

國立交通大學

外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班

碩士論文

好萊塢婚禮電影的演變：真命天子與家庭價值之呈現與探討



Hollywood's Wedding Comedy Now and Then:  
Representing “the One” and Family Values

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中華民國一〇二年七

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A Thesis

Submitted to Department of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics

College of Humanities and Social Science

National Chao Tung University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

in

Graduate Institute of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics

July 2013

Hsinchu, Taiwan

中 華 民 國 一 〇 二 年 七 月  
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摘 要

本文主要探討以婚禮為主題的電影在二十世紀末到二十一世紀初產量暴增的現象，針對此現象提出解釋，且進一步探討其中所代表的意義。此論文的貢獻在於將婚禮喜劇定義為由浪漫喜劇延伸出來的一種新的類型電影。

第一章主要分為兩個部分，第一部分是定義『婚禮喜劇』(wedding comedy)。第二部分是藉由情節、動機、最終目標與其意圖等四個方面來比較浪漫喜劇(romantic comedy)與婚禮喜劇相同與相異之處。

第二章從歷史背景作為切入點，將婚禮喜劇從1930年到2010年分為四個時期。探討各時期的社會氛圍與婚禮喜劇中女性腳色嘗試挑戰與顛覆當代社會觀點的精神。各時期的女性腳色刻畫反映當代女性渴望提升自主性與多元選擇。

第三章主要呈現婚禮喜劇在二十一世紀初所反應與顛覆的社會價值，並探討婚禮喜劇暴增與離婚率攀升之間的關係。將真命天子在浪漫喜劇中的設定去神秘化且給予新的解釋，並反轉落跑新娘在浪漫喜劇中所帶有的負面意義。

最後，針對家庭價值的部分，婚禮喜劇對於傳統家庭價值在二十一世紀初的概念做重新詮釋。

關鍵字：婚禮喜劇、浪漫喜劇、反偽裝、落跑新娘、結婚焦慮、真命天子、  
去神秘化、家庭價值

# **Hollywood's Wedding Comedy Now and Then: Representing "the One" and Family Values**

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## **Abstract**

The wedding scene is one of the most significant plot elements in romantic comedy, or rom-com, especially the "key kiss" on the altar which serves as a paradigmatic indicator of a happy ending. The wedding scene used to be an iconic part at the end of romantic comedy. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood, however, there are more and more romantic comedy focusing on the wedding preparation as the main plotline. I presume that a "different phrase" or even a new genre is derived from Hollywood romantic comedy in the contemporary period.

The first chapter is divided into two sections. The first section centers on the definition of wedding comedy. As for the second section, the differences between romantic comedy and wedding comedy are the main focuses. I compare these two genres in mainly four parts, the plot, the motivation, the ultimate goal, and the main purpose of both genres. The second chapter focuses on the reflections and reversions of wedding comedy. Additionally, the female's self-transformation and self-liberation through wedding comedy has reached great progress in the order of time. In the final chapter, this thesis intends to point out what wedding comedy constantly reflects and reverts in the contemporary period. Moreover, the emerging number of wedding comedy and the high divorce rate share the similar curve in the charts. I intend to provide a possible answer to the representative of this tendency as well by using Chrys Ingraham's "wedding-ideological complex." Furthermore, I utilize Mary-Lou Galician's "twelve myths" to demystify the concept of the pre-destined mate.

To conclude, wedding comedy reverses the conventional perspectives toward runaway bride and it re-interprets the conventional family values.

Keywords: wedding comedy, romantic comedy, anti-disguise, runaway bride, wedding-ideological complex, demystify "the One," family values

## Acknowledgements

To reach self-knowledge is never a lighthearted journey. I am sincerely grateful to have a chance to go through this adventure with a lot of mental supports and warm companions. Although it took me more than years to find out the possible answers to my assumptions, I have no regret to my insistence on completing this seemingly impossible mission with no ulterior inducement(s).

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor Professor Pin-Chia Feng. Thank you for having faith in me. Prof. Feng provides not only crucial suggestions on my writing but also provokes much discussion by asking a lot of questions. During the process of answering all the questions she raised, I find mine eventually. My gratitude also goes to my committee members, of both my thesis and oral defense, Professor Ying-Hsiung Chou and Professor Yi-Min Huang.

I would also like to thank my classmates at Graduate Institute of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics of NCTU: Angeli Lin, Chen Yee Choong, Hsiao-Wen Su, Ya-Ru Yang, Yu-Jung Yen, and Wawa Yang. Their company definitely makes life at our lab a colorful one intellectually and mentally.

Special thanks also go to my dearest friends: Chen Yee Choong, Ya-Ru Yang and Yu-Jung Yen. Without their intellectual supports and constantly concerns I may never complete my thesis. Without having them around, I may not have the courage to run toward a better choice for my life decision.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my parents, my sister and my brother for they never doubt my ability to finish my thesis. To me, this is not merely a thesis but a very personal self-transformation of my own and I am grateful to have some many people accompany with me.

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## Chapter One

### The Definition of Wedding Comedy

The wedding scene is one of the most significant plot elements in romantic comedy, or rom-com,<sup>1</sup> especially the “key kiss” on the altar which serves as a paradigmatic indicator of a happy ending.<sup>2</sup> The wedding scene used to be an iconic part at the end of romantic comedy. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood, however, there are more and more romantic comedy focusing on the wedding preparation as the main plotline. The theme of wedding becomes a central and an important part of, not just a way to conclude, the film in romantic comedy. In *It Had to Be You* (2000), for instance, the female lead falls in love with someone else during the wedding preparation. In *The Wedding Planner* (2001), *27 Dresses* (2008) and *Something Borrowed* (2011), the female protagonists do not come to realize their true love until the men they loved decided to marry other women. Despite the fact that wedding films are quite popular in Hollywood, only few critics, such as Claire Mortimer and Chrys Ingraham, regard wedding films as an important subgenre in romantic comedy. Mortimer mentions that such films “foreground the narrative structure of the romcom, building on the contemporary popularity of the subgenre of the wedding movie” (39). In this thesis, I argue wedding comedy as a derivative mode of romantic comedy. Moreover, the theme about weddings has been extensively underlined and the significance of such feature has been emphasized in Stephen Neale’s *Genre and Hollywood: Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*. He remarks that

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<sup>1</sup> According to the definition in *Oxford English Dictionary*, rom-com is an informal phrase which represents romantic comedy in film or television.

<sup>2</sup> In *Bound to Bond: Gender, Genre, and the Hollywood Romantic Comedy*, Mark D. Rubinfield gives specific definitions of key kiss in romantic comedy and emphasizes the symbolic meaning of the certain kisses, “...there may be many kisses between a hero and a heroine...there is usually only one key kiss toward, or at the end of the love story that signifies an end to resistance...a pleasurable closure to the narrative. The key kiss is defined by conventions: by music, lighting, mood, and by the emotions it elicits...all conspire to ensure that the key kiss is seen as a sign of love—and all that love signifies: social regeneration through marriage, kids, old age, and death” (6).

“[g]enres do not consist solely of films. They consist also of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process” (27).

Wedding comedy on certain level also carries the expectation of the movie goes in the contemporary period. Additionally, the popularity of family-oriented sitcoms from the 1990s focusing more on heterosexual relationship receives great success.<sup>3</sup> To a certain extent, it urges the film producers to pay attention to such popular materials in order to attract more TV viewers to enter the movie theaters. Moreover, the marketing strategy of Hollywood film industry centers on stimulating consumption. Because of marketing concern in most of the films coming out of Hollywood industry, the portrayal of female protagonists and the ending of such films cannot be overly radical.

Claire Mortimer treats Michael Patrick King’s *Sex and the City* (2008) as a wedding movie, although the elements of wedding and comedy in the narrative seem to be overwhelmed by the stress on betrayal, fashion, and the importance of friendship, rather than the relationship of the couples. In line with these two critics, I, in this thesis, will analyze the significance of wedding comedy as a derivative genre of romantic comedy, and also delineate the prominent features and major themes in such films. The contribution of this research, therefore, is to treat wedding comedy as one of the representative forms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood romantic comedy, and to outline a preliminary classification of this derivative genre. Meanwhile the emerging number of wedding comedy can also be considered as a reflection of certain social values of this new century. The thesis aims to provide a reasonable interpretation on

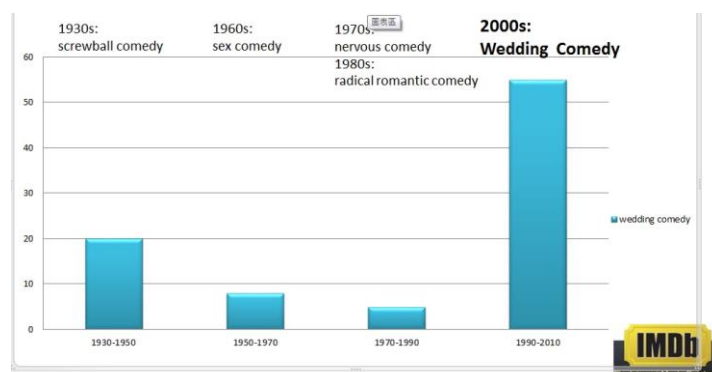
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<sup>3</sup> Sitcoms provide relaxing and entertaining TV programs with the function of temporary escapement for the viewers from their anxiety of everyday life. According to Marco Sievers’ *Report on the BBC1 Sitcom “My Family,”* the escapism is “closely related to the theme of entrapment contained in the sitcom concept” (9). Sitcoms are also a “vicarious pleasure” for the TV watchers. That is to say most viewers encounter similar situations and worries as the protagonists do in sitcoms. Due to the fact that they cannot express their thoughts in consideration of negative consequence in real life, the straightforward expressions between each character bring certain consolations for the audience.



the social values corresponding with the emergence of this genre (See table. 1).

**Table 1**



Source: The database depends on the six representative movie companies, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Sony, DreamWorks, MGM, Paramount, Universal, Walt Disney, and Warner Bros.

### Historical background

Each film genre has a specific theme in different periods. There is no exception to romantic comedy. In the 1930s, it was the time of screwball comedy; in the 1960s, sex comedy appeared; in the 1970s, nervous romantic comedy started to catch the attention of the audience. Then in the 1980s, radical romantic comedy and neo-traditional romantic comedy followed hard at heel (Claire Mortimer 10-19). In my research, wedding comedy is the representative derivative mode of romantic comedy mainly from 1990 to 2010. Contemporary film directors in the period from 1990 to 2010 tend to employ various materials in the making of the movies in order to catch the attention of a wider audience and to further build a stronger and closer connection with them. As Claire Mortimer states in *Romantic Comedy*:

Specific phases have been identified in the evolution of the romantic comedy....These different ‘phases’ of the genre reflect the social, economic and institutional climate of the time....with diverse forms seeking to speak to a proliferation of audiences, yet common themes, narratives and tropes

can be discerned. (10)

In *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre*, Tamar Jeffers McDonald also points out this feature which is intended to attract wider audience's attention.<sup>4</sup>

According to IMDb (The Internet Movie Databases), the statistics of Hollywood wedding movies with the genre features of comedy and romance reach a high number from 1990 to 2010 as I name it "the Contemporary Period." Judging from the increasing count of movies exploiting wedding themes, I posit that one of the "different phases" of romantic comedy, or even a new derived mode has gradually come into shape. As Mortimer, McDonald, and Steve Neale previously mentioned, wedding comedy can also reflect certain climate of the time. As will be explored in the following chapters, the formation and the development of this emergent form may "reflect the social, economic and institutional climate of the time" (Mortimer 10) and the component of the "intrinsic hybridity of genre films" (McDonald 8) can be discovered in such movies. There are many factors behind the change and hybridization.

The lifting of motion picture Production Code is an important example. It is an influential transition to switch the audience's attention from mental romance between the hero and the heroine in 1930s screwball comedy to a more physical-oriented relationship in sex comedy of the 1960s. In the late 1950s, movie producers and directors became fed-up with the Production Code and began to ignore it.<sup>5</sup> As a

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Neale and Rick Altman, for example, both importantly point to the intrinsic hybridity of genre films....Neale demonstrates that hybridity has a long history and Altman notes that film marketing has always attempted to maximize audience appeal by proliferating the number of genres to which a film can belong (8).

<sup>5</sup> The Production Code, also known as the Hays Code, started in 1934 and was abandoned in 1968. According to Mortimer, "Will Hays...[t]here had also been a number of high-profile Hollywood scandals involving the exposure of sordid details of the lifestyle of celebrated actors and filmmakers. The code consisted of a list of rules as to what could and could not be shown in film, censoring representations of sex and adultery, stating that the sanctity of marriage and the home had to be upheld and forbidding unnecessary scenes of passion.....'elephant in the corner'...read more into the film than what is made explicit" (14).

consequence, films went to a different direction. The transformation of the socio-cultural scope in the 1950s fully subverted the concept of marriage and, particularly, the conventional “happily-ever-after” ending of the wedding comedy. Such transformation engendered an in-between state for both the audience and the society to rethink possibilities other than love and marriage. Sheer romantic attraction<sup>6</sup> was no longer the sole aspect the female characters pondered on due to the awakening of female self-consciousness. Under such influence, women had second thoughts while facing the question if they were still going after romance and happiness. Even though the films in those days hardly had any wedding scenes, there were still several classical romantic comedies appeared during this period. Some of the films such as *An Affair to Remember* and *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1957) still possessed certain major traits of the wedding comedy. As a great contributor to feminism, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86) depicts the image of females at that time through one of her most influential works, *The Second Sex*. It is her opinion that women can gain control over their future; however, such choice cannot be made without great courage, confidence, and effort as well as self-consciousness. “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”<sup>7</sup> is her famous statement, which separating “woman” as a biological entity from “femininity” as a social perspective. Her standpoint is perceived as one of the most important contribution to the 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist thoughts and such transformation of women’s awakening, in my point of view, can be detected in the wedding comedy.

Although the persona of the leading male and female characters in the 1950s shared a great similarity with of the early screwball comedy, within the romantic atmosphere, a certain sentimental sorrow got melted away from the romantic comedy.

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<sup>6</sup> The female characters in films are no longer easily seduced or manipulated by the fragile romantic moment anymore.

<sup>7</sup> *The Second Sex*, p. 301./*Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. I, p. 285

We can observe such sadness in William Wyler's *Roman Holiday* (1953). The film can be seen as one of the classic romantic comedies during this period. The cinematic formulas are similar to that in *It Happened One Night*. For example, in order to gain exclusive news from the heroine, the hero intentionally befriends her in the first place and finally they fall in love with each other. Simultaneously, the settings of the male and female protagonists in both films are almost the same. They are from different classes; Ann (Audrey Hepburn) is a princess, and Joe Bradley (Gregory Peck) is an expatriate American reporter. In the end of the film, Princess Ann appears at the press conference and says, "Rome, by all means, Rome. I will cherish my visit here in memory, as long as I live!" and then departs. Apart from love and marriage, career and duties have become another option for women to pursue in romantic comedy. A line from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "T is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all" (*In Memoriam*: 27, 1850) seems to capture Ann's attitude toward this relationship precisely. For her, she has once fallen in love and is loved in return. This is what counts.

In Billy Wilder's *Love in the Afternoon* (1957), Ariane Chavasse (Audrey Hepburn) and Frank Flanagan (Gary Cooper) do not wed in front of the altar. Instead, in the end of the film, Frank grabs Ariane into a train and it carries them to an uncertain future. Is the playboy Frank with a flawed history of numerous love affairs ready to settle down for Ariane? Their future unveils as Ariane's father narrates their belated marriage, and gives the audience the happy ending they long wish for in a voice-over. The most notable detail in both films is that there is neither a wedding nor the plot of runaway bride in the end. Such "abnormality" can be attributed to the confidence and autonomy among female figures as Glitre remarks "...the characters are far more self-conscious of innuendo than the blithely innocent screwball comedy were" (35). Even though the atmosphere of wedding comedy in this period is not as

joyful as it is in screwball comedy, the happily-ever-after ending is still reserved in such films. As for the further comment, the movie producers add more dramatic plots to tantalize audience emotions; that is the strategy of Hollywood blockbuster.

The romantic comedy *An Affair to Remember* can be defined as a wedding comedy. Both Nickie Ferrante (Cary Grant) and Terry McKay (Deborah Kerr) are already engaged with someone else when they first met on a transatlantic ocean liner en route from Europe to New York. Such a background is quite conventional in wedding comedy. Even though it is a short gathering, they cannot help but fall in love with each other and promise to meet again in six months if they could break up with their fiancé and fiancée respectively. However, things do not run smoothly as they expect: Terry is overwhelmed as she is severely injured in a car accident. She does not want Nickie to take care of her for the rest of his life; therefore, she hides the fact by not showing up in time. After that day, both of them live their own life until Christmas Eve, which is a turning point for their destiny.

The setting of Christmas Eve in *An Affair to Remember* is not something coincidental. Based on Sheldon Hall's definition, Steve Neale points out that holiday miracle is one of the features of "New Hollywood cinema" that appeared in 1967. He believes that such arrangement has to do with the nature of "blockbuster" and with the producer's commercial strategy. The old and the new Hollywood cinema are generally different in three directions: the released time, the selecting of topics, and the target audience. Neal states that:

the latter are widely and rapidly released in the summer and at Christmas....

The specialness of the New Hollywood blockbuster is less apparently

exclusive. It is also less culturally prestigious....New Hollywood

blockbusters are principally addressed to the perceived tastes of children,

young adults and families. (2)

As soon as Nickie gets hold of Terry's address on the day before Christmas, he goes to visit her. Out of her love for Nickie, Terry intentionally ignores his interrogation and pretends to be aloof. Just when Nickie is discouraged by her coldness and is about to leave, he notices her indecisive attitude. He soon finds out the truth and is touched by Terry's consideration. The film ends with Nickie holding Terry in his arms, presenting a happy ending the audience anticipates. It is the setting of holiday miracle that brings them back together.

Although the similarity between romantic comedy and wedding comedy can be easily observed, the role settings are apparently different. In wedding comedy, the hero or the heroine invariably has already engaged with someone else, which does not serve as an indication of a happily-hereafter life. Moreover, the plot of running away from the groom or bride may be a climax in romantic comedy, and "other frequently occurring tropes include the wedding derailed by one partner running away..." (McDonald 13). Yet in wedding comedy, these tropes bring significant meanings rather than simply a way to render dramatic tension or a climax. The thesis mainly discusses the significance in terms of the following three concepts: female self-transformation, the pre-destined mate or "the One," and the strength of family values. The chapter ensuing will provide a more detailed definition of wedding comedy.

### **The Definition of Wedding Comedy**

A wedding scene in a romantic comedy does not make the movie per se a wedding comedy. It should also contain the three key components. McDonald lists three key components when it comes to defining a certain genre. They are visual characteristics, narrative patterns, and ideology. As he states, "[w]e identify film genres by the kind of images found in them and, in turn, these images then become



laden with a symbolism dependent on their genre: they become icons and their study within a genre dignified with the title of ‘iconography’” (11). The idea of “iconography,” furthermore, comes from Colin McArthur in his study of gangster film and he emphasizes locations, props and costumes, which shape the picture of a genre film as the elements of “iconography” (23). In romantic comedy, it also possesses this kind of iconography; the color tones are mostly warm and vivid, and a key appurtenance, a memorable object, can easily be found in the film which signifies an eternal love for the protagonists or reappeared as a key vehicle to bring them back together after serious fights or despite many obstacles. The basic problem of Hollywood romantic comedy, as David Shumway points out in *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy and the Marriage Crisis* that “[t]he love story is so familiar in our culture that we rarely give it a second thought.... ‘Boy gets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back’ is exhibit A of standard plots in all fictional media” (157). If we consider wedding comedy to be a derivative genre of romantic comedy, it surely contains such standard plots and settings. The locations of wedding comedy mostly take place in urban areas. The narrative pattern is usually that a boy meets, loses, and regains a girl, and the “meet cute” brings life and energy to romantic comedy. Wedding comedy shares this similar formula. This research intends not only to point out the process of forming such an “exhibit A,” but also to analyze the reasons behind these formulas. For instance: how does the boy get the girl? How does he lose her, and finally how does he win her heart back again?

The three key components noted by McDonald are visual characteristics, narrative patterns and ideology. The visual characteristics can be divided into two categories; the visual settings and the setting of the stock characters. The former one includes the “visual” elements that associate with locations, props, and costumes. As for the later one, we can capture the visual “characteristics” of the hero and the

heroine in a film (11). Unlike romantic comedy, wedding comedy starts with an easily observed message that the male or female protagonist is engaged in a relationship and is ready to take the next step. In *The Proposal* (2009), directed by Anne Fletcher and starring Sandra Bullock as Margaret Tate, Margaret, a pushy and mean executive editor in chief of a book publishing company, forces her assistant, Andrew Paxton (Ryan Reynolds), to marry her after receiving the order to be deported to Canada because of the coming expiration of her visa. Were there not the expiration of her visa Margaret would not have asked Andrew to marry her. *The Proposal* can not be categorized as a wedding comedy. Because neither does one of them has been engaged to other people before their first encounter nor does one of them infatuated with each other after knowing he/she is going to married someone else, its previous setting does not fit in the visual characteristic of this genre. The second key component is narrative patterns. Classic plot elements appearing in romantic comedy such as the “meet-cute”<sup>8</sup> or “key kiss” are not the main focuses in wedding comedy. Even if they are, these scenes are not crucial moments which influence the following storyline. In *What Happens in Vegas* (2008), the couple gets married because of the three-million-dollar jackpot. The tag line “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” indicates how absurd it is for the drunk, depressed and lonely man and woman, Joy Ellis McNally (Cameron Diaz) and Jack Fuller (Ashton Kutcher), to get married in the sin city. The depiction on the wedding ceremony or on the preparation barely lasted for no longer than five minutes. Furthermore, the self-transformation of the female lead is induced by the marriage life rather than the wedding preparation. Therefore, *What Happens in Vegas* cannot be categorized as wedding comedy, either. As for

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<sup>8</sup> Claire Mortimer mentions clearly about the definition of meet-cute as such: “The meet-cute is one of the defining moments of the rom-com, when the couple first encounters each other, generally in comic and prophetic circumstances. The meet-cute is prophetic in that it can often suggest the nature of the couple’s relationship. The situation is used to bring together the two central characters, bringing their conflicting personalities into comic collision, initiating the narrative dynamic” (Mortimer 6).

ideology, the intention to get married in wedding comedy is different from that in romantic comedy. In other words, there is not any sort of ulterior inducement(s) behind the decision to get married in wedding comedy. In *The Bachelor* (1999), which is a remake of the American silent film *Seven Chances* (1925), directed by Gary Sinyor and starring Chris O'Donnell as Jimmie Shannon, Shannon suddenly decides to get married with his girlfriend of three years, Anne Arden (Renee Zellweger), because he discovers that if he gives up the bachelor life before his thirtieth birthday, he will officially inherit the 100 million dollars property from his grandfather. The movie is an example of getting married for the ulterior benefits, which disqualify it as wedding comedy.

The wedding in wedding comedy is mostly an outcome of a profound and long-term relationship without any extra motive,<sup>9</sup> which are the primary presupposition and the critical element to define this genre. Although the three movies mentioned above circle around the topics of marriage, true love and weddings, they still do not accord with the primary presupposition and the definition of wedding comedy. As a result, these movies cannot be categorized as wedding comedy. Unlike the above mentioned movies. The following example contains the three key components and is defined as wedding comedy. In *Leap Year* (2010), Anna Brady (Amy Adams) tries to propose to Jeremy Sloane (Adam Scott), a four-year-relationship boyfriend, on the leap day. According to a Irish folklore, leap-year proposal dated back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century and on that day woman can propose to her lover to marry her. On her road trip to making the proposal, Anna encounters a

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<sup>9</sup> The following plots may often lead to a wedding in romantic comedy, but none of them can be defined as wedding comedies: getting a green card, the right to stay in certain countries, marrying for huge inheritance, unconsciously getting married during a drunk night, playing some ludicrous competitive mind games, or accidentally getting pregnant, in other word 'shotgun wedding' which according to OED's definition is "[an] enforced or hurried wedding, especially because the bride is pregnant."

total stranger, Declan O'Callaghan (Matthew Goode). The strong resolution for Anna to propose to Jeremy starts to thaw. Although Anna and Declan are not engaged to anyone when they first met, Anna puts a front and clear declaration that she is going to marry Jeremy. Such visual characteristic is crucial to wedding comedy that one of them has been engaged or is about to marry someone else. It explains why *Leap Year* falls in this genre.

The first climax and sign for the audience to be sure Anna and Declan should be the right couple is when they accidentally run into a stranger's wedding ceremony to seek shelter from a hailstorm. It is a sign to predict their intimacy later on, and it creates the first climax during the night. In wedding comedy, one of the usual narrative patterns is to break each other's masquerade (McDonald 13) before the wedding ceremony or during the wedding preparation. This is exactly what happened between them when Declan says to Anna right after the wedding party:

DECLAN. The woman who is so desperate, she's diddly-eying her way to Dublin making the most important decision of her life based on some ridiculous tradition which frankly, is a load of old poo.

ANNA. It's not a load of poo. It's romantic.

As the two adventurers finally arrive in Dublin, Anna finds out the reason why Declan hates the city so badly and suggests that he needs a closure with his ex-fiancé in order to move on. The masquerade is ultimately disappearing between each other. The self-transformation of Anne comes when Jeremy suddenly proposes to her not for love only, but for the fact that their getting married "was just the matter of time," and for a "package deal" (Jeremy) to get the expensive condominium. Afterwards, Anna flies to Dingle to see if Declan has the same thought of starting a relationship with her. Instead of saying yes, Declan proposes to Anna with the family ring he retrieved from his ex-fiancée while in Dublin and leads the movie toward the happy ending after the

“yes” (Anna). *Leap Year* demonstrates the primary and the most important setting in wedding comedy, and the ideology of this genre, which is getting married without any sort of ulterior motivations.

### **Two Categories of Wedding Comedy**

According to my research and personal observation, wedding comedy can be divided into two categories, the runaway wedding plot and the obstacle-overcoming wedding plot. The runaway wedding plot has two typical patterns, the dynamic runaway plot and the passive runaway plot. The former depicts a groom or a bride running away from the altar before the wedding starts or even in the middle of the ceremony, while the latter depicts the interruption of a wedding ceremony.

In the dynamic runaway plot, the bride/groom runs away from his or her own wedding, which mostly happens to the bride who runs away to a third person that will provide her with true happiness. Both the runaway figure and the third person may fall in love with each other only under an incomprehensibly short period of time, or are romantically in love at first sight. The process of meeting a stranger and then falling in love with him/her perfectly matches with the “meet cute” and “key kiss” plots and can be seen as the common features shared by classic romantic comedy and wedding comedy. One of the differences is that the bride realizes that the man she is going to marry is not the one for her, especially during the wedding preparation, and then she performs the classic runaway drama. Why do the brides mostly fall in love with some guys whom they just know for a short period of time? This kind of decision-making creates an illusion of destiny which is similar to the narrative pattern of Shumway’s “exhibit A.” That is to say, the heroine will inevitably and accidentally meet “the One.” After a rather brief encounter with the heroine, “the One” builds a passionate bond with the female protagonist that effortlessly replaces her previous

commitment and long-term relationship with her fiancé. This kind of plotline can be seen in *Runaway Bride* (1999), *It Had to be you* (2000), and *The Wedding Planner* (2001).

In the passive runaway plot, a man who is going to marry a woman will gradually change from a central position into a male supporting role, which means he turns out not to be “the One.” This role changing plot is similar to the “prick foil plot” in romantic comedy, a term used by Mark Rubinfield.<sup>10</sup> Rubinfield argues that the difficult choice for the female lead to determine who “the One” actually is apparently facile for the audience to make, “...the heroine often gets to pick between a ‘down-to-earth Joe’ and an ‘upper-class dick’” (34). Apparently the “down-to-earth Joe” is always the perfect match and the pre-destined choice for the bride. The main perception of the passive runaway plot focuses on finding the perfect match, Mr. Right or “the One.” The wedding interrupter or the intruder mostly has a significant liaison with the bride or groom. They may be close friends since childhood, understanding working partners, soul mates, love relationship counselors, or relatives such as younger cousins or sisters. *My Best Friend’s Wedding* (1997), *Bubble Boy* (2001), and *Made of Honor* (2008) are the examples of this type. As observed, wedding comedy in earlier period depicts men as accelerators to precipitate in the self-transformation for the better of the female protagonists and to make them better people. For this reason, the male leads are mostly older and with more social experiences than their female counterparts. The setting of elder men marrying younger women is still commonly appearing in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century wedding comedy, yet the function of the male role has changed. The male lead may not always stand in

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<sup>10</sup> Rubinfield categorizes four variations of the foil plot, and the definition of prick foil plot is as following: “...the prick foil plot, depicts two man who are in love with or profess to be in love with the same woman. The heroine must eventually choose between the two suitors: figuring out for herself which one is the hero and which one is the prick foil” (34).



a superior position to guide and to comfort the female lead. On the contrary, in some recent wedding comedy, the heroine may overcome the obstacles with the hero or even takes over the job as the mentor to conduct the inexperienced one. The heroines in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *27 Dresses*, and *Leap Year* not only devote their attention to the careers with promising future, and along with the excellent performances they also provide helpful suggestions for the heroes to deal with their love relationships.

The other category is the obstacle-overcoming wedding plot. It also contains two variations, the obstacle from paternity plot and the obstacle from matriarch plot. The former mainly emphasizes the significance of family values through the overpowering methods while the later ensures the family unity under an over protecting affection. The couple in this category is certainly resolved to get married with each other, yet an uncontrollable obstacle blocks their way. The only way to finally say “I do” in front of the altar is by getting through lots of tests to prove their loyalty and faithfulness toward each other and their relationship. Different from the runaway wedding plot, in the obstacle-overcoming plot there is no third person involved such as a close friend or a passionate and thoughtful stranger who gets in between the couples to interfere with their relationship or to change their decision to get married. It is the father figure who represents patriarchy in the family system that typically acts as the biggest obstacle. The father pulls the trigger and switches on his defense mechanism when he confronts or is challenged by the charming and younger invader who is going to marry his lovely and adorable daughter. The typical fathers are depicted in *Meet the Parents* (2000), *The In-Laws* (2003), *Guess Who* (2005), and *Our Family Wedding* (2010). As for other participants in wedding comedy, including childhood best friends and all the other less important third, fourth, or fifth subordinate roles become the most powerful backups to fix the couples up in order to make sure the wedding goes

well without any unexpected interruption. The interesting thing is that the key point for the male and female leads to finally get married is to reconcile the past animosity and to let the father witness the true love between the couples.

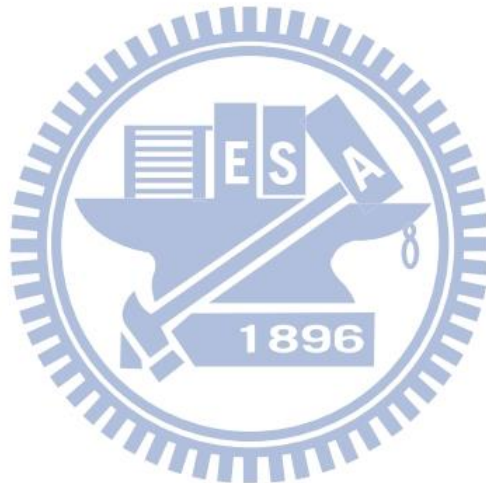
As for the motherly obstacle plot, the mother plays a more important role in the family. In the early period, the character of the mother hardly existed as someone with any influence. As Marjorie L. DeVault points out in *Feeding the Family: the Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*:

Through necessary for maintaining the social world as we have known it, caring has been mostly unpaid work, traditionally undertaken by women, activity whose value is not fully acknowledged even by those who do it....Social expectation has made the undefined, unacknowledged activity central to women's identity....Both men and women have learned to think of these patterns as "natural." (3)

The second-wave feminist movement helps raise the consciousness of women's rights. Thus, these maternal influences surface to represent the female power in wedding comedy. Although there are some wedding comedy in which the mother comes between the bride and groom, such as *Say It Isn't So* (2001), and *Monster-in-Law* (2005), and acts as a destructive role to confront the daughter-in-law to-be in order to ensure that she is still her son's priority, in most cases the settings of letting the mother both comfort her anxious husband and give the son-in-law to-be a hand/hint commonly appear in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century wedding comedy. When the daughter faces an oppressive form, mostly from a father figure, the character's function also changes from contending with her father to attempting to communicate with him in a rational way. The conflicts between family values and the awakening of feminist consciousness can be observed in wedding comedy such as *Guess Who*, *License to Wed* (2007), and *Our Family Wedding*.

In chapter two, the transformation of the female protagonists in Hollywood wedding comedy will be discussed in the order of time. According to the historical background and social phenomena, I will divide the development of wedding comedy into four periods in chronological order from 1930 to 2010. I will explore the changes of women's attitudes and self-transformations when they face weddings and long-term relationships during different periods. *It Happened One Night* (1934) will be discussed as one of the first wedding comedy in the first period, 1930 to 1950 (The Early Period), which contains many classic clips and plot elements that recur in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Hollywood wedding comedy. Although no research directly lists *It Happened One Night* as a wedding comedy, the change that the female protagonist goes through clearly manifest the female self-transformation and the film itself certainly qualifies as this genre. In one of the first and famous scenes in the film, the spoiled daughter Ellen "Ellie" Andrews (Claudette Colbert) fights against her father's will and seeks her true love, who is not of the same social status—having a millionaire father is a typical background for the female lead in such a screwball comedy. In order to pursue her love, Ellie jumps off the family yacht, swims toward the river bank and hits on a road trip all by herself. Ellie's action demonstrates two remarkable elements in wedding comedy: one is to bravely pursue what one's heart desires, and the other is to achieve development and maturity during this process of pursuit. In this film, wedding ceremony is a symbol and a process of transformation revealing how a woman has changed from a naïve rich girl into a mature woman with confidence and independence. In the second period, 1950 to 1970 (The Declined Period), the movies selected for this period include films from the 1950s: *Roman Holiday* (1953), and *An Affair to Remember* (1957); and from the 1960s: *The Graduate* (1967). *Annie Hall* (1977), *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986), and *Moonstruck* (1987) will be discussed as examples of the third period, 1970 to 1990 (The

Resurgence Period). For the fourth and the latest period, 1990 to 2010 (The Contemporary Period), I will mainly depict the following wedding comedy, *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997).



## Chapter Two

### Transformation the Female Protagonists in Wedding Comedy

The number of wedding comedy, according to the chart I provided in my introductory chapter, has shown a sharp increase starting from 1990 onwards to the year of 2010. In order to provide possible explanations to such development, this chapter chiefly discusses the changing historical backgrounds, social phenomenon, political preferences, and the transformation of the female protagonist in each of the four periods as introduced in the introduction, namely, the Early Period (1930 to 1950), the Declined Period (1950 to 1970), the Resurgence Period (1970 to 1990), and, finally, the Contemporary Period (1990 to 2010). A wedding comedy will be assigned to each period as a mean of case study: *It Happened One Night* (1934) for The Early Period; *The Graduate* (1967) for The Declined Period; *Moonstruck* (1987) and *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997) for The Resurgence Period and The Contemporary Period respectively. Each case study analyzes the wedding scene and the runaway scene to unveil the message that indicates the transformation of women's self-knowledge in this derivative genre. In addition, shot angles that portray the female protagonists' self-transformation will be particularly investigated to support my proposition that wedding comedy can reflect a change of attitude while facing one of the most important decisions in a woman's life, getting married.

Before getting into details about each period, the fundamental appeals of romantic comedy and wedding comedy require a distinct clarification. As previously mentioned, wedding comedy is the representative mode of romantic comedy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood. Romantic comedy and wedding comedy share some "family resemblance" (Alastair Fowler 41).<sup>11</sup> Kathrina Glitre in *Hollywood Romantic*

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<sup>11</sup> Fowler makes a metaphoric reference to treat genre as a family so that the "representative of a genre may then be regarded as making up a family whose steps and individual members are related in various

*Comedy: States of the Union, 1934-1965* provides further explanation of the concept, stating that both wedding and romance comedy share “many commonalities, each individual member will also be unique; and while the possibilities of cross-breeding are abundant, each generation will still bear some connection to the last” (11). In the 1990s, both romantic comedy and wedding comedy increased relatively, but the rising number of the films can be explained differently. In “Hanging on a Star: The Resurrection of Romance Film in the 1990s,” Catherine L. Preston discovers the similarity of the rise.<sup>12</sup> She observes, “Hollywood has not approached this level of romance films since the 1950s when there was a yearly average of 13 released over the course of the decade” (229), and announces the contribution to the upswing can be attributed to the change of the representation of love and marriage in the contemporary society. The wedding as the crucial element stands in between love and marriage has gained a surprising attention in the film industry. This derivative genre represents a process of transformation for a woman to understand herself better through the preparation for the wedding and to take further action to achieve her true inner desire regardless of the pressure received from the crowd, the society or even be tempted by a seemingly perfect fiancé. Taking a departure from the so-called regular, customary and cliché happy endings of most of the romantic comedy, wedding comedy highlights its process and to further provide other kinds of happy endings for the moviegoers; runaway wedding plot is a significant one to be focused on. If a quest for true love is the ultimate goal for romantic comedy, in wedding comedy, discovering her true womanhood is the ultimate objective for the female protagonist.

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ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all” (41).

<sup>12</sup> The production of Hollywood romance films stood steady in the past; however the number of the films started to change, “[b]etween 1960 and 1969 there were an average of 7 romances released a year. In the 1970s that figure went down to 5 per year. In 1980 the production of romances began to rise and between 1984 and 1989 an average of 20 were released each year. Between 1990 and 1996, the annual average rose to 26, peaking at 40 in 1991” (229).



## Films on Quest

The alteration of women's self-knowledge which leads to self-discovery and self-understanding does not happen spontaneously or suddenly, but it is motivated by the "wedding ceremony" itself. In other words, the ceremony initiates women onto the path of an enlightening pilgrimage. What is the meaning of a quest, then? The motivation of a journey is to invoke people to seek for certain answers or to obtain particular goals. While reaching the end of the journey, the original goal and the final destination are somehow different. That is to say, the original goal is the motivation for the quester to head on the trip. The question is how to define a quest; in *New York Times* Bestseller *How to Read Literature like a Professor*, Thomas C. Foster demonstrates how to define it in a literary text. The five elements that constitute a quest are "(a) a quester, (b) a place to go, (c) a stated reason to go there, (d) challenges and trials en route, and (e) a real reason to go there" (3). Coincidentally, most of the structures and storylines in wedding comedy display a questing theme and match Thomas's definition of a "quest."

In wedding comedy, a quester and a place to go are the first two elements to focus on. There are two canonical settings for a quester: one is those who are heavily involved in the arrangement of the wedding ceremony, such as the bride or the wedding planner, since the wedding will not be possible without them. The attendee of the wedding ceremony such as the maid of honor, the bride's best friend, or a relative of hers is the other. The third element in Thomas's theory of the "quest" is a reason or an intention to step on her journey; in this case, her wedding. Along the path, like Thomas's fourth factor, she has to confront with various challenges and trials, to complete the wedding preparation. A perfect location, a stunning wedding dress and, most importantly, fiancée's opinions and family approval are subsumed into her consideration along the way of wedding preparation. Any inadequacy in any of the

above may induce the cancellation of the wedding. The ultimate purpose to quest for wedding is a journey of self-discovering; towards the end, amidst all the setbacks, the protagonist finally realizes the true meaning of wedding and makes a better decision on her own.

### **The Epiphany in Wedding Comedy**

In *It Happened One Night*, Ellen Andrews (Claudette Colbert) comes to realize who she truly loves the moment she stands on the altar waiting for her fiancé, King Westley (Jameson Thomas). In *The Graduate*, Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) plays an innocent graduate student who has been striving very hard to fulfill his parents' expectations. He never has a chance to make decision autonomously and has been seduced several times by Elaine Robinson's mother, Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft). Bursting into Elaine Robinson's (Katharine Ross) wedding ceremony and convincing her to run away with him are his only two significant decisions in the film. According to Mike Nichols's comment on the introspective final sequence, the director of *The Graduate* considers the previous runaway scene to be an impulsive mistake. While I do not want to challenge this authorial opinion, I do want to offer my own interpretation of the ending sequence. As Elizabeth Grosz declares, "all readings are *interpretive* through and through.... Interpretations come from particular perspectives and represent particular values" (141). To me, the acting out of blind impulse in this film presents the gist of wedding comedy, which takes over the power of determination as long as the leading character is willing to admit his or her mistake, and then advance to the next level of self-understanding.

Furthermore, in *Moonstruck*, Loretta Castorini (Cher), a 37-year-old accountant, is about to marry Johnny Cammareri (Danny Aiello). During the wedding preparation, she is attracted to Johnny's estranged younger brother, Ronny (Nicolas Cage). As

Loretta's mother, Rose, exposes her husband's affair and announces her decision not to tolerate it any more in a family gathering, Loretta accepts Ronny's proposal after throwing the engagement ring at Johnny, who halted their wedding because of the disapproval of his dying mother. The abandoned wife-to-be always represents the image of a victim in a conventional role, who can only gamble or rely on her "Prince Charming" to rescue her. However, in *Moonstruck*, the submissive wife and the ungrateful fiancé start to reverse such prototype, leading our attention to another unique feature of wedding comedy, which is the character of the Mother. In this film, Loretta's mother, Rose Castorini, is expected to deal with her treacherous husband's affair in a conventional and obedient way, accepting the betrayal and tolerating the affair. Surprisingly, the aged Rose refused to compromise with such infidelity. Instead, she faces it with confidence and wisdom, subverting the conventional image of the conservative woman, who constantly lives under patriarchal oppression. Rose's words and deeds serve as an inspiration for her daughter. The chain reaction that leads to rejecting passive acceptance of traditional roles boosts up female power and solidifies images of strong women in wedding comedy.

In another example, Julianne Potter (Julia Roberts) decides to sabotage the wedding of her old acquaintance, Michael O'Neal (Dermot Mulroney), in *My Best Friend's Wedding* since Michael promises her that they will be marrying each other if none of them is engaged at the age of 28. In the last chasing scene, she realizes that Michael does not love her as she loves him. She maturely accepts the truth and walks away. Instead of making Michael accept Julianne's expectation or even the moviegoers', the director, P.J. Hogan, presents a fresh message to his audience: that finding the answer to one's selfhood is more valuable than to simply giving away a predictable ending. True happiness outshines the clichéd happy ending. As Thomas states, "the real reason for a quest is always self-knowledge" (3), women in wedding

comedy finally break through the assumption of “what if” and lead to the destination of self-transformation.

In order to analyze the various stages of females’ self-transformation in wedding comedy and to indicate its flaws, the following section will focus on the historical backgrounds of each period. As historical events influence the development of feminism and the revolution of female awareness, the portraits of female characters in wedding comedy as well as their responses while making crucial choices demonstrate the significances of the dramatic increasing in number of wedding comedy in the early 21st century.

### **I. The Early Period from 1930 to 1950: From Great Depression to WWII**

In the 1930s, the historical background of screwball comedy<sup>13</sup> influenced by The Great Depression, which erupted in 1929. Insufficient job opportunities with intense competitions led mass depression and helplessness. The setting of the film satisfied the audience and balanced their disquietude toward the society. Therefore, the films at the time presented the rich in an ambiguous way—they did not live as happily as common people presumed. For the rich, money and privileges were not equal to happiness, and deep down in their soul they were still lonely and unsatisfied. The female characters in wedding comedy are mostly born with a silver spoon. Conversely, the leading male characters often represent the image of the poor and are mostly unemployed. Such settings of the male characters are intended to urge the audience to identify with the male protagonists in the film. As mentioned earlier, the heroines in wedding comedy of this period are mostly born in a wealthy family. As Glitre mentions that they have been pampered since their childhood and none of them

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<sup>13</sup>According to Claire Mortimer, the definition of screwball comedy is “...a warring couple are placed in the center of the narrative and are responsible for the madcap escapades, chaos slapstick and witty, fast-paced dialogue that marks the progress of their explosive relationship” (11).

possesses sufficient social experience (25). When the Father resolutely forbids his lovely and naïve daughter to get into a relationship with some snobbish young men, the only way for the innocent daughter to stay with her lover is to break through the cage in which her father imprisons her, whether mentally or physically. Thus, in the beginning of *It Happened One Night*, spoiled heiress Ellen “Ellie” Andrew (Claudette Colbert) jumps off her father’s luxurious yacht, swims away to the river bank and disappears. Ellie’s exaggerative behavior underlines her determination to marry the one she truly loved. Meanwhile, Ellie lives in a time where the society is governed by men. Under such patriarchal society, the Father has total economic control, not to mention his absolute power over the household. The women, on the contrary, have to rely on men financially and domestically. Such recourse compels them to be mere men’s subordinate, let alone to pursue their own happiness. Hence, it takes more than stubbornness and obstinacy for a woman to act independently as she may suffer from famine or, even worse, death, once she leaves the patriarchal guidance. Ellie’s steadfast determination and staunch faith to be with her lover send the audience a message: women yearn to gain independence.

Meanwhile, Mortimer points out that watching screwball comedy in the movie theaters became a way for the needy and disappointed people to escape from the cruel reality temporarily. No matter how intensely the main male and female protagonists argue with each other, they will come to peace and the movie will end happily eventually. Such happy endings provide something these moviegoers aspire to, that is, Hope. As Mortimer observes:

...chaos reigned supreme and resulted in happiness and hope for its hero and heroine....strong contrast to the harsh realities of life in mid-1930s America, offering an exhilarating sense of escapism and, ultimately, optimism, as the audience remains comfortable in the knowledge that out of

the chaos there will be a happy ending. (11)

The structure of the film has reflected the emotion of the audience. On the one hand, they had no alternative while confronting the chaotic economic depression; on the other hand they were still faithful that the crisis could be solved eventually and they would be led to a better future, just like the ending of the films in the 1930s.

During the time of World War II, 1935-45, more than seven million women started to devote themselves to vocations. As a result, female characters during this period had undergone a massive transformation. Heroines might have jobs or even become important people with high social status. Mortimer further states:

...the themes and narratives shifted, reflecting a concern with the new gender politics stemming from the movement of women out of the home and into work. Films such as *His Girl Friday*, *Woman of the Year*... explore what happens when a woman penetrates a man's world and the domestic war of the sexes enters the workplace. (13)

In addition, the first and second wave French Feminism permeated through public arena, influencing women around the world significantly. Margaret Mead, an anthropologist and a professor of University of Columbia, was one of the leading feminists, who published *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* in 1935. It is a book that affected profoundly the way women dressed and talked in this period. The audience can notice that women in wedding comedy have gradually changed from a constrained and willful girl to a mature lady who possesses the ability to decide her own future in rational ways without making a tearful scene. In one of the well-known screwball comedies, and also wedding comedies, *The Philadelphia Story* (1940),<sup>14</sup> Tracy Samantha Lord Haven (Katharine Hepburn) is a wealthy Main Line

<sup>14</sup> *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) received 6 nominations, and won two Academy Awards, Best Actor (James Stewart) and Best Writing, Screenplay (Donald Ogden Stewart). *Film Daily* named the film as one of the ten best of the year. Moreover, in 1995, *The Philadelphia Story* film was being commend for



Philadelphia socialite and she breaks off her own wedding and firmly says “No” to her fiancé in the presence of everyone instead of running away from the ceremony. In *It Had to Be You* (1947), the situation gets more interesting. Not only does Victoria Stafford, plays by Ginger Rogers, refuses to get married in front of the altar, but she retreats from her own wedding thrice before saying the two magical words, “I do.” As we can see, the resolution of the two female protagonists mentioned above shows that they are no longer constrained by common customary. Choosing to walk away from the wedding typifies Tracy’s and Victoria’s autonomies, or, to a larger extent, women’s independence.

Overall, towards the end of the early period, the leading female characters in wedding comedy are no longer a target to be easily manipulated as in the early 1930s. Although the heroines in such films mostly commence to decide their own fate and choose their own path at the last moment, the self-knowledge behind the actions to refuse and further to quest deserves a fair appreciation.

## **II. The Declining Period from 1950 to 1970:**

### **Conventional Values and the Male Gaze**

As WWII came to an end in the mid-1940s, men were released from military service and began to crowd into the market. However, what surprised the men was the positions left behind by them were taken by women. Job opportunities were scarce with women reluctant to return back to the domestic sphere. As men and women were competing for job opportunities, a new conflict unfolded between the two sexes. During the post-war period, women were accused by men for “stealing” job opportunities from them. Such a conflict could be observed via the contemporary mass media. Advertisements and films at that time, if not displayed, hinted that

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"culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" by the Library of Congress and was chose as preservation in the United States National Film Registry.

women belonged to the household and men were the breadwinners. *The Feminine Mystique* is a book that allegedly highlights the second-wave feminism in the United States. In this book, Betty Friedan points out “the problem that has no name” in the 1950s and the early 1960s. What, then, is Friedan’s nameless problem? American post-war society believed that women could find fulfillment in marriage and housewifery. Mass media became an attire medium to convince women to stay in home and to be an “Angel of the House.”<sup>15</sup> Mortimer states that “[t]he domestic idyll was all that the American woman was assumed to be interested in, sacrificing education and career prospects for the fulfillment of being a wife and mother” (26). It was how society portrays the ideal American woman during this period. In general, wedding comedy was hardly produced during the post-war period. The reason is that the self-transformation achieved through the process of wedding preparation is not allowed in this “conservative morality of the fifties” (Cherry Potter xiv), which explains the decreasing number of wedding comedy during this period of time.

In addition, the efforts of representing female self-independence through career opportunities and self-knowledge faced serious challenges and were further repressed regularly in the declining period. Such setbacks can be simply observed in wedding comedy that was produced during this period as the image of woman was negatively distorted. In screwball comedy, the hero and heroine used to focus on a central value of mental attraction between men and women. Under the monitor of the Motion Picture Production Code,<sup>16</sup> Nickie Ferrante and Terry McKay in *An Affair to*

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<sup>15</sup> The phrase originally came from a poem written in 1854 by Coventry Patmore, who believed his wife was perfect and all wives should be like her. Back in the 19th century, the phrase was used to describe the “perfect Victorian woman.” The “Angel of the House” was a woman who was devoted and submissive to her husband. She was supposed to be passive, powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all, pure. In the 1950s, the term was used to describe the “perfect woman” who chose to be a housewife rather than a career woman.

<sup>16</sup> The Production Code, also known as the Hays Code, started in 1934 and was abandoned in 1968. According to Mortimer, “Will Hays...[t]here had also been a number of high-profile Hollywood scandals involving the exposure of sordid details of the lifestyle of celebrated actors and filmmakers. The code consisted of a list of rules as to what could and could not be shown in film, censoring

*Remember* can only present their intimacy indirectly. For example, they hug in the shadow and their kissing scene is skillfully blocked by the mast on the ship. However, the restriction of PCA<sup>17</sup> started to exist in name, but not in reality. Sex comedy<sup>18</sup> then rose and became a popular genre in this period. The female characters were portrayed in a depraved image as these heroines were morally criticized for their sexual liberation and enjoyment. *The Moon Is Blue* (1953) is one of the representative works of the sex comedy that was even nominated for the Oscar. An Academy Award was bestowed by the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) to honor its contribution to the film industry. Interestingly, the first Playboy magazine founded by Hugh Hefner was released in the same year and published in Chicago. The film that challenged the conventional values was on the list in the annually ceremony for excellence of cinematic achievements and the male-oriented weekly readings that features photographs of nude women were published to satisfied the male gaze. These social issues not only reflect the abandon of the production code but also highlight a more meaningful fact that with the embrace of the popular genre “the success of *The Moon Is Blue* and the acknowledgement of the possibility of female desire and sexual pleasure led to greater freedoms” (Mortimer 15).

Sex is no longer a taboo topic, and it can be discussed openly. Sex comedy also attributes male’s objectification of female. For instance, the stereotype of the “dumb blondes” was first accounted in Anita Loos’ novel, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady* (1924). The novel was adapted into a silent

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representations of sex and adultery, stating that the sanctity of marriage and the home had to be upheld and forbidding unnecessary scenes of passion.....’elephant in the corner’...read more into the film than what is made explicit” (14).

<sup>17</sup> Production Code Administration: from 1930 to 1967, the production code of the motion picture industry required all the films for approval before onscreen.

<sup>18</sup> According to Kathrina Glitre, the definition of sex comedy is that “[b]roadly speaking, the majority of Hollywood romantic comedies can be described as sex comedies, given that sex is usually an issue, albeit an implicit one. However, ‘sex comedy’ is more commonly used to describe a type of Hollywood comedy produced during the late 1950s and early 1960s” (33).

movie in 1928 and was remade by Howard Hawks 23 years later with Marilyn Monroe starring in the film. The female characters in the 1950s “[were] divided between the two opposing archetypes, the virgin and the whore” (Mortimer 27), which specifically implying the themes of “sexual desire and consumerism” (Glitre 34). As Mortimer states, films such as *The Moon Is Blue* and *Pillow Talk* (1959) “revolved around the narrative of both the man and the woman wanting sex, and the conflict created by the woman wanting marriage first, whereas the man wants his freedom” (16). Although women still visualized marriage as their final destination for a relationship, they no longer saw corporeal sex as a kind of confinement but as a mean to release them both physically and mentally. It is a huge leap forward for women in terms of sexual liberation as they show they have sexual needs, too.

#### **A. Rebellious Adolescent: *The Graduate* (1967)**

Unlike screwball comedy which provides a sense of escape for the audience from the financially collapsed society in the past, the New Hollywood cinema shifts to focus on everyday-life issue, especially the contemporary teenager’s attitude towards love and relationship. Whereas screwball comedy provides temporary refuge for its audience, the New Hollywood movie reflects the social reality. Along with the abrogation of the PCA code, the previous interdicted shot such as the seduction scenes can be presented in an undisguised way in films such as *The Graduate*.

Rebellious teenagers have always been an issue for both parents and teachers. Generational gaps and conflicts between parents and their teenage children were pervasive in the films at that time. One of the representative wedding comedies in this period is Mike Nichols’ *The Graduate*. The background of the film sets in the 1960s, where many major occasions took place, such as the Vietnam War, sexual revolution, and feminist movement. However, the protagonist Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) cares

almost none of them. He has neither dreams nor plans for his future. Instead, his rebellious deeds reveal his uncertainty about the future. For instance, he refuses to meet his visiting relatives and intentionally embarrasses his date set up by his parents. Though he does not want to live like his parents, he squanders his parents' money and drives an Alfa Romeo that his parents buy for him to fool around. One of the classic lines in *The Graduate* best describes the teenagers' act of going against everything without any reasons:

BEN. I've had this feeling ever since I graduated. This kind of compulsion that I have to be rude all the time...It's like I was playing some kind of game, but the rules don't make any sense to me. They're being made up by all the wrong people. I mean no one makes them up. They seem to make themselves up.

The contradiction between refusing to live under his parents' shadow and relying on their financial support leads Benjamin to act rebelliously with confusion. Neither does Benjamin want to conform to the rules, nor does he understand what he really desires for. What makes *The Graduate* so special is that it not only precisely reflects the social ideology of the era but also motivates and encourages audience to run away from their comfortable life.<sup>19</sup>

Besides the theme of rebellion teenagers in *The Graduate*, the difference between mother and daughter relationship is another topic to focus on. Ben runs into the Church to stop his lover, Elaine (Katharine Ross) from getting married. When making their way towards the church door, Ben and Elaine are stopped by Elaine's mother, Mrs. Robison. Grabbing Elaine's hand, Mrs. Robison tries to convince her only child "It's too late" to run away while Elaine answers "Not for me." Angered by her daughter's response, she furiously slaps Elaine hard on her face. Ben and Elaine's elopement has reminded Mrs. Robison of her early youth when she was forced to get

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<sup>19</sup> In 1996, National Film Registry selected *The Graduate* for preservation in the U.S and commented on it as "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant."



married because of her accidental pregnancy and she was unable to choose her own life. Elaine and Mrs. Robinson perfectly sum up the fate of women in different generations respectively: as Mrs. Robinson is forced to conform under social pressure, Elaine, on the other hand, has a chance to make her own choice.

Ben's deed has enraged other wedding attendees besides Mrs. Robinson. At the end of the film, Ben rips off a huge cross from the Church wall to fight against the riotous crowds. He bolts the Church door with the cross as soon as Elaine and he successfully make their escape, locking everyone inside the church. After jumping into a bus and smiling sweetly at each other, however, they start to look at different directions perplexedly. Here, instead of pure romantic love, Mike Nichols presents to the audience the questions behind such impulsive action: how will the eloped couples confront with their friends, parents and even their future? In other words, the director may imply that rebellion is not without consequence in the final scene of *The Graduate*. He intends to subvert the typical happily-ever-after ending in conventional wedding comedy, and to provide another perspective to examine the women's quest for independence. At all events, the cynical ending of the film with a touch of rebellion has marked *The Graduate* as a classical.

## **B. Ethnic Conflicts between African-Americans and Whites**

In addition to the issue of rebellious teenagers, we can see an undercurrent problem in the 1960s: racism. Afro-Americans have been constantly victims of racism in the United States. The Civil Right Movement in 1955 further showed that the racial discrimination was at issue.<sup>20</sup> This movement provides a new subject for the romantic comedy to work on, namely, the interracial relationship, particularly between people

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<sup>20</sup> The flashpoint appeared on a bus where an African-American woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up seat in the colored section to a white passenger. It was a symbolic event which triggered the Civil Right Movement from 1955 to 1968. The social movement mainly aimed at outlawing racial discrimination along with other uprising issues.



of African descendent and the White. Such social contingency as Mortimer points out has become a new momentum of romantic comedy:

Romantic comedy lost its impetus from the 1940s until the mid-1950s...American society had undergone a sustained period of revisionism in terms of gender relations, in the wake of the War, and at a time of conservative politics and xenophobia.... (15)

Hence, debatable social topics such as interracial relationship and marriage made it to the screen during the 1960s. In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), Joanna “Joey” Drayton (Katharine Houghton) is a white American woman and she has a whirlwind romance with Dr. John Prentice (Sidney Poitier), an idealistic African American physician. In the beginning, Joanna and John are going to get married and plan to announce their good news during dinnertime. At first glance, Joey and John look like a perfect couple. Both of them are highly educated and, most importantly, they are deeply in love with each other. However, the great obstacle they face up to is their different skin colors, which is profoundly different from what confronted the couples in the conventional romantic comedy or wedding comedy. The movie *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* depicts some ideal interracial romance between Afro-American people and the White. However, it has downplayed or even distorted the social reality. In their essay “*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations Regarding Stanley Kramer's Film on the Subject of Interracial Marriage*,” Glen Anthony Harris and Robert Brent Toplin point out that the settings of plots and characters are far from social reality, particularly John’s role as the Mr. Perfect and the overly simple solution to the racial problem. They criticize that this film has a “phony feel from the beginning, because of the characterization of the black beau as Mr. Perfect in every way” (702). Moreover, Harris comments that the director has idealized the ending of

the film. These illusions avoid a serious integration of xenophobia and push the liberation of the Afro-American people beyond reach.

In the long run, the female self-transformation during this period did not progress to another level compared to the early period; the declining period of wedding comedy provides various materials and themes which restore the potency such as the conflict between sexes, generational gaps and racial causes by the social and political issues.

### **III. The Resurgence Period from 1970 to 1990: Women's Liberation**

The swing 60s may be regarded as a dark period, since it involved the problems of social disorder, great liberation, and rebellion and so on. America in the 1970s was a society where social activities, open sexual relationship, and anti-war movement pervaded. Under the propagation of second-wave feminism, women were eager to express their dissatisfaction in a more radical, direct and conspicuous manner. As rebellious deeds were unable to grab the public attention, they turned to the venue of political parade and protest. Furthermore, the intimate relationship was challenged in public. In 1970, women's liberation movement officially launched, and the law for women to have abortion rights was passed in 1973. It indicates that women gain autonomy over their bodies and the right to keep the baby or not.

Women in wedding comedy are no longer portrayed as a family member prioritizing the welfare of her husband and children or responsible for solving any problems in her family. Potter remarks that as women become well-educated and perform well at work, they begin to "question their mother's assertion that they should save their virginity for marriage" (123). In his article "Romantic Comedy Today: Semi-tough or Impossible?," Brian Henderson comments on the development of romantic comedy. He highlights the changes of social structures and the attitude

toward heterosexual relationship; people start to quest for sexual satisfaction prior to building a strong mental connection. He argues that romantic comedy tends to suppress the question of actual sex act and once the sexual pleasure is highlighted, the romantic comedy would become impossible (21). McDonald further elaborates Henderson's argument that without the postponement of hero and heroine having sex the verbal foreplay is no longer demanded. So as to say the ideologies and narratives in romantic comedy will be impacted directly (60).

The filming technique in the 1970s underwent a significant reformation under the wave of sexual liberation. Films during this period no longer avoided physical attachment between characters. Socio-cultural issues at the same time were less attended to and were replaced by individual self-absorption. Such shift leads to what Tom Wolfe calls "the Me decade" (162). Instead of maintaining a conventional image, women turn to pursue self-preservation. They are less family-devoted and what they do are often out of personal wishes. McDonald confirms such inclination: "[p]olitical fervor and social optimism seemed to belong to the 1960s; the 1970s enshrined cynical apathy.... Many of the romantic comedies of the later 1970s reflect this new spirit of self-absorption" (61). The spirit of self-absorption was regarded as the central thought of wedding comedy during the 1970s. As women start to concentrate on themselves, they may find out more solutions when it comes to the matter of love and marriage.

#### **A. The Third Option: Unmarried Women**

The late 1970s belongs to the age of Woody Allen. Marriage has lost its sacredness. Divorce, emotional and physical infidelity have become the recurrent themes constantly appear in his romantic comedies. Mortimer points out that the

traditional setting in rom-com is overturned and overwhelmed by sexual and physical indulgence with a sense of nostalgic and sentimental feeling in Allen's movies:

Marriage is no longer an important goal for the characters, and sex has become a central force in the forging of relationships. ...[A] powerful sense of nostalgia evoked within these films as character strives to form meaningful and lasting relationships, which have increasingly come to be regarded as mythical and unrealistic in an ephemeral society. (17)

The typical happy ending can no longer satisfy the audience; Allen's films win over the public and receive positive response because of its realistic settings and sarcastic conversations. In his effort to explain such phenomenon, Mortimer claims that these films "reflected the angst and world-weariness of the period, where there is no longer any certainty about relationships and identity, and happy endings are rejected in favor of greater realism" (17). In the late 1970s, the themes of marriage as well as wedding comedy were marginalized in mainstream movies. Women were gradually reluctant to spend time maintaining or investing in a long-term relationship; instead, they preferred to indulge themselves into some intensive physical enjoyment for which they were less responsible. Women's attitude in this period has undergone a profound change when dealing with marriage and personal intimacy.

Annie in Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977) and Erica in Paul Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) best illustrate the feminine consciousness in the late 1970s. Getting a divorce or ending up in an unsuccessful marriage became a ubiquitous social phenomenon. These films inspire the possibility of "the third option." It awakens women's self-independence and self-consciousness, and even further reveals the change of women's role from a victim to a self-defender. She may no longer feel helpless or suffer from a mental breakdown after being informed of the end of her marriage. In the beginning of *An Unmarried Woman*, when Martin (Michael Murphy)

informed Erica (Jill Clayburgh) that he will be leaving the house soon to live with another woman. The accidental announcement pulls Erica back into reality, pushing her to think twice about her life and her personal values: whether a woman has the other option besides being a wife and an office lady. Is there a third option for her? *An Unmarried Woman* provides one of the possible answers for the above-mentioned questions. In the last sequence, instead concluding *An Unmarried Woman* with clichéd and expected endings of romantic comedy, the filmmaker makes Erica refuse to patch things up with Martin, the unfaithful husband who returns and begs for forgiveness. To one's surprise, she even rejects to travel with her new boyfriend, Saul (Alan Bates), an abstract artist, to Europe. She turns both men down eventually, saying that she will be "weighing up her options" (Potter xi). In the final reel, Erica chooses her own "happy ending." She carries a life-size painting given by Saul as a good-bye gift to her and walks through the streets alone with resolution and faith. She decides to live her life and to handle her own future without a man's interference or companionship.

Moreover, without family and husbands occupying women's free time, friendship gains a powerful and influential position in the films and becomes one of the significant roles in both romantic comedy and wedding comedy. The changing of supporting characters can hardly be seen in screwball comedy. As Mortimer states:

The best friend seems very much to be a phenomenon of the romcom since the Woody Allen films of the late 1970s, suggesting the increased emphasis on friendship in filling the void left by fragmented families and communities in the modern world. In this respect it seems significant that friends do not play a significant role in the screwball comedy. (8)

Women in such films used to either fight alone for their own sake or seek for support from family members or relatives. Women in romantic comedy throughout the 1980s

not only have careers with bright prospects and appreciable income but also have some witty friends giving comfort and advice with a sense of humor. For instance, in *An Unmarried Woman*, when Erica is having the sudden-unmarried-in-the-forties conversation in a bar with three of her intimate friends, Elaine, Jeannette, and Sue, they accurately place the women's distinctive perspectives on the used-to-be sensitive topics, which are, sex and divorce. Each one of them represents certain kind of spectrums respectively: the rational, the conventional, and the idealistic. Take Elaine for example. Being the "rational" representative, she asserts her authority in a relationship; therefore, she suggests Erica to defend herself by "hire[ing] a good lawyer." Besides being supportive, they also have fun teasing each other. When judging about Jeannette's relationship with her new nineteen-year-old lover, Elaine asks sarcastically "[d]oes she fuck him, or does she adopt him?" Overall, the functions of female friends and their existence have undoubtedly brought various perspectives and aspects towards the issue of heterosexual relationship.

### **B. The Reagan Period: Reversion to Family Values**

In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher (1920-2013), the first female prime minister of the Great Britain, the "Iron Lady," achieved what the second-wave feminists had been striving for: the equality both at work and at political regime. Meanwhile, Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), a former Hollywood movie star was serving his Presidency in the United States. These two remarkable and influential figures of modern times had aroused an intense battle between genders. To "return to old-fashioned 'family values'" was one of Reagan's major campaigns during his term in the White House (Potter 200). Reagan's policy indirectly sprouted the expiring romantic comedy and brought it back on screen. During the 1980s, the themes of forgiving unfaithful husbands and returning back to the family are visibly highlighted in romantic comedy.



In *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986) directed by Francis Ford Coppola, for example, Peggy Sue Bodell (Kathleen Turner) swears to her friends at her 25<sup>th</sup> high school reunion that she will be divorcing her treacherous husband Charlie Bodell (Nicolas Cage) soon. Most importantly, from her conversation with her acquaintances, she finds her decision rational and reasonable:

PEGGY SUE. We got married too young and ended up blaming each other for all the things we missed.

CAROL HEALTH. So, he started having affairs and you started getting depressed.

RICHARD NORVIK. I would be very careful about this if I were you. What if you fall into the hands of some madman with plans to manipulate your brain?

PEGGY SUE. Well, that's why I was getting a divorce!

Her firm resolution starts to waver, however, when a sudden accident takes Peggy to travel back literally in time to her high school years. In her journey back to the 1960s, Peggy recalls she used to have a wonderful time with Charlie when they were going out together. After returning to the present and coming to on a bed in a hospital, Peggy decides to give her man a second chance where he is guarding beside her. The appeal of “returning to family” in the 1980s romantic comedy might be considered to be a déjà vu of the 1950s, their motivations are totally different.

In my point of view, it is a strategy to defeat powerful and successful career women. Harvard and Yale Universities had done a series of investigations and numbers of analyses about the connection between late marriage and career women.<sup>21</sup> They found out that the working and independent women had a considerable percentage to end up in celibacy. According to Potter’s research, an article was published in 1986 *Newsweek* asserted that “Many women who seem to have it

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<sup>21</sup> Based on the statistics, Harvard and Yale Universities come up with the interpretation of their researches. As Potter mentions that “a college educated, unmarried woman at the age of thirty had a 20 per cent likelihood of marriage, at thirty-five a 5 per cent chance and at forty no more than 1.3 per cent chance” (203).

all—good looks, good jobs, advanced degrees, high salaries—will never have a mate.” An even sharper claim in the same article provided a certain suggestion for single women over forty that they “are more likely to be killed by a terrorist’ than marry” (203). Apparently, women in the 1980s have more self-knowledge and this progress is ascribed to the foundations of civil right in the 1960s and the women liberation in the 1970s. Such improvement, however, started to confront serious challenges as well as harsh criticism, particularly from the conservatives; since they found the image of independent women nearly unacceptable.

Most successful women, at that time, were often criticized of their “tough attitude.” As such attitude was the total opposite to what men value in a woman, which is tenderness. Those “tough women” were deemed unattractive and might have difficulties in getting married compared to the more traditional ones. The general comments on Margaret Thatcher’s domineering style and image in her Cabinet is exactly the best illustration of the so-called “tough attitude.” Although gender equality has progressed considerably at the end of the twentieth century, the Thatcher-esque “toughness” seems also to repel the opposite sex from courting them.

### **C. New Romance**

The “growing equality of the sexes at the end of the twentieth century” re-energized and resurrected romantic comedy (Mortimer 29). The equality between different genders was what the first-wave and the second-wave feminists strived for. What Margaret Thatcher had accomplished in her political career is undoubtedly a milestone. In his essay “The Big romance or Something Wild?: Romantic Comedy Today,” Steve Neale explains the resurgence and reinforcement of romantic comedy that “...the emergence of a new cycle of romantic comedies...‘new romances,’ can perhaps be interpreted as an assertion, within and against...the values of ‘traditional’

heterosexual romance” (287). Neale maintains that the year of 1987 saw the emergence of “new romances” with the release of these films: *Blind Date*, *Roxanne*, *Who’s That Girl?*, and *Moonstruck*. The new romance genre has four major features in styles: signs, values of old-fashioned romance, the commitment plot, and, lastly, the behavior and attitude of both the male and female protagonists. Take *Moonstruck* for instance, it is a “wedding comedy” without any wedding ceremony scene. Instead, the film features two proposing scenes, one in the very beginning and the other in the end, with two different guys. The proposal scenes highlight the signs and values of old-fashioned romance. Johnny Cammareri is the first one to propose to Loretta Castorini. Johnny proposes to Loretta in a family restaurant without going through the formal proposing ritual(s). He does not kneel down in front of Loretta nor does he present to her an engagement ring. Loretta chooses to overlook his ill-prepared proposal. She requests Johnny to kneel down and demands him to tentatively replace the engagement ring with his own. Johnny reluctantly acts what Loretta asks for. The ambiance of the sequence is unusual and far from what the audience expect in a romantic comedy. One cannot see the romantic undertone as well as the passion; instead, what catches the audience’s attention is the fiancée’s tough attitude. Even the tough Loretta has to succumb to the feeble Johnny in order to get married.

Unfortunately, even though Loretta accepts his proposal, their wedding is cancelled due to Johnny’s mother. To be more specific, when he goes back to visit his bedridden mother in the hospital, knowing that his mother dislikes Loretta, he makes a promise to his mother that he will cancel the marriage. His mother recovers miraculously after this. Loretta and her whole family are overwhelmed upon learning Johnny’s reason. Even Ronny, Johnny’s younger brother, finds his elder brother’s explanation absurd, “God, Johnny, you are forty-two years old. She is still running your life.” The cancellation sparks the unexpected romance between Loretta and

Ronny, which eventually leads Ronny to propose. To Ronny's proposal, unexpected as it may be, Loretta responds with the exact same line, which she says to Johnny in the beginning of the film "Where is the ring?"

The line "[w]here is the ring?" points out how important the signs and rituals are for the bride, or to wedding comedy. First of all, the ring is indispensable signifies the formality in the proposal. Hence, being able to decide for her sake is the essential point in wedding comedy. Notwithstanding the ring does not symbolize the autonomy of women, in these two scenes Loretta's attitude of commanding to be treated in a formal way can be seen as one. Secondly, Loretta's acceptance of Ronny's proposal in the end is not coincidental but, in my point of view, an allegorical one. Before *Moonstruck*, parental influence is significant in wedding comedy. Parents' decision can largely affect a couple's destiny. *Moonstruck* suggests that it is the couple that decides to marry. This may explain why Loretta chooses the younger one between the brothers; since Ronny's proposal implies that the influence of the parental side is gradually fading. Such implication can be seen in a scene where Johnny, the obedient son who listens to his mother even in making *his* life decision, passes over the engagement ring to Ronny after he has picked it up with his knee down from the floor. The passing-the-ring scene is likely to announce the advent of a new era.

The signs and values of traditional romantic comedy are essential in new romances, as we have seen Loretta's concern for the rituals in *Moonstruck*. The hero and the heroine accommodate their differences and eventually reunite and continue their marital bond. Tamer Jeffers McDonald names the sequence as "neo-traditional comedy" (85).<sup>22</sup> Along with his definition of this upcoming genre, McDonald criticizes that romantic comedy does not reflect social reality: the "new form of the

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<sup>22</sup>According to McDonald's definition, "The neo-traditional romantic comedy reasserts the old 'boy meets, loses, regains girl' structure' emphasizing the couple will be heterosexual, will form a lasting relationship, and that their story will end as soon as they do so"(86).

romantic comedy pays lip service to such ideas as big-city alienation, the prevalence of divorce and the inevitability of disappointment, but does so only to confound them with the perfect romance....” (86) The endings of romantic comedy from the late 1980s to the 1990s tend to conclude with the reunited happy endings. This tendency may bring certain consolation for the moviegoers to ease their anxiety toward the relationship in the real world: the high divorce rate since the 1980s.

To be more precise, one can say that the function of romantic comedy in the contemporary period is to create a fairytale-like story for the audience, especially women, to escape from. Yet at the same time, wedding comedy may intend to invite the spectators, particularly brides and bride-to-bes, to re-examine their choices before saying “I do.”

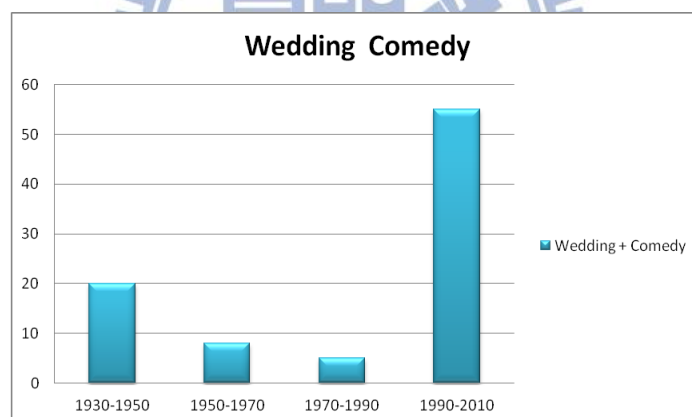


FIGURE 1 Wedding comedy from 1930 to 2010

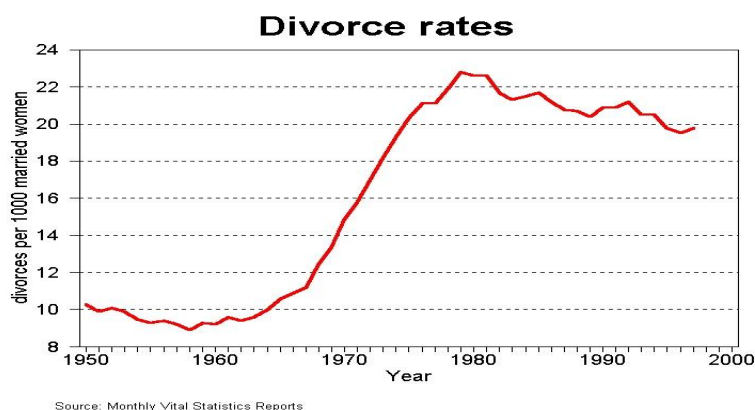


FIGURE 2 Divorce rates, University of Maryland.

As the emerging number of wedding comedy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (See fig. 1) shows the similar curve to that of the divorce rate (See fig. 2), the self-knowledge and self-transformation for women become essential issues to focus on in such films in the next period.

#### **IV. The Contemporary Period from 1990 to 2010:**

##### **Wedding Comedy in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hollywood**

The concept of the wedding along with women's social status is under constant revision throughout the decades. The Hollywood film industry concededly exhibits and contributes to the ideological and socio-cultural shaping for both the cultural rituals and women's positions. As the plots in romantic comedy, neo-romantic comedy and new romances are essentially similar in narrating the heroine's journey of searching for her true love, marriage seems to be the only outcome to announce the triumph of womanhood. Apart from sabotaging the opportunity for women to gain their autonomy, such comedies have also severely obliterated other possibilities for them as well. In recent years, one can observe the rise of a new genre of comedy which has arisen to (re-)examine the issue of relationship and wedding particularly from women's perspectives. Instead of concluding arbitrarily that marriage is the only way out, wedding comedy presents a different ending to the audience. Most importantly, it focuses on the process of women's self-understanding. Even though undergoing the same journey as they do in romantic comedy, female protagonists in wedding comedy provide alternative interpretations and perspectives. Unlike the core value in romantic comedies, love no longer conquers all; wedding comedy is about the protagonist's self-awakening, self-understanding and self-transformation. Take the movie *My Best Friend's Wedding* as an example. In the beginning of the movie, three lovely bridesmaids are circling around the bride and chanting the song, "You will be



His.”<sup>23</sup> The lyrics “Wishin’, and hopi’, and thinkin’, and prayin’, Planning and dreamin’ each night of his charms” created some romantic undertone. However, the female protagonist Julianne Potter in her late 20s is thunderstruck by the news of her good old friend Michael O’Neil’s coming wedding. The end of *My Best Friend’s Wedding* subverts the conventional dogma of romantic comedy, which is “love conquers all,” by presenting an alternative “happy ending” for Julianne. Julianne finally realizes her true feelings for Michael. Her deeds and her intention of getting married to Michael are not out of love, but out of a sense of nostalgia. The film brings out the central themes of wedding comedy; the transformation and self-knowledge of the female protagonist. In the end, what Julianne gains in her quest is neither a lover nor a wedding, but a sense of enlightenment in womanhood.

To conclude, the plots of running away to avoid confrontation or passive revolt widely appear in wedding comedy. Such reactions are viewed as the self-awakening of women who make their own choices instead of accepting this marriage with doubts or under social pressure. Relatively speaking, to hinder one’s wedding may be considered to be a more progressive move for the women in wedding comedy. Because once the women realize what they really want, they will start their journey, which is, the process of self-understanding. One can observe the transformation of heroines’ attitude toward love, relationship and marriage in wedding comedy of

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<sup>23</sup> The lyrics of “You will be His” by Ani DiFranco  
 Wishin', and hopin', and thinkin', and prayin', Planning and dreamin' each night of his charms. That  
 won't get you into his arms  
 So if you're looking for love you can share All you gotta to is hold him, and kiss him, and love him,  
 And show him that you care.  
 Show him that you care, just for him. Do the things that he likes to do. Wear your hair just for him,  
 'cause, You won't get him, thinkin' and a prayin', Wishin' and hopin'.  
 'Cause wishin', and hopin', and thinkin', and prayin', Planning and dreamin' his kisses will start. That  
 won't get you into his heart!  
 So if you're thinking how great true love is All you gotta to is hold him, and kiss him, and squeeze him,  
 and love him. Yeah, just do it! And after you do, you will be his.  
 So if you're thinking how great true love is!  
 All you gotta to is hold him, and kiss him, and squeeze him, and love him. Yeah, just do it! And after  
 you do, you will be his.  
 You will be his. You will be his!

different eras. In *It Happened One Night*, Ellen tries to run away from her own wedding when she realizes the one she is about to marry is not her true love. In *The Graduate*, Elaine is persuaded by Ben and decides to run away from her own wedding. In the 1970s, the attitude of the heroine is getting tougher. Erica, in *Moonstruck*, is fully aware of her preference and actively quests for her demands. As it comes to the 1990s, in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, Julianne takes over her fate and tries to stop her old friend's wedding. Along the way, the process of women's self-awakening, self-understanding, and self-transformation can be observed in wedding comedy from 1930 to 2000. In chapter 3, I will first examine *Sex and the City* to demonstrate the runaway bride in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood and then I will discuss the influence of family values in wedding comedy in the contemporary period.



## Chapter Three

### “The One” and Family Values in Wedding Comedy

This chapter mainly concentrates on two crucial elements of wedding comedy: the pre-destined mate, or “the One” and the influence of kinship to explain the emerging numbers of this derivative genre in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and mostly in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, which I have mentioned in chapter two as the contemporary period (1990~2010). The first section of this chapter utilizes two of Mary-Lou Galician’s twelve myths of romantic comedy to analyze the concept of “the One” in wedding comedy (2004).<sup>24</sup> The second section delves into the representations of family values in wedding comedy.

The section of the pre-destined mate is divided into three parts. The significance of wedding comedy in the first part is to uncover the illusion of what Chrys Ingraham names “wedding-ideological complex” (173). In *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*, Ingraham provides compelling cases from popular films, commercials, magazines, and even television sitcoms to show the pervasive influence of weddings and of our culture’s obsession with them. In his article “Unrealistic Portrayals of Sex, Love, and Romance in Popular Wedding Films,” Kevin Johnson converts Galician’s “twelve myths” into twelve narrative

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<sup>24</sup> Mary-Lou Galician lists twelve typical settings that widely appear in romantic comedy:  
 Myth#1, “Your perfect partner is cosmically pre-destined, So nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you”;  
 Myth#2, “There’s such a thing as ‘love at first sight’”;  
 Myth#3, “Your true ‘soul mate’ should know what you are thinking or feeling without having to tell”;  
 Myth#4, “If your partner is truly ‘meant for you,’ sex is easy and wonderful”;  
 Myth#5, “To attract and keep a man, a woman should look like a model or centerfold”;  
 Myth#6, “The man should not be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman”;  
 Myth#7, “The love of a good and faithful true woman can change a man from a ‘beast’ into a ‘prince’”;  
 Myth#8, “Bickering and fighting a lot mean that a man and a woman really love each other passionately”;  
 Myth#9, “All you really need is love, so it doesn’t matter if you and your lovers have very different values”;  
 Myth#10, “The right mate ‘completes you,’ filling all your needs and making your dreams come true”;  
 Myth#11, “In real life, actors are often like the romantic characters they portray”;  
 Myth#12, “Since mass media portrayals of romance aren’t ‘real,’ they don’t really affect you.” (ix)

patterns in wedding films. The twelve patterns match the twelve clichéd structures and settings which circle around the motifs of “Soul Mate,” of “All You Really Need Is Love,” and of “The Right Mate ‘Completes You.’” The three themes above constantly recur in “wedding stories” and “wedding films.” They affect the decision of the bride or the groom at the last moment whether to get married to her fiancé or his fiancée. As I have repeatedly emphasized, questing for one’s self-transformation through wedding preparation is the main purpose of wedding comedy. Getting married in the end of the film to create a happily-ever-after illusion is certainly not what wedding comedy wants to present to the audience; the ultimate goal for wedding comedy, instead, is to disillusion the myths. When it comes to the discourse of Ingraham’s “wedding-ideological complex,” the competition between the new and the traditional women in wedding comedy can also be observed. Which group will get married easier and be considered more attractive than the other? The new women, as Laurie Narancho suggests, “focus on professional work...and [create] a separation between the trappings of femininity...and [insisting] the feminist principles of equality” (35). Charlotte Brunsdon argues that the ideal situation for these career women is that “she is neither trapped in femininity (pre-feminist), nor rejecting of it (feminist), she can use it” (86). Are these professional new women really inferior to the traditional, house-bound women in the marriage market? Many wedding comedy films dwell upon this theme. In the first section, I will first apply Ingraham’s theory of “wedding-ideological complex” to demonstrate the battle between the financially independent women and the supportive housewives via the example of *My Best Friend’s Wedding*.

Then I will utilize Galician’s Myth#1: “Your perfect partner is cosmically pre-destined, so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you” (119) and Myth #10: “The right mate ‘completes you’— filling your needs and making your dreams come

true” (201) to discuss the concepts of “the One” and “Mr. Right.” A media literacy advocate and an award-winning mass media researcher, Galician lists 12 major mass-mediated myths and stereotypes about sex, love, and romance and names it as Dr. FUN’s Mass Media Love Quiz. By analyzing and criticizing the “twelve myths,” Galician argues that “higher usage of certain mass media is related to unrealistic expectations about coupleship and these unrealistic expectations are also related to dissatisfaction in real-life romantic relationships” (5). That is to say, the “twelve myths” commonly reflect the attitude of modern people towards love relationships and their perspectives on the issues of weddings and marriages. Such perspectives conveyed through the mass media symbolize a certain social phenomenon to meet and to further fulfill the “unrealistic expectations” of the audience. The main purpose of her study is to unveil these unrealistic expectations. In order to disillusion each of the 12 myths, Galician borrows several examples from people’s real-life experiences and some from romantic films. The spirit of wedding comedy, in my view, is to disillusion the myths as well, particularly Myth#1 and Myth#10. The concept of anti-disguise in *Sex and the City* will be highlighted in the second part. I will compare *Sex and the City* with the Disney animated version of *Cinderella* and mainly focus on the symbolic meaning underneath the sequence of changing outfits for the big ceremony, the scenes of Carrie’s wedding and Prince Charming’s party.

Furthermore, in the third part, I will take *Sex and the City* as an example to provide possible answers to the idea of “the One” and its representative in wedding comedy. By analyzing the motivation of the runaway bride and the scenario of runaway wedding plot, I intend to demystify Galician’s Myth #10. Mark Rubinfeld criticizes the gender and genre in Hollywood romantic comedy. According to his research, whether women have a voice in Hollywood cinema still remains ambivalent (34). Therefore, Rubinfeld cautions audience against such dominant implication in

conventional romantic comedies, that a heroine needs a hero to let her “feel complete” (35).<sup>25</sup> This is not just the case for romantic comedy. In wedding comedy, the question remains: when is the time for women to “feel” complete? Is it when they participate in a long-term relationship, when they get married, or when they are both involved in raising their offspring? From my observation, instead of searching for the other half who is capable of solving problems, accompanying with them through difficult moments, or even providing financial supports, women in wedding comedy are looking for someone who can respect their autonomy and stop treating them as incomplete subjects. For centuries, women have kept finding their ways to achieve self-fulfillment. The zeitgeist and the marital obligation for women remain conventional and full of stereotypes. Even if they have become more independent than traditional women in terms of their own careers and love relationships, such prejudices still exist.

Aside from finding “the One,” family is another factor to determine whether the wedding ceremony will proceed smoothly or not. The second section will be divided into two parts. I will examine the two family values, the “sexual restriction” and the “division of labor” respectively by analyzing *Leap Year* (2010) and *You Again* (2010). Moreover, in order to accommodate these family values to the changing society in the contemporary period, I intend to redefine the concept of “sexual restriction” as the “diminishing cohabitation” in the first part. As for the second part, I will re-examine the “division of labor” in the contemporary period and further analyze its connection with the high divorce rate.

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<sup>25</sup> Rubinfeld categorizes “Hollywood love story” into four plots through textual analysis and content analysis in order to “understand the genre’s popular appeal and its ideological implications” (xv). In chapter 4 “The Prick Foil Plot,” he mentions that this plot is not as important as the pursuit plot and the redemption plot in romantic comedy, but it has the potential to be “equally ideologically significant” (33). Wedding comedy reflects the merit for such potential rather than focusing on the “boy meets girl meets genre” (McDonald).



## I. Explicating the Myth of “the One”

### A. Wedding-Ideological Complex: *My Best Friend’s Wedding*

Wedding is a process for women to move from the status of “I” to that of “We.” The representation of the notions of the conventional femininity appears to be invisible, but it is powerful and all-pervasive in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century wedding comedy. When it comes to starting a family with her Mr. Right, the bride may face the dilemma of whether to give up her career or her goals to follow the one she loves. Wedding comedy seems to encourage and even give credits to the group of people who obey such traditional value. Those who do not sacrifice for their loved ones may be punished or even receive harsh judgments. Laurie Narancho points out that “offering the ultimate goal of romantic marriage” is considered a conventional setting in popular romantic films (39). No matter how financially or physically independent a female protagonist is in a heterosexual plot, she still needs a marriage certificate to prove her completeness. Take *Picture Perfect* (1997) as an example. Mr. Mercer (Kevin Dunn) is Kate’s (Jennifer Aniston) employer. He believes a woman without a marriage or a fiancé is considered “not stable enough” for a greater responsibility at work. Due to Mr. Mercer’s prejudice toward unmarried women, Kate is unable to get promoted despite of her talent.

In contemporary wedding comedy, women’s decisions overpower men’s influences. Men stop to be the saviors in women’s life, and women certainly are not the absolute victims in a relationship anymore. Although women can live without men financially, however, men to a certain extent are still a label to symbolize the completion for women who can both achieve success at work and at home. When women reach a certain age, especially in their 30s, getting married becomes a top priority goal. To a certain extent, the emerging number of wedding comedy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood is trendy and reinforcing the heterosexual ideology. In

order to conform to the social norm, some of these unwed women are eager to get married as soon as possible and some of them may consider following the guidance of relationship experts so as to figure out the reasons why they still remain singles. Such anxiety and self-proving process are the syndrome what Ingraham has highlighted as the “wedding-ideological complex” (186). He further depicts a compelling case that “the visual stimulation of the wedding story is a powerful means for suturing an audience to the interests represented in a film or television show” (126). The women around their 30s suddenly notice their youth has passed away fast, especially when they fill up some forms with the required information of age. They realize that they do not have much time to find a perfect mate to get married to before their “expiration” date.<sup>26</sup> Some of them in wedding comedy start to make phone calls to their former admirers to inquire about the possibilities of being engaged. Julianne in *My Best Friend's Wedding* can be seen as an example; she calls her admirer from college, Michael O’Neal, who makes an agreement with her that if neither of them is married at the age of 28, they will get married with each other instead.

Such arrangement delivers a certain message to the audience that getting married is the prerequisite of being a successful and a normal woman. Ingraham takes several scenes in *My Best Friend's Wedding* as examples to explain such complex and to emphasize that the pressure of getting married under the age 30 mostly comes from their peers and family members. Ingraham points out that “Kimmy is desirable because she is traditionally feminine.... [However,] Julianne is destined for a life of career without love” (185), which signifies a competition between the new woman and the traditional woman. Julianne is the new woman who is a determined New York

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Littwin in *The Postponed Generation* points out, “Demographers attribute the slight upward fluctuations in the marriage rate to the fact that baby-boomers are marrying later, and many are now facing the ‘biological clock’ syndrome” (218). The term “expiration date” is commonly used in mass media and it means the same as “biological clock.”

restaurant food critic and Kimmy is the traditional woman who is a dreamy blond undergraduate student from a wealthy family. There are three significant moments in the film that gradually stop Julianne from interfering with Kimmy and Michael's wedding. The first one is when Kimmy shows how deeply she loves her fiancé and how much she is willing to give up for him. Kimmy exclaims, "It's his career! I'm supportive. I want to be with the man I love. I can always go to school, but I can't always be with the man I love." After realizing the extent to which Kimmy is willing to sacrifice for love, Julianne is agitated because she thinks that this naïve girl is not suitable for the mature Michael. As his best friend, it is her obligation to rescue him from "the biggest mistake" he is about to make. In the elevator scene, Kimmy pleads with Julianne not to steal Michael's heart away. She is aware that Michael still cares about Julianne a lot and she knows she cannot compete with Julianne at almost every level. In order to win Michael's heart, the only thing Kimmy can do is to give up her own plans to support her fiancé's dream. Kimmy's decision, according to Ingraham's idea of wedding-ideological complex, exactly embodies the construction of traditional femininity. Ingraham comments that whether realizing it or not, the audience may have complied with such complex, especially the anxious nubile women (173). He further remarks that "[the] pervasiveness of these messages is a sign of the intense socialization effort that the wedding-ideological complex has undertaken in constructing femininity, heterosexuality, and the importance of weddings and wedding consumption to a woman's identity" (175). On the one hand, wedding comedy reflects the anxiety of unmarried women under this "wedding-ideological" social construction. On the other hand, it depicts the catastrophic result of hasty decision induced by said anxiety and thereby alerts the heroines and the audience not to be influenced by such illusion.

The climax in the whole movie is the scene in which Julianne and Michael stand

face to face in the white pavilion of a forest on Kimmy and Michael's wedding day. Julianne confesses her nine-year infatuation for Michael with a passionate kiss. At this very moment, the moviegoers may assume that they will have the clichéd and the customary happy ending as usual because it is a kiss in a close-up and the camera starts to track around the kissers to create a romantic aura. However, the magical moment stops in merely three seconds as Kimmy witnesses the betrayal of her fiancé and her maid of honor. Michael immediately chases after Kimmy, who is shocked and runs away, while Julianne runs after Michael. During the chase, Julianne calls her gay best friend George (Rupert Everett) who constantly persuades Julianne to give up her plan. And George delivers the final verdict, "Michael's chasing Kimmy. You're chasing Michael. Who's chasing you? Get it? There's your answer—Kimmy. Jules, you're not *the one*." This sequence is supposed to be the typical runaway wedding plot with a slight but important difference: in this film the one who is left behind the altar is no longer the supporting actress/actor; the Mr. Right is one who is being pursued. After the dramatic chasing scene, Julianne is the one to confess her mistake to Kimmy and further to concede that Kimmy is the one for Michael. Hence, in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, it presents a different perspective toward the topic of the One and Mr. Right. It breaks Galician's formulation that "Your perfect partner is cosmically pre-destined, so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you" (119). In making Julianne, the leading female protagonist, who fails to capture her Mr. Right, not Kimmy, the filmmaker P.J. Hogan has significantly transformed the concept of the One and Mr. Right in wedding comedy.

Women are the One for themselves, and they will find their other halves after they truly understand themselves and determine to express and to accept their own personalities. The purpose of doing so in wedding comedy is not to create or to

“provide a very unrealistic view of what marriage really is” (121).<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, it breaks the illusion of the power of fated love/predestined mate. Galician criticizes the ridiculous idea of searching for the perfect partner as displayed in mass media and she notes, “but you know you’re living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And you’re a human capable of changing and improving your ‘destiny’ rather than irrationally letting it enslave you” (120). According to Tania Modleski, romantic films in one way do influence women from combining romance, intellect, and independence. In order not to reiterate the same old path of being the “lesser partner” in a relationship, women need to think of what they really are and what they really want as well as deserve. The changing and improving part in wedding comedy is not to chase after the one you think you love, but to first clarify for yourself about your self-position and examine your intention of getting married. Without self-knowledge, women in wedding comedy may find “true love” but not their “true self.” Without being true to themselves, the “true love” they find might only be a fantasized one.

To me, the situation in contemporary wedding comedy tends to be more complicated than before. According to my definition of wedding comedy in chapter one, most of the male and female protagonists have already engaged with someone else before meeting each other. The climax and the most dramatic plot take place when the bride or the groom runs away from their own wedding. Why do they choose to call off or to run away from their own wedding right before the ceremony begins when hundreds of guests are present and luxurious decorations are all set? This is an even more crucial angle to be explored in “wedding-ideological complex.” Before providing an answer to this very particular question, first, I need to address the concept of anti-disguise which is essential to wedding comedy.

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<sup>27</sup> The quotation is from Galician’s book *Critical Thinking about Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media: Media Literacy Applications*.

## B. Anti-disguise: A 40-year-old Cinderella

If a woman has no self-knowledge toward the concepts of relationships, weddings and marriages, she may be affected by wedding-ideological complex. One of the syndromes of wedding-ideological complex relates to an aggressive behavior of the bride-to-be such as fighting over a wedding dress with strangers. Wedding-ideological complex may influence the bride in mainly two ways. On the one hand, the female protagonist will feel anxious if she cannot get married before a certain age. On the other hand, she is obsessed with the idea of having a luxurious wedding. In wedding comedy, it depicts the anxiety of the single women and unveils the consequence when a bride is affected by wedding-ideological complex. Accordingly, it cautions the heroines and the moviegoers to clarify their intentions to get married. In case such complex allures the nubile heroine to disguise herself in order to attract a perfect mate who can enter the wedlock with her or to have unrealistic expectations about wedding and relationship, finding her own voice is the top priority, the core value and ultimate goal in wedding comedy. As for women in contemporary wedding comedy, fashion is a medium to express their own voice and also a piece of iconography used to express individual identity. They dress for fashion and for themselves, sometimes with or without branded labels. In the opening sequence of *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), a pair of high heels represents an important element for women to empower themselves (see fig. 3). Most of the camera angles tilt up from the close up on the pair of high heels and then up to the outfit and face in knees up shot. The rapid shots changing from one woman to another and from one close-up to the next indicates the fact that in the modern city shoes represent an icon for career women of professional success. Andrea Sachs (Anne Hathaway) in *The Devil Wears Prada* does the makeover. She starts from wearing hideous student shoes to glamorous high heels. Such change is not to please her boyfriend, but to fit in with her job at the fashion magazine industry. The same

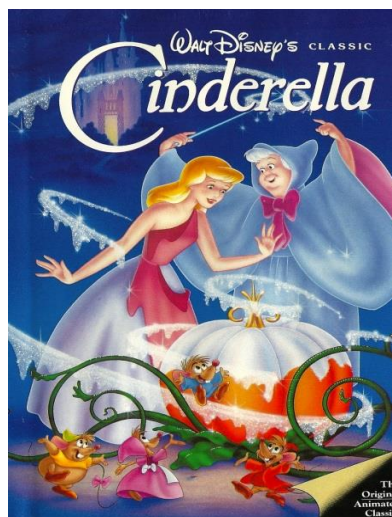


outfit changing scenario appears frequently in wedding comedy as well. The attempt to hide one's true personality or to advance her social status via changing her high heels or wearing different wedding gowns, I argue, is considered a way to disguise herself.



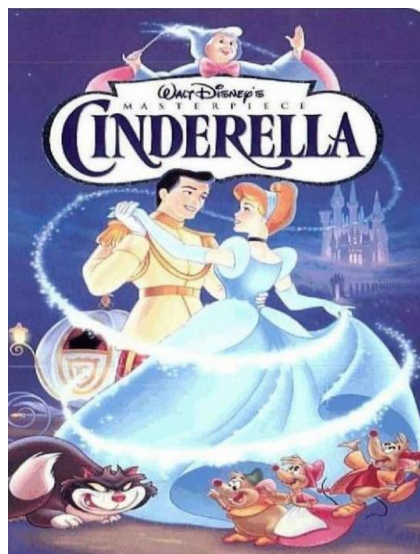
**FIGURE 3** Women in New York City rush to work in *The Devil Wears Prada*. Courtesy of 20 Century Fox/Photofest.

Here, I want to introduce the concept of disguise in wedding comedy. In order to win others' appreciation and approval, the heroine has to present herself as someone else through different outfits. Examples can be found in the fairytale archetype of Cinderella, who has to change her outfits and makes herself another person to win Prince Charming's heart. Alexandra Robbins remarks that the changing of clothes is a strategy for Cinderella to "ascend class stratum" (108).



**FIGURE 4** The godmother is doing the magical spell on Cinderella whose dress was ruined by her stepsisters in *Cinderella* (1950). Courtesy of Walt Disney Productions/Photofest.

Robbins further comments that the strategy of Cinderella’s fairy godmother is to disguise “any possible symptoms of grotesque with high-class fashion” (108) (see fig. 4). Unlike other Disney princesses who were born in a royal family, such as Snow White, Princess Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty*, Princess Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* and Princess Jasmine in *Aladdin*, Cinderella is a kind-hearted girl who was born into a bourgeois family. Cinderella humbly accepts her fate to serve her mean stepmother and stepsisters. After finishing her routine housework at night, Cinderella stares at the faraway palace and hopes to be invited to the party where Prince Charming lives. The unknown prince is a symbol of hope which supports Cinderella to get through the frustration in daily life and a chance to flee away from middle-class. In “*Cinderella’ as a Dirty Joke*,” Cathy Lynn Preston points out that “Cinderella’s rags are transformed into a ball gown, thereby mapping bourgeois hegemony over that bodily and social (class and gender) topography marked as low and dirty” (32).



**FIGURE 5** Cinderella in the magical dress dances with Prince Charming. She will be a real princess after the party. Courtesy of Walt Disney Productions/Photofest.

In fig 5, the dress of Cinderella is not chosen by herself, so it cannot represent the true image that she tries to present in the beginning of the fairytale (as in the dress she makes for herself). Different from the fairytale of *Cinderella* the concept of anti-disguise in wedding comedy highlights the fact that the choice of the bridal gown is *made* by the bride herself. The plot of changing from dresses to dresses in *Sex and the City* can easily be associated with the particular *Cinderella* theme when the fairy godmother does the magical spell to get Cinderella into a dazzling dress to attend the party in the palace. In fact, the director of *Sex and the City*, Michael Patrick King, confirms that the main storyline of Carrie Bradshaw is, in fact, adopted from the story of *Cinderella*.

There is a significant scene in *Sex and the City* conveying the message that one does not need a branded tag if she has faith in herself. Carrie Bradshaw, who lives in New York is in search for the two Ls, “Love and Label” (in her own words), and is going to get married in an antique gown (see fig 6).



**FIGURE 6** Carrie shows her antique wedding dress to her friends in *Sex and the City* (2008). Courtesy of Warner Bros./Photofest.



**FIGURE 7** Anthony and Charlotte are shocked while seeing the dress. Courtesy of Warner Bros./Photofest.

When Carrie shows the wedding dress she personally chooses for her big day, the camera moves simply from Carrie's wedding planner Anthony (Mario Cantone) to her best friend Charlotte York Goldenblatt (Kristin Davis), and it dramatically pauses as they see the one and only white dress at the same time. The romantic dream-come-true music stops right after the three reaction shots. The moment creates a comedy effect (see fig 7). When Charlotte doubts the dress is too simple for a wedding gown, Carrie says confidently, "It's simple and classic...when I saw it, I thought 'that is what I *should* marry Big in' (my emphasis)." Then Anthony asks the crucial question: what the label of the classic piece is. Carrie responds with a negligible tone, "No one. I *found* it at a vintage shop (my emphasis)." Carrie's response to Anthony, especially with the two words "should" and "found," is a



manifestation of her self-acknowledgment. The word “should” shows Carrie’s confidence and resolution in making her own choice; “I *found* it at a vintage shop” shows her agency and endeavor to express her own ideal. Confidence and agency are the two essential personalities for women in wedding comedy. Then Anthony murmurs his comment on the wedding dress, “The bride wore a dress by no one....The invitation is fancier than the dress.” The choice Carrie makes is unbelievable for the celebrities around her, but it really makes sense that she does not need the traditional rituals to prove her happiness. Although Carrie has made the decision for herself, social expectations and fairytale fantasy keep seducing her to give up on her own choice. In the end, she is persuaded to wear an expensive wedding gown by a super brand designer, Vivienne Westwood, because of public expectations. Similar to Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty in Disney animation, the three brides wear the wedding dresses chosen respectively by the fashion designer, the godmother, and the three fairies.

One can easily disguise his or her personality by intentionally changing outfits. For example, if a woman wants to make the guests to assume that she is a bride who has a lovely personality, she can achieve the purpose by putting on branded wedding dresses such as *Vera Wang*, *Carolina Herrera* and *Christian Lacroix*. If the bride intends to create the senses of being both romantic and elegant, *Oscar de la Renta* and *Lanvin* will be the proper choices. Different outfits make different identities. In wedding comedy, different dresses can successfully conceal the bride’s real personalities or create a false illusion for the audience or the pursuer. However, they can be a medium to represent and to enhance the bride’s qualities as well. The differences between these two depend on the intentions behind the choice of a dress. Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff point out that “a post-feminist mantra reverberates through many of the books: ‘I choose when to make myself pretty and if

I choose to be pretty, then only for myself” (497). I will discuss its significant meaning in what follows.

My analysis will concentrate on a sequence about changing outfits in *Sex and the City*. The *Vogue* magazine invites Carrie to participate in the wedding dress photo-shooting session for its latest theme—the 40-year-old bride. The assumption is distinct brands create particular identities for both the dresser and the viewer. Every time Carrie puts on a different wedding dress, she turns herself from a person to a different brand. There is one particular wedding dress that catches everyone’s attention—the *Vivienne Westwood* dress. The luxurious and romantic wedding gown brings out Carrie’s personality with touches of ecstasy and rebellion. Under this circumstance, wearing this dress is not to disguise her true personality but to highlight a certain aspect of her personality, instead. That is to say, if a bride chooses her own wedding dress without creating a false illusion, she still expresses her identity through the dress. However, the situation gets more complicated in *Sex and the City*. Even though in this film both the *Vivienne Westwood* wedding gown and the antique dress enhance Carrie’s personality in different ways, the intentions of choosing each dress vary. As previously mentioned, Carrie determines to wear the antique dress because she believes it is the right dress to marry Mr. Big in. As for the branded gown, it conveys a romantic fantasy to Carrie that she “needs” a dream wedding of her own. Such romantic illusion created by mass media constructs desire and incurs a costly wedding far beyond the bride’s means. It appears that at this moment wedding-ideological complex has its influence on Carrie.

For a bride, one of the purposes during wedding preparation is to find a dress that truly belongs to her. Finding “the” dress is equal to finding “the” voice of a bride in wedding comedy as well. By comparing the ending of the wedding comedy *Sex and the City* in 2008, and the Disney version fairytale *Cinderella* in 1950, I contend



that the “wrong” dress can be seen as a “false” disguise that obstacles the bride’s searching for her true image and may mislead the pursuers while the “right” one brings out and highlights her personality. It is only by anti-disguising can a bride achieve self-knowledge through self-transformation. However, in Carrie’s case, she has done otherwise. The second Carrie decides to give up the antique wedding gown and chooses the branded one, her anticipated magical moment is shattered. As for the consequence, the disguised bride will encounter great obstacles during wedding ceremony until she finds her own voice back. The following section will provide an even detailed observation toward Mr. Big (Chris Noth) and Carrie—the runaway groom and the disguised bride—in *Sex and the City*.

### **C. The Runaway Wedding Plot: the Fantasized One**

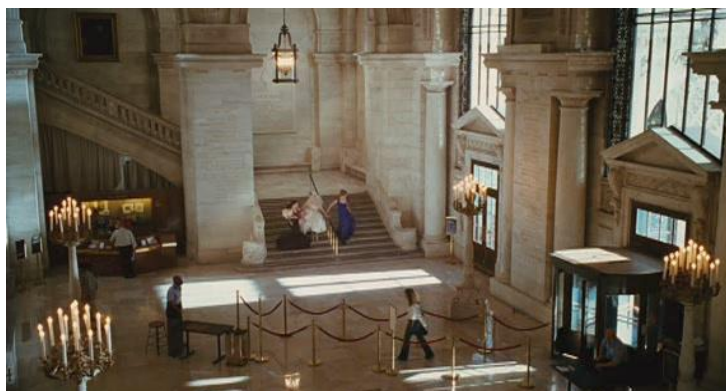
Wedding comedy is teemed with plots and scenes such as happy couples falling in love, beautiful bridal dresses, and luxurious wedding decorations. The escapement of either side is often the climax of the movie. If the runaway scene is to be averted, both the fiancé and the fiancée need to have complete faith that they are entering wedlock with the “right mate.” Yet, I argue that the existence of the One is not to “complete” the bride or to “make” her dreams come true in wedding comedy; instead, the one is someone who “anti-disguises” the bride, revealing who she truly is and thereby induces the bride to go through the process of self-transformation. As recur repeatedly in wedding comedy, the bride is assisted and is accompanied by the One whenever she loses her identity to overcome every obstacle ahead of her. In short, the bride comes to terms with herself and accepts who she is with the existence of the right mate. In this sense, meeting the One is part of the “wedding preparation.” Additionally, I also contend that every obstacle throughout the wedding preparation is meant to motivate the bride to achieve selfhood. It takes immense courage and

determination for a bride to run away. Yet, the bride goes through an awakening simultaneously the moment she decides to escape. Thus, the runaway bride does not actually “run away” because she realize she is about to marry the wrong one. Instead, she is *running towards* her true self.

The process of searching for Mr. Right presents exactly the journey of self-discovery for women. It leads them to go through self-transformation. When women have transformed themselves, all the anxious and heart-breaking moments will turn out to be milestones in their journey toward maturity and completeness. Take the runaway scene in *Sex and the City* for example. The director Michael Patrick King utilizes camera movements to reinforce such moment of self-transformation to the audience.



**FIGURE 8** Carrie is running away from her own wedding. Here is a full shot. Courtesy of Warner Bros./Photofest.



**FIGURE 9** Carrie is running away from her own wedding. Here is a long shot and it prolongs the dramatic moment. Courtesy of Warner Bros./Photofest.

In the scene in which Carrie is running away from her wedding, the camera closes up on Carrie's face along with the next medium shot; the audience can only see the back of Miranda and Charlotte who accompany Carrie off the stairs. Due to the employment of a medium shot, the stairs are invisible to the audience. Accordingly, the scene appears to show that three well-dressed women are hustling towards an imagined cliff (see fig. 8). The employment of the subsequent full shot sees the three ladies run away helplessly following by a long shot which highlights a sense of sheer loneliness in this particular moment (see fig. 9). Different from the *Cinderella* fairytale, there is no groom or prince to chase after the bride. Instead, the scene only displays three ladies with the clicking sound of their high heels echoing through the empty lobby. Thus, this particular scene emphasizes the absence of the groom. With the help of *Cinderella* to elucidate my point, I argue that the groom does not show up in Carrie's wedding because he is unable to recognize the bride. The Prince Charming of *Cinderella* requires two things to identify his princess—her wedding gown and the magical crystal shoes. Instead of the princess's face and her unique personality, Prince Charming recognizes his princess through these accessories. In "America's Cinderella," Jane Yolen questions the pervasive theme of disguise in fairytale. She remarks, "even face-to-face with the prince, she [Cinderella] is unrecognized until she dons her magic ball-gown. Only when her clothes are transformed does the Prince know his true love" (302). Despite the notion of wedding is mostly to satisfy women's fantasy towards love, romance, and marriage, the main spirit in wedding comedy is, however, to demystify such clichéd perception. In other words, for the women in wedding comedy, the only condition for them to meet the right one is that they have to unveil their disguise(s); only after which will she encounters "the One." Additionally, no one except the bride herself can accomplish such mission successfully. In order to make her wedding ceremony

proceed smoothly this time, therefore, Carrie needs to find her true self back once again.

In the beginning of the film, Carrie and Mr. Big are viewing apartments with plans to move in together. Carrie falls in love with a penthouse with one exception, the closet is too small. Thus, Mr. Big promises to build a bigger one for her. At the time Mr. Big shows Carrie the new closet, he successfully impresses her. In order to feel a sense of reality, Carrie keeps her new Manolos Blahnik—a pair of jewelry-inlaid blue high heel—in her love-at-first-sight closet which she decides to wear them on her wedding day together with her classical dress. Unfortunately, they do not match the splendid *Vivienne Westwood* wedding gown. Intending to comply with her friends, she eventually settles for another pair of white high heels (see fig. 10). As in the *Cinderella* fairytale, Vivienne Westwood enacts the godmother role as she delivers the gown to Carrie, the Cinderella of *Sex and the City*. I argue that a disguise is imposed on Carrie as soon as she puts on the *Vivienne Westwood* gown.



**FIGURE 10** Carrie wears *Vivienne Westwood* wedding dress. She has just arrived at the second floor of the city library where the wedding takes place. Courtesy of Warner Bros./Photofest.

Different from Prince Charming, Mr. Big fails to recognize such disguise because Carrie changes their original plan about the wedding. This is Mr. Big's third marriage

and he does not expect to have over 200 guests including press and celebrities. The original plan is to hold a small wedding of 75 guests. However, the wedding is getting much bigger because of the famous dress. On their wedding day, Mr. Big sits in the limo dialing the cell phone number again and again desperately. He prays to see Carrie's face and says: "I can't go in without you...baby, this whole bride and groom thing is really got me thrown...I need to know that it's still us, just you and me, like you said...come on baby, turn around...let me see you." Unable to reach Carrie or to see her face due to the throng, the groom finally leaves the ceremony alone in the limo. After the runaway scene, Carrie spends plenty of time on her own to figure out the problem. She realizes that she does not need a big wedding or a branded wedding dress to catch Mr. Big's attention. She does not need the dress to "ascend her class stratum" because she is not Cinderella and Mr. Big is not Prince Charming, either. Carrie sighs out loud and says, "I let the wedding get bigger than Big!" and this line is similar to Anthony's reaction when he tries hard to push Carrie and her big dress into the limo. He exclaims, "It's like trying to fit a cream puff through a key hole."



**FIGURE 11** Carrie gets married in a simple dress of her own choice with Mr. Big holding her hand tightly. Courtesy of Warner Bros./Photofest.



In the end of the film, Mr. Big proposes properly to Carrie by using the blue Manolos Blahnik in place of a ring. They get married in a simple wedding in New York City Hall with Carrie wearing her simple dress (see fig. 11). Both the wedding gown and the shoes are chosen by her and on her own will. In the end, Carrie endows the brand of the dress with her personal signature because she finally finds her true self back. Her confidence is indeed a brand that never falls out of fashion.

Galician demystifies Myth#10 and argues that the right mate cannot complete you and no one else can fill your needs or make your dreams come true (202). “The One” is supposed to be the person who the bride “wants” to marriage to, not the mate she “needs” to be with. In his studies, Arnold A. Lazarus lists “two dozen myths” about the topics mainly on love, relationships and marriage. In his Myth#13, marriage can fulfill all your dreams, he points out the difference between “need” and “want” a relationship or a marriage. He mentions that “[mature] love never transforms the other person into ‘emotional oxygen.’” Lazarus’s myth also conveys an important message: “I can live with or without you. I much prefer to live with you because I love you. I hope that you feel the same way about me” (87). The relationship between “I *need* you” and “I *want* to be with you” is apparently different. If a woman in romantic films needs someone to “complete” her, for instance—to be a completer, fixer or rescuer to fill her needs—in Galician’s words, this is not “romance,” but a “robbery” (204). In order not to be the victims of this mythology, what the bride “needs” is first to “complete” herself.

David Shumway mentions that “‘Boy gets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back’ is an exhibit A of standard plots in all fictional media” (157). For me, the standard plots in wedding comedy are “Woman finds herself, woman loses herself, woman finds herself back.” One should never fear to pursue one’s true self because the most important step for meeting “the One” is to remove their disguise(s).



## II. Family Values in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Wedding Comedy

Due to the rise of female self-consciousness and the demand for social equalities for both sexes, the institution of marriage has faced challenges and undergone a “social transformation” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as sociologist David Popenoe comments (*War over the Family* 3). Popenoe notes that marriage system was stable in the 1950s and it had the “highest ever proportion of women... married, bore children, and lived jointly with their husbands until at least age fifty” (4). Yet the circumstance in the contemporary period has changed. In “The Changing Significance of Marriage in the United States,” Larry Bumpass holds the opinion that such dramatic changes in family experience has greatly to do with the social transformation and the problem of cohabitation, to which the society pays less attention (63). Demographical table showed the population of cohabitation in 2000 increased three times than that in 1960 (Lynne Casper and Ken Bryson 4). In “Trends in Cohabitation,” Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu find out that cohabitation is actually an unstable family unit. The break-up rates of cohabitated couples is much higher than that of married couples. Bumpass further points out that most of the decline in marriage was neutralized by increased cohabitation (71).

The problems along with cohabitation can be serious, such as unmarried women with unexpected pregnancy. Situations may worsen if the couple decides to break up. Bumpass declares that the problem of parenthood can strongly influence not only children’s nurturing as well as their perspectives toward relationships and marriages (69-71). At this point, wedding comedy is strongly opposed to cohabitation and sticks firmly to traditional family values. To maintain the family values, Carl Schneider further offers a solution to deal with the unstable situation: to emphasize the necessity of marriage through mass media and education both in school and at home (178-79). Popenoe shares the same opinion with Schneider. In “A Marriage Research Agenda

for the Twenty-First Century,” Popenoe addresses ten critical questions to strengthen the mechanism of marriage in the contemporary period. Among the ten crucial issues, I choose to explore family values mainly on two aspects: “sexual restriction” (197) and the “division of labor” (200).

Among the two, sexual restriction is closely connected with the idea of cohabitation. Traditionally speaking, women play the bonding role in family to connect and to maintain the traditional system of family values. They have been expected and educated to sacrifice for the supreme power of men. In the contemporary period, the “sexual climate” has changed and the sexual liberty for both sexes has led to a downplay of family orders and its values. This may suggest that the sexual revolution is regarded as the great obstacle to rebuild a strong marriage system because “[women] are traditionally assumed to be the gatekeepers of sexuality” (Popenoe 197). Why does the family and its values decline in the U.S.? Do the “gatekeepers” need to take full responsibility for not obeying the rule of sexual restriction? In his second critical question,<sup>28</sup> Popenoe provides an answer for his question and states that in the generation of his grandmothers, they believe that a woman should “refuse to cohabit [with her loved one] except when marriage is clearly planned; that is, when she becomes engaged” (198). However, Linda McClain assumes that the discourse of “abstinence-only-until-marriage” appears to “pit reinforcing traditional families, family values, and the institution of marriage against supporting gender equality and accepting sexual diversity” (257). On the one hand, I agree with McClain’s argument that the demand on women to play the role of gatekeepers certainly fortifies traditional sexual restriction, and most importantly, it intends to make women take full responsibility for men’s behavior and their sexuality.

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<sup>28</sup> The second critical question in Popenoe’s paper is “*Is it possible to move toward a more culturally restrictive sexual system for both men and women and if so, how, and how restrictive should it be?*” (197). This question is under the title of Sexual Restriction.

On the other hand, wedding comedy does not restrain single men or women from sexual diversity. Instead of restricting women's sexual liberty, this genre in essence focuses on maintaining the marriage bond. That is to say, the tendency to go against cohabitation in wedding comedy does not contradict what McClain concerns about, which is "supporting gender equality and accepting sexual diversity" (257). It is about responsibility and self-identity. In what follows I will investigate the two family values accentuated in wedding comedy: the diminishing "cohabitation" in *Leap Year* and the "division of labor" in *You Again*.

#### **A. Diminishing Cohabitation: *Leap Year* (2010)**

The emerging number of wedding comedy and the high divorce rate share the similar curve in the charts mentioned in chapter two.<sup>29</sup> McDonald argues that the return of romantic comedy in the 1990s failed to reflect the crucial truth of the high divorce rate in the contemporary society. However, I contend that wedding comedy, as a derivative genre of romantic comedy, does not ignore such social phenomenon. Instead of depicting the constant high divorce rate and manifest public anxiety toward this problem, wedding comedy employs another strategy to address this issue: it intends to prevent such situation from getting worse which I will explain it in the following paragraphs. In addition, such intention does not attempt to regard wedding comedy as a medium to encourage women to go back to their family like the housewives in the 1950s nor does it try to rekindle the enthusiasm for conventional family values in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Different from the advertisements and films in the 1950s hinted that women belonged to the household and men were the breadwinners, this derivative genre commences to reexamine the conservative family

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<sup>29</sup> The first chart shows the number of the wedding comedy films grows rapidly in the contemporary period, and the second one shows the divorce statistics trend from 1950 to 2000 provided by the University of Maryland. Both charts are on page 43 in my thesis.

values in order to seek out resolution of maintaining the marriage bond under the “sexual climate” in the contemporary period. In *The Postponed Generation*, Susan Littwin comments that young adults have trouble with commitment in general due to the “subheading of their overall reluctance to define themselves” (216). In Littwin’s interview with Melanie, a social worker turned businesswoman, Melanie exclaims that with no rules or structures to follow there is a lot of anxiety when it comes to having a relationship (220).<sup>30</sup> Littwin elucidates that finding one’s identity is the key factor to maintain a stable relationship, and “good relationships seemed to happen to those who found their own direction first. Love conquered very little” (219). In my thesis, I repeatedly emphasize that wedding comedy is meant to depict women’s transformation and their journey to reach self-understanding in a relationship. Self-awakening is what the bride quests for in wedding comedy. When she actualizes her self-understanding, she will make the right choices before getting married.

Family is undoubtedly an important component in wedding comedy, which has its own voice to mold a “proper” or even a “perfect” family. Cohabitation, on the other hand, appears to be a deliberate postponement of a “proper” family in which the two lovers both commit themselves to the bond of marriage vows. By living together, lovers enjoy a prolongation of romantic relationship yet avoid the responsibility entailed on a married couple. This lifestyle is a challenge to family values which wedding comedy strives to emphasize. Discouraging lovers from cohabitation is regarded as a strategic response to this trend. Take *Leap Year* for example. There are two sequences that highlight the importance of diminishing cohabitation. The first sequence is about staying in a B&B for a night and the second one is about getting permission to purchase an expensive condominium. According to an old Irish legend, women can propose to their loved ones on leap day, and their boyfriends cannot reject

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<sup>30</sup> To respect the interviewer, no full name is provided in this interview.

their proposals. Anna Brady (Amy Adams) plans to fly to Dublin to propose to her boyfriend of a four-year-relationship, Jeremy Sloane (Adam Scott), on February 29<sup>th</sup>. During the flight, a storm diverts the plane to Cardiff, Wales. Anna meets Declan O’Callaghan (Matthew Goode) and asks him to drive her to Dublin. On their way to Dublin, their car crashes into a river and they fail to catch the last train. These two singles, however, are forced to spend a night at a remote farmhouse. Embarrassing moment occurs when the conservative host welcomes them warmly and then says, “You’re lucky, so you are. Just half an hour ago, I had two backpackers at the door wanting the room. But they weren’t married. Admitted it right out. No shame. So I sent them packing. Right is right, rain or no rain.” Under such circumstances, Anna and Declan have no choice but to pretend to be a married couple or else their hosts will not allow them to stay.

Another similar situation is about purchasing an apartment. When Anna finally arrives in Dublin, Jeremy surprises her by proposing to her in a hotel lobby. They have their engagement party in their new luxury apartment in The Waterford in the U.S. At the party, Anna learns that before Jeremy proposes to her, he has already told the committee of The Waterford that he and Anna are getting engaged. Jeremy admits that he tries to impress the chairman of the committee with a pompous tone, “The board, she called me in Dublin, probing about our marital status..... I got the message. Married, you’re in. Unmarried, you’re not. So I just said we were hours away from getting engaged. I just said it and it came out. And I don’t know where it came from, but I could almost hear them cutting our keys.” Marriage system to a certain extent is considered to be the extension of family values. The landlord of the country house in Tipperary as well as the committee members of The Waterford in New York are people who stick to the traditional family values. They make rules to prevent couples from any pre-marital cohabitation by any means. In the film, the means to prevent

single men and women from living together before wedlock have provided a space and a pause for both the hero and the heroine to reexamine their current relationship. To be more precise, wedding comedy emphasizes that getting married with each other does not simply mean to share a physical space with another person. In order to build a well-functioned family, it requires the ability for both hero and heroine to communicate with each other and furthermore to solve the problems together.

At the B&B, in order to convince the landlord and his wife and a Italian couple that they are a married couple, Declan and Anna cook dinner together and are forced to kiss each other passionately in front of everyone in the farmhouse. During the dinner preparation, they begin to communicate and further to cooperate with each other. The reason Anna and Declan get closer with each other is not due to cohabitation. The projection of being a real couple and having a harmonious family together is the key factor. In other words, if the landlord does not insist that all his lodgers need to be married couples, both Anna and Declan will probably argue away without taking each other seriously and they will see each other merely as acquaintances, friends or lovers at most. Without the visit to the B&B, Anna will never have a chance to reexamine her relationship with Jeremy and afterward to clarify her intention of getting married with him. During the engagement party, Anna finally realizes that having an apartment with Jeremy means they will have a life together as a family in this house. Yet, Jeremy makes Anna feel like they are less a couple than she and Declan were on the road trip to Dublin. Fortunately, due to the status of Anna's and Jeremy's relationships the committee members of The Waterford ponder about giving this unmarried couple the permission to buy the apartment during the interview. What if the committee members do not refuse to let unmarried lovers cohabit in the building? The ending of this wedding comedy will be reversed. Most likely Jeremy will not propose to Anna, at least not at that moment, and he will



persuade Anna to postpone the idea of getting married or just simply refuse her proposal for the reason that he enjoys the status quo. The concept of diminishing cohabitation prevents the situation from getting worse. If not, Anna would have already cohabited with Jeremy before going on the journey of her own, and subsequently, her self-transformation will not be possible. In the long run, she would keep on wondering about Jeremy's passionless behaviors until the end of their relationship.

In wedding comedy, the diminishing cohabitation does not directly contradict with women's gender equality or the restriction of sexual liberty. What this genre mainly concerns about is the side effects of cohabitation. Moreover, the concept of diminishing cohabitation in wedding comedy stimulates the bride-to-be to contemplate her intention of entering the wedlock before making the decision.

### **B. The Division of Labor: New Women versus Traditional Women**

Besides highlighting the importance of diminishing cohabitation, another family value that wedding comedy intends to focus on is the function of division of labor in a nuclear family. Popenoe analyzes the family in the 1950s and finds out there is a sharp division of labor which in a way keeps the marriage system stable. The woman stays at home as a full-time housewife and the man works outside as primary provider and the ultimate authority in the family. Housewives are depicted as the "Angel of the House" in the 1950s. Such image is considered to be the extension of positive family values. However, along with the rise of female self-consciousness and their financial independence, the conventional "Angels of the House" are less depicted in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century wedding comedy. That is to say this family form has declined gradually, especially in the contemporary society. In a family, a "good provider" is no longer exclusive men. Women's position in a family can be more than just a "good wife and

mother”; instead, they can be breadwinners as well. It is an inspirational progress for women in wedding comedy. Interestingly, the question remains: once women choose to be career women, then who will be the housekeepers and be responsible for parenting in the family? If men stay at home, do the house chores, and take over parenting from their wives, will the problem be solved? The author Graeme Russell comments that the division of labor in which women become breadwinners and men act as primary childrearsers lead to a higher breakup rate than the traditional ones (201). Which one can manage to maintain a stable marriage in their family, the new women with careers or the traditional women with chores? The conflict between social reality and the ideologies enriches wedding comedy with two core values, finding “the One” and reexamining the “family values.” As discussed previously in my thesis, the bride-to-be needs to anti-disguise herself in order to find the right mate. In what follows I intend to examine one of the latest Hollywood wedding comedy films *You Again* to illustrate my point on family’s “division of labor” in the contemporary period.

The hidden messages in wedding comedy appear to punish someone who does not obey the conventional values or refuse to act accordingly to traditional femininity. The matriarchs in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century wedding comedy were mostly born in the 1950s and they were basically raised and influenced by the “angels” in the house. The comparison between the brides-to-be and the mothers when they have to choose—to be a career wife or a housewife—is highly opportune for us to observe what has happened after the happily after. The audience may not see what will happen if the brides-to-be finally choose to pursuit their dreams instead of doing house chores as housewives, because mostly the film will not present the result of the brides’ decisions. In other words, the movies usually end at the happy-ever-after scene instead of showing the “reality” that follows. What we should observe is the role of mothers and

their lives after making the choice of being a career woman. In *You Again*, the director Andy Fickman shows the audience a typical but somehow disappointing future for the career woman.

The storyline in *You Again* is replete with numerous hints and implications to fortify family values, particularly on “division of labor.” The choice of being a housewife is shown as a pathway to happiness. The battle between the new women with successful careers and the traditional housewives can be seen in Joanna’s Aunt, Ramona Mona Clark (Sigourney Weaver) and Marni’s mother, Gail Byer Olsen (Jamie Lee Curtis). Marni (Kristen Bell) and Joanna (Odette Yustman) were in the same high school. At high school, Joanna used to bully Marni. Four days before Marni’s brother’s wedding, she finds out Joanna is the bride and decides to unveil the evil Joanna to her brother Will (James Wolk), unless Joanna apologizes for the awfully wrongdoing of the past. When Joanna first introduces Aunt Mona to her new family, Gail is surprised to see her best friend from high school who does not age at all. Preparing costly presents for people is one of the best ways to impress others and this strategy is not reserved only in business world, but in family gathering as well. Ramona brings lots of fancy gifts to please Will’s family, and she even says, “Do you think I’m trying to buy people’s affection? Did it work?” and she receives a “Yeah!” as a warm welcome. As Marni accepts a super brand gift from Ramona, she finds out that her mom has befriended one of Forbes’ 100 most powerful women who not only owns 14 hotels worldwide, but also possesses a private jet. Suddenly, Ramona becomes the spotlight in the family gathering and everyone, except for Gail, is interested in the wonderful stories about working globally. Gail keeps on wearing the fake smile during Ramona’s pompous speech until the conversation between her younger son Ben (Billy Unger) and Ramona has taken place:

BEN. No way! You own your own plane?

RAMONA. Oh, darling, sometimes I think it owns me. I am on it non-stop just flitting from one continent to the next. Not to mention all the back-and-forth with my divorce. Michael and I have been in litigation 14 months. We were only married for seven, so....

From this conversation we see how the powerful and successful career woman cannot have a happy family or even keep a husband. In Ramona's case, she undergoes not only one, but two divorces. She is capable of solving numerous perplexing problems from work and dealing with people from all over the world, but there is one thing she cannot maintain, her marriage. The implication appears repeatedly in this film to depict the lonely destiny of the career women, especially the successful ones.

In the reconciliation sequence, it intensifies such implication between Gail and Ramona, the married woman and the recently divorced one. Ramona confesses her jealousy for Gail in their high school years. Apparently, Gail is a supernova, a prom queen, a homecoming queen in high school and most importantly, everyone wants to be her friend. At some point Ramona wants to be Gail in order to attract people's attention. Thirty years later, Gail chooses to devote herself to her family and she is not jealous of Ramona's material lifestyle at all even though she does try on Ramona's luxurious earrings in her deluxe bathroom:

GAIL. You know what, Ramona? Honestly, I'm proud of you. I'm proud of what you've accomplished in your life. I think you've done amazingly. But my family is my accomplishment. So I'm not jealous of you. I have a family. They love me. I'm happy!

RAMONA. Well, happiness isn't everything. I was jealous. You had it all. You were pretty, you were smart, and everyone wanted to be your friend. Just seeing you the other night with all your family just...reminded me of...my marriages haven't worked out.

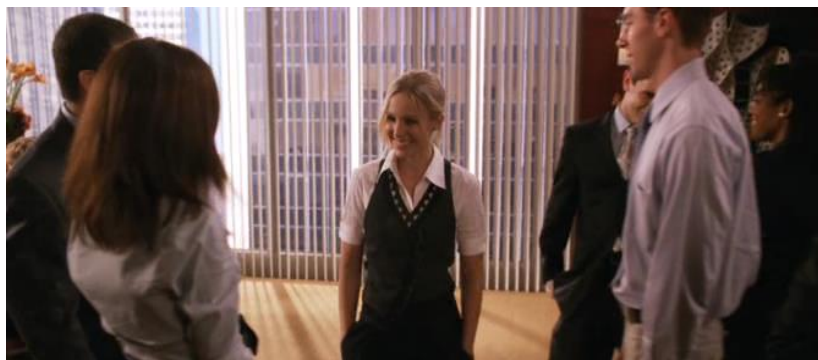
In Gail and Ramona's generation, society pushes women to believe that devoting themselves to their families is the pathway toward happiness. Gail used to be an alpha-woman in her high school year and then she has a happy family because she voluntarily dedicates her life to her family instead of being a career woman. On the

contrary, Ramona is an average high school teenager and she divorces twice because she is an aggressive businesswoman. In *You Again*, it is obvious to perceive the contrast between obeying the conventional values and refusing to act according to traditional femininity.

On the surface, Ramona's remarkable success in her career is the primary cause of her failure in marriage. However, the main problem is the division of labor between sexes. Traditional family values, such as the "division of labor," require new perspectives in order to accommodate to the social transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Stable financial income and family interaction are two essential things to form a proper family. Gender, on the other hand, should not be the primary factor to allocate the labor in a nuclear family. Both husband and wife can be "breadwinners" and do domestic chores together. However, the discourse on this family value in wedding comedy still remains rather conservative. In Ramona's case, both she and her husband fail to spend quality time getting along with each other. That is the major cause that brings their marriage to an end. Intriguingly, in *You Again*, it downplays men's responsibility on this issue; instead, it lets this alpha-female take full responsibility for it.

Both Marni and Joanna represent the young women of the new generation in *You Again*. This film has made notable progression in the depictions of the fate for these two alpha-female in the end of this wedding comedy. When the two young women first appear on screen, Marni has improved herself from a geeky girl with glasses and braces in high school to a successful public relations executive in New York who is recently being promoted to the position of VP before turning 30 (see fig. 12). On the contrary, Joanna has changed from a leader of the pack and a calculating cheerleader to a warm and kind-hearted woman who focuses on helping those who are less fortunate.





**FIGURE 12** Marni is depicted as a single career woman in *You Again*. Both her colleagues and her boss admire her performance at work. In this scene, they are just having a meeting and they are inspired by Marni’s speech. Courtesy of Walt Disney Productions/Photofest.



**FIGURE 13** Joanna is depicted as a bride-to-be in *You Again*. In this scene, Joanna’s image is the implication of the “Angle of the House.” She pretends not to know Marni at all and even compliments Marni on her appearance while she used to make fun of in high school year. Courtesy of Walt Disney Productions /Photofest.

When Marni asks about Joanna’s occupation, she tells Marni’s family that she “enrolls in nursing school” and becomes “obsessed with helping people in need.” She even shows Marni’s mother how to make a rose with a slice of tomato in the kitchen (see fig. 13). Joanna’s image as a housewife is highly contradictory to her Queen Bee image in high school. As the plot unfolds we understand that her great transformation has a lot to do with her loss of parents.

Different from Gail, who voluntarily becomes the “Angels of the House,” Joanna intentionally submits to the traditional role and pretends to act obediently. In her high



school years, Joanna is a confident manipulating girl. She is expected to achieve more in life, just like Aunt Mona. However, Joanna does not want to be “alone” like Aunt Mona. Hence, she chooses to pretend to be another person who is not herself at all in order to have a family once again. The audience can easily observe that in several quarrel scenes between Joanna and Marni Joanna reveals her aggressive personality only when she is alone with Marni. Even though Joanna is reluctant to give away her true personality, she still disguises herself to be an “Angel of the House” and achieves what she desires for, a wedding with Will, who is attracted to Joanna’s warm and caring characteristics. At the time he proposes to Joanna, he has not the slightest idea of what kind of person his fiancée was in high school. Such hint in *You Again* implies that the one who does not follow or believe in conventional values is disqualified to have a wedding or a marriage. It seems that once this alpha-female submits to the traditional femininity, a dream wedding is around the corner. However, in wedding comedy, the bride will never run her wedding smoothly until she anti-disguises herself. Joanna in *You Again* is not an exception.

Even though the implication that aggressive women can never get married is reinforced again in the reconciliation scene between Joanna and Marni, this wedding comedy conveys positive endings for the two heroines of the new generation. On the rehearsal dinner, Marni finally receives the apology she desperately needs from Joanna after she plays the video in which Joanna is revealed as a bully. Joanna explains why she does not apologize when she first meets Marni in the kitchen and tells Marni that she cannot live without Will, who is so furious about Joanna and runs away after the rehearsal dinner:

JOANNA. I just spent so many years trying to distance myself from the person I was. I just wanted to be a person my parents were proud of. I love them [Will’s family] so much, and it’s been such a long time since I’ve had a real family. I just didn’t wanna lose them.

One can interpret Joanna's explanation of disguising her true self in two aspects. On the one hand, she convinces herself that being aggressive is not a good personality anymore because such behavior cannot make her parents be proud of her or catch Will's attention, either. On the other hand, she needs to act like a traditional feminine to regain a family. However, what enrages Will is not Joanna's aggressive behavior in the video, but the fact that she deliberately disguises herself in front of him. Will is furious at being kept in the dark and he exclaims, "I don't really care who you were in high school. I care that you lied to me about it! You lied to me!" As Joanna apologizes sincerely to Marni in the kitchen, Marni comforts Joanna, assuring her that "You are not gonna lose them. They adore you. You fit into my family better than I do." They both chuckle and Marni accepts Joanna's apology because, at this moment, Joanna realizes that she will not lose this family by being her true self and then she anti-disguises herself with a sigh of relief. In addition, the scene of Will running away from Joanna functions as a catalyst that triggers Joanna to anti-disguise herself. Toward the end of the film, Will and Joanna reconcile on Will's tree house followed by an accident in which the tree house collapses.<sup>31</sup> A tree house commonly symbolizes peace and childhood innocence in literary works. In *You Again*, it is a place for Marni and Ben to escape from the world around them as well. After witnessing the whole family adores Joanna at their first meeting, Marni goes up to the tree house and tells Ben the secrets about their future sister-in-law. In this film, the tree house is a symbol of all the lies and fantasies about Joanna's adorable behavior. The collapse of the tree house represents the removed of her disguises. In the long run, they finally become a real family and hold the wedding in the hospital where the bride and the groom are both injured.

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<sup>31</sup> The accident is caused by Ben, who loosens the nails and tries to hide the house lest it be moved to Will and Joanna's new house.

Through her self-transformation during the wedding preparation, Joanna finally finds her true self back and reaches her self-understanding. In the end, Joanna gets married to “the One” who anti-disguises her. Compared to Marni, the recently promoted PR executive, even though the future of this successful career woman of the next generation still remains unknown, the audience can definitely feel some possibility between Marni and Will’s best friend in the final scene at Joanna’s wedding ceremony. Although this wedding comedy still ends at the happy-ever-after scene instead of showing the following “reality,” the film provides an open-ending to the “division of labor” for the next generation. To conclude, the battles between new women and traditional women have not yet finished, at least not in this wedding comedy.

The bride and groom need more than love to finally get married on their wedding day. In the typical runaway wedding plot, it is widely acknowledged that “the One” will in the end shows up at the bride’s wedding ceremony and takes her away from the “wrong” man. Yet, family opinions are equally crucial. The bride and groom, whether to walk into wedlock or not, are profoundly influenced by them. In *Guess Who*, the fiancée’s father dislikes her daughter’s husband-to-be and attempts to give him a hard time. The slogan of the poster is “Some in-laws were made to be broken.” Viola Fields (Jane Fonda) in *Monster-in-Law* tries everything possible to drive away her son’s girlfriend, Charlotte Cantilini (Jennifer Lopez). The situation gets worse when her son, Kevin Fields (Michael Vartan), proposes to Charlotte. In order to make sure the wedding is still in process, the top priority is for Charlotte to get approval from her future mother-in-law. The caption on the movie poster is “She met the perfect man. Then she met his mother.” However, in *You Again*, both the paternity and matriarch obstacles are absent.

The parental rejections are regarded as obstacles for the bride and groom to both

say “I do” in front of the altar. Such scenario is called the obstacle-overcoming wedding plot. In the typical obstacle-overcoming wedding plot, if the role of mother realizes how craftily her future daughter-in-law is, she will definitely refuse her son to marry such a hypocrite. Furthermore, as Simone de Beauvoir notes in mid-20century that “parents still raise their daughters with a view to marriage rather than to furthering her personal development” (137). Had Gail be the mother of the 1950s, she would unquestionably ask Marin to quit her promising PR career and find a husband as soon as possible. At different times, the ending of this type of movie could have been totally different. In Marni’s words, although “You can’t control the things that happen to you, but you can control the way you react to them. It’s all perception.” Despite that the influence of family values in mass media still remains strong in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century wedding comedy, female characters have some flexibility to choose their future and their lifestyle and are never stopped after the magically words “I do.”

Wedding comedy in essence, focuses on demystifying the concept of the pre-destined mate as well as aiming to caution the unmarried women not to be influenced by wedding-ideological complex. Additionally, this derivative genre highlights that the right mate is “the One” who appreciates the true personalities of the bride-to-be. Hence, the heroine needs to first complete herself and to find her own voice in order to meet “the One.” Moreover, to clarify one’s intention of getting married is another important idea in this derivative genre. Through the journey of self-transformation, the female protagonist gains her self-understanding and figures out her purpose of entering the wedlock. The moment she decides to anti-disguise herself is the time she successfully express her own subjectivity. On the other hand, in the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, wedding comedy intends to reexamine the conventional family values mainly on two aspects, which are, the diminishing cohabitation and the division of labor. Instead of restricting the sexual

diversity or strengthening the patriarchal oppression, wedding comedy strives to maintain the marriage bond and it also alerts the heroine and the audience to be serious about the responsibility of forming a family. That is to say, the emerging number of wedding comedy in the contemporary period to a certain extent promotes the awareness of having a well-functioned family by presenting a happy ending in which the parents devote themselves to the family together without abusing their influence.



## Conclusion

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the spirits of female awareness in Hollywood wedding comedy and the influence of feminism and post-feminism urge women viewers to actively quest for their true selves. Although family values are still deeply rooted in wedding comedy, contemporary female protagonists achieve more flexibility when faced with the traditional social norms.

In the early period, the accomplishment of the journey for a woman to understand herself and furthermore to seek self-transformation hardly exists at the end of the films, and ironically, her self-fulfillment is replaced by the love from a father figure who supposedly lead the couples to a happy life ever after. The traditional patriarchal values can still be observed in some wedding comedies such as *It Happened One Night* in this period and *The Graduate* in the decline period. Thereafter, most of the wedding comedies in the resurgence period start to focus on the influence of feminism. Meanwhile, the narrative of wedding comedy addresses more on female self-transformation in the end. Different from the occasional emphasis on family values in the 1970s and 1990s, the force of reaction to the society's point of view toward the value of marriage does not repeatedly repress female's self-liberation or self-determination. When the current marriage system faces the challenge of time, instead of provoking the anxiety and further to persuade women to get married by a certain age, wedding comedy insists on sending the message to the audience that instead of finding a perfect one to complete you, the important mission is to gain self-understanding. The endings of *Unmarried Woman* and *My Best Friend's Wedding* are the examples to convey such concept. In the contemporary period, the release of wedding comedy has reached a peak and the powerful father figure more or less loses its central impact in the family. In *Sex and the City*, for instance, Carrie overcomes



many obstacles in her love relationship accompanied by her close friends. Her parents, on the other hand, have never been mentioned in the film, which sounds like they never exist or if they do, they have no influence over Carrie's decision to marry Mr. Big or not.

Nowadays "wedding preparation" becomes an important element in romantic films. However, as Chrys Ingraham exclaims, "[c]onsidering the magnitude of wedding culture and wedding industry it is both shocking and mystifying that so few have studied weddings" (14). The significant meaning behind the emerging number of wedding comedy in the twenty-first century is associated with the high divorce rate in the contemporary society. Therefore, I elucidate my study of wedding comedy to provide a possible explanation toward this issue. The changing images of the female protagonists in each period, especially in the contemporary period, have made such progress. The wedding comedy genre is not merely to "appeal to a largely female audience, shape women's expectations and help them devise the 'standard package' of artifacts and activities that should make up a wedding," as Cele Otnes and Elizabeth Pleck comment (165). Wedding comedy is not a "standard package" to fulfill audience's "unrealistic expectations." In "DIE, BRIDEZILLA, DIE!," Heather Brook explains a neologism to refer to a woman who is desperately obsessed with the planning and organization of her wedding as "Bridezilla" (228). Films such as *Bride Wars* (2009) and *Bridesmaids* (2011) emphasize more on the concept of wedding envy and finding perfect wedding dresses. The distinction between the Bridezilla type of wedding films and wedding comedy is that instead of snatching the perfect gown out of other brides-to-bes, the latter considers wedding dress as a medium to express the bride's own voice and it is a reflection of her individual identity as well.

Furthermore, with the help of Galician's Myth#1 and Myth #10 to elucidate my point on the concept of "the One," I contend that the right mate is the one who

anti-disguises the bride. In addition, runaway wedding scene requires different perspectives in wedding comedy. Running away from the wedding ceremony is a means for a bride to pursue her true self rather than an impulsive behavior. In a sense, the popularity of wedding comedy can be a wake-up call for the bride-to-be and the ones in love to reexamine their current relationships. Through the self-transformation during wedding preparation, women in wedding comedy finally reach their self-knowledge. At the end of the journey they figure out their identities during their request, and make better choices. Wedding comedy strives to promote the merit to anti-disguise the bride-to-be and moreover, to re-interpret conventional family values. In my thesis, I have argued strongly to emphasize the importance of the two core values in this derivative genre.

Family values is an essential component in the construction of femininity and the restriction of women's sexual liberty as well as their choices of occupations. In wedding comedy genre, family values are explored and represented mainly on two aspects: "diminishing cohabitation" and the "division of labor." By re-interpreting these two conventional family values, wedding comedy has no intention to restrict female sexual liberty; instead, it highlights the significance of maintaining the marriage bond. To be more precise, the emerging number of wedding comedy persuades the female protagonists and the audience to prevent their marriages from coming to an end. On the one hand, the bride-to-be needs to clarify their intentions of getting married. On the other hand, in order to find her own voice anti-disguising herself is the crucial process during wedding preparation. The battle between the new women with successful careers and the traditional housewives are highly connected to the "division of labor" in wedding comedy. Sociologists such as Popenoe and Russell comment that a proper division of labor in a nuclear family is for women to stay at home as housewives and men to work outside as breadwinners. In wedding comedy, it approves this

arrangement and such image is considered as a way to strengthen family values. However, it does not imply that women devote themselves exclusively to their families is the only pathway toward happiness. Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City* and Anna Brady in *Leap Year* are professional career women. In these two wedding comedies, their professions do not interfere in their relationships with their lovers, and they both find their loved ones in the end of the movie. The main purpose for wedding comedy to present a perfect family in *You Again* is for audience to reexamine the family values. Although it downplays men's responsibility on the issue of divorce, it also presents a scene how Marni's father and mother cooperate with each other through difficult family problems and both parents participate in their children's lives without abusing the power of a paternity and matriarch. That is the key of labor division: both the paternity and matriarch have to devote themselves to their family.

Wedding comedy emphasizes female's transformation through wedding preparation. It reverses the conventional perspectives toward runaway bride and the influence of kinship. During the process, the bride-to-be understands herself better and has the courage to pursue her true self and her goals. In obstacle-overcoming wedding plot, the power of the paternity and the influence of the matriarch on certain level alert the fiancée to reexamine her relationship with the one she is about to marry and to make sure the person is "the One" she can form a family with. Most importantly, when the couples encounter the obstacles both of them can overcome it together. Although in terms of the concept of division of labor we have not yet seen a family formed by "househusband" and career wife, wedding comedy still continues to provide possibility and flexibility on reexamining gender roles, heterosexual romance, and wedding.

**Appendix A:**

Two categories of wedding comedy, with 33 filmic examples from 1990 to 2011

<b>The runaway wedding plot</b>	
I. The dynamic runaway plot	<i>French Kiss</i> (1995) <i>Runaway Bride</i> (1999) <i>It Had to be you</i> (2000) <i>The Wedding Planner</i> (2001) <i>Sweet Home Alabama</i> (2002) <i>Brown Sugar</i> (2002) <i>13 Going on 30</i> (2004) <i>Rumor Has It</i> (2005) <i>Ghosts of Girlfriends Past</i> (2009) <i>Leap Year</i> (2009) <i>Something Borrowed</i> (2011)
II. The passive runaway plot	<i>My Best Friend's Wedding</i> (1997) <i>The Wedding Singer</i> (1998) <i>Bubble Boy</i> (2001) <i>Enchanted</i> (2007) <i>Run Fatboy Run</i> (2007) <i>Made of Honor</i> (2008)
<b>The obstacle-overcoming wedding plot</b>	
I. The obstacle from paternity plot	<i>3 Men and a Little Lady</i> (1990) <i>Father of the Bride</i> (1991) <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> (1999) <i>Meet the Parents</i> (2000) <i>The In-Laws</i> (2003) <i>Guess Who</i> (2005) <i>Our Family Wedding</i> (2010)
II. The obstacle from matriarch plot	<i>Say It Isn't So</i> (2001) <i>The Notebook</i> (2004) <i>Monster-in-Law</i> (2005) <i>Arthur</i> (2011)
III. Highlight family values	<i>How to Make an American Quilt</i> (1995) <i>Picture Perfect</i> (1997) <i>Bend It Like Beckham</i> (2002) <i>American Wedding</i> (2003) <i>License to Wed</i> (2007)

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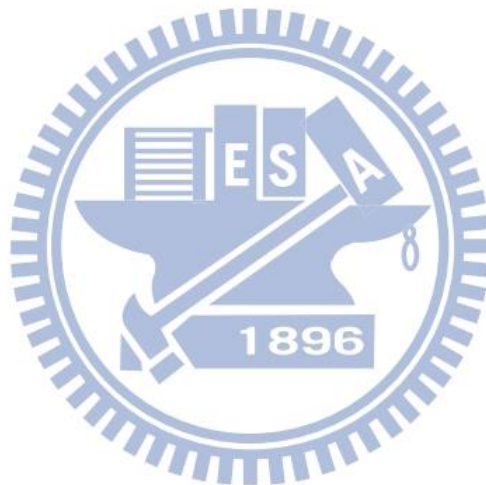
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