

# Wedding Industrial Complex in Celia Laskey's *So Happy for You*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the wedding industrial complex in modern American culture via a feminist lens and through an analysis of Celia Laskey's (2022) *So Happy for You*. It expands on Ingraham's study from *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture* (2008), focusing on the impact of the American wedding business on American wedding beliefs, specifically on its role in promoting capitalist, heterosexist, and racist narratives about weddings. The paper highlights a variety of factors, ranging from familial and cultural pressures to internet matching and popular culture, that contribute to entrenched traditional roles, collective heterosexual fantasies, and the pursuit of marital perfection. The paper also emphasizes the negative effects of these factors on individual and relational well-being, such as mental and physical health difficulties, reduced intimacy, and strained marital compatibility. The paper goes on to explain how these interactions perpetuate established gender standards, racial biases, and socioeconomic distinctions. Laskey's story is a sobering mirror of current society realities, warning of the dire consequences if the celebration of weddings continues unabated. The findings call for a critical analysis of the wedding industrial complex's upheld values and narratives, as well as their ramifications on both personal and societal levels. The paper's goal with this investigation is to develop a more thorough understanding of the complicated interplay between societal expectations, personal goals, and the commercialized wedding industry.

**Keywords:** wedding industrial complex, contemporary American culture, Celia Laskey's *So Happy for You*, idealization of wedding, white wedding

## Embarking on a Marital Inquiry: An Introduction

In her novel *So Happy for You* (2022), Celia Laskey depicts a contemporary American environment. One of the characters, Robin, a homosexual PhD candidate, is used to examine the fixation on marriage present within modern society. The narrative begins when Ellie, a distant friend, invites Robin to be her Maid of Honor. We discover that Ellie is attracted to traditional but questionable practices after encountering the “Wedding Industrial Complex”, a term used when criticizing the commercialization of opulent wedding ceremonies. The focus shifts to several companies that advocate a prescriptive narrative to ensure the “perfect” wedding ceremony. The participation of Ellie highlights the societal and market-induced pressures that drive couples to host lavish celebrations. The tale illustrates the societal conventions and commercial manipulations that promote wedding extravagance through the suffering endured by Ellie.

*So Happy for You* (2022) by Celia Laskey provides a literary lens to explore the interconnections of heterosexuality, race, and class within the wedding industrial complex. By examining these processes, this study aims to fill a scholarly gap by providing new insights into the sociological and economic causes affecting modern marital patterns. This article tries to illuminate the subtle and overt ways the wedding business, reinforced by ingrained societal structures, shapes individual and collective attitudes regarding marriage and love. This study investigates the effect the wedding industrial complex has on heterosexuality, racism, and class. Further, the study hypothesizes that this complex maintains established gender norms, racial biases, and class distinctions, exercising control and potentially misinforming individuals. This investigation encourages a critical examination of the entrenched societal and economic factors influencing modern matrimonial relationships. It also explores their broader implications for individual and societal well-being.

## Unveiling White Wedding: An Ingraham-inspired Theoretical Framework

This study employs a theoretical framework devised by Ingraham to explore the cultural intricacies of conventional wedding customs. Particular emphasis is placed on the concept of a “white wedding” in the United States, as depicted in the novel *So Happy for You* by Celia Laskey (2022). “White wedding” is a term used to describe a traditional wedding scenario in which a bride wears a formal white gown. Traditionally, she has a retinue of attendants and witnesses, participates in a religious ceremony, and then celebrates with a reception and a honeymoon (Ingraham, 2008, p. 5). In addition, the study investigates wedding ideologies to unravel the complexities of normative heterosexuality, global economic structures, and the influence of popular culture on the ritualistic aspects of life, specifically through the lens of the “white wedding”

Ingraham (2008) examines the institution of heterosexuality through the lens of white weddings, arguing that the wedding culture and industry are crucial in determining how heterosexuality and marriage are socially constructed and perpetuated (pp. 3-5). Despite their symbolic and cultural significance, weddings frequently escape critical scrutiny. Consequently, this encourages a variety of socially created heterosexual behaviors. This aspect of the framework created by Ingraham is echoed in the novel by Laskey, as the protagonist struggles with complex social expectations tied to wedding traditions.

Shifting the focus to economic dimensions, Ingraham (2008) highlights expansion within the wedding industry to sustain consumer engagement despite a drop in wedding occurrences (pp. 11-12). By integrating wedding-related storylines into popular culture, this expansion covers many media channels and illustrates the relationship between consumerism and wedding culture. *So Happy for You* explores this blending of consumerism and wedding customs. Therefore, the framework provided by Ingraham is an appropriate lens for this study.

Delving into the ideological realm, Ingraham (2008) investigates how marriage emphasizes heteronormativity and conventional gender norms. The traditional white wedding reflects the broader societal norms

and expectations around heterosexuality and marriage. The detailed depiction of this ideological reproduction in the story by Laskey demonstrates the applicability of the paradigm supplied by Ingraham. While providing a good framework for this study, the approach advocated by Ingraham has certain drawbacks, including its predominant concentration on American, white, middle-class and heterosexual dynamics, which may limit its applicability in other cultural and socioeconomic contexts. The strong emphasis on commercialization may overshadow other important factors, such as the cultural and individual values inherent in wedding customs. This study recognizes these drawbacks and works to supplement the framework devised by Ingraham with various viewpoints to provide a more comprehensive examination. By using Ingraham's framework, this study seeks to understand the effects of the wedding industrial complex on people, especially Ellie, the white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual female character. The investigation considers how consumerism, capitalism, and heteronormativity interact to shape contemporary wedding culture. Essentially, Ingraham's framework enables a discussion on how digital media reinforces or challenges conventional narratives about marriage and heteronormativity.

### **Tracing Commercial Love: A Review of Literature**

Illouz (1997) investigates how romantic love and capitalism interacted in the early 20th century by focusing on advertising for a range of products, including “shampoo, beauty creams, cars, motor oil, and cereals” (p. 37). This investigation reveals how advertising narratives commercialize romantic values. However, Illouz's primary focus on advertising narratives may ignore the broader socio-cultural processes that combine subjective experiences with commercial forces. My study explores the commercialization of the pursuit of illusory and romanticized models and values by using Ingraham's framework to examine how society constructs romantic relationships, expanding the discussion to include aspects of intimacy.

Shifting the focus to matrimonial aspirations, Bambacas (2002) investigates the public and popular discourses that influence the female

desire for white weddings. This analysis demonstrates how cultural narratives prioritize female involvement in organizing and carrying out white weddings, maintaining gender normative behaviors and traditional gender roles (p. 194). However, Bambacas' insights could become more impactful if she incorporated real stories from brides-to-be or added some empirical data into her analysis to challenge or support the narratives portrayed by the texts and media she examines. In exploring the gap, my paper uses a feminist lens to investigate the wedding industrial complex, and delves into the effects on individuals and their relationships. With a reference to Laskey's "So Happy for You," it probes further into the impact of sociological and financial factors enmeshed in the American marriage mentality and Ellie's life.

Delving into the wedding market sphere, Otnes and Pleck (2003) analyze how the market manipulates the subjectivities of the bride and promotes excessive consumption in the tradition of the grandiose white wedding (p. 62). Yet, without substantially considering emotional and symbolic factors may lead to a distorted interpretation. By examining the psychological, family, and social factors that support the continuation of expensive wedding customs, my study seeks to advance this discourse while highlighting the negative consequences of the wedding industrial complex on women, particularly brides.

Ingraham (2008), building on her earlier work (1999), expands her examination of the wedding industrial complex to include homosexual marriage, its connections to white weddings, heterosexuality, and demographic changes in matrimonial patterns both nationally and internationally. Ingraham's expanded analysis responds to criticisms by Freeman (2002), who suggests that weddings might serve as platforms for alternative forms of intimacy and community by challenging prevailing gender, sexuality, and temporality norms.

In conclusion, the writings of Illouz, Bambacas, Otnes and Pleck, and Ingraham provide a solid framework for understanding how romantic ideals, consumer culture, and social expectations connect. However, a more nuanced examination of personal agency and the broader socio-cultural circumstances could enrich these discussions. My study intends to build on this foundation by examining the intricacies of the function

of digital media and the numerous factors influencing contemporary love and marital aspirations. The authors mentioned here provide a collective picture of a society where romantic ideals are inherent to accepted social conventions. Essentially, these romantic ideals are commodities. My study aims to delve deeper into these phenomena by examining the complex interaction between traditional and digital media in shaping modern romantic and matrimonial aspirations. This study highlights the importance of analyzing and understanding the contemporary romantic ideals that underpin our perceptions of matrimony.

## Analysis

### ***Tracing the Economic and Societal Roots of Wedding Traditions***

The wedding industry, which promotes and fuels the commercialization of weddings, fosters an extravagant culture regarding bridal and guest dress. Ironically, the economic hardships of the 1920s to 1950s created new wedding customs that encouraged excessive spending on ceremonies and created a robust market for wedding celebrations (Laskey, 2022, p. 45). In *So Happy for You* (2022), the characters personify the socioeconomic dynamics involved. These characters include Kaivan's and Ellie's mothers, who dress extravagantly and represent how the wedding industry has succeeded in normalizing such extravagance. Bambacas (2002) provides insight into the social forces that push women to have grandiose white weddings and put them in charge of organizing these important celebrations (p. 194). The clothing, frequently reserved solely for weddings, is a visible representation of this deeply entrenched extravagance. The dress worn by Ellie's mother, described as something "she'd never otherwise wear" (Laskey, 2022, p. 249), is a prime example of the ubiquitous cultural expectations shaped by industry pressures that determine the sartorial choices of the individual participant during weddings. This customer behavior is consistent with the description of market diversification provided by Ingraham (2008). This tactic is employed in the wedding industry to maintain and expand its clientele in the face of falling marriage rates (p. 11). This paper explores the interaction

between the expectations of society and business objectives, and highlights the interplay of economic and cultural elements that perpetuate the exaltation of affluence in modern marriage traditions. The ingrained culture of extravagance connects with racial and class social structures in addition to issues of finances and personal preference, a topic further discussed in the discussion of white weddings that followed.

The portrayal of “white weddings” in *So Happy for You* (2022) highlights the interwoven themes of traditional matrimonial aesthetics and racial hierarchies by emphasizing the social privileges granted to white people. This paper explores a broader debate on racial identity and societal inequality in addition to the iconic image of a bride in a white gown. These subtle depictions of “whiteness” in weddings highlight racial identities and extend the advantages of being white in society to include marital relationships. By creating a narrative of racial exclusivity, Ingraham explains how the depictions of white couples in these ceremonies “set both a race and a class standard for who marries and who has a white wedding” (Ingraham, 2008, p. 53). This portrayal does more than promote a particular aesthetic; it covertly encourages racial exclusivity, often pushing other racial and ethnic groups to the margins. Analyzing this portrayal exposes racial features of weddings that are rooted in historical and systemic biases, and mirrors larger societal patterns of racial hierarchy. While subtle, this narrative adds to the possible marginalization or stereotyping of people of various races and ethnicities, exposing the intricate interplay between racial identity and marriage traditions. The racial overtones within wedding customs emerge as a reflective lens, necessitating further examination to understand and confront how racial hierarchies are supported and perpetuated within the matrimonial sphere. As previously discussed, the interaction of economic and cultural variables in generating wedding extravagance provides fertile ground for diving deeper into the racial and class hierarchies ingrained within these marriage rituals.

In Laskey’s novel, the entwinement of class and racial inequalities is examined through the lens of the expensive wedding to demonstrate how cultural conventions and the wedding business disproportionately benefit the wealthy. Ellie, a white woman from an “upper-middle-class”

family, sits at the crossroads of these hierarchies, her beautiful wedding gown and diamond ring reflecting more than just riches; they represent the underlying cultural systems that perpetuate class distinctions (Laskey, 2022, p. 32). This scenario further unravels the idea of romantic love, which typically emphasizes love as the foundation for marital connections and thus becomes entwined with these hierarchies. Illouz (1997) investigates connections between romantic behaviors and class divisions, emphasizing the portrayal of wealth as a necessary component for obtaining the media-promoted romantic ideal. More than mere adornments, Ellie's eight-thousand-dollar wedding gown and diamond ring emerge as significant emblems of class inequalities, providing a physical sign system that melds whiteness, wealth, and the ritual of weddings (Laskey, 2022, p. 269). This fusion deepens the romantic love ideology by fusing love ideals with race and class inequalities. This narrative is consistent with Ingraham's (2008) discussion of weddings as essential heterosexual rituals in popular culture that conceptually seek to legitimate the regulation of sexuality through marriage (p. 23). This narrative reveals the subtle ways marriage customs, powered by romantic love ideology, replicate and reinforce embedded societal structures. Thus, evaluating weddings goes beyond cultural critique, opening a window to deeper social dynamics and emphasizing the importance of deconstructing marriage customs to expose the ingrained racial and class disparities they represent and reinforce. The discussion of racial and class hierarchies entwined with wedding extravagance serves as a prelude to a broader consideration of how the selling of romantic ideals contributes to the perpetuation of these societal divisions.

Weddings, according to Ingraham (2008), are a "concentrated site for the operation and reproduction of organized heterosexuality" (p. 3), fusing romantic and economic desires. This commodification facilitates entry into a consumerist culture by replacing realistic marriage expectations with romanticized illusions. The monetization of romance in weddings, as seen by red-colored gifts and romantically suggestive nail colors like "Rosy Future" (Laskey, 2022, p. 165), promotes the wedding business. This commodification influences consumer sentiments, fueling a trend of extravagant wedding expenditures. Ingraham (2008)

investigates the use of market diversity to maintain customer involvement in the face of declining wedding rates (p. 11). Linking the concept of love with ethnic and romantic ideals stimulates financial investments with marketing methods. This situation necessitates a thorough investigation of the financial components embedded in marriage ceremonies and accompanying consumer behaviors to determine their impact on the economic viability of the wedding industry. This investigation of the commodification of romance and its repercussions on consumer behaviors in the marriage business foreshadows a more in-depth examination of individual experiences. The following discussion attempts to unravel the variables that create marriage wishes via the lens of a character like Ellie by analyzing the societal construction of matrimonial goals.

### ***The Influences behind Ellie’s Marriage Ideals***

The idea that marriage desires are socially constructed rather than naturally generated is crucial to this analysis. According to Ingraham (2008), marital preferences are not determined biologically but are products of culture (p. 7). This theoretical position is mirrored in Ellie’s narrative, as her strong desire for marriage reflects the broader cultural construction of marital desires. Ellie’s perception of and longing for marriage are shaped by various external factors, including familial expectations, societal conventions, and media exposure. The inquiry seeks to unravel the complex factors influencing Ellie’s marital ambitions by analyzing how these elements influence her choices regarding matrimony.

Ellie’s familial constraints represent a broader social narrative on marital goals. Her mother’s earlier obsession with Ellie’s matrimonial opportunities demonstrates a strong desire for marital conformity. The propensity to create romantic images and pry into Ellie’s romantic affairs displays her mother’s significant preoccupation with marriage. Unlike the traditional parental emphasis on academics, Ellie’s mother is only concerned with the relationship status of her daughter. The emotions of her mother, swinging from initial excitement to ultimate dismay during the beginning and end of Ellie’s romantic involvements, are reflected in words such as “What did you do?” as if it was somehow

[Ellie's] fault when Ellie breaks up with her boyfriend (Laskey, 2022, p. 286). The behavior of Ellie's mother exemplifies societal marital pressures, which escalate during social encounters with her friends (Laskey, 2022, p. 249). This pressure extends to Ellie, as illustrated in judgmental remarks by her mother, stating that her friends' daughters are married (Laskey, 2022, p. 288). The annual expectation for grandchildren adds to the strain, mirroring the cultural clock ticking against Ellie. This household setting, which is rife with marital and procreation expectations, is reminiscent of Ingraham's (2008) description of the matrimonial norms in society. It reveals the intertwining of familial tales and cultural conventions, emphasizing the sharp impact of pressures on the marital desires of Ellie. The story of Ellie's family is a microcosm of social, marital, and heteronormative ideals.

The widespread belief that marriage equals happiness, as shown in the story of Ellie and her mother, is anchored in societal, cultural, and economic frameworks. Her mother has a romanticized perspective of marriage. This view influences Ellie's outlook significantly, defining her ideal wedding day. Ellie internalizes marriage as the peak of happiness. A photo album kept by her mother exemplifies Ellie's attitude towards marriage. The album features images of a "long white dress, the sparkly ring on her finger, and the colossal, tiered cake," coupled with such reminiscences as "Happiest day of my life" (Laskey, 2022, p. 283). The idyllic image, vanishes when the reality of Ellie's wedding day shows how mismatched she and Kaivan are in their relationship. Kaivan is a man whom she met on the dating application. Ellie's mother tells Robin, "When you're thirty-four, any man willing to marry you is right!" This remark demonstrates her mother's yearning for Ellie to get married at the advanced age of thirty-four. (Laskey, 2022, p. 251) This remark also reveals ageism and sexism as interwoven. The desperation mirrors broader societal forces encouraging marriage, which frequently come at the expense of individual compatibility. Ingraham (2008) describes this scenario as a manifestation of established heteronormativity. The white wedding is a gauge of personal and societal affirmation and serves as a social milestone. The increasing pressure on women to marry mirrors cultural

norms urging individuals to prioritize marital compliance over personal happiness, aligning with Bambacas (2002) on the cultural forms directing individuals into matrimony. A closer investigation of these aspects exposes the various forces affecting marital desires, providing a comprehensive understanding of the societal constructions surrounding marriage and happiness.

The societal pressure to marry, evident in conversations between Ellie and her mother, demonstrates the coercion of individuals into marriage at the expense of personal happiness and compatibility. The continual intervention of her mother into Ellie's relationships serves as a microcosm for broader cultural standards. These standards and conventions affect what Ellie sees as her marital goals. Her behavior adheres to a societal narrative that associates marriage with personal and social achievement. This connection confirms Ingraham's (2008) claim that the institution of heterosexuality, exemplified by the white wedding ritual, strengthens these societal expectations. The instance of Ellie and her mother bolsters Ingraham's argument by providing a lens through which to study the negative consequences of adhering to socially established marital rules. Furthermore, the expectations of Ellie's mother demonstrate the influence of the wedding industrial complex, alluding to the economic forces involved. This complex perpetuates a culture of costly weddings according to traditional norms and, as a result, sustains a loop of growing expectations and increasing expenditure as part of marital rituals.

Government marriage incentives emphasize heteronormativity. This reflects the desire to reinforce traditional marital arrangements. The falling number of couples opting for marriage and the increase in divorce rates correlate to economic and demographic concerns, requiring government intervention (Laskey, 2022, p. 15). Financial assistance from the National Organization for Marriage and preferential loan rates for married couples are examples of such responses. Governmental policy is evident in marriage-focused ads and the restriction of abortion (Laskey, 2022, p. 44). Ingraham (2008) emphasizes the significance of marriage in regulating heterosexuality, which resonates with broader societal goals. Active participation by the government reveals a determined

effort to preserve the institution of marriage, with repercussions across economic, demographic, and individual dimensions. The narrative highlights a significant conflict between personal marital aspirations and cultural expectations, a duality exacerbated by government pro-marriage incentives (Laskey, 2022, p. 16). The investigation of cultural and political effects initiates consideration of the impact of commerce and the media. These are the channels through which these broader norms and incentives are frequently spread and maintained.

The advertisement promotes marital customs and instills dread to encourage individuals toward marriage. The narrative specifically spotlights advertisements that derogatorily identify women approaching certain ages as “leftover” or “rotten” (Laskey, 2022, pp. 15-16), serving as a sharp reflection of societal expectations. The narrative “Female Fertility Decline Begins in Late 20s,” which follows Ellie after her thirty-first birthday illustrates how such advertising strategies can alter individual actions, leading her to the dating app Spouse Spotter (Laskey, 2022, pp. 289-290). This situation exemplifies how advertising can reinforce traditional marital norms and direct human behaviors to conform to expectations of marriage within society. Ingraham (2008) investigates how the wedding industry, through cultural symbols and narratives, entrenches heteronormativity within society systems. In addition, Illouz (1997) reveals how modern romantic ideals are linked closely with advertising, which supports marriage. These perspectives coincide with the depiction of advertising in the novel, with the narrative demonstrating a relationship between social marital conventions and individual marital desires. Consequently, the ability of the advertising industry to manipulate and thereby uphold traditional marital paradigms is exposed.

As shown in the novel, dating apps like “Spouse Spotter”, function as conduits for instilling gender-biased marital customs. “Spouse Spotter” provides a “marriageability rating” (MR) statistic, which uses different criteria for men and women as proof of inherent gender prejudices (Laskey, 2022, p. 14). The pejorative classification of women, especially as ‘leftovers’ or ‘rotten’ based on their age and marital status, highlights societal pressure for early marriage (Laskey,

2022, p. 15). This gender prejudice aspect of the novel parallels Ingraham's (2008) investigation of how cultural and commercial institutions foster heteronormative marital expectations. Furthermore, the story emphasizes the role of dating apps in amplifying conventional gender biases and the marital expectations imposed by society, which can skew individual perceptions and marriage decision-making. The narrative engages in a broader conversation through the lens of "Spouse Spotter", clarifying the symbiotic interplay between dating apps and prevalent societal standards regarding marriageability. Primarily, this investigation examines the digital mediation of marital norms. However, it also considers the broader societal impact these dating apps have and the agendas they appear to mimic, reinforce, and sustain.

Websites serve as modern-day amplifiers of traditional matrimonial ideologies, with *brides.com* in the narrative exemplifying this trend. The journey taken by Ellie reveals a range of wedding charms, emphasizing a union of websites and age-old marital rituals (Laskey, 2022, p. 228). Experiences range from the dramatic to the bizarre, reflecting a digital echo of older rituals that underpin matrimony (Laskey, 2022, p. 228). An extreme charm, available by email, demonstrates a synthesis of digital distribution and conventional superstitions (Laskey, 2022, p. 292). This digital representation of marriage standards is consistent with Ingraham's (2008) analysis, highlighting conventional matrimonial norms. Through *brides.com*, the narrative criticizes the role of websites in changing and reinforcing traditional marriage dialogues with a digital reiteration of the standards that define matrimony.

As depicted in popular culture, the concept of a "white wedding", catalyzes the traditional ideals designed to reinforce this perception of what constitutes marriage. The practice promotes classist, heterosexist, and racist conventions. It goes beyond being considered simply a sign of wealth, acting as a channel for the dominant class to impose societal marriage norms through mainstream media. The constant projection of wedding imagery through various popular culture media, be it cinema, TV shows, romantic comedies, art, or mythology, reinforces traditional ideas of marriage. This observation is consistent with the insights provided by Ingraham (2008) and Bambacas (2002), who

emphasize the essential role played by the business market in shaping love and matrimonial engagements, as well as the influence of cultural forms on attempts by women to represent the ‘ideal bride.’ White wedding glorification creates a powerful socioeconomic narrative, anchoring class-based and heteronormative standards inside the cultural framework. This narrative illustrates the relationship between popular culture and traditional marital rules, which reflects a broader devotion to established matrimonial conventions within society.

The representation of weddings in Disney films reinforces traditional marital and racial conventions, impacting societal perception. Ellie’s love of *The Little Mermaid* and other Disney movies illustrates a societal trend in which such stories influence adult romantic expectations (Laskey, 2022, p. 284). The films often feature white, thin, feminine figures as bridal emblems, perpetuating a restricted definition of matrimonial elegance. This imagery fuels the princess fantasies held by Ellie while also influencing mainstream racial ideas of the desirability of marriage. According to Ingraham (2008), such depictions promote a romantic love ideology that links to socio-political institutions. Disney films reflect and reinforce standards within society. The Disney Company is responsible for racially and gendered narratives that have the potential to inform audience opinions of marriage desirability and racial inclusion. As a result, Disney films shape racial and gendered matrimonial ideologies with the lack of diverse representation in popular culture.

TV series, such as *Wild for Love*, promote and naturalize heterosexual ideas by obscuring their societal construction. Gender stereotypes are unnoticed by an audience absorbed in the show since they represent cultural norms (Laskey, 2022, p. 153). This obscurity prevents critical engagement with these depictions. Many television shows, notably family sitcoms, mostly feature heterosexual relationships, reinforcing traditional gender standards (Laskey, 2022, pp. 15, 290). In addition, depicting violence against unmarried women functions as social control as it penalizes deviations from marital norms. These heteronormative narratives permeate other media forms, such as romantic comedies, further reinforcing traditional gender norms. According to Ingraham (2008), media representations contribute to normalizing

heteronormativity. Similarly, Bambacas (2002) explains how everyday cultural discourses generate expectations toward idealized bridal imagery, reinforcing heteronormative practices (p. 194), and reflecting the ideologies perpetuated by TV shows. This analysis reveals how TV shows support heteronormative and gendered ideologies through such depictions.

Heteronormative and patriarchal ideals are perpetuated in romantic comedies, affecting audience conceptions of gender and love. These films frequently portray women as inferior to men, skewing perceptions of romantic fulfillment. The level of engagement Ellie has in these romantic comedies illustrates the extent to which such ideologies are consumed by the viewer and internalized. For example, in *She's All That*, the female character forgives deception by the male and accepts to be with him, emphasizing feminine subjugation (Laskey, 2022, p. 284). Similarly, romantic comedies such as *10 Things I Hate About You* and *There's Something About Mary* promote romantic attraction above rational decision-making. This assertion links female self-esteem to patriarchal affirmation (Laskey, 2022, p. 284). Viewing these portrayals increases Ellie's desire for marriage (Laskey, 2022, p. 205). Ingraham (2008) asserts that media narratives of this type support heteropatriarchal institutions by normalizing heteronormativity and patriarchal relationships. The reinforcement of these ideals in romantic comedies, as seen in Ellie's acceptance of heteronormative attitudes and female servitude under the pretext of "love," highlights the importance of critically examining the societal repercussions of romantic comedies.

Art enhances the romanticization of weddings by fusing romantic and materialistic themes. *La Mariée* by Marc Chagall at the Malibu Club is a prominent example, described as an "ode to young love" (Laskey, 2022, p. 222). It depicts a bride in a red gown and white veil, with a suitor nearby (Laskey, 2022, p. 222), underlining the romantic allure of the wedding. This depiction combines material symbols with romantic ideals. Ingraham (2008) focuses on this confluence by analyzing a commercial wedding complex that combines the values of romance and materialism. This concept is also evident in *La Mariée*, a painting

that demonstrates how art has had a significant influence in propagating glorified marriage narratives.

The sexist mentality is observable throughout mythology and folklore, particularly in wedding charms. Ellie's mother narrated a Polish myth in which an evil spirit persuades a bride to murder her best friend to avoid a cursed marriage (Laskey, 2022, p. 266). This folklore highlights a sexist premise: a husband takes precedence over all other connections in the life of a wife (Laskey, 2022, p. 267). This concept contrasts with the expectations placed on men, highlighting a gendered burden carried by women (Laskey, 2022, p. 267). The story prompts Ellie and others to contemplate lethal action. Ellie's violent conduct, combined with the twelve other brides actualizing this murderous notion, symbolizes the ominous reality born of myth (Laskey, 2022, p. 280). This genre of narrative, according to Ingraham (2008), serves to perpetuate gendered expectations. Although hypothetical, this story provokes serious thought about the ability of folklore and mythology to entrench detrimental gender standards. Bambacas (2002) examines how traditional wedding narratives covertly compel women into predetermined gender roles, shedding light on the significant and sometimes deadly effect of societal conventions. The preceding discussion on the harmful gender norms perpetuated through folklore extends to how the wedding industrial complex, through seemingly benign rituals such as bridal showers, maintains traditional gender roles, further entrenching women in a cycle of societal expectations.

### ***The Effects of the Wedding Industrial Complex***

Bridal showers reinforce traditional gender norms by reflecting the anticipated household responsibilities of women. The type of gifts received by Ellie at her bridal shower emphasizes this narrative. The presentation of a "hanger for her wedding dress" by Mindy (Laskey, 2022, p. 109) represents cultural expectations around bridal apparel. Similarly, the "rose quartz wine stopper" and "a red Le Creuset Dutch oven" (Laskey, 2022, p. 109), from Isabel and Shaun reflect traditional domestic roles, linking Ellie with the customary position of "wife". Ingraham's (2008) examination of the 'wedding complex' expands on

this phenomenon, illustrating how cultural phenomenon maintains gendered expectations. Wedding showers have a multifaceted role in reaffirming and embedding gender norms within societal narratives as individuals transition into marital life, as demonstrated by the experience of Ellie.

White weddings in the United States reinforce a homogeneous image of matrimonial customs by perpetuating a traditional narrative of marriage, particularly among white women. Laskey (2022) emphasizes the prevalence of such ceremonies, estimating “five thousand, maybe even ten,” displaying a uniform portrayal of brides (p. 257). Ellie, for example, represents “an iteration of every blonde, white bride who had come before her” (Laskey, 2022, p. 257). The tradition of the diamond engagement ring, as shown in the scenario involving Beth, represents this uniformity, as “the same diamond ring every other woman was given on bended knee” (Laskey, 2022, p. 73). The trend continues on social media because social media provides a forum for standardized ring display. Laskey (2022) identifies a universal pose in which women display their engagement ring on the chest of their husbands, reflecting cultural standards over personal ideals (p. 20). Ingraham (2008), states that wedding culture perpetuates a greater societal tendency toward heteronormative matrimonial ideals. Furthermore, Otnes and Pleck (2003) emphasize the involvement of the wedding industrial complex in marketing idealized white wedding imagery, which contributes to the perpetuation of traditional marriage narratives. This commitment to custom, as evidenced by consistent rituals and social media trends, demonstrates the lasting impact of ‘white wedding’ traditions on gender norms and heterosexual ideology.

Matrimonial impulses, which are widely assumed to be natural, are shaped by cultural standards, as described by Ingraham (2008, p. 7), who refers to these desires as products of culture. The emphasis on heterosexual relationships in American culture strongly encourages people to marry. This drive raises an important question: do matrimonial pursuits stem from personal wants or cultural indoctrination? Indoctrination like this discreetly navigates racial and heteronormative narratives, ingraining them in societal consciousness. The intersection of race,

heteronormativity, and marital desires reveals a complicated interplay that necessitates further investigation to determine its societal ramifications. This investigation is critical for dissecting societal myths about marriage and clarifying how they affect individual desires and perpetuate specific racial and heteronormative agendas.

The dominant narrative encouraging marriage jeopardizes the quest for ideal partnerships, forcing people like Ellie to prioritize marital readiness over compatibility. The dilemma Ellie experiences is evident when she reflects, “finding the perfect man or getting married?... I looked for guys who just seemed ready to marry” (Laskey, 2022, p. 288). Her marriage to Kaivan represents this societal pressure. The basis for their marriage is mutual readiness for marriage rather than personal compatibility. Ellie and Kaivan are “a good match” because they want to marry and establish a family (Laskey, 2022, p. 17). Ellie’s decision is motivated by the readiness for Kaivan to marry rather than his meeting her requirements for an ideal partner. This reasoning is consistent with marriage norms in society (Laskey, 2022, p. 290). This decision exemplifies criticism by Ingraham (2008) of heteronormative structures that prioritize marriage. The story of Ellie and Kaivan illustrates the ongoing societal pressure that overshadows personal desires for a suitable match. It shows a greater societal precedence of marital conformity over individual compatibility.

The societal imposition of marital expectations poses a significant threat to individual mental and physical health. The consequences of this threat impact the well-being of that individual. The result is the anguish suffered by Ellie. Her fear of marriage leads to mental suffering, which escalates to suicide ideation (Laskey, 2022, pp. 17, 141). When she enters her late twenties, her anxiety becomes more intense, resulting in bodily symptoms such as muscle tightness and recurring stomach aches (Laskey, 2022, pp. 287, 291-292). Engagement, in contrast to the anticipated delight, provides Ellie just a sense of relief. The narrative demonstrates a disparity between cultural marital expectations and individual satisfaction (Laskey, 2022, p. 17). This story aligns with the critique of societal constructs that push women into marriage, as stated by Ingraham (2008). Ellie’s story exemplifies the negative

consequences of a marital ideology that links marriage to personal and societal fulfillment. This narrative exposes the societal norms that obstruct individual pursuits of happiness and well-being.

The obsessive desire to marry, driven by societal conventions, weakens the essence of genuine intimacy, transforming initial interactions into transactional exchanges. A woman describes the nature of a transactional relationship during a barroom scene when she wishes for “two kids... And a gross household income of at least two hundred thousand” (Laskey, 2022, p. 20). This statement demonstrates a preference for measurable expectations over emotional resonance. The transactional approach to marriage happens in Ellie and Kaivan’s hasty decision to marry following a courtship lasting “less than a year” (Laskey, 2022, p. 16). Kaivan’s recurrent absences due to “networking event[s]” (Laskey, 2022, p. 16) demonstrate a disregard for nurturing intimacy, which contrasts with his lavish proposal of a ring enclosed in a “gigantic scallop” (Laskey, 2022, p. 19). Such behavior echoes Illouz’s (1997) critique of a modern romance paradigm in which consumptive gestures hide within images intended to demonstrate love. The scenarios portrayed reveal a cultural framework that favors marital conformity over the depth of the relationship, calling into question the underlying ideals that drive personal relationships.

The societal obsession with perfect weddings strains interpersonal connections dramatically, as demonstrated by the actions of Ellie. Her desire for “a big wedding” (Laskey, 2022, p. 98) reflects a larger societal narrative that favors elaborate wedding celebrations. Ellie is obsessed. She adopts extreme measures to ensure her wedding will be perfect. For example, Ellie keeps Robin in a closet to prevent her from absenting herself from the event (Laskey, 2022, p. 294). Minor disruptions considered trivial under normal circumstances trigger disproportionate emotions. This behavior demonstrates the extent to which Ellie is dedicated to her precisely designed strategy (Laskey, 2022, p. 175). This aspect of the story mirrors the argument put forward by Ingraham (2008) that criticizes the pursuit of wedding perfection. Consequently, it is crucial to critically analyze modern marital discourses to uncover their profound impact on individual and relational dynamics.

Superstitions surrounding marriage reveal a desperation to achieve what is considered marital success. The tendency towards superstitious behaviors uncovers sinister cultural practices. For example, in some cultures, the soon-to-be bride exhumes human bones for consumption on her wedding day to ensure longevity in her marriage (Laskey, 2022, p. 25). Another distressing ritual involves brides consuming menstrual blood to cleanse their union forever (Laskey, 2022, p. 83). Ellie's narrative reflects this when she faces pressure to enact a blood-related ritual despite her aversion (Laskey, 2022, p. 197). The scenario escalates to Ellie contemplating sacrificing her Maid of Honor, Robin, indicating a willingness to cross moral lines for marital blessings (Laskey, 2022, p. 266). This willingness to adopt extreme behaviours aligns with the description of cultural systems that place a high value on marriage proposed by Ingraham (2008). These behaviors have individuals go to extreme lengths to achieve what they perceive to be a successful marriage. These narratives, representing a mix of superstition and societal expectations, reveal the alarming extent people may go to under the pretext of ensuring marital success. This desperation hints at a deeper societal valorization of marriage.

## Final Reflections

Examination of the wedding industrial complex in *So Happy for You* reveals several significant factors, including familial and societal pressures, advertising, online matchmaking, popular culture, and folklore. These factors contribute to the perpetuation of traditional roles, shared heterosexual fantasies, and a fixation on marital perfection. This investigation sheds light on the negative consequences for mental and physical health, intimacy, and marital compatibility. It also emphasizes how the wedding industrial complex reinforces established gender norms, racial biases, and class inequalities that encourage individuals, particularly women, towards a heteronormative narrative that may conflict with their real wishes. The impact of the wedding complex effect extends beyond personal decisions as it replicates and reinforces societal inequities based on gender, racism, and class, all of which are integral to its marketing and commercial strategies. Laskey's

novel, *So Happy for You* critiques the extreme aspects of the wedding industrial complex. Laskey's book employs social realism to serve as a forewarning. It hints at a probable future and advocates a more in-depth study into the wedding industrial complex and its societal ramifications. This study argues for the re-examination of narratives and ideals in society, in addition to the broader implications for individual and communal well-being.

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