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A True Fairytale “Happily Ever After”: An In-Depth Communication Analysis

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*A True Fairytale “Happily Ever
After”: An In-depth Communication
Analysis*

*By,
Courtney Dempsey*



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Introduction

From “once upon a time” to “and they lived happily ever after” weddings through the ages have been modeled after tradition as well as the thought of a fairytale ending. Each bride believes in using her wedding to tell her own unique story when finally embarking on her “happily ever after”. This was not always the case, what we know today as the traditional white wedding gained popularity in the mid 18th century with Queen Victoria’s wedding, The Queen’s wedding marked the beginning of the booming bridal industry throughout England and the United States.

This bridal boom brought about the diversifying of weddings. Brides no longer all wanted to have the same traditional white wedding they wanted to be unique and stand out from their friends. By the mid 19th century brides began the destination-wedding trend. The style of unique destinations suddenly faded into the background as Princess Diana’s wedding took the world by storm. The traditional, lavish, royal wedding brought the storybook wedding to the forefront. Since this iconic moment the modern bride anecdote has evolved, holding true to the storybook ending but with each bride putting her own touch on it. Five popular themes have emerged, the Hollywood Glamorous Bride, the Boho Bride, the Beachy Bride, the New England Preppy Bride, and the Cinderella Bride. Each motif while special in its characteristics follows a very familiar pattern, which can be analyzed under Fischer’s Narrative Paradigm.

Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm begins with the idea that “humans are storytellers; the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is ‘good reasons’ which vary in form among communication situations, genres, and media”(Fischer 2). All meaningful communication happens through story telling verbally or nonverbally; we can analyze this creating of meaning through two principles, coherence and fidelity. Fisher’s coherence addresses, the structure of the narrative, and the resemblance between stories, ““rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings- their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity”(Fischer 2). Fidelity addresses whether or not the story is credible and rings true, “whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives... and the world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation”(Fischer 2). In order to apply the Paradigm I will be analyzing how each vendor evolves, reinventing themselves to fit into each bride’s unique narrative. Dress designers, florists, bakers and event venues are an integral part in every bride’s story; these four elements will assist in investing how the paradigm adapts to each different bride.

Another lens to gain a deeper understanding of these narratives is Feminist Theory. This will encompass how each bride is more empowered than historically shown. Women in the bridal field have evolved and have taken control of their industry. When the groom has become merely a prop; vendors, products and services have all been redirected towards focusing on the bride. This shift in power demonstrates the third wave or postfeminism that women have the freedom to choose from a diverse range of options.

The Dress

“Playing dress-up begins at age five and never truly ends.” —Kate Spade.

When many think of a traditional wedding dresses they automatically think white. Going back as early as the 1400’s brides would wear almost any color most commonly black or brown; except for green because it was believed to be unlucky! Today while bridal gowns do typically tend to be white, designers have been very creative in bringing unique and different modern bridal visions to fruition. Designers have not only needed to achieve their bridal vision but they need to be flexible to cater to all different types of brides. To maintain the coherence and fidelity identified in Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm, the designer needs to create a dress to fit the narrative of each different bride.

The Glamorous Bride - For the glamorous bride a designer would need to create a very form-fitting silhouette known as a trumpet gown made with heavy silk. This dress will be adorned with Swarovski crystals, gold leafing, metallic embroidery strategically placed to emphasize curves, and only the finest lace. This dress needs to fit the narrative of a Hollywood Golden Age dream, inspired by Marilyn Manroe herself, creating coherence strongly correlating with this story. This dress would ring true to this theme.

The Bohemian Bride - Next we will examine the dress choice of the bohemian bride. Her theme is nothing like the glamorous bride. Her story is all about being one with nature. This outdoorsy chic dress will be light and ethereal having flowing sleeves or off the shoulder straps. While being white, it will be minimally adorned with flower and/or leaf lace appliqué. This minimalistic natural look fits a more modern story of urban millennial couples wanting to go back to their nature filled childhoods. The coherence and fidelity to this story is newer, it may not ring true with every one. This story is tweaked often and may not be very similar to its predecessors, it also may not be recognized as credible because it is not as traditional.

The Beachy Bride - The beachy bride is similar to the boho bride, having its roots in nature. Like the boho bride, the beachy bride’s dress will be lighter in weight so it can catch and flutter in the ocean breezes. It may even be made tea-length so it will not drag through the sand. It may be adorned with pearl beads and scalloped lace to pay homage to its maritime setting. This dress cannot be anything like a large and heavy formal ball gown because it will not fit the narrative story’s fidelity. The beachy bridal dress’s style and decorative elements gives it the coherence of the theme.

The Cinderella Bride - The Cinderella bride may be one of the most commonly used bridal themes. Little girls grow up reading and watching Cinderella’s story of the girl in tatters who magically gets a fairy god-mother and becomes a princess. In the fairy tale she wears a pale blue very large tulle ball gown. To try to recreate the coveted fairytale, brides will get a similar dress in white and may add very pale blue elements such as a sash or even add a tiara paying tribute to Cinderella’s princess ending. Disney’s iconic Cinderella has been around since the 1950’s creating an unparalleled coherence and fidelity amongst the American population.

The Preppy Bride - Epitomized by the Jackie Bouvier and John F. Kennedy wedding right here in Rhode Island, the New England Preppy bride has been slightly modified but holds true to its roots. These A-line gowns are usually made of taffeta with usually higher necklines, and adorned with simplistic details such as rouching in the bodice, or beading; or with geometric or ruffled skirt detailing.

In traditional weddings the groom will stand at the front of the room and start the processional, the entire bridal party will follow. While people are happy to see the beginning processional everything is paused for the bride and her dress. She walks down the aisle last specifically to “here comes to bride”. This moment of undivided attention is unparalleled to the grooms. While usually the attention is completely on the men in this very special moment the women get undivided attention provided by the gown giving her center stage.



The Cake

Let's face it, a nice creamy chocolate cake does a lot for a lot of people; it does for me. Audrey Hepburn

Let them eat cake! Any wedding guest might argue that the best part of the reception is when the cake is cut and served. Having cake at a wedding originated from the Roman tradition of breaking barley bread over the brides head this trend, eventually evolving in Medieval England into stacking larger sweeter cakes which the bride and groom would kiss over. (Wilson 1). These traditions have been modernly adopted into stacking cakes and icing them and possibly smearing them on each other's faces. Today wedding cakes have become so unique and specific that some bakeries specialize only in baking wedding cakes. To maintain the coherence and fidelity identified in Fisher's Narrative Paradigm, the bakery needs to create a cake to fit the narrative of each different bride. These cakes have become just as unique as dresses changing in taste, design and style in accordance to fitting each brides' individual story.

The Glamorous Bride - In catering to the glamorous bride a baker would have to create something very rich and decadent in accordance with its Old Hollywood narrative. What would be more decadent and glamorous than a dark chocolate cake with dark chocolate filling, iced in bright white and embossed with edible gold calligraphy. Stacked as high as the venue will allow and surrounded by a plethora of flower arrangements. With no expense spared this baker would create coherence and fidelity within the narrative.

The Bohemian Bride - A bohemian bride would have completely different needs; decadence would not fit into her narrative. The nature themed nuptials would need something more organic most likely vegan, with organic berries, plainly frosted and adorned with real wildflowers. This very specific style would only fit into the bohemian narrative creating coherence with being completely one with nature with only organic ingredients as well as fidelity fitting this very narrow narrative.

The Beachy Bride - Beach themed weddings are most often outside on the beach making it hard for bakers to create and transport large traditional cakes. Most recently brides have turned to serving cupcakes instead of a whole cake because they are easier to transport and serve. To be cohesive with the beach theme these cupcakes are decorated with fake sand, white chocolate seashells, and pale blue frosting. These festive designs are nautical creating fidelity with guests.

The Cinderella Bride - The story of Cinderella is synonymous with Disney, their castle logo being Cinderella's castle. This castle serves as inspiration for the cake with bakers staking tiers very high, embellished in the signature Cinderella pale blue and a model of the iconic castle placed on top. The unmistakable trademarks from the movie create an automatic coherence and fidelity.

The Preppy Bride - New England Preppy bride tends to be the most traditional in the sense of cakes. Bakeries stack bright white rounded tiers, enhancing it only with edible ribbon or geometric detailing. At the preppy bride's wedding the cake is not very unique, its' simplicity detracts from its coherence and fidelity in this particular brides narrative.

According to Fischer each decision a “storyteller” is to make would greatly impact the entire narrative. After a bride adopts a theme every decision must be in accord because “identification [is] in account for how people come to adopt stories and adding the concept of narrative rationality, a “logic” intrinsic to the very idea of narrativity. The people’s symbolic actions take the form of stories and that they assess them by the principles of coherence and fidelity” (Fischer 14). The importance of these decisions can be seen throughout the theme of the narrative even carrying over to the importance of the cake!



The Flowers

"I must have flowers, always, and always." - Claude Monet

Almost as important as the dress, the bridal bouquets are an iconic part of the modern wedding. Most commonly brides will carry this bouquet down the aisle only to toss it during the ceremony, whoever catches these flowers is believed to be the next person to get married. Symbols of good luck flowers are meticulously picked to fit into the brides' narrative. Flowers are integral to the big day appearing in the service, possibly as seating decorations, in the bouquets, boutonnieres, on the table as well as decorating the entire venue! As an important part of the modern bridal look, the flowers need to align perfectly with the theme of the wedding. To maintain the coherence and fidelity identified in Fisher's Narrative Paradigm, the florist needs to create arrangements that fit the narrative of each different bride. These flower arrangements have become just as unique as dresses and cakes, changing in taste, design and style in accordance to fitting each brides' individual story.

The Glamorous Bride - The Glamorous old Hollywood bride would have a very flashy bouquet unlike most other brides. Most likely made of deep red roses these flowers would be mixed in with large plush feathers paying tribute to 1920's glamour lipsticks and feathered headpieces. It would also be adorned with crystals to coordinate with its ornate dress. Its direct connection to old Hollywood Glamour would create coherence and fidelity within the narrative.

The Bohemian Bride - The complete opposite of the Glamorous Bride would be the Bohemian bride instead of direct connections and complete matching the Bohemian bride looks for more a natural feel. Her bouquet would most likely be a compilation of different organic in-season flowers bound together by strips of ribbon and burlap. In accordance with her narrative these organic wild flowers will blend perfectly creating coherence with her woodsy natural narrative. This clear visual cohesion creates fidelity with guests.

The Beachy Bride - Since most flowers are not typically natural occurring in a beach setting it will be more difficult for a bride to create coherence and fidelity within the narrative. Brides have become very creative getting custom bouquets that break the typical mold being made of actual seashells. While creating coherence with the beach narrative by using seashells it does create somewhat of a conflict in the bridal narrative by not using flowers. This fidelity is verified in the same light that while the shells do fit the theme of the narrative the bridal narrative suffers.

The Cinderella Bride - In the classic Cinderella fairytale there is mention of glass slippers and pumpkins but never flowers. While classic white or blue flowers may be used to achieve some coherence with the color this doesn't necessarily create coherence with the classic Cinderella narrative. This lack of coherence makes it impossible to have fidelity.

The Preppy Bride - The New England Preppy Bride follows strict traditions and strives toward the most traditional bridal model. To mimic Jacqueline Bouvier's iconic day white and pink gardenias would be bound together in a classic minimalistic bouquet. This bouquet perfectly aligns with the JFK wedding creating coherence with the narrative and also fidelity because the wedding was so published we know this rings true.



While many meticulous details go in to creating the bride's dream narrative one of the most influential factors in a guests overall experience is in the choice of venue. While decorations can transform a blank venue into a destination some very specific destinations help to tie in all of the carefully planned details that weave together to create the final bridal narrative. To maintain the coherence and fidelity identified in Fisher's Narrative Paradigm, the venue must create an environment to fit the narrative of each different bride. Each venue is almost as important as the bride herself in setting the tone of the entire wedding.

The Hollywood Glamorous Bride – (keep these the same throughout) The inspiration for the Hollywood Glamorous bride can be found in the historic mansions of the 1920's. These monumental prohibition era homes of the rich set the perfect stage to transport guests to this time of opulence and elegance. Guest will be able to see the clear connection to the narrative creating coherence with the old Hollywood glamour that served as inspiration.

The Bohemian Bride- The Bohemian inspired bride's narrative is all about being one with nature. For this bridal narrative there is no better place then out and in nature. Bride who have used this theme have leaned especially toward evergreen farms, ranches or national parks. Despite its clear connection to being in nature this narrative is hard to create coherence with others. This coherence with nature but missing connection with guests makes the venue and narrative as a whole lack fidelity.

The Beachy Bride- A bride whose entire narrative completely revolves around the ocean would be impossible to pull off without being near or on the coast itself! While a wedding and reception can be set up on the sand there are also many venues that properties back onto or have breath-taking views of the ocean. Without the proper setting this nautical narrative would seem completely overpower powering to the nuptials themselves. Being on or near the beach creates immediate coherence and fidelity with the narrative and others who are invited to view the big day.

The Cinderella Bride- The Cinderella narrative creates immediate coherence and fidelity with guests but in the United States there is a slight shortage of castles. While there are no castles built for royalty there are a few estates, mansions and architectural wonders built in the gothic style inspired by those found throughout Europe. These self-proclaimed "castles" give guests the feel of the royal ball that Cinderella went to. Despite not being royal residences the grand buildings create coherence with the original fairytale and ring true with guests creating fidelity.

The Preppy Bride- Jackie Bouvier is the epitome of the New England Preppy bride holding her reception on an oceanfront farm estate under a large canopy. While everyone cannot share the same exact vision outdoor weddings held under large canopy's hold true to the New England narrative. This simply sophisticated reception creates coherence with Jackie Bouvier's highly publicized wedding also creating fidelity.

Each of these unique venues could not be interchanged with another. These venues specifically tie the narrative together. If the reception space were to not correspond with the bride's themed details the coherence and fidelity of the narrative would be completely lost.



Feminist theory

"There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish." -Michelle Obama

Women's rights have come a very long way historically, most notably the suffrage moment in 1848. Even most recently the Women's March in 2017 which swept the United States of America as well as the world. Along with these legal rights women have also come a very long way in evolving their roles as defined by society. The bridal industry speaks volumes to how women have become empowered dominating the industry becoming valued vendors as well as the bridal industry shift at aiming to please the bride not the groom, his role changed into being merely an accessory.

Explained in "third-wave feminism" which mainly addresses the positives role of feminism in empowering women and more specifically in this case the bride. Third-wave feminism "focuses on the individual and her choices from among a newly diverse range of options, it is less contingent upon political or organized activism than the feminists of the past" (Cuklanz 9). In the bridal industry the bride has the freedom to choose what ever she thinks may fit into her dream bridal narrative. Designers, bakers, florists and venues all cater directly to what a bride would like to choose. These vendors will change their aesthetic, and techniques all to reinvent themselves to what the bride decides she needs. This focus is not primarily on what the groom would like.

"Third-wave feminism has other dimensions... in mainstream media it includes an emphasis on individual choice through consumption"(Cuklanz 10). The focus of many bridal-television shows now focus on how the bride is making her choices. Programs such as "Say Yes to the Dress", "Bridezillas" and "I Found the Gown" all focus on what the bride wants, what she is choosing and how she is choosing it, the groom and his preferences are mentioned almost never. This speaks to how important the brides personal narrative has become. There are numerous bridal publications such as the "Newport Wedding Magazine", "Bridal Guide Magazine", and "Martha Stewart Weddings" which are constantly published and are targets toward the bride-to-be. These magazines have a market because of the evolvment of feminism and women's right to choose.

This third-wave feminist view illuminates how women have progressed with the freedom of choice. This opportunity for choice is very important and spans throughout politics, media and the everyday. Its resonance within the bridal perspective correlates with Fisher's Narrative Paradigm but more importantly shows the progression of women's rights that will hopefully continue to expand.



FOR ALL WOMANKIND



... and they lived
Happily everafter

In Conclusion

"If I'm honest I have to tell you I still read fairy-tales and I like them best of all." -Audrey Hepburn

These five bridal narratives all each have their own unique storylines, as trivial as they may seem each storyline perfectly demonstrates Fischer's Narrative Paradigm. The idea that every person is a "storyteller" aligns perfectly with the idea that brides are trying to convey a story with their wedding. Each elaborate story has its own key elements and characteristics that come together to weave together and complete one cohesive story.

Fischer's writings all address another very important factor of the paradigm, the ability to convey these stories to others and their ability to grasp the full story. He notes, "Some discourse is more veracious, reliable, and trustworthy in respect to knowledge, truth, and reality than some other discourse, but no form or genre has final jurisdiction over them. Some persons know more than others, are wiser, and are more to be heeded than others. But no one knows all there is to know even about his or her own area" (Fischer 13). This statement is especially true in today's society now more than ever. Now that the media is so sensationalized and sources are not always as credible it is harder and harder for people to gain credible information in order to understand archetypal stories that had been previously understood and passed down for generations.

Despite this hardship Fischer believed that the flexibility and understanding of human nature would help account for this hurdle of storytelling. He stated, "Liberation of the human spirit would seem to call for an acceptance of these facts, they are intrinsic to the narrative paradigm which is a response to the exigence created by their denial" (Fischer 13). His grasp on the human need to convey meaning can be seen in almost all aspects of life where people are trying to create new ways to show feelings or special memories.

The Narrative Paradigm as well as third-wave feminism have both illuminated the evolution of expression especially in the case of women. Through this project I have gained a deeper understanding of the human need to tell stories in correlation with Fischer's Narrative Paradigm as well as the evolution of women in their own story-telling roles. This specific evolution is extremely important in the rapidly changing world of media. I look forward to seeing how this evolution continues to grow and shape our world.

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