

# Tuning into Fantasy: Motivations to View Wedding Television and Associated Romantic Beliefs

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This project includes 2 empirical research studies designed to assess the motivations and associated romantic beliefs of individuals who watch wedding reality TV (WRT). Study 1 investigates the motivations for why individuals chose to watch or not watch the 2011 royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, and how those reasons are related to beliefs about love and romance. The results of the first study (online survey of 112 participants) revealed that interest in the royal wedding and positive beliefs about the royal couple were positively correlated with greater endorsement of romantic beliefs. Reported reasons for watching were also significantly related to differing beliefs. Study 2 examined the reasons individuals cite for watching WRT, and how those motivations are linked with beliefs about love and romance. Results of this online survey of 236 participants indicated that entertainment was the most common reason people chose to watch WRT. Viewing WRT was associated with endorsement of the belief that love conquers all, particularly for those who watched for entertainment and in order to learn. Finally, perceived similarity moderated the relationship between viewing WRT and endorsement of romantic beliefs. This project expands the application of uses and gratifications theory to the context of WRT.

*Keywords:* weddings, media, TV, uses and gratifications theory, romantic beliefs

Weddings have become a key part of American culture. In 2012, American families spent an average of US\$28,427 on wedding-related costs (Hicken, 2013). More than 2,000,000 people get married every year in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In fact, weddings are commonly featured on TV. For example, there are currently 32 wedding-related reality TV programs, including the popular *Say Yes to the Dress* (2013), *A Wedding Story* (2005), *Bridezillas* (2013), and *Four Weddings* (2013). Over the past decade, dozens of celebrities have televised their weddings, including Nick

Lachey twice (once to Jessica Simpson and once to Vanessa Minnillo), a number of athletes (i.e., Lamar Odom and Khloe Kardashian), two Survivor contestants, and three Bachelor-related weddings (Dyball, 2011; Nahas, 2013; Tauber & Dennis, 2013; Tresniowski, 2003; Upton, 2003).

Why do viewers watch reality TV related to weddings and marriage? Some authors have argued that wedding-related reality TV (WRT) entices viewers to become enraptured in the process, further propagating the notion of a fairytale ending (Giorgio, 2011). Another scholar writes that reality TV involving weddings “mobilizes fantasies, dreams and images of the traditional white wedding . . . [and] offers soothing stories about heterosexuality, love, and marriage, and fantasies about spectacle and celebrity” (Sgroi, 2006, p. 127). Engstrom and Baldrige (2006) speculate that reality TV devoted to weddings can create the ideal of the perfect wedding, especially for female audience members, which can reinforce femininity and consumerism. In general, these scholars are claiming that individuals watch WRT in order to fantasize about love, weddings, and fairytales. How-

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ever, empirical research is needed in order to substantiate the validity of these claims.

Marriage is often coined as one of the most socially beneficial and meaningful forms of intimate belonging (Wardle, 2011). Prior research shows that intimate relationships and marriage create several psychological and physiological benefits, including social support, love, sexual involvement, and friendship (Rhoades, Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011). Individuals who are not in a romantic relationship face a particular form of stigma, termed *singlism*, which reflects an all-encompassing ideology that favors couples over singles (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). This marriage ideal in society is reinforced with TV programs that feature wedding-related content, yet no research has investigated the link between viewing and endorsement of romantic beliefs.

What are the effects of viewing these programs? Within American culture, there is a drive toward wanting to be in a partnered romantic relationship. According to the *Girl Scouts Research Institute* (2011), young girls who viewed reality TV were more likely than nonviewers to report feeling happier when they have a boyfriend. However, there exists no published research about the association between WRT and effects. This project includes two empirical research studies designed to assess the motivations and associated romantic beliefs of individuals who watch reality TV associated with weddings. Study 1 investigates the motivations for why individuals chose to watch or not watch the televised 2011 royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, and how those reasons are related to beliefs about love and romance. Study 2 examines the reasons individuals cite for watching WRT, such as *Say Yes to the Dress* (2013), and how those motivations are linked with beliefs about love and romance. This pilot project offers a pair of studies that illuminate the nature of association between WRT and viewers.

### Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and gratifications is a perspective that focuses on why individuals seek out particular types of media content (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973–1974). The idea is that people bring diverse characteristics to a media encounter and make different choices about what me-

dia to consume, therefore exercising control over their media consumption (Katz et al., 1973–1974). Instead of looking at what media do *to* individuals, this perspective focuses on what individuals do *with* media (Klapper, 1963). There are a number of different motivations that scholars have identified as reasons why people use media. Some of those include habit, arousal, escapism, learning, interpersonal activity/social utility, relaxation, entertainment, reality exploration of personal identity, and a way to pass time (Bryant & Thompson, 2002; Rubin, 2002). For example, those who find themselves identifying with the characters in these marriage-themed TV programs might seek out such programs as a tool to reinforce their personal identity. Or, perhaps someone who wishes to expand his or her knowledge of weddings, love, and relationships might watch these highly romanticized programs to prompt behavior and action in their own lives. Conversely, many individuals may choose to watch these types of shows with the sole motivation to be entertained. Although these gratifications are most often applied to general media consumption, there is evidence that some of these reasons also can explain romantic media use, and reality TV watching (Ebersole & Woods, 2007). For example, both men and women report watching romantic reality dating programs for entertainment purposes (Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). In another survey, researchers found that individuals who cheated on their romantic partners and felt regret for doing so were more likely than those who had no regret to express interest in viewing reality TV programs that feature cheating storylines (Nabi, Finnerty, Domschke, & Hull, 2006).

Another motivation for consuming romantic media may be the desire to learn. For example, young people generally do not have much experience in relationships, and they often have questions about what norms exist for courtship and romantic love. Thus, they may be especially eager to process romantic messages in the media. In support of this idea, one study of undergraduate students mentioned previously found that men, more so than women, choose to watch reality dating programs because these shows provide information about dating and romance (Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). Furthermore, Hefner and Wilson (2013) surveyed undergraduates and found that individuals who watch

romantic comedy films with the intention of learning about relationships tend to report stronger romantic beliefs overall than individuals who watch those films for other reasons. All of this evidence suggests that people may seek out romantic media events like the royal wedding and WRT in order to understand more about romantic relationships, and that those motivations have implications for effects. This complicated balance between motivational exposure and viewing effects is the unique contribution that uses and gratifications offers to the study of media. One prominent scholar of this theory writes: "One such similarity is that both uses and effects seek to explain the outcomes or consequences of mass communication, such as attitudes or perception formation . . . behavioral changes . . . and societal effects. Uses and gratifications does so, however, recognizing the greater potential for audience initiative, choice, and activity (Rubin, 2002, p. 533)." In other words, a uses and gratifications perspective does not ignore the effects of that exposure, but merely explains how the choices individuals make to consume media have more of an influence on those effects than does the actual content itself.

In this article, I study whether or not this drive for information, or learning, is associated with stronger romantic beliefs than are other reasons to watch WRT. Those reasons include entertainment (viewing for enjoyment), passing the time (to alleviate boredom), personal identity (identification; understanding self), or social interaction (watching in order to interact with others; for a review, see Rubin, 1983, 2002).

### Romantic Ideals

According to previous research, the romantic ideal in Western culture is a set of beliefs about the power of love and the perfection of romance (Bell, 1975; Knox & Sporakowski, 1968; Lantz, Schmitt, Britton, & Snyder, 1968; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). It is a set of expectations for how a model relationship should form, develop, function, and be maintained. The four components of the romantic ideal include idealization of partner (i.e., love can overlook flaws, love is perfect); soul mate/one and only (i.e., fate and destiny work in tandem to connect true lovers); love at first sight (i.e., love can happen instantaneously); and love conquers all (i.e., love can overcome any and all obstacles; Bell, 1975; Knox

& Sporakowski, 1968; Lantz et al., 1968; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). Such beliefs develop and get reinforced by cultural institutions such as schools, churches, and media. The media spectacle of the royal wedding could also serve to reinforce fairytale beliefs like love conquering all. I refer to the endorsement of these romantic ideals<sup>1</sup> as romantic beliefs throughout this article.

Although some research suggests that having unrealistic beliefs can be detrimental to relationships (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999; Knee, 1998), most research related to endorsement of these Western ideals indicates a positive impact (Montgomery, 2005; Sprecher & Metts, 1989, 1999). Endorsing ideals leads to relational durability (Franiuk, Cohen, & Pomerantz, 2002), satisfaction (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996), and commitment (Sprecher & Metts, 1989, 1999) among undergraduate and older adult samples. For example, in a 5-year longitudinal study of 100 dating couples, researchers found that endorsement of beliefs was associated with several positive outcome variables, such as feelings of satisfaction, love, and commitment (Sprecher & Metts, 1999). Regardless of the valence of the effect of holding beliefs, it is important to determine where these beliefs are originating. This project attempts to do that by testing the theory of uses and gratifications within the context of viewing WRT.

### TV Viewing and Development of Romantic Beliefs

Previous work has demonstrated a clear link between watching fictional TV and the endorsement of relational beliefs. For example, Holmes and Johnson (2009) surveyed 271 undergradu-

<sup>1</sup> According to one conceptualization, romantic ideals refer to the types of traits that exemplify what constitutes the perfect partner and relationship (Markey & Markey, 2007). Researchers working within this realm typically ask participants to use a Likert scale and rate their ideal partner as well as their current partner on a list of descriptive adjectives, and then look to see if discrepancies exist between these two ratings (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001; Murray et al., 1996). According to this approach, there is no a priori group of adjectives that is always considered ideal by researchers or participants. Rather, the definition of a romantically ideal partner or relationship is unique to each individual. This conceptualization pertains only to issues related to specific partners and relationships instead of to love, romance, and the relationship process more broadly.

ate students and found that hours of TV consumption (all types) was related to stronger endorsement of dysfunctional relationship beliefs such as “mindreading is expected” and “the sexes are different.” More recently, [Osborn \(2012\)](#) surveyed 392 married individuals and found that heavier viewing of romantic TV (including a mixture of fictional and reality TV) was associated with lower marital commitment and higher perceived costs associated with marriage. This research did not look at wedding-themed programming in particular, nor did either study investigate the influence of viewing on romantic beliefs. In addition, no previous work has looked at the role of motivation to view WRT as a potential indicator of effects.

However, other research has investigated the link between viewing reality TV and holding corresponding beliefs, as well as how the motivation to view influences the relationship. For example, in one study, undergraduate students were surveyed about their exposure to dating reality TV shows and endorsement of dating attitudes ([Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007](#)). Results indicated that those with higher average viewing scores endorsed dating attitudes found within the programming (e.g., dating is a game) more so than lighter viewers.

Recent research has demonstrated that individuals are motivated to watch reality TV for instrumental (social interaction, information) and ritualized (pass time, entertainment) reasons ([Aubrey et al., 2012](#)). This survey of 592 undergraduates revealed that the personality characteristic of extroversion can lead people to report watching romantic reality TV for instrumental reasons, but the study did not investigate the outcomes of those reported motivations, such as relational beliefs. In addition, their category of romantic reality TV did not include wedding-related programming, which could have important implications for beliefs about love and marriage, particularly because of the realistic element embedded within the shows.

### The Current Study

Past research has demonstrated that viewing TV, including fictional programming as well as reality-based shows about relationships, is associated with relational beliefs ([Segrin & Nabi, 2002](#)). Past research has indicated that viewers often rate reality programming as realistic, and

that watching fulfills a variety of needs such as voyeurism, passing the time, and entertainment ([Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007](#)). Past research has also demonstrated that the reasons people watch romantic screen media are often critical in determining the effects of that exposure ([Hefner & Wilson, 2013](#)). However, few studies have investigated the reasons and corresponding implications of viewing WRT. Studying WRT is important because of three reasons: (a) the sheer volume and popularity of this content; (b) the Western cultural climate that demands marriage as the “normal” and expected relational trajectory, and (c) the need to continue the application of uses and gratifications theory to the association between ideal beliefs and the viewing of romantic-themed content. This article presents two studies designed to address these research aims.

In all major tests conducted in this article, age, sex, and relational status were used as control variables. In other work associated with romantic media and beliefs, age was found to negatively correlate with beliefs ([Hefner & Wilson, 2013](#); [Segrin & Nabi, 2002](#)). Furthermore, females tend to consume more romantic media content than do males ([Segrin & Nabi, 2002](#)), yet males often report stronger romantic beliefs ([Sprecher & Metts, 1999](#)). Finally, I also controlled relational status to reduce the possibility that reports of beliefs could be attributed to romantic status and not motivations of viewing WRT.

### Study One

According to the Wall Street Journal ([Schuker, 2011](#)), just over 24 million Americans tuned in to watch Prince William of Wales marry commoner Catherine Middleton on April 29, 2011. Dubbed the modern-day fairytale by some ([Lyal, 2010](#)), this wedding is arguably an example of legendary romance. With a handsome prince, a princess in a white lace gown, a horse-drawn carriage, and a balcony kiss, it was the closest thing our modern, technological, and often pessimistic society has had to a real-life fairytale ([Fu, 2011](#)). The coverage of William and Kate’s courtship, wedding, and now marriage continues to be a common staple of pop culture media ([Fu, 2011](#); [Hackett, 2011](#)). But, why are Americans so interested in the royal wedding and the royal couple? Using the lens of uses and gratifications theory, this study is an investigation of



the reasons why Americans chose to watch or not watch the royal wedding on TV. This study explores whether the reasons why an individual chose to watch the royal wedding are associated with endorsement of beliefs. Because the royal wedding was an isolated event and not necessarily indicative of long-term romantic media exposure, studying the reasons why an individual watched the wedding can help isolate some of the preexisting characteristics that people bring with them to media encounters. For example, if watching the royal wedding in order to learn about relationships is more strongly associated with endorsement of beliefs than another reason to view, this provides new evidence that it may not be media that are cultivating these ideals but rather that people are seeking out media that contain ideals in order to confirm their existing beliefs. In fact, [Hefner and Wilson \(2013\)](#) did not find an association between viewing romantic comedies and endorsing beliefs, except for those individuals who reported watching those movies in order to learn. Thus, I proposed:

*H1a:* Individuals who chose to watch the royal wedding will report stronger endorsement of romantic beliefs than will those individuals who did not choose to watch the ceremony.

*H1b:* Stronger interest in the royal wedding and the royal couple will be positively associated with greater endorsement of romantic beliefs.

The different reasons why individuals seek out the royal wedding may also have implications for interest in different parts of the royal wedding. For example, an individual who has idealistic beliefs about the royal couple may want to watch the royal wedding to see a real-life example of a fairytale. Conversely, someone who does not hold those idealistic beliefs, but is merely interested in the royal wedding coverage might report watching the wedding for entertainment or to pass the time more than to learn about love and relationships. With this logic in mind, the following hypotheses were proposed:

*H2a:* Individuals who have idealistic beliefs about the royal couple will report watching the royal wedding in order to

learn about relationships more than other reasons.

*H2b:* Individuals who were interested in the royal wedding will report watching the royal wedding to pass time, for social reasons, or entertainment more than to learn about relationships.

## Method

**Participants and procedure.** A total of 112 participants were recruited via nationwide snowball sampling. Of these participants, 19% were male and 81% were female. They ranged in age from 22 to 70 years ( $M = 38.66$ ,  $SD = 10.61$ ). Exactly three fourths of the sample were currently in romantic relationships, whereas 25% of the participants reported being single. Roughly four fifths of the participants were Caucasian (80%). The rest were Asian (5%) or Latino (3%). About 12% of the participants declined to respond.

After securing IRB approval, participants were recruited from advertisements posted on my Facebook profile. Interested participants were invited to click the link, which redirected them to Survey Monkey, the software Web site that housed the questionnaire. Participants were also encouraged to repost the survey advertisement on their own Facebook walls in order to generate more participation in the study. No incentives were offered for completing the questionnaire. The survey took ~10 min to complete.

## Measures.

**Open-ended responses.** The first question asked participants whether or not they had watched the royal wedding. If participants indicated that they had watched the royal wedding, the software of SurveyMonkey asked them: "Why did you watch the royal wedding? Please use your own words to respond in the space below." Similarly, if participants indicated that they had not watched the royal wedding, the software of SurveyMonkey asked them: "Why did you not watch the royal wedding? Please use your own words to respond in the space below." These responses were archived and coded by two independent, trained coders. The coders were female undergraduate students. In conjunction with the coders, I developed a coding scheme that consisted of four categories for each question. There were a total of 45 re-

sponses for question 1 and 58 responses for question 2. Across the 103 responses, the calculated Cohen's Kappa reliability coefficient for question 1 was .81, and for question 2 was .78.

**Interest in the royal wedding.** To gauge how interested participants were in the royal wedding, they were asked to respond to three questions, including: "I was interested in watching the royal wedding," "I was interested in watching news coverage of the royal wedding," and "I was interested in watching TV specials about the royal wedding/couple." Mean scores for the 3-item 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) ranged from 1.00 to 7.00 ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Positive beliefs about the royal couple.** To gauge participants' idealistic beliefs about the royal couple, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with three questions, including: "I believe that William and Kate have a fairytale romance," "I believe that nobody should care about William and Kate" (reverse coded), and "I believe that William and Kate have an ideal relationship." Mean scores for the 3-item 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) ranged from 1.00 to 6.67 ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $\alpha = .68$ ).

**Romantic beliefs.** To assess participants' beliefs about intimate relationships, I used Sprecher and Metts' (1989) Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS). The RBS assesses four types of beliefs that are part of the romantic ideal construct: love conquers all ("I believe if another person and I love each other we can overcome any differences and problems that may arise"), soul mate/one and only ("There will be only one real love for me"), idealization of partner ("The person I love will make a perfect romantic partner; e.g., he or she will be completely accepting, loving, and understanding"), and love at first sight ("When I find my 'true love' I will probably know it soon after we meet"). Mean scores for the 15-item 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) ranged from 1.53 to 6.00 ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .95$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Motives for watching the royal wedding.** I adapted a measure to assess motives based on Rubin's (1983) original scale, which measured reasons why individuals watch TV in general. In my study, participants were asked to think about 20 reasons for watching the royal wedding. Participants were asked to indicate the

degree to which they agreed with each reason on a scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). I intended that four subscales be included in this composite measure: information (e.g., "I watched the royal wedding so I could learn about a fairytale romance," mean scores range: 1.00 to 5.50,  $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ;  $\alpha = .72$ ), entertainment ("I watched the royal wedding because it entertained me," range: 2.60 to 7.00,  $M = 5.69$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ;  $\alpha = .88$ ), pass time ("I watched the royal wedding because it gave me something to do to occupy my time," range: 1.00 to 6.00,  $M = 2.14$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ;  $\alpha = .87$ ), and social interaction ("I watched the royal wedding so I could talk to others about what's going on," range: 1.00 to 6.33,  $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ;  $\alpha = .69$ ).

## Results

**H1.** To test this, I conducted a simple  $t$  test and compared the beliefs of those individuals who watched the royal wedding with those who did not. Results of the  $t$  test revealed no statistically significant differences in endorsement of romantic beliefs between those participants who watched the royal wedding and those who did not,  $t(99) = 1.58$ ,  $p = .118$ . Thus, hypothesis 1a was not supported.

To test the second part of this hypothesis, I conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to determine if endorsement of romantic beliefs predicted interest in the royal wedding and positive beliefs about the royal couple. I also included age, sex, and relational status (single or partnered) of the participant as control variables. In the first test, which looked at the association between beliefs and interest in royal wedding coverage, the regression analysis was statistically significant,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1, 91) = 4.81$ ,  $p = .031$ . That is, stronger endorsement of beliefs predicted greater interest in the royal wedding, even after controlling for age, sex, and relational status. In the second test, which looked at the association between romantic beliefs in general and positive beliefs about the royal couple, the regression analysis was statistically significant,  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(1, 90) = 6.01$ ,  $p = .016$ . That is, stronger endorsement of beliefs predicted stronger positive beliefs about the royal couple, even after

controlling for age, sex, and relational status. Hypothesis 1b was supported.

**H2.** In order to test this hypothesis, I conducted a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses with positive beliefs about the royal couple as the predictor variable and the subscales of reasons why individuals might watch the royal wedding as the outcome variables. In each regression test, I included the same control variables as hypothesis 1.

Results of the regression tests indicated that watching in order to learn significantly predicted positive beliefs about the royal couple,  $R^2 = .38$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .31$ ,  $F(1, 37) = 16.79$ ,  $p = .000$ . That is, participants who reported stronger idealistic beliefs about the royal couple also reported that they watched the royal wedding in order to learn about love and relationships, even after controlling for sex ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = .207$ ), age ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p = .058$ ) and relationship status ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $p = .62$ ). Conversely, the other reasons people chose to watch the royal wedding were not significantly associated with ide-

alistic beliefs about the royal couple. Thus, hypothesis 2a was supported.

Results of the regression tests indicated that watching in order to learn or to interact socially with others did not significantly predict interest in royal wedding media coverage. However, watching in order to pass time did significantly predict interest in the royal wedding,  $R^2 = .23$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .14$ ,  $F(1, 37) = 8.07$ ,  $p = .007$ , even after controlling for sex, age, and relationship status. Additionally, watching for entertainment also significantly predicted interest in the royal wedding media coverage,  $R^2 = .35$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .28$ ,  $F(1, 37) = 16.59$ ,  $p = .000$ . I concluded that hypothesis 2b was partially supported.

**Open-ended responses.** The responses for the two questions regarding why a participant did or did not watch the royal wedding were divided into four categories each. For reasons why people chose to watch the royal wedding, I grouped the open-ended responses into these four categories: Royal Family, Pop Culture, Fairytales, and Pass the Time. See [Table 1](#) for

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Table 1  
*Reasons Why Individuals Chose to Watch The Royal Wedding*

Description	Examples	Frequency
<i>Royal Family:</i> Watched because of an interest in and connection to the Royal Family and its history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I love all things British. I studied abroad in the U.K. I also watched the weddings of Charles &amp; Diana and Andrew &amp; Fergie. I watched Diana’s funeral. Watching William &amp; Kate get married seemed like the natural thing to do.”</li><li>• “I find the royal family and their practices and traditions fascinating. I am a big fan of tradition in any capacity (graduation ceremonies, weddings, etc.) and enjoy watching traditions older than our own country (the US).”</li><li>• “I watched the wedding because I knew I was watching history happen. Also because I’m fascinated with Diana and in turn the entire royal family.”</li></ul>	16 (35.6%)
<i>Pop Culture:</i> Watched because an interest in Fashion and pop culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “When big pop culture things happen, I tend to want to watch so I’m ‘in on it.’ Also, when I was little my mom made us get up to watch princess Diana get married, so it felt a little like tradition.”</li><li>• “I was curious. Wanted to see her dress and how the other people who attended dressed. Like pomp and ceremony.”</li></ul>	13 (28.9%)
<i>Fairy Tales:</i> Watched because of an interest in fairy tales and love stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I watched his mom and dad get married, watched him grow up. Plus I love a fairytale that comes true. I believe is love and romance.”</li><li>• “Because it’s a modern fairy tale and we’ve been watching William since the day he was born.”</li><li>• “I am a romantic and think this is a great love story.”</li></ul>	11 (24.4%)
<i>Pass the Time:</i> Watched because it was on TV or a way to pass time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I was at the airport and it was broadcasting on TV while I waiting for my flight.”</li><li>• “It was on CNN when I got up.”</li></ul>	5 (11.1%)

descriptions, examples, and frequencies for each category. Most notably, nearly one fourth of the participants who watched the royal wedding (24%) reported their primary reason for viewing was to see a modern-day fairytale in the making. For question 2, which asked individuals why they chose not to watch the royal wedding, I again grouped the responses into four categories: Lack of Interest, Unsuitable Time, Lack of TV access, and Media Hype. See Table 2 for descriptions, examples, and frequencies for each category.

I conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the means of idealistic beliefs about the royal couple with each of the reasons for viewing cited in the open-ended questions. Results demonstrate that viewing in order to see a fairytale was associated with

stronger endorsement of idealistic beliefs about the royal couple than were other reasons,  $F(3, 34) = 3.08, p = .04$ . This correlates with the results of the closed-ended, scaled data, in which viewing in order to learn about love was associated with idealistic beliefs about the royal couple.

## Discussion

Consistent with the uses and gratifications theory, the results of this study indicate that endorsement of romantic beliefs was associated with a desire to watch the royal wedding. The royal wedding incorporates two types of American ideals: the fairytale story of a prince and princess, and the idea that marriage is the ultimate expression of love. The results of this

Table 2

### *Reasons Why Individuals Chose Not to Watch The Royal Wedding*

Description	Examples	Frequency
<i>Lack of Interest:</i> Was not interested in the wedding due to personal reasons or due to a lack of respect for the Royal Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I honestly had no interest in it. I thought we fought a revolutionary war so that we did not have to deal with the affairs of the Royal Family. I also think it was a tremendous waste of British tax payer's money."</li> <li>• "Not English; not under English rule; and don't care for people who haven't done anything to be in the spotlight!"</li> <li>• "It does not have any special meaning for me. It does not make any difference in my life. The Royalty does not have any real action in society any more. Finally, because by that time was more important to know about real news, the tornadoes and floods than the entertainment news."</li> </ul>	27 (47.6%)
<i>Unsuitable Time:</i> Did not want to wake up early to watch at inconvenient broadcast time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It was on pretty early in the morning, and I couldn't care less about people I don't actually know getting married. I mean, my wedding is hardly of interest to me."</li> <li>• "Did not really care. Also, if they wanted us to watch it, they would not have had it in the middle of the night. Idiots."</li> </ul>	16 (27.6%)
<i>Lack of TV Access:</i> Did not have access or use of a TV or would catch the highlights later online or on the news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I wanted to but did not have a TV. I did watch as much as possible via the internet as possible."</li> <li>• "For one, I don't have cable. Secondly, I like sleeping, so I wouldn't have been interested in staying up to watch it. Third, I prefer to get recaps of events and to watch others' reactions to events, like through Twitter. (It's easier, faster, and typically more entertaining.)"</li> <li>• "Not interested and it will be replayed in the news for days."</li> </ul>	10 (17.2%)
<i>Media Hype:</i> Considered wedding overhyped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The media hype was unreal, and represents another example of their misplaced priorities."</li> <li>• "Too much hype for over what is a normal, although special, mile-marker in anyone's life."</li> </ul>	5 (8.6%)



study demonstrate that greater endorsement of romantic beliefs was positively correlated with interest in the royal wedding and positive beliefs about the royal couple. The results of this study also indicate reasons for viewing matter. That is, those individuals who held positive beliefs about the royal couple reported watching the royal wedding in order to learn about love and relationships. Conversely, those individuals who reported a general interest in the royal wedding media coverage indicated they watched the wedding for entertainment and to pass the time. In fact, viewing alone was not associated with belief endorsement, providing further evidence that the reasons to view romantic media or wedding-related TV may matter more than sheer consumption. This is consistent with previous work that has indicated similar results, in that motivation to watch can be related to stronger outcomes than content itself (Hefner & Wilson, 2013).

Given the popularity of this event, and the popularity of wedding-related relative TV, future research should explore how these media are associated with idealistic beliefs about relationships. According to a poll done by Reuters, 35% of Americans were interested in the royal marriage (Reuters, 2011). American media made an even bigger deal out of the wedding than did the United Kingdom and Australia, with wedding coverage that more than doubled that of those other countries, according to the Nielsen Company (Daily Mail, 2001). One *Time* journalist put it this way: "As William and Kate exchanged vows, a significant portion of our fractures, fractious planet, for those moments at least, shared an idea and a dream" (Mayer, 2011). People may watch celebrity weddings because they are curious or voyeuristic (Bagdasarov et al., 2010; Baruh, 2010), or because they are encouraged by the idealistic nature of love stories. Future research should also expand uses and gratifications theory to include context-specific motivations that might drive consumers to select particular programming. For example, in this case, there could be a number of other cultural reasons that viewers watched the royal wedding (e.g., interest in royalty, a desire to understand proper matrimonial protocol, etc.). Other limitations are present here: small sample size using snowball sampling, the assumption that viewers understand the reasons why they watched the wedding, and

the assumption that all participants had a choice whether or not to watch. Future research should also explore the connection between viewing wedding-related reality TV and expectations and beliefs about marriage, romance, and ideals. The next study addresses this need.

## Study Two

Study Two examines the reasons individuals cite for watching WRT, and how those motivations are linked with beliefs about love and romance. Instead of using an isolated event to illustrate that motivations for viewing can be linked to romantic beliefs, this study investigates the association between all types of wedding-related reality TV and endorsement of beliefs about relationships, love, and marriage. Although Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) used the uses and gratifications theory to identify a number of different reasons why individuals watch reality TV, they did not explore wedding-themed reality TV specifically. Thus:

*RQ:* What are the motivations for watching wedding-based reality TV?

Previous work has demonstrated a clear link between watching general TV and the endorsement of relational beliefs (Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Osborn, 2012), including the association between reality TV and similar beliefs (Ferris et al., 2007). Thus, I propose:

*H1:* Heavy viewers of wedding-themed reality TV will report stronger endorsement of romantic beliefs than will light viewers.

Past research has indicated that viewing romantic comedies with the intent to learn will result in stronger endorsement of romantic beliefs (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Most recently, research indicates that exposure to marriage-themed reality TV is associated with stronger endorsement of the idealization and love at first sight romantic beliefs (Lippman, Ward, & Seabrook, 2014). However, the authors did not include any measures associated with selective exposure, and even suggest that future work should investigate the possibility that the choice to view is simply an attempt to affirm preexisting beliefs (Lippman et al., 2014). In this sense, viewers who choose to view with the intent to learn may report differing levels of belief en-

dorsement than viewers who watch these programs for other reasons. Therefore:

*H2:* Viewing wedding-themed reality TV with the intention to learn will be more strongly associated with romantic beliefs than will viewing for other reasons.

Finally, a number of studies of fictional TV have found that homophily with characters enhances the effects of exposure to screen media (Cohen, 2001; Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Thus:

*H3:* Perceived similarity will moderate the association between viewing and romantic beliefs, in that the association will be stronger among those who perceive themselves to be similar to WRT characters.

## Method

**Participants and Procedure.** A total of 236 participants responded to a flyer advertising the online questionnaire. This flyer described the study as “An Investigation of Relationship Beliefs,” and was posted on various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Craigslist. Participants were also recruited by handing out flyers in various public places including Chapman University, shopping malls, and areas surrounding Chapman University in Orange, California. Of this convenience sample, 39 participants did not report any demographic information, and 15 reported that they were married. I excluded those participants. Of the remaining 182 participants, 19% were male ( $n = 35$ ) and 81% were female ( $n = 147$ ). They ranged in age from 18 to 63 years ( $M = 22.68$ ,  $SD = 7.62$ ). Roughly 74% of the participants were Caucasian ( $n = 134$ ). The rest were Black (2%), Asian (8%), or Latino (6%). About 60% ( $n = 110$ ) of the participants indicated that they were not in a romantic relationship. Participants answered questions related to romantic beliefs, exposure to WRT, motives for viewing WRT, perceived similarity, and demographics. Hours of overall TV exposure ranged from 0 to 43 hours per week ( $M = 10.16$ ,  $SD = 7.75$ ). I offered no incentive for participation.

### Measures.

**Romantic beliefs.** I again used the RBS (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The subscales included: love conquers all (5 items,  $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ,  $\alpha = .78$ ), idealization of partner (4 items,  $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ,  $\alpha = .72$ ), soul

mate/one and only (3 items,  $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ,  $\alpha = .70$ ), and love at first sight (3 items,  $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ,  $\alpha = .61$ ). Due to the low alpha, love at first sight was not used in any of the statistical tests. Mean scores for the composite 15-item 7-point Likert scale ranged from 1.47 to 6.20 ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = .95$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Exposure to wedding reality TV.** Media exposure has been assessed in a number of ways in prior research (Dixon, 2008; Segrin & Nabi, 2002), but no single approach has been adopted as the standard. I opted to ask them to indicate how many times they had seen a series of popular wedding shows, and I summed their responses. I included a list of 28 wedding reality shows that are currently on air ranging from *Say Yes to the Dress* (2013) to *Bridalplasty* (2011). Participants indicated how many times they had seen each show. The options were “never” (0), “once” (1), “a few times” (2), and “many times” (3). Summed scores for all 28 shows ranged from 0 to 56 ( $M = 8.94$ ,  $SD = 9.84$ ).

**Motives for watching reality wedding media.** I adapted a measure to assess motives based on Rubin’s (1983) original scale. The measure was identical to Study 1, except that participants were responding to reasons why they watched “wedding reality TV shows.” I also included the subscale of “personal identity” (e.g., “I watched these wedding shows so I could gain insight about my own life”). Mean scores for the “social interaction” subscale ranges from 1.00 to 6.40 ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ;  $a = .85$ ). Mean scores for the “to pass time” subscale ranged from 1.00 to 7.00 ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ;  $a = .95$ ). Mean scores for the “information” subscale ranged from 1.00 to 6.80 ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ;  $a = .92$ ). Mean scores for the “personal identity” subscale ranged from 1.00 to 7.00 ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ;  $a = .95$ ). Mean scores for the “entertainment” subscale ranged from 1.00 to 7.00 ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 2.40$ ;  $a = .98$ ).

**Perceived similarity to characters.** The degree to which individuals may feel similar to the people shown in wedding reality shows may increase viewer attention and help to enhance the effects of viewing these shows. To assess perceived similarity, I used the Perceived Homophily Measure (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975), which has been used in other media studies investigating perceived similarity between respondents and media characters (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Internal reliabil-

ity estimates for this scale have been shown to be very high ( $\alpha = .95$ ; Nowak, Hamilton, & Hammond, 2009). In this study, I asked participants to think about their favorite wedding show and then rate how similar they thought they were to the main same-sex characters from that favorite show. For example, if the respondent was a woman and she reported her favorite show as *Say Yes to the Dress* (2013), and then she was instructed to compare herself with the women she sees buying their wedding dresses. This measure includes 26 items, all of which are semantic differential phrases reflecting different characteristics a person might share with another. Examples include—"Doesn't behave like me/Behaves like me" and "Morals unlike mine/Morals like mine." Participants rated similarities between themselves and the movie character on a seven-point scale, with higher scores reflecting stronger perceived similarity. Each participant's score on this measure was based on the mean of their responses to all 26 items. Those mean scores ranged from 1 to 5.38 ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ). The measure showed high internal reliability:  $\alpha = .95$ .

## Results

**RQ1.** Entertainment was the most commonly cited reason ( $M = 3.87$ ), whereas watching for social interaction was the lowest motivation ( $M = 2.32$ ). See Table 3. A series of paired samples  $t$  tests indicated that the means of all motivations significantly differed from each other, except for pass the time and entertainment,  $t(174) = -1.53$ ,  $p = .129$ , and social interaction and personal identity,  $t(174) = .45$ ,  $p = .656$ .

**H1.** To test the relationship between viewing of WRT and endorsement of romantic beliefs, I conducted a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses, with belief endorsement as the outcome variable (i.e., RBS and subscales). Control variables were entered first: sex, age, relational status (single, partnered), and overall TV viewing. One test was statistically significant. Viewing wedding-themed reality TV predicted stronger endorsement of the belief that love conquers all,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(1, 173) = 3.70$ ,  $p = .050$ , even after accounting for the control variables. Hypothesis 1 was partially supported, because

viewing WRT was associated with one of the dependent variables, but not all.

**H2.** To test the relationship between viewing WRT with the intention to learn and romantic beliefs, I again conducted regression tests using the same control variables in the first block. In the second block, I entered each of the five motivation subscales for viewing wedding-themed reality TV. Given that the results of H1 indicated only love conquers all to be associated with WRT viewing, I conducted these tests only for the dependent variables of overall beliefs and love conquers all. Thus, I ran 10 tests. Of these, two were statistically significant. The subscales of information,  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(1, 167) = 4.81$ ,  $p = .030$ , and entertainment,  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(1, 167) = 5.41$ ,  $p = .021$ , significantly predicted endorsement of the ideal love conquers all, even after including control variables. Although information was a stronger predictor than other motivations, entertainment was also statistically significant. Thus, I concluded that hypothesis 2 was mostly supported.

**H3.** For this hypothesis, I entered controls simultaneously in the first block, WRT and the perceived similarity in the second block, and the cross product of the moderator and exposure variable (i.e., the interaction) in the third block. To reduce problems with multicollinearity, I mean centered the variables (i.e., transformed them into  $z$ -scores) prior to computing the interaction variable. I tested this hypothesis with two iterations of the outcome variable: overall beliefs and the subscale of love conquers all. Only the analysis testing overall beliefs was statistically significant,  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(1, 154) = 3.88$ ,  $p = .050$ . See Figure 1 for an illustration of this effect. The test predicting love conquers all was marginally significant ( $p = .062$ ). Because of this significance, I concluded that hypothesis 3 was mostly supported.

## Discussion

Study Two identified the motives for viewing WRT, as well as the association between viewing those programs and endorsement of idealistic beliefs. The results indicate four general conclusions: (a) Entertainment is the most commonly cited reason for watching wedding-themed reality TV, (b) Viewing WRT is associated with endorsement of the belief that love

T3

F1

Table 3  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of All Continuous Variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
TV consumption:	2.68	2.7	1												
1. Exposure to TV Weddings															
2. WRT exposure	8.94	9.84	.51**	1											
3. Overall TV	10.2	7.75	.25**	.22**	1										
Beliefs:															
4. RBS	3.85	.95	.01	.04	.06	1									
5. Love conquers all	4.74	1.27	.03	.05	.05	.85**	1								
6. Soulmate	3.68	1.25	.04	.11	.07	.79**	.58**	1							
7. Idealization	3.79	1.18	.02	-.01	.07	.84**	.66**	.50**	1						
Motivations:															
8. Entertainment	3.87	2.4	.49**	.73**	.17*	.01	.01	.04	-.07	1					
9. Information	2.63	1.59	.35**	.62**	.1	.07	.12	.05	.02	.78**	1				
10. Social interaction	2.32	1.23	.25**	.44**	.01	.03	.02	0	.03	.64**	.78**	1			
11. Pass the time	3.75	2.19	.44**	.63**	.12	.01	.05	.04	-.08	.91**	.72**	.68**	1		
12. Personal identity	2.35	1.43	.30**	.54**	.11	.07	.09	.08	.06	.68**	.93**	.80**	.66**	1	
Moderator:															
13. Perceived similarity	3.47	1.14	.27**	.38**	.12	-.05	-.03	-.04	-.05	.50**	.41**	.38**	.47**	.36**	1

Note. Exposure to wedding reality TV (WRT) was assessed by asking how often participants had viewed 28 television shows, with response options: *never* = 0, *once* = 1, *a few times* = 2, and *more than a few times* = 3. Overall TV was calculated by summing total hours in a week. Beliefs, motivations, and perceived similarity were assessed with 7-point scale: *strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 7.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

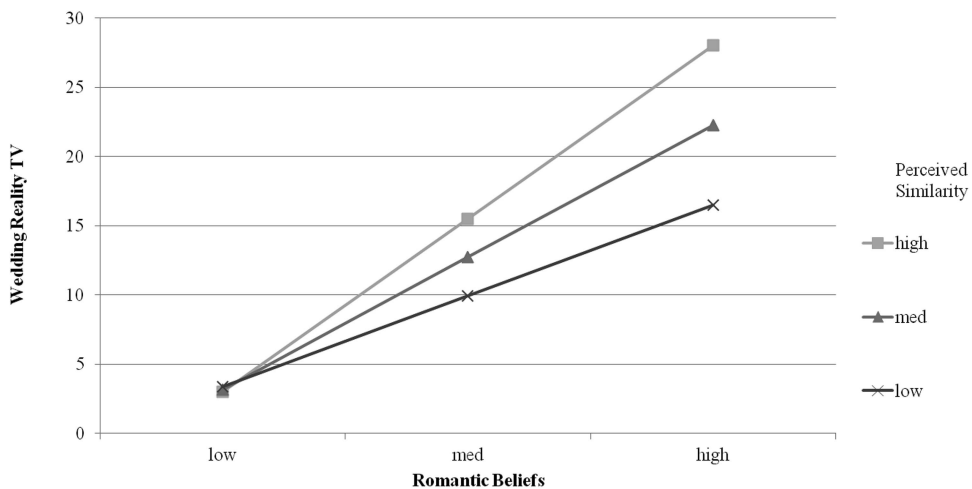


Figure 1. Perceived similarity as a moderator of the association between wedding reality TV exposure and romantic beliefs.

conquers all, (c) Watching WRT for information and entertainment were the strongest predictors of the belief that love conquers all, and (d) Perceived similarity moderated the relationship between viewing WRT and endorsement of romantic beliefs.

The results of this study provide additional evidence that watching with the intention to learn is the strongest predictor of the association between viewing and the belief that love conquers all. Weddings are a culminating event, representing that love has ultimately won out over the various obstacles every relationship faces, so it makes sense that this ideal would be the belief most strongly endorsed by heavy viewers, and explains why other beliefs were not similarly impacted. This evidence that motive matters is consistent with previous work related to uses and gratifications theory and the study of romantic media (Hefner & Wilson, 2013), but is also an extension of the theory. Although Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) identified many reasons why individuals choose to watch reality TV, they did not study WRT nor did they thoroughly investigate the association between viewing and various outcomes. My data also show that viewers report watching WRT primarily for entertainment, and that viewing for entertainment is associated with believing that love conquers all. Because the content presumably aligns most closely to the ideal of love conquering all, and because most

viewers reported viewing for entertainment, it makes sense why this belief and this motive were the most dominant while others (besides learning) were not similarly significant.

Homophily with the TV characters is also associated with a stronger effect, which is again consistent with previous work. That is, Ebersole and Woods (2007) found that one of the main reasons people watch reality TV is because of personal identification with the people on TV. My results extend this finding by providing evidence of what it might mean when a viewer identifies with a TV character. That is, my data demonstrate that those individuals who feel most similar to the characters on WRT will also report stronger endorsement of romantic beliefs than those people who feel less similar. In this case, overall beliefs instead of love conquers all were significant. This suggests that perceived similarity with WRT characters may be the strongest indication that these media can influence viewers, once again implying that romantic content alone may not always impact viewers in ways commonly thought.

The results of this study demonstrate that viewing can be largely irrelevant unless the viewer is watching with a focused motivation or a perceived similarity. Parents, adolescents, therapists, and other individuals should be cognizant that the reasons for viewing matter. If an individual does not want to bolster belief in the ideal, that person should not view in order to



glean information about love and romance. Conversely, if someone switches on the TV to watch WRT merely to pass the time, the associated effects of that exposure may be minimal. Viewers who watch with a perception of similarity are seemingly attracted to the fairytale elements of WRT, which may enhance their beliefs in the ideal.

Some limitations of this study exist. First, the sample was predominantly female, which may have skewed the results. Second, the sampling procedure was nonrandom, meaning that self-selection to participate may have implications for the findings. Future research should employ a representative sample to avoid these concerns. In addition, the age range of the participants spanned multiple generations, including individuals who may be at life stages in which they do not prioritize love and romance. Indeed, there have been key cultural shifts that may also explain some of my results, including a trend to marry at an older age than in years past (Hy-mowitz, Carroll, Wilcox, & Kaye, 2013). Third, the use of a survey does not allow for the substantiation of causality. Future research should include other methods, such as experiments, to help tease out the direction of causality. Finally, there needs to be more research associated with the outcomes of viewing romantic media for different reasons. For example, is relational satisfaction affected by viewing romantic media when individuals view in order to learn about love and romance? Future research should explore more relational outcomes in this constellation of relationship functioning, romantic beliefs, media use, and reasons people consume media.

## Conclusion

This article extends the application of uses and gratifications to the context of WRT, and demonstrates that the reasons for viewing matter when measuring outcomes. Viewing these programs is associated with endorsement of romantic beliefs, particularly among those who watch for information. In short, these types of programs and televised weddings provide a way for viewers to believe that “reality” can be translated into the ideal. This could lead to greater relational durability, satisfaction, and even commitment (Franiuk et al., 2002; Murray et al., 1996; Sprecher & Metts, 1999), which

means viewing with this focused intent could be extremely helpful to couples. Given that partnered individuals are generally happier and more satisfied with life than are single people (Soons, Liefbroer, & Kalmijn, 2009; Stack & Eshleman, 1998), and given that romantic beliefs are a key factor in the formation and maintenance of relationships (Sprecher & Metts, 1999), the findings from my study indicate that watching WRT may be a beneficial venture. Television content featuring lavish dates and ultimate commitments of marriage may serve to increase the endorsement of these beliefs, thereby potentially paving the way to the formation and maintenance of healthier relationships. In fact, future research should explore the association between motivated viewing and relational satisfaction. WRT offers hope to unmarried couples who want a fairytale feeling on their future special day, as well as comfort for those unpartnered individuals who yearn for the idyllic culmination of their own future romances.<sup>2</sup>

Fn2

<sup>2</sup> The RBS and Motives for Viewing were both subjected to a principal components analysis in each study. Eigenvalues and interpretability indicated that the subscales did fit the expected factor shape of each scale.

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