



Brief research report

Wedding-related weight change: The ups and downs of love

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined wedding-related weight change in 343 brides recruited from Bridal Expos in South Australia. Demographic measures and questions about weight were assessed over three time points: upon entry into the study ($n = 343$), 1-month pre-wedding ($n = 130$), and 6-months post-wedding ($n = 112$). Although close to 50% of brides-to-be indicated a desire to lose weight before their weddings, linear mixed modelling revealed that their average weight did not change in the lead up to their wedding. However, 6 months after their wedding, participants had gained approximately 2 kg. In addition, women who had been told to lose weight before their wedding gained significantly more weight post-wedding compared to participants who had not been told to lose weight. The findings demonstrate that wedding-related weight change may be an important factor in the body image of newlyweds and clinicians should be mindful of potential body dissatisfaction associated with post-wedding weight gain.

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Introduction

Over 2 million weddings occur annually in the US (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). In Australia, around 120,000 weddings occur each year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011), generating an estimated two billion dollars annually (weddingindustry.com.au). The cost of the average wedding exceeds US\$20,000 (Wong, 2005). Given the expense of such a day, couples may feel compelled to make it as perfect as possible. Casual examination of popular wedding magazines and websites identifies that within Western culture, the bride's appearance is a critical component of the wedding day's success. This focus on the bride's appearance and weight is also evident in the plethora of self-help books on wedding health and beauty (e.g., Villepigue, Rivera, & Alfieri, 2005), workout and fitness programmes targeted at brides (e.g., *Buff brides: Countdown to gown workout*), and television programmes (e.g., *Bridalplasty: A Fight for Perfection*).

Approximately 12–33 percent of brides-to-be report being advised to lose weight by someone (e.g., fiancé or parents) before their weddings (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008, 2009). Weight-related feedback from parents and partners has been shown to be influential in shaping body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviour (Pole, Crowther, & Schell, 2004; Rodgers, Paxton, & Chabrol, 2009).

In particular, perceived pressure to lose weight and be thin has been shown to lead to negative affect, body dissatisfaction, and dieting behaviour among women (Stice, 2002). This is likely to be exacerbated in the lead-up to a wedding when such interpersonal pressure adds to the media focus on pre-wedding weight loss.

Research has demonstrated that the majority of brides-to-be in both the United States and Australia aim to lose around 20 lbs before their weddings (Neighbors & Sobal, 2008; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008, 2009). However, it remains unknown whether they achieve this desired weight loss. Anecdotal evidence from Weight Watchers ("The ups and downs of love," reported in *Woman's Day*, 2006) indicates that brides lose around 9 lbs (4.1 kg) for their weddings. However, these data are unlikely to be representative of all engaged women and may over-estimate the amount of pre-wedding weight loss. An important further question is what happens to weight after the wedding.

In general, evidence suggests that weight gain is common after dieting (Mann, Tomiyama, Westling, Lew, Samuels, & Chatman, 2007). With respect to marriage-related weight gain, a small amount of research has established that being married is associated with weight gain among women (Jeffery & Rick, 2002; Shafer, 2010; Sobal, Rauschenbach, & Frongillo, 2003). This suggests that women may put on weight post-wedding. However, these studies provide no information about the timing of marriage within the sampled time periods, making it difficult to determine whether the weight gained is primarily in the immediate post-wedding period or more gradual weight gain over time.

Thus the aim of the present study was to examine wedding-related weight change among women. In particular, we were

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interested in whether engaged women aspire to and achieve weight loss prior to their weddings; and whether that weight loss is maintained post-wedding. The study also examined pressure from others as a factor that may affect wedding-related weight change. Overall, it was predicted that participants would lose weight prior to the wedding day, but would then regain this weight after the wedding.

Method

Participants

Baseline data were available for 343 brides ($M_{\text{age}} = 25.64$, $SD = 4.65$) recruited from two 'Bridal Expos' held in Adelaide, South Australia (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008). Of these, pre-wedding (1 month) follow-up data were available for 130 participants. Six-months post-wedding data were available for 112 participants.

Measures

Data were collected on three occasions: Wave 1 (baseline: initial attendance at a bridal expo), Wave 2 (1-month pre-wedding), and Wave 3 (6 months post-wedding). A brief questionnaire was designed for each wave of the study. Questions were presented in an attractive colour brochure entitled 'Bridal Health & Beauty Study'.

Demographic information. At all time points, participants were asked to indicate their wedding date, current age, height, weight, and if they were pregnant.

Other weight-related questions. At Wave 1 (baseline) and Wave 2 (1-month pre-wedding) participants were asked whether they had an ideal wedding weight (yes/no), and if so, what that weight was. In an attempt to assess the pressure to lose weight surrounding weddings, Wave 1 participants were asked whether anyone had told them to lose weight for the wedding (yes/no), and if so, who.

Procedure

Wave 1 participant recruitment was conducted by the first author who staffed a stand at two bridal expos in South Australia. Each expo provided a showcase of wedding-related products such as photographers, cakes, and flowers, in a single venue over a weekend period. Women who showed an interest in the study were verbally given information and asked if they would be willing to participate. Over 90% of women so informed chose to participate. Questionnaires were completed and then placed in a sealed box to maintain confidentiality.

Of the 345 brides recruited in Wave 1, 276 (80.0%) provided sufficient contact information to be followed up 1 month prior to their wedding. These women were mailed the Wave 2 follow-up questionnaire. Of these, 128 questionnaires were returned completed (a further 33 were returned blank), representing a return rate of 58.3% for Wave 2. Wave 3 questionnaires were mailed to participants 6 months after their wedding date (whether or not they had provided data for Wave 2). A total of 116 (4 returned to sender blank) were returned out of a possible 247 (47.0%). A raffle for a \$100 gift voucher was offered as an incentive for participation at each time point. The data for two participants who completed the Wave 1 questionnaire 1 month prior to their weddings were transferred to Wave 2.

Table 1

Means (and standard errors) for the mixed model analysis of weight by time.

Measure	Baseline ^a	1-Month-pre-wedding	6-Month-post-wedding
Weight	67.17 ^a	67.09 ^a (0.40)	69.23 ^b (0.44)

Note. Different superscripts denote a significant difference across time points.

^a Calculated by the repeated measures linear mixed model analyses and has no standard error.

Statistical Analyses

Given that data for all three waves were not available for all participants, linear mixed model analyses (Landau & Everitt, 2004) were utilised. These analyses have the advantage over ANOVAs as all participants (despite missing data from one or more waves) can be included (Landau & Everitt, 2004; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The model then calculates a regression line for each individual while controlling for explanatory variables such as fixed main effects. In the present study, the fixed main effect was time (Waves 1, 2, and 3). To control for pregnancy related weight gain, women who reported that they were pregnant at any time point ($N = 22$) were filtered out of analyses.

Results

Characteristics of the Sample

On average brides attended the bridal expos almost a year (10.60 months, $SD = 5.26$, range = 2–23 months) prior to their scheduled wedding date. They had a mean weight of 67.81 kg ($SD = 13.23$), and a BMI within the upper range of normal ($M = 24.86$, $SD = 4.88$; range = 16.65–42.58). There were no differences between participants who provided complete data and those who did not on weight or BMI at baseline (all t s < 0.79, $p > .05$). Approximately half (46%) of brides in the present study indicated that they had an ideal wedding weight and wished to be on average 9.11 kg (20.25 lbs) lighter by their wedding day. They were significantly heavier than brides who did not have an ideal wedding weight ($M = 71.27$, $SD = 13.32$ versus $M = 64.46$, $SD = 12.21$ respectively), $t(298) = 4.44$, $p < .001$.

Wedding-Related Weight Change

Weight change over time. Overall, a significant main effect of time was found for weight, $F(1,116.25) = 24.83$, $p < .001$. As can be seen in Table 1, the means for initial weight and 1-month pre-wedding weight were almost identical indicating that the average weight did not change in the lead up to the wedding. However, there was a significant difference in weight from Wave 2 to Wave 3. Six months after their wedding, participants had gained approximately 2.14 kg.

Individual change. Individual pre-wedding and post-wedding weight change was also examined among participants who provided completed weight data for all three Waves ($n = 87$). Overall, 47.1% of these brides lost weight prior to their wedding day ($M = 3.09$ kg loss pre-wedding, $SD = 2.21$), 32.2% gained weight ($M = 3.08$ kg gain pre-wedding, $SD = 3.20$), and 20.7% did not change. Thus, it is likely that the lack of overall pre-wedding weight loss for the whole sample represented differing levels of weight change among different subgroups of participants that cancelled each other out.

There was a statistically significant difference between the three groups in post-wedding weight gain, $F(2,73) = 3.45$, $p = .037$. Brides who had lost weight pre-wedding regained all of the weight that they had lost within the 6-months post-wedding ($M = 3.23$ kg gain post-wedding, $SD = 2.60$). Brides who had gained weight

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