A WEDDING FIT FOR A BRIDE: NEOLIBERAL CONSUMERISM, POSTFEMINISM, DRAMATURGY AND THE NORTH AMERICAN WEDDING

by

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Abstract

Despite declining marriage rates and an increased acceptance of common-law couples in North America (Milan, 2013), the wedding is still constructed as a meaningful life event through the use of reality wedding shows, which have increased in number in recent years. Wedding-related media, which is funded by the wedding industry, is responsible for communicating the expectations and standards of the modern wedding which couples are expected to follow (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2008; 2012; Mead, 2007). Bridal media, as wedding-related media is often called, positions brides as the focal point of the wedding and encourages them to create not just a standard wedding but a “perfect” wedding (Engstrom, 2012). This “perfect” wedding is positioned by bridal media as something that all brides can obtain through the purchase of material goods during the process of wedding planning. Given the emphasis placed on individualism in a neoliberal capitalist context (Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012), while there is a common notion of what the “perfect” wedding includes, each couple is expected to add their own personal touches, so long as they fall within wedding standards. As women are the focal point of the wedding celebration, it is important to consider how consumption-based feminine gender roles and norms effect wedding consumption given the high costs of the “perfect” wedding. For the purposes of this study, a multi-theoretical approach is taken that focuses primarily on Angela McRobbie’s (2009) take on postfeminism and a critical take on Goffman’s dramaturgy (1959; Paolucci & Richardson, 2006). A critical ethnographic content analysis was done using twenty episodes of the reality wedding television series Rich Bride Poor Bride. The findings of the study suggest that women are responsible for driving wedding-related consumption which relates to consumption-based feminine gender roles in the neoliberal postfeminist context. This study also finds that perfection and happiness also relate to wedding spending and tend to be of particular importance to the bride. As the bride becomes the focal point of the wedding, grooms are excluded, although they do wish to be involved.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

As common-law partnerships and divorce have gained wider acceptance in the Western\(^1\) context, the reason for marriage and by extension, the wedding, have come into question. Still, many couples and their families still see the wedding as a meaningful life event and a culture exists around the wedding celebration given the large number of reality wedding television shows, bridal magazines and websites. Wedding-related media informs couples planning to marry about wedding standards and also constructs an ideal or “perfect” version of the wedding. Couples also learn about how they can create their own version of this “perfect” wedding through wedding-related media (Boden, 2007; Engstrom, 2008; 2012; Mead, 2007). This “perfect” wedding is constructed as something that can be obtained through the purchase of material things as wedding-related media informs couples about the purchasable items or services their weddings must include (Engstrom, 2008; 2012; Mead, 2007). The relation between consumption and wedding perfection has resulted in a standard wedding that is already expensive, not to mention the added cost of personal touches that make weddings “perfect” for those who host them. While a wedding ideal is established by the wedding industry through media, every wedding must also include some aspect of originality. The need for originality stems from the emphasis placed on the individual in the neoliberal capitalist context in which these weddings take place (Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012). In this neoliberal capitalist

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\(^1\) The term “Western” is used to refer to dominant Canadian and American cultures
context, individuals focus on their own needs and wants due to a perception that all individuals have equal opportunities to achieve success and are therefore responsible for their own failures (Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012).

As wedding standards are based around heterosexual white middle class standards, wedding-related media tends to exclude those who do not belong to these groups from portrayals of the “perfect” wedding (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012). Grooms are also excluded from both wedding media and the wedding planning process due to a focus on the bride (Engstrom, 2012).

Wedding-related media is often referred to as bridal media due to the fact that brides are the target of this form of media because the wedding is positioned as a day which focuses primarily on the bride (Engstrom, 2012). As the wedding is viewed as an expensive event that not only focuses on the bride but is also planned primarily by her (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007), it is important to consider how women experience consumerism outside of the wedding celebration. Angela McRobbie (2009) argues that women in a neoliberal postfeminist context construct a feminine image through the consumption of feminine products. This feminine image or front is part of a feminine role that adopts a more traditional version of femininity in response to perceptions that feminism has gone too far (McRobbie, 2009). As Goffman (1959) argues that individuals cannot take on a social role without maintaining the associated front or characteristics, in a postfeminist neoliberal context, women must consume in order to display a feminine image.

As the wedding is a performance, all those involved have a role to play, including the guests, that influence the performance as the audience. Since it is the bride who takes
on the starring role in this performance and is also responsible for setting the scene by taking on the majority of wedding planning responsibilities (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007), her role is of particular importance. As women are the focal point of the wedding celebration, it is important to consider how consumption-based feminine gender roles and norms effect middle class wedding consumption given the high costs of the “perfect” wedding.

Chapter Two will set the scene for the current study by discussing the background and reasoning for the study. The first section will include a review of past research on the subject of Western weddings, wedding-related media and marriage and divorce in Canada. The second section will then discuss the theory and critical theoretical areas used in the context of this study and how these theories work together to form a multi-theoretical approach. Chapter Two will also discuss the method used for this study, which was a critical ethnographic content analysis of a single wedding reality wedding show: Rich Bride, Poor Bride.

Chapter Three will then discuss, in detail, the codes used for the critical ethnographic content analysis. This chapter will also present the results of the critical ethnographic content analysis.

Chapter Four will then analyze the results presented in Chapter Three using the past research and theories described in Chapter Two. This Chapter will then present the conclusions of the study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review, Theory and Methodology

Introduction

Neoliberal Western popular culture displays the “perfect” wedding where women are the “perfect” brides. The wedding industry uses wedding-related media to construct this “perfect” wedding as one that can be achieved through the consumption of material goods. Due to the fact that common-law partnerships are more accepted today than in the past, the reason for marriage, and by extension the wedding, comes into question. By constructing the wedding itself as a desirable thing to have, the wedding industry creates the need for the wedding. Wedding-related media, often referred to as bridal media, is a function of the wedding industry that primarily targets brides. Women are prime targets for the consumer-based wedding because in addition to having been positioned as the center of the wedding in the past, women are also led to believe that they must construct a feminine image or front through the consumption of material goods (McRobbie, 2009).

This chapter will provide the background and reasoning for the current study. First, selected research on Canadian marriage and divorce trends, Western wedding practices and wedding shows will be examined in order to establish the current relevance of weddings in the Western context. Second, the theory and critical theoretical areas used for this study will be discussed. The theoretical perspective used was Goffman’s dramaturgy (1959; Paolucci & Richardson, 2006) and the critical theoretical areas are neoliberal consumerism, constructed through the works of McRobbie (2009), Hasinoff (2008) and Tudor (2012) and McRobbie’s take on postfeminism (2009). Both the theory and the critical theoretical areas were engaged with using a social intersectional approach.
(Collins, 1998). Third, the methods used for the collection of data in this study will be described: A critical ethnographic content analysis of a selected reality wedding show.

**Literature Review**

Although the wedding celebration has generally been considered a public affair, it is usually attended by invited guests only in the Western context. Reality wedding shows presently popular on television significantly expands the size of the audience of the wedding, making it truly a public affair. Not only are these programs seen to be entertaining, but by displaying large, extravagant weddings, these shows also contribute to the mass marketing of the marriage ceremony as initiated in wedding magazines (Engstrom, 2012). Although some wedding-related media does focus on same-sex couples, the majority of wedding-related media is targeted at heterosexual couples, which will be the focus here (Engstrom, 2012). Reality wedding shows and bridal magazines often portray what is seen to be an expensive, traditional white wedding (Engstrom, 2012). Engstrom (2012) describes the “white wedding” as follows: “…bride dressed in white and bride-groom in suit or tuxedo repeating vows in front of a group of family, friends, and acquaintances, and then celebrating their newly consecrated marriage with a party consisting of a layered cake, music, and dancing” (1). It is important to note that the “white wedding” format that has become the expected format of weddings in the Western context today is based on early 20th century formations of the marriage ritual (Engstrom, 2012). While the format of the wedding may have remained, the context surrounding marriage appears to have changed.

Since the Canadian context is the primary focus of this work, it is important to examine marriage and divorce in Canada. The age at first marriage in Canada is
increasing, with fewer young adults getting married (Milan, 2013). According to Milan
(2013), the average age for first marriage was about 29 years old for women and 31 years
old for men in 2008. Men have generally been slightly older when they marry for the first
time when compared to their female counterparts, whose age-at-marriage rate remained
stable despite the increase in age of first marriage (Milan, 2013).

In 2008, 147,848 marriages took place in Canada (Milan, 2013). While the
number of marriages may fluctuate from year to year, in 2008, Milan (2013) notes a
marriage rate of 4.4 per 1,000 population, the lowest recorded in recent history. The
marriage rates provided by Milan (2013) show a relatively steady decline since 1981. It is
important to note that the marriage rate held at 4.7 per 1,000 from 2001 to 2003 and then
remained at 4.6 per 1,000 from 2004 to 2006 and then declined to 4.5 per 1,000 in 2007
(Milan, 2013). While the marriage rate has reached a low point, it had not decreased
much between 2001 and 2008 (Milan, 2013). Divorce rates also remained fairly stable
between 2001 and 2008, although they fluctuated more than marriage rates (Milan,
2013). According to Milan (2013): “There were 70,226 divorces in Canada in 2008, or a
crude divorce rate of 21.1 divorces per 10,000 population…”(11). The divorce rate was
also the lowest recorded since 1981, although only slightly lower than that recorded in
2004 (21.8 per 10,000) (Milan, 2013). While divorce has increased since becoming more
easily attainable and socially acceptable, according to the rates given by Milan (2013),
there were still slightly more than twice as many marriages as divorces in 2008.
According to the 2008 data, the average length of marriage for which divorce was
finalized in that year was 13.7 years (Milan, 2013). Of the 147,848 marriages that
occurred in 2008, Milan (2008) predicted that 37.6 percent of those marriages would end in divorce before the couple’s 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary.

Marital status is also relevant when examining marriage and divorce in Canada. In 2013, 13,437,432 Canadians had a marital status of married, 3,257,877 were listed as being in a common-law relationship, 807,140 were separated and 1,823,724 were divorced (Statistics Canada, 2014). More women than men had a marital status of divorced or separated (Statistics Canada, 2014), as men remarry more often than women.

Given that less people are getting married and more people are getting divorced, the wedding industry needs to promote wedding-related consumption in order to continue to thrive (Mead, 2007). Despite the decline in marriage, the number of wedding planners has increased, as more couples hire wedding planners (Mead, 2007). The wedding planner comes to be viewed as a necessary tool for wedding planning as career women often do not have time to take on the responsibility (Mead, 2007). Gains in women’s rights and an increase in women in the workplace means that marriage shares importance with career aspirations, and also enables consumption in form of purchasing the services of the wedding planner (McRobbie, 2009). While men may take on more responsibility in the realm of wedding planning and some wedding planners are men, women are still expected to take on the majority of responsibility when planning their wedding (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007). The necessity of the wedding planner ensures that wedding planners can make a decent living or in some cases a fortune (Mead, 2007). The wedding industry expands on meanings attached to the Western wedding to further its profits despite changing views toward marriage. Wedding-related media, often referred to
as bridal media due to the focus on the bride, is responsible for informing brides about wedding trends and costs.

Although the Canadian context is the main focus of this study, most bridal media as well as media in general comes from the United States. The market value for weddings in the United States in 2012 was $55 billion, with an average wedding cost of $25,656 (The Wedding Report). In Canada, the average total wedding cost was estimated to be around $27,000 (O’Brien, 2013; RateSupermarket.ca). While there is not much difference in cost between Canadian and American weddings, the higher cost for Canadians may reflect the availability of less expensive goods in the United States as well as the difference in value of currency, which constantly fluctuates. It is important to note that the majority of information available about weddings in Canada and the United States comes from the wedding industry (Mead, 2007). While bridal media corporations may publish this information to inform brides-to-be of what to expect, it seems unlikely that they would publish any information that would discourage spending or reflect poorly on the wedding industry. Mead (2007) also points out that in surveys conducted by media corporations such as Conde Nast, the participants were found through bridal magazines or websites. With participants having already taken an interest in these publications, Mead (2007) notes: “They had, in other words, already demonstrated an interest in having the kind of wedding that bridal magazines promote” (25). The bridal media gives information about cost, popular times to get married, number of guests, and so on. Cost largely depends on the number of guests, with the average being 124 for Canadian weddings and between 126-136 for American weddings (O’Brien, 2013; The Wedding Report). Given the influence of American media and culture on Canadian media and
culture, it appears that Canadian and American weddings do not differ much in terms of cost and number of guests.

A BMO Investorline (2014) study found that 40 percent of unmarried young adults intending to marry thought they would not be able to afford their dream wedding. Despite the fact that young people do not think they can afford their future wedding, this does not stop them from pursuing this dream. Due to the fact that $27,000 is considered to be a substantial amount of money, even for the middle class, Montemurro (2002) argues that this type of spending is an indication of the importance of the wedding celebration in a Western setting. In addition to the basic elements included in the expected wedding format mentioned earlier, many couples often include aspects from their cultural background or other personal touches that make their weddings more personal, special and meaningful (Engstrom, 2012). Boden (2007) notes: “…the contemporary wedding has become increasingly significant as an occasion chosen by brides and grooms, prepared and performed by and for each other,”(111). Although couples may feel that they perform the wedding for each other and close friends and families, the requirement for the large reception means there are many unfamiliar guests present, which inhibits the couple as they perform an intimate ritual of formal bonding in front of an audience. While couples may feel they freely chose to host public wedding celebrations and that they do so for themselves, the potential influence and expectations of family and friends as well as that of the media cannot be ignored. Although couples are not forced to marry or to have public wedding celebrations, the media surrounds couples, especially women, with depictions of what type of wedding they could have. Couples may also want to marry in this way because the public wedding celebration is
also seen as a representation of wealth and class (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007).

Wedding-related media, such as bridal magazines and reality wedding shows, inform couples about what their weddings should include in order to be successful or “perfect” (Boden, 2007; Engstrom, 2008; 2012; Mead, 2007). While weddings shown in most reality wedding shows are the weddings of middle class individuals, the weddings of celebrities are also publicized and can act as examples of the “perfect” wedding (Boden, 2007; Engstrom, 2012). Not only does wedding-related media provide examples of “perfect” weddings, it also communicates what is considered to be required and acceptable in terms of wedding practices (Engstrom, 2008). In her analysis of the bridal media company The Knot, Engstrom (2008) notes: “Because there are no legal rules for the wedding as a social event itself, wedding media…provide[s] informal, though structured, instruction (etiquette) to women regarding the correct way weddings should be conducted” (62). While Boden (2007) notes that weddings have moved away from tradition, it seems that media not only constructs guidelines for the modern wedding as Engstrom (2008) suggests, but bridal media also uses the guise of tradition to further impress upon brides the need to include certain elements in their weddings. As the media is a tool used by the wedding industry to influence marrying couples, the industry exerts its power through the media, constructing traditions in one sense to maintain a set of normal wedding practices and in another sense to promote consumption of certain wedding-related items or services.

While the wedding industry constructs expectations surrounding the wedding for its own benefit, all traditions are socially constructed (Mead, 2007). No matter how
traditions come to be, Mead (2007) notes that the origin of the tradition does not change the effect it has on those that subscribe to traditions. Mead (2007) argues that the wedding industry positions traditions as a set of practices from the past that brides can pick and choose from as opposed to having “traditional” weddings. Brides do not want to imitate weddings of the past in their entirety but they do want to include some “traditions” or “retro flourishes” as Mead (2007:56) calls them. While the wedding industry constructs its own traditions, Mead (2007) also notes:

“What is marketed as tradition by the wedding industry could be better called the traditionalesque – a pleasing mélange of apparently old-fashioned, certainly nostalgic, intermittently ethnically authentic practices that may have little relevance to the past or to the future and are really only illustrative of the present in which they emerge” (59).

The traditionalesque aids in the continuation and expansion of the wedding industry as in order to expand, the industry needs to add new elements while traditional meaning and value need to be attached these to new elements in order to ensure that couples will purchase these items and services (Mead, 2007). Bridal media is used as a central avenue to establish meaning in regards to both the traditionalesque and innovation, and to reinforce these components as “must-haves”, which increases wedding-related consumption and the wedding price tag.

Some couples who choose to participate in reality wedding programs may also include their own cultural traditions. While this may differ from what is expected in a Western context, many, if not all aspects of the standard wedding are still included. Wedding traditions as portrayed in the bridal media reflect wedding traditions of white individuals of Western-European heritage who dominated as the upper class. While non-white individuals of more ethnically diverse backgrounds may include Western “white” traditions, their traditions typically do not belong in the Western context. Although
spending extra money to include things such as dancers to perform a dance related to the bride and/or groom’s cultural background may seem unnecessary, individualizing the wedding celebration is an important part of wedding performance today. Of course, adding these unique touches tends to come with a price tag. It is also important to note that the parents of either the bride or groom may influence the couple’s decision to include aspects from their cultural backgrounds into the wedding celebration. In some cases, adding these aspects may become expensive, and can be a burden on the couple if the parents are not contributing financially.

As mentioned earlier, the wedding can be seen as a representation of wealth (Mead, 2007), which can also be a representation of the parents’ wealth if they are paying for the wedding. Parents, other family members and even friends may also be influential in the construction of wedding plans, especially given the potential financial contributions of parents. For the bride’s family, financial contribution to the wedding may be seen as an obligation due to past notions surrounding the wedding as an occasion paid for by the bride’s family. Otnes, Lowrey & Shrum (1997) argue that financially contributing family members can influence the purchases made by couples when planning their weddings, sometimes to the extent that the couple is dissatisfied with their purchases. Bridal media can also influence the wedding ideas of parents as it communicates acceptable wedding trends, which parents may also wish their children to follow.

While parents may also learn about acceptable wedding practices from bridal media, their ideas can also stem from their experience of the wedding celebration. The wedding experience of parents is likely to be dated by the time their children marry and
the wedding industry is continually adapting to changing times. Bridal media displays representations of weddings outside the familial unit and has the ability to inform viewers of modern wedding practices among other members of the bride’s generation. This is of course assuming that the bride fits into the age range most commonly represented in bridal media: women in their twenties or early thirties (Engstrom, 2012). Not only are young women the target of bridal media but more specifically young white women (Boden, 2001, Engstrom, 2012).

When examining bridal media it is important to note that: “Bridal magazines historically have excluded minority women […], with the image of the perfect bride reinforcing white standards of beauty” (Ingraham, 1999 cited in Engstrom, 2012). While visibly non-white women may be unrepresented in more mainstream bridal magazines, certain bridal publications specifically target these women (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012). Based on Engstrom’s (2012) findings, while visibly non-white brides do participate in reality wedding programs, the majority of participants in most of these programs are white. Engstrom (2012) also notes that in one case, an African American bride felt the need to lose weight in order to conform to an ideal that did not fit with her mother’s perception of African American beauty. This suggests that the standards of bridal beauty, which are consistent with Western white standards, hold whether or not the bride is visibly white.

The bridal role is the role played by the bride during both the wedding and the wedding planning. The planning of the wedding is considered to be the bride’s responsibility as the wedding is supposed to be her day (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007). Bridal media encourages brides to create a “perfect” wedding where they will be the star
of the show (Engstrom, 2012). Brides are told that they can achieve this “perfect” wedding through the consumption of material goods and with the help of wedding professionals (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012). In order to fulfil her role as the star of the show, the bride must also be “perfect”. The bridal role or identity is strongly linked to femininity and brides can achieve perfection by perfecting their own feminine image (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012). Brides perfect their femininity by adhering to Western beauty standards, most notably by altering their bodies through weight loss regimes (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012). A feminine image can also be constructed through the application of make-up and fashionable clothing, in this case the wedding dress (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012).

The “bridezilla” persona is that of a bride who has become so obsessed with having the “perfect” wedding that she becomes hysterical, unreasonable and controlling (Engstrom, 2012; Samek, 2012). While the “bridezilla” may appear to be a strong, powerful woman, her power is confined to the realm of the wedding and wedding planning (Engstrom, 2012). Samek (2012) notes that while some brides willingly accept the “bridezilla” label as a form of empowerment, the concept of “bridezilla” is still problematic. According to Samek (2012): “…the bridezilla figure is rooted in sexist characterizations of women as hysterical, irrational, overly emotional, and always poised to “lose it” (15). Thus while the “bridezilla” persona appears to be empowering for women, it also reinforces stereotypes of female behaviour.

One wedding item where perfection is of particular importance is the wedding gown. Engstrom (2012) notes that certain aspects of what is perceived to be the standard wedding, like the elaborate white wedding gown were not always part of the common
wedding experience, with brides in the past choosing to wear their best dress, no matter what colour that happened to be. Wedding media perpetuates the need for a single-use, white wedding gown, which in turn benefits the wedding industry (Boden, 2001; 2007; Engstrom, 2012). Bridal media is not solely to blame in this case as family members, particularly the mother of the bride, play a large role in influencing a bride’s dress selection (Engstrom, 2012). “Family members often express overwhelming emotions and cry at seeing the bride in “the” dress, which confirms the choice and increases the “magic” and fairy-tale ideal of the wedding” (Engstrom, 2012:132). Having family members, especially the mother of the bride, present when selecting a dress, confirms that the bride has chosen the right dress (Engstrom 2012). Having found “the” dress, the wedding becomes a reality, not just a fantasy (Engstrom, 2012). Not only is the dress important to the family financially (often they cover the cost at least in part) but there is also the notion that there can be only one dress that fits the bride’s and/or her family’s expectations of how the bride must look on her special day (Engstrom, 2012). Mead (2007) notes: “After experiencing “the ‘Oh, Mommy’ moment” when she tries on the gown that for her is the One, the bride will ultimately be provided with a gown which, she will be told, has been specially made for her and her alone” (81). Wedding gowns are still seen to be a luxury item and this plays into the value associated with it (Mead, 2007). Brides think that their dresses are special and that they have chosen a dress that fits their personal tastes. However, most brides learn about wedding dresses from the bridal media and their choice is still the type of dress that is deemed acceptable by the bridal media.

In reference to the show *Say Yes to the Dress*, Engstrom (2012) observes: “While the backstories might differ, the interchangeability of these women results in the overall
portrayal of brides as generic, identity-less women who wear a specific uniform considered legitimate and acceptable for today’s American wedding” (132). In their quest to find that “special” dress that is the “one”, it appears that most brides end up with similar dresses, implying that there is some shared notion of what constitutes the “perfect” dress, which is likely constructed in part by bridal media. Mead (2007) also discusses the uniformity of wedding dresses but also mentions that the bride having ordered and altered her dress to only fit her, makes the dress seem special and unique to the bride, even if it would not appear so to others. The dress may be unique to the bride but it still fits within the media’s construction of what a “normal” wedding dress should look like.

As the wedding is positioned as the bride’s day and her responsibility to plan, grooms are often excluded from the wedding planning process (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007). Wedding planning is viewed as women’s work, although Engstrom (2012) notes that some men do help with the planning of their wedding. Some men feel that the wedding is also their day, despite what others may think. Engstrom (2012) notes that some men dream about their weddings during childhood in the same way that women do. However, women still take on the majority of wedding planning responsibilities and some women do not allow grooms to participate (Engstrom, 2012). Brides feel that wedding planning is one area in social life where they have more control than men and do not want to give up this power, even if the men are providing the majority of financial support for the affair (Engstrom, 2012). Men are often criticized by brides for their lack of knowledge about weddings as only women and wedding industry professionals are allowed to have wedding expertise (Engstrom, 2012). As women are the primary targets
of wedding-related media (Engstrom, 2012), men are not given the opportunity to learn about weddings unless they work in the wedding industry.

While the wedding may also be meaningful to others involved, the wedding industry, through bridal media, positions the bride as the star of the wedding (Engstrom, 2012). Since the bride is also responsible for the majority of the wedding planning (Engstrom, 2012), it is important to understand how the bride, as a woman in a neoliberal capitalist context, influences wedding spending, given the high cost of weddings.

**Theory**

This section introduces the theoretical perspective and the critical theoretical areas that will be used for the purposes of this study. The theoretical perspective used is Goffman’s dramaturgy (1959; Paolucci & Richardson, 2006) and the critical theoretical areas are neoliberal consumerism, constructed through the works of McRobbie (2009), Hasinoff (2008) and Tudor (2012) and McRobbie’s take on postfeminism (2009). Both the theory and the critical theoretical areas were engaged with using a social intersectional approach (Collins, 1998), which will also be discussed here. These perspectives interconnect through consumerism, femininity and the feminine role. Postfeminism and neoliberal consumerism connect through postfeminist notions of femininity that are constructed through consumerism. Both neoliberal consumerism and postfeminism ignore social inequalities that stem from intersections of race, class and gender as both perspectives place responsibility on the individual for achieving success (Hasinoff, 2008; McRobbie, 2009; Tudor, 2012). Dramaturgy relates to femininity as women who take on the feminine role must maintain a feminine front through the consumption of feminine products. Due to the emphasis placed on femininity and
consumerism within the bridal role, this role is an extension of the feminine role portrayed through media in a neoliberal capitalist context.

**Neoliberal Consumerism**

Consumption in a neoliberal capitalist context is used as a tool for achieving individualized success. One’s ability to consume demonstrates success because wants and desires are positioned as something that can be obtained through individual consumption. Thus, the most successful individuals in a neoliberal capitalist context are those that can create a happy life through the consumption of material objects.

Neoliberalism emphasizes individuality and places responsibility on individuals for achieving their own success due to a belief that all people have equal opportunities in a neoliberal context (Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012). Women, non-white individuals and any other group viewed to be disadvantaged in the past can now purchase their way into what is considered to be a good life through consumerism (Tudor, 2012). Social inequalities are often ignored in the neoliberal capitalist context as hard work is positioned as the reason for success (Gray cited in Hasinoff, 2008). In this context, hard work is supposed to result in greater opportunities in terms of career advancement (Hasinoff, 2008), which should also result in higher income. This ignores possible barriers in career advancement for non-white individuals, however, media such as television presents a colourblind world where racial difference is only superficial (Gray cited in Hasinoff, 2008). By denying that any barriers exist in terms of achieving success, the media communicates that it is the individual who is responsible for their own success and any failure is not due to social inequality (Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012). This especially rings true for young women as McRobbie (2009) argues: “The impact of class
inequalities, racism and the sheer persistence of unsurmountable obstacles for girls growing up in poverty are eclipsed by the emphasis on improvement, success and the significant increase in the numbers of young women going to university” (73). Therefore, all young women are supposedly able to overcome their circumstances and become successful in this neoliberal context.

As success is viewed as an individual responsibility, failures are also the responsibility of the individual, whether or not these failures are related to greater social inequalities (Tudor, 2012). Thus, according to a neoliberal perspective, members of the working class do not advance because of their individual lack of ambition, not because of any lack of opportunity. The middle class is then positioned as better neoliberal subjects than the working class because the middle class has more opportunities to advance in the workforce and obtain higher levels of disposable income which allows the middle class to imitate the upper class and celebrity cultures through the purchase of items advertised in the media as being part of the lifestyle of a successful individual. Responsibility is placed on the individual as people are believed to have the freedom to make choices about how they live their lives (Hasinoff, 2008; McRobbie, 2009). These choices, however, still need to be the right choices according to the neoliberal capitalist system, particularly in regards to women as McRobbie (2009) notes that women need to make the right choices in order to be independent and avoid failure. The right choices are often those that fall in line with social expectations for women such as having a successful career and getting married.
While one may choose an alternative lifestyle to what is viewed to be the norm without being openly condemned, what is seen to be the “normal” lifestyle is still made out to be the most appealing option (Jolles, 2012). According to Jolles (2012):

“The middle class, as a socioeconomic and cultural location as well as an identity, demands conformity to social conventions, while it also demands individuality and is thus the space where such a feat is possible. Being normal promises respectability, and, as its effect, the freedom to be oneself” (49).

Maintaining respectability allows people to be accepted in middle class culture rather than being ‘othered’ as an individual that does not fit into middle class culture. As long as people do not venture too far from what is seen as “normal”, they are free to make their own decisions. What is normal and socially acceptable is portrayed in the media, a tool used by the neoliberal capitalist system to communicate its will to individuals. For women, feminism is reformulated to fit the will of the neoliberal capitalist system and a diluted version of notions from the second wave is then communicated to individuals through devices such as media. Thus, the feminism that is now seen in Western popular culture does not take on an activist stance, nor do women opt to accept the feminist label as it still represents notions of activist feminism from the second wave (McRobbie, 2009; Butler, 2013).

Part of this diluted feminism involves the push towards the reclamation of femininity, which stems from notions of feminism as having gone too far (McRobbie, 2009). The feminine identity that is constructed through media is a reflection of past notions of femininity and can be achieved through the purchase of material goods such as make-up, clothing and accessories (McRobbie, 2009). As women have become more involved in the workforce, they have more disposable income, which makes success in the neoliberal context possible (McRobbie, 2009). An increase in disposable income
among women allows them to buy into this version of femininity. Both female participation in the workforce and a consumer-driven version of femininity benefit the neoliberal capitalist system by allowing women to earn money and giving them a reason to spend it (McRobbie, 2009). Thus the neoliberal capitalist system has a vested interest in encouraging women to work as well as adopt more “traditional” notions of femininity that relate to consumer products. On the surface, it may appear as though a step has been taken toward gender equality in terms greater career opportunities for women, however, this step was only taken because it benefited a neoliberal capitalist system which benefits from increased consumption (McRobbie, 2009).

Third Wave and Postfeminism

Since the women who participate in contemporary wedding shows are most often those who grew up during a time where most well-known feminist views were viewed to be integrated in the Western context (Engstrom, 2012), it is important to consider how feminism has influenced them. Many postfeminists argue that feminism is no longer necessary as feminist ideals have already been implemented in everyday life, and now there is a trend under so-called “third-wave feminism” to incorporate traditional idealized femininity into feminism (Archer Mann & Huffman, 2005; Bailey, 2002; Kinser, 2004; McRobbie, 2009). Although authors such as Susan Faludi (1991) view postfeminism as a backlash to feminism, Jess Butler (2013) argues that postfeminism can be seen as an alternative to political activist-related feminism. Postfeminism and to some extent third-wave feminism reject notions of feminist activism in favour of an approach that incorporates individual agency into both feminism and commonly accepted notions of Western femininity. In regards to the third wave, Butler (2013) notes “…the third wave is
meant to provide women with a comfortable, inclusive – and, I argue, fundamentally neoliberal – space where they can cultivate individual feminist identities without all strident negativity of “old school” feminist activism” (42). While Butler (2013) argues that third wave feminism is similar to postfeminism, there is an activist stream of third wave feminism. Kinser (2004) argues that third wave activism shares some goals with that of the second wave but third wave activists differ in that they must respond to a postfeminism that seeks to depoliticize feminist discourse. Although both postfeminism and third wave feminism have a lot in common in that they both emphasize empowerment and agency, postfeminism rejects the feminist label (Butler, 2013). Given the commonalities between mainstream third wave and postfeminism, it seems difficult to differentiate the two concepts as both seem to place strong emphasis on individuality through consumerism. For the purposes of this study, postfeminism, particularly Angela McRobbie’s (2009) understanding of postfeminism, will be the focus as it is a better reflection of how femininity is portrayed through the weddings shown in reality wedding shows.

Postfeminism is considered to be the current stage or “wave” of feminism, in which feminism is viewed to be a thing of the past that has been taken into account (McRobbie, 2009). Angela McRobbie (2009) argues that postfeminism seeks to undermine feminist gains as past notions of female gender roles and femininity resurface and are willingly accepted by young women. A postfeminist view sees feminism as having gone too far, resulting in a need for a return to what is considered normal, especially in relation to feminine gender roles (McRobbie, 2009). In order to avoid the feminist label, McRobbie (2009) notes that this reclaimed version of femininity appears
as women: “…being girlishly distracted, slightly flustered, weighed down with bags, shoes, bracelets and other decorative candelabra items, all of which need to be constantly attended to” (67). This represents a femininity similar to that of the past where middle class women were often concerned about their appearance because they felt they needed to attract male attention as they were not expected to have lasting careers outside of marriage. The return to dominant notions of femininity is done by choice, not by force. McRobbie (2009) notes that in the case of femininity, the dominant structure controls individuals through an illusion of choice, in that women choose to reclaim femininity, it is not forced upon them. While this adoption of femininity is seen as a choice, Jolles (2012) notes that the dominant structures construct the choices that are in their best interest as the most favourable options. This power is also maintained by encouraging women to police themselves in that they make sure that they portray themselves as feminine because media negatively portrays the unfeminine woman as a threat to men (McRobbie, 2009). Women must dress up to portray their femininity, particularly in the workplace, in order to disguise the threat their presence in the workplace causes for men (McRobbie, 2009). Maintaining a feminine front is also important for heterosexual women as this feminine front is needed to attract a man to marry (McRobbie, 2009).

Postfeminism also reinforces marriage as a part of the normal feminine life plan (McRobbie, 2009). Having a life plan is also part of postfeminist notions of femininity, as McRobbie (2009) states: “Having a well-planned life emerges as a social norm of contemporary femininity. And conversely the absence of such styles of self-organisation becomes an indicator of pathology, a signal of failure or a symptom of some other personal difficulties” (77). In a Western postfeminist neoliberal context, women are
expected to have it all figured out in terms of when they will marry, what career path they will take, whether or not they want to have children, etc. This is due, in part to concerns over deceasing fertility with age (McRobbie, 2009). The absence of a life plan is frowned upon as one cannot just be in a relationship, have a job or have children without having the future planned out as this leads to instability. Instability in terms making frequent career changes, having unexpected children or continuously changing partners can affect an individual’s earning ability which can in turn affect their ability to consume. These instabilities are not in line with the needs of the neoliberal capitalist system as it requires individuals to earn enough money to purchase the products it produces.

Jess Butler (2013) argues: “…postfeminism works to exclude women of colour and reproduce racial inequality by reinstituting (Western) whiteness as a dominant cultural norm” (47). McRobbie (2009) also argues that there is a nostalgia attached to whiteness, in that returning to more “traditional” versions of femininity also means returning to white perceptions of femininity. As Western beauty standards are constructed around white norms, McRobbie (2009) notes that black and Asian women cannot achieve perfection in terms of beauty because they are not white. While postfeminist notions of femininity may exclude women of colour, this does not mean that these women do not accept these notions. Butler (2013) argues that women of colour do in fact embrace postfeminist notions of femininity and the consumption that it entails.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality addresses complex and intersecting issues, particularly along the line of gender, race and class. This approach was developed to address concerns that differences were not being taken into account by feminists of the second wave. While
most second wave feminists felt they addressed the problems of all women, some felt they did not consider how race or class could effect a woman’s experience of discrimination.

Patricia Hill Collins (1998) notes: “As opposed to examining gender, race, class, and nation, as separate systems of oppression, intersectionality explores how these systems mutually construct one another,”(63). While individuals’ positions may differ in terms of their particular relation to race, class and gender, these social constructions are interrelated and, as Collins (1998) notes: “…certain ideas and practices surface repeatedly across multiple systems of oppression and serve as focal points or privileged social locations for these intersecting systems” (63). In terms of gender, race and class, hierarchies exist within each of these categories in that women, racially non-white persons and lower class individuals are at a particular disadvantage compared to their counterparts (Collins, 1998). Although these divisions are socially constructed, individuals are taught that these hierarchies are natural (Collins, 1998). Despite the fact that certain groups experience inequality based on the intersection of gender, race and/or class, neoliberalism does not take this into account, instead taking the position that all individuals have equal opportunities (Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012). Creating this illusion of equal opportunity serves the interest of the neoliberal capitalist system as by making people think that they have achieved success by working hard, inequalities are dismissed and the disadvantaged are less likely to rebel.

Both McRobbie (2009) and Butler (2013) note that postfeminism aims to exclude women who are visibly non-white due to nostalgic notions of femininity that are associated with whiteness. The intersections of gender and class will be the main focus
here, although the representation of non-white individuals within reality wedding shows may also be of importance when considering the intersections of race and class. Although non-white individuals are also consumers, they are still expected to adhere to the same norms and “traditions” as white individuals, once again ignoring inequalities and difference.

Goffman’s Dramaturgy

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy approaches interpersonal interactions as if individuals were actors performing for an audience, wherein actors attempt to control the impression their actions give off. While Goffman’s work is dated, it is still relevant today. Paolucci and Richardson (2006) argue that Goffman’s work continues to be of importance as: “Scrutinizing standard rules of conduct in mundane everyday situations can expose the contradictoriness and arbitrariness of institutionalized rules” (336). While the behavioural expectations that existed in Goffman’s time may have changed, individuals are still subjected to this type of expectation when interacting with others (Paolucci & Richardson, 2006). Individuals feel they need to manage the impression their performance gives off in order to fulfil expectations and to save face in front of others (Paolucci & Richardson, 2006).

Goffman’s theory of dramaturgy examines interpersonal interactions by associating individuals with stage actors performing for an audience. Interaction and performance are defined by Goffman (1959) as follows:

“…interaction (that is, face-to-face interaction) may be roughly defined as the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence. An interaction may be defined as all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another’s continuous presence; the term “an encounter” would do as well. A “performance” may be
defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (15).

Interaction is viewed as a performance between two or more people. This performance is not for the benefit of the performers, but for those around the performer who are the audience. As people feel as though the “audience” of people that surround them are constantly observing their behaviour, people attempt to control their behaviour and manage the impressions that they make (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) notes: “…the “true” or “real” attitudes, beliefs, and emotions of the individual can be ascertained only indirectly, through his avowals or through what appears to be involuntary expressive behavior” (2). While an individual may attempt to hide their personal feelings, they cannot completely control the impression that is given due to uncontrollable behaviour such as a nervous tick. Individuals attempt to manage impressions in order to prevent the audience from receiving any information that would discredit their performance, although mishaps can occur (Goffman, 1959; Paolucci & Richardson, 2006). According to Paolucci and Richardson (2006):

“Mishaps may occur because of conflicting definitions of a situation (often institutionalized and external to the actor’s will), the actions of others (often subject to only partial influence by actors), or through the presentation of self (internal to the actor’s agency)” (339).

While impressions can be impossible to maintain in some situations, the individual is not always responsible for mishaps. However, the mismanaging of impressions can lead to a loss of control for the actor, who struggles to save face rather than to maintain a certain impression (Paolucci & Richardson, 2006).
Despite the fact that an individual cannot entirely control their own behaviour, individuals also want to control the behaviour of others. Goffman (1959) argues:

“…it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan” (3-4).

By controlling information surrounding the situation, an individual can gain leadership and control of the situation by convincing others to listen due to the fact that he/she appears to have more knowledge about the situation. While Goffman (1959) focuses on interpersonal interactions, his notion of control in these personal interactions also relates to the structural in terms of how those associated with power communicate to those without. According to Paolucci and Richardson (2006): “A critical dramaturgy would examine how the power of social institutions and norms of interaction can limit and manipulate actors…” (336). While both men and women perform different social roles, the neoliberal capitalist system provides a script through media and advertising for women to follow that accepts of the ideas of past feminism while maintaining white heteronormative notions of femininity that are tied to consumerism (McRobbie, 2009). Goffman (1959) also describes social roles, another form of guiding behaviour that relates to the feminine role. For Goffman (1959) social roles are:

“…the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status, we can say that a social role will involve one or more parts and that each of these different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audience or to an audience of the same persons” (16).
Although separate individuals are likely to respond somewhat differently when placed in similar situations, social roles and fronts provide expectations of what is socially acceptable behaviour in certain situations: Goffman (1959) says:

“When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it. Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both” (27).

For Goffman (1959), a front is a set of expected behaviours and characteristics that are attached to a social role. In order to fulfil expectations and manage impressions, actors must also manipulate their physical surroundings and appearance (Paolucci & Richardson, 2006). In terms of the feminine role, a woman cannot take on this role without maintaining a feminine front. McRobbie (2009) argues that as a feminine image is constructed through the consumption of fashion and beauty products, therefore, the feminine front is constructed, at least in part, through the consumption of material goods. Failure to afford feminine products such as fashionable clothes and make-up would make it difficult to maintain a feminine front for the audience.

It is also important that Goffman (1959) indicates how roles are performed for the benefit of others. While women may feel that they choose to adopt a feminine image for themselves, McRobbie (2009) argues that in the context of the workplace, women maintain this feminine front for the benefit of their male co-workers. Women also maintain a feminine front in order to appear attractive and this particularly applies to heterosexual women who feel they need to attract a man to marry. By constructing this feminine front through the purchase of fashionable clothing and make-up, women hope to maintain the impression which their performance gives off, which is that of an attractive,
feminine woman (McRobbie, 2009). Goffman (1959) argues that impressions can easily be shattered by destructive information. In relation to the feminine role and front, McRobbie (2009) argues: “…the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern sophisticated girl” (18). Thus by withholding critique, women are able to maintain the impression that they are feminine women who men would find attractive and avoid being labelled a feminist and a threat to men. Women who speak out against dominant notions of femininity would shatter the desired impression because submissiveness is a characteristic associated with more traditional notions of femininity that are sought in a postfeminist context.

Goffman (1959) also argues that performers may take on roles that do not fit with their personal beliefs, and yet they feel they must maintain this role because they are afraid that the audience will punish them if they do not. Roles or norms may be more the issue in some cases, as Paolucci and Richardson (2006) argue that norms may not fit with common behaviours and yet individuals still feel obligated to follow these norms. While women may believe in feminist ideals, they do not express them for fear of being labelled a feminist. Successful young women are also afraid that if they appear as a threat to men, then men will not find them attractive and this will hinder their ability to marry (McRobbie, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, the roles played by those involved in the wedding celebration will be examined, although the bride’s role is of particular importance. The bridal role, as constructed by the wedding industry, stems from a feminine role that constructs femininity through the consumption of material goods. Women, as brides, construct their “perfect” weddings through the consumption of material goods in the
same way that they construct their femininity. Maintaining the bridal role and the desired impression of the wedding is done through consumerism as emphasis is placed on the importance of keeping up appearances or maintaining the ideal feminine front. While all brides are encouraged to pursue the kind of “perfect” wedding shown in bridal media, non-white and working class brides can be excluded due to the fact that the types of weddings portrayed in bridal media are constructed around white, middle class traditions. Despite the emphasis placed on the bride and her role in the wedding planning process and the wedding itself, the wedding can be about the other parties involved, such as the groom, the family and the guests. The involvement of these other parties, particularly the groom, however, is often overshadowed by the involvement of the bride and her role in the wedding.

**Methodology**

The method used in this study consists of a critical ethnographic content analysis, of selected episodes of a single reality TV bridal show. Engstrom (2012) uses a similar method in her examination of reality wedding shows as portrayals of real weddings of real people. This method is unique as ethnographies generally consist of field work whereas in this case, reality television was used to observe participants. Combining the organized approach of content analysis through the use of a code sheet with the observational approach of ethnography also creates an organized set of findings that fit the goals of the study. While reality wedding programs are dramatized to some extent, these shows do portray real people who have chosen to host a public wedding celebration despite the fact that marriage is no longer seen as a necessity for couples who want their relationship to be officially recognized. Given that the wedding industry continues to
thrive despite the decline in the number of marriages, there is a strong popular culture built around weddings in North America that falls in line with dominant gendered social roles and consumption. The decline in marriage and rise in divorce in Canada described by Milan (2013) is an indication that while some still believe in the institution of marriage, many others do not support religious requirements for marriage or do not see marriage as the lasting commitment it was once believed to be. Also, today there is a new spin on the wedding as a theatre for consumption. As ethnography is a method which focuses on a particular culture and its participants (Altheide, 1996), it is important to explain how the wedding culture fits the definition of culture.

According to James (2010): “Culture consists of a dynamic and complex set of values, beliefs, norms, patterns of thinking, styles of communication, linguistic expressions, and ways of interpreting and interacting with the world that help people understand and thus survive their varied circumstances” (26). Members of this wedding culture still believe in the institution of marriage and see it as a life-long commitment to their partner, which should be celebrated among friends and family. Common practices or norms are communicated through the bridal media, which communicates what couples are expected to include in their weddings (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007).

For the purposes of this study, twenty episodes of the North American reality television show Rich Bride, Poor Bride are examined using the code sheet available in Appendix A. Questions included in the code sheet were developed based on the findings of past research and were divided into 5 sections: demographics; family and friends; consumerism, budgets and spending; feminism, independence and the relationship; and additional terms. Demographic questions were included to access the identity of the
participants and to assess whether these participants fit Engstrom’s (2012) profile of typical brides represented in bridal media; that being the young, white, childless and never-married woman. As not much is known about the identities of grooms participating in reality wedding shows (Engstrom, 2012), some demographic questions also included grooms in order to establish their identities. The section on family and friends was included to establish the influence of family and friends and whether or not that was tied to financial contribution and whether the familial relation of contributing parties was to the bride or groom. Questions about consumerism, budgets and spending established the cost and budget for the wedding as well as examined why the couple was driven to spend on certain items or services. A section including questions relating to feminism, independence and the relationship was included in order to establish whether feminist ideals had been internalized by participants given that feminism is seen as a thing of the past in popular culture. Lastly, the final section of questions included terms that are widely used within bridal media to establish whether or not these terms were used by marrying couples as a reflection of the influence of bridal media. It is important to note that the code sheet was developed based on the assumption that the couples shown in the episodes of the sample would be heterosexual couples due to Engstrom’s (2012) observation that heterosexual couples were the main focus of most reality wedding shows.

*Rich Bride, Poor Bride* not only focuses on the process of wedding planning but it also provides details about the couple’s spending and budget for their wedding. Each episode also features a wedding planner whose main function is to prevent the couple from spending beyond their budget. The budgetary details supplied by this show provides
useful information for the purposes of this study. The number of episodes included in the sample is based on those available through the network website (Slice.ca) and are randomly chosen from the relatively small number that can be accessed. Available episodes are from the 5th and 6th seasons of the show, which were aired in 2010 and 2011. Although this seems somewhat limiting, these episodes are more recent and given the increase in the number of wedding-themed reality television programs over the past ten years, participants on these shows are more likely to have been influenced by what they have seen on these types of shows. It is also possible that participants may have a better understanding of the expectations placed upon them when participating in this type of performance and may censor their behaviour accordingly.

While there may be advantages to using reality television programs in that it may be difficult to attend actual weddings, couples participating in these shows may act differently due to their knowledge that they are being filmed (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Fiske & Hartley (1978) also note that television programs, like other forms of media, are subject to interpretation based on the viewer’s cultural background. Given that the show Rich Bride, Poor Bride takes place in both Canada and the United States and it will be examined by a Canadian, it is likely that interpretations will fall in line with the intentions of the producer, however, results may not be generalizable outside of the North American context.

Reality television programs provide an interesting perspective as while the events they portray may be dramatized to some extent, these programs do provide an opportunity for viewers to witness events that occur behind closed doors (Engstrom, 2012; White, 2006). Although many have the opportunity to attend and in some cases
participate in weddings, many do not have the opportunity to view the wedding planning process without having personal ties to the situation. It is important not to forget the potential for dramatization of the wedding planning process or the fact that the producers of these shows control what makes the final cut for each episode, however, reality television programs focusing on weddings provide insight into the experience of those who choose to host the types of weddings promoted in bridal media (White, 2006). While most – if not all – reality programs include some level of dramatization, some appear more dramatized than others (White, 2006). White (2006) notes that some reality programs contain more structure and include participants who appear less realistic than others. While participants in reality wedding programs are aware of their being filmed, it is also important to note that while situations portrayed on these shows can become rather tense and dramatic, the purpose of this type of reality program generally tends more toward portraying happy occasions, unlike the show *Cheaters*, as mentioned by White (2006). Since the couples on these shows participate voluntarily, those who would not want to publicize their weddings would not be portrayed through these shows. It is also important to note the possibility that participants in some reality television shows receive some type of service and/or reward in exchange for their participation (White, 2006). White (2006) notes that in the case of the show *Cheaters*, the offering of such rewards in both the form of service (in this case a detective service) and cash rewards results in the participants being of predominately lower class status as they could not afford this service despite the fact that participation in the show comes at the cost of revealing their personal troubles to a large audience. While participants in reality wedding programs must have the means to pay for their weddings in order to participate in the show to begin
with, it is unclear if there are any rewards attached to some or all of the shows. It is possible that since many couples choose to have their weddings filmed, producers of these shows are providing this service so long as participants allow the filming of the wedding and the planning process that precedes it to be aired on television. Those who do participate, however, provide the public and those interested in research related to the practice of the modern wedding a chance to gain access to a much larger representation of marrying couples. As some still view weddings to be a personal and private affair, it would be difficult to gain access to a large number of participants without having to gain access through the use of false pretenses.

When considering Goffman’s (1959) notions of everyday performance in which people are aware of the potential audience that surrounds them, reality programming seems to take this performance to a new level in which the performers are willingly performing for a wider audience that may be paying more attention than the potential audience(s) that surrounds us as we move through our everyday activities. White (2006) notes that one can never truly tell if a participant in a reality television program is being genuine. Considering Goffman’s (1959) notions of personal front and performativity, even in our everyday lives we are performing for an audience. Given this performance, even when interacting with a stranger face-to-face, it would still be difficult to assess whether the stranger was being genuine or deceptive as outside of intimate relationships and even to some extent within them, a role is being performed (Goffman, 1959). Reality television participants in the context of wedding programs are aware of being filmed, making the wide television audience part of their reality. While reality wedding programs do allow access into the more private aspects of the wedding and its planning process,
wedding themselves are also performed for family and friends and couples often hire photographers to take photos and often film the event (Engstrom, 2012). This displays the possibility that the performance of the wedding itself may not be significantly altered by the inclusion of an additional television audience. The stress felt by brides during the process of wedding planning is often included in these programs and is often portrayed in a dramatic sense. While this may be part of the dramatization included in many reality television programs, stress and dramatic outbursts come to be part of the bridal role as expressed through the “bridezilla” persona (Engstrom, 2012).

**Summary**

Despite a decline in marriage rates, the wedding industry, through bridal media portrays the wedding as a meaningful life event now commonly constructed through consumption. A multi-theoretical approach is adopted here due to the fact that the wedding is a consumer-based life event that is constructed around white middle class standards and performed for an audience of guests and for society at large. While the bride’s role is of particular importance due to ties between the feminine role and consumption, she is not the only one involved in this performance that may find it meaningful. Grooms and family members also help to plan, perform and pay for the wedding celebration and it is important to understand their role in an event whose meaning has become so closely tied to consumerism.

Chapter Two will present the findings of the study. These are presented according to the categorized codes used for “reading” the selected episodes of the reality television wedding program: demographics; family and friends; consumerism, budgets and
spending; feminism, independence and the relationship; and additional terms. An analysis of these findings will then follow in Chapter Three.
Chapter 3

Results

Introduction

This chapter will present the results of the critical ethnographic content analysis of the twenty randomly selected episodes of the reality wedding series *Rich Bride, Poor Bride*. A discussion of the questions from the code sheet is also included. The questions are based on past wedding-related research as well as on the observations of this researcher after viewing past episodes of both the program used for this study as well as other reality wedding shows. Before getting to the specific findings of the content analysis, general background information on the rising significance of reality wedding television shows will be discussed.

Many reality wedding shows appear on television in Canada and the United States and, while some have been discontinued, new programs appear to surface as quickly as others disappear. Engstrom (2012) notes that TLC and WE TV are networks that air many reality wedding shows. While WE TV is not available in Canada, TLC does air a series of wedding-related programs every Friday, which they refer to as “Bride Day.” While other networks air reality wedding shows, in Canada, TLC hosts the most well-known wedding programs such as *Say Yes to the Dress* and *Four Weddings*.

Engstrom (2012) notes that the number of shows that focus on wedding planning has risen in recent years, indicating that this type of wedding program is growing in popularity. While some programs focus specifically on the wedding planning process, others focus on one particular aspect of the wedding, most notably the dress. For
example, the program *Say Yes to the Dress* places the dress as central to the wedding and emphasizes the need to find the “perfect” dress (Engstrom, 2012). This show, like some other reality wedding programs, has different versions or spin-offs, such as *Say Yes to the Dress: Atlanta*, *Say Yes to the Dress: Randy Knows Best* and *Say Yes to the Dress: Bridesmaids*. The popularity of the *Say Yes to the Dress* series indicates the importance of not only the dress, but also the need to find the “perfect” dress.

The show *Four Weddings* pits brides against one another as four brides attend and judge each other’s weddings (which often have varying budgets) in order to compete for the prize of a luxury honeymoon. This show portrays some weddings as better than others and weddings with higher budgets have a better chance of winning. Other shows, like *Bulging Brides* focus on the bride’s fitness and her ability to fit into her wedding dress.

While there are several shows within the reality genre that focus specifically on weddings, other reality shows may also occasionally venture into this domain. Shows that focus on cake decorating, like *Cake Boss*, often feature wedding cakes. Some reality television personalities also appear on wedding shows, usually those that air on the same network as their current show or the show that they had been on, which serves to further develop their status as celebrity. The weddings of reality show personalities that met on reality television programs, such as Rob and Amber from *Survivor*, are sometimes televised and aired as television specials. Weddings of celebrities have also been presented as television specials on many occasions. Royal weddings, such as that of Will and Kate have also aired widely on television, which could also be considered as a television special. Reality wedding programs allow regular people to feel like celebrities by allowing their weddings to also be televised.
In this study, twenty episodes of a single reality wedding show, *Rich Bride, Poor Bride*, were randomly chosen from those available on the *Slice* network website, which were from the fifth and sixth seasons of the show that aired in 2010 and 2011. This show provided many insights into the process of wedding planning and into couples’ feelings about the meaning of the modern wedding in North America as well as providing contextual information about the couple’s budget and wedding-related consumption. While *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* focuses on wedding budgets and cost, that does not mean that these weddings are any less expensive or extravagant than weddings portrayed on other wedding programs.

Although reality television wedding programs show real weddings of average people, participants may still be acting for the camera as opposed to being themselves. Given that the show is produced for its entertainment value, the producers of the show may also have encouraged participants to act out their frustrations and probably included the more dramatic footage over other footage in the final cut. Those responsible for the production of reality wedding programs decide what makes it into the hour or half hour that is aired on television, which allows the producers to portray a specific message about the wedding and its participants rather than what actually happened in real time.

Below are the results of applying the questions found in Appendix A, which are divided into the following categories:

- Participant demographics;
- Family and friends of the marrying couple;
- Consumerism, budgets and spending;
- Feminism, independence and the relationship and;
Additional terms.

Demographics

Reality wedding television shows portray mostly brides who are visibly white, who are in their mid-twenties to early thirties, who have not been married previously and do not have children (Engstrom, 2012). In order to examine whether or not this tendency was consistent with the brides shown in Rich Bride, Poor Bride, questions about race, age, previous marriage and children were included. A question about cultural background was also included as cultural heritage may influence the type of wedding a couple may wish to have or aspects they may wish to include. While most wedding shows focus primarily on the bride, questions about cultural background and race also included the groom as his background may also influence the type of wedding and there seems to be little information about grooms in terms of race. The profession of the bride was also included. Some other wedding shows also mention the bride’s profession but in most cases the bridal role is seen to eclipse other aspects of a bride’s identity and wedding planning becomes her primary task in the show (Engstrom, 2012). While the bride’s income was not mentioned in any of the episodes in the sample, the profession of the bride was mentioned during her introduction in each episode. The bride’s profession can be used as an indication of potential income, which may provide insight into the couple’s ability to afford the type of wedding they decide to have. The groom’s occupation is only mentioned in 85 percent of the episodes and 2 of the grooms are revealed to be students.²

² A question about the occupation of the groom was not included in the code sheet but this information was recorded.
Table 1 Cultural Background and Racial Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bride only</th>
<th>Groom only</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Not mentioned</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the cultural backgrounds of the bride and groom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentioned?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
weddings shows feature more diversity than previously thought, at least in the case of

*Rich Bride, Poor Bride.*

Table 2 Age of Bride

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which age range does the bride fall within?</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-32</th>
<th>33-39</th>
<th>40-46</th>
<th>46+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The bride’s age was also mentioned at the beginning of each episode and 85 percent of brides were between the ages of 25 and 32 years old (see Table 2). These findings are consistent with the age category of brides on the majority of wedding shows as mentioned by Engstrom (2012). Findings are also consistent with Milan’s (2013) finding of an average age of 29 at first marriage for women in Canada.

As previously mentioned, the profession of each bride was mentioned at the introduction of each episode of *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* included in the sample. The producers of this show acknowledge employment as a notable aspect of the bride’s identity, however, once she becomes immersed in the bridal role, the bride’s profession often becomes irrelevant. Bride Amy remarks: “I may be a financial analyst, but I’m also a bride and my wedding has to be perfect no matter what the cost”. Despite the fact that her profession involves finance, any knowledge she may have about money and spending wisely is suspended during the process of planning her wedding. In another case, bride Liz makes reference to both her and her fiancée’s profession when the couple argues about replacing guest favours with charitable donations due to the fact that each of them have caring professions. When examining the occupations of the brides in the sample, it appears that most of the occupations listed would require some type of formal training, most likely a university degree or college diploma. While obtaining a degree or diploma does not necessarily correspond to obtaining a high paying job under modern economic
conditions, it does at least provide employment potential and these women are presented as being employed. It is also notable that at least 40 percent of these occupations are female-oriented, such nursing, teaching and social work.

Only one couple in the sample was shown to have children. In this episode, the bride has one child from a previous relationship and the couple have one child together. Although it is much more socially acceptable for couples to live together and have children outside of the institution marriage, this couple still expressed the need to marry in order to make their relationship and family structure somehow official. While there was no mention of whether or not the remaining couples had children, considering the significance placed on the wedding day, if the couple had children then they would have probably been incorporated into the ceremony or reception in some way. It is also possible that these couples still believe in the traditionally accepted order of marriage before children, despite the increased acceptability of having children outside of the institution of marriage.

It was not mentioned in any of the episodes included in the sample as to whether or not any of the show’s participants had been previously married. Given the focus on the couple and the celebration of their upcoming marriage, it appears that previous marriages of participants do not fit within the scope of the program. While one bride does have a son from a previous relationship, it is never made clear as to whether or not she was married to her previous partner, although given that she is in her early 20s and given the age of her son (who appears to be about 7 or 8, although this is not mentioned), it seems less likely that she had been previously married.
Family and Friends

Family and friends have the potential to influence the choices of the bride and groom, especially if they are contributing to the wedding celebration in a financial sense. Based on Goffman’s (1959) social theory of performance, the family and friends of the couple may also be performing the wedding celebration and the wedding planning process alongside the couple as part of a team meeting social norms. According to Goffman (1959), the team would attempt to maintain a certain front for the purposes of the audience. In this case, the front would be that of the wedding as a large celebration where it is acceptable to spend large amounts of money in order to make the couple’s wedding a reflection of their personal tastes and the audience would be the wedding guests. The presence and influence of the parents, especially the mother of the bride, was examined in order to assess the amount of influence the family had on the couple in regards to the planning of their wedding. Otnes, Lowrey and Shrum (1997) and Engstrom (2012) suggest that a couple may be pressured to include certain aspects into the wedding that they would not have included if it were not for their parents or friends. The mother of the bride may also have a strong influence on her daughter’s decisions as the wedding is portrayed as an important day to the mother of the bride due to perceptions about relationships between mothers and their daughters (Engstrom, 2012). Any parent that has a close relationship with their child would see the wedding as an important day in their own life and their child would value their parents’ input. Relationships between the bride or groom and their parents would be reflected through parents’ presence during the wedding planning process and their willingness to contribute financially to the wedding celebration. If the parents are paying for the wedding or parts of the wedding, they may
also feel that they should have a say in what the couple includes (Otnes, Lowrey & Shrum, 1997). The couple may also feel they have to include things because their parents want them or think they should have them. In this case, the parents may impose their wedding ideals on the couple, especially if they are paying. Friends, such as those who are members of the bridal party may also influence the couple, especially if they are involved in the wedding planning process.

Table 3 Financial Contribution of Parents of the Bride and Groom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bride’s family only</th>
<th>Groom’s family only</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Not mentioned</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the parents of the bride or groom appear to contribute financially to the wedding celebration?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In regard to financial contribution, 40 percent of the episodes mentioned some type of familial contribution (see Table 3). In 25 percent of cases only the bride’s family contributed and the bride’s family contributed financially in 35 percent of cases. Indications that the bride’s family made some kind of financial contribution in 35 percent of cases suggests that patriarchal notions still linger in modern wedding practices. However, despite this, the couple was mentioned as being the main contributors to the wedding in 70 percent of cases while the bride’s family alone was never the main financial contributor (see Table 4). The groom’s family does contribute financially in 15 percent of the cases and in 10 percent of cases both families contribute, which shows that it is not just the bride’s family that contributes. In the one case, the father of the groom paid for a large Indian wedding with over 900 guests, which may be an expectation in Indian culture. It is also important to note that in many cases where the bride’s family
contributed, their contribution was to the purchase of the bride’s wedding gown or ceremony attire. The mother of the bride tends to be the parent who consents to the contribution of this money as she is often present when the bride shops for her dress. In some cases it appears as though the bride’s family had not intended to contribute financially but the mother does so in order for her daughter to be able to purchase the dress if it does not fit within the couple’s budget. The dress often carries a great deal of meaning for the bride and her mother as the mother’s contribution apparently increases her daughter’s happiness through the purchase. When the bride finds “the” dress, it also serves to confirm her role as a bride.

Table 4 Main Financial Contributor to the Wedding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who appears to be the main financial contributor to the wedding?</th>
<th>Bride</th>
<th>Groom</th>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>Bride’s family</th>
<th>Groom’s family</th>
<th>Both families</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Familial presence at wedding planning outings or gatherings determines the possibly of parental influence. A wedding planning outing or gathering would be considered to be an outing or gathering where the couple, with or without their family and friends would discuss and make decisions about their wedding and the elements they would like to include there. Such an outing or gathering would include visits to caterers, florists, decorators, etc. In regards to the presence of the parents or other family members at these outings or gatherings, the bride’s family was present in 70 percent of cases and the groom’s family was present at outings in 55 percent of cases with both families being involved in 35 percent of cases (See Table 5). Of the cases where both families were
present at wedding planning outings or gatherings, there did not seem to be a significant
difference in regards to which family was more involved (See Table 5a). It is also
important to note that family may include relatives other than parents such as siblings or
cousins, however these family members often fall into supportive roles rather than having
a strong influence.

Table 5 Family Involvement during the Wedding Planning Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are both the bride and groom’s families involved in wedding planning outings?</th>
<th>Bride’s family</th>
<th>Groom’s family</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5a Family Involvement when Both Families are Involved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When both families are involved in wedding planning outings, is one family more involved than the other?</th>
<th>Bride’s family more involved</th>
<th>Groom’s family more involved</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The couple’s parents appear to influence the wedding planning decisions in 45
percent of cases, with the bride’s family having influence in 25 percent of cases (See
Table 6). Influence and financial contribution do not appear to go hand in hand as 40
percent of cases include parental financial contribution while 45 percent include parental
influence. In some cases, parents have influence while not contributing financially and
some parents also contribute financially and do not have influence. In some cases,
couples will include certain cultural aspects because they perceive it as being meaningful
to their parents. Some parents also use the guise of culture and tradition in order to
enforce their views upon their children.
Table 6 Influence of Parents of the Bride and Groom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bride’s family only</th>
<th>Groom’s family only</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the parents of the bride or groom appear to influence the couple’s decisions in regards to the planning of the wedding?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Necessity of Wedding Items as Mentioned by Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there any items or services that the parents of the bride or groom mention as being a necessary part of the wedding?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Parents not involved</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7a Mention of Necessity by Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whose family mentions the necessity of a certain item or service?</th>
<th>Bride’s Family</th>
<th>Groom’s Family</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 30 percent of cases, parents of either the bride or groom mention some item or service as being a necessary part of the wedding (see Table 7). While parents were not involved in only 15 percent of cases, in at least of one of these cases, the couple did not live in in close proximity to their parents. Where items or services were mentioned as being necessary, the bride’s family mentioned this more often than the groom’s family (see Table 7a). The fact that aspects are mentioned as necessary more often by the bride’s family is consistent with the likelihood of the bride’s family to contribute financially. In the majority of cases that mention certain aspects as necessary, this aspect relates to food and drink and is often due to concern over not having enough, which results in parents offering to make a financial contribution in some cases. While parents push for their children to include certain things or increase others, this does not mean that their children comply, especially in cases where the parents are not paying for things they want their
children to include. In the case of bride Lisa, her mother pushes her to have a traditional ceremony inside a church rather than an outdoor one. Despite her mother’s wishes, Lisa does not opt for a church ceremony and goes ahead with her outdoor wedding for which she and her fiancée are paying. The mother of the bride influences her daughter decisions in only 25 percent of cases (see Table 8). This did not mean that brides’ mothers were not present at wedding planning outings or gatherings, as 75 percent of the brides’ mothers were present for at least one wedding planning outing or gathering (see Table 9).

Table 8 Influence of the Mother of the Bride

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the bride’s mother appear to influence her daughter’s decisions in regards to wedding planning?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 Presence of the Mother of the Bride

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the mother of the bride present at wedding planning outings/gatherings?</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Few</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While family has the potential to play a significant role, friends are often present throughout the wedding planning process and also have the potential to influence the couple in making their decisions. Close friends and relatives are often selected to be members of the bridal party and these people tend to be particularly close to the couple during the planning process as they are often asked to contribute some of their time to helping the couple with wedding-related tasks. Bride Amy goes so far as to say that the bridal party is responsible for her happiness, which also includes her fiancée’s groomsmen as well as her bridesmaids. Members of the bridal party are typically friends of the couple, and generally it is expected that they pay for their own attire and travel if the couple decides to marry outside of the location in which their friends reside. There are
some exceptions to this rule portrayed in two of the episodes examined. In one episode, couple Liz and Phil plan to have a destination wedding in addition to their wedding at home, however, they had expected their bridal party to pay to go on the trip with them. When the couple meets with the bridal party to discuss this, many members of the bridal party express that they cannot afford to pay for the trip. Since Liz would like their friends to be there, she offers to pay before approaching Phil (or so it appears) and when Phil caves, the bridal party cheers, despite knowing that the couple is also planning to pay for a wedding at home and cannot afford to pay for their bridal party to go with them without going way over their budget. While most bridesmaids expect to pay for their dresses, Bride Audrey is convinced by her bridesmaids that it is customary for the bride to purchase the bridesmaid dresses. When trying to get his bridesmaids to wear a dress he selected, groom Samir offers to pay for the bridesmaids dresses, however, the bridesmaids refuse to wear Samir’s choice and he settles for a dress that they like and are willing to pay for. While the bride generally has a say in the dresses her bridesmaids wear, bridesmaids tend to accompany the bride during wedding dress shopping and can sometimes have an influence in regards to the dress that is chosen. In the case of bride Nicole, it is the bridal party that emphasizes the need for the “perfect” dress despite the fact that Nicole does not appear to care as much and also does not wish to spend too much on the dress.

Table 10 Influence of other friends and family members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there any other friends or family members that appear to have a strong influence on the bride?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strong influence is characterized as influencing the couple to the extent that they agree to include some item or service (or upgrade) that they would not have otherwise chose. While friends played a role in most of the weddings shown in the sample, in only one episode did two particular friends appear to have a strong influence on the couple throughout the wedding planning process (see Table 10). In this case, friends Eric and Jimmy, who appeared to be an openly gay couple, had a tremendous influence on bride Dominque and her soon to be husband Tim. Eric and Jimmy’s “help” often involved suggestions for things that were beyond the couple’s budget, with a general approach of sparing no expense. While Eric and Jimmy often appear unwilling to comprise on their ideas, the couple, with the help of the wedding planner convince them to comprise and even succeed (with considerable difficulty) at getting them to agree to put together the centerpieces for the reception. Despite the fact that it is Dominque and Tim who are getting married, Eric and Jimmy act as if the bride requires their approval and express that they feel the day is about them too. When Eric and Jimmy express their feeling about their part in the wedding to Dominque, she is quick to correct them in that it is a day for her and Tim to celebrate with their friends, which includes Eric and Jimmy. It is notable that Eric and Jimmy appear to be the only openly gay subjects in all of the episodes included in the sample (although there are some wedding shows that do include gay and lesbian marriages). Given that reality television programs are often at least somewhat dramatized, it is possible that Eric and Jimmy are performing their gay identity by acting as “wedding experts” during the planning of Dominique and Tim’s wedding. Still, Eric and Jimmy were often reminded that it was not their wedding or their money.
While marrying couples may be directly influenced by their friends during the wedding planning process, friends as potential guests may indirectly influence the couple’s decisions. In many of the episodes in the sample, couples mentioned being concerned about their guests. Some couples seem concerned about the need to entertain their guests or as groom Tyler put it, without some form of entertainment, the reception would just be a “long boring dinner”. Food and alcohol are necessary aspects of the wedding in order to ensure that guests have a good time and typically are the largest single expense, which can cause budgetary issues. The dancing that normally follows the dinner at the reception was not seen as enough entertainment for guests in some cases. Some couples hired additional entertainers such as choreographed dance troops. For bride Liz, cutting additional entertainment was not seen as an option due to fear that guests would be disappointed. Cutting costs by opting for more basic items and services was not seen as an option for some couples as they wanted their weddings to project a certain image to their guests. While many couples seem concerned with their friends having a good time, some couples’ reasoning for hosting a large wedding was to please family and friends. In the case of Trish and Ben, bride Trish mentioned that her sole reason for hosting a large wedding was to please her family, which caused her to be more concerned about the budget due to the fact that she did not want to spend this money in the first place.
Consumerism, Budgets and Spending

Many wedding shows portray weddings of around a hundred guests or more that are lavish and expensive. The shows not only portray real-life weddings but also, as part of bridal media, influence wedding practices (Engstrom, 2012). Given that the average cost of a wedding in Canada is about $27,000, exploring why couples spend this kind of money on a wedding is of concern due to the fact that it could result in debt (O’Brien, 2013; RateSupermarket.ca). Despite the fact that Rich Bride, Poor Bride focuses on the budgetary aspect of wedding planning, it does not necessarily mean that the brides on this wedding program are any more budget conscious than any other bride within the reality wedding genre. Often it appears that the couple goes above and beyond the expected Western wedding format, sometimes due to an attempt at originality or to include some element of their cultural background outside of the Canadian/American culture. In the North American context, the expected wedding format generally tends to be that of some type of ceremony, which may or may not have some type of religious aspect, followed by a sit-down dinner at a banquet hall, which is then followed by dancing. While these aspects may not appear in this order or format, this is generally what one expects when invited to a wedding. Different aspects of the couple culture(s) may be included if the couple and/or their families place value upon cultural traditions, which may include some extra form of entertainment or a special type of meal may be served, which may also result in a higher cost. Guest counts also effect costs, which may also be related to culture as certain cultures such as Italian and Indian cultures are known to have larger weddings. Despite the expected basic wedding format, many couples wish to make their wedding original in some way that is meaningful to them. Weddings often have themes, rather
than just adopting the generic wedding theme in order for the wedding to be “special” in some way. Individuality is a large part of neoliberal consumerism, as even though items must still be chosen within constructed norms, subjects are made to believe that they can construct their identities by purchasing things to create a certain image (Bulter, 2013; Tudor, 2012). Women are particularly involved in this type of consumerism (McRobbie, 2009), which can influence wedding spending as wedding planning is viewed to be the bride’s responsibility (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007).

Table 11 Purchase of Wedding Items Outside of Expected Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the couple purchase any items or services outside that of the expected format of the ceremony/dinner/dance format considered to be the “traditional” Western wedding?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

80 percent of couples purchased items or services outside the expected wedding format (see Table 11). In some cases, emphasis was placed on making a grand entrance when the couple either arrived or entered the banquet hall. These “grand” entrances would sometimes include special transportation to the hall outside regular transportation or limos, given that limos can also be considered within the realm of expected wedding transportation (examples of special transportation from the episodes include a firetruck, trolley car and helicopter). Some “grand” entrances also included a choreographed dance number that included the couple but was mainly performed by hired dancers. Other items and services purchased in addition to the expected wedding format also included those that were purchased for the purposes of additional entertainment (which was considered to be that outside of or in addition to the DJ or band hired to provide dance music for the dance portion of the evening). Additional entertainment also included dancers, a samba
band and in one case, circus performers. Many of these extras were also purchased because of the cultural element they provided.

While it is considered customary at Indian weddings for the groom to enter the ceremony in grand fashion, one couple rented a pontoon plane for the groom to arrive in. In 30 percent of cases, items or services were purchased specifically because of the bride or groom’s cultural background (see Table 12). In 15 percent of cases, items or services were purchased due to the groom’s cultural background only and in 15 percent of cases items or services were purchased for both the bride and groom’s background. If items or services were purchased to represent the cultural background of both the bride and groom, this did not necessarily mean that the couple shared the same background. In the case of Amy and Jon, the bride hired Chinese lion dancers to perform at their wedding as a representation of her background and the groom needed to purchase a huppah (wedding canopy) for the Jewish wedding ceremony. It is interesting to note that the cultural background of the groom was represented in all cases where items or services were purchased for this reason. The cultural background of the bride, however, was only represented by items or services purchased for this reason when the groom also made purchases for this reason or the couple shared the same cultural background. There were also more cases where only the groom’s cultural background was mentioned (20 percent) compared to cases where only the bride’s cultural background was mentioned (10 percent). This could be an indication that the inclusion of cultural elements in the wedding may bare greater meaning for grooms than brides when the couple does not share the same cultural background. Given the North American context of the show, brides may get wrapped up in Western notions of the wedding and become more
concerned about other aspects of the wedding rather than adding additional cultural elements outside those of North American culture. While including elements that represent a couple’s cultural background may cost more, others may not cost more and some may not neatly fit into the expected wedding format as substitutions such as particular types of food to be served as part of the meal.

Table 12 Cultural Background as Reason for Purchase of Wedding Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there any items or services purchased specifically because of the bride or groom’s cultural background?</th>
<th>Bride’s Background</th>
<th>Groom’s Background</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purchase of items that are outside what is considered to be the expected Western wedding format are also related to the couple’s desire to make their wedding original as it is considered to be a representation of their identity both as individuals and as a couple. 80 percent of featured couples purchased items or services specifically mentioned as being necessary for making their wedding “their own” (see Table 13). These purchases included a wide variety of items and services including but not limited to décor, cheerleaders, actors hired to dress as English guards, a glass slipper, a pony and a tiki bar. These items or services were often purchased to represent a theme the couple had chosen for their wedding. While many couples often opt for themes that seem somewhat mainstream, not all couples will include the same elements of that theme, making their wedding original, at least in their eyes. It is also important to note that two couples chose to have destination weddings (in addition to having receptions at home) in which the couples purchased wedding “packages”. While these packages appear to provide the basics, Bride Liz still felt the need to customize her package. Given that this
option is offered, even though resorts offer destination wedding packages, they are aware of the perceived need for originality.

Table 13 Originality as Reason for Purchase of Wedding Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there any items or services purchased by the couple that was mentioned as being necessary for making their wedding their own?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While common everyday people seldom get a chance to become royal or celebrities, the bride is able to achieve this status for at least one day through the bridal role. Many brides believe that the wedding is their day where the focus is on them as they are the star of their own show (Engstrom, 2012). It is not surprising that brides who choose to participate in reality wedding programs feel this way considering that by participating, they are in fact the star of their very own episode. This is not to say that some grooms do not have similar feeling as grooms featured in the sample did have attitudes similar to that of the “princess” attitude of some brides. 35 percent of brides mentioned becoming a princess for their wedding day (see Table 14). Although brides may not have expressed their desire to become a princess on their wedding day, tiaras were quite popular as wedding accessories, indicating that there was some relation between the bride and a princess. In addition to the bride becoming a princess, celebrities can also be imitated on the wedding day due the perception of the wedding as a show. This was not the case for most couples, however, as only 10 percent of couples included items or services for the purpose of imitating the weddings of celebrities or more so emulating celebrities in general (see Table 14). In the case of Christy and Raymond, the couple decided on a Hollywood theme for their wedding and bride Christy had a red carpet-type photo-shoot set up for guests entering the hall. This photo-shoot included a
custom-made backdrop with the couple’s names and initials, which was of course an added expense. Tania and Michael also attempted to emulate the stars with their helicopter entrance.

Table 14 Becoming a Princess and Celebrity Imitation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the bride mention anything about becoming a “princess” for the wedding day?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any items or services purchased specifically for the purpose of imitating the wedding of a celebrity or royalty?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 Cost of the Bridal Gown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the cost of the bridal gown mentioned?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15a Cost in Relation to Average Cost

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the cost of the bridal gown is mentioned, does the cost exceed $2000?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cost of the bridal gown was mentioned in 95 percent of episodes and 55 percent of the gowns were shown to have exceeded $2000 (see Table 15 and Table 15a). The average or expected cost of a wedding gown in Canada is $2000 (O’Brien, 2013; RateSupermarket.ca). Many brides appear to place importance upon the purchasing of the dress, however, some brides did chose to wear dresses that they did not purchase from a store. Bride Alysa wanted a designer gown but when her father refuses to pay, Alysa decides to wear a designer gown a friend (who was recently married) has offered. Given the emphasis placed on originality, many brides appear to purchase their own dresses, however, in this case the bride chose to pay to alter a friend’s designer gown rather than purchase a dress that fits within her budget that she does not like. Bride Lisa also does not purchase her gown as her mother alters her wedding gown to suit the bride. While some
brides appear willing to wear previously worn dresses, bride Christy rejects the previously worn dress of her soon-to-be mother-in-law when it is offered to her as an option for saving money. A couple of brides also had their dresses handmade as opposed to purchasing ready-made dresses, with one bride having a custom-made dress that was designed by a friend. Despite the emphasis placed on the style of the dress, only 20 percent of brides mention having a designer wedding gown (see Table 16). Designer wedding gowns are considered to be desirable over other gowns, such as in the case of Alysa, but they are often more expensive. It is possible that some brides may have had designer gowns without this being mentioned, considering the spending attitudes of some brides. A bride seeking a designer dress would also have a positive attitude towards fashion, as designer dresses are regarded to be “high” fashion as opposed to the average mass-produced dress. Despite the lack of mention of designer gowns, 95 percent of brides appear to have a positive attitude toward fashion (see Table 16). Rather than spending money on a designer gown, some brides purchase multiple gowns.

Table 16 Bride’s Attitude toward Fashion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the bride appear to have a positive attitude toward fashion?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any mention of the dress being from a designer label?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45 percent of brides had multiple wedding gowns or outfits (see Table 17). In cases where brides had multiple dresses, many brides had one dress for the ceremony and another for the reception. Dresses worn at the reception were most often purchased because their design allowed the bride to dance. In a few cases, brides even have more than two dresses. The purchase of multiple dresses can relate to a bride’s participation in
a wedding show as just like a celebrity, she needs to have multiple wardrobe changes. The pressure placed on brides to find the “perfect” dress can also be a reason for the purchase of multiple dresses since brides on Rich Bride, Poor Bride only expect to marry once. In 45 percent of cases the bride emphasizes the need for the “perfect” dress, which matches the amount of brides who have multiple dresses (see Table 17). The need for the “perfect” dress also relates to the need for the “perfect” body to fit that dress, however, this was not the case here. While some other wedding shows focus specifically on bridal weight loss, only one bride appeared to be concerned about fitting into her wedding gown (see Table 17). It is possible that this aspect of wedding planning did not fit with the purposes of the show and may have been ignored by the producers.

Table 17 The “Perfect” Dress, Number of Dresses and Fitting into the Dress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the bride have more than one wedding dress?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the bride emphasize the need for the “perfect” dress?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the bride mention any concerns about fitting into the wedding dress?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The amount of guests in attendance can affect the cost of the wedding as larger guest counts require more food and larger reception venues. The average guest count at a wedding in Canada or the United States is around 124 guests (O’Brien, 2013; The Wedding Report). 50 percent of the weddings in the sample had guest counts below 150, with 45 percent of weddings having guests counts over that amount and the guest count was not mentioned in one case (see Table 18). One wedding had a guest count of over 900 people, which appears to have been due to the Indian background of the couple.
Table 18 Number of Wedding Guests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>100 or below</th>
<th>101-150</th>
<th>151-200</th>
<th>201-250</th>
<th>251-300</th>
<th>Over 300</th>
<th>Not mentioned</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many guests are expected to attend the wedding?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19 Wedding Cost in Relation to Average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the total cost exceed $27,000?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20 Budget for the Wedding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Above</th>
<th>Below</th>
<th>$27,000</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was the couple’s budget below or above $27,000?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21 Spending Overbudget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did the couple’s total spending exceed their budget?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to the nature of the show, the total cost of the wedding was always mentioned, although it remains unclear in some cases as to whether items purchased by parents were still factored into the total cost when the couple was paying for the wedding. 70 percent of the weddings featured in the sample had costs that exceeded $27,000 (see Table 19). Not only did costs exceed the average, but 55 percent of couples had budgets that were above $27,000 (see Table 20). The average budget for the sample was $32,450, with the lowest budget being $10,000 and the highest at $85,000 (which was for the wedding of over 900 guests). The spending of 95 percent of couples featured on the show exceeded their budget with only one couple spending only slightly below their budget (see Table 21). The average amount a couple spent over budget was about $9037, with the highest amount over-budget being $27,862 and lowest being $774. While it appears that most couples were not able to curb their spending, in 75 percent of cases the groom...
became concerned about the couple’s spending while the bride was only concerned in 25 percent of cases (see Table 22). Given that the groom is most often more concerned about overspending, this may be an indication that brides are more concerned about creating their “perfect” wedding than they are about costs. Concern about overspending may also be related to who provided the majority of financial support. While many couples said they were paying for the wedding, in some cases brides indicated that the groom was contributing more. Although the wedding planner’s main function appears to be that of keeping the couple on budget, in 75 percent of cases the couples ignored advice from the wedding planner about staying on budget (see Table 23). Of those cases where the wedding planner’s advice is ignored, it is the bride who most often sees items or services as necessary to the extent that price does not matter (see Table 23a). The bride and/or groom’s desire to include items or services that did not fit within the budget would occasionally lead one partner or both to purchase or book these items or services without their partner’s knowledge or consent. Brides engage in this behaviour in 60 percent of cases, while the groom does this in only 25 percent of cases (see Table 24). Although the bride is more likely to push for what she wants, this does not mean that grooms will not engage in similar behaviours in order to get want they want.

Table 22 Concern about Overspending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At any point during the wedding planning process does the bride and/or groom become concerned about overspending?</th>
<th>Bride</th>
<th>Groom</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23 Advice from the wedding planner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At any point during the wedding planning process does the couple ignore advice from the wedding planner in regards to staying on budget?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 80 percent of cases, happiness was mentioned as a reason for spending, which can be the happiness of the couple as a whole or of one partner (see Table 25). It appears that couples (mainly brides) often come to the conclusion that they can achieve their desired wedding through the purchase of material things. In some cases, more expensive material things were also considered to allow for greater happiness. Many wedding industry professionals also offer upgrades on their basic products or services and 60 percent of couples opted for upgrades, although upgrades did not appear to be offered in 15 percent of cases (see Table 26). Most of the upgrades that couples opted for were on aspects of décor such as centerpieces. It appears that the “basic” is viewed by some brides to be generic or cheap, which is not acceptable in their quest to create their “perfect” wedding.

Table 23a Necessity as a Reason for Spending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bride does</th>
<th>Groom does</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the couple ignores advice from the wedding planner, does the bride or groom see the item(s) or service(s) in question as being necessary to the extent that price does not matter?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24 Deceptive Spending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bride</th>
<th>Groom</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the bride or groom make purchases without the other’s knowledge or consent?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25 Happiness as a Reason for Spending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is happiness mentioned as a reason for spending?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26 Upgrades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Upgrades not offered</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the couple opt for upgrades on any products or services?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feminism, Independence and the Relationship

While feminism is not necessarily the first thing one tends to think about when discussing marriage and weddings, some women who identify as feminists do marry. Even if these women do not identify as feminists, they will have been effected by feminism and the gains made during the course of the second wave, such as greater employment opportunities (McRobbie, 2009). Although it may not be openly addressed, some bridal media does address feminist-related notions of female independence and equality in relationships between men and women (Engstrom, 2012). Wedding shows like *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* appear to give viewers an indication of power relations within the relationships of the participating couples through decision-making and involvement in the wedding planning process. The view of the wedding as being a more important day for the bride than the groom may also stem from past notions of women’s role as childbearing homemakers as opposed to career women. Considering that the wedding appears to celebrate the couple’s potentially life-long commitment to one another, in the modern sense, the wedding should focus on both the bride and groom as a couple. While the “bridezilla” persona may at first appear to be that of a strong, independent woman, through closer analysis she appears to more closely resemble a childish, hysterical woman (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012; Samek, 2012).

While some brides appear to place less importance upon the wedding celebration and one bride is even referred to as the anti-bride, there are no specific mentions of feminism in any of the episodes in the sample. Feminist views and influence, however, can be examined through how the bride interacts with her partner and the power dynamics of their relationship. In 75 percent of the cases, both bride and groom do not
have an equal say in decisions made about the wedding, with brides having more control over wedding planning decisions in the majority of cases (see Table 27 and Table 27a).

While the groom may not have equal say in decision-making, he is present at the majority of wedding planning outings or gatherings, with the groom being present most of the time in 60 percent of cases (see Table 28).

Table 27 Equality in Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do the bride and groom appear to have an equal say in decisions made about the wedding?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 27a Control over Decisions by Partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If the bride and groom do not appear to have an equal say, who appears to have more control over the wedding planning decisions?</th>
<th>Bride</th>
<th>Groom</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28 Presence of the Groom during the Wedding Planning Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the groom present during wedding planning outings?</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Few</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The bride appears to contribute financially to 90 percent of the weddings featured in the sample (see Table 29). As mentioned above, the couple is mentioned as being the main financial contributor to the wedding celebration in 70 percent of cases, and while some families are the main contributor, the bride is the main financial contributor in only 5 percent of cases and the groom is mentioned as the main contributor in 15 percent of cases (see Table 4). Although the couple may be mentioned as the main financial contributor, it is often implied that the groom carries more of the financial responsibilities than the bride. The groom’s financial contribution does not appear to give him at least equal say in regards to wedding planning decisions considering that the groom
contributed most or some of the financial support for the wedding in 85 percent of cases but only had an equal say about decisions made about the wedding in 25 percent of cases.

Table 29 Financial Contribution of the Bride to the Wedding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the bride appear to contribute financially to the wedding?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 35 percent of cases the bride and/or others involved in the wedding planning process do not allow certain items or services that the groom wishes to include (see Table 30). Even if the groom is allowed to include something that he wants, it appears as though the bride gets what she wants in most cases even if she has to convince her groom to spend, which demonstrates the bride’s lack of submissiveness in relation to the wedding. Such was the case for bride Sonnobia, who was able to convince groom Deo to include a pony for the couple’s second girly pink reception. When the wedding planner informed the couple that they should cut some items or services in order to stay within their budget, Sonnobia focused on the items Deo had chosen first rather than on her own spending. A bride’s unwillingness to comprise on her own purchases center on notions of the wedding as being “her” day and her dream wedding. Brides may see the wedding as “their” day, but that is not to say that grooms do not see the wedding as “theirs” instead of “ours”. A few grooms in the sample matched notions of “bridezilla” with their own “groomzilla” personas. These grooms, like some brides, needed to have everything they wanted in order to create their vision of the wedding. In the case of Rasha and Samir, groom Samir went overboard on spending while bride Rasha attempted to cut down his spending in much the same way grooms do with their “bridezillas”. Samir even went so far as to purchase what he referred to as a “man-gagement” ring despite his bride’s
protest. Although this was unusual, considering the amount of money men are generally expected to spend on engagement rings for their fiancées, it did not seem to be an unfair request, however, heterosexual men generally do not have engagement rings.

Table 30 Groom’s Wants and Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there any item or service that the groom mentions wanting to include in the wedding that the bride and/or other family members or friends do not allow?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the groom’s ideas more heavily criticized by the bride, wedding planner and/or family and friends?</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some grooms may have wished to include certain things in their wedding celebrations that they were not allowed by others involved in the planning of their wedding, but even if they did not want to include things outside of the bride’s vision, their ideas were more heavily criticized. In 85 percent of cases, the ideas of the groom were more heavily criticized by the bride and/or others involved in the wedding planning process (see Table 30). Grooms were often seen to have less knowledge about wedding planning than other participants in the wedding planning process, with women viewed as having more wedding planning knowledge than most men. Many grooms were criticized for being cheap in making suggestions that involved items that were less costly. Cheap was often portrayed as a bad word, at least in the minds of brides who often viewed expensive items as better than less expensive ones. While the wedding planners often encouraged the couple to opt for less expensive options, some grooms were even criticized by the wedding planners for their cheapness as their cheap suggestions would compromise the quality of the wedding. Although most grooms were more concerned about the budget than their brides, in the case of the overspending grooms, brides often criticized their grooms for their over-the-top ideas that were not only costly but did not fit
with the bride’s vision of the day in her attempt to reclaim the wedding as “her” day or at least “their” day. Western notions of marriage, as portrayed through popular media, also emphasize that marriage restricts the freedom of the male in a heterosexual relationship. Bachelor parties are often portrayed in popular media a man’s last night of freedom, implying that marriage negatively effects the freedom of men. These notions did not seem to appear within the context of *Rich Bride, Poor Bride*, although in the one case were the loss of freedom was mentioned, it was by the groom, not the bride (see Table 31).

Table 31 Mention of Freedom Ending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is there any mention of freedom ending as a result of marriage for the bride and/or groom?</th>
<th>Bride</th>
<th>Groom</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32 Wedding as the Bride’s Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is emphasis placed on the wedding being the bride’s day by those participating in the wedding planning process?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 85 percent of cases, emphasis was placed on the wedding being the bride’s day by those participating the in the wedding planning process (see Table 32). This does not necessarily translate into the bride being shown on camera more often, as grooms were shown on camera for about the same amount of time in 60 percent of cases (see Table 33). This may be due to the fact that both members of the couple went to most wedding planning outings or gatherings together or if the bride was shown without the groom in one scene, there was often a scene where the groom was shown without the bride. While the groom may appear to be present at the majority of wedding planning outings or
gatherings, the show still portrays the bride as having a greater role in wedding planning in 70 percent of cases (see Table 33).

Table 33 Focus on the Bride and Groom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the bride and her family/friends appear on camera more often than the groom and his family/friends?</th>
<th>Bride more (often)*</th>
<th>Groom more (often)*</th>
<th>About the same</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the show focus more on the bride and her role in the wedding planning than the groom?</th>
<th>Bride more (often)*</th>
<th>Groom more (often)*</th>
<th>About the same</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Often as part of the response for the question about appearing on camera

Additional Terms

The terms “perfect” and “traditional” were also coded for in the episodes included in the sample. The term “perfect” is often used in reality wedding television programs in reference to the need to have the “perfect” wedding and the “perfect” dress (Engstrom, 2012). This goal of perfection causes endless consumerism in regards to weddings as the “perfect” wedding is a fantasy, although brides are led to believe that it is attainable through consumerism (Engstrom, 2012). It is important to note that “perfect” is used in reference to the wedding in the show’s voiceover introduction, perhaps an indication that perfection is a common expectation held by couples who choose to participate in these programs. Aside from the mention of perfection in the show’s introduction, perfection is mentioned in 80 percent of cases (see Table 34). Perfectionism appears to be considered an acceptable behaviour within the context of wedding planning as many couples emphasized the need for certain elements such as the dress to be “perfect” rather than just nice or well executed.

Table 34 Specific Terms Used in Reference to the Wedding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the word “perfect” used in reference to the wedding?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the term “traditional” used in reference to the wedding?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The term “traditional” was also coded for due to the use of tradition to create necessity in regards to the purchase of certain items (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007). “Traditional” was used in reference to the wedding in 50 percent of cases (see Table 34). In some cases, “traditional” was used in reference to certain aspects of the wedding, such as the dress, as opposed to the wedding as a whole. While some brides clearly stated that they did not want a “traditional” wedding at the beginning of the show, friends and family may have convinced them to include more traditional aspects during the wedding planning process. Such was the case for bride Jihan, who had mentioned at the beginning of the show that she wanted a non-traditional wedding as she felt a “traditional” wedding was “cookie-cutter” or generic and unoriginal. While trying on a purple wedding dress, her mother and soon-to-be mother-in-law convinced her to try on a more traditional white wedding gown as her mother had offered to pay for the gown. After trying on the white dress, Jihan changed her mind about the purple gown and chose the white dress she tried on. While in some cases brides change their minds about going the non-traditional route on some items, this does not mean that their entire weddings shift towards the more “traditional”. It seems that the “traditional” wedding comes into conflict with notions of individuality, although many couples appear to achieve a more personalized wedding within a more “traditional” wedding format and still include some “traditional” aspects.

**Summary**

Engstrom (2012) sets up the profile of the average bride portrayed in reality wedding shows as a bride who is in her mid-twenties to early thirties, white, not previously married with no children. Most brides in the sample do fit this profile,
however, the shows in the sample present greater racial diversity than previously assumed as the majority of couples included at least one non-white partner. The occupations of all of the brides were mentioned at the beginning of each episode, however, the bride’s occupation was rarely mentioned outside of the introduction. While the occupation of the bride was mentioned in all the episodes, the groom’s occupation was not always mentioned. Although these shows tend to focus more on the identity of the bride as opposed to the groom, the cultural background of the groom was mentioned more often than that of the bride and also appeared to influence the spending of grooms more than brides.

Otnes, Lowrey and Shrum (1997) note that parents can influence their children’s wedding spending when parents are paying for the wedding. While many parents, particularly the bride’s parents, did make financial contributions to their child’s wedding, the marrying couple was most often the main financial contributor to the wedding. Financial contribution was not necessarily required for parents to have influence over decisions, although it did have an impact in cases where items or services were mentioned as being necessary. While friends did not appear to directly have a strong influence in most of the episodes in the sample, friends and relatives as guests did indirectly influence the spending habits of couples who were concerned about the impression their weddings made.

The weddings portrayed in the episodes included in the sample appeared to be considerably more expensive than the average wedding in Canada. Despite the fact that most couples set a budget already above the average cost of a wedding in Canada, the majority of couples were not able to stick to their budgets, often going over by large
amounts. Reasons for this over-spending often included striving to be original, seizing the opportunity to become a celebrity and, equating expensive weddings with happiness. Originality was often used as a reason for spending and the majority of weddings included items or services outside of the expected wedding format. While couples may not have specifically mentioned purchasing items or services in order to imitate celebrities or royalty, some couples sought a celebrity feel through their chosen theme and mode of transportation. Happiness, particularly the bride’s happiness, was also used as a reason for spending in the majority of cases. Brides were often responsible for the majority of overspending while grooms were often concerned about spending over their budget as it was often implied that they would take on the majority of financial responsibility for the wedding.

Although grooms were present for the majority of wedding planning outings or gatherings, this did not mean that they had an equal say in decisions or that their opinions were valued. The shows in the sample examined here position the wedding as the bride’s day and the bride takes on a greater role in the planning of this day as opposed to her groom. Brides also assume more control over decisions made about the wedding, even if grooms would also like to be involved in decision-making.

The terms “perfect” and “traditional” also appear in reference to the wedding. The term “perfect” appears in the majority of cases and can refer to the wedding as a whole or to particular wedding elements such as the dress. “Traditional” was also used in reference to the wedding dress as well as other wedding elements. The term “traditional”, however, was not used in reference to the wedding as a whole.
Chapter Three will analyze the findings of the study using the theory, critical theoretical areas and research discussed in Chapter One. The analysis will be divided into the same categories as the content analysis: additional terms; demographics; family and friends; consumerism, budgets and spending and; feminism, independence and the relationship. Following the analysis will be the conclusions of the study.
Chapter 4
Analysis and Conclusions

Introduction

Who is the wedding for? Bridal media positions the bride as the focal point of the wedding (Engstrom, 2012), which is of particular importance given that it is the bride who often drives wedding-related consumption. Feminine gender roles and norms, which are communicated through media, are tied to consumption in a neoliberal capitalist context and women often feel they must maintain these roles and norms in order to attract male attention (McRobbie, 2009). Due the focus on the individual in this context, women also feel that they have a certain degree of choice in the acceptance of feminine gender roles and norms (McRobbie, 2009). Therefore, women are the ideal candidates to create individualized meaning through consumption that fits within wedding standards and norms that are communicated through bridal media. This ensures the success of the wedding industry in a context where less people feel marriage is a necessity due to the greater acceptance of common-law couples and a greater likelihood of divorce.

While brides are often responsible for the planning of the wedding (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007), the groom, the families, and guests are also part of the wedding day and influence decisions made during the wedding planning process. Brides may drive wedding consumption but it is often the grooms and the families who provide the majority of financial support for the wedding (Engstrom, 2012). Financial contributions are linked to influence over decisions as those who are paying often wish to have a say in how their money is being spent (Engstrom, 2012; Otnes, Lowrey & Shrum, 1997). Despite the fact that grooms are often excluded from decisions made about the wedding
(Engstrom, 2012), grooms can also feel that the wedding is about them, which can also cause grooms to engage in wedding-related consumer behaviours similar to those of brides. Guests are also an important factor in the wedding as concern about the impression they receive can influence spending. As the guests are the audience for the performance of the wedding, they also play a role as others involved in the wedding planning process attempt to manage the impression guests receive as a mismanaging of impressions can lead to a loss of control of the situation (Goffman, 1959; Paolucci & Richardson, 2006), which can be prevented through the purchase of material goods in order to construct a “perfect” wedding. In a neoliberal context, as success is portrayed through one’s ability to afford material items (Tudor, 2012), an expensive wedding gives the impression that both the couple and their families are successful.

The wedding can also be for the larger society in which it takes place as it may serve to fulfil a greater social obligation. Many couples still feel the need to marry, despite living in a context where it is acceptable for couples to cohabitate and have children without getting married. Bridal media helps to construct the need to marry along with the need for the “perfect” wedding. The “perfect” wedding fits within what is considered to be the expected wedding format, or what Engstrom (2012) calls the “white wedding”. As the bridal media is owned by the wedding industry, this “perfect” wedding is portrayed as achievable through consumption. The wedding industry is, of course, part of the wider neoliberal capitalist system which establishes success as something that can be achieved by all through consumption (Tudor, 2012). By positioning individuals as equal (Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012), social inequalities are ignored in this context, which can lead to the exclusion of certain individuals based on race and class. McRobbie (2009)
observes that feminine beauty norms are constructed around whiteness, which can also extend to Western wedding norms such as standard wedding practices. Given that the “perfect” wedding is also viewed as something that can be achieved through consumption, those who cannot afford this “perfect” wedding may also be excluded.

**Additional Terms**

The terms “perfect” and “traditional” are both terms used in bridal media to describe weddings (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007). Wedding perfection is a goal sought by many brides as the bridal media positions perfection as something that can be achieved through consumption (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007). Many brides also wish to include certain “traditions” in their weddings, however, not to the extent that their weddings would be considered “traditional”.

The term “perfect” is used in reference to the wedding in 80 percent of the episodes in the sample. When it comes to the wedding, perfection is seen to be a necessity. Despite the fact that many people do get married more than once, perfection relates to notions of marriage and its ceremony as a once-in-a-lifetime event, emphasizing its specialness. Variations of the phrase “You only get married once” are expressed in some episodes, signaling an intention to remain married for a lifetime and the need to make their wedding “perfect” because they will not have another. It would be more accurate to say that you only get married first once as second weddings tend to be less elaborate for most. Engstrom (2012) notes that bridal media targeting couples marrying for the second time or renewing vows place more emphasis on the romance of the wedding as opposed to the size and cost. The couples in the sample appear to be getting married for the first time given that no previous marriages are mentioned, which
may influence their desire for the type of weddings shown in bridal media. Even though some couples do have vow renewals later in life, this is not taken into consideration as a substitute for a wedding.

Perfection also relates to spending as “perfect” and cheap do not go together given the reactions of the brides in the sample. The wedding industry has a vested interest in maintaining notions of the “perfect” wedding because realizing a dream or fantasy means lots of spending. The “perfect” expensive wedding also ensures that the audience of guests will receive the desired impression. Goffman (1959) argues that individuals manage the impressions their performances give off in order to prevent the audience from receiving information that would discredit them. Since the wedding is also a representation of wealth (Mead, 2007), a wedding that is not “perfect” is more likely to give off the impression that the couple could not afford to make their wedding “perfect”. Paolucci and Richardson (2006) also argue that performers can lose control of the situation if they mismanage the impressions their performances give off. A wedding that is not “perfect” can result in disappointment among guests, which would leave the couple and their families struggling to save face among their guests.

“Traditional” was another term relevant to the wedding. While some couples did strive to create what they felt was a “traditional” wedding, others only wanted to include certain “traditional” elements. Although the wedding industry wishes to maintain wedding norms, disguised as “traditions”, they also need to allow for the illusion of agency so that couples will continue to spend money on weddings. Given that the term “traditional” was used in reference to the wedding in 50 percent of cases, tradition seems to still have relevance for the brides in the sample. The use of “traditional” elements
rather than a “traditional” wedding was in line with Mead’s (2007) notion of the *traditionalesque*, wherein brides pick and choose which traditions they wish to uphold. These traditions can also relate to cultural background, particularly those with cultural backgrounds other than Western European. Brides with backgrounds differing from the norm often blended their cultural traditions with those more common to the North American context. As previously noted, grooms were also concerned about traditions and had input into which traditions were included. Still, most brides wore a white wedding gown for at least some part of the wedding celebration, signaling that this tradition was one which is important to many brides. Families may also push for certain traditions to be included, such as in the case of Jihan, who claimed to be a non-traditional bride and yet her mother convinced her to wear a white dress.

**Demographics**

The demographics of the sample, particularly the brides, are important as they assess whether these participants are similar to those represented in other forms of bridal media. The identity of the bride is of importance as Engstrom (2012) has noted that brides are the focus of most reality wedding shows and many of these brides are visibly white, in their mid-twenties to early thirties, have not been married previously and do not have children. As brides are often the focus, little is known about the identity of the groom as his role is often downplayed in reality wedding shows (Engstrom, 2012). Aspects of identity, such as cultural background, can also explain the inclusion of certain wedding elements, which can also affect costs. Establishing the identities of the bride and groom help to determine whether certain groups are excluded from reality wedding shows or the expected wedding format and if identity affects the costs of weddings.
Identity in terms of age, previous marriage and whether or not the couple has children also relate to the following of a perceived order of life events.

According to Milan (2013), the average age of first marriage for women in Canada is 29 years old. Engstrom (2012) also notes that brides appearing in reality wedding shows tend to be in their mid-twenties to early thirties. Given that 85 percent of the brides in the sample were between the ages of 25 and 32, the findings were consistent with both Milan (2013) and Engstrom’s (2012) research. McRobbie (2009) notes that young women are concerned about loss of fertility as age increases (McRobbie, 2009). This can relate to age of marriage as women want to have children before they reach an age where they may no longer be fertile. Strong emphasis is still placed on the “order” of life events being marriage before children, despite the fact that many people do have children outside of marriage. This “order” is reflected in the sample as most couples do not appear to have children or have not been married previously. McRobbie (2009) also mentions the pressure women feel to have their lives planned out at a young age. The women in the sample seem to have their life planned as all of them are employed and are now getting married. The common age group also seems to correspond with the age at which many young people have graduated university and have started their careers, which is an indication that they have begun to settle down. Having begun their careers, these young people can now afford or least think they can afford the “perfect” wedding that is portrayed in bridal media.

Even the couple that did have children outside of marriage still seemed to need marriage even if they had not followed the accepted “order” of life events. The couple still believed in marriage as a way to make their relationship “official” despite the
acceptance of common-law couples. This indicates that while it has become acceptable for couples to have children outside of marriage, these couples are still expected to get married if they want their relationships to be recognized by the larger society. Milan (2013) notes that in Canada, in 2011, 19.9 percent of couples were in common-law relationships, which had risen from 6.3 percent in 1981. While this indicates the increased acceptance of common-law couples, Milan (2013) also noted that the majority of couples in Canada were married and that the amount of couples in common-law relationships decreased with age. This indicates that common-law unions either dissolve as age increases or precede marriage. If common-law relationships precede marriage, then they are not seen as an alternative, indicating that many couples still feel the need to marry. Boden (2007) argues that the contemporary wedding is about the couple and is meant to focus on their relationship and commitment to one another. As the wedding is a public affair, couples feel that they cannot publicly express their commitment without a wedding and that they must have this public display of commitment in order to validate their relationship.

The couple from the sample that had children were presented as having lived together for some time and yet they still needed to get married in grand fashion and felt that they would only get married once. While many couples feel that they will only get married once, according to Milan (2013): “…37.6% of marriages entered into in 2008 are expected to end in divorce before the 25th year of marriage” (13). Despite high rates of divorce, this perception of the wedding as a once in a lifetime event fuels wedding consumption as many couples in the sample justify their consumption with some variation of the phrase “you only get married once” and feel that their weddings need to
be “perfect” because of this. The “perfect” wedding ideal is constructed by bridal media, which specifically targets brides (Engstrom, 2012).

As the bridal media constructs the “perfect” wedding ideal for brides, individual cultural backgrounds do not seem to be of much importance for brides when planning their weddings. Cultural background refers to the cultural heritage or ethnicity of either the bride or groom and does not necessarily relate to race. For example, groom Deo, who is visibly white, mentions his Portuguese heritage. The fact that the groom’s cultural background was mentioned more often than that of the bride – the groom’s background is mentioned in 40 percent of cases while the bride’s background is mentioned in only 30 percent of cases – seems unusual given the main focus in wedding preparations on the bride. However, it is possible that cultural background/traditions may be more important to the grooms than brides. Both Engstrom (2012) and Boden (2001) note that the majority of wedding media is aimed at brides, which suggests that brides are more aware of trends and are encouraged to follow wedding trends. Grooms, on the other hand, feel that including elements related to their cultural backgrounds, which may differ from the mainstream trends, are important and it is more important that the wedding be about the couple and their identity rather than catering to trends.

Whether or not the bride mentions her cultural background relates to the difference attached to non-white identities that “other” these women. McRobbie (2009) and Butler (2013) note that a postfeminist perspective places emphasis on the white female subject and the construction of norms around whiteness. According to McRobbie (2009; 70-71), black and Asian women can only be successful in a Western context if they accept Western beauty standards that were developed for white women. While black
and Asian women can reject their difference and attempt to fit in, they can never achieve perfection in the way that white women can (McRobbie, 2009). Jess Butler (2013) also notes that despite the fact that postfeminist notions of femininity are constructed around white norms, women of colour still embrace this version of femininity. 40 percent of the brides in the sample were visibly non-white and yet 95 percent of brides had a positive attitude toward fashion. The only bride that did not have a positive attitude toward fashion was white, meaning that all visibly non-white brides had a positive attitude toward fashion, which indicates that these women accepted Western beauty standards despite the fact that they were constructed around white norms.

McRobbie’s (2009) observations about white racial standards as cultural norms also extend to wedding practices. While couples may have added certain distinguishing cultural elements or had non-Christian ceremonies, all couples still had weddings that followed the dominant white Western wedding format. Most brides also wore a white wedding dress despite their cultural background or racial identity, maintaining standards that developed out of the traditions of white Westerners of European descent. Encouraging non-white women and women from various ethnicities to adopt white Western standards is an attempt to create a homogenous group of women representing the dominant racialized cultural norms where the disadvantages experienced by other women and histories of oppression and colonization are overshadowed by an illusion of achievable equality. Hasinoff (2008) notes that while reality television shows may include greater racial diversity among its participants, difference is often ignored and all participants are seen as equal. This relates to a neoliberal capitalist perspective where all people are perceived to have equal opportunities that allow everyone to achieve success.
(Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012). Social inequalities are ignored, as reflected here, when visibly non-white brides are expected to adopt the same standards as white brides, even though they do not represent the bridal/wedding ideals because they are not white or come from a non-dominant ethnic group.

Bridal magazines, which construct standard for brides, disproportionately display white women as opposed to their non-white counterparts, meaning that white brides are often portrayed as role models for brides who follow the mainstream media (Boden (2001; Engstrom, 2012). As reality wedding shows are also part of bridal media, Engstrom (2012) did note that these shows reflected more diversity among participants, although the majority of participants for most shows were white. 55 percent of the couples included at least one non-white partner, which contradicts Engstrom’s (2012) findings but is consistent with Hasinoff’s (2008) observations about racial diversity in reality television programs. Still, both partners were visibly non-white in 25 percent of couples, with 30 percent of couples having one white partner. It is important to note that in cases that included interracial couples, the non-white partners were not viewed as different from their white partners and cultural differences were only presented at the wedding as a celebration of cultural heritage or tradition which was removed from their everyday lives. This indicates that both racial and cultural difference are not portrayed as factors that impact the everyday lives and opportunities of the participants in this show, which again is in line with a neoliberal perspective.

The intersectional approach used here examines the complex intersections between the issues of gender, race and class. As Collins (1998) suggests, individuals can experience oppression on multiple levels, and in this case, visibly non-white individuals
can also be excluded from wedding practices on account of their socioeconomic status. While not all non-white individuals experience discrimination in terms of employment, many white individuals are chosen for jobs, particularly high-paying jobs, in place of their non-white counterparts (James, 2010). Socioeconomic status can effect a couple’s ability to participate in the type of weddings constructed by bridal media, as these weddings are expensive and elaborate affairs which not only require a large amount of money but also take time to plan. While the neoliberal capitalist context in which these weddings take place supposedly welcome the participation of all, those with low income would not be able to afford the “perfect” wedding.

Most of the women in the sample had employment that would have required some form of post-secondary education, which is consistent with Engstrom’s (2012) findings in terms of employment. Having received some form of post-secondary education meant that they, or their families, were able to afford this education and would most likely be considered middle class individuals. Job titles that include terms such as “analyst”, “designer” or “manager” can be considered indicators that these women were able to sustain a middle class socioeconomic status (see Appendix B for full list of occupations of brides included in the sample). These women were also able to make time to plan their weddings, regardless of whether this work interfered with their employment or not, indicating that they were not concerned about possible repercussions which may cause them to lose their jobs, as working class women would be more likely to be insecure about their employment. Working class women may also desire the “perfect” wedding but because they do not have the means to pay for it, they are often excluded from bridal media. Boden (2001) mentions that bridal magazines exclude brides that do not fit their
criteria for preferred readership, which includes brides of lower socioeconomic status. Engstrom (2012) notes that while some low-budget weddings are portrayed in reality wedding shows, these cases are rare as the bridal media needs to maintain the need for the expensive “perfect” wedding, although they do show that couples can have a wedding on a low-budget if they spend time doing things themselves. Bridal media does not want to completely discourage brides that cannot afford the types of weddings they promote, however, they do not want to give brides who can afford the “perfect” wedding the impression that they do not need to spend. While women can be excluded from the wedding practices displayed in bridal media on account of their socioeconomic status, non-white women of lower socioeconomic status are excluded by means of both race and class.

Engstrom (2012) found that brides’ education levels were not mentioned in reality wedding shows, but the bride’s occupation could be used as an indication of her educational achievement. Employment as an indication of education also relates to the acceptance of the bridal role. While these women are well-educated, this does not prevent them from becoming obsessed with the “perfect” wedding, no matter what the cost. The “bridezilla” persona is that of a bride who has become so obsessed with planning the “perfect” wedding to the point where she acts irrational and hysterical during the wedding planning process (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007; Samek, 2012). Bride Amy was consumed by the “bridezilla” persona to the extent that a lavish wedding became more important than avoiding debt, despite the fact that she was employed in the field of finance. Engstrom (2012) notes that while some reality wedding shows mention the occupation of the bride, this information is often downplayed or ignored throughout the
show. While Amy acknowledges that her occupation contradicts her spending habits, the majority of brides in the sample do not mention their occupation outside of the show’s introduction. These women are most likely aware of the implications of accruing large amounts of debt and yet they continue to pursue their ideal weddings, which are costly affairs. Some brides are also employed in professions that would be considered female-oriented, such as “teacher” or “nurse”. These women enact the dominant feminine role in their employment as caring professions tend to be associated with women. As the majority of women in the sample also have positive attitudes towards fashion as mentioned above, the women presented in reality wedding shows such as *Rich Bride*, *Poor Bride*, are those that accept dominant social roles for women. Goffman (1959) argues that an individual cannot take on a social role without maintaining the front that has been established for that role. These women appear to take on both the feminine role and the established feminine front or image since they enact dominant female roles through their employment and they also have positive attitudes towards fashion. McRobbie (2009) argues that the feminine image is constructed through the consumption of fashion and beauty products, which all of these women appear to do given that they have positive attitudes toward fashion and they all display the commonly accepted feminine image. Since the majority of these women also fully accept the bridal role, this is an indication that there is a link between the acceptance of the dominant feminine role and the bridal role. One bride in the sample did not fully accept the bridal role and she is presented as the anti-bride who does not care about the wedding to the same extent as other brides. While this bride expresses that she is only having the wedding because of her family, she still feels stress during the wedding planning process as it is still
important to her that the event is well planned out. As the planning of the wedding is part of the bridal role, even a more rebellious individual like this anti-bride gets pulled into taking on the bridal role.

While Engstrom (2012) finds that some reality wedding shows do mention the groom’s occupation, in regards to the sample, the groom’s occupation is not always mentioned. While the occupation of the bride was mentioned in every episode, the occupation of the groom was mentioned in only 85 percent of episodes. It is the bride who introduces both herself and the groom at the beginning of the show, which does not give the groom the same opportunity to describe himself, which may explain why the occupations of some grooms were not mentioned. This reinforces the view of the wedding as the bride’s day as more emphasis is placed on the characteristics of the bride than the groom. While the wedding can provide an opportunity for women to have more control than men (in some cases, an opportunity to have control over men), Engstrom (2012) argues that this control is limited to the wedding and the wedding planning process.

**Family and Friends**

Family and friends also play a role in the wedding through financial contribution, influence and their role as guests. Some family members and friends also feel that the wedding is for them, not just the bride and groom, which is reflected in their behaviour during the wedding planning process as they will give their input or, in the case of family, refer to certain aspects as necessary. The wedding can also be about the wedding guests as the couple and their families are often concerned about the impression their wedding makes on their guests, which can influence wedding consumption as this effects what is
included in the wedding. Who contributes to the wedding financially is important as financial contribution can impact decisions made about the wedding (Otnes, Lowrey & Shrum, 1997).

In the past there have been expectations of the bride’s family paying for the wedding as well as parents providing dowries for their daughters. While marriage is in most cases no longer viewed to be transference of responsibilities for the daughter from the father to the husband, it seems parents still feel some financial responsibility towards their daughters in the event of their marriage, given that the bride’s family made some financial contribution in 35 percent of the cases. While financial contributions from the groom’s family occurred less often, the groom’s family did contribute in some cases, an indication that some parents do contribute to their children’s wedding no matter what their gender.

Perhaps the couple cannot afford to pay for the entire wedding and parents offer to help where they can. Often items or services that were paid for by family when the couple was the main financial contributor for the wedding were things the parents wanted their children to have at the wedding or things the parents thought were necessary but their children could not afford as it would not fit in their budget. In the case of bride Trish, when her mother became concerned that there would not be enough food, Trish said that more food did not fit into the couple’s budget. Although the couple was the main financial contributor in this case, Trish’s mother offered to pay for the extra food to ensure that there would be enough. For Jihan and Justin, when the couple’s budget did not include funds for an open bar at the reception, the mothers of both the bride and groom offer to pay for this as they feel it is a necessary part of the wedding to ensure that
guests have a good time. The dress was another item that the bride’s parents bought or helped pay for, whereas the groom’s parents did not offer to pay for his wedding attire in cases where his parents were not the main financial contributors.

Given that the bride’s family is present at wedding planning outings or gatherings in 70 percent of the cases, the bride’s family is more involved than the groom’s family, who was only present at wedding planning outings or gatherings in 55 percent of the cases. Even if they were not paying for the majority of the wedding, the bride may have wanted family members, most likely her mother, to be present for support, especially since the bride’s mother was present for at least one wedding planning outing or gathering in 75 percent of the cases. Of course, if the bride’s family was paying, they would probably have to be there to give their consent to her wishes or at least make sure she was not going overboard with spending their money.

Parents mentioned certain items or services as being necessary for the wedding in 30 percent of the cases, which sometimes led to a financial contribution to the wedding in order to pay for these necessary elements. Concern over certain aspects being necessary also relates to concern about guests enjoying themselves. If there is no food or drink provided after the ceremony, parents may see this as a bad reflection on the couple and by extension on themselves due to lingering social expectations of the parents of the bride and groom paying for the event. This relates to Goffman’s (1959) notions of impression management, as the impression made on the guests is not only of concern for the couple but also their parents if they are involved. The guests are also the audience to which the couple and their families are staging the performance for and the parents are also partly responsible for ensuring that the guests see a wedding that fits the vision of what the
parents and the couple wish them to see. In order to avoid this, parents may chip in even if they had not intended to originally so that the wedding, and by association the family, does not appear cheap, which may occur if there is not enough food or alcohol for the guests. So parents are also influenced by the wedding media and perceived expectations for wedding events.

Like Otnes, Lowrey and Shrum (1997) suggest, family members do tend to have influence over decisions when they contribute financially. The link between financial contribution and influence reflects the importance of wealth in a neoliberal capitalist context where those who have the most money tend to have the most power. However, parents can also have influence when they are not providing a financial contribution. As the findings suggest, parents can contribute financially without having influence and parents can have influence without contributing financially. In 40 percent of the cases examined here, families contributed financially and in 45 percent of the cases families had some influence. While couples, more specifically brides, had to compromise on some of their desired items when parents were paying, none of the couples seemed dissatisfied on the day of their wedding because of the compromises they had to make.

While some mothers encouraged or enabled their daughter’s “bridezilla” behaviour in the episodes, others did not. Montemurro (2002) notes that: “…family and friends symbolize and enforce the social rules associated with the role of the bride” (70). Although family and friends helped the bride accept the bridal role, this did not extend to the creation of the “bridezilla” type. It seems the wedding industry, through bridal media, was responsible for the creation of the “bridezilla”. Engstrom (2012) and Mead (2007) note that “bridezillas” are obsessed with perfection. According to Mead (2007) wedding
culture, as portrayed through bridal media, requires that weddings are “perfect”.

Engstrom (2012) also notes: “…bridal magazines present a hegemonic version of the wedding, one that requires a pricey wedding gown and material for a lavish reception” (84). Thus, the “perfect” wedding cannot be achieved without the consumption of material goods, and not just any material goods, but expensive ones. Family and friends, especially parents, do not want the couple to put themselves in debt over the wedding in most cases. The wedding industry, however, wants couples to spend, spend, spend. Even if family and friends are also influenced by bridal media, they may not realize how expensive the proposed ideal wedding really is, but they are not the ones getting married.

Friends can be a bad influence in terms of spending, especially for couple Liz and Phil, who were so set on their destination wedding that rather than change their plan when their friends could not afford to come with them, they offered to pay for their friends. Their friends agreed despite the fact that they were aware of the at home ceremony and that the couple was already paying a significant amount of money. It is the bride who offers this solution as opposed to the groom. Rather than stop Liz’s plan to have the wedding of her dreams at any cost and beyond her means, her bridal party encourages her. The bridal party not only encourages spending for the wedding in general, but also spending for things that benefit themselves. This reflects the focus placed on the individual in a neoliberal capitalist context where individuals are responsible for their own failures and therefore must look out for themselves to ensure their own success (Hasinoff, 2008; Tudor, 2012). While Liz and Phil’s friends were aware that the couple was spending a significant amount of money for wedding before
agreeing to pay for the trip, the friends saw an opportunity to go on a free trip that they could not afford on their own.

Friends were only considered to have strong influence if they were able to convince the couple to make purchases that they would not have made themselves, which only occurred in 5 percent of the cases. This supports the earlier claim that it is the wedding industry, through the use of bridal media, that influences overspending in regards to the wedding. In the case where friends did have strong influence, Eric and Jimmy did push for things that they wanted that the couple would not have thought of and in some cases did not want. These friends felt that the wedding was also about them even though they were not the ones getting married. It is notable that Eric and Jimmy were the only openly gay individuals seen in the episodes included in the sample. Engstrom (2012) notes that while weddings are still assumed to be only for heterosexual couples, same-sex couples do appear in some reality wedding shows. It is interesting to note that in this analysis, the only openly gay couple to appear were friends of one of the marrying couples, which reinforces notions that weddings are for heterosexual couples only.

Weddings can also be about the wedding guests. While the wedding is portrayed by bridal media as being for the couple, the couple also seems very concerned about what their guests will think, sometimes going out of their way and their budget to fulfil perceived expectations. It also comes back to how concerned the person who’s paying the most is about the guests. Montemurro (2002) argues that guests do not enjoy attending wedding-related events. Couples are aware of this and attempt to make their weddings guest-friendly through spending on entertainment and food. The couple wishes to control the impression their wedding gives to their guests, as a boring wedding would give off a
bad impression in that the couple was not capable of paying for a wedding that would be enjoyable for their guests. Since many guests need to travel to attend weddings and are expected to provide gifts, wedding guests do pay the price of admission for these affairs and many couples think they need to provide them with the whole circus.

**Consumerism, Budgets and Spending**

Who the wedding is for can also effect spending in terms of who is spending the money and why. Weddings are often seen as the bride’s day, which stem from past notions of the wedding as an important event for women due to a change in status and lifestyle since middle class women were not expected to have careers outside of marriage in the past. Positioning the wedding as the bride’s day also serves the wedding industry as women in a neoliberal capitalist context are positioned as ideal consumers due to the link between the feminine role and consumerism (McRobbie, 2009). The bride’s perception of the wedding as her day and her need for perfection, as constructed by the bridal media, influence wedding spending in that she is often the one who is overspending while the groom is the one who is concerned. The dress, as an important wedding item for the bride, is an important and common example of mounting the ideal wedding at any cost. While it is often the groom who tries to stick to the budget, these budgets are an indication of what the couple is willing to spend or can afford. The relation of the budget to the final cost of the wedding is an indication of whether the attainment of the “perfect” wedding was more important than the cost. More specifically, originality, cultural background and happiness are all used as reasons for wedding spending by both the bride and groom.
Couples included elements outside of the ceremony/dinner/dance format in 80 percent of episodes in the sample. These elements were often considered to be necessary for making their wedding their own, as couples also mentioned this in 80 percent of episodes. These additional elements were often considered to make the wedding more special or original. One element of the wedding where money is spent for the sake of appearing to be special and original is the “grand” entrance of the just-married couple at the reception. Meaning is placed on the “grand” entrance as it is supposed to be the first time the couple is introduced to the world. Marriage is still seen to be life-changing even though many couples live together and have children before marriage and even without formal marriage, so what is different about going through the ceremony? Although the union is official and, legal, in practical everyday life what is different? Some women choose to keep their maiden name and in Quebec women are prevented from changing their maiden names legally. Therefore the entrance of the newly married couple into the reception may be more about dramatics than about the announcement of the married couple. As the couple plan the wedding as if they are putting on a show for their family and friends, the second act must have a dramatic entrance. This entrance makes a statement about the couple’s tastes and what the audience can expect to see at the reception. This element is meant to leave an impression, whether it be about the couple or the reception they have planned. Bride Audrey talks about her grand entrance as way to start the party of the reception. Audrey decides to hire showgirls to accompany her and her groom for their entrance as this will make their entrance original and spectacular.

Originality is also expressed through the use of entertainment outside of just a DJ playing dance music. Entertainment is viewed as an important aspect of the wedding,
especially in regards to guests. Many couples were concerned about their guests having a
good time and felt they needed to entertain them. Couples think that having dinner and
dancing is not entertaining enough for their guests. Obligations to their guests could stem
from the costs guests must pay to attend, especially if many of them come from out of
town. Additional entertainment also fits into the concept of the wedding as a show or
play, sometimes transforming the wedding into a variety show as opposed to just another
love story. Not only do the couple act out their roles as bride and groom, now they even
hire actors and dancers. Goffman (1959) argues that the impression of the situation that
performers attempt to maintain is fragile and can easily be shattered if performers give
away destructive information. By hiring professional actors or dancers, the couple
ensures that the definition of the situation, and the impression it gives off, will be
maintained because these professionals are less likely to make mistakes.

Entertainment may also make their wedding a memorable and unique event.
While their wedding will be memorable to them, they also want it to be memorable to
their guests. Again, they don’t want their guests to be disappointed but they also want to
be the talk of the town. Despite the fact that it is their wedding and they include things
that are meaningful to them, the couple also cares about what others think, which would
not be the case if the sole purpose of having the wedding was for them.

Ironically, the bride may be more concerned about matching the ideal wedding as
seen in bridal media than including distinguishing cultural elements. Parents also seem to
have influence in the inclusion of these elements and so they may be the ones who push
for these things, especially if they’re paying. However, grooms feel cultural elements are
important and even if they don’t have much say in the planning of the wedding, they do
fight for the inclusion of cultural elements. Wedding planners will also stand by the
groom in these instances, as they acknowledge that the groom feels strongly about this,
even if “bridezilla” threatens to cut aspects wanted by the groom to make room in the
budget. Grooms are more concerned about making the wedding about the couple,
especially when extras for the benefit of guests threaten their budget.

Even the “originality” that couples include isn’t all that original. Couples choose a
theme from those that are deemed acceptable, most likely those shown in bridal media.
While every couple will not choose exactly the same items to include as part of their
theme, they still stay within that theme which has been encouraged by the wedding
industry as goods and services are made available to fit those themes. The wedding
industry wants to ensure that couples have to purchase lots of décor and additional items
because that means spending more money. Setting the scene using props and costumes
can also ensure that guests receive the desired impression of the wedding (Paolucci &
Richardson, 2006). The bridal media positions the wedding as an event that should be
meaningful to the couple while also presenting what the “perfect” wedding should
include (Engstrom, 2012; Mead 2007). Cultural traditions are also part of creating a
meaningful event. Elements that make the wedding meaningful, which may or may not
relate to cultural traditions, are positioned by the industry as things that can be purchased.
Groom Deo decides to include a Samba band to represent his Portuguese heritage. While
this element helps make the wedding meaningful for Deo, it is something that the couple
needs to pay for. Although Deo’s hiring of the Samba band adds meaning and makes his
wedding seem more original, as a form of additional entertainment, the inclusion of a
Samba band still causes Deo’s wedding to remain within the realm of what is constructed
as the “perfect” wedding by bridal media. Allowing for couples to have choice within the bridal media’s construction of common themes and wedding practices maintains the status quo. This illusion of choice prevents couples from feeling like they are being controlled, as awareness of this control could lead to rebellion.

While the couple may have felt they added additional elements for themselves, these elements often played a role in putting on a show for their guests, as if they were acting out a play. If they were only having the wedding for themselves, they would not need to work so hard to project this “perfect” vision because they would see it no matter what the cost. Mead (2007) notes: “…a wedding nonetheless prompts in its participants – the guests as well as the marrying couple – a desire to enact a role that has been scripted by some source more authoritative than their own powers of invention” (9). Goffman (1959) also notes that when taking on an established role or front, an individual will feel they must maintain that role or front. In the event of the wedding, the bride and groom take on established roles which they are compelled to maintain. The more authoritative force mentioned by Mead (2007) is the neoliberal capitalist system in which the wedding industry thrives. Roles that surround the wedding, particularly the bridal role, are communicated through bridal media, which informs brides about what is expected of them for their weddings as well as the process of planning their weddings. While the couple is often trying to please their guests, the guests are also part of the construction of the wedding. The guests also have a role to play as they provide the audience for the show.

The average number of wedding guests for weddings in Canada and the United States is between 124 and 136 (O’Brien, 2013; The Wedding Report). 50 percent of
weddings included less than 150 guests, while 45 percent of weddings included more than 150 guests and in one case the guest count was not mentioned. If Rich Bride, Poor Bride portrayed examples of average weddings, then more weddings in the sample would have had guest counts below 150. Higher guest counts also mean higher costs given that a meal is served and large venues would cost more. It is possible that the weddings featured on this show are chosen because they are above average in terms of cost, although they are not presented as such and promote a higher wedding budget than the average. While Rich Bride, Poor Bride is filmed in both Canada and the United States, most couples on the show gave budgets and/or spent more than the average cost of a wedding in Canada. The average cost of a wedding in Canada is $27,000, although the average budget for the sample was $32,450 and 95 percent of couples in the sample spent over their budget with an average amount over budget of $9,037. These weddings were not portrayed as high-end weddings conducted by the upper class, but as average weddings conducted by the middle class. The weddings were only average in the sense that these couples spent what they did to get what they wanted, sometimes even having to scale back on some desired items. These shows suggest that if only the average amount is spent, couples will not be able to get what they want and their weddings will only be average. While some couples are able to spend below the average, these weddings have lower guest counts and a full meal may not be served. These weddings are presented as low budget, cost effective and cheap weddings, not as the average. It is also unclear as to whether the average wedding has a wedding planner and this fee is listed among other items and services at the end of the show. The cost of the wedding planner is normally around $2000, depending on the cost of the wedding.
Wedding planners appear in all episodes of *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* and are presented as a great help to the couple. When reviewing costs at the end of each episode, many couples remark that the fee that they paid the wedding planner was worth it. *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* promotes the use of the wedding planner as it demonstrates the role in which wedding planners play as well as the difficulties of planning a wedding. This is consistent with Mead’s (2007) observations that many women do not have time to plan their weddings themselves. Mead (2007) also noted that promoting the usefulness of the wedding planner benefits the wedding planning business and wedding planners are definitely promoted in *Rich Bride, Poor Bride*. Wedding planners also help to maintain the desired impression of the wedding for the wedding guests. As mishaps can have a negative effect on the impression the audience receives (Goffman, 1959; Paolucci & Richardson, 2006), wedding planners help to manage impressions and ensure that crises are dealt with before guests arrive.

Even if these couples have above average budgets, they are still unrealistic about the cost of what they want for their wedding. Wedding planners are often shocked at the budgets they receive from couples after hearing their plans for the wedding. A study produced by BMO InvestorLine (2014) of Canadian adults who wish to marry found that close to 40 percent of participants believed that they would not be able to afford their ideal wedding. The participants in this study have not yet been married and so while they realize that they will not be able to afford their dream wedding, this does not mean they will not pursue it. The fact that couples will not be able to achieve their “perfect” wedding within their budget does not stop their spending, even when wedding planners alert them to the fact that they are over-budget before the wedding as couples ignored
advice from wedding planners in regards to the budget in 75 percent of cases in the sample. Often wedding planners would inform the couple that making certain purchases would put them over-budget, but they would avoid telling the couple not to spend. In the case of couple Dipika and Amol, however, wedding planner David does tell the couple to stop spending.

Under a neoliberal capitalist system, individuals are responsible for their own successes and failures (Tudor, 2012). Debt, as a result of overspending, would be considered a failure as an individual who cannot afford their wants and desires would be considered unsuccessful. If individuals accumulate too much debt, this can result in a declaration of bankruptcy, which would not benefit the neoliberal capitalist system as debts would not be repaid. While industries need individuals to spend, in order for the neoliberal capitalist system to function, individuals also need to be encouraged to save their money to avoid large amounts of debt. This can be applied to the wedding as a large, costly event. Rather than discouraging unaffordable wedding practices, the press release for the BMO InvestorLine (2014) survey promotes planning ahead in the form of investment to meet budget requirements. Given that this study was produced by a bank, it seems logical that they would present this option as it is in their interests. Banks, as part of the neoliberal capitalism system, have a vested interest in the spending habits of the middle class. While the wedding industry wants couples to spend large sums on their weddings, they do not want couples to accumulate a debt so large that they cannot pay back to the point of declaring bankruptcy as that will not benefit the wedding industry or the larger neoliberal capitalist system which they are a part of. Encouraging adults to save
their money and also invest their money ensures that couples will be in a better position to pay back debt if they have not saved enough.

Weddings, as presented through bridal media, maintain a gendered division of labour wherein the woman (bride) is responsible for the work of planning the wedding while the man (groom) is responsible for providing the financial support (Engstrom, 2012). The groom is concerned about spending in 75 percent of the cases, which often does not stop the spending. Again, this points to the wedding as being more about the bride and her vision, than the groom and his concern about debt after the wedding, especially if he is the main financial contributor. While many brides do make some financial contribution, if the groom is providing more financial support it may be easier for the bride to spend his money, although for most brides in the sample, spending money was not an issue as only 25 percent of brides became concerned about overspending. Although it occurred in only 10 percent of cases, if the families of the bride and/or groom were the main financial contributors to the wedding, brides in these cases did not have trouble spending money, although they did encounter some resistance. This was the case for bride Alysa, who wanted a designer dress and a designer cake, however, this did not fit her father’s budget when both the bride and groom’s families were paying for the wedding.

While all of the couples hired the wedding planners to help them stay on budget, they did not listen to the advice that they were paying for in 75 percent of cases. Still, the wedding planner does not push very hard for the couple to listen, so long as they understand that they will be over-budget. As a paid employee, the wedding planner is in a difficult position in terms of advising couples to stay on budget, however, they do depend
on couples’ spending on weddings as their fee is often based on the cost of the wedding. Wedding planners often discourage the bride and/or groom from making purchases behind the other’s back as they know that it will likely result in an argument. The bride is the one who most often makes purchases behind the groom’s back, with only brides engaging in this behaviour in 45 percent of cases and both bride and groom engaging in this behaviour in 15 percent of cases. The bride will do whatever it takes to achieve her “perfect” wedding. While the groom is upset when he finds out, the bride often convinces him to go ahead with her plan, even if she has to scale it down to some extent. Brides use various tactics during arguments to get the groom to agree, in one case a bride even questioned her groom’s love when he did not agree.

No matter who is doing the spending, in 80 percent of cases happiness is given as the reason for spending. This fits a neoliberal capitalist perspective of spending as a way to buy happiness or obtain it through material things which of course are purchased. The “perfect” wedding cannot be achieved without buying things. Happiness is another tactic used by brides to convince their grooms to purchase items. Brides will tell grooms that purchasing a certain item or service will make them happy and sometimes brides will even relate their happiness to that of their groom or imply that the groom does not want them to be happy if they do not agree to make a purchase. Often the bride will change her tone of voice to one which sounds girlish and cute, clearly in an attempt to manipulate the groom.

The standard isn’t good enough when it comes to weddings as 60 percent of couples in the sample opted for upgrades on products or services. The upgraded items also are those that are relatively less meaningful or important, and yet they still spend
because the hall has to look a certain way. Again, this is part of the image projected to guests. The couple doesn’t want their guests to think they are cheap because they purchased basic décor and so even if what is presented as the basic option is very nice, the bride often favours a more expensive option. Décor is part of setting the scene for the show that is the wedding, particularly the wedding reception. Remarks about certain wedding items needing to look expensive may stem from the view of the wedding as a representation of wealth. Mead (2007) notes that there is a tendency for couples to present themselves as wealthier than they are at their weddings. Couples and their families want to project the image that they are able to afford to host an elaborate wedding even if they can’t. Goffman (1959) notes that impressions are fragile and performers must make sure their audiences don’t receive any information that could discredit the impression they are trying to maintain. By only allowing expensive items, couples and their families are ensuring that their guests perceive the wedding as an expensive affair that the couple or their families can afford. This ties into the desire for brides to be princesses and elevate their status, even if only for a day. The concern over items at least looking expensive is more closely linked to brides as grooms are often criticized for their cost effective suggestions. Grooms are also more concerned about the budget, meaning that the expensive look is less important to them. If the parents are paying for the wedding, or at least contributing funds, then they may also see their child’s wedding as a way to demonstrate their own wealth. In the case of the wedding that included over 900 guests, the groom’s father had decided to pay for the entire wedding and the groom mentioned that the reason for this was because his father wanted to “show-off” to his friends.
Middle class individuals can relate to celebrities as media portrays them as people who are just like them, or at least were before they rose to stardom (Furedi, 2010; Mead, 2007). This similarity allows celebrities to act as role models, particularly in cases where celebrity weddings are portrayed in the media (Boden, 2001; Furedi, 2010; Mead, 2007). Boden (2001) also argues that weddings provide an opportunity to imitate celebrities as the wedding is something both average and celebrity couples experience. This imitation can of course be achieved through consumption (Boden, 2001). In only 10 percent of the cases couples purchased items or services specifically for the purposes of imitating celebrities or royalty. While there may not have been a particular celebrity, and items may not have been purchased specifically for the purpose of imitating celebrities, the celebrity feel was definitely sought after. “Hollywood” is also a theme some couples choose, which again put emphasis on celebrity status. While brides are seeking the starring role whether they choose this theme or not, it enables them to take it to the next level. This is consistent with Engstrom’s (2012) finding that the wedding is a day where couples can be celebrities, the stars of their own show. The bride is particularly affected by this notion due to the positioning of the wedding as the bride’s day where she is the center of attention (Engstrom, 2012; Mead, 2007). Brides see their weddings as an opportunity to become “princess” for a day (Engstrom, 2012). While only 35 percent of brides mentioned becoming a “princess” for their wedding day, many brides wore tiaras as part of their wedding outfit, which is a symbol of the “princess” which brides wish to become. Both the “princess” and, more generally the bridal role, are tied to femininity in terms of the bridal appearance (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012). Brides are expected to maintain Western beauty standards in the way they present themselves on their wedding
day in that the bride gets her hair done, puts on make-up, wears high heels and of course, the big white wedding gown (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2012). McRobbie (2009) notes young women have grown up in a culture where feminism has been taken into account and they feel it is time to reclaim femininity as a personal choice. The bride role, as a role that places a strong emphasis on femininity, is one way in which a woman can feel she has reclaimed femininity by choosing to host a wedding that fits the expected wedding format.

The wedding gown is one of the most important wedding elements when it comes to brides. While a few brides opted to wear a dress that they had not bought new from a store, the dress is altered to fit the bride, to be “her” dress even if she did not purchase it originally. In these cases, the dress is not special because it is specially made for her as Mead (2007) notes, but the dress is altered to fit the bride so that it still becomes “her” dress. The stereotypical wedding dress is not practical attire for many brides, especially if they wish to spend the night dancing at the reception. 45 percent of brides in the sample had more than one dress. Brides with multiple dresses would have a dress for the ceremony and then at least one other for the reception. The reasoning given for the separate ceremony dress in some cases was due to cultural/religious backgrounds that require attire specific to that background. However, brides could have worn their ceremony attire to the reception if they wanted to. Brides who opt to wear a white dress after having worn different ceremony attire attempt to escape the position of “other” that this attire places them in so that they may be like the white Western bride. Dresses for the reception were often seen as being easier to dance in or would fit the theme of the reception. In some cases, friends, family or the groom would mention their discontent
with spending on an extra dress, but that did not prevent it. The addition of a second
dress, particularly if that dress is not white or related to a particular cultural background,
relates to Engstrom’s (2012) and Mead’s (2007) notion of the white wedding dress as a
uniform, in that all white wedding dresses are similar in terms of style. With the second
dress, the bride is able to choose the colour and it does not have to be a ball gown. Rather
than change the idealized version of the dress, the wedding industry maintains this
version as it encourages additional spending. The need for the white wedding dress is of
course communicated through the bridal media (Boden, 2001; Mead, 2007; Engstrom,
2012). As these shows are both examples of weddings as well as part of bridal media,
these shows also promote the continuation of the wearing of the white wedding gown,
although they demonstrate that brides are not obligated to wear this dress throughout the
entirety of their weddings so long as they buy more than one dress and that the second
dress is also acceptable attire for a formal affair. The second dress provides the bride with
the ability to choose a more unique dress while staying within common wedding
practices by wearing the white dress for at least part of the wedding and to be able to
have wedding pictures taken with the white dress.

Although it is most often the bride who is responsible for overspending, some
grooms even take on behaviour similar to that of the “bridezilla” during the planning of
the wedding. Groom Samir is a good example of the “groomzilla” with his over-the-top
ideas that even his bride thought were too much. Some men do think about their
weddings from a young age like women and may also have a vision for the wedding
(Engstrom, 2012). Just like the “bridezilla” who continuously refers to the wedding as
“her” day, the groom also sees the wedding as “his” day. While grooms may struggle to
control “bridezillas”, brides dealing with “groomzillas” have a greater struggle as they attempt to regain control of the wedding as the bride’s day. Engstrom (2012) notes that brides can become territorial about the wedding as it is considered to be a space where they have control over decisions. Rasha did not accept Samir’s idea of the male engagement ring and she struggled to gain control over the wedding planning. Samir’s behaviour was portrayed as unconventional, although it was still included in the show. Family members may get involved in a bride’s struggle to regain control as well as they also see the wedding as the bride’s day, which is not implemented to the same degree when the groom struggles to assert his role in the wedding. Engstrom (2012) notes the reversal of roles in relation to the wedding planning can challenge the masculinity of groom. While Samir’s masculinity is not openly questioned, he does feel the need to assert his power as the one who is taking on the majority of the financial responsibility, even though the couple says they are both paying for the wedding.

**Feminism, Independence and the Relationship**

The wedding is often portrayed as the bride’s day and she is viewed to be the one responsible for the wedding, however, the groom is also part of the wedding and the planning process that precedes it. Contrary to popular belief, the wedding is also about the groom, who also feels the wedding is a meaningful event and not one that signals the end of his freedom as only 5 percent of grooms mentioned this. As McRobbie (2009) notes that feminism is considered to be something that has been taken into account in the current social climate, it appears that women in the sample do not outwardly acknowledge feminism.
The lack of any mention of feminism may also have to do with the stigma surrounding the label of feminist. Many young women refuse to take on this label as they fear that they will be seen as women who are unfeminine and dislike men (Butler, 2013), characteristics that clash with the ideal bride and the perfect wedding. It is also possible that the producers would have taken out any footage that mentioned feminism as it would not fit with the ideal bridal role. Paolucci and Richardson (2006) note that performers can hold roles that contradict one another, causing them to behave in such a way that is in line with one role but contradicts another. Openly expressing feminist attitudes would not fit with a bridal role that is constructed around neoliberal postfeminist notions of femininity. These notions of femininity stem from the more traditional feminine roles of the past, which activist feminists would view as outdated and oppressive. Bride Trish, labelled as the anti-bride during the course of her episode, was portrayed as more rebellious than the other brides in the sample. While she did not mention feminism, Trish did admit that she did not want to have a large wedding and that it was because of her family that she had decided to go ahead with a wedding. Trish’s wedding was not portrays as average, but rather as a cost effective wedding that was not as cost effective as they had planned. While this bride was able to rebel to some extent, she was still pushed into the bridal role as she was still concerned about creating her vision of the wedding, which involved spending. Goffman (1959) notes that established social roles also have established fronts, which must both be maintained when the performer takes on that role. As the bridal role is an established role, Trish could not take on that role without adopting the behaviour or front associated with it.
The bridal role can be empowering for women as it does give them control over the wedding and the “bridezilla” also appears as a strong independent women. However, Engstrom (2012) and Samek (2012) have observed that reality wedding shows portray the “bridezilla” as a “monstrous” hysterical woman. This portrayal of the “bridezilla” relates to McRobbie’s (2009) mention of the widely held perception of feminism as having gone too far. While women are allowed to have control over wedding planning, if they go too far or become obsessed with creating the their “perfect” wedding to the extent that they attempt to control others, then they will receive negative attention and be shunned for their behaviour (Engstrom, 2012). It is also important to note that while women are given control over the creation of the wedding, it is often the men who are portrayed as providing the majority of the money and the men control the budget. Thus while some brides are able to manipulate their grooms, a bride’s power over the wedding may not be what it appears as often brides do have to answer to whoever is paying the most.

Both Engstrom (2012) and Mead (2007) noted that women are expected to take on the majority of wedding planning responsibilities as the wedding as viewed to be the bride’s day. 70 percent of episodes in the sample focus more on the bride’s role in the wedding planning as opposed to the groom and in 85 percent of episodes in the sample, emphasis was placed on the wedding being the bride’s day. The perception of the wedding being about the bride allows brides to be viewed as wedding planning experts who are aware of their guests’ expectations. Both Boden (2001) and Engstrom (2012) note that bridal media portrays brides as having wedding expertise while their grooms are expected to be clueless about the wedding and therefore the ideas of grooms are dismissed as they are viewed to be invalid. Ideas presented by grooms are often criticized
because the groom is not allowed the expert status. According to Engstrom (2012), the only men who are allowed to have wedding expertise are those who work within the wedding industry. The ideas of grooms are heavily criticized by brides, the wedding planner or friends and family in 85 percent of episodes in the sample. Many grooms do present cost-saving ideas due to their concern about overspending as 75 percent of the grooms in the sample were concerned about overspending, which was often a result of the bride’s spending. However, almost any alternative proposed by the groom is shot down by others. Most things that are cost effective are viewed to be of lesser quality and therefore unacceptable. Given that bridal media focuses on the bride, the groom is not encouraged in the same way to learn about the norms of wedding planning, which impacts the value placed on their suggestions for the wedding, even though it is also their wedding.

Brides had more control in about 93 percent of cases where the bride and groom did not have equal say in wedding related decisions. The bride appears to have more control because the wedding is seen to be her day and she is expected to take on more of the planning responsibilities, although she now has the help of a wedding planner. Even though some grooms struggle for control, especially when spending gets out of hand, it is still the bride who runs the show in the majority of cases. In some cases, the bride even controls the groom through manipulation. Boden (2001) notes that bridal magazines encourage this manipulating behaviour as a way for brides to get what they want for their weddings. Not only does the bridal media construct the “perfect” wedding but it also encourages brides to obtain this by any means necessary.
Despite the view of the wedding as the bride’s day and her responsibility, grooms are present at most outings in 60 percent of cases and grooms attend some outings in 40 percent of cases, which contradicts Engstrom’s (2012) finding that groom participation is rare. The groom’s presence signals that the bride is not solely responsible for the planning of the wedding. While women are considered to have more knowledge about weddings during the process of planning, men are still present and still provide input into decisions about the wedding, although this input is heavily criticized. The grooms shown on Rich Bride, Poor Bride want to be involved in the planning of their wedding, even if some brides would prefer if they didn’t. Many grooms do wish to include certain things in the wedding and feel the wedding is important to them as well, signaling that their involvement is due to an interest in participating and that the wedding is meaningful to them as well, even if this is overshadowed by the role of the bride. Grooms also pick certain elements for the wedding and some outings are to look at items or services they have picked. Grooms want to include certain items or services that others involved do not allow in 85 percent of episodes in the sample. Some of these elements are those cultural elements which grooms feel are important while some elements picked by grooms seem just as outrageous as elements that some brides desire to have at the wedding. Grooms concerned about the budget may also arrange gatherings to view more cost effective items, which are often criticized by the bride. Even if the groom is allowed to have what he wants, this does not mean that the bride will compromise on her wants because, after all, it is still supposed to be her day.
Conclusion

Once again, who is the wedding for? Much emphasis is placed on the wedding as the bride’s day and it is often the bride who takes control of the wedding planning as part of the bridal role. While the bride is positioned by both the wedding industry and her friends and family as the person who the wedding is for, other parties also view the wedding as an event for them. Many grooms take part in the wedding planning process and also feel that the wedding is a meaningful life event, despite perceptions of the wedding being for the bride. The finding of this study also show that some grooms care about their weddings to the extent that they can take on a persona similar to that of the “bridezilla”, called the “groomzilla”. As bridal media attempts to exclude grooms from learning about weddings and their ideas are often discredited, further research is needed in order to further examine the “groomzilla” persona. The wedding can also be about the couple as a unit, a day for both the bride and groom, although this is rare. Families, particularly the bride’s family, also feel that their child’s wedding is an important event in their lives and the quality of their child’s wedding is a reflection of their wealth. Wealth, or one’s ability to consume, is considered to be a measure for success in a neoliberal capitalist context (Tudor, 2012). The couple and their families can also see the wedding as an event for their guests, due to the fact that much time and money is spent to ensure that the wedding gives off a good impression and their guests have a good time. As the guests are the audience for the wedding performance, it is important that the couple and their families maintain the impression that they are able to afford an expensive wedding. Failure to manage this impression, in this case through the purchase of cost-effective wedding items, would shatter the impression and would cause the
performers to lose control of the situation (Goffman, 1959; Paolucci & Richardson, 2006). This study also finds that happiness is tied to wedding-related consumption, which also suggests that couples feel that in order to perform a successful wedding, which they believe will make them happy, they must consume. Perceptions about who the wedding is for can also effect roles that are taken on for the performance of the wedding and the planning process that precedes it, especially in cases where gender roles are reversed.

The wedding can also serve to fulfil a greater social obligation as bridal media communicates the need for the wedding and what that wedding should include. Bridal media, as a part of the wedding industry, not only perpetuates the need for the wedding, but the need for the “perfect” wedding, which can only be achieved through consumption. This fits with the neoliberal perspective of achieving success through one’s ability to purchase material goods (Tudor, 2012). The findings of this study confirm that the term “perfect” is used in reference to the wedding and that this effects wedding spending as in order for a wedding to be successful, it must be “perfect”. As social inequalities are ignored in a neoliberal context, the wedding may also include certain groups while excluding others. McRobbie (2009) notes that Western beauty standards are constructed around white norms, which is particularly important given the focus on the bride. This can be extended to weddings as what is considered to be the standard wedding is also based on white norms. Thus the wedding, as a costly affair based on white norms can serve to exclude individuals based on both race and class. As Engstrom (2012) notes that weddings are also based on assumptions of heterosexuality, same-sex couples can also be excluded from the standard wedding.
Weddings may have meaning on an individual level, but they also serve a larger purpose in a neoliberal capitalist system. The wedding industry, as part of this system, uses bridal media to ensure the continuation of standard wedding practices and the consumption which they entail. Brides are positioned as the focal point of the wedding not only because of tradition or past notions of female gender roles, but also because the bride is an ideal candidate for increasing wedding-related consumption. As McRobbie (2009) argues that femininity in a neoliberal capitalist context is strongly tied to consumerism, women construct a feminine front, as part of the feminine role, through consumerism. The consumption of feminine products is unavoidable if women wish to maintain a feminine impression given Goffman’s (1959) observation that an individual cannot take on a social role without also taking on the associated front or behaviour. Goffman (1959) also argues that performers must carefully manage the impression their performances give off. Women in a neoliberal capitalist context need to carefully manage a feminine impression in order to attract a man to marry (McRobbie, 2009), which the women in Rich Bride, Poor Bride have done successfully since they are getting married. By positioning brides as the focal point of the wedding and giving them control over wedding planning decisions, the wedding industry, through bridal media, ensures its own success which also contributes to the success of the larger neoliberal capitalist system.
References


RateSupermarket.ca. What is the Cost of Love? Retrieved from http://www.ratesupermarket.ca/what_is_the_cost_of_love/


**Episode References**


Appendix A
Code Sheet*

Episode Citation:
Bride and Groom’s Names:

Demographic Questions
Are the cultural backgrounds of the bride and groom mentioned?
Bride only___ Groom only___ Both___ Not mentioned___
Does the bride or groom appear to be of a non-white racial identity?
Bride only___ Groom only___ Both___ Neither___
Is the bride’s profession or income mentioned?
Yes___ No___
If mentioned, what is the bride’s profession and/or income? ___________________
Is the age of the bride mentioned?
Yes___ No___
If so, which age range does the bride fall within?
18-24___ 25-32___ 33-39___ 40-46___ 46 and over___
Do the bride and groom have any children?
Bride only___ Groom only___ The couple have children together___ Not mentioned___
Has the bride or groom been married to different people in the past?
Bride only___ Groom only___ Both___ Neither___ Not mentioned___

Family and Friends
Do the parents of the bride or groom appear to contribute financially to the wedding celebration?
Bride’s Family only___ Groom’s Family only___ Both___ Neither___ Not Mentioned___
Do the parents of the bride or groom appear to influence the couple’s decisions in regards to the
planning of the wedding? **
Bride’s Family only___ Groom’s family only___ Both___ Neither___
Are there any items or services that the parents of the bride or groom mention as a being
necessary part of the wedding?
Yes___ No___ Parents³ not involved___

³ The term “Families” originally appeared as the response here but the wording was changed in order to be
consistent with that of the question.
If so, who mentions this? 

Bride’s Family___ Groom’s Family___ Both___

What is the item or service? ________________________________

Does the bride’s mother appear to influence her daughter’s decisions in regards to wedding planning? 
**
Yes___ No___

Is the mother of the bride present at wedding planning outings?
Most___ Some___ Few____ One____ None____

Are there any other friends or family members that appear to have a strong influence on the bride? 
**
Yes___ No___

If so, what is the relation of the person or persons to the bride? ________________________________

**Consumerism**

Does the couple purchase any items or services outside that of the expected format of the ceremony/dinner/dance format considered to be the “traditional” Western wedding?
Yes___ No___

If so, what? ________________________________

Are there any items or services purchased specifically because of the bride or groom’s cultural background? 
**
For the bride’s background____ For the groom’s background____ Both____ Neither____

If so, what? ________________________________

Are there any items or services purchased by the couple that was mentioned as being necessary for making their wedding their own? 
**
Yes___ No___

If so, what were the item(s) and/or service(s)? ________________________________

Are there any items or services purchased specifically for the purpose of imitating the wedding of a celebrity or royalty? 
**
Yes___ No___

If so, what? ________________________________

Is the cost of the bridal gown mentioned?
Yes___ No___

______________________________

4 “Neither” also appeared as a response for this question but was removed as it did not make sense given the context of the question.
If so, does the cost exceed $2000?  
Yes___ No___

Does the bride have more than one wedding dress?  
Yes____ No____

Does the bride emphasize the need for the “perfect” dress? **  
Yes___ No____

Does the bride mention any concerns about fitting into the wedding dress? **
Yes____ No____

How many guests are invited to the wedding?  
100 or below ___ 101-150__ 151-200__ 201-250__ 251-300__ Over 300___ Not mentioned ___

Is the total cost of the wedding mentioned?  
Yes____ No____

If so, does the total cost exceed $27, 000?
Yes ___ No ____

Was the couple’s budget below or above $27, 000?
Above____ Below____ $27, 000____

What was the couple’s budget? ______________________________________

Did the couple’s total spending exceed their budget?  
Yes____ No____

If so, by how much? ____________________________

At any point during the wedding planning process does the bride and/or groom become concerned about overspending?  
Bride____ Groom____ Both____ Neither____

At any point during the wedding planning process does the couple ignore advice from the wedding planner in regards to staying on budget? **
Yes____ No____

If so, does the bride or groom see the item(s) or service(s) in question as being necessary to the extent that price does not matter?
Bride does____ Groom does____ Both____

Does the bride or groom make purchases without the other’s knowledge or consent?
Bride does____ Groom does____ Both____ Neither____

Is happiness mentioned as a reason for spending?  
Yes____ No____

Does the couple opt for upgrades on any products or services?
Yes___ No___ Upgrades not offered____
  If yes, what are the upgraded products and/or services? ___________________________

Feminism
Are there any specific mentions of feminism or feminists?
Yes___ No___

Do the bride and groom each appear to have an equal say in decisions made about the wedding?
**
Yes___ No___
  If not, who appears to have more control over the wedding planning decisions?
    Bride____ Groom____

Is the groom present during wedding planning outings?
Most____ Some____ Few____ One____ None____

Is both the bride and groom’s family involved in wedding planning outings?
Bride’s family____ Groom’s family____ Neither _____ Both____
  If both, is one family more involved than the other?
    Bride’s family more involved___ Groom’s family more involved___ Equal___

Does the bride appear to contribute financially to the wedding? **
Yes___ No___

Who appears to be the main financial contributor to the wedding? **
Bride____ Groom___ The couple____ Bride’s family____ Groom’s family____ Both Families____

Is there any item or service that the groom mentions wanting to include in the wedding that the bride and/or other family members or friends do not allow? **
Yes___ No____

Are the groom’s ideas more heavily criticized by the bride, wedding planner and/or family and friends? **
Yes____ No____

Is emphasis placed on the wedding being the bride’s day by those participating in the wedding planning process? **
Yes____ No____

5 The response of “Both Families” was not included in the original code sheet but was added when it was discovered that both families did contribute in one case.
Does the bride and her family/friends appear on camera more often than the groom and his family/friends?
Bride more often____ Groom more often____ About the same_____

Does the show focus more on the bride and her role in the wedding planning than the groom?
Bride more____ Groom more____ About the same_____

Is there any mention of freedom ending as a result of marriage for the bride and/or groom?
Bride____ Groom____ Both____ Neither_____

Does the bride appear to have a positive attitude toward fashion? **
Yes___ No___

Is there any mention of the dress as being from a designer label? **
Yes____ No____

Other
Is the word “perfect” used in reference to the wedding?
Yes___ No___

Does the bride mention anything about becoming a “princess” for the wedding day?
Yes___ No___

Is the term “traditional” used in reference to the wedding?
Yes___ No___

* Questions do not appear in the text in the same order. The results of some questions are presented in different categories in the text.
** Not mentioned was originally included as a response for these questions but was removed at the beginning of the data collection because it was considered to be unnecessary and confusing.
Appendix B

List of Bride’s Occupations by Episode

Sonnobia (season 5, episode 66): Service Analyst
Dipika (season 5, episode 67): English teacher
Christy (season 5, episode 69): Human Resources
Trish (season 5, episode 70): Professional Space Organizer
Tania (season 5, episode 71): Pharmacy Technician
Nicole (season 5, episode 73): Public Health Manager
Alysa (season 5, episode 75): Lab Technician
Rebeccca (season 5, episode 77): Supply Analyst
Sukhi (season 5, episode 78): Television Reporter
Juliette (season 6, episode 79): Teacher
Steph (season 6, episode 80): Nurse
Rasha (season 6, episode 81): Interior Designer
Amy (season 6, episode 82): Executive Assistant
Diana (season 6, episode 83): Massage Therapist
Liz (season 6, episode 84): Legal Social Worker
Amy (season 6, episode 85): Financial Analyst
Dominique (season 6, episode 86): Retail Buyer
Lisa (season 6, episode 88): Fashion Designer
Jihan (season 6, episode 90): Analyst
Audrey (season 6, episode 91): Insurance Broker