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The Status of the American Bride: A Content Analysis of Wedding Websites and Bridal Magazines

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THE STATUS OF THE AMERICAN BRIDE:

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF

WEDDING WEBSITES AND BRIDAL MAGAZINES

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Kirsten Elizabeth Kemmerer

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2012

Title: The Status of the American Bride: A Content Analysis of Wedding Websites and Bridal Magazines

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The media have a large impact on the choices we make as consumers. Wedding media specifically target women and have a tremendous influence on the choices of many brides-to-be. In this study, I analyze the media's construction of what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a "perfect" wedding. Using content analysis, I study the written and visual content of wedding websites and magazines to examine marketing schemes targeting brides-to-be and other women who consume these media. The results from this research showed that the media promote both saving and spending money, as well as the adherence to traditional gender roles. According to the bridal media, a bride needs to invest in a dress, honeymoon, and other staples to create the appearance of an elegant wedding. This study informs women on the media messages marketed toward brides.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a global capitalistic society, consumerism increasingly represents one's economic

status. The consumption involved in the wedding industry is no exception to that representation.

The fairytale wedding has become a reality for many who feel pressured to mimic celebrity-

style, or upper class luxurious weddings. Lavish society weddings presented in the media, often

inspire others to spend more money than they can afford influencing women specifically to

spend money to create the image of royalty, if even just for a day (Howard, 2006).

In American society, conspicuous consumption is endorsed, with the idea that doing so

will earn respect from others (Jacobsen Koepke, 2007). Conspicuous consumption, or

"displaying goods and services to deliberately show off one's social position" (Scott, 2010, p.

289) is apparent even in the wedding industry where many brides consume conspicuously

regardless of their social class, trying to create the appearance that they spent a lot of money on

their wedding (Harris, 2008). Capitalism encourages women to spend, and many women

succumb to this pressure.

Today the United States wedding industry grosses around $72 billion in sales every year

(Wynn, 2011), and is one of the most resilient industries in America (Benezra and Ebenkamp,

2003). No matter the state of the economy, couples seem to spend on weddings. Even lower

class individuals, who do not have wealthy parents and who often have to pay for their weddings

themselves, may compromise difficult financial situations to have an expensive wedding

(Smock, Manning & Porter, 2005).

The media has a large impact on conspicuous consumption and the choices that women

make when planning a wedding. Mead (2007) argues that without the mass amount of wedding

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media, there would not be a wedding industry at all. Media such as bridal magazines, bridal television shows, and wedding websites, are sources of support and reference for many women as are pictures and videos from Hollywood weddings which create a standard for brides all over America, that bigger and more extravagant is better (Mead).

For my study, it is important to consider the power that media have over consumers. Media (print, images, and words) construct a certain view of reality (Kane, Taub & Hayes, 2000).   In terms of time and exposure, media occupy a larger and more sustained portion of our lives than do other sources of socialization including parents and family. The internet, as a form of media, is especially powerful in terms of the information a person takes in and process; people learn more from what they visually see than from what they hear or read (Kane et al.).

Wedding websites have grown in popularity and account for a large portion of wedding media. Indeed, the wedding website is one of the fastest growing sectors in wedding media. Gallagher (1999) argues that one of the most popular wedding websites is www.theknot.com, where you can buy a wedding ring, find thousands of dresses, get suggestions on the best priced photographers, and discover where and how to get a steal on wedding favors. Websites allow brides to order their wedding dresses while connecting with other brides-to-be about their respective wedding ideas. Like theknot.com, many wedding websites are committed to making wedding planning an effortless and cheap one stop shop.

Like websites, the bridal magazine is very popular. Many women browse or read bridal magazines long before they even get engaged (Braverman, 2006). Bridal magazines are often one of the main resources that brides use when they plan a wedding (Mead, 2007). Images of hairstyles, dress styles, wedding venues, cake styles and sizes as well as wedding size are all illustrated in bridal magazines (Lewis, 1998).

Because of the size and resiliency of the wedding industry, and its marketing through websites and magazines, it may be important to better understand the tactics and patterns present in wedding media. In this study I analyze the media messages targeted to brides-to-be. To do this, I have examined five wedding websites and three bridal magazines. I rely on symbolic interactionism, Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class, and Pierre Bourdieu's Distinction (Veblen, 2006; Bourdieu, 1984) as theoretical frameworks to examine the roles of both consumerism and the media in the wedding industry. To understand media constructions of brides and weddings, I also reflect on contemporary constructions of girlhood to show how as women have gained economic and social power, they continue to be expected to meet standards of physical beauty (Wolf, 1991). This contemporary maintenance of femininity and traditional standards of beauty can be accomplished through consumption (Lamb & Brown, 2006). As women increasingly consume to meet social standards of beauty, their consumption practices spill over into the wedding industry. The main intention of this study is to determine how the media constructs what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a "perfect" wedding.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I explore five bodies of literature: (1) media construction and weddings, (2) capitalism, consumerism, and class, (3), class and marriage, (4) the wedding industry and (5) Girl Power and the beauty myth. The focus of this literature review was to gain a better understanding of the role of media in the wedding industry, the role of capitalism in the wedding industry, the relationship between class and marriage, and the constructions of contemporary girlhood.

The literature on how wedding media constructs messages of the ideal bride and wedding was very limited, but some research has been done on the increasing costs of a dream wedding (Benezra & Ebenkamp, 2003) and how women are increasingly being pressured by this industry (Mead, 2007). While no research has focused on wedding marketing schemes that exist in the media, literature on social class, weddings, and marriage and how the Girl Power phenomenon and the beauty myth have affected women in contemporary society inform media constructions of perfect brides and weddings.

Media Construction and Weddings

The media greatly influences the choices a bride makes while planning her wedding. Because brides are the main consumers and planners of weddings, brides are targeted in wedding media and thus may often aspire to meet the standards set by the media (Mead, 2007). To illustrate how the media influences brides, I will discuss the power the media have over their consumers, the role of the Cinderella story in our culture, and the basic forms of wedding media.

The Power of the Media

The media shapes consumers choices and refracts cultural values. "By virtue of its ubiquity, interactive nature, and arousing content, the media are influencing our values and expectations of reality, regardless of our willingness to be influenced" (Kane et al., 2000, p. 57). The media's constructed reality is not an accurate representation of reality, but many media consumers have a hard time recognizing and understanding mass media's portrayal of reality from actual reality. In our culture, we recognize advertising as propaganda for selling commodities, but it does more than that. Advertisements, such as the photographs used in wedding magazines and on wedding websites, can depict the underlying structures of social stratification as well as power relations of class, race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, and ability by using subtle visual tools (Howkins, 2009). Therefore, even impressionable individuals may misapprehend values from mass media.

Because of the misapprehension of values from mass media, marketers often use our visually-based culture to their advantage (Howkins, 2009). For example, advertisers look to incite a rapid emotional response to endorse name brand recognition. Advertisements are often the first source of information that individuals receive about a product and first impressions may be hard to dispel (Phillips, 2007). When a bride comes in contact with wedding media such as magazines and websites, this is often the first source of wedding advertising coming into her hands (Mead, 2007).

Brides who consume wedding media may use it as their primary source of wedding inspiration. This can help create more wedding media. Thus there may be a reciprocal relationship among wedding media, consumers, and producers. That is, if individuals consume bridal movies, bridal magazines and bridal websites, more bridal media and other types of

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wedding related products will be produced and available for consumption. Hollywood marriages also keep people interested in wedding media, therefore the media commonly use Hollywood weddings as the standard for contemporary brides to reach. The media uses to its advantage Americans' love of happily-ever-after tales and the ritual nature of weddings as an important right of passage in the American Dream. The media's presentation of values within the industry is evident throughout its use of the Cinderella story.

Cinderella's Influence

Cinderella is the perfect role model for young brides-to-be if they want to part with both their money and their identities (Kingston, 2004). The "Cinderella dream" is a pivotal metaphor for the wedding industry: doesn't every girl dream of being Cinderella for a night? However, as Kingston argues, not everyone has a fairy godmother (or wealthy parents) that will provide her with free and unlimited wedding luxuries. Although girls and women learn to fantasize about the perfect wedding, but many are unable to afford to make their luxurious and expensive dreams come true. Perhaps women learn to fantasize of dream weddings because of the volume of wedding media to which they are exposed and characters to which they are exposed like Cinderella help fuel their wedding desires. Different types of wedding media are available and accessible to people of all ages whether through a Disney fairytale, a wedding website, bridal magazine, as well as other types of wedding media. The wedding industry is hard to avoid because it surrounds females from the time they are born well into adulthood.

Common Forms of Wedding Media

Websites are especially influential and addictive and are sometimes a bride's only source of wedding advertising (Mead, 2007). Many wedding websites are addictive in part because their purpose is to alleviate the common stressors of wedding planning (Weintraub, 2002).

TheKnot.com and WeddingChannel.com are two popular sites that are committed to making wedding plans easy and more importantly painless. These wedding websites claim to make wedding planning easier and more efficient.

Another commonly known and older form of media accessible to brides is the bridal magazine. Sometimes referred to as "wedding porn" (Mead, 2007), bridal magazines offer both "the seductive pleasure of taking up what may be a long-anticipated role and the shock of realizing just what enacting that role is going to require in terms of money, time, and energy expended" (p. 17). Bridal magazines can be fascinating for newly engaged women, offering them something exciting to look forward to, and simultaneously alerting them to the stress that is yet to come. There are a variety of bridal magazines, and most of them allow brides to enter into a fantasy world (Mead).

The relationship between the media's construction of values related to weddings is evident from the literature in this section. The media influences consumers' decisions and this phenomenon is apparent especially in the wedding industry. This literature informs my research on how wedding media constructs what it means to be a bride and have a perfect wedding because it shows that brides are inspired to consume through wedding media. Stories and tales such as Cinderella influence women to want luxurious weddings from an early age. After discussing the media's role in the wedding industry, it is important to review how my research relies on the literature on capitalism, consumerism, and class.

<div align="center">**Capitalism, Consumerism, and Class**</div>

Capitalism, consumerism, and class underlie the wedding industry. Although related, capitalism is a system in which the means of consumption (or purchasing products) is maintained by private individuals and organizations, while consumerism is simply the practice of an

increasing consumption of goods ("Dictionary," 2012). Within contemporary capitalist society, brides may feel pressure to mimic behaviors or members of the upper class. Additionally, consumerism is encouraged through wedding media outlets. Pressured to consume, brides may strive to create the appearance of having spent money, no matter what their social class. Because of the pressure brides feel to consume, the role of capitalism, consumerism, and class in wedding media is important to consider.

Capitalism and the Wedding Industry

In today's capitalist society, it is hard for many people of the lower classes to support themselves and their families. Resources and opportunities are distributed unequally in our stratified society. Our economy is not organized to care for those people who have fewer resources. Therefore, in our society there are many citizens who are underprivileged (Jacobsen Koepke, 2007). These individuals are not only economically poor, but outside of the dominant, mainstream culture and less able to participate in society financially and culturally. Exploited, people in lower classes usually remain at the mercy of capitalists. Does the wedding industry oppress those in a lower social class?

Capitalism and social status have long been associated with weddings and marriage. Howard (2003) found that even in the late 19th century consumer capitalism played a large role in the wedding ceremony with wedding bands (or rings) becoming an important status symbol. Middle-class men tended to believe that a wedding band was appropriate, while working-class men thought of it as a subject for humor, if not dangerous in the context of physical labor. Working-class women, on the other hand, believed the ring represented her role as a wife and a social class gain for her. Howard's work illustrates that consumerism and weddings are

intertwined and that, for a bride, investing in wedding artifacts, such as the wedding band, could yield a greater social status.

Consumerism and the Wedding Industry

Similar to capitalism, consumerism influences the wedding industry, and wedding marketers seem to use conspicuous consumption to their advantage. Marketers tend to overstate the importance of certain wedding items (Mead, 2007). For example, Mead argued that 150 years ago the wedding gown was a marker of "affluence and social status" (p. 81), but today the bridal gown has become obligatory, regardless of the bride's (or groom's) income or class. Interviewing brides, Mead discovered that the meaning of a wedding was different for many brides. For example, Mead found that some women saw their weddings as markers of achievement in their personal and professional lives. Nevertheless, brides shared similar experiences with a wedding industry determined to provide the "true" experience of being a bride. In other words, when a newly engaged woman encounters the wedding industry, she has many options and alternatives available to choose from to create her perfect wedding. Mead found that each bride realized that she was now engaged not only to a man, but also to an industry.

Consumerism and purchasing power can also be portrayed in wedding photos (Mead, 2007). Mazur (1993) examined whether a bride's social class could be inferred from her bridal portrait, a usually formal photograph of the bride in her wedding gown. Raters successfully sorted bridal portraits into those that they perceived to be of high or low social class brides. Mazur argued the purchasing power of the brides helped determine how they decided to look "good" for their wedding. Since upper-class women usually have more resources, they can use these resources to pay for a "better" look. They can afford expensive boutiques and skilled

beauticians, while the lower class brides may not emphasize the most current fashion trends because they know they would not be able to afford them. Mazur also found that most magazines targeted young women and promoted similar styles even though their readers were of different education and occupational statuses. Thus, the difference in perception and display of the brides' social class was not a product of consuming different types of wedding media; individuals of all social classes consumed the same magazines.

Consumerism and the Recession

Despite the recent recession, brides try to create the appearance of being rich, no matter what their financial situation. Harris (2008) reported that many brides have trouble getting their fairytale wedding in unstable economic conditions. Harris interviewed Rebecca Dolgin, the executive editor of The Knot (theknot.com), and found that a trend of many contemporary brides is to move away from the over-the-top weddings. Yet while brides cut back on wedding expenses they are still likely to try to create the appearance that they spent a lot of money. In her interview with Dolgin, Harris noted a variety of affordable yet classy suggestions for wedding necessities. For example, wedding experts suggest the bride buy a fake Styrofoam cake with only the top tier being real cake and to serve guests from a sheet cake to save money and the guests will not realize the difference (Harris). They also recommend brides buy a second hand, used designer dress to save money, but give the appearance that they spent a lot of money.

Even though many brides have cut back on wedding spending, there are still many wedding-related businesses are doing well economically in the growing wedding industry. Thompson (1990) summarized a few case studies of profitable small businesses in the wedding industry, these studies including a wedding consultant business, a videographer, a wedding cake business, a symphony, a florist, a catering business, a photographer, a travel agent, and a bridal

gown and tuxedo business. In addition, the bridal registry business is lucrative (Nestoras, 2010). According to Nestoras, the bridal registry business alone, which usually consists of a single store, such as Macy's or Target, where brides "register" to receive items that they want their guests to buy them as wedding presents, is a $20 million industry. All of these niche' industries have prospered greatly because of continued wedding-related spending.

Who Pays for the Wedding?

Consumerism plays a large role in the wedding industry. From the resiliency and strength of the wedding industry to the pressure felt by brides to appear richer than they are, consumerism is at work. The significance of a luxurious wedding pressures some brides to consume. The media is the primary source used by marketers to pressure brides to spend. Because of this pressure to spend, it is important to consider the role of social class in marriage and weddings.

When referencing consumerism within the wedding industry, it is important to consider who is actually doing the consumption. Traditionally, the wedding was considered the bride's special day, thus, her family would be responsible for the bulk of the wedding costs, including the reception ("Who pays," 2002). Another custom is for the groom's family to pay for the rehearsal dinner and the honeymoon. Some families continue to follow this traditional division today. There are three common approaches to financing the big day ("Who pays"). The first continues the traditional approach: the parents of the bride and groom divide the costs as described above. The second approach includes the parents of both the bride and the groom evenly splitting the costs, or the wealthier set of parents will pay for most of the expenses. A third and increasingly common approach is for the bride and groom, especially those who are older, or getting remarried, to pay their wedding expenses themselves.

Class and Marriage

Examining marital patterns and trends of different social classes helps inform who consumes wedding media. Knowing when individuals of different social classes are getting married, provides insight on when and who are consuming wedding media.

Current Marital Trends

Persons of similar socioeconomic and educational backgrounds are more likely to marry persons of similar class and background (Hou & Myles, 2008). According to Hou and Myles, well educated women and men are more likely to marry one another and form families with high earnings and a lower risk of unemployment, and lower educated couples earn lower wages and have a higher chance of unemployment than those in the upper classes. Although it is more likely for lower educated women to marry higher educated men (Seltzer, 2004), lately there has been a trend in women having higher levels of education than their husbands (Hou & Myles, 2008).

Social class and educational attainment affect marital trends. Middle class marital trends tend to differ from those of the lower class. Middle class individuals, women especially, appear to wait to get married and have children until they achieve autonomy and financial success (Marsh & Dickerson von Lockette, 2011). Marsh and colleagues (2007) found that the delay of marriage could be attributed to the fact that more women are in the work force than ever before. They also found that single, living-alone, professional black women especially are the new emerging middle-class.

Lower class individuals, on the other hand, are more likely to marry at younger ages (Uecker & Stokes, 2008). Couples who marry earlier are more likely to be from disadvantaged families. Young lower class women are less likely than upper class women to receive financial

support from their families for their weddings. Also, it is more likely for those marrying early to have lower educational aspirations, because often those that marry early are from disadvantaged families (Uecker and Stokes). Uecker and Stokes also found that cohabitation prior to marriage is more likely to occur among those marrying early. Uecker & Stokes' research on marital trends helps inform who may be consuming wedding media.

Although lower class couples are likely to marry at younger ages, cohabitation is more common for lower class individuals before marriage for several reasons. First, Smock, et al. (2005) found that couples waited to marry to be able to have enough money to pay for a "real" wedding. A "real" or proper wedding means one in which there is a ceremony and reception with all of the "fixings" (i.e., a catered reception, an open bar, etc.) for family and friends to enjoy (Smock et al.; Cherlin 2010). Second, Smock et al. found that marriage is postponed as men from lower class relationships establish themselves as the main economic provider and many couples want to reach financial goals before making the commitment to a wedding. Financial worries and lack of money can be a source of stress in relationships and wedding expenses may cause strain for the couple. For all of these reasons lower class couples may be more likely to postpone weddings than others (Smock et al.).

Similarly, even though lower class couples are more likely to get married at a younger age, marriage rates are lowest among lower-income groups in the United States (Cherlin, 2010). For the lower class, marriage is a much sought but often intangible goal. Most want to marry, but only when they are sure that they can do so successfully. To many women in the lower class, a "successful marriage" means one in which their husband holds a decent job and has the ability to treat them fairly and free from abuse, when they have enough money for a down payment on a home, or when they have "enough" money to pay for a "nice" wedding (Cherlin). The growth of

the wedding industry and the financial pressures that this celebration inflicts has pressured the lower class to postpone marriage.

Wedding Costs and Class

According to Mead (2007), the average wedding costs a total of seven months of the average individual's salary, contributing to a couple's delay in marriage. These delays may translate into a marriage put off indefinitely due to difficultly meeting financial goals or affording a proper wedding (Smock et al 2005.; Marsh & Dickerson von Lockette, 2011; Seltzer, 2004). As many lower class couples choose to cohabitate instead of pursuing even more unwanted financial hardships (i.e., having a "real" wedding), the wedding industry may create class based marketing schemes to lure in the lower class.

The resources that come from a person's family of origin may influence marriage decisions (Uecker & Stokes, 2008). When the family is of a higher social class and has higher financial assets, its offspring are less likely to marry early. When an individual has a financially stable family, getting married to secure a middle class status is less necessary. By contrast some lower class individuals view marriage as a way to ascend to middle class status.

The idea of marriage seems to be associated with having or attaining a certain comfortable financial status (Smock et al., 2005). Marriage appears to require a certain level of economic stability. Many working and lower class couples not only want financial stability as a prerequisite to marriage, but also want sufficient financial resources in order to have a large wedding. Middle and upper class individuals funds are already economically stable, also they feel they can wait for marriage to pursue other educational, career, and personal interests.

Similarly, the wedding has become an important symbol of the couples' personal achievements and represents a stage they have reached in their personal, social, and financial

development (Cherlin, 2010). Cherlin reports that even moderate to low income couples view a substantial wedding as a requirement for marriage because their wedding will afford them the chance to display their stable lifestyle. For working and lower classes, weddings can be used to illustrate an earned financial stability. For the middle classes, weddings can be used to flaunt financial stability.

The Wedding Industry

The strength and vitality of the wedding industry has been consistent due to the fact that women of all social classes continue to purchase wedding services whether they have the funds or not. The literature on the wedding industry better exemplifies this point.

The Strength of the Wedding Industry

The wedding industry is one of the most resilient industries in today's economy; it does not appear affected by changing economic conditions (Benezra & Ebenkamp, 2003; De Lollis 2009). This does not mean that equivalent amounts of people get married in both good and bad financial times (Smock et al., 2005), but instead that spending on weddings is consistent no matter the condition of the economy (De Lollis). Wedding ceremonies seem to be a consistent ritual in our culture regardless of the recent economic recession.

The resiliency of the wedding industry has attributed to the fact that the average wedding has become more luxurious and more expensive throughout the years (Parrish, 1999). Because of this, there has been research done on how a bride can save money on her wedding day. Spears and Kopecki (1995) interviewed couples and examined spending trends to determine how to save the average bride a few extra bucks. Practical suggestions address where to buy discount designer dresses and how to find an appropriate affordable disc jockey. Although brides looked for less expensive alternatives, they appeared unwilling to compromise quality. Brides of many

social classes and backgrounds try to find cheaper ways to have an elegant, beautiful wedding without spending tens of thousands of dollars.

Lifestyle changes, such as waiting to get married and establishing financial stability are another big part of this continual alteration in the wedding market (Thompson, 1990). Since many young men and women delay their weddings to complete their education and establish their careers, they will have more money for a wedding. The pressure to have a "dream wedding" is felt from all social classes (Smock et al., 2005), and both lower and middle classes alike save in order to have a proper wedding and reception for their family and friends.

Another reason the wedding market is a stable industry is due to the needs of the Echo Boomer bride (Benezra & Ebenkamp, 2003). According to Benezra and Ebenkamp, the Echo Boomer ("Millennials" or "Generation Y"; individuals born after 1979) bride is one that is a perfectionist and expects the same from the products created for her and her wedding. Benezra and Ebenkamp argued that the Echo Boom generation was raised with the democratization of design, which means that today's brides are in charge of what they buy regardless of social class. Echo Boomer brides also want something that feels unique and luxurious.

The wedding industry is not largely affected by changes in economic conditions because many women spend on weddings whether they have the financial means to do so or not. Similarly, today's women feel as if they need to be in charge of their purchases by creating personalized and unique wedding experiences, and this attitude has supported the resiliency of the wedding industry. Because women today want to be in charge of their purchases, it is important to review the literature on contemporary femininity and consumerism.

Girl Power and the Beauty Myth

What it means to be a girl in contemporary American society has been shaped by Girl Power rhetoric and messages of ideal beauty. These discourses have also shaped what it means to be a bride and have a perfect wedding.

Girl Power

Recent Girl Power discourse has redefined the meaning of girls and girlhood. According to Gonick (2006), Girl Power represents a "new girl" who is assertive, dynamic, and unbound of constraints of more traditional or passive femininity. Girl Power is a unique phenomenon that supports "girliness" along with liberated feminist practices (Ivashkevich, 2011). More particularly, according to Ivashkevich, Girl Power aims to resolve the past dichotomy between femininity and feminism. Femininity focuses on bodily appearance, childrearing, housekeeping, and other traditional feminine values, while feminism focuses more on gender equality, social action, and women's empowerment.

The Girl Power discourse seeks to erase this dichotomy by combining aspects of both femininity and feminism. Girl Power, according to Ivashkevich (2011), "paints an ambiguous picture of a super girl" (p. 16). This "super girl" has it all! She is smart and career oriented, but she also enjoys traditional domestic activities. Also, this "super girl" is one "who embraces her sexuality without being submissive to men, and is autonomous yet dependable and caring at the same time" (Ivashkevich, p.16).

This Girl Power message is often spread to young females by many contemporary media outlets (Ivashkevich, 2011). This message has been used in many television shows such as *Kim Possible* and *Powerpuff Girls*. Television shows with "strong" female leads suggest that not only can females be feminine, but also intelligent, strong and ambitious. Ivashkevich argues that

when the media place an emphasis on the appearance of females in cartoons and television shows, it implies that femininity is a precondition for Girl Power (i.e., only girls who look feminine and girly will receive cultural support).

As is evident from this literature, the discourse of Girl Power thrives on paradoxes: can traditional feminine qualities and the new liberated attitude of a "power girl" coexist? After interviewing young girls, Ivashkevich (2011), found that when Girl Power is experienced by actual girls, it is a contradictory mess. More specifically, Girl Power drives girls to "intellectual, professional, and athletic achievement" (Ivashkevich, p.26), yet it also demands that they work diligently on stylizing their bodies and consuming products. Although Girl Power often gives females the sense of power and self-esteem, it hides the material and consumption-related forces that shape identity.

Styling and perfecting the female body, as Girl Power suggests, is achieved only through consumption (Ivashkevich, 2011). Contemporary girls' and women's empowerment is often directly related to consumer culture and the ability to purchase. In particular, scholars point out that by providing girls with opportunities to enact sexualized images can to conceal larger socioeconomic factors that grant some girls the full power of consumption while placing limitations on those who are not as well off.

Consumption as empowerment influences brides to spend and showoff their status. As the Girl Power discourse states, embracing this new girlhood consumption promises opportunities for displaying one's economic privilege (Ivashkevich, 2011). The ability to consume not only increases female-power, but it also conveys a woman's status by her ability to purchase and her advantage as a middle-class female with access to brand-name consumer sites.

The Beauty Myth

In relation to Girl Power, feminist scholars have analyzed the beauty myth, which focuses on the importance of female beauty in contemporary society. Wolf (1991) argues that the more women have gained social power and prominence, the more they are expected to adhere to standards of physical beauty. Today, women have more money and power and legal recognition than ever before, but in terms physical appearance, many women are controlled by media induced self-hatred and physical obsessions.

This beauty myth is a socially constructed ideal perpetuated by what men feel is beautiful. According to Wolf (1991), women feel pressured to meet a certain beauty "standard" that is either set by men or believed to be set by men. "Beauty" as a normative value is socially constructed and, even today, patriarchy determines the content of that construction. Wolf argues that the beauty myth is not about women at all, instead is about men's institutions and institutional power. More specifically, the beauty myth focuses on politics, finance, and sexual repression. For example, "beauty," according to Wolf, is similar to a currency system in which being beautiful is the gold standard. Women are ranked in a hierarchy based on their physical appearance where they have to compete for resources that have already taken by men.

The beauty myth ideal continues today and is reflected within the Girl Power movement. In years past, feminists were stigmatized or stereotyped by being ugly and masculine or manly, which is the opposite of feminine beauty (Wolf, 1991). This idea conflicts with the Girl Power message. Girl Power discourse argues that women can be progressive, liberal and appreciate their femininity too (Ivashkevich, 2011). Thus, the beauty myth is reflected within in the Girl Power movement, which states that while women are increasing their status in the social world, they are still held to a beauty standard (Wolf, 1991).

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review indicates that marriage and weddings play a large role in women's lives (Mead, 2007; Cherlin 2010). Women of all social classes are pressured to consume in order to create the appearance of affluence. The literature shows that the media impacts consumer's choices regardless of social class.

Although the literature reviewed is extensive and informs my study, there are no studies that examine marketing messages in bridal media. In this study, I sought to how wedding media constructs messages toward brides. To understand media construction of brides and weddings, I reflect on literature on media construction and weddings, capitalism, consumerism, and class, class and marriage, the wedding industry, and contemporary femininity and traditional standards of beauty and how the wedding industry plays a role in this relationship.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Symbolic interactionism, Veblen's Theory of the Leisure class and Bourdieu's work on

distinction offer a strong conceptual framework for my research, and my main research question:

How does the media construct the status of a "bride" and the idea of a "perfect" wedding?

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism "focuses on the interaction between the individual's internal

thoughts and emotions and their social behavior" (Pelletier, 2009, p. 175). Simply, it focuses on

interaction and the symbols that are deeply associated in those interactions. According to Ritzer

(2010), people act toward objects, but they do so based on the meanings that those things

represent them. This also means that other individuals might act toward the same thing in a

different way, thus different objects and different interactions hold different meanings for each of

us. In the context of my research, a bride may believe certain material objects serve to make her

more desirable or help her appear to have a certain status. In this perspective, bridal artifacts act

as symbols for how a bride relates to others and how she thinks she is perceived. Symbolic

interactionism helps explain how advertising and symbols are used to sell wedding products.

Theory of the Leisure Class

Thorstein Veblen's Theory is another important theory that informed my research. The

main idea of the Theory of the Leisure Class is people strive for status in society and to elevate

their social position in the eyes of others (Veblen, 2006). One of the main terms that Veblen

used was emulation. Emulation refers to when individuals seek out others with similar,

favorable traits and try to imitate them. Emulation impels individuals to stay away from those

considered "unworthy" and instead conform to the attitudes and behaviors of individuals

believed to be respectable. Veblen argues that status does not automatically pertain to wealthy individuals. Instead, status is achieved by putting wealth on display, through conspicuous consumption. As previously stated, conspicuous consumption refers to when "goods and services were displayed to deliberately show off one's social position" (Scott, 2010, p. 289). In this case, status is achieved by being able to buy and show off goods and services that are unnecessary and too expensive for others to acquire.

Veblen's theory illustrates how capitalism promotes the idea that people must conspicuously consume in order to be respected by others (Jacobsen Koepke, 2007). Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class provides insight to the media construction of an ideal bride and wedding as consumption for the purpose of raising one's perceived status is heavily promoted in wedding media.

Bourdieu's Distinction

Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu's study on distinction has been used to explain social status differences throughout society. The theory of distinction has been an important concept in understanding contemporary consumerism and status. Distinction examines the aesthetic (appreciation of beauty) preferences of different groups throughout society (Ritzer, 2010). Taste is a component of distinction. Taste refers to "the acquired disposition to differentiate among the various cultural objects of aesthetic enjoyment and appreciate them differently" (Ritzer, pp. 188). Taste serves to unite those with similar preferences and to differentiate them from those with different tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). The purpose of taste is to give an individual, as well as others in a society, a sense of his or her place in the social order.

There are two fields that comprise the study of taste: class relationships and cultural relationships (Ritzer, 2010). Bourdieu sees these fields as a series of positions in which many

games are pursued. The positions are occupied by agents (either individual or collective). These agents' actions are governed by the structure of the field (class relationships or cultural relationships), the type of positions, and the interests that accompany each position.   However, this "game" can also be used for personal achievement where individuals use a range of strategies to personally excel at the game. Taste can be used here to assert one's position within the field. But, the field of social class has a profound effect on one's capability to play the game; those in higher classes have more power to have their tastes accepted and oppose tastes of individuals in the lower class. Therefore, cultural relationships are in fact related to the hierarchical world of social class.

Bourdieu also relates taste to his other main concept, habitus. Habitus refers to "the mental or cognitive structure through which people deal with the social world" (Ritzer, 2010, pp. 183). Basically, habitus is a result of the internalization of structures in the social world, and when a certain behavior or belief becomes a part of a society's structure it becomes socialized into individuals of that culture. Bourdieu believes that tastes are shaped by these deep-rooted and long-standing internalizations.

Bourdieu's theory seems similar to Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class, but there are differences. Instead of the main force of human behavior being emulation, Bourdieu believed that to occupy a position within a field is to differ from those who occupy neighboring positions (Ritzer, 2010). Simply put, through tastes individuals have the power to stand out and establish their differences from others. Whereas Veblen believed that individuals conspicuously consume in order to establish similarities with those in higher socioeconomic classes. I draw on Bourdieu's theory of distinction to explain how certain wedding artifacts can create distinction among brides.

Symbolic interactionism, Veblen's Theory of the Leisure class and Bourdieu's work on distinction provided a strong conceptual framework for this study. I used each of these theories when conceptualizing the research questions, methods, and data analysis. In the next chapter, I explain the methodological approach used to examine how the media constructs the status of a "bride," and the idea of a "perfect" wedding.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

To discover how the media construct what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a perfect wedding, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of five popular wedding websites and three bridal magazines. I collected data from November 2011 through January 2012. In this chapter I review and describe my research methods, in particular the content used, the rationale for my approach, the research design, and issues of trustworthiness and limitations.

Information Needed to Conduct the Study

I reviewed wedding websites that focus on weddings in their entirety, not websites that market just one wedding product. (Websites that sell only wedding dresses, or focused mainly on teaching a bride to create homemade wedding favors, for example, davidsbridal.com and myweddingfavors.com, are excluded.) These websites are comprehensive commercial wedding websites, all of which are known as sites where a bride can plan her entire wedding. I poured over the opening pages of the websites and I clicked on, viewed and analyzed any large or prominent advertisements (related to weddings) on the opening page. I did not register for any of these websites, so that I examined publically available content only. I did this so that I would view content that was available to everyone, not just website members. The five wedding websites that I analyzed are: projectwedding.com, theknot.com, weddingchannel.com, marthastewartweddings.com, and disneyfairytales.com. Table 1 reports the number of webpages that I viewed on each site.

Table 1		
Number of Webpages Viewed		
Websites	**Number of Webpages Viewed**	**Hits per Month**
Projectwedding.com	8	1,000,000
TheKnot.com	9	2,100,000
WeddingChannel.com	13	400,000
MarthaStewartWeddings.com	9	650,000
DisneyFairytales.com	4	NA
Total	43	≈ 4,150,000

Projectwedding.com was created in 2007 with the hopes to make wedding planning an easier and more fun process. According to "Quantcast" (2011), the majority of projectwedding.com's viewers are female (73%) and less affluent (52% of the viewers earn less than $50,000 annually). Also, projectwedding.com's viewers are mostly Caucasian (77%) and have no children (55%). Projectwedding.com has around one million hits per month. While mostly visited by college graduates (48%), a large number of viewers have not attended college (37%). Lastly, the age group with the highest representation is ages 25-34.

Theknot.com was created in 1996 and the brand has expanded to include books, magazines and broadcast offerings. According to "Quantcast" (2011), theknot.com gets 2.1 million hits per month. Theknot.com is mainly visited by women (65%) with the largest age group being 25-34 year olds. Sixty-one percent of the viewers have no children and forty-nine percent of the viewers are college graduates. The majority of theknot.com viewers are Caucasian (82%). In terms of income, the viewers seem to be spread out among the income ranges (14% make $0-50k, 25% make $50-100k, 33% make $100-150k, and 28% make $150K+). Theknot.com users are more affluent than those of projectwedding.com.

Weddingchannel.com was created in 1997 and has now turned into a central location for couples to plan their weddings and organize their gift registries. According to "Quantcast"

(2011) the website gets an average of 400,000 hits per month. The majority of visitors are females (64%), Caucasian (78%), and the largest age group of viewers are between ages 25-34 (32%). Sixty-three percent of the viewers have no children and the largest group of viewers includes college graduates (47%). Also, in terms of income, the viewers seem to be spread out among the higher income ranges (12% make $0-50k, 23% make $50-100k, 31% make $100-150k, and 34% make $150K+). Users of weddingchannel.com are comparable to theknot.com users in terms of income.

Marthastewartweddings.com provided me with somewhat of historical background, but I could not find information on the demographic of its users. Marthstewartweddings.com was created 1995 and is used as a supplement to the *Martha Stewart Weddings* magazine. The website seems to have gained popularity because according to "WideStat" (2012) marthastewartweddings.com gets around 650,000 hits per month.

Disneyfairytales.com was an entirely different type of website than the others that I viewed. The website is not affiliated with The Walt Disney Company or any of its subsidiaries. It is an individually owned and operated website that updates brides-to-be of the latest Disney fashions. The website was created in 2009, but there is no other information available in terms of hits per month, demographic information of users, etc.

I also analyzed bridal magazines published on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, including: *Brides, Bridal Guide,* and *You & Your Wedding.* I used three issues of *Bride* (November 2011, December 2011, and January 2012); two issues of *Bridal Guide:* (November/December 2011 and January/February 2012); and two issues of *You & Your Wedding*: November/December 2011 and January/February 2012. Table 2 summarizes the magazine content I viewed, detailing the issues I viewed and the number of articles and advertisements that I examined. Since the late spring

and early summer months are the most popular for weddings and many brides begin planning

their weddings months and even years in advance (Mead, 2007), I focused on magazines and

websites in the winter months (magazines and internet content published at this time of year will

most likely have information that pertains to planning a wedding during the peak wedding

season). These magazines were chosen based on their ease of access and availability. I

purchased the issues in supermarkets or bookstores.

Table 2

Magazine Content Viewed

Magazines	Number of Issues	Date of Issues	Number of Articles	Number of Advertisements
Brides	3	November 2011 December 2011 January 2012	24	235
You & Your Wedding	2	November/ December 2011 January/ February 2012	16	121
Bridal Guide	2	November/ December 2011 January/ February 2012	12	168
Total	7		52	524

Brides magazine provided me with no information on its users demographic, instead

there was limited information on its history and purpose. The magazine was published in 1934

and the editors refer to the magazine as the "engaged woman's bible." The magazine is also

supplemented by the brides.com website. Around 310,000 copies of *Brides* are sold annually

(Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011).

I used issues of *You & Your Wedding* magazine, but there is also an accompanying

website (youandyourwedding.co.uk/). The magazine has been in circulation for over twenty-five

years and is British commercialized. *You & Your Wedding* is the UK's number two selling

wedding magazine with sales around 50,000 annually (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011).

Information on *Bridal Guide* was difficult to find. Like *Brides* and *You & Your Wedding,* the magazine has an accompanying websites (bridalguide.com). Additionally, the magazine sells around 150,000 copies annually (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011).

Description and Rationale for Content Analysis Method

To collect data I used a content analysis. Content analysis is a method of analyzing written, verbal, or visual communication messages (Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). According to Elo and Kyngas, a content analysis is a systematic and objective means of describing phenomena. Content analysis allows for flexibility in research design (Elo & Kyngas, 2005). Content analysis makes it possible to specify words to fit into fewer content-related categories. According to Elo and Kyngas, it is assumed that when classified into the same categories, words, phrases and the like share the same or similar meanings. Thus, when I coded my data, words and phrases that share similar meanings were placed under the same category and shared the same main theme.

I examined specific themes within wedding media, therefore a content analysis was an appropriate method to extract and analyze the data that I collected. In order to fully understand the potential meanings that exist within the data, an "in-depth analysis of selected content using qualitative research methods is required" (Macnamara, 2006, p. 15). Macnamara argues that a content analysis is the best type of analysis to use when making inferences by identifying characteristics in text and pictures, especially in the media. Because I was interested in the visual images and how advertisements were worded, a qualitative media content analysis was the most practical type of methodology for my research question: how do the media construct what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a perfect wedding? In addition, according to

Macnamara, a properly done content analysis can provide valuable cultural insights and allows interpretation of text for purposes of social change.

More specifically, I conducted an inductive content analysis. An inductive content analysis is often used when there is not enough prior knowledge about the phenomenon or when the information that is available is fragmented (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). This type of content analysis is also commonly referred to as a conventional content analysis, which is an approach that is usually appropriate when the research and literature on the phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The inductive process includes three steps: open coding, creating categories, and abstraction. Open coding means that notes and headings are written in the text while reading it. I read through the magazines and websites many times in order to be sure that I took comprehensive notes to describe all aspects of the content. In particular, I noted how wedding websites and bridal magazines used certain phrases or words. Both words and images were collected and analyzed. I observed the content for certain phrases that relate to social class or status as well as words that portray different styles and types of weddings such as "glamorous," "luxurious," and "budget." Then, the headings I made were collected from the notes I took and then were organized, thus creating different detailed categories to my research.

After I coded my data, the lists of categories were grouped under other, larger categories or themes. The purpose of grouping data is to reduce the number of categories by combining those that are similar or dividing dissimilar ones into larger themes or categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). However, creating categories was more than just simply combining observations that are similar or related. Instead, argue Elo and Kyngas, data should be classified as belonging to a particular group and this implies a comparison between these data and other observations that do not belong to the same category. The main reason for creating categories was to provide a way

to describe the phenomenon at hand, to increase understanding, and most importantly to generate knowledge (Elo & Kyngas). In an inductive content analysis, the researcher comes to a decision, through interpretation, as to which things to put in the same category.

The last part of the inductive process is abstraction. According to Elo and Kyngas, abstraction means "formulating a general description of the research topic through generating categories" (2007, p. 111). Each category was named using content-characteristic words, such as "budget weddings" and "luxurious/glamorous/Hollywood weddings." Then, those categories were broken down into subcategories, such as "DIY projects" and "designer/runway styles." This process continued until the categories could not be broken down anymore. The results of a content analysis are derived from the meaning of these categories. These categories are both conceptually and empirically grounded, deriving from themes in previous research as well as theory.   In conclusion, a successful content analysis requires that the researcher can analyze and simplify the data at hand and form categories that reflect the subject of study in a reliable and trustworthy manner.

To get a more refined sense of the kinds of wedding messages being conveyed, I analyzed all the written text and accompanying images (including advertisements), scrutinizing each message thoroughly. I examined each website and read through each magazine several times, I looked for patterns in both text and imagery. As themes began to emerge, I reviewed the material again, to get a better sense of their prevalence. Table 3 summarizes the coding scheme that I used for my data.

Table 3		
Coding Scheme		
Saving	**Spending**	**Adhering to Traditional Gender Roles**
DIY	Hollywood, Celebrity Weddings, New Trends	Physical Beauty
Creativity/Resourcefulness	Designer Dresses	Rings
Consumer Savvy	Wedding Registries, Outside Advertisers	Wedding Dress
Save here to spend elsewhere	Honeymoons	

Overview of Research Design

This section reviews my chosen research design. The following list summarizes the steps used to do this research. Following the direction of Bloomberg & Volpe (2008) after the listing each step, I included a thorough explanation of how these steps were carried out.

1. Before data were actually collected, appropriate and relevant literature was selected. This literature review was conducted to get a better sense of the research that has already been done on weddings, media, and marriage.

2. Following the approval of my proposed research, I began collecting magazines and deciding which websites I would use for my study. This was difficult due to a lack of availability and variety of wedding magazines. There were many bridal magazines to choose from, but some of the most popular included The Knot and Martha Stewart Weddings. Because I am using these as websites, I decided to use magazines that were separate from the websites that I chose. In the end, I decided to use magazines and websites that are easily available and accessible to almost anyone in the United States.

3. Once I decided on the websites and magazines I would use, I began collecting data. I did this by reading and re-reading the wedding magazines and websites.

4. After data collection, I began reporting and analyzing what I found.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Validity of content analysis is achieved by "thoroughly understanding the research objectives, preliminary reading of a sub-set of relevant content, and careful selection of the sample of media content to be analysed" (Macnamara, 2006, p. 13). To achieve these ends, I familiarized myself with concepts, messages for analysis, and guidelines for classifications and coding. I also reviewed the coding scheme to certify I understood descriptions and instructions. To ensure some degree of reliability, I repeated all of these steps. I attempted to address my own biases by forgoing my own opinion on wedding media and reporting only what I found throughout the research process. Similarly, I collected data from a variety of wedding media sources, including five wedding websites and seven issues of bridal magazines, in order to reduce biases.

In order to achieve credibility in my project, I maintained quality and rigor while interpreting and analyzing my data in relation to my research design. I was constantly aware of my study's purpose, conceptual framework, research question and methods while analyzing data, which has the chance to increase credibility (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). Gathering data from multiple sources, such as the variety of websites and magazines that I have used, has enhanced the credibility of my research.

Limitations

It is important to discuss the methodological limitations associated with this study. First, because there is a variety of bridal content to choose from, it is likely that I have missed valuable

data from the magazines and websites that I chose not to explore. For example, if I had to do this research project all over again, I would not use *You & Your* Wedding and disneyfairytales.com because *You & Your Wedding* is published in the UK and disneyfairytales.com was an individually run website. Using these media could have skewed by data because *You & Your Wedding* is published in the UK, which likely means that the editors are marketing toward UK brides. Also, disneyfairytales.com was a privately owned website which was unaffiliated with the Disney name, and I did not realize this before I began my research. This was the only website that was ran by a single individual, and the data that I collected from this website was not as rich as the data from the other four websites. For example, the website did not provide much editorial or written data, rather the website focused more on pictures of Disney-related items.

Also, I chose not to register for any of the websites from where I collected data, and so I was only able to obtain public information on main pages of the websites. Perhaps if I registered on the sites, additional information would have been presented further informing my research questions. Moreover, I have not been able to interact with subjects or get first-hand experience from brides-to-be and those who have recently married. Because of this, I do not know if brides in fact do experience some pressure from wedding marketers to spend more or whether they have questioned spending large amounts of money on a wedding. Also, it would be interesting to interview brides from different social classes to learn about their wedding experiences, and about the images and themes brides used to display their status. Because many individuals have a hard time recognizing and understanding mass media's portrayal of reality from actual reality (Kane et al., 2000), doing qualitative interviews could enhance our knowledge on how brides truly feel about the pressure to spend on weddings, rather than only deciphering how the media tells brides

they should feel and act. This research could be enhanced if later on I pursue qualitative interviews.

Overall, content analysis was a sufficient methodological approach, which addressed my research objectives and answered my research question. I examined specific themes within wedding media, therefore a content analysis was an appropriate method to extract and analyze the data that I collected.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze how the media constructs what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a perfect wedding. To do this, I examined bridal media, including both websites and magazines. The websites that were examined are listed as followed: marthastewartweddings.com, weddingchannel.com, projectwedding.com, disneyfairytales.com, and theknot.com. The magazines analyzed included the following: *Brides, Bridal Guide, and You & Your Wedding.* I used 3 issues of *Brides:* November 2011, December 2011, and January 2012. I used two issues of *Bridal Guide:* November/December 2011 and January/February 2012. I also used two issues of *You & Your Wedding*: November/December 2011 and January/February 2012. An analysis of these media help inform our understanding of how media constructs weddings. This chapter presents the key findings obtained by collecting content from wedding magazines and websites. These findings answer my research question: how does the media construct what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a "perfect" wedding?

Upon completion of data collection and analyses of the data, three major findings emerged. They include:

1. All of the magazines (100%) and all of the websites (100%) clearly and consistently promoted "money-saving" tips and messages.

2. All of the magazines (100%) and a majority of the websites (80%) contained messages that promoted spending, thus contradicting their heavily used "money-saving" messages.

3. All of the magazines (100%) and all of the websites (100%) contained messages that promoted adherence to traditional female gender roles.

Below I discuss each finding in detail. I set out to document a broad range of content, and therefore I hope to provide an opportunity for readers of this study to see wedding media through a critical lens. The emphasis throughout my research is on how the media constructs what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a perfect wedding. Thus, I include illustrative quotations and example descriptions taken from my data in attempt to portray the media construction.

Finding 1

Finding 1: All of the magazines and all of the websites clearly and consistently promoted "money-saving" tips and messages.

The primary finding of this research is that the magazines and websites heavily promote saving money. To demonstrate how these medium encouraged saving I will discuss low-budget weddings and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) projects. Based on the content from both media sources, it seems as if a low-budget, money-saving wedding is important to consumers. Often, money saving techniques included DIY projects as ways for brides to cut costs. This theme was stated explicitly and repeatedly throughout content examined.

Evidence that led me to believe that budget low-cost weddings are more prevalent is the placement and repetition of such messages. Every single magazine promoted either "saving" or "budgeting" on their cover. For example, the November/December 2011 cover of *Bridal Guide* stated "MONEY SAVERS! 75 Cost-Cutting Tips From Real Brides" and the January/February 2012 cover of *Bridal Guide* advertised a similar message "50 EASY WAYS TO SAVE MONEY." Similarly, a cover of *Brides* magazine advertised "Budget Blast! 89 instant ways to control your costs" (Jan 2012). No other message or content was so consistently promoted on the cover every single magazine issue. The seven magazine covers conspicuously displayed

their money-saving messages, with the words often in bold, colored font for emphasis. These money-saving tips were frequently from brides who had already been married illustrated through stories published about former brides' weddings. These brides often suggested and validated money-saving tips and tricks that they used at their own weddings.

Out of the content reviewed, there is a high promotion of saving over spending. Both forms of media offered an array of suggestions gathered from wedding experts and past brides. The magazine and website content suggests that creativity and resourcefulness are the key to saving. "Be creative! If that's tough, get inspired by what other people have done" (*Bridal Guide*, Nov/Dec 2011, p. 151). Similarly, one issue of *Brides* suggests, "Decorate strategically. Add blooms in high-traffic areas (entryways, patios). Don't worry about barely visited spots like staircases and hallways" (Nov 2011, p. 237). This idea is was also illustrated on marthastewartweddings.com, "Economic Wedding Bouquet Embellishment: Mix berries, pinecones (for winter), and other economical non-floral embellishments among costlier blooms to fill out bouquets and displays."

Cutting back on certain wedding "necessities" is a great way to save, according to *Brides* and marthastewartweddings.com. If a bride wanted to splurge on an expensive designer dress, all of the media sources recommended cutting back on other areas of the wedding like photography and reception site costs. Plus, *Brides* magazine and marthastewartweddings.com revealed that the fastest way to decrease a bride's wedding costs is by cutting the guest list. This idea was illustrated in *Brides* magazine, "Know who your friends are. Nipping the guest list can shrink costs big-time. To avoid offending noninvitees, pepper wedding convos with words like small and intimate" (Nov 2011, p. 235). Marthastewartweddings.com suggests a similar idea

"Set guest list boundaries. To minimize the guest list, refrain from inviting children and coworkers. Include your friends' significant others but not casual dates."

There were a variety of other interesting suggestions on saving money that were repeated throughout the magazines and websites. Recycling items such as dresses, flowers, shoes and centerpieces are just some of the many cost-cutting recommendations made by the wedding magazines and websites. Projectwedding.com repeatedly demonstrated this concept, "Whether you buy a preowned dress or sell your new gown after your wedding, you can save (or recoup) a significant portion of the retail price. That's hundreds or potentially even thousands of dollars that can be used on other wedding costs (or towards upgrading your honeymoon)!" Again, projectwedding.com illustrated saving techniques, "Don't buy 'wedding shoes.' Instead, buy a fabulous pair of colored shoes that will add a fun punch of color to your day…and that you can wear again and again." Similarly, *Bridal Guide* demonstrated a similar idea, "Choose wedding favors that do double duty, like small silver frames that also hold guests' table cards, (Jan/Feb 2012, p. 154).

Many of the media sources (71% of the magazines and 80% of the websites) urged brides to set a solid budget that is realistic and easy to follow. The media content suggests that setting a budget often makes planning a wedding easier and saves a lot of wasted time. One issue of *Brides* magazine exemplified this concept, "Bare your budget. Be clear about what you can spend when you meet with vendors. It saves time and will spare you from browsing fancier options that may tempt you to spend above your means" (Nov 2011, p. 236). Similarly, theknot.com demonstrated this idea, "Budget wedding basics. Your wedding budget is one of the biggest factors in determining a lot of your wedding decisions, so it's important to make a clear budget early in the planning process." According to *Brides* and theknot.com, setting a

budget, whether it is a large amount or a small amount, is one of the most effective ways to control wedding costs.

The disneyfairytales.com website's layout was notably different. It contained few advice columns or tips on how to save or how to find creative ways to cut costs, instead the website focused on promoting Disney-themed weddings. Although Disneyfairytales.com did not provide specific money-saving tips, or discount offers, it greatly promoted saving by the use of coupons. However, this website did provide a "coupons section," which no other website I analyzed had. While other websites had links that provided coupons, Disneyfairytales.com had a large list of coupons for over fifteen outside companies. For example, there were coupons for eighteen outside vendors such as, Adorn Brides, Ann's Bridal Bargains, Bachelorete.com, The Knot Wedding Shop, and House of Brides.

Complementary to the money-saving messages promoted throughout the media that I examined, the seven magazine issues and five websites I explored also offered many DIY projects as a way to save money. This variant of money saving was repeated so often throughout the magazines and websites that I believe requires attention of its own. In addition to money saving, these DIY projects are notable as an outlet for the bride to be creative and add a personalized touch to her wedding.

The websites that I examined often had separate links for DIY projects and ideas. Most websites (80%) included DIY discussion boards, live chats, or blogs where brides could post their own DIY ideas and projects that they used or planned on using at their wedding. For example, theknot.com had an especially large and detailed section on DIY projects, which includes ideas for DIY stationary, wedding cake tips, dress details, reception ideas, photography ideas, hair accessories and so on. Each separate project had its own link that detailed the steps

on how to easily complete the project. Marthastewartweddings.com had a similar format. There were fewer ideas on marthastewartweddings.com, but there were still many creative projects with a lot of pictures to help the bride visualize her final product. Theknot.com is also one of the websites that had a DIY discussion board. The cover page for the discussion board read "DIY. Doing it yourself? If you're just learning or already an expert, get inspired on this uber-talented board of crafters" (theknot.com).

Projectwedding.com was especially creative concerning DIY projects. This website offered DIY inspiration for showers, favors, flowers and receptions. Often, their ideas were creative and beautiful, and more importantly- easy. Projectwedding.com provided instructions on how to make a variety of different wedding staples. There were ideas on DIY centerpieces, escort cards, invitations, bouquets, tabletops, and monograms for invitations.

Weddingchannel.com and Disneyfairytales.com did not offer as much detail as those discussed above, but they still provided some DIY ideas and projects. Weddingchannel.com only covered DIY party favors. It focused more on personalization than DIY projects, per se, and they provided templates for favors a bride could personalize herself. Similarly, disneyfairytales.com advertised personalization and advised how a bride could make a generic Disney wedding into something special and personal, to fit the taste and desires of the bride. While this website promoted anything and everything Disney related, three articles promoted personalization and creativity.

In terms of the magazine content, at least one DIY story appeared in each issue I examined. In every issue of *Brides*, there was a section titled "The Busy Girl's Guide to DIY." In one edition of *Brides* (Nov 2011), there were steps on how to create DIY table runners – another money saver using less fabric. Another issue of *Brides* (Dec 2011) detailed how to make

decorative tissue pomanders (a type of decoration), a money saver made of tissue paper. A third

issue of *Brides* (Jan 2012) included instructions on how to make paper garlands, another money

saver. Each issue of *Brides* devoted at least one to two pages of step-by-step descriptions on

DIY projects.

  You & Your Wedding and *Bridal Guide* also provided DIY projects in both of their bi-

monthly issues. *You & Your Wedding* (Jan/Feb 2012) explains how to create crafty centerpieces,

number cards, decorations and wedding favors with colorful tape (referred to as Washi tape),

depicting beautiful and inexpensive crafts. Another issue of *You & Your Wedding* (Nov/Dec

2011) provides brides who have decided to do an entire DIY wedding with the following:

"Project-wise we start with a mood board. The key, we learn, is to focus your mind: if you want

a DIY wedding, the choice can be overwhelming. […] Mood boards can allow you to identify

personal, unique wedding features" (p. 133). This issue of *You & Your Wedding* detailed how a

mood board (similar to a bulletin board or idea board, except the bride covers it with ideas,

colors, fabrics, etc. that inspire her) can set the stage for an entire wedding. Apparently, when a

bride uses a mood board, it helps her to channel ideas about her wedding and helps her to begin

her DIY journey. *Bridal Guide* (Nov/Dec 2011) recommends pouring through DIY guidebooks

for inspiration, although, they add, that sometimes it is just better to pay someone if you find the

right price.

  Although these DIY projects were time-consuming, they provided brides with

suggestions how to personalize their wedding in simple ways. Not only were many of the

suggested DIY projects presumably easy, they often allowed the bride to spend less by making

items such as favors, invitations, and flower bouquets herself. More than anything, the DIY

projects were promoted as it allowing the bride to be creative and add her own personalized touch to her wedding.

The "money-saving" and DIY messages were most prominent throughout the wedding media I examined. These media offered many recommendations to cut back on annoying and unwanted of excessive wedding costs, as well as offering DIY projects for cost cutting. The fact that every media source I examined promoted money saving tips makes this finding significant.

Finding 2

Finding 2: All of the magazines and a majority of the websites (80%) contained messages that promoted spending, thus contradicting their heavily used "money-saving" messages.

The advertisements and editorial messages often contradicted the repetitively used "money-saving" theme. This finding was prominent in both weddings magazines and websites. To illustrate how these media encouraged spending I will discuss wedding registries, outside advertisers, celebrity weddings, honeymoons and wedding dresses.

While money-saving messages were very noteworthy, so to were references to glamour, runway wear, and expensive reception sites. Honeymoons were another sector of wedding spending that was consistently promoted and encouraged. The following excerpt demonstrates this idea: "Some things are worth the splurge. Brides are raiding their piggy banks for these temptations (can't say we blame them): A second dress for the reception, food trucks, elaborate candy bars, knockout designer shoes, high-end transportation, fine-art photography, and video and photo booths" (*Brides*, Jan 2012, p. 282).

Eighty percent of the websites that I examined used outside advertisers on their homepages. Usually, these were stores advertising their bridal or wedding registries. For example, projectwedding.com had a section on its homepage devoted specifically to its bridal

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registries promoting stores like Crate & Barrel, Macy's, Bloomingdale's and Williams-Sonoma. Theknot.com and weddingchannel.com advertised these exact same retailers, as well as Pottery Barn, Barneys New York, and Bed Bath & Beyond. In addition to the section for registries, Macy's had its own banner across the top and another across the right side of the Projectwedding.com homepage, to further promote its bridal registry. Similarly, the weddingchannel.com had a Macy's banner across the top of the homepage promoting the wedding registry.   Located prominently at the top and right hand side of the page, theknot.com also advertised for another retailer's bridal services: the Wedding Suite at Nordstrom.

Disneyfairytales.com was the only website that did not promote outside companies and mainly focused on promoting Disney-themed weddings. Besides the coupon list, this website endorsed the Disney name through the promotion of Disney wedding cakes, Disney weddings, and Disney honeymoons.

Similar to the promotion of expensive outside advertisers, wedding dresses were used as a way to promote spending. The main wedding staple featured in these media was the wedding dress. Every form of media had some type of section on wedding dresses. Disneyfairytales.com, for example heavily promoted Disney related wedding dresses, "New Disney Enchanted Wedding Dress." Every website advertised dresses for an array of price ranges. Thus, these sections focused on both those brides who had money to spend and those who did not.

In terms of magazines, all of the magazines advertised "dream" (*You & Your Wedding*, Jan/Feb 2012, p. 164), "glamorous" (*Brides*, Jan 2012, p. 86), or "luxuriant" (*Bridal Guide*, Nov/Dec 2011, p. 59) dresses. There were very few advertisements that referenced dresses on a budget. Although, *You & Your Wedding* advertised budget dresses on the front page of its January/February issue: "It's all about the dress! Love-at-first-sight styles for your shape and

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budget." Two hundred and eighty seven of the advertisements were for wedding dresses and wedding designers, and they all neglected statements about cost. As I skimmed through all of the advertisements one thing was very clear: they were all similar. In all of the advertisements there was a picture of a bride. The bride was dressed in a designer dress (the advertisements were usually advertising a wedding dress designer). The background of the advertisements were either one of three ways: either there was a stark, plain background to make the bride standout, or there was a background that depicted (as far as I can tell) a reception site garnished in hundreds of flowers, or a tropical wedding ceremony site.

The advertisements I examined usually did not encourage or refer to money saving. Eighty percent of the websites contradicted money-saving messages by promoting retailers such as Macy's or Bloomingdale's, and all of the magazines advertised expensive designers. Also, luxurious tropical honeymoons were referred to and encouraged in all of the magazines and eighty percent of the websites. The advertisements presented in the media content I examined contradicted the money-saving messages that also appeared throughout the content.

The media also contradicted money-saving messages by consistently advertising messages about celebrity and Hollywood weddings. Every issue of *Brides* magazine featured an upcoming celebrity wedding. Each issue detailed what wedding items *Brides* would suggest to this famous person to use on her wedding day. Designer dresses were always recommended. Also, there were recommendations on shoes (sometimes costing thousands of dollars), tropical honeymoons, jewelry, flowers, invitations, and even a signature cocktail suggested for each celebrity bride. This focused on celebrity weddings is likely outside the realistic means of most readers of *Brides.*

Celebrities were referenced in the wedding media, setting the standard for many of the ideas and suggestions presented. Details about what celebrity brides wore, where they had their weddings, or who made their cakes were common. *Brides* magazine had 5-9 references to celebrities and their weddings per issue. In addition, many of the "newest trends" found in the magazines and websites seemed to be influenced by celebrities. For example, *Bridal Guide* (Jan/Feb 2012, p. 86) suggested that the "Newest Trend" was the "Bold and colorful engagement rings" worn by celebrity brides including Reese Witherspoon (pink diamond), Beyoncé (yellow diamond), Jessica Simpson (ruby) –even Carrie Bradshaw (black diamond) the *Sex and the City* character played by Sarah Jessica Parker. *Bridal Guide* (Jan/Feb 2012) referenced new and celebrity trends on its front cover, "2012 Wedding Trends: THE BEST OF WHAT'S NEW." Similarly, theknot.com also referenced celebrity weddings, "The Luxe List is an exclusive circle of top celebrity wedding and event designers. Here you will find their insider tips and tricks to throwing a beautiful wedding as well as 100s of wedding photos from some of the most high-end, luxury weddings across the country."

All of the magazines and 80% of the websites had a "runway" section, which focused on the latest fashion runway bridal trends. *You & Your Wedding* (Nov/Dec 2011) referenced the runway on its front cover "FROM RUNWAY TO YOUR DAY: Dream dresses." Inside the magazines, on the other hand, there was usually a large spread (five or more pages) on what was new, popular and "hot off the runway." Websites, too, used current runway trends in their "Fashion" or "Bridal Fashion" sections. For example, theknot.com has a section devoted to "Runway Videos." Their website included 86 videos from wedding dress runway shows, allowing brides-to-be a view of the "hottest runway trends." Similarly, weddingchannel.com had a section titled "STRAIGHT FROM THE RUNWAY: 10 HOT WEDDING DRESS TRENDS."

This section depicted the newest runway trends from Bridal Fashion Week. These references to high fashion were prominent through all of the magazines and 80% of the websites.

Another luxurious item to purchase is the honeymoon. The majority of wedding media that I studied promoted lavish, tropical honeymoons. It seems as if the ideal honeymoon would take place at a luxurious resort in a tropical location. Although three sources advertised saving on the honeymoon, 71% of magazines and 80% websites promoted tropical getaways at deluxe resorts.

Eighty percent of the websites promoted spending rather than saving on the honeymoon. Marthastewartweddings.com strongly endorsed spending on a romantic tropical getaway. The two advertisements shown on the homepage were for Palace Resorts, a honeymoon resort in the Mexican Dominican Republic. Marthastewartweddings.com conjured the image that a honeymoon was supposed to be something unique, and the site never referenced the costs associated with honeymooning. It read on the site, "Plan your ultimate honeymoon! Let our experts help you dream up a trip of a lifetime. Browse our ideas for unforgettable experiences in exotic destinations to make your romantic vacation one for the books: Favorite seaside resorts, hotels with a view, new hot spots." This excerpt illustrates how important and symbolic a honeymoon is; these media framed a honeymoon as a once in a lifetime trip that should be unforgettable. Similarly, projectwedding.com demonstrated this point, "Hawaii Honeymoon. Hawaii provides the perfect backdrop for enjoying the beginning of your beautiful marriage with the one you love! Use these tips and advice to help you plan a breathtaking honeymoon in Hawaii (expert advice)." Projectwedding.com even went to far as to sanction going on a "mini moon," which is similar to a honeymoon and includes going on variety of short trips prior to the wedding to decide which destination would be ideal for the honeymoon.

Weddingchannel.com and marthastewartweddings.com had advertisements that promoted tropical and luxurious honeymoon locations and resorts. On the right side of the weddingchannel.com homepage, there was an advertisement for RIU Hotels and Resorts (subtitle: Including: Costa Rica, Aruba, Bahamas). Marthastewartweddings.com advertised for a honeymoon resort. These advertisements were located across the top of the page as well as along the right hand side of the homepage. The advertisements were for Palace Resorts in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. In fact, every single link on honeymoons on the projectwedding.com website was for an exotic location including such places as, Santorin, Kenya, Maui, New Zealand, Japan, Hawaii, Cabo, etc.

Weddingchannel.com played up the romance factor. All of their pictured honeymoons were described using the adjective "romantic," and often promoted honeymoon destinations outside of the United States. Disneyfairytales.com advertised Disney Honeymoons and detailed Disney honeymoon hotels and resorts, while trying to convince their consumers that, indeed, a Disney-themed honeymoon is the right choice for every couple.

Like websites, 71% of the magazines I reviewed promoted lavish and expensive honeymoons. One issue of *You & You Wedding* (Jan/Feb 2012) offered "The 2012 HOT LIST," referring to top honeymoon destinations as "The coolest bar, the hottest beach – we reveal 20 so-now honeymoon gems the travel experts chose for themselves" (p. 249). This "HOT LIST" included honeymoons with "jaw-dropping views," "stunning suites," "intimate hideaways," "divine dining locations" and other "HOT" honeymoon requirements. Similarly, *Bridal Guide* had page after page of honeymoon information in both of its issues. From travel-photos to a guide on gratuities, this magazine covered a significant amount of information about honeymooning. Neither issue focused on saving, rather they, like the issue of *You & Your*

Wedding (Jan/Feb 2012), provided information on food, star resorts and hot honeymooning sports. Relatedly, two issues of *Brides* (Dec 2011, Jan 2012) magazine focused on tropical honeymoon locations, and left out ways to save.

There were three sources that discussed saving techniques for honeymoons. Theknot.com, *You & Your Wedding*, and *Brides*, provided ways to save on honeymoon expenses. Theknot.com offered tips on ways to cut costs, through organized honeymoon planning and budgeting regarding the destination, the transportation, hotel and food costs. If these areas were well organized and planned for the off-wedding season, then it is likely that the married couple would save on their honeymoon. The November/December issue of *You & Your Wedding* and the November issue of *Brides* also offered tips on how to lower honeymoon costs.

Although there were a few exceptions, according to the media, it seems as if honeymoons are the one luxury for which the bride and groom should not sacrifice expense. Honeymoons were portrayed as the norm. The media content that I observed promoted tropical luxurious resorts as the "ultimate honeymoon" (*You & Your Wedding*, Jan/Feb 2012, p 251).

Messages that focused on spending and celebrity weddings were frequent in the media. While money-saving messages were important and recurrent, there were more pages devoted to spending. In the magazines and the websites spending was focused on more frequently (75% of the time) than saving (25% of the time). Both money saving tips and the hottest trends were advertised and promoted. Although these forms of media are marketing towards a variety of brides, they are potentially sending mixed messages to their consumers.

Finding 3

Finding 3: All of the magazines and all of the websites contained messages that promoted the adherence to traditional female gender roles.

All of the wedding media I examined promoted adherence to traditional gender roles, emphasizing the importance of the wedding dress, the wedding ring, and the physical appearance of the bride. The wedding dress has been a traditional wedding staple for the past 150 years and has been a constant representation of femininity (Mead, 2007). The wedding/engagement ring is a symbol of a woman's status in society (Howard, 2003); a large engagement ring represents a woman's worth in society. In capitalist American society a ring size not only shows how much the groom can afford, and thus his financial ability to take care of his wife, but the ring is often used to measure women's worth. That is, the larger the ring, the more worth the woman is presumed to have. Comparable to the wedding dress and ring, brides use dresses to enhance their appearance and femininity; if a woman adheres to traditional standards of beauty she is considered a true representation of the ideal woman (Wolf, 1991).

One of the main representations of the "tradition" and significance behind the wedding is the wedding dress. The wedding dress was continuously and repetitively promoted as an item of importance on a bride's wedding day. All of the magazines and all of the websites promoted the wedding dress in a variety of ways.

The magazines I examined were filled with articles and messages about the wedding dress. In fact, every magazine that I examined (seven issues altogether) had messages that pertained to the wedding dress prominently displayed on their covers. One issue of *Brides* (Nov 2011) encouraged consumers that the contents of the magazine contained information on finding "THE RIGHT DRESS for your body." Similarly, the cover of *Bridal Guide* (Nov/Dec 2011)

stated that inside a consumer would find "THE BEST DRESSES: SUPER-CHIC STYLES UNDER $1,000." In addition, every magazine issue included advertisements from a variety of wedding dress designers and wedding dress companies.

Brides magazine had a six page spread in its November 2011 issue titled "It's all about the dress" (p. 220-226). This spread included information and advice from fashion director Randy Fenoli (star of The Learning Channel's *Say Yes to the Dress*). Fenoli details which types of dresses are most flattering on different types of female bodies. For example, he encourages women to know the shape of their bodies when shopping for clothes; because every woman's body is unique, wedding dress styles will fit differently on different women. Fenoli argues that in order for a bride to look her best, she needs to find the appropriate dress for her body shape.

Similarly, the websites I examined all had pages referencing wedding dresses. For example, disneyfairytales.com had a section titled "Disney Princess Wedding Dresses." Theknot.com had four different links pertaining to wedding dresses located sporadically throughout their homepage. Likewise, projectwedding.com and weddingchannel.com had similar layouts on their homepages, both having at least four different links to choose from that pertaining to wedding dresses.

As evident from the magazine and website content that I collected, this staple endures. The magazines I viewed showed a wedding dress on more than half of the pages in each issue, whether it was an advertisement from an outside company or an article from the magazine itself. The websites examined showed similar results; the most common links and pages were associated with the wedding dress. This traditional wedding staple was advertised and editorialized as a wedding necessity for brides-to-be.

Comparably, women's wedding and engagement rings were emphasized and advertised throughout the media I examined. In all of the magazines there were anywhere from four (*Bridal Guide,* Jan/Feb 2012) to twenty one (*Brides,* Dec 2011) advertisements for wedding and engagement rings. Throughout the entire data collection process, I did not see one wedding or engagement ring in the advertisements that had only one diamond or stone, unless is was a relatively large stone. Every ring I saw had three stones or one large stone with surrounding smaller stones. In fact, out of all the money-saving tips and messages throughout the media I examined, there was no advice or suggestions on spending less on wedding and/or engagement rings.

As stated earlier, in *Bridal Guide* magazine celebrities were used to emphasize the importance of a female engagement ring. *Bridal Guide* (Jan/Feb 2012, p. 86) suggested that the "Newest Trend" was the "Bold and colorful engagement rings" worn by celebrity brides including Reese Witherspoon (pink diamond), Beyoncé (yellow diamond), Jessica Simpson (ruby) –even Carrie Bradshaw (black diamond) the *Sex and the City* character played by Sarah Jessica Parker. This quote illustrates the "bold and colorful" rings are the next new trend in engagement rings, suggesting that because celebrities are wearing these rings, they already are the "newest trend."

A bride's physical appearance was another message that promoted adherence to traditional gender roles in both magazines and websites. There were twenty six articles about getting "fit" before the big day. There was advice on how to prepare physically in other ways, such as tanning, facials and hair highlights. Simply put, the media content that I examined told a bride that in order to have the bridal experience and a perfect wedding, then she needed to meet certain beauty criteria.

One issue of *Brides* and one issue of *You & Your Wedding* contained a "wedding countdown" used to inform the bride what types of wedding preparations she should be doing by when, in terms of improving physical appearance. The magazines included advice such as "get a facial" or "get a teeth whitening treatment." Not only were these countdowns mental preparation for the bride on what was to come, they were presented as aids for physical preparation. As one ad stated, "Go for a manicure and a pedicure. (Do waxings and facials no fewer than four days before)" (*Brides*, Nov 2011, p. 36). Another affirmed, "Boost circulation by body-brushing before showering: start at your feet and work upwards in long, firm strokes. […] Add Omega 3-rich oily fish to your diet and start treatment courses for cellulite, thread veins or unwanted hair now to achieve maximum results" (*You & Your Wedding*, Jan/Feb 2012, p. 227).

Physical appearance was thought to be so important by *Bridal Guide, You & Your Wedding*, and Disneyfairytales.com, that entire pages were devoted to one beauty issue such as make-up or hair. For example, *Bridal Guide* (Jan/Feb 2012) devoted an entire page to bridal make-up dos and don'ts. The page emphasized how important it was to have bridal make-up applied correctly, that is, not too heavily (p. 112). *You & Your Wedding* (Jan/Feb 2012, p. 227-229) contained a three-page spread titled "The Ultimate Brideover." Basically, it covered the steps a bride should take in order to start physically preparing for her wedding (in terms of make-up, hair, skin, nails, etc.). Disneyfairytales.com focused mainly on hair. The site had many internal and external links that showed a variety of "princess" hairstyles suggested for brides who wanted to be a princess for a day.

Also, according to the websites and magazines, to be physically ready, one had to lose weight. There were weight-loss programs with step-by-step instructions on how to lose those last few pounds before the big day. *Bridal Guide* devoted an entire page of tips on how to lose

"those last 10 pesky pounds" (Jan/Feb 2012, p. 114). Marthastewartweddings.com had a "Get Ready Wedding Guide" that covered not only make-up and hair tips, but also advice on fitness and nutrition. The fitness section included specific exercises for a bride so that she can be lean and sculpted for her wedding day.

Projectwedding.com provided a variety of information on how to enhance physical appearance on the big day. First, the website recommend avoiding certain foods before the wedding day, such as dairy products or any spicy foods to prevent bloating. Projectwedding.com also recommended buying a wedding gown that makes the bride look taller and thinner. As the website suggested, certain necklines and styles look better on different sized women, thus picking the style that best fits the bride will improve her overall physical appearance.

Physical appearance was an important theme throughout much of the media content that I studied. As projectwedding.com stated,

"It's supposed to be the happiest day of your life. As the bride, you'll be the center of attention, and not only will your friends and family be present, but your photographs will capture the moment forever. On the big day, you want to look like yourself, only better. There's nothing worse than a bride wearing a gorgeous gown, in the perfect location, whose hair is so dreadful that guests can't keep their eyes off of it."

In both the magazines and websites there was advice on how to improve or enhance physical appearance before the wedding day, just as the previous quote illustrated. These different forms of media illustrate that physical appearance plays a large role in what it means to be a bride.

The strong promotion of traditional gender roles was a major message promoted throughout the media. From the importance of a dress and engagement ring, to the significance of a bride's physical appearance on her wedding day, traditional gender roles were promoted. This finding was continuously reproduced and represented throughout the media I studied.

Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the three major themes I uncovered in analyzing the content of bridal magazines and websites. As typical of qualitative research, I included extensive samples of text from the media content in my findings report. By using text directly from the media, the findings are well supported.

One significant finding is that money-saving messages were used repeatedly throughout the examined content. This finding was revealed in all magazines and websites and was repeated often. Every magazine cover referenced this message and every website portrayed this message in some way. These media sources portrayed a consistent message: setting a wedding budget is an easy way to save money.

Do-it-yourself (DIY) projects were highlighted as a way to save. DIY projects were advertised frequently throughout the magazines and websites examined. These DIY projects were presented by the media not only as money-savers, but also as a means for the bride to personalize her wedding. These projects usually consisted of inexpensive materials and were easy to replicate. The magazines and websites provided step-by-step instructions on how to complete many of these projects thus allowing for the bride to easily recreate the items for her own wedding.

The second finding was that all of the magazines and 80% of the websites advertised messages that contradicted the money-saving messages. Although money-saving messages were prominent, the media did not fail to reference luxurious, glamorous or expensive items either. While the media frequently referenced money-saving messages, there were often references to the hottest runway trends, the most expensive bridal gowns, and luxurious honeymoons. Thus,

there was a large contradiction between the spending and saving messages about what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a perfect wedding.

The last finding of my study was that all of the magazines and all of the websites contained messages promoting adherence to traditional female gender roles. This idea was illustrated through the promotion of the wedding dress, engagement rings, and the importance of physical appearance. The wedding dress was seen as one, if not the most important item that a bride needs on her wedding day. Wedding and engagement rings were portrayed as a traditional wedding staple. Lastly, the physical appearance of the bride on her wedding day was deemed very important. The media signified a variety of steps that should be taken in order to optimize physical beauty for the big day. Moreover, the combination of these three themes informs what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a "perfect" wedding. In the following chapter I analyze my findings as well as the major themes that arose throughout my research project.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

The purpose of this study was to explore a collection of wedding magazines and bridal websites to examine the media's construction of what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a "perfect" wedding. It was hoped that a better understanding of the media's construction of these ideals would provide insight for brides and consumers of wedding media.

To explore the media construction of brides and weddings, I analyzed content within and throughout wedding websites and bridal magazines. The data were coded, analyzed, and organized by categories and themes that arose throughout the data collection process. To reiterate, I asked: How do the media construct what it means to be a bride? What does it means to have a "perfect" wedding?

These research questions were largely satisfied by the findings presented in the previous chapter. One of the main findings of my study was that the media focused on budget weddings and money-saving advice for brides. Most of the media outlets contradicted this message by advertising pricier and more luxurious items, e.g., the honeymoon. Also, the media content suggested that women adhere to traditional standards of beauty on their wedding day.

This chapter analyzes, interprets, and synthesizes these findings as they inform my research question which explored how the media constructs what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a perfect wedding. There were four significant themes that emerged from my data that informed my research question. They include: 1) the spending/saving contradiction, 2) everyone can have an elegant wedding or create the illusion of an elegant wedding, 3) the symbolism of certain wedding items, and 4) the construction of contemporary femininity. Each

theme, and how it connects to the research question and the conceptual framework for this study is explored in this chapter.

Theme 1

Theme 1: Spending/Saving contradiction: What are the wedding media doing to consumers?

The most prominent theme in the wedding media was that magazines and websites were promoting both saving money and spending money. These contradictory messages were clear and consistent throughout all of the media that I examined.

The media asserted that saving money and making one's wedding more personable is a popular and current trend. Having a budget wedding doesn't mean the wedding cannot still be "perfect," it simply means the couple spends less money to make the day perfect in their own way.

The "saving" message correlates with the literature on consumerism, capitalism, and class. The wedding industry is difficult to avoid, socializing females from the time they are born well into adulthood. Although the fairytale wedding may be an aspiration of many females, many brides have trouble paying for their fairytale wedding in poor economic conditions (Harris, 2008). The executive editor of The Knot (theknot.com), Rebecca Dolgin, stated that many brides are moving away from expensive over-the-top weddings (Harris). Yet while brides cut back on some expenses, they may still try to create the appearance that they spent a lot of money. This plays on the theme of the "budget bride." Wedding media encourage brides to appear as if they spent a lot of money while simultaneously cutting costs.

Many of the money-saving messages the media encouraged did not appear to be "cheap" ideas that classified the bride as being cheap or classless. Instead, the media offered suggestions

on how to easily cut out unnecessary wedding items to cut the wedding budget. While I do not know about brides' actual choices or behaviors, it seems as if budgeting and saving money maybe important wedding decisions because they are extensively covered in the available wedding media.

The wedding media also used money-spending messages that were contradictory to the heavily used money-saving messages. Basically, as the media suggested ways to save money, they simultaneously advertised expensive diamond rings, designer dresses, and lavish honeymoons.

Media powerfully construct a view of reality for consumers. As Kane et al., (2000) claimed, the power the media has on its consumers is endless. We are affected by the media's messages whether we choose to be or not. The wedding media I analyzed suggests that large rings and designer dresses are important to the "perfect" wedding. These media outlets use advertisements to persuade or convince consumers that spending creates an image of the perfect bride.

While wedding media create an image of the perfect bride, they also capitalize on the resiliency of the wedding industry even in economically desperate times (Benezra & Ebenkamp, 2003). Marketers know that brides and their families are willing to spend money, so they are relentless in their advertising. Advertisements in wedding media convince all brides to spend while simultaneously generating profits.

Symbolic interactionism, Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class, and Bourdieu's concept of distinction inform why the media use contradictory spending messages. First, symbolic interactionism focuses on how certain interactions create certain meanings (Pelletier, 2009). The wedding media reviewed in this project might convince a bride to consume to maintain the

image of an ideal bride. Because the wedding media advertisements suggested that certain dresses were luxurious and that a bride needed a certain ring in order to feel glamorous (and loved), these messages could be symbolic of what it means to be a bride.

Moreover, grandiose advertisements that promote expensive material items can make a bride feel the need to consume to be accepted by others (Veblen, 2006). For example, the wedding dresses and rings in these advertisements entice conspicuous consumption. Similarly, advertisements featured seemingly unnecessary items such as a "second" wedding dress (one dress for the wedding ceremony, the other for the wedding reception), a sequin-adorned wedding cake, and expensive designer shoes, to show off a bride's social position. Paradoxically, wedding media targets women of all classes to spend (whether they have the money or not) in order to differentiate themselves.

The term distinction refers to the aesthetic preferences of different groups throughout society (Ritzer, 2010). Taste, a component of distinction, refers to how different groups of people appreciate cultural objects differently (Bourdieu, 1984). Conceptually, distinction and taste help explain how advertisements control consumption by suggesting certain wedding items are important. If all of the advertisements show expensive and luxurious things, consumers learn there are certain items that cannot be sacrificed if they are to emulate the image of the ideal bride. When brides buy into these products, they distinguish themselves socially and economically.

Although these messages can be theoretically analyzed individually, there is also a collective goal of the marketers. This saving/spending contradiction promoted by the marketers manipulates readers of all social classes. Although it seems as if the magazines and websites try

to help brides save money, the ultimate goal of the wedding media is to get women of all social classes to spend.

So, what is the wedding media saying to consumers? Basically, these wedding media want people of all social classes to spend. Although it is assumed women of all social classes would love to save money on their weddings, the media simultaneously advertising expensive items to promote and increase spending from brides of all social classes. Advertising to all social classes, those who can afford expensive items and those who cannot, increases viewership of expensive items, which could increase spending. Thus, by sending contradictory messages, the companies producing and selling wedding products benefit.

Advertisers look to incite a rapid emotional response to endorse name brand recognition (Howkins, 2009), and many marketers know that consumption plays a role in the wedding industry as many brides seek to create the appearance of being wealthy even when they are not (Mead, 2007). Marketers play on the contradiction of saving while simultaneously saving so that women of all class and backgrounds are influenced to spend. Advertisements for designer dresses and large diamond rings, as well as the focus on celebrity weddings and runway styles target all brides regardless of their ability to afford such things. As Mead argues, marketers overstate the importance of certain wedding items in order to get brides to spend money.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus helps explain this finding. Habitus refers to "the mental or cognitive structure through which people deal with the social world" (Ritzer, 2010, pp. 183). Basically, habitus is the result of the internalization of the structures in the social world. People are endowed with a set of schema through which they "perceive, understand, appreciate and evaluate the social world" (Ritzer, pp. 183). Although habitus is an internalized structure that constrains thoughts and choice of action, it does not determine them. Habitus merely suggests

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what people should think and what they should choose to do. Wedding media treat potential customers as having choices, regardless of social class background. These media outlets capitalize on the notion that the spending of potential brides is unlimited. Therefore, habitus helps to explain why brides feel that spending is important; because the media reinforces spending.

Theme 2

Theme 2: Anyone can have an elegant wedding or at least create the illusion of an elegant wedding.

Whether brides chose to have budget weddings or lavish celebrity-style weddings, they are always encouraged to create the appearance of having spent a lot of money. Even when the media I viewed promoted saving, it simultaneously reassured brides that saving on certain wedding items would not make them look cheap; even when brides chose a budget wedding, that did not mean that the wedding was going to lack elegance. Similarly, Harris (2008) found that many brides are moving away from elaborate and over-the-top weddings. However, while brides cut expenses, they still try to create the appearance that they spent a lot.

Additional research supports the idea that a bride does not need to spend thousands to have a sophisticated and tasteful wedding. Spears and Kopecki (1995) interviewed couples and researched wedding trends to determine how to save the average bride a few extra dollars. The researchers found that although brides may look for less expensive alternatives, they appear unwilling to compromise quality. Brides of many social classes and backgrounds try to find cheaper ways to have an elegant, beautiful wedding without excessive cost. Cherlin (2010) supports the idea that lower class individuals who hope to have a successful marriage, also want to be able to have a nice wedding and reception for themselves and their families. Even for the

lower class, marriage, is a much sought after, but often intangible goal. Most want to marry, but only when they are sure that they can do so successfully.

The most common approach for financing a wedding today is for the bride and groom to pay for their wedding expenses by themselves ("Who pays," 2002). Because individuals in the lower classes tend to marry at an earlier age (Cherlin, 2010), it would be quite difficult for a couple in poor socioeconomic conditions to produce an elegant celebrity-inspired wedding. It is also important to consider the effects that creating an elegant wedding has on lower class individuals. Individuals in the lower classes are not only being pressured by media outlets to have an elegant wedding, they are also responsible for paying for their wedding in its entirety.

Thorstein Veblen asserted that people strive for status in society and to elevate their social position in the eyes of others (Veblen, 2006). One crucial point Veblen addressed is that status does not automatically pertain to wealthy individuals. Instead, status is achieved by putting wealth on display. One way this occurs is through conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption refers to when "goods and services were displayed to deliberately show off one's social position" (Scott, 2010, p. 289). The wedding media often explained that there were ways to cut back, without having to sacrifice certain expensive or important items. The wedding media encouraged brides not to sacrifice such staples as the dream wedding dress or reception site, so the magazines and websites often suggested cutting back on the guest list, the invitations, or the party favors so as not to lose the appearance of luxury. These were small tips that saved some money, but doing these things, as the media often portrayed, would not make a bride seem cheap or excessively thrifty. Cutting back on a few unnecessary items could let the couple budget money towards other important wedding staples. This conspicuous

consumption or showing off a few expensive wedding items, enables a bride to maintain an image of glamour, regardless of her class status (Veblen).

Theme 3

Theme 3: There is a deep symbolic meaning behind certain wedding items and preparations.

The wedding dress, the honeymoon, the wedding/engagement ring, and DIY projects are symbols of the perfect wedding, which enable the bride to personalize and differentiate herself from others.

The wedding dress, an important wedding staple for the past 150 years, (Mead, 2007), is an essential item. As Mead has shown regardless of income or class, the wedding gown is obligatory for every bride.

As symbolic interactionism tells us, certain items can hold a deep symbolic meaning for individuals and the interactions those individuals have (Pelletier, 2009). Thus, whether a bride is from a lower socioeconomic status or not, her wedding dress will be a symbol of her transformation into the perfect bride. This pressure may be difficult for lower-class brides considering that they do not often have help from others financially ("Who pays," 2002).

Additionally, symbolic interactionism explains why an expensive wedding dress is such a sought-after commodity. The media emphasize that the more extravagant and costly the dress, the more perfect the bride. Because the more a bride spends on her dress the more perfect she can appear, a bride learns spending techniques from the media to create this luxurious appearance via the dress.

Wedding dresses are the prime example of adherence to traditional gender roles. A woman wearing a dress represents the ultimate adherence to femininity. Women are expected to look

"feminine" in all circumstances, looking masculine, in any way, is never condoned. Thus, it is important to consider why wedding media relies heavily on the promotion of wedding dresses.

Every wedding dress that was advertised in the media illustrated a woman in a beautiful wedding dress in a passive position. These advertisements illustrated the importance of the dress, and the bride, and the elegance of the bride on her wedding day. Each bride radiated femininity from the perfect up-do, to the princess dress; the advertisements convinced me that the "perfect" bride was one who was wearing a beautiful (and feminine) dress.

Honeymoons were another wedding staple that had symbolic meaning. Honeymoon advertisements were almost always for tropical and luxurious destinations. There were hardly ever references to saving money or cutting back on one's honeymoon. The media encourages and influences brides to believe luxurious and most tropical honeymoons are the ideal and can symbolize a higher social status. As Cherlin (2010) argues that a wedding is an important symbol of the couples' personal achievements, so too can a honeymoon may serve as a status symbol. Similarly, the honeymoon can act as the first statement of a couple's life together; it symbolizes the start of a marriage and a pronouncement to family members that the couple has made it. Moreover, the media outlets I examined suggest that a tropical and luxurious honeymoon is the conclusion to the "perfect" wedding.

While it is not clear whether media outlets influence couples to consume expensive honeymoons or if the advertisements reflect the types of honeymoons couples choose, as Veblen tells us, certain items help to create the image of an upper class social position. In this case, a bride might feel that in order to be an ideal bride and in order to have a "perfect" wedding, she needs to make her expensive, luxurious and tropical honeymoon destination visible.

In addition to the wedding dress and the honeymoon, wedding rings and engagement rings were other important wedding items that were portrayed as a necessity. Often encouraging brides to mimic celebrity-style rings, the media advertised large, multi-stone rings as a necessity for a bride-to-be. The advertisements and editorials throughout the magazines and websites stressed that every bride deserved to have a beautiful ring. The ring is one wedding staple that signifies conspicuous consumption. Bigger, fancier, celebrity-like engagement rings suggest money and importance. The larger the wedding ring, the more financially secure a couple appears.

Similarly, DIY projects were promoted in all of the magazines and websites as a way to cut costs. As Harris (2008) suggests, DIY projects, as alternatives to spending are popular. A majority of the media outlets I studied promoted DIY projects, emphasizing that personalization was essential. If a bride could add a personalized touch to her wedding, it would make it singular and unique.

DIY projects are a unique and inexpensive way to add a personalized touch to a bride's wedding. If a bride completes a DIY project then she is differentiating herself from other brides. The DIY project, whatever it may be, promises to add an exclusive touch to the bride's wedding. Thus, as we know from symbolic interactionism, a DIY project can symbolize many things for the bride on her wedding day; her hard work, her personalized touch, and her money-saving abilities. A DIY project may symbolize exclusivity, too. The bride has something for her wedding that no other bride has.

Class may play a factor in choosing to participate in DIY projects. Because individuals in the lower class are likely to have to pay for their own wedding ("Who pays," 2002), then they

may seek ways to cut costs without sacrificing a unique and elegant status. DIY projects can be inexpensive, plus they also allow the bride to add a personalized touch to her wedding day.

Bourdieu's concept of distinction also explains the symbolism behind the wedding dress, the honeymoon, the engagement and wedding rings, and the need for DIY projects. Distinction refers to the aesthetic preferences of different groups throughout society (Ritzer, 2010), and taste is a component of distinction that serves to unite those with similar preferences and to differentiate them from those with different tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). Through advertisements and articles, these media outlets stress the importance of a fairytale wedding dress, a luxurious and tropical honeymoon, a large wedding ring, and a DIY project. Thus, brides may feel that in order to meet the standard of a "perfect" wedding they must literally buy these items to distinguish themselves. For those in lower socio-economic classes, instead of buying expensive items, DIY projects can be used as an alternative to spending to help to distinguish brides, albeit in an affordable manner.

Theme 4

Theme 4: The construction of contemporary femininity.

The expression of femininity was also important throughout the bridal media. Brides' physical appearance, independence, consumerism, and adherence to traditional gender roles were ways to express femininity.

Across all of the magazines and websites from which I collected data, physical appearance of the bride on her wedding day was stressed. Affirming traditional and stereotypical gender assumptions, wedding media assume that a wedding is supposed to be the happiest day of a woman's life, and, thus, it is expected that she look flawless. Physical perfection on the

wedding day was repetitively featured. As stressed by the wedding media viewed in this project, every single bodily detail was important (hair, skin, nails, weight, etc.).

The media contributes to our values as consumers and contributes to our construction of what is real (Kane et al., 2000).   But the media's constructed reality is not always an accurate representation. Many have a hard time recognizing and understanding mass media's portrayal of reality as exaggerated. So, when wedding media repetitively express the importance of having a perfect physical appearance on one's wedding day, these messages may be taken seriously by brides, especially when wedding websites and magazines are the dominant source of wedding media consumed by brides (Mead, 2007). Thus, many brides-to-be may internalize the message that physical beauty is important in constructing the image of the "perfect" bride.

Women often feel pressured to meet a certain beauty standard because the importance of feminine beauty has been stressed historically (Wolf, 1991). The media I examined advertised physical appearance as significant and stressed its importance on the bride's wedding day. Because of these pressures from the media, women may feel as if they have a certain standard that they must meet in order to become the ultimate bride.

This constant message of physical perfection and femininity that was present in the bridal media is supported by recent Girl Power discourse. Girl Power discourse suggests that women have the power to stylize their bodies and consume products (Ivashkevich, 2011). This discourse supports the idea that perfecting the female body, or being physically attractive on one's wedding day, is achieved only through consumption. Thus, a bride must consume in order reach physical perfection on her wedding day. This idea was reflected in the bridal media I examined. The media encouraged brides to get spa treatments, manicures and pedicures, celebrity-inspired up do's, waxing sessions, and these were only a few of the many suggestions. All of these

products cost money, thus the media suggest that in order for a bride to reach optimal wedding day potential, she should consume these much needed beauty treatments.

Additionally, the wedding media suggested that as consumer brides should be independent, yet they should adhere to traditional gender roles. Thus, although brides should be independent consumers, they should still follow some traditions such the fairytale dress and the large engagement ring. These messages, as well as the message supporting the importance of physical beauty, shape, and help to construct contemporary femininity.

What does it mean to be a Bride and what does it mean to have a "Perfect" Wedding?

This study illustrates that the media constructs messages about what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a perfect wedding. According to the bridal media, in order to be a bride and have a perfect wedding a bride needs to spend money or at least create the appearance of having spent a lot of money. A bride needs to invest in a ring, dress, honeymoon, and other staples to give off this image and appear to have an elegant wedding, no matter what the cost. Additionally, the media suggested that brides did not even have to sacrifice inconsequential items if they chose not too. Instead, the media offered brides options such as personalization and DIY projects as a way to save money but still create the appearance of an elegant and well put-together wedding. It was suggested that these items would also give the bride a sense of pride in having played a significant role in the creation of certain wedding items. Thus, adding a touch of personalization and DIY ethic, a woman could still be considered a bride and have the perfect wedding.

Lastly, in order to have the perfect wedding and to be considered a "perfect" bride, a bride was encouraged to adhere to traditional gender roles. A bride-to-be was supposed to have her dream wedding dress; it was suggested that a bride was not a bride without her dream dress.

Moreover, large multi-stone rings were promoted throughout the media. The media suggested that because celebrities often had large and bright rings, other women should also follow this trend. Finally, in order to be the perfect bride the media stressed the importance of the physical appearance of a bride on her wedding day. A bride-to-be was supposed to be tan, fit, have an elegant up do, and, of course, have her dream wedding dress.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore wedding websites and bridal magazines to examine the media construction of brides and weddings. The findings indicate wedding media promotes "money-saving" tips and messages, spending, and the adherence to traditional gender roles. Brides-to-be, as well as other women consuming wedding media, must contend with contradictory messages abut what it means to be a "bride" and what it means to have a "perfect" wedding.

The consistent promotion of "money-saving" throughout wedding media suggests that women of all social classes are targeted to consume wedding products. The promotion of lower-cost options suggests that anyone can have, or at least create the appearance of an elegant wedding regardless of social class. Contradicting "money-saving" messages were persistent messages that urged women to spend, especially on wedding staples such as the dress, the ring, and the honeymoon so they could have the perfect wedding. Celebrity-inspired ideas were continually used as the standard that a woman needed to mimic in order to have the "perfect" wedding.

The promotion of contradictory save/send messages in the wedding industry is important to brides-to-be and other women. For instance, women of the lower class may feel like they need to invest money that they don't have on a luxurious wedding because the wedding media makes them feel as if they should. Similarly, wedding media suggests that a bride can only be unique and express her individuality by consumption, which is especially problematic for women of the lower classes.

The promotion of adherence to traditional gender roles and the construction of contemporary femininity is also significant to brides-to be and other women. The wedding media suggests that a bride needs a luxurious wedding dress in order to be considered a "bride." This may pose a problem for lower class women who feel pressured to spend on an expensive designer dress. Similarly, women may feel as if they need to adhere to traditional standards of femininity in order to be considered a true "bride." Thus, women are pressured to feel as if they need to have a flawless physical appearance in order to have the true wedding experience.

Uncovering inconsistent save/spend messages, along with messages that women should adhere to historically expected gendered roles, i.e., to be beautiful, physically fit, in wedding media contributes to the sociological literature on weddings and brides. This study illuminates symbolic messages in wedding media and wedding product consumption that construct contemporary femininity as women being independent and economically self-sufficient while simultaneously adhering to traditional expectations of beauty. As illustrated in feminist critiques of "Girl Power" through wedding media, we see that as women's empowerment increases, they are expected to rely more heavily on traditional gender roles. Thus, this thesis is not just about brides and weddings, but also on larger issues of gender inequality that are deeply rooted in our society.

Recommendations

This study could be further developed by gathering a larger catalogue of information to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to be a bride and what it means to have a perfect wedding. First, I only collected data from public content, it would be useful to see how and if data differed for registered members of the five websites I examined. Second, not only can the data I collected be interpreted and organized differently by another researcher, but

also different data sources could have been used to answer my research question. For example, I chose to use *You & You Wedding* as one of my wedding magazine resources, but others might not have chosen this magazine because it is published in the UK.

While gender is an important variable for analysis, I did not include gender as part of the conceptual framework for this study. Instead, I drew from gender literature, including Girl Power and Beauty Myth research to inform my understanding of how gender works in wedding media. Future studies might include gender as a theoretical framework.

The following should also be considered: based on the limitations of the current study, ethnographic interviews could be conducted with brides and brides-to-be to asses the extent to which the same or similar findings would be uncovered based on the media influence on brides spending decisions. Similarly, a study using the ethnographic interviews could be undertaken with brides from past and present generations to compare findings and differences in perspectives over time and across generations.

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