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A Cross-Cultural Study of Weddings through Media and Ritual: Analyzing Indian and North American Weddings

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Erika Buckley

Abstract

The wedding is one of the only rituals or events that many cultures of the world consistently have in common. Weddings are found in almost every society. A wedding can feed consumer appetites and the industry that supports it. Costs for the average United States wedding can range from \$26,000 to \$35,530 or more (“Cost of Weddings” 2006). The costs of Indian wedding ceremonies vary from \$34,000 up to \$2 million (Das 2005). Despite this large range the Indian wedding industry averages only \$11 billion annually while its American counterpart is a whopping \$50 billion each year (“Cost of Weddings” 2006, Das 2005). Remarriages constitute 30% of the American wedding industry (Ingram 1999) while in India, remarriage is relatively uncommon. Given the amount of money spent on this cultural ritual, it is reasonable to assert that it carries a great deal of personal, cultural, and social significance. I’m going to contrast and compare Indian and American weddings through an examination of film. This study is similar to Best’s (2000) study of American proms, another related cultural tradition. Specifically I will examine portrayals of wedding ceremonies as presented by both Hollywood and Bollywood films.

KEYWORDS: Weddings, Indian Weddings, American Weddings, Bollywood Films, Wedding Ceremonies, Film

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Introduction

The wedding is one of the only rituals or events that many cultures of the world consistently have in common. Weddings are found in almost every society. A wedding can feed consumer appetites and the industry that supports it. Costs for the average United States wedding can range from \$26,000 to \$35,530 or more ("Cost of Weddings" 2006). The costs of Indian wedding ceremonies vary from \$34,000 up to \$2 million (Das 2005). Despite this large range the Indian wedding industry averages only \$11 billion annually while its American counterpart is a whopping \$50 billion each year ("Cost of Weddings" 2006, Das 2005). Remarriages constitute 30% of the American wedding industry (Ingram 1999) while in India, remarriage is relatively uncommon.

Given the amount of money spent on this cultural ritual, it is reasonable to assert that it carries a great deal of personal, cultural, and social significance. I'm going to contrast and compare Indian and American weddings through an examination of film. This study is similar to Best's (2000) study of American proms, another related cultural tradition. Specifically I will examine portrayals of wedding ceremonies as presented by both Hollywood and Bollywood films.

I will be analyzing the components of the wedding ritual as well as analyzing the material and cultural interpretations of marriage ceremonies. Perspectives vary by differing roles; there are commonalities and differences in values. I hope to elucidate what this event means for those anticipating and engaging in the wedding ceremony.

It is important to look at these rituals as they pertain to the popular culture in the United States as well as in India. While wedding ceremonies in the U.S. can vary dramatically, this study will be restricted to the ideal "white wedding". Therefore, I will also limit my

examination to Judeo/Christian practices and ceremonial components that were popularized prior to the 19th century and have continued to the present day, particularly within the white middle class. The Indian wedding rituals will be analyzed using the Vedic ceremony (i.e., those rituals most commonly associated with the Hindu or Buddhist practices) commonly found in the higher caste systems.

Previous research in this area has been limited in its analysis of Indian wedding rituals (Kolenda, 1984). Similarly, there have been only a few examinations of pre-wedding preparations or post-wedding preparations for American weddings in regards to work (Sniezek, 2005). There are a small number of sociological analyses of the American wedding and their rituals in recent decades (Chesler, 1980; Ingram, 1999; Wallace 2004). Most studies have limited their research to romance and marriage ideals (Coontz, 2005). Few studies have been performed cross-culturally about the execution of the wedding ceremony itself (Dunes, 1996; Kolenda, 1984). Some similar studies have been performed, however, analyzing related rituals and other rites of passage such as American proms and debutante balls (Best, 2000). Proms and their counterparts can hold many clues to the significance of the components embedded in the wedding.

The present study explains the involvement of families and community as they relate to negotiations between public and private displays and interactions in an explanation of this ritualized event. This study will differentiate between rituals allocated by religious requirements and those that have developed due to capital displays and class structures. These topics are analyzed through a qualitative examination of American and Indian ritual components within media depictions of weddings.



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Faculty Mentor

This research addresses the following questions. First, what are the rituals that are embedded in the marriage ceremony? Are wedding rituals in more modern societies drastically different from those in more traditional societies or are there commonalities? Second, how are we socialized into these rituals and how do participants come to understand their roles in these events? Finally, what are the cultural and social meanings of these weddings?

Background

A ritual is defined as a:

Set of prescribed behaviors... 'It is generally agreed that ritual is particularly endemic in situations of change at those times of an individual, group, or society when there is the greatest uncertainty and when people have difficulty in expressing their ideas and feelings in a more direct way. In fact, ritual is dynamic and creative, because it allows people to handle situations that are otherwise troubling and disruptive. Ritual not only brings order out of chaos, but relieves people's fears about their personal and collective futures (Gills in Wallace, 2004 p.3-4).

According to Rappaport, 2002:

Ritual as a structure that is a more or less enduring set of relations among a number of general but variable features. As a form or structure it possesses certain logical properties, but its properties are not only logical. In as much as performance is one of its general features, it possesses the properties of practice as well. In ritual, logic becomes enacted and embodied-is realized-in unique ways.

However, according to Berardo and Vera, 1981:

Rituals and ceremonies form a part of the institutional arrangements

which can be understood only in terms of the ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and values, i.e., the ideological frameworks, which render them meaningful. The movements, gestures, instruments, times, places, and words that constitute these rituals are expressions (signs and symbols) of other aspects of society.

Proms, another U.S. ritual, can be seen as precursors to weddings (Best, 2000). Parents prod girls to perfect themselves, planning for months at a time for this single night. Boys are socialized to be less invested in proms. Their main concern usually is directed toward payment of the night's events, making arrangements for transportation and expenses related to post-prom activities (Best, 2000), though the division of payment has altered slightly over the years.

With respect to weddings, historically women's families pay for the necessities of the event (Wallace, 2004). Changes in the economy have forced couples to start sharing the cost of weddings (Ingram, 1999) and, recently, girls have increasingly been paying for their portion of expenses related to proms (Best, 2000). The view of gender roles can vary slightly across racial and ethnic categories but the mainstream view of proms and weddings in North American culture is very constant.

While much of the research in the arena of weddings ultimately is studying marriage (Coontz, 2005), there are a few studies of both Indian and North American wedding rituals. Emphasis has been placed on the division of labor and gender roles within North American society. Studies have shown that women disproportionately do more work for the wedding, home, and what has been frequently referred to as "kin work" (Sniezek, 2005). Women in addition often do not perceive this as an unfair division of work until

the disparity in effort concerns two-thirds of the responsibilities attached to planning a wedding or engaging in house work (Sniezek, 2005). It is uncertain whether this outcome is found among Indian couples.

While interest in U.S. weddings is growing, theories have barely begun to form in regards to the Indian Vedic wedding. These wedding rituals have barely altered through centuries and may hold many answers for not only Indian society but North American society as well. Studies that have analyzed specific Indian societies have included weddings as part of their study because it is an important component of most cultures (Kolenda, 1984). More current research needs to be done across time and place so a better understanding of social expectations and meanings can be attained.

In order to identify properly the two groups' rituals and separate them into categories, I borrowed from Max Weber. By following Max Weber's "ideal type," I constructed an ideal type of wedding to represent the average Indian and American wedding ceremony. This construction facilitates cross-cultural comparisons. For the Indian wedding, the ideal type took the form of the Vedic Ceremony (for full descriptions see Appendix I). For the North American wedding, the ideal type was the Judeo-Christian "white wedding" (for full descriptions see Appendix I). To further examine different cultural practices and their importance in the ritual, I have examined movies and text and broken the rituals into five categories: gender, wealth, kinship, superstition, and fertility.

Gender

Ingram (1999) alludes to the concept that by American females being so heavily involved in the construction and ideology of the perfect "white wedding" from early ages, the male's exclusion

from the world of the wedding at a similar time by default expresses a need to do other “more important” tasks. The white middle class female is socialized and marketed to by means of toys, movies, games, and parents in hopes that in the future the female will be a primary player in capital consumption particularly in regards to the wedding industry. Males and most minority groups, however, are not seen as such a viable interest, and are not as heavily included in the marketing strategies (Ingram 1999). The lack of visibility and exclusion in the wedding industry sets the stage for future gender division of responsibilities where most often the male has few tasks.

Much of the consumerism, exclusion of males, and changes in ritual that currently exist in the U.S.A. began to form during the country’s transitional phase from the last half of the 19th century towards the beginning of the 20th century, according to Wallace (2004). The bride’s family had always performed such tasks as making the cake, housing the wedding, making the dress, creating a good trousseau, and attaining flowers. The male’s duties included making sure he had a home to bring his new bride to and finances enough to keep her. As consumer culture began to popularize in the late 1800’s to early 1900’s traditionally home created rituals began to be paid for and contracted outside of the home. The bride’s family often covered the cost of the wedding excluding the groom’s tux, the rings, and the honeymoon because families did not want the groom to have certain expectations of reaping “gifts” early if he did contribute to the wedding (Wallace, 2004). Women after that time often carried the burden and pride of creating their “white weddings.” A prime example of the domination of the wedding by the female members of the family is shown in *Father of the Bride*. Multiple times George (the father) is told

to not fuss and ultimately let the women handle everything. He is just there to pay. Even after he has a slight nervous breakdown because of his feelings of lack of control in “his own” daughter’s wedding, he still succumbs to the tradition that “women rule” the wedding and he pays for what they want.

The exclusion of males in wedding ritual preparations gives the impression that 1) the male has more important things to be doing with his time that are not wedding related (Ingram 1999), and 2) the wedding is not the male’s domain. A problem arises with modern American weddings due to the desire of the bride to involve the groom in the preparations, even though he has been socialized for decades not to participate. Often the male does not want involvement in those activities, as shown in the rhetoric used to describe the to-do-list for the groom. Wedding manuals include instructions for men to “Endure the gift registry process with fiancé,” implying a burden or a sentiment that they are just there while things are being performed around them. While modern additions to these preparations are trying to include the groom in the decision making process (Delaney 2005), he may just be more content including himself as a financial contributor similar to males in the prom ritual.

When comparing each culture’s bride and groom to-do-lists there are some key differences in the allocation and language used to describe everyone’s duties. In the Indian tradition the groom and bride have almost an equal amount of preparations to perform. The vocabulary used to describe the execution of such tasks evokes a need to work together because it is practice for the future. In comparison the duties given to the bride in American weddings drastically outweighs those listed for the groom. While in the American wedding, many of the rituals such

as exchanging the rings and lighting candles are performed together, they were not necessarily prepared together. In the Indian ceremony the rituals may be performed together or with another family member, and their preparation was performed by family, bride, groom, or both together.

The Indian wedding is not without its gendered rituals however. Madhuparka Vidhi is a ritual in which the mother-in-law washes the feet of her new son-in-law that shows a change in the respect hierarchy from mother in law to her new son in law. There are also still rituals such as giving the bride away where the bride is still in essence a form of property. This ritual is cross cultural and similar gender roles are exhibited and actions performed. In both societies women are considered the property of her parents, her father in particular. That ownership was passed off to the groom and his family through the ritual of the wedding. In the American ceremony this can be understood by the officiator asking “Who gives this woman away.” In the context of the Indian wedding, the concept of a dowry is often still in effect. The dowry is a way for the bride’s family to help pay for her new expenses that she will incur while in her new family.

Wealth

Several ritual components in the wedding ceremony pertain to wealth across both cultures. One such example is jewelry. Only families whose incomes can afford jewelry have it. In the Indian wedding, jewelry is considered to be very important, especially bangles. They are almost comparable to the diamond engagement ring in American society. Indian families in higher castes are more likely to have an engagement ceremony, where rings may be exchanged. That shows the differences in wealth between classes. While In American society caste systems do not exist, class systems do. There is a clear difference between

North American upper and middle classes. While the middle class attempt to make it appear as if there is no difference between their lifestyles and that of the wealthy and famous, a price must be paid for lavishness. In *Madea's Family Reunion* the mother of the bride is in essence selling her daughter to a man that abuses her, just to attain money. She has to be viewed as wealthy and the biggest show for her is her daughter's wedding, which she proceeds to spare no expense even though her funds are limited. This makes the wedding less about the couple and more about the appearance of attainment of the American dream. The "dream wedding" is the announcement.

For middle class North Americans, weddings can create and often include some debt. Much of that debt they will incur heavily because of the cost of the "dream wedding" they really can not afford. The average middle class American bride's family can not usually afford to pay for the wedding alone either. The recent change in the societal norms and economic construction of society has caused grooms to begin to help pay for the wedding without it being construed as a ploy to attain specific "services" early. Two incomes are necessary for basic home living and with the average cost of a wedding causing families to incur debt, males have begun to contribute. Even though couples are beginning to pay for weddings jointly, the cost is still disproportionately felt by the female who still earns less than the male, debt is still being incurred.

One of the most important and most expensive rituals in the wedding is the wearing of a white wedding dress. This dress usually is only worn by the purchaser once. The white dress has deviated from its predecessor the dark colored wedding dress, and it became the descendant of the pastel wedding dress. Up until the mid 1800's to 1900's wedding dresses were still made to be

worn multiple times. Brides wanted dresses to be durable and darker so they showed less stains when they were worn multiple times. Even in WWII some women were still wearing colored dresses that they planned to wear multiple times. The white wedding dress had began to run parallel to the dark dress around the late 1800's after Queen Victoria's wedding. The 1900's sparked entrance of the white dress into mainstream society. Around the 1960's and 1970's the white dress being worn only once grew in popularity and became an institution in North American weddings (Wallace, 2004). Only with wealth, or the concept of having wealth, can a person wear an article of clothing, which cost them several hundreds or thousands of dollars, for one day and then have it sit in storage or give it away.

This wealth in many senses isn't real wealth for the average North American family; it is just the illusion of wealth. Wealth is the total value of the accumulated assets owned by an individual, household, community, or country (Deandroff, 2001). In the late 1800's to 1900's the emergence of wedding debt began to appear, as consumerism grew and North American women wanted to be able to feel like a queen or socialite on "their" one day. Women at the time were still encouraged to keep their weddings realistic and in range of their real income (Wallace, 2004). That hasn't kept brides and grooms from spending. In *Father of the Bride*, George is constantly checking the numbers about the cost of the wedding. He is continuously having emotional breakdowns because they are so high. He even pitches the idea of a home wedding to his wife and daughter because the cost is so high. The North American wedding industry has made couples and their families feel almost pressured to have the dream "white wedding" (Ingram, 1999). They are not

fulfilling the American dream, or are ruining their daughter's if they don't spend all they can. In response middle class couples and families keep spending their imaginary wealth.

While their Indian counterparts spend only what they have saved and can afford, Indian families, rich and poor, are also still keeping in mind dowries. In Indian society a family saves up money from their daughter's birth for the wedding. The family understands that they will probably still have to pay for a dowry, which will be used to sustain the daughter in her new home. The wedding and dowry are in Indian culture less an expression of wealth but a manner in which Indian families can celebrate their children and "thank" the other family for taking their unmarried daughter off of their hands. They may on average spend more on the wedding, but it is all inclusive to not only their daughter's wedding but her life after. Here the underlying gender valuing in India is more important than the overall perception of a wealth display.

Kinship

In the American wedding, there are a few rituals that involve family members. Those same rituals also reflect the absence of familial involvement later on in the marriage and the lack of responsibility and importance placed upon family in mainstream North American culture. This may explain why so many wedding rituals do not include the family of either bride or groom. One such exception to the rule may be the giving away of the bride. This is a ritual less about kinship than about ownership. The question of "Who gives this bride away" is in actuality saying "Who owns the bride now?", thus giving gender dominance to the males in her life. First the father of the bride has ownership over the young woman and during the wedding ceremony the father-in-law passes his possession and dominance to the bride's groom. "The father owned his

daughter until he had chosen a worthy marriage partner to 'give' her to (Seligson, 1973)" (Chesser 1980).

In the giving away of the bride in Indian culture the bride is, in essence, considered property. A clear example of this is in the movie *Hum Dil de Chuke Sanam* where the female is compared to a kite. The ground is her family and the sky her future husband. The bride is sent into the sky with a string. That string could be said to be the wedding. She will forever be connected to the family, but she now belongs to the sky. Her connection should never be cut. If somehow it is, it is a tragedy. Within the Indian rituals of the wedding the family involvement is a pivotal part. The participation of family within numerous rituals expresses and are exhibited within the marriage after the wedding. These rituals may give insight into the expectations of family in the society. These rituals are present throughout the whole ceremony. The following rituals fall under kinship type rituals: Kashi Yatra, Parchan, Varapreshanem, Kanyadaan (Kanya Dhanam), sapatapadi (seven vows), Vaaku Nichaya Muhoortham, Maangala Dharanam, Laaja homam, Ashirvadam, Vadhupraves. They aren't just symbolic. The bride often is moving literally into the home of her new husband with his whole family: father, mother, grandmother, and possibly aunts and uncles. In the movie *Chori Chori*, The bride is nervous and crying about her wedding for many reasons. One is because she was an orphan and has no biological family to help her perform any of the rituals. The presence of family for the enactment of the rituals is the key. It is very important when her new family tells her that she is now more apart of their family than the groom, before the wedding even begins.

In the view of mainstream North American society the family inclusion often is limited to her immediate in-laws,

her husband's parents. To that measure, they are as close as distance allows. Often those very in-laws are not living in the home of the new bride and groom. For many North Americans, in post 1960s, the opposite might have been the case, but with the popularization of retirement homes the live-in parent has moved out. The individualistic concept not commonly found in Indian culture was deemed normal in North American culture. North American cultural norms, rarely include family, much less extended family.

In Indian culture, wedding responsibilities are more likely to be shared by both families and even members of the community. Family involvement in almost every part of the wedding does not allow for as much individual responsibility. This lack of individual responsibility helps avoid the occasional feeling of "ruining" the wedding. Unlike North American weddings where a wedding can be "ruined" by one person forgetting something duties are distributed amongst the guruji (several families, and their members). It is very difficult for one person to ruin an entire wedding through carelessness. A prime example is the keeping of the rings. It is such a social taboo and constant occurrence that many American media depictions of the wedding include this faux pas. In Indian representations of similar events this lack of attention does not completely ruin the event because rituals often are not left up to one individual. The wedding is a group project or ritual for the community. There are problems with a ritual that could potentially "ruin" an Indian wedding, but it would be on a bigger scale. If by chance, someone forgot the garlands for the bride and groom's sapatapadi (seven vows) or if the sacred fire was not present, the wedding would not take place. Each of these rituals is not just performed by bride's family alone. The groom's family is also equally involved. In *Mere Yaar*

Ki Shaadi Hai, the bride's family and groom's family check with each other to make sure specific parts of the wedding are being taken care of, showing open communication and trust that has developed between the two families.

Superstition

Superstition is the largest category of all of the ritual categories. This is due to the fact that most of the rituals that may have fallen under any other category usually also fall under superstition. All of the fertility rituals fall under superstition. The mere presence of things such as children and flowers around a person do not normally invoke pregnancy or an easier ability to get pregnant, but for some reason that changes with its presence at a wedding. In both *Chori Chori* and *The Wedding Planner* there are scenes where the superstition of the groom not seeing the bride before the wedding is mentioned. It is as if the wedding ceremony itself is able to cast a spell over the rituals and symbols within it making them supernatural and powerful. That is the only way that a piece of cloth can protect a couple of people from an evil eye or evil spirits. It is also almost as if the wedding itself invites such calamities. Why did the evil spirits appear? Why will bad things just happen to you if you do not have these symbolic things on this particular date? Why would they not manifest on another day? What calls upon these evil things to want to attack a bride and groom, and the need to have to ward them off or trick them away from the couple and the wedding? It is apparently the producer of things good and evil. Does that say something about society's perceptions of the act in and of itself? Do we subconsciously believe that the act is not sensible? In the Indian and American ceremonies in the vows and the rituals, the couple has to fight off bad situations in life and is told about

the struggles they will endure together. Are we secretly saying that these struggles would not have manifested had this ceremony not been “conjured up,” or is it the fact that love has been paired with marriage recently?

The ritual of the wedding historically cross-culturally may have some clues. Indian culture has a theme that coincides with arranged marriages and has for centuries: You marry first and love comes later. (Cootz, 2005) This may have been a theme prior to the mid 1800’s in American society when marriages were often still arranged. (Wallace, 2004) It isn’t known for sure, but couples were not likely to be instantly in love with each other. In many other scenarios they may have met each other for the first time at their wedding or only a few days before. In fact early Catholic married couples were encouraged not to be in love too much with each other. Catholic leaders were comparing too much love for one’s wife to committing the act of idol worship (Cootz, 2005) possibly because they should not be loving any thing as much as God. This belief could be considered religious superstition of condemnation from God upon your wedding if you care too much for your future spouse.

Fertility

“White wedding” ceremonies tend to have more rituals pertaining to fertility than the Vedic ceremony. While both Indian and North American ceremonies have flowers, the Indian weddings physically speaks about children and the parents duties to them and each other, the American wedding, however, has more symbolic showings of reproduction. These portraits include the flower girl and the ring bearer. Rituals of fertility include the cutting of the cake with the male’s hand over the female’s hand. The flowers of the wedding are not to be excluded. All of these fall under the category of fertility, flowers

being the most recognizable. Flowers could be found in bridal garlands adorning the crowns of peasant brides (Chesser, 1980). They would appear on the shoulders of WWII brides. Flowers would also appear in the form of the orange blossom a favorite of brides in the U.S. from prior to the 1800’s to the 1940’s (Wallace, 2004). The orange blossom was believed to be a dual increaser of fertility, because it bloomed and bore fruit (Wallace 2004). In every single American or Indian film flowers appeared somewhere. In the movie *Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai*, the whole house especially the mandap (canopy) was covered in flowers that were decorated by the bride’s family and friends. In *Wedding Crashers* every wedding had flowers on some wall or table. If not they were at least on the cake.

The cake symbolized several things from breaking of bread (Wallace, 2004) to fertility. Its forms have altered over time from heavy European fruit type of cake to the light and fluffy American style. (Wallace, 2004) It is often cut to symbolize the breaking of the hymen and hopeful production of children (Dunes, 1996). Fertility ritual in the Roman days was also in the form of a wheat cake that was offered to the god, Jupiter. In this ritual there was also often an alter boy, who ushers the inclusion of children in the wedding ceremony as vessels of fertility. The modern day American ring bearer and flower girl could be said to be manifestations of an alter child. Children still carry sacred ritualistic symbols up isles to alter or the ritualistic places where weddings are often held.

The Vedic ceremony revolved around future children. Children’s creation and actual childhood are considered at least nine of the sixteen Hindu Samskaras after the wedding. They are not so much hoped for, like they are in the “white wedding,” as they are expected. They are discussed in the *saptapadi* in one of the vows.

Children are viewed more as an institution and a religious doctrine. They can not be conjured.

Religion

While religion may seem to take prominence in the “white wedding,” it does not have the largest number of rituals dedicated to it. The Indian wedding has more rituals in it dedicated to religious practices than the American wedding. The Vedic rituals overall practice in the Indian wedding often come back to their religious beliefs because the wedding rituals are viewed as a new contribution to Hindu life. The unification of two people replicates activities performed by Hindu deities. The creation and fostering of children is a sacrament and rite of passage, just like the wedding itself, under religious doctrine or dharma (duty). An example of such beliefs is the practice of Kanayadan, while it is the giving away of the bride, it is also where the bride takes upon the form of the goddess Laxmi. The groom is supposed to be lord Narayan. It is the family’s greatest duty and honor to give her away because she is the figurative embodiment of a goddess. Another example of religious participation can be viewed in the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, the couple can not have their wedding until the auspicious time of their horoscopes line up exactly right, so the wedding is postponed. They can not get married until “God/Gods” give them permission through the horoscope.

In North American weddings people are not often viewed as reenacting the actions of God or doing their religious duty in getting married. The closest thing to that is the Judeo/Christian belief that the marriage is a covenant or agreement between the couple and God. The priest could be the medium by which this agreement is taking place. In the “white wedding” ceremony it

does take place often in a temple or church, which are considered religious buildings. Other than the location and the officiator presiding over the wedding there are few religious rituals that are generalized across the North American wedding. These Judeo/ Christian rituals may be enacted on an individual basis, but they are not as pervasive as the Vedic religious rituals. In text and media there were more rituals that appeared under the religious context Indian culture than in North American. Most other categories out numbered the religious category in appearances counted in media.

Data and Methods

The ideal type weddings were created for proper identification of rituals within the viewed films. The films were chosen on the basis of popularity in each of their cultures, amount of wedding preparation shown, and ceremony showings. All of the seven American films were chosen from different categories such as comedies, dramas, and “family” or “feel good films”. The seven Indian films were chosen from a range of Bollywood films as well. After selecting the films to be analyzed, I performed a content analysis counting specific component rituals for the number of times they appeared in the film. They were then categorized into five categories: wealth, gender, fertility, religion, and kinship (see Table 1 and Table 2, Appendix II and III). The number of rituals in each category was tallied (see Table 3, Appendix IV). The number of North American rituals is greater than the Indian rituals in the categories of gender, wealth, superstition, and fertility. Conversely, kinship and religious rituals were more common in the construction of Indian wedding rituals.

Fertility rituals in the Indian films appeared fifteen times in total for the two wedding rituals considered

to be fertility rituals. This number of appearances is in comparison with the 73 times that the five North American fertility rituals appeared in the “white wedding” films. This gap in presentation of fertility rituals shows support for the contention that there is a greater importance placed on fertility in North American films compared to Indian films.

In regards to the category of religion more religious rituals were identified for the Indian culture than North American. The number of appearances of these same religious practices in Table 4 appeared in the Indian films more often than in North American films. There is a trend for the Indian media to project an image of the wedding as more of a religious event than North American films. While the North American weddings are often shown taking place in churches or synagogues, places considered religious realms, the Indian wedding gives more all around religious practices in the wedding than North American weddings.

There is a stronger presence of the concept of kinship for Indian weddings than in the North American weddings (see Tables 3 and 4, Appendix IV). In Indian movies, kinship rituals appeared over forty times while the North American movies emphasized kinship rituals only sixteen times. This coincides with the previously stated concepts about family and kinship being valued higher in Indian culture, as shown through the wedding practices and film.

Under the category of gender, the number of rituals for each cultural group was almost equal. The amount of gendered rituals that appear in North American film only slightly outweighed the number of gendered wedding rituals viewed in the Indian media. It is possible that the degree of importance placed on gender roles is equal in each culture. Another interpretation could be that that both cultures are almost

equal in their valuing of both genders. It could also be viewed that females are greatly valued in each culture and still expected to fulfill different duties in their roles determined by each culture. Alternatively, both cultures could value one gender group over the other to the same degree, which shows that females are not valued highly in each culture to the same degree. However, they still are expected to fulfill their different gendered responsibilities in each culture.

Under the category of superstition the number of identified rituals for North American culture was twice that of Indian culture. The number of viewed rituals for North American culture didn't contradict the ratio or the fact that the superstition may be valued more in American society. There is a slight correlation in the fact that the religious rituals are low and the superstitious rituals are high in North American culture. This may be due to the fact that Indian culture is only recently starting to be viewed as an up and coming capitalist society and still has many parts that are considered sacred and traditional, and has fewer superstitious rituals not related to religion. The high amount of superstition in North American culture could also be related to the concept of capitalism, education, and shifts in such becoming “developed” societies where popular cultural ideas related to religion, become symbols that eventually morph into superstitious practices. The religion is reduced in importance and replaced with other popular cultural norms, so the original connections are lost to the society. The new norms become more prominent like the old religious practices.

Rituals categorized as associated with wealth were also higher in North American culture than in Indian culture. The amount of times wealth rituals were observed in North American wedding movies was high as well. One might attribute this to the capitalistic nature of not only the North American

wedding industry but the society as a whole, a prime example of how the media uses the wedding to sell ideas for other things in American society. As previously discussed weddings are used for multiple purposes in North American society. In Indian culture wealth rituals were the second highest observed set of rituals of the wedding. This could be correlated with their rise in the capitalistic market, or strictly an event where unlike anything else, Indian families want to put their best foot forward. The high display of wealth may be both the North American and Indian cultures' ways of giving their children that one fairy tale when the majority of both cultures cannot actually afford it. The question is, while it is known that most North American families are going into debt to pay for their "dream white weddings" (Ingram, 1999), are Indian families doing the same or saving up to pay for the wedding?

Conclusion

This research attempted to set an example for future research about cross-cultural wedding studies.

In response to the first questions, "What are the rituals that are embedded in the marriage ceremony? Are wedding

rituals in more modern societies drastically different from those in more traditional societies or are there commonalities?" The ideal American wedding and Indian wedding rituals were divided into five major categories and are described in the charts on pages 24-28. There are similarities in their societal values related to gender and religion as based on the rituals, while the other categories such as fertility, wealth, superstition and kinship show clear differing social values. Some differences and similarities were expected and others were not.

In analyzing the second question, "How are we socialized into these rituals and how do participants come to understand their roles in these events?" It was found that, due to historical presentations of gender roles, some of the socialization processes helped give insight to the development of these rituals and their significance. Through the media and commercialization of the wedding, the "white wedding" became seen as the female domain, while males were socialized into thinking the wedding was not a male domain.

Finally, it was asked "What are the cultural and social meanings of these weddings?" The "white wedding"

has become an example of American consumer culture after humble beginnings prior to the late 1800's as a small family community organized event. Indian weddings are still community organized and executed events. They tend to focus on the couple within the community that united them. While Indian weddings may not be small in size or price, their underlying values have not changed greatly over the centuries.

Future research may include attending weddings and interviewing married or engaged couples regarding their weddings.

Wedding rituals may appear to be just physical manifestations but through my data and textual research, it is apparent that the rituals seem to be based on ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and values. New rituals and traditions appear every year in all cultures because of globalization. The wedding as well is evolving. New trends are becoming rituals through popularization (Berardo, 1981). The more they are practiced and performed the more the rituals say about the evolving cultures which produce them.

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Appendix I

Vedic ceremony

The rituals should last about three to four days. There are witnesses in all the parts of the wedding often family, friends, and community members that may have helped either unite, introduced the couple, or that prepared the wedding. The Vedic ceremony begins with an engagement ceremony on the first night of the wedding. The bride and groom exchange rings. The night continues with blessings from their families and friends and music with dancing. There are flowers on the blessing plates, the walls and tables of the bride and groom's homes, and on the mandap, which is usually in the bride's home, for all the events. The bride is wearing traditional garb during these rituals such as wedding bangles, a bindi, a red sari, veil, necklaces and even a nose ring that may extend by a chain to her ear. The groom wears a sherwani, which usually is cream, tan or white. Next Ganesh poojan can be performed where obstacles are believed to be removed for the couple in their home by invoking lord Ganesh. Following that Mandaparohana, where the place of the wedding is established, is performed. Also a Kashi Yatra (barat) happens, where the groom is in a parade, and he is "convinced" to come to the married life by the bride's family. The groom is greeted and escorted (Vara Yatra) by them to the wedding spot in their home. Then Parshan takes place, where the mother of the bride greets the groom with a flower garland (Jaymala). Grahshanti is then performed by washing the feet of groom by his mother-in-law. The groom is then fed by his mother in law in Madhuparka Vidhi. Varapreshanem is started and the bride's family and groom's family are introduced and the declaration of marriage is made. The bringing of the bride to the mandap takes place, and Kanyadaan (Kanya Dhanam) is performed, where the bride is offered to the groom by her family. This has been

deemed one of the most important rituals in the wedding besides saptapadi (seven vows). Mangalferal takes place next, where the bride and groom encircle the fire with hands joined. Vaaku Nichaya Muhoortham is performed when the two fathers face each other and mantras are chanted. Next the groom and his sister tie a mangala sutra (sacred rope) around the bride which is called Maangala Dharanam. In the most important act of Saptapadi, the bride and groom take seven steps around the sacred fire (Agni) tied to each other. While taking those seven steps seven vows are recited by bride and groom towards the end of the wedding. Panigrahan is where the groom takes the bride's hand in his as his new wife. Next in Dhruvadarshan the couple looks at the pole star together. Laaja homam is where the brother of the bride and her husband help her feed the sacrificial fire in the ceremony. Finally, in Ashirvadam, the bride and groom receive blessings from their parents, the guruji, and elderly members of their families. That concludes the main wedding ceremony. Bidai is the exiting of the bride and groom to the groom's home. The bride and groom exit in a carriage or car that has been tested for safety. The wedding party leaves the bride's home and travels to the home of the groom and his family. Vadhupravesha is the ritual of welcoming the bride and groom by his family into the home of the groom and his family by another party.

The "white wedding" ceremony

In the ideal type North American wedding the ceremony begins with the witnesses being seated first. The ceremony will most often take place in a church or temple for one day only. The building will be carefully decorated with flowers and candles. There could even be a flower archway at the altar awaiting the bride and groom. The processional, which is the walking down the aisle of the whole wedding party,

includes bride's maids and groom's men, the mother of the bride, flower girl, ring bearer, and father of the bride. The father of the bride escorts the bride down the aisle that is lined with flowers. The bride wears a white dress, a veil, and many articles of jewelry including her diamond engagement ring. The father hands her to the groom after which the officiator asks "Who gives this woman to be married?" The father responds "I do." There will be brief speech by the officiator of the wedding, and then there will be the exchange of rings and vows. There is the call for any objections from the attendees. The officiator will pronounce them husband and wife. They will receive permission for the kiss, and then perform the act. Then there will be the recessional that is led by the bride and groom, in the opposite order from how they entered the site. There is a reception shortly following the initial ceremony, where there will be tables decorated with flowers. There will be a dance floor and a head table for the wedding party facing the guests. The reception takes place in a wedding venue where dinner will be catered. There will be the occasional pause for a speech, during the dinner from the maid of honor and the best man. The food and dancing will continue, only for a short while, until the cutting of the cake by the bride and groom. The groom's hand should be placed on top of the bride's during the actual penetration of the cake. The couple will feed each other the first slice of cake, before it is served to the guests. The top layer of the cake will be taken home by the bride and groom and frozen for a year to be eaten on their one-year anniversary. The dancing will then continue with the father and bride dance, followed by the bride and groom's first dance as husband and wife. There is the removal of the garter belt by the groom. He tosses the garter into a group of males. The male who catches it is deemed to be the winner and he is predicted to be a groom

within a year. A similar ritual takes place when the bride tosses her bouquet behind her back into a group of women. The female who catches it is believed to be the next female to be married. The music and dancing continue until it is time for the bride and groom to leave. They are showered with rice during their exit to their vehicle. The car is covered with ribbons, flowers, cans on the bumper, and a sign of some sort that reads "just married."

Appendix II

Table 1. Indian films and the wedding rituals that appeared in them

Ritual	Number of times that a ritual has appeared in the movie								
	Movie Name	Chori Chori	Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai	Chori Chori Chupke Chupke	Hum Tum	Kuch na Kuchna Hota Hai	Mujhase Dosti Karogi	Kuch Naa Kaho	Total times shown
Witnesses (wealth)		2	1	1	1	2	1	2	10
Giving away the bride/ Kanyadan (gender/ religion/kinship)		1			1	1	1	1	5
Dowry/trousseaus (gender/wealth)			1						1
Carrying the bride across the threshold (gender)									0
Bridal veil (superstition/ gender (American))		2	1	1	1	1	2	1	9
Wedding sarri (gender)		2	1	1	1	1	3	1	10
White wedding gown (gender/ wealth)									0
The groom's attire: Sherwani/ black tux (wealth/ gender)		2	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Feeding each other food (kinship)									0
Cutting the cake (fertility/ superstition)									0
The cake (superstition/ wealth)									0
Sweets at an Indian wedding (superstition/ kinship)		1					1		2
Bouquets of flowers (fertility/superstition/ wealth)									0
Flower girl (superstition/ fertility)									0
Ring bearer (superstition/ Fertility)									0
Indian flower garlands (superstition/Kinship)		3	1	1	1	1	2	1	10
Flowers in the wedding (fertility/superstition/wealth)		2	2	1	3	1	4	2	15
The fire in the mandap/Agni (religion)		1		1	1	1	2	1	7
The vows/saptapadi (7 steps) (religion/ kinship)				1	1	1	2	1	6
Something borrowed something blue (superstition/kinship)									0
The parade of the groom/ Kasi Yatra/ Barat (wealth/ kinship/ gender)								1	1
Mandap (religion/ kinship)		2	1		1	1	1	1	7

Continued on next page

Table 1. Continued from page 24

Ritual	Number of times that a ritual has appeared in the movie							Total times shown
	Chori Chori	Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai	Chori Chori Chupke Chupke	Hum Tum	Kuch na Kuchna Hota Hai	Mujhase Dosti Karogi	Kuch Naa Kaho	
Jewelry on bride (wealth)	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	10
The diamond ring/ engagement ring (wealth)	1	1	1		1	2	1	7
Trading of the wedding rings/ giving of ring (gender/wealth)	2	1				2	1	6
Blessing the bride in her part and groom with red bindi/ Saubhagya Chinha (religion/ gender)	3		1	1	1	1	1	8
Henna /Mehendi party (gender)	2	1	1	1	1		1	7
Church/temple/synagogue/hall (religion)								0
Bride or groom's home in wedding (kinship/ gender)	2	2	1		1	2	1	9
Engagement party (wealth)		1			1	2	1	5
Priest/pastor/Guruji (religion)	1			1	1		1	4
Horoscope's are aligned/ picking a date (religion)	1	1			1	1		4
Bridesmaids (superstition/ wealth)								0
Groom can't see bride before the wedding (superstition)	1							1
The kiss (gender)				1				1
Tossing of bouquet (superstition)								0

Appendix III

Table 2. American films and the wedding rituals that appeared in them

Ritual	Movie Name	Number of times that a ritual has appeared in the movie						
		My Big Fat Greek Wedding	Wedding Crashers	Meet the parents	The Wedding Planner	Father of the Bride	Monster-In-Law	Madea's Family Reunion
Witnesses (wealth)		1	4	1	5	1	1	1
Giving away the bride/ Kanyadan (gender/religion/kinship)		1	1		2	1		
Dowry/trousseaus (gender/wealth)								
Carrying the bride across the threshold (gender)								
Bridal veil (superstition/gender (American))		1	8		3	1	1	1
Wedding sarri (gender)			1					
White wedding gown (gender/wealth)		1	7	2	3	1	1	1
The groom's attire: Sherwani/ black tux (wealth/ gender)		1	5	1	2	1	1	2
Feeding each other food (kinship)			2					
Cutting the cake (fertility/ superstition)			1					
The cake (superstition/wealth)		1	1			1		1
Sweets at an Indian wedding (superstition/kinship)			1					
Bouquets of flowers (fertility/superstition/wealth)		1	4	1	3	4	1	4
Flower girl (superstition/fertility)		2			1	2		2
Ring bearer (superstition/fertility)		2				1		1
Indian flower garlands (superstition/kinship)								
Flowers in the wedding (fertility/superstition/wealth)		3	13	1	10	7	6	
The fire in the mandap/Agni (religion)								
The vows/saptapadi (7 steps) (religion/kinship)		1	1			1		1
Something borrowed something blue (superstition/kinship)		1						
The parade of the groom/ Kasi Yatra/ Barat (wealth/kinship/ gender)								
Mandap (religion/kinship)							1	

Continued on next page

Appendix III

Table 2. Continued from page 26

Ritual	Number of times that a ritual has appeared in the movie							
	Movie Name	My Big Fat Greek Wedding	Wedding Crashers	Meet the parents	The Wedding Planner	Father of the Bride	Monster-In-Law	Madea's Family Reunion
Jewelry on bride (wealth)		1	7	1	3	1	1	1
The diamond ring/engagement ring (wealth)		1		2	1	1	1	
Trading of the wedding rings/giving of ring (gender/wealth)		1	1			1		
Blessing the bride in her part and groom with red bindi/Saubhagya Chinha (religion/ gender)								
Henna/Mehendi party (gender)								
Church/temple/synagogue/hall (religion)			5		3	1		1
Bride or groom's home in wedding (kinship/gender)				1		1	1	
Engagement party (wealth)		1						
Priest/pastor/Guruji (religion)		1	2	1	3	1		1
Horoscope's are aligned/ picking a date (religion)								
Bridesmaids (superstition/wealth)		8	7	1	8	3	3	3
Groom can't see bride before the wedding (superstition)		1			1		1	1
The kiss (gender)		1	2	1				1
Tossing of bouquet (superstition)						1	1	

Appendix IV

Table 3. *Number of rituals identified in each category in the movies*

Ritual category	Indian Films	American Films
Gender	7	8
Family/ Kinship	7	3
Superstition	5	10
Wealth	6	9
Religion	6	4
Fertility	2	5

Table 4. *Number of times rituals appeared in the movies*

Ritual Categories	Indian Films	American Films
Wealth	63	166
Gender	64	61
Superstition	37	132
Kinship	40	16
Religion	41	34
Fertility	15	73