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"The Effects of Event Planners in the Media on Women's Wedding Expectations"

Introduction

"With people marrying later, more women working and weddings growing even splashier, many couples are hiring planners to help sort through the dizzying choices concerning the location, invitations, flowers, photographers, color scheme, D.J.'s, bands lighting, place cards, centerpieces, cakes and fog machines, to name a dozen" (Mallozzi & Gettleman, 2007, p. 1). As portrayed above, event planners have a long list of important duties and details that are involved when coordinating weddings for clients. The industry of planning weddings is progressively expanding and evolving, society's dependence on media sources to receive information is also getting larger. A few major media outlets that are becoming more popular along with wedding planning are event planning based reality shows, wedding based magazines and websites. All three of these media outlets are consumed and viewed by many people across the United States every day and serve as a way of communicating.

Media outlets can have a powerful impact on society as a whole while they also have the power to change or evolve an individual's views and thoughts on different subjects. I am interested in understanding how media can influence a person's opinions and beliefs as they observe portrayals through these outlets that may be realistic or not. Watching, reading, and looking at event planners in the different types of media, can all play a part in the thoughts and ideas individuals have of event planners and their abilities to complete their job efficiently. Therefore, the communication phenomenon I am interested in exploring is how the media affects the opinions of women's plans for their own weddings and their interactions with event planners.

The purpose of this study is to examine women's perceptions and expectations of event planners based on what they view in the media.

Planners, Weddings, and Media – Topic Background and Overview

The event planning business is progressively growing and evolving, along with society's dependence on media to receive and interpret information. Event planners are viewed in the media by both men and women alike of different ages, and the event planners' identities and job descriptions are portrayed in the media for the viewers to see. The predominant media sources in which individuals can view event planners include wedding planning television shows, wedding magazines, and wedding based websites. All of these media sources are looked at by numerous individuals everyday who are curious and intrigued by event planners and the weddings that they create for their clients. Various media outlets show event planners coordinating weddings for all different types of individuals. This representation of event planners in media outlets generates ideas and expectations viewers may have of event planners.

Today, the average wedding costs about $27,800 and is constantly increasing (Giles, 2012). With this in mind, couples in the process of planning their own wedding want to make sure that every dollars spent towards their wedding is spent wisely. Most couples want to ensure that the day of their wedding is flawless, and that every detail included is how they envisioned. The event planners main goal after being hired is to help make the clients' visions into reality. In an article discussing the event planning business, Jackson (2005) explains that the average event planner makes around $55,000-$64,231 a year. As seen, on average an event planner receives an exceptional amount of money from individuals who want to make their dreams become reality and are willing to pay for help in doing so. As stated in the book *The Knot's Complete Guide to*

Weddings in the Real World, Roney (1998) states that the normal price of hiring an event planner

is around ten to fifteen percent of the total budget of the wedding if one is hiring the consultant

for the entire wedding (p. 21). The content contained in these various outlets is consumed by its

viewers, in which they can then form opinions and ideas on how they view others in the real

world, and how they feel their wedding day should be portrayed.

When coordinating weddings, event planners are seen as "professionals whose lives revolve

around all things nuptial; they're part party planner, stage manager, financial adviser, vendor

broker, shrink, and all-around wedding maniacs" (Roney, 1998, p. 21). Event planners can be

hired part-time and help the client with tasks such as creating the schedule, vendor lists, venue

choices, etc. For a higher price, event planners can be hired full-time, in which they are with the

client from day one until the day of the actual event. Some important steps the event planner can

complete for the client are staying within budget, creating a timeline of the planning and event

process, reading over all of the vendor contracts, managing the wedding day, etc. (Roney, 1998).

The event planner is essentially hired to assist the client in making sure their wedding day is

portrayed as desired.

As previously stated, the duties that event planners carry in their profession are illustrated

in various media outlets. A few specific outlets that exhibit these duties are the reality based

television shows *My Fair Wedding* and *Whose Wedding is it Anyway?,* wedding magazine named

The Knot, and the website *mywedding.com.* Television shows such as *My Fair Wedding* and

Whose Wedding is it Anyway? present event planners arranging their client's "dream wedding",

which consist of an unlimited budget. These reality television shows give its viewers an inside

view on each step taken to plan the wedding, such as picking the flowers, dress, venue, etc. and

portrays the event planner taking care of each step. *The Knot* is a popular wedding magazine that

features all aspects of how to create a wedding suited to personal style, and often features event planners' designs and creations from weddings that they have developed themselves. This magazine is now available online and through other media sources such as an iPad, Kindle, or Nook, which means this magazine, has the means of reaching many more viewers. Wedding websites such as *mywedding.com* have become increasingly more popular as the rise of technology has increased. This website allows its viewers to essentially plan their weddings on their own by picking which specific details on their own such as the venue, catering, photographer, etc. Each of these media sources are viewed my many each day and have shown its viewers all there is to know about event planners, the planning process, and the wedding itself.

Media artifacts, or specific wedding reality television shows such as *My Fair Wedding* and *Whose Wedding is it Anyway?*, provide us with the information needed to examine how the media portrays certain aspects of the entire wedding process and all involved. The television network, *WETv*, is on its fifth season of airing the television series *My Fair Wedding* which is about an event planner, David, and his coordination team who plans weddings for numerous clients, who are the average American. Aside from this show, David's job is as a celebrity planner and he has planned many extravagant celebrity weddings and continues to do so. In this show, he looks at the client's original ideas, adds in some of his own thoughts, and then proceeds to plan a wedding for his client that has no budget limit whatsoever. David's main goal on the show is to plan a wedding that pleases his client, no matter the cost. The actions that are shown on this show reiterates the notion that making occupations of individuals more dramatized, exciting, and not realistic, attracts viewers and skews perceptions of reality.

Similar to this, is the television show *Whose Wedding is it Anyway?*, which is a television series show on the *Style Network.* Each episode features a bride and groom that meets with the wedding planner to discuss the ideas and themes they already have for their wedding. The program then shows the event planner at work planning the client's wedding which includes the dress, rehearsal, reception, etc. and in the end they receive a honeymoon that is also paid for by the show. *Whose Wedding is it Anyway?* displays the idea that a wedding can be planned with no expenses and with a limited amount of stress. As seen from this television show, a certain portrayal of how easily weddings can be planned could be obtained by the viewers. Those who watch television shows based on event planners coordinating weddings can have unrealistic expectations compared to the abilities of actual event planners just as these participants had differing ideas about religion in weddings. *My Fair Wedding* and *Whose Wedding is it Anyway?* can be understood as television shows that depict what its viewers feel they should be able to have in their own lives.

The Knot magazine publishes information on how to plan a wedding including all aspects, and features event planners from across the United States. In these features, event planners show pictures and explanations from previous weddings that they have coordinated. The viewers that consume this magazine are exposed to the process of planning a wedding, while given tips to handle the stress caused by this process. The information taken in by the viewers of this magazine can affect the ways in which they see event planners and the abilities that the event planners have. As represented in the magazine *The Knot,* the information shared can reflect peoples' beliefs of others, themselves, and their ideas and perceptions of event planners. *Mywedding.com* is a website that features information and help on how to successfully plan a wedding with ease. It has individual tabs for each topic of interest to provide for easy usage by

those utilizing the website. This idea of planning one's own wedding is made to seem easy and stress-free, when in reality, it may not be as easy as it seems. This website's goal is to influence those that who are planning a wedding, that they can plan it on their own. This idea is portrayed by the media and can persuade certain viewers that this can be done. Although the magazine's intentions are to help individuals plan their own weddings, it also pushes its viewers away from he thought of using an event planner.

My communication phenomenon is important to research because mass media is an influential factor in "determining audience perceptions" (Jeffres, Atkin, Lee, & Neuendorf, 2011, p. 114). Perceived views and thoughts viewers form on other individuals or groups based on features shown through media consumption, is an occurrence that happens to many people without realizing this. Analyzing the different beliefs and ideas one may have on event planners and their occupations in real life compared to that portrayed in the media, illustrates the importance of communication through media outlets.

Theoretical Grounding

The concept, the generalized other, can be defined as is the general viewpoints held by a society or culture. Wood (2010) explains this notion by stating that "the perspectives of the generalized other reflect the views generally held by others in a society" (p. 49). The general viewpoint that is specifically relevant to my study is that weddings are a key event in people's lives, and the rituals and traditions used to celebrate this event include commonly held ideas related to consumption as a part of the rituals or traditions. The generalized other is also represented in the context of the event planners because they benefit from the common perceptions people have about wedding practices.

Wood (2010) also discusses the different ways in which the perspectives of the generalized other are disclosed to a society. Specifically to my research, I focused on the specific construct of how "we learn broadly shared social perspectives through media and institutions that reflect cultural values" (Wood, 2010, p. 49). In the United States, some of the general views shared among people come from messages learned from media outlets. In the book *Communication in Our Lives,* Wood (2012) states that "the generalized other is culture specific; the values, codes of conduct, roles, rules, and so forth of the generalized other reflect the distinct history and character of a given culture at a specific time" (p. 59). Wood (2012) explains that shared perceptions are unique to cultures and the characteristics that make up these cultures imitate views are that accepted in that culture.

The concept of the generalized other as explained by Wood (2010), has provided a basic structure in which my research can build off of. In today's society, expectations and beliefs of generalized conceptions are often created through messages projected from popular media sources such as television shows, magazines, and websites. As I stated previously, weddings are significant events in people's lives, and the rituals used to celebrate this event contain generally held ideas related to their utilization as a part of the ritual. A few common and important rituals and traditions amongst weddings in American culture are the wedding dress, venue, music, food, flowers, etc. Wedding rituals have been engrained into our society as a whole, therefore event planners benefit from these common perceptions of weddings. The notions created in society describing that a couples' wedding should be distinguishable, elegant, and include a stress free planning process, all positively benefit the event planner and also the event planning industry as a whole. Overall, the concept of the generalized explained by Wood (2010) relates to my research because it looks at the expectations and perceptions women have of event planners and

relates that the ideas and opinions that women have of event planners comes from the general views that are held in society.

Event Planning in a Media Driven World – A review of literature

Over the past few years, various media sources have caught on to the fascination many Americans' have with event planners coordinating extravagant and elegant weddings for their clients. This somewhat recent curiosity of event planners in alliance with weddings can be found throughout mainstream media outlets such as reality television shows, wedding based magazines, and wedding and event planning websites. Many scholars have conducted fascinating research on various media outlets and specifically examined the content contained in order to better understand the affects portrayals in media have on individuals' influences and perceptions of other groups of people, individuals, and situations. Additionally, to keep up with society's increased interest in event planning and weddings, the outlets have actively displayed different types of media in which this phenomenon can be observed and enjoyed by viewers. A few of the most recent types of media featuring this field have been reality television shows based on event planners, wedding magazines, and also websites that contain an abundance of information. I divided my research into three categories which are: elements of event planners, reality television influences, and

Elements of Event Planners

Robson (2011) states that "over the years, events have become more structured and have required a dedicated person to oversee them" (p.45). Although events have regularly been a part of our society, they have been recognized more recently because of the increased need for event

planners to coordinate events for individuals. The basic responsibilities of an event planner include designing, planning, and executing an event for their client. Robson (2011) examines the basic characteristics of event planners and how these factors affect the event planners' knowledge of coordinating events. This research is important in evaluating and understanding event planners and also to gain a better understanding of the industry.

Robson (2011) studied 329 event planners that completed a survey with questions asking their age, gender, amount of education received, and years of experience in this field. The results showed that event planners were mainly compiled of women between the ages of 35-44, who had received a college education. The average amount of experience between these participants was 10 years. This information is useful when looking at the various types of event planners and how they perform. Additionally, this research gives a better understanding of the demographics of the average event planner in today's event planning industry. Event planners can be seen and understood in many different ways, as shown in the study conducted.

Influences of Reality Television Shows

According to Engstrom and Semic (2003) "our concept of the wedding ceremony comes from our observations of the mass media, especially though films and television entertainment programs" (p. 145). Engstrom and Semic (2003) looked at the portrayal of religion in the reality television show, *A Wedding Story* which is aired on the television network *TLC*. This study was completed by researchers viewing 85 different video-taped episodes of *A Wedding Story* in which they noted any common wedding rituals, their presence during the episode, and other religion-based artifacts featured during the show. The results these scholars gathered, found that

the majority of weddings consisted of young, white couples whose ceremonies included some form of Christianity and traditional wedding practices and rituals.

This research proves that certain wedding based television shows actually portray what the viewers would consider realistic and normal in our society. Although individuals' ideas of what reality really consists of can differ from what is seen on television shows, this research proves that expectations and perceptions individuals have of reality can also match up with television shows. Previous ideas that the viewers had about most weddings in this television show being conducted with some form of Christianity and traditional wedding rituals, proved to be correct. This relates to my research in that this study, along with my research, explains how a society creates general meanings and views of things such as wedding ceremonies, rituals, traditions, etc. Media influences play a large role in the receiving and processing of information, and they also allow societies and cultures to formed joined viewpoints.

In relation to the previous study and reality television and viewers ideas of reality compared to what they view through television shows, O'Guinn & Shrum (1997) conducted a study using 2,929 participants who were randomly chosen. The participants completed a survey with questions based on television and the viewers' perceptions of how they recognize other individuals in society compared to individuals they view in everyday television shows. The results from this study exhibited that participants who watched more television believed that the majority of people in our society live lavish and wealthy lifestyles. Individuals who consume media sources unconsciously analyze the content they viewed and then interpreting the information into their own ideas.

O'Guinn & Shrum (1997) affirm that "the average individual watches more than four hours of television per day. Television supplies its viewers with images, accounts, and stories of life that are often removed from the viewer's daily experience" (p. 279). Media outlets, especially television shows have proven to impact the perceptions and expectations the viewers have on people in society. Generally, people have a general sense of the commonly shared notions the American culture has implied in society. With content displayed in media sources, expectations and beliefs can be higher or lower depending on the content being viewed. Watching reality television can aid one to have realistic thoughts, or even thoughts only fantasized about in one's imagination,

Rose and Wood (2007) also focus on the idea that individuals' thoughts and views of other people and events are affected by the material viewed in reality television shows. In their study, 15 participants picked a television program of their choice to watch, and afterward the shows were all viewed, participants were interviewed by Rose and Wood (2007). The results from this study proved that some participants saw reality television shows as a connection with their own life experiences and nothing to be seen as unusual or different, while the remaining participants saw the television shows as something that sparked their imagination into a fantasy world.

These scholars affirm that certain individuals pick out pieces of information from television shows and apply them to their personal lives, while the other individuals typically just watch the content and view the television show as a type of entertainment. Some individuals watch television shows and take notice of components included in the program such as the people involved along with various types of situations and events. After these individuals have observed the people, situations, or events, they then apply the characteristics portrayed in the television program, to their own personal lives. Similarly, my study also examines the affects

that media sources can potentially have on individuals' perceptions and thoughts of what they view.

Representations in Media

According to Jeffres, Atkin, Lee, and Neuendorf (2011) American society's media has "come to represent a more complex pattern of stories and images that embody little certainty and much relativism" (p. 102). In conducting their research, a survey was given to random individuals located in a major metropolitan region. The questions that were included in this survey asked if they personally saw their own values and portrayals in the media. In the results of this study, Jeffres et al. (2011) explained they found that consuming media is connected with perceived media representativeness of one's own values. After reviewing the results, Jeffres et al. (2011) concluded in saying "that several dimensions of values recognized in the media are linked to people's perceptions of how the media portray people like them" (p.101).

These Communication scholars found that "bombarded by a sea of messages, many people fail to see their images reflected in the media. This issue can be generalized to multiple sources of identity and meaning in people's lives" (Jeffres et al., 2011). In relation to my research, this study proves that individuals and views creating by society as a whole are surrounded in the media. Although individuals may not see themselves in the same way they are portrayed through various media sources, it is important to note that people in society normally have general thoughts on certain concepts. There are also a large amount of messages that are sent through media everyday which relates back to the concept of society's ideas being formed through the media. The media based in our culture has the potential to impact our thoughts and ideas.

Yim (2003) carried out a study that examined "the hypothesis that audience concentration is one indicator of audiences' responses to such a media environment" (p. 114). Specifically, he measured how audiences respond to items located in media by specifically analyzing the audiences' concentration on just magazines. In his results gathered from affiliated sources, Yim (2003) showed that there was a low concentration of audiences who revealed a relationship between items and audience concentration in magazines. This study further implies that "audience concentrations are not always consistent with economic concentration in the media industry" (Yim, 2003, p.125). This demonstrates that media is consumed by many different people; some people prefer certain types of media outlets to look at while others may like another kind of media outlet.

With the rapid development in various media technologies, viewers are able to receive information faster as time proceeds. Yim (2003) discovered that people are drawn to media sources which have the greatest audience appeal for that individual personally, not just magazines. This concept of concentrations on various media outlets ties in to my study because my research focuses on different media outlets and how the viewer's perceive others based on what they observe. In my research, women seem to be the target audience for wedding based media sources, so these media sources cater to their audience by giving them the material that they want to see.

All in all, from research conducted my many scholars on media and the event planning industry, I gained an in depth knowledge amount the nature of the business and every aspect that goes into being an event planner. It is known that media outlets such as television shows, magazines, and websites can all have an effect on people, whether it be positive or negative. An individual's perceptions, expectations, and influences on media related content can also be

altered and the amount of time one spends engaging themselves in these outlets, the larger

chance an effect will take place. The gap in my research is that there aren't any studies about

how the media influences perceptions others have of what event planners can do in the event of

planning a wedding.

Methodology

I have chosen to examine my topic from a qualitative perspective. I have selected this

approach because I want to further understand the attitudes and beliefs that women have about

event planners and how this affects their interactions with event planners. More specifically, I

want to look at the unique meanings created by the participants that are formed through the

media. In using this approach, I can learn more about the meanings and thoughts women have of

event planners based on what they see in the media. Suing qualitative methodology to do this

will help me to gain others specific feelings and thoughts rather than obtaining more generalized

answers.

RQ 1: Does wedding based media, specifically the television shows My Fair Wedding and

Whose Wedding is it Anyway?, effect the opinions and expectations of women's plans for their

own weddings and also their interactions with event planners?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a method of conducting research accented in using exploratory,

basic, and analytical approaches applied to communication within a certain phenomenon

(Keyton, 2011). In using qualitative research to explore my topic, I want to receive feedback

that will allow me to understand my research as a whole, rather than researching specific answers

about my topic. In conducting my research, I will use the procedure of conducting focus groups

to gain information about my communication phenomenon. Keyton (2011) explains that "a focus group is a facilitator-led group discussion used for collecting data from a group of participants about a particular topic in a limited amount of time" (p. 292). As I gain information through conducting focus groups, I will have an assistant that will be electronically recording the information that is being said. During the process of the focus group, I will need an assistant, a laptop, notebook and a pen. In addition to this, I will make sure to write down any information that I can, while making sure to pay attention to the participants' facial expressions and tone in their voices. It will be vital to get as much information and direct quotes as possible, while also observing the nonverbal communication involved.

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    introduction of the uncertainty measure. *Communication Monographs*, *70*(2), 114-128.

What would happen to wedding planners if people suddenly stopped having weddings? I had this thought the other day while scrolling through Instagram. A friend of mine, a wedding planner, had posted pictures from a wedding she recently organized. There are many different kinds of businesses involved in the wedding industry. This includes wedding planning and consultancy companies, dressmakers, jewelers, florists, caterers, furniture-staging companies, hotels and other venues, DJs, photographers, videographers, hair stylists, make-up artists, beauty therapists, bridal book and magazine publishers, and so much more. While marriage is still expected of men, the pressure on women is a lot stronger. Unmarried men are bachelors.