would wish”; not to gossip, and to “never let him go away from you feeling ill-tempered.”²⁶ A poem written in the voice of a husband, with the refrain “I have a tender conscience / That measures five foot three,” reminded the reader of her important role as guardian of her husband’s morals, of her duty to “thrust out a white and rounded arm and bar the way within” when he stood “at the door of sin.”²⁷

A model of marriage defined by strict gender roles paralleled the extensive catalog of characteristics required for a woman to find a husband. In this model, which made up the basic unit of consumption in the new consumer society, the husband was the

²⁵ Mrs. Edward P. Foster, “My Idea of a Model Husband,” *LHJ* Sept. 1890, IV; John Lambert Payne, “The Secret of Happy Marriages,” *LHJ* Mar. 1893, 8; Helen Watterson Moody, “What It Means to be a Wife,” *LHJ* Mar. 1899, 26; see also Helen Jay, “How to Be a Happy Wife,” *LHJ* Nov. 1890, 8.

²⁶ See, for example, Bok, Editorial, *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 10; Ruth Ashmore, “Just Before the Ceremony,” *LHJ* June 1891, 9; Ashmore, “Side Talks with Girls,” *LHJ* Feb. 1892, 16.

²⁷ Harry Romaine, “My Tender Conscience,” *LHJ* June 1891, 4.

breadwinner and the wife was the homemaker/consumer. Editorials published in February and June 1890 on the qualities expected in a wife and a husband, respectively, outlined the *Journal's* version of ideal marriage. According to Bok, a husband's duties included providing for his wife financially and offering her his consideration and love; he advised that women look for men who were honest, reasonable, and moral. A wife was expected to maintain the household through diligent, unceasing work; to be trustworthy and discreet; and to always be gentle and loving with her husband. The very titles of these two editorials, "What Is a Model Wife?" and "Qualities Which Make Good Husbands," demonstrate how much more important marital duties were considered to be for women, who were expected to be "*model wives*," as compared to men, who needed merely to be "*good husbands*."²⁸

Since the *Journal* was a women's magazine, the duties and responsibilities of wives received significantly more attention than those of husbands. For example, an article on "the First Year of Married Life," instructed the new bride that, in the case of crisis, "if but one will yield, that one should be the wife." If she must protest about some legitimate complaint, she was encouraged to "choos[e] some time when he is neither hurried nor flurried." In general, however, the article advised her to "guard against ready and frequent indulgence in tears... not [to] take offence too easily... [and] to harmless and inoffensive idiosyncracies, [to] shut her eyes." The author of "That Man: Your Husband" warned the reader that the intoxication of new love would wear off eventually and advised her to cultivate a friendship with her husband in order to "keep her influence over the man who has won her." To that end, she was instructed to show interest in his

²⁸ Bok, "What Is a Model Wife?", *LHJ* Feb. 1890, 8; "Qualities Which Make Good Husbands," *LHJ* June 1890, 8.

interests, to be tactful and magnanimous about his faults, to show good sense and have a kindly sense of humor, and to be a good cook. The article implied that any husband would be grateful to have such a wife and would thus be amenable to respecting her wishes and agreeing to her requests. The *Journal* clearly presented the message that a good wife not only attended to her husband's material and emotional needs; she derived pleasure from doing so. A brief column entitled "The Rules of a Happy Wife" contained a list of things a wife should do, including agree with her husband, act as his moral compass, vary her dress and hairstyles to keep him interested, feed him well, and keep a neat home. As the title implied, it was through taking care of her husband that a wife could find happiness in her marital role.²⁹ Other articles also included a focus on the importance of a wife's appearance, admonishing her to "learn to put her gown on properly" because "no creature living takes more heed of externals than your orthodox man" or reminding her, "above all, [to] let him find you fair to look upon. Let your eyes be as two jewels for depth and brilliancy, and your soft hair shade a brown whereon sweet content shall rest."³⁰

As these examples indicate, in the *Journal*'s depiction of marriage, the meaning of love was vastly different for husbands and wives, and each spouse expressed affection accordingly. An 1894 editorial by Bok clearly stated that women's love for their

²⁹ Christine Terhune Herrick, "The First Year of Married Life," *LHJ* June 1892, 2; Octave Thanet, "That Man: Your Husband," *LHJ* Feb. 1893, 8; Mrs. Burton Kingsland, "The Rules of a Happy Wife," *LHJ* July 1895, 8. For other articles with extensive lists of wives' responsibilities, see also Allan Eric, "A Man's Idea of a Good Wife," *LHJ* Apr. 1890, 8 (a wife should be happy, helpful, a good cook, a good housekeeper, faithful and devoted); Ruth Ashmore, "The Profession of Marriage," *LHJ* Apr. 1897, 18 (a wife should cater to her husband's needs, talk about his interests, not bore him, not find fault with him, and always be neat and dainty).

³⁰ The Duchess, "How to Marry Well," *LHJ* Mar. 1890, 6; Felicia Holt, "To Girls About to Marry," *LHJ* May 1891, 8.

husbands was supposed to be a driving force in their lives: “When a woman loves a man she lives for him. From the moment she awakens in the morning until she closes her eyes at night a loving wife’s thoughts are of her husband. All day she performs her duties with the thought of his pleasure uppermost in her mind, and his image in her heart... What would he like best is her constant thought... His color becomes her color; his taste her taste.” Bok assured his readers that this was not “an ideal picture. It is one which is enacted every day in thousands of homes.” While he approved of such all-consuming devotion on the part of a wife, Bok was critical of the “silent appreciation” typically offered by her husband, lamenting, “one tender word of recognition from him brightens the hour for her. And why is it that men cannot open their eyes more clearly to the fact that their wives live for them?... What is that fiendish streak which is in so many men that leads them to withhold the word of just praise?” He called upon men to recognize the importance of love to their wives and to give of their love more freely with the goal of making women happier at home, warning that “unspoken love is one of the most dangerous moths in our domestic happiness. Love is more to a woman than it is to a man. It is her very existence... There is so much in a loving caress, so much in a tender word of love to a devoted wife... That, to a woman, is the elixir of life.”³¹ Indeed, throughout the decade, the *Journal* reinforced this picture of wives as utterly dependent on their husbands’ demonstrations of love and husbands as utterly ignorant of their wives’ feelings. One article warned the new husband that he might “come home in the evening to be greeted by a wife whose eyes are fiery red, whose lip quivers, and who cannot speak without bursting into tears. What is the matter? As you rushed away to

³¹ Bok, “At Home with the Editor,” *LHJ* Feb. 1894, 16.

catch the car in the morning you forgot to kiss her good-by and tell her that you hoped she would be happy all the day long. It is a little thing, to be sure, but you trained her to this affection during the honeymoon, and you hurt her feelings when you leave her without a word now.”³²

Wives were instructed as to the behavior and treatment they should expect from their husbands, and here again the magazine emphasized women’s all-consuming need to be loved. Bok admitted in an 1891 editorial that American men could show more affection to their wives and went on to describe in detail how they *should* behave: they should bestow upon their wives more kisses and other romantic gestures; they should regularly offer honest praise and approving words; they should recognize and acknowledge how hard their wives worked in the home; and they should greet their wives happily at the end of the day. Women were apparently so dependent on their husbands’ love that no matter how exhausted they were by the endless work of keeping house, a “hearty kiss” from a husband upon his return home could “smooth out the wrinkles of care.”³³ Other *Journal* contributors also illustrated the loving attention that good husbands should pay to their wives. The author of “My Idea of a Model Husband” described a man who “talks with [his wife] on equal terms as with creation’s lords, ... confides in her wholly, and asks her advice. He shows due appreciation of her efforts to make home attractive, praises her handiwork, commends her economy and thrift... He compliments and caresses ‘just as he used to,’ overlooks faults and never mentions them before company. If an impatient word ever escapes his lips, he speedily atones for it by a

³² Ruth Ashmore, “The Young Husband’s First Year,” *LHJ* Feb. 1895, 16. See also Lilian Bell, “Men as Lovers,” *LHJ* Feb. 1896, 6.

³³ Bok, Editorial, *LHJ* June 1891, 12.

kiss.” The various contributors to a feature on “What Constitutes a Good Husband” named many qualities a woman should look for in a husband, including “kindness, forbearance, thoughtfulness for one’s comfort and feelings, with frequent assurances of affection”; “unselfishness, consideration and unfailing good nature”; and the ability to “prove the husband’s deeds as tender as the lover’s words.”³⁴ Elsewhere, however, women were told that the responsibility for initiating the interactions of an ideal marriage originated with them: “When the wife can make her husband’s home-coming a joy, his home-staying a pleasure and a delight, and his leaving home a sorrow, then, and *then only*, can she expect a great deal from him [emphasis mine].”³⁵ These different sets of advice worked together both to emphasize for readers how vital their husbands’ love should be to their sense of self and to lay the blame for not receiving it at their own feet.

While women worked tirelessly to be worthy of their husbands’ affection, according to the *Journal*’s version of marriage, men sat in judgment of their wives’ efforts. One 1890 issue featured both an advice column cautioning women only to wear curl papers in their hair “when John is asleep or at his work” and an editorial by Bok in which he enumerated all the various ways his readers might face judgment from their spouses or beaux:

My dear readers, a man notices a lot of things in you for which you would never give him credit. He will notice, for instance, that there is a smear on the front of your silk waistcoat, although he may not tell you so. He notices whether you said ‘good morning’ pleasantly, or whether you just bit it off. He notices whether your hair is becomingly arranged, or whether it is dragged back in a tight knot for comfort and because you

³⁴ Mrs. Edward P. Foster, “My Idea of a Model Husband,” *LHJ* Sept. 1890, IV; Elizabeth Phelps Ward, “The Duchess,” Amelia E. Barr, Mary J. Holmes, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher, and Grace Greenwood, “What Constitutes a Good Husband? A Consensus of Opinion,” *LHJ* July 1894, 5-6.

³⁵ Ruth Ashmore, “What to Expect from a Young Man,” *LHJ* June 1897, 22.

don't mind him, being 'a family friend' or 'merely my husband.' He notices your careless disregard of a fresh morning dress at breakfast more than you think he does. He notices when your skirt is frayed around the edge, and you might be surprised if he were to tell you how many buttons are off your shoes. He notices every one of your little points of behavior towards your children, and judges you accordingly.³⁶

Features such as these made it clear for readers that the work of presenting themselves in a desirable way during courtship did not end at the altar but was in fact a lifelong process.

The idea that women's behavior was constantly judged also laid the groundwork for advertisers' common tactic, frequently used in the coming century and beyond, of encouraging insecurity by employing the specter of judgment from the outside world.³⁷ Indeed, the role of husbands as judge of their wives' appearance and behavior was already a prominent part of the discourse about marriage that the *Journal* helped to create at the end of the nineteenth century that was soon to be taken up and expanded by advertisers. As the *Journal's* implications regarding love, marriage, and consumption were all tangled up together, it is no surprise that the fear of judgment was ultimately adopted by advertisers eager to channel individuals' emotions toward the purchase of consumer goods.

This judgmental gaze was rarely turned the other way, with one prominent exception: husbands were expected to be able to provide for their wives financially, and a man's ability to do so (or not) was a major factor in a woman's search for a spouse. Indeed, a husband's earning ability was a key feature in this new model of marriage designed to support the growth of consumer culture. As an older, long-married woman

³⁶ Felicia Holt, "Curl Papers and Husbands," *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 5; Bok, Editorial, *LHJ* Oct. 1890, 10.

³⁷ On advertisers' use of the specter of judgment ("the negative appeal"), see Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*.

counseled a young friend in a fictional piece published in 1897, “The only comfortable way a woman can earn her bread is to induce some man to earn it for her.”³⁸ The *Journal* gave similar advice in its editorial content, as in a feature on choosing a husband that advised the reader to “see that your husband is a good business man; unless he is, he will not be able to make for you a proper home.” One male author, in describing his own marriage, which he presented as the ideal, underscored a husband’s financial responsibility when he explained, “I keep my wife informed as to the progress and character of my work, as well as of the future financial prospects resulting from it.”³⁹ While this advice recognized the economic reality that few women were able to support themselves in the late nineteenth century, it also stood as a contradiction to the more frequent claims of the magazine – namely, that the primary meaning and function of marriage was to join two souls in love and that material concerns had no bearing on the emotional realm to which marriage belonged.

Throughout the decade, the *Journal* struggled with the contradictions between the emphasis on romantic love as the key element of marriage and the underlying reality that the growth of consumer culture was driving the changes in representations of marriage. A short story published in the April 1891 issue exemplified this tension. The heroine of the story was a 26-year-old “old maid” who was misled into marriage to a widower by the promises of his sister that he loved her. While she longed to “have a glimpse each into the other’s hearts,” it became clear almost immediately after their wedding that he had only married her because he needed someone to care for his home and children.

³⁸ Alice S. Wolf, “Her After-Fame,” *LHJ* June 1897, 7-8.

³⁹ Bok, “Qualities which Make Good Husbands,” *LHJ* June 1890, 8; Allan Eric, “A Man’s Idea of a Good Wife,” *LHJ* Apr. 1890, 8.

Observing bitterly that “our marriage is merely a business contract, entered into from purely practical considerations,” the heroine agreed to serve as her new husband’s housekeeper and governess in return for \$600 per year. But then one night at dinner, “he saw her with luminous eyes, cheeks delicately flushed, her whole face radiant with beauty of a new order,” and, beginning the next morning, he brought her flowers daily. Soon she discovered that she was in love with him, too, and they vowed to be “together now, together always.” In this particular story, the love-based model of marriage triumphed as the husband and wife lived happily ever after.⁴⁰

The development of consumer culture depended on a model of marriage in which husbands allowed their wives some control over the income they earned in their work outside the home, to be earmarked for the purchase of consumer goods. Thus, at other moments in the *Journal*, the economic, consumption-based model of marriage took center stage, as in the frequent items that addressed the question of a wife’s household allowance. Over and over again, the *Journal* insisted that the wife was entitled to claim her husband’s income as her own, “for she makes a home for [him].”⁴¹ These features described an early iteration of the breadwinner/homemaker model that was to dominate cultural conceptions of marriage for much of the next century. Some columns specifically took up the questions of household allowances and/or the division of income, informing readers that: “at the time a woman marries, her husband theoretically takes her into partnership. She has as much right in the joint assets of the firm as he has.... Instead of separating her from her husband, the sense that she is working side by side with him

⁴⁰ Caroline Atwater Mason, “Mrs. Rossiter Lamar,” *LHJ* Apr. 1891, 1-2.

⁴¹ Ruth Ashmore, “The Young Husband’s First Year,” *LHJ* Feb. 1895, 16.

for a common object will only make the bond firmer and unite them more closely.”

Another column advised readers that “no man should become engaged to a woman without having a perfectly frank talk with her in regard to his means, and the woman should be quite as honest in telling of her qualifications and willingness to undertake to master the problem of making a home on the income that seems assured to them both.”⁴²

More general articles on marriage also “emphasize[d] the fact... that marriage is, on one side, as much a business contract as any other partnership, and demands exactly the same business treatment. The husband is the earner, the wife the distributor, of capital, and of the two her work is really the more complex and difficult.... It is right that the wife should insist upon having an allowance.”⁴³ The presence of these regular remonstrances that husbands treat their wives as partners in the business of the household suggested that the reality in many homes was likely otherwise. Other features also occasionally hinted at the conflicts over money that were likely the reality for many of the *Journal*’s readers. For example, one Ivory Soap ad, touting the product’s low price, included an illustration of a couple, the woman looking down penitently while her husband held a paper in one hand and pointed angrily at her with the other, with the caption “THE BILL IS TOO LARGE.”⁴⁴ While appearing to contradict the *Journal*’s attempts to portray marriage as primarily an emotional relationship, such references to the economic relationship between husband and wife were in fact a necessary part of the work the *Journal* was undertaking: that of educating its readers in how to become confident consumers.

⁴² Elizabeth Robinson Scovil, “A Wife’s Household Allowance,” *LHJ* Jan. 1882, 18. Maria Parloa, “Division of the Family Income,” *LHJ* Feb. 1893, 15.

⁴³ Helen Watterson Moody, “What It Means to be a Wife,” *LHJ* Mar. 1899, 26.

⁴⁴ Ivory Soap ad, *LHJ* June 1896, inside front cover.

Indeed, throughout the 1890s, the *Journal* promoted a model of marriage that acknowledged the importance of its financial basis and its place within consumer culture, while highlighting an emphasis on the emotional significance of the marital relationship – an early indicator of the shift toward companionate marriage that would happen over the next few decades. Husbands were expected to provide financially for their wives, who in turn were expected to run the household and raise the children, but both spouses were also supposed to remain actively in love during the course of their marriage. In an editorial published in the middle of the decade, Bok proposed, “If a man marries a woman to be his wife, in all which that term implies, then let him treat her as a wife. Simply to provide well for her is not enough... To be given plenty to eat and plenty to wear is but a poor offering to a heart that is longing for the expression of a husband’s love.” The wife, meanwhile, was expected to attend to her household duties not merely as her end of the economic partnership, but with the aim of keeping love alive within the marriage. One advice column informed readers that there was “no preservative of romance in married life so sure as good housekeeping.”⁴⁵ Some authors referenced companionship explicitly, recommending that the prospective bride “decide for yourself if this be the man of all others in whom you will find your ideal companion” and that “developing common tastes is a great bond between husband and wife.... They must like to do the same things, to go to the same places, like the same people, find the same things funny and the same things interesting.”⁴⁶ In features such as these, love and money and

⁴⁵ Bok, “At Home with the Editor,” *LHJ* Feb. 1894, 16; Helen Watterson Moody, “What It Means To Be Engaged,” *LHJ* Feb. 1899, 15.

⁴⁶ Ruth Ashmore, “The Profession of Marriage,” *LHJ* Apr. 1897, 18; Helen Watterson Moody, “What It Means to be a Wife,” *LHJ* Mar. 1899, 26.

romance and work were all tangled up together, presaging the full flowering of the culture of consumption that was to come in later decades.

The lines between romance and economics were likewise blurred by the very structure of the magazine, which was from its inception dependent on advertising as its main source of revenue. More than any other feature of the *Journal*, the advertisements that appeared in its pages drew attention to the new economic reality at the heart of marriage: its function as transmitter of the husband's income to the wife for the purpose of consumption. The messages that the *Journal* offered to readers about the importance of romantic love and marriage in their lives were surrounded by ads, whose very presence reinforced the centrality of commerce and consumption in the typical reader's life. Sometimes, the ads published in the *Journal* offered their own messages about love and marriage, which contradicted the magazine's typical portrayal of romantic love as something separate from economic concerns. These advertisements connected love, marriage, and happiness to consumption in a variety of ways and, like the features that referenced money, exposed a tension between the romantic ideal presented by the magazine and the economic reality of what marriage meant, both to individual couples and in society at large.

The majority of magazine advertisements published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* during the 1890s provided straightforward information about the advertised product, through either extensive use of text or the presentation of images and slogans designed to lay out facts. Such ads presumed that readers chose the product based on its specific qualities and did not typically make big claims about the effect the product would have on the consumer's life. However, though not as common as they would shortly become,

there were some advertisements in the *Journal* that promised broader things like happiness and success through purchase and use of specific products. Some of these ads used the marital relationship as a framework or starting point from which to make their claims or present their sales pitches. An ad for cooking utensils was presented in the voice of a husband, who confided to *Journal* readers that “my wife says she wouldn’t try to keep house without the ‘Never-Break’ steel cooking utensils,” while an ad for shortening implored husbands to “Commend Me to Your Honorable Wife.” Some ads linked marriage and consumption by suggesting the advertised product be given as a wedding gift. One such ad, titled “JUNE WEDDINGS,” asked, “Have you a friend who is going to be married, and are you in a quandary as to what will make a suitable wedding gift?” and offered to send a catalogue to any interested party. Ads such as these presented marriage through an economic lens, marking it as a site of consumption.⁴⁷

Other ads went further and promised marital happiness through purchase and use of the advertised product, emphasizing the housework that was part of a wife’s marital duties. “June Brides!” exclaimed one ad, “We want you to start life right, and to every June Bride... who will send us an invitation to her wedding, we will send entirely free of cost the best carpet sweeper in the world!” An ad for laundry starch asked *Journal* readers, “*Is Your Husband Cross?* No wonder he is, if his shirts, collars and cuffs are not properly laundered,” and it suggested that the reader “send to your Grocer for a package of ‘Electric Lustre Starch.’ It only costs ten cents, and your husband’s linen will look like new, and he will be happy. Many homes have been made happy by using ‘Electric Lustre Starch.’” The claim that a specific product could produce a happy home was also

⁴⁷ Bronson Supply Co. advertisement, *LHJ* Feb. 1891, 31; Cottolene shortening ad, *LHJ* March 1894, 16; Woodward & Lathrop advertisement, *LHJ* June 1892, 23.

made by an 1890 ad for typewriters, which encouraged all husbands and wives to buy the advertised brand so that they might “do all their scolding and fault finding in printed letters addressed to each other and see if married life is not a success.” This ad and others like it were published alongside editorials and articles that also offered solutions to marital problems, beginning the method of suggesting to the reader that the happiness she sought could be achieved not just through the correct choice of husband and the proper wifely behavior, but through her consumption choices as well.⁴⁸

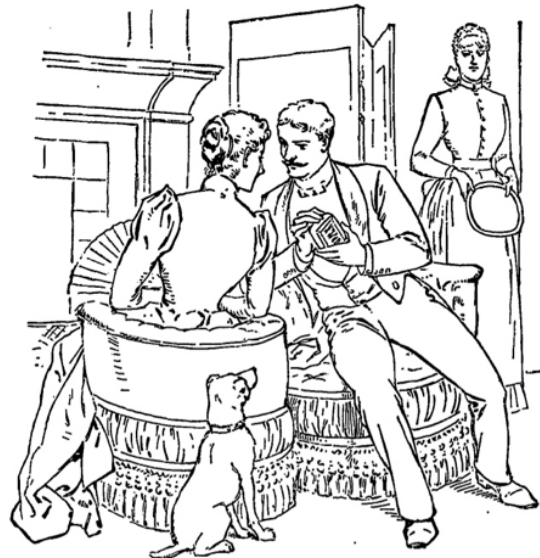
Product advertisements also suggested that use of the product would enable the consumer to find love, as in the case of the Ivory Soap ad featuring an illustration of a couple engrossed in conversation, leaning towards each other and gazing intently into the other’s eyes, the very picture of romantic interest. The accompanying poem let the reader in on the secret: the subject so occupying this couple that “the maid scarce turned her head” was “the excellence of Ivory Soap” (see Fig. 1.2). Similarly, a breakfast food ad showed a man looking approvingly at a woman who was explaining to him that her health “came from eating Ralston Breakfast Food.” The advertisement promised to send, free of charge, the rest of the story “that ends ‘I Will Marry You, My Pretty Maid.’” And an ad for breath mints paired an illustration of a well-dressed couple sitting close together with the suggestion that readers use the mints “After The Waltz.” In all three cases, the advertisement claimed that the advertised product enabled the romantic connection that was depicted and, in the case of Ralston Breakfast Food, led directly to marriage.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bissell Carpet Sweeper ad, *LHJ* June 1895, 25; Electric Lustre Starch Co. advertisement, *LHJ* Apr. 1891, 26. Merritt Typewriter ad, *LHJ* June 1890, 29.

⁴⁹ Ivory Soap advertisement, *LHJ* June 1892, 32; Ralston Breakfast Food ad, *LHJ* Dec. 1897, 22; S&H Violets ad, *LHJ* May 1898, 15.

Other advertisements suggested the connection between product and love more subtly. An ad for Columbia bicycles showed a woman seated on a bench under a tree, her bicycle parked along side her, with a man leaning on the bench on her other side, looking down at her and smiling. Although nothing in the text directly stated so, the ad implied that the romantic moment portrayed in the ad was made possible by the woman's bicycle. Even ads without images of a couple employed ideas about romance to sell products, such as an ad for facial powder which featured an illustration of a woman staring out from the page with a chubby winged Cupid on either side of her face. The slogan under the illustration, "Kisses the Cheek like Cupid's Breath," called to the mind of the reader both the love – Cupid – and the physical intimacy – kisses – that use of the product would bring her (see Fig. 1.3).⁵⁰ In all the various ways that advertisements in the *Journal* called upon romantic love to sell products, they joined the broader work of the magazine to encourage readers to identify themselves as wives and consumers simultaneously and to associate emotions with the experience of consumption.

⁵⁰ Columbia Bicycles ad, *LHJ* Feb. 1893, IV; Pozzoni's Complexion Powder ad, *LHJ* June 1893, 33.



THEY sat en tete-a-tete that day,
Absorbed in converse bright and gay;
The dog intent forgot to beg,
The maid engrossed scarce turned her head.
You'd guess a year and not find out
The subject that they talked about;
'Twas not of fashion, beaux nor belles,
Nor promised joys nor banished hope,
But topic more engrossing far—
The excellence of Ivory Soap.

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Fig. 1.2: Ivory Soap ad, *LHJ* June 1892



Pozzoni's Complexion Powder

Kisses the Cheek like Cupid's Breath

It is cooling, refreshing, cleanly, healthful and harmless. A most delicate and desirable protection to the face during hot weather. It is made in three shades, Pure White, Flesh and Brunette, and when rightly used is *invisible*.

The prejudice that has for years prevented many intelligent people from using Complexion Powder is fast disappearing as the many refreshing uses—to prevent chafing, sunburn, wind-tan, lessen perspiration, etc.—are understood and tried.

**REFUSE
THEM**

Insist on having Pozzoni's, however, as it has been the standard for 30 years. There are a thousand and one imitations, and at almost every store you will be offered something as good as Pozzoni's. There is no other Complexion Powder as good as Pozzoni's. Many are *unsafe*, some are *poisonous*.

Send Mail Order and 50 cents in stamps to

J. A. POZZONI CO., Office and Laboratory

102 South 8th Street, St. Louis, Mo.

Fig. 1.3: Pozzoni's
Complexion Powder ad, *LHJ* June 1893

Gender roles and the meaning of manhood in the new consumer culture

The development of consumer capitalism destabilized long-held beliefs about the relationship between gender, economic power, and access to the public sphere. Before the consumer economy took hold, men and women both contributed their productive labor to support the household, but women did not typically participate in public activities. Men were the public actors, representing both themselves and their families. Whereas men had been the economic leaders in the nineteenth century, in important ways women became the central actors in the consumer economy of the twentieth.⁵¹ As the

⁵¹ Nancy Cott links the dissolution of “the marital model in which the individuality and citizenship of the wife disappeared into her husband’s legal persona” to the achievement of woman suffrage in 1920. I would argue that the seeds of that change appeared earlier, with the identification of women as the nation’s

large-scale manufacture of household goods picked up in the late nineteenth century, it seemed only natural to men like Edward Bok that women be tapped to purchase them, as the earliest mass-produced goods typically replaced things women traditionally made at home.⁵² The process of turning women into consumers, of defining consumption as a quintessentially female activity, necessitated a corresponding shift in cultural conceptions of masculinity and of the role of men in the new consumer culture.

In addition to his work as editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Edward Bok wrote several texts for young men on various aspects of business success, and consideration of these writings alongside his more prolific writings to women illuminates some of the ways that masculinity was also retooled to fit with the values of consumer culture. Most scholarly discussion of Bok has focused on his enormously influential role as editor of the *Journal* and on his significant contributions to the identification of women as the nation's primary consumers.⁵³ Yet during the 1890s, Bok published several essays in *Cosmopolitan* addressed to young men which he ultimately revised and expanded into a book, *Successward*, published in 1895. Bok also traveled the country during this decade, giving lectures based on his writings to men.⁵⁴ During this time, Bok's *Journal* regularly published features for men, including the Bok-authored column "Problems of Young Men" and a series of articles addressed to young men by the Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, a

primary consumers at the end of the nineteenth century. Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁵² On Bok's role in identifying women as "natural" consumers, see Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁵³ See Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies' Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post* (Albany: State University of New York Press), and Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*.

⁵⁴ For press coverage of Bok's lecture tours see, for example, "Edward Bok to Lecture Here," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 30, 1898, 22; untitled item in *Richmond (Va.) Dispatch*, Oct. 23, 1898, 5.

frequent *Journal* contributor. Bok and his ideas were well known to large segments of the American public. The *Journal* was the most widely read magazine of the era, but Americans did not need to subscribe to or read the *Journal* to be familiar with Bok's opinions and principles. Bok was the frequent subject of newspaper profiles, and his *Journal* editorials were regularly excerpted and syndicated in newspapers throughout the country. The author of one article noted, "Mr. Bok's wonderful popularity with women has, perhaps, never been equaled... Not less, however, has Mr. Bok endeared himself to young men by his timely, straightforward, and practical advice."⁵⁵ Bok's writings to men, which emphasized the importance of business success, and his writings to women, which emphasized their domestic duties, were in fact two sides of the same coin. Ultimately, he sought to establish models of manhood, womanhood, and marriage that would complement and cultivate the developing consumer culture.

Edward Bok was centrally concerned with promoting a particular arrangement of gender roles: men as business successes who earned the income, women as homemakers and consumers who wisely managed their families' resources. In his view, the breadwinner/homemaker marriage should be anchored by tender love between the spouses which, although primarily the wife's responsibility, was also vital to the husband. Bok referenced this model of marriage in his writings to both sexes. In an 1892 editorial he advised *Journal* readers that a woman's best chance at kindling a man's interest in

⁵⁵ Newspaper profiles, see "Famous Before Thirty," *Boston Daily Globe*, Nov. 13, 1892, 32 and untitled, *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1898, Illustrated Magazine, 13. For examples of syndicated editorials, selections from "The Rush of American Women," published in the January 1899 issue of the *Journal*, appeared in *The [Yuma] Arizona Sentinel*, Dec. 31, 1898, 1; *The [Los Angeles] Herald*, Dec. 28, 1898, 5; *The Record-Union [Sacramento, CA]*, Jan. 24, 1899, 2. Selections from "The Platform Woman," also from the Jan. 1899 issue, appeared in *The Richmond [KY] Climax*, Feb. 22, 1899, 1; *The Evening Bulletin [Maysville, KY]*, Jan. 31, 1899, 1; *The Record-Union [Sacramento, CA]*, Jan. 23, 1899, 6. Quote is from untitled item in *Richmond (Va.) Dispatch*, Oct. 23, 1898, 5.

marrying her would be to “convince [him] that she can be the manager of his home, the pilot that steers his ship of state,” and he encouraged readers of *Successward* to strive for greater business success, insisting, “it is possible for every young man to rise above his position.”⁵⁶ While Bok always described a woman’s domestic duties as part of her role as a wife, he rarely connected business success and financial prosperity explicitly with a man’s responsibilities as a husband. Yet it is clear that Bok understood men’s work to be just as closely tied to their marital role as was women’s. Men’s work, and the income it brought them, facilitated women’s domestic labors, and although Bok did not highlight that fact in *Successward*, he did conclude the book with a chapter intended to convince his readers of the importance of marriage to a good woman. His choice to include a chapter on marriage served to connect men’s employment with their responsibilities to their wives, and his claim that “a man’s life is never complete in its fullest happiness until that life is made whole and complete by the love of a true woman” underscored the importance of business success, since it was through that success that a man would be fulfilling his duties to his wife and, thus, earning her love.⁵⁷

Bok’s message regarding the proper relationship between men and women, work and home, and love and marriage was consistent: husbands went to work outside the home to support the domestic labor and consumption their wives performed within and for the home, and each worked for the other not merely out of a sense of duty but as a way to express their love. A woman’s love for her husband motivated both her housekeeping and her purchase of consumer goods, Bok explained in a *Journal* editorial:

⁵⁶ Bok, “At Home with the Editor,” *LHJ* Apr. 1892, 12; *Successward: A Young Man’s Book for Young Men* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895), 39.

⁵⁷ Bok, *Successward*, 155.

“Nearly everything she does is with the thought of him. If she puts a dainty touch to a room she instinctively wonders what he will think of it when he comes home. If she buys an article in the shops that he will see, close beside her own preference for it is the thought whether he will like it.” He likewise informed his male readers in *Successward* that the successful man “has reached his present status” through “the marriage state, through the love of a woman.” Years later, Bok even used this same framework to make sense of his own marriage in his autobiography, written and published shortly after he left the helm of the *Journal*. Describing his very first day of work at the age of thirteen, as an office boy at the Western Union Telegraph Company, he recounted (in his oddly formal third-person voice) that “there had been born in Boston, exactly twelve hours before, a girl-baby who was destined to become his wife. Thus, at the earliest possible moment after her birth, Edward Bok started to work for her!”⁵⁸ The concept of a husband “working for” his wife structured Bok’s model of gender relations throughout his career.

Bok made a man’s ability to earn money central to his depiction of ideal manhood. At the beginning of *Successward* Bok defined “a successful life” as “nothing more nor less than living as well as we know how and doing the very best that we can,” and he claimed, “no success can be measured by fame, wealth, or station.” However, he went on to specifically stress the importance of a man’s success in business, advising the reader that “the art lies in doing more than was bargained for, in proving greater than was expected, in making more of a position than has ever been made before,” and that “a young man who holds back for fear of making mistakes loses the first point of success.” Bok emphasized the monetary facets of business success, exclaiming, “Salaries are

⁵⁸ Edward Bok, *Successward*, 182; “At Home with the Editor,” *LHJ* Feb. 1894, 16; *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (New York: Scribner’s, 1922), 16.

higher than ever; young men never before earned the incomes which are received by some today. All success is possible.”⁵⁹ He provided a long list of suggestions intended to guide young men’s behavior both within and outside the workplace, touching on the importance of honesty, alertness, a willingness to learn, and respectability. He advised his readers to avoid liquor; to get eight hours of sleep every night; to dress as well as they could afford; and to use moderation in smoking, attending the theater, dancing, and playing sports.⁶⁰ In each case, he presented his advice as yet another way for a man to increase his chance of success in the business world. Elsewhere, too, he underscored the financial rewards that would come with that business success, insisting in an essay in *Cosmopolitan*: “The American employer stands ready to pay all that the American employee is capable of earning.”⁶¹ He was careful to note that men did not have to become financially successful before getting married, but he made clear that ultimate prosperity should be the goal of any married couple. “I do not believe... in the theory of love in a cottage with nothing else,” he explained, “but I do believe in young people starting at the lowest rung of the ladder and then climbing up. Nothing else in the world knits the interests of two people so closely together, or insures such absolute happiness in the future as their lives progress.”⁶² Bok tied a man’s earning capacity directly to the future happiness of the married couple and described their shared investment in his career as a fundamental bond between husband and wife.

⁵⁹ Edward Bok, *Successward*, 30; 50; 52; 55

⁶⁰ Bok, *ibid.*, 67; 86-95.

⁶¹ Edward Bok, “The Employer and the Young Man,” *The Cosmopolitan* Apr. 1894, 734.

⁶² Bok, *Successward*, 180.

As in the *Journal*, Bok's writings for men exposed tension between his emphasis on the financial basis of marriage and the value he placed on love. Just as Bok presented an idealized vision of marriage and the power of romantic love between spouses to his female readers, he likewise extolled the importance of marriage to his male readers. He concluded a list of rules for business success to the readers of *Successward* with, "And last but not least, marry a true woman and have your own home," and in the book's final chapter, "On the Question of Marriage," Bok waxed rhapsodic about the value of a loving wife to a successful man. Indeed, he identified a wife's love as being a key factor in a man's ambition and drive:

Nothing is such an incentive to a man to make the best of himself as the knowledge that there is some one in the world who believes he is just the cleverest fellow alive; that there are eyes, far lovelier than all the stars in heaven to him, which sparkle at his coming; that there is a loving, womanly heart which beats quicker at the sound of his footsteps; that there is a nature ever ready to sympathize with him in his troubles and gladden at his victories – a dear, sweet, loving woman, who laughs with him, and puts her soft, loving arms around him when he is in trouble, rouses him to his better self, making him feel that, after all, this world is not such a bad place to live in.⁶³

Bok also warned his male readers to marry only the woman they truly loved, who had the capacity to love them in return. "The only girl he is safe to marry is she who fills all his life, his every thought, who guides him in his every act, whose face comes before him in everything that he does – the girl, in short, without whom he feels life would be a blank, without whom he could not live."⁶⁴ At the time that Bok penned these words, he was not yet married; and his ultimate marriage to Mary Louise Curtis, daughter of the publisher

⁶³ Bok, *Successward*, 68;157-8.

⁶⁴ Bok, *ibid.*,165.

of the *Journal*, was known to be distant and unhappy.⁶⁵ Despite his lack of personal knowledge on the subject, Bok strove to highlight the importance of love and marriage to his readers. He presented romantic love as being the primary locus of connection between spouses, while simultaneously emphasizing and displacing the economic work that constituted the real basis of marriage, just as did his magazine. In truth, according to Bok's model, love for each other motivated men and women to perform their respective duties of working/earning and housekeeping/consuming, while the bonds of marriage held them together as a unit of consumption.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Bok's model of marriage supported the development of a particular form of consumer capitalism. As individuals' relationships to the economy change, so too must their structure of beliefs. In other words, for consumer capitalism to succeed, its subjects must understand themselves to be consumers. The economic shift that took place in the United States over the second half of the nineteenth century, from an economy based on production to one based on consumption, required a corresponding conceptual shift. By the early twentieth century, this shift had largely occurred, and many Americans now perceived themselves as consumers rather than as producers.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions*, 98.

⁶⁶ On the conceptual shift to self-identification as consumers, see for example Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gary Cross, *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Mary Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999);

Consideration of the meanings produced in Edward Bok's work – especially his *Ladies' Home Journal* – provide insight into how that conceptual shift happened. The features in the *Journal*, as well as Bok's essays and books for men and the excerpts of his editorials that were published in newspapers across the nation, encouraged readers to think of themselves as consumers not just when they were at the store shopping for products or when they were turning the pages of a magazine daydreaming about the advertised goods, but in their most intimate relationships and in their most commonplace moments. This was true not just for women, who have traditionally been identified as the targets of this address, but for men as well.⁶⁷ According to Bok and the *Journal*, a man's conception of his identity as a husband should focus on his responsibility to earn enough money to allow his wife to purchase consumer goods for the family, and his ability to do so should never be far from his mind, even – or especially – when courting his bride-to-be. A woman's conception of her identity as a wife should focus on her responsibility to make wise consumption choices, and the importance of those choices should never be far from her mind, even – or especially – when dressing, attending to personal hygiene, or

Lawrence Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Susan Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973).

⁶⁷ Scholars who have focused on the efforts of Bok, the *Journal* and other popular magazines, and the advertising industry to establish women as the nation's primary consumers include Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies' Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Ad-Man in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Damon-Moore considers the messages of the *Saturday Evening Post*, also published by Cyrus Curtis, alongside those of the *Journal* and establishes that a similar model – women consume while men earn – was in operation between the two magazines during the first decade of the twentieth century (the *Post* was acquired by Curtis in 1897 but did not begin to find a wide audience until about 1900).

preparing meals for her family. Bok and the other *Journal* contributors wove the centrality of consumption into nearly every aspect of the marital relationship. They paid lip service to a version of idealized romantic love, which they insisted should remain above and apart from material concerns, but in reality their emphasis on consumption as the foundation of the marital relationship likewise anchored the very conception of romantic love to consumption as well. The importance of their impact on the development of consumer culture in this way cannot be overstated. The rudimentary formulation that romantic love depends on consumption, first visible in the 1890s, contained the seeds for ever more elaborate iterations of the concept. Throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first, advertisements and other forms of popular culture have told Americans over and over and over again that the way to find true love is to make the proper consumption choices. The commitment on the part of advertisers to using promises of love to sell products suggests that perhaps the truth is somewhat different: perhaps, in fact, consumer capitalism depends on a particular conception of romantic love.

The model of romantic love and marriage presented by the *Ladies' Home Journal* in the 1890s differed in important ways from that articulated by the men and women who placed personal ads during the same time period. The centrality of love to the ideal marriage described by the *Journal's* editor, contributing writers, and advertisers was largely missing from the personal ads, which emphasized rather the stark economic facets of the marital relationship that the magazine tried to gloss over. At this moment in time, the ideology of consumer culture was not yet, for the most part, directly reflected in the desires of individuals. Men and women who turned to the classified pages generally used

them as a site through which to pursue a version of marriage that was more simple and pragmatic, unembellished by any of the rhetoric employed by the producers of popular culture. Rather than a sentimental love match, ad placers sought an economic relationship wherein financial security was the single most important element. This tension between love-based and financially-focused models of marriage would continue to structure the relationship between the values of consumer culture and of individuals throughout the twentieth century and beyond, with the two frameworks being at some moments more aligned and at others more at odds with each other. At no point in the future, however, would they be as out of sync as they were at the end of the nineteenth century, when the individuals who sought marriage through the use of personal ads largely rejected the values of the nascent consumer culture that hoped to influence them.

CHAPTER TWO

“Object, Matrimony”: Love, Marriage, and Consumption in the 1920s

“His eyes rest tenderly upon her lovely, glowing beauty. Upon her dainty finger he slips the crowning jewel of her happiness – the sparkling solitaire that proclaims his love. Such is the reward of beauty.”

Facial cream advertisement, 1924¹

Introduction

Scenarios like the one presented by the facial cream ad cited above were prevalent in popular magazines during the 1920s. Promises of romantic success and marital happiness were among the available tools in the developing arsenal of advertisers, and ad men employed them frequently as they sought to entice American women to select their products from an increasingly wide range of choices. Advertisements, and the magazines in which they appeared, were some of the most visible manifestations of the developing consumer culture, trumpeting that culture’s values to a nation still in transition from an older value system that derived personal identity from productive labor. All aspects of American life, both public and private, were affected by this transition. Popular conceptions of marriage in the 1920s furthered the changes that had begun in the 1890s, emphasizing the emotional significance of romantic love while simultaneously revealing a conception of marriage as a site that enabled consumption rather than as a relationship

¹ Pompeian Night Cream ad, *Ladies’ Home Journal* (hereafter *LHJ*), March 1924, 151.

organized around production. Advertisements and magazines, along with other popular culture productions, contributed to a new, modern model of marriage that focused on personal and emotional connection. In this model, which cultural producers had begun to elaborate at the end of the nineteenth century, the work of romance replaced the productive labor that had once formed the basis of the marital relationship. Modern marriage, in the 1920s, was supposed to be based on love, which would motivate husbands and wives to undertake their respective responsibilities – and, not coincidentally, support the development of consumer capitalism. However, an examination of newspaper personal ads published during the decade suggests that many Americans struggled with the model of marriage that was presented to them by popular culture. As in the 1890s, more personal ads referenced the economic relationship – that is, man’s provision of financial support in return for woman’s housekeeping – than any other element of marriage, and many included no mention of other aspects. While some ad placers embraced aspects of the new modern marriage promoted by consumer culture, other ad placers’ focus on the economic dimensions of marriage, largely to the exclusion of any emotional, romantic, or sexual concerns, stood in opposition to the magazines’ presentation of marriage as first and foremost an emotional relationship.

This chapter examines popular women’s magazines and newspaper personal ads. Its title comes from a phrase that was ubiquitous in the personal ads of the 1920s, in which an “educated young farmer” who wanted to make the “acquaintance of healthy girl 18 to 23 years, clean complexion”; a dressmaker who wished “to correspond with gentleman of high morals”; an “international bachelor” who desired “to meet an independent lady, orphan preferred”; and a “blonde widow, jolly disposition,” who

“would like to meet railroad man not over 45” all had the same object: matrimony.² The phrase equally described the ideal presented by popular magazines throughout the twenties, in whose pages marriage appeared to be the goal on a variety of levels.

Women’s magazines played a pivotal role in the development of consumer culture. They were among the earliest mass-market magazines, due to advertisers’ (largely accurate) belief that women were the nation’s primary consumers. Advertisers wanted to ensure that their ads, which mainly targeted women, would reach their intended audience.³

Women’s magazines are also crucial to this study because they were a key site for the elaboration of new ideals of romance and marriage, romance likewise having long been understood as primarily the concern and purview of women. Personal ads are considered as evidence of how individuals made sense of the new ideals of romance and marriage, and the ways those ideals were connected to the values of consumer culture. The elements that ad placers chose to include in their ads, as well as those they left out, offer a glimpse into how American women and men conceived of marriage and its meaning in their own lives.

The analysis of this chapter focuses chiefly on the middle-class women’s homemaking magazine with the highest subscription rate, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and the widely-read working-class women’s romance/confessional magazine *True Story*, both of which were advertising sales of over 2 million by the middle of the decade.⁴ The *Journal*

² *Denver Post*, Feb. 1, 1920, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post*, Feb. 1, 1920, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* June 5, 1921, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* June 12, 1921, want ad sec., 1.

³ By the 1920s, research showed that women purchased at least 80 percent of the family’s consumer goods. Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 171

⁴ For *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *True Story*, which form the bulk of my research, I chose three issues per year (1920-1929) and read them cover to cover. For each year, I looked at the February and June issues,

included educational features and historical fiction in addition to housekeeping tips and love stories, while *True Story* was primarily made up of allegedly true stories of romance and betrayal, with relatively infrequent editorial content. While others have examined various aspects of the *Journal*, *True Story* has received comparatively little scholarly attention. In her important study of pulp magazines and their male readers, Erin Smith notes that, while the majority of pulp titles were action and adventure magazines were intended for men, all the big pulp publishers had at least one romance pulp for women, and that the circulation of these women's pulps topped all the others.⁵ Her study examines periodicals targeted to working-class men, in an attempt to broaden the field of the history of consumption beyond the middle-class women to which it had previously been limited. Her insight, of the importance of attention to the working class, should be expanded further to include working-class *women*, who were sometimes addressed as consumers in different ways than their middle-class counterparts. Magazines such as *True Story* were a crucial part of the cultural landscape in the early decades of the twentieth century and are deserving of careful scholarly attention. Here, I examine that magazine alongside the *Ladies' Home Journal* to consider the ways in which the promotion of consumption and the construction of modern marriage transcended class boundaries as well as the ways in which class affected those processes.

operating under the assumption that Valentine's Day and the June wedding season would elicit more advertising and editorial matter related to romance, and rotated through the other ten months over the course of the decade. I also looked at the advertisements in the February and June issues of the middle-class women's magazine *Woman's Home Companion* and the extremely popular *Saturday Evening Post*, targeted to middle-class women and men, to provide a larger body of evidence from which to draw conclusions. Sales figures, see *Printers' Ink*, Oct 30, 1924, 116-117; *Printers' Ink*, Sept. 17, 1925, 37.

⁵ Erin Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 27.

The advertisements in mass-market magazines, and the articles, stories, and other content that surrounded them, employed the language and values of consumer culture in their presentation of love and marriage and, in so doing, participated in developing a cultural conception of romantic love as inextricably linked to consumption. The many similarities between the middle-class “slicks” (so called because they were printed on high-quality, glossy paper) and the working-class “pulp” (printed on cheap wood pulp) contributed to an increasingly homogenized cultural vocabulary that began to cross class lines as the reach of mass culture expanded. While there were also important differences between the two, romantic love, in the pages of both of these widely-read magazines, was presented as dependent on proper consumption and as a vital element of a happy, successful marriage.

For the purposes of this study “romantic love” is set apart from mere sex appeal or physical attraction by virtue of its assumed objective: marriage. That is, the behaviors and experiences that were coded as romantic love were those that were presumed either to lead to the exchange of “I do”s, or to occur between husband and wife. This definition is supported by the cultural emphasis on marriage at the time: the age at first marriage dropped, and fewer people remained single, compared to previous decades.⁶ The magazine content itself likewise presented romantic love within the framework of marriage. Advertisements regularly employed romantic images of proposals, weddings, and happily-married couples, marking romance as a crucial facet of the new marriage ideal, and they appeared alongside stories in which marriage was presented as the logical – usually sole – consequence of falling in love. Characters in these stories fell in love on

⁶ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking Press, 2005) 203.

the first page and were married by the last. Other stories, in which infidelity and romantic indiscretions received harsh punishment, implied that love was only properly expressed en route to, or within the boundaries of, marriage. Articles on bridal showers; wedding etiquette; choosing silver, china, and furniture for the new home; and efficient household management tips for the wife and mother assumed that all readers were, in the words of one advertisement, either “brides to be or brides that were.”⁷

Love at first sight, courtship, proposal, wedding, marriage: all these phases existed simultaneously in the pages of the magazines, meaning that any reader could potentially identify with her or his own place on the trajectory. Advertisements that showcased the wedding vows appeared alongside those emphasizing the moment of attraction and those that warned of the potential for husbands to become disinterested in their wives – advertisers cast their nets broadly, and the linear progression from one phase to the next was suggested rather by the magazine stories (as well as other cultural sources like movies and novels), which provided the framework that made sense of the otherwise confusing jumble of ads. The broadness of the advertisers’ address meant that their targets, the readers of these magazines, were interpellated as sweethearts or suitors, as brides or grooms, as wives or husbands – ideally, there was room for all to join their hopes for romance to their desires for consumer goods. Of course, the reality is that the representations of romance presented in mass-market magazines were culturally specific, and limited the possibility of identification by race, ethnicity, sexuality, and, to some extent, class. It was not until much later in the century that advertisers began to embrace the business potential of targeting their messages to more narrowly defined markets.

⁷ Laun-Dry-Ette Electric Washing Machine Advertisement, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, June 1923, 143.

These ads, articles, and other features offered guidance to readers facing a changing romantic style and new expectations for courtship and marriage. Magazine advertisements helped readers navigate the rapid cultural changes of the 1920s by posing consumption as the ultimate solution.⁸ Making the correct consumption choices, the ads suggested, would make individuals attractive to the opposite sex and, at the same time, would help make choosing the right mate as easy as choosing the right brand of clothing, face cream, or toothpaste. The articles, editorials and stories, which existed alongside the advertisements, were in dialogue with the discourse of the ads – namely, that success in romance and happiness in marriage were to be achieved through the purchase of the proper consumer goods – in complicated ways, sometimes echoing that discourse and other times contradicting it. Taken all together, the other features sketched out a less unified, more nuanced picture of the relationship between love and consumption in the 1920s than that depicted in the advertisements, expressing not just the potentially positive side of that relationship (consumer goods can bring happiness to all!) but also anxieties about how the relatively new consumer culture would impact traditional relationships. Likewise, they revealed ambivalence about the changes that were underway in the formulation of cultural ideals of love and marriage, affirming certain elements of modern marriage, such as the importance of romantic love to marital happiness, while cautioning against the loosening of sexual morality and upholding traditional gender stereotypes.

The personal ads placed by individuals seeking marriage also expressed ambivalence about the many cultural changes faced by individuals. While the personal

⁸ Roland Marchand argues that advertisers of the 1920s and 1930s, “perceiving new vacuums of guidance and personal relationships, stepped forward to offer their products as answers to modern discontents.” Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 13.

ads of the 1890s revealed that many still desired a model of marriage based on older, pre-consumption values, the beginnings of a change in attitude were visible in those placed in the 1920s. Many, but not all, ad placers rejected the new standards of behavior that received increasingly positive representation in popular culture as well as the model of modern marriage held out as ideal. While the majority of men and women voiced a desire for spouses with personal qualities that reflected the sensibilities of the Victorian era, some did express interest in finding a mate who embodied the fun, energetic, modern stereotypes presented in popular culture. Most ad placers focused almost exclusively on the economic basis of marriage in a way that harked back to the 1890s, but some did envision a relationship anchored by companionship and compatibility. The slight, yet noticeable changes in the content of these personal ads, when compared with those published in the 1890s, suggest that the rapid development of consumer culture and the accompanying shift in mainstream discourse around intimate relationships that had occurred in the intervening years was just beginning to take root in the minds of individual Americans.

Class differences in *Ladies' Home Journal* and *True Story*

In many respects, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *True Story* took up the topics of romance, love, and marriage, and their relationship to consumption, in similar ways and with similar emphases, suggesting that concerns about the impact of modern marriage and modern consumer culture on individuals spanned the class divide. However, there were some important differences between the two publications that were directly related to the class identities of the magazines' readerships, and these differences expose how central the needs of consumer capitalism were to the representations of popular culture.

Ladies' Home Journal published literary stories whose intended purpose was to uplift the cultural sensibilities of its readers, while *True Story* prided itself on the “simplicity of expression” employed by its writers, whose stories of “true” encounters were meant to serve a moral purpose, warning readers of the dangerous consequences of behavior such as lying, stealing, or premarital sex.⁹ The *Journal*’s tone was didactic and distanced while *True Story* worked to encourage readers’ personal identification with its content, from the use of colloquial language to the photographs, resembling movie stills, that illustrated each story, which stood in direct contrast to the pen-and-ink drawings that accompanied the *Journal*’s fiction (see fig. 2.1).



Fig. 2.1: Varying styles of illustrations accompanying stories: photographs, which called on associations to the movies (*True Story*, Feb. 1925), versus pen-and-ink drawings, which called on associations to the fine arts (*Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1925).

⁹ *True Story* advertisement, *Printers' Ink*, Oct. 7, 1926, 37.

These general variations also colored the way each magazine approached nearly every topic. The major difference between the two magazines' treatment of romance, love, and marriage was in the editorial content. *True Story* published articles, columns, and editorials that highlighted the exciting, sensational aspects of love and marriage, while the *Journal* kept the two largely separate, offering a sentimental portrayal of romantic love while focusing on the practical details of marriage. A comparison of the editorial content of the two magazines – as well as an examination of what differences existed in the advertisements exposes these sites of divergence, helping illuminate the roles class played in developing distinct constructions of romantic love and differing expectations about the relationship between marriage and consumption. While it could be said that the content of these and other similar magazines reflects only the *publishers'* ideas about class identity, scholars such as Richard Ohmann, Erin Smith, and Jennifer Scanlon have argued persuasively that such magazines' popularity, as well as the publishers' engagement with readers, suggests that they resonated with their intended audiences and that they thus can be read as sources that provide some information about class. Roland Marchand likewise claims that there are reasons to view advertisements as a basis for "plausible inference" about popular attitudes. He notes that audience response was assessed more thoroughly for advertisements than for other cultural productions, because advertisers needed to know if their campaigns were having the desired impact; that ads sometimes did reflect consumer attitudes, through advertisers' use of surveys and questionnaires; and that repetitive media images certainly had *some* impact on public

consciousness, even if it is impossible to define that impact precisely.¹⁰ Above all, the differences visible between the *Journal* and *True Story* appear to be a function of the different ways that editors and advertisers identified middle- and working-class women as consumers as well as the relationship that each magazine had to advertising.

Romance played a significant role in both publications, which was unsurprising given the editors' desire to catch and hold the interest of as many women as possible, coupled with the identification of romance as women's concern and the powerful association between romance and consumption being developed by advertisers.

Romance appeared, in various forms, much more frequently in the *Journal* of the 1920s than it had in the 1890s, a difference that likely reflected both the cultural shift towards relaxing standards of intimacy, which made romance an appropriate topic for public discussion, and the increasing influence of advertisers on popular culture productions.

The presence of features in the *Journal* such as an article on the history of valentines, a poem about a love letter that thawed a young woman's heart toward the man who loved her, and a full color fine-arts illustration titled "The Wedding of the Butterflies" (which depicted two butterflies at an altar made of blades of grass, with a beetle officiating, a choir of birds, and ladybugs, crickets, flies, and other insects as wedding guests) suggested the importance of romance to the larger middle-class-women's world presented by the magazine.¹¹ The cultured, rarified tone of these features aligned this particular

¹⁰ Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996); Smith, *Hard-Boiled*; Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, xix-xx.

¹¹ Alice Van Leer Carrick, "Valentines," *LHJ* Feb. 1923, 22-3; Oliver Herford, "A February Thaw," *LHJ* Feb. 1927, 21; Oliver Herford. "The Wedding of the Butterflies," *LHJ* June 1926, 21.

version of romantic love with the *Journal's* overall position as self-appointed arbiter of good taste for American women.

The sensational tone of *True Story* as it described thrilling real-life experiences was likewise reflected in that magazine's portrayal of romance, the clearest example of which is a series of editorials written by editor Bernarr Macfadden in the second half of the decade. Macfadden's editorials helped set the tone for the magazine and provided a didactic backdrop to the less overt teachings of the stories, outlining the proper ways to find romance and achieve happiness. "The Cave Man Sweetheart" described the ideal romantic persona a man should adopt, a combination of passionate and civilized that also characterized the suitors and husbands portrayed by the stories. In this editorial, Macfadden addressed himself to the women who were the primary audience for the magazine. Such an address also had the effect of educating women in what to look for in a mate, rather than educating men themselves about how to behave in romantic relationships.¹² In another editorial, "Marry for Love," Macfadden reiterated the emphasis on the importance of love found elsewhere, arguing that love was the only appropriate reason for marriage. He warned readers not to "contract a loveless marriage, no matter what advantages it might offer you in money or fame. It will always be the source of bitter regret. It can never bring life's most divine possession – happiness." He counseled readers on how to find love in "Acquiring a Charming Personality," in which he explained that a charming personality "is especially valuable in attracting an enticing

¹² One wonders if this phenomenon – of educating women about the type of behavior to expect from their husbands, rather than educating the men themselves, might have led to the increasingly high levels of dissatisfaction around unmet expectations that Elaine Tyler May notes in divorce records during the 1920s. Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 71.

romance,” which was important because “life’s greatest reward comes with a happy love life.” Interestingly, given that the pages of *True Story* were filled with advertisements for books that claimed to be able to teach readers how to be charming, which presumably entailed some amount of artifice, Macfadden encouraged them to “lay aside all subterfuge.” And yet, after repeatedly emphasizing the importance of love to a happy existence, he warned in an editorial titled “When Love Is Dangerous” that “we are not entirely sane when love is the sole guide. Being in love is always dangerous... Try to curb some of the intensities of your love nature. Hold them within reasonable bounds. Self-control is always commendable. But it is especially needed when the imagination is fired with the love madness. A loving mate can bring you sublime happiness provided you are properly equipped to assume its responsibilities.” This editorial, perhaps more than any other, reflected the dominant discourse of the stories published in *True Story*: the search for and experience of being in love, while an exciting and desirable part of human existence, was also fraught with peril.¹³

Discussions of marriage in the *Journal*’s editorial content were practical and largely emotionless, in contrast to the melodramatic tone of *True Story*. Marriage was a central concern of the *Journal*’s editorial staff and readers alike, and articles included such subjects as proper wedding etiquette, one piece of the broad standardization of weddings described by Vicki Howard in her study on the development of the wedding industry, as well as articles that addressed themselves to newlyweds and the project of furnishing the new home, emphasizing the connection between marriage and

¹³ Bernarr Macfadden, “The Cave Man Sweetheart,” *TS*, Oct. 1927, 21; Macfadden, “Marry for Love,” *TS* Feb. 1923, 31; Macfadden, “Acquiring a Charming Personality,” *TS* June 1928, 23; Macfadden, “When Love Is Dangerous,” *TS*, June 1929, 23.

consumption often made by the advertisements.¹⁴ Other features also contributed to the overall impression that marriage was of interest to the magazine, such as an article, published early in the decade, that argued for a constitutional amendment providing for the federal regulation of marriage and divorce laws, framing it as an issue of protecting women's rights. A 1927 editorial presented the *Journal's* version of modern marriage, in which spouses were to be on equal footing. Editor Barton Currie argued that "there isn't much essential difference between the perfect fool of a dominant male of the good old traditional sort and the perfect fool of a dominant flapper of the ultramodern type... Every fifty-fifty partnership in marriage that is likely to go calmly and serenely and prosperously on its way must be founded on frankness, tolerance and as complete an absence as possible of condescending dominance from either side of the hearthstone."¹⁵ Of course, the fifty-fifty partnership envisioned by the editorial staff of the *Journal* was one in which men worked outside the home and contributed financially while women purchased consumer goods, managed the home, and raised the children. Despite these specifically gendered responsibilities, this model was nonetheless noteworthy for the *Journal's* insistence that the work done by each spouse be seen as equally valuable and important to the family economy.

Unlike the ideal visions of marriage presented by the *Journal*, *True Story* often focused on the possible problems marriages could face. The "Intimate Home Problems

¹⁴ For articles on weddings, see, for example, Elinor Blake Cabot, "The Perfect Church Wedding," *LHJ* June 1923, 36. For articles on furnishing the new home, see Ethel Davis Seal, "The Home of the Newly Weds, Furnished in Good Taste at Small Expense," *LHJ* Jan. 1921, 35; Mitchell Mackay, "The Bride and Groom Furnish Their Home: A Salesman Tells Them What Furniture to Buy for the Living Room," *LHJ* Feb. 1924, 38; Millicent Yackey, "The Bride's Kitchen Equipment," *LHJ* June 1928, 36. Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 9-32.

¹⁵ E. Jean Nelson Penfield, "The Twentieth Amendment," *LHJ*, Jan. 1921, 30, 102, 105; Barton Currie, "Ideal Divorce Fodder," *LHJ* June 1927, 38.

Forum,” a regular series in the later part of the decade, was a prime example of one of the major differences between the slicks, which viewed their readership as a passive audience, and the pulps, which regularly provided readers with the opportunity to participate in the production of meaning in the pages of the magazine.¹⁶ Here, readers wrote in to give their advice to the featured couple, who were struggling with some sort of problem related to marriage. The “best” letters were published and their authors were awarded prize money. This feature invited readers to involve themselves directly in the kinds of stories published in the magazine, enabling them to make their opinions known and feel as though they could influence the events they read about, for these problems closely resembled the stories published, and were even described and framed the same way. The choice to use “real,” albeit mediated, individuals in the production of meaning was one that would be repeatedly called upon by cultural producers in the decades to come, including on the quiz shows, televised weddings, and unscripted programming discussed in subsequent chapters. This choice worked to draw readers/viewers in by including reader/viewer surrogates who spoke on their behalf, and it gave weight to dominant discourse by presenting it in the voices of individuals, who were granted authority through their presumed knowledge of cultural models of marriage and romance.

Unsurprisingly, the snippets of letters that were published in *True Story*’s Intimate Home Problems Forum mirrored, to a large degree, the overall ideology of the magazine. So Opal, a wife who was “naturally efficient and shrewd in business matters,” was advised to “keep out of your husband’s business; your place is in the home” despite the fact that her husband was “careless, indulgent to creditors, and on the verge of

¹⁶ Erin Smith discusses this difference, and its influence on class identity and the history of reading in the U.S., in depth in *Hard-Boiled*.

bankruptcy,” because he resented her interference. The first prize letter was from a woman who explained that she had been in a similar situation as Opal and warned her,

. . . if you value your happiness and your love – pick up your skirts, scurry out of your husband’s office and *stay out!*... No matter how modest your home, *stay in it*. Be a nice, old-fashioned housewife. Shake off that business aspect. Remain the charming girl with whom Alex is still in love.

In a separate issue, a wife who wanted to work outside the home was told that “any married woman with children, who has an able-bodied man supporting her, should not work” because her husband might grow lazy and stop working, at which point:

. . . poor wifey will have to make up for his idleness; what she thought would be a few years of help, is in reality a lifetime of hard work. She will become ill-natured, cross; lose her youthful looks and vigor. In time, the husband for whom she did all this, will turn to another woman for pleasure, for the simple reason that his wife is too tired to go with him.

In both these cases, the published letters contributed to the consensus view of the magazine, which here advocated for traditional gender roles as the necessary conditions for marital happiness and warned women who wished for more power and control that they risked losing their husbands’ love.¹⁷

The most noticeable difference between the advertisements in the slick middle-class magazines and those in the working-class pulps was the significantly greater proportion of ads to editorial copy in the former. Middle-class magazines like the *Ladies’ Home Journal* derived the majority of their revenue from advertising, which thus occupied a significant amount of space inside each issue. Pulp magazines like *True Story*, on the other hand, made most of their money from newsstand sales, so they needed to include more of the material that their readers wanted – namely, sensational

¹⁷ “*True Story*’s Intimate Home Problems Forum,” *TS*, June 1927, 6; “*True Story*’s Intimate Home Problems Forum,” *TS*, June 1929, 8.

confessionals. Erin Smith draws a stark distinction between pulp ads and slick ads in her study of male crime pulps, arguing that the two:

... advertised different kinds of goods. Slick-paper ads evoked powerful desires and feelings of inadequacy that could be assuaged only by the purchase of consumer goods. Pulp ads, on the other hand, tried to convince working-class readers that additional work, training, or self-help would lead to a better-paying job. Pulp ads were a kind of remediation for working-class consumers, designed to help them earn enough money to make it worthwhile for advertisers to bother creating or evoking their consumer desires.¹⁸

This distinction does not entirely hold true, however, when it comes to a pulp like *True Story*, which was targeted to women. While the types of goods advertised differed, in the main, between *True Story* and the various middle-class magazines examined here, there were important continuities in the underlying work performed by the ads. Middle-class magazines like the *Journal* did advertise comparatively more consumer goods including many, such as prepared foods, automobiles, furniture, and household appliances, that were absent from the pages of *True Story* (at least until the end of the decade, when the magazine's circulation figures could no longer be ignored by national advertisers), while the correspondence courses and self-help books featured so prominently in the latter were relegated to small, quarter- and eighth-page ads in the back pages of the slicks.¹⁹ However, when it came to ads that employed representations of romantic love, the basic discourse was the same whether the intended audience was middle-class women or working-class women: the advertised product was a crucial component of one's quest for a happy marriage, and being a savvy consumer was

¹⁸ Smith, *Hard-Boiled*, 57-8.

¹⁹ On advertisers finally taking notice of *True Story*'s growing readership, see Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 56.

a crucial element of one's role as a wife. Ads in both magazines emphasized the work required of women to find, and keep, a loving husband, and in particular, the extensive overlap in cosmetic advertising suggested that physical appearance was key for both working- and middle-class women. (The relatively inexpensive price of most cosmetics, of course, made them a more suitable product for working-class women than the relatively higher-priced goods advertised only in the *Journal*.) Ads in both slicks and pulps emphasized the importance of the first impression, dramatized key romantic moments such as love-at-first-sight and the proposal, used wedding imagery to infuse products with desired qualities, and linked the maintenance of a happy marriage to a need to consume. These many similarities illustrate the increasing reach of consumer culture and advertisers' desire to interpellate all individuals as consumers. At the same time, the difference in the relative import of advertising between the two publications, coupled with the differences in editorial content noted here, suggests that class played a significant role in the development and dissemination of the meanings of consumer culture.

Throughout all of the non-advertising content of each magazine (that is, the stories, articles, and editorials), *Ladies' Home Journal* presented a less realistic, more idealized version of marriage than *True Story*. The *Journal's* portrayal of marriage was almost exclusively positive. Virtually all of the *Journal's* stories about love and marriage had happy endings, whereas many of those in *True Story* did not. The articles, columns, and editorials in the *Journal* dealt solely with practical concerns, such as the proper order in which the bridal party should process down the aisle or what pieces of furniture a

newly married couple most needed for their new home, while *True Story* covered, in features such as the “Intimate Home Problems Forum,” marital stresses that would likely be familiar to many readers, such as disagreements over managing finances, wives working outside the home, and potential spouses coming from different class backgrounds. This difference in emphasis corresponds with the different role advertising played in each magazine. If advertisements were the main source of revenue (as they were for the *Journal*, but not for *True Story*) then the editorial staff needed to create an environment that fostered readers’ desire to consume. Portraits of marital discord in *Ladies’ Home Journal* would hardly have had the desired effect, especially when so many of the ads linked their products to love and marriage. *True Story*, however, was not as dependent on advertising during the 1920s, despite the attempts of the publisher to court advertisers in the industry press.²⁰ Much of the advertising *True Story* did contain, that for one kind of self-help product or another, could theoretically have been *more* successful surrounded by cautionary tales of what could happen if readers didn’t start correspondence school, or get promoted, or have beautiful clothes, or learn to attract men. Erin Smith argues that the stories published in the male-targeted crime pulps she studied were reflective of many of the common concerns of working-class men in the interwar decades, such as “scientific management, the rise of consumer culture, and the entrance of women in large numbers into paid employment.”²¹ The stories in *True Story* may likewise be read as reflective of the concerns of working-class *women*: how to achieve

²⁰ See, for example, *Printers’ Ink*, June 12, 1924, 126-7 (“If you manufacture and advertise something which appeals to the man in the street or the woman in the home, use *True Story*, and reach through it the most potential audience in the magazine reading world today”); *Printers’ Ink*, Aug. 26, 1926, 37 (“More people tumble over themselves at the newsstands to buy *True Story* for a quarter than to buy *any* magazine in the world, for *any* price!”).

²¹ Smith, *Hard-Boiled*, 10.

the financial security (and perhaps even social mobility) that could only come through marriage in an age of rapidly changing expectations around courtship, romance, and sexuality; how to manage the competing demands of frugal housekeeping and rampant consumer desires; and how to access the middle-class world displayed on movie screens and in the pages of slick magazines such as the *Journal*. At the same time, the content of both magazines was reflective of the concerns of advertisers, who identified the middle-class readers of the *Journal* as more able and proficient consumers and, thus, as worthier targets of their messages. In fact, within the model of marriage presented by consumer culture – namely, one dependent on consumption to succeed and to bring happiness to both spouses – middle-class women, who had more disposable income via their husbands' employment and thus more opportunities to purchase advertised products, did indeed have a greater chance of realizing that ideal marriage, whether or not the products actually brought the happiness promised by advertisers. By virtue of their relative lack of income, working-class women by definition had more problematic marriages, at least according to the definition of success provided by advertisers.

Product ads, romance and consumption

Magazine advertisements relied heavily on portrayals of romance to appeal to readers. The course of romantic love, as presented by mass-market magazines, followed a narrowly prescribed trajectory that included a dramatic first encounter, a courtship period, and the hallowed moment of the proposal, finally culminating in the wedding day. The development of a new, public system of courtship and the widespread cultural acceptance of the big white wedding have been associated with the simultaneous

development of consumer culture.²² Advertisements, too, connected each stage of the trajectory with consumption: the moment of attraction/love at first sight could be achieved through use of the right products; courtship was expressed through gifts and time spent together at leisure pursuits; proposals were made with diamond rings; and the wedding was an occasion for gift-giving as well as for the purchase of special, single-use products like wedding gowns, food, and flowers. It is important to note that this trajectory ended with the wedding – representations of marriage, while still linked in important ways to consumption, took on a different register.

In some ways this seems hardly noteworthy – after all, advertisements presented *everything* as dependent on consumption. Yet there was something particularly powerful about the ways images of romance were employed by advertisers, who had already identified women as the nation’s primary consumers. Their conscious choice to use romantic appeals to women were documented not just in the ads they produced, but in the records they left behind. Since romance, love, and marriage were likewise primarily understood as being the concerns of women, advertisers repeatedly called upon the trajectory of romance and upon portrayals of married life in attempts to channel the supposed interests of the American woman towards a desire for particular products. Ad agency records reveal that this technique had been found successful through market testing for a dish soap campaign, among others; explained vice-president William Esty in a J. Walter Thompson staff meeting, “We found that [a] very, very compelling angle to hands and beauty in hands... is brides: If you can tie it up with brides it is very

²² See, for example, Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) on the development of public courtship ritual, and Vickie Howard, *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) on the growth and standardization of the wedding industry.

effective... We established very definitely that while brides are powerful, it is three or four times as effective if you show them in bridal costume instead of ordinary costume. You have not only got to say they are brides but prove it by showing the bridal outfit.”²³ The focus on issues of love, courtship, wedding planning, and marriage in the content that surrounded the ads joined the work of advertisers in marking these topics as women’s domain and encouraging women to consider themselves as consumers first and foremost, even in the most intimate relationships of their lives.

Advertisements that featured the first encounter between a man and woman suggested that potential mates noticed, and responded to, an individual’s consumption choices. An ad for satin coat linings suggested that shared taste in consumer goods could spark an attraction between strangers, depicting a woman complimenting a man on his handsome coat, which she recognized as being lined with Skinner Satin. In ideal form, the initial moment of attraction was one of the most revered of romantic events: love at first sight. An ad for facial powder unsubtly used this very phrase as a title for its illustration of a man, hat in hand, gazing raptly at a young woman, elaborating in the text: “Her beauty instantly captivates him. His glances linger at first delightedly, then lovingly, upon the dainty texture of her skin.”²⁴ While the trope of love at first sight was not a new addition to cultural narratives of romance, the ads’ portrayal of the moment as being dependent upon the use of consumer goods gave it a very different register.

Products began to bear the responsibility for bringing people together in love, in a way

²³ Representatives’ Meeting Minutes, Dec. 3. 1929, J. Walter Thomspon Company. Staff Meeting Minutes Collection, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University. Lux Car Card, Apr 20 – June 20, 1928; Lux newspaper ad, May 1928; and Lux ad published in *True Story*, July 1929; J. Walter Thompson Company, Domestic Advertisements Collection, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

²⁴ Skinner’s Satins ad, *SEP* Apr. 17, 1926, 184; Pompeian Beauty Powder ad, *LHJ* Sept. 1921, 79.

that both heightened the control an individual had over the process (finding love is as simple as choosing the right facial powder or coat fabric) and diminished the importance of individual characteristics (*any* man could respond to a woman using the “right” powder; the man who loves you could have fallen for *any* woman who used that powder).

In the magazine ads, the process of courtship unfolded within the limits of consumption practices. Beth Bailey’s study of courtship in the twentieth century outlines the transition from calling, which took place in the domestic sphere, to dating, in which men took women out in public, and had to spend money to do so. That transition was reflected in the ads, where courtship practices that were presented as romantic included gifts of chocolates and flowers (always given to women by men) and activities such as dancing. “She will remember, so don’t YOU forget,” warned a Florist Association ad in a February issue of *Saturday Evening Post*, reminding its male readers of Valentine’s day while demonstrating to its female ones, through the illustration of a smiling young woman seated on her sofa admiring a bouquet, the happiness they could feel if only their beaux sent them flowers. Ads for chocolates used illustrations of couples seated closely together to suggest the intimacy such gifts could bring about, while a variety of advertisements, including those for deodorant, lipstick, shoes, and self-help books, called on images of couples either dancing or seated cozily along the edges of the dance floor to associate their products with romance. Some ads that represented courtship presented the product itself as a catalyst to romance, implying that the right beverage could make an attractive man or woman want to join you, and the right music could inspire the romance of dancing. Sometimes the focus was not the qualities or attributes a particular product may bestow upon the consumer; rather, it was the simple act of *choosing* the product that

was represented as attracting the interest of the opposite sex. Specifically, consumption choice was presented as a possible area for a couple to discover common ground; sharing the same taste in consumer goods, these ads implied, was a potential basis for a successful relationship, corresponding to the value placed on shared interests as part of the ideal companionate marriage.²⁵

Advertisements promised that consumer goods could also help achieve that most desired and fetishized of romantic tableaux: the proposal. Some ads explained explicitly how specific products, such as cookbooks or beauty products, could lead to a proposal. An ad for a cookbook offered free by a condensed milk manufacturer told the story of a woman who couldn't cook. "Modern to her fingertips," the text explained, "Julie fell in love with a man who demanded the old-fashioned virtues in a wife. What was she to do?" With the help of the cookbook, she whipped up some coconut macaroons after a dance one night. The man promptly proposed to her and she thus "found the way to happiness." An ad for facial cream depicted an elegantly dressed couple in a theater box, with text explaining that use of this particular cream might allow a woman not merely to attract a man but to inspire in him thoughts of matrimony: "SHE watched the beautiful leading lady on the other side of the footlights. HE watched the beautiful lady on this side – the one sitting so sweetly close to him. And he pictured her smiling at him, someday, across their breakfast table – his leading lady for life!" Other ads implied such an effect through inclusion of the image of the moment of proposal or of the engagement

²⁵ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*. Society of American Florists Ad, *SEP*, Feb 9, 1929, 111; Romance Chocolates ad, *SEP* Feb. 3, 1923, 117; National Confectioners' Association ad, *SEP* Feb. 4, 1928, 85; Mum Deodorant ad, *LHJ* June 1927, 204; Tangee Lipstick ad, *True Story* (hereafter "*TS*"), Nov. 1928, 85; Foot Saver Shoes ad, *Woman's Home Companion* (hereafter "*WHC*") June 1928, 61; Independent Corporation "Personal Charm – A Course for Women" Advertisement, *TS*, May 1923, 7. Coca-Cola ad, *SEP* Aug. 29, 1925, 119; U.S. Player Piano Rolls ad, *SEP* Feb. 10, 1923, 141.

ring. A deodorant ad featured a large, full-color illustration of a man placing a ring on the finger of his female companion, while another had a smaller illustration of a couple sitting side by side on a sofa, both admiring the ring on her outstretched left hand (see Fig. 2.2). And an ad for facial cream depicted a couple on a sofa, his arm around her shoulders, both looking down at the diamond ring on her left hand. “Beauty’s Reward,” proclaimed the text. “His eyes rest tenderly upon her lovely, glowing beauty. Upon her dainty finger he slips the crowning jewel of her happiness – the sparkling solitaire that proclaims his love. Such is the reward of beauty.” This last ad articulated the promise at which the others merely hinted: the woman who chose the proper products would be rewarded with a proposal from the man of her dreams.²⁶

As the ultimate destination of the romantic trajectory, the wedding received frequent attention in advertising, and advertisers used wedding imagery in a variety of ways to link the experience with consumption. Like those featuring proposals, some implied that products would lead to marriage through the image of a wedding scene. Deodorants, sewing patterns, and chewing gum all used depictions of brides and grooms to represent the promise of romantic love through use of the advertised product. An ad for rouge made this implication clearest, by featuring an illustration of a bride over the title “Beauty Rewarded.” While the text of the ad explained that “the lovely coloring of her complexion rewarded her with beauty on her wedding day,” the illustration suggested that, in fact, the *wedding* was her reward for using products such as makeup to alter her

²⁶ Borden’s Condensed Milk ad, *TS* Feb. 1929, 93; Pompeian Night Cream ad, *LHJ* Mar. 1924, 151; Kuppenheimer Good Clothes ad, *SEP* Apr. 17, 1926, 81. Mum deodorant ads, *LHJ* Feb. 1929, 153, and *LHJ* Feb. 1923, 99; Pompeian Night Cream ad, *LHJ* Jan. 1922, 63. See also Pompeian Facial Cream ad, *LHJ* Feb. 1925, 78. See also Baby Ruth ad, *LHJ* Feb. 1929, 153, in which eating Baby Ruth by candlelight inspires talks of honeymoons; Jergens Lotion ad, *LHJ* Oct. 1925, 215, featuring a photograph of a man’s hand slipping a diamond ring onto a (soft, smooth) woman’s hand; and Paris Garters ad, *SEP* June 30, 1928, 51, in which a man’s slouchy socks lead a woman to reject his proposal.

appearance. Other advertisements were more direct in offering products, such as self help books, that would win the reader a husband if she purchased them – “He Said He’d Never Marry!,” exclaimed one ad, assuring *True Story* readers that through the purchase of *Fascinating Womanhood* “you, too, can enjoy the worship and admiration of men, and be the radiant bride of the man of your choice” – as well as offering cautionary tales of women who were passed over by potential mates for such faults as incorrect use of silverware at dinner parties. An illustration of a lone woman watching forlornly as a newly married couple exited the church was accompanied by an explanation of how the groom chose his bride: “Alice, time and again, made some glaring slip in her use of silverware. Grace just *never* offended in that way. She *knew*.”²⁷

Other ads associated weddings with consumption by focusing on the opportunity for gift giving. Advertisers presented a wide range of products as ideal wedding gifts, including silver, hairbrushes, watches, sheets and towels, pots and pans, radios, Thermoses, and wool blankets. Turkish towels were advertised as “The Towel for Brides,” aluminum cookware was linked to “the warm sunshine of a day in June, the joy of youth in wedded bliss,” and a blanket advertisement offered “A hint to friends of the Bride” (to give wool blankets, of course). It was common at early twentieth-century middle-class weddings to display all the gifts on “gift tables” for guests to view, a practice that in earlier years had invited much social critique but was widely accepted by the 1920s, as the burgeoning consumer culture took hold. Several ads published in *Ladies’ Home Journal* featured the bride and groom standing arm in arm surveying their

²⁷ Mum Deodorant ad, *LHJ* June 1925, 142; Butterick Patterns ad, *LHJ* May 1922, 110; Wrigley’s ad, *LHJ* June 1929, 124; Pompeian Bloom ad, *LHJ* June 1925, 61. Psychology Press “Fascinating Womanhood” ad, *TS*, July 1924, 150; Tudor Plate Silver ad, *TS* June 1929, 81.

bounty, their smiling faces suggesting the happiness that awaited all betrothed couples when their union was enriched by housewares and other consumer goods.²⁸

Some ads linked their products with the state of marriage, in an attempt to associate the product with desirable qualities in the mind of the consumer. These ads called upon qualities assumed to characterize marriage, such as stability, romance, and happiness. Jewelry was one item frequently linked with marriage, as in a jewelers' ad that described the bride and groom, depicted looking into an open gift box, as "On the Altar of Happiness." The ad encouraged gift-giving as an important element of the marriage process, claiming that "wedding gifts bind together into a fuller life, old joys and new happiness. They symbolize the hope and promise of the future and recall the tender associations of the past. A gift of Jewelry, because it is intrinsically precious, preserves, throughout life in undimmed beauty, all the poetry and romance that enshrine the wedding day." Jewelry, in this ad, stood in for the experience of marriage itself. Several ads likewise worked to emphasize the lasting quality of their products through an association to marriage, including an ad for sheets and pillowcases that suggested them as a most appropriate wedding gift, particularly because "they *retain* their lovely qualities through countless launderings," an ad for a radio that explained "of all the gifts the bride receives, those are cherished most that bring *lasting* happiness and satisfaction"

²⁸ See, for example, Community Plate Silver ad, *LHJ* May 1922, 92; Amber Pyralin Hairbrush ad, *LHJ* June 1921, 145; Elgin Watch ad, *LHJ* June 1924, 108; Martex Turkish Towels ad, *LHJ* Mar. 1923, 126; Wear-Ever Aluminum Cookware ad, *LHJ* June 1921, 71; Stewart-Warner Radio ad, *SEP* June 12, 1926, 32; Thermos ad, *LHJ* June 1925, 190; Kenwood Wool Blankets ad, *LHJ* June 1925, 195. On critiques of gift displays, see Vicki Howard, *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 19. For images of the couple at the gift table, see Wallace Silver ad, *LHJ* June 1925, 194; Warren's Standard Printing Papers Advertisement, *SEP*, Feb. 13, 1926, 179; Greeting Card Association ad, *LHJ* June 1928, 187; Jeweler's Association ad, *SEP* June 4, 1927, 146.

(emphasis in originals), and a hairbrush ad that paired an illustration of a bride with text stating that “most loved of all are the gifts which live for years.”²⁹

Advertisements that used the wedding as a metaphor sought to associate romance and love with the product directly. A series of Campbell’s Soup ads from the early 1920s featured the “Campbell’s Kids” as bride and groom, with slogans such as “Starting Right” and “A Happy Beginning” attempting to connect suggestions to serve tomato soup as a first course with readers’ positive associations to marriage. A Best Foods ad did away with literal representations of the wedding altogether in an ad that proclaimed, “Orange Weds Strawberry in the Recipe of the Month for June.” Through the “marrying” of orange with strawberry in the included salad recipe, this ad fit right in with the rest of the wedding-related content of the June 1929 issue of *Woman’s Home Companion*. Ads of this type skipped over the intermediate work of implying that the product could bring love to the user and instead presented the product as, in a sense, embodying love itself.³⁰ Some ads took this connection one step further, presenting the product as a stand-in for the romantic partner. Several ads suggested that women might actually love their new silver more than their new husbands. In an ad for Heirloom Plate, a bride promised her grandmother that she would “love, honor and cherish” her silverware, while Community Plate included lines of dialogue presumably between a woman and her fiancée, under an illustration of the woman holding an open box of silverware on her lap, a sensuous smile on her lips: “‘I’m a lucky girl –’ ‘You’ve got me!’

²⁹ Jewelers’ Association ad, *SEP* May 27, 1922, 111; Utica Sheets and Pillowcases ad, *WHC* June 1925, 58; Stewart-Warner Radio ad, *SEP* June 12, 1926, 32; Amber Pyralin Hairbrush ad, *LHJ* June 1922, inside back cover.

³⁰ Campbell’s Soup ad, *LHJ* June 1921, 27; Campbell’s Soup ad, *WHC* June 1923, 31; Best Foods ad, *WHC* June 1929, 91.

‘Silly! Any girl can get a man... but only the lucky – a gift of Community Plate.’” A tobacco ad took this concept the farthest. It showed a groom walking down the aisle with his anthropomorphized pipe, resplendent in a white dress, with which he could finally “live happily ever after,” now that he’d found the right kind of tobacco to smoke (see Fig. 2.3).³¹ In these ads, in particular, the experience of romance and the experience of consumption blurred together, as the love one spouse had for the other was conflated with the love that advertisers hoped consumers had for their products. These ads made manifest the romance of consumption that advertising, in the aggregate, represents – the pleasure to be taken in the act of consuming, the love one feels for consumer goods.

³¹ Heirloom Plate ad, *LHJ* June 1923, 145; Community Plate ad, *WHC* June 1925, 56; Wallace Silver ad, *SEP* June 26, 1920, 40; Granger Tobacco ad, *SEP* June 19, 1926, 201. See also Holmes & Edwards Silverplate ad, *LHJ* June 1923, 105.



Fig. 2.2: The power of the proposal.
Mum deodorant ad, *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1929.

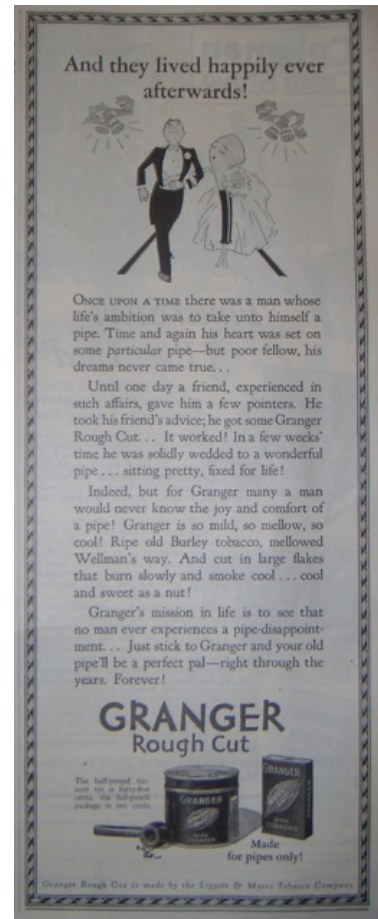


Fig. 2.3: The product as love object.
Granger Tobacco ad, *Saturday Evening Post*, 1926.

Product ads and representations of marriage

Magazines of the 1920s elaborated upon the model of marriage that was first articulated, tentatively and with much negotiation, in the *Ladies' Home Journal* of the 1890s. Now, advertisers and magazine editors alike confidently portrayed a relationship based on the husband's work outside the home and his financial contribution, and the wife's consumption and homemaking responsibilities, bolstered by the belief that spouses should derive great satisfaction from their marriage and should be each other's ideal

companions. More than ever before, marriage was a major focus of women's magazines not only because it was an important aspect of many readers' lives but also because it was a significant object of advertisers' attention. Advertisers, and the ads they created, presented marriage as more than the legal, religious, and social union of two people. Marriage also generated a new unit of consumption: the family. It was to the advantage of advertisers to encourage the procession of all courting couples to the altar, and two ads described advertisers' investment in fostering marriages with unusual clarity. The first, a 1926 ad for printing paper, explained to potential advertisers that

The man (or woman) who marries becomes at once a new sort of consumer. Money saved for Heaven knows what is immediately diverted to new and different channels and spent in ways unthought of. *Every wedding day is a birthday of new needs. Every peal of a wedding bell is the beginning of a response to somebody's advertising.*³² (emphasis mine)

The second, published in 1928 by a prominent national advertising agency, N.W. Ayer, featured an illustration of a bride and groom, with the words "THE OPTIMISTS" in large letters over their heads. The accompanying text read:

This year again, two million American youngsters will stride gallantly forth to meet and conquer the threatening ogre of living expenses. Without experience, with few set preferences in merchandise, and with enthusiasm as their only ally, they will demand from the national market the inevitable requisites of home making. A million boys will set off for a million jobs with high purpose and renewed determination. A million girls, wondering a little, will plan a million homes, and three million meals a day. Together, they will excitedly ponder the spreading of millions of dollars. What kitchen utensils? What furniture? Which curtains? The selection of a rug becomes a problem of infinite dimensions. The buying of a vacuum cleaner is a great adventure. Silverware. Linen. China. Glassware. New food products... During this year, advertising will give them established preferences in merchandise. Familiar trade names will spring to their lips, laying the foundation for the buying habits of a lifetime.³³

³² Warren's Standard Printing Papers Advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* (hereafter "SEP"), Feb. 13, 1926, 179.

³³ N.W. Ayer & Son Advertising Agency ad, *SEP* Jan. 14, 1928, 41.

Marriage was supposed to be the promised land that awaited at the conclusion of the romantic trajectory, but in the eyes of advertisers, within the framework of consumption, marriage was both a culmination and a new beginning.

Ads for specific products used this assumption as inspiration for their appeal to readers. An ad for furniture finish, for example, showed a couple in a foyer, coats on, suitcases at their feet, presumably just returned from their honeymoon. “Their Own Home,” the text announced, “Just as they visioned it during those wonderful hours of shopping.” A kitchen cabinet ad advised new brides to “Start Your Housekeeping Right,” asking, “Have you pictured it in your mind, June Bride – that first tasty dinner in the new home? How tenderly you will set the table in all its fresh, new linen and sparkling silver.” An ad depicting a couple who were thrilled that their acquisition of some new silver pieces would allow them to expand the guest list for their dinner party explained, “You know how it is with young married folks... Why, half the thrill of housekeeping comes in adding a few new possessions now and then.”³⁴ All these ads emphasized the needs of a newly married couple to furnish their home with the trappings of modern life, possessions considered necessary to a happy home and, thus, a happy marriage. In fact, however, the ads, stories, and editorial features together suggested that although the transition to domesticity would initially provide newlyweds with the exciting opportunity to furnish their home, their life together would ultimately be followed by challenges to romance. The long expanse of married life that followed the ceremony was filled with endless meals to be cooked, clothing and appliances to be

³⁴ Du Pont DUCO Furniture Finish ad, *LHJ* June 1926, 112; Sellers Kitchen Cabinets ad, *SEP* June 25, 1921, 44; Jewelers’ Association ad, *SEP* Nov. 6, 1926, 203.

purchased, houses to be kept clean, and children to be raised – a monotonous and repetitive existence that required the regular injection of beauty and excitement to keep the romance of the early days alive and maintain a happy marriage.³⁵ Indeed, some ads suggested that newlyweds' happiness was in danger from the very moment they uttered their vows. Even the honeymoon was not safe from perspiration odor (according to a deodorant ad featuring an illustration of a newlywed couple embracing in the privacy of their hotel room), careless hair dressing ("Honeymoons last longer when hair keeps its charm," claimed a hair tonic ad), or poor choice in home construction. The Herringbone Metal Lath Company related the tragic story of newlyweds who hadn't used their product: "They had spent only two days in their new home when an ugly crack broke through the surface of their charming living room wall... Had they been wise enough to insist upon Herringbone Doublemesh Metal Lath, no unsightly cracks would ever have brought their happy contentment to such an abrupt end."³⁶

Just as the magazine content provided guidance to help readers navigate the rapidly changing courtship norms, it also offered instruction in marriage maintenance, and the responsibilities laid out for spouses were strictly separated by gender. Both husbands and wives bore some responsibility for maintaining the marriage, but, as in most other areas of the domestic, it appears that the lion's share of the work fell to women – a fact probably due at least as much to the perception of women as the primary

³⁵ Though the prevalence of ads featuring children and the responsibilities of parenthood (specifically, motherhood) suggested their importance to cultural formulations of marriage (and to the goals of advertisers), they will not be considered in this analysis, which focuses on representations of romance. Advertisers were apparently unable to represent children and romance together – a challenge encountered by many parents, as well.

³⁶ Mum deodorant ad, *LHJ* June 1928, 150; Wildroot Hair Tonic ad, *WHC* June 1924, 106; Herringbone Doublemesh Metal Lath ad, *SEP* June 4, 1927, 103.

consumers as to the traditionally gendered division of labor in the home.³⁷ The responsibilities of the husband included financial support and gift-giving, while a wife was expected to be a cook, homemaker, companion, and object of beauty. The ads, unsurprisingly, were insistent in presenting marital happiness as dependent on each spouse making the proper gender-specific consumption choices. This breadwinner/homemaker model built upon the model of marriage first formulated in popular culture by Edward Bok and the *Ladies' Home Journal* in the 1890s.

Ads that emphasized men's responsibilities to their wives were doing double duty, at some moments speaking directly to male readers (as when they appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*) but also always educating women about what to expect from their husbands, especially when encountered in the pages of a women's magazine. The primary responsibility for men was to provide for their wives financially. An ad for a correspondence school called on all the trappings of middle-class domestic bliss in its exhortation to men to further their education (or, more likely, to the wives reading that particular issue of *True Story* to suggest the same to their husbands):

Do you remember the promises you made when you wooed the girl who is now your wife? Have you forgotten the scenes your fancy painted – that home of your own – a real yard for the kids – a maid to lighten the household burdens – a tidy sum in the bank – a wonderful trip every summer? *She* has not forgotten. She still hopes that you will make true these dreams. She still has faith in you. You don't want to disappoint your wife and make her life a burden, do you?

³⁷ The fact that I mostly examined women's magazines certainly goes a long way towards explaining why women's responsibilities were addressed to a much greater extent than men's. However, an examination of the *Saturday Evening Post*, which targeted women *and* men and contained ads addressed to both, suggests that even in a periodical intended for a mixed-gender audience, the responsibilities of wives were emphasized. There were no successful middle-class magazines exclusively for men during this period; Erin Smith's study of working-class pulps with primarily male readerships likewise reveals a comparatively smaller proportion of ads focusing on men's responsibilities as husbands.

These were the biggest-ticket items consumers could hope for; a home with a yard, household help, travel, and substantial savings with which to buy the many lesser-order products and services that were deemed necessary, as the standards for what good husbands were expected to provide continued to escalate. Other ads also emphasized the importance of a man's ability to provide a home for his wife, such as the insulation ad that depicted a bride and groom looking at each other, with the caption "I, John, pledge thee, Mary, to *buy* or *build* thee a home." Occasionally, ads for specific products, such as oil heaters and cleaning brushes, illustrated the ways that a husband could ensure his wife's happiness by keeping her supplied with products to make her life easier. In general, however, the wife was identified as the primary consumer in the family, and the husband's role was limited to earning, through his labor, enough money to buy a home and to support his wife's consumption.³⁸

The one exception to this distribution of consumption responsibilities was the husband's role as giver of gifts to his wife. Gift-giving was an oft-relied upon trope in ads, as it was one of the only available ways for advertisers and readers alike to imagine men as consumers. Many ads employing this premise illustrated the moment of reception, and frequently included a depiction of the woman gazing at the gift with her hands clasped in front of her with delight. An ironer ad featuring this pose asked, "What gift from a thoughtful husband can be more welcome than a Simplex Ironer?," while a player piano ad described the moment as "Her thrilling surprise – Suddenly, a future vibrantly happy with music is revealed to her." The moment of reception was also illustrated with the couple embracing, as in a vacuum ad that admonished men, "Don't

³⁸ American School ad, *TS* Feb. 1922, 80; Williams Oil-O-Matic Heater ad, *SEP* June 5, 1926, 142-3; Fuller Brush ad, *SEP* June 18, 1927, 95; Celotex Insulation ad, *LHJ* Nov. 1927, 131.

disappoint her again this Christmas! Show her that you really *do* care, and throughout her lifetime your thoughtfulness will be ever in her mind.”³⁹ Products intended to make housework easier were not the only gifts appropriate for a husband to give his wife. Items as small as chocolates or as large as cars could also help men meet their responsibilities as gift-givers. An ad depicting a couple side by side on a piano bench, looking at each other as she held a box of chocolates in her hand, explained that “the desire to bring pleasure to those we love is as powerful a force today as in the Age of Chivalry.” And a Studebaker ad showed a couple standing in front of a Christmas tree, the man looking down at the woman and smiling while she smiled down at the key in her hand. “The Keys to Happiness,” the ad proclaimed, explaining that a car “is the one gift every woman wants most in the world.” Men were also expected to perform the conventional romantic rituals (gifts of chocolate, flowers, or jewelry) at the prescribed times (Valentine’s Day, anniversaries).⁴⁰ Ads showcasing the moment of reception and the wife’s delight at the gift suggested to men that their contribution to marital happiness could come in the form of material gifts; thus, their role as provider was not strictly limited to making the money required for the wife’s consumption. These ads also attempted to instill household items such as vacuums and refrigerators with romance, emphasizing the ways such ads worked to manage the tension between romantic excitement and domestic necessity.

³⁹ Simplex Ironer ad, *LHJ* Dec. 1920, 49. Hallet & Davis Virtuoso Player Piano ad, *SEP* Nov. 17, 1923, 73. Hoover Electric Cleaner ad, *SEP* Dec. 6, 1924, 138-139.

⁴⁰ Romance Chocolates ad, *SEP* Apr. 5, 1924, 108. Studebaker ad, *SEP* Dec. 5, 1925, 65.; Society of American Florists ad, *SEP* Feb. 14, 1925, 158; La Tausca Pearls ad, *LHJ* Dec. 1920, 163; Norris Exquisite Candies ad, *SEP* Feb. 9, 1924, 92; Society of American Florists ad, *SEP* June 6, 1925, 176; National Confectioners’ Association ad, *SEP* Feb 4, 1928, 85.

In return for her husband's provision of financial resources, gifts, and romantic behavior, a woman was expected to be his emotional and physical caretaker – a cook and housekeeper who also attended to her husband's emotional state.⁴¹ These expectations were summed up neatly by an ad that depicted a conversation between a husband and a wife; in response to his questioning why women had tea parties, his wife explained that “we exchange hints on how to please husbands; how to keep them happy and well-fed.” A wife could use a player piano to increase her husband's happiness, according to an ad showing a well-dressed couple in a living room, the woman turning to look at the man while playing the piano. “Playing the music he loves,” the text read. “With favorite melodies she soothes away the cares and worries of his day.” Wives were even expected to be assets to their husbands' careers through their consumption choices, according to an ad for silverware:

No wonder they call a fellow's wife his ‘better half’! Just look at the way Sally had helped him all the way along. Somehow, through her, just the people he needed to know, he always did know. Just the impression he wanted his home to make, it always did make – because of Sally. And now, with the members of his firm and their wives invited for dinner tonight, the table is perfectly appointed, even to the last salad fork and orange spoon. Sally again!⁴²

This ad connected the explicit focus on the importance of consumer goods to personal and marital happiness, well established by the 1920s, with Edward Bok's earlier insistence on the role marriage should play in a man's success in the business world.

⁴¹ Minute Tapioca ad, *LHJ* Aug. 1924, 116; Jackson Lears notes that this version of domesticity, as presented by advertisers, marked a shift from previous conceptions of woman's role as not just the caretaker of the home, but the moral guardian of society as well. Rather than wielding their moral influence upon their husbands and children, advertisements suggested that the way for women to successfully fulfill their new, more circumscribed caretaking roles was through proper consumption. (Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 187.)

⁴² Hallet & Davis Virtuolo Player Piano ad, *SEP* Oct. 13, 1923, 151; Rogers Bros. Silverplate ad, *WHC* June 1924, 74.

Many advertisements did not separate “happy” from “well-fed,” suggesting rather a causal connection between the second state and the first. Katherine Parkin notes that throughout the twentieth century, women’s magazines and advertisers alike “promoted the belief that... women should shop and cook for others in order to express their love,” and indeed, numerous ads for food products suggested that women must be skilled cooks (or purchasers of prepared foods) who used meals to demonstrate their love for their husbands. The right foods could entice one’s husband, as an ad for a cookbook published by *True Story*, “161 New Ways to a Man’s Heart,” indicated, explaining that the recipes contained therein were “Why Husbands Hurry Home.” A wife could also use food to cure her husband’s bad mood (with maple syrup for breakfast) or to achieve “matrimonial harmony” (by distracting his attention from a \$205 dress shop bill with delicious mustard). An ad for A&P Supermarkets emphasized that this responsibility began as soon as a woman walked down the aisle as a newlywed: an illustration of a bride in white gown and veil was accompanied by text reading “Soon after the strains of the wedding march fade away, her thoughts will turn to her new responsibilities – none of which are more important than Good Foods for ‘him.’” Maintaining the happiness of those newlywed days could be as easy as replacing coffee with a caffeine-free substitute: an ad for Postum informed the reader that, “in the words of a prominent jurist, ‘More marriages founder on the rocks of petty nagging and irritability than are wrecked by any other cause.’ And the pity of it is that so often neither husband nor wife realizes that their irritability may be chiefly due to a common, easily corrected mealtime indiscretion.” If only married couples didn’t drink so much caffeine, this ad suggested, perhaps the high divorce rates so alarming to social commentators of the 1920s would go down!⁴³

⁴³ Katherine Parkin, *Food Is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia:

According to the advertisements (and to popular conceptions of modern marriage), women were supposed to be fun-loving, energetic companions in addition to homemakers. The ideal modern wife's duties extended beyond the domestic sphere: one shoe ad asked, "Do Your Feet Go Gladly – or do they nag your every step – always making you stay home rather than go out?"⁴⁴ In contrast to the more rigidly gender-segregated public and private worlds of the Victorian era, the modern woman's confinement to the home was seen as problematic. Many advertisements represented couples engaged in some sort of active outdoor pursuit, such as skiing, hiking, ice skating, camping, riding in a boat, playing on the beach, or playing tennis; couples were also frequently shown dancing together.⁴⁵ Some advertisements specifically mentioned ways the product could help women fulfill this component of their duties. An ad for arch support inserts asked women, "Can you dance or hike or play golf or tennis to your heart's content – or are these and other youth-retaining activities denied you by tired, aching, painful feet?" And an ad for shoes warned women of the dangers of not meeting their husbands' expectations in this area, relating the story of a couple whose life seemed to follow the pattern for happiness, from a "romantic courtship" to engagement in college to married life replete with popularity among their friends and success for him in business. Yet, they were "miserably unhappy" because "she had become nervous,

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 4. "161 New Ways to a Man's Heart" ad, *TS* June 1927, 15; Towle's Log Cabin Syrup ad, *SEP* Sept. 3, 1927, 130; French's Prepared Mustard ad, *LHJ* June 1928, 171; Atlantic & Pacific Company ad, *LHJ* June 1928, 66; Postum ad, *LHJ* Oct. 1928, 60.

⁴⁴ Martha Washington Dress and Comfort Shoes ad, *LHJ* Jan. 1924, 116.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Kodak ad, *SEP* Nov. 27, 1920, outside back cover; Kodak ad, *SEP* Sept. 6, 1924, outside back cover; General Motors ad, *SEP* Feb. 6, 1926, 49; Coleman Camp Stove ad, *SEP* July 10, 1926, 117; Squibb's Dental Cream ad, *SEP* Aug. 14, 1926, 90; Unguentine ad, *SEP* July 2, 1927, 124; Mum Deodorant ad, *LHJ* May 1922, 135; Blue-Jay Corn Treatment ad, *LHJ* July 1925, 125.

impatient, incapable of enthusiasm... They had very few good times together. She seldom played golf; never played tennis; didn't care to walk; had little energy for dancing." This young wife was failing to live up to the ideals of companionate marriage, but luckily she happened to see an ad for Arch Preserver Shoes in a magazine one night and, after purchasing a pair, "changed into another woman."⁴⁶

Other ads also acknowledged the contradictory expectations for women to be active, energetic, cheerful and interesting despite the burdens of housework. A woman dancing with her husband in a clothes washer ad "washes most of the morning... *then* dances half of the night.... Once she would have taken to her bed. Now a big morning's wash leaves her entirely fresh, ready to dance, to play bridge, or to see a show that same evening." An ad for prepared foods suggested that perhaps "the most common mistake women make is letting their husbands outgrow them. The man is out in the midst of active affairs, busy meeting people and doing things. He grows and develops. But the wife... lets herself become absorbed in the narrow circle of housekeeping interests. When he comes home she greets him with conversation about burnt pies, the price of eggs or how Johnny lost his rubbers! And then is hurt when he finds his newspaper more interesting!" Using prepared foods, this ad suggested, would give a woman more time to cultivate outside interests and leisure pursuits so she would be a more appealing and interesting companion for her husband when he came home from work. Another ad, for a laundry service, offered the same result for the woman who sent her laundry out rather than spending one day a week washing clothes at home: "freedom to become her husband's partner in work and play; his mental mate and true companion." Like ads that

⁴⁶ Dr. Scholl's Foot Comfort Appliances ad, *SEP* June 18, 1927, 175; Arch Preserver Shoe ad, *LHJ* Feb. 1925, 164.

acknowledged the possibility that women might not be satisfied by homemaking responsibilities, these advertisements hinted that meeting *all* the expectations of a modern wife might be an impossible goal for women, who could not be exciting, cheerful, and energetic *and* at the same time devote themselves as completely to housekeeping, cooking, and caretaking as society demanded. Nevertheless, they promised that proper consumption would allow women to do so.⁴⁷

Finally, wives were advised to attend to their appearance, maintaining the youth and beauty they possessed on their wedding day in order to hold their husbands' interest. The advertisements that presented this message employed one of two techniques, offering either positive portrayals of women who remained beautiful after they were married or negative accounts that warned wives of the dangers of not doing so (see fig. 2.4). Some positively framed ads used wedding imagery to underscore their point. "Keep your complexion always as smooth and alluring as rose petals," encouraged an ad for facial cream, pairing its text with an illustration of a bride and groom. An ad for hand cream, titled "As beautiful as on her Wedding Day," displayed an illustration of a bride's hands, explaining to readers that "hands need not become rough and red as soon as they begin to do housework!" And an ad extolling the labor-saving virtues of home appliances coupled an illustration of a man's hand slipping a wedding ring on a woman's finger with the admonition to "Keep that hand soft!"⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Easy Clothes Washer ad, *LHJ* Apr. 1928, 193; Libby's Prepared Foods ad, *LHJ* Sept. 1920, 61; Laundryowners National Association ad, *LHJ* Oct. 1929, 122.

⁴⁸ Boncilla Beautifier ad, *TS* June 1923, 78; Jergens Lotion ad, *LHJ* June 1927, 52; GE Appliances ad, *LHJ* June 1923, 202.

Other positive ads painted a picture of the happiness enjoyed by women whose husbands still loved them years into their marriage. Laxative use kept one woman “beautiful as the day we married – clear, youthful, lovely skin, lustrous hair and sparkling eyes!” An ad for Palmolive Soap promised “still the thrill of courtship,” informing readers that “the supreme test of a wife’s charm comes after two years of marriage” and implying, through an accompanying illustration of an elegantly attired couple in a theater box, that this “test” would be passed easily by wives who used Palmolive, who would be rewarded by being taken out by their husbands as they had been during the courtship phase. A Pompeian Cream ad depicted a couple in evening clothes out to eat at a restaurant. Jack, the text explained, “was a man of rare magnetism,” and when he first became engaged to Sally, “the envious others wondered, ‘How long will it last?’” But “tonight they had been married five years, and his every glance, his every thought, was for her alone. ‘There’s no one like you, Sally,’ he said. ‘You’re as pretty now as the day I met you!’”⁴⁹

Ads that employed the negative appeal reminded women of all that could go wrong in their marriages if they were not careful. “Would your husband marry you again?” a soap ad asked ominously. “Fortunate is the woman who can answer ‘yes.’ But many a woman, if she is honest with herself, is forced to be in doubt – after that she pays stricter attention to her personal attractions.” In a Listerine ad, a woman sat sadly in front of a framed photo of a man, wondering “Why had he changed so in his attentions? ...He had been the most attentive lover and husband imaginable. But of late some strange something seemed to have come between them.” The “strange something” was, of

⁴⁹ Nujol ad, *LHJ* Jan. 1924, 131; Palmolive Soap ad, *LHJ* Sep. 1924, 50.; Pompeian Cream ad, *LHJ* Jan. 1923. See also Palmolive Soap ad, *WHC* Feb 1924, 77.

course, bad breath. Similarly, an ad for bran flakes included an illustration of a woman standing alone at a dinner table set for two, her hand to her cheek and a dejected expression on her face. “Night after night... ALONE!” exclaimed the text. “She is only thirty and has been married less than five years. Yet night after night she sits in bitter loneliness. Her husband’s interest has lagged because she has failed to protect herself against the common foe of youth and beauty.”⁵⁰ Some negative ads warned of the possibility of infidelity if a wife let herself go. “Are you still the ‘one’ girl?,” inquired a facial cream ad. Less subtly, another ad asked *True Story* readers, “Is Your Husband Beginning to Look Around? – as your hair grows grayer.” And an ad for slippers asked, “Do You Look Your Best at Breakfast?” cautioning women who “forget that early morning impressions are strongest, that the husband who remembers his wife as he left her at the breakfast table, can’t help but make unfavorable comparison with the trim, neatly appointed women he meets in business hours during the day.” In each case, the specter of an unhappy marriage or an inattentive or unfaithful husband was presented as the inevitable result of a wife not attending to her appearance by making the correct consumption choices.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Palmolive Soap ad, *SEP* Apr. 9, 1921, inside back cover; Listerine ad, *LHJ* Oct. 1924, 66; Post’s Bran Flakes ad, *TS* June 1927, inside back cover.

⁵¹ Pompeian Night Cream ad, *WHC* June 1925, 84; Wyeth Sage and Sulphur Compound ad, *TS* Feb. 1927, 97; Daniel Green Comfy Slippers ad, *LHJ* June 1924, 112.



Fig. 2.4: The importance of appearance. Positive appeal, Palmolive soap ad, *Woman's Home Companion* 1924. Negative appeal, Daniel Green Comfy Slippers ad, *Ladies' Home Journal* June 1924.

Personal ads: Real-life models of marriage

Were the concerns of 1920s product advertisements – how to make a good first impression; the importance of romantic acts; a man's ability to provide for a family and a wife's ability as a cook and housekeeper – reflected in the individual quests for marriage that filled the classified section? The analysis that follows focuses mainly on personal ads placed in the *Denver Post*, one of the only major metropolitan newspapers that published them on a regular basis during the 1920s.⁵² A typical Sunday edition of the paper would

⁵² Ads from the *Spokesman Review* (Spokane, WA) and the *Albuquerque Journal* are also included here, but they make up a small percentage of the ads considered, because those papers published many fewer. Of

have at least one full page of personal ads in the classified section, comprising somewhere between 20 and 30 ads. Though the majority of ad placers were from Colorado and surrounding states, the varying locations mentioned in the ads reveal that men and women from all over the country used the *Post* to advertise their searches for a spouse.⁵³ These personal ads touched on many of the same topics and expressed many of the same anxieties as the product advertisements and magazine content previously reviewed. And even more, perhaps, than in the pages of the mass-market magazines, personal ads were a place where the tensions between old and new models of marriage – between the doctrine of separate spheres, the sentimentalization of romantic love, and an understanding of marriage as an economic partnership, on the one hand, and the desire for sexually and emotionally fulfilling companionship undergirded by consumption, on the other – were visible. While personal ads of the 1890s exclusively articulated older, pre-consumption values, those of the 1920s were engaged in a process of negotiation.

First and foremost, the emphasis on marriage in the magazines was also reflected in the personal ads. Their very existence, particularly in such large numbers, underscored the importance of marriage to Americans at this time. Indeed, of all the time periods examined in this project, the 1920s saw the highest percentage of personal ads specifically articulating a goal of marriage: almost every individual who placed a personal ad at this time explicitly sought a spouse. While men had placed close to 80% of the personal ads in the 1890s, by the 1920s the distribution by sex was not quite as

the over 35 papers I surveyed, these were the only three that appear to have published personal ads at all during the 1920s.

⁵³ Many groups of people were not represented here, including immigrants who didn't read or write English, those who were illiterate, and, for the most part, people of color and ethnic and religious minorities (though a few ads were placed by African American and Jewish men and women over the course of the decade).

uneven: two-thirds of the ads were placed by men and one-third by women. This pattern would remain constant throughout the twentieth century and, while not as extreme as in the 1890s, still conflicted with the messages of consumer culture that marriage was primarily a woman's concern. Despite the insistence of the product advertisements, magazine stories, and editorial content alike that marriage was *woman's* highest goal, *woman's* reward for following the rules of appearance and behavior, *woman's* most important work, the pattern revealed in the classified pages suggests that marriage was, in fact, of vital importance to men. There were likely several reasons for this pattern. Men probably placed personal ads in greater numbers than women because, as movers and actors in the public sphere, they were more comfortable with that relatively public "means of introduction" (a phrase used frequently, and apologetically, in these ads). They likely also turned to the personal ads because they too were at a loss when faced with the new standards of courtship, but unlike women received little guidance or instruction targeted specifically to them. Whatever the specific reasons behind each individual man's choice to utilize personal ads in the search for a wife, the frequency with which men placed personal ads made clear that men, too, desired marriage and conceived of it as essential to their lives.

Aside from the general emphasis on the importance of marriage, the personal ads published in 1920s newspapers did not wholeheartedly embrace the values promoted by consumer culture. Rather, ad placers were engaged in a process of negotiation with those values, sometimes conforming with, and other times challenging, them. For example, physical appearance, a vital piece of the romantic trajectory as presented by magazine ads and other content, found infrequent mention in personal ads, suggesting that individuals

were not especially concerned with their potential mates' looks. However, those that did mention appearance in their ads adhered to the magazines' belief that it was only important for *women* to be physically attractive. Ten percent of women described themselves as attractive and five percent of men sought an attractive woman, while only a handful of ad placers of each sex mentioned man's appearance. The messages of consumer culture regarding the importance of appearance were primarily targeted to women, and the personal ads indicate that indeed, women were receiving – or, at least, believing – those messages in larger proportions than men.

The tension between the modern qualities represented in magazine advertising and the more reserved, Victorian model of social norms and behaviors often glorified in editorials and advice columns was visible in the personal ads. Personal ads that referred to qualities such as “energetic,” “jolly,” “fun-loving,” and “affectionate,” and to activities such as dancing, sports, motoring, and amusements, all appear to be describing the modern values of the 1920s, which found positive representation in magazine ads for shampoo, soap, shoes, and deodorant, among others.⁵⁴ Though these ads made up a very small percentage of all the ads published, this was nevertheless a noteworthy difference from the 1890s, when such values were not mentioned at all. Women and men alike advertised for modern spouses. Ads placed by women sought “a gentleman... fond of dancing and cards”; “some jolly, good fellow that has a good home”; a “gentleman as companion, with car and enjoys dancing”; a “live wire modern young man”; and a

⁵⁴ See, for example, Wildroot Liquid Shampoo ad, *LHJ* June 1921, 117; Luxtone Soap Company ad, *TS* June 1921, 3; Palmolive Soap ad, *LHJ* Feb. 1925, 50; Arch Preserver Shoe ad, *LHJ* Feb. 1925, 164; Daniel Green Comfy Slippers ad, *LHJ* June 1926, 146; Foot Saver Shoes ad, *LHJ* June 1928, 70; Mum Deodorant ad, *LHJ* June 1927, 204; Neet Hair Removing Cream ad, *TS* June 1927, 92; Tangee Lipstick ad, *TS* Nov. 1928, 85.

“young gentleman... who likes dancing and sports.”⁵⁵ Men in search of modern wives described a “young lady who enjoys motoring and other amusements”; a “brunette lady... who enjoys outdoor sports and dancing”; a lady “who likes to go to shows and have a good time”; a “good looking girl” for “good times”; a “young lady who would teach him latest dances and whose charges would be moderate”; and a “young lady under 25 who enjoys mountain trips, shows, dancing.”⁵⁶ While magazine *ads* often showcased these modern qualities as desirable, stories, particularly the more sensational ones published in *True Story*, warned about the potential dangers of living “the gay life.”⁵⁷ Judging from the classified pages, many men likewise worried about the effects the modern lifestyle could have on a woman. Men who disapproved of the new morals far outweighed those seeking them out, and in nearly every edition of the newspaper there was at least one ad, placed by a man, that made clear his disdain for modern women, usually in condescending, if not downright angry, terms. Such criticisms, implicit or explicit, included: “those who dance need not answer”; “painted faces and fluffy ruffles need not apply”; “no adventuresses or flirts need answer”; “widower would like acquaintance of real woman... jazz fiends save your stamps”; “habitual cosmetic users kindly save ink”; “no modern flapper... no dancer or dumb dora”; “no flapper, golddigger, nor fluffy ruffy

⁵⁵ *Denver Post*, June 12, 1921, want ad sec., 1; *Spokesman Review*, Dec. 3, 1922, C5; *Denver Post*, July 2, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Sept. 7, 1924, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Apr. 19, 1925, want ad sec., 1.

⁵⁶ *Denver Post* July 2, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post*, Oct. 8, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Spokesman Review*, Jan. 7, 1923, C5; *Denver Post* Feb. 4, 1923, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post*, Aug. 5, 1923, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Aug. 8, 1926, want ad sec., 1.

⁵⁷ “The Wife Who Changed Her Mind,” *TS*, February 1921, 56-59; “The Little Cloud,” *TS*, March 1921, 34-5; “Who Shall Judge?,” *TS* June 1924, 47-8, 177-9; “What is Marriage Worth?,” *TS* June 1927, 42. 115-8; Phyllis Duganne, “The Amateur Rebel,” *LHJ* Feb. 1922, 6-7, 149-55.

type.”⁵⁸ These ads voiced an outright rejection of the model of modern womanhood that consumer culture held up as being attractive and appealing. Women, too, largely rejected modern qualities, though they did so by highlighting old-fashioned values in their ads. One-quarter of the women who placed personal ads sought “refinement” and “respectability” in potential spouses and ascribed those qualities to themselves (and ten percent of men did likewise). The attitudes of these ad placers indicates that many individuals were hesitant to accept the new standards of behavior often highlighted in cultural productions.

Despite the widespread criticism of the new morals, there *were* examples of modern marriage among the many visions of matrimony presented in the ads. Equality between husband and wife was desired by some – or, at the least, lip service was paid to the ideal. Both men and women advertised for spouses with whom they wanted to “go 50-50.” Others elaborated upon this vision, such as the woman who described herself as “willing and capable of carrying her end of the yoke, would be a real helpmate and companion for some good man.” Ad placers also sought out spouses to whom they could relate and with whom they could have fun, as represented by the phrase “a real pal,” which was used by many including “a widow, middle age and of pleasing personality; lonely and desire the companionship of a man, a regular pal, willing to go 50-50 and make life worth living” and a man who “would like to meet young lady... who would be a real pal.” Some ad placers also looked to marriage as a source of personal fulfillment and happiness, including a widow looking for gentleman “with home or means, mutual happiness and matrimony” and a “gentleman of 60 looking for a companion. I do not

⁵⁸ *Denver Post*, Feb. 15, 1920, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post*, Mar. 27, 1921, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* June 12, 1921, want ad sec., 1; *Spokesman Review*, Jan. 14, 1923, C5; *Denver Post*, Feb. 4, 1923, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Mar. 20, 1927, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post*, Jan. 1, 1928, want ad sec., 1.

want money. I want someone to make me happy.” Finally, a few individuals enumerated both their own personal qualities and the qualities they sought in an attempt to achieve a marriage that would be as fulfilling as proponents of modern marriage claimed it should be: “Woman past 40, alone and lonely, teacher by profession, college education, reasonable liberal views, sane sense of values, sense of humor, wishes acquaintance of man in like circumstances. Feels she has ability to be ideal companion, pal, wife and home maker to man looking for the above qualities in a wife”; “Lonely businessman has good habits, appearance, health, morals, nice home and car; like kindness, home, travel, the better things of life; would marry lady of similar tastes.”⁵⁹ The idea that one’s spouse should have “similar tastes,” which would gain currency in personal ads placed in the decades to come, could be one element of seeking out the compatibility required by modern marriage, and perhaps in these few cases, it was. For the most part, however, ad placers who desired a mate with similar qualities typically focused on those qualities considered important in the older model of marriage, like religion (Catholics, Jews, and Christian Scientists all advertised for spouses within their religion) or ethnicity (German, Scandinavian, Italian, Dutch, Polish, and Slav). Perhaps the single most oft-referenced constellation of shared qualities was the afore-mentioned “respectability” and “refinement,” along with “sincerity” – all characteristics associated with the waning Victorian model of marriage rather than with the sensual excitement of the new manners and morals. And for all the emphasis in the magazines on the importance of romantic

⁵⁹ *Denver Post*, July 9, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Spokesman Review*, March 12, 1922, C6; *Spokesman Review*, Sept. 10, 1922, C7; *Denver Post*, Jan. 11, 1925, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post*, Apr. 4, 1920, want ad sec., 2; *Spokesman Review*, Sept. 10, 1922, C7; *Spokesman Review*, Jan. 14, 1923, C5; *Denver Post*, Apr. 2, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* May 26, 1929, sec. 4, 1; *Denver Post*, Nov. 7, 1926, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* May 19, 1929, sec. 4, 1.

love, almost no ad placers mentioned it. Only two women described themselves as “loving,” while not a single woman voiced a desire for a loving husband. An equally small percentage of men included mention of love in their ads; a few described themselves as loving, a few sought a loving wife, and one man “want[ed] to marry my equal for love and companionship.”⁶⁰

Most ads, rather than focusing on the personal and emotional aspects of the marital relationship, emphasized the economic side. As in the 1890s, financial security was the single most frequently mentioned factor in ad placers’ searches for a spouse, and again *men’s* financial status was mentioned more often by ad placers of both sexes. One-third of women sought a husband with financial stability, and one-quarter of men advertised themselves as such (while 15% of men and 20% of women mentioned the woman’s financial status in their ads). In conjunction with the emphasis on men’s financial security, ad placers generally expressed a conception of marriage in which the husband was the breadwinner and the wife was the homemaker. Men frequently advertised their ability to provide for a potential wife, either explicitly or by referencing their employment, financial security, and/or home. “Is there a working girl or young widow who is tired of working and wants a good home?,” asked one man. Others described themselves as “man, 33, with home and means”; “capable of supporting the second party”; “steadily employed”; “real man will care for lady.”⁶¹ Unlike the earlier

⁶⁰ All in *Denver Post*: June 1, 1924, want ad sec., 1; Apr. 8, 1928, want ad sec., 1; June 5, 1927, want ad sec., 1; see also want ad sec., 1 of June 12, 1921, Oct. 8, 1922, May 20, 1923, Jan. 11, 1925, and Oct. 14, 1928.

⁶¹ *Denver Post* July 9, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Spokesman Review*, Nov. 16, 1924, C5; *Denver Post* Apr. 19, 1925, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Apr. 26, 1925, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* July 5, 1925, want ad sec., 1.

ads, some ads placed in the 1920s referenced specific material possessions as an indicator of financial security, a hint that the values of consumer culture were beginning to take hold. Some men included information such as “have Cadillac car”; “refined widower... has ranch, fine modern home in town”; “honest mechanic with home”; “young man with coupe”; “has 5 acre garden, fruit, chicken tract”; “widower... nice home, independent income... car.”⁶² Ads such as these underscored the belief that women sought men who could give them such things – a comfortable lifestyle, a beautiful home, access to the outside world of leisure pursuits through an automobile. And, indeed, many women who placed personal ads did express a desire to be provided for, as they looked for “an earnest, sincere man, capable of making a good living and keeping up a comfortable home”; “gentleman... must have sufficient means to ensure comfortable home”; “gentleman with home or means”; “gentleman who has nice home and would appreciate a woman that wishes to make a pleasant home.”⁶³

Concurrently, many ads focused on women’s domestic skills and inclinations, as men and women alike articulated their searches for a spouse through advertising for housekeeping services and assumed ideal wives to be home-loving. Men whose “object” was “matrimony” sometimes placed ads that, but for that final phrase, looked as though they belonged in the help wanted section: “widower with means... wants housekeeper good-natured, pleasant and homey”; “cook wanted for two men on ranch”; “housekeeper wanted that is alone, for man that has his home.” Some women likewise advertised

⁶² *Denver Post*, Apr. 18, 1920, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Mar. 27, 1921, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Oct 8, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* June 8, 1924, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Apr. 26, 1925, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Nov. 14, 1926, want ad sec., 1.

⁶³ *Denver Post*, Oct. 8, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* May 27, 1923, want ad sec., 1; *Spokesman Review*, Aug. 24, 1924, C4; *Denver Post* Oct. 25, 1925, want ad sec., 1.

themselves simultaneously as wife and housekeeper: “refined, capable woman... wants housekeeping in widower’s home... object, matrimony”; “young widow wants position as housekeeper... object matrimony.”⁶⁴ Women also emphasized their domestic qualities to potential husbands: “is there an honest man who would appreciate a true, home-loving wife”; “home girl who likes home life and would be glad to marry and make life worthwhile for workingman of good habits.” In their turn men, who assumed that women wanted nothing more than a home of their own, sought “a widow... alone and wanting a home,” a woman “wishing to meet industrious, honorable man and have a comfortable home,” and a woman “that would appreciate a good home.”⁶⁵

This version of marriage presented by the personal was in tension with that presented by the advertising and other content of popular magazines. These ads revealed the economic underpinnings of marriage, emphasizing the fact that, at a time when their opportunities for paid employment were severely limited, most women required husbands to support them financially and were expected to perform domestic duties in return for that support. Like the personal ads, representations in commercialized popular culture affirmed the breadwinner/homemaker model as the norm. However, the personal ads’ overall focus on the economic relationship between spouses, coupled with the relative lack of attention to their personal, emotional connection, stood in contrast to other aspects of the messages of consumer culture. Advertisers, magazine editors and others attempted to infuse the marital relationship with romance and excitement, and encouraged readers to look to their spouse for companionship and emotional fulfillment and to expect their

⁶⁴ *Spokesman Review*, March 5, 1922, C7; *Spokesman Review* Mar. 17, 12; *Spokesman Review*, Jan. 2, 1923, 8.; *Spokesman Review*, March 5, 1922, C7; *Spokesman Review*, Jan. 7, 1923, C5.

⁶⁵ *Denver Post*, Oct. 8, 1922, want ad sec., 1; *Denver Post* Apr. 1, 1928, want ad sec., 1; *Spokesman Review*, June 9, 1922, 12; *Spokesman Review*, Sept. 3, 1922, C7; *Spokesman Review*, Feb. 6, 1924, 10.

marriage to be their primary source of happiness. The portrayal of marriage offered by many personal ads stripped away all of the work being done by the mass cultural producers, reaffirming the primacy of the economic relationship between husband and wife. For the majority of those who placed personal ads in the 1920s, economic concerns were central to their thoughts about marriage while the desire for romance was, at most, on the periphery. Still, some individuals did voice a wish for a marital relationship that was based on compatibility, shared interests and a desire to have fun together, all elements of the new modern marriage depicted in popular culture, and others emphasized the importance of men's income as an avenue to the purchase of material things like homes and cars. The presence of these ads suggests that individuals were beginning to accept the values of consumer culture in ways they had not during the 1890s.

The incremental changes visible in personal ads from the 1920s did not reflect the more drastic changes in the format and content of popular magazines. Magazines in the twenties contained many more advertisements, which were produced using more sophisticated techniques, and the models of romantic love and marriage presented by both the ads and the rest of the content were decidedly modern. Rather, personal ads from the twenties correspond to the magazine content from the 1890s, which revealed the negotiations and struggles as the nascent consumer culture took hold. In many ways the personal ads of the two decades were similar: most ad placers explicitly sought marriage, while more men and women were concerned with financial security than any other factor. Yet the changes that did occur – such as the small numbers of ad placers who voiced a desire for compatibility and companionship, and publicly valued material possessions – hint at the broader changes that would take place in personal ads from subsequent

decades, which position ad placers' views more in line with the values of consumer culture. The personal ads of the 1920s reveal the early shifts in attitude that would result in wide scale acceptance of those values in the future.

Conclusion

All these sources – product advertisements, magazine content, and personal ads – evidenced concerns about how the values of consumer culture and ideals of modern marriage would affect individuals, though those concerns found markedly different expression in different sites. In the not so distant past, marriage had been an economic relationship in a visible and productive way, in which each spouse's labor contributed to the functioning of the household. By the early twentieth century, the simultaneous development of modern consumer culture and of modern marriage had wrought major changes on the apparent relationship between the marital relationship and the economy of the family and the nation. Within dominant cultural discourse, the economic function of spouses was largely reduced to husbands earning salaries in order to provide their wives with money to purchase the consumer goods that the household required. This economic relationship was obscured by the work of marriage – that is, the performance of romantic acts and the achievement of sexual intimacy and emotional fulfillment – which was supposed to transcend and be set apart from economic concerns. This new understanding of marriage as separate from the economy, first articulated in the 1890s and fully realized in popular culture by the 1920s, marked a major transition from previous eras. The advertisements and other content of popular magazines represented a world in which this

transition was a *fait accompli* while simultaneously, and contradictorily, emphasizing the innumerable ways in which modern marriage was dependent upon consumption. In the personal ads, however, it is clear that many individuals struggled to make sense of this new equation and that some continued to resist it, conceiving of marriage in explicitly economic or functional concerns that did not depend on consumption. The presence of such struggles and resistance in the historical record helps lay bare the work that in which commercialized popular culture, such as magazines, were engaged. The world represented in the pages of the magazines was a world in which love and romance were the primary concerns, and consumption was merely an aid to the achievement of such. In fact, as institutions such as advertising, popular magazines, and movies exercised increasing control over defining concepts such as romantic love and marriage, those concepts came to serve consumption rather than the other way around. In using promises of romantic love as the reward for consumption, advertisers attempted to harness emotional concerns – how to find a mate and achieve a happy, satisfying marriage – to economic ones – the need to keep the engines of consumer capitalism turning. The personal ads examined here suggest that, at least in the twenties, those attempts were not entirely successful.

CHAPTER THREE

“Searching for happiness”: Consumer Culture, Personal Ads, and the Quest for Compatibility in the 1950s

Introduction

In the 1950s, mainstream representations of marriage focused more on domesticity, stability, and security than on the exciting modern marriage that had dominated the cultural landscape of the 1920s. Cultural producers of the fifties depicted and promoted the breadwinner/homemaker model with new zeal after the disruptions of economic depression and wartime. The growth of the consumer economy in the postwar years meant new opportunities for promotion of the values of consumption. Indeed, mid-century advertisers were more invested than ever in linking romantic love and marriage to consumption, as the nation attempted to avoid another depression by “reconverting” its wartime production facilities to work producing consumer goods for civilians and as politicians and social commentators alike highlighted stable marriages and security within the home as key weapons in the ideological war on communism.¹ Marriage was not just a highly charged concept in 1950s America; it was also, in fact, a more common and visible presence in everyday life. During the immediate postwar period, the marriage

¹ On the growth of the postwar consumer economy, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic* (New York: Random House, 2003); on domestic containment and its relation to the Cold War, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

rate rose while the growth of the divorce rate slowed. Men and women in the fifties married at younger ages and had more children, spaced more closely together, than their predecessors, reversing (although only temporarily) dominant demographic trends of the twentieth century.² This combination of economic growth, political ideology, and demographic reality made romantic love and marriage fertile ground for advertisers and other creators of popular culture, who drew on both topics frequently as they sought to produce texts that would have mass appeal. The opening paragraph of a 1955 *True Story* article summarized widespread beliefs about the importance of marriage during this period in American society:

Marriage is the most exciting relationship that anyone can know, and even those whose marriage has been completely tragic look with pity upon the unmarried as having “never lived.” For there is nothing else in our lives that provides such endless variety and interest, and that offers so many opportunities for emotional and spiritual growth, for personal satisfaction and fulfillment.³

Across various forms of popular culture, throughout the postwar period, American men and women were told that marriage was the cornerstone to a happy life.

By the 1950s, the growth of consumer culture had resulted in the development of more forms – and the expansion of genres – of commercialized popular culture.

Accordingly, the scope of evidence in this chapter is wider, considering not just the women’s magazines that have been important sources in previous chapters but also magazines intended for both male and female readers, like the home design magazine *Better Homes & Gardens*. Publications targeted directly to African Americans were also

² Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 178.

³ Marian Randall, “Guide to Ideal Married Love,” *True Story*, March 1955, 60-61, 147-8.

a new addition to popular media since the 1920s, so *Ebony* is considered here, as well as the general interest magazine *Life*, after which *Ebony* was consciously modeled. The most important introduction to the cultural landscape was undoubtedly television, a whole new form of commercialized popular culture that would come to dominate the nation over the next several decades. Personal ads, while less visible in mainstream newspapers than they had been in earlier decades, continued to provide individuals with the opportunity to articulate their own desires. Advertisers, magazine editors, television executives, and writers for magazines and TV all made love and marriage a regular focus of their work and, in so doing, helped shape a widespread cultural perception that marriage was a crucial element of a fulfilling life, a state to which all men and women aspired. Surveys demonstrated that “fewer than one American in ten believed that an unmarried person could be happy,” and indeed, many individuals who placed personal ads during this decade articulated a desire for happiness and fulfillment that they believed would come from marriage.⁴ The presence of marriage in commercialized popular culture mirrored its presence in the real world, which is to say that it was everywhere: in magazine articles on wedding planning, bridal fashions, home-making tips, marriage advice, and family-centered home design; in the skits, songs and monologues on television variety shows; as key plot points in soap operas and as the central “situation” of several of the decade’s most popular sitcoms; and in advertisements in both media that sought to link love, marriage, happiness and consumption in the minds of readers and viewers.

⁴ Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 180.

As television expanded rapidly and took hold in American homes during the 1950s (two-thirds of the nation's homes acquired television between 1948 and 1955, and it was in 90 percent of households by the end of the decade), it quickly became an important medium for the transmission of dominant cultural values.⁵ The presence of love and marriage on the televisual landscape further attested to their importance in American culture at the time. The topics often appeared on variety shows, which featured love songs and skits about dating or married couples, as well as on popular sitcoms featuring married couples, some of whom were married in both real and televisual life, such as with the stars of *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and *I Love Lucy*.⁶ Yet even television series and serials that didn't involve the actual marriage of their stars tended to focus on marital and family relations as the primary "situation" for both comedy and drama. Other television genres also centered on marriage and family. *Do You Trust Your Wife?*, a popular mid-decade game show, was organized around the marital relationship, and will be discussed at length below. Like magazines, television was a medium that generated profits through the sale of advertising space, and it offered advertisers a powerful new way to reach consumers. While television commercials took up many of the same themes as magazine

⁵ Installation statistics in Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

⁶ See, for example *Colgate Comedy Hour*, airdates 11/12/1950, which featured Dean Martin singing "Glory of Love," Kitty Kallen singing "I Can't Give You Anything But Love Baby," and a skit in which Martin played an amorous boy visiting his girlfriend while she babysat. An episode of *Your Show of Shows* (airdate 10/20/1951) included a skit about courtship during the Victorian era, in which Sid Caesar and Imogen Coca played a prim and proper couple and poked fun at the modesty assumed to characterize that time, while *The Lux Show with Rosemary Clooney* (airdate 10/31/1957) featured several songs about love, including one in which Clooney invited her lover to "come and kiss me to show that you're glad." In one *Burns and Allen* episode, the show's sponsor, Carnation evaporated milk, extended their tagline about contented babies being fed milk from contented cows to the stars of the show, who were described as "our contented couple, Carnation's own George and Gracie" ("Gracie Gets Banned from the Bank," *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*, airdates 12/7/1950). All, Paley Center for Media archives.

ads, including the importance of love and marriage and the connection of romance to consumption, those messages likely had a different register for viewers. Television's sense of liveness and immediacy, its use of direct address, the power of the spoken word and the moving image, the mantle of cultural authority it quickly adopted, its frequent place of honor as the focal point of living rooms and dens across America: all these points of difference may have given TV's messages more weight for many individuals. At the same time, early television commercials were in general less sophisticated, likely due to the newness of the medium. Advertisers had spent half a century perfecting their techniques on the printed page, and by the fifties they had largely moved beyond the text-heavy, informational advertisements that were common around the turn of the century to ads that relied on images, colors, a few key words, hints, and suggestions. When they turned their talents to television, however, advertisers seemed to take several steps backwards and returned to straightforward informational advertising much of the time. While they worked out the best ways of expressing their messages, networks, broadcasters, and advertisers also experimented with different ways of airing commercials as they attempted to reach viewers in the most powerful and persuasive way possible. Many programs, adopting techniques from radio broadcasts, integrated "a word from our sponsor" right into the show, a practice that served to link the message of the advertiser with the content of the programming in a particularly explicit way. In these types of commercials advertisers took full advantage of all the unique attributes of the televisual medium to hawk products in a way that was impossible on the printed page.⁷

⁷ For example, an episode of *Colgate Comedy Hour* in which Peggy Lee guest-starred featured Lee singing "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" and then, immediately afterward, a song about Halo, "the shampoo that glorifies your hair." The proximity of the two performances, coupled with the observations, made by a (male) representative of the sponsor about the beauty of Lee's hair, implied that use of the product would

The cultural landscape of the 1950s was full of representations of couples in love and of happy marriages, of husbands returning home at the end of the workday to their smiling wives' embrace. More than ever before, marriage was expected to be the primary relationship in people's adult lives, providing both spouses with personal intimacy, sexual fulfillment, and emotional support. Marriage was also understood to be the basis of the consumer economy, as the breadwinner/homemaker model first introduced in the 1890s was fully elaborated and widely accepted by individual Americans. The producers of commercialized popular culture had an agenda behind their relentless depictions of wedded bliss: they sought not just to portray the happy home that was believed to be a key cultural weapon in the Cold War, but also to link the emotional experiences of romance and marriage to a desire for consumer goods. This chapter examines how those connections were made in a variety of ways across a wide range of media – through representations of weddings and romantic love; through the models of marriage presented as ideal in mainstream media; and through a close reading of one popular quiz show that took the marital relationship as its object of study – before turning to a consideration of individual desires as expressed in newspaper personal ads. African American and white representations of romantic love and marriage were largely similar, but they diverged around the portrayal of the breadwinner/homemaker model in ways that exposed different economic realities for each racial group. The personal ads surveyed, from both white and black newspapers, were in dialogue with these themes in complicated ways, at some moments reflecting them, at others challenging them, and sometimes presenting models of marriage that differed from those visible in commercialized popular culture.

not only give one beautiful hair, but would lead to romance and the exciting experience of being bewitched, bothered and bewildered. *Colgate Comedy Hour*, airdate 5/23/1954, Paley Center archives.

Weddings, consumption and romantic love

In the 1950s, advertisers and other producers of commercialized popular culture continued to develop and flesh out the powerful connections between romantic love and consumption that they had formulated in the 1920s. The upheaval of the intervening years – the lean times of economic depression and the disruption of wartime – was finally over, and mainstream America returned to normalcy with a vengeance. Advertisers had the perfect opportunity to harness the widespread cultural desire for uncomplicated comfort to a desire for the material goods that, thanks to postwar reconversion, were more readily available than ever before. Wedding imagery was a continued visible presence in commercialized popular culture, although the marriage of the fifties that it referenced tended to be characterized by domesticity, stability, and security, rather than the heady excitement of the twenties' modern marriage. The astronomical growth of the consumer economy in the postwar years was driven both by intentional business decisions, as wartime factories converted to producing consumer goods, and by the concurrent growth of the population, as Americans married younger and had more children spaced more closely together. These demographic changes made the wedding a particularly charged moment for advertisers, who took advantage of the unmistakable connection between romantic love and consumption that weddings both literalized and symbolized.

Literally, weddings were an opportunity for consumption on a scale not often experienced by middle-class America. “The \$3 Billion Wedding Business,” a 1952 *Life* cover story, showcased the magazine publishers, bridal consultants, department stores,

and wholesalers who made immense profits during “the month of the greatest emotional extravaganza of the entire year – the altar-bound parade of the June brides.” The article explained, “the wedding business operates on the assumption that the bride is caught in a ‘threefold must-buy market’ – that is, she must buy for the wedding day, for her trousseau and for her new home. Taking advantage of this, the trade spares no expense to see that the bride spares no expense.” It went on to provide a specific example of the bridal industry’s attempts to “take advantage of” the bride, explaining:

One of the great threats to arise in recent years is the short white dress which uses less material, is cheaper and can be bought in ordinary dress departments. When a bride wears a short wedding dress, she usually only has one attendant, and this means an additional slump in the sales of bridesmaids’ dresses. The disastrous short-dress trend is being fought fang and claw by the Bridal and Bridesmaids Apparel Association, which loudly insists that only long dresses are truly maidenly and that a short one really shouldn’t be worn until the second or third wedding.

This muckraking-esque perspective, coupled with advice to readers on “How to Marry on \$300,” may have given the impression that the editors of *Life* were opposed to the commercialization of love and romance represented by the wedding industry. Such an impression was contradicted, however, by the presence of several wedding-themed advertisements in the issue, including one for acetate fiber that appeared just a few pages after the article and featured photos in a similar style, asking, “Do you know why most bridal gowns are made of acetate?” Ads published in other issues also reinforced the connection between weddings, romantic love, and consumption, such as a Pepsi ad featuring an illustration of a newlywed couple embracing and smiling joyfully as they paused midway through opening a stack of wedding gifts.⁸

⁸ “The \$3 Billion Wedding Business,” *Life* June 9, 1952, 118-130; Celanese Corporation of America advertisement, *Life* June 9, 1952, 135. For other wedding-themed ads see Ansco film advertisement, *Life* June 9, 1952, 26 (photo of bride and groom embracing); Douglas Airplanes advertisement, *Life* June 9,

Symbolically, for advertisers, the wedding represented the beginning of a lifetime of consumption. An ad published by the J. Walter Thompson ad agency in the *New York Times* in January 1950 explained to potential clients that “FORTY PER CENT of all US families are NEW families since 1940!” Alongside an illustration of a bride and groom, the ad elaborated: “Yes, one marriage every 20 seconds, more than 4300 every day, 17½ million since 1940! What a challenge to business! With hundreds of unsatisfied wants, these families will have more money than ever to spend, or to save. Yet they also more than ever will need information and guidance.”⁹ Advertisers used wedding imagery to sell their services to manufacturers, and they also used it to sell products to consumers, as they sought to imbue the advertised merchandise with emotional significance by calling to mind the romance associated with the wedding day. Images of brides in white dresses and veils (with or without grooms) were used to sell all kinds of goods, many predictable, like beauty products, mouthwash, and diamond rings, and some much less so, such as Cheez-It crackers, luggage, clock radios, Cadillacs, and the most unusual of all, cemetery monuments. This ad tried to connect the “cherished memory” of the wedding day with the “cherished memories of dear ones departed,” urging consumers, “while the family is together, plan today to buy a cemetery lot and erect a permanent monument.” More typical were the facial soap ad that promised, next to an illustration of a smiling bride, that “a lovely complexion helps dreams come true!” and the mouthwash ad that paired an illustration of a handsome groom carrying his smiling bride in his arms with text

1952, 89 (“How honeymoons have changed!”); Parker 51 Pen advertisement, *Life* June 9, 1952, 102 (illustration of bride as potential gift recipient). Pepsi-Cola ad, *Life*, June 23, 1958, 70.

⁹ JWT house ad, *New York Times* 1/17/1950, J. Walter Thompson Company. Domestic Advertisements Collection, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

explaining, “exquisite she was as he carried her across the threshold, a girl with breath as sweet as the blossoms in her bridal bouquet.”¹⁰ Ads for Jergens Lotion emphasized how important marriage was for women in particular. Photographs of brides at the moment the groom slipped the ring on her finger were accompanied by statements, in the bride’s voice, like “The world began at noon” or “Time stopped – and my life began.” Use of Jergens, the ads promised, would not only enable readers to realize “every woman’s dream,” but would keep their husbands interested after the wedding day. Wives’ dual roles, as housekeeper and as sex partner, were underscored by the promise of “busy hands he admires... beautiful hands he loves.”¹¹ Through the repetitive use of wedding imagery in advertisements, advertisers encouraged consumers to think of their wedding days, and the marriages to follow, as simultaneously unique and special, requiring special preparation, and as yet another reason to purchase consumer goods, many of which were advertised in other more quotidian contexts as well (see Fig. 3.1).

The editorial content surrounding magazine advertisements frequently supported advertisers’ view of the wedding as the birth of newly minted consumers, and it revealed that the identification of women as consumers, first forged in the 1890s and elaborated upon in the decades since, was now an unquestioned element of the cultural landscape. Regular features on consumer goods for the home and housekeeping tips emphasized the domestic space of marriage and suggested that getting married was first and foremost an opportunity for consumption. The “home service” department of *True Story* published

¹⁰ Camay Soap ad, *True Story*, Feb. 1950, inside front cover; Listerine ad, *True Story*, June 1953, 3; Barre Guild Monuments advertisement, *Ebony*, Apr. 1956, 14.

¹¹ Jergens Lotion ad, *Good Housekeeping* (hereafter “*GH*”), Jan. 1949, 107; Jergens Lotion ad, *GH* May 1949, 4.

articles aimed at young wives, addressing such potential problems as “dinner on time,” and pairing those problems with solutions in the form of products, like a sandwich grill, can opener, or pressure cooker to get dinner ready quickly.¹² A monthly column in *Good Housekeeping*, “The Hope Chest – A Service for Brides,” instructed readers in the choice, purchase, and maintenance of household items such as kitchen linens, silver, refrigerators, bed linens, pillows, and electric mixers and blenders.¹³ In addition to linking marriage with the consumption of material goods, these columns also emphasized that this consumption – as well as the housework that would inevitably follow the acquisition of the goods exhibited – was the responsibility of the woman. Addressed explicitly to “brides,” the column often asserted that “the smart bride” would purchase the particular item featured and would, for example, “keep in mind serviceability as well as color scheme when she selects bed coverings for her hope chest.” The illustrations that accompanied a column on kitchen linens, meanwhile, made clear what the responsibilities of each spouse were. The first three illustrations showed a woman engaged in kitchen work, while the fourth showed a man sitting alone at a table, reading a newspaper with a smile on his face, a cup of coffee in his hand, and a plate of food on the table in front of him. While the wife consumed and then used the household goods, this series of illustrations suggested, the husband enjoyed the fruits of her labor – not just her cooking, but her careful attention to the aesthetic details of home decorating.¹⁴

¹² “We’ve Been Married One Year!”, *True Story* July 1950, 47-51.

¹³ See, for example, “Hope Chest” in *GH* May, 1949, 26-27; Feb., 1950, 26; Oct., 1949, 26; June, 1950, 26; Nov., 1950, 26-27; March, 1951, 26.

¹⁴ “The Hope Chest,” *GH* Oct. 1949, 26; May 1949, 26-27. Similarly, An article in the June 1951 issue of *True Story*, “Kitchen gifts for the bride,” likewise clarified the beneficiary of women’s housework, suggesting different sets of gifts depending on “if he likes a good cup of coffee,” “does he insist on potatoes for every dinner?,” “does he ask for fresh fruit pies?,” or “does he like that charcoal-broiled

Many advertisements likewise made a connection between consumption and an individual's emotional state. As the purest, most unadulterated vehicle for the messages of consumer culture, advertising most clearly articulated the perspective that consumption was the means to love. More than any other aspect of 1950s culture examined here, advertising showed the least change from the 1920s in terms of the representation of romantic love and marriage. Like ads from the twenties, magazine ads and television commercials suggested that the use of particular products would enable the consumer to find love and would enhance, or perhaps even create, marital happiness. Ads targeted to women made the connection between the product and romance explicit. They promised women a "happy ending" if they kept Schlitz beer in the house for their boyfriends, that they could be "everything a man ever wanted!" by wearing a Jantzen swimsuit, that "he'll love you in pink [makeup]," or that "your hair is romance." An ad titled "How to Hold a Husband" advised readers of *True Story* to "Serve him desserts glorified with Reddi-Wip... your dessert magic secret that helps to hold a husband." In ads intended for both men and women, the connection was more often implied. Such ads, for things as varied as soda, motor boats, cigarettes, and razors linked their products to romance, implicitly, through images of happy, smiling couples enjoying the product and its benefits together (see Fig. 3.2).¹⁵ Some ads in *Ebony* addressed the same issues,

flavor?" What *she* liked was apparently of little concern when it came to outfitting her kitchen. ("Kitchen Gifts for the Bride," *True Story*, June 1951, 53-5.) Other features also described women's labor in the kitchen as intended to serve the needs of men, such as the article that explained "Readers know that HE LOVES STEW! Beef, lamb, veal – or any combination of them – will make a stew that is guaranteed to please the man of the house on any cold winter day." ("Readers know that He Loves Stew," *True Story*, Feb. 1956, 76.) Katherine Parkin writes extensively about advertising's message that women should demonstrate their love for their families through the preparation and service of food in *Food Is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Schlitz ad, *Life*, Feb. 5, 1951, 36; Jantzen ad, *Life*, June 19, 1950; Cutex ad, *True Story*, June 1953, 31; White Rain Shampoo ad, *True Story*, June 1954, 19. Coca-Cola ad, *Life*, June 20, 1955, outside back

performing a similar function and promoting the same message as their counterparts in white magazines: use of the advertised product would aid the reader's quest to find happiness, romance, and true love (by freshening her breath, eliminating underarm perspiration odor, providing her date's favorite kind of beer). "Maybe YOU are to blame!," warned a Lysol ad. "A peck-on-the-cheek from a distant husband is a mighty poor substitute for the warmth a loving wife as a right to expect. But – *do* you have this right? Have you been really careful about personal daintiness, lately? It's a shame to let neglect spoil your married happiness."¹⁶



Fig. 3.1: Wedding imagery (Listerine ad, *True Story* 1953)



Fig. 3.2: Association of product with romance (Coca-Cola ad, *Life* 1955)

cover; Evinrude Boats ad, *Life*, Oct. 1, 1956, 16; Lucky Strike ad, *Life*, June 9, 1958, outside back cover; Schick ad, *Life*, Dec. 14, 1959, 13. Reddi-Wip advertisement, *True Story*, Oct. 1951, 127.

¹⁶ See, for example, Colgate ad, *Ebony*, May 1953, 4; Ipana Toothpaste ad, *Ebony*, June 1954, 14; Mum deodorant ad, *Ebony*, June 1952, 11. Lysol ad, *Ebony*, May 1953, 91.

Television commercials also connected proper consumption to happy marriages, though usually much less explicitly, as evidenced by commercials that aired during daytime serials. Sandy Flitterman notes that the commercials which air during soap operas – typically for products intended to help women with their housekeeping labor – offer simple solutions, as counterposed to the complicated family dramas and romantic entanglements between which they are inserted, a juxtaposition that makes the reassuring commercials even more effective. A glance at some soaps that aired throughout the 1950s shows that this has held true since television’s beginnings (and is, of course, a holdover from the soap companies’ sponsorship of daytime serials on radio beginning in the 1930s). In a 1952 episode of *Search for Tomorrow*, a mother-in-law’s scheming to break up her son’s marriage was interrupted by a Spic and Span commercial in which a husband, helping his wife in the kitchen, reached for a box labeled “soap” to clean the linoleum. “Oh, no, not soap, dear!,” his wife exclaimed. “This new Spic and Span is heaps better for cleaning linoleum.” An apparently disastrous potential problem between spouses was thus easily – and quickly – resolved, unlike the problem faced by the husband and wife on the soap opera.¹⁷

In addition to presenting products as an aid to happiness, advertisers also associated their products with romantic love by presenting them as stand-ins for consumers’ (usually women’s) love objects. “In Love With That Wonderful Tide!” exclaimed a laundry detergent ad, illustrating the concept with a picture of a smiling woman gazing adoringly at the box of Tide in her embrace, complete with drawn-in

¹⁷ Sandy Flitterman, “The Real Soap Operas: TV Commercials,” in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches – An Anthology* (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1983); Spic and Span ad, aired during *Search for Tomorrow*, airdate 2/15/1952, Paley Center archives.

hearts over her head, while an ad for “Lovable” bras featured an illustration of a smiling woman announcing, “I’m in love with a wonderful bra!” A luggage ad drew on the language associated with weddings to imbue its suitcases with romance, as a “smart bride” declared “*I do* want Samsonite!” “No wonder brides fall in love with Samsonite!” read the accompanying text.¹⁸ Sometimes, advertisements both presented the product as the love object and featured images of couples in love. A Schlitz campaign from the middle of the decade announced to magazine readers that “If you like beer, You’ll *Love* Schlitz,” pairing the sentiment with photographs of couples, beer in hand, looking into each other’s eyes and smiling, thereby suggesting that the way a man or woman felt about his/her beloved would be similar to the way they felt about their beer of choice – if, of course, that beer was Schlitz. Schlitz’s slogan “No harsh bitterness – Just the *kiss* of the hops” further conflated romantic behavior (kissing) with the enjoyment of a beverage. “You love lipstick that *really* lasts!” read the headline of one ad, accompanied by a photograph of a smiling woman in the embrace of an adoring man. And the headline of a Philip Morris ad, “Loved for gentleness,” applied both to the woman in the illustration, being zipped into her evening gown by her tuxedo-clad husband, and to the cigarette in her hand. These ads hinted at a connection between the love a consumer felt for a product and the love that the product would inspire between mates (see Fig. 3.3).¹⁹

¹⁸ Tide advertisement, *True Story*, Feb. 1950; Lovable bra advertisement, *True Story*, Oct. 1951, 101 – see also Lady Love slips ad, *Ebony*, June 1951, 67: “You’ll fall in love with Lady Love.” Samsonite ad, *True Story* June 1953, inside back cover.

¹⁹ Schlitz advertisements, *Life*, Aug. 10, 1953, 71 and Aug. 24, 1953, inside back cover; Cutex advertisement, *True Story*, Feb. 1955, 14; Philip Morris advertisement, *True Story*, Feb. 1956, 21.



Fig 3.3: Products as love object (Tide ad, *True Story* 1950) and as symbol of love between partners (Philip Morris ad, *True Story* 1956)

Representations of marriage

The dominant model of marriage articulated in the commercialized popular culture of the 1950s had two distinct components, one functional and the other emotional. Functionally, an ideal marriage was one in which the husband went to work to earn the money required to support his family, while his wife stayed home to shop for consumer goods, attend to the housekeeping duties, and raise the children.²⁰ This model resembled the version of marriage first promoted by Edward Bok's *Ladies' Home Journal* in the 1890s and represented widely in 1920s popular culture. In the 1950s, however, it took on a different register. In the earlier decades, cultural producers encouraged individuals to

²⁰ For further discussion of this model, see Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, 229-244.

identify as consumers, constructing a model of marriage in which husbands and wives demonstrated their love for each other by performing their consumption-related duties (for men, earning the income they then permitted their wives to spend; for women, purchasing the consumer goods required to keep house for their husbands). By the fifties, the representations of marriage in commercialized popular culture served a different purpose, encouraging individuals to return to what was figured as the “normal” marital arrangement after the major disruptions of economic depression (which limited men’s ability to be the breadwinner) and wartime (which temporarily allowed women many more possibilities in terms of acceptable paid work outside the home and identification as something other than wife). The contexts within which earlier models of marriage and those of the 1950s occurred were also quite different: despite the insistence in 1950s media that women should only find fulfillment through full-time wife- and motherhood and homemaking, married women’s participation in the labor force was actually growing at nearly double the rate during this time as it had in the earlier decades.²¹ In the face of this reality, cultural producers continued to promote the “traditional” breadwinner/homemaker arrangement, which scholars such as Elaine Tyler May have linked to Cold War beliefs that saw the stability of the nation abroad as directly dependent on American domestic stability. Popular depictions of this arrangement, which found widespread representation in a variety of texts addressing different groups of consumers, including television programming, magazines, and advertising, typically figured the husband in a dominant position relative to his wife. For the most part, these

²¹ The growth rate of married women’s participation in the labor force was 6.9% between 1890 and 1940, compared with 15.8% between 1940 and 1970. Susan Rimby Leighow, “An ‘Obligation to Participate’: Married Nurses’ Labor Force Participation in the 1950s,” in Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 38.

media presented a gendered division of labor and an uneven distribution of power within marriage as normative.

However, this model was complicated by the periodic portrayal of an alternate vision of marriage emphasizing its emotional component, which was characterized by personal compatibility and physical and spiritual intimacy. This perspective was found most frequently in women's magazines, which sought to educate women about the importance of the emotional connection with their husbands and offered advice about how to achieve such a marriage through diligent attention and conscious work. The underlying assumption here was, as it had been in the 1890s and 1920s, that women needed marriage more than men, and were thus responsible for shouldering the bulk of the emotional labor in addition to their domestic work. Historian Kristin Celello argues the belief that marriage requires work, which became increasingly common over the course of the twentieth century, originated in part from a widespread cultural fear of divorce. This fear was particularly powerful during the 1950s, when the importance of stability and conformity was a paramount concern. Just as the portrayal of wife as homemaker ignored the reality of married women's paid employment, the attention given to emotional labor and its role in "saving" marriages from divorce ignored the reality that nearly one in four marriages ended in divorce during the 1950s.²² While it did not necessarily displace the breadwinner/homemaker model, the emphasis on personal compatibility allowed for a model of marriage in which the emotional needs of both spouses were viewed as important.

²² Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). 1950s divorce rates, page 7.

A variety of television programs represented the breadwinner/homemaker model of marriage, reinforcing the unequal division of power between spouses at the same time. In *The Honeymooners*, Ralph Kramden's frequent angry, over-the-top outbursts toward his wife Alice figured him as the spouse in control. After one such incident, however, when he demanded that she acquiesce to his wish to spend their savings on a summer cottage, Alice's power, at least in the domestic arena, was reestablished when he meekly asked her, "Can I have my dinner now?"²³ Family sitcoms like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* offered a similar model of marriage, minus the anger. Harriet Nelson, Margaret Anderson, and June Cleaver all appeared perfectly content in their roles as perfect housewives, doting mothers, and affectionate spouses. While the division of labor between spouses was a largely unexamined backdrop to the narrative activity of the family sitcoms, it was a central concern of *I Love Lucy*. Lucy's constant attempts to break into show business (usually by breaking into Ricky's nightclub act) spoke to a worry that middle-class women might not accept unquestioningly the domestic duties which, after the upheaval of wartime, were reemphasized as their proper role. However, Lucy's challenges to Ricky/domesticity were never fully enacted or rewarded. Not only did she never succeed in becoming a star, but when forced to make a choice, she always chose marriage over pursuing her own dreams.²⁴

²³ *The Jackie Gleason Show*, airdates 10/2/1954 and 1/23/1954, Paley Center archives. This type of situation – the infantile husband versus the patient wife – was not uncommon in the slapstick-type sitcoms, and does suggest some anxiety around traditional gender roles, which were more complicated (both on the television screen and, likely, in real life marriages) than a simple binary of dominant husband/subservient wife.

²⁴ Mary Beth Haralovich notes that while urban sitcoms like *Lucy* and *The Honeymooners* focused on their central comic figures, the "growing family" sitcoms "shifted the source of comedy to the ensemble of the nuclear family as it realigned the roles within the family," naturalizing that realignment through use of a

Magazines that focused on the home represented women's location in the domestic space as natural, while at the same time revealing the vast scope of the labor she was expected to perform. Even *Better Homes & Gardens*, which ostensibly sought to make home improvement and home design a shared activity between spouses, ultimately marked most of the interior of the home as women's domain, while men were relegated to their woodshops, barbecues, and lawnmowers, pursuing active tasks on the fringes of domesticity. This separation was a direct result of the magazine's assumption that the families of its readers resembled, as one article put it, the "traditional" family that comprised "one of the basics... of our American way of life[:] with Father earning the living, Mother supervising the home, and the children enjoying a happy childhood."²⁵ As a typical women's magazine, *Good Housekeeping* regularly focused on the many responsibilities of women in "keeping house," providing instruction in how to accomplish these various tasks successfully. Every issue included recipes, shopping and housekeeping tips, party plans, and features on household items (as well as advertisements for the same or similar goods). With new suggestions for ways to be a better housekeeper and hostess appearing each month, *Good Housekeeping* gave the impression that, truly, a woman's work was never done, though her domestic responsibilities were often disavowed as labor and cast instead as romantic seduction or the expression of love.

Magazine advertisements also underscored the work expected of housewives.

Canned corn was billed as "quite a dish to set before a husband," while an ad for tapioca

realistic mise-en-scène. Haralovich, "Sit-coms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, eds., *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 110-141.

²⁵ Ann Stone Schoor, "Mothers are needed at home!," *Better Homes & Gardens* July 1953, 6.

pudding included a recipe for a strawberry sundae labeled a “husband-dazzler.” This ad implied that dazzling husbands was not optional for wives, but rather one of their marital responsibilities; a photo of a bride and groom that appeared at the top of the advertisement was captioned “When a girl gets married, she wants to be a dream cook that her husband can marvel at, brag about.” An ad for Trushay lotion, titled “For every woman who leads a double life,” likewise addressed itself to married women. This advertisement was a perfect visual representation of the dual roles of the 1950s wife. A photograph showed a woman split down the middle. On the left side of the picture, she was in a kitchen, dressed in a housedress and apron, washing dishes in a sink with one hand. On the right side, she was in an elegant living room, dressed in an evening gown, hand demurely but suggestively resting on her breast, and a man in a tuxedo was visible behind her, looking at her approvingly. “DEPENDABLE YOU!,” read the caption under the left half, “Dishes washed shiny-bright, undies dunked every night! *You* do it all – and *now* with never a fear of rough, red hands.” Under the right half, the caption proclaimed, “DELECTABLE YOU! His queen of hearts – your hands so creamy smooth – protected by Trushay.” While the expectation that they be both accomplished at housework (dependable) *and* sexually attractive (delectable) was likely difficult for many wives to live up to, this ad simultaneously acknowledged that difficulty and negated it through the presentation of an unrealistic solution.²⁶ Like magazine ads, TV commercials also emphasized women’s responsibility in the arena of housework, and made clear that their

²⁶ Niblets canned corn ad, *GH* May 1949, 4; Minute Tapioca ad, *GH* June 1950, 163; Trushay Lotion ad, *GH* Nov. 1950, 123. On advertisers’ decision to emphasize the homemaker role, represent a gendered division of labor in the kitchen, and encourage women to believe that their choice of prepared foods would demonstrate their love to their families, see Katherine Parkin, *Food Is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

husbands were to benefit directly from their labor, thus redefining that labor from “work” to, instead, a woman’s contribution to marital pleasure. “Believe me, Tom didn’t always look so happy when he was eating my fried chicken,” explained a woman in a Crisco ad. “He used to say my fried foods tasted greasy... Then I changed to Crisco, and what a difference!”²⁷ Advertisements promised women that choosing the right products would enable them to fulfill their responsibilities of cooking and cleaning and yet remain beautiful while doing so, thereby securing their place in their husbands’ hearts.

Women’s magazines suggested that wives’ responsibilities were not limited to housework, however; many also revolved around the maintenance of the marital relationship. In a regular column purporting to be the “Monthly Guide to a Reasonably Happy Marriage,” *Good Housekeeping* readers were given suggestions that made visible the subtle and unseen work they were expected to put into making their relationships succeed and in putting their husbands before themselves. To cultivate intimacy, wives were advised to read newspapers and talk with neighbors about local politics in order to have something to discuss at dinner. For wives who found themselves wondering if they were falling out of love, the author suggested that they spend less time thinking about themselves and instead “do something special for your man, not because you love him particularly at the moment but because he’s human, because he has worked for you for years, because he too has had to give up a lot of self.” Women were also expected to help their husbands succeed in the workplace; they were encouraged to monitor their husbands’ choice of clothing styles, to teach them to tell positive stories about others, and to instruct them to drink without boasting about it, all in an attempt to mold a man who

²⁷ Crisco commercial, aired in *The Guiding Light*, airdate 7/10/1952, Paley Center archives; Stopette deodorant commercial, aired in *The Guiding Light*, airdate 7/10/1952, Paley Center archives.

would be “able to hold his own among his smooth and dashing masculine colleagues.”²⁸

True Story likewise emphasized women’s role in ensuring marital harmony, which frequently meant taking a backseat to their husbands’ needs. A feature on “How to Live Happily Ever After” informed women considering marriage that, in the case of conflicts, they should always adapt to their husbands’ points of view. The author of *True Story*’s advice column repeatedly counseled women who were worried about their husbands’ infidelities to pay less attention to their housework and children so that they could “plan unexpected, exciting diversions... entertain at home... share interests... [and] keep looking attractive,” advice that was echoed in a cautionary article about why men leave their wives, which also instructed readers to praise their husbands and to avoid contradicting them in public.²⁹ In a multitude of ways, women’s magazines incorporated wives’ emotional work into the breadwinner/homemaker model of marriage.

The primacy of this model was reinforced in publications for both white and black readers, but with variations that exposed one of the few major differences between white and black representations of marriage. The breadwinner/homemaker relationship was on display in a variety of magazine features, usually as an unexamined facet of the story’s focus, but some stories in black publications called into question the relevance of that model to readers’ lives. A *Life* article on the marriage of the Japanese Emperor’s daughter to a commoner included a description of the bride’s conversation with the press.

²⁸ Samuel Grafton, “Man Talk,” *GH* Feb. 1953, 207; May, 1953, 44, 199-200; Sept. 1953, 44, 143-144; June 1954, 42.

²⁹ Dan Senseney, “How to Live Happily Ever After,” *True Story*, June 1950, 45. Mrs. Helen Willman, “What Would You Do?,” *TS* Oct. 1951, 10; see also July 1950, 13; Feb. 1953, 12. Jules Archer, “Why Husbands Leave Home,” *TS* Feb. 1953, 55 (“If you want a loyal, devoted husband, build up his ego. Make him feel appreciated at home. Praise his good points and accomplishments to friends, relatives, and your children. Don’t contradict him in public. Smile at those old jokes of his you’ve heard fifty times. Prove to him that you’re *proud* to be his wife!”).

“When asked whether she could make ends meet on her husband’s salary, the princess confidently replied, ‘Ah, yes.’” A *True Story* editorial directed readers to “spend your money and he’ll keep his job!,” in an effort to ward off a post-war economic recession by encouraging consumption.³⁰ Although the specific concerns of these two scenarios differed – the Japanese wife’s consumption was restricted by her husband’s relatively meager income, while the American wife was encouraged to buy more – both were structured by the same unquestioned assumption: that the husband earned the money, while the wife used his income to purchase the goods the family needed. *Ebony*’s celebrity profiles also showcased the breadwinner/homemaker model. An article on Harry Belafonte’s second marriage, for example, included a photo of Belafonte seated at the kitchen table being served by his wife, with a caption explaining that she “takes pride in her home and cooking.” Sammy Davis, Jr. described the house he owned, to which he hoped to someday bring a wife, as “a woman’s home,” explaining that he wouldn’t want his wife to travel with him because “I would like for [her] to keep it for me.”³¹ Yet the comments of boxer Ezzard Charles, in the article “What Men Notice About Women,” revealed important differences between the models of marriage presented as ideal for white and black Americans. Charles declared, “The most important thing of all is that she must not be entirely dependent on me. I’d like her to be able to do something in case anything should happen to me. In other words, she should be qualified to work, if necessary.”³² In white media, the breadwinner/homemaker model was dominant,

³⁰ “Democratic Nuptials,” *Life* June 5, 1950, 28; Editorial, “Spend your money and he’ll keep his job,” *True Story* June 1954, 128.

³¹ Harry Belafonte, “Why I Married Julie,” *Ebony* July 1957, 90-95; Sammy Davis, Jr., “I Don’t Want to Get Married,” *Ebony* Feb. 1956, 104-10.

³² “What Men Notice About Women,” *Ebony*, Jan. 1950, 34-6.

whether or not it was reflective of actual experience. Though many married women worked outside of the home during the 1950s, this was not reflected in the popular culture examined here – not in middle-class magazines, not in working-class magazines, not on television. Indeed, magazine articles sought to dissuade women from working, warning them that “there is a definite correlation between juvenile delinquency and working mothers” and pointing out that “because of taxes and extra costs, working wives often contribute much less than they realize to the family bank roll. Some wives are even paying to work!”³³ For black Americans, however, for whom two incomes were more frequently a necessity due to racially-based income disparities, a marriage in which a wife worked outside the home was sometimes presented in a positive light, as in the case of Charles’s comments.

The allowance for working wives was not the only difference between black and white models of marriage. While mainstream (white) media did not have to be conscious of race – their whiteness was assumed, normalized, taken for granted – *Ebony*, with its mission to present black life to its readers, could not ignore it. Race was front and center in nearly all of the magazine’s editorial features (if not its advertising, much of which was race-specific but some of which featured whites), and articles on love, marriage, or sexuality were no exception. Discussions of marriage in *Ebony* frequently revolved around the issue of interracial marriage, a concern that was entirely absent from the pages of white periodicals. Readers’ responses to an article on NAACP president Walter White’s marriage to Poppy Cannon, a white woman, illustrated the range of opinions on the topic within the African American community. While some praised the profile,

³³ Ann Stone Schorr, “Mothers are needed at home!,” *BH&G* July 1953, 6; Charlotte Montgomery, “Can Working Wives Make it Pay?,” *BH&G* Nov. 1957, 68.

others argued, “the idea of intermarriage between the races is still repugnant to many persons all over the world, and such material can only serve to intensify already-existing demands for segregation and more segregation.” While this man’s objection was to the potential political impact of raising the topic, another reader, from New York, worried about the personal impact of such marriages which, he argued, “mean more racial battles for the couple, more malevolent interference with the couple’s personal life, and calls for more caution thus curtailing still further the concerned Negro’s freedom of movement.” Other articles throughout the decade continued to reflect the importance of the issue to the African American community, including a profile of an African king who was exiled by the colonial British government for marrying a white British woman; an article about “Aryan” men and women in postwar Germany who sought African American spouses; the first-person account of a former Ziegfeld Follies star who married a black doctor, thereby ruining her career and ultimately her life; black singer Pearl Bailey’s account of her marriage to white musician Louis Bellson; and a piece about interracial marriages among college students.³⁴

In 1957 Harry Belafonte explained “Why I Married Julie” by focusing on the personal connection he shared with his white wife and minimizing their racial differences and the potential political impact of their decision to marry. “A man has a great need for love and the presence of an understanding woman in his life if he is to find happiness and fulfill himself. That is why I married Julie Robinson... We didn’t marry to prove a social

³⁴ “Famous Negroes Who Married Whites,” *Ebony*, Dec. 1949, 20-31; “Letters,” *Ebony*, Feb. 1950, 10-11; Seretse Khama, “Why I Gave Up My Throne for Love,” *Ebony*, June 1951, 32-43; “Wanted: Negro Husbands and Wives,” *Ebony*, Mar. 1951, 65-9; Helen Lee Worthing, “Hollywood’s Most Tragic Marriage,” *Ebony* Feb. 1952, 26-36; Pearl Bailey, “This Time It’s Love,” *Ebony*, May 1953, 122-8; “Interracial College Marriages,” *Ebony*, July 1953, 89-94. See also “English Bride in African Home,” *Ebony*, Aug. 1955, 29-34; “German Mail Order Bride,” *Ebony*, June 1953, 62-6; “Mexico’s Interracial Movie,” *Ebony*, Feb. 1950, 48-50.

point, we did it for love.” The editors countered Belafonte’s insistence that his marriage was a private affair of the heart, not a public action with political significance, by including a sidebar titled “Prominent Negro Leaders Answer Question: Does Interracial Marriage Hinder Integration?” Yet the general consensus of those answering the question (including civil rights leaders, religious leaders, and musicians, actors, and other celebrities) supported Belafonte’s position; many agreed with him that, in the words of Sammy Davis Jr., “marriage, whether interracial or not, is strictly a private matter that should concern only the two parties involved.” Most also were in agreement with each other that intermarriage between blacks and whites would not harm the process of integration. In a subsequent issue of *Ebony*, Martin Luther King, Jr. deemphasized any larger social or political significance of intermarriage, stating, “in the final analysis, marriage is a mutual agreement between two individuals. It should be based on similar interests, abiding faith and genuine love.”³⁵ Throughout the decade, *Ebony*’s features on interracial marriage repeatedly described the tension between political import and cultural significance, on the one hand, and personal compatibility, romantic connection, and true love, on the other.³⁶

The importance of personal compatibility to marital happiness began receiving increased attention during the 1950s. By this time the dominant model of marriage portrayed in popular culture was more complex, on an emotional level, than the “modern marriage” of the 1920s. Spousal love, in the twenties, was a largely unexamined aspect

³⁵ Harry Belafonte, “Why I Married Julie,” *Ebony* July 1957, 90-95; Rev. Martin Luther King, “Advice for Living,” *Ebony* June 1958, 118-19.

³⁶ Similar attempts to minimize the political import of interracial unions were made in mainstream white culture as well. Alex Lubin argues that by “framing interracial romance and sexuality as matters of private choice and not as rights to be demanded in the public sphere, mainstream American culture limited the kind of political transformation interracial intimacy could engender.” Lubin, *Romance and Rights: The Politics of Interracial Intimacy, 1945-1954* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2005), xi.

of marriage. While seen as a necessary component, the specifics of that love were seldom explored or explained, at least in the widely-read texts examined by this study. In the fifties, in contrast, magazines began to elaborate upon an ideal of marital love to which brides and grooms, wives and husbands, should aspire. In particular, this ideal distinguished the shallow, superficial emotions of the “love at first sight” variety from a supposedly more meaningful love based on personal compatibility. An article published in *True Story*, promoting an engagement period of at least six months to allow the engaged couple to discover if they were truly well matched, explained to readers that, during a lengthy engagement, “you’ll find out for sure if it *is* love – deep and understanding and mature love – instead of a blind kind of love.” The article defined the ideal love as selfless devotion and cautioned readers against marrying without “real love,” without which a marriage could not survive. However, the engaged girl was warned that only she could know if she were truly in love: “You must search your own heart for the answer.” Elsewhere, the magazine defined “tender love,” as opposed to “sexual love”: “love is compassion, love is consideration, love is an attunement so complete that husband and wife can sense each other’s moods, feelings, wishes.” An article in *Better Homes & Gardens* likewise commented, “a good marriage is one in which personal and mutual satisfaction become almost indistinguishable.”³⁷ Over and over again, articles such as these encouraged women (and, to a lesser degree, men) to believe that a satisfactory marriage was one characterized by emotional closeness between spouses.

³⁷ “Love Before Marriage: Rules for Engaged Couples,” *True Story* June 1955, 55-6, 77-8; Flora Rheta Schreiber, “Woman’s Deepest Needs: What All Wives Should Demand,” *True Story*, Feb. 1956, 56-9, 66-9. Allan Fromme, “How to Hold on to a Happy Marriage,” *BH&G* Aug. 1950, 12-16, 120-122.

Nonfiction articles as well as some confessional-style features on marriage put forth the perspective that, in the words of one such feature, “love isn’t enough. A wedding isn’t a guarantee you’ll live happily ever after. A wedding, with real love, is just an *opportunity* to be happy.” Such stories emphasized repeatedly that love was “the only real basis for successful marriage – the only true ‘reason for it.’”³⁸ A two-part series, “What I Hate About My Wife” and “What I Hate About My Husband,” summarized the contents of letters the magazine had solicited from men and women about the most common complaints they had about their spouses. The author of the second ended with an observation about the give-and-take required of a successful marriage:

He has gripes about me, no doubt, as I have about him. But, I’ll tell you this: We have one marriage in a million, and this house constantly rings with laughter. Who wants to live with someone who is perfect? We enjoy our fights because the making-up is sweeter. The children sense how close we are, and they are closer to one another... He would die if he had to eat his own cooking; he would look like a tramp if he did his own laundry. He’d lose his job if he didn’t have me for an alarm clock. Without me, he’d live on coffee, cigarettes, and an occasional hamburger. But what would I be without him? He is my reason for everything. I dress for him and no one else. I cook for him and pamper him something awful. I’m happy, because he makes me that way. And, when I’m sad or just plain mad, he’s usually the cause of that, too. My husband’s a mess, but I’m lucky to have him. And maybe I’m a mess, too, but he’s lucky to have me. It’s really as simple as that.³⁹

For all the lip service paid elsewhere to family togetherness, features such as this one argued convincingly that the love between spouses was the primary attachment in the nuclear family.

³⁸ “The Truth About the First Year,” *True Story*, June 1951, 44, 118.

³⁹ “What I Hate About My Husband,” *True Story*, Aug, 1958, 52-3, 112-14.

Ebony's editorial features did not emphasize the importance of compatibility in marriage in the same way that women's magazines with a primarily white readership did, but several features – besides those on interracial marriage – suggested that making lasting connections with a potential mate was also of concern to readers. In the January 1950 issue, *Ebony* published several letters from readers, in response to a previously published article on "Eligible Men," that revealed concerns from both sexes about how to find a good mate. A. Edmond Singleton of Los Angeles commiserated with the men profiled, complaining, "I just can't find a worthwhile girl friend; goldiggers and barflies are all I am able to meet. I am a disgusted man." In her letter, Ernestine Garnett of New York City illustrated the difficulties many women likewise experienced in looking for a husband. She named four of the men who had been profiled in the original article, and explained that "I have been married before but it just wasn't a go. I am hoping my second one will be a much happier one.... I hope that I am eligible for one of them.... I want most of all a companion. Do you think you can help me out?" In 1954, another *Ebony* reader wrote in to explain how the magazine had made her "one of the most happy girls alive" – her interest in a fabric designer profiled in the May 1952 issue led to their introduction through mutual friends. "We have been married now since October [1953]," she wrote, "and I know if I hadn't seen him first in EBONY all this happiness would not be mine." Celebrity profiles likewise stressed the role of compatibility in romance and the importance of love as an emotional component of successful marriage. Among the prominent African American men interviewed for the piece "What Men Notice About Women," civil rights leader Lester B. Granger mentioned "intelligence and a sense of humor," while actor Canada Lee was concerned with "whether she is able to provide

exciting intellectual stimulation.” Wrote Cab Calloway and his wife, “our life together is proof that a marriage can survive wholly on love, for if ever a marriage has been tried, ours has. That we have a happy life and a happy home, vindicates our faith in love and the rewards that come when two people learn its real meaning.”⁴⁰ While the breadwinner/homemaker model still received the most attention during the 1950s, features such as these in *Ebony* and in women’s magazines indicate that a belief in the importance of personal compatibility to marital happiness was gaining in popularity.

Do You Trust Your Wife?: Marriage and consumption on television

Quiz shows, a staple of 1950s television, were early precursors to the “unscripted” programming (that is, shows that feature individuals who are not actors) that became a major cultural force around the recent turn of the century, permitting glimpses of ordinary people onscreen. The presence of “real” people on television lent significance to these programs’ claims to represent knowledge, and added weight to dominant discourse by presenting it in individual voices, in a similar way as did the reader contributions to *True Story* discussed in the previous chapter. The popular quiz show *Do You Trust Your Wife?* took the marital relationship as its central premise and object of study and incorporated, in each half-hour primetime broadcast, most of the key aspects of mid-century representations of romantic love, marriage, and consumption discussed above. While brief moments of challenge to dominant values were visible on *Do You Trust Your Wife?*, editorial choices generally supported those values. Married couples competed against each other for monetary prizes, with the grand prize being a “trust fund” of \$100 a week

⁴⁰ “Letters,” *Ebony*, Jan. 1950, 7; “Letters,” *Ebony*, July 1954, 6. “What Men Notice About Women,” *Ebony*, Jan. 1950, 34-6. Cab and Nuffie Calloway, “Can Marriage Survive on Love Alone?,” *Ebony*, Feb. 1955, 45-50.

for one year (a not insignificant sum, the equivalent of about \$840/week in 2012 dollars). The early rounds of questioning tested a husband's knowledge of his wife, while later rounds gave him the opportunity to choose whether she or he would answer a series of increasingly difficult general-knowledge trivia questions. *Do You Trust Your Wife?* aired on CBS on Tuesday evenings from 10:30 to 11 pm from Jan. 3, 1956 through March 26, 1957, at which point its sponsor, the Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company, declined to renew its option on the program. The very fact that a quiz show would be organized around the marital relationship testified to the importance of marriage in American culture at the time and the show's popularity demonstrated the interest that television viewers took in the topic. It ranked 7th in primetime programs among viewers after its first month on the air, and at the time of its cancellation, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that producer Don Fedderson's office was "swamped with pleas to keep the show going." The show was centrally concerned with presenting a particular normative model of marriage, so much so that after a common-law couple nearly made it onto the show in its early months, all potential contestants were required to provide their marriage licenses.⁴¹ Each episode included interviews of the married couple participants by the host, Edgar Bergen, and his trio of ventriloquist dummies (proper yet hyper-critical Charlie McCarthy, simple farmer Mortimer Snerd, and man-crazy single woman, Effie Klinker), and these interviews took up many of the same themes as the magazines, advertising, and other programming already explored. In particular, *Do You Trust Your Wife?* emphasized a gendered division of labor in which the husband enjoyed a dominant position relative to

⁴¹Charles Denton, "Jimmy Dean Legend Swells." *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, Apr. 15, 1956, p. J13; Walter Ames, "Flynn to Do TV Film," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 4, 1956, p. A5; Val Adams, "Bergen's Sponsor Drops Its Option." *New York Times*, Feb. 22, 1957, p. 43. Walter Ames, "Allen Gets Good Studio Reactions." *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 26, 1957, p. A6.

his wife, highlighted the importance of domesticity and the nuclear family, and, through its very premise, linked the marital relationship and love between spouses to consumption, money, and material possessions. The show's comedic aspects, such as the use of dummies as co-hosts, certainly might have worked, at moments, to undermine the more normative aspects of the program. However, the structure of the show and its ultimate focus on competition, prize money, and winning reestablished the importance of conforming to traditional gender roles.

In the show's opening moments, the announcer framed the premise in terms that linked marriage, male dominance, and money: "Tonight a husband, by knowing whether to trust his wife, can retire for life." When asked by the host how they'd spend the money if they won, couples often had answers that included the purchase of material goods, such as the couple with eleven children who wanted to buy an automobile big enough for their entire family. A newspaper article about Erik and Helena Gude, the show's longest-winning contestants, likewise emphasized consumer goods in describing the change in their financial position: "Their car – a 1949 jalopy – is paid for. They're doubling up on their furniture payments. 'What were your plans before you won?' they were asked. 'Just to survive,' Gude answered. 'And now?' 'Oh, to live it up a little,' she says... Sometime, when the bills are paid, he would like a boat. And she would like a mink cape."⁴² Commercials for the show's sponsor also worked to link romance, love, and marriage to the consumption of material goods, particularly when viewed, as they were, in between segments of the show. One Frigidaire commercial showed a couple

⁴² Eleven children: *Do You Trust Your Wife?*, airdate Jan. 3, 1956. All episodes of *DITYW* from the Television Collection at the UCLA Film & Television Archive, Research & Study Center. "\$100 a Week Feels Dandy, Couple Says." *Los Angeles Times*, Feb., 17, 1957, p. B1.

“having fun the easy way” by using the easy features of their refrigerator to host a party. Host Bergen introduced another Frigidaire ad by saying, “We try to make lots of couples happy on this show, and now I’d like to show you something that will make every couple happy.” In both cases, the advertised product was presented as being the reason for the couple’s enjoyment and/or happiness.⁴³

After the first several months, L&M Cigarettes took over Frigidaire’s role as the show’s sponsor, at which point the commercials that aired during the show took a decided turn towards showcasing romance more explicitly. L&M’s commercials all featured couples engaged in various activities, emphasizing “modern” life, highlighting moments of romance, and linking those moments to the portraits of actual marriage which made up the program. On one episode, Bergen’s lead-in to the commercial made this connection clear. “It’s time for a little music and talk about living modern,” he said to Effie Klinker, the man-crazy dummy. “That’s my favorite topic, next to men of course,” Effie replied. “Well,” said Bergen, “watch this and you may learn how to get your man.” The ad that followed was a typical one. A man and woman in old-fashioned, Victorian-era clothing were sitting by a frozen pond, watching a similarly-dressed ice skater. In a flash, the skater’s outfit changed to contemporary-style clothing, and in another flash, the couple’s clothing followed suit. A male voice encouraged viewers to “free up! Freshen up your taste! Live modern, smoke modern! Smoke L&M!” while the couple was shown smoking together, then skating arm in arm. The final shot cut from the couple to a cigarette package. In this commercial, modern romance and excitement were linked with this particular brand of cigarette, both through the footage of the couple

⁴³ “Having fun the easy way”: Frigidaire commercial, *DYTYW*, airdate Feb. 21, 1956; “Make every couple happy”: Frigidaire commercial, *DYTYW*, airdate Jan. 10, 1956.

smoking together and, especially, through the cut from the couple skating arm-in-arm to the image of the product. Bergen's lead-in pushed the connection even further, incorporating the representations of marriage that were the focus of the show. Another L&M commercial made the connection between the product and romance even clearer. A woman and man were each sitting in their own convertible, parked side-by-side. As the woman looked through her bag, the man handed her his pack of L&Ms. She mouthed "Thank you," the announcer exclaimed, "A modern miracle happens!" and he lit her cigarette while she inhaled, exhaled, and smiled dreamily. As the voiceover went on to enumerate the features of the L&M "miracle tip," the video cut from a shot of the couple sitting together, smoking and smiling at each other, to a shot of them sitting side by side at a restaurant table, to a shot of them walking onto a dance floor and beginning to dance, to a shot of the cigarette package. The visual aspects of the commercial implied that the "modern miracle" was the romantic encounter that would result from choosing to smoke L&Ms.⁴⁴

Much as the other popular culture productions examined here, *Do You Trust Your Wife?* offered several different representations of marriage. First and foremost, every episode emphasized, multiple times, the accumulated knowledge about each other that was presumed to come with the day-to-day intimacy of married life. The first question that each couple faced was directed to the husband, and was always introduced by Bergen in the same way: "Mr. So-and-So, we'd like to see just how much you know about your wife." Husband and wife walked to blackboards separated by a curtain and labeled "His" and "Hers," then each wrote down their answer to a simple question, such as what high

⁴⁴ L&M cigarette commercials: ice skating, *DYTYW*, airdates Jan. 29, 1957; convertibles: *DYTYW*, airdates Jan. 15, 1957.

school the wife graduated from, her favorite (male) actor, her favorite ice cream flavor, her favorite dog breed, her stocking size, whether or not she was superstitious, or her waist size.⁴⁵ In almost every instance, the husband demonstrated that he knew his wife well by providing the same answer as she, and the only knowledge that was deemed important was the knowledge that a husband possessed about his wife. In this way, the show affirmed the dominance of the husband and his mastery over his wife. The topics of the questions attempted to assert husbands' control over the domestic arena; that this was notable is made clear by a newspaper item that stated, "The questions and answers on CBS-TVs *Do You Trust Your Wife?* program, starring Edgar Bergen, reveal that most husbands know more about their wives than is generally believed."⁴⁶

In some instances, the interviews that began each segment also offered a model of compatibility between spouses, as in the case of Mike Wendt, chief animal keeper at the Los Angeles Zoo, and his wife Thelma. When Bergen asked Mrs. Wendt what it was like being married to a zookeeper, she replied, "it's really wonderful. I think after 31 years of married life I can say that. You see, I love animals too." She described their courtship: "Oh, it was very romantic. He would call for me on his motorcycle and we would go out to the countryside, watch various animals and study their habits, chase snakes and lizards." "Mike, you really married the right woman," Bergen observed. Mike agreed, "She really loves animals." Their shared interest in animals was presented as the reason they were "right" for each other. Mrs. Arthur Hamilton, married just eight months, likewise emphasized compatibility when she told Bergen that she liked her husband

⁴⁵ High school, favorite actor and ice cream: *DYTYW*, airdate Jan. 10, 1956; favorite dog breed and stocking size: *DYTYW*, airdate Jan. 3, 1956; superstitious: *DYTYW*, airdate Jan. 29, 1957; waist size: *DYTYW*, airdate: Feb. 21, 1956.

⁴⁶ "Find Husbands Know a Lot About Their Wives," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 29, 1956, p. W9.

because of “his personality, his sense of humor.” The compatibility of other couples was evident in the fact that they worked together, such as Mr. and Mrs. William Hall, who bred skunks for housepets; Mr. and Mrs. Norman Frank, manager and owner, respectively, of a small hotel; and Mr. and Mrs. Mickey Carter, both wildlife photographers.⁴⁷ “Shared interests,” such as demonstrated by the spouses who worked together, was one of the most common cultural shorthands used to connote compatibility.

Despite these periodic representations of personal compatibility, *Do You Trust Your Wife?* primarily emphasized the gendered division of labor that other texts likewise showcased as normative. Interviews, for example, always included information about the occupations of the spouses. Most couples conformed to the male breadwinner/female homemaker model, such as Mr. and Mrs. Murphy, who were “a painting and decorating contractor” and “a housewife and a long distance swimmer”; Bergen himself reinforced the primacy of that model through his questioning. “What do you do?” he asked husbands, while wives were asked, rather, “Do you have a family?” or, alternatively, queried about how they met their husbands (as women were also responsible for romance). Mrs. Al Ellis expressed the dominant model neatly, recounting to Bergen during the opening interview that, in her winning essay for the Mrs. United States Navy contest, she wrote, “my husband can provide a nice life for me and my two children.” However, there were some examples of wives who worked or who had career plans. Mr. Sauer worked for a glass company and his wife was planning to become a policewoman, while Mrs. Carter was a wildlife photographer. The only outright rejection of this model, the Coontzes, drew laughter from the audience when they described their situation: Don

⁴⁷ The Wendts: *DYTYW*, airdate Nov. 6, 1956; the Halls: *DYTYW*, airdate Dec. 4, 1956; the Hamiltons: *DYTYW*, airdate Feb. 21, 1956; the Franks: *DYTYW*, airdate Nov. 6, 1956; the Carters: *DYTYW*, airdate Sept. 11, 1956.

was a “househusband,” unable to work because of ill health, who took care of the household business while Thelma worked. Even the advertising joined in to emphasize the gendered division of labor, particularly to reinforce the wife-as-homemaker (and -consumer) portion. One commercial, for example, informed women how they could “reduce the work of shopping” by purchasing a new Frigidaire for its increased storage space.⁴⁸

In some ways, *Do You Trust Your Wife?* appeared to offer a model of marriage as a partnership: a husband-and-wife team, by working together, could win the grand prize and thereby achieve a modicum of fame and financial security. And in fact, some couples on the show actualized that model, taking turns answering questions based on their conception of each spouse’s knowledge base. However, the appearance of a partnership was belied by the fact, evident in the show’s title, that it was the husband who had control over the process. This imbalance was made clear in various ways. At the beginning of the show, the announcer explained, “A contestant can return until he is defeated. Yes, a man can retire for life on *Do You Trust Your Wife!*” Though the *couple* were both technically the contestants, in the announcer’s framing of it, “contestant” equaled the husband alone. The husband was also the only one presented as benefiting from success on the show (by being able to retire for life if *he* kept winning). The progression of the show also exposed the husband’s control over the process. Each time host Bergen introduced the topic of the next question, he asked the husband, “Do you trust yourself, or do you trust your wife?” The husband then decided who would answer the question. Sometimes he looked to his wife, who might nod or shake her head to

⁴⁸ The Murphys, *DYTYW*, airdate Jan. 10, 1956; the Ellises: *DYTYW*, airdate Dec. 4, 1956; the Sauers: *DYTYW*, airdate Jan. 3, 1956; the Carters: *DYTYW*, airdate Sept. 11, 1956; the Coontzes: *DYTYW*, airdate Sept. 11, 1956; Frigidaire commercial: *DYTYW*, airdate Sept. 11, 1956.

indicate whether she felt capable of answering, but her input or assent was not required by the set-up of the show. Rather, the husband held sole control.

Men's power over their wives was on display as couples moved through the rounds of questions.⁴⁹ For the easier first-round questions, husbands trusted themselves a slight majority of the time (54%). Husbands and wives both answered these intermediate questions correctly about 80% of the time. The couples whose wives answered, and answered correctly, can be read as examples of the ways that individual husbands and wives may have contested the models of male dominance presented as both normative and ideal, instead seeking out opportunities to afford each spouse control and power within the marital relationship. There was a much greater discrepancy in the "trust fund" question with which the show ended – the couple who won this question won \$100 a week for a year. Husbands trusted themselves to answer 64% of the time over the episodes reviewed here. Their faith in their own intelligence over that of their wives was apparently justified: husbands won the trust fund question 64% of the time, while wives *lost* 75% of the time. The only two times that wives won, among the episodes considered, were the only two times that both husbands trusted their wives, so it was two women going head to head. Whenever one husband trusted his wife and the other trusted himself within this sample, the man won. It is especially important to note that Erik Gude, husband half of the longest-running winners (who won 23 weeks in a row, right through to the show's cancellation), *always* chose himself to answer every trust fund question the couple faced. The Gudes's success eventually garnered them a fair amount of attention, making them visible not just to the show's viewers but to readers of

⁴⁹ The following analysis is based on twelve episodes of the program from various points in its broadcast run.

magazines and newspapers across the country. Erik Gude's faith in himself, and lack of faith in his wife, adhered closely to other popular representations of the proper balance of power within marriage. A more disturbing sign of the expectation that husbands should hold control was apparent in gossip column reports that a husband who trusted his wife to answer the first two easy questions, then trusted himself to answer the toughest third question, and got it wrong, "got so mad, he had to hit somebody. So he took a wallop at his wife."⁵⁰

This reading of *Do You Trust Your Wife?* illuminates the complexity of the interplay between culturally dominant models of marriage and the ways that individual couples lived and experienced their own marriages. While the words and actions of the contestants provided momentary glimpses into how individual Americans thought about love and marriage, the show's producers chose couples who would represent a particular model of marriage, and the tightly organized framework of the show effectively limited most contestants' ability to display relationships that differed from the dominant ideal put forward by consumer culture. The values of consumer culture dictated the framework of the show: the centrality of the marital relationship, the connection of romantic love with consumption, the dominance of the breadwinner/homemaker ideal. The contestants on the show did, at times, try to challenge the vision of marriage as an unequal relationship defined by the power a husband held over his wife, whether by including mention of a wife's career or by opting to have her answer the trivia questions, and they often chose to

⁵⁰ For press coverage on the Gudes, see Gordon Cotler, "The Question About Quiz Shows," *New York Times*, Dec. 1, 1957, p. 90; "Couple Reach \$79,200 in TV Quiz Winnings," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 30, 1957, p. 2; "\$100 a Week Feels Dandy, Couple Say," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 17, 1957, p. B1; "Pair Reach \$93,600 on Quiz Show," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 20, 1957, p. 2; "Woman Tells Police Sad Story of Race Tip," *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 6, 1957, p. 2; and "Red Cross Selects Boy Hemophiliac as Drive Symbol," *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 13, 1957, p. 21. "Wallop his wife": Art Ryon, "Ham on Ryon," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 30, 1956, p. A5.

emphasize personal compatibility as an important element of their love, rather than consumption practices. Ultimately, however, the show structured the spouses' relationship to one another and limited their opportunities to contest that structure. Over and over again, the show affirmed the husband's authority over his wife, rejecting other dynamics and rewarding those couples who adhered to the desired model. The derisive laughter faced by the lone househusband to appear on the show, and the unprecedented success of the dominant Erik Gude and his submissive wife, suggest that men and women would not be able to find alternative models of romance and marriage within the confines of commercialized popular culture, which was, after all, produced by those who had a vested interest in supporting the values of consumption. Other sites were more likely to enable potential challenges to those values, as the following examination of newspaper personal ads reveals.

The meaning of love and marriage in personal ads

While the unscripted moments of individual expression on *Do You Trust Your Wife?* occasionally revealed individual values, a better place to look for the perspectives of American men and women on the meaning and purpose of love and marriage is the personal ads published by individuals who sought romance, dating, and marriage. Again, as in the 1890s and 1920s, the classified pages gave voice to individuals with a strong desire to find a spouse. In their focus on financial status as a key element of their quest, ad placers of the 1950s demonstrated that the economic underpinnings of heterosexual relationships were important to them, so much so that monetary concerns were, again, the most frequently mentioned element in the ads as a whole. However, there were some

important changes in the ads of the fifties as well. There was a decided shift in the focus on financial status in this decade, with a much larger percentage of ad placers, both male and female, emphasizing the importance of *men's* financial position, which evinces an acceptance of the breadwinner/homemaker model presented by consumer culture. At the same time, the lack of mention of consumer goods suggests that ad placers had not fully accepted consumer culture's focus on consumption. Some individuals who sought marriage for the happiness they believed it would bring focused on personal compatibility as a crucial element, a model that at the time was only beginning to be connected to consumption. Many individuals who sought marital happiness expressed a belief in the importance of the emotional aspects of the marital relationship, an emphasis that was entirely missing in personal ads from the earlier decades. The personal ads of the 1950s revealed that many individuals struggled with the model of marriage presented to them by consumer culture, accepting some aspects while rejecting others, searching for relationships that would satisfy them on many levels.

Personal ads were a less visible part of the cultural landscape in the 1950s than they had been in either the 1920s or 1890s. Despite the near-universal cultural focus on the importance of marriage, major metropolitan newspapers did not publish them. The public pursuit of mates was relegated to the pages of tabloid newspapers like the *Los Angeles Mirror*, the paper examined here, alongside coverage of other "sensational" news such as gruesome accidents, murders, and celebrity gossip. Even the mere discussion of personal ads was relegated to less-than-respectable venues, like the pioneering celebrity gossip magazine *Confidential*, which published a story on the *Mirror* ads in 1952. Describing the personals section as "a reflection of a baffled, bothered, unhappy and

repressed segment of the populace,” the *Confidential* article sheds light on why personal ads disappeared from mainstream papers during this time period. At a cultural moment so deeply concerned with normalcy, with outward appearance, and with maintaining the status quo and eliminating deviation from the norm, the blatant quest for partnership was too destabilizing, both because of an apparent belief that individuals who would go so far as to publish a personal ad must be desperately lonely and unhappy, and because a significant number of ads did not specifically mention marriage as an objective. The *Confidential* article commented, with equal parts glee and horror, that *Mirror* advertisers “believe in the adage that there is ‘nothing hid which should not be revealed,’ and just love it when their libidos are showing.”⁵¹ While some ad placers did indeed voice a desire for a sexual relationship, most *Mirror* ads were more innocuous. Some were funny, designed to catch the eye. “Man who leans backward wishes to meet lady who leans forward. Obj: One Enslanted Evening”; “Successful engineer with corn wants to meet Dream Girl, 18, with beans. Object: Succotash”; “Attractive, intelligent, lonely blond divorcee. Prefer tall, dark, handsome, educated, intelligent, sincere rich man over 30. But who doesn’t?” Others were practical, like the “partially blind man” desiring to meet a girl “able to drive my car,” the “classical composer” who “would like to meet interesting woman with piano,” the semi-retired gentleman who wished “to meet lady with means, social background, prefer one who has GOLF CLUB MEMBERSHIP,” and the “Jewish Lady” with “some export experience” who “desire[d] to meet an exporter.”⁵² Yet all ads voiced a genuine desire to find a mate, and in many of the ads, we can see

⁵¹ Carter Richards, “Hollywood’s Lonely Hearts,” *Confidential*, Dec. 1952, 34, 62-3.

⁵² *Los Angeles Mirror*, Mar. 4, 1950, 38; *Los Angeles Mirror*, Mar. 6, 1950, 46; *LA Mirror* Aug. 21, 1956, sec. 3, 7. *Los Angeles Mirror*, June 1, 1953, 55; *LA Mirror*, Mar. 1, 1950, 49; *LA Mirror*, Oct. 19, 1951, 54; *LA Mirror*, Jan 5, 1952, 26.

evidence of the ways individuals were in dialogue with the ideologies of consumer culture.

Black men and women who sought romance and marriage were able to take advantage of the *Chicago Defender*'s "Lovelorn Column," although it was not technically a classified section. Rather, it was a space where the letters of *Defender* readers, on various topics related to matters of the heart, were published. Occasionally the letters asked the author of the column, Yvette Chante, for advice about whether or not to marry their beaux, what to do about parents who insisted they were too young to date, how to find a girlfriend, or what to do about their suspicions of a cheating spouse. Sometimes individuals wrote in looking for platonic pen pals. For the most part, however, the letters read like the personal ads published in the *Mirror*, only written in complete sentences. They always followed the same format, beginning with "Dear Mme. Chante," describing the type of woman or man the letter-writer would like to correspond with or meet, and often also providing information about the letter's author. The letters included the authors' full names and home addresses, so that interested parties could write directly to them as opposed to an anonymous box number at a newspaper (which was the case with the *Mirror* ads). Such details may have aided the process of connection by creating a more personal, intimate feel. While not identical to classified ads, the letters from the "Lovelorn Column" deserve to be considered alongside traditional personal ads, both because they appeared to provide the same function and because, importantly, those who wrote the letters themselves understood them to be "ads," sometimes explicitly referring to them as such. Despite the differences in format, the *Defender* letters, like the ads

found in the *Mirror*, were in dialogue with the ideals of consumer culture about romance, love, consumption and marriage.

Ad placers in the 1950s focused more on the emotional benefits of marriage, often described in terms of companionship, happiness, or love, than their predecessors in the 1890s and 1920s, who rarely mentioned those aspects. The sheer number of personal ads published throughout the 1950s indicates that the quest for love was of paramount importance in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans, even if most major newspapers shied away from publishing them; the relatively small sample considered here, of only a few issues per year for the two papers over the decade, included over a thousand ads. As in the 1920s, male ad placers outnumbered women by nearly two to one in the *Los Angeles Mirror*, despite the implication in most cultural representations that the quest for and maintenance of romance and marriage was primarily women's responsibility. Clearly, the search for love and marriage was also of vital concern to men. In the *Defender*, the ratio of women to men authors was more nearly equal, with black women writing slightly more letters than black men. This racial difference seems related to the main difference in media representations of marital ideals targeted to each race: the preponderance of white men taking the initiative to find love reflects the dominant position husbands were accorded in popular culture representations, while the more equal ratio of black men and women calls to mind the reality, acknowledged in *Ebony*, that an economically successful marriage for African Americans would likely require a more equal financial contribution from both spouses. Ads placed in both papers by both men and women reflected the importance of romance, love, and marriage to both sexes. In the *Mirror*, one man framed his ad as a search for "Home & Happiness... Would like to meet

someone who would love, honor and cherish me as I would her and hers,” while another wrote that he was “searching for happiness, longing for feminine partner.” One white woman likewise was seeking “marriage happiness” while the ad of another, more desperate, read in its entirety “LONELY WIDOW MUST BE JUNE BRIDE.”⁵³ In the *Defender*, innumerable ads began by asking Mme. Chante to help the author find love as she had helped so many others. Ad placers wrote that they were “lonely... and would like a true companion and marriage”; a “lonely widow... who would like very much to find a good husband”; or were “looking for a nice wife, who wants to live a sweet married life.”⁵⁴

In other ways, the personal ads challenged the mainstream emphasis on marriage. While romantic love was supposed to result in marriage within the codes of popular culture, only one-quarter of white ad placers and one-third of black ad placers specified marriage as their objective, a dramatic change from the near-universal (95%) mention of marriage in the personal ads of the 1920s. Ten percent of ad placers sought someone specifically for dates, and over half did not specify their objective. Perhaps the many individuals who did not explicitly desire marriage were taking to heart the new focus on personal compatibility, hoping to meet potential mates and to get to know them before deciding whether to take the relationship further. According to mainstream representations, sex was not supposed to occur until after marriage, but personal ads

⁵³ *Los Angeles Mirror*, Jan. 14, 1952, 51; *Mirror*, June 15, 1953, 47; *Mirror*, Jan. 1, 1952, 28; *Mirror*, June 19, 1953, 52.

⁵⁴ *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 14, 1951, 14; *Defender*, Oct. 28, 1950, p. 14; *Defender*, Feb. 16, 1952, 15.

seeking “companionship only” appeared in the *Mirror* from time to time throughout the 1950s.⁵⁵

Ads in the *Defender* also occasionally called the cultural emphasis on marriage into question. Several ad placers, all women, were explicit in their desire to meet a man without the expectation of marriage.⁵⁶ Like the similar ads in the *Mirror*, these occasional letters hinted at other possibilities for romantic and/or sexual connection between men and women, beyond the normative dating-proposal-marriage-family trajectory presented by the dominant culture. The stress on marriage as the source of ultimate happiness was also disrupted by the mention of divorce in both papers. Though ad placers who were divorced and mentioned that fact in their ads were in the minority, they were a visible presence on the classified pages, serving as a reminder to those seeking happiness through marriage that the two did not always go together. The format of the *Defender*’s “Lovelorn Column” allowed ad placers to describe their situations in more detail than those who advertised in the *Mirror*, such as Roger Maddox, who wrote that he had “been married twice. My first wife died and the second one and I are divorced,” or John Brown, who had “been divorced and now I am seeking another chance at happiness.” Women’s letters also described unsuccessful marriages, including Mrs.

Z.P. Williams, who had “been married and was deserted by my husband,” and Daisy

⁵⁵Sometimes these ads required a bit of deciphering, such as the “good looking man” who had “lots of responsibilities” and was looking for “daytime dates” with a girl “who has responsibilities too but wants discreet adventure and who is available days only like I am,” or the “attractive cosmopolitan woman” seeking “mutually stimulating friendship with free thinking” man. Other times, ad placers made their intentions clear: “If you are attractive & lonesome, would love to date, but not interested in marriage.” *Los Angeles Mirror*, Jan. 1, 1952, 28; *LA Mirror*, Oct. 2, 1951, 46; *Los Angeles Mirror-News*, Dec. 19, 1955, sec. 3, 6.

⁵⁶“I am not looking for a husband,” wrote Rose Thomas, who described herself as an “undivorced” mother of six. M.A. Burns sought men “who like to have fun” and was “not interested in getting married at this time.” And Miss Chandler Young insisted that “I am not interested in marriage, I am looking for a companion only!” *Defender*, June 2, 1951, 43; *Defender*, Aug. 2, 1952, 15; *Defender*, May 21, 1955, 8.

Manning, whose “marriage was a complete failure.”⁵⁷ That divorced men and women published ads in search of a new spouse indicated that they themselves were not disillusioned by previously failed promises that marriage could lead to happiness, but their presence nonetheless challenged the overall picture presented by personal ads and by the larger matrix of commercialized popular culture of which they were a part.

Financial status was the single most frequently mentioned aspect in 1950s personal ads, just as it had been in the 1920s and 1890s, but the percentage of those ads that focused on men’s financial status as opposed to women was significantly greater in the fifties than in previous decades.⁵⁸ This increased emphasis on men’s earning potential and ability to support a wife and family hewed closely to the breadwinner/homemaker model of marriage that dominated popular culture, and the descriptions of many ad placers reflected that model. In the *Mirror*, men advertised themselves as a “Good Provider,” or as “well established, [with] car and home,” included details about their salary and/or net worth, and sought women who were “domestically inclined” and “home-loving.” Women, for their part, described themselves as “Good Homemaker” or “excellent hostess & homemaker,” and sought men who would be “financially able & willing to support” them.⁵⁹ Those who wrote in to the “Lovelorn Column” also expressed the desire for a relationship based around the

⁵⁷ *Defender*, Mar. 6, 1954, 9; *Defender*, Sept. 1, 1956, 8. *Defender*, Feb. 16, 1952, 15; *Defender*, Sept. 15, 1951, 14.

⁵⁸ Of all ads mentioning financial status in the 1890s, 68% mentioned men’s financial status and 53% mentioned women’s (numbers add up to more than 100% because some ad placers mentioned both). In the 1920s those percentages shifted to 72% men and 44% women, and in the 1950s they were 91% men and 27% women.

⁵⁹ *LA Mirror*, Jan. 14, 1952, 51; *LA Mirror*, Jan. 14, 1952, 51; salary/net worth see, for example, *LA Mirror*, Mar. 1, 1950, 49 and Oct. 15, 1951, 44; *LA Mirror*, Jan. 1, 1952, 28; *LA Mirror-News*, Aug. 21, 1956, sec. 3, 7. *LA Mirror*, Jan. 14, 1952, 51; *LA Mirror-News*, Dec. 5, 1955, sec. 3, 6; *LA Mirror*, June 5, 1953, 59.

breadwinner/homemaker model. Women included in their descriptions of themselves that they could “cook and keep house well,” were “a good wife and housekeeper,” or could help make “a nice home”; and their requirements for a man included that “he must have his own home or a good job,” or “is able to support a wife,” or even simply “works for his living.”⁶⁰ Men likewise described themselves in terms of their breadwinning ability: “a working man with a good job”; “I have a good factory job”; “I’m employed by a railroad”; “I have a steady job and can take care of a family.” Their qualifications for a wife included one who “must be able to cook”; one “who is not lazy, a good housekeeper”; or “one who is willing to wear the dress and let me wear the pants.”⁶¹ Many men and women of both races expressed a clear desire for a marriage like those represented in popular culture.

Ads that expressed an alternate economic model of marriage were an infrequent, yet important, presence in both papers. While both white and black individuals sometimes framed their rejection of the breadwinner/homemaker model in a similar way, at other moments race played a role in how those challenges were articulated. There were white women for whom “the size of your pocketbook [is] of no importance” and who were “not seeking nor offering any fortune,” as well as white men who either downplayed the importance of wealth (“Have little financially except my job but can’t there be a lot else to offer?”) or who were looking for wealthy women to support them.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Defender*, Apr. 14, 1951, 14; *Defender*, Feb. 16, 1952, 15; *Defender* Feb. 16, 1952, 14. *Defender*, Apr. 14, 1951, 14; *Defender*, Aug. 16, 1952, 15; *Defender*, Mar. 6, 1954, 9.

⁶¹ *Defender*, June 10, 1950, 10; *Defender*, Sept. 1, 1951, 14; *Defender*, Feb. 16, 1952, 15; *Defender*, Mar. 6, 1954, 9. *Defender*, June 2, 1951, 43; *Defender* Sept. 15, 1951, 14; *Defender*, Dec. 17, 1955, 8.

⁶² *LA Mirror*, Jan. 5, 1952, 26; *LA Mirror*, Oct. 15, 1951, 44. *LA Mirror*, Jan. 3, 1952, 51; looking for wealthy women, see for example: *LA Mirror* Mar. 1, 1950, 49, Mar. 4, 1950, 38, and *LA Mirror-News*, Dec. 5, 1955, sec. 3, 6.

The *Defender*, as well, published letters from individuals who voiced a general repudiation of the dominant model of marriage. The widow who wrote “I have a very nice home here,” the young girl who wrote “I am not a homely girl nor do I like to stay home,” and the businesswoman who sought a man “who can appreciate a woman who is ambitious” each brought challenges to the notion that men should provide the home for their wives, that wives should prefer the domestic above all else, or that women’s ambition should be subsumed under that of their husbands, as did the man who wrote “I want a girl who wants me for myself and not what I can give her.”⁶³ Other *Defender* letters, written by both men and women, referred to the desire to “get ahead in life” as a quality sought after in a potential mate. These letters – advertising for a man “who wants to make something of his life,” who “values savings and getting ahead,” or who “wants to get somewhere in life”; or for a woman who “wants to have something in life” or “has an honest desire to get ahead in life” – expressed a model of marriage largely absent from the personal ads placed by whites. They articulated a vision of progress achieved through joining together in a marital partnership, thereby acknowledging the economic reality that black families often depended on the income of both spouses.⁶⁴ Indeed, black women in particular seemed aware of this reality. Unlike all other groups of ad placers, who focused on men’s income, wealth and earning potential to a much greater degree than women’s, black women referred to their own and their potential mates’ financial positions in nearly equal percentages (9% vs. 13%).

⁶³ *Defender*, June 2, 1951, 43; *Defender*, Feb. 2, 1952, 15; *Defender*, Aug. 2, 1952, 15; *Defender*, Feb. 2, 1952, 15.

⁶⁴ *Defender*, Oct. 7, 1950, 14; *Defender*, Nov. 7, 1953, 9; *Defender*, Aug. 2, 1952, 15; *Defender*, Dec. 17, 1955, 8.

Although the husband's income, in the breadwinner/homemaker model, was supposed to facilitate his wife's ability to purchase consumer goods for the home, ad placers' focus on financial status was not accompanied by a focus on consumption. In fact, one of the areas of greatest divergence between the representations of popular culture and the visions of romantic love articulated in the personal ads was the connection of consumption to love and marriage, which ad placers largely rejected. A few ad placers, both men and women, made general reference to desiring "the better things of life," which likely meant a lifestyle based on consumer goods, and men occasionally mentioned their possession of a car (usually including the make, model, and year), but references to the types of consumption typically connected with romance and marriage in popular media – jewelry, clothing, food – were few and far between (in contrast to the personal ads of the 1980s discussed in the next chapter). Ad placers' rejection of the focus on consumption went beyond the ties to romance, however: very few ads voiced the belief that consumer goods of any kind were necessary to happiness. A personal ad from 1956 even poked fun at materialism: "Guy 35, without yacht, like to meet gal with no sportscar, to console each other for lack of same."⁶⁵ For the most part, ad placers made no mention of consumption, either specifically or indirectly, and in so doing they rejected an outright connection between consumption and satisfaction in personal relationships.

Those ad placers that sought satisfaction or happiness turned away from consumption and toward a desire for personal compatibility, in a further divergence from the dominant ideology of consumer culture. True, a model of personal compatibility among spouses found sporadic expression in women's magazines, but it was rarely, if

⁶⁵ *Los Angeles Mirror-News*, Aug. 6, 1956, sec. 3, 7.

ever, portrayed in advertisements, which, if anything, referenced the concept of compatibility as related to shared consumption tastes. Indeed, such a concept is in tension with the values of consumer culture, depending as it does on personal qualities that may have little or nothing to do with consumer goods. However, the search for compatibility was expressed in nearly ten percent of the ads reviewed here, a significantly larger percentage than in previous decades.⁶⁶ It was a search evident in the *Mirror*, not just in ads that explicitly sought those with the “same traits” (industriousness and an interest in singing and hiking), “similar interests” (sports, theater), or “same qualities” (refinement, education, enjoyment of desert and mountains), but also in those where the ad placer described either her/himself or her/his desired partner in great detail, such as the Englishman who “like[d] outdoor life, country and ocean jaunts, prospecting and rock hunting, photography and home movies,” and the woman who wanted to meet a man who was “very intelligent, liberal, democratic, ethical, mature, has a sound standard of values, excellent sense of humor, is a lot of fun, preferably interested in the arts & psychoanalysis.”⁶⁷ That these individuals went into such detail suggests a concept of love that went beyond the limited, formulaic, consumption-dependent model presented by popular culture. Rather than simply looking for a breadwinner or homemaker, a co-parent, a pretty face, or a late model car, these ad placers sought relationships based on personality traits, habits, hobbies and interests, broadly defined. Many of the letters in the “Lovelorn Column” likewise framed the search for a mate through the lens of personal compatibility. Mrs. James Smith was perhaps most explicit when she explained

⁶⁶ Just two percent of ad placers mentioned personal compatibility in both the 1890s and 1920s.

⁶⁷ *LA Mirror-News*, Dec. 5, 1955, sec. 3, 6; *LA Mirror-News*, Aug. 6, 1956, sec. 3, 7; *LA Mirror*, June 2, 1953, 15; *LA Mirror-News*, Dec. 19, 1955, sec. 3, 6; *LA Mirror*, Oct. 17, 1951, 51.

that “good character, compatibility, [and] a zest for wholesome healthful living are most important,” but the women looking for “a gentleman of like character,” or for “young men who have similar interests [journalism and novels in one case; music, dancing and singing in another],” the man who “loves all types of music and dances” and was “looking for a girl who loves all types of music and dancing,” and those letter writers of both sexes who described their own hobbies (e.g. “reading, listening to good music, and painting”; “I like to swim, bowl and play tennis”), were also actively engaged in seeking out a compatible mate based on qualities other than those defined as important by consumer culture.⁶⁸

Without an accompanying emphasis on consumption, ad placers’ focus on financial status appears as an only partial acceptance of the breadwinner/homemaker model. In the domestic arena, the value of consumption and a gendered division of labor seems to have been virtually unquestioned: most ad placers recognized the necessity of income to raise a family and the reality that men were much more likely to be able to earn that income. However, ad placers generally rejected the attempts of advertisers to imbue consumption with romance and to make the progression of romance dependent on consumption. In this way they separated the realm of romantic love from the domestic and claimed their romantic lives as their own. The messages of consumer culture became more ubiquitous than ever in the 1950s, particularly as television became an unquestioned presence in most homes by the end of the decade, while at the same time the percentage of ad placers focusing on compatibility rose dramatically. Perhaps we can see this turn towards compatibility as a rejection, or at least a renegotiation, of consumer

⁶⁸ *Defender*, Apr. 7, 1951, 7; *Defender*, June 24, 1950, 10; *Defender*, Feb. 2, 1952, 15 and Nov. 21, 1953, 9; *Defender*, Sept. 15, 1951, 14; *Defender*, Mar. 20, 1954, 9 and Oct. 7, 1950, 14.

culture's encroachment further and further into the private space of Americans' lives. That rejection ultimately appears temporary, however, as in future decades advertisers and other producers of commercialized popular culture will co-opt the concept of compatibility and attempt to define it through consumption practices.

A comparison of personal ads to the messages of the consumer culture in which they originated reveals that personal ads are evidence of the ways people appropriate the tools of popular/consumer culture for their own ends; not simply a reiteration of dominant cultural values, they are a location of ideological struggle. In some instances, ad placers did in fact employ the same vocabulary as the creators of advertising and other popular culture, and they appeared to desire the models of romance and marriage presented in those media as ideal. Many other ad placers, however, presented alternate models that included only some of the elements of the dominant representations or rejected those representations all together. For every personal ad that read like a description of a magazine advertisement or a TV show, such as that placed by the blond, blue-eyed woman who wanted to meet a "tall, healthy white man who is interested in marriage, home, children, gardening, mountain drives and barbecues," there was another that outright rejected the messages of commercialized popular culture, like the "quiet, kind, loyal, refined, intelligent" man, "fond of children, dogs, sports, reading, writing, good music," seeking a companion who was "intelligent and values other than material possessions." More common, however, were ads that were a mix of reflection and opposition. The "successful, professional man" seeking "an attractive woman companion, very slender, smartly dressed," to "share interests, books, music, sports, good food, social drink" valued his ability to provide and his potential mate's appearance, but

he sought a connection within the realm of personal compatibility. The “successful lady” who wanted to “compare personalities” with a “well-groomed gentleman” who “cherish[ed] home life & loving companionship” valued domesticity and *her* mate’s appearance, but was also proud of her own success and likewise expected a connection based on more personal attributes.⁶⁹ Ads like these are evidence that individuals living within consumer culture struggle with the ideological frameworks presented to them and seek to make sense of their lives and experiences in more complicated ways. Within the realm of romantic love, many people living during the 1950s rejected a model based solely on consumption, searching instead for relationships based on personal qualities that were not, at that time, tied to products or profits. By the 1980s, however, consumer culture’s producers would find ways of linking the desire for personal compatibility to consumption practices.

⁶⁹ *LA Mirror*, Oct. 15, 1951, 44; *LA Mirror*, Jan. 4, 1952, 50; *LA Mirror*, June 3, 1953, 53; *LA Mirror*, Jan. 14, 1952, 51.

CHAPTER 4

“Prince Charming Seeks Cinderella to Make It All Come True”: The Dominance of Consumption Values in the 1980s

Introduction

The ideology of romantic love presented by commercialized popular culture in the 1980s was based on the cultural beliefs that had first been articulated in the 1890s: that the ideal marriage was one that promoted women's work as consumers, that consumer goods would enable individuals to find and retain satisfying romantic love. However, the century that cultural producers had had to hone their skills, coupled with the increased number of outlets for their ideology, did result in some important changes and additions to that ideology, which by the 1980s reached farther, encompassed more, and influenced individual desires to a much larger degree than in previous decades. By the 1980s, the various forms of mass media – including magazines, radio stations, television channels and television programming – had multiplied dramatically. Indeed, this very fact is perhaps what most characterized eighties popular culture itself; that is, there was an enormous proliferation of choices in television shows, movies, magazines, and music, mirrored by the proliferation of choices in consumer goods of all kinds – clothing, cars, floor polish, frozen dinners, lipsticks, and on and on and on.¹ The exponential expansion

¹ The embrace of target marketing as a governing strategy in the ad industry during this time is one indication of the proliferation of choices available to consumers; Joseph Turow argues that ad practitioners' embrace of this strategy was evidence of their belief that America was becoming increasingly divided into narrow interest groups who could no longer be reached by a collective mode of address such as network

of consumption choices was paralleled by the expansion of a consumerist ideology of romantic love in American culture. In the eighties, events like weddings and objects like diamond rings no longer merely acted as romantic referents, used by advertisers to sell other products; now, rather, they had become commodities themselves, existing within commercialized popular culture to sell themselves, to sell a particular experience of consumption. The factors that would lead to romantic success, according to the experts, had likewise expanded, so that individuals were encouraged to consider a multiplicity of personality, character, and behavioral traits as they strove for the compatibility, complementarity, and easy communication that were supposed to guarantee them happily ever after. While such recommendations only sometimes directly centered on consumption choices, their overall impact was to encourage individuals to seek out compatibility in consumer tastes and to conceive of themselves and others as products that could be described by a long list of qualities and tastes, as personal ads from this decade reveal. Advertisers also expanded their address during the eighties, identifying not only women as their primary audience but men too as consumers and the target of their messages at the same time that other widely-held beliefs about gender were also being destabilized, in the face of vast numbers of married women working outside the home.

Given the increasingly fragmented nature of consumer culture's discourses, this chapter casts a wide net to analyze some of the most common trends, as observed through the consideration of similar sources as the previous chapter: magazines, television programming, the advertising that appeared both in print and on-screen, and personal ads.

TV. Joseph Turow, *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

Representations of love in advertising; a new, dual-earner model of marriage that began to displace the breadwinner/homemaker ideal; and the use of weddings and proposals to promote the values of consumption are all examined, before turning to media coverage of the engagement, wedding and marriage of Britain's Prince Charles and Princess Diana, which stands as an example of many of the themes considered in the preceding sections, including the centrality of consumption to modern-day emotional experiences and the belief in the importance of personal compatibility to marital success. Finally, an analysis of personal ads placed during the decade leads to the conclusion that individuals living in the 1980s had accepted the values of consumer culture to a much greater degree than their predecessors in the earlier decades discussed previously. These values were held not only by heterosexuals. This analysis also includes personal ads placed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans individuals, who were an increasingly visible presence in the U.S. after the efforts of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s and the widespread coverage of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s.²

Consumption retook center stage in American culture in the 1980s, after widespread rejection by an influential counterculture during the previous two decades. In many ways, the cultural landscape had changed dramatically since the 1950s, most notably through the sweeping calls for social change put forth by the civil rights movement, second-wave feminism, and gay liberation. Yet, at least in the mainstream acceptance of the values of consumer culture, and in the expansion of the consumer economy, the eighties very much resembled the fifties. Ronald Reagan's \$8 million

² Print publications specifically targeted to LGBT readers were not yet widely available and, unlike *Ebony* in the 1950s and the mainstream LGBT publications that would emerge in the 1990s and early twenty-first century, did not yet evidence an embrace of the values of mainstream consumer culture. Beyond the personal ads published in such newspapers and magazines, then, their other content is not considered here.

inauguration set the tone for a decade in which mainstream culture emphasized luxury and the ostentatious display of wealth. Parallels have been drawn between the Reagans' conscious embrace of glamour and the premiere, a week before the inauguration, of *Dynasty*, the prime-time soap that likewise focused on the lives of the fabulously wealthy; for example, *Dynasty*'s weekly costume budget had the same \$25,000 price tag as Nancy Reagan's inaugural gowns.³ A 1984 *Esquire* cover story headlined: "The New Passion of the Eighties: A Special Valentine's Report on Men and Their Money" summed up this cultural embrace of materialism.⁴ The discourses of consumer culture linked romance and consumption in ways both familiar and new. Like in previous decades, message makers insisted that romantic love was a crucial part of life and that proper consumption choices would help individuals find and retain love. However, new to the eighties were an increased emphasis on the problems couples might face, the reality of substantial workforce participation by married women, which led to conflicts between old and new expectations of gender roles, and changes in sexual norms as represented by the new visibility of gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals.

Romantic love and consumption in 1980s advertising

The print ads and television commercials from the 1980s reveal the balancing act in which advertisers were engaged, between acknowledging changing cultural norms and remaining committed to the ideological underpinnings that had defined their field since

³ Kimberly R. Moffitt and Duncan A. Campbell, eds., *The 1980s: A Critical and Transitional Decade* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011); Nicolaus Mills, "The Culture of Triumph and the Spirit of the Times," in Mills, ed., *Culture in an Age of Money: The Legacy of the 1980s in America* (Chicago: Ivan. R. Dee, 1990); Gil Troy, *Morning in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jane Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

⁴ *Esquire*, Feb. 1984.

its inception. At first glance, eighties product advertisements appear to be quite different than those from earlier decades, both in advertisers' more sophisticated techniques and, notably, in the increasingly overt sexuality that became acceptable over the course of the decade. During this time period advertisers also developed a conception of men as consumers, which they had largely ignored in previous decades. However, beneath these surface changes, the basic messages of advertising remained the same after nearly a century, in terms of their depiction of the relationship between love and consumption. Explicit and implicit claims that products can help consumers find love dominate these messages, which also often express ideas about gender that remained constant over the twentieth century, figuring men in positions of dominance over women and identifying women as the primary consumers. Advertisers' continued commitment to the same framework upon which they'd been relying for nearly a century revealed how very central that ideology is to the functioning of consumer culture, while their depiction of the changing place of sexuality in mainstream culture and their newfound desire to identify men as consumers in their own right revealed their determination to present the values of consumer culture in ways that would appeal to as many people as possible.

Advertisers sometimes made explicit connections between products and romance, explaining how their product could enable the reader/viewer to achieve a happy, loving relationship. One television commercial featured a nervous man with large glasses who almost got a dinner date with a sexy-voiced woman who called him to find out what he was cooking, but when he told her that he was out of Miracle Whip for the pasta salad, she hung up on him. The commercial ended with him standing in front of a stack of about 20 bottles of the stuff, staring at his phone and begging, "Ring, come on, ring."

Advertisers frequently conjured up images of sensual romance in commercials for perfume and cologne. “If you want romance to come on strong, you have to come on soft,” Jane Seymour explained, as shots of her face in closeup were intercut with shots of her spraying perfume on her neck.⁵ Print advertisements for cigarettes and alcohol frequently featured couples embracing, gazing at each other, or engaged in romantic activities like picnicking, dancing, having dinner over a small, candlelit table, or sitting in front of a fireplace, with either a cigarette or glass in hand.⁶ These ads implied, through their use of romantic images, that the advertised products would facilitate or even spark romance between two individuals. The composition of some ads drove this point home especially forcefully, linking various aspects of the advertised product to the apparent connection the featured couple shared (see Fig. 4.1). An ad for Vantage cigarettes published in *Ladies’ Home Journal* at the beginning of the decade showed a woman holding a cigarette and looking confidently at the camera, while a man standing just behind her held a lighter up to her cigarette and gazed adoringly at her. Target circles surrounded the tip of the cigarette and the flame of the lighter and the text underneath read, “The Vantage Point – Where great taste and low tar meet.” While ostensibly drawing attention to the connection of two features of the product – cigarettes that possessed both great taste and low tar – the target circles also encompassed the point of connection between the man and woman, making the product’s function as romantic aid,

⁵ Kraft Miracle Whip commercial, 1988, Foote, Cone & Belding Historical Reel, Paley Center for Media (hereafter “PCM”); Max Factor Le Jardin Fragrance commercial, aired during *Dynasty* (“The Carousel Ball”), Dec. 21, 1983 (ABC), PCM.

⁶ Cigarettes/alcohol, see for example Belair cigarette ad, *People* May 4, 1981, p. 84; Benson & Hedges Cigarette ad, *LHJ* March 1984, p. 155; Parliament cigarette ad, *LHJ* June 1989, pp. 106-107; More cigarette ad, *LHJ* Oct. 1989, p. 93; Almaden Wine ad, *Esquire* May 1980, p. 7; Cribari Wine ad, *Esquire* May 1980, p. 94; Cruzan Rum ad, *People*, May 4, 1981, pp. 52-3; Boodles British Gin ad, *Esquire*, June 1983, p. 8.

since the woman's need for a light apparently prompted this interaction, just as much a focus as the explicitly advertised product features. In a cognac ad that appeared at the end of the decade in *Esquire*, a man held a glass in one hand, looking at a woman who leaned her head towards his, eyes closed, apparently sent into a state of rapture at the smell of the cognac. This moment of sensual connection was brought on by shared enjoyment of the advertised product.⁷



Fig. 4.1: Product attributes are responsible for a couple's connection

Vantage ad, *LHJ* 1980

Remy Martin ad, *Esquire* 1989

While the cigarette and cognac ads discussed here present similar messages about the role products can play in fostering romance, differences in the tone of the two ads

⁷ Vantage cigarette ad, *LHJ* Feb. 1980, p. 27; Remy Martin cognac ad, *Esquire*, June 1989, p. 56.

reveal the key changes in 1980s advertising: namely, the use of overt sexuality to sell products and the conscious construction of the male consumer. The cigarette ad, which appeared in *Ladies' Home Journal*, had a softer, more romantic appeal, with its emphasis on connection and its bright-eyed, smiling models. The cognac ad, on the other hand, which appeared in *Esquire*, was much more sexual, with the suggestive posing of the models, the look of ecstasy on the woman's face, and the emphasis on sensual pleasure. The 9-year gap between the publication of the two ads alone provides some explanation for this difference, as the media in general, and advertising in particular, became more openly sexual over the course of the decade – for example, the Calvin Klein fragrance ads that were ubiquitous by the late eighties, with naked bodies arranged in a variety of risqué ways, would have been very out of place five years earlier.⁸ Yet the difference in tone between the *Journal* ad and the *Esquire* one also mimicked a larger difference between the two publications that held true over the entire decade. Advertisers generally used more romantic appeals when speaking to women and more sexual appeals when speaking to men. The reliance on sexual imagery was part of the construction of the male consumer, and composition differences between the ads reveal other strategies that advertisers used to promote this construction. Both ads figured the man as dominant over the woman, through presenting the women as, literally, objects of the male gaze within the frame of the ad, and by positioning the men as controlling access to the advertised product.⁹ However, while the woman in the *Journal* ad was clearly figured as the consumer of the cigarette, it was the man in the *Esquire* ad who held the glass of cognac

⁸ See, for example, Calvin Klein Obsession ad, *Esquire* Apr. 1987, 24-5.

⁹ While the woman in the Vantage ad held the cigarette, she depended on her male companion to light it and render it usable to her, and the woman in the Remy Martin ad likewise was able to enjoy the aroma of the cognac only because the man was holding it close to her.

and who would, presumably, enjoy not just his female companion's reaction to its aroma but would sip it himself.

Advertisers specifically targeted their messages to each gender in other ways as well. As in previous decades, advertisers worked hard to convince women that attending to their appearance, through purchase of the proper cosmetics and apparel, would enable them to achieve romantic success. A commercial for perfume included shots of a woman dancing in several different venues with different clothing and different hair styles, always with an adoring man, promising that as long as the woman always chose Charlie Fragrance, she'd retain the interest of men, and a pantyhose commercial focused on pairs of women's legs, the camera pulling back occasionally to show a man leaning close to a woman in an elevator or a couple sitting at a restaurant, before zooming back in to show the woman and man playing footsie under the table. An ad for lotion featured a photograph of a woman in a very low cut, strapless gown, with a man's hand reaching into the frame to touch her shoulder as she looked in his direction. The accompanying text explained that the advertised product was "appreciated by more women *and men* than any other moisturizer" (emphasis mine). Women were also instructed, though less frequently than in earlier eras, that they could find and maintain romantic love through traditional female caretaking activities like food preparation. A margarine ad literalized the connection between product and love, depicting heart-shaped pats of butter on different foods, with couples' names inscribed on each one ("Sue-n-Jay," "Lois-n-Bob"),

and informed readers of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, “you can make a healthy relationship healthier with Promise Extra Light Spread. It has a taste the ones you love will love.”¹⁰

Men were more frequently the recipients of advertising's messages about self-presentation leading to romance than they had been in the decades discussed in previous chapters. A television commercial for cologne described the fragrance as “masculine and sharing, confident and bold,” with intercut shots showing a rugged man slapping cologne on his face, horses galloping on the plains, and a woman pulling the man in hard for a kiss. Cologne ads in print similarly presented images of couples embracing or gazing into each other's eyes to demonstrate the impact the advertised brand would apparently have on the reader's love life.¹¹ Ads for other men's products also featured romantic images of couples, encouraging men to consider their hair, clothing, and physical fitness as potential factors in their search for love.¹² This increased emphasis on the importance of men's appearance in ads was echoed elsewhere, like in a 1981 *Esquire* article on “what women really think about men's bodies,” which presented a model of physical manhood for readers to aspire to that read like it was written by Goldilocks: strong, but not too strong; physically fit, but not narcissistic; hairy, but not too hairy. The ideal man should have eyes that “shine with pleasure” and a mouth with smile lines and pleasant breath and

¹⁰ Charlie Fragrance ad, aired during *Dynasty* (“The Carousel Ball”), Dec. 21, 1983 (ABC), PCM; No Nonsense Pantyhose ad, aired during *All My Children* (“Devon Tells Ellen She Loves Her”), Dec. 20, 1983 (ABC), PCM. Nivea Moisturizer ad, *LHJ* Feb. 1986, 21. Promise Extra Light ad, *LHJ*, Oct. 1989, 61.

¹¹ Stetson cologne commercial, aired during *Dynasty* (“The Carousel Ball”), Dec. 21, 1983 (ABC), PCM. Cologne print ads, see for example Jovan Musk Oil ad, *Esquire* June 1981, p. 34; Aramis Cologne ad, *Esquire*, June 1983, p. 33; Drakkar Noir fragrance ad, *Esquire*, Mar. 1984, p. 19; Calvin Klein Fragrance ad, *Esquire*, June 1985, p. 16; Lauder for Men fragrance ad, *Esquire*, June 1989, p. 33.

¹² Hair/clothing/physical fitness: Head & Shoulders ad, *Esquire*, Dec. 1983, p. 256; Dry look hairspray ad, *People* July 13, 1981, p. 106; Corbin men's clothing ad, *Esquire*, Apr. 1987, p. 191; White Stag sportswear ad, *People*, Mar. 9, 1981, p. 19; Tretorn shoes ad, *Esquire*, July 1988, p. 8; Soloflex ad, *Esquire* Feb. 1982, p. 1.

hands that express “care, consideration, sensitivity, sureness, strength.”¹³ Advertisers also relied on the concept of gift-giving when targeting male consumers, as they had in prior decades when that framework seemed to be the only way to reach men. An ad for recliners encouraged readers of *People* to “spoil someone you love with your gift of the most comfortable seat in the house,” with an accompanying photo of a woman seated in a recliner. The ad on the very next page of the magazine informed readers that a Lane Love Chest, “the gift steeped in the romance of the ages,” was “a very special, personal and charming way for a man to say he’s in love.” Both ads featured images of the embracing couple, such as had been commonly used in advertising since the 1920s to convey the love that a woman would feel for her boyfriend or husband upon reception of his gift. Ads for more traditional romantic gifts, such as chocolates and jewelry, promised men that the women they loved would “surrender [their] heart[s]” for Godiva chocolates and that giving them gold necklaces would “cause a sensation.”¹⁴

The expansion of the media during the eighties provided advertisers with more venues for their messages. Advertisements that echoed the content in which they appeared further heightened the connections between media, romance, and consumption, a fact of which advertisers were well aware. De Beers, for example, spent \$400,000 for television commercials that aired during the broadcast of Prince Charles’s wedding to Lady Diana Spencer.¹⁵ One of these, a commercial for a diamond anniversary ring, aired

¹³ Priscilla Flood, “Body Parts,” *Esquire* June 1981, 35-43.

¹⁴ Action recliners by Lane ad, *People* Nov. 23, 1981, pp. 24-5; Lane Love Chest ad, *People* Nov. 23, 1981, pp. 26-7; Godiva Chocolate ad, *Esquire*, Feb. 1988, p. 8; JCPenney jewelry ad, *Esquire*, June 1985, p. 179.

¹⁵ Edward Jay Epstein, “Have You Ever Tried to Sell a Diamond?” *The Atlantic*, Feb. 1982, accessed online 3-10-13 http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/02/have-you-ever-tried-to-sell-a-diamond/304575/?single_page=true

just after the end of the ceremony. The ad featured a song with lyrics similar to wedding vows (“For the best of times, for the worst of times, for what’s been, for what will be / For all the years, and all the tears, for what you mean to me”) playing over footage of a woman happily receiving a ring from her husband, after which a male voiceover intoned, “The gift that says you’d marry her all over again.” Similarly, the broadcast of an episode of *Dynasty*, featuring the wedding of Amanda Carrington to Prince Michael of Moldavia, included a camera commercial that also featured scenes from a wedding, encouraging viewers to “enjoy the moment while you capture the memories.” Both these commercials linked the advertised product to the romantic event – a wedding and all the attendant emotion – featured in the broadcast, infusing the product with romantic qualities.¹⁶ Another way advertisers connected products to the emotions aroused by the romantic elements of programming was through the use of TV actors. For example, a hair color commercial featuring Linda Evans, star of *Dynasty*, aired during the show. While Evans, resplendent in an elaborate evening gown and jewels, extolled the virtues of Ultress, she walked through a party at a luxuriously appointed house, among other women and men in fancy dress. She spoke her last line, “You could be the best you’ve ever been,” as she walked up to a man, took his arm, and smiled at him. The “best you’ve ever been,” given the location of this commercial in the television schedule, implied not just love and romance as symbolized by Evans’s contact with the man in the commercial, but called to mind the heightened drama and ostentatious consumption of *Dynasty*, where Evans played Krystle Carrington, surrounded by luxury and in love with the handsome, charismatic, and ultra-wealthy Blake Carrington. Other advertisements

¹⁶ De Beers commercial, aired during *CBS News Special Report: The Royal Wedding*, July 29, 1981 (CBS), PCM; Pentax camera commercial, aired during *Dynasty* (“The Royal Wedding”), May 15, 1985 (ABC), PCM.

that featured the *Dynasty* cast included a bridal wear company's "Dynasty Collection," with photographs of Krystle and Blake Carrington and Jeff Colby, and a Visa credit card ad that promised readers of *Brides* who "said yes" to their offer a free bottle of "Forever Krystle" perfume. A framed photo of Krystle and Blake reminded readers of the romance and luxury that could be theirs if they only had access to the honeymoon shopping and worldwide cash advances that the First Card Visa would afford them.¹⁷

Advertisers also expanded their ideology by adopting specific elements of cultural beliefs about romantic love for their own purposes. The concept of personal compatibility as an important factor in successful relationships, which had been presented in the fifties as something separate from consumption, began to appear in advertisements in the 1980s. A mid-decade print ad campaign for cigarettes presented images of couples who disagreed about some apparently important issue: in one example, he liked classical music while she liked rock; in another, she liked expensive perfume of which he didn't approve. In both cases, the disagreement was apparently overridden by the "one taste they agree on," represented by a picture of the woman and man smiling at each other, each with a cigarette in hand. An ad for shoes that featured an image of a cuddling couple promised "complimentary styles... for the perfect match." Ads like these reframed the concept of personal compatibility as something that could be expressed

¹⁷ Ultress by Clairol commercial, aired during *Dynasty* ("Aftermath"), Sept. 25, 1985 (ABC), PCM; After Six "Dynasty Collection" ad, *Brides*, Dec/Jan 1984-85, 113-115; First Chicago Visa ad, *Brides*, Oct/Nov. 1986, 304. Jane Feuer notes that these ads can also be read against the program, as commentaries on "the wholly affirmative endorsement of Reaganite ideology that the program as a whole" was accused of, and points out that in their straightforward embrace of consumption the ads often miss the campy tone of the show, which was responsible for much of its popularity. I read these ads here not to claim that they were a seamless extension of the show's ideology or to argue that they were or were not successful at getting consumers to purchase the advertised products, but to point both to advertisers' attempts to link the representations of popular culture with the discourses of consumption and to the widespread cultural valorization of ostentatious consumption that characterized the 1980s. Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties*, 139-140.

entirely through consumption choices. In the case of the cigarette ads, differences in some consumption choices were overshadowed by the more important shared taste in the advertised product, while in the shoe ad the product allowed the couple to complement each other. The transference of the idea of compatibility to consumption behavior was also visible in the personal ads of this decade, as will be discussed below.

Representations of marriage: Challenges to the breadwinner/homemaker ideal

The models of marriage that circulated in 1980s commercialized popular culture were markedly different than those from previous decades, primarily in the acknowledgement that gendered expectations had changed – dual-income families were becoming the norm – and the multifaceted advice given to those seeking marital success, which no longer focused solely on the presence of romantic love. The discourses of popular culture did continue to present marriage not just as an excuse for consumption, but as the ultimate destination of romance, while also acknowledging that maintaining romance once married could be difficult, and love was still viewed as being of primary importance in the marital relationship. The factors that were believed to contribute to the growth and maintenance of love, however, were in flux. Popular magazines paid increasing attention to the belief that love itself was not enough to make a marriage successful, positing rather that a complex combination of chemistry, compatibility, complementarity, and communication would ensure a happy, and long-lasting, marriage. The dramatic increase in wives who worked for pay and the accompanying destabilization of long-held beliefs about gender roles within the home surely contributed

to these changes in marital ideals, as did the reality of high divorce rates. While most marital advice was still offered to women, men's expectations around marriage and their reactions to the expectations of their wives received more attention in commercialized popular culture than in previous decades. This fact was likely related to the increased interest in identifying men as consumers, which opened up space for cultural producers publicly to consider and/or to try to construct their desires as a discrete group.

Love was a key part of the ideal marriage as represented in women's magazines. While *Brides* presented marriage primarily in terms of the consumption it would enable, some editorial features emphasized the love between spouses that was also fostered by marriage. One piece described a couple dancing together at their reception: "All you see is each other, all you feel is a warm surge of love – encircling your lives." Another likewise focused on the importance of love to the engaged and newly betrothed couple: "From the first glance you exchanged, to the realization that you had become soul mates, your love for each other has warmed you, with a soft, ever-deepening glow." Portrayals like these stressed the significance of romantic love in mainstream conceptions of marriage, as phrases like "encircling your lives" and "a soft, ever-deepening glow" implied that the love a couple shared on their wedding day would continue to grow and be a major force in their life together.¹⁸ *Ladies' Home Journal* also regularly underscored the importance of love to its model of marriage, making statements like "love is the closest we can get to human perfection."¹⁹

¹⁸ "Rapture – Swept Up in a Whirl of Excitement," *Brides* Apr/May 1989, 483; "Forever," *Brides* June/July 1988, 411.

¹⁹ Nancy Rubin, "How to Fall in Love with Him Again," *LHJ* Feb. 1986, 79-80, 160-164.

At the same time that women's and bridal magazines presented marriage in idealized terms focused on romance and emphasizing the importance of love above all else, many editorial features exposed the potential difficulties a married couple could face. While this fragmented, contradictory message about marriage was not new to the 1980s, what was new, as compared with the previous decades discussed here, was the increasingly wide range of problems about which the engaged or married woman (or, less frequently, man) should be concerned. The regular *Ladies' Home Journal* feature "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" covered, over the course of the decade, instances of an unfaithful husband, a husband uninterested in sex, a couple who married too young, a bisexual husband, a husband unwilling to show his wife affection, a husband who focused on work to the exclusion of his marriage, a husband who treated his wife like a child, a physically abusive husband, a habitually dishonest husband, and a husband with a raging temper.²⁰ This monthly feature detailed the problems faced by a married couple who had entered counseling and always followed the same formula: her side of the story told in her voice, his side of the story told in his voice, and the perspective of the counselor. While the husband's side of the story did include examples of how his wife contributed to – or was the cause of – their marital problems, it's important to note that the order in which the stories were presented, as well as the titles themselves ("My Husband Won't Make Love to Me!," "My Husband Treats Me Like a Child!," "My Husband Lied to Me!") typically presented a situation in which the husband's behavior was the problem. The messages of these regular features were concordant with the message that popular culture had been giving women for close to a century: the

²⁰ "Can This Marriage Be Saved?," *Ladies Home Journal*: Feb. 1980, 18-26; May 1980, 30-34; June 1981, 8-12; Sept. 1982, 10-17; June 1983, 14-18; Dec. 1983, 8-14; June 1985, 14-18; Nov. 1986, 14-18; June 1987, 14-18; Oct. 1989, 14-18.

responsibility of marriage maintenance rested on the shoulders of the wife. In the case of the *Journal* and “Can This Marriage Be Saved?,” given that virtually all the marriages in these columns were, in fact, “saved,” it is clear that a major component of the magazine’s marital advice was that women should accept their husbands, regardless of their flaws.

The *Journal* also advised readers to find contentment in marriages from which romantic excitement had dissipated. While empathizing with those who “rue that day that special passion begins to dissipate,” the magazine insisted that “there’s something better on the other side of romance. It’s the honesty and compassion of day-in, day-out love.” Women were encouraged to “relish the deep pleasure of stabilized companionship, the strengthening, life-enhancing security that comes from being in a loving, committed relationship.”²¹ Kristin Celello argues that the main slant of discussions on marital “work” during the 1980s was shaped by the overall cultural emphasis on success and the discourses of neoliberalism, and this type of advice worked to redefine success not as the retention of passion but, perhaps more realistically, as the continued enjoyment of stability and companionship.²²

While the models of marriage that were existed in these media were, for the most part, presented by the writers/editors/producers/advertisers, *Ladies’ Home Journal* occasionally invited readers to participate in meaning-making. In June 1983 the magazine advertised a contest to win a “dream-come-true band of diamonds worth \$5,000,” which would “put some sparkle into your marriage.” Contestants were asked to contribute their hints for a successful marriage, in twenty-five words or fewer, in a

²¹ Colette Dowling, “After Romance Fades, What Makes a Marriage Last?” *LHJ* Feb. 1980, 84-89.

²² Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), chapter 5, 133-162.

contest that reinforced the links between diamonds and marital love. “June is the traditional month for weddings, the time when thoughts of love are everywhere. And what better way,” the *Journal* asked readers, “to make you feel like a bride again than a glorious diamond anniversary band?” The first, second, and third prize entries, as well as twenty-three honorable mentions, were featured in the following February issue. Not surprisingly, the entries chosen by editors as the winners reinforced the magazine’s overall ideology about marriage: that love was a crucial component; that successful marriages depended on compatibility, complementarity, and shared interests between partners; and that maintaining one’s marriage required hard work and the cultivation of communication, trust and intimacy. Contributors’ advice included “hold hands when you argue – it keeps love in the conversation”; “a joyous marriage is made up of two independent people whose individual strengths complement one another”; “Plan time together; common goals are a must”; and “Communication dissolves barriers. Express your feelings.”²³ A few years later, a *Journal* piece on “what keeps the love fires burning over the years” featured quotes from “a gallery of contented couples” (all of whom appeared to be married, based on the fact that the members of each couple shared a last name). Again, these “real” voices, ultimately mediated by *Journal* editors, reflected the magazine’s viewpoint. Some couples demonstrated the importance of compatibility and complementarity, like one husband who loved his wife’s energy, that “everything [she] says or does ends in an exclamation point,” while she appreciated his ability to calm her down, to “ease the pressure when I’m feeling frantic.” Another wife explained, “We see things the same way. We’re partners in life.” Others emphasized the work of marriage:

²³ “Win a Diamond Anniversary Ring,” *LHJ* June 1983, 82; “Winning Hints for a Happy Marriage,” *LHJ* Feb. 1984, 72-4.

“Whenever I blow my top, Laura calms me down by using the problem-solving techniques I’ve taught her.”²⁴ Features such as these had the effect of adding additional weight to the ideology of the magazine by presenting it in the voices of readers.

The dramatic increase in working wives posed a major challenge to the breadwinner/homemaker model of marriage that had dominated previous decades. The percentage of married women who worked outside the home doubled from 1950, when 26% of wives worked for pay, to 1980, when fully half of all married women were working or looking for work, and it continued to climb throughout the eighties.²⁵ While working wives received little support or positive representation in mainstream media during the 1890s, 1920s or 1950s, by 1980 the changes were undeniable, even for the message makers who remained invested in a model of marriage that, at bottom, supported the growth and stability of consumer culture. Thus, television programming, magazine content, and advertisements in all regularly presented images of marriages in which both spouses worked, though those representations were seldom simply positive ones. The irony, of course, is that the increase in working wives was not just a result of feminist progress and an increase in both employment opportunities and cultural support for women. The shift to the two-income family as the norm rather than the exception was also likely driven by a shift in individuals’ perception of their needs, a perception that was very much shaped by the incessant messages of consumer culture encouraging ever more consumption. References to working wives were occasionally merely factual,

²⁴ Barbra Walz, “Why Do I Love You?” *LHJ* Apr. 1987, 83-88.

²⁵ George Gilder, “Women in the Work Force,” *The Atlantic*, Sept. 1, 1986, accessed online Feb. 5, 2013 <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1986/09/women-in-the-work-force/304924/>; Linda J. Waite, “U.S. Women at Work,” The Rand Corporation, December 1981, accessed online Feb. 5, 2013 <http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2008/R2824.pdf>

expressing no judgment about the phenomenon. A life insurance ad published in *Esquire*, for example, showed a couple at a busy breakfast table, both wearing suits. Above the photo, in large, bold font, the ad explained, “She earns \$46,000. He makes \$33,000,” then went on to ask, “Who in this family should have the most life insurance?”²⁶ The apparent acceptance of working wives expressed in this ad is unsurprising, given that the increase in women who earned a significant percentage of the family income meant an increase in the number of life insurance policies New York Life could sell. For the most part, however, the issue was one that challenged beliefs about gender differences in which many individuals and consumer culture alike were deeply invested, and as such media coverage of the phenomenon tended to reflect (and foster) conflict and controversy.

Expectations, advice, and the reality of many individual marriages appeared to conflict during the 1980s like never before. Changes in the economy and in individual families’ workforce participation were accompanied by models of marriage that at times adhered to older standards and expectations and at other moments attempted to forge new ground in ideals of spousal relations, an uncomfortable state of affairs for many husbands and wives. One article in *Ladies’ Home Journal* described the changes as being driven partly by economics and partly by women’s desire for a more equitable partnership:

The old contract that had men bringing home the bacon and women waiting in the kitchen to cook it is no longer viable. For one thing, because the bacon has become so expensive, it often takes two paychecks just to afford meat on the table. Women also realize that the quality of family life improves when husbands share child-rearing, and that relationships thrive when there’s more mutual awareness and greater emotional interaction.²⁷

²⁶ New York Life ad, *Esquire*, Feb. 1980, 11.

²⁷ Erica Abeel, “The Hurting Husband,” *LHJ* Jan. 1981, 32-40.

Here, the author of this article appeared to present the new world of dual-income marriages as a largely positive development that brought about changes in marriage and family life that would benefit men and women alike. However, a simple glance at the title of the article, “The Hurting Husband,” revealed a very different story. Its real purpose was not to praise recent changes but to enumerate the various difficulties men were having in trying to cope with those changes, in dealing with what the author termed “liberation shock.” The article cited a study done by ad agency Doyle Dane Bernbach, which found that “the biggest complaint among married men who have busy wives is that they, the men, now have to spend more time doing household chores, something they dislike,” and profiled several couples who struggled to find a balance between the woman’s newfound desire for autonomy, a career, and/or a more emotionally involved and supportive husband, and the man’s desire to retain his role as sole financial provider with few domestic responsibilities. Ultimately, the author advised readers, “a couple that values marriage and family above individual goals will find it easier to struggle through personal crises and clashes of self-esteem... This sense of partnership, in which her gains are his and vice versa, helps turn the shocks of change into unexpected rewards.” While this appears to be sound advice, the fact that only women were receiving it – *Esquire* featured plenty of tips for men on how to succeed in business but virtually none on how to be a better husband or father – posed the question of what would happen if only one half of the couple valued family above individual goals. The ultimate outcome in that scenario would not likely be much different than the model marriage advocated by women’s magazines in the 1950s, which advised their readers to put their husbands’ needs before their own. A few years later, the *Journal* published a “Marriage Report”

which found that only twenty percent of marriages in America fell “into the category of breadwinner-husband and stay-at-home wife.” While those traditional marriages were outnumbered by “the two-paycheck families,” the article’s author noted that shared responsibility for bringing in income did not translate to equal roles within the family. Rather, “while many men and women on their wedding day subscribe to the belief that a wife’s career is just as important as her husband’s... that a father should have equal responsibility for child care... and that housecleaning is everybody’s job, the reality does not quite measure up to such lofty expectations.”²⁸

Portrayals of the ideal behaviors expected from men found most frequent representation in women’s magazines. There, these representations served to encourage readers to adjust their expectations of their husbands, who were supposed to take on domestic duties, plan romantic moments, and actively work on their marriage in addition to being a breadwinner. One *Ladies’ Home Journal* piece, titled “Romantic Dinners for Two – He Cooks!”, featured photographs of “hunk-in-residence Bob Woods, aka Bo Buchanan of ABC’s *One Live to Live*” readying the kids for a night at Grandma’s, shopping (for groceries, flowers, and champagne), and prepping dinner, which included chilled champagne and candlelight. An article in *Brides* assured readers that men *wanted* to take on more domestic responsibilities, presenting the shift in husbands’ attitudes as a logical consequence of women’s move into the workplace. “Because many women are working and no longer solely devoted to getting married,” the (male) author explained, “marriage for men is no longer the buyer’s market it once was. With men pursuing marriage, there has come an appreciation of its worth. This has made for a new type of husband – one who is eager not merely to help out (‘I do the heavy jobs, like taking out

²⁸ Margery Rosen, “The Marriage Report,” *LHJ* June 1985, 97-102.

the garbage'), but to share in responsibilities, to be an equal partner in both the joy and work of marriage. More and more, marriage is becoming a contract between equals, with tasks allocated regardless of sex." However, some features acknowledged that men might struggle with attempts to meet these new demands being made of them. "While men today may subscribe to the need for communication in a relationship," explained one *Ladies' Home Journal* article, "many simply don't know how to express their feelings. And since men have traditionally defined their role as that of doer rather than nurturer, they are genuinely baffled by the emotional demands being made on them."²⁹

Mainstream popular culture showcased men's desires in new ways during the 1980s. The reality that men were confused by – if not downright resentful of – the new emotional style and domestic involvement expected of them found frequent representation in eighties media. *thirtysomething*'s Michael Steadman gave voice to men's likely complaints in a 1987 episode, when he grumbled to his friend and co-worker Elliott, "There is always something bothering her, or something that I didn't do, or something that I did and I shouldn't have done. And it's like I come home and I'm thinking what can I do to help? What does she need? But it makes no difference, because she's going to find something to get on me about anyway."³⁰ Even *Esquire*, which rarely touched upon the topics of romance or emotional intimacy, featured a cartoon in the middle of the decade that depicted the gulf between women's and men's expectations of what a relationship should be. After presenting the stages of falling in love – "the beautiful love amnesia," "the beautiful love trance," "everything about our

²⁹ "Romantic Dinners for Two – He Cooks!," *LHJ* Feb. 1984, 80-81; Ron Hollander, "Why Men Marry," *Brides* Aug.Sept. 1983, 400-1; Margery Rosen, "The Marriage Report," *LHJ* June 1985, 97-102.

³⁰ *thirtysomething*, "Couples," original airdate Oct. 27, 1987 (ABC).

loved one is fascinating,” – the final panel of the cartoon featured the woman saying, “I think it’s about time to clarify our needs and define our goals in this relationship. Don’t you, Dennis?” while her boyfriend responded, “Are you kidding? The big game is on! Got any beer?”³¹ These representations emphasized what was likely a reality for many couples: that husbands and wives did not see eye-to-eye on how their marriage, and their responsibilities, should be structured.

The reality of working wives was acknowledged throughout commercialized popular culture during the 1980s, but women were still expected to fulfill all the other responsibilities that had been theirs in previous decades. They were supposed to cook, and clean, and raise the children, and attend to their marriages and to the emotional states of their husbands. Even “self”-improvement was to be undertaken as a way to be a better *wife*. In an excerpt from one of his best-selling books published in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Leo Buscaglia, a.k.a. “Dr. Love,” admonished a woman whose husband left her after she “gave him the best years of my life,” after she cleaned and cooked and raised their children, that she hadn’t done enough because she hadn’t done anything for herself. “If you are truly a lover, you want to give the best *you* there is. And that means developing all the wonder of you – as a unique human being.”³² The clear implication of his words was that if she’d only taken the time to better herself, in addition to seeing to the needs of the rest of her family, her husband would never have left. A perfume ad from 1980 emphasized to readers of the *Journal* that, despite the changing cultural landscape and increasing opportunities for employment outside the home, they should

³¹ Lynda Barry, “What Is Falling in Love?,” *Esquire* March 1984, 89.

³² Dr. Leo Buscaglia, “A Lesson in Love,” *LHJ* Sept. 1982, 50.

still focus attention on domestic chores like cooking as well as being attractive to men, if for no other reason than to bolster their husbands' fragile and threatened masculinity. The text of the ad, superimposed over a photograph of an apparently naked women sensually applying perfume to her neck, read: "You can bring home the bacon. Fry it up in a pan. And never let him forget he's a man!"³³ (See Fig. 4.2).



Fig. 4.2: Women are still expected to be beautiful and domestic

Enjoli ad, *LHJ* 1980

While they did evince interest in creating male consumers during the 1980s, advertisers remained rigidly inflexible when it came to the central paradigm that defined their messages, namely, that women were the nation's *primary* consumers. Thus, while the increase in working wives was accompanied by an apparent emphasis on the importance of dividing household responsibilities more equally, advertisements for most

³³ Enjoli perfume ad, *LHJ* May 1980, 39.

consumer goods (that is, the domestic/household ones) continued to specifically target women. The pages of *Esquire* were filled with glossy ads encouraging men to attend to their appearance (skin care, cologne, and fashion) and to indulge in their sensual desires (expensive liquors, luxury cars), but the products offered to men were intended to serve the relatively narrow purposes of attracting women and satisfying the men themselves. Advertisements in women's magazines, in contrast, included those for products intended to benefit women's families, such as foods and cleaning products, as well as cosmetics and fashions that were supposed to attract men. (Self-indulgence ads for women were less frequent than those for men and mostly focused on the pleasures of lower-cost products like chocolates or romance novels rather than top-shelf liquor and European automobiles.) The editorial content was likewise split, with men's magazines focusing on topics like politics, finance, arts and entertainment, sports, fashion, and health, all assumed to be of personal interest to men, while women's magazines spent much more time covering topics and activities that would benefit others, including cooking, housekeeping, child rearing, and marriage maintenance. The continued conflict in dual-income marriages over the distribution of household work, showcased throughout the decade in various magazine articles and television programs, highlights just how deeply rooted the belief was that all areas of domestic life were women's responsibility. Although they theoretically could have doubled their reach by including men more often as the targets of their messages, advertisers continued to cling to that belief, and likely contributed to marital conflict by continuing to present an unchanging view of gendered responsibilities. The very foundation of consumptive romantic love, as first articulated during the 1890s, was a marital arrangement that depended on women expressing their

love for their husbands through consumption, and making changes to that foundation by also identifying men as consumers for the household, as opposed to simply for themselves, was apparently too destabilizing for consumerism's cultural producers.

Weddings, honeymoons and proposals

By the 1980s, consumption had become such a powerful value that it could be represented untethered to specific products or services, so that the experience of consumption itself became the commodity that consumer culture was selling. The proliferation of the media meant increasing specialization – many topics that had previously received coverage in general interest titles were shifted to magazines specifically devoted to them. Specialized coverage provided advertisers, editors, and other cultural producers with the opportunity to extend and elaborate upon the aspects of specific topics that were, or could be, related to consumption, and the exponential increase in the presence of such messages in the media landscape of the eighties was an important factor in the widespread acceptance of the values of consumption during this time. Women's magazines in the 1890s, 1920s, and 1950s had regularly published features on weddings, including etiquette, decorations, menu planning, and bridal fashions, but in the eighties the *Ladies' Home Journal* almost never covered weddings specifically, focusing instead on the minutiae of daily married life – meal planning, housekeeping, and marriage maintenance – that came after the ceremony and honeymoon. Instead, specialized bridal magazines, which had first appeared in the 1930s and 1940s, cornered the market on representations of the big, white wedding.³⁴ The

³⁴ On the development of bridal magazines in the postwar era, see Vicki Howard, *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), chapter 3.

producers of *Brides*, one of the most widely read bridal magazines, fused romance, matrimony, and consumption together as they promised readers a lifetime of happiness if they only followed the rules laid out within the pages of the magazine. Readers were regularly informed that careful choice of goods and services would lead to a successful union. One of the most noticeable changes in the use of wedding imagery was the fact that, whereas in previous decades the image of a smiling bride or a couple at the altar had been used to sell other products (cosmetics, prepared foods, etc.), in the 1980s such images were used to sell the concept of the wedding itself, which had become a commodity in its own right.

Brides often employed the trope of a “dream come true” in its presentation of weddings and marriage, encouraging readers to identify with the images and descriptions of the magazine, particularly the advertising therein, and to adopt them as their own. Every issue contained a single page of whimsical text, musings on the meaning of love and marriage, that preceded the fashion spreads, and this was a common site for the articulation of the “dream come true” promise. “The wedding colors you choose, the dress styles you select, the china and glassware patterns you pick – all give you a chance to make your dreams come true” read one such page, while another urged readers to “envision table settings for dinner parties, the most romantic bedroom. Each choice you make turns daydreams into reality.”³⁵ Clearly, the dreams that *Brides* hoped to inspire in its readers were ones of consumer goods, and that message was expressed repeatedly. The beginning of a section on honeymoon travel encouraged readers to “Indulge your

³⁵ “In Love – and feeling so new, so glorious!,” *Brides* Aug./Sept. 1983, 367; “This Magic Moment,” *Brides* Oct/Nov 1986, 235.

most delicious honeymoon dreams,” an article on dress shopping was entitled “In Search of Your Dream Dress,” and a lengthy guide to planning “Your Dream Home” offered to “help you two weave your dreams into a dazzling home-spun tapestry.”³⁶ This formulation was self-fulfilling: the magazine’s producers presented the “dream” and then promised to help make it come true.

Indeed, as a cog in the wedding industry machine, *Brides* existed for the sole purpose of generating more profits for that industry. The magazine’s editor and contributors thus worked to present models of weddings and marriage that depended on consumption. The table of contents of a typical issue illustrated the phases of consumption encouraged by the magazine: the articles, columns and photo layouts progressed from “Planning Your Wedding,” which included ideas for ceremonies, thank-you gifts for members of the wedding party, what to look for in a wedding photographer, and how to find the perfect dress; to “Your Home Together,” with the all-important registry checklist as well as features on home decorating and food; to “Travel,” meaning the honeymoon trip that was supposed to start one’s marriage off on the right (i.e. romantic) foot. The advertisements that filled the magazine focused on the same three consumption categories. Page after page of lavish bridal fashions, wedding rings and floral arrangements, kitchen goods and other housewares (often in the hands of a smiling couple), and tempting photographs of romantic beaches and mountain resorts, interspersed between articles on thank-you note etiquette and drawing up a wedding budget, encouraged readers to conceive of their engagement and marriage in terms of consumer goods.

³⁶ “Indulge your most delicious honeymoon dreams,” *Brides* June/July 1980, 283; “In Search of Your Dream Dress,” *Brides* Aug/Sept 1983, 332; “*Brides* Planning Guide: Your Dream House,” *Brides* Dec/Jan 1984-85, 157-180.

Editorial features and advertisements alike promised readers of *Brides* that the love they shared with their fiancés could be expressed through the products and services they chose for their weddings. Regular fashion advice columns, addressing questions on topics such as how to manage a dress with a cathedral train, what attire a groom should wear at a fall semi-formal daytime wedding, and strategies to prolong a manicure, emphasized the importance of items like clothing and beauty products to the success of one's wedding day. Indeed, a guide to wedding dress shopping underscored that importance, promising to help the reader find “a wedding look you – and he – will fall in love with” and thereby implying that it would be the dress, rather than the woman, that her fiancé loved. Articles on wedding ceremonies reinforced the notion that serious attention must be paid to each element, suggesting that readers consider unique traditions (many of which depended on consumer goods, such as drawing on regional fashions when choosing attire, using state flowers when designing color schemes, hiring “exciting musicians,” releasing helium balloons or brightly colored butterflies, and choosing “getaway transportation” in the form of a horsedrawn carriage or vintage Thunderbird convertible) in order to “put your personal imprint on your ceremony.”³⁷ The ceremony itself became yet another product, one that was supposed to represent the identity of the couple.

The advertisements in bridal magazines also bestowed upon specific products the ability to represent individuals and the love they shared. One clothing ad suggested that the advertised formalwear would give the couple wearing it “The Look of Love,”

³⁷ “Your Wedding Fashion and Beauty Questions,” *Brides* June/July 1980, 34; “In Search of Your Dream Dress,” *Brides* Aug/Sept 1983, 332; Heidi Benson, “Marriage American Style,” *Brides* Aug/Sept 1983, 128; “A Creative Ceremony,” *Brides* Oct/Nov 1986, 99.

underscored by the accompanying photo of a bride and groom with their foreheads touching, smiling tenderly at each other, while another promised the engaged couple, “Together, you can make your marriage great” – as, presumably, would the After-Six-clad bride and groom in the picture.³⁸ A florist ad encouraged readers to give flowers “a starring role on your wedding day” in order to make “everything around you look as beautiful as you feel,” and an ad for perfume paired a two-page close-up photograph of a bride wrapped in a tulle veil with the simple reminder, “This is your moment to be Beautiful.”³⁹ Of all the products associated with the wedding day, wedding rings, as the physical symbol of marriage that most married people wore every day, were the most ripe for associations to romance and love, and advertisers took full advantage. One such ad featured a photograph of a beaming bride and groom leaving their ceremony arm in arm, with large text reading “Perfect symbols of love” above their heads. The ad went on, “Perfectly matched Keepsake rings... will reflect your feelings forever... For a perfect match, trust your love to Keepsake.” Another presented a picture of a bride and groom embracing and laughing above text that exclaimed, “At the moment you exchange your vows and wedding rings, your dreams come true.”⁴⁰ Ads such as these encouraged the association of products with emotions.

In *Brides* model, the honeymoon was also an opportunity for emotional expression through consumption. One article warned readers not to skip this “important beginning to a marriage that lasts,” lest they experience “the letdown and feeling of

³⁸ Lord West Formalwear ad, *Brides* June/July 1980, 56-7; Barry’s/After Six ad, *Brides* June/July 1980, 112.

³⁹ Teleflora ad, *Brides* June/July 1980, 158-9; Estee Lauder Beautiful ad, *Brides* Oct/Nov 1986, 12-13.

⁴⁰ Keepsake rings ad, *Brides* June/July 1980, 55; Krementz jewelry ad, *Brides* Oct/Nov 1986, 21.

unimportance that lack of a honeymoon [would] cast on their marriage.” Traveling somewhere together immediately after the wedding would, according to the authors of the article, “cast a glow over the beginning of your marriage – an aura of happiness that will stay with you all your lives.” Specific destinations were described through their attributes that would enhance a newlywed couple’s romantic connection.⁴¹

Advertisements also emphasized the romance of honeymoons as symbolizing the beginning of a married couple’s life. United Airlines promised *Brides* readers that “United’s Hawaiian Honeymoon vacations are a beautiful way to start your life together. There isn’t a more romantic place in the world for two people to be in love.” Newlyweds could enjoy a gorgeous sunset on the beach with their arms around each other, like the couple shown in the ad, for as little as \$929 per couple (air fare not included). In another issue, Dolphin Cruise Lines described the “paradise” of the \$995-per-person “Honeymoon Dreams” cruise in detail, with a heavy focus on consumer goods and services including “Award-winning cuisine. Chauffeur-driven limousines. A beautiful suite at the luxurious Mayfair House... Chilled champagne. Breakfast in bed... Flowers in your cabin. Gifts.”⁴² Honeymoon-related consumption did not stop at the price of airfare and accommodations, however. One *Brides* feature, aimed at helping readers make their “honeymoon in the sun” “as perfect as the [accompanying] pictures,” offered extensive suggestions for products brides-to-be should purchase for use on their

⁴¹ Marcia Powell and Lynn Graeme, “Your Honeymoon: The Important Beginning to a Marriage That Lasts,” *Brides* June/July 1980, 79. For an example of a destination described through romantic attributes, see “In the Poconos, New Glamour Enhances Romance,” *Brides* June/July 1980, 284, which emphasized the attention that the area’s attractions and employees paid to honeymooners, the “tender, loving caring about the delicious excitement you two feel about your first days of being totally, touchingly together.”

⁴² United Airlines ad, *Brides* June/July 1980, 291; Dolphin Cruise Lines ad, *Brides* June/July 1988, 561.

honeymoons, including waterproof mascara, sunscreen, combination hairbrush/water spritzers, cameras, and clothing.⁴³

The editorial features and advertisements in *Brides* linked consumption not just to the emotional experiences of weddings and honeymoons, but to the new life that a husband and wife began together. This “beautiful beginning” was represented through the accumulation of household goods, as in an ad for china which explained, “Generation after generation of brides have begun their new lives by selecting a beautiful Lenox pattern.” The registry checklist featured in each issue demonstrated just how extensive that accumulation could be: the checklist in the August/September 1983 issue included a total of 168 items in the categories of formal flatware, casual flatware, formal dinnerware, informal dinnerware, hollowware/servers, formal glassware, casual glass/barware, bar/entertainment needs, gourmet/kitchenware, housewares, electronics, linens, and decorative, as well as other general categories the reader could fill in for herself (furniture, closet/storage, luggage, exercise/sporting equipment, stationery, hobby). An extensive guide to “Planning Your Dream Home,” published in 1984, instructed readers to “start thinking about the type of home that will best suit you two. Then you can visit your Wedding Gift Registry and select fine furnishings, exciting tableware to create a home style you’ll both love.” The language used in the guide encouraged readers to view the consumer goods for which they’d register as aids to creating and maintaining romance in their married lives. A section on choosing flatware, for example, urged the engaged couple to “imagine yourselves entertaining as newlyweds, your table set with sparkle, romance!”; another instructed readers in “How to create a romantic, restful aura in your bedroom”; a third suggested, “You’ll want your

⁴³ “Honeymoons in the Sun,” *Brides* June/July 1988, 474.

furniture to live just as happily-ever-after in your new home as you two, so shop for quality pieces that will endure!”⁴⁴ Features such as these presented consumer goods in a romantic light, not just as facilitators of romance between spouses but also as possessing inherent romantic qualities.

Advertisements, too, worked to infuse common wedding registry items like dishes, glasses, and other housewares with romance, often by equating the products with the newlyweds themselves. An ad for china visualized that equation, superimposing a photograph of a happy couple within the center of a plate and assuring *Brides* readers, “this exquisite china, like your enduring love for each other, will last forever.” The same couple-love-product connection was implied by a crystal ad that promised to help the newlyweds “begin your life together in perfect harmony.” The accompanying picture was of a champagne flute and a pitcher, arranged close together as stand-ins for the bride and groom (see Fig. 4.3).⁴⁵ Other ads positioned the product itself as the love object, typically taking the place of the groom in the woman’s affection. One cookware ad depicted a woman holding a pot and exclaiming, “It’s just what I’ve been waiting for!” while another encouraged readers to “Experience the joy of another long-lasting relationship [with] the nonstick that’ll stick around for anniversaries to come.” An ad for dishes that included an offer for a sample plate for only \$2 invited readers, “Before you make a commitment to stoneware, consider this proposal... Start a happy, lasting relationship with new Cornerstone. After all, it’s not every day you get a proposal this

⁴⁴Lenox China and Crystal ad, *Brides* June/July 1980, 1-2; Registry checklist, *Brides* Aug/Sept 1983, 55-56; “*Brides* Planning Guide: Your Dream House,” *Brides* Dec/Jan 1984-85, 157-180.

⁴⁵ Viletta China ad, *Brides* Aug/Sept 1983, 222; Orrefors Crystal ad, *Brides* Aug/Sept 1983, 319.

attractive.”⁴⁶ In their attempts to forge associations between the emotional experiences of the proposal and wedding, the love women presumably felt for their fiancés, and the items they might receive as wedding gifts, these ads expressed advertisers’ hopes that consumers would indeed make an emotional investment in and develop a “lasting relationship” with specific products.

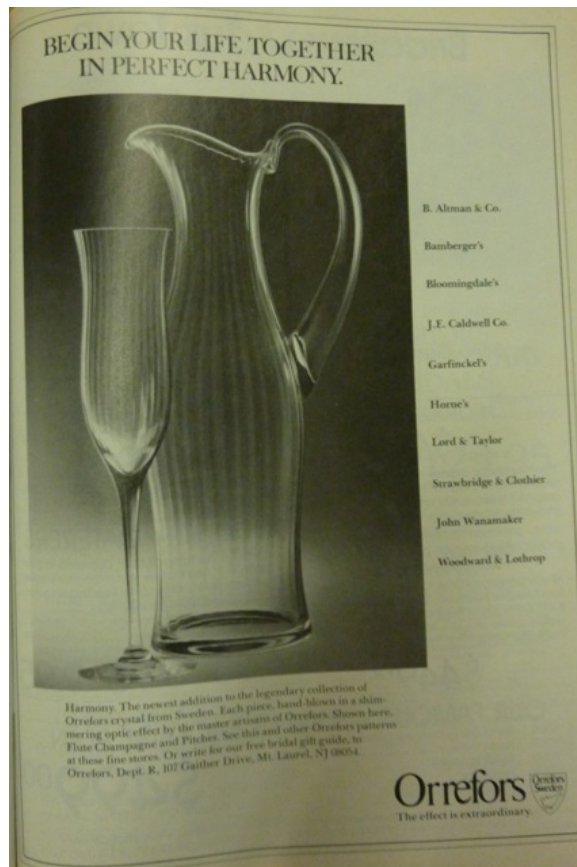


Fig. 4.3: products as stand-ins for the bride and groom

Weddings continued to be a particularly powerful cultural symbol, an opportunity for the producers of mass culture to underscore the links between romantic love and

⁴⁶ Revere Cookware ad, *Brides* Oct/Nov 1986, 52; SilverStone Supra cookware ad, *Brides* Apr/May 1989, 540; Corning Cornerstone ad, *Brides* Aug/Sept 1983, 54.

consumption that they forged in more subtle ways elsewhere. In fact, weddings – and, concurrently, the state of matrimony – received more positive treatment in popular culture than they had since the 1950s. Counterculture critiques of conformity and a skyrocketing divorce rate appeared to be in the past. A 1982 interview published in *People* magazine with Barbara Tober, editor of *Brides*, noted, “After nearly a generation of mockery and abuse, matrimony is once again booming. This year 2.5 million U.S. couples are expected to tie the knot.” Tober explained, “Marriage is more popular than ever... There’s a reverence for marriages that work, and a new passion among couples in love to make a commitment.” As a representative of the bridal industry, Tober could not hold to her initial statement that marriage was simply about the love a couple shared. For her, marriage was always also about the consumption of goods and services. When asked what she thought of elopement, Tober responded, “It’s fine, but you should still wear something special. You’ll want rings too, of course. And flowers are always nice. Since you will nearly always have witnesses at any ceremony, why not ask your best friends and, afterward, serve a meal to them and maybe some other guests? For dessert you might as well have a wedding cake.” A marriage without the consumer goods that were the basis of a traditional wedding ceremony was inconceivable to her, as someone whose livelihood depended on the big white wedding. Indeed, the scope of the bridal industry of which she was a part was revealed in Tober’s statement that “the national wedding price tag is over \$6 billion, from invitations through honeymoons. Then there’s another \$6 billion that newlyweds spend furnishing their homes.” In the early eighties, that industry breathed a collective sigh of relief as an ethic of consumption reasserted itself in American culture. An article in *Ladies’ Home Journal* on the renaissance of the

traditional wedding ceremony noted that “crystal, sterling and fine china are still top-selling items” on bridal registries, and quoted the president of the National Bridal Service, who explained, “In the 1970s, people questioned the value of material possessions. Today, there’s greater attachment to having pleasant, decorative home furnishings.”⁴⁷

Television commercials also used images of weddings to link love, romance, and consumption. A commercial for facial tissues presented the product as an integral part of the experience of weddings. As images of different weddings flashed on the screen – the father of the bride handing her off to the groom while a bridesmaid dabs her eye with a tissue in the background, a just-married couple running out of the church in slow motion while rice rains down on them, a close-up of a male hand slipping a wedding ring on a female hand – song lyrics reiterated common wedding tropes and, in the shift from “me and you” to “we,” created a state of ambiguity where the tissue might stand in for one member of the newlywed couple: “Finally the day is here, and we brush back a little tear, thinking of the joys of life as man and wife, with all our families near. Oh yes my love, it’s me and you, oh yes my darling I do, I do. We’ve shared your joys, we’ve dried your tears, we’ve touched your life all through these years.” A camera commercial proposed the wedding day as the “perfect day for the Pentax Sport 35” and employed the “perfect day” trope with images of a smiling bride, bridesmaids reaching for the tossed bouquet, an adorable flower girl, the bride and groom kissing, and the newlyweds leaving in a horse-drawn carriage. The final slogan, superimposed at the end of the commercial, promised that Pentax would give the viewer “the freedom to be your best,” and

⁴⁷ John Stickney, “Barbara Tober knows what makes a great wedding,” *People* July 5, 1982, 79-81; Nancy Rubin and Nancy J. White, “Something Old, Something New,” *LHJ* Sept. 1982, 82-3, 133-6.

presumably by extension would contribute to the possibility of having the best wedding, the best love, the best marriage.⁴⁸

As the initiator of the entire wedding process, the proposal continued to occupy a privileged spot in advertisers' representations of romantic love. In a change from previous decades, most depictions of the proposal in the 1980s were in ads for diamonds, rather than ads for the products (beauty aids, etc) that were supposed to lead to a proposal, and these ads did not typically feature the actual moment of the proposal, but rather focused on the diamond itself as a symbol of the proposal, of the wedding, and of romantic love. In a decade with widespread cultural emphasis on luxury consumption and the material trappings of wealth, advertisers' choice to use diamonds to stand in for both the emotion of love and the experience of the proposal was unsurprising. It was also a logical progression for the diamond industry. The history of the DeBeers diamond cartel and its advertising strategies over the course of the twentieth century is one of artificially controlled supply and manipulated demand, where the links between diamonds and romance were drawn consciously, and basically out of thin air, in an attempt to recession-proof the diamond market by making the stones a fundamental part of the ideology of consumptive romantic love.⁴⁹ Diamonds as they have existed in advertising have always been more ideology than substance, and this truth was foregrounded in the diamond advertisements of the eighties. A de Beers ad published in *Brides* (see Fig. 4.4) went so far as to position the diamond as a woman's love object,

⁴⁸ Kleenex Tissues commercial, Foote, Cone & Belding Historical Reel, PCM; Pentax camera commercial, aired during *Dynasty* ("The Royal Wedding"), May 15, 1985 (ABC), PCM.

⁴⁹ On the history of DeBeers and diamond advertising, see Anonymous, "Glass With Attitude," *The Economist* Dec. 20, 1997-Jan 2, 1998, 113-114; Epstein, "Have You Ever Tried to Sell a Diamond?"; and Jessica L. Ghilani, "DeBeers' 'Fighting Diamonds': Recruiting American Consumers in World War II Advertising," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 2012 26: 222 accessed online Apr. 20, 2013 <http://jci.sagepub.com/content/36/3/222>.

instructing readers to “Marry a diamond that’s not too small” and to “Marry a diamond with the best character traits” (which, according to the ad, were the main features of a diamond: carat weight, color, cut and clarity). Another ad, which appeared in *People*, highlighted the joy that possession of the ring itself, rather than the fiancé that purportedly accompanied it, would bring to the engaged woman. Underneath a photograph of a woman alone, gazing into the camera with a satisfied look on her face and her left hand, with its diamond ring visible, resting on her shoulder, bold text proclaimed, “You’re going to be so proud!” The ad went on to tell the reader what she had to look forward to if her fiancé proposed to her with a Keepsake ring: “Enter a room and you are immediately surrounded by friends sharing your excitement. And no wonder. A Keepsake is special.” While this ad could be read as aligning the special ring with the special love/special fiancé that the woman also possesses, it also clearly showcased the ring itself as her reason to be proud and as the reason that her friends would surround her excitedly, hoping for a glimpse of her diamond.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ de Beers ad, *Brides* June/July 1980, 87; Keepsake engagement ring ad, *People*, July 13, 1981, 19.



Fig. 4.4: de Beers ad, *Brides*, 1980



Fig. 4.5: de Beers ad, *Brides*, 1983

Many engagement ring ads of the 1980s reflected the cultural focus on conspicuous consumption by going a step further, presenting diamonds as a symbol not just of enduring love, but also of material wealth. The de Beers ad that encouraged women to “marry a diamond that’s not too small” explained, “choosing a larger diamond makes good diamond sense. For size affects value... years from now, you’ll both be glad you invested in a diamond as rare as your love.” de Beers’ “two months’ salary” concept – what began as an advertising slogan suggesting men should spend the equivalent of two months’ salary when purchasing an engagement ring – was used to great effect as part of the ads that linked diamonds, love, and affluence. One such ad, published in *Brides*, featured a large photo of a couple embracing, the woman’s diamond ring visible as she

rested her hand on the back of her fiancé's neck, a look of utter contentment on her face (see Fig. 4.5).⁵¹ Above the photo, the ad asked, "Isn't 2 months' salary a small price to pay for something that lasts forever?" Underneath, the ad's text explained, "your jeweler can help you choose the most spectacular diamond in your price range." The diamond in the ring worn by the model in the ad was not particularly large or ostentatious, and the ad worked to emphasize that the size of one's ring should be relative to one's fiancé's income. A small photo placed at the bottom of the ad showed different sized diamonds so readers could compare the sizes and prices: a 1/3 carat diamond would cost somewhere between \$600-\$1700, for example, while a 1 carat stone would cost between \$3000-\$11,000. Yet even while underscoring the proportionate relationship between ring size and available income, the ad simultaneously implied that a diamond's monetary worth was of paramount importance by labeling each photograph with a dollar value. At the same time, the ad assured readers, "You have a love that money can't buy." Judith Williamson argues that ads that express critiques of consumer culture can be particularly powerful, as they simultaneously appear to give credence to those critiques while ultimately reiterating the primacy of consumption and its attendant values.⁵² Her insight certainly applies to this de Beers ad, which took a moment to voice the widely-held belief that romance should exist in a realm separate from economic concerns. Yet the ad's reassurance to readers, that their love could not be reduced to a monetary figure, was sandwiched between the question, "Isn't two months' salary a small price to pay for something that lasts forever?" and the prompt, "And you'd like a diamond engagement

⁵¹ de Beers ad, *Brides* Aug/Sept 1983, 45.

⁵² Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 2005 [1978]).

ring that's as special as that love." While the middle statement tried to reject the values of consumption in favor of a purely emotional version of romance, the rest of the ad worked to reestablish the most important message: that romantic love could, and should, be expressed through consumption and measured in the material worth of an engagement ring.

Charles and Diana: A Royal Love Story

During the 1980s, media coverage of Britain's Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer offered a unique opportunity for cultural producers to link romantic love to consumption and material worth through the representation of two "real life" individuals. As with the contributions of magazine readers' contributions in the 1920s and the quiz show participants of the 1950s, the use of real people's experiences to articulate the values of consumption granted those discourses the weight of authenticity. American media presented the story of Charles and Diana, who were married in an elaborate, televised ceremony in July 1981, as a romantic narrative that fit neatly within the reigning ideology of consumptive love. Their story resonated with media producers and audiences alike during a time when mainstream culture placed a particularly high value on ostentatious displays of wealth and viewed the consumption of luxury goods as a significant emotional experience in and of itself. An estimated 750 million people worldwide watched Charles and Diana's wedding, marking it as a major romantic event in 1980s cultural history. The potency of the "future king chooses his bride" story was so powerful that it continued to circulate throughout the decade, as in the 1987 ad by a jewelry company who purported to use "rare Welsh gold," like that used in Diana's wedding band, to create "the wedding ring of royalty – because you've found your prince

charming.”⁵³ Media coverage of the engagement and wedding of Charles and Diana focused not just on romance, but on the expression of love through extravagant consumption. As the decade progressed, coverage of their marriage shifted focus to the importance of compatibility to marital success and, ultimately, to the danger of heightened expectations amid rapidly changing cultural values. The following analysis draws from magazine articles, the broadcast of the wedding on July 29, 1981, and a made-for-TV movie, *Charles and Diana: A Royal Love Story*, that aired on ABC in September, 1982.⁵⁴

A flurry of articles published in *People* during the five months between the announcement of Charles and Diana’s engagement and their wedding indicated a belief, on the editors’ part, that there was considerable interest in the details of their relationship among American readers. These articles highlighted the elements of the story that fit it into the conventional narrative of engagement and marriage: the “blissful happiness” of a woman who has accepted a proposal, the “sizable diamond-and-sapphire ring,” speculation about the all-important wedding dress, the long list of tasks on any engaged woman’s wedding planning to-do list, and the items on the couple’s registry, including “a pair of fireplace bellows, a chicken fryer and lid, and large leather wastebasket bins in burgundy, black, cream or green.” The choice of language in these articles emphasized the “fairy-tale” nature of Charles and Diana’s story, of “the Girl Next Door” who was swept off her feet by the dashing prince and carried to the cathedral in a “gilded carriage” pulled by “royal horses,” after which “the Prince and his Princess will live happily ever

⁵³ Welsh Gold Wedding Ring ad, *Brides*, Feb/March 1987, p. 300.

⁵⁴ *CBS News Special Report: The Royal Wedding*, 7/29/1981 (CBS); *Charles & Diana: A Royal Love Story*, 9/17/1982 (ABC), both PCM.

after.”⁵⁵ There was, however, relatively little actual information about their courtship to go on, and avid royal-watchers had to wait for the worldwide broadcast of the wedding to get their romantic fix.

The broadcast of the wedding on CBS, presented by news anchor Dan Rather, British journalist David Frost, and author Lady Antonia Fraser, highlighted romance, tradition, and spectacle. The anchors called the event “the wedding of the century and one of the great spectacles of our generation.”⁵⁶ While the actual camera feed (provided by the BBC) tended to showcase the grand spectacle and royal pomp and circumstance, much of the anchors’ focus was on the elements of the wedding that the bridal industry likewise focused on: the fashions, the flowers, the guest list, the food. Fraser exclaimed, upon getting the very first glimpse of Diana in the glass carriage transporting her to St. Paul’s Cathedral, “Isn’t that romantic! I think that’s the most romantic dress a lady about to be a princess has ever worn!” She went on to detail the old/new/borrowed/blue elements of the dress, as well as “other traditional and romantic touches” like myrtle in the bridal bouquet and the family diamonds in her tiara and earrings. Later, when Diana exited the carriage after arriving at the cathedral, Fraser remarked upon her “wonderful” veil and 25-yard train and her “voluminous” skirt. Before the ceremony began, the cameras cut from the procession of the royals (the Queen Mother; the Queen; Prince

⁵⁵ Fred Hauptfuhrer, “Prince Charles Finally Finds His Royal Bride: A Shy Teacher Named Diana Spencer,” *People*, Mar. 9, 1981, 32-3; Jerene Jones, “What Will Lady Di Wear at the Wedding?,” *People*, May 4, 1981, 44-51; Jerene Jones and Andrea Chambers, “Preparing For Her Fairy-Tale Wedding Puts Lady Di in a Royal Tizzy,” *People*, June 22, 1981, 26-31.

⁵⁶ This “proclaimed historicity” is one of the hallmarks of the “media events” identified by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, to which group Charles and Diana’s wedding certainly belongs. Dayan and Katz argue that one of the functions of media events is to support hegemonic establishments, and in the case of the royal wedding the hegemony for which support was evoked was not just the British state, as demonstrated by the focus on ceremony and ritual, but also the values of consumer culture as demonstrated by the focus on the material trappings of the ceremony and their connection to the emotions of romantic love. Dayan and Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Charles and his brother, Prince Andrew; Diana) on their way to the cathedral, to shots of various dignitaries (the Crown Prince of Jordan, Nancy Reagan) in their seats. After the ceremony, Rather described the ring that Charles gave Diana, made from the last of a nugget of gold that had also been used to make the rings of the Queen and some other royals. As Diana and Charles rode in an open horse-drawn carriage to Buckingham Palace, waving to the crowds thronging the street, Rather marked the momentousness of the event by saying to viewers, "If there's someone in your household in the United States not watching this, my gentle suggestion is you get them. You won't see this many times in your lifetime, if ever." Fraser, meanwhile, continued to wax rhapsodic about the newly minted princess's dress: "That wonderful fairy tale dress! The beautiful, romantic neckline is shown to full advantage in the coach. She really does look like a fairy princess." Rather informed viewers that the wedding cake was "marzipan-covered fruit cake in the tradition of British weddings," 200 pounds on four tiers, three-and-a-half feet tall, which took nine hours to bake. Anchors also found moments to stress the romantic aspects of the wedding. After Rather explained to American viewers that this was the first time in over 300 years that an heir to the throne had chosen an English woman for a bride, rather than a royal from another nation, David Frost opined, "I think this is one of the reasons that there's such emotion today, because this is a love match." He reiterated, "It's not made for reasons of state to create alliances with countries abroad; this is a love match." Later, as the couple was settling into the coach for the ride to Buckingham Palace, Antonia Fraser reacted to a rare display of connection between the two, squealing with delight, "The princess whispered in his ear!" Frost noted, "This is primarily a spectacle of the eye and ear, but also of the heart."

The ceremony itself combined a focus on religion and tradition with an emphasis on the romantic love assumed to exist between Charles and Diana. The Dean of St. Paul's addressed the congregation first, with a description of matrimony that stressed its religious foundation. The Archbishop of Canterbury then led the couple through their vows, as they promised to "love, comfort, honor and keep" each other "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health... according to God's holy law," and he prayed to God that they "may ever remain in perfect love and peace together." After hymns and readings from the Bible, the Archbishop returned to the podium and gave an address in which he offered his thoughts on the meaning of marriage. "Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made: the prince and the princess on their wedding day. But fairy tales usually end at this point, with the simple phrase 'they lived happily ever after.' This may be because fairy tales regard marriage as an anti-climax after the romance of courtship." He offered his belief that "marriage is first of all a new creation for the partners themselves. As husband and wife live out their vows, loving and cherishing one another, sharing life's splendors and miseries, achievements and setbacks, they will be transformed in the process... Those who are married live happily ever after the wedding day if they persevere in the real adventure, which is the royal task of creating each other and creating a more loving world." Here, the Archbishop articulated similar sentiments as women's magazines: marriage was not just about love and passion, but also about life-long compatibility.

While the American public demonstrated a deep interest in Charles and Diana's romance, the reality was that they knew very little about the courtship between the two. *Charles & Diana: A Royal Love Story* filled in the gaps with a fictionalized account that,

as the title promised, offered a romantic tale of true love, leading to a proposal, and culminating in a “fairy tale” wedding. The film’s ties to the discourses of consumption were multi-layered; it operated not only as a representation of the ideology of consumptive love, but also as a literal product in the media marketplace, used by the network to sell advertising time, and as a text that provided the perfect environment to sell other products. The script worked to dispel the notion (suggested elsewhere) that Charles chose Diana merely out of a sense of duty to the monarchy to choose a wife (coupled with a sense of urgency as his thirtieth birthday approached and then passed). Early scenes demonstrated that Charles encountered attractive, available young women on a regular basis – while skiing in Switzerland, as spectators at his polo matches, at parties – but did not appear to feel a spark with any of them. As he despaired of finding someone to love, the Queen assured him that love at first sight was possible: “It can happen in a flash, it really can.” Meanwhile, intercut scenes of Diana established that she was an earnest young woman of upstanding morals, one who would rather stay home at night to make paper chains for her preschool students than go out dancing with her London flatmates. Diana first caught Charles’s eye when she accompanied his younger brother to an intimate family gathering, after which the Queen Mother invited her to Scotland to spend more time with him. After some banter over a croquet game, he invited her to go fishing with him. Their first moments alone were presented as the beginning of their love story: she stumbled into his arms upon exiting his Range Rover, prompting him to tell her, “Your cheeks are like roses, like English roses,” while she put her hands on her cheeks and looked up at him coquettishly. The next scene showed Diana returning to her London flat to find that the entire hall was filled with bouquets of

red roses. The gift of red roses, an unambiguous romantic marker in popular culture, acted as shorthand to clue viewers in to Charles's true feelings about Diana.

The progression of their relationship was shown through more romantic tropes, such as candlelit dinners, and through the development of emotional intimacy, represented by them sharing their feelings about difficult experiences: for her, her parents' divorce when she was six; for him, the recent assassination of his beloved great-uncle Louis Mountbatten. After that conversation, during which Charles explained, "I couldn't share that with anyone," they moved to a lighter topic: Diana's years of dance training. The camera cut to them standing together, holding hands, as she gave him tap lessons. The combination of emotional intimacy, lighthearted fun, and attraction (Charles: "You're very beautiful... I've been thinking of you as jolly and amusing but you're beautiful") was apparently the recipe for love, as Charles confessed at the end of the scene to the friends who joined them, "You know, I'm learning to love this girl." The further development of their love was then depicted through a montage of scenes of them picnicking, walking through the woods hand in hand, sitting by a river, Charles putting his vest on Diana and then wrapping his arms around her. Each scene showed them deep in conversation but the viewer only heard music, leaving one to imagine the kinds of conversations they might have had that would have led to them falling deeply in love.

As in many other mainstream romantic narratives, the proposal was a pivotal moment in *Charles & Diana: A Royal Love Story*. Prior to proposing, Charles articulated why he loved Diana, explaining, "I've never known a woman like you. You're not locked in, overawed. You feel perfectly free to be yourself, and that's what I love." His explanation emphasized personal qualities Diana possessed rather than her beauty, her

wealth, or her suitability as a wife. Just as other representations of the proposal framed it as an integral part of the romantic trajectory, here too it was infused with heightened romance. After he asked her, “Diana, will you marry me?” and she accepted his proposal, they exchanged their first onscreen “I love you”s. The next scene – of them at a press conference after the announcement of their engagement – began with a close-up of her hand, with its enormous blue sapphire engagement ring, linked through his arm. Here, the ring performed the same function that bridal magazines and diamond advertisements described: it stood as a representation of the love Charles and Diana allegedly shared and of their promise to marry each other.

The remainder of the movie, from post-proposal through wedding, juxtaposed the scope of the wedding with the intimate relationship between Charles and Diana. Discussing their plans, Diana fantasized, “We could have it at Hyde Park Corner and I wouldn’t care, as long as you turned up,” and then joined him in acknowledging the true scale. Charles noted, “Two and a half thousand people inside that cathedral”; Diana responded, “A million outside”; Charles then added, “The entire world glued to the television.” Diana referred to the work involved in wedding planning, explaining to a friend that she was able to cope with the pressure because “as long as there are a hundred things happening, there’s no time to panic.” The scenes of the wedding itself largely replicated the BBC footage that had been broadcast, with shots of the royal family leaving the palace, the cheering crowds lining the streets, the well-dressed and dignified guests inside the cathedral, and long shots of St. Paul’s, both exterior and interior, that emphasized its size and grandeur. Yet interspersed within these shots were brief scenes that attempted to reorient the viewer’s attention to the romance at the heart of the story.

When Prince Charles and the Queen were walking down the stairs inside Buckingham Palace, getting ready to begin the procession to the cathedral, she turned to him and said, “You see? It can happen,” referring back to her insistence, at the beginning of the movie, that finding love “in a flash” was possible. And after the ceremony, the camera cut to a close-up of them in the horse-drawn carriage in which they rode back to Buckingham Palace. Diana said to Charles, looking at the crowds around them, “Thousands of people!” to which he replied, “Millions.” She then said, as they joined hands, “Just two people.” The movie ended with a freeze frame of them kissing on the palace balcony.

Like many love stories, including the animated movie *Cinderella*, to whose story Diana’s was often compared, *Charles & Diana* ended with the post-nuptials kiss. However, their marriage received continued media coverage for the rest of the decade (and beyond). Early stories emphasized their ongoing romance, claiming that “Diana was the ‘starry-eyed lover’ in the beginning, but now the prince is totally captivated – more in love than he ever thought he could be,” and provided evidence of that love, such as the fact that Charles enjoyed “slipping surprises under Diana’s pillow: perfume, jewelry, notes.” Their union was alleged to have made them both better people, as “each has achieved a newfound confidence in this marriage.” Such stories also took pains to emphasize the unremarkable nature of their domestic life, noting that “Charles and Diana are both homebodies,” and that “the evenings that the couple spend together at home are ordinary and cozy... It is these evenings – alone with her husband and her baby, listening to music and curled up with a book – that Diana seems to love best.”⁵⁷ Some reports emphasized the luxury of Diana’s life, such as the fact that her wardrobe, less than two

⁵⁷ James Whitaker and Phyllis Battelle, “Dazzling Diana,” *LHJ* Feb. 1982, 85-87, 146-151; Gwen Robyns, “Diana: When a Princess Becomes a Superstar,” *LHJ* June 1983, 85-89, 131-136.

years after marrying Charles, was valued at \$250,000. She was described as a compulsive shopper, and her clothing collection allegedly required “two full-time dressers, a lady-in-waiting, personal attention from about 10 designers, tens of thousands of dollars a year and a lot of time.”⁵⁸ The stories that focused on the royal couple’s romantic interactions, their cozy domestic life, and the luxury to which Diana now had access were largely positive, painting a portrait of a happy couple whose dreams had come true.

However, hints of marital trouble were visible from early on, as in one story detailing Diana’s “difficult period of adjustment” to her loss of privacy. As time went on, more stories exposed the flaws in their marriage. The tenor of these articles varied depending on the intended audience. Stories published in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, whose general message to readers was to encourage them to make the best of the marriages they had, might note, four years after the wedding, that the prince and princess appeared to be growing apart, based on the fact that they spent increasing amounts of time with discrete friend groups, but they attempted to end on a positive note: “Since Charles and Diana appear to be as affectionate and attentive as ever, it would seem that having a diversity of companions helps them develop as individuals while enriching themselves as a loving couple.” In contrast, articles in celebrity gossip magazine *People*, which had initially fawned over the romantic engagement and wedding, soon turned sour. One such article noted that Charles and Diana were “at decidedly different stages of their

⁵⁸ Jeff Jarvis, “Reveling in the Lap of Luxury,” *People* Mar. 31, 1983, accessed online <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20084539,00.html> Dec. 17, 2012; Gioia Dilliberto, “Hello, Harry!” *People* Oct. 1, 1984, accessed online <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20088780,00.html> Dec. 17, 2012; Michael Small, “Bundles for Britain,” *People* Nov. 11, 1985, accessed online <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20092156,00.html> Dec. 17, 2012

lives: While Di dance[d] all night, Charles prefer[red] nothing more than playing polo, tending to his sons, watching television and hitting the sack early.” By 1987, one *People* article noted, “After six years, Charles and Di’s fairytale marriage loses its glow.” Emphasizing the importance of compatibility, as did many other cultural sources of the time, the article claimed, “their shared enthusiasms are distressingly few, and their mismatched tastes sometimes comically obvious.” Another article published a few months later argued, “the fairy-tale love story behind the couple’s wedding in 1981 was largely fictitious,” pointing instead to Charles’s duty to choose a wife as the real reason for his proposal to Diana, “the younger sister of one of his friends [who] was attractive, was a virgin.”⁵⁹ The trajectory outlined in these articles, from swept-off-their-feet romance to being disappointed at unmet expectations and major differences in goals and tastes, likely mirrored the experiences of many married couples during the decade.

Media producers constructed a narrative of Charles and Diana’s love story that had little to do with the actual individuals themselves; rather, it spoke to a cultural preoccupation with extravagant consumption as the expression of emotional experience, as well as widespread concerns about how to identify personality match-ups that would result in successful marriages and whether reigning models of marriage could withstand major changes in gendered expectations of responsibilities and behaviors. Both journalistic and fictionalized accounts of Charles and Diana’s relationship provided space

⁵⁹ Anne Edwards, “In the Court of Princess Diana: Diana & Her Friends,” *LHJ* Nov. 1985, 133-135, 219-226; Scot Haller, “Princess Diana’s Royal Retreat,” *People* Jan. 31, 1983, accessed online <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20084161,00.html> Dec. 17, 2012; Fred Bernstein, “Rebellion at Kensington,” *People* July 22, 1985, accessed online <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20091329,00.html> Dec. 17, 2012; Fred Bernstein, “Happily? or Just Ever After?” *People* June 8, 1987, accessed online <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20096470,00.html> Dec. 17, 2012; Bonnie Johnson, “Autumn of Their Discontent,” *People* Nov. 9, 1987, accessed online <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20097534,00.html> Dec. 17, 2012

for these issues to be explored and gave individuals the opportunity to engage with questions about the place of romantic love in a consumption-obsessed culture and the significance of compatibility to marital success.

Personal ads: compatibility through consumption

Like Charles and Diana, individuals who placed personal ads in the 1980s sought romance in a world that was ever more focused on consumption. Indeed, ad placers of the eighties revealed a perspective that was much more consumerist than that of their predecessors. Increased emphases on appearance and compatibility, as well as general changes in the composition of the ads, suggest that ad placers were beginning to think of both potential mates and themselves as products, and specific attention to consumption tastes received significant attention for the first time. While the desires of these individuals still appeared to be in a process of negotiation with the values of consumer culture, they hewed much more closely to those values than did the desires of previous decades' ad placers. Personal ads from the 1950s that referenced compatibility appeared to challenge the dominant breadwinner/homemaker model of marriage promoted by contemporary consumer culture. However, by the 1980s ads that emphasized compatibility were more in line with mainstream values, partly because compatibility was a more central part of mainstream models of marriage and partly because it was more tied to consumption choices. The notion of compatibility as an important factor in a successful relationship was evident in ads where ad placers described personal qualities and/or interests, of themselves and/or of their desired mates. Some of these ads, especially those that focused on qualities such as honesty, loyalty, a sense of humor, unconventionality, or on interests such as sunsets, nature and meditation, gestured to a

model of romance that was not bounded by the constraints of consumption. Others that focused on activities requiring money, like dining, travel, theater, or sailing, adhered more closely to the model of romance provided by such vehicles of consumer culture as magazines and television. Many ads expressed both elements, a desire to find connection outside the realm of consumption alongside an embrace of the values of consumer culture. Such ads suggested that for many individuals, their ideas about love were influenced by consumer culture to a greater degree than in earlier time periods, but the shift toward total acceptance was not yet complete. Most importantly, the sheer volume of detail included by many ad placers, whether that detail was related to personal qualities, consumption habits, or both, revealed a consumerist approach to the pursuit of romance. In fact, the single most notable change from earlier time periods was the exponential increase in detail. Across the board, personal ads published in the 1980s included many more details about both the ad placer and about his/her desired mate than those from previous decades, indicating an increasing acceptance of the idea that “shopping” for a mate could be the same as “shopping” for consumer goods. The personal ads considered in this chapter include those published in a selection of major papers from various cities in the U.S., including San Francisco, Denver, Miami and Des Moines, as well those published in gay newspapers from Chicago, Boston, and Washington D.C. and in magazines for gay, lesbian, and trans readers.⁶⁰

The personal ads examined here attest to the importance of romantic love, as an overwhelming majority of all ad placers – female or male, gay or straight – were in the market for a romantic relationship. However, they do not necessarily support the cultural

⁶⁰ *Christopher Street* (gay men’s lifestyle magazine); *On Our Backs* (lesbian erotica); *The TV-TS Tapestry* (support for transvestites and transsexuals).

emphasis – at least as evident in the other media included in this analysis – on marriage as the natural destination of such relationships. Only a very small minority of ads, all placed by heterosexual individuals, specifically voiced a desire for marriage. While this is not to say that many ad placers did not ultimately hope to marry, it does stand in contrast to earlier time periods when a larger percentage of ad placers made that hope explicit.⁶¹ The majority of the ad placers specified what their goals were – dating, a relationship, sex, or marriage – but a significant minority did not. Since, by this time, personal ads were generally known to be an avenue through which to pursue a romantic relationship, it's reasonable to assume, as readers of these papers likely would have, that ad placers who didn't specify their goals in placing their ads were in fact looking for a woman or man with whom to have a relationship. A higher percentage of gay and lesbian ad placers specifically sought sexual relationships than their straight counterpart, but the majority of all groups either explicitly sought a long-term relationship/marriage or implied such a desire by leaving their intention unspecified.⁶² In a variety of ways, ad placers in the 1980s illuminated the importance of finding romantic success. The lesbian who was “looking for thoughtful adventure [and] thoughtless passion,” the gay man who sought “the coveted relationship,” the mother of two who hoped to meet a man “for good company, future,” the “fun man” who needed a “decent lady in 20s for a happy, serious relationship,” and the pre-operative MTF transsexual who wanted “to meet that special someone to share the rest of my life with” all revealed the continued cultural importance

⁶¹ 83% of ads in the 1890s, 95% of ads in the 1950s, and 29% of ads in the 1950s specifically mentioned marriage as the goal, compared to just 9% of straight-placed ads in the 1980s.

⁶² Specifically seeking sexual relationships: 25% gay versus 15% straight for men; 30% lesbian versus 11% straight for women. Looking for committed relationship beyond just sex: 84% of straight men, 89% of straight women, 69% of gay men, and 59% of lesbians.

of having a romantic partner.⁶³ In some ways, the landscape of personal ads was different in the 1980s: fewer people were explicitly seeking marriage, most ads contained much more detail than those from earlier eras, and there were more public forums in which sexual minorities could engage in the process of advertising for love. In one very important way, however, personal ads from the 1980s, as a group, resembled those from previous decades. Their existence was a testimonial to the importance of romantic connection to individuals' models of happiness and to the lengths some people would go to try to find it when not readily available in their daily lives.

Appearance was more important to and more highly valued by ad placers in the 1980s than in the decades considered in previous chapters, though there were noticeable differences based on gender and sexuality. Overall, ad placers believed that men placed a higher value on their partners' appearance than did women, and advertised accordingly. Straight women, as a group, mentioned physical appearance most frequently: over half described themselves as attractive, and another ten percent both described themselves as attractive and stated a desire for an attractive mate. Ads like "slender attractive WF seeking unattached, financially secure man," "attractive, professional European lady... seeks conservative, refined gentleman," and "attractive blonde w A-1 humor seeks caring Jewish man" were typical for straight women.⁶⁴ While just ten percent of straight men mentioned only their own attractiveness, nearly 40% sought an attractive mate, either in addition to describing themselves as attractive (15%) or as the only mention of appearance (24%), in ads like "man wants attractive lady 30-50 for close relationship," or

⁶³ *On Our Backs* Summer 1985, 46; *Christopher Street*, Oct. 1983, 60; *Denver Post*, Apr. 1, 1988, p. 2D; *The TV-TS Tapestry*, Issue 52 (1988), 107.

⁶⁴ *Des Moines Register*, July 4, 1982, p. 1G; *San Francisco Chronicle*, Mar. 17, 1985, p. 23; *Miami Herald*, July 6, 1986, p. 1E.

“int’l businessman, warm, handsome like to meet attractive woman.”⁶⁵ These figures suggest that women’s appearance carried more weight than did men’s, as women showcased their own appearance in an attempt to sell themselves as desirable partners, while men evinced a concern with their potential dates’ looks more often than their own. The fact that two thirds of lesbians did not mention appearance in their ads at all suggests, further, that women’s appearance was of particular importance to men. Gay men mentioned attractiveness more than lesbians or straight men, and a full 40% mentioned their own attractiveness, either alongside a desire for an attractive mate or as a stand-alone self description, which, again, reveals an increased interest in appearance on the part of men.

Ad placers also tended to adhere to cultural conceptions around gender roles when it came to the question of money: men were more often expected to be the financial provider in a relationship. Straight women frequently seemed to offer their appearance as a sort of barter for financial support. An attractive woman seeking a financially successful man was a combination that appeared often in women’s ads, like the “petite, attractive F [who] wishes to meet dynamic, successful M with high standard of living,” or the “very attractive, slender Asian female” who desired a relationship with an “affluent” male. The counterpart, a successful man seeking an attractive woman, was also common, such as the “handsome rich bachelor [who] needs beautiful centerfold lady” or the “generous male [who] desires attractive female.”⁶⁶ In general, straight women were much more concerned with financial stability when considering a possible romantic relationship than straight men. Nearly half (47%) of all straight female ad placers

⁶⁵ *SF Chronicle*, Jan. 6, 1980, p. 2; *Miami Herald*, July 13, 1986, p. 1E.

⁶⁶ *SF Chronicle*, Jan. 5, 1980, p. 16; *SF Chronicle*, Dec. 6, 1987, p. 21; *SF Chronicle*, Jan. 5, 1980, p. 16; *Denver Post*, Jan. 11, 1986, p. 1C.

included mention of financial status in their ads, while only about a quarter (27%) of straight men did so. Of the straight individuals who included financial details, both men and women placed a higher value on men's financial contributions (96% of men who mentioned finances were describing their own, while 85% of the women who did so were advertising for successful men). Women also clearly believed that their own financial contributions to a relationship were important, including details about their own financial stability or career success 61% of the time, while men, who only included requests for a mate who was financially successful 4% of the time, had apparently not yet gotten the message about the reality of dual-income families. Gay men and lesbians were less concerned, overall, with financial status than their straight counterparts, but in these groups lesbians were even less concerned than gay men – only 12% of lesbians mentioned financial status, while 22% of gay men did so. The statistics here demonstrate that, just as the messages of consumer/popular culture would have them believe, individuals did indeed place a higher value on men's career and financial success as a facet of their identity and as an important male contribution to a romantic relationship. Indeed, while some ads made reference to the ad placers' material possessions or other luxuries that their incomes could support, men placed all such ads. Both gay and straight men promised things like a "West Village town house and car," a "country home in Woodstock," an "ultramodern east Lakeview apartment," "trips to Hawaii," "Dom Perignon and moonlight sails," and "social position, golf and travel," presenting them as selling points to the individuals perusing the classified sections.⁶⁷ Women made no

⁶⁷ Town house and country home, both *Christopher Street*, Oct. 1983, 60; *Windy City Times*, Jan 8, 1987, p. 22; *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 20, 1984, p. 25; *Miami Herald*, July 6, 1986, p. 1E; *Denver Post*, Oct. 8, 1989, p. K1.

mention of specific possessions or luxurious lifestyles, either in their own self-descriptions or in their descriptions of their ideal partners.

Beyond just the explicit mention of material possessions, personal ads of the 1980s frequently expressed an acceptance of the values of consumer culture in a variety of ways. Individuals who placed these ads were more fluent in the discourse of consumer culture than were their predecessors. Some referenced popular culture, writing “Clark Kent looking for pretty Lois Lane”; “Prince Charming seeks Cinderella to make it all come true”; or “Beauty prof lady seeks Prince Charming.” These ads assumed that newspaper readers all possessed a shared body of cultural knowledge, such that reference to characters from popular movies would call up reliable associations: Clark Kent, the bumbling disguise of the powerful, masculine Superman; Lois Lane, the smart, stubborn, gorgeous reporter who Superman loved; Prince Charming, the handsome, wealthy bachelor sought after by all the maidens of his kingdom; Cinderella, the simple, kind girl next door whose beauty stole the prince’s heart.⁶⁸ Using this kind of cultural shorthand had the effect of reducing individuals to types, of likening them to cultural productions. Other ad placers located themselves more firmly, and more consciously, within the realm of advertising than those from previous eras, riffing on the language of product ads – or even slogans for particular products – with headlines like “Summer clearance,” “Now on the market,” “End of summer special,” and “She Slices, She Dices!”⁶⁹ Individuals who placed this type of ad explicitly equated the function of personal ads with that of product

⁶⁸ *SF Chronicle*, Jan. 1, 1980, p. 22; *Miami Herald*, July 6, 1986, p. 1E; *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug. 2, 1981, p. 31. *Superman* was released in 1978; *Cinderella*, originally released in 1950, was re-released in theaters several times including in 1981, and would thus have been a contemporary reference for the individuals who placed the latter two ads.

⁶⁹ *Windy City Times*, Sept. 21, 1989, p. 50; *Windy City Times*, Dec. 25, 1986, p. 36; *Windy City Times*, Sept. 21, 1989, p. 50; *On Our Backs*, Nov/Dec 1989, 48.

ads and thus implicitly equated people with products, albeit with an ironic, tongue-in-cheek take on advertising discourse.

Personal ads from the 1980s frequently contained much more detailed descriptions of the ad placer, and/or the type of person the ad placer was seeking, than the ads from earlier decades. This level of detail corresponds to the exponential increase in forms of media and types of consumer goods that characterized the late twentieth century. The wide range of products, services, television channels, music genres, and more that were available to individuals may well have had the effect of encouraging them to see themselves as consumers even in the realm of romantic love, with the ability to pick and choose from an endless variety of desirable character traits and consumption behaviors. Many of the qualities desired by ad placers or used to describe themselves were personality traits rather than consumption behaviors. Nevertheless, the sheer overall variety of traits mentioned, and the specificity of the combinations desired, suggests a consumerist state of mind on the part of ad placers. Unlike earlier eras, when nearly all personal ads mirrored the same formula and those placing the ads usually had only the most basic of requirements – women sought a husband who would be a good provider while men wanted a wife who was a good homemaker; both wanted respectability and, sometimes, a spouse with whom they could have a good time – by the 1980s many ad placers were quite specific in both their self-descriptions and their desires. By this time, the belief that a person could be accurately summed up through a list of descriptors, be they personality traits, consumption habits, other interests or a combination of the three, had truly taken hold. Overall, nearly forty percent of all ad placers included consumption habits and/or personality traits in their ads. The individuals represented in the classified

section conceived of themselves, and those they sought, as simultaneously both products and consumers. In so doing, they reduced the quest for love to a checklist of desired traits – physical characteristics, consumption tastes, personality traits, activity interests – against which to evaluate possible dates to see how they measured up (a concept that would see further expansion and development with the rise of internet dating at the turn of the twenty-first century).

The individuals who placed personal ads paid frequent attention to consumption tastes, marking them as a crucial factor in romantic relationship. The idea that one's preferences in music, television, movies, or food could somehow reveal important information relevant to one's suitability as a mate was a new development in the realm of personal ads, and some specified their tastes in great detail, such as individuals who enjoyed "Pavarotti, 60 Minutes and mushroom barley soup," "Dan Fogleberg and James Taylor," "Prairie Home Companion... Iowa football and basketball," "films, NPR, food," "Brazilian jazz" or "classical music and modern literature."⁷⁰ Many others included more general descriptions of the kinds of activities they enjoyed, which were often activities that required money, such as "movies, theatre, travel, good food and wine," "skiing, dancing, tennis," "traveling, films, music, theatre," "dancing, bridge, fishing, baseball, and quiet dinners out," "travel, movies, art and dining out," and "golfing, movies and aerobics."⁷¹ Ads of this type typically referred only to the activities enjoyed by the ad placer, with the occasional add-on request for a woman or man "with similar interests."

⁷⁰ *Miami Herald*, July 13, 1986, p. 1E; *Denver Post*, Apr. 1, 1988, p. 2D; *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 9, 1987, p. 19F; *Windy City Times*, May 14, 1987, p. 30; *Windy City Times*, Sept. 21, 1989, p. 50; *Windy City Times*, Oct. 19, 1989, p. 40.

⁷¹ *Des Moines Register*, July 4, 1982, p. 1G; *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 6, 1984, p. 17; *Bay Windows*, Jan. 2, 1986, p. 14; *Des Moines Register*, July 4, 1982, p. 1G; *Windy City Times*, Dec. 21, 1989, p. 42; *Des Moines Register*, Sept. 1, 1985, p. 2G.

The frequent reference to such activities, coupled with the lack of a corresponding list to describe potential partners, implied a belief that enjoying the same activities was an important part of a successful relationship. These ads also implied that successful relationships required the regular expenditure of money in order to pursue such activities. The ideal relationship, as presented by these ad placers, was one in which the couple spent a great deal of time outside the home engaged in various leisure pursuits.

Like the Boston-area gay man who noted that he was “not into ‘dinner, art, theater,’ etc.,” some ad placers eschewed the obvious focus on consumption, choosing to focus on personal qualities instead. These types of ads sometimes focused on self-description, like the “DWM, attractive, intelligent, energetic, independent, honest and caring” or the “GWF... humorous, sincere, intelligent, fun-loving.”⁷² Other times, those placing the ads only described the type of partner they sought, such as the gay man seeking “someone who is reasonably intelligent, attractive, fun-loving, ambitious and a good person” or the lesbian who “value[d] integrity, intelligence, maturity, openness.”⁷³ Often, individuals who focused on personality traits included descriptions of both themselves and the type of mate sought, such as the “gentle and creative” woman “seeking relationship with man of quality communication, chemistry”; the “rugged exec., extremely intelligent, athletic, aggressive” who wanted a woman who was “beautiful & sexy but not egotistical, intelligent & sophisticated but warm & funny”; and the “versatile, health conscious, bright achiever, energetic and sincere” gay man seeking a

⁷² *Bay Windows*, Apr. 12-25, 1984, p. 30; *Des Moines Register*, Sept. 1, 1985, p. 2G; *Washington Blade*, May 2, 1986, 25.

⁷³ *Windy City Times*, Mar 12, 1987, p. 29; *Bay Windows*, June 5, 1986, p. 19.

man “who is well adjusted, solid mind and body, secure, with a keen sense of humor.”⁷⁴

Unlike the ads that focused solely on consumption choices, which assumed the necessity of identical tastes in order for a couple to fall in love, the ads that focused on personality traits acknowledged that different combinations of traits might lead to a successful relationship, and they demonstrated the range of qualities that could potentially be desirable, depending on the individual(s) in question. However, these ads should not be read as an outright rejection of the values of consumer culture. Rather, ad placers’ extensive cataloging of their own appealing qualities and/or traits they desired in others is evidence of the pervasiveness of a consumerist state of mind. Here, ad placers extend the comparison and evaluation of products based on their selling points, encouraged by the discourses of advertising and the techniques of display in retail stores and in media texts, to the process of looking for a romantic partner.

Overall, the personal ads of the 1980s evinced a much greater acceptance of the values of consumer culture than those placed in previous decades. Beyond reiterating the models of romantic love and successful marriage that received representation in commercialized popular culture, the individuals who used the classified pages to search for love in the eighties articulated a perspective that was profoundly influenced by the cultural valorization of consumption. The translation of individual desires for romantic love into the idiom of consumption would be even further realized by the rise of Internet dating in the early twenty-first century, as the final chapter will discuss.

Conclusion

⁷⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 6, 1984, p. 17; *San Francisco Chronicle*, Mar. 17, 1985, p. 23; *Bay Windows*, Feb. 4, 1988, p. 20.

The expansion of the media and of consumption choices during the 1980s was accompanied by the expansion of the ideology of consumptive romantic love. As the act of consumption became valued as an emotional experience in and of itself, touchpoints on the romantic trajectory – the proposal, the wedding – became commodified and existed within popular culture as advertisements not for particular products but simply for the values of consumption. Concerns about how to achieve a successful marriage were increasingly articulated through the framework of compatibility, which was more easily appropriated by consumer culture than earlier models. Individuals who placed personal ads displayed a much greater degree of acceptance of the values of consumer culture than their predecessors. Ad placers of the 1980s marked consumption tastes as a relevant criterion in the search for romantic love and demonstrated a conception of themselves and potential mates as products through the composition of their ads. Their increasing acceptance of consumer culture's ideology of romance foreshadowed the changes that would come in the early twenty-first century, when Internet dating sites refashioned the quest for romance within the bounds of the discourse of consumption.

CHAPTER 5

***The Bachelor* and Online Dating: Consumption, Choice, and Romantic Love in the Twenty-First Century**

Introduction

Many representations of love and romance exist in today's media landscape of seemingly unlimited choice and infinitely fragmented target markets, but a single dominant ideology of consumerist romantic love remains visible across mainstream commercialized popular culture. The assertion that consumption and love are mutually dependent is ubiquitous in twenty-first century media. It is a unifying thread that joins together the messages that consumers encounter in a variety of places – clicking through websites online, streaming music on their smartphones, watching their favorite television shows, flipping through magazines at the doctor's office – and forms an endlessly repeating refrain. Despite the even greater expansion of the media since the 1980s, there are still cultural productions that receive a relatively wide audience. ABC's long-running unscripted dating shows *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, in which a single man or woman chooses a potential spouse from among 25 hopeful mates, are among the most visible and most popular contemporary representations of romantic love. Close readings of the most recent (2012) seasons of the two shows offer a snapshot of one prevalent representation of romantic love in twenty-first-century America, supplemented here by representations from various sources including print magazines, websites, other TV

programming, and online, print, and television advertising. This romantic narrative is, like those examined in previous chapters, one that is assumed to end at the altar. It is highly influenced by the values of consumer culture, and many popular representations depict the quest for love as being similar to the experience of going shopping, dependent on evaluation of all the available products (i.e., potential partners) through comparison of their various features. In addition to the importance of choice, this contemporary model of love also relies on the seemingly contradictory concept of destiny, a belief that for every individual there exists a perfect partner, variously referred to as “The One” or a “soulmate.” Consideration of the new arena of online dating reveals that for the most part, this successor to the newspaper personal ads of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a site where the values and demands of consumer culture dominate individual searches to find love. Indeed, the values of consumer culture appear to influence the search for love to a much greater degree than in previous decades. The identification of *all* individuals as consumers in the realm of romantic love has diffused the turmoil that was visible in 1980s popular culture over working wives, the construction of the male consumer, and concerns about the impact that both would have on the gendered balance of power in romantic relationships. Now that men and women alike can be construed as consumers in the market for love, the discourses of popular culture are less concerned with the relationship between gender and purchasing power than in previous decades.

This chapter outlines the various ways that the *Bachelor* shows promote consumption as a central element in their narrative of romantic love, argues that that narrative further expands the ideology of consumptive love that consumer culture developed over the last century, and demonstrates that consumer culture’s romantic

ideology is reflected in the individual quests for romantic success taken up online. Sections analyze the links between romantic love and consumption in twenty-first-century popular culture; the seemingly contradictory models of choice and destiny that structure contemporary models of finding love; and the continued emphasis placed on the proposal, before turning to a consideration of some of the most popular dating sites. In general, the model of love articulated by *The Bachelor* franchise is one that is heavily influenced by the values of consumer culture, and the process of finding love upon which the title characters embark bears marked similarities to the process of utilizing online dating sites. The narratives of both *The Bachelor* and of popular dating sites rely on the concepts of choice and destiny to define romantic love through the discourses of consumer capitalism.

Questions about the best ways to find romantic success and attempts to translate emotional experiences into consumption behaviors have occupied a central place in popular culture for over a century, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, and *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* put a new spin on these common themes by allowing the viewing audience to witness ordinary individuals undertake the search for true love. In so doing, the shows further the transmission of consumption values to individuals, encouraging viewers to identify with the people onscreen who proceed through a romantic narrative that, while seemingly “unscripted,” has been constructed by producers to serve the needs of consumer capitalism. *The Bachelor*, which first aired in early 2002, was an immediate success, drawing 19.5 million viewers with its final episode in which Alex Michel chose – but didn’t propose to – Amanda Marsh.¹ The woman Michel

¹ Emily Nelson, “This Year’s ‘Bachelor’ Really Doesn’t Want to Be on TV,” *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 8, 2002, B1.

rejected in that episode, Trista Rehn, later became the first *Bachelorette*, as producers responded to charges that the show was sexist and demeaning to women by turning the tables and allowing Rehn to choose from 25 men. Each season of the show follows the same basic formula: the title character goes on dates with the contestants in a variety of luxurious and romantic settings, then chooses which contestants to keep for another week and which to send home in dramatic “rose ceremonies” (so-called because the contestants who get to stay are offered roses). The final four contestants take the title character to their hometowns to meet their families, after which the pool gets whittled down to three contestants who travel to a romantic (often tropical) location with the title character. At that point, the remaining contestants are given the opportunity to spend the night with the Bachelor/Bachelorette, who then chooses two of them to introduce to his/her family members before making his/her final selection, which ideally results in an on-air proposal. As of this writing, ABC has aired sixteen seasons of *The Bachelor* and eight of *The Bachelorette* and, while the programs may not receive quite the ratings they once did, they are still reliable moneymakers for the network (bringing in \$177.9 million in advertising revenue for the 2009-2010 season).² They have also worked their way into the cultural vocabulary of the nation, spawning what the *New York Times* terms “an abundant comedic subculture” that includes sketch comedy shows, *Saturday Night Live* spoofs, fake Twitter accounts, Tumblr blogs and more.³ By Ben’s and Emily’s seasons (seasons 16 and 8, respectively, though fans typically refer to the seasons by the title character, not the number), many of the contestants have been long-time fans of the

² Brian Steinberg, “How ABC Keeps Fans in Love With ‘The Bachelor,’” *Ad Age* Feb. 14, 2011, accessed online <http://adage.com/article/media/abc-fans-love-bachelor/148843/> 1-4-13.

³ Megan Angelo, “The Romance! The Roses! The Roasts!,” *New York Times*, Feb. 12, 2012, AR20.

show, which at times produces a curious mirror effect. Not only do these men and women already know the script and the strategies that have and haven't proven successful in the past; they also already possess knowledge of the person for whose attention they're competing, since both Ben and Emily were contestants themselves in the preceding seasons.⁴ During the initial parade of women pouring out of limos to introduce themselves to Ben in the first episode, one confessed, "I watched last season and I have to say I have the biggest crush on you!," several of them quoted his memorable lines from the previous season to him, and a common refrain was, "I'm so happy that it's *you!!!*"

Of course, a great many TV genres deploy and intersect discourses of consumerism and of romance. Yet such reality programs as *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* are particularly well suited for promoting the romantic narrative that has been developed by the producers of consumer culture, as both are explicitly economically based. Producers of unscripted programming are ultimately invested in shaping the events that unfold before the cameras into interesting and coherent narratives that will attract viewers and keep them coming back for more. As Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray point out, while unscripted television is compelling partly because of its promise to represent something real and authentic, at the same time viewers are aware of the constructed nature of the program they watch. Yet this does not mean that the programs are not ideologically and economically effective. Viewer awareness can encourage the audience to engaged with the programs even more, this giving them an even greater impact as viewers play with, yet still accept, their discourses and their commercial underpinnings. Indeed, Chad Raphael urges us to remember the political economic

⁴ Ben's on-air proposal was rejected by Ashley Hebert in Season 7; Emily accepted Brad Womack's proposal in Season 15 but the couple broke up six months later.

origins of “reality” TV, which arose as a money-making strategy in the face of the restructuring of the U.S. television industry in the 1980s. Unscripted programming offered producers a way significantly to cut production costs and, thus, gave them a better chance at recouping their investment and making a profit.⁵

The salient question about the *Bachelor* franchise is why these narratives about the quest for true love and marriage are so compelling to twenty-first century audiences. What does it mean for contemporary American culture to have these narratives occupy such a prominent place in popular consciousness? Theories of audience reception are one way to answer this question, placing the pleasures offered to the viewer at the center of the explanation.⁶ Watching with a group of friends, yelling at the screen; identifying with particular types of characters, rooting against the villains, trying to predict who will be chosen; believing in the inherent importance of the quest for true love and/or adopting an air of contempt for the whole process; taking the narrative at face value and/or relishing in the campy aspects of the program – shows like *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* offer a multiplicity of potential pleasures for the viewer, who may experience any and all of them at the same time in spite of the fact that some appear to be mutually exclusive. Features in the popular press, published amid the highly successful ratings of the early seasons, usually made one of two points when discussing the show’s appeal: either, in the

⁵ Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray, “Introduction,” Murray and Ouellette, eds., *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); Chad Raphael, “The Political Economic Origins of Reali-TV,” in Murray and Ouellette, eds., *Reality TV*.

⁶ On reception theory, see for example Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Lynne Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); David Morley, *Television, Audiences, and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992); Thomas Streeter and Wendy Wahl, “Audience Theory and Feminism: Property, Gender, and the Television Audience,” *Camera Obscura* 33-34 (May-Sept.-Jan. 1994-1995), 243-261.

words of one *Los Angeles Times* article, “the quest for love and acceptance is universal,” or, as a *New York Times* contributor put it, viewers were attracted to the show’s “kitschy tone.”⁷ Jonathan Gray likewise argues that unscripted dating shows like *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* are complex texts that provide multiple points of engagement for viewers, encouraging them both to identify with the participants and to analyze and critique the gendered behavior norms displayed onscreen.⁸

Romance and consumption in twenty-first century popular culture

In a myriad number of ways, from the small details of each episode to their broad function as revenue generator for ABC, *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* promote consumption as a central part of the narrative of romance they present. In so doing, they join the chorus of commercialized popular culture that continues to demand in the twenty-first century what it demanded in the twentieth: that individuals perceive themselves first and foremost as consumers and that they thus believe that success in all areas of life, including romance, depends on the purchase of consumer goods and services. While the basic message remains unchanged from previous decades, its scale appears to have magnified exponentially. The development of the Internet and, more recently, smartphones, have made many more avenues of consumption available to many more people. Now, fans of *The Bachelor* can watch an episode and then visit sites that provide a rundown of what the contestants wore along with links to order identical

⁷ Josh Friedman, “Looking for Love in Front of Millions,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 25, 2002, F20; Caryn James, “The Bachelor and His Barbies: Love at 25th Sight,” *New York Times*, Nov. 17, 2002, 2.19.

⁸ Jonathan Gray, “Cinderella Burps: Gender, Performativity, and the Dating Show,” in Murray and Ouellette, eds., *Reality TV*.

clothes.⁹ With a simple click on a track pad or tap on a smartphone screen, anyone with the disposable income (or room on her credit card) can have the dresses, shoes, and jewelry shown onscreen delivered right to her door.

The *Bachelor* franchise presents a world in which consumer goods and services are an integral part of individuals' quests for romantic success. The narrative arcs of each episode include a focus on self-presentation, luxurious surroundings, exotic travel, and expensive activities as lubricants in the process to find love. Makeup, hair products, dramatic clothing, and fashion accessories are ubiquitous, and the attention to surface details is evident at every turn. The women are all varying degrees of thin and curvy. They all have long hair, carefully made up faces, and a seemingly endless array of bikinis, cocktail dresses, and higher-than-high heels. The men, for their parts, range from slim and trim to action-movie-star muscular and are, without exception, well-groomed, well-coiffed, and well-dressed. The stars and contestants alike dress down for daytime dates, dress up for evening dates, and don suits and evening gowns for rose ceremonies, but, regardless of the level of formality, it is clear that much thought goes into the choice of outfits, accessories, and grooming. In one episode of *The Bachelor*, Ben surprises three of the women in their hotel room before dawn to begin their group date and tells them they need to leave in just a few minutes. The next scene shows all three women in the bathroom frantically shaving their legs and underarms, the implication being that a man could never fall in love with a woman with armpit stubble.¹⁰ Commercials that air during the shows reinforce the focus on appearance. Interspersed among the footage of fit, attractive, well-dressed men and women going on dates, kissing, and talking about

⁹ See for example <http://possessionista.com/tv-fashion/bachelor> (accessed 11-25-12)

¹⁰ *The Bachelor*, Season 16, Episode 7, ABC, Feb. 13, 2012.

marriage, ads for diet plans, clothing and lingerie, whitening toothpaste, hair color, shampoo, facial cleansers and moisturizers, acne treatments, body wash, and various cosmetics (including foundation, mascara, lipstick, eye shadow, anti-wrinkle cream) become part of the romantic narrative the shows present, promising viewers that they too can look like the beautiful people of *The Bachelor*.

Like the many advertisements, advice articles targeted to those searching for love also suggest that appearance plays an integral role in that quest. One cosmopolitan.com article advises women to wear “delicate textures like rayon, silk, and fur [in order to] trigger an intense response in men. These fabrics accentuate your softer, feminine nature, which heightens his amorous instincts,” while others suggest “sexy makeup that gets you noticed” and quick workouts to do the morning before a big date to “look even hotter naked.” An article on “hairstyles men love” advises readers that “guys are most turned on by low-maintenance styles that feel natural,” so, to approximate one hairstyle, Cosmo recommends using a silicone-based straightening serum, clipping hair into sections and drying individually with a paddle brush and blow dryer equipped with a nozzle, then finishing with a light shine spray. Another article lists “ways to decorate your, um, vagina,” including fox fur merkins; genital “facials” and pubic hair dying intended to give one’s vulva a more youthful appearance; pink blush and bleaching creams intended for labia; crystal implants under the skin for “extra energy”; and temporary gold leaf tattoos.¹¹ And such detailed attention to one’s attractiveness is not only a concern for

¹¹ Tamara Schlesinger, “What Makes Men Fall in Love,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/relationship-advice/What-Makes-Men-Fall-in-Love> accessed 6-18-12; Loni Albert, “Ooh – Sexy Party Makeup,” http://www.cosmopolitan.com/hairstyles-beauty/skin-care-makeup/party-makeup?click=cos_latest accessed 12-1-12; Molly Triffin, “9 Ways to Look Even Hotter Naked,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/advice/health/how-to-look-good-naked#slide-1> accessed 12-1-12; “8 Hairstyles Men Love,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/hairstyles-beauty/hair-care/hairstyles-men->

women. A video that accompanies an AskMen.com article on new colognes of fall 2012 suggests to men that they choose a light fragrance for work, but “on date night, that’s when you want to turn it up. Something like a musk will really get a woman’s attention,” while other articles on the site warn men about “facial styles women hate,” and instruct them in how to choose the right pair of eyeglasses, “because your face is the first thing she sees.”¹² An ad for anti-wrinkle facial cream offers readers of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* an enticing image of romantic success: a smiling older woman resting her hand on the bare chest of the sexy younger man who is nuzzling her temple. A cosmetics ad in *Ebony* pairs a photograph of a black man gazing adoringly at a heavily made-up black woman with the tag line “All we do is think about you,” ostensibly a reference to the makeup line’s being designed specifically for darker skin shades but also promising devotion from potential suitors.¹³ In their ubiquity, these messages encourage women and men alike to believe that they will find romantic success only if they are conscious of, and working to improve, every aspect of their appearance and self-presentation.

Advice articles, particularly those online, place emphasis on the importance of consumption choices much more directly than the *Bachelor*. While the shows do feature the role of clothing, grooming products, travel, and fine dining in the process of finding love in a general way, the narrative arcs give little airtime to the choice of specific products (other than the Neil Lane engagement rings that are featured in the proposals,

love#slide-1 accessed 12-1-12; Meagan Morris, “6 Ways to Decorate Your, Um, Vagina,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/hairstyles-beauty/how-to-decorate-your-vagina#slide-1> accessed 12-1-12.

¹² “The Basics of Cologne,” viewed on <http://www.askmen.com/grooming/appearance/men-s-colognes-fall-2012.html>, accessed 12-1-12; Farah Averill, “Facial Hair Styles Women Hate,” http://www.askmen.com/grooming/appearance/16_facial-hair-styles-women-hate.html accessed 12-1-12; Maggie Kalogeropoulos, “2008 Eyeglasses,” http://www.askmen.com/fashion/fashiontip_300/390_fashion_advice.html, accessed 12-1-12.

¹³ eb5 facial cream ad, *Ladies’ Home Journal* Nov. 2011, 29; Fashion Fair ad, *Ebony* June 2012, 1-2.

discussed below), which are highlighted, rather, in the commercials. Online articles, in comparison, coach those looking for success in the dating world on how to decipher the meaning of potential mates' consumption habits. Women are encouraged to consider "What His Cellphone Says About Him" and "What His Apartment Says About Him." Whether he pulls out an Apple iPhone, a Samsung Galaxy S II, and LG Cosmos, or an HTC Droid Incredible 2 can clue a woman into fundamental qualities like being creative, career-driven, spiritual, or a "player," respectively. Big dark leather couches that take up a lot of space "suggest he might not yet have enough room to fit you into his life"; dog toys lying around and family photos on his tables mean "he's ready to take on the responsibility of loving someone else"; and a mix of vintage furniture means that "he loves his possessions and each one means something to him... When he finds something beautiful, he has to have it... Maybe that thing of beauty is you." Women's consumption choices can also telegraph important information to the men in whom they are interested. Glamour.com educates female readers about "What Your Underwear Says About You to a Hookup" and "What Your Swimsuit Says About You, According to Guys."¹⁴ Features like these underscore advertising's message that product choice is of ultimate importance in the process of self-definition and the evaluation of others.

On the *Bachelor* shows, connections between consumption and love extend to the settings and experiences that provide the backdrop upon which the narrative unfolds.

¹⁴ LaDawn Black, "What his cell phone says about him," <http://www.match.com/cp.aspx?cpp=en-ca/yahoo/article/article.html&articleid=12559&trackingid=526214&bannerid=683695&ER=sessiontimeout> accessed 11-10-2012; Malia Griggs, "What His Apartment Says About Him," <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/relationship-advice/what-his-apartment-says-about-him#slide-1> accessed 6-16-2012; "What Your Underwear Says About You to a Hookup," <http://www.glamour.com/sex-love-life/blogs/smitten/2012/11/what-your-underwear-says-about.html> accessed 12-6-12; Danica Lo, "What Your Swimsuit Says About You, According to Guys," <http://www.glamour.com/fashion/2012/05/what-your-swimsuit-says-about-you-according-to-guys#slide=1> accessed 12-6-12.

When not on dates, the contestants spend their time in the opulent *Bachelor* mansion in the early episodes and then, in later episodes, in upscale hotel suites in a variety of exotic locations, which are typically introduced onscreen by footage of the contestants' exclamations of delight upon entering. On Ben's season, the group traveled from Los Angeles to Sonoma to San Francisco; to Park City, Utah then on to Vieques, Puerto Rico; Panama City; Belize; and finally Interlaken and Zermatt, Switzerland. Emily and her hopeful suitors spent several weeks in her hometown of Charlotte, NC, then went on to Bermuda; London; Dubrovnik, Croatia; Prague; and the Caribbean island of Curacao. In these different settings, the show's participants go on a range of over-the-top dates, including helicopter rides and trips on private jets; bungee jumping; climbing the Bay Bridge; swimming with sharks on one date, with dolphins on another; dinner at a Southern resort listed on the National Register of Historic Places; taking a horsedrawn carriage to a 13th-century castle; having private dinners in famous public sites like the Tower of London and enjoying private concerts by major performers including Matt Nathanson and Dolly Parton. Hot tubs, flickering candles, and vases of roses are too numerous to count, and every episode in a tropical location includes several romantic dinners-for-two on the beach.

Throughout the progression of the show, the participants link their experiences on the dates to their emotional states and to the process of falling in love. On *The Bachelor*, for example, after climbing the San Francisco Bay Bridge with Emily, Ben says in an interview, "If we can accomplish something like this, there's nothing we can't do together," while Emily's interview runs as a voiceover to footage of them kissing at the top: "A bridge is something that takes two different things and brings them together."

Scaling the side of an ancient Mayan temple in Belize, Courtney explains, in a voice-over, “Each step Ben and I took was like a step in our relationship,” while in a later episode they take a helicopter ride over the Matterhorn, as Ben says, “We’re flying higher than the Swiss Alps and I’m hoping our relationship is also progressing to new heights.” Contestants on *The Bachelorette* draw similar connections. Chris and Emily have to rope climb up the side of a building in Charlotte to get to the restaurant at which they have dinner, after which Chris comments, “Climbing a building is definitely like love, we’re starting at the bottom and we’ll make our way to the top.” While cliff diving in Bermuda with Emily, John says, “This could be a big jumping off point for the both of us.” Arie, a race car driver who took Emily for a lap in his car during their hometown date, tells her in a video he made for her afterwards that “my heart is always racing toward you.”¹⁵ These types of statements work to strengthen the connections between the experience of falling in love and the experience of consumption that consumer culture strives to normalize.

Travel, luxury, and dating act as facilitators of romance in other sources as well, and the repetition of these discourses in multiple cultural sites adds to their overall influence. In print ads, smiling gay couples “savor quality time on Amtrak,” cuddle up on a bicycle in “Key West’s laid back, live-and-let-live atmosphere,” and enjoy a workout at luxury spa Canyon Ranch, after which “they’ll go home feeling closer than ever.” An ad for Walt Disney World features an African American couple embracing at a dinner table, with text inviting readers of *Ebony* to “experience... romantic candlelit

¹⁵ *Bachelor* examples: Bay Bridge, 16.3, ABC, air date Jan. 16, 2012; Mayan temple: 16.7, ABC, air date Feb. 13, 2012; Swiss Alps, 16.11, ABC, original air date Mar. 12, 2012. *Bachelorette* examples (all viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>): rope climb, 8.3, original air date May 28, 2102; cliff diving, 8.4, original air date June 4, 2012; race car: 8.9, original air date July 9, 2012.

settings that are made for adults to enjoy.” An article in the same issue of *Ebony* encourages readers to spend a weekend “wrapped in fine linen sheets at your fave Black-owned bed-and-breakfast” because “B&Bs trigger romance, passion – love.”¹⁶ An article in *Men’s Health* magazine informs readers, “Modern courtship revolves around eating and drinking,” and offers rules for men to follow in the early stages of dating, including what kind of restaurant to choose for a first date and when to order for the woman with whom you’re dining. Even when dining at home, the choice of food is key, according to a feature in *Ebony* that asks, “Food elevates romance, so why not enchant your special one with a great meal you cook at home?” The popular image of the lavish honeymoon trip is a potent site for linking romantic love and luxury, as exemplified by ads in bridal magazines that make promises like, “Your happily ever after begins in Aruba.”¹⁷

Whether episodes of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* are viewed on ABC on television, or online (abc.com and hulu.com are two of the most common ways to watch online), the ads that appear alongside them often employ romantic scenarios or rely on romantic metaphors to sell their products. Sometimes, the advertised product is presented as being a catalyst for love, such as a smartphone ad in which a pretty young salesgirl uses the advertised phone to flirt with a customer, voice-texting her friend that “the cutest guy came into the store today”; a beef commercial in which a couple sets a romantic table for two in their kitchen and then smile at each other as they take pleasurable bites of their beef; or a cream cheese commercial that shows a man waking a woman up with breakfast

¹⁶ Amtrak ad, *Out*, June/July 2012, 27; Key West tourism ad, *Out*, Dec. 2011/Jan. 2012, 47; Canyon Ranch ad, *Out*, June/July 2012, 39; Walt Disney World ad, *Ebony* Feb. 2012, 35; Eisa Ulen, “Inn Love,” *Ebony* Feb. 2012, 70-74.

¹⁷ Nick Fauchald, “Beauty and the Feast,” *Men’s Health* June 2012, 158-63; “In-the-Mood Foods: Home-Cooked Meals Guaranteed to Ignite Sparks,” *Ebony* Feb. 2012, 68-9; Aruba tourism ad, *Bride’s* Nov. 2011, 190-91.

in bed. They take bites of their bagel and smile at each other as a singer sings, “Spread a little love my way, spread a little love today.”¹⁸ Products are also exchanged between couples in commercials for paper towels, soup, tissues, and cough syrup, while chain-restaurant and department store ads include happy couples who do not ostensibly have anything to do with the advertised stores, but serve to associate them with romance nonetheless.¹⁹ Other commercials position the advertised product as the love object, including a butter substitute ad that encourages viewers, “Go ahead, cheat on butter”; a car ad that emphasizes the vehicle’s reliability with the tagline “Experience love that lasts”; and a series of potato chip ads that ran before and during all the online episodes of *The Bachelorette* while they were available to view on abc.com. These ads open with the slogan “One taste and you’re in love,” and feature a woman sensuously opening a bag of chips, pulling one out, and taking a slow, ecstatic bite with popular love songs as accompaniment. The spots all end with a male announcer’s voiceover proclaiming, “Only Lay’s have that light airy crispiness you’ll fall in love with after just one bite.” An ad for granola bars made with milk literalizes the product as love object equation: a human woman, on a date with an animated granola bar with a face, arms and legs, is confused because “your profile said you were milk.”²⁰ These ads work to suggest to

¹⁸ Samsung Galaxy 2 ad, aired during *The Bachelor*, 16.4, ABC, Jan. 23, 2012; Cattlemen’s Beef Board ad, aired online during multiple episodes of *The Bachelorette* season 8 at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>; Philadelphia Cream Cheese ad, aired during *The Bachelor*, 16.5, ABC, Jan. 30, 2012.

¹⁹ Bounty ad and Campbell’s Chunky Soup ad, both aired during *The Bachelor*, 16.3, ABC, Jan. 16, 2012; Delsym Cough Syrup ad and Kleenex ad, both aired during *The Bachelor* 16.4, ABC, Jan. 23, 2012. J.C. Penney ad, aired during *The Bachelor* 16.5, ABC, Jan. 30, 2012; Subway ad aired during *The Bachelor*, 16.6, ABC, Feb. 6, 2012.

²⁰ I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter ad, aired during *The Bachelor* 16.5, ABC, Jan. 30, 2012; Subaru ad aired during *The Bachelor* 16.8, ABC, Feb. 20, 2012; Lay’s ads aired online during multiple episodes of *The Bachelorette* season 8 at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>; Kraft Milkbite Granola Bars ad, aired during *The Bachelor* 16.8, ABC, Feb. 20, 2012.

viewers, in a variety of ways, that success in love can be found through consumption, and their proximity to television programs that focus on the importance of romantic love and of finding “the one” strengthens that message.

The content of two commercials particularly resonated with the content of the programs by employing key elements of the *Bachelor/ette* in their sales appeals. An ad for Fancy Feast that aired during the finale of *The Bachelor*, in which a proposal is expected, features a man proposing to a woman by giving her a cat wearing a tag on its collar that says, “Will you marry us?” A gasoline commercial that aired online during episodes of *The Bachelorette* plays off of the importance of the phrase “I love you,” often referred to as “those three little words,” which is powerful currency in the *Bachelor/Bachelorette* universe (contestants typically say it to the show’s star in later episodes as a way to demonstrate how serious they are about wanting marriage). As an animated car drives onscreen, an announcer’s voice croons, “With all your car does for you, it wants to hear those three little words: Chevron with Techron.” The car then pulls up alongside a Chevron sign and hugs the pole with its wheel, at which point its antenna twists into a heart shape.²¹ Both these ads call directly on the themes of the shows/episodes in which they appear, thus strengthening even further the connections between consumption and love.

Like the commercials that air during *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, ads from other sources also employ romance to sell products, in a variety of ways. Some

²¹ Chevron ad, aired online during multiple episodes of *The Bachelorette* season 8 at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>. For examples of the meaning “I love you” holds on the shows, see *The Bachelorette* 8.8, when Emily sends Chris home, telling him “My other relationships grew faster and deeper” and he responds angrily, shouting, “How much faster could it be? I told you I loved you!”; and *The Bachelor* 16.7, when both Nikki and Kacie say “I love you” to Ben in an effort to convince him to visit their hometowns and meet their families.

advertisers present a romantic relationship between the consumer and the product, like two separate paint ads – one that offers the “love your color guarantee,” and another that represents the choice of paint as a marriage, “for as long as you match her décor” – and the ice cream ad that contrasts a large container with small snack-sized cups by terming the former “commitment” and the latter “dating.”²² Other ads use the product to represent and/or facilitate the love a couple supposedly shares. A couple in a cigarette ad smile at each other over the open pizza box they held between them, in which is nestled a heart-shaped pizza, while luxury car commercials show the recipients of cars – complete, of course, with big red bows on the hoods – hugging and kissing the individuals who gave the gift, and a disgruntled girlfriend/wife forgives her man when he brings her a drink because, according to McDonald’s, “nothing says I really love you like our new caramel hot chocolate.” A June 2012 online campaign for Nivea seeks to link the moisturizer with romantic love through the creation and promotion of “National PDA [public display of affection] Day.” The campaign invites people to “show the world your love and win a date night,” by directing them to a Facebook app in which to make a public pledge about how frequently they will hug/kiss/touch/hold hands each day, from which a randomly selected couple will win a \$200 date night each day.²³ Additionally, ads for a wide variety of products, including travel services, luxury fragrances, clothing, and cosmetics, employ images of couples smiling, embracing, kissing, or otherwise arranged in ways to suggest romance. While not making an overt sales pitch based on

²² Valspar ad, *People*, Apr. 23, 2012, 86; Ace Hardware ad, viewed on Pandora.com, Apr. 11, 2012; Edy’s Slow Churned Ice Cream ad, *People* June 4, 2012, 89.

²³ Newport cigarette ad, *Ebony* July 2011, 27; Lexus commercials, aired during *Monday Night Football*, ESPN, Nov. 21, 2011; McDonald’s commercial, aired during *House*, FOX, Jan. 20, 2012; Nivea campaign, on cosmopolitan.com, accessed June 18, 2012.

romantic concepts, the use of such images works to associate the advertised product with love in a more subtle way.²⁴

The discourses of twenty-first century consumer culture focus less on the relationship between gender and purchasing power than those of earlier decades, but men's ability to fund romantic gestures and make substantial financial contributions in a relationship is still valued. The reality that the majority of women work outside the home, which so shook the cultural landscape of the 1980s, is generally accepted and tends to receive little comment in most mainstream sources, and there is a widespread acceptance of the notion that both partners/spouses will contribute to the family economy. However, the notion that men are financially responsible for romantic expenditures does still surface from time to time, most commonly around the proposal, which men are supposed to make – after purchasing a diamond ring (gendered expectations of the proposal are discussed at length below). Articles about the importance of salary when evaluating a potential mate, or who pays for what while dating, also reveal that the beliefs of earlier generations do still have some influence over popular models of relationships. A roundtable discussion featured on match.com that asks, “Is the size of a man’s salary still a critical element?” finds that the answer, in general, is a qualified “yes.” The women interviewed link a man’s salary, and his willingness to spend money on the woman he is dating, to feelings of romance, security, and love. The men, meanwhile, voice their understanding of women who want “to live

²⁴ See, for example, Amtrak ad, *Out* June/July 2012, 27; Walt Disney World ad, *Ebony*, Feb. 2012, 35; Armani code (fragrance) commercial, <http://www.askmen.com/grooming/appearance/grooming-picks-november-2012.html>, accessed 12-1-12; Gucci Guilty (fragrance) ad, *Esquire* Apr. 2012, 15; Banana Republic ad, *Esquire* Dec. 2011, 5-6; Fashion Fair cosmetics ad, *Ebony* July 2012, 50-51; Maybelline SuperStay Lipstick commercial, aired during *Glee*, FOX, Nov. 8, 2011.

well,” although they admit it can be hard to live up to such expectations. Yet the feature ultimately offers a mixed view of the focus on salary and its influence on happiness, ending with one man’s advice to women, to “ignore finances and pick the guy who makes her laugh.”²⁵

The proposal

The expected culmination of every season of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, the proposal, has long been a favored site to promote the commodification of romance. In the 1890s, 1920s, and 1950s advertisers employed the moment of the proposal as a promise of what specific products could bring the savvy consumer, and in the 1980s the moment became a commodity in and of itself, represented by the connoted luxury of the diamond ring and standing alone as a satisfying consumptive experience. In contemporary culture, the commodification of the moment remains, but is supplemented by an emphasis on emotion. On the *Bachelor* shows, the proposal has become a site wherein producers fuse emotion and consumption, reiterating their season-long message that romantic love can only properly be experienced and achieved through the consumption of goods and services. The attention paid to the ring and the heightened drama of the proposal itself – complete with dramatic settings and suspenseful music – blur the boundaries between the emotional experience of making and accepting a proposal and the experience of consumption that the diamond ring represents.

The narratives of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* situate the shows firmly within a powerful pro-marriage ideology that circulates throughout the contemporary

²⁵ Amanda May, “Does a Man’s Salary Matter?” <http://www.match.com/cp.aspx?cpp=/cphp/yahoo/article.html&articleid=6265&TrackingID=526103&BannerID=689200&ER=sessiontimeout>, accessed 7/3/12

cultural mainstream.²⁶ That marriage is the purported goal of the shows is made clear in statements from the title characters like “I’m confident that my wife is in this room” or “There’s nothing else missing from my life other than a husband to love me” and statements from contestants such as “I think he could be the guy that I eventually marry” and “This could be my first date with my future wife.”²⁷ The responses of those rejected during the course of the show also underscore the weight attached to achieving success in love, particularly from those contestants who are sent home at the end of the first or second episode, before they’ve had a chance to have more than a superficial interaction with Ben or Emily. Leaving the very first rose ceremony, Lyndzie tells the cameras, “Going back to Arizona still single, I feel like such a loser, such an absolute failure,” while Amber T. breaks down in tears, asking, “I’m embarrassed, what did I do wrong?” After not receiving a rose from Emily at the end of the second episode, Kyle reflects, “When you get your heart broken, it’s the worst feeling in the world”; in the same situation after the second episode of *The Bachelor*, Jenna sobs, “I can’t believe this is happening. I’m mortified. I think I deserve love, I have always been trying to find it.”²⁸

²⁶ While recent census figures show that married couples now make up a minority of households, the fervent battle over gay marriage exposes the belief, held by both supporters and opponents, that legal marriage should still legitimize romantic relationships and solidify the foundation of family life. The continued cultural valuation of the institution, coupled with its apparent scarcity, has led to the normalization of what Suzanne Leonard terms “marriage envy” in contemporary culture. Leonard identifies the competitive structure of *The Bachelor* as “an excellent example of how pro-marriage ideology predicates itself on notions of exclusivity.” Leonard, “Marriage Envy,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34 (Fall/Winter 2006), 43-64.

²⁷ Ben, *The Bachelor*, 16.6, ABC, Feb. 6, 2012; Emily, *The Bachelorette*, 8.1, originally aired May 14, 2012, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>; Elyse, *The Bachelor*, 16.5, ABC, aired Jan. 30, 2012; Ryan, *The Bachelorette*, 8.2, originally aired May 21, 2012, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>.

²⁸ Lyndzie and Amber, *The Bachelor*, 16.1, ABC, Jan. 2, 2012; Kyle, *The Bachelorette*, 8.2, originally aired May 21, 2012, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>; Jenna, *The Bachelor*, 16.2, ABC, Jan. 9, 2012.

Ads that air during the shows also emphasized the importance of marriage, such as an insurance company commercial that pairs the exhortation “Your dream is out there, go get it!” with footage of a smiling bride with her veil streaming out behind her and a preview for an upcoming episode of *Good Morning America* with a segment on “single bridezillas” who don’t let their lack of a fiancé stop their dreams. “I’ve been planning my wedding for years!” exclaims one.²⁹

Like the trajectory of romance presented by commercialized popular culture in earlier decades, the ostensible culmination of both *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* is the moment of the proposal. With marriage as the ultimate goal, the proposal is the necessary precursor to the wedding that is presumed to follow. This is made explicit from the first episode of the show in a variety of ways: the diamond ring that forms the “o” in the *Bachelorette* logo (the “o” in the *Bachelor* is a man’s wedding ring, also gesturing to the intended end result); comments from contestants, like “I know what I want and it’s two carats – I think I’m worth it!” that focus attention on the ring itself; the montage of scenes previewing the upcoming season that includes footage of Ben holding a diamond ring, with him saying in a voiceover, “I’m so in love and I’m ready to spend my life with someone!” As the show progresses the focus on a proposal remains central to the narrative. In the third episode of *The Bachelor*, Ben’s sister tells viewers, “I’m excited for my brother to fall in love and get engaged.” In subsequent episodes Samantha confesses to the camera, “I have such crazy feelings for Ben already, I feel like I should already have a ring on my finger!”; Kacie, getting ready for another one on one date, says that “this could be the date that changes the rest of my life. In a few weeks I could be

²⁹ American Family Insurance commercial, aired during *The Bachelor*, 16.5 (ABC, Jan. 30, 2012); *Good Morning America* preview, aired during *The Bachelor* 16.4 (ABC, Jan. 23, 2012).

engaged to this guy, and this could be the turning point”; Courtney gloats, “I’m definitely getting one step closer to calling Ben my fiancé”; Nicki exclaims in an interview, “I want to be the person he proposes to – I found love and I want it!”; and host Chris Harrison informs the remaining contestants, “Ben is very hopeful that at the end of this, he will get down on one knee and propose to one of you.” Throughout, Ben makes statements like “I want to walk away from this with a wife. I want to propose once more in my life,” and, “Knowing that a potential proposal is just weeks away, it’s exciting knowing that’s the next step in my life.”³⁰ The inevitability of a proposal is likewise evident in the *Bachelorette*. In the third episode Chris Harrison congratulates the contestants who were left, but warns them, “Remember, only one of you will be her fiancé.” Two episodes later he reminds them again, “Only one of you will become Emily’s husband.” The men, and Emily, often evaluate their relationships in terms of how likely a proposal seemed. After his first date with her, for example, Arie confesses, “I can’t believe the depth of the connection we made today. I can image someday getting down on one knee,” and later, after a post-hometown-visit date, “All I can think about is that moment when I get to propose to her.” In the final episode, Jef explains, “Meeting Ricki is one hundred percent the final piece of the puzzle for me, before I propose to Emily,” while Arie announces, “I’m ready to get down on one knee and propose.”³¹

Various production choices function alongside the participants’ statements to reiterate the show’s intended progression toward a proposal and to underscore the

³⁰ Scenes from *The Bachelor*, ABC, season 16, episodes 1 (Jan. 2, 2012); 3 (Jan. 16, 2012); 4 (Jan. 23, 2012); 6 (Feb. 6, 2012); 7 (Feb. 13, 2012); 9 (Feb. 27, 2012); and 5 (Jan. 30, 2012).

³¹ Scenes from *The Bachelorette*, ABC, season 8, episodes 3 (orig. aired May 28, 2012); 5 (June 11, 2012); 9 (July 9, 2012); 7 (June 25, 2012); and 10 (July 22, 2012): all viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/S5556990>

importance of the proposal in the lives of the couple. The high drama of the rose ceremony with which each episode ends – long pauses between each name, close up reaction shots of the anxious contestants, tense violin music – accentuates the importance attached to the Bachelor/Bachelorette’s choice, which each week ostensibly brings him/her closer to a proposal. The narrative voices of the host and the announcer likewise underscore the momentousness of the proposal as the climax of the narrative. During the first episode of Emily’s season host Chris Harrison states, “Emily is about to embark on the most exciting adventure of her life,” while the announcer makes similar statements in the voiceovers introducing the season finales of both shows: “As Ben faces the biggest decision of his life... will [he] make the right choice?”; “It’s the most dramatic television event of the summer. Who will Emily choose – Arie, or Jef? Or will her dreams come crashing down?” The use of superlatives, like the “most exciting adventure of her life” and “the biggest decision of his life,” and the reference to “dreams” all encourage viewers to believe that the show’s stars, too, attach great weight to the decision to make or accept a proposal.

Representations of proposals in other cultural sources also frame it as a major life moment. A jewelry ad featuring a photograph of a man gazing at the diamond ring in his hands, much like the footage of Ben in the final episode of *The Bachelor*, informs *Brides* readers, “Your proposal is the most meaningful conversation you’ll ever have.”³² Stories in *Brides* about real-life weddings include details about the proposal, which always have a dramatic element: one man took his girlfriend fly-fishing on the Snake River in Jackson Hole, WY, and “caught” a Tiffany ring; another couple became engaged when the man proposed during a trip to Argentina; a third celebrated their proposal “at the famously

³² Scott Kay Jewelry ad, *Brides*, July 2012, 2-3.

romantic One If By Land, Two If By Sea restaurant” in Manhattan; and a fourth became engaged when the man got down on one knee on the top of a double-decker bus in London. A piece on how readers’ best friends react to their engagements also features examples of proposals, such as one groom-to-be who popped the question on a mountaintop and another who flew all of his fiancée’s best friends to Chicago for the weekend to celebrate with them. The inclusion of details about the proposal in virtually all descriptions of weddings in the magazine implies that a dramatic moment involving a man down on one knee with a diamond ring is a necessary prerequisite to getting married.³³ Online articles also echo that implication, encouraging male readers to “plan a badass proposal” and to “think about what it will be like to rehash the way it went down for the rest of your life.” A match.com feature similarly reminds readers that “when a couple gets engaged, everyone wants to hear the proposal story.”³⁴

The proposal, generative of the marriage that is assumed to follow, is central to cultural narratives of romance, particularly the fairy tale model embodied by stories such as “Cinderella,” in which the couple lives “happily ever after.” The participants of both shows demonstrate that they themselves position their experiences within that model. In the season premiere of *The Bachelorette*, Tony exits the limo to meet Emily for the first time with a glass slipper on a pillow, introduces himself as Prince Charming, and tells

³³ Francesca Castagnoli, “A Higher Love,” *Brides* Nov. 2011, 242; Heather Lee, “Height of Summer,” *Brides* July 2012, 163; Heather Lee, “The Bride Wore Boots,” *Brides* July 2012, 183; Clare Coghlan, “Global Affair,” *Brides* Mar. 2012, 300; “Girl Talk,” *Brides*, Nov. 2011, 30.

³⁴ Jon Finkel, “How To Propose,” http://www.askmen.com/dating/dating_advice_600/638_how-to-propose.html accessed 10/8/12; Krista Franks, “Creative Ways to Pop the Question,” <http://www.match.com/magazine/article/12729/Creative-Ways-To-Pop-The-Question/> accessed 10/8/12; for a similar perspective, see also Christie Griffen, “5 Signs He’s About to Propose,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/relationship-advice/signs-he-will-propose> accessed 6/18/12 and Annie Daly, “I Totally Effed Up My Proposal,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/relationship-advice/marriage-proposals-almost-ruined?click=rel#slide-1> accessed 10/8/12.

her, “I believe in fairy tales, I believe in love,” while in an interview ultimate winner Jef tells the camera, “I believe in the fairy tale ending.” In a later episode, Jef explains, “Emily gives me the feeling that people write fairy tales about.”³⁵ In *The Bachelor*, at various points, exotic dancer Blakely says, “Ben could absolutely be the beginning of my fairy tale,” once-divorced Nikki muses, “This could be my second chance at a fairy tale,” finalist Lindzi says, “Fairy tales are magical, and... Ben’s my prince charming,” and ultimate winner Courtney exclaims, “I feel like I’m in a fairy tale because it doesn’t get more romantic than this!” In the finale of *The Bachelor*, as she takes a helicopter to a mountaintop in the Swiss Alps, Lindzi’s excited voiceover reveals the cultural significance of the proposal: “This is the moment girls dream about their whole lives.”³⁶ The two men who propose in the seasons analyzed here both emphasize their intentions to “live happily ever after” by using the word “forever” in their proposals. Ben tells Courtney, “I promised myself that I wouldn’t get down on one knee again unless I knew it was forever. And I want you to know that you’re my forever,” while Jef assures Emily, “I want you to know that what I’m about to ask you aren’t just empty words that in a few weeks or months or years will be lost. What I’m about to ask you is a forever thing.”

Commercials that air during the shows reinforce the focus on the moment of the proposal and its status as a significant emotional and consumptive experience. Several different ads for Neil Lane engagement rings (which are also featured prominently in the on-show proposals) showcase the image of a man down on one knee, presenting a ring to the woman standing before him, and describe it as “the moment when forever begins.”

³⁵ Tony and Jef, *The Bachelorette* 8.1, orig. aired May 14, 2012; Jef, 8. 5, orig. aired June 11, 2012, both viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>.

³⁶ Blakely, *The Bachelor*, 16.1, Jan. 2, 2012; Nikki, 16.5, Jan. 30, 2102; Lindzi, 16.7, Feb. 13, 2012; Courtney and Lindzi, 16.9, Feb. 27, 2012, all on ABC.

The cultural importance of the proposal itself is underscored as a voiceover promises “the ring that lives up to the moment.” A Honda CRV ad mirrored the show in multiple ways, further heightening the emphasis on the proposal. It aired between two segments that featured Ben on a group date with eleven women. The date card the women had received read, “Let’s cross some things off our leap list,” and the date began with the girls piling into several Honda CRVs and driving to a street in San Francisco that has been closed down and filled with snow for them to ski on. In the ad, a woman who has just been proposed to rattles off a list of things she wants to do (hike the Appalachian Trail, learn to play the drums, finish her short film) before she gets married. The voiceover that ends the ad encourages viewers, “Before you make your leap, make a list. Then get going in the completely redesigned CRV.”³⁷ The mutually reinforcing situations of the show and the commercial perform several functions: they remind viewers that the trajectory of *The Bachelor* is meant to end with a proposal; they contribute yet another strand to the ubiquitous cultural web of connections between romance and consumption; and they imply that marriage is such a life-altering experience that one’s goals and aspirations will necessarily change after the ceremony.

But, much more than a car, a ring is the key commodity on *The Bachelor*. The diamond engagement ring is a powerful cultural symbol, representing, among other things (eternal love, a visible signal that a woman is spoken for), the centrality of consumption to models of romantic love. The ring itself receives special attention on the shows, as jeweler Neil Lane brings a selection of rings for the Bachelor, and the final two Bachelorette contestants, from which to choose. “Big day,” *Bachelorette* finalist Jef said

³⁷ Neil Lane Bridal Collection at Kay Jewelers ads, aired during *The Bachelor*, 16.5 (ABC, Jan. 30, 2012); Honda CRV ad, aired during *The Bachelor*, Season 16 Episode 3, ABC, Jan. 16, 2012.

to Lane upon meeting him. “Biggest day of your life!” Lane responded, continuing, “The ring really cements that union. It’s always on her finger.” When making his choice Bachelor Ben tells Lane, “This is the one, I’m sure of it. I feel really good about this,” mirroring the way he speaks about the contestants on the show and thereby conflating the ring and the woman. Courtney echoes this focus on the ring as a love object when her first response to his proposal is, “Yes! Of course! I love you! Oh my gosh, it’s beautiful. I love it!” Immediately after accepting his proposal, she turns her focus to the ring and expresses her love for *it* with the same level of emotion and excitement with which she’d just expressed her love for *him*.³⁸ Other media coverage of the show also focused attention on the rings. The *People* article on Ben’s choice of Courtney, published the week after the final episode aired, includes a sidebar that described “the \$50,00-plus 3-carat sparkler... featur[ing] a cushion –cut diamond in an intricately carved platinum setting accented by 96 round-cut diamonds” and a quote from Neil Lane himself, who explains that “the leaf design reflects the couple’s past, present, and remarkable future together.” A feature on the *Brides* website showcases “the stunning rings exchanged over the last two years by former *Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* contestants,” and includes details about each Neil Lane engagement ring that has been used in a proposal, accompanied by information about when the couple announced – and, in most cases, called off – their engagements, and links directing the reader to similar rings available for sale on jewelers’ websites.³⁹

³⁸ Jef, *The Bachelorette*, 8.11, originally aired July 22, 2012, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>; Ben and Courtney, *The Bachelor*, ABC, Mar. 11, 2012.

³⁹ Monica Rizzo, “*The Bachelor*’s Ben and Courtney: Can This Really Last?,” *People* Mar. 26, 2012, viewed online <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20580865,00.html> accessed 12-9-12; Rosie Purdy and Cari Wolfert, “Engagement Rings Seen on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*,”

The ring itself takes center stage elsewhere as well. While some jewelry ads represent the moment of the proposal, as discussed above, others rely on the image of the ring alone. Such images work on multiple levels. They call on the associations to commitment and eternity that diamonds are supposed to symbolize – some ads reference this explicitly, like one that describes the ring as “the only visible and lasting symbol of your commitment” – at the same time as they hold out the ring as a material object to covet and fetishize (see Fig. 5.1). Ads for products unrelated to jewelry or weddings also feature diamond engagement rings, which serve to link the advertised product to the romantic state assumed to characterize the experiences of engagement and matrimony. A magazine ad for facial moisturizer presents an image of a gleaming diamond ring leaned up against the moisturizer jar, accompanied by a tag line reading “Now, radiance isn’t just for brides.” The text goes on to promise skin that “looks radiantly healthy and happy. Like it went on an amazing honeymoon.”⁴⁰

<http://www.brides.com/wedding-engagement/engagement-rings/2010/08/Engagement-Rings-From-The-Bachelor-The-Bachelorette> (accessed 9/23/12)

⁴⁰ Tacori rings ad, *Brides*, March 2012, 52-53; Forevermark ad, *Esquire* Dec. 2011, 35; Cartier ad, *Brides* July 2012, 9; Neutrogena Healthy Skin ad, *Ladies' Home Journal* Aug. 2011, 5.



Fig. 5.1: Images of the ring represent the proposal

Forevermark ad, *Esquire* Dec. 2011

Cartier ad, *Brides*, July 2012

Taken together, the two advertisements for engagement rings included above illustrate advertisers' assumptions about gender differences. One appeared in a men's magazine and the other in a women's magazine, and the fact that their messages are quite different suggests that advertisers believe a proposal means different things for a man than it does for a woman. The first ad, which appeared in *Esquire*, is straightforward and matter-of-fact, focusing on the quality of a Forevermark diamond. The text at the top of the ad, "Your signature is your promise," emphasizes the action the man takes when proposing – he makes a promise that he will marry the woman – as well as calling to mind the historically male business world, with the association to the signing of contracts. The second ad, which appeared in *Brides*, surrounds the ring, in its box, with symbols of romance, including roses and the Eiffel tower. The text also focuses on

romance, linking Cartier rings with “true love.” The association of the ring with roses, traditionally given to women by men, reinforces the proper gendered behavior for a proposal: man offers, woman accepts. While the Cartier ad assumes that a proposal is a romantic experience for a woman, just like being given roses or taking a trip to Paris, the Forevermark ad assumes that it is a business decision for a man, who will consider the ring on the physical merits of the diamond.⁴¹

As in previous decades, advertisers and other cultural producers also use the powerful symbol of the marriage proposal to strengthen the cultural links between love and consumption. Magazine advertisements encourage readers to view their weddings as an opportunity to accumulate consumer goods, beginning with the very moment of the proposal. A kitchen appliance ad features an image of a proposal – a couple in the middle of painting a room, the man down on one knee in front of the words “Will you marry me?” painted on the wall, the woman smiling delightedly while reading them – with accompanying text that reads, “Now that he’s popped the question, it’s time to say ‘yes’ to the kitchen of your dreams.” A department store ad offers readers “irresistible proposals,” informing them that “the second best part of getting married [is] registering for all the fabulous gifts at Macy’s Wedding & Gift Registry.” A feature on the *Cosmopolitan* website also articulates this focus on the material benefits of the journey to marriage. Ostensibly about the stressful aspects of engagement, it also mentions some of the “bonuses” of being a bride-to-be, including the gift registry (“It’s impolite to talk about it, but the idea of scoring all that loot is what gets you through those days when you want to leave your fiancé on the side of the road somewhere far, far away”), “happy-couple perks” like the “freebies and upgrades” you might get at restaurants when people

⁴¹ Forevermark ad, *Esquire*, Dec. 2011, 35; Cartier ad, *Brides*, July 2012, 9.

hear you're newly engaged, and the chance that "Grandma's pricey jewels and other sentimental stuff... gets passed to you at wedding time. And some of it's actually good."⁴² The focus on the material benefits of getting engaged in features like this is a moment where the values of consumer culture – that is to say, valuing things that cost money over emotions or human relationships – are especially overt and visible.

Finding love: choice, and destiny

Early twenty-first century popular culture frames the discourse of romantic love through two premises: choice and destiny. While elements of these frameworks had appeared in earlier decades, it's not until recently that they have been foregrounded as such essential parts of the process of finding love. Although seemingly contradictory, both are linked to the values of consumer culture that pervade contemporary American culture. On the one hand, popular narratives present the path to romantic success as a series of choices. These choices include the ways an individual presents him- or herself to potential mates through appearance and behavior, and the choice a user makes among online profiles on a dating site when deciding who to contact or to which contacts to respond. This narrative of choice is linked, in ways both subtle and obvious, to the general experience of consumption and to the specifics acts of choosing between products which structure that experience. Relationship experts, givers of advice, and authors of articles profiling real-life marriages expend much energy attempting to identify exactly what makes people fall in love, so that those still single can apply these insights to their

⁴² Cuisinart ad, *Brides* July 2012, 94-5; Macy's Registry ad, *Brides* July 2012, 33; Colleen Rush, "7 Scary Truths About Getting Engaged," <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/relationship-advice/tips-for-engagement> accessed 10-1-12.

own romantic quests and make their choices accordingly. On the other hand, commercialized popular culture also often presents romantic love as a matter of fate or destiny. This perspective frames falling in love as something that happens *to* a person, rather than as something that a person can affect (by choice of clothing, cologne, dating site, or restaurant). The love-as-destiny view posits that, rather than the world being full of potential mates from whom individuals can choose, there exists for each individual a single perfect match, typically referred to as either a “soulmate” or “The One.” The belief in the role of destiny operates as a counterpoint to the more consumption-oriented focus on choice, as a reclaiming of some form of instinct or knowledge that people possess apart from the demands of the market. However, although seemingly at odds, these two frameworks often operate simultaneously, so that an individual typically finds The One while in the process of comparing and evaluating a range of possible partners. The narrative of The One being discovered through choice resituates the importance of human emotion within a trajectory that mirrors the experience of consumption. The importance of love gets elevated to a mystical, magical level, obscuring factors that may actually contribute to romantic success or failure, while individuals are encouraged to continue their evaluative searches until they find The One.

This narrative, of the process of evaluation leading to The One, structures the presentation of romantic love on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. The very framework of the shows depends on choice to drive the progression of the narrative: interviews with the Bachelor/Bachelorette in which they evaluate the contestants are interspersed with footage of their dates, and every episode ends with a dramatic ceremony in which the title character must choose which contestants to send home and

which to keep for another week. In this way, the shows present the quest for love as a logical progression: assess possible mates based on how closely they meet one's predetermined standards, make choices between competing possibilities accordingly, and one should have little difficulty ultimately selecting one's ideal mate. Yet, while the two shows' basic structure and many of their obvious details emphasize the importance of conscious choice in the quest for love, references to destiny also appear throughout the narrative arcs. In relying on the same notions of choice and destiny that structure representations of romantic love elsewhere in commercialized popular culture, the producers of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* join their models of love to the broader cultural discourse that links romance and consumption.

The parade of hopeful contestants before the title character, with which each season of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* begins, sets the stage for an emphasis on the experience of consumption from the start. One after another, the contestants emerge from a caravan of limousines and present themselves to the Bachelor or Bachelorette, who stand outside the *Bachelor* mansion, before continuing in to a cocktail party. Each contestant has less than a minute to try to make a good impression, and a variety of techniques are employed to do so. Among the women vying for Bachelor Ben, one walks past him, circles back around, and says, "Just in case you don't believe in love at first sight, here's your second chance"; another wears her "Miss Pacific Palisades" banner; and a third, riffing on her job as an epidemiologist, sanitizes her hands and uses breath spray before kissing him. Many of the women pause before reaching him and turn around, like a model on the catwalk, displaying their fancy dresses and their toned bodies. The goal, of course, is to stand out from the crowd, which the final woman to

arrive does admirably, riding up on horseback. Although the men hoping to win Bachelorette Emily's heart do not rely on their physical appearance in the way their female counterparts do (i.e., no spinning around to show off their suits), they do similarly strive to impress her. One man brings her a glass slipper on a pillow and introduces himself as Prince Charming, while another arrives in a helicopter. As the first chance the contestants have to interact with the title characters, these brief encounters resemble nothing so much as sales pitches, mini advertisements attempting to display what the contestant has to offer.

From the very start, then, the structure of the shows encourages the Bachelor and Bachelorette (and the viewers at home) to view the contestants in comparison to one another. As the title characters witness the stream of contestants exiting the limos, they could very well be shoppers in the appliance department, trying to decide which television set to purchase. The same formula that encourages the Bachelor and Bachelorette to conceive of themselves as consumers simultaneously pits the contestants against one another. Unlike the contestants on other reality game shows, who compete, and win or lose, based on specific qualities like physical strength, intellectual ability, knowledge of trivia, or ability to manipulate others, the contestants on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* compete in the arena of desirability as a spouse. Qualities like physical appearance, intelligence, and skill as a manipulator certainly come into play, but the major differences on these shows are, first, that the ultimate winner is chosen based entirely on the subjective tastes of one single person; and, second, that the contestants are being judged across the board both on their individual qualities and on the sum of their parts. These differences mean that the contestants on the *Bachelor* shows are always

engaged in two distinct strategies: they are competing against one another, and they are attempting to showcase their best qualities and sell themselves to the show's star. From time to time, contestants are explicit about their strategies of self-presentation. Ryan explains in an interview that he wants Emily to see "that I can step in and be a part of what she does," while Sean prepares to open up emotionally to Emily before a one-on-one date, telling the camera, "it's imperative that I don't hold back." Rachel likewise decides that openness is the best strategy to appeal to Ben, explaining, "this is a situation where you have to be able to communicate quickly," and Lindzi plans to "let down my guard a little bit."⁴³

Production choices encourage competition between the contestants. Host Chris Harrison repeatedly reminds the contestants on both shows to "make the most of your time" with the stars and, in the case of the coveted one-on-one time, to "use it wisely." To further heighten the emphasis on rivalry, both of the seasons considered here include group dates that are structured around competitive events. On Ben's season, a group of women are split into two teams to play a softball game against each other. The members of the winning team get to have dinner with Ben while the losers go back to the hotel. Interview clips of contestants explaining how important it is to "win that extra time with Ben" reveal how seriously the women take the competition, as does the footage of the morose losing team driving back to the hotel in their van, tears streaming down some of the sweat-stained faces. The men on one group date with Emily are likewise split into teams, this time competing in a sailboat race for the right to have dinner with her that

⁴³ Ryan: *The Bachelorette* 8.2, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired May 21, 2012; Sean, *The Bachelorette* 8.9, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired July 9, 2012; Rachel: *The Bachelor*, 16.4, ABC, aired Jan. 23, 2012; Lindzi, *The Bachelor* 16.3, ABC, aired Jan. 16, 2012.

night. “It’s really important to win time with Emily,” one of them explains to the camera.⁴⁴ Beyond the structure of the show, the makeup of the cast also influences the level of competitiveness. Creator and producer Mike Fleiss has explained that casting is crucial to ensure the level of drama that fans have come to expect. “We need our fair share of villains every season... If there’s a conflict, we don’t want people hugging it out in the first fifteen minutes,” he told ABC’s *20/20*.⁴⁵ The “villains” tend to be more vocal about their focus on competition and on winning, leading to frequent charges from other contestants that they “aren’t here for the right reasons.” The “right reasons,” according to the logic of the show, are the desire to find love and to get married, as opposed to the desire to beat the other contestants through any means necessary and thereby win the prize of being chosen by the star, or the desire for one’s fifteen minutes of fame.

However, despite the lip service paid to “the right reasons,” the competitive mindset of the contestants and the evaluative mindset of the star are mutually constitutive, and examples of both are evident in every episode. On a group date with Ben, in which he takes eight of the women fly-fishing, contestant Courtney explains in an interview, “Let’s be honest, it’s not really about catching the trout, it’s about catching Ben.” Later, after being given the rose, she gloats to the camera: “Winning. *Winning*.” One of the contestants comments to the camera, during the first-night cocktail party of Emily’s season, “It’s like the Super Bowl, getting the first impression rose.” The title characters’ attitudes toward the competition between contestants vary. After watching

⁴⁴ “Use it wisely,” see for example *The Bachelor* 16.4, ABC, aired Jan. 23, 2012 and *The Bachelorette* 8.2, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired May 21, 2012. Softball game, *The Bachelor* 16.5, ABC, aired Jan. 30, 2012; sailboat race, *The Bachelorette* 8.4, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired June 4, 2012.

⁴⁵ *20/20: Inside the Bachelor*, ABC, viewed online at <http://www.hulu.com/watch/135076> on 8-21-12, originally aired Mar. 15, 2010

the women's softball game, Ben comments, "Seeing these women, the intensity they all had, trying to win more time with me, it made me feel really good about the women I still have around." For him, their competitiveness is a sign that they really care for him. Emily, in contrast, voices her concern that the contestants on her season "will see this as a game, a competition. I don't want to be the prize that you win at the end." She is so opposed to the idea of being seen as a prize, one man's repeated use of the phrase "trophy wife" leads her to send him home while they are in the middle of dinner on a one-on-one date.⁴⁶ Regardless of their stated level of comfort with the competition between the contestants, both Ben and Emily progress through the show in a near-constant state of evaluation, frequently discussing the good and bad points of each contestant. This judgment is required by the framework of the show; each week, the Bachelor/Bachelorette is expected to choose which contestants to keep for another week and which to send home, and they thus must invest time and energy in assessing the contestants both on their own merits and as they compare to one another.

Ben's and Emily's evaluations of the contestants typically cover two main categories: the individual qualities of the contestant, and the ways the star and contestant relate to each other. Personal qualities that receive positive evaluations include genuineness, confidence, beauty, intelligence, and humor, while relational characteristics admired by Ben and Emily include chemistry, comfort level, a feeling of safety, and a feeling of being understood by the other and being free to be oneself. Both Ben and Emily – and the contestants on their seasons – also value similarity between them and

⁴⁶ Trout/"winning," *The Bachelor*, 16.4, ABC, aired Jan. 23, 2012; Super Bowl, *The Bachelorette*, 8.1, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired May 14, 2012; "Seeing these women," *The Bachelor*, 16.5, ABC, aired Jan. 30, 2012; "People will see this as a game," *The Bachelorette*, 8.2, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired May 21, 2012.

their possible mates. In the first episode of *The Bachelor*, contestant Nikki explains that she and Ben would be a good match because they've both "been through things" – in her case, divorce at a young age and, in his, having had his marriage proposal publicly rejected on a previous season of *The Bachelorette*. In later episodes, Ben explains to Kacie that he sent her home from the rose ceremony following hometown dates because "we are worlds apart in where we come from, two wonderful families but very different backgrounds," and tells Courtney as he proposes to her, "We're on the same wavelength." In the first episode of *The Bachelorette*, contestant Tony confides to the camera, referring to the fact that he and Emily are both single parents, "We have so much in common, if I get sent home tonight it will be devastating." Later, Emily explains that it's important for her to be sure that she and a potential mate are "a match on fundamental issues, not just fun and laughing," and she sends one contestant home after his list of twelve qualities he wants in a wife reveals that "what we want out of a relationship isn't the same."⁴⁷

These ways of considering relationships aren't unique to TV's reality shows. Dating websites and online and print articles targeted to those searching for a romantic partner are full of advice, tips and strategies, underscoring the message that romantic love is both crucial to personal happiness and something that anyone can achieve if the proper steps are followed. These articles frequently promote the evaluative mindset encouraged by *The Bachelor* franchise, and tend to give advice that is centered either on individual qualities (how to be a desirable date as well as what qualities to look for in possible

⁴⁷ Nikki: *The Bachelor*, 16.1, ABC, aired Jan. 2, 2012; Ben quotes from 16.9, aired Feb. 27, 2012, and 16.11, aired Mar. 12, 2012. Tony: *The Bachelorette*, 8.1, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/S15556990>, originally aired May 14, 2012; Emily quotes are from 8.3, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/S15556990>, originally aired May 28, 2012 and 8.6, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/S15556990>, originally aired June 18, 2012.

mates) or on relational ones. Like many aspects of the *Bachelor* shows, these features promote the notion that romantic success can be achieved through conscious, logical choice, both in terms of choosing how to present oneself and in choosing the right mate. Just as *Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* contestants make strategic choices about how to behave in the hopes of attracting the show's star, many online and print articles offer advice on how women and men should act in order to find love. An article in *Ebony* instructs women who hope to find love with a religious man in what kind of church to attend, which church-based activities to participate in, and what kind of conversations to strike up with single male attendees.⁴⁸ Articles on match.com offer tips on boosting one's confidence while on dates and behaviors to avoid in the early stages of a relationship. A Cosmopolitan.com article gives readers tips on "Good Girlfriend Behavior," as well as behavior to avoid. Another *Cosmo* article explains "What Makes Men Fall in Love," advising women to "let him see your vulnerable side," "make it clear you don't expect [him] to change," choose activities that "show your high value" to "increase [his] self-esteem," and "make him feel like you two just 'fit,'" in order to meet what the author identified as "guys' ... four primal relationship desires": to protect, to have freedom, to shine, and to have comfort. Articles on AskMen.com, meanwhile, encourage men to arrive at a date armed with "prep work and a game plan," and suggest that men who want to make a good impression on a first date should "ask her questions..., be nice to other people..., pick up the tab..., go in for a kiss..., and follow the two-day rule" before contacting her again.⁴⁹ Features like these assert the belief that

⁴⁸ Claire McIntosh, "Sanctified and Solo," *Ebony* June 2011, 61.

⁴⁹ Natalie Krinsky, "5 ways to boost your dating confidence," <http://www.match.com/magazine/article.aspx?TrackingID=516307&articleid=6092> accessed 7-3-12; Laura

only a well-thought-out strategy will enable individuals to find people to love them, with the implication that all possible partners are engaged in a process of careful evaluation and choice.

Just as the stars and contestants on the *Bachelor/Bachelorette* shows articulate a preference for finding a partner similar in personality, values and/or experiences, and with whom they form a “good team,” advice articles also stress the importance of similarities, compatibility, and complementarity. An article on match.com encourages readers to consider their personality type and those of potential mates (using a model of four types based on varying levels of brain chemicals, as identified by anthropologist Helen Fisher) and notes, “people are generally attracted to those who are similar in terms of education, intelligence, religion and financial status.” Other online articles, on the *Cosmopolitan* website, encourage readers to “suss out their compatibility” before moving in with their boyfriends and outline the factors to consider when assessing whether one’s boyfriend is husband material. An article published in *Ebony* recommends that individuals whose goal is “long-term commitment” consider their levels of compatibility with their boy- or girlfriends across seven areas: “spiritual, financial, social, personal, developmental, physical, and sexual.”⁵⁰ Profiles of successful relationships, which

Gilbert, “5 relationship behaviors to slow down,” <http://www.match.com/cp.aspx?cpp=en-ca/yahoo/article/article.html&article.html&articleid=5297> accessed 7-3-12; Bethany Heitman, “Good Girlfriend Behavior: Do This, Not That,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/relationship-advice/be-a-good-girlfriend> accessed 6-18-12; Tamara Schlesinger, “What Makes Men Fall in Love,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/relationship-advice/What-Makes-Men-Fall-in-Love> accessed 6-18-12; Chloe Anderson, “How to Get a Second Date,” http://www.askmen.com/dating/dating_advice_600/676_how-to-get-a-second-date.html, accessed 12-1-12; David Wygant, “Date Planning,” http://www.askmen.com/dating/dating_advice_600/642_date-planning.html, accessed 12-1-12.

⁵⁰ Kimberly Dawn Neumann, “Which personality type are you?” <http://www.match.com/y/article.aspx?articleid=6250&TrackingID=526103&BannerID=688251&trackingid=526214&bannerid=683695> accessed 7-3-12; Anna Davies, “Moving In With Your Guy?” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/relationship-advice/moving-in-with-your-boyfriend> accessed 6-16-

frequently attempt to identify the elements that lead to their success, also often highlight similarities in interests, personality traits, and life goals, as well as complementarity. According to *People*, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his new wife Priscilla Chan “share the same values,” while long-married Hollywood power couple John Travolta and Kelly Preston’s marriage is a success partly because, as Preston explains, “Friends tease that we’re the same person – we fly together, we go swimming, we love to just hang out.” An article that raises the question of whether Kim Kardashian and Kanye West’s relationship was a PR stunt or “real love” features a sidebar on “5 Things They Have in Common,” presented as evidence that their relationship is, indeed, “real love.”⁵¹

This notion of “real love” is apparent on television as well. Although the framework of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* and the ubiquitous competition (by contestants) and evaluation (by Ben and Emily) emphasize the role of conscious choice in the quest for romantic love, statements made by various cast members and some production choices underscore the importance of fate, destiny, or an indescribable connection. In the second episode of Ben’s season, Courtney explains in an interview, “We have this thing, it’s just there. It’s either there or it’s not and we have it.” Later, as he contemplates whether to propose to Courtney, Ben falls back on a similar explanation of the appeal she holds for him: “I’ve had this incredible feeling about her since our first date... There’s like this weird magical force that pulls us together.” Emily’s choice to send Joe home from a one-on-one date in an early episode of her season underscores the

12; Celeste Perron, “How Not to Marry the Wrong Guy,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/dating-advice/how-not-to-marry-the-wrong-guy> accessed 6-18-12; Shane K. Perrault, Ph.D., “Ready to Commit – or *Forcing* the Fit? 7 Keys to Compatibility,” *Ebony* Dec. 2011/Jan. 2012, 79.

⁵¹Kristen Mascia, “Relationship Status: Married,” *People* June 4, 2012, 80-84; Michelle Tauber, “John Travolta: Under Fire,” *People* May 28, 2012, 58-64; “Kim & Kanye: Real Love?” (no author), *People*, Apr. 23, 2012, 23.

importance of the intangible over the quantifiable; she explains that he “has a lot of the qualities that I want but I don’t really feel a spark... I know when I meet the person I want to spend the rest of my life with, I’ll know, and it didn’t happen tonight.” In a later episode she reiterates, “I want that feeling where you know, you just know.” At one point she comments that with Sean, “it just feels right.” In the final episode of her season, Jef maintains, “I think it’s fate... I’ve never been in love like this.” Just before the proposal Emily tells him, “You are my soulmate, you are the perfect person for me,” and he responds in kind, saying at the beginning of his proposal, “I think it’s so rare that people find the people they’re meant to be with... I’m so grateful that we found each other.”⁵² These mentions, peppered in among the incessant appraisal and studied self-presentation, gesture toward the relevance of the narrative of “The One” in contemporary cultural models of romantic love.

Other cultural sources including articles, interviews, and celebrity profiles also reference a belief in “The One.” Actress Sara Ramirez tells *People* of her new husband, “Pretty much when I first met him we both knew something on some very kind of spiritual level,” while BMX star and MTV host T.J. Lavin explains of his new wife, “I knew I was gonna marry her the second I met her.”⁵³ Often times this belief is referenced offhandedly, as in online articles encouraging women to date men that are not their usual

⁵² Courtney: *The Bachelor*, 16.2, ABC, aired Jan. 9, 2012 and 16.9, ABC, aired Feb. 27, 2012; Joe, *The Bachelorette* 8.2, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired May 21, 2012; “you just know”: *The Bachelorette*, 8.3, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired May 28, 2012; Sean, *The Bachelorette* 8.5, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired June 11, 2012; Jef, *The Bachelorette* 8.10, viewed online at <http://abc.go.com/watch/the-bachelorette/SH5556990>, originally aired July 22, 2012.

⁵³ Julia Haskins, “Sara Ramirez Reflects Back on ‘Wonderful’ Wedding Kiss,” <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20645501,00.html> accessed 12-2-12; Mark Gray, “TJ Lavin Weds Longtime Girlfriend in Las Vegas,” <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20644934,00.html> accessed 12-2-12.

type in order to learn “a unique set of skills that will come in hand when you do meet The One,” and to be open to dating an ex-boyfriend’s friend because “there’s no reason your ex’s friend couldn’t be your soul mate,” or informing them, “if after giving it thought you’re still not sure your guy is The One, he probably isn’t.”⁵⁴ Advertisers also call on the concept, in ads for shoes and paint that encourage listeners on Pandora.com to “fall for your sole mate” or to “find your soul paint,” or ads for wedding dresses that present readers of *Brides* magazine with a “Love Story” of “finding The One.”⁵⁵ Use of these tropes in advertising, in particular, makes visible the association between finding a romantic partner and choosing a product that more subtly structures the discourses of other sources, like advice articles and *The Bachelor*.

Online dating: Romance and consumption on the Internet

The most dramatic change to the media landscape between the 1980s and the early twenty-first century, even beyond the rise of reality television, has been the growth of the Internet as an arena for cultural production, social connection, and the dissemination of the messages of consumer culture. The Internet has largely replaced the newspaper as the site wherein individuals undertake the search for love, and the result has

⁵⁴ Maura Kelly, “5 guy-types women appreciate,” <http://www.match.com/magazine/article.aspx?articleid=12005> accessed 7-3-12; N.F. Mendoza, “4 questions to ask before dating an ex’s friend,” <http://www.match.com/magazine/article.aspx?ArticleID=5714> accessed 7-3-12; for other casual references see Cericola, “How I knew it was love” (“I knew he was The One when he played my song”), accessed 7-3-12; Celeste Perron, “How Not to Marry the Wrong Guy,” <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/dating-advice/how-not-to-marry-the-wrong-guy> accessed 6-18-12.

⁵⁵ Shoedazzle ad, viewed on pandora.com, May 10, 2012; Ace Hardware ad, viewed on Pandora.com, Apr. 11, 2012; David’s Bridal ad, *Bride’s* July 2012, 65.

been a marked increase in the degree to which the values of consumer culture influence that search. In particular, the frameworks of choice and destiny, which dominate many of the popular culture sources already reviewed, structure users' participations on these sites and reduce the search for a romantic partner to an experience akin to shopping.

Scholars from a diverse range of disciplines have examined the effect of new media and technology on various aspects of human connection. Some take a positive view of those effects: Howard Rheingold points out the possibilities for virtual community formation enabled by the Internet, and Clay Shirky notes that online social tools provide new ways for people to collaborate without reliance on traditional organizational structures. Others, like Sherry Turkle, are more pessimistic about the influence of new media. Turkle argues that advances in technology allow people to be in quasi-relationships, while still protecting themselves from the demands of others.⁵⁶ Dating is just one of the many areas of American experience that have been altered by the far-reaching impact of the Internet, and here too the changes could be viewed as either positive or negative – or both. In a study published in early 2012, a group of social psychologists argued that while online dating has some advantages over conventional dating – access to a larger pool of potential partners and the ability to communicate over the computer before meeting to garner an initial sense of compatibility – there are also

⁵⁶ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (revised ed.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008); Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011). For other important discussions of the Internet and its influence on human interaction, see for example Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, The Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) on the history of the Internet's development; Lawrence Lessig, *Code Version 2.0* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), on the Internet as a regulable space; Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006) on fan culture, online relationships, and the individual production of meaning on the Internet.

important aspects of online dating that may, in the words of the study, “undermine romantic outcomes.” The authors contend that there is a disconnect between what people find attractive in a profile and what they find attractive in real life encounters; that comparing a large number of profiles side-by-side encourages “judgmental, assessment-oriented evaluations”; that communication via computer, if the duration is more than a few weeks, can yield unrealistic expectations that undermine face-to-face meetings; and that matching algorithms are unlikely to predict partners who are compatible for a long-term relationship, in part because they rely on principles of similarity and complementarity that recent scientific research has found to be less important to relationship well-being than typically assumed and in part because they cannot take into account the more important predictors of relationship success: how two people deal with stressful situations together and how they grow and change over time.⁵⁷

Advances in computer technology began influencing the quest for romance by the mid-eighties, as ads for computerized dating services appeared in the personals sections of many newspapers, promising hopeful singles a new and improved way of finding their perfect match. A decade later, dating websites had displaced the computerized services, allowing users to access the profiles of thousands of other singles for a fee. By the late 1990s, Internet dating was becoming increasingly socially acceptable, as evidenced by newspaper stories repeatedly proclaiming it as such – even if many couples that met online remained embarrassed by it. The bride and groom featured in a 1999 *New York Times* piece waited until their wedding to reveal to their family and friends how they had met, the achievement of that ultimate romantic goal acting to legitimize the nascent

⁵⁷ Eli J. Finkel, Paul W. Eastwick, Benjamin R. Karney, Harry T. Reis and Susan Sprecher, “Online Dating: A Critical Analysis from the Perspective of Psychological Science,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* Jan 2012 13: 3-66, accessed online (<http://psi.sagepub.com/content/13/1/3.full>) 9-14-12.

method of connection.⁵⁸ A mere dozen or so years later, online dating has become a billion-dollar industry. One industry report estimated that almost 25 million unique users around the world accessed an online dating site in a single month. In 2010, match.com released studies, done in collaboration with an independent research firm, demonstrating that one in five committed relationships, and one in six marriages, begin online.⁵⁹ Yet, at the same time, recent news reports have focused on the fact that the growth of the paid online dating business seems to have stalled. As one such report put it, “the numbers suggest that while singles in search of a match may post a profile, they’re not finding who they’re looking for.”⁶⁰ Stalled growth may also be explained by the fragmentation of the market into ever more specialized groups – dating sites exist for gays, lesbians, Jews, Christians, African Americans, city dwellers, and farmers; sites like AdultFriendFinder connect those looking for sexual contact only; and AshleyMadison.com promises to connect individuals already in committed relationships with others looking for discreet affairs. While the various specialized sites confirm the value placed on a wide range of choices in twenty-first-century consumer culture, an examination of the most widely used sites allows the contemporary observer to consider

⁵⁸ Bonnie Rathman Morris, “You’ve Got Romance! Seeking Love Online,” *New York Times*, Aug. 26, 1999, 1. For similar stories, see also Leyla Kokmen, “Web Takes Matchmaking to Online Level,” *Denver Post*, Sept. 21, 1998, F6; Lyle V. Harris, “They’ve Got Mail: Cyber Dating Service Members Finally Meet Face to Face,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 21, 1988, C1; Jennifer Wolcott, “Click Here for Romance: It’s Anonymous, Yet Intimate. Online Dating is Entering the Cultural Mainstream,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Jan. 13, 1999, 11.

⁵⁹ Eli J. Finkel, Paul W. Eastwick, Benjamin R. Karney, Harry T. Reis and Susan Sprecher, “Online Dating: A Critical Analysis from the Perspective of Psychological Science,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* Jan 2012 13: 3-66, accessed online (<http://psi.sagepub.com/content/13/1/3.full>) 9-14-12; Annie Gleason, “New Studies: One in Five Couples Meet Online,” <http://www.examiner.com/article/new-studies-one-five-couples-meet-online> accessed 12-23-12

⁶⁰ Paul Smalera, “Internet Dating is Past Its Prime: Why the Future for Paid Web Sites Looks Rocky,” *Washington Post*, June 27, 2010, G2; see also Julie Ruvolo, “Why Advertising Won’t Save Online Dating Sites,” *AdAge*, Mar. 21, 2011, viewed online <http://adage.com/article/digitalnext/advertising-save-online-dating-sites/149377/> accessed 1-4-13

the meaning and purpose such sites have in mainstream culture. The following analysis will focus primarily on POF (formerly PlentyOfFish), match.com, and OkCupid (which was purchased by match's parent company in February 2011), Google's top three most searched dating sites of 2012.⁶¹

Online or mobile dating services fall into one of three categories – personal selection sites, matching sites, and mobile apps – and all have two key features in common that set them apart from traditional personal ads. First, they all exist for the sole purpose of making a profit. Paid sites like match.com and eHarmony charge membership fees and/or have tiered membership levels with an enhanced ability to view the profiles of and communicate with potential partners based on how much one is willing to pay, while free sites like OKCupid and POF monetize their customer base by selling ad space (paid/free apps operate on similar principles). Second, all of these sites have limitations inherent in the format – as one is filling out a profile, there are many boxes and drop-down menus, which offer one little choice. The site designers, not the users, determine which features and characteristics are most salient to the quest for love, and in many cases provide the answer choices as well. There are also always spaces for personal expression, but prompts, character limits, and where (or whether) those elements appear on one's default profile page are, again, chosen by the site designers, not the individuals attempting to use them for self-expression. The three sites considered here are all personal selection sites, which allow users to choose which features they'd like to search for – including, but not limited to, gender, sexual orientation, geographic location,

⁶¹ Rounding out the list of top-searched dating sites were eHarmony, DateHookup, Zoosk, ChristianMingle, AdultFriendFinder, JDate, and Singlesnet. Christina Huffington, "Online Dating: Google's Most Searched Singles Sites of 2012," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/online-dating-google-mos_n_2287990.html#slide=1875141 accessed 12-12-12.

relationship goals, tobacco/alcohol/drug use, career, income, and personal interests – and then to browse through the profiles that fit the search criteria to choose which users to contact.⁶² The description of the personal selection sites that follows is based on my experiences filling out profiles and browsing through the sites in September 2012.

The limitation placed on personal expression by the structure of dating sites results in the mediation of individual desires to a much greater degree than in the classified pages of previous decades. Dating sites are a location where the needs of consumer capitalism take precedence over the needs of users, where the values of consumption dictate how individuals undertake the search for romantic love. This change from one type of source to another necessitates an accompanying change in interpretive strategy. Unlike the analysis of personal ads in previous chapters, I do not include observations about specific, individual online profiles or common themes visible across a large selection of profiles – the very structure of these sites limits one's access to those other users deemed potentially compatible by the behind-the-scenes matching process, making it impossible to view a balanced sample from which to draw conclusions. Rather, I consider the way the sign-up and search processes are structured and the implications of those structures vis-à-vis the questions about connections between romantic love and consumer culture with which this project is concerned.

⁶² Matching sites, like eHarmony.com or chemistry.com, require users to complete extensive questionnaires about themselves and rely on algorithms to match users based on particular notions of compatibility. They also require substantial membership fees, making them less accessible than the personal selection sites considered here, all of which offer free services (as well as tiered membership levels that promise more in-depth matching). Mobile apps, the newest members of the bunch, utilize GPS technology and allow smartphone users to find potential dates (or sexual hookups) who are in their immediate vicinity in real time. Mobile apps are likely the future of “online” dating, as handheld devices (like smartphones and tablets) become more heavily used than computers, but at the time of this writing that momentum is still in the process of shifting, hence the focus on websites in the following discussion. Mobile apps are also, at least so far, geared more towards enabling casual sexual encounters than facilitating romantic relationships and, thus, fall outside the scope of this project. On mobile apps, see Hephzibah Anderson, “A New Kind of Love Story,” *AdWeek*, May 2, 2011, accessed online <http://www.adweek.com/hephzibah-anderson/new-kind-love-story-131195> 1-3-12

The concepts of choice and destiny, dominant on *The Bachelor* shows and elsewhere in popular culture, also structure the models of romantic love presented by many of the popular dating sites. Choice plays a role in nearly every aspect of a user's experience, from which site(s) to join, to what information to include in a profile, to what features to search for in a potential mate, to the "matches" with which s/he wants to pursue contact. Personal selection sites appear to leave the choices entirely up to the users, who have the ability to browse through profiles based on the search functions they set up for themselves, although these sites also offer suggested matches based on various factors, such as relationship goals, shared hobbies, or political beliefs. Like on the *Bachelor* shows, the emphases on choice and similarity/complementarity encourage users to view potential partners as products and to favor connections based on shared consumption tastes, which are easily identifiable. At the same time, references to the concept of romantic success as destiny, which also occur frequently on these sites, appear to refocus on the emotional realm while still relying on the discourses of consumption. One analysis of the success stories featured on match.com notes that virtually all share several similarities: they express belief in a soul mate; they emphasize love at first sight; and they articulate a sense that finding one's mate leads to a feeling of being completed and to living happily ever after; success stories on POF and OKCupid emphasize the same details.⁶³ These very points also find frequent expression in product advertisements. The emphasis on destiny is visible in other places as well, such as the

⁶³ Sharon R. Mazzarella, "Cyberdating Success Stories and the Mythic Narrative of Living 'Happily-Ever-After with the One,'" in Mary-Lou Galician and Debra L. Merskin, eds. *Critical Thinking about Sex, Love and Romance in the Mass Media* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 23-37.

message at the top of the page when a new POF user begins to fill out her/his profile:

“Complete this questionnaire to meet your soulmate!”

Although not all published success stories are from married couples (some are from those earlier in the dating process), marriage is clearly the goal of these sites. Many of the pictures in the success stories photo galleries are of couples on their wedding days. The webpage devoted to match.com’s successes promises “more relationships and more marriages than any other site.” POF stresses the importance of marriage through its search function, which allows users to perform a basic search (sex, age, ethnicity, location), an advanced search (with many possible interests/features included), a username search, or a marriage search. Choosing “marriage search” brings up a page with profiles of users who said they are looking for marriage. In early 2013, POF announced a wedding contest, which solicited “great stor[ies] about how you met and fell in love” from couples who met on the site and were currently engaged. Site users would vote on the stories and the winning couple would be awarded \$100,000 “to help them plan their wedding, honeymoon, and start their lives together.”⁶⁴ While highlighting the importance of marriage, the contest primarily served as an opportunity for POF to advertise its success in facilitating successful matches, i.e., those that ended in marriage. Earmarking the \$100,000 prize as wedding and honeymoon spending, meanwhile, reinforced the ties between love and consumption emphasized by the wedding industry.

On the three sites considered here, the degree to which the information visible on profiles is user-generated varies. POF and match.com are more restrictive, while OKCupid provides the most space for self-expression. On all three, users give details

⁶⁴ <http://success.match.com/index.aspx?lid=4> accessed 1-2-13; http://www.POF.com/contest_about.aspx accessed 1-5-13.

like sex, desired sex of potential partners, type of relationship sought, whether one has or wants children, body type, religion, tobacco/alcohol/drug use, occupation, income and political views via drop down menus that allow for one answer choice only. POF provides a few spaces where users can use their own words: a brief “headline,” a mandatory description, an optional suggestion for a first date, and a generic space for “interests.” Match allows users to write their own responses to “about me and who I’m looking for,” “for fun,” “favorite hot spots,” “favorite things” and “last read,” but offers prompts in all the text boxes to direct users to include particular types of information in particular ways. Most of the information visible on both POF and Match profiles comes from users’ selections from drop down menus. Match.com allows users to choose as many “interests” and “sports and exercise” answers as they want from the lists provided, but they do not have the ability to list their own answers, so those whose primary interests or favorite sports/ways to exercise are not among the 26 or 23 choices listed, respectively, will not find themselves accurately represented on their profile pages. While OKCupid profiles do include a significant amount of information obtained via drop down menus, they are comprised mostly of user-generated responses to ten different topics, including not just the self-summary and list of favorite media/food found on the other sites, but also more unique topics like “The six things I could never do without,” “I spend a lot of time thinking about,” and “The most private thing I’m willing to admit.” While these expanded opportunities for self-expression mean that OKCupid profiles display more personal, user-generated sentiments than profiles on POF or Match, the difference is one of degree, not of kind. The information available on OKCupid profiles is still mediated by the site designers, who determine what information is important

enough to warrant an essay prompt. The site provides no space for purely open-ended writing.⁶⁵

Not only do site designers ultimately determine what information will or will not be shared, and how it will be displayed, dating sites also offer tips for users on how to sound most appealing in their profiles and how to look most appealing in the photographs they post. POF instructs users, when filling out the mandatory profile description of themselves, to “talk about your hobbies; talk about your goals and aspirations; talk about yourself and what makes you unique; talk about your taste in music.” Match.com likewise prompts users, “don’t overthink it; write about things you like; talk about your ambitions; say what makes you, you; [write about] things you like to do” in their descriptions, and to be “funny or witty... use your favorite one-liner” when composing their headlines, the text displayed at the top of the profile. If the process of self-description still seems daunting even with those helpful prompts, Match.com users can choose instead to pay \$34.99 for a service called “ProfilePro,” which offers “professional writers [who will] polish your profile so your personality shines through.” An article on match.com that promises tips on getting “a picture that really attracts attention online” encourages users to have their photos taken outside in open shade, choose camera settings that will warm the skin tones, have the photographer stand slightly above eye level, “aim your heart and palms toward the camera to send the message that you are open and receptive,” adopt poses from celebrity red-carpet photos, show yourself in your natural

⁶⁵ While users could theoretically utilize any of the write-in text boxes on any of the sites for whatever purpose they want, I didn’t encounter any examples of this in the browsing I did on the three sites considered here.

environment and with friends and family, and try to capture spontaneity.⁶⁶ “How To Improve Your Profile” videos embedded in the POF profile edit page – one for women, one for men – offer similar tips on how to take and select images and encourage POF users to be positive and optimistic in their descriptions. The POF videos also offer gender-specific advice: women are warned not to post pouty pictures of themselves with lots of skin showing, lest they repel “the right kind of guy,” who is attracted to “cute, approachable, and relaxed” women, while the video for men emphasizes the write-in “profession” box (which receives no mention in the women’s video), informing them that “women are looking for a guy who is either successful or has career plans.” According to POF, then, not much has changed in the dating world: women are valued for their (wholesome yet attractive) appearance, while men are valued for their income-earning potential.

In many ways, the structure of online dating sites encourages the association of people with products, and it equates the process of looking for a partner with the experience of shopping. The integration of the values of consumer culture into all areas of the site is particularly visible on OKCupid, which enables and encourages an evaluative attitude in users by including “similar users” in a sidebar when an individual profile is being viewed, along with brief comparative descriptions. So, while a user is considering individual X, s/he need only look to the right of the essay on the six things X could never do without, to find a selection of other users who may be “more adventurous,” “less arrogant,” “more compassionate,” “kinkier,” “more attentive,” “less into sports,” “thrifter,” or “more indie” than X. The same evaluative process is

⁶⁶ Amy Spencer, “Look Great in your Photo!,” <http://www.match.com/cp.aspx?cpp=/cphp/magazine/article.html&articleid=9318&trackingid=525748&bannerid=666021&ER=sessiontimeout> accessed 7-8-12

encouraged more subtly on all three sites, where a user's "matches" page displays many potential partners' photos side by side, encouraging him or her to make decisions on which profiles to click through to based on physical appearance and comparison. The equation of people with products occurs at other moments as well. The many drop-down menus and boxes to be checked, as well as the more infrequent opportunities for self-expression, have the result of reducing users to a list of features, like the description of a product on the webpage of a retail site. Beyond how users think of themselves, this perspective colors how users think about their potential partners as well, likely to a much greater extent – after all, users likely spend far more time browsing the profiles of others than completing their own. Match.com, in particular, allows the user to specify in great detail what type of person she or he wants to meet: height, body type, eye and hair color, occupation, income range, faith, ethnicity, languages spoken, and educational level must all be specified in order to complete one's profile, which, presumably, allows the site to suggest matches for users to consider. Users can also input their preferences on as many of those features using the custom search feature to look for their own potential matches.

In addition to online dating sites' demands for users to reduce themselves to a list of desirable features, and their display of potential dates like products on a shelf, the very concept that the quest for love can be reduced to a computerized matching formula also reflects the values of consumer culture. Here, too, the belief that structures the matching process is that, if enough of an individual's features are cataloged and characterized, finding a list of potentially compatible partners should be easy. Match.com is the most circumspect about its matching process, explaining only that it uses "intelligent matching technology [to] integrate [users'] personality, preferences and on-site actions, along with

behavior predictions.” OKCupid bases its matching process on the answers that users select for hundreds of questions, including more behavioral ones like “Could you date someone who was really messy?” and “Would you consider sleeping with someone on the first date?” as well as those that focus more on personality, like “Do you enjoy intense intellectual conversations?” and “Would you prefer good things happened, or interesting?” Users of OKCupid are regularly reminded, “The more you answer, the smarter OKCupid gets at recommending matches.” POF suggests matches based on its “Relationship Chemistry Predictor,” a 73-item questionnaire to which users select disagree/somewhat, agree/somewhat, agree/agree to statements like “I get nervous easily,” “I think highly of myself,” “I’m very open to trying new foods and different cultures,” and “White lies, like faking orgasm, are perfectly normal in maintaining a relationship.” POF assures users, before they begin the test, that it is “based on research done on 10’s [sic] of thousands of couples in relationships.” Match.com and OKCupid also tell users how compatible they might be with potential partners while viewing their profiles: match allows users to view a checklist of their desired qualities side-by-side with a potential date’s, while OKCupid includes, on each profile viewed, a breakdown of the potential for romantic or platonic connection, as well as the possibility two individuals wouldn’t get along, expressed as “X% Match, Y% Friend, Z% Enemy.”

In their very structure, these personal selection sites promote the process choice as the best way for users to find their destiny, their soulmates, their Ones. Their repeated message to consumers is that a reliance on computerized, “scientific” matchmaking is the most surefire and efficient way to achieve romantic success with their true loves. These ratings systems, checklists and test results are meant to reassure users and give them

confidence in making selections from the many profiles available to them. However, the appropriation of the matchmaking process by computer programs may actually have the opposite result, making individuals feel incapable of judging for themselves, in real life situations, who might be a good match for them. The attempt to reduce individuals to checklists and personality types, or to plot them on a match/friend/enemy graph, requires a willful disregard of individual complexity and the multidimensional factors that, according to decades of well-designed research, actually influence any given relationship's likelihood of success.⁶⁷

Whether the existence of online dating will ultimately be a positive or negative influence on the romantic landscape remains to be seen. For now, this analysis of 2012's most popular dating sites reveals that the values of consumer culture have come to wield a much greater influence over individual searches for love than in previous decades. The earliest iteration of the ideology of consumptive romantic love, as it appeared in the 1890s, encouraged individuals to conceive of themselves as consumers and of their marriage as a site for the expression of love through consumption. While individuals resisted this ideology in their self-definitions at first, over the course of the twentieth century individual desires gradually showed acceptance of consumer culture's demands that they self-identify as consumers and that they seek out the ideal romantic relationship presented to them by commercialized popular culture. In the 1980s, the appropriation of the relational concept of compatibility as applying not only to personal qualities but also to consumption tastes marked the beginning of the conceptual shift to identifying

⁶⁷ Eli Finkel et. als. outline some of the findings of this research, done primarily by psychologists and sociologists, which point to factors including the extent to which couples experience chronic and acute stress, the way couples cope with stressors, and individual maturity and change over time as being predictive of the long-term success of relationships. Finkel et. als., "Online Dating."

individuals not just as consumers but as products. This shift has been fully realized by the discourses of Internet dating in the early twenty-first century. Personal selection sites' use of the frameworks of choice and destiny, which echo the strategies of advertising and are supported by other popular sources, encourage users to conceive of themselves and potential mates as products and structure the experience of looking for a romantic partner as identical to the experience of shopping for consumer goods. The demands of consumer capitalism have overtaken the desires of individuals as the driving force in today's romantic market.

NOTE ON SAMPLING

Studying popular culture presents the cultural historian with a challenge unique in the field of history: not how to find evidence, but rather how to identify a manageable body of evidence with which to work. I used a variety of strategies to identify, locate, and sample the sources analyzed in this dissertation. Throughout, my goal was to replicate the reading/viewing experiences of these media's original readers/viewers, so whenever possible I looked through entire issues of magazines and watched television programs complete with commercials as originally broadcast.

Magazines

I examined the 1890s *Ladies' Home Journal* for chapter 1 online, via ProQuest's American Periodical Series database. All the magazines considered in chapters 2-4 were accessed, in hard copy, at the Boston Public Library, except for *True Story* (chapters 2 and 3), *Life* and *Confidential* (chapter 3), which I examined at the Library of Congress, and *Christopher Street*, *On Our Backs* and *The TV-TS Tapestry* (chapter 4), which I examined at the Sexual Minority Archives (Northampton, MA). Some of the magazines considered in chapter 5 were ones I had purchased; others I examined at my local (Pittsfield, MA) public library.

For chapters 1-4, I used the same sampling strategy. I looked at the February and June issues for each year in the decade, assuming that these months would typically include more coverage of romantic love, given that Valentine's Day is in mid-February and June is identified as the traditional month for weddings. I then rotated through the other ten months randomly over the course of the decade so that for each year, I examined three issues. For chapter 5, I collected and saved many relevant magazines that I or others had purchased during 2010, 2011 and 2012 (this chapter was written at the end of 2012). I also browsed through the magazines at my local library, which keeps 6-12 months of each title available, again looking at the February and June issues as well as, sometimes, a third. I supplemented this research with browsing current magazines' websites, which sometimes contain entire issues. For all chapters, I looked through each magazine cover to cover, reading every editorial feature that had anything to do with romance, love, dating, engagement, weddings, or marriage. I made note of every advertisement that touched on any of those themes or that featured an image of a couple.

Television

For chapters 3 and 4, I relied primarily on the holdings of the Paley Center for Media. Because product advertising is one of the main concerns of this project, and because I believe it important, when possible, to consider advertisements within the context in which they were originally presented, I first used the Paley Center's database to identify all the broadcasts in their holdings from the 1950s and 1980s that included commercials. From that initial list, I looked at a wide range of programming from both the 1950s and the 1980s, again paying particular attention to any programs or commercials that touched on romance, love, dating, engagement, weddings, or marriage. Once I identified particular programming on which to focus—*Do You Trust Your Wife?* for chapter 3 and coverage of Charles and Diana for chapter 4—I watched everything I could access, regardless of whether the original advertising was included in the recording. In the case of *Do You Trust Your Wife?*, of which the Paley Center had only two episodes, I was able to find more at the UCLA Film & Television Archive. UCLA had a limit on how many episodes they could make available for viewing, so I chose twelve episodes spread out over the broadcast run (from January, February, September, November and December, 1956, and January and February, 1957).

For chapter 5, I watched every episode of season 16 of *The Bachelor* and season 8 of *The Bachelorette*. Because many people today watch their favorite programs online rather than on live television, I watched some when they were broadcast on the network and some on the ABC website. In both cases I watched all the commercials as well as the programs themselves.

Internet

I chose the dating websites examined in chapter 5 based on the most recent figures available for most popular dating sites. I set up profiles on each of the three sites and browsed the profiles of other users over the course of a month (September, 2012).

I also viewed several websites as twenty-first century analogues to the magazines considered in other chapters, that is, as venues for the voices of cultural producers and as vehicles for advertising (alongside traditional print magazines, which I looked at for chapter 5 as well). Some of these are the online presences of print magazines (*Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Esquire*) while others are stand-alone websites (AskMen.com). I browsed these sites as users often do, by clicking first on a story of interest (in my case, one focused on love, romance, dating, engagement or marriage) and then following other links as they appeared. I paid attention both to the stories on these sites and the advertisements. I also made note of internet advertising of interest that I encountered as I was online in my leisure time.

Advertising Industry Records

Early in the course of my work on this project, I traveled to Duke University's John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Marketing, and Advertising History, where I focused on the archives of the J. Walter Thompson agency. I identified accounts for which ad campaigns seemed likely to have taken up romantic themes (Chesebrough-Pond's, Lever Brothers, Warner Lambert, Andrew Jergens and Revlon) and read through associated collections, including the papers of various ad men and women who worked on those accounts, staff meeting minutes, and account files. As my project took shape, the research I'd done at Duke was less relevant than I'd hoped, but I did find some useful information there, particularly in the meeting minutes where advertisers' decisions to use romance and marriage as selling points were discussed and elaborated.

Newspapers

Finding newspaper personal ads for each of the historical decades considered in this project was the biggest research challenge I faced. For chapter 1, I found personal ads from the 1890s through online searches, using both the ProQuest historical newspapers database and the Library of Congress's Chronicling American project, by doing keyword searches for "matrimony" or "matrimonial." For chapter 2, I first looked through microfilm reels of dozens of different papers from around the country to identify which papers had published personal ads regularly during the 1920s, and then read through four months from each year in the decade for each of those papers, staggering the months so that I looked at each an equal number of times. This sampling strategy resulted in more evidence than was reasonable for a project of this size, so I decided to look at fewer total reels for the remaining chapters. The approach I had used to locate the papers considered in chapter 2 did not work for chapter 3, as I was unable to find any mainstream newspapers that published such ads in the 1950s, but I happened upon a story in the magazine *Confidential* about the personal ads published in the *LA Mirror*. I looked through one or two (depending on availability) reels of both the *Mirror* and the *Chicago Defender* for each year in the decade. The research for chapter 4 was much easier, as most metropolitan newspapers published personal ads in the 1980s. For this chapter I chose papers from various regions across the country and, because I had many more papers in my sample, I read through only one month's worth per year for each paper (again, staggering the months/years as much as possible across the various papers). All of the papers I looked at for chapters 2-4 were either part of Brown University's holdings or were made available to me by request through interlibrary loan.

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The Library of Congress's Motion Picture, Broadcasting & Recorded Sound Division

The Paley Center for Media (New York, NY)

The Sexual Minority Archives (Northampton, MA)

The UCLA Film & Television Archive

Newspapers:

Albuquerque Journal

Atlanta Constitution

Bay Windows

Boston Daily Globe

Chicago Daily Tribune

Chicago Defender

Christian Science Monitor

Denver Post

Des Moines Register

Evening Bulletin [Maysville, KY]

[Washington, D.C.] Evening Times

Fort Worth Daily Gazette

[Los Angeles] Herald

Kansas City [MO] Journal

Los Angeles Mirror

Los Angeles Times

Miami Herald

[San Francisco] Morning Call

New York Times

Omaha Daily Bee

Pittsburgh Dispatch
Record-Union [Sacramento, CA]
Richmond [KY] Climax
Richmond [VA] Dispatch
Saint Paul Globe
Salt Lake Herald
San Francisco Call
San Francisco Chronicle
Spokesman Review [Spokane, WA]
Wall Street Journal
Washington Blade
Washington Post and Times Herald
Windy City Times

Periodicals:

Ad Age
Ad Week
Better Homes & Gardens
Bride's
Christopher Street
Confidential
The Cosmopolitan
Ebony
Esquire
Good Housekeeping
Ladies' Home Journal
Life
Men's Health
On Our Backs
Out
People
Printer's Ink
Saturday Evening Post
True Story
The TV-TS Tapestry
Women's Home Companion

Television:

All My Children
The Bachelor
The Bachelorette
CBS News Special Report: The Royal Wedding
Charles & Diana: A Royal Love Story
Colgate Comedy Hour

Do You Trust Your Wife?
Dynasty
The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show
The Guiding Light
The Jackie Gleason Show
The Lux Show with Rosemary Clooney
thirtysomething
Search for Tomorrow
Your Show of Shows

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