

The Wedding Industry vs. Brides

Weddings are more than just a ceremony in today's society. Weddings are a current phenomenon and they are being broadcasted all over the country. From television shows to movies to magazines, the media is often highlighting weddings. *And a multi-billion dollar industry.* I recently got engaged and I am in the chaotic process of planning a wedding. *You can buy a software package that helps you organize this process. I think it's called "Wedding Planner" or something like that, and it uses a PERT chart.* In just these past five months, I have been significantly surprised by the reality of planning a wedding and just how much **influence the media has on shaping one's wedding**. *The influence is through what media folks call a "two-step flow," right--media influences someone involved in the process who then influence others?* In order to fully analyze the wedding industry, it is important to analyze the rhetorical strategies the wedding industry utilizes.

The current situation between the wedding industry and brides is unlike many other case studies. For instance, when analyzing an issue between the views of a free market purist and the views of a person who believes in government regulation, there are two distinct opinions that are at conflict with one another. However, when it comes to the wedding industry, the conflict is not necessarily a two-sided debate. This situation is different because brides are often not at conflict with the wedding industry. In fact, brides often **completely accept and agree with the advice the wedding industry tells them**. *Why? Most people accept what doctors tell them w/o thinking, and advertisers. Is this case different in some way?* So where is the conflict? Well, the problem lies within the fact that brides do not realize that a conflict should exist and do not realize that at times

they should be disagreeing with the wedding industry. The problem is that many brides do not hold conflicting views, but instead accept everything the wedding industry throws their way. The brides should be the opposing side, but instead they are in agreement with the wedding industry's side of the situation. [Do they view themselves as consumers?](#) This is the problem. Therefore, the wedding industry gets away with using rhetorical strategies to communicate persuasively and brides stupidly believe them.

Knowing that brides do not participate as an opposing side to the crisis, it is important to analyze the rhetorical strategies the wedding industry utilizes to convince brides to practically worship the industry. [Where are the parents \(who should be playing the role of informed and rational consumers in all of this\)?](#) In this situation both figurative language and an appeal to emotions are heavily utilized. The first of many strategies used is to emphasize the theme that it is not the groom's responsibility to get heavily (or even slightly in some cases) involved in the wedding planning tasks. After five months of my own wedding planning, I have personally encountered this rhetorical strategy on several different occasions. For instance, one time I was at a store shopping for linens and Andrew was not with me. At the store, I was never once asked any questions about my fiancé. Not only did the saleswoman not want to know about him, but she obviously did not seem to think his opinions mattered. [Did they \(this seems to be a reasonable inference to draw from his absence\)? It might be fun to do an experiment--take him with you and see if the salespeople change their approach.](#) Another instance was when Andrew and I went to register at Bed Bath & Beyond. At the store, the saleswoman gave off the impression that planning the wedding was all about me and only my opinion mattered. While at the store, the saleswoman made the comment that

Andrew's job was to simply scan every item that I instructed him to scan. In doing so, the saleswoman was excluding Andrew from the decision making process. [Oops, you've already done the experiment.](#) Overall, in both instances it was the norm for the groom to be much less involved (or not at all) in the wedding planning process. The saleswomen went out of their way to emphasize the theme that it is important to exclude the grooms from the wedding planning process. [So, did it work \(that is, how did Andrew respond\)? Why?](#)

The similar perspectives on excluding my fiancé relate to a point that Angie Besel et al. made. The article, "Here Comes the Bride: An Ethnographic Content Analysis of Bridal Books" examines 13 bridal planning books in order to analyze the messages conveyed to engaged couples. Overall, the authors concluded that the books are saturated with messages involving unequal labor distribution and the essence of preserving traditional gender roles (Angie Besel et al. 119). The saleswomen at the stores seemed to believe that since I was the bride, it was expected that I be the one to do the majority of the wedding planning work. The wedding industry's emphasis on grooms not being a part of the wedding planning process was a strategic move to get the couple to spend more money. It is not hard to imagine that grooms are better at saying no to spending more money on wedding-related purchases than brides. [Why would they be, since they're not directly paying for it?](#) By stressing that the majority of the wedding planning work was my responsibility and by eliminating my fiancé from the process, the saleswomen were attempting to get me to spend as much money as possible.

The wedding industry's ability to create a theme that involves not including grooms in the wedding planning process directly relates to another rhetorical strategy.

The wedding industry also utilizes imagery through the emphasis on materialistic items. I also have already encountered this strategy. **My mother** made me hire a wedding planner to help organize the wedding. [Now we're getting to the root of the problem?](#) Although my wedding planner has done a fantastic job at creating a beautiful wedding, it is obvious that she is a part of the wedding industry and that she is utilizing the rhetorical strategy of imagery to influence my decisions. [Is she paid on a commission?](#) When my mom first met with my wedding planner, they discussed a total budget for my wedding. Next, they took that total and divided the money into smaller categories. Whenever we go to complete a specific wedding planning task, such as purchasing flowers, we use the money from that specific category. However, every time we spend money on a category, we always end up going over budget. When this occurs, my wedding planner attempts to confuse my logic and always tells me to just imagine what my wedding day would be like with these flowers or those linens. She then seems pleased with our ability to only go over budget a small amount. [Makes sense, since she has no reason to care what it does to your overall budget.](#) When looking at the budget from a category basis, it appears as if spending a little extra money was no big deal. [A Congressman once said re: the federal budget, "A billion here, a billion there. After a while it adds up to real money." Yours is just on a smaller scale.](#) This viewpoint is exactly the outcome of the wedding industry's strategic move. The wedding industry's goal is to make brides go over budget just a little bit in each category. Since it is just a small amount, the brides think it is no big deal. However, this is untrue. In reality, going over a small amount in multiple categories adds up and eventually makes brides spend much more money than their total budgets had allotted.

Not only have I experienced the wedding industry's emphasis on materialistic possessions with my wedding planner, but I also experienced it when registering at Bed Bath & Beyond. At the store, the company was emphasizing that materialistic possessions are determinants of the happiness present in a marriage. [Are the strategies any different in really upscale stores \(say, those in Houston's Galleria\)?](#) The saleswoman asked us to imagine our future home together and then told us that “these are the items that will make your family happy”. The saleswoman gave off the impression that certain materialistic items and the presence of more items would increase the level of happiness present in a marriage. The woman utilized imagery to make me believe that I could only make my husband happy if I had a \$150 pot to make his favorite soup. The wedding industry once again utilizes imagery to make brides focus on materialistic items, thus ultimately making brides spend much more money. [I have to ask: did you buy the pot?](#)

The store's emphasis on materialistic possessions can be related to an article by Erika Engstrom. In her article, Engstrom analyzes 20 episodes of *Real Weddings from The Knot*. In her article, Engstrom states that most of the television shows have “a common theme pointing to the traditional view that wedding planning... is centered on shopping and [the] attainment of material goods” (Erika Engstrom 70). Engstrom argues that since the media has much power and influence, stresses have been placed on the materialistic aspects of a wedding. Engstrom's article is further demonstrating that the wedding industry is able to utilize imagery to make brides desire to purchase more items. [But, so far you've not talked much about the media, but about interactions with real people.](#)

A third rhetorical strategy used is symbolism by appealing to brides' emotions. The wedding industry places much symbolism on the wedding day as opposed to on the marriage relationship. In doing so, the wedding industry makes the wedding ceremony seem as if it is the most monumental day of a woman's life (not because the woman is getting married, but because her **childhood fantasy** of her perfect wedding day is finally coming true). *Where did these come from? Why don't women grow out of them?* The wedding industry often makes brides believe that a more expensive wedding symbolizes a happier wedding day. In her article, Meghan Sweeney analyzes weddings in both Ann M. Martin's *The Baby-sitters Club* and Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Alice* books. Sweeney concludes that these books not only romanticize weddings as a heterosexual fairy tale, but they also invite the reader to identify with the characters through the wedding planning process. *Ok, I'll ask. Is the process different in gay and/or lesbian weddings?* Sweeney makes the assumption that these books emphasize the theme of longing and belonging through the girls' constant desire to be consumed by love (Meghan Sweeney 5). Sweeney's article further represents the media's ability to appeal to women's emotions by depicting the wedding ceremony as the ultimate symbol of true happiness. *Has the imagery of women "capturing" or "conquering" their men gone away? That's the only thing that would make the wedding day be an ending instead of a beginning?* By creating this symbol, the wedding industry is often able to get brides to spend more money in order to experience the perfect wedding day.

After analyzing in depth a few of the rhetorical strategies the wedding industry utilizes, it is obvious that the purpose of the industry's rhetoric is to get brides (and basically all those involved in the wedding planning process) to spend as much money as

possible. The wedding industry does this by emphasizing the glory of materialistic items and by getting the rational fiancés out of the equation. One of the wedding industry's goals is to simply leave the brides **hopelessly confused** about their individual desires.

Good point--they don't really have to successfully persuade you, they just have to befuddle you. In doing so, the wedding industry will remain in control of the brides.

Weddings are such a phenomenon now in America and the wedding industry doesn't want brides to change this status quo by focusing on their individual desires that differ from the status quo. In leaving the brides unaware of their individual desires, the wedding industry is able to increase brides' spending on the thousands of wedding "necessities". Knowing this purpose and goal, it is sad, but obvious that the major conclusion of this crisis is that the wedding industry plays up the wedding, but downplays the meaning of the marriage relationship. This idea is created through the industry's ability to convince brides that their wedding day is *their* special day. Therefore, the brides should believe in the importance of materialistic items to satisfy their special day and should act on those beliefs by spending more money. **Doesn't the industry benefit from a high divorce rate (are the spending patterns any different in second weddings)?**

Looking closely at the rhetorical strategies used, it is certain that the industry is effectively utilizing persuasion and is doing a great job at it. Unlike many brides, I am aware of the rhetorical strategies being used on me. However, even though I recognize this issue and recognize that it should be a two-sided debate, I too have fallen victim to the wedding industry's strategies. Although the 'victim bride' part of me wants to say that these strategies are awful, the analyst in me sees that the wedding industry is beautifully performing these strategies to accomplish their goal. The fact is that the

wedding industry's strategic choices are working. The majority of the American society listens to and obeys the wedding industries "advice" causing the emphasis on spending money on weddings to constantly increase. [Of course, the interesting question is why do you fall for the rhetoric when you know what's going on \(presumably most women don't know, or don't want to admit they know?\)](#)

After defining the wedding industry as the user of rhetorical strategies, it is important to define the audience as the group that is the victim to these strategies. The target audience of the wedding industry's rhetoric is primarily brides. The industry also targets those who may have a desire to please the bride at all costs, such as a mother or father of the bride. In addition to these two target audiences, the wedding industry also targets teenage girls and single women. In doing so, the industry makes these women start fantasizing about their weddings now, so that by the time their wedding day comes around, the wedding industry will already have a firm control over the ladies' desires. The role that the wedding industry asks the audience to play is that of a female desiring to be a bride. Ultimately, the wedding industry targets females and successfully influences them to spend more money through the industry's rhetorical strategies. When a group targets an audience, they also often exclude an audience. In this instance, the audiences excluded intentionally are the grooms and the rational thinkers who do not follow their emotions over their logic. In excluding these audiences, the wedding industry is once again increasing the amount of money spent.

Knowing that brides are the wedding industry's primary target audience, it is obvious that I am a part of this audience. As stated previously, I recently got engaged, which makes me fit perfectly into this crisis situation. In this situation, I would be

considered part of the target audience because the wedding industry wants me to desire to be the ideal fantasy bride. If the wedding industry is able to make me desire this position, the industry has a better chance of getting money out of me. Since I am so directly involved in this situation, it was easy for me to choose this topic because I can reflect on my own personal experiences to further analyze the situation. Right now, I am a current victim. Although I agree with some of the pieces of advice the wedding industry gives me through the media, I disagree with some of the industry's concepts as well. Unlike many of the other brides the industry is targeting, I see the rhetoric present. I know the truth behind the wedding industries strategies and I can choose whether or not I want to avoid these strategies and make my own personal decisions. [You keep answering my questions on the next page! \(that's a good thing\)](#)

Although the wedding industry has done a fantastic job at utilizing rhetorical strategies to convince the audience (including myself at times) to spend more money on wedding accessories, the industry might face a few constraints. One constraint that the industry might face is the inability to reach out to brides that do not pay attention to the media. The media acts as a team. For instance, The Knot has a television show, a magazine and a website. In most instances, this aspect of the media helps make the wedding industry extremely powerful. [But, only if brides and prospective brides choose to watch/read it.](#) However, since the media is the primary means of communication between the wedding industry and brides, a bride who does not watch television or read magazines would be harder to reach. [See.](#) This would place a constraint on the wedding industry's ability to reach out to all females. Another constraint that is often out of the industry's control is the sudden increase in scholarly articles that are standing against the

wedding industry by pointing out the industry's strategies and flaws. These articles bring to light the reality of the wedding industry's ability to place emphasis on materialistic items and divide labor tasks unequally between the genders in order to increase money spent on weddings. If all women were to read these articles and finally realize the reality of the wedding industry's impact on brides, this situation might actually become a two-sided debate. [Why would they want to do that?](#)

The wedding industry and the media highly influence the American society. Although constraints exist, such as scholarly articles, the wedding industry has done such a great job at controlling brides through rhetorical strategies that the likelihood of these constraints being harmful to the industry is slim. The American society, including brides, is so focused on the entertainment aspect of the media that they fail to see the reality of the wedding industry. Brides want to believe in the wedding industry and want to see weddings as a fairytale. The wedding industry even goes out of the way to emphasize that despite a **bride's class**, the bride can still have the perfect wedding day. [How does socioeconomic class fit into all of this?](#) The goal is just to get each bride to spend as much money as possible. Right now in America, our culture is sadly denying the opportunity to create individual opinions on weddings. Our culture is so focused on the wedding industry's presence in the media that the majority of the audience does not try to form personal opinions or do research. Instead, the audience members continue to believe most every piece of advice the media gives. Until brides take a step back from the media that has consumed our society, the wedding industry will continue to steal money from brides and this issue will continue to remain a one-sided debate. [Yeah, I finally asked a question that you didn't answer \(socioeconomic class\). This really is](#)

very good work. You don't answer the class question, and you don't really explain why you're still a victim (although you hint at it re: your relationship with your mother), but otherwise it's a good effort.

Works Cited

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