

From the Poconos to Puerto Vallarta: The Evolution of Honeymoon Advertising from 1959-2004

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Over the past fifty years, weddings and the events accompanying them – such as bachelor parties, rehearsal dinners, and honeymoons – have become increasingly elaborate, with the average cost of all wedding-related events now approaching \$22,000 in 2002 (Condé Nast Infobank, 2002). Ninety percent of married couples now take some form of honeymoon after their weddings, and these trips have become longer and more costly over the past half century. Existing scholarship on honeymoons describes the evolution of the trip from one that involved the bride and groom visiting relatives (and often bringing them along on the trip as well) in the Victorian Era, to one that now reflects a more couple-centered, luxurious orientation that is aligned with the emphasis on romance that is characteristic of contemporary consumer culture.

In *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding*, Otnes and Pleck (2003) observe the honeymoon has undergone many significant changes since World War II. Their work, as well as other in-depth studies of the honeymoon (e.g., Bulcroft, Smeins and Bulcroft, 1999; Bulcroft et al. 1997), argues these changes include: 1) the shift in preference from rustic, nature-oriented, more male-oriented honeymoon locales to those that are more exotic, tropical, and frequently foreign; 2) the shift in purpose of the honeymoon from a time when the bride became sexually initiated by her husband, to one that is now centered around the couple indulging themselves in their favorite pastimes that typically reflect a desire to engage in an affluent lifestyle; 3) the increasingly consumption-oriented nature of the honeymoon, with its emphasis on luxury hotels, international travel, shopping, gourmet meals, and souvenir shopping.

While all of the above studies refer to archival work in conducting their analyses of the honeymoon, to date no one has examined the ways honeymoon advertisements themselves might reflect changes in this event. Thus, the specific research questions explored in this study are:

1) What are the major changes in honeymoon ads – in terms of the themes of the ads, portrayal of destinations, types of activities, “main characters” (e.g., the bride,

groom, service providers) and goods, services, and experiences portrayed?

2) How do these changes correspond to those discussed by previous scholars in honeymoon ads? Do advertisements seem to act as catalysts for change – predating the times when particular honeymoon trends are discussed – or do the ads seem to reflect the changes that have already occurred with regard to the honeymoon? For example, it has been established that the airlines had to proactively develop campaigns to convince newlyweds to fly to Hawaii from the continental U.S., and that these campaigns took a few years to convince the American public of the safety of overseas airline travel (DeSoto Brown, 1982).

To address these questions, we conducted a content analysis of 159 ads from *Bride's* magazine from 1959 (the first year *Bride's* was purchased by Condé Nast) to 2004. Ads were sampled systematically with a random start (e.g., every *n*th ad for the number of honeymoon pages devoted to an issue), and were acquired at the Condé Nast library in 2000. Eleven ads were sampled from one issue in 1959, since the company only published two issues that year. For the decades of the 1960s through the 2000s (from 2000-2004), two years were selected at random from each decade, and then ads from two issues were randomly selected from each of those years. The following was the ad count for each of the decades: 1959 – 11; 1960s – 26; 1970s – 31; 1980s – 32, 1990s – 30, 2000-2004 – 29. For the sake of consistency, only one ad was sampled for coding per page (alternatively, either the rightmost or leftmost ad for ads with multiple pages).

A coding sheet was devised by three members of the research team, with the categories reflecting the changes in the honeymoon that were discussed in the literature. The coding scheme was then pretested in the fall of 2004 with a sample of 30 ads. Three coders, all of whom were graduate students in either advertising or marketing departments and two of whom were blind to the literature on the honeymoon and the purpose of the study, coded the ads. The coding sheet was then revised and the entire sample of ads coded by two coders in the spring of 2005. The levels of intercoder reliability were then calculated for each

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category, and only those with reliability levels of .8 or above were reported, with the results for those variables with reliability levels between .67 and .8 reported as "highly tentative and cautious" (Krippendorf, 1980, 147).

Tests of proportions indicate statistically significant differences in the presence of some of the various elements or themes in the honeymoon ads across the decades. Thus, it was apparent that honeymoon advertisements probably both contributed to the increased elaboration of the honeymoon, and also reflected consumers' continued acceptance of the honeymoon as a trip whose meaning had changed drastically since World War II.

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