

THE BRIDE IN AMERICAN MEDIA: A FEMINIST MEDIA STUDIES AND
CRITICAL ANALYSIS, 1831-2012

by

EMILIA NOELLE BAK

(Under the Direction of Janice Hume)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the figure of the bride in American media. Today, the bride is a ubiquitous figure. She graces the covers of magazines, websites are devoted to her, and multiple television series star her. This study aimed to understand the American bride contemporarily and historically by examining magazine media from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as today's reality television programming. Pulling from feminist media studies and critical cultural studies and proceeding from the standpoint that representations matter, portrayals of the bride were analyzed in terms of gender, class and race for ways in which these representations affirmed and/or resisted the dominant ideology.

The bride was examined in media targeted at women to understand how media meant for women talked about the bride, a uniquely female figure. The nineteenth-century women's magazine *Godey's Lady's Book*, the twentieth-century women's magazine *Ladies' Home Journal* and today's most notorious reality bride show, *Bridezillas*, were all examined.

INDEX WORDS: bride, *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Bridezillas*, feminist media studies, cultural studies, wedding

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the women in my life. I could not have completed this dissertation without the support, guidance, wisdom, love and friendship of women. I would like to especially dedicate this work to my mother who taught me early that being a woman meant much more than being a bride, that it meant being brave, being strong and building bonds with other women to work toward a better world for women *and* for men.

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Preface

“Friday is Bride-day on TLC,” the TV booms. Cue eye roll. *Bride-day. Really?* But I don’t change the channel. In fact, I stay stuck to the couch for not one, but two episodes of *Say Yes to the Dress*. While a part of me disdains the modern media’s bridal culture, I find myself far from free of its pull. Not only am I guilty of watching bride shows, including but not limited to *Bridezillas*, *Four Weddings*, *Say Yes to the Dress*, *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?* and *Bulging Brides*, but I judge. Not just the brides’ often tacky behavior, but their bridal choices. *That’s the dress she’s going to buy? Those are her wedding colors?* These thoughts, and other less flattering ones, bang around inside my head, before I launch into daydreaming what my own white wedding will be like. Wintertime. Formal. A fitted gown with a sweetheart neckline. Live music, of course. So, while I’d like to think I’m completely unlike the brides I see on TV, my wedding fantasies suggest I’m not.

When I started this dissertation, I was in a long-term and serious relationship of more than four years. Friends, family and even strangers would ask when we were getting married...constantly. We would shrug off the questions with smiles. I was working on a Ph.D., so no time for wedding planning, and we lived together and were committed to each other. What was the rush? I didn’t feel like I needed to be a bride to know we were forever. It would happen when the time was right. I also wasn’t immune to the hypocrisy

that I could marry if I chose to, but my younger brother, a gay man who'd been with his partner for even longer than I'd been with mine, couldn't. Finally, I wasn't like *those* women on TV or even some of my friends and sorority sisters. My life wasn't oriented around having a wedding and being a bride. I was a little more evolved than that. Then the unthinkable happened.

My boyfriend left me. I was blindsided and heartbroken. And then it got worse. He married someone else two and half months after walking out on me. I thought I might die of a broken heart. (I didn't.) I cried for what felt like years over losing the man I thought was the love of my life, but I noticed I was crying about something else too. I realized I was crying over the wedding we would have had. On the cold floor of the bathroom I spilled tears over a mermaid-style lace dress I'd never worn. I also caught myself wondering if I'd ever be a bride. I was 28 and single. According to some of the media I examined for this dissertation, I was beyond even a spinster. I was a spinster to the 10th power or something. I'd catch myself calculating if I met "the one" right now, I could still just barely get married by 30. Sick. Clearly the culture of weddings and the desire to be a bride had gone to work on me more than I'd ever realized.

Despite the bride obsessed media and growing up in the South, where we marry young (and divorce young, some of the weddings I've attended were second tries at matrimony), marriage in America is on the decline, an interesting juxtaposition to the explosion of bride and wedding-themed shows.ⁱ You'd never know matrimony was down from watching TV. The bride shows don't talk about this, and do appear to be mostly

insulated from the public and heated debate over gay marriage. According to the bride shows, all is well in traditional marriage land. Men marry women, and all women want to look like Cinderella on their wedding day.

So what's actually going on in these bride shows? And why is the media so bride obsessed? Has it always been so fixated, and is it just the reality genre that makes it feel so in-your-face? These questions and others, including what these shows say about women, tug at me while I watch from my couch, and I'd be lying if I told you that my break-up hasn't given me an even more critical eye toward what these bride shows are peddling. Women have a ways to go toward equality, but I question how far along the path we are when looking like a princess for your wedding day is touted as a woman's most important life goal (note, having a healthy marriage is not the emphasis, just a perfect wedding) or when women put each other's bodies down during dress fittings. It's to these questions I'll now turn, but to truly understand our modern media bride, we'll first look to the past.

ⁱ "The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families," Pew Research Center, November 18, 2010, accessed June 5, 2012, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/11/18/the-decline-of-marriage-and-rise-of-new-families/1/>

Chapter 1

Introduction

At the close of the 19th century, a columnist for the women's magazine *Godey's Lady's Book* went off on a bit of a tear about the trend of ostentatious marriages. She wrote

Once upon a time marriage was as irrevocable as death; it is so no longer. So, then, why should it be celebrated with such inordinate pomp and ceremony? The same couple that goes to the alter to-day with all outward show and display, and who are proud to say 'I will' in the presence of a promiscuous multitude, will, as likely as not, have quite as overpowering a desire to say 'I won't' after a few months of married misery.ⁱ

The columnist, Annie De Montaigne (a countess), saved her worst criticism, not for the couple, but for the bride: "Were the trousseau, the presents, and the dramatic display left out of the question, there are many women who would not care to get married at all."ⁱⁱ

Flash forward 117 years later, and De Montaigne is likely rolling in her grave. It seems her worst wedding nightmares have come true. Not only are weddings ostentatious, but whole communication mediums are dedicated to the spectacle of weddings and their stars, the brides. Smiling brides grace magazine covers (and not just bridal ones). Brides gush over their big day details on weddings websites, debate dresses on one television channel, and berate bridesmaids on another. Bridezillas stalk the cable stations, bulging brides battle to lose pounds for the big day, and fiscally-minded brides

blow their budgets for dresses that make them feel like princesses. It seems history has left the countess's advice for smaller weddings unheeded. Today, few events rival the wedding's importance, especially for the bride, following the course left by another *Godey's* columnist, the publisher Louis Godey himself, who wrote, "It has been for ages, and will probably be for many to come, one of the most important epochs of a woman's life to arrange, order, and make up her wedding outfit."ⁱⁱⁱ Godey was writing in 1866, but his words are eerily familiar. The modern American has only to turn on the television to hear a similar message: "Finding the perfect dress is one of the most important things a bride can do," said Randy Fenoli, a consultant on TLC's *Say Yes to the Dress*.^{iv} It seems for a woman, there is no role more valued than the bride.

There is no escaping the mass mediated bride of today. She is ubiquitous. From wedding websites such as *TheKnot.com* to new reality bride shows being launched as I write, the bride is everywhere.^v American media are simply obsessed with this figure in white, yet despite looming so large in our culture, she remains understudied. The aim of this dissertation was to begin to bring more understanding to the mediated bride. It examined the American media bride of today, and because she did not emerge out of thin air, the media bride of the past as well. Specifically, the bride of mass circulation magazines, the nineteenth-century's *Godey's Lady's Book* and the twentieth-century's *Ladies' Home Journal*, were examined. In today's fragmented mediascape there is no equivalent text to these two magazines. The reality series *Bridezillas* was analyzed, a type of text that couldn't have existed in the previous eras examined here. *Bridezillas* as a text is important for understanding the modern construction of the bride, and the existence of the show offers insights about the evolution of media itself. While some scholars have

begun analyzing television shows within the wedding genre at large, the figure of the bride remains veiled (pun intended). Wedding photography, foreign war brides, wedding ceremonies and traditions have been analyzed, but few have looked directly at the American bride.^{vi} This study takes on that bride, from the nineteenth century to the present, examining our cultural construction of and obsession with the bride.

The Bride in Media

The bridal television genre is expanding exponentially with shows on various networks including TLC's *Brides of Beverly Hills*, *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding*, *Four Weddings*, *Say Yes to the Dress* (and its four spin-offs), Style network's *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway*, E!'s *Bridalplasty*, We TV's *Rich Bride Poor Bride*, *Bulging Brides*, *Big Easy Brides* and the notorious *Bridezillas*. Cable networks also offer up mini-series about minor celebrities planning nuptials, which follow a bridal reality show format with dress choosing and agonizing over details for the big day. These include Style network's *Marry Me in Mexico: Trish's Dream Wedding* which featured the planning and wedding of Trish Suhr from the series *Clean House*, a home makeover show, and *Niecy Nash's Wedding Bash* which featured Nash, also from *Clean House*.

Since the reality television genre began its rapid ascent to prime-time staple mass communication scholars have studied the genre.^{vii} Precursors to the wedding reality show, such as *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette* or *Joe Millionaire* which focus on romance and the engagement, have been analyzed by feminist media scholars, who found that these series normalized heterosexuality, patriarchy, and traditional roles for women through the use of the fairy tale narrative.^{viii}

Some scholars have started to examine wedding-themed reality shows, including Rebecca Herr who analyzed the wedding reality shows, *A Wedding Story*, *For Better or For Worse* and *My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé* as part of an examination of the American wedding as a conveyor of upper-class taste and style.^{ix} Herr argued that reality television “is an important tool in contemporary society for perpetuating the shared understanding of elements of a proper white wedding.”^x

Recently, the conversation about the meaning of the mediated bride was furthered with Erika Engstrom’s *The Bride Factory: Mass Media Portrayals of Women and Weddings*.^{xi} Asking how bridal media reflects the modern woman’s status, Engstrom explored reality wedding planning programs, newspaper coverage of weddings, and the portrayal of alternative brides and grooms in the media. Her analysis found that the bridal shows constructed an image of brides and women steeped in hegemonic femininity: “The portrayal of women in bridal media reaffirms the assumed identity that ‘society’ expects women to take: that of the beautiful, ecstatic bride.”^{xii}

A few studies have examined the figure of the bride in magazine media. Specifically, Laura Patterson compared images of plus-sized brides and “normal”-sized brides in “Why are All the Fat Brides Smiling? Body image and the American Bridal Industry.”^{xiii} Patterson found that even though larger brides appeared in bridal magazines it was only in advertisements, not editorial content, suggesting “the plus-size bride was solely a figment of the advertising imagination. As far as the magazine copy and layout were concerned, she did not exist.”^{xiv} Patterson was troubled more by the way the plus-sized brides appeared rather than their relegation to advertisements: “The minus-size models wore the universally recognizable facial expressions of haute couture: disdainful,

contemptuous, smoldering, ‘sexy-but-evil’ looks,” while the plus-sized brides wore smiles.^{xv} Patterson argued that when these images and facial expressions are placed in the larger context of our model, fashion, and beauty culture “these ads imply that the plus-size bride is not entitled to the same kind of glamour or embellishment as her slender counterpart. The text of such ads tends to emphasize words such as fashionable or flattering, words seemingly deemed unnecessary in the ads for ‘standard’ sizes.”^{xvi}

The issue of beauty is vital for understanding the bride. Today, women’s beauty work is extensive including makeup, hair, fitness, keeping up with fashion, and increasingly cosmetic procedures and plastic surgery.^{xvii} Naomi Wolf argued that the pursuit of universal and objective beauty has distracted and oppressed women, terming this the beauty myth. The media has been central in deploying this myth and convincing women of the value of trying to attain beauty. Wolf argued that this pursuit of beauty serves the “need of today’s power structure, economy and culture to mount a counter-offensive against women.” The beautiful bride is a figure we are all familiar with, and interrogating the quality of beauty in her mediated construction is vital. How central is beauty to the meaning of the bride? This dissertation builds on the work of Wolf, Patterson, Herr, Engstrom and others, by working in issues of the bridal body, beauty, race and class into the analysis of the bride.

Because the twenty-first century bride of reality television did not emerge from a vacuum, this dissertation examined the media bride of the past, as well as the media bride of today. Historically speaking, the American media bride has been overlooked more often than her contemporary counterpart. However, history’s foreign war brides have received some ink. In *From the Battlefield to the Bridal Suite: Media Coverage of British*

War Brides, 1942-1946, Barbara Friedman examined the British war bride in American and British media, including magazines newspapers and armed services publications. Friedman found American media portrayed the British war brides in a variety of ways over the years. Portrayals ranged from predator to pioneer and legitimate military wife.^{xviii}

Theoretical Framework: Feminist Media Studies & Cultural Studies

Guiding this analysis of the bride, were the traditions of feminist media studies and cultural studies. Feminism itself is not always easily defined, in part because of political fragmentation. Criticisms of Western feminism by women of color and women from developing countries have spawned many different developments in feminist theory. For example, Black feminism demands recognizing intersectionality, such as with race and gender, when examining oppression. Marxist feminism turns to social structures such as capitalism to understand women's inequality. While definitions of feminism and feminist theory are heterogeneous, each branch of feminism rejects women's oppression and works against it.

Like feminist theory and feminism itself, feminist media studies represents a diverse and dynamic body of work: "the study of gender and media is extraordinarily heterogeneous," encompassing different methodological approaches, understandings of gender, difference, culture, and more.^{xix} However, feminist media studies is unified in a belief in gender oppression and a desire to change it, an interest in power, and the belief that media provide a vital place to examine issues of gender, oppression and power. Rosalind Gill wrote that feminist media studies begin from "the proposition that representations matter" and are "animated by the desire to understand how images and

cultural constructions are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression.”^{xx} While gender serves as the core of feminist media studies focus, the discipline is not restricted to gender, and encompasses issues of race, class, sexuality and more.

In some ways, cultural studies overlaps with feminist media studies. Both are concerned with issues of power and believe studying culture (which includes media) can give insight into ideological power and struggle. Cultural studies, like feminist media studies, has varied roots and branches, including Marxism, Gramsci’s hegemony, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, political economy, and others. Despite overlap, tension has existed between cultural studies and feminist media studies. Early feminist media studies work was not well received in male-dominant cultural studies, because “critical communication scholars used to ignore gender just like mainstream communication scholars did,” according to Liesbet van Zoonen.^{xxi} In time, cultural studies recognized it shared “more with feminist philosophy [...] in its recognition of the place of power and difference in all cultural processes.”^{xxii} Scholars, including van Zoonen, have combined the two approaches, and when we look historically, we can see the influence critical cultural studies and feminist media studies have had on one another.^{xxiii} For instance, in the early work of feminist media studies, the lack of women on television was attacked, as well as the inaccurate representation of women and the use of degrading stereotypes.^{xxiv} Then, due in large part to the influence of poststructuralism, feminist media studies shifted from critiquing how female characters inaccurately reflected reality and began considering how the media was constructing reality.^{xxv}

This dissertation drew from both of these rich traditions in examining the bride shows. Feminist media studies’ “unconditional focus on analyzing *gender* as a mechanism that structures the material and symbolic worlds” suited it to take on the bride shows, which displayed a very gendered notion of the bride and of women in general.^{xxvi} From critical cultural studies, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony was useful for examining the ideology the bride shows put forth. Hegemony “refers to the wide-ranging and subtle ways through which the dominant ideology (a system of meanings, beliefs, and values favored by those in power) is reinforced, reproduced, and maintained through cultural institutions like television,” and the bride shows.^{xxvii} In certain aspects, the bride shows heeded the call of early feminist media studies critics by featuring mostly women and by showing women in positions of agency. But hegemony allowed us to prod and examine the shows more deeply and see the ways in which the bride shows and the historical magazines were also reinforcing the dominant ideology.

Methodology

This dissertation proceeded from a feminist methodological standpoint. Sandra Harding outlined feminist research as research that emerges from women’s experiences, that is for women, and that places the researcher on the same critical plane as the researched.^{xxviii} Harding also rejected the stance of the “objective” researcher and the idea that knowledge could ever be value-free. The figure of the bride is uniquely female, therefore her portrayal is deeply connected with women’s experiences. This dissertation was undertaken for women in the sense it is for all who participate in the social structure and culture (everyone). Finally, as the preface of this work illustrated, the author never

claimed to be a neutral observer who left herself somewhere outside of her research in order to produce value-free knowledge.

Like the varied bodies of work they originated from, feminist methodologies and cultural studies methodologies do not prescribe an exact method for research. Both pull methods from various disciplines to best get at the questions they are asking. However, some methods, specifically qualitative methods, are more often found in feminist media studies and cultural studies. Both traditions emphasize examining a phenomena within its social context, which lends itself to qualitative methods. In the early tradition of feminist studies, when feminist media critics were more concerned with the media inaccurately reflecting the reality of women, quantitative content analysis was a common tool. Today, some feminist media studies scholars examine production, some study the audience, and others analyze media texts. All are legitimate ways to conduct feminist media studies work. This dissertation followed the tradition of examining the text.

The study of media texts, rather than audiences or production is not without criticism. Bonnie Dow, in defense of those who examine text, asserted that audience and text studies are both valuable and both offer something different to feminist media studies.^{xxix} Amanda Lotz and Sharon Ross argued feminist researchers do not have to look at the text, and the audience, and production, etc. all at once in one work, for it to be considered feminist media studies.^{xxx} Instead, studies of the text “can be conducted in such a way as to peripherally attend to or be cognizant of the historical and the institutional, and it is this broader awareness of the process of cultural construction and distribution that becomes characteristic of feminist television criticism.”^{xxxi}

Specifically, this dissertation relied on historical analysis and textual analysis for its methods. Chapter two and three historically examined the bride in American magazine media. Like critical cultural studies and feminist media studies, the study of history has no prescribed method. Rather, method is determined by the questions asked and by the primary sources available to the historian. History, of course, must be grounded in primary sources, with the research in tune with the historical and cultural context of the era. Thus, in order to conduct the analysis of the bride in chapters two and three, the author first immersed herself in the examined time periods, the nineteenth century and the World War II era.

Textual analysis was called upon for chapter four, which examined twenty-first century reality bride shows. In textual analysis a preliminary soak is used “to select representative examples which can be more intensively analyzed.”^{xxxii} Entire seasons of the bride shows were watched (way too many times), and these served as the long soak. Only every other episode of a selected season was used for more intense analysis. This type of analysis points “in detail, to the text on which an interpretation of latent meaning is based.”^{xxxiii} And that analysis tries to be as thorough and multifaceted as possible. “Position, placing, treatment, tone, stylistic intensification, striking imagery, etc., are all ways of registering emphasis,” used in textual analysis.^{xxxiv} While patterns are certainly important to textual analysis, exceptions are equally so because, “the really significant item may not be the one which continually recurs, but the one which stands out as an exception from the general pattern.”^{xxxv}

Research Questions

Guiding this study were the overarching questions: How is the bride portrayed in American media? And, what do these portrayals mean about the bride and ultimately, women? In order to explore these larger questions, this dissertation asked others as well: How was the bride portrayed throughout the run of *Godey's Lady's Book* in the nineteenth century? How was the bride portrayed before, during and after WWII in *Ladies' Home Journal*, and was the war reflected in her representation? And finally, how was today's bride portrayed in the reality television series *Bridezillas*?

Chapter Overview

Chapter One

Chapter one set the contextual framework for this study, reviewed previous work on brides and wedding media, and outlined the significance of this study. Chapter one also laid out the theoretical underpinnings of this work and explained its methodology.

Chapter Two

Chapter two traced the evolution of the bride in *Godey's Lady's Book* throughout the magazine's publication, from the 1830s to the end of the century. Specifically, it examines the way *The Lady's Book's* brides affirmed and challenged the ideology of separate spheres for men and women.

Chapter Three

Chapter three examined the bride in the *Ladies' Home Journal* from 1930 to 1955, a time period of great change for American women. When men went to war,

women went to work, but when WWII was over women were expected to return to the home.^{xxxvi} This chapter explored if and how social changes were reflected in a magazine that emphasized women's traditional roles of bride and wife.

Chapter Four

Chapter four explored the 2012 season of perhaps the most notorious of all the reality bride shows, *Bridezillas*. The show is infamous for featuring women planning their nuptials and deteriorating into a state of crazed bridal wrath as plans (of course) go wrong. The bride as a figure of power and issues of class and race were among the themes explored.

Chapter Five

The final chapter revisited the research questions and pulled together and analyzed the findings from each chapter. This chapter also related this work's findings to the contemporary social culture surrounding the bride shows, including gay marriage and the decline of marriage in America.

Chapter 2

The Evolving Bride in *Godey's Lady's Book*

Bride: (n). Definition: A woman who is about to be married or is already married, who is pale, trembling, fainting, dying, beautiful. Also, a woman who is about to be married or is already married, who is educated, reserved, moral, courageous.

In the February 1857 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, publisher Louis Godey's column, "Godey's Arm Chair," reminded readers to pay their postage, advertised pearl card-cases and hair ornaments, recited tid-bits about circulation, and offered a piece titled "The Bride" by Washington Irving which opened, "I know of no sight more charming and touching than that of young and tender bride in her robes of virgin white led up trembling to the alter."^{xxxvii} "How beautiful is the following?" Louis Godey gushed over Irving's treatise on the bride, and then reminded readers "we have a bridal figure in our fashion plate for this month."^{xxxviii}

Today, more than 150 years later, the figure of the bride is everywhere. Brides beam from glossy magazine covers, fret over tulle and lace dresses on one television channel, and pitch cake-smashing tantrums about their perfect weddings being not-so-perfect on another. Media are still obsessed with the bride, the figure in white. This chapter examined the mediated bride, but in a time long before *TheKnot.com*, *Bridezillas*, or even *Brides* magazine, when women were expected to be married, the nineteenth century. The top-circulating magazine of the time was the women's magazine, *Godey's Lady's Book*.^{xxxix} As a publication targeted at white middle-class women, during an era

when marriage was essentially required for females, *The Lady's Book* offered insights about the societal importance and value of being a bride during the 1800s.

This chapter aimed to understand how *Godey's Lady's Book* portrayed the bride historically. Examining the bride of the past was also an attempt to better understand women's lives, as the bride is a distinctly female figure, and add to the history of women, a history that is still being "reclaimed."^{xl}

This analysis of *The Lady's Book* was filtered through a feminist media studies and critical cultural studies lens, therefore always with an eye toward gender justice and questioning how the portrayal of the bride might work toward feminism's goals, the dominant patriarchy's or both.^{xli} Critical cultural studies reminds us that dominant ideology's work is always incomplete. Alternative ideologies challenge and undermine the dominant ideology's "common sense" about the world, and this chapter mined the brides of *Godey's Lady's Book* for the ways they reproduced the dominant ideology, but also refuted it. Feminist media studies is a twentieth-century paradigm, deployed here by a twenty-first century author to examine nineteenth-century ideas about the bride and women. Feminist media studies scholars asserted that representations matter and have sought to understand "how images and cultural constructions are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression."^{xlii} Media representations have been understood by critical cultural studies and by feminist media studies as reflecting reality or as constructing reality.^{xliii} I would argue that media does some of the work of both. Early feminist media scholars criticized media for its lack of women, negative portrayals of women, reliance on stereotypes, and for not reflecting the reality of women.^{xliv} It is likely they would have criticized *The Lady's Book* for similar reasons. However, while

twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminism looks different from nineteenth century feminism, it does not mean the writings in *The Lady's Book* can be simply dismissed as confining women and reproducing patriarchy.

In her examination of women in *The Lady's Book*, Laura McCall noted that “It has been alleged that Godey's [...] preached the gospel of purity, piety and domesticity, and that the stories, vignettes, and editorials fostered a strongly antifeminist sentiment.”^{xlvi} While not explicitly using a feminist lens, McCall conducted a content analysis of *Godey's* fiction between the years of 1830 and 1860 “in order to determine whether in fact it preached a doctrine of feminine submission and a limited, home-based way of life.”^{xlvi} McCall found that *Godey's* fiction did not simply communicate that women should be pious, pure, submissive and domestic. Rather, McCall found

A more complex perspective, rife with ambiguities and tensions. The women in *The Lady's Book's* fiction were not passive, purity did not connote asexuality, piety was understated, and home was not the only sphere to which women aspired. None of the stereotypical traits were pervasive and even when mentioned they often contained contradictory or distorted meanings.^{xlvi}

Despite existing in a time when traits such as piety, purity and submissiveness were valued for women, *The Lady's Book's* fiction was capable of portraying women in complex ways.

During the nineteenth century the women's movement in the United States began to blossom. In 1848 the first American women's rights convention in Seneca Falls took place and reforms to property laws for married women were passed displaying the willingness of women to cross the boundaries of the “separate spheres” and fight for their

rights.^{xlvi} Though a mainstream and conservative publication, the impact of the women's movement can be seen in *The Lady's Book*. In her study of heroic women in the magazine, Janice Hume found a change in the magazine's depiction of heroines between the years before Seneca Falls and ten years later.^{xlix} Prior to Seneca Falls, heroines were intelligent but also often victims, "they were always pale and trembling; they nearly always wept or shrieked and they often collapsed."^l Women's roles as wives and mothers were of great importance and contributed to heroism.^{li} Ten years after Seneca Falls, the roles of wife and mother were still of great importance, but Hume found a change in other characteristics of heroic women: "Rather than being melancholy victims, these women were cheerful, resourceful, and brave."^{lii} While the continued valorization of the wife and mother (two roles deeply connected with the role of the bride), suggested writings in *The Lady's Book* continued to confine women in certain ways, clearly it challenged restricting ideas about women in others. The analysis undertaken here of *The Lady's Book's* brides sought to capture the complicated, contradictory and changing figure of the bride, and therefore women, as the bride is a uniquely female figure. One overarching question guided this chapter: How was the figure of the bride portrayed in *Godey's Lady's Book* throughout the time it was published, 1830-1898?

The Historical Bride, Weddings & Marriage

Of course there is no bride without the tradition of marriage, which so often necessitates the event of a wedding. Although brides and weddings have much humbler roots in this country than contemporary television shows like *Bridezillas* and historical publications like *The Lady's Book* (with its thousands of articles including brides) might

lead you to believe, weddings and marriage have always occupied a place of importance. In colonial America weddings reflected the harsh environment. With few women and short lifespans for men, women often married more than once.^{lii} Marriage was a practical and economic arrangement more so than it was an arrangement borne of romance or love.^{liv}

In colonial America weddings were not elaborate affairs where the bride took center stage, and often “married” couples cohabited without being formally or officially married.^{lv} Often there was not a minister or other official in town to legally marry a couple, therefore it was left to the community to sanction a union. A prevalence of babies being born shortly after couples were married also revealed a more informal take on marriage.^{lvi} Yet, weddings and marriages were still important. A type of wedding announcement can be found in publications from colonial times, and marriages were announced at town gatherings.^{lvii} In the eighteenth century, marriage was especially vital for women as marriage was “the one career choice for most white women.”^{lviii} American colonists regarded marriage highly, especially for women: “It was woman’s reason for existence,” and therefore should be “the chief ambition for every woman to get a husband.”^{lix}

We see a regional difference in weddings during this time. In the North women married a little older, in their mid-twenties. In the South, (white) women often became brides by age 20.^{lx} Weddings in the Northeast often occurred on a weekday “so as not to interfere with the minister’s Sabbath-related duties on the weekend.”^{lxi} The bride and wedding were less accommodating down South among the planter class where weddings were planned in advance, included elaborate meals, and were social family gatherings.^{lxii}

Marriage was a family affair in terms of the celebration and the courtship itself: “A prudent couple did not venture to enter it without first being assured of the approval of both his and her relatives.”^{lxiii} In the South, black women kept as slaves were not always allowed to marry. When they did marry, the marriages had no legal or social validity. Black women were routinely subject to rape by their white owners and other white men, whether they were married or not.^{lxiv} Despite this, slave weddings did occur, sometimes with the blessing and aid of slave owners.^{lxv}

By the nineteenth century in America the nature of marriage was changing. The ideal of marrying for love began to take hold. In her study of nineteenth-century domestic novels, Cogan found that the idea of marrying for money alone was “despicable,” though for many women (and men) marrying for economic reasons was very much a reality.^{lxvi} Whether for love or money, most women in the nineteenth century became brides with marriage serving as “the central act of most women’s lives.”^{lxvii} After all, women’s most important roles, “helpmeet to her husband, a fertile wife, a competent mother,” stemmed from the bridal role.^{lxviii}

The more informal type of marriage seen in colonial times still occurred in the early nineteenth century. It was still “more important that the community recognize and sanction a union than that a legal document was produced.”^{lxix} One aspect of marriage that remained unchanged was that “an adult woman was defined by her relationship to the institution of marriage: she was either a miss or madam—a maid (and later a spinster) or a wife (then perhaps a widow).”^{lxx} Each of these terms demonstrated how deeply rooted into American culture defining a woman by her marital status was; it was part of the language. Women’s identities revolving around their marital status could certainly be

seen in the *Lady's Book*. More than once, the publication wrote to its audience to “always place the prefix Mrs. or Miss before your name.”^{lxxi}

Two roles deeply tied to the role of the bride, those of wife and mother, are integral in understanding the figure of the nineteenth-century bride. During this time, the role of the bride led women into the roles of wife and mother, which became especially valued post-revolution. After the American Revolution, the idea that women were not as capable as men intellectually was challenged through the ideal of the republican mother.^{lxxii} This conception of motherhood held that women needed to be educated in order to properly educate their sons for the good of the young republic.^{lxxiii} *The Lady's Book's* longtime editor, Sarah Hale, grew up under what we now term the ideology of the republican mother, and her emphasis on women's education reflected this.^{lxxiv} Patricia Okker argued that during the nineteenth century ideas about men and women began to shift from the post-revolutionary toward Victorian notions of extreme sexual difference.^{lxxv} Women went from being thought of as inferior, but similar, to men to being thought of as wholly different from men. In terms of intelligence, the republican motherhood paradigm necessitated female intelligence in order for women to educate their sons. Yet, in the nineteenth century, the social landscape questioned if women could even be intellectual.^{lxxvi} In fiction of the nineteenth century women's bodies were also constructed as inherently different from men's.^{lxxvii} Despite the century's ideology, Sarah Hale retained her commitment to women's education while promoting men and women's inherent differences such as women's moral nature in contrast to men's moral vulnerability.^{lxxviii}

The Lady's Book & Methods

Godey's Lady's Book was founded in 1830 by Louis Godey, and in 1837, it was merged with *American Ladies' Magazine*.^{lxxix} This merger marked the beginning of Sarah Hale's 40-year stint as editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*. This was an influential position for a woman, as *The Lady's Book* was the highest circulating women's magazine of the time, with a circulation of 150,000 by the middle of the nineteenth century.^{lxxx} *The Lady's Book* was an intriguing publication for examining the bride in for reasons beyond its impressive circulation. In nineteenth-century America, women and men were supposed to occupy separate spheres, the domestic and public respectively.^{lxxxi} During a time when women were relegated to the domestic sphere, women's magazines created a space in the public sphere for women in several ways.^{lxxxii} With a female editor and regular pieces authored by women, *The Lady's Book* was a space where women existed and worked outside the home. Readers too, by buying and reading *The Lady's Book*, a piece of popular mass media, participated in a public space for women. Alison Piepmeier argued that Sarah Hales's control over the popular *Lady's Book*, also served as a kind of bodily mobility.^{lxxxiii} Through print, Hale, and other women authors, traveled out of their domestic sphere and through public space. Mary Kelley points out that women writers of the nineteenth century, who she termed literary domestics, transgressed the domestic sphere by writing publically about women's private lives.^{lxxxiv} So while *The Lady's Book* was a publication for the home, it also took women out of their separate sphere by letting them participate in public culture as readers and by employing them as authors and editors.

Magazines themselves hold an important place in American culture and history exerting social and economic influence.^{lxxxv} James Wood argued that the earliest magazines in America aimed to influence opinion and present political information and then evolved as national educators and as a literary force.^{lxxxvi} By the “mid-1830’s magazines were a strong force in American life.”^{lxxxvii} Frank Luther Mott wrote in the 1930s that magazines were important to examine for the way they conveyed popular ideology and interpret “the men and women of their own days.”^{lxxxviii} Certainly, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* as “an American institution in the 19th century”^{lxxxix} provides a place to mine and interpret the bride and therefore the women of the nineteenth century.

To examine the figure of the bride in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* a search of “bride” was conducted for every issue of the magazine using two digital archives, Accessible Archives and American Periodicals Series Online. A search for “bride” resulted in 2,362 results. Because of the overwhelming amount of material, every 10th result was extracted for examination with a sample of 236 articles.^{xc} Finally, articles were not used for analysis that did not discuss the bride in context. For example, one result was a piece of fiction authored by a writer who previously wrote a piece titled “The Bride.” The author’s biographical information was the only reason the article came back as a “bride” result, therefore it was discarded. Out of the 236 results read, nineteen were not included for analysis, yielding a final sample of 217 articles.

If *Godey’s Lady’s Book* is an indicator, nineteenth century Americans seemed to be as bride obsessed as we are today. The results in the sample were overwhelmingly fiction, but articles containing the figure of the bride comprised a wide range of genres including poems, songs, fiction, fashion plates, mini-biographies, advice columns,

charades games, recipes, cultural pieces, publishing announcements and short plays.^{xcii}

Through a close reading of each piece in the sample several themes strongly emerged concerning the bride as well as an evolution of her portrayal throughout the magazine's publication.

Analysis

One central theme that remained constant from the magazine's start in the 1830s through its demise was the high societal value placed on the role of the bride. Whether or not a woman ever filled the role of the bride, on the pages of *Godey's Lady's Book*, she was defined by her relationship to that role. Women who didn't marry were "old-maids," "shrewish," "spinsters," "lonely," and "unloved." Women who did marry were often referenced by the term bride, even after they married, illustrating how being a bride became a woman's identity. According to *The Lady's Book*, a woman remained a bride for three months after marriage; however, characters married for years were still referred to as brides.^{xciii} The role of bride was automatically attributed to the readers of *The Lady's Book* as well. "As many of our readers no doubt are on the eve of matrimony," began a nonfiction piece entitled "Hints About the Doings of the Fashionable World."^{xciii} *The Lady's Book* also reminded readers and correspondents (more than once) to always prefix their names with Miss or Mrs.^{xciv}

Because the bride was so highly valued in *The Lady's Book*, I expected to find, especially in the fiction, that a "good" female would be rewarded by fulfilling the role of the "fair young bride" while a "bad" female character would become an "unloved old maid."^{xcv} This assumption could not have been more wrong. Women who were villains

ended up as brides almost as often as heroines. However, when villains became brides there was a clear difference between happy brides and unhappy brides. The distinction between the two was a theme found throughout the magazine's publication. Another recurring theme was the physical beauty of the bride. Beauty, like the role of the bride itself, was not only the territory of the heroine. Female villains were beautiful too, sometimes more so than the heroine. Before a closer discussion of the happy/unhappy bride and the bride as beautiful, the themes that evolved over the course of *The Lady's Book's* run will be examined.

Early Godey's Brides, 1830-1850

The brides of the early *Godey's Lady's Book* were not a lot to be envied. Resembling the heroines Hume described in *The Lady's Book* during the years 1837-1838, the fictional brides during *The Lady's Book's* first two decades "were always pale and trembling."^{xcvi} Even the nonfiction bride appeared on the delicate side, blushing, embarrassed and crying.^{xcvii} Aside from needing some sun, the early brides of *The Lady's Book* often fainted and either went mad or died without their husbands or true loves. For instance, in the story "The Lost Jager," Netty, who was "pale" "quivering" and with "trembling fingers," fainted at hearing her love, Fritz, may have perished in a storm while hunting (he didn't).^{xcviii} If Fritz had died, Netty might have ended up like the "fair tender maiden" of a "Venetian Song" who lost her mind after her love died on their wedding day.^{xcix} Now the Venetian maiden raves from a convent, pressing her "pale cheek" through the bars unbelieving that her lover is dead. The truly heartbroken bride couldn't seem to keep living without her lover. The bride characters in "Rupert de Lindsay," "The

Banished,” “The Bride,” “Frank Lygon,” “The Sacrifice,” “Andmar:- A Story of Peru,” “The Old Arm Chair,” and “Menetto” all perished without their true loves.^c

This fictional characterization of the early bride, as pale, trembling, fainting and dying could certainly be argued as representing women as weak and dependent upon men for their happiness. However, this portrayal of the bride served other goals as well. The brides who died without their hearts’ true love were often being forced by a father, brother, or another male figure into marrying men they did not love. Therefore the deaths of these brides served to condemn the practice of arranged marriages that women didn’t want. In the story “Rupert de Lindsay,” Rupert’s beloved, Mary, was forced by her brother and father to marry a man she didn’t love.^{ci} When Rupert crashed the wedding to rescue Mary, she fainted from all the excitement, amid which Rupert was stabbed and died. Then,

Mary recovered from her swoon to see the weltering body of her lover before her, to be dragged by her brother over the very corpse into her former prison, and to relapse with one low and inward shriek into insensibility. For two days she recovered from one fit only to fall into another - on the evening of the third, the wicked had ceased to trouble, and the weary was at rest!^{cii}

After Mary’s death, her father and brother died too, the latter in prison. A similar story arc was found in “The Banished.”^{ciii} After Elizabeth’s husband, the king of Scotland, was murdered, one of the usurpers to the throne, Edmund, insisted that she marry him or all her people would be forced to leave Scotland. While a loyal male subject worked to bring down the usurpers, “pale” Elizabeth agreed to be Edmund’s bride. When the usurpers’ plot unraveled at the wedding, and the rightful man became

king, Elizabeth, whose heart had already burst from her husband's death, died on the spot.^{civ} The two men who essentially tried to blackmail her into marrying Edmund were harshly punished. One had his eyes put out and the other was buried in the chains he wore for the remainder of his life. While the early fictional brides of *The Lady's Book* could be dismissed for their trembling and fainting, their stories must be viewed with complexity. The brides themselves might have been victims of patriarchy, but the articles condemned a patriarchy that forced women to marry against their will.

Growing a Backbone: Godey's Brides from 1850-1870

The Lady's Book's fascination with the bride continued unabated during the middle of the nineteenth century through and after the years of the Civil War. Nonfiction pieces such as "Advice to a Bride" and "Ladies on the Point of Marriage" reinforced the ideas of separate spheres by advising brides on their job (not their husbands') of keeping up a happy domestic life.^{cv} During this time, *The Lady's Book* still assumed its readers were deeply interested in all things bridal, remarking in the nonfiction article "Bridal Finery" that bridal wear was "never uninteresting to a group of ladies, young or old."^{cvi} The bride in nonfiction pieces continued to be presented as occupying a role of importance, a role synonymous with rich fabrics and expensive gifts. "The Sister of the Sultan," described the lavish presents given to the bride for her wedding day, while an 1866 "Godey's Arm-Chair," publisher Louis Godey's column, asserted the bride's dress "must, of course, be of some rich white material."^{cvii} Before 1840, white was not the "of course" color for a wedding gown.^{cviii} Some revolutionary-era brides even wore red.^{cix} However, with the wedding of Queen Victoria in 1840, for which she donned a white

gown, white became *the* color for wedding dresses.^{cx} By the end of the nineteenth century a white wedding gown “was the preferred garment for elite and upper-middle-class brides on both sides of the Atlantic.”^{cxii}

In one of his columns, Godey also remarked that “one of the most important epochs of a woman’s life [is] to arrange, order, and make up her wedding outfit,” a familiar message to women today, two hundred and forty plus years later.^{cxii} An interest in international brides also remained during *The Lady’s Book’s* middle years, as seen in the nonfiction pieces “Marriage in Russia” and “Concerning Rings and Precious Stones” which included information on bridal traditions among French royals.^{cxiii}

However, fictional brides in the middle decades of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* revealed a marked change from their earlier counterparts. Perhaps the most noticeable change among the fictional brides of *The Lady’s Book* was the increase in brides that lived. Even without their husbands or true loves, brides were not so readily dropping dead from heartbreak. Brides became survivors who lived to love again. Minnie in “The Thrice-Wedded” and the bride (no name required) of the poem “Twice a Bride” married more than once.^{cxiv} “Twice a Bride” was published in 1869, four years after the end of the Civil War. During the war, an estimated 750,000 soldiers perished from battle and disease while civilian deaths were much lower.^{cxv} No doubt, many women widowed by the war were twice brides.

Alice Lee, the young mother and widow of “The Two Doctors of Oldbury,” survived the death of her first husband and took an active role in determining her own happiness.^{cxvi} Despite thinking “she would never wish to marry again,” she attracted two doctors as suitors.^{cxvii} Alice consented to marry Dr. Carter, but then realized he was only

after her money, her child disliked him and she herself didn't truly love him. Instead of sitting back and accepting her fate, Alice hatched a scheme to get Dr. Carter to break off the engagement himself. Her plan succeeded and Alice made a "beautiful bride" the second time around to the doctor she did love, Dr. Parker.^{cxviii}

Other brides in these middle years of *The Lady's Book* also began to fight back against their oppressors instead of passing out or dying. In a script meant for acting charades, the tale of Fannie, the ward of Mr. Credulous, was conveyed.^{cxix} Fannie loved Frank, but Mr. Credulous refused Frank's request for Fannie's hand so that he could marry her. Fannie's preference didn't seem to matter. She wasn't allowed to leave the house without her guardian, and he forbade Frank, her beloved, from the house. Instead of submitting to the marriage or dying on the spot, Frank, Fannie and Fannie's maid, Mattie, tricked Mr. Credulous and the couple escaped and eloped.^{cxx}

Brides also faced and endured other hardships. In the stories "Life's Contrasts" and "A Heroine of Today" both bride characters lost their wealth and worked in order to survive.^{cxxi} In another fiction piece, "Effie Stanley," Effie took on work as a seamstress to support her family after her father lost his property.^{cxii} Despite a soft upbringing,

Effie never murmured or complained; her dearest wish was to see her beloved parent free from the necessity of pursuing that employment for which her feeble health so unfitted her; and, with this object ever before her, day after day the devoted daughter plied her needle as contentedly as if she had never known any other condition in life.^{cxiii}

Effie's uncomplaining dedication to work and family earned her a place as the "fair bride" of Clarence Hamilton, who just happened to be wealthy. Female characters who

worked in the *Lady's Book* toiled in jobs appropriate for women, teacher, governess, seamstress, before being returned to their proper social standing via marriage.^{cxxiv} In the mid-nineteenth century, rising class consciousness and “the increasing visibility of a class of permanent waged workers during and after the Civil War” posed a genuine problem for the middle and upper classes of the United States and Europe.^{cxxv} But, America’s unique system of fluid class mobility allowed those tensions to be somewhat managed.^{cxxvi} Literature hinted at class conflict through characters like Effie Stanley, whose transformation took “the problem of the material inequities of class and sets it aside, producing, through the turn to gender, a woman who by meeting the gendered specifications of the middle class gains its material comforts as well.”^{cxxvii} Note that Effie didn’t go work in a factory to support herself, because the “factory operative or the mill girl” were characters “whose gender cannot save them from the ravages of class.”^{cxxviii} Domestic novels of the era and clearly *Godey's Lady's Book* as well, preferred stories such as Effie’s whose perfect performance of the feminine roll gained her reentry to the upper class and kept the myth of easy class mobility intact.

Working Women and the Rise of the Villainess: Late 19th Century Brides in

Godey's

By 1870 the nonfiction bride was relatively unchanged. She was still “fair” and concerned with the domestic sphere.^{cxxix} Women were warned to “keep a sharp eye on the cook” and conduct “a careful study of the cookery book” to make the home attractive to their husbands.^{cxix} Ladies were also advised to use tact to get what they wanted from their husbands and not act out of “sheer stupidity.”^{cxix} Nonfiction pieces on wedding

traditions such as bridal wreaths and rings, continued to assume readers were always interested in all things bridal.^{cxxxii}

However, the fictional brides of *The Lady's Book* developed much further than their nonfiction counterparts. The trembling, dependent, swooning, fictional brides of the early nineteenth-century *Lady's Book* were essentially nowhere to be found. The depiction of fictional brides as hard-working women continued, a characterization that refuted the ideology of separate spheres. Rosy of "The Ruggles Family" started a business as a dressmaker to support her family and pitched in with the heavy work around the farm such as sawing wood.^{cxxxiii} Her brother "admiringly" told her she was as "handy as a man."^{cxxxiv} When Rosy became a bride, it was unclear whether she would continue to work or not. Working women characters increasingly appeared in *Godey's* fiction and they also existed in reality. Some nineteenth-century women worked outside the home, even if only a few years before marrying, and most women worked inside the home.^{cxxxv} Before the Civil War, roughly ten percent of women worked outside the home, a number that would continue to increase throughout the century.^{cxxxvi}

Brides were often portrayed as courageous when tested by family misfortune, financial ruin, illness and war. In the story "Light out of Darkness," the two main female characters, Lillian and Rose, were engaged when their father's business went under.^{cxxxvii} Both cheerfully (yes, cheerfully) turned to domestic and farm work to keep the family afloat and nobly refused to marry sooner than planned just to avoid poverty. In the story, two young women of another ruined family did become brides to avoid living in reduced circumstances and both ended up miserable. That a woman should marry for love not ease of life is clear here, and the bride emerged as a courageous woman who was not

afraid to roll up her sleeves. In the story “The Spy of the Delaware,” which took place during the American Revolution, Martha displayed a different type of courage and took life-threatening risks.^{cxxxviii} She bravely hid one of George Washington’s men, a spy, in her house, while her uncle entertained “odious” Hessians.^{cxxxix} She played along as hostess and helped detain a Hessian to aid Washington’s soldier. Her bravery and patriotism led her to be the “promised bride” of the spy.^{cxl}

Other female characters in *The Lady’s Book*’s fictional bride stories also emerged as full-fledged villains. In the magazine’s early decades, a story’s villains were often men, such as the men trying to force brides to marry without love. While female characters who would be classified as villainous due to the fact that they work against the hero or heroine of the story appeared in *The Lady’s Book*’s earlier years, women with teeth (sharp ones too) really emerged during these last decades of the magazine’s publication. One such villain was Maud in the fiction piece “Retribution.”^{cxli} Maud schemed with the help of her brother to get a man, Percival, to marry her though he loved another, Gertrude. Maud’s plan was successful, and she became Percival’s bride. Years later, after thinking her husband was dead, Maud hunted down Gertrude to taunt her with the story of how she stole Percival from Gertrude. Not necessarily a flattering portrayal of a bride or a woman, however, female villains also displayed female agency. Women became actors in the stories, not just pieces manipulated by male characters. Even jilted Gertrude forged her own path to happiness by marrying a man she cared for before becoming the bride of Percival later in life.

Despite widening depictions of the bride, women were still being defined by their relationship to marriage during the 1800s. In “A Stray Valentine” the heroine’s

unmarried aunts were described as “neglected and lonely old maids,” and in “Licensed to Marry” an unmarried aunt was described as a “spinster,” an “old maid,” and was openly ridiculed.^{cxlii} The most poignant example of this may be “An Old Maid’s Autobiography.”^{cxliii} The narrator described her unmarried status in unflattering terms such as “unloved” and “lonely old woman.”^{cxliv} Clearly, fulfilling the role of the bride was still highly valued.

Recurring Themes

Several bridal themes stayed constant throughout the magazine’s run. Two of these were the contrast between the good bride and the bad bride and the characterization of the bride as beautiful. The fact that many bad girls in *The Lady’s Book* still got to be brides was perhaps a function of the times, and was an instance where the media reflects the culture. Most women in nineteenth-century America married at some point in their lives. Therefore, it makes sense that the female characters written by men and women of this time would often marry.

Good brides maintained a very distinct set of qualities, and these led them to the role of happy brides. Good brides were always moral in their actions and words, willing to put up with suffering rather than act dishonorably. For instance, in editor Sarah Hale’s 1837 story “The Love Marriage,” the bride, Ellen, preferred to adopt a lower status and marry for love, rather than marry a man for money.^{cxlv} She and her husband found happiness working together toward the same goals. Sixty-two years later, the morality of the good bride remained strong. In “On the Other Side of Jordan: A Hebrew Love Story,” Lengela would have rather lived without her true love than act immorally by marrying the

man her mistress loved.^{cxlvi} Luckily, for Lengela her mistress's immorality shone through and Lengela's moral resolve was rewarded with the role of happy bride. Good brides never went after wealth and often communicated a disdain for money. Lizzie, the bride of 1844's "The Awakened Heart" demonstrated an indifference to her loss of fortune and became "lovelier than ever" as the bride of a poorer man.^{cxlvii} Decades later, Rose of "Light Out of Darkness" was downright happy to leave behind society and fortune and live and toil in the country.^{cxlviii}

Good brides were characterized as educated or as being intelligent. An early bride, Alice in "A Sketch of Fashionable Life: A Tale" liked to read, and the nonfiction brides many years later of "The Women Who Dared" were described as having "keen" and "fine" intellects and being "well educated."^{cxlix} The lauding of an intelligent and educated mind for a female in the *Lady's Book*, fictional or real, was a legacy of editor Sarah Hale's insistence on education for women. It makes sense that Hale would choose or sometimes author pieces that not only portrayed women as educated but that portrayed education for women as beneficial.

Bad brides, who wound up unhappy brides, emerged around the middle of *The Lady's Book's* run as women were emerging as villains. Once the bad bridal figure emerged, she could be found throughout the magazine's remaining years. Bad brides were immoral, selfish and mean. They went to any lengths to get what they wanted regardless of the cost to others' happiness or their own reputation. Bad brides sought wealth over love and were always plotting to get a man, often from the good bride of the story. An example of bad bride can be found in "An Old Maid's Autobiography." In the story, Minnie's friend Josephine plotted behind her back, forged letters, and stole

Minnie's intended in order to marry rich.^{cl} But Josephine got her just desserts. A few months after stealing Minnie's man, she was in a train accident and confessed to Minnie, "Doctor Wilmer and I did not live happily together [...] for we never loved each other. He knew that I had married him for his money."^{cli}

Tellingly, good or bad, fiction or nonfiction, the bride was often described as possessing physical beauty. Brides were beautiful, young, fair, tender, lovely, bonny, beauteous, and pretty. The fictional bride of "The Fate of Duke de Biron" had beauty that "burst forth into a flower, and a flower of most transcendent loveliness," as well as possessing "innocent imploring eyes" and "bright fair hair."^{clii} Sometimes the bad bride's physical beauty was greater than the good bride's, but her lack of inner beauty always cost her in the end. In the nonfiction piece "The Female Costume in the Reign of Henry the IV" the sister who possessed the lesser beauty but most prudence ended up a bride.^{cliii} In the fictional piece "An Uncrowned Queen," the character Augusta was a bad bride.^{cliv} She was prideful and valued money over love, ending up the bride of a much older man. Yet, she had great outward beauty: "Augusta, the eldest daughter, had been walking on the piazza [...] drawing the attention of all the passersby to her grace and beauty."^{clv} Violet, Augusta's sister and a less conspicuous beauty, ended up a happy bride in the end because of her sound morals. Physical beauty was attributed to almost all of the brides. So, morality gave good brides their edge, which was in keeping with the century's idea that women were supposed to be moral. Outward beauty was important for *Godey's* brides, but in the nineteenth century, it wasn't enough.

Additionally, the character of the orphan bride appeared often in the *Lady's Book* sample and throughout the magazine's run. Roughly thirty-six out of 217 brides were

orphaned and all orphaned brides were confined to fiction.^{clvi} Orphan brides were not notably different from non-orphaned brides other than the fact they were orphaned. Orphan brides were usually attractive, such as Maggie in the story “The Mystic Cave,” who was described as having “large blue eyes,” “a fair brow” and “scarlet lips” which of course made for a “beautiful bride.”^{clvii} Even the orphan brides less fortunate in the looks department either became beautiful later in life or were at least attractive to their husbands.^{clviii} Like non-orphaned brides, some orphan brides worked, some didn’t, and despite being orphaned, brides without parents still found the means to be educated.

So, why the recurrence of orphan brides? According to Marilyn Holt, the literary orphan “was one of the most popular figures in literature of the 1800s,” and orphans and their care were prominent issues in nineteenth-century America.^{clix} In the first few decades of the century, epidemics including cholera and yellow fever left children without one or both parents and the second half of the century with civil war, an increase in immigration and visible poverty further increased the number of children in need of care.^{clx} Solutions were mixed. The nineteenth century saw an explosion in the number of orphanages and marked the beginning of the orphan trains, the practice of shipping orphans out West to help fulfill the labor shortage.^{clxi}

The literature of the century was in tune with the plight of orphans and the orphan brides in *The Lady’s Book* certainly reflected a literary trend. Orphans in literature also personified the moral tone of the century. Holt writes, “literary orphans were sentimental subjects, the stuff of which not dreams, but morals were made. Stories and poems routinely portrayed the orphan who, after much suffering, received his reward. The reward often came as death, with the suffering child finally at peace after a world of

troubles.”^{clxii} Literary orphans who did not perish were often saved by an adult and sometimes discovered they were part of the gentry or not even orphans at all. For the orphan brides of *The Lady’s Book* however, marriage was most often the reward for honorable suffering. Mary, the moral orphan of “Heel and Toe” worked hard as a seamstress to earn money for books to educate herself with.^{clxiii} She was “fond” of her needlework, and her humble cottage was a “miracle of neatness.”^{clxiv} Later as a schoolteacher, Mary’s intelligence, looks and ladylike manners caught the eye of Roland Rivers, who was, of course, handsome, rich, and smart. A jealous rival for Roland had Mary fired from her teaching job, which she nobly accepted. No matter, Roland proposed and the two married. In the nineteenth century morality was part of women’s sphere and the orphan brides, such as Mary, were another embodiment of this sphere. They were moral in their actions and were rewarded as brides. Caring for the home and family were also part of women’s work, and it should be pointed out that an orphaned bride, with no family of her own, could more completely devote herself to her husband and his family. In this aspect, the orphan bride may have been the ideal bride.

Conclusion

Dismissed in the past by some scholars for containing “drive!”^{clxv} *The Lady’s Book* was a rich place to understand brides, women, and the world they were living in during the nineteenth century in America. Returning to the research question, (how was the bride portrayed in *The Lady’s Book* throughout its publication?) we found that the bride was portrayed in complicated and evolving ways. Early brides were pale, swooning, trembling and often perished or went mad without the men they loved. These brides

eventually gave way to hard-working brides, resistant brides, and even villainess brides, each of which granted women more agency within the narrative. *The Lady's Book's* brides also challenged practices such as arranged marriages by condemning male characters that forced women into marrying. Despite the ways brides from *The Lady's Book* resisted, some bridal characterizations were confining. *The Lady's Book's* brides, good or bad, were almost always beautiful, emphasizing the importance of physical beauty for women, especially women who married. Women were also continually referred to as brides even after they married, showing how the role of the bride became a woman's identity. However, building on Hume and McCall's studies of women in *The Lady's Book*, this study of the magazine's brides further showed that nineteenth-century women weren't simply toiling away submissively in their separate spheres. Just like in the outside world, the fictional brides of *The Lady's Book* began to work outside the home. Reforms in laws, such as the Married Woman's Property Act, allowing married women to keep their own wages and inherit property, were also part of the changing culture for women in the time these stories were written.^{clxvi} While certainly not a feminist publication, especially by twenty-first-century feminist media studies standards, the influence of nineteenth century feminism could be seen in the magazine by the bride's evolution.

In keeping with a feminist media studies outlook, one thing that must be asked of *The Lady's Book's* brides is who is missing? *The Lady's Book* was a mainstream publication targeted at white middle-class women published during a time when women were expected to marry. It is not surprising then that nearly all of the brides are young, white, middle-class or wealthy women. However, the magazine and its articles were not

insulated from the social issues of the time. Poverty was dealt with in fictional stories. A number of bride characters in *Godey's* were subjected to poverty when their fathers lost their fortunes. The plight of factory workers, a severe economic depression midcentury, and The Civil War, "which overwhelmed the "capacity of individual states to finance the war effort and manage their economies" certainly made poverty an inescapable social issue of the century.^{clxvii} The tales conveniently ended with the bride marrying and returning to her previous class position in society or an elevated one, but the threat of poverty was present in *The Lady's Book*.

Race is another issue found in the bride stories of *The Lady's Book*. None of the fictional black characters were brides, except for one, in the story "A Tale of New Orleans."^{clxviii} The heroine, Julia, had two white men in love with her. Both wanted to marry her despite a secret known only to her father and the two men. One of the young men finally told her, "Julia, you are a quadroon!"^{clxix} Julia died from poor health and a broken heart (at learning the secret) before she decided whom she loved and fulfilled the role of the bride. It was a safe ending for a story about two white men wanting to marry a mixed-race woman in spite of her racial heritage. The author also provided a footnote to the story: "It is well known that some of the most beautiful and accomplished women are among this rejected caste," a seemingly bold statement for 1845 America, a time when slavery was in existence and the fear of miscegenation was used to argue against abolition.^{clxx} Despite being a mainstream conservative publication, this anomaly showed that the writers and readers of *The Lady's Book* were not immune to the outside sphere and were grappling with the pressing social issues of the time.

Feminist media studies and cultural studies allowed us to see the brides of *The Lady's Book* with complex eyes. The publication was not feminist for sure. One article decried, “what would the ladies do? Who would care for them?” about women pursuing the right to vote.^{clxxi} Women’s identities as characters in, contributors to or correspondents with the magazine revolved around their marital status. Also, the assumption that a woman would marry and fulfill the bridal role was thrust upon readers. The publication assumed women were interested in all things bridal and that if they weren’t already married they were “no doubt on the eve” of marriage.^{clxxii} These assumptions demonstrated the way that through an entire century, the role of the bride was still *the* role for women. However, we’ve seen the ways the brides of *The Lady's Book* and the magazine’s publication itself resisted completely constricting ideas about women, such as refuting the ideology of separate spheres. The bride stories of *The Lady's Book* also grappled with other social issues of the era such as race and slavery. Despite being a mainstream publication, *The Lady's Book* included stories such as “A Tale of New Orleans,” with its mixed-race heroine and the story, “The Spy of the Delaware,” where the bride character aids a runaway slave, in its pages, allowing the dominant ideas about race to be called into question. So while depictions of the brides were constraining to women in some ways, hegemony is never complete, and working brides, educated brides and even villainous brides refuted the dominant ideology of the nineteenth century.

Finally, the brides of *The Lady's Book* provide an interesting foil for the media brides we see today. Unlike today’s television series that revolve around big weddings and brides with larger-than-life attitudes, the brides of *The Lady's Book* were often reserved, and some had quiet or even secret weddings. Toward the end of the nineteenth

century we saw the first inklings of the modern wedding take controversial hold. In 1895 a columnist lamented the growth of ostentatious weddings, charging wealthy people to lead wedding reform because “if it were no longer fashionable to make such a public display at such a time, no would want to do it.”^{clxxiii} Clearly this reform for smaller weddings did not succeed and the brides of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* gave way to the bride of the twentieth century, the consumer bride.

Chapter 3

“Back Comes the Bride:” The Brides of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, 1930-1955

“The really successful woman is the woman who marries the right man.”^{clxxiv}

In a 1946 article about wedding etiquette, the *Ladies’ Home Journal* addressed the bride: “If you are a bride—then this is your day of days, the day when all eyes and admiration are focused on you. You want to be lovely, but everything must be smooth as satin—bridal satin that is.”^{clxxv} This small example from the *Journal* hinted at several of the themes surrounding the bride’s portrayal in the magazine during this chapter’s time frame, 1930-1955. This snippet emphasized that the role of the bride was *the* role of roles for women, that being physically “lovely” was important for the bride, and that certain material things had become fully integrated into the production of being a bride and having a wedding, i.e. bridal satin. But, there was also a subtext of warning in this tidbit as well. “Everything must be smooth as satin...” or else, the *Journal* hints. In that unwritten “or else” was the threat of not having the perfect wedding, and perfection was important for the *Ladies’ Home* bride for multiple and surprising reasons.

Throughout the nineteenth century in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, the figure of the bride evolved. She transformed from weeping weakling to a survivor, a worker. However, picking up the portrayal of the bride roughly thirty-five years later in the mass circulating women’s magazine *Ladies’ Home Journal*, might leave one wistful for the brides of the

Lady's Book. In the last of the early years of the twentieth century through its middle decades, the figure of the bride seemed to predate the active brides of the *Lady's Book*.

This chapter examined the bride in the *Ladies' Home Journal* during a twenty-five-year period, 1930 to 1955. This era was selected purposefully to capture the pivotal years of the Second World War in an attempt to determine if the war's affect on American women's lives could be detected in the magazine's representation of the bride. The questions guiding this chapter were: How was the bride portrayed before, during and after World War II in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and was the war reflected in her representation?

The frameworks of feminist media studies and cultural studies brought an interesting lens to a magazine and a time period in American history often considered quite un-feminist. Feminists such as Betty Friedan have famously criticized this era and women's magazines, including the *Journal*, for cultural limitations placed on American women. Friedan's landmark work, *The Feminine Mystique*, identified a "problem that has no name," in a culture that idealized the roles of housewife and mother for women, roles she believed could be narrow and limiting, and many of the articles in the *Journal* used for this chapter felt quite rooted in the dominant ideology.^{clxxvi} But, "the hegemonic system is not hermetically sealed; it leaks," and an ideology that aimed to keep women in domestic roles leaked on the pages of the *Journal* and out in the world.^{clxxvii} American women's progress didn't fall completely dormant between suffrage and the second wave. While admitting that "popular culture in the 1950s routinely denigrated women's interests in anything outside of the home and emphasized competition between women for male attention," Kathleen Laughlin cautions against relying on the wave theory of

feminist activism in America, in part because of its neglect of the years between 1920 and the 1960s.^{clxxviii} During the years in between “waves,” women still worked for women’s interests, even if they didn’t always identify as feminists.^{clxxix} Yes, Friedan identified a real malaise in the lives of middle class American women, but our theoretical frameworks allow us to complicate understandings of the dominant culture, such as with the brides of *Ladies’ Home Journal*.

While not looking specifically at the bride, others have studied the *Journal*’s portrayals of women during the time period this chapter takes on. Women and work was a prominent and contentious issue in this era and is important for understanding the bride, as women were often expected to stop working upon marrying. Jane Marcellus examined the representation of married working women in popular magazines including *Ladies’ Home Journal* during the interwar years captured in this sample. She noted the *Journal* portrayed wed working women ambivalently, sometimes praising and other times problematizing them.^{clxxx} In another study, examining multiple magazines’ representation of female secretaries, also in the interwar years, Marcellus found representations in *Ladies’ Home* sometimes showed female secretaries in a positive light as, “competent, well-read women whose initiative would lead to success,” but such representations were rare.^{clxxxi}

Women’s roles in times of war, which encompasses the issue of women working, is another topic scholars have examined in *Ladies’ Home*. In an essay on the *Journal*’s 1943 WINS (Women in National Service) campaign, James Kimble found the *Journal*’s prescription for femininity underwent a change in wartime.^{clxxxii} Kimble argued the *Journal*’s traditional white middle-class domesticity expanded as women’s roles

expanded on the home front.^{clxxxiii} WINS materials touted “feminine empowerment in stark contrast to the traditional submissiveness of the *Journal*’s pre-WINS issues.”^{clxxxiv} However, Kimble pointed out that the *Journal*’s WINS campaign was limited because it stressed the changes in women’s roles was temporary and that WINS recruits needed to maintain their femininity.^{clxxxv}

Even as American society reneged on the promise of women’s advancement in the aftermath of World War II, Kimble found the *Journal*’s encouragement of women’s involvement in peacemaking, through the magazine’s reframing of the former enemy, was a way for empowered women to continue to assert themselves post-war: “By tacitly suggesting that their readers feel compassion, adopt sufferance, and experience identification toward the defeated enemy survivors, *LHJ*’s editors were thus bestowing upon American women an important opportunity to help create peace.”^{clxxxvi} A friendly tone toward international war brides in the *Journal* holds with Kimble’s findings of encouraging readers to feel compassion and identification with the former enemy, as some of the war brides in the sample were from Italy and Japan.

However, others have found that the post-war *Journal* promoted women’s domesticity rather than women’s empowerment. Friedan’s seminal book has already been mentioned, and she is not alone in finding that women’s magazines of the era heralded housework and home life for women. In a study of *Ladies’ Home Journal*’s 1946 content, Sarah Odland found the *Journal* celebrated domesticity and especially motherhood for women. The *Journal* played into the reassertion of traditional values for women portraying “white middle class mothers, aided by the advice of experts, protecting the future of American democracy through the performance of selfless, hands-on

mothering.”^{clxxxvii} In a study of the *Journal*’s changing heroines starting in the 1950s, Janice Hume found the *Journal*’s 50s’ heroines to be housewives. With men home from war and the Cold War waging, Hume writes “society needed the wife and mother at home, and while many women did enter the workforce in the 1950s, the housewife heroine reflected America’s hope for safety and economic prosperity.”^{clxxxviii} The *Journal*’s encouragement of domesticity for women through the celebration of housewives and mothers was important for contextualizing the value of the bridal role for women. In the mid-twentieth century, the only (socially accepted) path to the roles of mother and homemaker was through the role of the bride. Clearly, being a wife, mother and homemaker were highly prized. The role of the bride was important for its own reasons to be discussed later, but because of the era’s valuing of the wife, mother, and housekeeper roles for women, the role of the bride was already valuable by default.

Advertisements featuring images of women during the years examined here have also been studied. Charles Lewis and John Neville examined images of women in advertising for the years, 1940, 1943 and 1946 in the magazines *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life* and *Ladies’ Home Journal*. During the war years advertising images of wage-earning working women increased, while images of women not in occupational roles decreased. After the war, however, images of working women decreased to pre-war levels.^{clxxxix} Interestingly though, images of women as homemakers and mothers remained relatively stable throughout the years Lewis and Neville examined.

Complicating Friedan’s and others’ readings of the era’s women’s magazines is Eva Moskowitz’s study of *Ladies’ Home* and other mid-20th century women’s magazines. Moskowitz challenged the status of Cold War era women’s magazines as antifeminist

symbols.^{cxc} She argued, “month after month women’s magazines reported the difficulties women encountered in realizing the satisfaction that marriage and motherhood supposedly guaranteed.”^{cxc} While Moskowitz credited Friedan’s work with being innovative, she maintained women’s magazines *did* highlight the difficulty women had in “conforming to domesticity and their difficulty securing happiness.”^{cxc}

American Women in the 1930s

In her book on American women in the 1930s, Susan Ware wrote, “decades have a convenient way of compartmentalizing the past. Labels like the Twenties, the Fifties, or the Sixties immediately suggest a certain interpretive framework.”^{cxc} While Ware warned of the dangers of oversimplifying decades, she pointed out the 1930s, bookended by the stock market crash of 1929 and the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, had a certain cohesion due to the “gravest economic crisis the United States has ever faced.”^{cxc} The Great Depression and its fallout echoed loudly through the decade for all Americans. The Dust Bowl and the plummeting farm prices plagued farmers. Unemployment in cities saw people in threadbare clothes and suffering from starvation.

Of course the Great Depression had consequences for women’s lives as well. Ware asserts for the typical middle class American woman, the stock market crash made life hard but not “uniformly bleak.”^{cxc} The average American woman didn’t lose her trust fund or end up in a Hooverville.^{cxc} The typical woman still had a husband working but for much less money. Middleclass housewives, who budgeted most of the money, had to make do on a lot less. Old coats were relined with blankets and day-old bread became the norm.^{cxc}

Despite the high rate of unemployment in the 1930s, affecting between 12 and 15 million workers at its 1933 peak, almost 25 percent of women worked outside the home during the decade.^{cxviii} Shifting social attitudes in the 1920s, due in part to women's suffrage, and economic expansion brought on by the First World War, led women's numbers in the workplace to rise.^{cxix} However, after WWI some women were ousted from jobs for returning soldiers.^{cc} When the Depression hit, women's work outside the home became a necessity for some.^{cci} This work, however, was often menial, grueling, underpaid and accompanied with a heaping side of hostility. About one fifth of white women toiled in factories and a third as domestic workers.^{ccii} Nine out of ten black women worked as agricultural workers, and about two thirds of all domestic servants were black.^{cciii} Domestic work and factory work were notorious for not paying living wages, and women were rarely paid the same as men.^{cciv} Public hostility to women working stemmed from various places. Some believed women took jobs from men, others that women working went against rightful female roles.^{ccv} For many, no matter how many women worked, women ultimately still belonged in the home, and working for wages challenged the idea that caring for the family was a woman's true job.

This hostility toward women working could be seen in the literature of the era. Laura Hapke argued that writers in the 1930s "reinforced a disturbingly regressive perception of the feminine role," as the public debated if women should work.^{ccvi} The negative feeling aimed at women working outside the home was even greater toward married working women.^{ccvii} This hostility "became public policy when Section 213 of the 1932 Federal Economy Act declared that in federal staff reductions, workers married to other federal employees would be the first to lose their jobs," resulting in the

termination of many married women.^{ccviii} However the public felt about women workers, American women, married and unmarried, have always worked. Women have worked inside the home, as unpaid domestic laborers, and outside the home as well, and as the twentieth century progressed, their numbers working outside of the home continued to grow.

Women, War and its Aftermath

On December 7, 1941 bombs rained down on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor killing and wounding thousands. Perhaps inevitably, the United States had been pulled into World War II. As men were called to arms, women were called to work. As the image of Rosie the Riveter appeared to encourage women into industrial jobs, a mother and daughter in coveralls graced the cover of the *Ladies' Home Journal* as part of its WINS campaign.^{ccix} Women's roles were expanding outside the home. At the height of the "wartime industrial production 2 million women were working in war-related industries," and women also worked in jobs that were not directly related to the war.^{ccx} But, after the war, women were expected to return to the kitchen, and many of them were laid off in peacetime. Despite these layoffs, "by the late 1940s, a sustained and significant increase in women's labor force participation was underway, which would continue until the 1980s."^{ccxi}

Trying to "re-domesticate" middle class women took more than layoffs, and an ideology that celebrated domestic roles for women was called into play. As demonstrated in works like Friedan's and by other scholars who have studied women's magazines post-WWII, a cultural shift took place after the war touting the value of women's traditional

roles as wife, mother and homemaker. In this Cold War era, the family was to be “the bulwark of stability in a threatening time.”^{ccxii} Marriage was the path to this American family, and between 1940 and 1960, Americans married more and younger.^{ccxiii} Incomes were also on the rise, and there was more than ever to spend them on. Elaine Tyler May asserted consumption and the family, and the connection of the two, were ideologically important at this time. Consumption, specifically consumption for and by the family unit would help American defeat communism: “the ‘model’ home, with a male breadwinner and a full-time female homemaker, adorned with a wide array of consumer goods, represented the essence of American freedom.”^{ccxiv} It is of little surprise that the big white wedding took its consumer turn during this era as well: “A middle-class woman sought to acquire a diamond engagement ring and have a luxurious wedding, with gifts of silver, china, glass stemware, a toaster, and salad bowls [...] an opulent wedding was soon constructed as a social necessity.”^{ccxv}

About *Ladies’ Home Journal* and Method

The *Ladies’ Home Journal* got its start in 1883 and within three years reached a circulation of 400,000.^{ccxvi} Overlapping with and overtaking *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, by the turn of the century, *Ladies’ Home* became the first magazine with more than one million subscribers.^{ccxvii} Post World War II, *Ladies’ Home* maintained a circulation in the millions.^{ccxviii} Like *Godey’s*, *Ladies’ Home Journal* is not only an interesting site of study because of its impressive circulation. The magazine served as “a primary forum of public debates about women’s issues.”^{ccxix}

Unlike the neatly digitized *Godey's Lady's Book*, access to the *Journal* consisted of hard copy and microform. However, article titles were searchable digitally. A search for “bride” and “bridal” between the years 1930 and 1955 revealed forty articles. Because article titles and not content were searchable, a search for “marry” and “wedding” were also done, yielding a samples of eleven and thirty-five respectively. Some of the search results overlapped, putting the actual number of results for the four search terms at eighty. Ads unfortunately were not searchable digitally, but I felt they should be included. Therefore, a sort of snowball sampling method was used. As I pulled the articles the digitized search revealed, I also pulled the ads and other articles featuring brides surrounding those articles. This tactic revealed more about the use of the bride in the *Journal*, than the digitized search, limited to titles, allowed. The figure of the bride was used often to sell things, an important testimony to her cultural importance that I would have missed without the snowball technique. As I pulled articles, I digitized them with the use of my iPad. The list of articles and ads in the sample totaled 107. However, one headache of studying history reared its head when I went to pull the items determined by the digitized search, missing pages. Therefore, taking into account missing articles and those, once read deemed irrelevant, the final sample analyzed and used for this chapter was one hundred articles and ads.

Analysis

One title in this sample summed up the importance of being a bride in the *Ladies' Home Journal* during this time period perfectly: “The most important day in your Life.”^{CCXX} All other themes that emerged about the bride were rooted in this idea, and it

was an ideology that didn't waver throughout the time period. Being a bride was the most important role a woman could ever play. It was the day a girl, yes, a girl, "is the center of everything. She had the star role and the center of the stage."^{ccxxi} As a bride, it was her, "day of days."^{ccxxii} Because a bride's wedding day was the highlight of her life, she had to be beautiful and she had to consume certain things in order for her time as the bride to be perfect. The bridal role would also transform her. She would begin a new life as a woman. But, even in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, champion of domestic roles for women, sometimes that new life wasn't always what the bride imagined it would be.

The Beautiful Bride

Like the brides of the *Lady's Book*, the brides of *Ladies' Home Journal* were represented as physically beautiful throughout the sample's timeframe. Pre, during and post-WWII brides were "radiant," "lovely," "breath-taking," "perfect," and, of course, "beautiful."^{ccxxiii} Brides were also described as a "beauty," a "vision," as "pretty," and "exceptionally pretty."^{ccxxiv} While the bridal characteristic of physical beauty seemed to be unchanged since the nineteenth century, bridal beauty did take on an added dimension in this part of the twentieth century, bodily beauty. No longer was bridal beauty only the territory of the bride's face, but a bride's body and weight had become important as well.^{ccxxv}

In the 1946 article, "English Bride...American Beauty," Norma Domina, a British war bride, was described as "young, slim and pretty."^{ccxxvi} The article discussed Norma's interest in American beauty tips and tricks, but the *Journal* showed equal interest in Norma's body. The author wrote that her figure was "worth its weight in wishful

thinkers,” weighing in at only 108 pounds.^{ccxxvii} But, the *Journal* also noted that Norma once “weighed 138!”^{ccxxviii} And, yes, there was actually an exclamation point next to Norma’s previous weight, making the healthy 138 pounds read like half a ton. Despite being “slim” and “exceptionally pretty”^{ccxxix} the *Journal* noted about Norma that “there’s always room for improvement.”^{ccxxx} It turned out in the *Journal*’s eyes, you could actually be too thin, so a quart of milk a day, “should add the few pounds Norma needs and permit her to join the top ranks of ‘figure-conscious’ American girls.”^{ccxxxi}

In the article “War Brides Ten Years Later,” the *Journal* continued its interest in war brides and in women’s figures.^{ccxxxii} The article profiled women from different countries who married American servicemen during and after WWII. The five women profiled hailed from Belgium, France, Japan, England and Italy. Their bodies were described with words like “slender,” “delicate,” “petite,” and “small.”^{ccxxxiii} The “Roman beauty” from Italy, Mrs. Arthur Burcks, maintained her “size 10 figure she is still so proud of,” through a decade of marriage.^{ccxxxiv}

Fiction pieces were concerned with the bride’s body too. In the story, “Too Young to Marry,” one of the characters recalled weighing 98 pounds when she was a bride.^{ccxxxv} In another story, “Doctors Shouldn’t Marry” Jerry fell in love with Silver, the bride character. Jerry thought she was beautiful and “fragile—like a Venetian glass.”^{ccxxxvi} While Jerry was drawn to Silver’s slight figure, his Uncle found Silver “anemic-” looking.^{ccxxxvii} However, better to be slightly sickly thin and get to be a bride, as Silver did, than be too plump and miss out on the chance. The danger of not possessing a beautiful body was warned against in a 1940 cartoon advertising Ry-Crisp wafers. The cartoon showed a plump woman clutching flowers and crying into a handkerchief on the

steps of a church in a wedding gown and veil. A slim couple was shown walking away with the word bubble, “Someone ought to tell her about Ry-Krisp,” coming from the tiny-waisted woman’s head.^{ccxxxviii} The copy read, “Don’t let ugly fat rob you of romance.” After all, the ad counseled, “a slim alluring figure is sure to win a man’s admiration,” which the reader saw, as the thin woman in the cartoon clearly had a man holding her arm.^{ccxxxix} If you don’t have that slim figure, this ad warned women, you’ll miss out on playing the most important role of our life. While this was an advertisement, clearly the *Journal* also endorsed this warning. *None* of the bride characters in the sample were overweight, negating the possibility that a non-thin bride could even exist.

While being beautiful was important for the *Ladies’ Home* bride, the *Journal* maintained that it was also important for the wife. The image of a bride on her wedding day was forever fixed in a husband’s mind, according to the *Journal*, and, “the bride, who by intelligent effort, keeps herself as close as possible to the sweet, groomed and gracious girl her husband married is wise,” advised one article.^{ccxl} One assumption was that as a bride a woman was her most beautiful. Sadly, love wasn’t enough to keep a man claimed the *Journal*. The bride also needed “tolerance, kindness and *beauty* [emphasis added],” to make married life work.^{ccxli} While it was part of a woman’s work to stay beautiful once she transitioned from bride to wife, *Ladies’ Home* warned against letting a husband in on too much of the beauty routine. Conduct that beauty routine in private the piece “Bridal Beauty” advised.^{ccxlii} After all, filing nails in front of the hubby should be grounds for divorce.^{ccxliii} Advertisements about bridal beauty also had an air of the confidential to them, as if the bride was letting readers in on her beauty secret. One ad for lotion drew women in with the words “How do Other Girls Get Married?” and employed the

confidential tactic. A small photo at the top of the advertisement showed a bride in a dress and veil embracing a young man, who we assume is her husband.^{ccxliv} On the other side of the bride stood another young man gazing at the couple. Behind the threesome an unsmiling young woman regarded them clearly wondering, “How do other girls get married?”^{ccxlv} Carol, it seemed, wasn’t in on the bride’s secret, yet. The ad’s copy revealed that, “men are attracted by a soft touch.”^{ccxlv} The next photo showed a smiling Carol lightly touching a man’s face. She learned, “soft hands play a lovely part” in becoming a bride and quickly snapped up a bottle of Jergens.^{ccxlvii} The lotion company used this ploy again in an ad emblazoned with the words, “I made the big play at the Army game!”^{ccxlviii} The young woman in the ad complained that the object of her affection always treated her like a sister, so she made a play for him by attending a cold, rainy game where he held her hands. Those hands were soft thanks to Jergens, and by the end of the night, she secured a marriage proposal. As they danced, the soon-to-be-bride looked over Jim’s shoulder at the camera with a smile.

Between advertisements and editorial content, the message that the bride should be beautiful, in face and body, was clear. Without possessing this type of beauty, a woman could not be a bride. Being a bride was simply equated with beauty, seen in the *Journal*’s ads, “Hair as beautiful as a bride’s;” stories, “I never before or since seen nothin’ so beautiful as her in that white dress;” and nonfiction articles, “another gift every woman should hope to bring to her husband is beauty.”^{ccxlix} Beauty was vital for brides and women, but its work had to be carried out invisibly. Brides were not only supposed to be beautiful but they were supposed to maintain the illusion that their beauty came

naturally because, “Men are idealists. They want to preserve illusions about women they love.”^{ccl}

The Bride as Consumer

By the mid-twentieth century, the bridal role had also clearly become a consumptive role. Fictional stories, advice columns and editorial pieces all hit upon the idea that to be a bride, a woman must consume certain material things regardless of the economic situation of the times. For instance, in 1934, as the country muddled through the Great Depression, the article “Marry in Haste? Not by a Budget,” asserted that “a fashionable New York wedding not long ago” had a \$25,000 budget.^{ccli} The article advised brides on how to have a perfect wedding on a smaller budget, but stressed that a perfect wedding “means budgeting time, energy and money.”^{cclii} Even with a smaller budget, the reader learned certain material things were a must for a woman to be a bride, including the dress, the flowers, engraved invitations, reception refreshments, linens, lingerie, silver and the bride’s trousseau.^{ccliii}

Even in wartime, the bride’s role was attached to things. In “Bombardier’s Bride,” a true story, Gladys Norwood’s wedding was canceled multiple times due to the unpredictable schedule of her enlisted fiancé.^{ccliv} When her fiancé called her to tell her the wedding had to be postponed yet again, Gladys’ reaction wasn’t sadness or frustration that her marriage to a man she loved was being put off. Instead, she said she “thought about my bridal gown and the church decorations and the invitations.”^{cclv} In the article “To the Bride,” Ann Batchelder wrote that “even if we *are* at war and things in our time are changing so fast and so much that we can’t keep up with many of them, weddings

must have all the beauty and gaiety and glamour it's possible to give them."^{cclvi}

Batchelder went on to provide recipes for the wedding reception meal and advised women to use the best and most shining silver, finest china and glass and loveliest clothes. Even in wartime, being a bride deserved the best of what was available.

Material things such as the cake, the flowers and the dress took on such importance during this chapter's timeframe that they sometimes superseded the event of the wedding. A cartoon from 1947 showed a woman admiring a wedding dress. Beside her, a saleswoman leaned against a counter with a dialogue bubble that read, "My advice is snap it up while it's in stock and *then* look for a husband."^{cclvii} In the fictional story "Wedding Present," the material things associated with the wedding were considered so vital that the bride character's younger sister, Cathy, sold her beloved pet horse so Cathy's parents could buy all the things that would make Sandra's wedding perfect.^{cclviii} Cathy's sacrifice was rewarded when Sandra's fiancé bought back the horse, but the message remained that it was the right thing to do, to sacrifice for the bride so she could have all that she "needs." After all, as Sandra and Cathy's mother reminded their father, for their daughter who was about to be a bride, it was the "most important thing in Sandra's life."^{cclix}

Consumption wasn't just important for being a bride on the actual day of the wedding. It could make or break a woman's chances of getting a ring on her finger in the first place. In the 1934 fictional story "Design for a Wedding" the bride character, Rosemary, called upon a dressmaker in Europe. She and her mother were in hard times financially, and her beau, untouched by the Depression, was coming to visit. Rosemary needed an expensive-looking wardrobe to catch her beau, Charley, for good. The clothes

worked their magic and Charley proposed. The idea that purchasing certain things would land you a husband was also employed in advertisements featuring brides. In a 1947 ad for Woodbury soap, a just-married couple, Beall Baldwin and Vincent Charles Turecamo, was featured. Amid photos from the couple's courtship and wedding, Vincent is quoted as saying about meeting Beall that, "her glow registered with me."^{cclx} The ad's copy pointed out, "See, girls? Cupid works fast, for girls with Woodbury-smooth sparkle!"^{cclxi} Consuming things was part of being a bride, but it was also part of getting to that role in the first place.

So, while consumption became a taken-for-granted aspect of being a bride in this era, it extended to the bride's family and friends as well. For a woman to properly be a bride, those around her had to be able and willing to consume. Despite the financial troubles of the 1930s, articles on showers for the bride abounded. In 1935's "May Showers bring June Brides," the *Journal* asserted, "of course every engaged girl is entitled to at least one shower, for there is no more pleasant and gracious way by which her intimate and dearest friends may show their interest in her future."^{cclxii} Forget the non-tangible ways a friend may show interest in or love for the bride, being a bride was about things now. Another article on decorating, "A Bride's Dining Room," suggested hiring a decorator to help coordinate all the gifts the bride would *naturally* receive from friends and family.^{cclxiii} Gifts were taken-for-granted to the point that it was acceptable to designate certain gifts to certain people. For instance, a lace tablecloth "was suggested for the dining-room token of the best friend."^{cclxiv} Assigning gifts resulted in "a minimum of useless wedding presents and a maximum of permanent reminders of real love and thoughtfulness."^{cclxv} A material item was apparently only a reminder of "real love" if it fit

into the predesigned decorating scheme. Of course, telling people what to give the bride (and bridegroom) has today become a normalized part of the wedding culture, also known as the wedding registry.

Equating affection for the bride with material things continued into the 1940s and 50s. In 1948, Ann Batchelder reminded May readers about “all the showers and parties you would be called upon to give,” as June was the month many women marry.^{cclxvi} In a 1950s article, “Wedding Special,” the trusty Batchelder reminded readers when a woman is getting married, “somebody has the responsibility of providing those special things that every bride deserves at her wedding and every guest expects.”^{cclxvii} In the mid-twentieth century, despite a financial depression and a second world war, the role of consumer became inseparable from the role of the bride. Being a bride became synonymous with the best of the best in material things. This quality of consumerism helped to give value to the bridal role in this era. Because the bridal role was so important, a woman needed to consume more than usual. Larger-than-life consumption helped mark the bride as special. In the article “Perfect Bridal Table” we saw just how special she had become. The host insisted on “the famous gold service of the Waldorf,” Astoria for the bride.^{cclxviii} The gold service “has been used for years in the entertaining of visiting royalty,” the *Journal* noted.^{cclxix} It seemed in America, where there was no actual royalty, being a bride was on par with being royal, an idea that would become all-too-familiar in the twenty-first-century bride’s expressed desire to be a princess for her wedding day.

The Bridal Role as Transformative

While readers of the *Journal* were repeatedly hit over their heads with the importance of beauty and consumption for the role of the bride in the mid-twentieth-century years, there was more to the bride than being pretty and spending lots of pennies. The bride was certainly valued in the *Journal* because being a bride meant a husband and that was a life goal. But, the bride was also a gateway role. It was the role that turned a girl into a woman, and for mid-century *Ladies' Home*, being a woman was a positive and desirable thing. Today, we arguably value youth above all else. American women spend thousands on creams, potions, lotions and surgical procedures to look young or even girlish. But, in the middle part of the twentieth century being a woman was something to celebrate.

In the story, "Quiet Family Wedding," the bride character, Connie, found herself experiencing a little cold feet the night before her wedding.^{cclxx} She snuck out of her family's house to the place she used to meet an old boyfriend, Jim, calling out his name as she arrived. Instead of finding her old boyfriend there, Connie stumbled upon her fiancé, Simon, who was none too pleased to find her looking for another man the night before their wedding. As the couple worked through what Connie was really feeling about the relationship, her fiancé told her, "I want to marry a woman, not a schoolgirl."^{cclxxi} Sneaking out to maybe take off with an ex-boyfriend was girlish. After a little morning adventure with her fiancé, Connie felt a transformation in her heart and committed to her fiancé, as a woman, not a girl, in love.

In the 1955 story, "The Bride's Sister," the bride role as transformative was found again. Ginger, the bride's sister, was feeling like an outsider with the hustle and bustle of

Caroline's wedding happenings.^{cclxxii} Ginger also felt that Caroline had, in a way, become lost to her. As a bride, Caroline belonged to the wedding, but Ginger sensed another change in Caroline as well. With the wedding approaching, Caroline had "these sudden, new powers."^{cclxxiii} Ginger felt as if Caroline could see into her heart, and "as the bride, Caroline knew a special, marvelous, womanly secret."^{cclxxiv} The reader saw Caroline's womanly wisdom play out in the story too. Caroline's ex-boyfriend, Bolly, was torn up over her impending marriage, and Caroline sent Ginger, still loyal to Bolly, to talk with him. Ginger and Bolly ended up on a date for Caroline's wedding, and Ginger realized Caroline, in her infinite bridal wisdom, sent her to Bolly.

Sometimes, as in "The Bride's Sister," the bride's transition from girl to woman was imbued with a sense of magic in the *Journal*. 1944's "The most important day in your Life" used mystical imagery to talk about the bride's transition into "a wonderful new life."^{cclxxv} The article conjured images of a "bride touched with silver glory," a "fairytale," and "heroes," in this case American servicemen.^{cclxxvi} In the 1952 poem "Wedding Eve" the bride walked out into a garden the night before her wedding. While there, the garden leaves whispered to her, "'Bridal' they whisper, 'love,' and / 'soon.'"^{cclxxvii} The bride cut three types of colorful flowers, but they magically turned white as they fell at her feet. In a 1942 poem, "Bride to Be" the bride was struck by the magic of everyday items that the role of the bride had infused with magical qualities: "She had not dreamed pots and pans could be / So shining; that an ordinary broom / Could seem a bit of a magic in a room. / She had not thought that she would ever see / Enchantment in white curtains."^{cclxxviii} The magical transition of woman to girl that being a bride brought about was clearly considered powerful.

These mystical characteristics of being a bride certainly referenced romantic love, “love has made small things in lawn and wool / And glass and wood and silver beautiful!”^{cclxxix} But, this magic transition was also about the physical act of love, sex, which wasn’t something I expected to find in the mid-twentieth-century *Ladies’ Home Journal*. The subtext of sex in the bride’s transition from girl to woman can be seen in the fictional story, “Flyin’ Chance for the Bride.” The bride character, Margy Loo, is set to get married when her fiancé, Dacy, told her to think over her decision to marry him one last time before the wedding that night. Dacy was a rather rough character, and he wanted to make sure Margy Loo was certain she wanted to spend her life with him. If she did choose to go through with the wedding, Dacy told her, “after tonight, you won’t be a girl no more.”^{cclxxx} Dacy was clearly referring to the wedding night. Of course, the assumption was that a girl who was not yet a bride was a virgin, which was problematic in its own ways. However, the change a bride goes through from girl to woman was shown in the *Journal* as a positive transition and this implied that women being sexually experienced (even just within the confines of marriage) was also a positive attribute.

Being a Bride is Magical, Married Life...Not So Much

While the bride role was sometimes shown in the *Journal* as a transformation instilled with magical qualities, life after being a bride was sometimes hinted at as less-than-ideal in both fiction and nonfiction pieces. Happiness was a quality almost always attributed to the bride on her wedding day in the *Journal*. The bride had “a glow in her eyes.” She was “radiant,” “happy,” and “smiling,” in her “moment of high triumph.”^{cclxxxi} It was taken for granted that being a bride was a happy matter for women. However,

some pieces in the sample offered glimpses into lives of brides-become-wives that weren't always shining and happy.

Perhaps the most telling example of this was the 1947 article "Would You Marry Your Husband Again?" While the *Journal* assured readers that four out of five married people would choose their same spouse again, *Ladies' Home* pointed out that even those who said they would choose the same spouse a second time around may "cherish a doubt" because of their lukewarm, "Well, I guess so response."^{cclxxxii} And, despite the magazine's general romanticizing of the bridal role and the wedding, this article asserted that, "women are a little more likely than men to be disappointed in marriage!"^{cclxxxiii} The article attempted to delve into why women might be less satisfied than men once the bridal gown was off and the wife hat on:

Women are inclined to think an undue share of the responsibilities falls on the wives; the majority of women think they lead a harder life than men; and they think their happiest years end sooner. Perhaps, too, they think a housewife's life is duller; an earlier JOURNAL survey found that the group of workers least likely to enjoy their jobs was—housewives!^{cclxxxiv}

While the exclamation points infused these statements with an air of surprise, as if the idea that a woman could possibly be unsatisfied as a wife and homemaker was shocking or unbelievable, this article still acknowledged the reality that not all women were happy as housewives. That reality was the one Friedan charged women's magazines with negating in this era, an assertion Moskowitz refuted. This piece in the sample supports both Friedan and Moskowitz. It acknowledged that women weren't necessarily satisfied as wives and homemakers, but the article's near anomaly status and backpedaling toward

the end upheld a glamorization of the bride, wife and mother roles for women. After acknowledging that housewifery was the least happy profession for women, the article warned,

if you value your happiness, think twice before you join the minority who think they married the wrong person. Or if you already believe you made a bad choice, think about it some more [...] remember that the great majority of all adults—men and women, married and single, widowed and divorced—consider marriage more important to a woman’s happiness than a home, or a job, or friends, or plenty of money, or even children.^{cclxxxv}

So despite recognizing some women’s dissatisfaction with married life and housewifery, this reality was brushed away with the advice to “think about it some more,” because marriage was the real key for women’s happiness, of course.

Fiction too touched on the idea that life was not always perfect once the bridal satin was packed away. In the fictional story, “Silver Wedding,” a married man, Henry, took his wife, Gertrude, out for their 25th wedding anniversary. Their plans were almost derailed by their grown daughter, Ginny, who wanted Gertrude to babysit. Annoyed by his daughter, Henry unfavorably compared daughter to wife. Henry thought Ginny wasteful in getting a master’s degree (a contrast to the valuing of education for *Lady’s Book* brides) and Gertrude wonderful in always looking clean, never drab, and keeping the house effortlessly tidy for years without a housekeeper. The reader could easily pick up on which sort of bride was the better example. Despite Henry’s reminiscing on Gertrude’s beautiful walk, narrow face, and housekeeping skills and showering her with a white dress, a night out, and flowers, Gertrude gave a different take on the marriage. The

readers glimpsed the Gertrude who, “in secret shed lakes of tears” about Henry’s past infidelities.^{cclxxxvi} When Henry told Gertrude there was never any woman but her she thought him a “dear liar!”^{cclxxxvii} Discussing men’s infidelity, which other stories in the *Journal* did too, seemed to work against the idea that being a bride lit the way down a new, shining and happy path, an idea purported by the *Journal*. In a way, to have a story with infidelity that recognized the pain it caused acknowledged again that married life could be less-than-satisfactory for women. However, like in the nonfiction example above, the *Journal* backpedaled on this acknowledgement. As Gertrude wondered if she and Henry should babysit rather than go out to celebrate their anniversary, Henry reminded her, playfully but still, that she swore to love, honor, and *obey* him. The couple went out as Henry wished. So, in the *Journal*, being a bride did not always lead to perfect happiness, but as a woman, that was the deal you signed up for, so you were stuck with it.

The Dark Side of Being a Bride

While the *Journal* did offer glimpses into the idea that women might not always be satisfied in life after the role of the bride, stories in the sample that featured rebellious brides shut down the idea that brides should take control of their own lives. Fictional stories in which the brides asserted power ended with the brides being reprimanded and the rightfulness of men’s power being affirmed. For instance, in the story “You’ll Marry Me at Noon,” bride Scott was too “bossy,” especially toward Conlon, whom she married.^{cclxxxviii} Despite being warned that men didn’t like women who told them what to do, Scott maintained the power in the relationship with her husband, leading him to crack. Conlon got so fed up with Scott being in control he wrecked the car with them in

it, killing himself and their unborn child. Scott woke up in the hospital widowed and unable to have children and feeling like, “she had killed Conlon,” by not letting him be in control.^{cclxxxix} Scott’s punishment wasn’t complete though. She tried to rule over her next lover and he left her.

Another bride, Sharon, asserted a little agency by sneaking out the night before her wedding to meet an old flame in the story “Hasty Wedding.” She too was duly punished when her old flame ended up dead the next morning. Upset by his death, Sharon didn’t want to go through with her wedding, but in a disturbing scene, her fiancé forced her to marry him. “Get dressed or I’ll carry you down to the car,” her fiancé, Jevan, told Sharon when she protested.^{ccxc} Even though Sharon said “no” to continuing with the wedding, she “helplessly” did what Jevan told her.^{ccxci} Sharon thought she, “could scream—she could struggle, but unfortunately Jevan was very much stronger than she.”^{ccxcii} With her fiancé’s hand “painfully tight on her arm,” Sharon married him in a daze.^{ccxciii} Later the reader discovered Jevan was trying to protect Sharon from becoming a suspect in the murder of her ex by continuing with their wedding plans, but this only reinforced the idea that his threatening of her and physically harming her were the right actions. He was doing it for Sharon’s own good, but without letting her in on the plan until after they were married. This sent the message that women didn’t need to be consulted in deciding what was in their best interest. After all, when Sharon acted on her own, it got her into trouble, as it did with the other rebellious brides. When women displayed power in stories, it led nowhere good, but when a man displayed power over a woman, everything turned out all right.

Another bride's story condoned men's power over women, Connie's story, "A Quiet Family Wedding." She also snuck out the night before her wedding to visit an old boyfriend, but was busted by her fiancé. He forced her into his car "trying out of his own hurt to hurt her too."^{ccxciv} In the car, Connie's fiancé kissed her, "hard, passionate angry kisses bruising her lips, pressing her head far back against his arm trying to make her give up something of her spirit."^{ccxcv} Connie protested, but even though she said no, she meant yes: "Her fingers clutched him even while she was repeating, 'Let me go.'"^{ccxcvi} Despite her fiancé being "almost violent" with her, Connie realized he was the one and they married.^{ccxcvii} As in the Sharon's story, men's power was shown to be the right thing, but in Connie's story, the idea that women *like* having men assert power over them surfaced in the scene in the car. While these stories were few, they were powerful. They clearly removed power from the hands of the brides and placed it into the hands of men, portraying the power dynamic of men over women as best for everyone involved. The added element of borderline violence in Connie and Sharon's stories as behavior in the brides' best interest was also disturbing when considered in a culture of domestic violence that kills women on a regular basis.

Conclusion

For the most part the *Ladies' Home Journal* of the mid-twentieth century glorified the role of the bride and insisted that the bride be beautiful and a consumer. The quality of beauty as necessary to the bride was a legacy of the nineteenth-century bride, but the great emphasis on consumption introduced in the fading years of the nineteenth century emerged full force in the twentieth century. This was likely grounded in the era politics as

well as culture. In the Cold War, consumption by the family unit was deployed as an ideological tool with which to fight communism.^{ccxcviii} Because America was vulnerable in terms of things like rocket technology, the image of “American superiority in the cold war rested not on weapons, but on secure, abundant family life of modern suburban homes.”^{ccxcix} It makes sense that the bride role, the socially acceptable path to a family, would emphasize consumption. All the gifts and gadgets the bride was supposed to receive for her wedding existed against this backdrop in which the consumption of home goods would give America the edge over communism. Excessive consumption for the bride’s big day also testified to just how important being a bride was. For a role so valued, no expense was spared.

The *Journal* also portrayed the role of the bride as transformative. It turned girl into woman, a positive transition from the *Journal*’s perspective. During this era, magazines such as *Ladies’ Home Journal* took flak for their championing of the happy housewife role for women, but there were moments that acknowledged that life after being a bride wasn’t always satisfying. While the *Journal*’s acknowledgement of marriage as not always happy seemed to chafe against its celebration of the bride, glamorizing the bride while simultaneously recognizing marriage’s realities ultimately worked together to insist upon yet another ideal for the bride, the ideal of perfection. Being “perfect” as a bride and having a “perfect” wedding was an ideal found throughout the sample. Brides weren’t supposed to attain perfection just for perfection’s sake. A bride needed to be ideal and have a flawless wedding because married life *wasn’t* perfect. And according to the *Journal*, perfection on a bride’s wedding day was what saw her through the difficult married years ahead. As one article emphasized, “all your life you

will have the memory of a perfect wedding day.”^{ccc} Or, as bride Sandra’s mother put it in “Wedding Present,” the wedding must be perfect because its memory “will carry her through” when times are tough.^{ccci} With this in mind, consuming the right things and the right amount of things and being as beautiful as possible dovetailed into the ideal of bridal perfection. Beauty and consumption were part of creating the ideal of the flawless wedding day that a woman could look back on throughout her life. While acknowledging then that marriage was not always so happy, this is ultimately a sad message. It not only placed a burden of perfection on the bride’s shoulders, but it also painted the wedding day as the highlight of a woman’s life. Her life and happiness were all downhill from there.

Overall, *Ladies’ Home* left us with a rather regressive depiction of the bride. In *Godey’s Lady’s Book* brides were beautiful and, yes, in the early years dependent on men for their happiness and even their lives, but throughout the nineteenth century, brides were also moral and educated. The middle-twentieth-century brides had education and moral superiority stripped away from them leaving beauty as a defining quality and consumption as a stand-in for education and character. Revisiting feminist media studies, we must ask again, what’s missing from the *Journal’s* portrayals of the bride? Thanks to the *Journal’s* fixation on war brides, we did see one non-white bride, a Japanese war bride, but black brides were rendered invisible in this sample. Of course, the *Journal* since its beginnings was “clearly targeted toward white, native-born women and, more narrowly, toward women with discretionary income,” so it is no surprise that the bride was represented as a white middle-class woman on the pages of the *Journal*. The *Ladies’ Home Journal*, like the *Lady’s Book*, was a mainstream publication, and in general, its

messages about the bride were in line with the dominant ideology of the time. Ideology selectively depicts “what is ‘natural,’ ‘possible,’ ‘good,’ and ‘inevitable.’”^{ccci} In the *Journal* what was natural and possible for brides (and women) was selectively and narrowly depicted. For instance, the absence of non-beautiful and non-thin brides, rendered women’s beauty work as good and natural but also inevitable. If you wanted to be a bride, you had to engage in beauty work. What was also missing from the depiction of the brides was change brought on by the war. I expected to find that the brides in the war years would be out working, Rosie the Riveter-style. The war itself was present, some articles and stories featured war brides and discussed the war, but the characteristics of the bride didn’t undergo any radical change. Perhaps this was related to Lewis and Neville’s finding that magazine ad depictions of women as mothers and homemakers stayed relatively stable throughout the war years. The bride, especially back then, was related to the roles of wife, homemaker and mother, therefore it was not surprising that her depiction remained rather consistent.

Also surfacing in the *Ladies’ Home* brides was the thin but dark thread of the need for men to control women. In several stories, we saw the bride characters harmed by their lovers but the brides either liked or submitted to the treatment. In Scott’s story, her headstrong personality caused her to lose her husband and later her fiancé because she tried to hold the power in her romantic relationships. Ending up alone, Scott finally learned not to control men. Men who controlled women received no such lesson in the *Journal’s* bride stories. Instead, these stories served as a warning: no good happens when women are in control of men or even themselves. In 2013, we think that message outdated, no longer socially acceptable. But perhaps it lives on in some depictions of the

modern bride. As we turn to the twenty-first-century representation of the bride we find the bridezilla. Here is a bride under no man's control, and a woman not controlled by a man is shown as a zilla, a monster. Perhaps we aren't as far from the ideology of the *Ladies' Home* bride as we'd like to imagine.

Chapter 4

Modern Bride: Monster Bride? The Bridezillas

Four women walk into a shop called Trashy Lingerie. One of them, the bride, tells the salesclerk she wants lingerie for her wedding night, specifically something that will cover her love handles and suck her in. She tells her bridesmaids, “Your task is to, after I try things on, judge them. But your task is not to denounce what I pick.” The bridesmaids are already on edge after being pulled from a diner to the shop without getting their dinner. As the bride tries on lingerie, one of them asks if she needs help. “Shut up,” she responds. When the bridesmaids don’t care for the bride’s lingerie choices, they pull some of their own to show her. The bride dismisses all of their picks. “Is this a joke to you?” she asks. When the bride emerges in another outfit the group doesn’t like, the lurking bridezilla emerges full force. “I drove here, so you bitches are gonna walk,” she says. “This is about me!” the bride insists. One of the bridesmaids, fed up and with somewhere to go, tells the bride she’s leaving. The bride yells for her to wait, chases her and grabs her. As the bridesmaid escapes, the bride screams, “You’re fired! You’re fired Takorah. Don’t be at the wedding!” Back in the dressing room, the bride reiterates to a long-gone Takorah, “You’re fired, bitch.” The bride announces she’s going with one of her earlier lingerie choices. When one of the bridesmaids disagrees, the bride pops her head out of the dressing room asking, “Did you say no?...Then you’re fired too.” By the end of the shopping trip, all three bridesmaids have been fired, leaving the bridezilla ranting alone in the dressing room.^{ccciiii}

You can forget the ear-busting screeches, throaty roars and fire-breathing of the classic movie monster, Godzilla. What comes from the mouth of a bridezilla is much more terrifying. Some choice scenes from the latest season of the reality series included a black bride telling her mother she'd like to role play "black girl and Klansman" with her white fiancé, a bride ridiculing her black fiancé, claiming if it were up to him, their wedding would be in the backyard with "watermelon and fried chicken," and a Puerto Rican bride shouting at a dry cleaner of Asian descent asking if now "we're outsourcing dry cleaners too?"^{ccciv} And these didn't even touch on the endless stream of "bitches," "heifers," "whores" and "hookers" leveled by the bridezilla at friends, family and innocent bystanders alike. The twenty-first century has clearly left behind the brides of *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Godey's Lady's Book*.

This chapter examined the most infamous brides of reality television, the brides of WE TV's *Bridezillas*. The scene at the lingerie shop, pulled from the fifth episode of season nine, was an illustration of typical bridezilla antics, but it also illuminated some of the series' recurring thematic elements: the role of consuming material things for the wedding, the bridal body, agency through the control of others, and the stereotyping of women and minorities. Through a prism of race, class and gender, the brides of *Bridezillas* were analyzed to understand some of the ways in which the role of the bride has evolved in twenty-first-century media and what the role of the bride means specifically on the show *Bridezillas*. van Zoonen reminded us that feminist media studies has an "unconditional focus on analyzing gender," but gender is not always the sole focus.^{cccv} "Ethnicity, sexuality, class and a range of other discourses intersect with gender in various and sometimes contradictory ways," and are therefore also territory of the

feminist media studies scholar.^{cccv} In *Bridezillas*, gender was certainly a defining discourse as the brides are all women, but class and race loomed large in the series as well.

Cultural studies' theorizations of how power works were especially useful for examining *Bridezillas*. On the surface, the bridezilla was supposedly an agent of power. Being a bride is a valued and therefore elevated position already, and the bridezilla took that power further. She got her way *or else*, and in a society that values fame and celebrity, appearing on television also placed the bridezilla in a position of power. But are the bridezillas really powerful women? The season of *Bridezillas* analyzed here featured many minorities and women from the working class, traditionally disenfranchised groups, but hegemony's long and shadowy fingers were firmly wrapped around the participants on the show. Gramsci's concept of hegemony, the "bourgeois domination of the thought, the common sense, the life-ways and everyday assumptions of the working class," was instrumental in understanding how *Bridezillas* works.^{cccvii}

The Rise of a New Reality:

It often feels as if there is a reality show about *everything*. From shows about people who buy abandoned storage units, to people who catch catfish with their hands for sport, to moms who sign up/ force their daughters to compete in pageants for little children, whatever your interest or guilty pleasure there's a corresponding reality show out there to suit your tastes. And if there's not, it will premiere next season. Of course, TV wasn't always this way. There was a time when dramas and 30-minute comedies

dominated television programming. But then a little show called *Survivor* premiered, and everything changed.

Most credit the launch of CBS's *Survivor* with kicking off reality television's quick rise to television staple.^{cccviii} *Survivor* premiered in 2000 and is still going strong. Season 25 (!) debuted in September 2012. The show features 16 everyday people (and strangers) assembled in the wilderness, with little food and no shelter, trying to survive for 39 days. The contestants form tribes, compete in challenges, and like any good reality show, ratchet up the drama by fighting with each other. The catch is, every few days someone is voted off "the island." The last one standing wins the title of *Survivor*, oh, and one million dollars.

The finale of *Survivor*'s first season had more than 51 million viewers, and other television networks and producers began "scrambling to find shows starring real people."^{cccix} The reality craze was born. However, *Survivor*'s claim to fame as the first reality show is not undisputed. Richard Huff argues "it was actually *The Real World* in 1992 that brought the concept of reality television to the American audience."^{cccx} MTV's *The Real World* plucks seven strangers from around the country and plops them into one house or apartment "to find out what happens when people stop being polite and start getting real."^{cccxi} Like *Survivor*, the series is still going strong.

A precursor to both *The Real World* and *Survivor*, and an important part of reality television's history, is the game show. Game shows were popular on TV in the 1950s, and their descendants, such as *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*, still exist today. Television shows that, in a way, could be called reality television, because they involved "real" people, were also taking shape in the 1940s.^{cccxii} Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* and

its precursor *Candid Microphone* are classic examples. *Candid Camera*, launched in 1948, played pranks on everyday people.^{cccxi} The format lives on in recent iterations such as *Betty White's Off Their Rockers*, in which elderly people attempt pranks on the young. Whether you credit *Survivor*, *The Real World*, *Candid Camera* or 1950s games shows with birthing reality television, *Survivor's* impact cannot be diminished in the rise of modern reality TV. Because of its popularity and viewers' continued fascination with all things reality, there are now hundreds of reality programs to be found on television. TV's many reality shows can be categorized into genres the same way fictionalized television programming can. Instead of the crime drama, the medical drama or the family comedy, we have the reality competition, (*Survivor*, *Project Runway*, *The Amazing Race*) the addiction recovery show, (*Hoarders*, *Addicted*, *My Shopping Addiction*), the weight-loss show (*The Biggest Loser*, *Extreme Makeover Weight-Loss Addition*, *Heavy*), the inside-look at-a-career show, (*Tanked*, *NY Med*, *Cake Boss*) and many, many more. And of course, reality television has also given us reality bride shows.

Reality Wedding Television

The event of a wedding has long been a focus for television. Real (a royal wedding) or fictionalized (the wedding episode of beloved TV characters) weddings have served as landmark television events. Before *Survivor's* big reality bang in 2000, most wedding TV about real people was confined to the weddings of the very famous or the royal. An exception is TLC's *A Wedding Story* that began airing in 1996. *A Wedding Story* followed an engaged couple as they prepared for their wedding, and the show

ended with their wedding day. The series did well, with more than one million viewers in 1999, and heralded the beginning of a reality genre that was about to explode.^{cccxiv}

Since then, more than twenty reality wedding shows have come and gone, and many are still on the air. Some of the shows focus on the wedding, but most zoom in intensely on the bride. These are the series I refer to as reality bride shows, in which the wedding is still central to the narrative of the show, but the bride takes center stage. A sampling includes: WE TV's *My Fair Wedding with David Tutera*, *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* and *Big Easy Brides*, TLC's *Beverly Hills Brides*, *I Found the Gown*, *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding*, *Randy to the Rescue*, *Say Yes to the Dress*, *Say Yes to the Dress: Atlanta*, *Say Yes to the Dress: Big Bliss*, E's *Bridalplasty* and FLN's *Bulging Brides*.

Perhaps the most infamous of reality television's bride shows is WE TV's *Bridezillas*. The series follows two women, or brides, per episode, and each bride is featured for one to three episodes. A bridezilla's story follows a typical arch. We begin with the couple. They recount their courtship while the camera cuts between them in idyllic settings, walking on the beach or in a park, and the couple speaking to the camera. During this first couple interview trouble is usually hinted at through the narrator, quick clips of a bridezilla's antics, or through her fiancé's responses to an off-camera producer's questions. For the next hour of the show, conflict ensues. Under the pressure of fulfilling the bridal role and planning the perfect wedding, the bride transforms from the (usually) smiling woman we met in the interview into a monster of Godzilla-like proportions. There are always issues with the cake, a dress, members of the wedding party, the venue, the flowers or the bridegroom. To overcome these wedding obstacles,

brides scream, yell, cry, throw things, break things, belittle people, hit people, threaten and swear. Despite all the conflict, the stories end with the wedding day.^{cccxcv} After all the screeching, ultimatums and hateful behavior, the end of an episode has an odd happily-ever-after visual aspect to it. We see the vows, cake cutting and dancing, “glossing over the obvious conflicts that indicate deeper problems.”^{cccxcvi}

An important element of the show *Bridezillas* is the presence of the omniscient narrator. The narrator, a woman, serves as the voice of reason, pointing out when the bridezilla is acting in a contradictory or illogical manner.^{cccxcvii} Because the bridezilla theoretically runs the show, the narrator works to undermine and ridicule the bridezilla for the audience. For instance in episode eight of season nine, bride Michelle said her fiancé, Greg, called her a princess. Greg said, “That is a mistake I made early on.”^{cccxcviii} The narrator added sarcastically, “Oh, Greg, there’s another much bigger mistake that you’re about to make.”^{cccxcix} As a bride and as the short-lived star of the show, the bridezilla occupies a position of relative power. However, the narrator works to check that power because her interpretation of a bride or situation serves as the logical and objective interpretation for the audience. Her word is the last word.

As a series, *Bridezillas* has evolved (or devolved?) from its first season. *Bridezillas* originated as a documentary series called *Manhattan Brides*.^{cccxxx} The series was edited into an hour-long special dubbed *Bridezillas* and aired on Fox in 2003.^{cccxxxi} *Bridezillas* as we know it today began airing on WE TV in 2004. The first season of the show “concentrated on New York brides and featured high-priced weddings,” a far cry from the typical bride and weddings seen in later seasons.^{cccxxii} In its ninth season,

Bridezillas features brides from around the country and few weddings that would be described as elite.

Bridezillas is the sort of programming that's the meat and potatoes of the WE TV network. Reality shows chock full of drama are its main fare. On its website the network describes itself as "family 2.0."^{cccxxiii} The "About WE TV" section explains

Every kind of family. All kinds of drama. [...] It's the real, familiar stories that make us say 'that could be me!' Featuring celebrity families you just can't miss and personalities you want to know more about like The Braxtons in *Braxton Family Values*, Joan and Melissa Rivers in *Joan and Melissa: Joan Knows Best?* and Shannen Doherty in *Shannen Says*. And nothing causes family drama like planning a wedding. Don't miss *My Fair Wedding with David Tutera* and *I Do Over* with Diann Valentine. Plus, everyone's favorite original drama queens, *Bridezillas*.

WE TV clearly peddles itself as a network full of "real" drama. Real people are watching too. The network is currently available in more than seventy-seven million homes, and *Bridezillas* is touted as one of the station's biggest hits.^{cccxxiv} The 10th season premiered in May 2013, as did a follow-up series, *Marriage Boot Camp, Bridezillas*.

Reality or Just Reality TV?

An issue arising when examining reality bride shows, and all reality television in general, is the issue of reality. While reality television features real individuals, they are, in some ways, playing characters. Research indicates audiences understand to some degree that reality television isn't completely real. A focus group conducted on viewers

of *Survivor* found that viewers knew and accepted that reality television is manipulated.^{cccxxv} Despite understanding that “producers control what they see through the manipulation of activities, editing, and casting decisions” the focus group members still found the program to be real.^{cccxxvi} *Survivor*, was “real (authentic) for the audience for these reasons: the lack of a formal script, the cast of non-actors, the honest emotions displayed, and the elements of surprise and unpredictability.”^{cccxxvii} In 2001 *Survivor* came under some scrutiny when the producer admitted to reenacting scenes to get better camera angles.^{cccxxviii} This revelation that reality TV wasn’t quite real did “change the way people viewed reality television.”^{cccxxix} Yet, audiences are still sometimes surprised upon finding out that an element of a reality show has been manipulated. A small scandal erupted in 2007 when Discovery Channel’s “Bear” Grylls, of the reality series *Man vs. Wild*, was accused of spending nights in hotels rather than in the wilderness as he claimed.^{cccxxx} The show has since been canceled. Specific features of reality shows are also known for being less “real” than others. For instance “one of the staples of reality shows, the confessional segments, may be the most tweaked in all of reality.”^{cccxxxi} The issue of audiences caring about the unreal nature of reality TV remains open. Reality television continues to blossom, and viewers tune in despite knowing that settings are contrived, plots are written, and that scenes are reshot, edited and tweaked.

Some reality shows no longer try to disguise the role of producers in portraying reality. On *Bridezillas* viewers can hear producers asking questions of the bridezilla and her fiancé in the confessional segments, and when brides won’t cooperate with cameras, we see producers step in and remind brides of their contracts. We are also privy to arguments between the producers and bridezillas. One bride became quite angry with the

crew when her cupcakes were late for the reception and accused the crew of being behind the baker's lateness. She claimed they were purposefully causing drama to get a reaction out of her.^{cccxixii} While these exchanges may shatter the illusion of reality in some ways, in others it strengthens it. Not containing her wrath to those who are *supposed* to be on camera makes a bridezilla's rage feel quite real.

Of course, to be on *Bridezillas*, a woman must act like a bridezilla. There is also the issue of compensation. Brides are paid \$3,000 to appear on the show, which doesn't even begin to touch the average wedding budget.^{cccxixiii} In 2006, the typical American wedding cost about \$28,000.^{cccxixiv} Compensation could work predatorily, in that for the truly cash-strapped \$3,000 is tempting enough to endure public shame. This may be one reason we saw so many budget brides on season nine. In analyzing *Bridezillas*, the possibility must be considered that all of a zilla's antics, and her family's reactions, were faked for the cash or for the short-lived celebrity status. However, this chapter was concerned with the *representation* of the bride on *Bridezillas*. Real or faked for TV, her representation is there.

Stereotypes in the Media

It would be nearly impossible to discuss *Bridezillas* without mentioning stereotypes. The series trafficked heavily in them, with stereotypes about women and minorities front and center. Feminists have historically criticized television for limited, unrealistic and stereotyped depictions of women. For example, they have taken advertising and dramas to task for showing women in the kitchen or bedroom more often than men.^{cccxixv} While feminist media studies has moved into more complex criticism, in

part because there is no one realistic woman, reality television's use of stereotypes must be examined in the context of *Bridezillas*. There is no avoiding the topic with "any discussion of the portrayals of people of color in American entertainment," according to Wilson, Gutierrez and Chao.^{cccxv}

The portrayal of minorities and women in American media has a troubled history, which is not surprising given these groups historic treatment. During the nineteenth century and throughout the earlier twentieth century, the stage was marked by degrading portrayals of minorities.^{cccxvi} Minstrel shows with white actors in blackface appeared in the 1830s, and the practice continued with early motion pictures.^{cccxvii} Early films showed black Americans as criminals and undesirables eventually giving way to, "less threatening characterizations," including domestic workers, maids and waiters.^{cccxviii} Unfortunately, today black actors today still face a Hollywood of fewer and stereotyped roles. Reality television has received a bad rap for its reliance on stereotypes. A textual analysis of ten reality shows found at least one stereotyped black participant per show, and more than half of all the black participants' characteristics fit black stereotypes.^{cccxix} According to Tia Tyree, stereotypes of black women are "old" and "numerous."^{cccx} They include the mammy, a mothering figure who is "obese, independent, cantankerous," and asexual.^{cccxli} Others include the matriarch, "an emasculating, controlling, and contemptuous woman who berates her male loved one" and the jezebel, a "young, exotic, promiscuous, oversexed woman who uses sexuality to get attention, love, and material goods."^{cccxlii} Newer stereotypes of black women include the welfare mother, the gangsta female, the gold digger, and the angry black woman.^{cccxliii}

Other minority women haven't fared much better in media portrayals. Some stereotypes of Latina women, "the maid and the welfare mother, overlap with African American female images."^{cccxl} According to Angharad Valdivia Latinas are also portrayed with the "binary virgin-whore opposition that representations of women in general project."^{cccxli} This opposition is especially expressed by the contrast of "rosary-praying maids or devoted mothers" with perhaps the most well known of Latina stereotypes, the "sexually out of control and utterly colorful spitfire, an image quite specific to Latinas."^{cccxlii} The spitfire Latina is easy to spot by her "red-colored lips, bright seductive clothing, curvaceous hips and breasts, long brunette hair and extravagant jewelry."^{cccxliii} Latin Americans in media are also hallmarked by accents, letting the audience mark them as other.^{cccxliv} Stereotypes of Asian women are also culturally entrenched. Portrayals of Asian women as submissive and quiet "geisha girls" dates back to 1950s film.^{ccc} Other stereotypes include the dragon lady, the "oriental femme fatale" and the subservient domestic worker.^{cccli}

By relying on negative stereotypes, the women of *Bridezillas* were subjected to a type of "othering," a process in which those that are thought to be different from the mainstream are identified to re-affirm dominant positions of power. The idea of "othering" has been conceptualized in terms of race and gender, and has historically been seen in the examinations of the way the West conceptualizes the East, one of its oldest and most entrenched images of the Other.^{ccclii} Feminist studies have also engaged the concept of "othering," examining how the "other" is "coded as female and constructed in the context of hierarchical relations of power."^{cccliii} The concept is useful for examining

the bridezilla, whose very name, a mash up of bride and Godzilla, “others” her and sets her apart from other (no pun intended) brides.

Weddings, Consumption and Reality TV

The role of the twenty-first-century bride has become wedded to the task of consuming. The big white wedding that was hinted at in the late years of the nineteenth century and took hold in America during the 1940s and 1950s has become the norm. As we saw with the brides of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, purchasing certain objects, such as the cake and wedding dress, has become an indispensable part of a bride’s big day. These objects have become revered to the point of being sacred.^{cccliv} The wedding dress especially is described as “possessing sacred qualities, given its distinctiveness from everyday attire, [and] its ability to make a woman feel like a princess.”^{ccclv} The transformation from regular woman to princess bride is partially rooted in the acquisition of things. Consider the tradition of registering. Geller points out, “at no other point in life does a middle-class person feel able to ask his or her community for what he or she needs and wants, and at no other moment does the community reach out with such magnanimity.”^{ccclvi} In the twentieth century, magazines such as *Life* and *Ladies’ Home Journal* contributed to the normalization of the bridal role as a consumptive one, and today’s reality bride shows continue this work.^{ccclvii} Today though, the consumptive quality of the bridal role has evolved beyond just the ability to consume. A bride doesn’t just need to buy a white dress to get married, she needs to buy a white *designer* dress to get married. Weddings were traditionally a time for a family to display wealth, and now

the display of wealth via the purchase of certain high-class goods, “a couture gown or gourmet meal,” is essential.^{ccclviii}

Reality television, as a genre in general, is no stranger to consumption. Much of reality TV fare could be classified as lifestyle television, which highlights the importance of appearance and improves its participants and audience through consumption.^{ccclix}

Home makeover shows such as HGTV’s *Dear Genevieve* or *Design on a Dime* improve participants via their homes. Makeover series such as TLC’s *What Not to Wear* or NBC’s *The Biggest Loser* are other examples. Both place great importance on participants’ appearance, and participants’ transformations occur through the consumption of clothing, stylists’ advice, celebrity trainers and prizes. Reality bride shows could certainly be considered in terms of lifestyle television. The utmost importance is placed on a bride’s appearance, and the consumption of the dress, the cake, the venue, the reception food, etc. are what transform a woman into a bride.

Method

Bridezillas has run nine seasons from 2004 to the summer of 2012. Its tenth premiered in May of 2013. In order to keep the scope of this chapter manageable, one season, the ninth, was selected for analysis. This chapter relied on textual analysis to examine *Bridezillas*. In cultural studies, texts, as parts of culture, are “complex (and contested) artifacts of ideologies.”^{ccclx} One way to examine them is textual analysis, a deep, thorough and multifaceted analysis of the text. After a long preliminary soak in the text, textual analysis extracts a “representative sample which can be more intensively analyzed.”^{ccclxi}

Season nine contained twenty-two one-hour episodes. The entire season was used as part of the textual analysis's long preliminary soak. To keep the analysis manageable, every other episode was selected for examination. However, because many of the bridezillas' storylines continued for more than one episode, at least part of every episode was analyzed. Guiding this chapter was the question: How was the bride portrayed in season nine of *Bridezillas*?

Analysis

With a name like *Bridezillas*, no one should be surprised to find a show featuring brides behaving badly. The bridezilla is a bad bride, the twenty-first-century foil to the good brides of the *Lady's Book* and the mutated descendant of the twentieth-century pretty consumer bride. What was surprising about *Bridezillas* though was some of the ways in which the bridezilla was rendered "bad." She was bad of course for her behavior, but she was also bad for not meeting cultural expectations for the bride, including beauty or consumption. These ideas as well as themes of race and power ran throughout the series.

Budget Brides

"It's my wedding. I want a cake! [...] I want a fucking cake!" -Christine^{ccclxii}

In America today, consumption has become a taken-for-granted part of the bridal role. The big white wedding was popular in the mid-twentieth century, but it grew even bigger in the culture of conspicuous consumption of the 1980s.^{ccclxiii} But for the bridezillas of season nine in 2012, a tight budget sometimes stood in the way of a perfect

wedding. Episodes of *Bridezilla* often revolved around the same material things our culture tells us are important for weddings, things the bride (and bridegroom) should consume for a wedding, including the cake, the bride's and bridesmaids' dresses, hair, makeup, lingerie, the bridegroom and groomsmen's outfits, rings, food, flowers and reception venues. Because some of the brides this season couldn't consume exactly what they wanted for their weddings, bridezilla moments were built into the show. After all, nothing set a bridezilla off faster than not getting what she wanted. So, in some ways, as a show centered on bridal drama, the budget bride was ripe for bridezilla antics. She wasn't getting her dream wedding, but that didn't stop her from wanting it.

Bridezilla Jennifer, a 37-year-old certified nurse's assistant, admitted to being "cheap," but still wanted to fulfill the idealized bridal role with all its trappings. When asked why she wanted to be married, she mused, "I want the white dress. I want the cake. I want people coming over celebrating with me."^{ccclxiv} Her friend pointed out that Jennifer was describing a wedding and that wasn't exactly the same thing as a marriage, but the two became conflated on *Bridezillas*. On the show, one supposedly determined the success of the other. Bridezilla Michelle testified to this, "I think that a great wedding creates a great marriage. And, I think if we didn't have a perfect wedding, it would create stress on the beginning of our marriage."^{ccclxv} And, consumption is part of creating that great wedding.

When Bridezilla Jennifer's lack of funds interfered with her idea of a dream wedding, she sometimes launched into bridezilla moments. In one of these moments, Jennifer lashed out at a tailor she asked to fix her reception dress.^{ccclxvi} During the season, several bridezillas had separate dresses for the wedding ceremony and the reception. A

second dress is becoming one of those material bridal things women need to consume to be a bride, a growing and expensive trend. The tailor told Jennifer the dress repairs would cost \$20. When she protested the price, she said, “I’m not that stupid.”^{ccclxvii} The narrator chimed in, “Nope. Just that cheap.”^{ccclxviii} Being thrifty may be a virtue elsewhere, but not in the role of the bride. After telling the tailor, “I’m done with you,” she walked out and vented, “I don’t have \$20 dollars. It’s ridiculous.”^{ccclxix} In a rant to the camera, Jennifer explained: “It was a \$30 dress for seven bucks. Either I shop for bargains, find bargains, or get shit for free.”^{ccclxx} Finally she called the tailor a “fucking thief” as she headed to her car.^{ccclxxi} Jennifer’s budget and bridal ideals were at odds with one another. For her, having an additional dress for her reception was part of being a bride. She couldn’t get what she wanted with money, so as a bridezilla, she resorted to another resource, bad behavior. In this case it didn’t work, and we never saw the reception dress again.

Another bride, Danielle, was plagued by a low budget. Danielle, in an odd twist, also worked for *Bridezillas*. About that, she said, “I watch this show over and over again, especially working with the show and dealing with brides. And, I completely thought they were crazy bitches, but now that I am one of those brides I’m completely on their side.”^{ccclxxii} The wedding’s tight budget caused discord between Danielle and fiancé, Nate, a teacher. When Nate balked at buying a wedding cake priced between \$200 and \$1,000, Danielle launched into a bridezilla tirade. “Every bride wants a wedding cake. There’s a whole time set aside for taking pictures for cutting the cake. Without a cake you don’t get to do that,” she yelled. ^{ccclxxiii} When Nate offered to bake a cake instead, Danielle grew even angrier. “You ain’t baking shit,” she screamed.^{ccclxxiv} Then she began throwing Nate’s video games and DVDs, yelling he should sell them to come up with

money for the cake. At the end of her episode, Nate presented Danielle with a grocery store cake and, in full bridezilla mode, she threw her dog into the cake. About her wedding, she said, “This was not the wedding of my dreams at all. I mean, I wanted my wedding to be classy. And, what I got today was the complete opposite of class.”^{ccclxxv} Of course, this lament came right before Danielle and friends started shot-gunning beers.

The ideas of bridal consumption and class were intertwined in *Bridezillas*. A wedding was considered “classy” if it involved a certain level of consumption. Rebecca Herr points out that the type of class that is synonymous with weddings is, of course, upper class.

Elements such as professionalization and conspicuous consumption in the planning and execution of weddings beginning in the 19th century point to the fact that the naturalized class in the case of the wedding is the upper class. This is problematic for those who are not socially and economically a part of the upper class.^{ccclxxvi}

Fairytale weddings are the cultural expectation, but they are not always the reality for the average American bride. Because high class is the class implied in “classy” in terms of weddings, “the wedding becomes a performance of false identity [...] This performance is the reason behind much of the stress over details felt by those planning the wedding.”^{ccclxxvii} Danielle and Nate’s conflict over an expensive cake illustrated the stress the performance of being high class creates. But because planning weddings is mostly women’s work, it is Danielle, the bride, who was distraught over not getting her gourmet cake.

Race and *Bridezillas*

“My fiancé being Vietnamese and me being Mexican is a little hard considering he uses chopsticks and I don’t. My fiancé really can’t drive. It’s kinda stereotypical, but he really can’t. He thinks that he can, but he can’t. But I don’t know how to explain to him that they just can’t drive.”^{ccclxxviii}-Davina

In an analysis of the series *What Not to Wear*, Martin Roberts notes that as an example of lifestyle television, the show treats cultural otherness “as purely incidental.”^{ccclxxix}

Lifestyle television, including shows such as *Bridezillas*, implies with its incidental treatment of race “that we have somehow moved beyond the issue of racial and cultural politics.”^{ccclxxx} *Bridezillas* at times acknowledged the racial differences of its brides. For example, in an interview with the camera, Bridezilla Jennifer said, “I’m a Puerto Rican bitch.”^{ccclxxxi} However, race was treated simultaneously as incidental and as characterized by stereotypes.

More than half of the brides in season nine were minorities. Many American women play the role of the bride, but minority brides through the lens of *Bridezillas* are rendered as different in more ways than one. *Bridezillas* by nature of the show are “different” brides, brides gone bad. The large presence of minority brides this season acting out in racially stereotyped ways also conflated the identities of bad bride and minority bride.

In episode seven, viewers met Liza, a 37-year-old, Puerto Rican college student. She described herself as “spicy” recalling the Latina spitfire character, and her antics

throughout her episodes only furthered this stereotype of the out-of-control Latina woman. For example, Liza's friends and family are supposed to help her cook her reception meal, but her mother informed her the meat they purchased wasn't any good. When Liza's sister told her to relax, Liza suddenly began yelling and threw a mug to the floor, smashing it to pieces.

Liza's characterization also played into the overly sexual Latina trope. Her fiancé told the camera Liza's body is what attracted him to her: "Nice boobs. Great Ass. And I like some cushion for the pushin."^{ccclxxxii} Liza mused that her fiancé, Jason, will love her no matter what because she possessed certain "skills. And those skills will take you far."^{ccclxxxiii} Liza smiled and winked at the camera, clearly implying sexual skills. Liza wasn't shy about trying to apply these "skills" to people other than her fiancé either. When Liza arrived at the dry cleaner late, the clerk told her she couldn't clean her dress by the time of the wedding the next day. Liza blamed the clerk being female, rather than her own lateness, for her failure to get her dress cleaned: "I couldn't even flirt with her. If it'd been a man, I could have shown him a boob or something," she said.^{ccclxxxiv}

In Liza, stereotypes about race and class overlapped with each other as well. Liza's bridesmaid, Vianca, picked up the tab for the cake, but there was a slight issue with the payment. The cost of the cake Liza wanted was \$600, more than Vianca wanted to pay. But Liza didn't care. She screamed, "This is the cake I want. I'm a princess. I need a cake that looks like a fucking castle, and you're gonna buy it."^{ccclxxxv} Liza was further angered by Vianca's payment plan, food stamps. Liza asked her, "How ghetto can you get?"^{ccclxxxvi} The baker pointed out that it was illegal for Vianca to pay in food

stamps, but didn't exactly say she wouldn't accept them either. Vianca made plans to come back later, without the camera crew.

In bridezilla Jeanine's episodes, race loomed large as well. Jeanine, a 25-year-old student in Florida was marrying Thomas, a 25-year-old gas station manager. He is white and Jeanine is black. Roughly a third of the couples in the twenty-two-episode season are interracial couples. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the show, interracial relationships ended up being characterized as hostile, as the fiancé was often a target for the bridezilla's wrath. Jeanine and Thomas's relationship was no exception. Jeanine's antics played right into several damaging stereotypes about black women, often fluctuating between the angry black woman and the controlling matriarch who demeans her male companion. For example, when Thomas tried to surprise Jeanine with ice-skating, she erupted at him for waking her up and messing up her weave. She told him that later she was, "gonna whoop your fucking ass."^{ccclxxxvii} Thomas lamented that Jeanine was always "trying to control my behavior."^{ccclxxxviii} And, control seemed to be one of Jeanine's main goals: "I like to be in control. And, there's a lot of areas that he drops the ball on, which allows me to be in control at all times."^{ccclxxxix} Jeanine was also an unwed mother of multiple children, marking her with yet another stereotype.

Like Liza, Jeanine also sexualized herself, recalling stereotypes about black female sexuality. During her vows, she told Thomas, and every person at her wedding and every viewer of the show, "The moment I saw you, I knew you were a one night stand."^{ccccxc} While this was disturbing on myriad levels, in terms of race, Jeanine proclaimed the details of her sexual appetite for all to hear and fell right into the characterization of a jezebel, using her sexuality to get attention.

Unfortunately, almost all of the minority brides on this season of *bridezillas* portray characteristics of stereotypes that have been used against minority women for centuries. Returning to the notion of the “other,” *bridezillas* were already marked as “other” brides by appearing on the show. They are “bad” or “deviant” brides. The heavily stereotyped minority brides are “othered” to an even greater extent, marked as even more different through their demonstrated stereotyped behaviors and characteristics.

Beauty and the Zilla

“Fat brides aren’t cute.” -Natalie^{ccccxi}

Physical beauty was another way the twenty-first century brides of *Bridezillas* depart from their *Lady’s Book* and *Journal* counterparts. The brides of the *Lady’s Book*, good or bad, were almost always beautiful, and the *Journal’s* brides were expected to pursue beauty in terms of their faces and the bodies. Since the wedding day was the most important of a woman’s life, she should look her very best for it. The expectation of physical beauty was still present in the culture of the show *Bridezillas*. However, some of the brides failed to meet the bridal standard of bodily perfection, and the camera made sure to shame them for it.

Bridezilla Shederyl was one of the brides who didn’t live up to standards of bridal body beauty. However, she watched over what her bridesmaids ate like a hawk. In the twenty-first century, the ideal of beauty has extended to the bridal party as well, and brides throughout the season tormented bridesmaids about their looks. When one of Shederyl’s bridesmaids, who in Shederyl’s opinion needed to lose three pounds, tried to

eat a candy bar, Shederyl snatched it and threw it in a footbath. But, Shederyl didn't apply the same strict diet standards to her own bridal figure. When she attempted to try on her reception dress for her friends, it didn't fit. She told the camera: "The dress is too little. My butt is too big. I had to lay down and get on the floor and have them zip the dress up. And then they had to pick me up like a piece of wood. So, I'm not going to eat for two days."^{cccxcii}

However, Shederyl was unable to keep her vow of fasting, and the show made sure to shame her for it. The narrator referred to Shederyl as "the Southern fried zilla," and the camera often focused on her eating.^{cccxciii} In one scene, footage of Shederyl chewing was spliced together repeatedly and pig sounds were added. When she finished, the narrator referred to her as a "zilla at the trough."^{cccxciv} While this was derogatory treatment in general, there was something disturbing in equating Sherderyl, a black woman, with an animal. While Shederyl furthered this comparison herself by saying she felt like a "little piggy," it was in these moments that the danger of lifestyle TV's incidental treatment of race surfaces. Characterizing Black people as animalistic is a poisonous stereotype. With no historical awareness or sensitivity, all treatment of bridezillas is fair game on the show.

Shederyl's friends also mocked her for not having the thin body of the ideal bride. Lakesha said she thought Shederyl, "is going to be fat as hell on her wedding day."^{cccxcv} On that day, Shederyl resigned herself to her bridal body imperfection and said, "I did all I could do. I ain't eat for like 24 hours."^{cccxcvi} As Shederyl, according to the narrator, "waddles" down the aisle, the show added heavy footstep effects, reminiscent of Godzilla

stomping down the streets. Therefore, Shederyl was not only a monster because of her mean antics but because she wasn't thin.

Bridezilla Natalie, a former reality show participant on the series *Bad Girls*, also failed to meet bridal body beauty standards. In one of Natalie's episodes, she and two friends visited a spa called L.A. Slim Wrap to get wraps designed to help you quickly lose inches and water weight. In true bridezilla fashion, Natalie saw the wrap session as a competition between her and her friends, saying, "I'm hoping that I can lose the most inches because I'm the bride, and I need to be the sexiest on the day of the wedding."^{cccxcvii}

Despite the wraps, Natalie's bridal body apparently still wasn't up to par. When she tried on wedding dresses in a size four, or as the narrator put it, tried to "squeeze a whole lot of crazy into a teeny tiny dress," the dresses didn't fit.^{cccxcviii} Natalie's mother said, "I don't know where her mind is when she thinks she's a size four."^{cccxcix} When Natalie said the fabric of one of the dresses is complicating the fit, her fiancé quipped, "Oh it's the material?" and Natalie's mother laughed.^{cd}

While no one on the show precisely declared a bride *must* be skinny, *Bridezillas* works as a moral in reverse. To be the right kind of bride, we know to do the opposite. Viewers know not being thin is "bad" by the presence of non-thin bridezillas but also because of their treatment by the show, the narrator, and their friends and family. When a bridesmaid said to a bride, "you lookin' kinda chubby," we know it's not a compliment.^{cdi} It must be added though, that neither of the brides discussed here were obese or even really overweight. While not super-thin, both appeared to be average American women, which made the ridicule of their bodies even more perverse. Because

these two fairly average brides weren't considered slender enough, the ideal that a bride must be thin, skinny even, was reinforced.

Bridezillas: Powerful Women?

"Nobody says I can't do anything." -Remy^{cdii}

Certainly there can be no discussion of *Bridezillas* without discussing power. All the yelling and screaming and name calling and swearing and throwing things and threatening boils down to the brides trying to assert dominance over others. But, does that make them powerful women? A favorite target for bridezillas was their bridesmaids. Culturally, the role of the bridesmaid is to assist the bride the day of her wedding and with some of her bridal work. However, the bridezillas used the bridesmaid role to exploit and control. For example, bridezilla Ashanti, whose uncle precisely pointed out that "this sounds more like a divorce than a wedding," tried to get her bridesmaids to sign a contract detailing their duties that went far beyond the usual bridesmaid tasks.^{cdiii} Ashanti's idea of a bridesmaid's duties to the bride included cooking, party planning and speaking for her when she lost her voice. When the bridesmaids scoffed at the contract, Ashanti delivered an ultimatum, "sign it or you're not in the wedding."^{cdiv} Not quite convinced, one of the bridesmaids, Teri, pushed back, "We're your bridesmaids, not your servants."^{cdv} After Ashanti stormed out, the bridesmaids acquiesced and signed the contract. Point to the bridezilla.

Controlling the appearance of the bridesmaids was a particular favorite for bridezillas, a shadowy territory. Part of being a bridesmaid means wearing the dress, shoes, jewelry, makeup and hairstyle determined by the bride, but where does the bride's

control of her bridesmaids' bodies end? One bride, Remy, who was Egyptian, forced one of her white bridesmaids to visit a tanning salon because she wanted her bridesmaid's skin tone to match hers. This was a troubling scenario even before Remy claimed for Bethany's wedding, "I'll bleach myself for her."^{cdvi} After Bethany reluctantly received her spray tan, Remy claimed she was still too white and ordered her in the booth for another go. The salon attendant refused, explaining she must legally wait eight hours before re-spraying someone. Remy began yelling, switching between English and Arabic, and stormed out.

Another bridezilla who tried to assert dominance over a bridesmaid's body was Janelle. Janelle wanted a bridesmaid to press her hair for the wedding, but the bridesmaid texted that she was getting braids. Janelle ranted that the style, "looks like the Predator."^{cdvii} Janelle tried to get her maid of honor, Sabrina, to tell the bridesmaid, "To either press that shit or get the hell out the wedding."^{cdviii} Sabrina protested that, "this is a friend you've had since grade school."^{cdix} Janelle dealt with the wayward bridesmaid herself and cut her from the wedding. While we don't know why the bridesmaid wore her hair naturally, it could be personal or political, Janelle made it political. Braids weren't in line with her idea of how black women should look at a wedding and this coupled with her lack of control over her bridesmaid launched her into a full-scale zilla attack. The bridesmaid didn't take it lying down though and signed off with, "Fuck you, Janelle."^{cdx}

Of course, the bridezilla's favorite target for power plays was her fiancé. In contrast to the bride's world in *Ladies' Home Journal*, there is no love, honor and obey on *Bridezillas*. Many women and men have worked hard and fought to drop that "obey" from the bride's vows and replace that kind of partnership with something more equal.

However, more equal partnerships are not what we got on *Bridezillas*. Instead, we saw brides who tried to control and dominate their male partners. Bridezilla Davina was in a constant push and pull for power with her fiancé Brian. In one of her episodes, she delegated making the seating chart for the reception to Brian, but he still hadn't completed it when his friends showed up to take him out for his bachelor party. Davina told Brian, "If you walk out that door, I swear to God I'll call off the wedding."^{cdxi} Brian conceded and sat down to do the chart, but as the narrator told it, "As Brian's cronies continue to trickle in, Davina's vice-like grip appears to be slipping."^{cdxii} Brian started to get a little rowdy as more friends came in, and Davina's bridezilla antics got turned up as she felt the power shift away from her. "I'm the bride. What I say fucking goes. If I want him to do the seating chart, he's gonna do it," she yelled at Brian's friends.^{cdxiii} The night ended without the seating chart finished and the wedding (temporarily) called off.

In another seating chart showdown, Bridezilla Marlene demanded her fiancé Jose do the seating chart immediately. He wanted to finish his beer and in response a remote went flying at the wall. Marlene was just getting started though. The night before their wedding, Jose went to pick up a friend against Marlene's wishes. Marlene yelled into the phone, "I hope you fucking choke on your beer and you drop dead. That's what I hope Jose because I can collect on your fucking life insurance you mother fucker."^{cdxiv} But at their wedding Jose served up a little revenge with his own power play. He halted the ceremony and asked to speak with Marlene in the hallway, jolting her and guests alike. He told her interrupting the ceremony was "payback" for how she'd been acting. Jose still said "I do," though, so Marlene still got what she wanted in the end.

During her opening interview, Bridezilla Janelle said, “It’s funny how a strong woman that knows what she wants and demands what she want is a bitch.”^{cdxv} This statement sounded like an insightful cultural critique. However, since it came from the mouth of a bridezilla, any legitimate critique about gender was undermined. Because of the structure of the show, everything a bridezilla says and does is already pre-constructed as crazy. That’s why viewers tune in after all, to see brides act nuts. Janelle’s point falls flat because there is a difference between a strong woman and a woman who demeans those around her. Janelle is the same woman after all who said, “I’m queen bee up in this bitch, alright. Y’all my bridesmaids, and y’all supposed to do what they hell I tell you to do.”^{cdxvi} Power on *Bridezillas* is about dominating others, be they family, friends or fiancés, but are the bridezillas truly powerful? Sure, they got their way a lot of the time in the frame of the show, but ultimately they were also women offered up for scrutiny and mockery. In the *Journal* we saw men in control of brides, and the brides of the *Journal* were supposed to be emulated. With *Bridezillas*, the takeaway is not to be like these brides. Therefore, women running the show is shown as something negative for everyone involved.

Conclusion

It’s clear that the twenty-first-century brides of *Bridezillas* are very different from their historical counterparts. The brides of the *Lady’s Book* and *Ladies’ Home Journal* embodied a celebration of the bride, but the bridezilla exists on a spectrum where the role of the bride is open to scorn as well as reverence, and *Bridezillas* deals in scorn. On the show, the bride was represented as a woman concerned with consumption and lording her

bridal power over those around her. Brides were also represented as failing bridal beauty standards and often in stereotyped ways. The redeeming qualities of brides from previous centuries, such as intelligence or womanhood have fallen away. The brides' intelligence levels were mocked on *Bridezillas*, and none of the brides even pretended that being a bride would turn them into women in terms of sex. Many of the brides lived with their fiancés or already had children with them in season nine. What the show really does is take the role of the bride off of a pedestal and mock it. *Bridezillas* turns the woman consumed with having the perfect wedding into a caricature. Being obsessed with your wedding's perfection is not only negative, but also unnecessary in the twenty-first century. Women aren't stuck anymore the way the unhappy wives of the *Journal* were. So, in way, *Bridezillas* serves as a critique of the idea that a woman needs a perfect wedding to ensure her future happiness. It also questions if a woman needs a wedding at all. If being a bride makes women into monsters, is it still a role we need? Marriage and family patterns might say no. The creation of families comes through many and diverse avenues today, not just heterosexual marriage. And, as stated earlier, marriage rates are down.

Unfortunately, *Bridezillas*' cultural critique was lost in the din of the zillas' screams, and the show, with its exceedingly negative portrayals of women and minorities, worked hegemonically. Bonnie Dow wrote that to maintain its "dominance, the hegemonic system must adapt [...] However understanding television's hegemonic role allows us to see that TV is less progressive than we think."^{cdxvii} For instance, one episode featured a successful black couple, but any good this representation could have done was undermined in moments such as when the bridezilla called her fiancé the n-word. There

are moments in which *Bridezillas* could resist the dominant culture. Bridezillas Shederyl and Natalie not being stick thin for their wedding days could have served as an act of resistance. They could have claimed their bodies as beautiful the way they are, gnawing away at ideological constraints on what makes a beautiful bride or a beautiful woman. However, not being a size zero was framed as something negative, not only by the show, but by the brides themselves. Shederyl and Natalie are aware of beauty standards, that they aren't living up to them, and are distressed by not meeting these standards. In terms of class the same pattern emerges. The budget-challenged brides turned into bridezillas because they wanted to consume certain material things because "necessity has been tagged on to the elements of a lavish wedding."^{cdxviii} The brides don't question the rightness or common sense that a wedding should incorporate expensive high-class goods.^{cdxix} Instead, they desired to incorporate those elements into their weddings in order to temporarily transcend their social class. So, even though television "adjusts to social change," seen on *Bridezillas* from featuring rich, white brides in the first season to featuring more diverse brides in terms of class and race in later seasons, the hegemonic process adjusts progressive elements "in a manner that simultaneously contradicts or undercuts a progressive premise."^{cdxx}

It could be argued that featuring minorities and women on TV as the stars of the show resists an ideology that oppresses these groups. *Bridezillas* could be showcasing the gains minorities and women have made by showing them with power and agency. Unfortunately, the nature of the series placed the women who appeared on the show in a necessarily negative position. The brides were simultaneously the stars *and* villains of the show. The reliance on stereotypes was also damaging, and the added element of reality,

in that these are real women and not characters in a traditionally scripted drama, further complicated their representation. In *How Real is Reality TV?* David Escoffery asked “are people more likely to believe that women or African Americans or homosexuals are ‘like that’ because it is a reality show?”^{cdxxi} This question is a reminder of the repercussions reality show representations can have in the world. Returning to feminist media studies, whether or not the “reality” element of these shows influences their reception, is secondary to the point that “representation matters.”^{cdxxii} Maybe the brides were just acting for a paycheck and some short-lived fame, but their representations of the bride, of minorities, of the working class and of women are out there now.

While the representations of minority women and the working class were potentially more harmful than helpful on *Bridezillas*, when we ask who was left out in the show’s portrayal of the bride, the answer is certainly different than in the previous chapters. Minority brides from diverse racial and economic backgrounds are very present in the series. Of course, non-stereotyped minorities are absent. But in the twenty-first century, perhaps the most glaring absence in terms of the bride was the absence of gay brides and couples. For a show that broke other “taboos” such as showing interracial marriage and children with unmarried parents, it kept to a traditional view of marriage in season nine. Reality bride shows in general depict marriage as between men and women, but not always. At least one bride show, TLC’s *Say Yes to the Dress*, featured a lesbian couple shopping for wedding gowns, and many reality bride shows feature gay characters in roles such as wedding planners or fashion experts. On *Bridezillas*, despite a contemporary cultural context where gay couples marry and the legality of gay marriage is being decided, gay brides are invisible.

Finally, in the twentieth century, the *Journal* warned against brides having power via stories that reprimanded brides who tried to take power into their own hands. *Bridezillas* served as the manifestation of “look what happens when men aren’t in control of the bride.” What happens, according to *Bridezillas*, is all hell breaks loose. This characterization of what women unchained looks like undermines the efforts that have been made for women’s equality. And really, the whole show, despite any subversive cultural critique it might contain, is representative of a modern backlash against gains made by minorities and women in the last century. In the twenty-first-century’s version of the bride, she has evolved, but not forward.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

One of the brides on season nine of *Bridezillas* laments to the camera about her wedding week, tears running down her face, “This should be the best week of my life. I’m supposed to be walking down the aisle with someone I love. Instead it’s the week of hell.”^{cdxxiii} In this, she captures the expectations for the role of the bride and some of the realities of today’s bride. According to the bride’s legacy left behind by *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and *Ladies’ Home Journal*, the wedding was *it*, the big thing, for a woman. The bride was the role of a lifetime. Today, despite the bride being ever-present on TV, the Internet and magazines, being a bride just isn’t that same as it used to be, and the brides of *Bridezillas* exist in an almost opposite world than their historical counterparts. The three texts don’t exist in neat linear progression. Rather, the mass media and the bride fragmented with one result being the rise of the bridezilla. This dissertation delved into what it meant to be a bride in the past, but we must pause and ask does it mean to be a bride today at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and how have changes in media changed the meaning of the bride?

In the nineteenth century, in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, being a bride was the important aspect for a woman, not so much the wedding. Weddings were often small in *Godey’s*, sometimes even secret. In the *Lady’s Book*, the reader often didn’t see the actual event of the wedding, the story moved from bride to wife, such as in the story “The Governess.” The character Miss St. Clair transitions from “bride elect” to “the bright and

happy wife.”^{cdxxiv} As times changed throughout the nineteenth century, we saw the bride change as well. She evolved from a flimsy fainter to something of a fighter, but her value never diminished. In the *Lady’s Book*, the bride was always a valued role.

By the mid-twentieth century, in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, we saw the event of the wedding itself take on much greater importance and by default the bride did as well. The wedding became an occasion to consume, and it was the stage for the wedding’s big star, the bride. As regular *Ladies’ Home* writer Ann Batchelder put it,

I suppose there is nothing like a wedding in the air to call out the jubilee spirit. It just seems as if one lives for parties. [...] And all for to make merry and celebrate around the bride to be, for these are the times when a girl is exactly the center of everything. She has the star role and the center of the stage, and let her make the most of it.^{cdxxv}

Batchelder hit upon some of the themes characterizing the bride in these middle years of the twentieth century. Weddings increased in importance, requiring parties and consumption. Weddings were also what took the bride, a girl, into womanhood. But, she also needed to make the most of her wedding day because life after being a bride might not be all she dreamed it would be. However, as in the *Lady’s Book*, the role of the bride was valued and celebrated throughout the years examined.

Now, in the twenty-first century, things are a little different, and representations of brides and weddings have been made possible that were probably unimaginable in previous centuries. On *Bridezillas*, the bride has gone from a revered figure to a caricature, and weddings are simultaneously shown as important yet not-so-important. The pressure of planning a wedding is theoretically what drove a bride over the edge, but

on *Bridezillas*, most of the couples already led a “married” life. They lived together and many already had children together. Add in a cultural context of declining marriage rates and a heated debate on the very definition of marriage, and I think we see the brides of *Bridezillas* are symptomatic of a culture that isn’t quite sure what the bride (or a wedding) means today. The things being a bride and having a wedding signified in the past—becoming a (sexually mature) woman, transitioning into the domestic sphere, becoming a wife, homemaker or mother—no longer apply. You don’t have to don a white dress or say any vows to participate in any of these roles. And, some of these roles, like housewife, many American women will never play because they have careers or simply don’t want to. Yet, as a country, we’re still fixated by the bride, even if we aren’t quite sure what she means. Despite this uncertainty about the bride’s meaning today and the fact that the brides of *Bridezillas* are a universe apart from the brides of the *Lady’s Book* and *Ladies’ Home Journal*, mediated brides did share some thematic continuity across the centuries that told us something about the way we see not only American brides, but American women.

Returning to this dissertation’s feminist theoretical grounding, Wolf’s argument about the beauty myth is important to consider when examining the bride in American media. The concept of beauty being used to oppress women was seen repeatedly in depictions of the bride from the nineteenth century through the twenty-first. Wolf argued that the beauty myth is a rather recent invention, placing its inception in the nineteenth century:

The beauty myth gained ground after the upheavals of industrialization, as the work unit of the family was destroyed and urbanization and the

emerging factory system demanded a ‘separate sphere’ of domesticity to support the new labour category of the ‘breadwinner’ who left home for the workplace during the day. [...] a new class of literate, idle women developed, on whose submission to enforced domesticity the evolving system of industrial capitalism depended.^{cdxxvi}

Wolf places the foundations of the modern beauty myth specifically in the 1830s, the time period in which the *Lady’s Book* and its’ brides emerged.^{cdxxvii} Throughout the *Lady’s Book’s* run the brides, good and bad, were almost always beautiful. Beauty was just one of a number of “social fictions” attributed to women’s natural sphere used to “enclose” women.^{cdxxviii} These social fictions “adapted themselves to resurface in the postwar feminine mystique,” and beauty work surfaced as vital to the bride in the mid-twentieth century *Ladies’ Home Journal*.^{cdxxix} Only in *Ladies’ Home*, the tenet of possessing a beautiful body in addition to a beautiful face was added to the bridal beauty requirement. Interestingly, when we think of this time period, the celebration of fuller figures of women like Marilyn Monroe is what lives on in our cultural memory of that era. However, this dissertation’s findings concerning the *Journal’s* ideals about women’s bodies, showed that the obsession with thin was taking root in American long ago.

In the twenty-first century, women’s lives looked very different from women’s lives in the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, but “the more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon them.”^{cdxxx} Since the dawn of the *Lady’s Book* and *Ladies’ Home Journal*, American women have made strides toward social and legal equality including voting rights, property rights and legalized abortion.

Of course, women still have a ways to go. Yet, as women have become more equal to men, our culture's emphasis on women's beauty has also intensified. As Susan Douglas argues, beauty has become an indicator "of a woman's potential for success."^{cdxxxix} So, when a bride on *Bridezillas* failed to meet beauty standards for her wedding, she was a failure and therefore deserved merciless taunting. While we saw this vilification of the bride who didn't live up to bridal beauty standards on *Bridezillas*, it was a theme found in other reality bride shows. There were bride shows in which brides must lose weight for the wedding, and the bride show *Bridalplasty* featured brides competing for plastic surgeries for their weddings. Even reality shows that appeared to embrace the non-perfect bride, like TLC's *Say Yes to the Dress: Big Bliss*, shamed brides for not having "ideal" bodies. Brides who were deemed overweight by producers were segregated on a version of the show with the word "Big" in the title. Ouch. The tenet of beauty, which is culturally and narrowly defined, is inescapable for the bride.

Ultimately, beauty, as a bridal quality, is confining to women. Beauty as an important external value for the bride reinforces an ideology that places women's value in the external realm rather than on the internal, and the requirement that brides be beautiful is just another way to objectify women. Modern women are already preoccupied with beauty work. The role of the bride and the requirement that she be her most beautiful on her wedding day only intensifies that beauty work and turns the ritual of a wedding into a catalyst for women's objectification. Note, in the media examined for this dissertation, beauty was never essential to the character of the bridegroom, and when a man did concern himself with beauty, as one groom did on *Bridezillas*, he was ridiculed

by the narrator as feminine, placing the concern of beauty even more squarely into the realm of the bride and women.

Class was also a theme found in the different conceptions of the bride. In the *Lady's Book*, class was discussed through bride characters that lost their fortunes. The brides were temporarily reduced to poverty and work, but their strong morals led them to marriages that restored them to their previous position in society. While bringing attention to the plight of the working poor, class issues were still glossed over. Poverty was represented as something temporary and solvable through being a bride, not as a systematic issue. The high-class wedding goods that are mandatory for today's bride, were taking root in the years examined here of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The brides of the *Journal* as well as their loved ones were expected to consume for the wedding. The *Journal's* brides were advised at times on how to have weddings at home, but being a bride was also equated with high-class extras such as the gold table service at the Waldorf Astoria. These high-class extras, such as designer dresses and gourmet cakes are constructed by today's wedding culture as tradition.^{cdxxxii} We saw this on *Bridezillas* when brides grew angry about not getting things such as traditional pricey wedding cakes. An expensive cake represents the "commodification of wedding traditions" that has taken place in America.^{cdxxxiii} Herr asserts that the modern wedding industry is built on selling supplies that allow brides (and grooms) to transcend their social class for their wedding day, and on *Bridezillas*, when brides were denied that transcendence they morphed into monsters.^{cdxxxiv} Class transcendence masquerading as wedding tradition functions hegemonically. It was one of those subtle ways in which the rightness of the dominant ideology is maintained. Spending a fortune for your wedding has become

common sense even for those who cannot afford it. Instead of taking that money and spending it on a home or education that could theoretically help you improve your life economically, brides and grooms spend it on one day to mimic economic affluence.

Along with beauty and class, the issue of power snaked through the centuries of bridal representations. In the *Lady's Book*, early brides seemed rather powerless. Their fates were often determined by men, and they were rather weepy and weak. Some early *Lady's Book* brides that were powerless over their fates in life chose death, which condemned a life where men had all the power. In the middle and late years of the *Lady's Book* the brides demonstrated more power. Some brides worked outside the domestic sphere and others fought back against those who tried to direct their fates. In the mid-twentieth century, power shifted away from the brides of the *Ladies' Home Journal* as male control over some of the brides was shown in a positive light. And, even though the *Journal* hinted at the unhappiness some brides felt after marriage, advice to simply make up one's mind to be happy rendered brides without power to concretely do anything about being unhappy.

The *Ladies' Home Journal* also seemed to warn against a world in which the bride holds power. In stories in which brides asserted themselves they were duly punished. Two brides in particular, asserted their will by sneaking out to meet old flames, Connie of "A Quiet Family Wedding" and Sharon of "Hasty Wedding." For a moment they seemed bold and powerful women. They asserted themselves by doing what they wanted, disregarding the expectations of their families and fiancés. However, upon closer inspection, even in the brides' acts of rebellion, men's power loomed large. The fictional brides of the *Journal* weren't stealing out into the night to take off on independent lives.

They were compelled by the power of men over them to sneak out of their homes. So even in moments of apparent power, the brides' power was relative to men's. And, of course, the brides' choices were ultimately shown to be the wrong ones, and the brides' fiancés ended up saving the day in each of their stories. We can only imagine, what would have happened if the brides weren't under the power of their fiancés? The implication is disaster. And that disaster can be found in the figure of the bridezilla half a century later.

According to the show *Bridezillas*, when brides have power, a monster results. This idea was enhanced in the series with special effects. When some of the brides were on their very worst power trips, red laser beams were shown shooting from their eyes, and their voices were lowered into a demonic range, so the brides visually and aurally appeared as monsters. Women with power were shown as dangerous. Since the show functioned as a sort of moral in reverse, we also saw that when brides were in charge, everything went wrong and everyone suffered. Weddings barely happened, and friends, family members and fiancés were humiliated. Looking back to the brides of *Ladies' Home Journal*, the brides' lack of power spoke to Friedan's feminine mystique and a time before the second wave of the feminist movement. When we looked at the brides of *Bridezillas*, there seemed to be a disconnect. In the twenty-first century women and minorities are theoretically supposed to be considered socially and legally equal. So, why such negative portrayals of them with power and agency? One word, backlash.

Some feminist scholars assert that we are in a period of backlash against feminism.^{cdxxxv} When we define feminism in the broad sense of working toward equality for all, that backlash isn't limited to the gains made by women in the twentieth century

but extends to gains made by minorities as well. Douglas argued “legitimation of feminism in the mass media and backlash against it have smacked against each other with the force and chaos of billiard balls colliding.”^{cdxxxvi} Perhaps, there is no better example of this than *Bridezillas*. On the one hand, the brides of *Bridezillas* encompass a kind of social progress. The type of bride found in *Bridezillas* wasn’t really culturally conceivable in the time of the *Lady’s Book* or in the period of the *Journal* examined in chapter three. Because of the gains made by women and minorities in terms of civil rights, we have a mediascape today where these groups not only appear as main characters of series, but as powerful characters. This wasn’t commonplace half a century ago, and was something early feminist media scholars criticized. Now feminist media studies has moved into more complex criticism, and we must look at the bridezilla complexly too. After all, cultural studies reminds us that even ideological texts can contain resistant meanings. Engstrom wrote that the bridezilla “takes the role of bride in a new direction by encouraging women to assert themselves and take explicit control over what a gendered society tells them is their special day.”^{cdxxxvii} From this angle, the bridezilla takes the traditional ideology about brides and weddings, seen especially in the legacy of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and turns it on its head. The bridezilla takes the idea that the wedding is *it* for a woman, that it is *her* day, and runs with it, far, like, a marathon far, and this bride-monster also serves as a criticism of the modern wedding and the burden the creation of the perfect wedding places on women. The consumption circus that a wedding has become and the onus of perfection makes these brides into monsters. When we pull back from the brides specifically, we can see our \$28,000- have-to-have-the-perfect-body wedding cultural norm as something unhealthy. When we pull

back, it's the culture of American weddings really being taken to task on the series. *Bridezillas* reveals a wedding system that is sick through the stories of these women. It's the material, bodily and emotional demands of the modern wedding that makes a bride into a bridezilla. The brides of the show are collateral damage. But, that collateral damage is still, well, damaging. Because the women are so strongly highlighted as bad, rather than the modern wedding, it is difficult to look past their representation to a critique of the wedding system itself. Criticizing the modern wedding may be part of the subtext of *Bridezillas*, but a sly cultural critique is not what the show is about. Criticizing women and stereotyping minorities is its main text, and *Bridezillas* is ultimately a hegemonic text. As Dow described, "the demands for more minority and female representation result in higher visibility for these groups on television," which we saw on *Bridezillas*.^{cdxxxviii} "But the specific ways in which these characters are portrayed may implicitly work to contain the more radical changes such representation implies. In this process, there is limited progress in content, but the general hegemonic values remain intact."^{cdxxxix} And even though the hegemonic system "leaks," the progressive elements of *Bridezillas*-- minority and female representation in media, a critique of the wedding culture—were overshadowed by relentlessly negative portrayals of these groups. There is just no getting around the damaging depictions of these brides. Yeah, the brides had power, but they were depicted as "crazy," "nuts," "psycho" and in racially stereotyped ways, hour after hour, season after season. And while I do see a critique of the demands of the modern wedding, these demands—material things, perfect body, etc. —are also ultimately reaffirmed by painting brides who fail to meet them as bridezillas.

One theme that appeared in both the *Lady's Book* and the *Ladies' Home Journal* but seemed to fall away in *Bridezillas* was the theme of spinsterhood for unmarried women. In the *Lady's Book* women were clearly defined by their marital status, and unmarried women were termed spinsters and old maids. In the *Journal*, articles such as "How to be Marriageable," depicted women who were unmarried in their late-twenties as somehow flawed.^{cdxl} For example, Marcia, a 29-year-old teacher who was unmarried was described as having an "empty" life because she wasn't married and didn't have children.^{cdxli} On *Bridezillas*, the spinster character didn't really appear, except once. At one of the bride's wedding receptions, two women got into quite a fight during the bouquet toss. The bride remarked she didn't realize she had so many angry, single friends.^{cdxlii} Clearly, the pressure to marry hasn't completely fallen away, but spinsterhood is not the threat it used to be. Perhaps this is because women no longer need men for their livelihoods, and not being married doesn't equal being alone anymore. Women have multiple socially acceptable options for creating families, and the beginnings of this were found even in a *Journal* story in which the widowed bride adopted three children.

Changes in media and how these changes have factored into the changing portrayal of the bride must be noted. In the *Lady's Book* and in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the bride was idealized and placed on a pedestal, but these brides existed in mass circulating magazines of the past. The brides of *Bridezillas* exist on a medium that is visual and aural and for a highly segmented cable TV audience. In the eras of the brides from the past examined here there was nothing like cable television. In the nineteenth-century writings of *Godey's Lady's Book*, despite the appearance of bad brides, good

brides were the stories' stars. In the middle years of the twentieth century, the brides of *Ladies' Home Journal* were almost all "good" in that they pursued to perfect their role as brides. Enter the bridezilla, the twenty-first century foil to the good brides of the *Lady's Book* and the mutated descendant of the twentieth-century consumer bride. While the good bride might have made for quality entertainment in the days of the *Lady's Book*, in the twenty-first century, it's the bad bride, the bridezilla, who's the star of the show. Television has to be exciting in a way written texts didn't, and with niche cable programming, the envelope must be pushed further and further to attract audiences. There aren't any bride shows advising on bridal perfection the way twentieth-century *Ladies' Home* did. And, *Bridezillas* doesn't stand alone as a show focused on bad brides. WETV's *My Fair Wedding with David Tutera* functions as a type of wedding makeover show for brides who lack the taste level and money to put on a big white wedding. In a culture where mass consumption rules, their bad bridal choices must be rehabilitated before the big day, and when they disagree with Tutera's choices, drama ensues. Other examples of shows focused on the bad bride include those focusing on the bridal body. There have been several bridal weight loss shows focused on brides who were "bad" because they gained weight before their weddings. The bad bride has replaced the good bride in terms of cultural fascination in part because, unlike the magazines examined here that existed for a mass fairly homogenous readership of middle-class white women, *Bridezillas* exists for an increasingly fragmented cable audience.

The span of centuries covered in this dissertation revealed a complex and evolving bride. She was rich with meaning in magazines or on reality television, in the nineteenth century or at the dawn of the twenty-first. Despite the brides' complexity, each

of these representations left much out in terms of the bride. In the *Lady's Book*, racial and economic diversity was rare. One mixed bride appeared, in an interracial relationship, and brides sometimes descended into poverty before being lifted out via marriage, which showed the conservative nineteenth-century magazine was not completely isolated from social issues. However, the bride reflected the white middle-class audience of the *Lady's Book*. Similar omissions were found in the brides of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. A minority war bride appeared, but black brides were rendered invisible right before the American Civil rights movement would heat up. Again, white middle-class women were the intended audience of the *Journal*, and the brides of the *Journal* reflected this. In terms of who was represented as a bride in media, *Bridezillas* was more inclusive, showing minority women of many different racial backgrounds. However, gay brides, who would certainly have been unexpected in the conservative magazine media of the past, were still rendered invisible on season nine of *Bridezillas*. Gay couples have appeared on television, reality and scripted, for decades, but on reality bride shows marriage is still largely presented traditionally. One vein of bride research I would like to pursue is looking at non-mainstream media's portrayal of her, historically and contemporarily.

This work's focus was the bride, but by association looked at the American wedding as well. As the bride changed through time, the American wedding did too. From the secret and rather quiet weddings of the early *Lady's Book*, to the day of days in *Ladies' Home*, to the circus of *Bridezillas*, representation of the wedding in media has evolved. However, despite the recent decline in the number of married couples, one thing has not changed. Weddings as rituals still continue to be important to us. While not the focus of this work, this dissertation has shown the value Americans place on the ritual of

marriage and the importance of ritual itself in our lives. Graduations, funerals and birthday parties are other rituals used to mark the passage of time and events in our lives, yet none of these rituals have captured the media's attention the way weddings have. This work only begins to touch on the role of ritual in terms of the wedding and the bride in America and exploring these topics in terms of ritual would certainly provide interesting and important insights.

This dissertation worked to understand the meaning of the bride in American media by looking at media historically and contemporarily targeted at women. Of course, there were limitations to this work. The first being the media I chose to examine. If I'd picked different publications or a different television series to examine, I may have found very different depictions of the bride. Other limitations include sample size. Interrogating the entire series of *Bridezillas*, instead of one season, may have revealed additional themes about the bride, and the same goes for the *Lady's Book* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Moving from the historical to the contemporary is also a limitation in that there is nothing quite like the *Lady's Book* or *Ladies' Home Journal* today in terms of cultural force. Now, engaged women look to *Brides* magazine in addition to TheKnot.com, wedding shows, Facebook pictures, blogs and even Twitter to create their image of the bride. Trying to understand the bride in a fragmented media world and in a world where marriage itself has in a way become fragmented added difficulty and complexity to the task of examining the bride.

The bride has meant different things in different eras. Ultimately, this dissertation, gives a clear picture of where the bride in American media has been and a glimpse into where the bride is going. Marriage rates are down and the country awaits the decision of

whether or not gay marriage will become legalized. Women's lives have changed greatly from the times of the *Lady's Book* and even from the years examined in the *Journal*.

Today's bride lives in a murky cultural context where American women seem to have more freedoms than ever but also continue to be objectified, raped, and abused, among other offenses. Marriage and family are also being redefined socially and legally, and we as a society are working out what it means to be a bride. One thing is certain, if we turn on the TV, or engage with any media, we see that the bride is a role still central to women's lives.

Epilogue

“We’re just under so much pressure to throw a wedding, for it to be perfect. Sometimes I just want to elope,” says the voice of one my best friends through the phone. She’s talking softly so her fiancé can’t hear her. They’ve been going through a rough patch for some time while still planning their wedding. “And TV makes you feel like you should have certain things,” she says. I’m not sure what the answer is for her, to elope, to stay the course, or to call the whole thing off. I reach for words from a married friend of mine. “My friend said that when she was getting married people only wanted to talk about things like her colors. She said no one tells you it’s going to be hard sometimes.”

Despite my friend’s doubts, we continue with wedding planning. We shop for dresses, visiting the bridal salon where a bride reality show, *Say Yes to the Dress: Atlanta*, is filmed. No one’s filming while we’re there, but you wouldn’t know it by the way people talk about weddings and dresses. A consultant asks about my friend’s wedding date. It’s a little more than a year away, and the consultant makes a face. “I couldn’t do that. Don’t you just hate that wait?” she asks my friend. My friend and her fiancé are both lawyers, with careers and lives. My friend politely responds that she doesn’t mind the long engagement, that she and her fiancé are quite busy. I not-politely think I’d like to tell the consultant to shove it. I think her comment was rude and is indicative of a culture where being a bride is still of the utmost importance to a woman. Here, in off-duty reality bride show world that is certainly the case. As my friend looks at

herself in the mirror in a strapless ballgown, a woman says to her, “I don’t know you, but I know this dress is you. This is your dress.” Another woman asks, “Are you saying yes to this dress?” the catchphrase used on the show. I cringe inwardly, maybe a little outwardly too. Turns out, it wasn’t my friend’s dress. We both preferred the feel of a little bridal boutique in the Highlands where the consultants were more relaxed and the wedding wasn’t talked about with that “day of days” feel.

My friend and her fiancé continue to work on their relationship and for awhile the production of their wedding takes a back seat to repairing their love for each other. As a bridesmaid and unofficial wedding planner, I carry on with the wedding plans, sometimes thinking about what’s become of my own. This is especially present when tasked with finding a wedding song for the couple’s first dance. I make up a playlist, but there’s one song that I hold back from putting on there, the song I thought my ex and I would dance to for our first dance. After a listen and a few tears, I put the song on the playlist. It’s a beautiful song and I love my friend dearly. I want her to have it as a choice for her wedding day. When my own will be I don’t know, but I hope with the knowledge from my friends’ experience and from my own research that I can approach it with my eyes on what’s truly important, building a life and a partnership with someone I love. Discussing this with my brother, still happily unmarried yet committed to his partner of more than five years, he laughs. “Whatever,” he says. “You’re going to be a total bridezilla.” I shake my head. What do little brothers know anyway?

Endnotes

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