Before "I Do": A Five Decade Review of How Consumerism Has Affected Wedding Planning in America

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Danielle Leigh Ketner

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Deanna Pucciarelli

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

This research paper explored the influences of consumerism on the wedding planning process in America over the past five decades (1960-2010). The objective of this project was to explore how consumerism (1) impacted the expectations of engaged couples; (2) influenced the average cost of weddings; (3) shaped current attitudes towards marriage; and, (4) created new opportunities and challenges for the wedding planning industry. My interest in conducting this research included being a twenty-first century bride myself, and majoring in hospitality management with a focus on event management—specifically, wedding planning. I delved into the historical trajectory of the wedding industry and investigated if and how consumerism had influenced changes in attitudes towards marriage. Further, all the variables associated with planning a wedding were examined such as: planning services, department stores’ wedding-related departments, venues, food and beverage, attire, and media outlets such as magazines, television, film, and the Internet. The final two sections of my thesis looked at how everything leading up to this point may affect future careers in the wedding planning industry.

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Part I: Introduction

As a college student with a program major in hospitality and food management, the wedding industry is part of a career field that I plan to join after graduation. In order to learn more about the origins of the industry, as well as learn how the so-called “white wedding” has evolved, I have decided to conduct research in this area. My hopes were that in examining the history of the wedding industry, I could learn more about the origins from which the current wedding culture has blossomed, and help future wedding planners better understand the cultural variables that overtime have shaped brides’ perceptions of a perfect wedding.

As a bride-to-be, and thus a consumer, I must negotiate with the wedding industry. In comparing the preparations of my own wedding to those of my mother and grandmother, it is apparent that the amount of factors that go into planning my wedding is vastly different from theirs. It is from this realization that I hypothesized that the rise in consumerism in America in the last half-century had shaped modern society’s “white wedding.” Consumerism in this sense is defined as the growing inclination to spend more money on goods and services. According to Boden (2003), “…the changing social and cultural significance of the wedding does not just implicate commercialism and consumerism as important contributing factors, but also its relationship to wider family kin and community structures and processes, including contemporary understandings of marriage [and] romantic love” (p. 15). It is due to consumerism that planning a wedding is more complicated now than ever, and because of this Americans’ perceptions towards marriage and wedding planning have begun to change.
Part II: Historical Background

Cultural Attitudes Towards the White Wedding

The white wedding has been a part of wedding culture since the late nineteenth century, and has remained customary today even after surviving the ever-changing century that was the 1900s. A “white wedding” is a term for a traditional marriage celebration that includes a bride (dressed in a white gown and white veil) marrying a groom (dressed in a suit) through a ceremony in a place of worship that is followed by a reception. The color white is often prominent in these celebrations, and can also be found in the white icing on the cake, the bride’s white shoes, white decorations, and white diamond of the engagement ring. Several times throughout the century, however, the future of the white wedding was challenged due to fluctuating ideals and the alteration of cultural norms in American society. “No single influence created and sustained the popularity of the white wedding during the six decades of economic, ideological, and political change that followed World War II” (Jellison, 2008, p. 61). From the expansion and growth of the wedding industry, to the media highlighting celebrity weddings, to mothers teaching these traditions to their daughters, there are numerous factors that have contributed to the longevity of the white wedding.

In the beginning of the 1960s, “the wedding industry capitalized on dominant postwar gender prescriptions that urged grooms to be financial providers and brides to be housewife-consumers who kicked off a lifetime of domestic spending with the purchase of a formal wedding gown” (Jellison, 2008, p. 3). Consistent with marriage ideals of the 1940s and ’50s, brides during this period felt that the white wedding was an acceptable way to get married. Although women were slowly becoming a growing part of the workforce, several still liked the option of becoming a housewife and caring for their husbands and future children. The parents of
the bride and groom most likely got married in the 1940s, during a time when extravagant
weddings simply could not happen due to World War II. Until this point, “the standard of
elegance was fairly low not simply because of limited budgets but also because of the generally
held belief that one should not display wealth beyond one’s means” (Otnes, 2003, p. 121). If a
middle-class family held a lavish wedding before the 1960s, it was considered inappropriate and
garish. However, societal norms changed starting in the sixties. “To compensate for the lack of
luxury at their own weddings, mothers and fathers of the 1960s encouraged their daughters to
marry in lavish fashion” (Jellison, 2008, p. 27). Mothers often accompanied their daughters in
the planning process, and ensured that their daughters would have a better wedding than they
did, and thus hopefully a better marriage.

During the entire sixties decade, the Vietnam War was in full force. While sons and
husbands joined their comrades in the military, the angst regarding the war surprisingly did not
hinder the wedding business. Jellison (2008) argues, “instead, according to wedding industry
insiders, Vietnam-era draft policies that excluded married men were a real boon to business,
thanks to the ‘rush of fellows trying to beat the draft by getting married’” (p. 27). These rushed
marriages ended up being great for the wedding industry, but not so great for the newlyweds.
Because the incentive to get married was based on avoiding the draft and not an actual, loving
relationship, the futures of these marriages were destined for eventual failure.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the prevailing attitude towards white weddings made a
complete turnaround. Several women embraced feminism and shunned conventional gender
norms created by “The Establishment,” also known as the power structures of mainstream
society. “Heaven knows that if there was an Establishment ritual, it had to be the white wedding,
a holdover from the past that trafficked in feminine subjugation and meaningless social display”
As the feminist movement rocked America, women were no longer happy being housewives and wished to become self-sufficient. The feminist claim against marriage stated that traditional heterosexual marriage only benefitted the men, and this caused them to question why they should partake in this tradition. “According to this argument, a wife provided her husband with sexual favors, children, and a lifetime of free maid service in exchange for the adequate economic support that she was denied direct access to by the sex-segregated labor market” (Jellison, 2008, p. 30). As divorce rates rose, members of the younger generation began to consider staying single as a more promising alternative to getting married.

Even as the institution of marriage came under fire, the wedding industry was still able to find numerous clients that were still eager to have a white wedding. Thankfully, “…the 1970s wedding industry successfully relied on the continuing loyalty of Baby Boomers who had grown up in the postwar era thinking of marriage and formal white weddings as the norm” (Jellison, 2008, p. 36). There were two predominant ways that couples got married in the 1970s. More conservative brides wanted to get married in the traditional style of their parents, while feminist brides wanted their ceremonies to be very informal, giving some of them the term “barefoot brides.” Those who resisted the wedding industry but still valued marriage challenged the white wedding with what some called the “New Wedding.” According to Howard (2006), the New Wedding was “a self-consciously anti-materialist celebration, [that] took place outdoors or in a noncommercial space, with handmade or hand-me-down wedding clothes” (p. 171). Although their definition of a white wedding may have been different than their parents’ twenty or thirty years ago, women who wanted to get married could not imagine getting married without some sort of a ceremony—whether it was formal or informal. “Although the social and political forces of the 1970s had altered some of the details of the wedding business, its basic parameters
remained intact, and its product—the commercialized white wedding—continued to attract new adherents as the nation moved into the 1980s” (Jellison, 2008, p. 48).

The 1980s decade saw an immense revival in the white wedding, and during this time the wedding industry expanded to its biggest size thus far. Now that the late Baby Boomer generation began to get married, the wedding industry gained more customers than ever before. “The brides of the early 1980s were inspired to embrace in their weddings a formality that seemed exotic and appealing after the ‘let-it-all-hang-out’ 1970s” (Wallace, 2004, p. 253). With a new conservative republican president, America wanted to revisit some of its earlier norms after the rebellious culture of the 1970s. In response, brides took the traditional white wedding and made it bigger and better than ever before. The white wedding even made its way into second marriages as several brides decided to remarry after their divorces. Many looked to the 1981 wedding ceremony of Lady Diana Spencer to Prince Charles of Wales as a model of what they wanted for their wedding: grandiosity, beauty, and elegance. With several bridal magazines already established and covering the ‘wedding of the century,’ bridal-wear shops emulating Lady Diana’s dress, and television news programs broadcasting the entire wedding, it was easy for the royal white wedding to become a bride’s fantasy-turned-real.

Throughout the mid-1980s and 1990s, women were delaying marriage in order to focus on getting college degrees and establishing themselves in their careers. As the average age of the American bride rose, so did brides’ discretionary income. Self-sufficient couples were now breaking tradition of having parents pay for a wedding as they now saw it fit to pay for their own weddings. A couple that paid equally for a wedding also reflected the gender equality that their parents fought for in the seventies. Economic conditions also greatly improved as America moved into a period of economic growth, thus increasing the wealth of the middle class.
“Predominantly expansive economic times through the 1990s and a culture that profoundly approved of the acquisition of wealth [had] combined to turn the American wedding into an all-out extravaganza” (Wallace, 2004, p. 253). Although divorce rates were still high during this period, the amount of attention that consumers put towards white weddings nevertheless made marriage attractive.

Finally, as the twenty-first century emerged, the white wedding was still as popular as ever. “The millennium year was heavily promoted in both bridal magazines and popular media as likely to be a record breaking year for the number of weddings staged” (Boden, 2003, p. 81). Armed with knowledge, assistance, and the newest technology from the 1990s (most notably, the Internet), brides were more prepared to plan their white wedding than any of their predecessors. The attitude towards marriage and weddings was overwhelmingly positive, despite continuing to live in a period of high divorce. “Equally, though, it might appear to be more ‘romantic’ to get married in an era of high divorce rates and associated cynicism, striving against the odds to live happily ever after as husband and wife” (Boden, 2003, p. 119). As numerous children of divorced parents were now planning to get married themselves, many couples remained optimistic that their marriages would last longer than their parents.

In a modern society where consumption is used to highlight wealth and quality of life, the lavish white wedding is the ultimate symbol that a relationship is happy, healthy, and successful. No longer does a wedding represent the transition of a bride into a housewife, but rather it emphasizes the romantic appeal of making a lifelong commitment to another person.

The Dress

One of the most recognizable symbols of a wedding is the bride’s white gown. In 1840, Queen Victoria initiated this trend when she wore one on her wedding day to Prince Albert of
Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (Otnes, 2003). Since this occasion, white gowns have been associated with royalty and marriage, two things that young women have valued for decades. For years wedding industry advertisers have compared brides to princesses, and have used that marketing scheme to continue the tradition of the long, white gown. As fashion trends introduced new bridal gown styles, fabrics, and prices, the bride of each decade was sure to distinguish herself from her mother and grandmother.

Following World War II, the wedding gown manufacturing industry grew swiftly as ready-to-wear gowns became popular. No longer did brides have to hire dressmakers to measure them personally and wait weeks or months for a dress; now all one had to do was go to a bridal salon and choose a dress from the rack. Also due to the war, the development and refinement of synthetic fabrics altered the styles and prices of dresses. Because traditional fabrics like silk and lace were in short supply and thus were more expensive, the bridal-wear industry had to get creative. “The invention of nylon in 1938 had a profound effect on wedding gear since it was used...for the crinolines that kept skirts full, for imitation silk tulle veiling, and for endless varieties of machine-made lace that successfully mimicked the priceless handmade silk stuff” (Wallace, 2004, p. 200). With cheaper materials that looked almost equivalent to their costly counterparts, wedding gown manufacturers were able to make dresses for less money, thus lowering the total price that the bride would pay.

In following with current street fashion trends, the length of wedding gowns of the early 1960s rose to expose shoes and ankles. This appalled bridal-wear manufacturers and bridal consultants, as floor-length gowns that were more expensive helped to boost their profits. Several wedding industry employees began to push for the return of floor-length gowns, espousing that the shorter dresses should only be used for second or third marriages. “Members
of the industry also feared that women who purchased shorter gowns had less formal weddings with fewer attendants and thus fewer bridesmaids dresses” (Jellison, 2008, p. 73). By the mid-sixties, the full skirt was back with a new waistline that hit just below the bust, but the formality of weddings was still on the decline.

As the sixties ended and the seventies took over, a split appeared between bridal fashions. “One set of editorial pages was devoted to the old standbys, sober gowns with their high necklines and long sleeves, while in another section models were wearing—almost anything. Tunics and pants with rope belts. More caftans. Shirtdresses with patch pockets.” (Wallace, 2004, p. 225). A bride who embraced the new informal styles no longer needed to go to a bridal salon to get her wedding garb. She felt comfortable wearing her own clothes, or just bought new clothes from a local store. The amount of brides who married in this informal fashion was comparatively low to the traditional brides, but it was still enough to shake the confidence of the bridal-wear industry for a few years.

Luckily, the throng of women who still wished to have a white wedding kept the bridal-wear business afloat, and “a little more than half of all first-time brides acquired their gowns ready-made by 1975, while the rest made their gowns, had them custom-made, or wore an heirloom dress” (V. Howard, 2006, pp. 165-166). Heirloom gowns, which are wedding gowns passed down from earlier generations, were considered a threat by the bridal-wear industry. “Bridal consultants and the wedding apparel industry lobbied against the practice of using heirloom dresses, thus playing a significant role in the invention of the tradition of the once-worn long gown” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 141). It was challenging to popularize new dress styles if brides still embraced the older styles of their mother or grandmother’s dress. Bridal-wear shops
also lost a sale if a bride decided to wear a hand-me-down, so they strongly marketed the idea of buying a unique dress to match the bride’s one-of-a-kind personality.

Dress preservation became a much larger business in the 1980s and became another profitable facet of the wedding industry. If she bought a new gown, a bride could start her own heirloom that she could pass down to her own daughter one day. “The bride upheld tradition by paying to preserve her new dress to be worn by a future bride, a future that the industry hoped would never materialize as the cycle of consumption repeated itself” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 171). When dropping her once-worn dress off at a bridal salon to be cleaned and preserved, a bride would find comfort in the fact that her dress would be completely unspoiled for her future daughter. Yet she failed to recognize the futility of executing the practice before knowing if she would end up with a daughter, and despite the fact that she chose not to wear her own mother’s gown.

As the eighties continued, the American bridal-wear industry found opportunities in other nations.

“Until the 1980s, the majority of dresses worn by ordinary American brides were made domestically, but by the mid-eighties, Taiwanese imports began to appear at the semiannual bridal markets... Taiwanese manufacturers could make dresses at a fraction of the price of their American competitors, and they were quick to improve the standards of handiwork” (Mead, 2007, p. 93).

Because of this, the retail and wholesale prices of wedding dresses dropped. Nevertheless, bridal-wear companies could still make profits through alterations and the sale of additional accessories. Another key element to the profit from a wedding dress was its designer. A dress
sold by a well-known fashion designer, such as Priscilla Kidder of Priscilla of Boston, could still dictate a high price simply because of the brand name, even if the dress was made abroad.

One retailer that took advantage of foreign-made gowns was David’s Bridal, which launched in 1990 (Otnes, 2003). Bargain-hunting brides of the early 1990s recession embraced the store’s affordably priced gowns, and did not mind the ambience of David’s being unlike the bridal salons in which they usually searched. “Over the subsequent years more branches of David’s opened, gradually becoming less like warehouses and more like conventional stores, with dressing rooms and carpets” (Mead, 2007, p. 87). The store carries not only wedding gowns, but also bridesmaids’ dresses and suits for the groom and his groomsmen. “Moreover, David’s has revolutionized the way bridal gowns are purchased by stocking the same bridal and attendant gowns in different sizes rather than just carrying samples” (Otnes, 2003, p. 103). The chain is still around today and highly successful, featuring several popular fashion designers at lower prices than their competitors.

Throughout the 1990s, several fashion designers had established themselves in the bridal-wear industry, and by this time their names were very familiar among brides: Alfred Angelo, Carolina Herrera, and Oscar de la Renta to name a few. However, because the average age of the bride had risen, many current dress styles were much too young for the modern bride. “In neglecting to focus more attention on the creation of designs that would appeal to the older bride, the bridal-wear business was in danger of losing its most potentially lucrative market segment—the growing number of upwardly mobile professional women who delayed marriage in order to establish their careers” (Jellison, 2008, p. 50). The bows, puffs, and frills of the eighties were simply too girly for the contemporary woman. Renowned fashion designer Vera Wang discovered this when she wed in 1989, and decided to create her own line of gowns in 1990
"Vera Wang," 1999). Formerly a designer for Ralph Lauren, Wang has since been a trailblazer in the bridal-wear industry by bringing sex appeal to dresses with form-fitting styles and strapless gowns. As this new style became popular, several other designers followed suit and started making their own sexy styles. "By the mid-1990s, Giorgio Armani had a wedding collection and the design duo of Mark Badgley and James Mischka were turning out sleek, sexy gowns for brides" (Wallace, 2004, p. 261). These styles of dresses remained popular into the twenty-first century, and a majority of the gowns featured in bridal magazines in the 2000s were strapless.

To fit into these new sensual styles, brides have been increasing their budgets, but they have been losing something else—weight. “For many brides, the area that most quickly wreaks havoc with both finances, and—more significantly—the bride's self-esteem, is the wedding dress” (Patterson, 2005). Time after time, the traditional bridal identity has not just been any woman in a white dress, but a young, fit female with an hourglass figure—whether it has been Elizabeth Taylor, Princess Diana, or Kim Kardashian. Plus-size brides have not nearly gotten the same attention by the bridal-wear industry as their thinner counterparts, and bridal-wear manufacturers did not start producing higher quantities of plus-sized gowns until the 1980s (Jellison, 2008). Thus, many overweight brides have attempted to shed a few pounds before their wedding to look and feel healthy. “In a recent poll on Brides.com, 74 percent of respondents said they were trying to lose more than 10 pounds for their wedding” (Ellin, 2009). Not every bride attempts to undergo this transformation, but wedding industry media encourages the idea “even at the moment when, traditionally, [brides] are removing themselves from the sexual marketplace” (Wallace, 2004, p. 265). They are losing weight to fit the male view of the ideal female hourglass form. Moreover, some overweight brides might not consider if their new
figures would fit into the dress they bought six months or more ahead of their wedding date. Trying to rush alterations to resize it to a new, slimmer body can become expensive, thus further profiting the bridal-wear industry and causing additional premarital stress.

A rising trend among today’s brides is buying multiple dresses. A wedding day can be broken up easily into two sections—the ceremony and the reception. Apparel manufacturers financially benefit from indecisive brides who cannot choose between two dresses. The bride could wear one dress during the ceremony and one dress during the reception. Another option for brides is to wear their mothers’ dresses for the ceremony, and then a new dress for the reception. However, the heirloom gown may still need to be tailored to its new wearer if mother and daughter are not an exact fit. According to Erika James at Brides (2014), “the two wedding dress trend isn’t going away anytime soon...[b]ut even pulling off one wedding look requires lots of planning.” Brides who choose multiple gowns have to consider what else they might change about their look—different shoes, different jewelry, or even different hairstyles. Not to mention, the various costs associated with switching appearances—both monetary and temporal. Any time that a bride takes changing into another gown is time away from her family, friends, and new husband. Buying a second dress means additional costs in alterations and possibly different undergarments, so budgets need to be carefully managed to ensure that a second dress is worth the extra cost.

For the groom, it has been long customary to rent either a suit or tuxedo to wear for his wedding day, after which he will return the garments so that another groom can say his vows in it the following weekend. Nevertheless it is peculiar that the same is not typical for brides. “While sewing one’s gown, having it custom made, or buying it ready-made were consumer scenarios discussed frequently in trade literature and bridal magazines, bridal apparel rental
services were never a part of the discourse” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 175). Historically, wedding industry magazines have been about as likely to recommend that a bride rent her dress, as they have been to suggest that she have a simple ceremony at city hall. The Wedding Report (2014) estimates that in 2013, the average amount of money spent on the groom’s attire—rented or purchased—was only $203, while the average amount of money spent on the bride’s wedding dress(es) was $1,211. That means that brides are spending typically over one thousand dollars more than their future husbands, yet they both wear their wedding day attire for the same amount of time. Why do brides and/or their families make this choice? Because by spending the extra money to purchase the dress, the bride gets to keep at least one piece of her Cinderella fantasy long after the event is over.

The bridal-wear industry, as a branch of the entire wedding industry, has succeeded over the past six decades in encouraging brides to continue the tradition of the white gown. Current television shows like The Learning Channel’s Say Yes to the Dress further promote the idea that spending thousands of dollars on one dress—or even two or three—is the standard and should be expected by newly engaged women (Park, 2012). Even brides who pay initial lower costs on their gowns can expect to find extra fees hidden in alterations, veils, belts, cover-ups, shoes, and other wedding day attire accoutrements. Other brides extend their dress budgets due to persuasive salespeople or the idea that a dress is the one: a dress so perfect it deems itself worthy of a higher spending limit. Because the white gown is an established tradition—thus considered by most to be a necessity—it is plausible that brides will continue to spend a significant percentage of the overall wedding budget on wedding gowns well into the future.

Planning Services
According to Mead (2007), “wedding planners (or wedding consultants, or wedding coordinators, as they are sometimes known) help brides and grooms navigate the business of preparing for a wedding, serving much as a general contractor does on a house renovation project” (p. 38). In her book, Mead recounts attending a seminar for beginner wedding planners led by Jerry Monaghan, the cofounder of the Association of Bridal Consultants, and his wife, Eileen. As the duo gave advice, Eileen asked the audience to list elements of a wedding that brides must consider when planning:

“‘There’s the budget,’ she said. ‘The location. The time-line. The flowers. The decorations. The rentals. The paper. The music. The entertainment…There’s the catering, the hotels, the negotiation, the photography, the videography, the favors, the personal care—that’s hair, makeup, pedicure, and manicure. There’s the site coordination, the transportation. There are the other parties: the rehearsal, the Sunday morning brunch, the bridesmaids’ luncheon, the showers. There’s the attire…There’s the honeymoon. The legal stuff: the prenup and the marriage license. There’s the officiant. Organizing the bridal party. Etiquette. Gifts.’” (p. 50)

With all of this in mind, it is easy to see why the need for a wedding planner has risen in the past sixty years and has become standard today. But it is also noteworthy to remember that not all of these elements were considered necessary in the mid-1900s.

The occupation of “wedding planner” came about in the 1930s under the title “bridal consultant” and stemmed from department stores. Originally these consultants were saleswomen in the bridal salon area of department stores, and helped brides in selecting their gowns and in fittings. Sometimes, they provided assistance on the day of the wedding, where their “duties included attending wedding rehearsals and going to the bride’s home and church to help the
wedding party dress. [They] often stayed until the bride was safely down the aisle.” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 149). Although these women did not have vast knowledge about other facets of the wedding event like modern day planners, they knew plenty about bridal gowns and wedding etiquette. “Department-store bridal consultants were salesclerks, but they were also experts on tradition and as such helped shape American wedding culture” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 144).

Traditionally, only the bride and her mother decided upon wedding plans. Other women in the family like sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and future mothers-in-law gave advice as needed, but were simply helpers and not decision-makers. “It was not until the expansive days of the 1950s and ‘60s that putting on a wedding became a logistical feat involving a set of vendors like caterers and florists and custom dressmakers who were new to the middle-class family” (Wallace, 2004, p. 192). As more and more items were tacked onto the wedding “to-do” list, brides began to realize that they might need professional help with their weddings. “Bride’s, in 1965, acknowledged that ‘so bewildering can be the labyrinth of details surrounding a wedding and reception’ that a family would do well to avail itself of professional planning help” (Wallace, 2004, p. 192). Brides and their mothers looked to bridal consultants in department stores for expertise in all matters bridal, and the consultants were more than happy to help. Weddings provided countless sales opportunities to department store staff, and consultants were the ones who reaped most of the benefits from them.

In the 1970s, the growing informality of weddings reduced some of the stress of planning the event from brides. “Above all, the industry had brought a level of standardization to the celebration of weddings. It was precisely this similarity that the brides and grooms of the 1970s wanted to avoid...So trend-setting couples began to take back some of the responsibility for producing their own weddings” (Wallace, 2004, p. 238). These couples chose which elements
they wanted for their weddings, and added their own personal touches to their celebration. Instead of arranging a meeting with a florist to design a bouquet, more informal brides handpicked whatever flowers they wanted. Instead of playing the Wedding March as the bride walked down the aisle, popular songs were substituted. Outdoor weddings became more popular, too. In an era where weddings were becoming commercialized, brides with informal tastes wanted to make sure their weddings were unique and stood out from the norm. However, more traditional brides still considered using planners because the time it took to plan a wedding was increasing. “In 1959, [Bride’s] magazine recommended the bride begin planning a mere two months before the wedding and specified twenty-one tasks for her to complete. By 1970, the number of months had increased to six, and the number of items on the ‘to do’ list to forty-seven” (Otnes, 2003, p. 61). A year or longer to plan a wedding is the standard today.

The professionalization of bridal services began around the beginning of the 1980s. “In the early 1980s, after the decline of the department-store bridal salon, independent bridal consultants became the main source of professional advice to brides” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 154). Females mostly dominated this industry as department store clerks had traditionally been women’s careers, and female family members had generally helped with wedding plans anyway. Organizations like the Association of Wedding Professionals and the Association of Bridal Consultants were formed with missions to increase professionalism within the industry, and to create a network of members committed to all things bridal. “The appearance of these organizations was an important benchmark in the rise of a national wedding industry, signaling that a fully conceptualized bridal market was now in place” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 156). These organizations, which often taught courses or seminars on wedding planning, helped standardize wedding etiquette and customs. As more wedding professionals entered the market, “a side effect
of this professionalization was that female family members became unqualified for planning a wedding” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 156). The long-standing tradition of several female family members helping brides with their weddings changed to include only the bride, her planner, and maybe her mother.

In the early 1990s, America experienced a recession that affected most families throughout the country. As brides suddenly became cost-conscious, “wedding professionals...now emphasized that they were at the bride’s disposal to help her stay ‘on budget’ in her wedding plans” (Jellison, 2008, p. 51). For planners, having experience in accounting and budget management became a greatly utilized skill, for brides looked to a wedding professional for advice on finances too. The recession was short-lived, and soon America was on its way to economic prosperity. Because more couples were choosing to pay for their own weddings—and the expansive economic times gave them more discretionary income—they looked to find the most qualified wedding professional that could give them their fairytale wedding. While many sought out a person or print literature on planning, others turned to technology to help them with plans. “For TV-generation brides who would rather follow instructions from the video screen than the printed page, the 1990s also witnessed the release of dozens of instructional videotapes, wherein bridal-wear retailers, caterers, florists, photographers, invitation designers, and others in the wedding business touted their wares and services” (Jellison, 2008, p. 58). Technology began to grow increasingly important to brides, especially with the introduction of the Internet, which allowed brides to communicate with their planners through e-mail correspondence.

By the time the twenty-first century arrived, wedding planners had an established profession in the event management industry. This can be observed in the 2001 movie The
Wedding Planner. Although this romantic comedy focuses more on the love interest between Jennifer Lopez and Matthew McConaughey, the viewers do get a glimpse into the life of a female wedding planner—commissions, sales, budgets, venue and catering meetings, and most importantly solving wedding-day emergencies. In fact, Lopez’s character is so obsessed with her work that she makes no time for herself. It is for this reason that brides would rather hire a planner than do it themselves: by paying someone else to hassle with all of the minute details, busy brides can relax on their wedding day. The use of wedding planners “has become more widespread, thanks in part to their endorsement in the pages of bridal magazines” like Brides and The Knot, two publications that incorporate advertising heavily throughout their pages of nuptial advice (Mead, 2007, p. 38). According to The Wedding Report (2014), the average amount of money spent on full-service planning in 2011 was $3,482, which almost doubled the average from 2008 and accounted for thirteen percent of the wedding budget overall. Although this seems like an extraordinarily high price, full-service planning packages are generally all-encompassing and include several desirable tasks such as: budget development, vendor recommendation and selection, attendance at vendor meetings, event design, logistics planning, color coordination, hotel accommodations, rehearsal and ceremony execution, etiquette advice, delivering payment to vendors and more.

In March 2010, the website Pinterest was launched and transformed the way many twenty-first century brides gather wedding inspiration and ideas. The website allows users to “pin” websites and images to “boards”—very much like an online bulletin board—to save them for later viewing. “Boards” can be themed so “pins” can be organized into various categories—one of the most popular is the wedding category. “The most popular age range [of users] is 25 to 34, and its wedding boards are hugely popular, driving a bonanza of referral traffic to industry
folks who know how to use it” (Velasco, 2013). The lexicon “Pinterest wedding”—a wedding that utilizes several ideas that have been gathered from the pin-sharing website—has made its way into magazines, websites, and blogs. “Lately, though, wedding planners and industry experts have started to notice a pattern: a widening gap between brides’ expectations and what their budget can actually get them” (Velasco, 2013). Unfortunately, “Pinterest weddings” could leave a bride feeling disappointed if her wedding reception does not meet her expectations set forth from her Pinterest board. Usually, this disappointment is due to a budget constraint. “All of the magical powers wedding coordinators might seem to possess must also coexist with the disenchanting qualities of planning an event on a budget that might not be adequate to make the bride’s dream a reality” (Otnes, 2003, p. 90). Pinterest has also created new challenges for planners, as brides often approach planners with concepts of exactly what elements they wish to see at their wedding instead of coming in with none or very few ideas. However, some planners see Pinterest as an opportunity to further connect with their brides, and use their “shared boards” feature to collaborate with brides and understand their visions. One florist interviewed by Velasco (2013), “who uses shared boards to collaborate with clients,” admits that “it keeps [her] very in line with what brides want. ‘Purple’ can mean 50 different things, or [the bride] could say ‘peonies’ when she means ‘roses’” (para. 10). Pinterest also has its own smartphone and tablet applications, which allow brides to access their stored wedding ideas and pin new ones from anywhere. “So forget the era of brides schlepping binders thick with magazine tear sheets. With Pinterest, sharing ideas...is just an iPhone or tablet away” (Barker, 2012, para. 8). With millions of ideas covering everything from invitation calligraphy to aisle runners, Pinterest has revolutionized the way today’s tech-savvy couple plans their wedding.
Another challenge for today’s couples that begin to plan their wedding is the idea that they must have a unique theme that reflects their uniqueness as a couple. “Every detail is deemed to have meaning, and every choice reflects on the bride and groom...and if you are what you buy, it’s never more true than on your wedding day. Guests are supposed to be able to interpret consumer choices...as facets of the couple’s personality” (Wallace, 2004, p. 291). For example, a couple that enjoys spending time outdoors together—camping, hiking, and/or swimming—might feel that their wedding should either be outside or include elements of the outdoors: centerpieces with leaves and pinecones, trail mix guest favors, invitations shaped like tents, or groomsmen wearing hiking boots with their suits instead of dress shoes. All of those elements would make for a very lovely and creative wedding, but pulling off a theme of that complexity would put a lot of pressure on the couple and would most likely require significant planning help. To secure a particular venue that aids the theme, many couples need to reserve a reception space a year or longer before the wedding date, which also allows for more planning time. “One of the difficulties in planning a wedding today is that since the average wedding is quite large, people attend a lot of them,” so couples feel that they must make their wedding stand out from others (Wallace, 2004, p. 292).

Evidently wedding planning has drastically changed over time mostly due to the professionalization and expansion of wedding consulting profession and the increased use of technology in planning assistance. The consequences of these incidents include the removal of female family members from the planning process, a lengthened engagement period, and increasing consumer expectations from brides who attempt to plan their dream wedding. The evolution of wedding planning not only changes how weddings are planned, but the details of the weddings themselves. “The difference is that today’s weddings scale levels of complexity and
detailed planning that make earlier events look like Sunday-school picnics” (Wallace, 2004, p. 253). Although the basic elements of the modern wedding are the same as they have always been, this new age of idea sharing—and the availability of full-service wedding planners—has brought the white wedding to magnitudes that it has never seen before.

Registries

Besides making wedding plans, engaged couples must make plans for their future homes. Historically, items in the newlyweds’ newly established home were wedding gifts from family, friends, and extended family. As V. Howard (2006) points out, “in the early twentieth century, however, gift givers generally followed their own whims, as the numerous duplications of silverware, silver serving items, crystal, candlesticks, and vases found on elite wedding gift lists from the period suggest” (p. 114). These repeated incidents necessitated a better, more efficient system, and thus the bridal registry was created. A bridal registry is a program—originating from department stores—that allows soon-to-be newlyweds to list the items from a store that they would like in their homes. Once a registry is made, it is up to wedding guests to use this list to buy the couple a wedding gift. After a specific gift has been purchased, it is eliminated from the list to prevent duplicate items. Bridal registries benefit all sections of a department store because couples choose items from throughout the store: housewares, bed and bath, bridal wear, and apparel. Over the past several decades this has been a profitable tool for retailers as it has optimized increased consumer spending, and at the same time couples received items that matched their tastes and desires.

Brides of the 1960s were unsure of bridal registries and the etiquette surrounding them. “Telling the giver what one wanted as a wedding present in this way, however, could be considered vulgar or crass... The bride not only would have asked for a specific item, she would
know its price and thus how much the giver spent. A registry was also clearly impersonal, a fact only emphasized by the use of forms and prefabricated lists” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 117).

However, several brides still opted to use them with help from their bridal consultants. The consultants were able to calm brides’ worries by assuring them that the items they put on their registries were simply wishes—not necessities—and their guests would be happy to ensure they got the couple an original gift. Department stores like Carson Pirie Scott & Co. produced a form called a “Bride’s Preference List,” which was a “full page of preprinted items that...marked a shift toward standardized consumption as the retailer now told the bride what she should have in her new home” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 117). On this list were standard items that a newly married couple might want in their home: china, guest towels, potholders, placemats, sheets, silverware, and other housekeeping items. There was no minimum—and more importantly no maximum—amount of items that a bride should register for, but as many brides actually did need these items in their homes it only made sense that they asked their guests to buy them as wedding gifts. At this time, brides most likely went to department stores with their mothers to pick out items for the registry, as a mother would know what household items and brands would be best.

During the seventies, department stores and their bridal registries took a hit when the feminist movements made some women realize that they did not want to be housewives, and that the wedding industry as a whole was centered on consumerism. “The second-wave feminist movement drew renewed attention to inequality in marriage and exploitation of women by businesses and the media” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 113). Registries obviously were geared towards young women, and enticed them to want to receive a myriad of household essentials that would help them to become a skilled housewife. Feminist brides who had “New Weddings” definitely wanted to steer clear of wedding registries, as they preferred to marry in an anti-materialist
fashion that defied most bridal norms. Undoubtedly there were still brides who chose to register
before they got married, and “according to Marcia Seglison in her book about the wedding
industry, The Eternal Bliss Machine, which was published in 1973, $200 million was being spent
on wedding gifts each year, and the bride was embarking upon married life with 120 major new
products to her name” (Mead, 2007, p. 117). As the trends of women joining the workforce and
young people living on their own before marriage, people started buying their own household
items more than relying on family to buy it for them when they got married.

With the revival of the white wedding in the 1980s, brides were more accepting of the
bridal registry. However, because even more couples had already been living in their own
apartments before tying the knot, many of them already had the basics of a first home. “The
couples...frequently combin[ed] two households into a more luxurious shared home whereas
their predecessors often were fresh out of their parents’ homes” ("Bride and groom sign up for
gifts," 1983). These couples, in order to give their relatives something to purchase, began asking
for nontraditional items in their registry such as espresso machines, camping equipment, and
videotape players. “Engaged couples today often fill out the gift registry forms together, adding
Pac-Man and power tools to the list that used to be mostly china and silver selected by the bride
and her mother” ("Bride and groom sign up for gifts," 1983). Because the items that couples
already had in their residences were most likely passed down or of lower quality, registry
consultants often recommended upgrading items that the couple already owned. According to
can heed when planning their new home is twofold—to seek the advice of trained experts in the
store and to buy furniture, appliances, fabric, rugs, bedding and major accessories of good
quality” (p. 85). It was also in this decade that registries began appearing in retailers other than
department stores—like hardware stores—thus encouraging couples to register for gifts at more than one place. Not only could couples now register for physical items, but also honeymoon registries were beginning to come to light. “At Neiman-Marcus, says Harriet Hicklen, bridal registrar at the suburban Chicago store, couples can register for gift certificates to be applied toward honeymoon trips arranged through the store’s travel service” ("Bride and groom sign up for gifts," 1983). This practice would eventually become popular in the 2000s, as registering for more traditional items like silver and china would decline.

The beginning of the 1990s decade was very similar to the 1980s, with the exception that even more couples were cohabitating before marriage. Nevertheless, by the late 1990s the Internet was commonly used by retailers and consumers, and this revolutionized the gift registry procedure. The online registry was born. “Target, which established its Club Wedd registry in 1995, was extremely influential in this positioning of registering as fun: It was the first retailer to replace the solicitous registry consultant, bearing clipboard and fine-china counsel, with a scanner gun, thus bringing the spirit of the video-game arcade to the precincts of domesticity” (Mead, 2007, p. 111). Now that couples had privacy to create their registries—and did not need a sales consultant following them to write down the items they wished to receive—couples could relax and enjoy themselves when making a registry. With the registry market opened up to include the World Wide Web, competition for loyal customers became fiercer than ever before. Retailers across the nation “optimistically believed that women formed lifelong brand and store loyalties at the time of their wedding” and that the “the [most] important thing—then as now—was to turn the bride into a permanent consumer” (V. Howard, 2006; Mead, 2007). If stores could turn a bride into a loyal customer, then there was a greater chance that her future children might also shop with them, thus ensuring continued sales.
In the twenty-first century, the “wedding-registry business is more elaborate than ever before, particularly since couples no longer need to register in person with a local department store but have access to the infinite warehouses of online retailers” (Mead, 2007, p. 117). In fact, one of the more difficult decisions to make regarding the bridal registry is not what to register for, but where. Instead of choosing only one place to register, it is much more common for couples to have registries at a few stores in order to select a larger variety of items. Online retailers like Amazon.com allow couples to make gift registries, even though they do not have a single store where consumers go to shop. According to The Knot (2014), couples should “aim to have at least twice as many items on [their] list as guests at [their] wedding.” Using that logic, a couple who invites 150 guests to their wedding should register for 300 items, an amount that would produce a great deal of profit to one retailer if the couple received most of the items they chose.

Yet, many modern couples have been asking their loved ones to spend money on things other than material goods, such as a romantic honeymoon or even a down payment on a house. Websites like HoneymoonWishes.com and HoneyFund.com allow couples to sign up for trip packages, and then have their relatives pay for various expenses included in that package. For example, if a couple signs up for a seven-day cruise to the Caribbean, a guest could pay for a sixty-dollar excursion for the newlyweds to go on, or even a couple’s massage. This service, once organized through paper certificates in the eighties, is now completely digital and online. Other websites like Hatch My House and Down Payment Dreams allow guests to give cash donations to a couple so they can spend the money towards a house. Instead of giving cash in person, guests get to see what their donation will go towards and know that it will be spent
wisely. This kind of registry also makes gift giving easier for guests who may be out-of-state and cannot send a gift without significant costs in shipping.

Registering for gifts is one of the few tasks that the groom is actually involved in when planning a wedding. “A survey conducted by Bridal Guide magazine of its readers in 2006 found that 96 percent of its respondents planned to register. Not only do brides plan to register; grooms do, too: Ninety percent of respondents said that they would be accompanied by their fiancés when registering, while only a quarter of brides would be accompanied by their mothers” (Mead, 2007, p. 111). It is only recently that gender norms have shifted to where it is not uncommon for a man to do the cooking and/or cleaning in the house, thus it makes sense that he should help his bride when choosing items for their home. With thousands of online reviews about what cookware lasts longest and which bed sheets are softest, brides do not really need to consult their mothers anymore for help with their registries because the Internet has made comparing items significantly easier. Most items are chosen now as a matter of personal preference, thus couples communicate with each other what styles or brands of items they prefer over others instead of what a parent or store clerk might recommend.

Even if a couple decides to elope and skips having a white wedding, this area of the wedding industry will still be profitable. And even though a couple might not register, they will still need to buy products for their new home together—plus there is always the possibility of a family member buying a wedding present for them regardless of the absence of an actual wedding. “Marriages and weddings are very different things, even though the wedding industry tends to conflate them for marketing purposes, as JCPenney did with its wedding-picture-style advertisements that promised endurance both from true love and from cookware” (Mead, 2007, p. 164). Because registering for gifts forces couples to make decisions together, this practice is
almost like preparation for a real marriage except with consumerism tied to it. The bridal registry proves to be a successful tool from department stores that increases spending and promotes specificity in consumer choices, which explains why “American brides registered for $9 billion worth of gifts in 2006” (Mead, 2007, p. 109). When retailers vie for a bride’s loyalty, it is not because they have better products than their competitors, but because they know she is their only hope for another profitable year.

**Venues**

When a couple becomes engaged one of the first wedding elements that they will discuss is where they want to get married. “Whether [they] choose a religious ceremony in a local house of worship followed by an old-fashioned reception at home, or invent new traditions some place far away, finding a tie-the-knot spot is one of the first things to cross off [their] list because the hot spaces (or venues) are often booked a year in advance” (Blum, 1997, p. 21). Their location options are boundless, but first they must decide whether they want the ceremony and/or reception to be indoor or outdoor. After that decision has been made, some possible settings include: churches, reception halls, hotel ballrooms, country clubs, a courthouse, local parks, barns, or even the beach. Certainly these locations all appear typical to today’s brides, but options for venues have not always been so diverse.

In the 1960s, many brides decided to move their receptions away from the tradition of the bride’s parents’ home. “[P]ostwar urban brides and grooms could avail themselves of hotels or restaurants for their receptions, [but] those in smaller towns frequently turned to their church reception rooms or a local catering hall” (Wallace, 2004, p. 208). Instead of having intimate home receptions like those in earlier generations did, wedding receptions moved to more public spaces. Ceremonies were still typically held in churches, but to make things easier, brides who
wed in a church would use the venue’s reception hall for their reception, so guests would not have to move to a different location after the ceremony. V. Howard (2006) notes that “marrying in a public space, even a church venue, often signaled a more elaborate wedding involving printed invitations; a runner for the church; a prayer book; arm bouquets, corsages, and boutonnieres; and pre-printed wedding souvenirs for guests” (p. 180). It was more likely that food in a reception hall would be professionally catered; a domestic reception could feature a home-cooked buffet created by the mother of the bride and helpers. However, a new location option blossomed in popularity in the 1960s—the banquet hall or the catering hall.

“Instead of searching for different florists, photographers, musicians, caterers, and wedding cake providers, and then worrying about business contracts, payment, and the logistics of the wedding location itself, the customer purchased a standardized package that drew on the wedding hall’s on-site services. Creating the true one-stop wedding, these halls provided all the material elements of the formal white wedding except the bridal gown” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 211).

Banquet halls were more often used in cosmopolitan areas and big cities like New York, where brides and grooms could afford to spend lavishly on the wedding packages offered by the venues. The result of these standardized reception packages was the standardization of the wedding reception itself, making traditions out of the various elements usually found at these analogous receptions. Components like live music, the first dance, and professional photography—usually not found at a home reception—became desirable items to include in the wedding day.

As the seventies emerged, brides continued to move their ceremonies and receptions from churches and into hotels and banquet halls. These venues were significantly larger than any
church reception hall might have been, and thus “larger venues allowed brides to invite more guests; more guests meant that people, quite simply, went to more weddings; and going to more weddings led inevitably to comparisons” (Wallace, 2004, pp. 209-210). Most commonly found in New York, these wedding palaces could easily handle more than one wedding in a night, and during that time one establishment “estimates on the number of weddings held annually...range between 1,500, and 2,000” (Nemy, 1972). Along with these upscale venues, brides ventured to the great outdoors for their ceremonies and receptions. “Bride’s ran a recurrent feature on planning an outdoor wedding, full of important considerations like park permits, catering difficulties, and the necessity for temporary sanitation arrangements” (Wallace, 2004, p. 240). Outdoor weddings have always been challenging to plan due to the need for tables, chairs, food, and a dance floor—in addition to the unpredictability of inclement weather—but have remained a popular choice since this trend began. This type of ceremony was perfect for unconventional “New Wedding” brides, but also proved to be elegant for those who wanted their traditional white wedding in a different location. Even presidential daughter Tricia Nixon had her marriage ceremony in the White House Rose Garden, although she had the governmental home as a backup in case it rained on her four hundred guests (Robertson, 1971).

Banquet halls and the outdoors were still popular wedding locations in the 1980s, but as traditions resurfaced, brides found themselves being attracted to churches and homes once again. According to L.S. Ayres and Company’s Wedding Embassy Yearbook (1983), “most brides from the time they were small girls have had a secret desire for a church wedding,” and it is noted that “an old spacious house with a winding stairway and gracious rooms is a beautiful background for a ceremony, and even an apartment can be made a lovely setting” (p. 8). The Yearbook also describes the advantages of hotel, club, and outdoor weddings, but suggests, “a combination
indoor-outdoor reception affords variety and is an excellent means of handling a larger number of guests than the house will accommodate” (pp. 113-114). Staying at the same location for both the ceremony and the reception was no longer considered a necessity, and brides found it convenient to make guests travel in between events in order to have more time for wedding photos. At this point in time, the options for ceremony and reception venues were the largest they had ever been, but they were about to get bigger.

For the more adventurous couple, the ideal wedding location could be found in a destination wedding—a growing trend of that arose in the 1990s. The couple could travel and marry alone without guests—also known as eloping—or have a small entourage follow them to their destination of choice. The New York Times reported:

“The newest trend in the wedding industry [was] the combination destination wedding/honeymoon, in which several days at a resort are set aside to fete the bride and groom, hold the wedding and encompass the honeymoon. Family members and friends [were] all invited to take part in what is essentially a mini-vacation for everyone, with a wedding occurring smack in the middle” ("Fall weddings honeymoon," 1994).

Attractive locations included tropical retreats, European hostels, Rocky Mountain lodges, or even Walt Disney resorts. Whether a few states over or across the ocean, American newlyweds liked the idea of extending their honeymoons to include their weddings, creating a more intimate setting to begin their marriage. As America neared the twenty-first century, elopement had become less taboo than it had been decades earlier, and many couples found it to be a wonderful cheaper option. “[T]hanks to a rising number of older brides and grooms, a spate of second marriages...and the new 1990s cheap-is-chic ethos, elopements of one sort or another [were] almost as common as the traditional ceremonies in churches and banquet halls” (Ravo, 1991).
Las Vegas became a popular elopement location, and is still well known for its many wedding chapels—where couples can get married for as little as $100 (V. Howard, 2006). Couples were marrying however they wanted, wherever they wanted, and surrounded by whomever they wanted without concern for traditional etiquette.

In the 2000s, “the wedding day...turned into a wedding weekend, and in the upper middle class, it [was] common for out-of-town friends and relatives to travel by plane to attend a wedding where they [would] arrive on Friday night and leave late Sunday or early Monday morning” (Otnes, 2003, p. 107). As wedding celebrations became longer, the need for additional entertainment venues such as restaurants, hotels, and casinos became greater. All of these venues must work together to promote each other so that they all benefit from the increased business that weddings bring. This is especially true for destination weddings. Destination weddings are “now such big business for some beach resorts in the Caribbean and Mexico that their travel ads feature special wedding packages in which they promise not only to provide all the legal documentation but also the bride’s bouquet, wedding announcements, and the cake” (Wallace, 2004, p. 298). This kind of packaging is similar to those of banquet halls that have been mentioned earlier, except more than one business can benefit from the arrangement. When a couple gets married, it is not only the church and the reception site that benefits financially from the union. Venues for bachelor/bachelorette parties, rehearsal dinners, bridal showers, morning-after brunches, and—much later—anniversary parties also gain revenues from customers who come together to celebrate a friend or family member’s marriage.

Today, brides have continued to be creative with their wedding venues, tying the knot anywhere from rustic barns, to exotic zoos, to scenic wineries, to recreational stadiums. “In fact, a church or synagogue wedding is a bit less common now than at the end of World War II
because of the rise of interfaith marriages and the decline in religious affiliation among first-time brides and grooms” (Otnes, 2003, p. 110). The venue decorations over the years have also changed. “If you look at wedding pictures from the 1960s you see the guests sitting on humble folding metal chairs, but today, rental chairs come with their own little shrouds in white tulle or brocade tastefully colored to match the table linens—for an extra five dollars to ten dollars a chair” (Wallace, 2004, p. 290). Brides’ expectations for what a wedding venue can offer in terms of equipment rental, catering, decorations, and picturesque locations are much greater than they were when their mothers and grandmothers got married. Luckily, in today’s world brides’ options are varied enough that they can secure a venue that gives them exactly what they want.

**Food and Beverage**

Food and beverage is easily the second of the most important element of the wedding reception after securing a location. “Whether a family affair or a catered extravaganza, the wedding reception by definition [is] an event that revolve[s] around hospitality and the provision of food and drink for guests” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 192). Couples must choose whether to have a served, plated meal, a buffet line, or food stations around the room. Another aspect to take into consideration is whether or not alcohol will be served at a wedding, and who will be the one who will pay for it. However, like with venues, options for food and beverages are limitless—from simple dishes like pulled pork and mashed potatoes, to filet mignon and shrimp cocktail. Finally, the most important food item at any wedding is undoubtedly the wedding cake, whose tiered shape can be crafted and decorated in an infinite amount of ways, but is expected at almost every white wedding.

Wallace (2004) argues, “before World War II, a catered event was primarily an upper-class phenomenon. In small towns or less prosperous groups, food for weddings tended to be
contributed by family and friends of the bride, a kind of gala potluck” (p. 207). If the bride or groom had a favorite dish, one of them may have asked one of her relatives to make it for the wedding reception. After the war, due to brides moving their receptions to public spaces, and their parents being more willing to give their daughters a lavish wedding, catered food at weddings began to catch on. “Middle-class ideals in the 1950s and ‘60s were marked by such decorum and restraint that trays of tea sandwiches and cups of spiked punch, along with slices of wedding cake, were deemed a perfectly satisfying menu” (Wallace, 2004, p. 207). At this time, the wedding cake was traditionally a dark fruitcake—a tradition carried over from Britain—which was given to guests on the way out, and “because of [its] high alcohol and sugar content, [it] can be preserved for a year or even longer provided [it is] moistened from time to time with additional spirits and stored in airtight containers” (Kleiman, 1989). However, caterers and bakers later helped to diversify the selection of cakes and “[made] more elaborate wedding cake customs traditional” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 193). The sixties was probably the end of the popularity of the traditional homemade food and fruitcake wedding, as times changed and brides altered their tastes.

In the seventies, the wedding palaces that several brides chose to utilize were a catered dream come true. “They [were] the catering establishments that specialize[d] in the wedding extravaganzas every girl once wanted, and many still do; the receptions with music, champagne and the kind of dinners gourmets call gourmand” (Nemy, 1972). It was during this era that the groom’s family became more involved in paying for the reception. “In 1970, [Bride’s] mentions ‘the large and costly dinner receptions’ that had become popular, and the increasing practice of the groom’s family offering to contribute to escalating nuptial expenses” (Wallace, 2004, p. 232). With two family incomes helping to contribute to one event, couples could afford to have
decadent food at their weddings than they could ever make on their own. As vegetarianism and veganism were dietary choices made among some of the “barefoot brides” of the mid-seventies, healthier options in menus began to be a necessary consideration. “Brides wanted carrot cakes under the statutory white icing because carrot cake was a trendy new healthy-sounding treat that people actually ate because they liked it, not because it was expected” (Wallace, 2004, p. 237).

The cost of wedding receptions rose as the decade headed towards the eighties. According to Jones (1979), “wedding costs, with the reception the main item, are currently at least twice as much as they were four or five years ago... On a per-guest basis, the cost [of a reception] can range from $12.50 at a restaurant, $25 at a catering establishment, $50 at an Ivy League club and $60 and up at hotels such as the St. Regis or the Plaza. Kosher catering can add $15 or more per person.” These escalating costs were just an indication of what was to come at the end of the century.

According to the Wedding Embassy Yearbook (1983), “the food and beverage served to guests should be the best the bride’s family can provide, whether a large repast is served by a caterer or a simple collation is prepared at home. Aside from being delicious, the food should be beautifully served, with the best china and silver which can be provided, from attractively laid tables” (p. 32). Quality and presentation of food was important, thus brides who wanted a formal wedding preferred their reception in a place other than the home. Surely a professional caterer could present an important meal better than a relative could. The Yearbook emphasizes that “a tiered wedding cake is always beautiful,” and also mentions the long-standing tradition of fruitcake, noting, “the cake itself may be white or yellow cake, or dark, rich fruit cake frosted with white icing” (p. 33). A tiered cake—requiring more ingredients, labor, and time—was
surely more expensive, but brides feared that a one-tiered cake might appear more like a birthday cake.

Caterers in the late 1980s had established a system that was both profitable to them and desirable to brides and their families.

“By the late twentieth century, caterers developed new marketing techniques that pushed consumers to spend more on their wedding reception. The ‘package,’ which presented the consumer with set groupings of goods and services, was a key innovation...These package prices outlined the goods and services deemed necessary for a proper wedding, including such things as a cocktail reception, dinner, flowers, entertainment, after-dinner bar, and gratuities and taxes. This pricing method encouraged expenditure, creating the illusion of a good deal while actually adding items and services that the couple might not have originally intended to purchase.” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 195).

If a caterer made the most inclusive package just out of a couple’s price range—but made all of the items in the package enticing—couples could agree that it was worth spending the extra money on the additional amenities.

As the ‘90s rolled in and America was met with an early economic recession, brides still wanted an assortment of menu options, but at an affordable price. “By the early 1990s...à la carte pricing was introduced as it allowed caterers to respond to consumer demand for a wider menu choice. This pricing structure also allowed caterers to respond to increasing food costs” (V. Howard, 2006, pp. 197-198). Cost-conscious brides also looked to alternatives for expensive champagne, and found that sparkling wine was a cheap substitute. “Champagne starts around $20 a bottle; sparkling wine, in the same kind of bottle with the same kind of cork making the same kind of ‘pop’ when it’s removed, can be found for as low as $5 a bottle” (Prial, 1993).
When the recession ended and economic downturn transformed into economic prosperity, brides were back at spending more of their budgets on superior food.

After the twentieth century ended, the brides of 2000s and their fiancés needed to make food and beverage selections all sorts of wedding weekend events—the rehearsal dinner, wedding day breakfast, cocktail hour, reception, and possible morning-after brunch. They rarely chose only one item to serve at their wedding, for caterers now provided a wide range of options to choose from. Kantor (2002) writes, “these days, it is hard to attend a wedding without tripping through the cuisines of four or five different regions during the cocktail hour alone, what with the sushi, pasta, stir-fries, samosas, mini pizzas and crepes” offered before the bride and groom make their appearance. And although alcohol has been traditionally been served at weddings, it too is no longer a necessity. “For example, brides who do not drink alcohol and who do not want it served at the reception must decide whether to stand their ground against relatives and guests who expect a cash bar, wine, and champagne” (Otnes, 2003, pp. 90-91). Even the sacred tradition of serving wedding cake for dessert has been modified, for newlyweds who prefer other desserts now feel no shame in serving those instead. “Other newly popular additions to the dessert buffet include sundae bars, Krispy Kreme doughnuts, and Rice Krispies Treats. No one, caterers least of all, seems upset by hosts’ paying $200 a head for a meal ending with Rice Krispies Treats, a recipe as easy and cheap as they come” (Kantor, 2002). In order to keep up with the appeal of having a unique wedding, engaged couples are trying to select a variety of foods that are not commonly served at weddings and instead literally reflect their own tastes.

Today, food traditions and trends vary by region. For example, a longstanding tradition in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania has been to have a cookie table instead of a wedding cake (Lieber, 2009). In some areas of the United States, informal potluck receptions are still popular, and in
other regions cocktail hours with passed hors d'oeuvres are seen as unnecessary. Yet, the popularized white wedding has a cocktail hour, catered meal, and wedding cake. Additionally, both vendors and their clients must heavily consider dietary concerns and alternative dietary lifestyles, such as vegetarianism, veganism, gluten-free diets, lactose-intolerances, kosher practices, and raw foodism. A polite bride now offers these options at her wedding reception, choosing foods that will please the diversity of her guests. “A seated dinner at the reception is now the norm, rather than passed hors d'oeuvres or a buffet,” which means that when invited guests RSVP, they should be able to select a menu option that best suits their dietary needs (Wallace, 2004, p. 287). These decisions affect every food choice from edible wedding favors to types of beers served. Because the choices they make in this area are the most criticized by their guests, the bride and groom must make sure they pass the metaphorical test with flying colors.

A current beverage trend is to include a signature cocktail or two that ties in with the theme of the wedding or is the bride or groom's favorite alcoholic drink. “The signature cocktail at wedding receptions...has gone, in the last few years, from optional to almost obligatory” (Miles, 2009). Whether alcoholic or non-alcoholic, catering companies or bar services must discuss these selections with their clients, learn how to make them, or be able to suggest a cocktail that would fit perfectly at the reception. Besides their creative appeal and delicious taste, some wedding experts have “credited the economic recession for spurring the trend, noting that serving a signature cocktail, no matter how thoughtful or complex, is considerably less costly than hosting a full open bar” (Miles, 2009). Even with a signature cocktail, usually at least one bottle of champagne is still present at the reception for the purpose of toasting the happy couple.

The debate between open bars and cash bars has long been debated. On one hand, an open bar is usually appreciated by guests who want to let loose or enjoy an alcoholic beverage,
but can become expensive to those paying for the service very quickly, and can cause overconsumption issues and inappropriate behavior. On the other hand, a cash bar is an excellent way to save money in the wedding budget, but is sometimes considered rude to ask guests to pay for a service when they have been invited and are not the ones hosting. However, with this logic, destination weddings should also be considered rude since guests are paying for their own travel and accommodation fees to attend the wedding. TheKnot.com—a highly popular wedding etiquette website and vendor search engine—advises that cash bars are improper and not a good idea, and should be avoided by having a “limited bar” ("Wedding food & drink: Is a cash bar acceptable?,” 2014). A limited bar usually serves only soda, beer, wine, and some champagne for toasting, but a signature drink could also be included in this package. There are regional differences across America that dictate whether or not a cash bar is acceptable, but in wealthier areas an open bar is usually expected.

Food and beverage decisions continue to be of the utmost importance when planning a wedding reception, but the decisions must be made carefully as the options for these items has expanded significantly over time. From a simple homemade meal with everlasting fruitcake to a full five-course meal with a dessert bar and specifically designed alcoholic drinks, wedding cuisine is more complex than ever. “Menus now include not merely cake and something to drink a toast with, but multi course meals and champagne” (Wallace, 2004, p. 305). The Wedding Report (2014) estimated that in 2013, couples spent on average $4,743 on event food service, and $2,445 on event bar service, which constituted a substantial amount of the wedding budget. For a once-in-a-lifetime event, newlyweds will gladly spend money on exquisite food and drinks to celebrate their new life together.

Photography and Videography
According to Mead (2007), “the creation of a visual record of the wedding day has been sought by brides and grooms for almost as long as the technology to do so has existed” (p. 176). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the wealthy could afford to have a photographer take photographs on their property, but most people could only afford an in-studio portrait taken some time after the wedding day had already passed (Otnes, 2003). For a long time, these portraits were the only mementos of a couple’s wedding day. “By the 1930s, the society crowd was inviting photographers with big-view cameras and electric floodlights into the sanctuary,” and later pictures of the bridal party and close family members became more important (Otnes, 2003, p. 115). The practice of making a wedding album caught on, and wedding photography became a solidified career path for professional photographers.

Before the sixties, photographers only went to the ceremony to capture the necessary portraits, and maybe a few other shots like the bride and groom leaving the ceremony location. In the 1960s, “photographers began to go on location to both the wedding and the reception ” (Otnes, 2003, p. 115). Now that receptions were being held in more exciting places than the bride’s parents’ home, couples wanted photographers to capture all of the post-ceremony festivities. Moments like the couple’s first dance, the cake cutting, and the bouquet toss were added to the wedding album. “Likewise, color photos replaced black-and-white, adding warmth and emotion to the photographs” (Otnes, 2003, p. 115). The tradition of having a wedding photographer present on the wedding day to capture memories was well established by this point, but soon moving pictures would find their way into the big event.

Color photography and reception photos remained standard throughout the early seventies, but wedding videography has its roots in the late seventies. According to Otnes (2003), “videotaping weddings began in the late 1970s but was technically difficult at the time
(the camera still came with an electric cord rather than a battery pack, and the images were of poor quality)” (p. 118). Film cameras for personal pictures were already available and used by the public during this era, but the popularity of the portable Super-8 film cameras allowed couples to be aspiring videographers and record their most precious moments. “Couples had been experimenting with Super-8 sound cameras in the 1970s, but the attractiveness of video over [photography] was the ease in viewing it” (Otnes, 2003, p. 119). The Super-8 movie camera, introduced by Kodak in 1965, ranged in price from $125 to $300 and was manufactured by a variety of companies (Glenn, 1974). This camera was mostly used for amateur videography, but its use by Americans sparked an interest in documenting daily life and special events as home videos. For this reason, couples began requesting wedding videographers for their big day.

By the 1980s, videocassette recorders (VCRs) allowed Americans to record video on analog tapes. “Portable, battery-operated VCRs [made] it possible to record outdoors and other places where electricity [was] unavailable or inconvenient to use,” and “the battery...[gave] a maximum of one hour recording on a full charge” (Pepper, 1979). The wedding video would be given to the couple on a Video Home System (VHS) tape and could be played on the couple’s personal VCR. Throughout the eighties decade this technology improved to provide clearer pictures, longer recording times, and more portable equipment—thus helping the wedding videography industry. Wedding photographers began to deviate from the traditional routine bridal portraits and used editing techniques to make artistic-looking photographs. Using special effects such as “filters, a matte box, multiple exposures, special lighting, or special lenses,” photographers could produce various creative shots of the bride and groom (Heffner, 1981). Brides who cared about their wedding pictures turned to professional photographers who had the
equipment and knowledge to create these masterpieces and were preferred over amateur photographers.

The 1990s saw big business for video cameras and video editing. Between 1986 and 1991, almost ten million Americans bought camcorders for their own video recording pleasure, and “by the middle of the 1990s, the majority of weddings were being videotaped” (Elmer-DeWitt, 1991; Otnes, 2003). With the help of computers, videographers could edit their footage into a movie-like sequence. “Editing on a VCR [called] for extraordinary patience and split-second timing. That's where the computers [came] in...Computers [could] also be used to generate titles, graphics and fancy scene shifts--like the "tumble," in which one image seems to turn over to reveal another” (Elmer-DeWitt, 1991). With this technology, newlyweds became almost like celebrities in their movie-like wedding videos. Videography services were also professionalized by the establishment of the Wedding and Event Videographers Association International (WEVA) in 1995, “whose members devote a lot of their time to figuring out how to make a convincing case for the value of the service they provide to brides who may be otherwise preoccupied with selecting and paying for the material production of the wedding itself” (Mead, 2007, p. 184). Because videography is not an essential part to the execution of the wedding day—but rather an extra component that is decided upon as a matter of preference—videographers must create a need in couples that a wedding video is essential to document the start of their life together.

Photographers of the nineties still used their artistic visions to tell the story of a couple’s love, but trends leaned towards a more photojournalistic approach that emphasized capturing candid moments more than posed images. This new variety of photographic style increased the professionalism of wedding photography, and many photographers asked “between $3,000 and
$4,500 just for the shoot, negatives, and proofs,” and were “booked at least six months ahead of time” (Matloff, 1997). As well as hiring an expert, couples found ways to include guests in the picture-taking process. “In 1994, Kodak introduced a flash wedding edition of its Fun Saver camera and successfully capitalized on the idea that couples should offer guests disposable cameras to use at the reception” (Otnes, 2003, p. 119). After the wedding, the film in the disposable cameras would get developed, and the bride and groom would get to see their wedding from the guest’s perspective. However, disposable cameras created challenges for photographers, who were trying to capture moments—in a possibly dark reception room—with several background flashes interfering with images due to guests taking their own pictures.

At the advent of the new millennium, photo and video services began their accelerated movement towards digitization. “While most weddings [were] still photographed on film,” some photographers had already switched to digital wedding coverage, for it “offered wedding photographers a wide range of products and services that expand[ed] the potential for more sales” (Schaub, 2001). Digital single-lens reflex cameras (DSLRs) replaced film with reusable memory cards, which allowed the photographer the ability to retake photos as necessary, or the videographer to record high-definition video. The adoption of the Internet into everyday life also pushed photography and videography into the digital age. “The Internet [became] a way to prospect clients and show work and also [became] more important in print ordering, finishing and even album arrangement” (Schaub, 2001). Digital video discs—or DVDs—became a huge hit in the twenty-first century. “By the mid-2000s, DVD had established itself as the entertainment media format of choice, and VHS was quickly fading from the scene” due to its several advantages: “the five-inch, CD-like disc [offered] twice the resolution of VHS for video purposes, never [wore] out, [did] not need rewinding, and [let] the user change languages at the
touch of a button" ("Digital video disc," 2007). Videographers could film the footage through their digital video cameras, edit the footage on their computers, and burn the footage onto a compact DVD to give to the clients. Technology certainly made the editing process faster and the quality of the finished products much better.

Nowadays, over a decade into the twenty-first century, the quality of wedding photography and videography is at its highest due to further advancements in digital technology. An emphasis on high-definition photos and videos has resulted in the most realistic-looking representations of the bride and groom. Hurter (2010) points out:

“Since the digital revolution, the photographer’s job has become more complex. Responsibility for retouching, color management, album design, and even printing is now something that many wedding photographers readily shoulder—in exchange for the vastly improved creative control that comes with being able to control every step of the process.”

Editing software from Adobe, including Photoshop and Lightroom for photos, and Premiere and After Effects for videos, gives these vendors complete artistic control over the moments that they capture. The jobs of photographers and videographers are also more complex due to the greater amount of equipment that they must carry. A prepared professional will have multiple memory cards, flashes, batteries, and lenses at the ready in case a malfunction happens.

Presently, the invention and mass-adoption of smartphones has greatly affected the wedding-day experience. Several guests now have a mobile device that can take pictures, record videos, and immediately share them with social networks. As of 2013, 56 percent of Americans owned a smartphone—the largest age group owning them is between 18 and 29 years old (Smith, 2013). Popular photo-sharing mobile applications like Instagram have joined the wedding day
and have replaced the desire for disposable cameras. If a couple chooses to use a hashtag—"a word or phrase preceded by a hash mark (#), used within a message to identify a keyword...and facilitate a search for it"—the photos taken by wedding guests and posted on social media can be tracked for later viewing (Dictionary.com). However, smartphone usage has caused major conflicts with hired professional photographers and videographers. Some guests who want their own photos of the couple are willing to block the aisle—and the professionals—in order to snap a picture on their phone. In fact, according to a recent survey, “40% of guests were encouraged to post and share wedding photos [on] social media” (Dockterman, 2014). Brides now need to consider whether they want to have an “unplugged wedding”—where guests keep their smartphones away from the ceremony and reception—or if they want to encourage picture- and/or video-taking by guests.

Over the years, wedding albums have gone from a handful of portraits of the bride and groom, to lengthy albums containing portraits, candid photographs, and still life photographs. The photojournalistic style that became popular in the nineties is still widely desired by brides today, but with greater emphasis on documenting the decorations in the ceremony and reception locations—like centerpieces, favors, flowers, and guest cards. Wedding videos have changed from a camera on a tripod at the end of the aisle, to full-fledged short films with flashy effects and set to romantic music. “Because weddings often feature mini-family reunions, photographs affirm a belief in family solidarity and may represent one of the few times when certain relatives are visually included in the family circle” (Otnes, 2003, p. 18). The appeal of videography is that a photograph will capture the bride’s dazzling smile in her white gown, but a video will capture her deep breath before her walk down the aisle, how gracefully she danced with her new husband, and the sound of her laugh at the best man’s toast. After a wedding is over, the only
thing that will last over time will be the memories inside the mind of every guest, and the pictures and/or videos that were taken on that happy day. For this reason, engaged couples have become much more selective compared to their ancestors when it comes to searching for and booking these services.

**The Media**

Wedding industry media—including magazines, film, television, and the Internet—have had a significant impact on brides’ attitudes about the white wedding over the past half-century. Not only do they reflect cultural norms of their various time periods, but the various media outlets also help to create new ones. Usually a common factor among all of these mediums includes the coverage of celebrities’ lives, relationships, marriages, and overall fascination of the public with the rich and famous. “Weddings [gain] positive press for the celebrities; [enable] the media to sell more newspapers, magazines, and television air time; and [provide] free advertising for dressmakers, pastry chefs, hotels, and other segments of the wedding industry” (Jellison, 2008, p. 113). Likewise, all of these media outlets bring attention to wedding industry vendors and suppliers, and promote the buying of consumer products in order to allow brides to emulate the weddings they see. Marketing and advertising are crucial to these facets of the wedding industry, but have been highly effective and persuasive in keeping the white wedding desirable over the last fifty years.

**Magazines.** The bridal magazine industry in the United States began with *Brides* magazine—founded in 1934 and currently owned by Condé Nast—and is the oldest bridal magazine in the United States that is still in circulation today (Mead, 2007). For clarification, the magazine was titled *Bride’s* prior to 2005, after which the apostrophe was dropped from the name (Mead, 2007). The magazine’s long-standing history with American brides makes it the
main authority on the cultivation of the wedding industry over the past sixty years. “Through their advertising, editorials, feature articles, and merchandising efforts and promotions, first *Bride's*, and later other bridal publications, naturalized higher levels of consumption and played a key role in the invention of the formal white wedding tradition” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 72).

Bridal magazines are not only a valuable resource to their readers, but also their advertisers who are able to promote their products and services easily to target markets.

In the early sixties, “for the first time, the wedding industry gathered data about their readers for advertisers to create an accurate picture of the U.S. bridal market as a whole” which allowed advertisers to use “national market research to understand the business of brides” (V. Howard, 2006, pp. 86-87). With a clear picture of the demographics of bridal magazine readers, advertisers could pinpoint the consumer needs of brides across America and cater to those needs in return for, hopefully, an increased profit. “By the early 1960s, advertisers spent more than $2 million in the magazine, which had a circulation of 220,000...[and] an increasing range of companies also sought a bridal market” (V. Howard, 2006, pp. 81-82). By identifying to readers what services and businesses belonged to the bridal industry—and by identifying to advertisers what their readers wanted—bridal magazines truly were mutually beneficial to both parties.

Throughout the sixties, “useful advice on renting apartments, health insurance, birth control, sexual fulfillment, balancing a career and marriage, and the changing roles of women shared the pages of *Bride's* with the ever-present photographs of long peau de soie gowns trimmed with alençon lace” (Wallace, 2004, pp. 212-213). In addition to advertisements for dresses, venues, and other wedding suppliers, magazines answered readers’ questions regarding how to properly handle challenging social problems regarding weddings. “Perhaps in response to changing behavior, etiquette writers began addressing new social circumstances, such as divorce
and second marriages” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 75). With magazines replacing etiquette books and becoming the reigning authority on wedding planning protocol, they had the power to make the rules concerning how brides should get married.

Although the early-70s began with rebellion against the white wedding, bridal magazines still had their loyal readers intact. “With more than four out of five brides of the period consulting such magazines, however, it was a pretty safe bet that the majority of the nation’s brides desired familiar ritual rather than do-your-own-thing innovation” (Jellison, 2008, p. 36). The “New Wedding” brides that defied tradition were most likely not the women who were reading bridal magazines. Both Bride’s and Modern Bride, its main competitor, targeted the same readers:

“Young women, aged eighteen to twenty-four, many of whom worked or went to college, who all came from the same regions in the United States and were from a range of racial, class, and ethnic backgrounds, were most likely to pick up either one of these magazines as they planned their nuptials” (V. Howard, 2006).

Because of this competition for readership, Bride’s and Modern Bride vied for exclusive advertisers and original content. “According to one 1977 report analyzing circulation figures alongside census data, over 86 percent of all first-time brides were bridal magazine readers,” thus it was important to editors that brides bought their magazines off the rack and not ones published by rivals (V. Howard, 2006, p. 85).

It was also during this era that the admiration of lavish weddings was spurred on by publications highlighting the rich and famous. “Time, Inc., furthered the nation’s fascination with celebrity when it launched People magazine in 1974, bringing full-time celebrity reporting...into the mainstream” (Jellison, 2008, p. 114). People magazine reported on all facets
of celebrities’ lives—their careers, their children, their homes, and especially their marriages. “Weddings, naturally, were a staple feature of these celebrity-driven publications. Weddings have always been fascinating, providing as they do an intimate glimpse of a stranger’s emotional and sexual life in an event that the average person has also experienced” (Wallace, 2004, p. 267). Now that women could read about the weddings of their favorite actresses and singers, they drew comparisons between their own lives and those of superstars—which furthered the belief that they, too, could marry in luxurious style.

The printed press coverage of the 1981 royal wedding between Prince Charles and Lady Diana only reaffirmed the public’s obsession with the weddings of the famous. “In reality, Bride’s magazine and the rest of the wedding industry had helped create the expensive fairytale wedding long before Diana’s 1981 ceremony. The royal wedding did not so much transform women’s image of the ideal wedding as it solidified their already existing picture of the perfect nuptial celebration” (Jellison, 2008, p. 137). Brides of the eighties, born around the sixties, had grown up idolizing celebrities and learning the established traditions of the white wedding. However, due to rising divorce rates in the eighties, bridal magazines became more aware of the second-time bride. “Bridal magazines began to ease up on their advice that only first weddings be large, expensive affairs, opening the way for what the industry was now calling ‘encore brides’ to become second- or third-time consumer of formal wedding gowns and bridesmaid dresses” (Jellison, 2008, pp. 49-50). These articles encouraged previously divorced brides to celebrate their second marriages with the same amount of glamour and spectacle as they had for their first wedding.

Until the nineties, bridal magazines had predominantly been for the young, white, middle-class woman. Very few magazines catered to the ethnic differences of other brides, but
“market segmentation, combined with broad social change, resolved in the rise of specialized ethnic bridal magazines” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 96). By not appealing to these other segments, advertisers were losing out on a significant portion of the American bridal market. “Brides Today, the first national magazine targeted specifically to the black bride” was introduced in 1992, and “Latina Bride, published in California, appeared in 1997” (V. Howard, 2006; Jellison, 2008). These publications still featured a woman in a white dress on the cover, but offered more advice on cultural wedding customs and how to include them during ceremonies and receptions. However, these publications could not even come close to matching the devoted readership of the more popular wedding magazines. “With 700 advertising pages and 405,000 readers per issue by decade’s end, Bride’s remained the nation’s most influential bridal magazine, followed by its venerable competitor, Modern Bride, which enjoyed a per-issue circulation of 371,294” (Jellison, 2008, p. 58). Regardless, this new market of ethnic bridal magazines carried the white wedding tradition into cultures that traditionally had their own method of marrying.

An established trend of this decade was the use of real-life weddings as well as those of the famous. “By the mid-’90s, the practice of including real weddings in the editorial mix was firmly established...[and] the inclusion of genuine brides and grooms in their pages guarantee[d] that they [knew] what they [were] talking about” (Wallace, 2004, p. 272). Brides-to-be could see how real brides around the country were getting married, and this—combined with the Internet—allowed for more extensive idea sharing among brides.

The 2000s saw big changes for bridal magazines in ways that were not anticipated in the twentieth century. The arrival of the Internet compelled many bridal magazines companies to create digital publications as well as in print. “In 2006, Condé Nast launched Brides.com, a Web site combining content from all its bridal magazines as well as new content created for the Web,
in its own pursuit of the online reader” (Mead, 2007, p. 19). Several other magazines followed suit, including The Knot, Martha Stewart Weddings, Southern Bride, and Bridal Guide. When tablets and smartphones became widely used in the 2010s, these same magazines adopted their own bridal magazine apps, where brides can digitally subscribe and have the newest issue automatically released onto their device the day that it is published. “Courting advertisers, and serving as a delivery system of brides to advertisers, is still the mission of Brides and its fellow magazines, as well as of the rival online publications” (Mead, 2007, p. 23). The Spring 2014 magazine issue of The Knot consisted of 584 pages, most of which provided opportunities for advertisers to promote their businesses to a wide audience of affianced women.

Despite this radical change in the way brides read magazines, one thing has not changed—the exclusion of the groom. Bridal and wedding magazines are almost always geared towards women. There are very few—if any—wedding magazines geared towards the groom, groomsmen, or other males involved in the wedding. “While he usually [has] his own section in magazines, it is clear that he [is] not expected to be the reader... Information on the groom’s financial responsibilities, his gift to the bride, etiquette, appropriate wedding attire, and advice on honeymoons [are] given to the bride, apparently to be passed on to him” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 94). Traditionally, the groom is not as involved in making wedding plans as his bride is, thus he has no reason to purchase wedding industry literature because his bride has probably already done so. “The corresponding lack of publications aimed at grooms only serves to reinforce the welcomed absence of men from the all-female community of wedding consumers” (Boden, 2003, p. 73). The goal of most advertisers is to persuade the bride so that she may persuade her groom into buying whatever goods or services she feels are necessary.
Another element that has not changed in the bridal magazine industry is the collection of surveys and reporting of statistics about its readers. Every year, Brides releases its American Wedding Study, and TheKnot.com releases the results of its Real Weddings Study. The results of these studies reveal rising trends in the wedding industry, as well as hard facts like the average cost of a wedding, average length of engagement, and average age of the bride and groom. “The details of the American Wedding Study suggest that today’s bride is embracing her role in exactly the spirit of consumer ebullience...that is encouraged in the pages of the bridal magazines” (Mead, 2007, p. 24). The greatest evidence that consumerism exists in the wedding industry can be found in the pages of a bridal magazine, where advertisements and advice columns push brides to utilize bridal boutiques, caterers, florists, and the registry. “In these ways, bridal magazines helped invent the bridal market itself, defining what consumer goods and services were necessary for the ideal wedding and marriage” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 82). Now that these magazines have been established for several years and have illustrious reputations, it is unlikely that brides will stop using them to help them achieve their white wedding fantasy.

**Television.** Whether the program is a sitcom, soap opera, reality show, or drama—and whether or not it is fictional—televised weddings attract viewers. Runaway Bride director Garry Marshall said, “That was the tradition in TV. When your ratings went down, you turned it into a wedding. We got Fonzie married, we got Richie married, we got Mork married. We almost got Laverne married. We got Shirley married. Brides and sweeps weeks go together in TV” (Wallace, 2004, p. 273). This statement by Marshall applies to each decade throughout this entire period, as weddings of main characters in popular television shows regularly happened. Not only did weddings make appearances in episodes, but televised celebrity weddings were also popular,
and in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, television programs specifically related to weddings appeared.

Sitcom TV weddings are crowd-pleasers—usually because they unite two of a show’s main characters in a comedic way—and in the 1960s, *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965) was a popular sitcom featuring a loving relationship between its two main characters, Jeannie and Tony. Jeannie, an actual genie, serves astronaut Tony Nelson—her “master”—after he frees from her lamp, but the two of them must keep their arrangement a secret. In fact, “Jeannie was one of the first television shows to feature a man and a woman living together without the benefit of marriage” (O’Dell, 2013, p. 95). A romance blossoms, and in the show’s final season the audience finally gets to see a wedding between Jeannie and Tony. Towards the end of the series, “Jeannie has also largely stopped referring to Tony as master,” which could be a nod towards the gender equality movements about to happen in the seventies (O’Dell, 2013, p. 95). However, during the ceremony in the wedding episode, Jeannie keeps daydreaming about how she has waited to get married her whole life, and now her own wish has been granted. Jeannie feels that her white wedding is perfect, and this opinion largely reflects the attitude towards traditional weddings during that decade.

At the beginning of the seventies, America witnessed the marriage of Richard Nixon’s daughter, Tricia, to Edward Cox in 1971 (Wallace, 2004). “Ultimately, one American in four watched the televised coverage of Tricia Nixon’s wedding” (Wallace, 2004, p. 126). In the past, Americans read about weddings in publications like *Life* magazine—especially for the royal weddings of Grace Kelly in the late fifties and Princess Margaret in the early sixties. This time, witnessing the marriage of an American president’s daughter through a television was as close to a “royal” wedding as the United States could get. “With most young women of the early 1970s
rejecting the barefoot countercultural wedding and its anti consumer ethic, they looked to Tricia Nixon as a bride who tastefully consumed what the wedding industry had to offer” (Jellison, 2008, p. 129). The wedding industry greatly appreciated Tricia Nixon’s traditional wedding at a time when second-wave feminists brides were resisting it.

A spinoff from the popular ‘70s program, The Mary Tyler Moore Show, the perpetually single character Rhoda Morgenstern was given her own self-titled show. After having several dating disasters during the previous show, Rhoda finally finds love in this new show with a man named Joe Gerard, whom she later marries. “In a 1974 episode of Rhoda, Rhoda Morgenstern (Valerie Harper) ended up taking the New York subway to her ceremony, wearing her wedding dress” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 173). However, Valerie Harper did not want her character to become married, following the feminist attitude of the seventies. “The network resisted actress Valerie Harper’s wish to have Rhoda and her boyfriend...just live together, rather than ending her cutting-edge status as an independent, single television character with a marriage” because there were “business concerns over ratings,” and “advertisers limited television’s potential for social experimentation” (V. Howard, 2006, p. 173). To have the two main characters cohabitate instead of marry would have pushed the envelope and risked the show’s reputation with the public, thus the traditional white wedding still dominated plot lines on the small screen.

The 1980s had two large televised weddings: British royalty’s Lady Diana and Prince Charles, and soap opera characters Luke and Laura from General Hospital. “When Lady Diana Spencer married the Prince of Wales on July 29, 1981, 750 million people around the globe witnessed the televised ceremony” (Wallace, 2004, p. 250). The most stunning feature about seeing the couple on TV was Diana’s legendary wedding dress. “The sparkling dress and the other thrilling highlights of the televised nuptials secured the popularity of elaborate white
weddings for years to come” (Jellison, 2008, p. 133). Royal weddings are of the most exquisite, lavish weddings that money can buy, and the broadcast of this one around the world only made women wish that could marry like princesses such as Diana. Popular American soap opera General Hospital featured TV couple Luke Spencer and Laura Webber, whose love turned into a wedding in 1981. Their wedding episode garnered fourteen million viewers, and set a new record for the size of an audience watching daytime television (Keller, 1999). The success of this televised wedding brought new insights to producers on how to make their shows more popular. According to Otnes (2003), “most of the viewers of popular television programs, especially of daytime soap operas, were women. Television producers understood that inserting a wedding into a soap opera or comedy meant increased ratings during crucial sweeps periods” (p. 179). It became obvious that the way to attract women to a television show was to have some sort of on-screen romance between main characters, for which the viewers would all hope that the couple would eventually get married in a future episode.

Television in the nineties saw a new union between weddings and the small screen—network shows that focused on real-life weddings. Instead of paying actors to impersonate a couple in love and then pay screenwriters, designers, and editors to film a TV wedding, networks realized that filming real-life weddings was cheaper. In 1996, The Learning Channel premiered their program A Wedding Story, in which each thirty-minute episode follows one couple through their wedding planning journey all the way to the reception. “By 1999, A Wedding Story had provided its viewers with episodes of 200 weddings; it became one of TLC’s most popular shows, with almost 1 million viewers” (Engstrom, 2003). Undoubtedly, each wedding in the series was unique—aided by episodes featuring brides and grooms from different cultures, religions, and philosophies—but still ending with a smiling bride and groom amid a party full of
family and friends. The popularity of this show singlehandedly set the tone for the kinds of television programming that would occur in the twenty-first century.

In the early 2000s, real-life weddings began leaking into American morning television programs, as a few offered engaged couples opportunities to get married live in front of millions of viewers. Wallace (2004) notes:

“Both Good Morning America and Today [married] couples on-camera… the shows’ producers [linked] with established wedding authorities and vendors who [provided] their goods or services and [reaped] the incredible publicity afforded by the show. [There was] even an element of audience participation… Ten days before the wedding, [a] bride’s dress was chosen (with online voters’ help) from among five that [she] had approved” (pp. 274-275).

However, in having real people gain national publicity for their on-screen marriages, their weddings were elevated to a celebrity status that was desired by women across the country. With weddings saturating the public television, young women dreamed of the day when they would get to be like the brides on TV, and brides-to-be looked to these shows in order to gather ideas for their own upcoming nuptials.

On April 29, 2011, Prince William of Wales—son of Prince Charles and Princess Diana—married Catherine “Kate” Middleton in a televised royal wedding ceremony much like the one of his parents thirty years earlier (Marquand, 2011). In America, the children of ‘80s brides got to witness a royal wedding in their own era with comparable excitement as their mothers had when Charles and Diana married. Kate’s wedding dress—strikingly different than Diana’s puffy-sleeved gown—was sleek, elegant, and adorned with beautiful lace sleeves that have since permeated contemporary wedding dress designs. In fact, it was estimated that around
twenty-three million Americans watched the spectacle on television, covered on eleven different networks, and the ceremony had higher viewership than Charles and Diana’s (The Nielsen Company, 2011). Kate’s non-royal status made her a modern-day Cinderella who went from commoner to future queen in one fell swoop, and the public eagerly supported that story. Goodale (2011) argues, “the wedding of Kate Middleton and Prince William may be British, but it fits squarely into the burgeoning ‘fairy-tale wedding’ craze that has thrived on American reality TV and helped drive the cost of the average American wedding” (para. 1). Just as the 1981 royal wedding brought back the advent of lavish weddings, this royal wedding reinforced that this method of getting married was here to stay.

Seven years ago, The Learning Channel forever changed the way brides thought about wedding dresses with the premiere of its newest show, Say Yes to the Dress ("Say Yes to the Dress," 2014). Each episode follows three different brides at Kleinfeld’s Bridal in Manhattan—two on their search for “the dress,” and one other bride returning to the store to try on her dress after it has been through Kleinfeld’s alterations department. During the show, there are several clips from interviews of the brides, their friends and/or family, and the consultants of Kleinfeld’s, wherein they gossip both positively and negatively about the experience of dress shopping. Because the cost of Kleinfeld’s dresses frequently start in the $3,500 range or higher, the show normalizes the spending of several thousand dollars on wedding dresses (Kleinfeld, 2014). Due to the show’s success, for four years straight, TLC has created spin-offs and several similar shows, such as: Say Yes to the Dress: Atlanta (2010), Say Yes to the Dress: Big Bliss (2010), Say Yes to the Dress: Bridesmaids (2011), I Found the Gown (2012), and Something Borrowed Something New (2013). All of these television programs remain popular among
women—whether or not they are brides yet—because they combine the excitement of wedding planning with the fantasies of princess-like stardom.

One development that has changed the way Americans watch television is the widespread adoption of online streaming services like Netflix and Hulu. These companies allow people to watch their favorite television shows and movies on the Internet for a minimal monthly fee. Once they have a subscription, users can watch their favorite wedding-related television programs or wedding-centered movies over and over again as much as they want. Recently, the practice of “binge-watching” shows—or watching several consecutive episodes of the same show during a single period of time—has become popular among college-age subscribers (Maerz, 2013). The repeated and continuous exposure to wedding shows like this standardizes how weddings are supposed to be planned, how they are supposed to look, and how much money is supposed to be spent on them.

Over time, television programs have shifted away from highlighting a romance between two main characters, and now focus more on the various elements it takes to produce a wedding. The repeated instance of the white wedding on television perpetuates the established tradition. However, audiences best like shows that they can relate to, thus screenwriters of scripted programs keep the white wedding tradition in wedding episodes because that is what the public expects. Deviations from the norm can jeopardize an audience’s positive reception of a show, as witnessed by what ultimately happened to the plot of Rhoda. In the past, the star power of celebrities is what attracted viewers to the show—and the plots are what made them continue watching—but now TV shows that recycle the same plots but change the people have invaded American networks. By focusing instead on the wedding dress, the food, and the reception,
today's television shows highlight consumer products as the most important aspects of getting married—not love, romance, or “until death do us part.”

**Film.** The silver screen—much like the small screen—attracts audiences to watch their favorite celebrities act out exciting and appealing plot lines. “Hollywood has long known that, in general, women attend more movies than men” and respond largely to romantic movies or romantic comedies (Otnes, 2003, p. 165). The ultimate expression of love and romance is a wedding, thus it is guaranteed that films that feature this occasion will be attractive to women. Movies are also more likely than other mediums to influence the groom, since “a bride-to-be can probably persuade her groom to watch a wedding film even when he might not be willing to glance at an etiquette book” (Otnes, 2003, p. 164). More specifically, films that include weddings in their plots allowed the wedding industry to gauge how women were currently getting married, how they wanted to get married, or what their beliefs on marriage were. From a female viewer’s perspective, these movie weddings inspired high expectations for a woman’s future real-life wedding, and the messages divulged through these films from the directors and writers comment on societal norms, traditions, and attitudes of the white wedding.

One of the biggest musical hits of the 1960s was *The Sound of Music* (1965) featuring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer. Maria (Andrews), a former nun, becomes the governess of Georg (Plummer), a widowed aristocratic navy captain living in Austria with a strict hold on his seven children. As the plot progresses, the sexual tension between the two increases, but their relationship is complicated by pre-World War II conflicts between Austria and Germany. At the end of the first act, the beautiful wedding of Georg and Maria takes place. It is during this scene that the audience witnesses Maria’s complete transformation from nun, to governess, to beloved wife and stepmother. “Moreover, the dramatic processional, complete with
flowing veil and elegant bridesmaids, contributed to the popularity of floor-length white gowns, which had been a bit shorter in the fifties” and early sixties (Otnes, 2003, p. 175). Wearing a long-sleeved satiny dress with a veil that drags several feet behind her, Maria looks like royalty as she walks down the aisle surrounded by pews full of guests. Their traditional ceremony—complete with Gothic cathedral—reinforced the attractiveness of elaborate church ceremonies. Amidst the threat of World War II, Maria and Georg’s wedding subtly reminds the audience that having an elaborate ceremony is the proper way to marry because tomorrow is not guaranteed.

At the end of the sixties, attitudes of the younger generation began changing about the institution of marriage, and the film *The Graduate* (1967) draws attention to those changes. The protagonist, 20-year-old Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman), is in love with Elaine Robinson (Katharine Ross). Yet, she has settled at the altar with a parent-approved classmate, Carl Smith, who thinks he and Elaine “would make a pretty good team” (Levine & Turman, 1967). This impromptu wedding, set in place by the Robinsons and with apathetic consent from Elaine, symbolizes the haste of young people to get married after college. Benjamin crashes the wedding ceremony, and after some hesitation, Elaine runs to him and they sprint out of the church. The film ends with them at the back of a public bus, where they sit unsmilingly and avoid eye contact with each other. The film’s open-ended conclusion leaves audiences to ponder about whether or not Benjamin and Elaine’s love was ever true, and leaves loose ends as to the financial and marital consequences of the discarded wedding. Elaine’s blatant rebellion against marrying her parent’s choice of a husband—and total abandonment of her white wedding—reflects the changes in attitudes towards marriage at that present time. Overall, *The Graduate* represents its time period very well, and connected with young audiences who withdrew from “middle-class customs and conventions, including prohibitions against premarital sex, deference to parental
authority, and the sanctity of monogamous marriage itself’ (Jellison, 2008, p. 169). As it has been previously noted, movies like this and the rebellious attitudes of this generation did not prevent white weddings from happening, but merely gave rise to alternate opinions that supported feminism and gender equality.

In 1970, the comedy *Lovers and Other Strangers* was released, and the movie—laden with references to divorce, affairs, commitment, sex, and absent marital passion—comments on the way people establish and maintain relationships. The plot encompasses the wedding of Mike Vecchio (Michael Brandon) and Susan Henderson (Bonnie Bedelia), two young lovebirds who are nervous about getting married. In the opening scene, the audience sees the couple in bed at their shared apartment, acknowledging both the growing trends of cohabitation before marriage and the tolerance of premarital sex. Susan’s older sister, Wilma, and her husband Johnny are having marital problems regarding gender equality. Wilma—empowered by the feminist movement—believes that she and her husband should be equals, but Johnny wants to be the boss of the house and have his wife obey him. Ritchie, Mike’s older brother, and his wife want a divorce after six years of marriage. When he shares this news with his Catholic parents, they berate him and believe that he is giving up too quickly. Unlike previous generations when couples stayed together no matter what, divorce rates rose in the seventies and young people accepted the option of divorce if they wanted to terminate a marriage. Despite Mike’s attempts to get Susan to cancel the wedding for them, she reminds him that her father has already paid for and planned everything, her mother bought a $900 dress, and that they love each other. Mike believes that since they have been living together for a year and a half that getting married is unnecessary, but knows how important the wedding is to Susan and agrees to continue. They have the traditional white wedding—Susan wearing a white gown in a church, Mike standing at
the altar in his best suit, and an opulent reception afterwards with a live band and Baked Alaska for dessert. Despite the relationships that crumble around them, Mike and Susan are married and happy—at least for now, it seems. The film affirms that even though attitudes against marriage were prevalent, there were still girls that had always wished of being a bride and wanted to have a white wedding.

The 1980s experienced a dry spell when it came to the release of wedding movies. "Eighties story lines typically focused on the travails of action-adventure heroes such as Bruce Willis, Harrison Ford, and Arnold Schwarzenegger; there was little room for white gowns and bouquets in such hypermasculine worlds" (Otnes, 2003, p. 179). Then, in 1989, the film *When Harry Met Sally* was released, and it revived audiences’ desire for romantic comedies and love stories. Although the film is not centered on a wedding, the viewers do get to witness the wedding of Harry and Sally’s best friends. The ceremony and reception appear to be in the same venue—some sort of ballroom on an upper floor of a building—decorated with several flower arrangements and accompanied by a live jazz band. At one point, a formally dressed waiter offers Sally a passed hors d’oeuvre carried on a silver platter—pea pods with shrimp—a small but evidential appetizer that completes the ambiance of the elegant wedding. Throughout the film, the characters of the film draw conclusions about marriage. Harry is overall cynical of heterosexual relationships and gets divorced, and Sally explains that she and her boyfriend “didn’t want to get married because every time anyone [they] knew got married, it ruined their relationship” (Ephron, 1989). As the plot continues the two fall in love after realizing they were perfect for each other all along, and the movie ends with them describing their wedding that they planned in three months. They rave about their enormous tiered coconut cake that was served with a chocolate sauce, and overall describe their wedding as being beautiful and wonderful.
Despite both being critical of marriage and well in their thirties—and this being Harry’s second marriage—they apparently chose to get married in the traditional way like their best friends did.

Described by Otnes as “the decade of the wedding movie,” the ‘90s certainly did release numerous movies centered on weddings. Of the multitude, *Father of the Bride* (1991) and *Runaway Bride* (1999) are two that adequately serve as definitive examples of Hollywood’s obsession with the white wedding. First, *Father of the Bride* was actually a remake of the original 1950 film; this time updating the plot to include modern-day attitudes towards weddings and marriage, and including more slapstick comedy. Both stories revolve around the patriarch of the Banks family, whose daughter is getting married. As plans for the wedding are made, the escalating costs deeply concern Mr. Banks, who appears to be the only one in the family concerned about the amount of money being spent on his daughter’s upcoming nuptials. The film’s release coincided with the recession of the early nineties, appealing to audiences who in their own lives struggled with the expenses of formal weddings. “The audience of 1950 was intended to sympathize with the father of the bride as a sensible Everyman; the audience of 1991 was intended to view the father as an eccentric, an object of ridicule because he does not want to spend several thousand dollars on his daughter’s wedding” (Jellison, 2008, pp. 174-175). The women of the Banks family repeatedly assure Mr. Banks that his spending money is justified because his daughter deserves an extravagant wedding. At the end of the movie, the father misses the opportunity to say goodbye to his daughter before she leaves the reception for her honeymoon, but she calls him moments later to say thank you and that she loves him. This moment makes all of the copious spending worth it to Mr. Banks, who knows he truly made his daughter happy. Both versions of the movie maintain society’s belief that the only acceptable way to get married in America is through the commercialized white wedding.
Runaway Bride (1999), starring multi-time movie bride Julia Roberts and Richard Gere, follows the story of a woman, Maggie, who repeatedly leaves men at the altar. The film “marked a turning point in the depiction of weddings because it was the first to express ambivalence about the necessity for a big wedding, even as it shows the title character almost participating in five ceremonies occurring over a decade” (Otnes, 2003). Additionally, the movie displays five very different wedding ceremonies—each time with Roberts in a different wedding dress—revealing the importance of having a unique wedding. When Maggie is about to get married for the fourth time, her father remarks that he is lucky that he is “actually able to plan and pay for so many weddings,” to which she replies, “not this time, this one is on me” (Lucchesi, Madden, & Tannebaum, 1999). This line illustrates how cultural attitudes towards who should pay for a wedding have shifted, and that it is acceptable for a bride with a career to pay for her own nuptials. Her grandmother comments that she believes Maggie is not afraid of the wedding day, but rather the wedding night—hinting that she might be nervous about losing her virginity. Maggie then pulls her aside and mentions that she “charmed the one-eyed snake” a while ago, confirming the fact that several young women by this age had had sexual experiences before they got married. After having four large, expensive, failed weddings, when Maggie weds for the fifth and final time, she opts for a small intimate ceremony because she realizes that she hates big weddings. While this movie shows that a bride’s subsequent weddings after her first can be lavish, too, it simultaneously addresses that a bride’s wedding ceremony should be however she wants to have it—whether it is an all-out traditional ceremony or a private one on top of a hill.

The wedding movie obsession of Hollywood in the nineties continued into the twenty-first century, kicking off with the hit movie My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002). Thirty-year-old, single Toula Portokalos (Nia Vardalos) comes from a very large family that is proud and boastful
of their Greek heritage. Still living at home and working at the family restaurant, Toula is seen as the family failure—that is, until she meets Ian Miller (John Corbett). The two fall in love and get engaged, but to the dismay of her family, Ian is not Greek. Devoted to Toula, Ian takes all of the necessary steps to “become Greek” before their wedding, including getting baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church. The film is one of a handful of wedding movies that deals with interfaith marriages, for up to this point the characters of bride and groom have gotten married predominantly in a heterosexual, Protestant Christian ceremony. This time, it is the bride’s family—not the bride—who excitedly make all of the wedding plans. Toula’s mother orders invitations without consulting Toula first; Toula’s cousin chooses the color and designs the bridesmaid dresses without Toula’s approval; and Toula’s father, in charge of the ever-increasing guest list, seems that he would “rather go bankrupt than insult anyone from the church” (Goetzman, Hanks, & Wilson, 2002). Several times throughout the film, the couple jokingly makes references to eloping, but instead embrace the Greek heritage for the sake of family tradition. Even Toula’s wedding dress, which Ian describes as a “big, frosted cupcake,” is humorous to the two of them—hinting that if the bride had chosen her own dress, she probably would not have picked the one she wore. Toula never reveals to her family or the audience what kind of wedding she would have preferred. However, at the end of the film we see Toula and Ian, who have been happily married for six years, still in love despite their imperfectly perfect wedding ceremony. My Big Fat Greek Wedding emphasizes the importance of the white wedding tradition to family, and draws attention to the pressure of upholding that tradition under the persuasion of relatives.

One of the last wedding movies to come out of the ‘00s decade was the comedy Bride Wars (2009), starring Anne Hathaway and Kate Hudson. Childhood best friends Liv (Hudson)
and Emma (Hathaway) have dreamed about having June weddings at the Plaza in New York since their adolescence. When both become engaged around the same time, they immediately head to the office of wedding planner extraordinaire Marion St. Claire (Candice Bergen) to book their weddings at the Plaza. During the appointment, Marion asks the girls if they would like to consult their husbands before booking the venue, they both smile and candidly say “no.” This response demonstrates the typical manner in which most wedding plans are made, with the bride having total control and her future husband absent during the process. Accidentally, Liv and Emma’s weddings become booked for the same date, which causes an intense competition between the two. Mutual sabotage ensues with the girls destroying their friendship through pranks that wreck various elements of their weddings—fake dance lessons, blue-dyed hair, and dreaded pre-wedding weight gain. Liv, a former “fat girl,” gains five pounds from nibbling on multiple cookie baskets being sent from Emma pretending to be Liv’s fiancé. When she can no longer fit into her expensive Vera Wang gown, she cries out, “you don’t alter Vera Wang to fit you, you alter yourself to fit Vera!” (Hudson, Riche, Taylor, & Yorn, 2009). The movie ridicules all of the consumer products and services that the brides spend money on in preparation for their weddings, highly dramatizing the girls’ obsession with needing a perfect wedding. This is emphasized by the mid-ceremony cancellation of Emma’s wedding. The months spent planning and the thousands of dollars spent on the affair are immediately wasted. The film ends with the girls forgiving each other and making amends in time for Liv’s reception, which almost makes the audience forget about the high levels of stress and ridiculous antics that have lead up to the resolution of the film. The final message of the movie stresses the importance of friendship over marriage, reminding its viewers that material goods should never overshadow real relationships, and that a perfect wedding does not necessarily equate to a perfect marriage.
In the current decade, two movies that stand out for depicting how complications in relationships affect wedding planning are *The Five-Year Engagement* (2012) and *The Big Wedding* (2013). The former tells the story of San Franciscans Tom (Jason Segel) and Violet (Emily Blunt), who get engaged only a year after they meet. Although they begin making plans, they end up delaying their wedding for two major reasons—Violet’s sister gets pregnant, and then Violet gets a new job opportunity in Michigan. This is one of the few movies in Hollywood history where a couple’s wedding is delayed because of the bride’s career—a plot line that would not have been written fifty years ago. Following the move, Tom offers to resume the wedding plans since his job does not take up as much time as Violet’s. In fact, while tasting cakes he exclaims, “I don’t know why girls get so tense about all this planning, it’s fun!” (Apatow, Rothman, & Stoller, 2012). This scene is also unique to Hollywood, as grooms are not often shown helping their brides plan the wedding—let alone believing it to be enjoyable. After a few years in Michigan, the couple they have waited long enough and they hurriedly and excitedly make plans together. However, a secret of Violet’s is revealed before the wedding that ultimately cancels it. Five years after Tom’s initial proposal, the couple reunites and Violet proposes to Tom with an impromptu wedding at a local park. Tom gets to choose preplanned options for the music, the officiant, and his suit. They finally get married in front of their family and friends at the conclusion of the movie, thus ending their engagement. The film definitely shows multiple ways in which couples can plan their wedding—either one-sided or together, either diligently or carelessly, and either immediately or delayed. The expensiveness of wedding planning is not mentioned, however, despite the couple’s repeated investments in save the dates, venue deposits, and rehearsal dinners. Nevertheless, Violet and Tom end up honoring the white wedding tradition even though it is in an original and unconventional way.
Finally, the most recent comedy set around a wedding is *The Big Wedding* (2013). Alejandro (Ben Barnes), the adopted son of divorcees Don and Ellie Griffin (Robert De Niro and Diane Keaton), is getting married. When Alejandro’s Catholic birth mother and sister come up from Colombia for the wedding, Alejandro begs Don and Ellie to pretend to be married since he knows his religious mother does not approve of divorce. Meanwhile, the other characters involved in the wedding also deal with their own relationship problems. Don now has a long-term girlfriend, Bebe, who is Ellie’s ex-best friend and the caterer for the wedding. Jared and Lyla, the Griffins’ biological children, are struggling to maintain relationships. Jared, a 29-year-old virgin, finds himself attracted to Alejandro’s Colombian sister and tries throughout the film to sleep with her. Lyla is separated from her husband, but has recently discovered she is finally pregnant by him after trying for so long. After a rushed wedding ceremony, Alejandro and his bride enjoy a luxurious wedding reception under a beautiful outdoor tent that has been set up at the Griffin homestead and decorated like a traditional ballroom. What is ironic is that Alejandro chooses to please his Catholic mother by hiding his adoptive parents’ divorce, but does not think to honor his religious heritage by getting married in a Catholic church reflecting the national trend towards secular life. The wedding reception shown in the film represents the typical desired reception of the twenty-first century—extremely elegant, outdoors with beautiful weather, over one hundred guests, and with excellent food. Additionally, in reality tented weddings tend to be more expensive than reception venues due to the need for supplies like electricity and toilets; labor like outside caterers and decorators; and various equipment rentals like tables, chairs, lighting, and the dance floor ("Renting a Tent," 2005). With a complicated plot similar to *Lovers and Other Strangers*, the film also addresses the topics of divorce, affairs, premarital sex, and commitment, presenting the idea that relationships are still as complicated now as they always
have been. Although *The Big Wedding* focuses more on family relationships than the actual wedding planning itself, all of the conflicts that surround the wedding add stress to the couple on their perfect day.

For the last half century Hollywood has succeeded in keeping the white wedding in the public eye. Because movies seem to portray the reality of the period in they are released, girls who see these movies when they are in their teens grow up with attitudes that everyone gets married the way that actors and actresses do in movies. The weddings in all of the aforementioned movies “provided movie patrons with a ‘tangible model’ for molding or measuring their own life goals, deeds, expectations, and acquisitions” (Jellison, 2008, p. 150). Innately, girls wish to imitate the people they admire, and actresses who played the role of the bride attracted these girls to want to be as beautiful, happy, and in love as they seemed. The brides of today’s generation—who were born in the late eighties and early nineties—grew up just in time for Hollywood to mass-produce wedding movies. Wedding movies on TV channels, the adoption of DVDs, and the rise of movie-streaming services like Netflix allow brides to watch wedding movies from any era, from which they will find that the white wedding has strong roots in the past. “After years of viewing films that portray the white wedding as the ultimate symbol of family love and material security, real women want to create some of that Hollywood magic for themselves” (Jellison, 2008, p. 179). The wedding industry, knowing this, is prepared to cater to the bride who wants her wedding to be as perfect as Julie Andrews’s, Julia Roberts’s, or Kate Hudson’s.

**The Internet.** In 1993, the World Wide Web went public with the introduction of the first browser, Mosaic, and giving Americans access to the Internet (Binder, 2003). This innovation drastically altered everything about how Americans lived: the way they did business,
the way they communicated, and eventually the way they planned weddings. The Web
developed and improved throughout the nineties, “and in the closing years of the decade, the
Internet, which was transforming many aspects of American life, also became a major player in
the commercialized wedding” (Jellison, 2008, p. 58). Over time, vendors created websites to
showcase their offerings; online retailers created websites to sell wedding supplies like
invitations and favors; and, eventually bridal magazines created websites to appeal to digital
readers. Communication between brides and vendors is faster and easier, as electronic mail (e-
mail) is sent back and forth to discuss wedding matters at a distance. Search engines like Google
and Bing allow brides-to-be to find information at the click of a mouse—such as wedding dress
prices, venues in her location, and advice from other brides on message boards and chat rooms.
The Internet is an extremely useful tool that today’s brides are fortunate to have, for it makes
wedding planning easier for them, but at the same time has given brides innumerable options to
choose from and thus has caused extreme competition within the wedding industry.

In 1996, TheKnot.com was founded as a site for brides to go to as a one-stop site to
receive advice on etiquette and planning ("The Knot brand overview," 2014). Since then, the
website has grown into a corporation that publishes several planning books and even a magazine.
In 2007, a similar website, WeddingWire.com, was launched and became The Knot’s main
competitor ("What we do," 2014). Originally both sites were meant to help wedding vendors
contact potential clients, but both have become more than that. Their community message boards
are popular among users, where brides can go to vent about problems or ask questions about
feasibility and etiquette. Nowadays, users of the websites can create their own profiles—entering
things like their wedding date, colors, theme, and location—and the sites will recommend
vendors from their area as well as products and ideas in their wedding colors that they might like.
Along with that, the sites allow users to utilize checklist, budgeting tools, and guest list tools to help plan weddings. The online checklists are extremely extensive and include items that are not vitally important to the wedding plans, such as making inspiration boards, booking a calligrapher, and taking dance lessons. The inclusion of these items makes users consider that these items might actually be necessary, even if they would have never considered them before. Both websites have inspiration boards—similar to Pinterest—where brides can browse through ideas and save their favorites. Additionally, both have mobile apps that allow their users to access their checklists, budgets, and inspiration boards on the go.

The most significant feature of The Knot and WeddingWire is the ability for brides to create websites for their weddings. According to (Boden, 2003) “more and more couples are creating their own wedding web-sites, showing that weddings are not only becoming tied into consumer culture but also new communication technologies” (p. 53). Loaded with hundreds of preset designs, themes, and colors, couples can create web pages containing information about their wedding location, date and time, registry, and bridal party. The websites even have RSVP features so attendees can confirm whether they are coming or regretfully decline. With four in ten couples including a URL for the wedding website on their invitations, it is safe to say that this trend has been helpful to brides in the planning process—especially since the time spent confirming RSVPs online would be shorter than phone calls (Dockterman, 2014). Although these websites are free upon creation of a user profile, these websites then use the provided e-mail address to send out daily newsletters and advertising promotions that entice brides to purchase from their sponsors or consider new trends.

Using sites like these and search engines like Google to search for vendors can be easy but overwhelming. For example, doing a local search on The Knot for photographers in Indiana
currently results in 829 vendors—a number surely to stress out any bride. For starters, a bride usually clicks on an organization’s website and looks at their reviews. Former clients can leave reviews for these vendors online, and this can either help or hurt a vendor’s reputation. A website can say a lot about a company or the person that is in charge of it—a website that is too plain, not very user-friendly, and not updated often will reflect poorly on the business owner. In addition to websites, vendors use social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter to gain followers and share their pictures and updates more easily. Thus, vendors not only need to specialize in their areas of the wedding industry, but also know how to properly market themselves online and make themselves presentable to potential clients. When all is said and done, a couple must feel that they are getting the best value for the price, so vendors must be persuasive to convince consumers to hire them.

Social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have infiltrated the wedding industry and affect not only vendors, but also brides, grooms, and their guests. “The use of social media in wedding planning has risen fourfold in the past four years, according to a recent survey conducted by the wedding-planning sites The Knot and WeddingChannel.com. In it, nearly 50 percent of brides said they used social media to communicate information about their wedding, up from 23 percent in 2008” (Ries, 2012). Problems can arise, however, if members of the bridal party share too much information about the wedding online. Brides and grooms trying to keep wedding plans private may have to silence family members and friends, or risk hurting uninvited guests’ feelings. Even worse, if the date, time, and location of the wedding are posted online, unwanted guests may show up on the day of the wedding since they have all of the necessary information.
Nevertheless, this new era of constant updating and sharing of personal life calls new
etiquette rules into question. Couples now must make the decision whether or not to have an
“unplugged wedding”—where guests are forbidden from using their smartphones and other
devices during the ceremony and reception so that they fully experience the wedding in the
moment. Some guests might become too absorbed in how many “likes” they are receiving on
their wedding posts that they may ignore important events. Other couples embrace social media
at their weddings, creating a wedding day “hashtag” for guests to use when they post pictures,
tweets, or status updates from the wedding in order to track all of the activity later. According to
The Knot and Mashable’s Social Wedding Survey, “55 percent of couples use a wedding
hashtag, up more than 40 percent from only 9 percent of to-be-weds in 2012, and 20 percent use
it across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Ten percent of couples did not create a hashtag and
wish they had” (Bennett, 2014). Either way, this decision necessitates extra planning on the part
of the affianced couple to set up ground rules about how much social media usage will be
allowed on their special day.

On another note, distributors of wedding supplies including everything from wedding
dresses to centerpieces have greatly benefitted from online marketplaces. Most recently, Etsy—a
website that lets users open up a virtual “shop” from which to sell their handmade items—has
become popular for couples that want to find one-of-a-kind items for their wedding. Because of
the pressure these days to have a unique wedding, this website is perfect for planners and brides
looking for ideas. In April 2012, the site launched a Weddings section of their website, with the
goal of making their “sellers’ businesses more accessible to shoppers who prefer browsing over
searching,” and the site added a Wedding Registry feature (Hood, 2012). Thousands of products
fall under this category, including wedding dresses, table numbers, cake toppers, thank you
notes, and wedding rings to name a few. The plethora of items—along with items that are sold through other online retailers like eBay, Amazon, and on The Knot—make it almost impossible for a bride to choose what item most perfectly suits her wedding vision, and encourages her to search for hours to find the ideal product.

In conclusion, the Internet has been a magnificent tool for brides since the nineties to learn more about what goes into planning a wedding, yet it has posed new challenges to the planning process. Online search tools aid brides in exploring and selecting the appropriate vendors for their needs, but the expansion of wedding industry providers on the Web makes the searching process longer and more complicated. Future brides see weddings now more than ever through the blogs, posts, and websites devoted to them. This leaves room for comparison, which adds to the desire to have an inimitable wedding. Public postings such as discussion boards, comments, and reviews have unified the community of brides-to-be and offer an online support system. Simultaneously, all of this idea sharing helps the wedding industry to identify trends in the bridal market and use those to attract consumers to buy into those trends. The competition in the wedding industry is fiercer, thus new online marketing techniques have to be executed to successfully secure the business of brides. Aspects like wedding websites and social media have been added to the tradition of the white wedding with help from the Internet and the wedding media that perpetuate new fads. As long as the Internet is around, the aspects of the white wedding will continue to change and broaden as brides compete for individuality in a saturated market.
Part III: Discussion

Throughout this half-century period, it is notable that basic wedding elements that have stayed constant. Brides wear white dresses even as fashion trends come and go, and their grooms wear suits; someone is assisting the bride with the planning details and etiquette advice; the couple registers for gifts to help establish their new life together; a venue is utilized to host the event; food and beverages are provided—the most important staple being the multi-tiered, white wedding cake; documentation of the ceremony is provided through photography (and more recently videography); and brides turn to bridal magazines for assistance and inspiration. All of these elements have remained stable and necessary in making plans for a wedding celebration throughout the eras.

Influences on Spending Amounts

The push towards increased spending on weddings began with mothers of sixties brides who wanted to give their daughters lavish weddings. These mothers got married around World War II when discretionary income was sparse as citizens needed to be frugal during the wartime. The economic expansion that grew the US economy post WWII further provided the opportunity for an increasing middle class as a proportion of the total population. Accordingly, discretionary money increased and this afforded spending on non day-to-day living expenses. Parents of the sixties bride wanted to make sure their daughters had a better wedding than theirs by paying for goods and services for the wedding that were within their economic class status. As wedding receptions moved from inside homes to larger venues, these facilities could accommodate larger guest lists—further adding to overall wedding expenses. This shift also resulted in more weddings being professionally catered instead of potluck or home-cooked. The brief trend in shorter wedding dresses never prevailed due to bridal consultants, compelling brides to pay more
money for full-length gowns and reinforcing tradition. As more women entered the workforce and cohabitated before marriage, engagement periods became longer and couples found themselves with more discretionary income. Bombarded with all the various wedding elements deemed necessary by wedding industry publications, couples began spending money on wedding planners to help them. By the 2010s, most information with regards to wedding planning can be found online through extensive research—yet most brides lack the time or motivation to be able to tackle wedding planning alone. The constant public display of the personal through the various online media outlets compounds the need for the bride to match or exceed peers’ weddings. In working with a planner from the wedding industry who wants to help fellow industry vendors, brides are more likely to listen to advice from professionals who can get them deals or make recommendations in areas like invitations, flowers, and photography. Especially in America today, success is measured through the amount of objects one can afford, thus couples wish to convey their happy and healthy relationships through extravagant weddings.

Other constants in the wedding industry involve the use of the media to encourage consumer spending and imitation of celebrities. Advertisements for vendors and products are abundant throughout bridal magazines and establish brand name recognition with soon-to-be brides. Bridal magazines return the favor to advertisers by providing them with demographic information on the bridal market. Bridal registry providers all contend for a couple’s loyalty through magazines and television advertisements by promising the best brand-name products and largest selections of items. Articles featuring celebrity weddings make women yearn for an expensive and extravagant wedding. Television programs either stimulate desires for weddings similar to those of beloved fictional couples or promote the emulation of real-life weddings—all the while having commercials between segments for more consumer products and services. The
Internet provides a gateway to information regarding the best vendors and most innovative products for having a unique wedding. The consumerism found in all of these outlets has helped the wedding industry grow and thrive.

**Nuptial Cultural Norms**

In contrast, it appears that the attitudes and societal norms regarding weddings and marriage have changed. At mid-century America, there is a strong belief that Americans should not display wealth beyond their means. Later, through the economic growth periods of the early 60s, later 80s, and the .com explosion of the late 90s—and with more attention drawn to celebrity weddings—the accumulation and display of wealth is encouraged and commended. Parents of the bride initially were expected to pay for almost all wedding-related expenses. As women married later in life because they chose to first further their educations and start their careers, the responsibility fell, at least in part, to the affianced couple to finance their wedding. Divorce and remarriage—once taboo subjects—are now commonplace and have proven that weddings are no longer once-in-a-lifetime events. However, there is now a need to distinguish a second marriage from a first one, thus second weddings can still be as extravagant as their earlier counterparts.

**Historical Markers**

Likewise, several events throughout history have impacted brides and their methods of wedding planning. The feminist movement of the late sixties and early seventies brought informality and originality to weddings. The gender equality movement encouraged women to pursue higher educations and more prestigious careers. This ultimately led to the rising age of the average bride and allowed for two-income families, giving couples more discretionary income to spend on products and services. I have already examined several times how Prince Charles and
Diana’s wedding affected the wedding industry, but the professionalization of wedding planning services in the eighties is equally important. Due to the growing plethora of wedding planning details, brides now look to professional wedding planners to assist them in the arrangements instead of looking to their female family members. The development and expansion of the Internet in the nineties forever changed the way brides plan weddings by providing them with electronic communication with vendors, updated information on etiquette, and access to millions of ideas on how other brides around the country—including celebrities—got married. And today, with the innovation of smartphones and social networks, people are more digitally connected to each other than ever. This has resulted in the public eye witnessing more real-life weddings, which leads to comparisons and prioritizes the importance of originality and uniqueness.

Additionally, when the same trends reappear over and over in wedding photographs and videos, new traditions are formed and become an expected part of the standard commercialized white wedding.

Overall, I have found the research for this project to be absolutely fascinating as I see the progression of the American wedding industry and how its changes over time have affected brides. It appears to me that a combination of increased discretionary income, targeted consumer appeals, and digital sharing of our lives via the Internet could be a possible answer as to why so many elements have been added to weddings and thus why the average cost of weddings is currently the highest in history. In my personal experience as a twenty-first century bride it seems that society puts greater emphasis is put on the wedding than on the marriage itself. There are several articles out that advise me on what color my bridesmaids should wear, how to incorporate nature into my centerpieces, how to save money on invitations, and what my possible
wedding theme could be—but there is seldom advice on how to handle sharing finances, how to deal with rough patches in my marriage, or how to start looking for houses.

**Part IV: Conclusion**

The results indicated that there has not been a sole factor that has had the greatest influence on the wedding planning process. Rather, a combination of sustained traditions, wedding industry growth, cultural changes, inclinations to spend more, and technological advancements have all had a hand in bringing the wedding planning process to the complexity it is today. I learned that consumerism—although it appears a detriment to me as a modern bride—is what my career as an event planner will survive on in the future. As people become more willing to spend extra money on additional elements for their weddings, it creates new challenges for me as an event planner to successfully incorporate these to the satisfaction of my clients.

One of the things that surprised me was how the second-wave feminist movement and the “New Wedding” trend influenced weddings. Because of these, women defied traditions by cohabitating and waiting for marriage, and had greater life achievements than becoming housewives. Women who earned their own money saw it fit to pay for their own expenses, initiating the shift in financial responsibility for weddings. It was also due to these that originality and personality entered ceremonies and receptions—introducing outdoor weddings and do-it-yourself attitudes to wedding planning. When divorce rates began to rise, it caused the need for new etiquette rules to be conceived regarding second and subsequent marriages.

Another surprising discovery was just how significant the development of Internet was to the wedding planning industry—enabling electronic communication, assisting vendors in
marketing their services, and facilitating the online registry. All of these have simplified the wedding planning process and reduced some of the stress that previous generation brides and vendors may have experienced. But most importantly, the Internet helped share wedding planning ideas from all across the country. It is the accumulation of advice, websites, blogs, videos, and photographs repeatedly displaying white wedding traditions that have shaped today’s cultural norms. Brides of today’s generation have never known what wedding planning was like before the Internet, and the weddings they see regularly through screens today shape their expectations of what their own wedding should look like.

This information is extremely relevant to all hospitality students who plan to enter into the wedding planning industry—including myself—because by understanding clients’ expectations we can become more successful. The professionalization of the event management industry—especially with regards to weddings—has opened up millions of jobs across the country. Most modern undergraduate college students pursuing a degree in event management have considered wedding planning at some point in their educations, and fifty years ago the profession was still nascent. Bridal consultants in department stores did not have formal degrees in event management. They relied on the etiquette and traditions that had been standard for several generations and passed down verbally. To gain credentials as an event planner today, a bachelor’s degree in event management or a related field is required—which costs a great amount of money. Once a degree is earned, belonging to professional planning organizations is crucial to maintaining relationships with others and remaining relevant in the industry. Now that today’s bride and groom have more specific preferences, it is important that we understand what their desires are and from where those desires stem.
Technology has evidently played an important part in forming these desires, thus as wedding planners we must understand how to utilize this technology to our advantage. We must be able to analyze market trends from what brides are talking about and sharing online. In this fast-paced world, seasonal trends move quickly and the next big thing is just around the corner. We must also know how to market ourselves to be attractive to couples—both verbal and online communication with clients is crucial. The consumer products and services that our clients want will come from vendors with whom we must have positive relationships with and be willing to recommend. As a facet of the wedding industry, we must mold with the consumerist components of it and allow our clients to not only spend money on their weddings, but also on our services.

Limitations

In my decision to focus on the whole of the industry and national historic trends I recognize that stereotyping can blur the individual. Geographic regions within the United States, and pockets of ethnic, racial, and religious groups may differ from my analysis. Income is a strong predictor of spending and thus people in poverty who lack the means for a lavish wedding also do not fit my theories. In grouping, however, we can say that the majority act with certain behaviors and outcomes and this analysis can be used as a record to understand and express American culture.
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