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**THE ELITE WEDDING PLANNERS' COMMUNITY:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION INTO AN EMERGING
OCCUPATIONAL COMMUNITY**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by me and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. All the data collection and analysis were carried out by me as the sole researcher.

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to develop the theory of occupational communities by focusing on how the nascent occupational community of wedding planners organises and flourishes. Two key aspects are explored: the ‘becoming’ and the ‘doing’ (Anteby, et al., 2016) of the nascent occupational community. Studying the ‘becoming’ opens up the black box of how nascent occupational communities emerge, while studying the ‘doing’ deepens our understanding of how the nascent OC configures itself. This research was conducted as a multi-sited ethnographic exploration of the wedding planning industry and the individuals who have established themselves in the occupational community of wedding planners. The highlighted sites include two elite wedding planning companies one in the U.K. and one in India, wedding planners conferences in the U.K, Europe, and India, the wedding gallery in U.K, as well as wedding fairs and wedding shows both in the U.K. and India. Analysis of the data collected through close observation and lengthy interviews provides in-depth and behind-the-scenes insights. This study underscores the necessity for conducting `research from an occupational perspective over an organisational one (Van Maanen & Barley,1984), in light of changes in work structures (Damarin,2006). The research aims to contribute to the literature of occupational communities and attempts to develop a theory focusing on how occupations organise themselves in the emerging occupational community. In doing so, it forms connections between the nature of the task carried out by the members of the occupational community and the background of these individuals prior to becoming wedding planners. These connections are then traced to the emergence of the occupational community. The study also zooms into the wedding planning conferences, exploring how they contribute to our understanding of the configuration and sustainment of the occupational community.

Keywords: nascent occupational community, community configuring events, task domain, wedding planning industry, elite wedding planners

Abbreviations

WP	Wedding Planners
OC	Occupational Community
NOC	Nascent Occupational Community
U.K.	United Kingdom
U.S.A.	United States of America
HNI	High net worth individual
MC	Master of Ceremonies
DJ	Disk Jockey

1. Introduction

I used to think a wedding was a simple affair.
Boy and girl meet.
They fall in love. He buys a ring.
She buys a dress.
They say, 'I do'
I was wrong.
That's getting married.
A wedding is an entirely different proposition. (Shyer, 1991)

As the father of the bride states in the 1991 American film *Father of the Bride*, a wedding is indeed “an entirely different proposition” from merely “getting married”. The reality is that weddings today, particularly among the highly affluent, have become lavish productions requiring an enormous expenditure of money and meticulous professional planning. Over the past several decades, the wedding planning industry has mushroomed around the globe. My thesis uses the example of the elite wedding planners community to develop the theory on how nascent occupational communities are organised and how do these occupational communities sustain themselves.

Conducted empirically as a multi-site ethnographic study (Marcus, 1995), this research seeks to fill a gap in the literature by adding new facets to our understanding of how nascent occupational communities organise and sustain themselves. While the extant literature points to some possible triggers for the emergence, details about how new occupations emerge is a question that has not been adequately addressed thus far (Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky, 2016). This study strives to heighten awareness of how nascent occupational communities emerge by exploring nature of the wedding planners' tasks and linking it to the background of the members before they entered the nascent occupational community of wedding planners.

This thesis also attempts to develop a multi-layered understanding of how nascent occupational communities reproduce and sustain themselves. In doing so, it highlights the pivotal role of conferences as *community configuring events* a term which is introduced later by the researcher after an analysis of these conferences. These community configuring events are then studied in conjunction with the nature of the task to develop the theory of a *mirroring effect*. This effect takes place when the task domain of the members of the nascent

occupational community is mirrored in the manner in which the conferences are conducted. By developing this theory, the present study demonstrates how nascent occupational communities sustain themselves through *community configuring events*.

1.1 Theoretical Underpinning of the Research

In the existing literature, there has been a call from scholars (Van Maanen & Barley, 1982; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984; Salaman, 1971; Sandiford & Seymour, 2007; Anteby, 2016) to draw attention to the need to focus on occupations. Barley also argues that without an updated understanding of work, “organizational theorists risk building theories around terms with shallow content” (Barley, 1996, p. 408). For example, by continuing to refer to managers as homogenous group, organisational theorists fail to address the vast occupational segregation, specialisation and variation that have developed in the area of management in recent years.

Since the organisational scholarship lacks in-depth knowledge of the work, the construction of theories only leads to “shallow generalities” (such as claiming to be a nation of knowledge workers) or images of the division of labour from an earlier era (Barley, 1996, p. 408). Here none of these perceptivities are credible (Barley, 1996). Organisational theorists usually engage in work with respect to the growing complexities, interdependencies, and so on. Such notions primarily merge work with forms of organising. However, discussions of what people do and how they do it are scarce (Barley, 1996). The result is a theoretical danger of not maintaining pace with constantly evolving occupational dynamics (Anteby, 2016) and thereafter running the risk of formulating theories with shallow content. Hence, a more multi-faceted understanding of occupational communities in general is warranted.

Furthermore, as the dynamics of work are in constant flux with the shift from traditional to unconventional forms of work, there has been a rise in new and emerging occupations (Hollister, 2011). However, most of the existing studies are focused on how occupations gradually transform into professions, i.e. how professions emerge from occupations. This research attempts to answer the unanswered question (Nelson and Barley, 1997) of how occupations emerge in the first place. The study also examines the role of conferences in the production and perpetuation of the occupational communities.

1.2. Decision to Focus on the Wedding Planning Industry

The idea of pointing my lens on the wedding planning industry occurred to me when I was working on my master's dissertation at Warwick Business School. I undertook a pilot study in the field of wedding planning. It was based completely on interviews with some wedding planners. The purpose of these interviews was to glean first-hand knowledge about their work. During my research, I learnt that the community of wedding planners is still emerging. I became increasingly intrigued by how this community functions and conducts itself. As the interviews with wedding planners progressed, my curiosity was piqued even further. I was eager to know more deeply how these wedding planners actually create such dazzling and magnificent weddings and why. The following excerpt from my diary during that pilot study encapsulates the thoughts and feelings that steered me towards my eventual Ph.D. thesis topic.

It had already one hour already, I was patiently waiting outside the office of the wedding planner for a chance to meet her. While I sat in the waiting room, my eyes fell upon some magazines that had been laid out to showcase the work of the wedding planner. I flipped through the pages and saw an article featuring the wedding planner I was about to interview. In the article, she discussed how to sustain oneself in this competitive industry. She stated that the wedding planners needed to design a unique wedding to make their clients happy. I was fascinated to learn how the community thrives or even survives without any well-established educational institute or training. These elite wedding planners had the trust of the high net worth individuals, the clients who were willing to spend enormous sums of money for a service provided by people who have no recognised educational qualifications or training in the field. I wondered how people could be so foolish to give away their money to anyone for basically one event on one day. How do the wedding planners even convince the clients? How do these planners carry out such glamorous weddings? How do they continue their work? I had several questions running through my mind for which I could not find answers anywhere.

However, as this was a master's dissertation, I confronted both time constraints and knowledge limitations in terms of qualitative research techniques appropriate for an in-depth study on the emerging community of wedding planners. Therefore, I decided to pursue my

questions through further studies at the doctoral level after acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge along with the expert guidance of my supervisors. This research involves the close study of the epitome of the wedding planning industry: the ultimate luxury of elite wedding planners across the U.K. and India. These are the wedding planners who cater to the exclusive community of high net worth individuals (HNIs). The wedding planning industry is among the industries that are heavily reliant on reputation for their perpetual existence. “You are only as good as last wedding” says Paul (a pseudonym), an elite wedding planner based in the U.K.

In other words, the elite wedding planning industry appears to be an especially challenging one because of the constant pressure of maintaining an exemplary image in the marketplace, a reputation that could be easily destroyed with one wedding that does not go according to plan. If even one client is left dissatisfied, the elite wedding planner is in danger of losing all future clients. Since this is an industry that depends almost entirely on word of mouth, the opinions of both the clients and the wedding guests are of utmost importance. Thereafter it is vital that the wedding planners do everything they can to ensure that everyone is happy with every aspect of the wedding. Also, as every wedding is a ‘make or break’ event, the wedding planners, they must take extra steps to build and retain their standing in the industry. This element of risk makes the occupation of wedding planners a novel case to research.

In addition, during my preliminary research, I learnt that the wedding planning industry was still in the process of establishing itself. It lacks any stringent entry requirements. For example, there are no specific educational qualifications required. There are no high skill training requirements, no licensing or certification needed, or any rigid apprenticeships or union memberships required. Hence, wedding planners constitute a unique and fitting example for the study of emerging occupational communities.

1.3. Intended Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The primary impetus for this study is to contribute to the literature on occupational communities, specifically nascent ones. First, this research aims to develop a theory by focusing on how the nascent occupational communities organise themselves. In doing so, it links the nature of the task carried out by the members of the nascent occupational community of wedding planners with the background of these individuals before they became wedding planners. This connection is then traced back to the emergence of the new

occupations. Second, by zooming into the wedding conferences, i.e. the community events attended by industry members, the study attempts to determine whether and how these community events contribute to a deeper understanding of the occupational community. The study zooms out to focus on the task domains of the members of the nascent occupational community of wedding planners and analyses the relationship between these two aspects. By examining this interconnection between task domain and community configuring events in the wedding planning industry, the thesis reveals how this particular community configures itself. At the same time, it seeks to develop a theory to help understand how such nascent occupational communities organise and sustain themselves in the absence of any stringent forms of legal or institutional structuring.

Regarding its practical contributions, this research suggests how new and aspiring wedding planners can enter the elite circle of their occupation. While many individuals attempt to join it, not all are able to achieve their goal. By offering authentic glimpses into the day-to-day practices carried out by wedding planners, this ethnographic study contributes to our understanding of how one might be able to succeed in this highly competitive and exclusive business. It is my hope that my thesis can heighten awareness concerning the pathways and pitfalls to help the individuals become part of this exclusive occupational community. Additionally, I hope that my analysis of the crucial role played by conferences as community configuring events will be useful in the future structuring of the wedding planners' community and other nascent occupational communities. To meet these objectives, my main research questions are as follows:

- i. How are nascent occupational communities organised?
- ii. How do community configuring events assist in the establishment of nascent occupational communities?

1.4 Thesis Structure

In terms of structure, the rest of the thesis consists of six chapters which are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the theoretical underpinnings of the study. It outlines the key literature on occupational communities. The chapter starts by justifying the necessity for using an occupational lens over an organisational lens for the study. It aims to clarify and highlight the distinctions among the terminologies of occupation, profession and semi-professions, thus bringing clarity to the study. The chapter then discusses the concept of

nascent occupations and discusses the gap in the literature, specifically the paucity of research on the early emergence of occupational communities. This chapter also introduces the concept of field and community configuring events and uses this concept to understand the staging and configuration of the nascent occupational communities and the relevance for the same. The chapter ends by reiterating the research questions of the study.

My methodological approach is explained in Chapter 3. This chapter also explains how the different aspects of methodology, such as research design, data collection and data analysis, were used for this research. In addition to touching on the ethical concerns, Chapter 3 delineates the research setting and details the background of the companies where most of the observations and interviews took place. Complementing these observations and interviews were various other data collection methods. Chapter 3 concludes with an explanation of how the data were analysed and a summary of my reflections on the entire research process.

Constituting the lengthiest section of this thesis, Chapter 4A, 4B, 5 and 6 offer the empirical findings and analysis. Chapter 4A, the first empirical chapter, is a vignette of an elite Indian wedding which spanned four days. Based on my field diary and notes, this vignette is presented to give the reader an intimate glimpse into the grandeur of an actual elite wedding. A traditional, four-day Indian wedding was the choice for the vignette because it not only gives the reader a rare opportunity to feel like a guest at a traditional wedding in India, but it also allows the reader to anticipate the tasks carried out by the wedding planners to ensure success.

This vignette is followed by Chapter 4B which begins with a brief history of weddings and the wedding planning industry. Included in this discussion are pertinent details about the growth of wedding planning in the U.S.A., India and the U.K. This chapter seeks to address the first research question and thus reflects on the ‘becoming’ part of this occupational community. It explores the previous occupations of individual wedding planners and their path to the wedding planning industry. Their entry into the industry is analysed with respect to the emergence of this nascent occupational community. Chapter 5 also explores the tasks performed by the elite wedding planners. The findings presented in both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 offer insights into the second research question of how nascent occupational communities configure themselves. Specifically, Chapter 6 sheds light on to understand how the wedding planners conference serves as an event or mechanism for configuring the nascent occupational community of elite wedding planners.

Finally, Chapter 7 is the discussion and conclusion chapter. This chapter theorises the concepts emerging from the three findings chapters and builds the theoretical contributions of the study. First, it theorises how nascent occupational communities organise themselves that allows them to emerge. This can be understood more deeply by looking into the nature of the task of the occupational community and then traces it back to the backgrounds of the individuals prior to entering the occupational community. Second, Chapter 7 theorises the relationship between the task domain of the nascent occupational community and the community configuring events. This helps to develop a nuanced understanding of how emerging occupations configure and sustain themselves. The chapter ends with a summary of the key contributions of the study and touches upon directions for possible future research.

2. Literature Review

This chapter begins by explaining the terms *occupation* and *occupational community*: two terms that figure prominently in my thesis. It then discusses the rationale for using an occupational lens over an organisational lens and for focusing on the study of occupations. Once the relevance of such research is established, the concepts of occupational communities and emerging occupational communities are explained in greater detail. Next, the centrality of the *task domain* in the study of occupational communities is considered. The section continues with a brief outline of how occupational communities distinguish themselves. The chapter then moves on to introduce the notion of a *field configuring event* in the context of occupational communities, which is an area that remains relatively unexplored in the literature. To deepen our understanding of such an event, the chapter focuses on the example of conferences. The chapter ends with an explanation of the literature gap, followed by the research questions.

2.1. Occupations, Occupational Communities and Communities of Practice

In examining the existing literature, one can find a certain degree of overlap and confusion among the terms ‘occupation’, ‘occupational community’ and ‘community of practice’. Therefore, at the outset, it is necessary to clarify how I use these concepts in my dissertation. The term ‘occupation’ is complex because it can have both a lay and technical meaning. In lay terms, it simply refers to a purposeful activity and more often to the work that someone does in return for payment (Oxford Dictionary). In technical terms, however, an ‘occupation’ is defined as a set of jobs whose main tasks and duties are characterised by a high degree of similarity (ILO, 2012, p.11). In such a context, the term functions as a classificatory device to provide an overview of the job market (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005; ILO, 2012).

In the social sciences, occupations are generally conceived as a mechanism for segregating, allotting and directing labour (Abbott 1988; Barley, 1996; Scott & Lammers, 1985; Simpson, 1985; Stinchcombe, 1956; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). According to Abbott (1995), the traditional understanding of the term consists of three elements: “a particular body of persons, a specific kind of work and an organized body or structure, other than the place of work itself” (pp. 873-974).

The concept of ‘occupational community’ adds a further element. This term is defined as “a group of individuals who are recognized predominantly as being in a similar type of work; considered as individuals who generally identify positively with their work, they share certain norms, values and perspectives” (Van Maanen & Barley, 1982). Accordingly, an occupation is perceived “collectively as an important membership category for those concerned that this notion of occupational communities emerges” (Salaman, 1974). Hence, the idea of an occupational community helps to explain grouping and membership in reference to an occupation. Rather than being used as descriptive category, the term captures the results of specific social processes of inclusion and identification.

Furthermore, Salaman (1974) argues that all communities entail some components of an occupational community, including how members of occupational communities perceive themselves in terms of their occupational role, in other words, their ‘self-image’. It also includes the reference group that is shared by the members of these communities, that is, the individuals with whom they share similar views, attitudes and values, and finally, how the members of the occupational communities’ form connections with other members of their occupation as well as non-members.

The concept of an occupational community also partially overlaps with the idea of a *community of practice* (COP) and other social structures related to knowledge and learning (Murillo, 2011). Communities of practice have been defined as “groups of people who share a concern, set of problems or a passion about a topic, who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). Examples of COPs include nurses reviewing and discussing patients cases during their daily luncheons (Wenger, 1996); petro-physicists engaged in deep-sea petroleum discovery at the Shell company and meeting weekly to discuss the issues they encounter in their formal teams (Mc Dermott & Kendrick, 2000); Chief Information Officers from different companies in the San Francisco area who gather every month for a technical presentation and review followed by dinner (Moran & Weimer, 2004), or public defense attorneys sharing a county office and attempting to improve their court performances, thus crafting their professional identities (Hara and Schwen, 2006). Hence, COPs are regarded as sites of knowledge sharing and innovation. A COP can be distinguished from the notion of the occupational community in that the former aims at foregrounding the dimension of learning and knowledge sharing rather than focusing on belonging and membership (Prokesch, 1997; Swan et al., 1999; Lesser & Everest, 2001).

2.2. Rationale for Studying the Topic of Occupations

Almost 40 years ago, Van Maanen & Barley (1984) convincingly argued for the need to use the occupational community as a unit of analysis of human behaviour, yet much of the literature leans towards adopting an organisational approach. Thus, the organisational and occupational lenses are compared in this section to discern the differences between the two and then later explain the rationale for emphasising the study of occupations.

On the one hand, from an organisational angle, work is evaluated mainly according to the barometer of the individual's movement or lack of movement within the predefined hierarchical positions in the organisation (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007). Here each upward or downward movement within the preset hierarchy is also accompanied with a corresponding increase or decrease in the remuneration, power, prestige and other rewards allotted to the individual (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007). From an organisational perspective, the work carried out by an individual is a comparatively small part of the big challenges concerning authority, coordination, production methods, workflow or service design (Van Maanen & Barley, 1982).

On the other hand, from an occupational viewpoint, an individual's work is not gauged by his/her movement in the preset order. Rather, it is evaluated on the basis of what that person does, whether other members of the occupation agree with him/her and are supportive, and so on (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). From an occupational perspective, individuals have an edge as they benefit from maintaining some of the everyday reality of first-hand work experience (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984).

Moreover, we see that in today's scenario, the notion of the traditional organisation is evolving, leading to a more extensive scope for the study of occupations (Damarin, 2006). There is a growing shift in work arrangements from the traditional strict bureaucratic structures to the more flexible ones (Damarin, 2006). This change can be seen at different levels. At the industry and firm level, there has been a transition from the standardised production of products to specialised and custom-made goods, and from mass-scale production to small project or batch-based production, as well as a shift from the fixed machinery to technologies that can be programmed (Damarin, 2006). Additionally, large monopolistic organisations have given way to smaller networked firms, from largely manufacturing physical products to the providing of services with increasing focus on creativity and quality (Heydebrand, 1989; Jurgens, 1989; Piore & Sabel, 1984; Wood, 1989).

Also, at the level of work and employment, we can see huge changes in the structure of organisations (Appelbaum & Albin, 1989; Burris, 1988; Hecksher, 1995; Heydebrand, 1989; Jurgens, 1989; Piore & Sabel, 1984; Powell, 2001; Smith, 1997; Wood, 1989). To illustrate, Vallas (1999) predicted that over a period of time, the traditional bureaucratic form of workplace hierarchy would become outdated. Today, we see a growing trend away from traditional bureaucratic forms of work structure and towards more flattened or non-hierarchical structures (Damarin, 2006). This development is leading to a more occupational-based structure at workplaces due to an overall acceptance of more flexibility and fluidity in jobs and careers (Damarin, 2006). Given this trend, it is certainly reasonable for researchers to refocus and study occupational communities in greater depth.

As mentioned above, the present-day studies indicate that occupations are becoming increasingly significant in workplaces (Anteby, 2016). The literature suggests that for a long while, occupations have been contributing to the systematisation of the society (Ritzer, 1975; Weber, 1968) while at the same time offering their members recognition through affiliations (Durkheim, 1984/1933; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). Indeed, occupations are gaining significance nowadays, as they are regarded as being able to bring stability to the units of modern employment, particularly in the sector of “destabilizing forces on workers’ organizational affiliations” (Anteby. al., 2016; p.188).

In recent times, there has been a change in work forms with the decreasing labour force availability in firms, significantly higher turnover rates, a noteworthy upsurge in casual work, and careers spread across several organisations (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2010; Bidwell et al., 2013; Cappelli, 2001; George & Chattopadhyay, 2005). Further, the U.S. General Social Survey reports that a rising number of people are employed in unconventional work arrangements (including freelancing); the figure was as high as 40.4 percent in the year 2010 (Government Accountability Office, 2015, p. 4). According to Ashford, George and Blatt (2007), the employability in unconventional work arrangements leads to a detachment of employee and employer.

Barley and Kunda (2004) point to the importance of reviewing the possibility that as organisational affiliations diminish, occupational affiliations could fill the void. As they state, “census data clearly project that occupational forms of organizing are becoming more prominent”, taking note that the “ratio of occupational organized work to hierarchically organized work” has risen from 0.38 to 0.56 between 1990 and 1998 (pp. 305-306). In addition, many workers have comparatively increased degrees of commitment to their occupation as opposed to their organisation (Anteby, 2016). For example, a study by the

National Commission for Employment Policy deduced that during the 1970s male workers were more inclined towards changing their occupation and would stick to their employer, but during the 1980s and 1990s, this sequence changed where changing employers became more frequent than changing occupations (Rose, 1995).

Studies also indicate an upsurge in significant occupational forces. For instance, whereas only five percent of workers during the 1950s had an occupational certification, today around a third of the workers possess an occupational certification” (Kleiner & Krueger, 2010). Over the years, prominent dynamic occupational affiliations have been witnessed in a broad range of industries (Anteby, 2016). As an example, ‘hired hands’ and ‘mercenaries’ in tech and military industries (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Baum & McGahan, 2013), software programmers (O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007) and journalists (Boczkowski, 2010) all particularly identify themselves with their occupation (Anteby, 2016), projecting once again “how the workers are more connected and attached with the occupations than the industries in which they carry out their work” (Carnevele, Rose & Cheah, 2011, p. 2).

Opting for occupational affiliations can also lead to various consequential outcomes. Such affiliations result in strong occupational commitment which in turn relates positively to job engagement and job satisfaction of the workers and a corresponding enhancement of job performance and decline in workers absenteeism (Anteby, 2016; Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000). Another result of occupational affiliations is an increase in rewards for the workers, as exemplified by the initial five years of occupational tenure in the U.S. workforce leading to a 12-20 percent rise in workers’ wages. By contrast, the organisational tenure has very little impact on wages (Kambourov & Manovski, 2009). It is worth noting that occupations also play a major role in the construction of occupational outcomes (Bechky, 2011). For instance, some occupational affiliations grow so powerful that they tend to be able to influence regulations by validating specific innovations over others (Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002) and by managing certain occupational certifications which influence the supply and expense of labour for various organisations (Kleiner & Krueger, 2010; Weeden, 2002), thereafter projecting the growing significance of occupational affiliations.

Furthermore, due to changes in the nature of work structures from the rigid to the flexible and fluid, there is a growing need to focus on occupations over professions (Barley & Kunda, 2004). This trend is leading to a decrease in the professionalisation strategies such as licensing techniques, high quality training and strong legal regulations (Abbott, 1988; Bolton & Muzio, 2008). The extant literature offers numerous studies on these strategies as mechanisms for the professionalisation of occupations (Abbott, 1988; Bolton & Muzio,

2008), such as the professionalisation of architects (Champy, 2006), journalists (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003), and engineers (Meiksins & Watson, 1989). However, with the heightened importance of occupations, occupational affiliations are arguably becoming more important in comparison to professional and organisational ones. Finally, while the existing literature has focused primarily on how professions emerge from occupations, we know far less about how the occupations themselves emerge.

2.3. Occupational Communities: Types and Components

The notion of communities that are based on occupations has been strongly embedded within the literature of sociology for several years now (Bechky, 2003; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). Traditionally, the word ‘community’ was reserved for groups of people who lived in close proximity to one another (Salaman, 1971). More recently, this definition has evolved, as today’s communities are not necessarily restricted to a geographical area but formed on the basis of shared identity and relational exchange (Hsu & Hannan, 2005). Van Maanen & Barley (1984) point out that it is not necessary that individuals in an occupational community be engaged in the same organisation. In fact, they could be working in different organisations or could be self-employed. When an individual from a particular occupational community is involved in an organisation, the culture of the occupational community materialises as a prominent aspect of the individual’s performance (Van Maanen & Barley, 1982). Therefore, an occupational community can be defined as a group of people who see themselves as members of the same occupation rather than individuals who are merely working together in the same organisation (Berger, 1964). Some studies of occupational communities have revealed how individuals in a specific occupation share similar values with the members of the same occupational community (Gomez-Mejia, 1984). For example, this tendency is evident among fishermen (Weaver, 1977), forensic accountants (Lawrence, 1999) and engineers (Bechky, 2003).

Occupational communities have also been segregated into two types: the local and the cosmopolitan. This categorisation was introduced by Merton (1957). Other scholars, such as Reissman (1957), have used this distinction in occupational communities to support the idea that the primary differentiator between local and cosmopolitan occupational communities concerns whether they use a reference group comprised only of people of their organisation or composed of all members of their occupation (Reissman, 1957, pp. 281-306). To clarify, local occupational communities are ones in which members of the occupational community

are inclined towards their immediate local world, which would be their own town or workplace (Reissman, 1957). Here the reference group of the local occupational community does not consist of all the members of the occupation, but those with whom they share the same work situation or geographical location (Reissman, 1957), resulting in the greater likelihood that members of the local occupational community are at least acquainted with one another (Reissman, 1957).

By contrast, in cosmopolitan occupational communities, membership is based on the occupation as a whole and often only some section of it. Here, unlike local occupational communities, the members are not just interested in their specific workplace or geographical location but in the world of their occupation as a whole (Reissman, 1957). In other words, the occupation itself is the primary reference point. Generally, members make “friends or associate themselves with members of their occupation, who they might not even work with” (Reissman, 1957, p. 135). However, members of the cosmopolitan occupational community are not limited to the geographical location in which they may be situated. It is far less likely that members of this occupational community would know every member.

Irrespective of whether occupational communities are local or cosmopolitan in nature, there are some key defining components of occupational communities listed by Salaman (1971). The first component is *self-image*, i.e. the manner in which the members of the occupational community perceive themselves with respect to their occupational role. This self-perception is not casual or random, but usually based on specific occupational roles and the assurance and support that one receives from the other members of the occupational community. Here individuals not only perceive themselves in terms of the occupational role alone but also in terms of their self-image. This does not generally occur among individuals who happen to share the same occupation, but rather among those who are part of an occupational community. To illustrate, in a study conducted by Becker (1956) on jazz musicians, these individuals perceived themselves in terms of their occupational role. This self-image superseded any other identities that these jazz musicians had. In Becker’s study, one man mentions that he did not care about his identity as a Jew, as the only identity he was chiefly concerned about now was that of a jazz musician.

The next component of occupational communities listed by Salaman (1971) is the *reference group* which consist of other members of the occupational community. Here the various components are interwoven. The component of self-image is directly related to the use of reference groups for the occupational community. In other words, the self-image is also affected by the identity possessed by the reference group. The concept of reference

group has also been used in a normative context. For instance, members of occupational communities tend to make note of the reactions and feedback of their fellow members and attach importance to these opinions. Those individuals in their particular reference group are the only people who can make valid judgements of the member's work performance. Since the members feel that their problems can be truly understood only by their reference group, they take the responses of their fellow group members seriously.

The last component listed by Salaman (1971) relates to how members of the occupational community associate themselves and make friends with other members of their occupational community rather than with outsiders, that is, individuals who are not part of their occupational community. Members of an occupational community may not only share hobbies and interests with such friends within their occupational community, as well as work-related issues, regardless of whether or not these individuals share the same work situation (Salaman, 1971). Thus, we see that these components of occupational communities are often interconnected. Developing an understanding of these components contributes to a more multi-layered understanding of the concept of occupational communities.

2.4. How Occupational Communities Emerge, Constitute Themselves and Reproduce

Occupations play a vital role in the reproduction (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983) and transformation of markets and institutions (Lounsbury, 2003; Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002; Scott et al., 2000). Previous research has indicated how occupations are significant sites for theorisation, framing, creating and diffusing new practices (e.g. Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lounsbury & Kaghan, 2001; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). Given the key contribution of occupations towards shaping institutional arrangements, the genesis and growth of occupations should be studied by scholars who are interested in the development of new market activities (Dimaggio, 1991; Lounsbury, 2001; Weber, Heinz & DeSousa, 2008), which in turn leads to the development of new and emerging occupations.

There have been several studies on how occupational communities constitute and reproduce themselves. For instance, some researchers have explored how occupational communities constitute themselves by fixing occupational jurisdictions and solidifying these jurisdictions through various political and rhetorical strategies, including the formation of associations and controlling membership criteria (Begun & Lippincott, 1987; Kronus, 1976; Halpern, 1992; Gross & Kieser, 2006; Kipping & Saint-Martin, 2005; McKenna, 2006).

Occupational communities also make claims through theoretical and formal knowledge (Abbott, 1988; Hughes, 1984) and formulating their expertise to give themselves authority over their task domains (Power, 1997; Lawrence, 2004; Gross & Kieser, 2006; Alvesson & Roberston, 2006).

Previous studies also demonstrate how nascent occupational communities use different strategies to legitimise themselves. For example, Lawrence (2004) points out how Canadian public accountants, who were not considered as legitimate by other actors in the field (such as lawyers and engineers), create a role for their occupation in the nascent field of environmental audits. In Lawrence's research, they form a professional association which, albeit open to all, is primarily comprised of accountants. The study reveals that this association also assists in defining what an environmental audit professional is and what is incorporated in this definition. In most cases, emerging occupations are not yet at a stage where they can utilise some of the legitimisation approaches that are recommended by the literature on professions, for example, the closure of membership (Halpern, 1992; Begun & Lippincott, 1987), as they do not have access to the means to enforce such restrictions (Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky, 2016).

On the other hand, the early strategies for the formation and reproduction of occupational communities are largely informal ones such as apprenticeships and social networks (Maroto, 2011). Some highly structured, legally binding and unionised occupational communities, such as plumbers, might also limit apprenticeships (Bilginsoy, 2003). Other occupational communities have less structured apprenticeship programmes and are not unionised, such as hairdressers and body art practitioners (Sanders, 1989).

Much of the literature is focused on how occupational communities move towards closing themselves through formal professionalisation strategies such as licensing, professional organisations, statutory regulations, and so on (Maroto, 2011). The bulk of the literature in this area concentrates on how occupations organise knowledge and create standards and criteria for individuals to join the occupational community, thus moving towards ways of institutionalising and 'closing off' the occupational community and moving towards professionalisation (Maroto, 2011).

There is an important and growing body aimed at analysing already established professions (Bucher & Strauss, 1961; Zald & Berger, 1978; Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002; Schneinberg & Lounsbury, 2008), yet there has been only scant research on emerging occupations specifically (Lounsbury, 2001). Although comprehensive sociological literature exists on organisational, occupational and professional legitimacy, very little

attention has been directed towards the emergence of new occupations (Sherman, 2010). Emerging occupations may be occupations that are new or occupations in which employment increased from very low levels (Himes, 1996). Unlike professions, occupations are not tied to high level training, highly specialised knowledge or complex rules and procedures. As a result, in order to appreciate the experiences of members of emerging occupational communities, we need further research in the form of both empirical investigations as well as new theoretical constructs in the area of work and occupations (George, 2013).

Keeping in mind the present situation, with the change in employment from long-term, secure jobs giving way to a more unpredictable and varied labour market (Hollister, 2011), we can see an upsurge in new and emerging occupational communities. Scholars explain that the disruption of well-known work situations should not be viewed necessarily as a jobless future or the end of work (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1996; Rifkin, 2000). Instead, these trends lead to a wider scope. In other words, they yield to new types of work (Abbot, 1993; Osnowitz, 2010; Osterman, 2001) which lead to eventually to the formation of new occupations. George (2013) also credits the changing economic trends and the uncertainty in the labour market for the creation of new nonstandard occupations.

Dingwall (1983), Nelson and Barley (1997) and Sherman (2010) stress that how occupations originate and come to be recognised is a question that has been largely neglected in the sociology of work (Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky, 2016). While we know little about the early processes of the emergence of occupations (Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky, 2016), the past literature does put forward several triggers for the emergence of occupational communities. These include ‘hiving off’ tasks, the advent of new technologies and a vacuum left by another occupation, (Bucher & Strauss, 1961; Bucher, 1988; Hughes, 1984; Zekta, 2003, 2011).

One likely impetus is that one occupation “hives off” tasks (Hughes, 1958) so that a new occupation is formed to take up those tasks. The hiving off of tasks occurs when established professions allocate more routine work to others. Sometimes this hiving off happens by allocating the routine tasks to assistants, as exemplified when engineers assign the task of redundant calculations and tests to engineering technicians. In other instances, hiving off may create totally new occupations. This phenomenon is seen especially in the health care industry, where new occupations, including medical technicians and respiratory therapists, are formed as a result of the ‘hiving off’ of tasks formerly performed by registered nurses and physicians (Freidson, 1970; Nelsen & Barley, 1997).

The second possibility is the creation of a new occupation as a consequence of significant technological developments (Anteby et al., 2016). Occupations are seen to be tied

to the commercialisation of the latest technology (Barley, 1988). As an illustration, before the commercialisation of automobiles and televisions, there was no necessity for occupations such as automobile mechanics or television repairmen (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). However, changes in technology not only spawned occupations that maintain this technology but also occupations that would operate the technology itself (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). Air traffic controllers or technicians in nuclear power plants are among the many examples. Here when a new technology is generated and accepted widely, it requires skilled support, which then leads to the emergence of a new occupational community to respond to the needs of the individuals operating the new technology (Anteby et al., 2016).

The third probability of the emergence, which is the oldest and least well studied source of new occupations, is the transformation of unpaid work into paid work (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). Individuals attempt to justify 'non work' activities as 'work' by trying to obtain recognition and remittance for the activities (Anteby et al., 2016). Put simply, certain tasks previously associated with domestic chores are transformed into occupations that command the exchange of money (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). For instance, there are certain types of activities, including housekeeping or volunteering (Daniels, 1988; Rollins, 1987), that deliver 'socially valued goods or services' (Vallas, 2012) but were not previously regarded as real work or as well-defined occupations. In redefining these activities, individuals attempt to commodify them and create a new work classification (Nelsen & Barley, 1997).

Thus, in totality, the number of new and revised occupations recorded in the U.S. Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system consists of 974 categories (as of 2016), in contrast to 503 occupational categories, which existed when this classification system was introduced in 1977 (Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky, 2016). As the range of traditional employment is shrinking (Kalleberg, 2011), the scope for new occupations is increasing, as evidenced by the growing number of consultants (Werr & Styhre, 2003), fundraisers and web developers (Watson, 2013). In the existing literature of emerging occupations, much of the attention is on fledgling occupations that arise from the recent technological advances. Examples include data scientists, digital analysts, growth hackers, optimisation specialists, and web application developers (Bryant et al., 2004; Davenport & Patil 2012, Waller & Fawcett, 2013). I would also add 3D animators, robotics technicians and artificial intelligence engineers. While there is greater research on emerging occupations related to technology, limited study is carried out on other emerging occupations that have no connection whatsoever to the evolving technology.

Although the literature on the early emergence of occupational communities is limited, Bucher (1962, 1988) asserts that the process of becoming an occupational community includes searching for like-minded co-workers, creating a sense of shared meaning, obtaining an occupational mandate for the tasks and legitimising and fixing an occupational jurisdiction. Despite the existence of this categorisation of stages, such categories do not fully explain the early emergence of an occupational community. This gap in the literature could be attributed to a couple of reasons. Some scholars suggest that studying the early emergence of occupations becomes more difficult compared to the study of the emergence of organisations because many occupations emerge sporadically. By contrast, organisations are created by a specific set of individuals at a particular time and place (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). The legal system acknowledges organisations as actors with specific rights and duties (Coleman, 1974). Here organisations are generally registered with a definite authority and in due course receive funding for their functioning (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). Therefore, once these organisations are registered, researchers can identify and trace the founders of the organisation, and then, through interviews, they can trace back the events leading to this status (Nelsen & Barley, 1997).

In the case of emerging occupations, however, the first practitioners are usually spread out across several locales and are most likely unaware of the other one's existence (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). Some of them might not even regard themselves as pioneers of the occupation. In addition, as no authority registers occupations, the social and legal identification and recognition come more slowly when compared to that of organisations (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). Unlike the recognition of organisations, social recognition comes prior to the legal one. Also, in the case of most new occupations, as the key occupational pioneers remain unknown, it becomes challenging to identify them and thus difficult to interview them. (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). In fact, by the time scholars recognise the formation of a new occupation, the earliest practitioners are lost to history (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). Consequently, we are likely to find more in-depth studies of occupations that have already 'emerged' rather than the ones that are still in the process of 'emerging'.

Nevertheless, research on emerging or nascent occupational communities is not totally missing from the existing literature. One fairly recent study was carried out to determine how emerging occupations construct their mandates (Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky, 2016). Here the discussion centres on the role of values in the construction of an occupational mandate, especially for occupations that do not rely on skills and technical expertise as a method of differentiation. The study explores the emerging occupational community of

service designers and how they strive to understand their customers and help the organisations create new and upgraded services and customer experiences that can be later translated into solutions for them to implement. Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky found that the practitioners enacted their values in their daily work routines by a set of material practices, such as shadowing customers or the front line staff, carrying out interviews in the service sector or generating journey maps of a service user's experience. The researchers explain how the emerging occupational community of service designers used values to make their work practices distinctive. The service designers term the combination of their values and work practices as their 'ethos', and suggest that this ethos has been useful in defining the occupational mandate. Overall, the study explains how values serve to construct mandates in occupations where skills and expertise are not the key differentiator.

Another noteworthy study by George (2013) investigates the emerging occupational community of life coaches. The research seeks to understand how individuals in this particular occupational community are endeavouring to professionalise themselves. According to George (2013), their first goal of these life coaches was to make clear their occupational identity and outline the occupational jurisdictions for their services. The study shows how the life coaches attempt to achieve professionalisation through credentialisation and standardisation. It looks into the traditional concepts of gender and links these concepts to their impacts on the construction and future of the occupational community of life coaches. The emphasis is on understanding how life coaches' cash in on unpaid services such as listening to clients and providing advice: two actions previously characterised as typically and inherently "feminine" behaviours. We can deduce that George (2013) studied the task of the occupation largely from a gender perspective.

Sherman (2010) offers another example of the literature on emerging occupational communities. The study focuses on the nascent occupational community of personal concierges and errand services, also known as 'lifestyle management', that originated in the late 1990s. This research explores how personal concierges, whose services are considered to be associated with 'women's labour', attempt to apply gender neutral frameworks in order to legitimise their occupation. Again, we observe that these nascent occupational communities are studied from a gender perspective. In short, the existing literature misses out on vital unanswered questions regarding the initial emergence of occupations. In this thesis, I seek to address some neglected questions.

2.5 Centrality of Task Domain

Occupations are frequently understood “partially in terms of the work activities that are carried out by the members of the community”, which Abbott (2005) terms as the “task area” (p. 322). Occupations are not defined simply by how individuals become part of the occupational community but also by what they do (Anteby et al., 2016). This idea has also been approached via the ‘doing’ lens (Anteby et al., 2016). The doing lens focuses on how members of the occupation perform activities (e.g. work tasks and practices) and the effect of the same on individuals, occupations and group outcomes, such as dignity and a sense of identity.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1991), occupations are “social entities and are formed as a reality from the social perspective through patterns of human interaction over a span of time” (p.87). As Abbott (1995) explains, “people in particular occupations may be differentiated by their specialized skills, credentials, similar experiences and/or their gender, race or class background; the bundles of task carried out by the members are defined by their products, tools, activities clients, location; among several things” (p.863). Abbott states that members of an occupations are “linked to sets of tasks and jobs through non-workplace structures” (p 862), and occupations contain a specific set of tasks which are associated with a well-defined group of individuals (Abbott, 1995). This idea sheds light on the importance of the ‘task’.

The literature also indicates that sharing common work and constructing positive conceptions does not guarantee that individuals will consider themselves part of the new occupation. Here constructing a new occupation includes building a system of shared values (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) and engaging in social undertaking (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Work has been studied to produce a feeling of involvement in the context of an occupational community (Marschall, 2002). Further, Marschall (2002) suggests that the work tasks carried out by a specific occupational community holds special importance for the members of that community as it gives them a sense of uniqueness. Thus, in order to appreciate fully the factor of human interaction and social engagement in understanding the functionality of the occupational community, it is beneficial to explore the task domain.

In this thesis, the term ‘task domain’ refers to the layperson’s interpretation of it as the ‘nature of the task’. The next section reviews the current literature on the role of tasks. In the research on the role of tasks in occupational communities, there are articles on how the occupational communities strive to protect their key task domains from rivals, as illustrated

by a study on the jurisdictional battles on factory floors (Beckhy, 2003a, pp.720-721). The study found that since a task is viewed as “a means of sustained livelihood, occupations fiercely guard their core task domains from potential incursions by competitors” (Beckhy, 2003a, pp.720-721). This claim over the task, has also been highlighted by Abbott (1988a) in his research on the methods by which professional jockeys position one another by making claims over specific task areas. This tendency indicates how the tasks are critical for occupational communities and cannot be neglected in any study of the same.

In exploring the role of tasks in the occupational community, some studies have looked into the implications of performing tasks with vast variation in the work content (Anteby, 2016). This broad variation across occupations pertains to the skill level, autonomy and intensity of tasks, which have largely focused on the inequalities along class, gender and racial lines (Kalleberg, 2011; Osterman, 2013). Other scholars, associated with the work design tradition, have emphasised these task variations with respect to the outcome of the work, such as motivation (Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). In any case, these studies have presented the vastly structured picture of work content within each occupation. Past literature also notes the importance of consideration the nature of the task. For example, according to Salaman, (1974), the nature of the task can be used as a method of inclusivity for the occupational community. He discusses this notion in light of three different kinds of inclusivity which differ markedly from one another. The first type of inclusivity is adopting a system of norms and values that can be applied to the lives of the members of the occupational community. This application is referred to as both “insider and outsider work”, as illustrated by the military life (p.34). Salaman’s second form of inclusivity is called “occupational embrace”, while the last type of inclusivity is that derived from the “nature of the task” (p. 35).

Studies have examined the practices of members of an occupational community where the nature of the task is clearly dangerous, yet the occupational community remains intact. As an illustration, in exploring the life and work of coal miners, Schwieder (1983) reveals the monotonous, dirty and dangerous work carried out by the coal miners. In spite of the nature of the work, Schwieder observes that the miners generally liked their work and gained pride in demonstrating their expertise. However, the focus of Schwieder’s research is specifically on the immigrant Italian American mining families. She exposes the harsh reality of these hard-working immigrants who toil in the coal mines. Albeit arduous and often treacherous, their work fosters a sense of pride, and the workers tend to adjust to their environment. A running theme in Schwieder’s research is also the stark social inequities that

affect the performance of the tasks carried out by these working class Italian immigrants. Nonetheless, one of the key conclusions of the research remains the fact that the tasks help cultivate a positive identity for the members of the occupational community.

In another study, the occupational community of zookeepers is examined by Bunderson and Thomas (2009). They demonstrate how the task of zookeeping is generally performed by individuals who love animals and enjoy performing the task of taking care of zoo animals. The study notes that the zookeepers were poorly paid and began their work with lengthy unpaid internships that progressed to low-paid yet marginally secure jobs. Here, despite the low remuneration, the members continued to be part of the occupational community and were happy to faithfully execute their tasks as zookeepers, as they were motivated primarily by their love and concern for animals. The study suggests that the zookeepers' tasks help perpetuate the existence of this particular occupational community, thus reinforcing the importance of 'tasks' in occupational community research.

In investigating occupational communities, we repeatedly see how being attached to the task helps the members of the community bond with one other. The literature also points out how in order to feel a sense of belonging in the community, members may perform tasks which, under normal conditions, they are not expected to carry out at work. This has been termed as "cheating at work" (Mars, 1973; Mars & Nicod, 2019). The literature reveals that cheating here is not seen as an act of self-interest, but an act that helps the members bond with one another. For example, in the study of dockworkers, workers who break the vessels and then announce that the goods are damaged do so in order to share them among themselves; it is interpreted as an act of sharing rather than cheating (Mars, 1973; Mars & Nicod, 2019). Likewise, Mars' restaurant waiters manipulate client's checks to conceal some served and paid dishes from the books to generate a hidden pot of money that is distributed among the kitchen and wait staff. Here both these studies are limited to geographical settings of the occupational communities of specific dockworkers and restaurant servers. These studies project how members of the community of both dockworkers and restaurant servers do not limit themselves to their assigned tasks but also the task of stealing, which in turn serves to unify all the members of the occupational community.

In the existing literature, the concept of the occupational community has also been revisited by Sandiford and Seymour (2007) in order to understand the emerging face-to-face service occupations. Here the work and task demands are unlike the traditional or professional occupations. This study offers a deep exploration of the role of customers in the formation of the occupational community. Sandiford and Seymour (2007) demonstrate how

in carrying out the tasks demanded in face-to-face service occupations, clients, contrary to the general view, are in fact projected as a source of peace rather than conflict with their tasks. While this study does highlight out the centrality of tasks in this occupational community, the main focus is on the role of the clients. Also, this service occupation studied by Sandiford and Seymour (2007) revolves around the hospitality sector, where all the members of the occupational community are working at one location, thus restricting the study by its geographical boundaries. Consequently, there is scope to conduct further research on the centrality of the task on members of occupational communities that are not confined by geographically.

Furthermore, in most of the previous studies on the study of occupational communities, an occupation is characterised as work consisting mainly of a generally homogenous set of tasks. However, there is a paucity of research dedicated to occupational communities where the tasks are heterogenous. One emerging study by Fine (1996) looks at the occupation of cooking and finds that when tasks are heterogenous, “each task or sets of tasks conveys self-images and implications for identity” (p. 112). Fine explains how the task of creative cooking helps a chef build an identity as a culinary artist as well as an effective restaurant supervisor by executing out the different tasks related to people management along with the hiring and firing of the restaurant staff. In Fine’s study, one chef remarks, “You almost need to be a psychologist...to be able to deal with problems [of the staff]” (Fine, 1996, p. 95). Fine’s study reinforces the heterogeneity of tasks and how this factor influences the outcome of the work in the occupational community. Thus, exploring occupational communities with heterogenous tasks contributes to our understanding of how these tasks help to sustain members of such an occupational community, and not just its’ effect on the work outcome. Certainly, this facet offers rich potential for further research.

To sum up, this section discusses the importance of the centrality of tasks for the occupational communities. In the existing scholarship, the tasks of an occupational community have been viewed as vital elements as they link members of the occupational community (Abbott, 1995). The set of tasks renders each occupational community as unique (Marschall, 2002). Consequently, attempts are made to protect the key task domains from the competitors (Beckhy, 2003). In addition, tasks are used as a mechanism to exercise inclusivity in the occupational community (Salaman, 1974). The existing literature explains how the tasks generate a positive identity for the members of the occupational community (Schwieder, 1983) and motivate its members to perform their tasks (Bunderson & Thomas (2009). The tasks also serve as a tool to understand the clients in face-to-face service

occupations (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007). Moreover, while the past literature does present the importance of tasks in the occupational community, it fails to explain whether the task domain can be used to unravel the unanswered question of how nascent occupational communities emerge (Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky, 2016). Hence, this thesis strives to deepen understanding of the task domain of the occupational community and determine whether the task domain has any relation to the community's emergence and how it organises itself .

2.6 How Do Occupational Communities Distinguish Themselves?

Unlike professions, members of occupational communities do not require high level training, highly specialised knowledge or any complicated rules or procedures to be part of the occupational community (Van Maanen & Barely, 2004) Additionally, in professions, the work is measured by one's movement or lack of movement within a well-defined hierarchy of the organisation (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007). Here the upward or downward movement within the predefined hierarchy is in alignment with the individuals' increase or decrease in salary, power, prestige and other perquisites (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007). However, from an occupational perspective, an individual's work cannot be quantified by these factors (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007), which makes it challenging for the members to distinguish themselves among other members of the same occupation as well as differentiate themselves from other occupational communities.

The literature points out how occupational communities often rely on a variety of strategies to distinguish themselves, much of it focused on attaining occupational jurisdiction and techniques to legitimise themselves, which eventually leads to professionalisation. (Lawrence, 2004). Scholars have also made attempts to differentiate occupational communities by safeguarding the task domain of the occupational community from competitors (Bechky, 2003). In this section, I explore how objects and materials can be used by occupational communities to render themselves distinct among both members of the same occupational community and different occupational communities. In order to understand this process, I explore the concept of objects in the context of boundary work. In accordance with the practice perspective in management and organisation theory (Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Von Savigny, 2001), the notion of 'boundary work' is referred to as meaningful collective or individual effort to influence symbolic or material boundaries, demarcations and distinctions affecting occupations, groups or organisations (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Phillips & Lawrence, 2012).

In the literature, boundary work has been categorically divided into three types: collaborative boundary work, configurational boundary work and competitive boundary work (Langley et al., 2019). The category of ‘collaborative boundary work’ includes how individuals draw on, negotiate or restructure boundaries in interaction with others in order to carry out collaboration and coordination to accomplish their everyday work (Strauss, 1978). ‘Configural boundary work, focuses on how individuals work from outside existing boundaries to design, arrange and rearrange the sets of boundaries affecting others’ behaviours (Langley et al., 2019). This classification zooms into how patterns of both integration and differentiation among groups of people within or outside the organisation can be rearranged to ensure that certain activities are performed within the spaces. (Langley et al., 2019).

My central focus is on the third category: ‘competitive boundary work’, since it is most relevant to my research questions regarding how nascent occupational communities organise themselves. Competitive boundaries pertain to how individuals create, protect or extend boundaries to differentiate themselves from others (Langley et al., 2019). This also includes creating and defining an exclusive territory that would lead to providing some sort of an advantage (Langley et al., 2019). These boundaries are termed as ‘competitive’ as they involve defining boundaries or distinctions as mechanisms for attaining and reproducing power, social position and status for those who engage in this type of work (Bourdieu, 1977). In a competitive boundary, boundary relations are created in a manner in which greater power and legitimacy are allocated to one side while excluding the other side. For example, one can point to how boundary work is carried out to distinguish one group from another as in the case of scientists versus non-scientists (Garud, 2014; Gehman & Karunakaran, 2014; Gieryn, 1983; Murray, 2010), or in the distinction between privileged occupational groups and others in the environment (Burri, 2008; Hazgui & Gendron, 2015; Martin, Currie & Finn, 2009). Other studies have looked at how various groups use boundary work to validate membership for some and exclude others (Ashuri & Bar-Ilan, 2016; Edlinger, 2015; Mikes, 2011; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). Competitive boundary work thus defines the self-determined boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

Additionally, the reproduction of power can be included in competitive boundary work (Langley et al. 2019). This phenomenon can be seen, for instance, in efforts made to include lower status professionals in the health care industry (Allen, 2000; Martin et al., 2009). Another example discussed by Allen (2000) is the practice followed by nurse managers regarding policy changes, specifically those involving the creation of posts of

assistants and support staff. In this study, Allen demonstrated how the nurse managers engaged in boundary work by separating the nursing work from different types of work by taking control of deciding the requirements for the new roles, laying down the expertise required for the posts and valuing the experience of the nurses.

Furthermore, the existing literature states that boundary work is significant because of its outcomes for the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Lindberg, Walter & Raviola, 2017; Zeitsma & Lawrence, 2010). Boundary work also has an impact on the perpetuity and disturbance of power relations among groups and organisations (Allen, 2000; Arndt & Bigelow, 2005; Barrett, Oborn, 2012; Bucher, Chreim, Langley & Reay, 2016). In another example, boundary work is looked at in light of the role of objects, in assisting professional groups to maintain their position (Langley et al., 2019). As an illustration, in Burri's (2008) ethnographic study exploring the transformation of health care imaging, the focus is on the emergence of technologies such as MRI, CT and PET scanning and how radiologists undertake boundary work to obtain jurisdictions over the technologies and the handling practices. The radiologists ensured that the new machines were physically stationed within the department of radiology and not anywhere else. They asserted their positions in the medical hierarchy by maintaining and claiming exclusive expertise in the production and evaluation of images and by swiftly creating the capability to publish results from their research.

Past studies have frequently ignored objects, such as medical machinery, and have regarded them as stable with fixed meaning in the daily life, but it should be noted that objects tend to play different roles (Argote, 2011; Wagner & Newell & Piccoli, 2010; Zeitsma & Lawrence, 2010). When we look at our daily practices, we can observe how one's actions are closed linked with different objects (Nicolini, 2007; Orlikowski, 2006). It is quite clear that our actions are reliant on certain objects, including buildings, vehicles, furniture, phones, computers, attire, and so on: familiar things that we often take for granted (Nicolini et al., 2012, Lee & Amjadi, 2014). However, it should be noted that humans are closely connected to objects and it is necessary to include the role of objects in the theoretical context (Lee & Amjadi, 2014).

Also, objects can represent power within organisations (Lee and Amjadi, 2014), and members can use objects to control work processes and decide who will be included in specific work tasks and who will be excluded (Becky, 2003a). For instance, in one study on engineers, the blueprints drawn by the engineers are objects used to determine what different groups of technicians and assemblers should do. Objects were also used to challenge

authority, as technicians used equipment to pinpoint the flaws in the drawings of the engineers (Lee & Amjadi, 2014). Other research indicates that objects have also been involved in resolving conflicts between members of the organisation (Friendman & Podolny, 1992; Gherardi, 2001, Scott & Wagner, 2003). Hence, they serve as useful tools for communication purposes as well (Bechky, 2003a; Bechky, 2003b). To summarise, objects are seen to represent authority and power in organisations. In the existing literature on occupational communities, while there has been research conducted on the ‘doing’ and materiality of social relations, there is little exploration of the active role of objects in occupational communities. My study offers a brief explanation of how these occupational communities use objects to distinguish themselves.

2.7. Configuring Events as Key Reproduction Mechanism for Occupational Communities

Unlike professions, occupations do not produce and reproduce themselves through formalised training, examinations and strong regulations and licensing (Cannon 1967; Gerstl, 1961; Salaman, 1971; Kleiner & Krueger, 2010). Instead, occupations produce and reproduce themselves through less structured apprenticeships and training facilities, (Sanders, 1989). Occupations may also produce and reproduce themselves through social networks (Sanders, 1989). One such potential social network could be *community configuring events*. In the existing literature, there is virtually no mention of community configuring events. However, my study aims to add a few strands to fill this gap by exploring the possibility of these events for occupational communities. I will start by drawing from the existing literature on field configuring events which have been previously studied in the context of the production and reproduction of institutions. I then draw attention to the example of conferences to examine how this setting could be used to study occupational communities, especially as a reproductive mechanism for the same.

2.7.1. Field Configuring Events

The concept of *field configuring events* originates from organisational fields. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have defined these fields as “those organizations that in totality, contain a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that construct related products and services” (p. 147). It has been acknowledged occupational fields began as the gathering of

individuals, groups and organisations that met occasionally in the beginning, with these meetings eventually becoming more regular. According to Powell et al. (2001), such interactions gave way to competitions and associations, and then depending on the local situation and viewpoint, they resulted in field evolution.

Field configuring events also assist in shaping, sustaining and configuring the development of innovative products, knowledge categories, and industrial parameters that are found in organisational, institutional and professional domains (Meyer et al., 2005; Sydow et al., 2004). At the same time, it has also been recommended by Lampel and Meyer (2008) that the idea of field configuring events brings us closer to ad-hoc social organisations such as professional gatherings, cultural tournaments, business ceremonies, trade shows, and technology contests where people with diverse backgrounds and goals congregate on either a one-time basis, non-periodical or periodical basis in order to share novel products, build social networks, develop industry standards, share and interpret information, recognise achievements or proceed with business activities (Lampel & Meyer, 2008). Events that are emphasised within the existing literature exhibit most of these features: a) field configuring events allow actors from various organisations and locations to come together at a common location; b) field configuring events are traditionally of limited duration and frequently occur within a span of hours or a few days maximum; c) field configuring events provide opportunities for face-to-face communication between the participants in a sizeable unstructured fashion; d) field configuring events are recognised as largely relying on dramatic and ceremonial activities; e) field configuring events emerge to be events that allow for cumulative sense making and the interchange of information, and f) in due course, field configuring events are inclined to produce reputational and social resources which can then be used for other purposes in diverse settings (Lampel & Meyer, 2008). In short, field configuring events bring together various members from an organisational domain (an industry for example), within a restricted space and time with the aim of knowledge sharing and task coordination (Schüßler et al., 2015). Such events play a major role in constructing and shaping regional, professional or techno-based domains. (Schüßler et al., 2015).

The term ‘field configuring event’ was suggested by Meyer in order to approach the various types of events that were organised in a location where the exchange of business cards occurred, networks were formed, business deals were struck and standards were set (Meyer et al., 2005). These kinds of events are intriguing in terms of spaces, where it is possible to analyse the construction and development of organisations and geographical, professional, regional or urban fields (Glynn, 2008). Field configuring events are regarded

then as critical mechanisms that eventually contribute to the direction of the growth and progress of markets, technologies and industries (Lange et al., 2014). These events construct a ‘minute world’ that imitates a shared, unfulfilled vision of the industry, focal technology or market (Lampel & Meyer, 2005). Field configuring events are also viewed as important mechanisms for the development and the emergence of related paths such as markets, professions, technologies and industries (Lampel & Meyer, 2008).

This section discusses the characteristics of field configuring events and how they are presently used as a setting catering to organisational, institutional and professions domains. As Lampel and Meyer (2008) have indicated, field configuring events bring together all the stakeholders in a specific ‘organizational field’, facilitating intense conversation and enabling decision making which leads to a change in the direction in which a field develops. This includes the reshaping of social and political legitimacy of the field and greater media converge (Smith & Raven, 2012; Boone et al., 2014). My study uses the component of field configuring events, but instead of the ‘fields’, I apply the field configuring event to occupational communities. I explore its scope with respect to its production and the reproduction of occupational communities. The next section examines conferences that have been previously studied illustrations of field configuring events.

2.7.2. Scope of Conferences as Community Configuring Events

Rao (2001) suggests that “conferences are ubiquitous strategies of claim making that link diverse participants together into a collective performance” (p. 266). Knorr-Cetina (1995) maintains that conferences form ‘a grid of discourse spaces for experimental coordination and integration’ in scientific fields. However, Lampel and Meyer (2005) acknowledge that in spite of this finding, conferences still remain understudied as “mechanisms and venues” in organisational scholarship (p. 1028). While conferences appear in the existing literature of organisational studies, their role as a field configuring event is very limited. Also, there is no research exploring conferences in the context of occupational scholarship. Thus, my thesis seeks to use conferences as a venue for community configuring events and thereafter explore it as a mechanism for the reproduction of occupational communities.

In reviewing the past literature on the study of conferences as field configuring events, one prominent study carried out by Garud (2008) looks at conference related to cochlear implants. The results from this paper suggest that conferences are not independent,

isolated entities. Rather, they are regarded as entrenched events in a larger flow of activities. Every conference leads to the emergence of a synthesis that is provisional with respect to the tensions that are created due to a clash of logics (Farjoun, 2002). Accordingly, conferences are holistic events organised to promote interactions that are nonlinear during the collision of small worlds (Farjoun, 2002). Another study carried out by Schüßler and Sydow (2015) argues that conferences constitute settings that facilitate sensemaking, value transformation and networking.

Another point to consider is that conferences provide key venues where people from various social organisations can converge with the collective intention of constructing an organisational field (Meyer et al., 2005, p. 467). Conferences have also been regarded as a setting where the participants assemble to develop theories about their distinct practices (Greenwood et al., 2002; Strang & Meyer, 1993). Scholars have credited conferences as an appropriate place to theorise the emerging practices of the participants as these emerging practices lack broad acceptance; consequently theorisation of these practices by the participants would be a result of “shared and contested beliefs” (Hoffman, 1999, p. 354). As “the discourses that are revealed at public events create scope for numerous translations, connections between varied heterogenous elements are defined and refined” (Phillips et al., 2004, p.635). Therefore, the literature depicts conferences as a key venue for carry for the configuration of emerging fields as well.

I aim to apply this concept to my study and replace the ‘emerging fields’ with ‘emerging communities’ to study emerging occupational communities. Lampel & Meyer (2008) also point out that a conference acts as a perfect space for researching selected participants to acquire their primary qualitative data. Additionally, Martin (2003) highlights that although these events offer the potential for rich data, at the same time, they are generally ignored settings for data collection. In addition, Lampel & Meyer (2008) state that entering the conferences as participant observers provides ample opportunities for interaction and networking with practitioners in their own language and in their own space, i.e. a special window on the participant’s social, organisational and occupational worlds. Thus, I seek to understand conferences as community configuring events and explore them in the context of the reproduction of occupational communities. Finally, for occupational communities that do not use strategies that are “distinctly structured, legally binding or organised by unions” (Bilginsoy, 2003) for their existence but rather require less structured mechanisms, conferences as community configuring events would provide a setting to carry out these less

structured mechanisms implicitly. Thereby, they offer great potential for the reproduction of occupational communities.

2.8 Research Questions

In summary, this chapter offers an overview of the literature, beginning by clarifying the key concepts of occupation and occupational community that are integral to my thesis. Recent studies point to a growing shift in work arrangements that is leading to an increase in casual work and an individual's employment being spread across various organisations (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2010; Bidwell et al., 2013; Cappelli, 2001; George & Chattopadhyay, 2005). As the nature of work evolves from traditional work arrangements to contemporary work arrangements, today's workers are observed to be more attached to their occupation rather than to their employer (Anteby, 2016). With the rise of unconventional work arrangements, we can see the diminishing importance of strict examinations, strong professional associations, traditional formalised training, highly regulated membership and rigorous admission process (Cannon 1967; Gerstl, 1961; Salaman, 1971). As the work structure is fluid, the methods of trainings have become informal with less or no stringent training, less structured apprenticeships and a shift from organisational affiliations to occupational affiliations (Barley & Kunda, 2004). This change has resulted in a greater need to study work through an occupational lens.

Chapter Two's discussion on occupational communities has highlighted the determinants of the occupational communities discussed and the growing shift in the nature of employment, from long-term, stable jobs to more precarious and inconsistent employment (Hollister, 2001). This situation has led to an upsurge in new and emerging occupations. In the existing literature, there is very little mention of the early emergence of these occupational communities (Sherman, 2010; Abbott, 2005). However, the literature does point out the possible reasons for the formation of some new occupations, such as the birth of new technologies or changes in technologies, 'hiving off' tasks or a gap left by another occupation (Bucher & Strauss, 1961; Bucher, 1988, Hughes, 1984; Zekta, 2003, 2011). Even so, there is still only scant information on how nascent occupations emerge and how members organise themselves which in turn facilitates the emergence. In response this thesis seeks to understand how nascent occupational communities are organised.

The chapter goes on to delineate the implications of the centrality of tasks. The existing literature suggests that occupations are to some extent understood in terms of the

tasks performed by the members, or as Abbott (2005) terms it, the “task area” (p. 322). Abbott also states that a group of individuals in an occupation are linked by the set of tasks that are carried out through nontraditional structures (Abbott, 1988). Furthermore, in order to study the interaction of members and how they engage with the other members, the task domain is a vital aspect to be investigated. Thus, it can be argued that ‘tasks’ constitute a critical aspect for the existence of an occupational community. My study looks at the ‘doing of the task’ to understand how members sustain themselves as an occupational community. However, my thesis also investigates the task domain to comprehend more deeply how individuals become involved in the nascent occupational community—in other words, how a specific occupational community is organised.

Furthermore, this chapter also mentions socialisation in occupational communities. In bureaucratic work structures, the socialisation of members occurs through formalised education, high skills training programs, regulation and powerful memberships and associations. Still, with a fluid work structure, the socialisation of members of an occupational community generally occurs at their respective workplaces, i.e. with individuals with whom they work or with members who do the same work (Salaman, 1974). The literature points out that socialisation takes place more easily in local occupational communities where individuals are geographically situated close to one another (Salaman, 1974), in contrast to those individuals who are not. This study explores socialisation that occurs in cosmopolitan occupational communities and draws from the existing literature of field configuring events, as to how community configuring events could provide a conducive setting for socialisation. Additionally, as my study narrows its focus on emerging occupational communities, we know that one of the challenges confronted by the emerging occupational communities is the creation of a clear definition and place for this occupation (George, 2013).

Consequently, as the past literature projects, field configuring events not only provide a platform for face-to-face communication with other members of the community to acquire knowledge, but such events are also helpful in acquiring information by allowing participants opportunities to observe and monitor other participants (Bathelt & Schuldt, 2010). Thus, I was motivated to draw from field configuring events and study the unexplored setting of community configuring events with the objective of studying the socialisation of members of emerging occupational communities at community configuring events. The concept of community configuring events is introduced as one of the mechanisms through which nascent occupational communities may produce or reproduce themselves.

Furthermore, it is a potential tool for helping define the nascent occupational communities. After a review of the extant literature, it was concluded that there is a gap in the literature in terms of how the task domain of these nascent occupational communities would affect the manner in which these occupations configure themselves through community configuring events. Understanding this relationship would contribute to a more multi-layered understanding of these occupational communities. Therefore, based on the review of the literature, my study identifies two research issues that form the basis of the research questions underpinning my study. These questions are as follows:

- i. How are nascent occupational communities organised?
- ii. How do community configuring events assist in the establishment of nascent occupational communities?

This study seeks to further explore the literature of emerging occupational communities by addressing these research questions. Having completed a review of the literature, the next chapter will focus on the research methods that support my study.

3. Research Methods

3.1. General Methodology and Research Design

The main objectives of this chapter are to explain my methodological choices and to clarify the process I followed in undertaking my research. This study follows a qualitative research approach to address the following two research questions:

1. How are nascent occupational communities organised?
2. How do community configuring events assist in the establishment and sustainment of nascent occupational communities?

According to Silverman (1997), the selection of one methodological design over another should be guided by the type of research problem and practical issues that are of significance to the given inquiry. Marriam (2002) argues that for a study that strives to comprehend a particular phenomenon, situation or process, a qualitative approach is fitting. Following Marriam's rationale, this study uses a qualitative research approach rather than a quantitative one.

In terms of the research design, this thesis is generally based on ethnography. It uses a multi-sited ethnography, including ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews. The table below illustrates how the data collection has been carried out in eight steps.

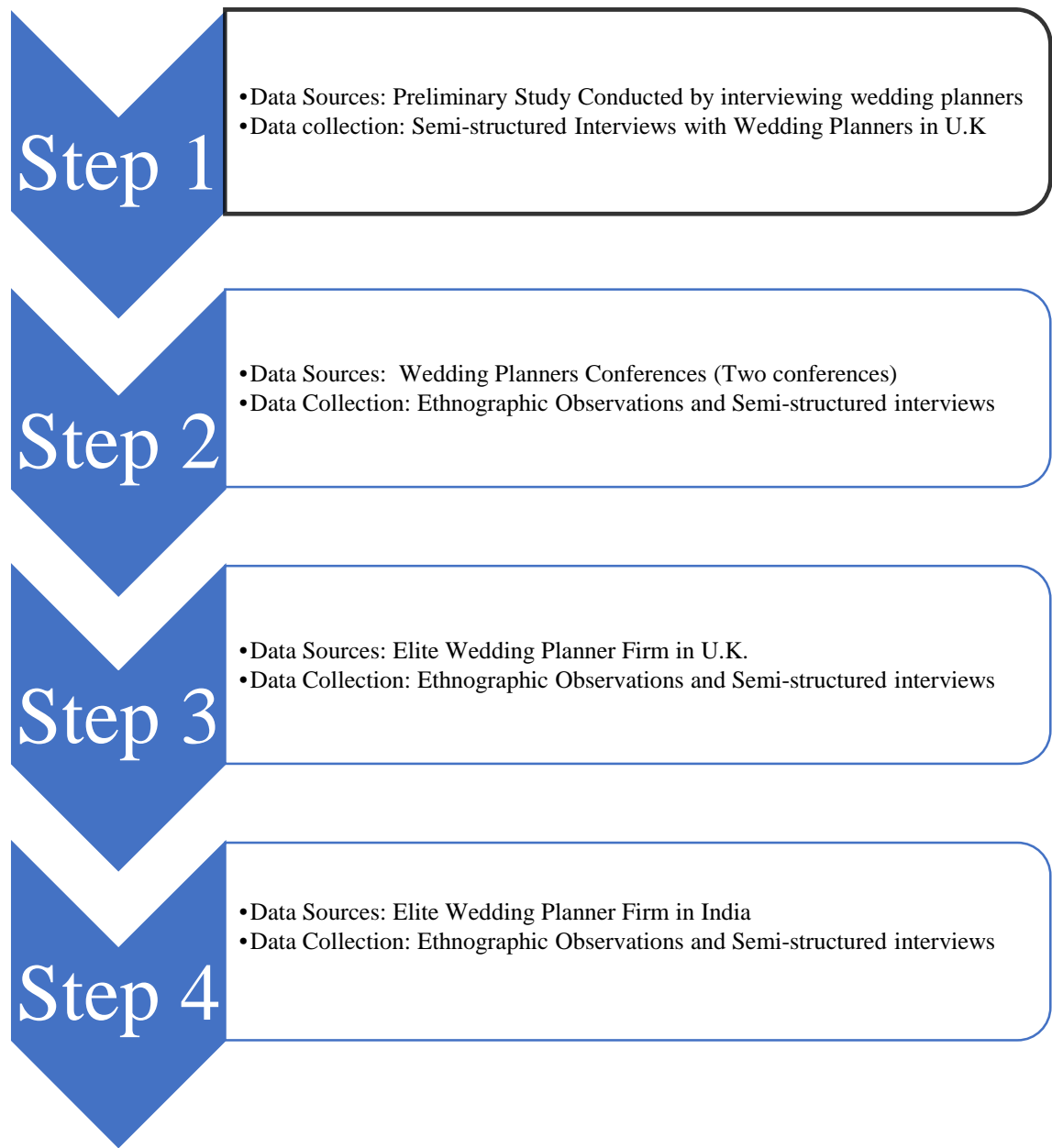


Figure 1

Additionally, I decided to use Nicolini's (2009) method of zooming in and zooming out throughout the various stages to probe and understand the practices of the wedding planners.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. The next section (3.2) discusses the research setting, followed by details on the background of the elite wedding planners firms in the U.K. and India. The chapter then proceeds (3.3) by discussing some ethical considerations. Next it focuses on the data collection methods (3.4), explaining how the data

gathering tools, observations and interviews were implemented. This section is followed by a reflection on the process of access negotiation (3.5) and an explanation of the data analysis methods (3.6), highlighting how inductive thematic analysis is used for this study. The chapter then touches on my reflections on the research process (3.7) as well as the boundary conditions of this study (3.8) before concluding with the summary (3.9).

3.2 Research Setting

3.2.1 Rationale for Selecting the Wedding Planning Industry as the Research Site

The decision to focus on the wedding planning industry as an appropriate research site was both an empirical and theoretical choice. After completing my master's dissertation, I became increasingly curious about the world of wedding planners. I wanted to delve into all facets of it. At the same time, I also began reading extensively about emerging occupational communities. Through this parallel reading, I began to situate wedding planners in the context of emerging occupational communities and to identify empirical and theoretical grounds for undertaking this study.

The more articles I read about emerging occupational communities, the more I realised that there are significant gaps in the literature. The configuration of these new occupational communities has received only scant attention in the field of Organisation and Human Resources Management. Moreover, there has been only limited research on the connection between how these emerging occupational communities configure themselves and how they perform their task domains. My curiosity about this connection, coupled with my growing interest in the world of wedding planning, spurred me to continue my investigation.

In today's scenario, the employment market is continually evolving, with a shift from permanent, long-term jobs to more precarious and varied jobs (Hollister, 2011). In this climate of change, new occupations appear frequently. As for the emerging occupational community of wedding planners, it is worth noting that it is not formed on the basis of high skills training or educational qualifications, complicated rules and procedures or stringent associations. This absence of rigid criteria helps us classify it as an occupation (Abbott, 1988). While the existing literature includes various studies on understanding new occupational communities that arise as a consequence of evolving technological advances (Waller and Fawcett, 2013), there is a paucity of research on occupations that are *not* directly related to the field of new technologies. Wedding planning fits under this latter category.

Indeed, since the extant academic literature on this industry is limited, the nascent occupational community of wedding planners serves as a fairly novel setting. One noteworthy study by Blakely (2007) explores the occupation of wedding planners in light of the connections between liberal feminism and the commodification of family life. Other studies have looked at the work of wedding planners as a mechanism to promote tourism (Bertella, 2015; Del Chiappa & Abbate, 2013). However, as previously stated, wedding planners have not been studied within the literature of emerging occupational communities, thus rendering them an especially interesting focus for my research.

3.2.2. Background of Elite Wedding Planning Companies

To carry out my study, I narrowed my focus to *elite* wedding planners. The decision to concentrate on this top echelon of the wedding planners occupational community was a conscious one. To gain a clear and multi-layered understanding of the operations of this emerging occupational community, I chose to approach those individuals in the community who engage in wedding planning exclusively as their dedicated occupation and who have established a solid reputation and a wealth of experience in the business.

This research was conducted in the U.K. and India. Its comparative research design is often used in ethnographic research involving two or more cases in which the researcher is seeking to draw some comparison between them (Bryman & Bell, 2011). An explanation of this design can be found in Hyde's (2006) study evaluating role redesign in the National Health Service (NHS). Further aspects of this design are delineated by Wickham and Collins (2004) in their study on the structure of female employment across Europe. To conduct this empirical study, the same research instruments of ethnographic observations and interviews were used to investigate the similarities or differences in the emerging occupational communities of wedding planners in these two countries. As Hantrais (1999) notes, not only does such cross-national comparative research support the generalisability of findings, but it also provides a deeper understanding.

3.2.2.1. Case 1: Background of 'Galaxy' in the U.K. The fieldwork for this study was conducted at an elite wedding planning company based in London, England. For purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, I will refer to it by the pseudonym 'Galaxy' throughout my thesis. It was established approximately 20 years ago, making it one of the first few wedding planning companies in the U.K. It is owned and managed by a woman who

is referred to in this thesis by the pseudonym ‘Mrs. Jessica’. Before becoming a wedding planner, she had been working in the public relations sector for eight years. She credits her experience in public relations as one of her main gateways into the world of wedding planning. Today her elite wedding planning business is regarded as one of the top wedding planning companies in the U.K. Since it is reputed to be among the best for delivering superior services to HNIs, Galaxy serves as a model for others in this industry who wish to produce the ultimate luxury weddings.

In terms of Galaxy’s day-to-day operation, Mrs. Jessica has a team of five permanent employees on board. They include one personal secretary for herself and four other employees who are designated the title of ‘wedding coordinators’. The primary responsibility of the secretary is to answer phone calls on behalf of the elite wedding planner, book her appointments, and schedule her days. The other four employees, the wedding coordinators, are given the task of assisting in the coordination of the wedding as per Mrs. Jessica’s instructions. These tasks range from creating time sheets for the clients, coordinating with the suppliers and clients as instructed, making purchases of required materials, assessing their quality, and ensuring compliance with quality control standards and health and safety regulations. These wedding coordinators also manage the company’s website and Mrs. Jessica’s social media accounts, such as Instagram and Facebook. In addition, Galaxy outsources on an as-needed basis. Generally, this work involves extra helping hands on or around the day of the wedding.

3.2.2.2 Case 2: Background of ‘Ocean’ in India. The second phase of my fieldwork took place at an elite wedding planning company that is referred to in this thesis under the pseudonym of ‘Ocean’. It is based in Mumbai, India: a place of stark contrasts. Mumbai is India’s most populous city and the fourth most populous city in the world. With a population of approximately 22 million, as recorded in October 2017, Mumbai hosts the world’s largest concentration of slums. Simultaneously, it is home to one of the wealthiest men on the planet. Although one cannot fail to notice the abject poverty in this city, there is a growing number of middle and upper middle class families with disposable incomes, as evidenced by the lavish lifestyles one can see there.

Ocean is a wedding planning company that deals exclusively with weddings of the HNIs of the country. Formed in 1990, it has been in operation for three decades. However, the company’s actual *wedding* arm has only been functional for the past ten years. Originally, Ocean was an entertainment and general event management business for the Bollywood film

industry. It started off as a partnership, but that partnership eventually dissolved. At that point, one of the partners launched the wedding branch of the company. To protect his identity, I will refer to him by a pseudonym: 'Mr. Amit'. Since he already had a recognised name, Mr. Amit had the strong business and social connections that were required to launch himself into the world of elite wedding planning.

Ocean is comprised of six permanent employees apart from Mr. Amit. There is one secretary and five other employees, who carry the title of 'wedding assistant'. The secretary is the employee who remains the closest to Mr. Amit. The secretary's job involves responding to clients' calls, scheduling appointments and meetings, maintaining the elite wedding planner's diary and managing his daily schedule. Ocean's five wedding assistants have responsibilities similar to those of the wedding coordinators at Galaxy, the previously mentioned elite wedding planning company in the U.K. They liaise with the various suppliers, e.g. florists, sound engineers, lighting engineers, caterers, and so on, upon the direction of Mr. Amit. They also prepare the time sheets for each event, make promotional presentations, conduct research on the clients, and manage the company website and social media platforms, most notably Facebook and Instagram. In addition to these six employees, Ocean, like Galaxy, outsources workers on an as-needed basis. The latter are usually manual labourers who assist at the wedding venues or production sites.

3.3 Research Ethics

Stake (2005, p. 49) underscores the importance of ethics for qualitative researchers, pointing out that they are guests in the private spaces of the world. Consequently, their behaviour should be respectful and their code of ethics should be strict. Here, as qualitative researchers come in close proximity to the people they study, it is vital that the researchers understand and embrace clearly delineated ethical codes of conduct. In other words, the researcher should ensure that neither participants nor the organisation are harmed in the process of conducting the research and that all ethical protocols are adhered to (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

While undertaking my research, I complied with all the ethical guidelines set out by Warwick University. I ensured that I gave the participants of my study the consent form (attached in the Appendix), which confirmed that the participants were not participating in the study based on any undue influence or coercion. They were voluntarily participating in this study. In terms of carrying out my fieldwork at the elite wedding planning enterprises in

both the U.K. and India, I also followed all the stipulations brought forward by the elite wedding planners. I signed all their legal documents of confidentiality and other concerns. Furthermore, I reminded my interviewees, in both the U.K, and India, that they were free to opt out of my study at any point in the course of my fieldwork. I assured them that I would by all means maintain anonymity and privacy. This would also be guaranteed by strict data protection protocols.

In order to safeguard my data, I stored it in my password-protected laptop. The actual names were concealed under pseudonyms in all the transcriptions, and all comments were assigned to those pseudonyms to prevent any of the participants from being identified. As most of the participants refused to be audio-recorded, I complied with their wishes and did not record anyone without their official consent. In addition, all the names of the participants and the organisations have been anonymised in my field notes.

3.4. Data Collection

The data were collected through observations, interviews, documents, informal conversations. My data collection at the elite wedding planners offices and other spaces of operation stretched over a period of 4.5 months: a 2-month ethnographic study in the U.K and a 2.5 month ethnographic study in India. My fieldwork consisted of close observations, interviews and the examination of documents. My ethnography research also included observations, interviews and informal conversations at wedding planners conferences, wedding fairs, wedding trade shows and wedding galleries. The table below indicates an overview of my data collection.

Location & Time	Research Method	Duration (days; observations/ number: interviews)	Duration (each day/ each participant)
Galaxy in U.K.	Observations	45 days	7-8 hours
	Interviews	12 participants	45-60 minutes
Ocean in India	Observations	67 days	8-9 hours
	Interviews	14 participants	45-60 minutes

DWPC Conference	Observation	2 days	8-9 hours
	Interviews	12 participants	15-45 minutes
Engage Conference	Observation	2.5 days	9-10 hours
	Interviews	27 participants	15-45 minutes
EWPC Conference	Observation	4 days	8-9 hours
	Interviews	30 participants	15-45 minutes
Bridelux Symposium	Observation	2 days	8-9 hours
	Interviews	18 participants	15-40 minutes
Wedding Gallery	Observation	1 day	75 minutes
	Interviews	3 participants	15-20 minutes
Wedding Fairs and Wedding Shows in U.K.	Observation	3 days	3-5 hours
	Interviews	17 participants	10-20 minutes
Wedding Fairs and Wedding Shows in India	Observation	3 days	3-5 hours
	Interviews	20 participants	10-20 minutes

Table 1: Overview of Data Collection

3.4.1. Ethnographic Observations

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring setting or fields by means of data collection methods that capture their social meaning and regular activities (Brewer, 2000). In this method, the researcher is present in the settings and might also be involved in some activities at the setting which can assist him/her in collecting data in a structured manner (Brewer, 2000). While ethnography can include an array of research methods, observation is a common method that has been associated with ethnographic research for a long time through the work of social researchers such as Van Maanen and Barley (1984). Van Maanen (2006, p.18) points out that ethnography has an ultimate focus on the “empirical”, on “personalized seeing, hearing, experiencing in specific social settings that produces something of a hostility to generalizations and abstractions and not related to immersion in situated detail”. Furthermore, it has been noted that ethnographic observations

are important from a practice perspective, as “social and organizational life stem from and transpire through the real time achievements of ordinary activities” (Nicolini & Monterio, 2017, p.11).

Hence, in order to make sense of the ‘real time’ accomplishment of mundane activities, I engaged in ethnographic observations, where I observed the ordinary activities of the emerging occupational community of wedding planners. As also mentioned by Delamont (2004), participant observation, ethnography and fieldwork are interchangeable, as they all entail spending long durations watching people, speaking with them about what they are doing and thinking; all these activities are structured to lead to a nuanced understanding of the participants’ world. In my study, ethnographic observations facilitated the observation of the emerging occupational community of wedding planners in its natural setting. I observed and listened to everything around me. Also, Silverman (2008) asserts that one of the key benefits of observational research is that it allows a shift in attention when any new and captivating data appear. I chose to rely on ethnographic observations as the method of data collection because this method has characteristics similar to a funnel structure (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In other words, it allows the research problem to evolve over a span of time and the research scope to be clarified in due course.

However, while carrying out ethnographic observations, the researcher might tend to observe everything without a definite focus. To avoid this issue, Silverman (2008) cites Emerson et al. (1995, p. 146) regarding the benefit of a list of questions while making field notes (see the table below):

1. What are people doing? What are they striving to achieve?
2. How are they doing this?
3. How do people perceive what is going on?
4. What assumptions do they make?
5. Analytical questions: What do you see going on here? What did you learn from the notes? Why did you include this in the notes?

Table 2

Thereafter, during the process of my ethnographic observation and note-taking, I continued revisiting these questions to avoid veering off the intended focus of my research.

3.4.1.1. Observation at ‘Galaxy’ in the U.K. The first phase of observation was carried out at the elite wedding planning company Galaxy in the U.K. over a period of two months. The regular working hours there were from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily, with a 45-60 minutes lunch break and a few short coffee breaks. However, there was no specific time to break for lunch or coffee, so the employees had relative freedom in choosing when to take their permissible breaks. As negotiated with the elite wedding planner, I was allowed to observe the elite wedding planner and her team during their working hours, i.e. 8.5 hours per day, five days per week.

In addition to carrying out their administrative operation at the workplace, Mrs. Jessica and her team had meetings with clients at either the wedding planner office, a hotel or a restaurant—and with suppliers at either the office, the wedding venue, or the specialised supplier’s premises. I was permitted to accompany the elite wedding planner and the team to most of these meetings. However, in terms of meeting with the elite clients, I was only allowed to observe the meetings taking place at the office, not even if they were outside at the five-star hotels or restaurants. I also carried out informal observations during the lunch and coffee breaks. To ensure that I did not wander off course as a researcher while conducting my observations, I reminded myself to take notes of the following: people, interactions, situations, activities, rules, and the way objects are used.

3.4.1.2. Observation at ‘Ocean’ in the India. The second phase of observation took place at the elite wedding planner company ‘Ocean’ in India for 2.5 months. I had negotiated with the elite wedding planner, Mr. Amit, who allowed me to observe how they execute their functions at their workspace. The working hours at Ocean were 9:30 a.m. to 6:30/7:00 p.m. There was also an allotted one-hour lunch break and short coffee breaks. During my time at the wedding planners organisation, I took note of formal observations of the elite wedding planner and his team at their workplace and at various meetings with suppliers and clients. I took notes during coffee and lunch breaks as well. I also observed the informal conversations that occurred when I travelled from one place to another (e.g. wedding venues, meetings at restaurants, and so on). Furthermore I adopted the same pattern of observation that I followed at Galaxy: focussing on people’s interactions, body language, and their use of objects. This intense focus and systematic note-taking was beneficial in helping me avoid distractions.

3.4.1.3. Conducting Observations at the Wedding Conferences. In addition, my study included ethnographic observations at wedding conferences. These conferences lasted two to

three days. The conferences were generally from 10 a.m. until dinner time, 10 p.m. Usually, the itinerary included keynote speeches, breakout sessions, workshops as well as some fun activities and scheduled meals. These conferences also provided scheduled meals. I conducted my observations during informal points such as meals and more formal, structured parts of the conferences. Designed to be a platform where the wedding planners can interact with one another, these conferences constitute a robust setting for data collection. While at the conferences, I paid attention to how they were structured. I also observed how the individual wedding planners projected themselves in terms of their clothing, body language, communication styles and general behaviour. Finally, I took note of the format of the informal sessions and the overall purpose of the conference.

3.4.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews comprised the second method of data collection for this study. Fontana and Frey (2005), define qualitative interviewing as “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we attempt to understand our fellow human” (p. 698). I chose the semi-structured interview technique to collect the data. This technique serves as a useful mechanism to “comprehend experiences and regenerate events in which one did not participate” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3). As a tool for eliciting valuable data, this type of interview provides the perfect balance between the openness of unstructured interviews and the formality of closed-structured interviews. In other words, semi-structured interviews offer the researcher a certain level of control over the flow of the interview while simultaneously providing the freedom to follow unpredicted directions and paths. This method also helps the researcher recognise the gestures of the interviewee in this face-to-face interview, which in turn can be helpful in clarifying any doubts that might occur in the minds of the participant and the interviewer (Hermanowicz, 2002). It enables the researcher to dig more deeply, to probe for further elaboration on the participant’s responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Moreover, semi-structured interviews can elicit rich information about the experiences and perceptions of the insiders. To ensure that the interviewees in my study were keen on answering and continuing the interviews, the first few questions that I asked them concerned themselves as individuals. One example is as follows: *“Everyone knows about you and your outstanding contribution in this world of wedding planners. Could you please tell me about your journey until here?”* Such opening questions helped the interviewees become comfortable in the interview process.

Overall, I adopted a friendly, non-threatening approach, influenced by the ‘grand-tour’ questions suggested by Spradley (1979). Here, I initially asked the interviewees to describe the general traits of the site or their social networks. I asked simple ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘where’ questions to establish a general foundation for my conversations. This was then followed up by questions about the work practices of the participants and related follow-up questions. These questions are important as a tool for encouraging elaboration while also critically questioning the validity of the stories being told (Cook and Crang, 1995). Either at the beginning or during the interview, the interviewees were invited to add examples and narratives to their remarks. This procedure did not work well all the time. Even so, some robust accounts were collected. Additionally, it should be noted that during the entire interview process, in order to gain the trust of my interviewees, I continually assured them that these interviews were confidential and all precautions would be taken to prevent the leakage of any information.

The primary focus of this research was on the semi-structured interviews conducted with the owner and employees at two elite wedding planning companies: Galaxy in the U.K. and Ocean in India. Also significant were the interviews carried out at wedding planners conferences. While at the conferences, wedding trade shows and fairs, I attempted to speak with all the elite wedding planners in attendance. In addition, I interviewed some clients, suppliers and outsourced workers. Given this multi-pronged approach, I had a rich database to facilitate a deeper, multi-layered understanding of this novel occupational community.

In the course of my research, one of the recurring challenges was the fact that some of the interviewees refused to be recorded. In spite of my repeated assurances that it would not harm them, they harboured common doubts. As one participant put it, “Anything on tape, can be twisted and always used against us. So I don’t want to be taped.” As an ethical researcher, I respected their concerns and complied. However, doing so meant that I would have to jot down their words as quickly and as accurately as I could, using short forms and abbreviations for the interviewees who refused to be audio-recorded. Along with these formal interviews, I would ask informal questions while having conversations during meals, coffee breaks and drinks. Since these questions were asked outside the traditional workplace, I made notes by keeping small pieces of papers or a tiny diary with me.

3.4.3. Research Diary

As noted previously, my fieldwork included a variety of settings: the office of the wedding planners, the homes of clients, wedding venues, workplaces of suppliers, restaurants, and hotels. In addition, I attended wedding conferences, galleries and fairs. As I was collecting ethnographic data, I kept a research diary, which proved to be immensely helpful in putting into words what I was seeing, hearing and doing. Included in my field notes were both descriptions of my observations of particular events as well as other follow-up leads that arose. My research diary was used to record not only descriptions but also my immediate thoughts.

The process of note-taking for the research diary has been emphasised by various researchers, such as Palmer et al.,(1974) and Burgess (1981). Palmer et al., (1974) divide the process of note-taking into ‘Observational Notes, Theoretical Notes and Methodological Notes’, whereas Burgess offers the following terminology to categorise the process: ‘Substantive account, Methodological Account, and Analytical Account’. However, for my study, I maintained my research diary through ‘scratch notes’ (Sanjek, 1990) and ‘jottings’ (Emerson et al., 1995). During my fieldwork, I would write down short notes, which helped to jog my memory when I was writing in full later. I would also jot verbatim quotes from my participants whenever necessary and feasible. As Emerson et al. (1995) point out, often for practical purposes, it is not always possible to engage in observation and extensive note-taking simultaneously. Therefore, I took down short notes in my research diary and expanded them later. While developing more detailed notes, I also reflected on them and raised questions to myself about some specific occurrence or process that I had witnessed that day in the field. These field notes were later translated into coded field notes and then into ethnographic texts.

3.4.5. Documentation

Along with observations and interviews for the collection of the data, this research incorporates data from documentation. I strived to glean relevant naturally occurring data on the background of the wedding planning industry. I also collected information about the growth of the industry globally and particularly across the U.K. and India. Additionally, I gathered any relevant information I could obtain regarding the case companies in the public domain. My main aim in this process was to familiarise myself with the industry, as I needed

to develop at least a generic understanding of the context before embarking on the actual fieldwork.

3.5. Access

To complete my fieldwork on the emerging occupational communities of wedding planners, I was required to obtain official access to their workplaces both in the U.K and in India. Permission was also necessary in order to enter the spaces where the elite wedding planners meet and interact with each other, most notably, wedding planners conferences. The section below explains not only how I obtained access but also how I secured the trust of the interviewees in order to carry out my research effectively.

3.5.1. Gaining and Maintaining Access and Trust at ‘Galaxy’ in the U.K.

Riese (2018) argues that access is a dynamic and multidirectional process, contingent on the researcher’s capability to gain access and develop a ‘multi vision’. Obtaining authorised access into the elite wedding planners’ companies has been a challenging process as elites have the power to restrict the researcher’s access in the first place (Cassell, 1988). Therefore, to establish initial contact with these individuals, I communicated with a photography company that was responsible for the coverage of a wedding planners conference in Italy in April 2016. I offered my time and labour as a volunteer assistant to the photographers. Since this photography company was based in India, I had developed a prior link with the company through my personal network when I was pursuing my undergraduate degree in India, and I genuinely wanted to become involved in photography. Therefore, once I had convinced the owner to get me on board to assist the photographers at the wedding planners conference, I knew I could use this opportunity to interact with some of the elite wedding planners. It was my hope that brief, casual conversations with them would lead eventually to formal interviews for my research.

Before attending that conference, I consulted with my supervisors on ways of approaching specific wedding planners with natural conversation starters. I took note of all the guidance and tips provided by my supervisors and attended the wedding planners conference as a legitimate member of the photography team for the event. As advised by my supervisors, during the coffee breaks, I kept an eye out for the elite wedding planners and approached them individually. I started by striking up a conversation about their work. I commented on how their work has always been a model for others to aspire to. I told them that they were “star figures” in the wedding planning community.

Admittedly, I used flattery as a tool to demonstrate my ardent and genuine interest and appreciation. It also kept the conversation flowing. As these conversations progressed, I told the elite wedding planners that I was a PhD student at the Warwick Business School and would love to interview them to learn more about their path to success. As I had hoped, most of them responded enthusiastically to the idea of sharing their narratives. They handed me their business cards so that I could email them to arrange a date and time for an interview. Soon after the conference, I emailed 12 elite wedding planners based in the UK: the ones who had given me their business cards. Seven individuals replied to express their willingness to be interviewed. All of them had offices in London. I then prepared to carry out my preliminary interviews with the main objective of convincing the wedding planners to allow me to conduct extensive observations and interviews at their workplaces.

Finally, only one out of the seven wedding planners agreed: Mrs. Jessica of Galaxy. However, she drafted a letter for me to sign before I undertook my observations and interviews at her company. The letter outlined several 'don'ts' during my fieldwork. The list of stipulations included non-disclosure of any names, financial figures, venues, and any details about the clients' events or personal information. The letter also highlighted that I was not permitted to record conversations with the wedding planner, the Galaxy employees, the suppliers and the prestigious clients. I was also prohibited from taking photographs or videos while carrying out my fieldwork. Finally, the letter stressed that in the course of my research, understandably, I could not leak any kind of information to anyone or respond to anyone seeking such information. "Anyone" included not only newspapers, magazines or television networks, but also anyone associated with rival wedding planners.

Gaining access to Galaxy's operation was problematic. However, winning the trust of the elite wedding planner and her individual employees was equally challenging. Even though I had given Mrs. Jessica reassurance by signing the document she had drawn up, she still felt somewhat insecure about possible breaches in terms of ethics and confidentiality. I observed that the wedding planner and her team were extremely worried about potential leaks of any financial details. Since the Galaxy weddings were mainly those of extremely wealthy individuals, their financial negotiations and transactions involved substantial amounts of money. Most of the clients expected and requested strict confidentiality. Thus, for the first few weeks, the staff barred my presence from any meetings or interactions with clients. They also concealed from me all accounting data. As noted in the literature, in instances where powerful elites are being studied, a researcher is often viewed as a threat, an outsider with the

potential to expose elite groups to possible ridicule or to situations that could ruin their lives (Cook, 1995; Pettigrew, 1992).

Given the concern over confidentiality, it was of utmost importance to me that I secure the trust of the wedding planners. I needed to convince them that I was not going to make them objects of mockery or damage their reputations in any way. As explained by Janesick (1994), gaining the trust of research participants contributes to the accomplishment of the goal of qualitative research, that is, to capture the nuances and meaning of each participant's life from his or her point of view and to ensure that each participant is willing and happy to share everything with the researcher.

However, earning the participants' trust did not occur overnight. It took me some time to make myself one among "them" and make them feel comfortable around me. In my efforts to do so, I went to all extents, including helping the wedding planners on and off and even running some of their mundane errands. I tried my best to be there for them whenever needed. For example, on one of the days of a demonstration for a big client, one of Mrs. Jessica's key employees was supposed to bring some decorative pieces from the supplier's warehouses, but she fell sick and left the office early to go to the hospital. In this situation, I jumped in and offered to pick up the items. By the time I delivered them, it was already 2 a.m. Nevertheless, despite my awareness of the late hour, I went ahead and helped Mrs. Jessica. Seeing me going out of my way to assist them, she and her team softened themselves towards me and became more accommodating and self-disclosing. There were a couple of other situations where I offered to provide an extra hand when Galaxy was short-staffed. This gesture made the team feel that I was truly concerned about helping the company instead of merely conducting my research for my own benefit.

Over time, a genuine bond developed, and I found myself wanting to share food with the Galaxy team. Having learned about their fondness for Indian curry, I asked my grandmother back home in India for her authentic recipe. She offered me step-by-step instructions as I prepared her delicious dish. When I presented the chicken curry to the wedding planner and her team, they absolutely loved it and were licking their fingers. Over the course of my presence at Galaxy, they would often request the homemade chicken curry, and I happily obliged.

Furthermore, I would make a point of catching up with the team every Friday when they went out after work for dinner and drinks. At first, I was not welcomed with open arms. There were times when I would go out with the team yet feel alone at the table. Although it was upsetting to be ignored, I persevered. I still joined them every week, and gradually, the

team became less guarded in my presence. Eventually, I got the opportunity to speak with the employees informally. When we were discussing our favourite television programs, I developed a natural connection with some of the team members through our mutual love for the comedy *Friends*. They also opened up about their relationships and families which made the conversations a little more personal, further helping to break down barriers. I realised that these informal social activities served to strengthen my communication and bond with the wedding planner and her staff. Thus, I have followed Van Maanen (2010) who believes that the goal of a researcher should be to obtain trust so that he/she becomes ‘part spy, part voyeur, part fan, part member’, which helps in carrying out the research.

3.5.2. Gaining and Maintaining Access and Trust at ‘Ocean’ in India

The second phase of my fieldwork occurred at Ocean, an elite wedding planning company in India. Gaining access to Ocean followed a route similar to the one I used in the U.K. The contacts established at the wedding planners conference in April 2016 were used to approach elite wedding planners in India. I opted to carry out my research at a company in Mumbai. Although I finally gained access, the next step of securing the trust of the employees was a major hurdle. The persistent fear of my breaching ethics was prevalent in the mind of Mr. Amit, the owner of Ocean. I realised that building trusting relationships tends to encourage both parties, the researcher and the participants, to “work more collaboratively” (Brown & Duguid, 2001). Thus, I was determined to earn the full trust of everyone at Ocean so that I could continue my research with ease and obtain a greater insider perspective regarding the day-to-day activities of the company.

To create a friendly impression on the first day of my fieldwork, I brought some sweets for Mr. Amit and all his employees. As my hometown is Bangalore, I chose to bring its famous almond sweets. When I was in school, my grandmother would make these sweets for my friends, and they always appreciated them. To my delight, Mr. Amit and his team loved the almond sweets. It was a simple gesture on my part, yet it did play a role in creating a positive first impression and ‘breaking the ice’. Everyone at Ocean thanked me and seemed willing to open conversations with me, starting with the topic of the sweets.

Additionally, as in my fieldwork in the U.K, I made attempts to be a team player—to become someone whom the employees could trust. I wanted everyone at Ocean to behave as they would usually, without being overly conscious of my presence. I realised the need to demonstrate my concern for the company and the staff. Consequently, I developed the same

strategies that proved successful at Galaxy. I volunteered to run errands whenever an extra hand was required, even late in the evening. I let the team members know that I was always happy to help them; they could “rely on me 24-7”. Gradually, these gestures made the employees feel more relaxed around me. They seemed to accept me as a member of the team, eventually allowing themselves to open up to me. It is interesting to note that during my research at Ocean, I was approached by employees from a major competitor. They wanted to learn some trade secrets from me. Of course, I politely declined to reveal any information at all. My honesty and transparency in reporting this incident to Mr. Amit further convinced him and his assistants that I was someone whom they could trust.

Moreover, while at Ocean, I slowly learnt more about the wedding planner and the employees. I came to know that two of them were from North India and one was from East India, having the mother tongues of Punjabi and Bengali respectively. Fortunately, as I was fluent in these two languages, I was able to communicate with them in their mother tongue. I discovered that conversing with some of the employees in their native language helped them feel more connected to me, as if I were one among them. Quite often, these employees would discuss the latest Bengali movies or Punjabi songs. Over time, the sense of camaraderie and kinship that developed among us led to employees opening up to me about work-related concerns. As Cook and Crang (1995) point out, such ‘blending-in’ with the community can be achieved by communicating in the language of the participants.

3.5.3. Gaining Access to the Wedding Planners Conferences

As mentioned in Section 3.4.1., the initial access to my first wedding planners conference in April 2016 happened with the help of my personal connection with a photography company that permitted me to join their team on the pretext of offering them assistance with the filming of the event. Thereafter, as discussed earlier, the conference provided an opportunity to make face-to-face contact with several elite wedding planners. In due course, these wedding planners later put forward a word to the organisers so that I could attend other conferences. Such a chain of events could be viewed as an example of a partial snowball technique (Coleman, 1958). Over the course of my research, I attended four wedding planners conferences, namely DWPC (April 2016), Engage (October 2016), EWPC (July 2016, August 2017) and Bride Lux Symposium (October 2018). These conferences constituted valuable opportunities for conducting my research on how this emerging occupational community configures itself as a community.

3.5.4. Gaining Access to Wedding Fairs, Trade Shows, Wedding Gallery

The other research sites that were examined for the purpose of understanding the emerging occupational community of wedding planners included the wedding gallery in London (January 2018), one wedding show in London (March 2017), one wedding fair in London (March 2017), one wedding fair in Chennai-India (May, 2016), and one wedding show in Delhi (August 2017). Interestingly, access is not restricted to any of the events mentioned above. For most of them, it is either entry by ‘showing up’ and then purchasing a ticket at the door. Tickets to other events can be purchased online. After attending these events, I understood that they are not necessarily a forum where members of the wedding planners’ community interact with one another. Rather, they are events where the general public and prospective clients can view the stalls set up by some wedding planners and suppliers of the wedding planning industry, such as florists, bridal gown retailers, invitation designers, confectioners, and so on. Nonetheless, it was vital for my research to explore all these sites to immerse myself in the world of wedding planning and enhance my knowledge about every aspect of the business.

3.6. Methods of Data Analysis

3.6.1. Principles of Conducting Data Analysis

Scholars argue that data analysis is an activity that takes place throughout the life of a research study (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). Silverman and Marvasti (2008) suggest that in most qualitative studies, unless one analyses data more or less from the beginning of the research, the researcher will inevitably have to play catch up. Thus, Silverman and Marvasti (2008) recommend kick starting data analysis by (i) analysing naturally occurring data that is already present in the public domain; (ii) analysing your own data as you collect it, and (iii) asking essential questions about your data. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) also recommend that researchers re-evaluate the early data as they collect it in light of the research questions. Furthermore, they suggest that the researcher consider certain questions, including the following: Is the researcher confident about his or her proposed method of data analysis? Does the data analysis point towards any interesting questions? Has the researcher obtained sufficient data to make sense of whether any interesting generalisations can be made?

3.6.2. Thematic Analysis

Regarding the analysis of my data collection from observations and interviews, I relied chiefly on the method of *thematic analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As Braun and Clarke state, thematic analysis is inadequately demarcated and hardly acknowledged, yet it is still used extensively as a method to analyse qualitative data. They point out that thematic analysis should be regarded as a basic method for analysis of qualitative data as it contains core skills that are helpful in qualitative analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Although analysing data through thematic coding has been regarded as a process that is carried out within the key analytic traditions (e.g. *grounded theory*), Boyatzis (1998) maintains that thematic analysis is not a particular method, but rather, a tool that can be used across various methods.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), one of the salient benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility, among other advantages; they explain that since it is primarily independent of theory and epistemology, it does not require deep theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches like those needed in grounded theory and *discourse analysis*. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis, from a practical perspective, is best suited for analysing data in doctoral research projects because it provides a more convenient form of analysis, especially for those early in their qualitative research career.

Additionally, as thematic analysis is not integrated into any pre-existing theoretical framework, it can be used with varied theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This suggests that thematic analysis is a mechanism that functions both to portray the reality and to offload and discover the surface of reality. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a mechanism for recognising, analysing and reporting themes and pattern within the data. They also argue that a theme captures something that is essential for the research question and constitutes some degree of patterned response within the data. Finally, despite its lack of distinct guidelines, thematic analysis provides a six-phase guide (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps are as follows: (i) become accustomed to the data, (ii) produce initial codes, (iii) search for themes, (iv) re-evaluate the themes, (v) define and name the themes, and finally, (vi) report the themes in writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6.3. Inductive Analysis

It should be acknowledged that there are two ways in which thematic analysis may occur: in an inductive or ‘bottom up’ method (e.g. Frith & Gleeson, 2004) or in a deductive or theoretical or ‘top down’ method (e.g. Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). As the central aim of

my research is theory development, I have relied on *inductive analysis* to analyse the qualitative data. Given this approach, the analysis is led by specific evaluation goals (Thomas, 2006).

In the inductive approach, the researcher starts with a particular area of study and lets the theory surface from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At the outset of this study, the research questions that were laid out were only acting as a preliminary guideline which helped in the data collection process. However, once I reached the field, the scope of the study changed significantly. Here the collection of data, literature review and data analysis were being carried out continuously (Watson, 2012). With the aid of the initial data analysis, new research questions are framed, which then serves to guide the research for the data collection and theory development in the subsequent stages (Watson, 2012).

In ethnographic research, the data are analysed continuously throughout the research, right from the time of pre-field analysis, where the general pathway of the study is recognised, to the data analysis taking place in the field, where the themes emerge (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 159). These themes are useful in drawing attention to the next stage of data collection, i.e. observations and interviews in this case. The use of an inductive approach facilitates the recognition of themes that are directly connected to the data themselves (Patton, 1990). The researcher then takes note of any repetition of themes that may arise and separates them. At the same time, comparisons are made between the emerging new data and the previously collected data, along with working repeatedly between the theory being constructed and the data that is focused upon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Thus, inductive analysis is the process of coding the data without attempting to fit it into a pre-existing coding framework or the researcher's analytical presumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this sense, thematic analysis is indeed data driven. It has also been recognised that the inductive approach functions well with the repetitive nature of ethnographic research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Therefore, I followed an inductive or 'bottom up' form of thematic analysis.

3.6.4. Field Note Analysis

As Silverman and Marvasti (2008, p. 199) have stated, "in making field notes, one is not solely recording data, but is also analysing it." Silverman also recommends expanding the field notes beyond the immediate observations as a technique of analysing the field notes. Silver and Marvasti (2008) suggest that this analysis of the field notes could be accomplished

by keeping in mind the contact summary sheets suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984), as shown in the table below. Accordingly, I recorded my observations about my fieldwork in a diary as a technique to carry out fieldwork analysis.

What events, people or situations are associated here?
What are the key themes or issues for the contact?
Which research question did the contact concentrate on the most?
What are the new speculations or guesses about the field situations that were recommended by the contact?
Which area should the researcher focus on during the next fieldwork?

Table 3: (Source: Mike & Huberman, 1984:50)

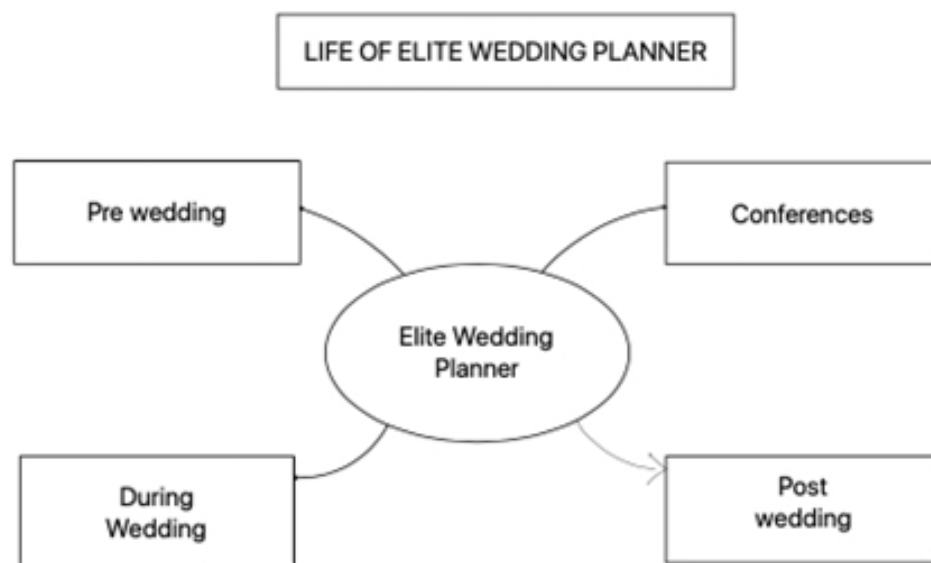


Figure 2: Initial Thematic Map showing the life of the occupational community of elite wedding planners. The researcher zooms into these activities to obtain the next set of themes.

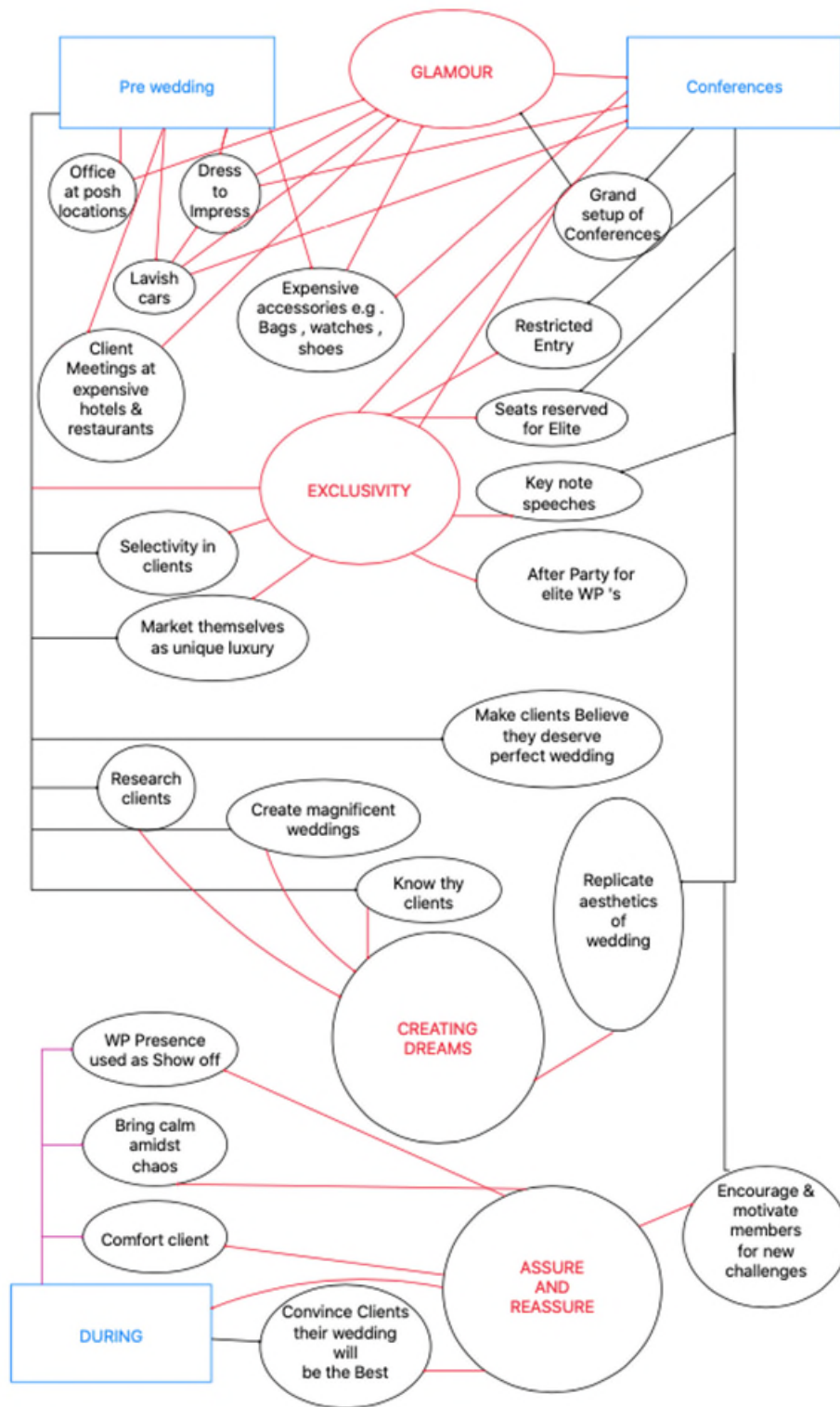


Figure 3: Developed Thematic Map indicating the main themes

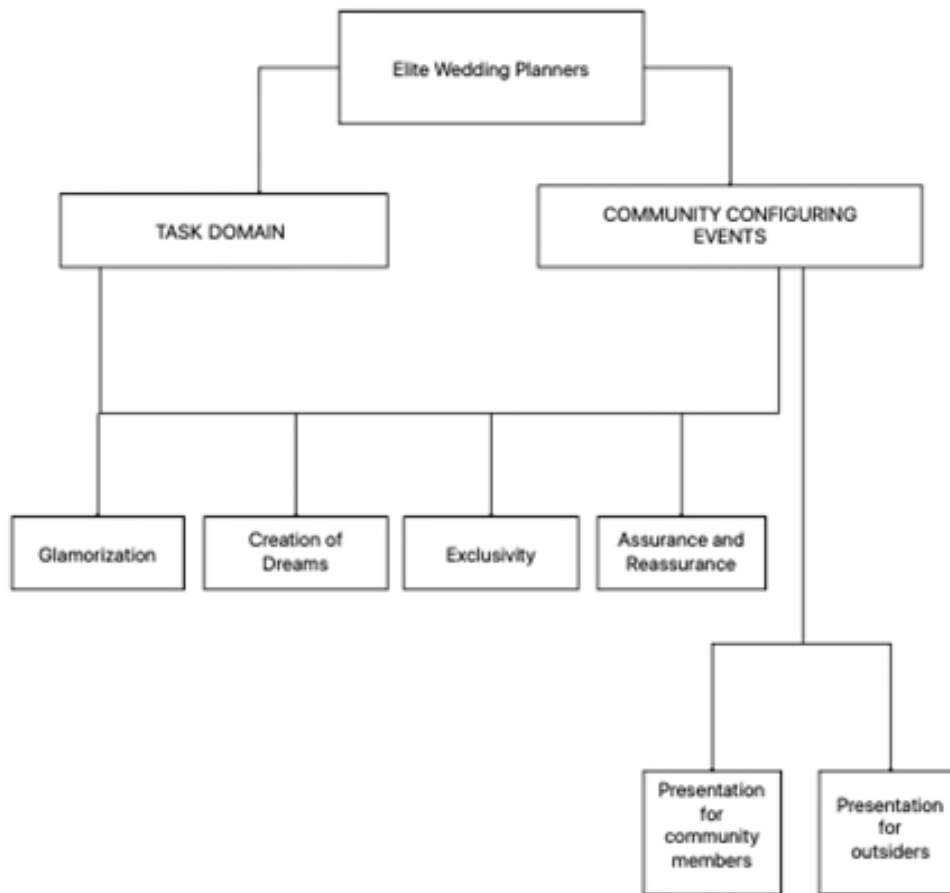


Figure 4: Final Thematic Map showing the main themes for the study

3.7. Reflections on the Research Process

This section discusses my role as a researcher throughout the process of my research. It is important to be reflexive about the role of the researcher because reflexivity raises vital questions about one's capability as a researcher to capture and understand the complex, interactional and emergent nature of our social experiences (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 984). Also, reflexivity should be taken into consideration as it involves the inclusion of the researcher in what is being studied (Hardy, Phillips & Clegg, 2001).

When I first endeavoured to secure access, I concealed my identity as a PhD student seeking a research opportunity. I connected with the photography company that was responsible for filming the wedding planners conference. I only mentioned that I was interested in helping them film the event. As I had made previous contact with them three years before, I was able to join the photography crew, and no suspicions were aroused.

However, even though I did not disclose my ‘identity’ as a researcher initially, once I got in touch with the elite wedding planners, I did reveal my true identity and motives.

Thereafter, my identity was reinforced by the elite wedding planners in both the U.K. and India when I began my fieldwork at their companies. My identity was also reinforced each time the elite wedding planner introduced me to members of the team, making everyone aware of my position. This reiteration instilled my status as an ‘outsider’ on the premises. Therefore, it was incumbent upon me to earn and maintain their trust. I employed various methods (which I have highlighted in sections 3.5.1. and 3.5.2.). Gradually, my efforts changed my role from an outsider to an insider.

During the initial days of the research process, I was treated as an outsider. Thus, I was restricted in terms of my observation capacity. To illustrate, I was not allowed to attend client meetings and I had limited access to documents. Additionally, I was not invited for meals or gatherings, a situation that had a negative impact on my data collecting opportunities in the early days of my field work. However with tremendous efforts, I started getting accepted and managed to make the transition from an outsider to an insider. Subsequently, I obtained more robust data which immensely benefitted my research.

Furthermore, I faced some psychologically disturbing and totally unanticipated situations while carrying out my fieldwork at the wedding planning company in India. For instance, while on the grounds of a wedding venue site in Mumbai, I witnessed an accident in which one of the outsourced manual workers slipped from a crane and fell to the ground. He died on the spot. This incident left me emotionally shaken. Afterwards, coping with the memory of the tragedy, I found my research extremely challenging.

Another incident that occurred during my fieldwork in India stands out as particularly disturbing. As I had eventually developed a bond of trust with Mr. Amit and his Ocean team, I would often accompany them to meetings with clients—on the pretext of being part of the wedding planners team (as Mr. Amit chose not to reveal my true identity to his wealthy clients for fear that they would worry about their privacy being jeopardised in some way). Generally, these meetings would take place at the client’s home. On one such occasion, after the initial client visit, we received a follow-up message from the client, the bridegroom’s father. He said that he wanted to discuss some further points before finalising the deal. He mentioned that the issues were minor, so Mr. Amit’s presence was not necessary and any senior assistant could be sent. It was decided that the senior assistant (female) would meet with the client. I asked to come along to observe the meeting. Upon meeting the client (i.e. the bridegroom’s father) at the hotel, he insisted that both of us satisfy him sexually or risk

his cancelling the deal, an outcome that would cost the company a loss of one million dollars. At that moment, I was paralysed. I had never expected to be in such a precarious situation. I was so stunned that I could not process how to react. However, the senior wedding planning assistant got up right away and pulled me up. She politely declined the offer, and we both walked out of the client's suite. The entire episode left me emotionally rattled for a long time. Certainly, it underscored my challenges as a female ethnographer in the field and the attendant risks.

Albeit extremely unpleasant, this incident was an indelible learning experience. I realised that for any future fieldwork, my preparation would have to involve familiarising myself with all the potential challenges confronting female ethnographers. It is imperative that I anticipate all unexpected contingencies and be ready to tackle them mentally and physically.

3.8. Boundary Condition and Limitations

This study is aimed at enhancing understanding of the occupational community of wedding planners. During my data collection, I observed marked differences between wedding planners in the U.K. and their counterparts in India in terms of how they self identify. For instance, I realised a significant gay identity among the wedding planning community.. However, due to time limitations, this important aspect has been omitted from my thesis, as it deserves more than just a cursory mention. Hence, in subsequent research, there is scope to explore the gay identity within the occupational community of wedding planners and understand this facet on a cross-national level.

3.9. Summary

In brief, this chapter aims to explain the research methodology that underpins my study. This research adopted a qualitative approach to explore the emerging occupational community of elite wedding planners. A case study approach was chosen to understand the same across two cases based in the U.K. and India. The collection of data took place largely through ethnographic observations and interviews. Observational notes and interviews were transcribed and analysed via an inductive thematic analysis. In addition, the process of obtaining access and maintaining the trust of participants has also been delineated. This chapter concludes with the researcher's reflections. The subsequent chapter focusses on the relevant findings.

4A An Indian Wedding Vignette

This chapter is a vignette of my experience observing the planning of a particular Hindu wedding in India while I was doing my fieldwork at Ocean, an elite wedding planning company in Mumbai. I observed that Indian weddings are not just a one-day affair, especially for a high-net-worth couple. The wedding can span up to six days, depending on personal preferences and the families' financial capabilities. Witnessing the entire process—from the initial meeting with the two families to the last night when the couple wave goodbye to relatives and friends—was an enlightening and unique experience. This vignette allows the reader to become immersed in the world of weddings. While reading, the reader can feel like a witness at the wedding and gain a glimpse into two worlds: the world of the wedding planner and that of the client.

I attended three initial client meetings, all of which were held at the home of the bride's family. Interestingly, at each of those meetings, the bride's extended family members far outnumbered those of the bridegroom. As one experienced wedding planner assistant revealed, "Ragini, even today, 70% of the families still believe that the girl and her family should take over the financial responsibility of the wedding, and only in rare cases would the bridegroom's family ever do so." That assistant also informed me that the bridegroom's family might sponsor at least one segment or aspect of the wedding, usually a less exorbitant one. Ultimately, however, the onus is on the family of the bride.

When the Ocean representative and I entered the living room of the bride's family, we faced 20 individuals: 12 from the bride's side and 8 from the bridegroom's side. Seated near the bride were her parents, her paternal grandparents, her maternal grandmother, her brother and sister, her paternal elder uncle and his wife, and her maternal uncle and his wife. In slight contrast, the groom was accompanied to this meeting by a smaller entourage that included his parents, his grandparents, his maternal uncle and his paternal uncle and aunt. Upon our arrival, we were greeted warmly and offered tea, cookies and dried fruit.

All the family members were extremely excited to learn about the various ideas from our end. After the presentation, the bride's face was beaming with joy. She made eye contact with her fiancé who responded with a silent nod—as if to say that he was also happy with the proposed arrangements. At the same time, their siblings were already discussing which colour saree or lehenga they would wear for the wedding, while the mothers and aunts were debating whether they would have to talk to the designers or just walk into a showroom. Amid the excitement, the bride's paternal grandfather leaned forward and whispered

something into his son's ear. It was a message instructing the bride's father to signal to the bride's mother with his eyes that it was time to usher most of the family members, including the bride and groom, out of the living room so that the older men in the family could speak privately with the Ocean representative. Addressing the bride's father and grandfather, the bridegroom's father declared that he would gladly agree to a four-day wedding that the entire community would remember. He also reassured them that he would welcome their daughter into his family and treat her as a daughter of his own. Then he added that as a token of appreciation, he wanted to fund at least the Mehndi Day segment of the wedding.

As discussed in a later section of Chapter 4A, the Mehndi is the fun celebration that takes place on the evening of the second day. At that point, the bridegroom's paternal uncle commented that their side understood how stressful it was to be responsible for the entire wedding, so they wished to alleviate some of the burden by taking charge of the Mehndi night. The bride's grandfather smiled at the father and the uncle of the bridegroom and accepted this arrangement. Then the men stood up, embraced each other and exchanged congratulatory words for taking a concrete step towards the wedding preparation. The deal was sealed, and the decision was made to award the contract for the four-day wedding to Ocean. Thus, I looked forward to observing all the stages of the planning process of a specific elite wedding in India.

Although the bride and bridegroom followed the same religion, they were of different castes: Punjabi (descendants of people from Punjab in the north) and Gujaratis (generally people with roots in Gujarat, the west part of India). While both castes are Hindu, they still vary in certain aspects when it comes to wedding customs. Nevertheless, this wedding consisted of a series of lavish events stretched over four days. The first day is the *Mata Ki Chowki*, the second day the *Mehndi*, the third day the *Sangeet*, and finally, the fourth day is the marriage day, which includes the *Haldi* ceremony.

Day 1: Mata Ki Chowki

On the first day of the four-day wedding, I arrived at the venue around 11 a.m. with one of the Ocean assistants, the production manager, the florists, and four other labourers who had been outsourced for this wedding. Each member of the team was assigned specific tasks in decorating the entire house—with special attention to the living room, the major site of the festivities. Dominating the wedding décor were exquisite fresh flowers, some of which were imported from overseas. By 11:30 a.m., all the materials had been unloaded from the truck.

By 11:40, everyone was ready to spring into action. Following the design plan document, the team started decorating the exterior of the two-storey house with lights and flowers and the interior with various wedding decorations. It was a huge house with a big courtyard, garden and a swimming pool. Although the Mata Ki Chowki could have taken place at the home of either the bride or the bridegroom, it was decided by the families that this event would be at the bride's home.

While the set up was in motion, the father and the uncle of the bride popped in now and then to check the progress. At about 1 p.m., the mother of the bride came over and asked the entire team what they would like for lunch. She insisted that they take a lunch break as she had made arrangements for all the 12 people who had come to her house that day. I went inside to grab lunch with the rest of the team. The extensive buffet menu included two varieties of dal, cottage cheese, mixed vegetables, naan, rice papad, yogurt and jalebi (an Indian sweet). The mother of the bride came over to ask if we were enjoying the food. It was then that I took the opportunity to introduce myself. During our conversation, I asked about the cultural significance of the Mata Ki Chowki. Speaking in Punjabi, a language we shared, she said, "As you know, before every beginning, we like to summon the goddess and take the blessing from Mata Rani [an Indian goddess]....Without her, we can't move a single leaf—let alone start a new journey."

Then the bride's paternal grandmother joined the conversation, adding that they couldn't thank Mata Rani enough. The grandmother said that she wanted her granddaughter to praise the goddess before anything in life. The warm rapport that I developed immediately with these two women was largely attributable to my ability to speak their language. Becoming emotional, the bride's paternal grandmother stated that she was so glad to be able to witness her granddaughter's wedding, especially because she had feared that she was going to be "called to the goddess's house" before the wedding. As she remarked, "Ragini, I have told my son, that my granddaughter's wedding should be a wedding that the entire community will remember throughout—rather, the entire *two* communities, now that it is a Punjabi and Gujarati wedding." She let out a laugh after mentioning that inter-community aspect of the wedding. She then looked at me seriously and asked whether I would be there at the Mata Ki Chowki. She insisted that I be there and pray to Mata who would then bless me and fulfil all my wishes. She laughed again. With her hand over my head for a couple of seconds, she told me that perhaps I should pray to the goddess for a nice life partner. (This gesture is something that the elders in Indian families perform as a blessing of good luck for the future).

Meanwhile, the team had finished their lunch and returned to complete the work by 4:30. The event would start at 5:30. The assistant and the florist were busy in the living room. They began decorating the idol of the goddess to be placed in the centre of the room. A beautiful structure had been created for the idol earlier by the production team and brought to the event. After placing the decorated idol on the structure, the team started organising the seating for the 57 expected guests. The entire floor was to be covered with a high quality mattress, which would then be covered with beautiful golden covers matching the colour combination of the surrounding decorations. The crew laid down support cushions for the comfort of the guests. In addition, a few chairs were placed throughout the back end of the room for the elderly and disabled guests.

By approximately 3:00, the set up was complete, and the sound engineer arrived with his equipment. The sound requirements were basic: 5 JBL speakers, 3 microphones, 4 projectors and 4 screens. Most of the sound equipment was placed in the living room, apart from one set of speakers, a projector and screen which were set up in the garden. They needed the projectors and the screens to carry out live projection of the event that was taking place indoors. At that point, the florist's team and the outsourced labourers left, while the wedding planner's assistant and two assistant sound engineers and I stayed behind for the festivities.

The bridegroom arrived with his family at 5:00, 30 minutes early. The two families greeted each other affectionately. The bridegroom and his siblings touched the feet of the bride's parents and grandparents, while the others hugged each other and proceeded towards their seats. The family of the bridegroom complimented the bride's father on the beautiful decorations and took time to admire them closely. Their faces indicated that they were satisfied. Then the father of the bridegroom asked his son to take the bride and sit in the first row in front of the idol. He told them that it was their day and they should pray for a happy future together. The grandparents were not comfortable on the floor, so they moved to the back where the chairs had been arranged.

At around 5:20, the "Aarti ladies" arrived. These were a group of five women who were hired to sing during the event to pay homage to the goddess. One could compare this group to a choir in a church, leading the others in praising Mata Rani. Since it was our wedding planning team who had arranged for the Aarti ladies, the wedding event designer went over to greet them. I noted that the event designer from Ocean was also responsible for their food requirements. After enjoying some sweets and soft drinks, they made their way to the first row on the left side of the idol of the goddess. They had brought along Indian

musical instruments, namely a harmonium, 50 chimtas, 2 tablas, 2 mridangams and 2 shankhas. They were going to play all the instruments apart from the chimtas, which were going to be distributed among the invitees. The chimta is a simple tong-like instrument which can be played by anyone as it involves simply shaking it in one hand.

Although the event was scheduled officially for 5:30, it actually started after 6:00, since most of the guests arrived late. The bride's grandfather opened the event with a welcome speech, followed by a speech by the bridegroom's grandfather. Both men thanked everyone for coming. Then one of the Aarti group ladies approached the microphone to announce that she wanted to hear the voices of all the guests in singing along and praising Mata. She ended her remarks by uttering "Jai Mata Di", which got the crowd motivated, as it was a familiar phrase used to arouse religious feelings: "praise the goddess".

The music that followed triggered a mixture of reactions. Some people tended to clap their hands faster to the rhythm of the songs, whereas others folded their hands and closed their eyes. Towards the end, the bride's parents, grandmother and some of the guests had tears in their eyes. Slowly, however, the mood of the room shifted when the choice of songs became more cheerful. People now lifted their hands in the air and began clapping and singing along. When the blessings concluded around 8:30, the guests proceeded to the garden and pool area where the food was already laid out. The entire garden was decorated with delicate yellow fairy lights and lanterns which looked beautiful after sunset. Admiring the decorations, many of the guests asked the bride's father which company he had hired to set up the event. The other guests headed for the food counter.

There was absolutely no meat in the three-course meal, as the family had told us that Mata Ki Chowki was an event to praise the goddess and ask her blessings for a new beginning. At such a holy function, it would be inappropriate to serve any meat. During the dinner, the guests spoke to the bride and the bridegroom and both families. Limited to a relatively small number of only 57 guests, this event was considered an intimate one, allowing everyone to interact with each other. By 11:15, the bride and groom had finished going around to thank everyone for coming. Then the guests began to depart. They exchanged goodbyes with the family members, some by embracing, some by shaking hands—or by touching the feet or saying "Namaste" if bidding farewell to the elders. By 11:45, all the guests had left and everything was dismantled by our team. When I reached my room, it was 2:30 a.m. I was exhausted, but I looked forward to Day 2: the Mehndi.

Day 2: Mehndi

Day 2's event, the *Mehndi Ki Raat* took place at a banquet hall of a 5-star hotel. Since the event was scheduled for 4 p.m., we (the wedding planning team) arrived at 9 a.m. to kickstart the decorating. It included yellow and orange floral decorations for the entire hall, decorations for the backdrop, a stage for the bride and her close friend and family, and the set up for the music. By around 2 p.m., the decorations were completed. The wedding planner dropped by around 12:30 p.m. to ensure that everything was going according to the plan. Two hours later, the sound engineers arrived to assemble the sound system.

By 3:00, everything at the venue was in place. After some members of the wedding planning crew had left, there were five people remaining to handle the rest of the event: 2 wedding designers/coordinators, 2 sound engineers and 1 outsourced worker. At 3:30, the two families arrived. They surveyed the room and seemed quite pleased, as evidenced by the appreciation expressed by the mother of the bride to the event coordinators. She then asked about the exact measurements of the stage. The event coordinator replied, "Ma'am, the stage is 24 feet wide, and 16 feet deep, as we discussed earlier. The bride and her friends or a couple of relatives can sit on the stage and get the mehndi done...." Smiling, the mother nodded and thanked the event coordinator who then offered her a copy of the 10-page itinerary containing all the details of the day. Upon seeing it, she admitted that she had inadvertently left her copy at home. Before turning to leave, the bride's mother smiled and told me that I could stay for the entire Mehndi function. I felt extremely happy and thanked her by folding my hands and saying "Namaste".

At approximately 3:30, the mehndi ladies reached the venue. These were a group of 12 women responsible for applying henna to the guests and to the bride. The beginning of the event was signalled at 4 p.m. with light Indian music. By that time, only about 18 guests (the immediate family of the bride and the bridegroom) were present. The rest began trickling in around 5 p.m. The mother of the bride looked slightly impatient, for she kept glancing at her watch and then towards the entrance door. Noticing her impatience, her father approached her and said, "My daughter! Why are you so impatient? You know that everyone comes 40 to 60 minutes late. Everything will be fine. Trust me! And wait! Have you ever gone to a wedding on time yourself? We all go one hour late at least so don't worry...It's your daughter's big day, so go and enjoy. Let's get the henna started for her as it will take time." The mother smiled and replied, "I know you are right! I am just so stupid and worried without any reason. I will go and get the mehndi started."

Since the mehndi design had already been decided by the bride, no time was wasted on making selections. The two senior women started applying the mehndi. One woman focused on the bride's arms and hands, while the other woman applied the henna to the bride's feet. This pattern seemed to speed up the process. They opened a mehndi design book to find a specific design for reference. The sisters, close relatives, friends of the bride and the bridegroom also got their henna work done, while the men chatted around the food and drinks counter.

Curious about how the mehndi was progressing, I greeted the bride, complimenting her on her beautiful appearance. She smiled and said that she was a little nervous about the mehndi process. To be specific, she added, "I really hope that the colour is still dark after I wash it. You know, it is always nice to have it darker. The darker the mehndi is, the more love I will receive from my mother-in-law." Letting out a nervous laugh, she continued, "I know this sounds silly, but it has been a superstition or a tradition running along for ages...that the colour of the mehndi on the hands of the bride should be dark, so I want to do anything to get the colour dark." The mehndi lady joined our conversation to reassure the bride: "Babyji, don't worry. I have homemade tricks to get the colour really dark for you. I have got along with me a lemon. I will keep squeezing it on the henna. This should help after it dries. Also, do not wash your hands today under any circumstances. Perhaps you could peel it off if when it's dry, but do not wash it with water. If you do, don't blame me later." The bride accepted this advice, which was seconded by her friend who was sitting next to her. Then, adding to the discussion, the grandmother shared the story of her own mother who used heated cloves to intensify the colour.

Meanwhile, the bridegroom came and sat next to the bride. Teasing her, he said that he was excited to know how dark the mehndi would be, as the intensity of the colour was a sign of whether or not she would get along well with her mother-in-law or end up in a typical mother-in-law and daughter-in-law cold war. He then laughed it off and smiled to the bride, reassuring her that he would always love her. At that point, all the other women started teasing the bridegroom and shooed him out of the room so that his initials could be applied to the bride's hands. He was not allowed to witness this stage, as he would have to search for his initials on the wedding night. If he succeeded, he would be the dominant partner in the relationship, but if he failed, the bride would dominate. The young man laughed. Looking towards the bride, he said that he would be happy to hand over the reins to her.

A few minutes later, we could hear the music starting. Then a group of girls entered the hall and occupied the front space. Holding dandiya (colourful sticks used in some

Gujarati dances), they began to dance. As noted earlier, the groom's family were Gujaratis. These dancers were followed by some Bhangra music and some traditional Punjabi dance performances for the Punjabis in the house. Since the following day's special event, the Sangeet, would include a mix of Bollywood music and traditional folk songs, both families wanted to keep the Mehndi day as traditional as possible. After the performances by the dance troupe, the DJ announced that the floor was open to all the guests. Most of those who got up to participate were the younger people, while the older guests sat chit-chatting. While the bridegroom was forced to join them on the dance floor, it was understood that the bride could not participate, as she still had the mehndi on her hands and legs. Nonetheless, her face was beaming to see her fiancé having fun.

After an hour, the DJ shifted to soft music and announced that dinner was ready. By approximately 11:00, all the guests had finished their meals and were starting to leave. However, the bride, the bridegroom and their immediate family members remained until they had thanked all their guests and bid them good night. Then the family members hugged each other and made their way out of the hall. While they waited for their chauffeurs to bring their cars around, the bridegroom touched the feet of all the parents, uncles and grandparents. Before everyone got into their respective cars and drove off, he wished his fiancée a good night's sleep and told her that he could not wait to dance with her at the Sangeet the following evening.

Day 3: Sangeet

The next day was the Sangeet day. The event was scheduled to start at 7:00 in the evening. We reached the venue before 8:00 in the morning. It was a luxurious banquet hall at a 7-star hotel. Our crew included the wedding coordinator, the wedding designer, 2 wedding assistant designers, and 4 other assistants. All the other individuals involved were instructed to arrive at specified times: the decorators with the props at 7 a.m., the florist and his team at 9 a.m., the sound engineers at 10 a.m., and the light engineers at noon. The wedding planner had also hired a few extra pairs of hands to help with incidental tasks that might arise. These men arrived at 8 a.m.

The schedule had been sent out by email and text, and telephone reminders were given to all the suppliers a day before to ensure that nobody would be late. After the wedding planner's arrival at approximately 7:15 a.m., he chatted quickly with the wedding coordinator and the creative designer to run through everything again. To save time, the decorators had already been to the venue on the previous day to construct the dance floor and the backdrop

for the event. Additionally, all the props and other objects had been delivered the day before. These items included pillars, vases, ornate chairs, tables, cushions, and a special Persian carpet for the hall. Everything had to be placed in precise positions.

The wedding planner felt compelled to recheck whether these decorations were laid out according to the plan, as the other details were dependent on the location of the larger pieces of décor. Mr. Amit requested a couple of amendments, such as the positioning of some vases, and the symmetrical arrangement of the backdrop. After he and the creative designer gave their approval, the florists, lighting technicians and sound engineers were called in. They worked assiduously for almost five hours. At 1:30, just before they had completed their work, Mr. Amit popped in again. Turning to the creative designer and production manager, he said, “This is a really important day and an important client. We need to make sure nothing goes wrong at any cost. If we mess anything up, it will cost us to shut down our company. This client is very influential. So both of you, please keep rechecking everything against our original blueprint to be sure. You know, better safe than sorry.”

After Mr. Amit and his team were satisfied with the work of the florists and the sound engineer, the lighting team sprang into action. I asked the creative director why that team was brought in last. He explained, “Lighting is a really tricky issue. You can play with the lighting, and it can do wonders to the entire look of the venue. However, the lighting in a venue is also dependent on other factors such as decorations, both the objects and the floral arrangements.” He added: “Ragini, you will watch now how important the lighting can get in any event. It can really turn around an event.” Then the lighting engineer confirmed that the right time to start working on the lights is after all the decorations have been put in place: “When we know the colours dominating the venue, we can work on where to focus the light and where not to focus the light to make the flowers look beautiful.”

Later the photographers and videographers arrived to tell the light engineers where to focus the lighting to get the best photographs. By 5 p.m., the set up was finished and the caterers had arrived. Since the chosen theme was Bollywood, all the decorations adhered to that theme. The entire venue resembled the set of a typical Bollywood movie. Even the servers and attendants were given the uniform of Sabji, a famous character in Bollywood movies. Even the guests were requested to dress according to Bollywood characters. The official start time of the Sangeet event was 7:30, but as usual, the close family members and a couple of friends of the bride and the bridegroom arrived by 7 p.m., whereas the others began pouring in by 8:00. The evening kicked off with the MC taking charge by welcoming everyone. He assured the crowd that they would experience one of the most entertaining

nights of their lives. He also stated that there would be a surprise for all which he would not reveal until later. This announcement aroused curiosity and excitement, as evidenced by the cheerful clapping and whispering. The MC then signalled to the assistants at the back and a video started to play.

The video was a three-minute clip about the couple and their love story. As it concluded, the bride and the bridegroom held hands and looked into each other's eyes for a while. The guests were smitten by the beautiful video. It was created by professional videographers hired by the wedding planner. Albeit only three minutes, it had been shot and edited over a span of four months. After the screening, the MC announced that there would be a couple of dance performances, beginning with the younger cousins of the bride (aged 16 and younger), followed by the younger cousins of the bridegroom. The Sangeet was structured to achieve balance: one performance from the bride's family and then one from the bridegroom's family. Both families were hooting and cheering for either "Team Bride" or "Team Bridegroom". It looked like there was a healthy competition going on, with the encouragement of the MC. The next pair of performances was by the older cousins, aged 16 to 27. They had fun performing songs from their own era. The next dance performance was by the parents and the aunts and the uncles of the bride. The song, a 1980s' tune, awakened nostalgic feelings in many of the older guests. The bride was delighted to see her father perform as there had always been insider jokes in the family that the father of the bride was the family's worse dancer, coupled with the stereotypical image of the father being a reserved man. The bride cheered her father on, "Go, Daddy!" In keeping with the format of alternating performances from each family, the next performance was by the parents, aunts and uncles of the bridegroom. It was great entertainment for everyone. The bridegroom started teasing the bride by telling her that he was pretty sure that she wanted her mother-in-law to "dance to her tune". He said that he was excited to see who would win the inevitable mother-in-law/daughter-in-law battle. Then they started laughing, and the bride gave him a sarcastic smile, replying that there was no such battle. She said that he was expecting too much drama in their marriage, and he would surely be disappointed.

The series of dance performances culminated in one special dance by the grandparents. This joint performance was a particularly touching moment for everyone as this loving effort by the grandparents had been unexpected. The grandfathers of both the bride and the bridegroom had been regarded as strict and reserved, certainly not individuals who would ever participate in entertaining a crowd. However, this Sangeet was an exception, so

their participation on stage was cherished by all. Each of the grandparents was handed a microphone to say a few words. The grandfather of the bride went first:

I know, everyone here was surprised to see me here on stage... You must be wondering how can this man—who hardly talks and is always the person in authority, not allowing the children to have fun—be here on stage... laughing and dancing? He continued, “ So to you all, I say...this is my love for my granddaughter and my going-to-be grandson-in-law. I knew that this would make my granddaughter happy on her Sangeet day. So here I am...In fact, here we are!”

Then the bride’s grandmother took over the microphone and added, “To all those sitting here and expecting the obvious...I am happy to disappoint you guys this time, as it was not me but the grandfather’s idea to prepare this dance performance. In fact, he has been the only one forcing me to dance today.” At that point, the grandparents hugged each other and their grandchildren. The grandfather of the bridegroom came forward next and remarked that the family of the bride had “stolen the show”, and the audience should refocus on “Team Bridegroom”. Then he laughed and added that at first, they were going to do two separate performances, but then it crossed their minds that they should work together. He admitted, “I must say that I loved every bit of it...We really feel like a family now.”

In the midst of these emotions, a large, globe structure was lowered onto the stage. The MC announced that the surprise for the night would include more than the grandparents’ performance. Then out of the globe emerged two popular Bollywood stars. The guests were given a couple of minutes to process this breath-taking appearance. It had been a well-guarded secret, one that only the parents of the couple had known. After the initial excitement had died down, the Bollywood stars congratulated the bride and the bridegroom. Then they began to dance to their hit numbers, which elicited a wave of excitement among the crowd. Some guests got up to dance. The bride, bridegroom and their grandparents, who were still on the stage, were prompted by the Bollywood stars to join them in dance, thus intensifying the cheerful atmosphere.

One of the Bollywood stars was also a great singer. While he sang his favourite romantic song, he urged the couple to start dancing. The bridegroom asked the bride for her hand and they slowly started dancing. After that song, the Bollywood star commented, “Can you see them, these two look so madly in love with each other....They haven’t taken their eyes off each other for a minute” The bridegroom laughed and replied to the Bollywood star: “You are supposed to be the king of romance. You have always been an implicit competitor

for me, as you manage to set such high standards of romance that it becomes really difficult for me to hope. In fact, I speak on behalf of all the men sitting here.”

The MC then announced that the dance floor was open and the celebrity DJ (Mr. A) was there to take over for the rest of the night. He added that the catering service would open in another 30 minutes and the guests could make their way to the dinner whenever they wanted to and were always welcome to come back to the dance floor. It was around 9:25 p.m. As expected, most of the guests proceeded to the food. By around 11 p.m., most of the guests had finished their dinner and were back on the dance floor. The DJ gauged the mood of the room and started to play the songs accordingly to get the party going. Soon all the guests were drawn like magnets to the dance floor. I observed one man who seemed about to leave at first. However, he turned to his wife and said, “I don’t think we should leave after all, as the night is just getting started and DJ B is here....Let us enjoy this night.” Some of the men were seen flinging their coats in the air and dancing to the beats of the songs. By 3:50 a.m., the DJ announced that he was about to play the last two songs for the night, as he would be closing the set at 4 a.m. Therefore, he started playing slow and emotional songs, which changed the mood in the room. At around 4:10, the DJ announced his last song which slowly ushered the tired guests out the door.

The two families were extremely exhausted. By 4:40, they had all left the venue. The wedding planning team stayed behind for a while to organise items to be picked up by the crew the next day. By the time I was dropped off at my residence, it was 6 a.m. As I was getting out of the car, the creative director reminded me that I would have to reach the venue in only a few hours to observe the next event, the Haldi ceremony. Although I hadn’t had enough sleep for a while, I reassured him that I’d be there. He laughed and exclaimed, “Ragini, welcome to the world of wedding planners! Now go get some sleep.”

Day 4: The Marriage Ceremony

My alarm went off at 8 a.m., but after only two hours of sleep. I struggled to get up. Knowing I was running late, I finally pushed myself to get ready. I was supposed to reach the house of the bridegroom for the Haldi by 10 a.m. Compared to the previous three events, this event was much smaller and less elaborate. Only minor requirements were necessary, and they were set up by the Ocean crew the day before. Customarily, the Haldi ceremony takes place at both the house of the bride and the house of the bridegroom. I decided to be present at the bridegroom’s house for the ceremony. I had attended the Mata Ki Chowki at the bride’s

home, so I thought it would be interesting to explore how things are carried out by the family of the bridegroom.

The ceremony started at 11 a.m. when all the close relatives of the bridegroom gathered at his house. They all took turns applying haldi (or turmeric paste) to the bridegroom's face, hands and legs. During this ceremony, traditional songs were played, and some of the bridegroom's friends and relatives got up to dance. After all that effort of applying the haldi, the bridegroom got up to wash it off. At that moment, his mother entered the room and said, "No, son! I told you earlier that you are not supposed to wash it off so soon! I want you to wait for another hour at least before washing it off." She added, "You know that applying haldi helps you ward off all the evil. It protects you." Then the grandmother said, "My grandson, applying turmeric will give your skin a glowing effect. You will look very handsome. Even your grandfather applied turmeric before meeting me, and it is because of the haldi he was looking really nice—or else I wouldn't have married him." At that point, the bridegroom had no choice but to sit down again for another hour with the haldi paste.

Meanwhile, the dancing, laughter and chit-chatting continued among the guests. After an hour, the bridegroom went to take a quick shower to wash away the haldi and to change into fresh attire. While he was getting ready, the food was being laid out for lunch. The bridegroom's friends urged him to leave his house and spend some time with them before the wedding ceremony, but his grandmother adamantly forbade it. She made it clear to his friends that she would not allow him to step out of the house until the evening. According to her, stepping out right after the Haldi ceremony would be a bad omen. She did not want to take any chances when it came to the future married life of her grandson.

The designer arrived at the home at 4:30 to ensure that everything was going well. The bridegroom was getting dressed in his sherwani, his Indian wedding attire. When he emerged from his room, his parents, grandparents, aunt, uncle and siblings—in other words, a total of 10 family members—were all waiting in the living room to inspect his outfit. Proudly, the bridegroom's mother turned to her son and declared, "My son is truly looking like a prince today." The grandmother and aunt came up and kissed his forehead. Then the grandmother disappeared into the kitchen and returned with green chilies. She waved them over her grandson's head, saying that as he looked so good today, she wanted to ensure that no evil eye would fall on him. The green chilies would eliminate that possibility.

The designer signalled to the photographer to take photographs of the bridegroom with his family. At that point, Mr. Amit dropped by unexpectedly. This was a visit that I had

not seen in the original itinerary. In an informal conversation with him, I asked if there was a special reason for his appearance at the bridegroom's home instead of just meeting the family at the venue. The wedding planner replied, "Ah, you know how it is. The mother of the bride called to say she was really worried about how everything is going to turn out. She requested me to just drop by to check, so I couldn't refuse. Sometimes at these stressful moments, my presence tends to calm the clients. In fact, I was also at the home of the bride earlier, and now I'm here." Mr. Amit then approached the bridegroom and his family to reassure them that they all looked flawless and amazing. At 6 p.m., he reminded everyone to proceed to the venue—a 7-star hotel. Fortunately, it was only an 8-minute drive from the house. Therefore, it had been decided earlier that the *Baraat* (i.e. the bridegroom's formal procession to the venue) would leave from the house itself. Mr. Amit had told me that the tradition dictated that the bridegroom would have to arrive at the venue on either a horse or an elephant.

By 6:15 p.m., the bridegroom was outside with his family, friends, and a priest who had come to perform some traditional rituals before the bridegroom could mount the horse. First, the priest applied some red power on the head of horse and the bridegroom. Then the bridegroom mounted the horse and sat on his "throne", which is how everyone referred to the saddle. The horse was white and decorated ornately with jewellery and flowers, just like the saddle. As the rest of us walked along, accompanying the bridegroom, the grandfather of the bride told me that the horse in the *Baraat* should always be white, no other colour, as white horses are considered auspicious. Joining the procession to the wedding venue were musicians who had been hired to play the drums and Indian flutes. The rhythmic beats of the drums were so entertaining that the guests started dancing as we made our way to the venue.

By 7:15, we reached the destination. Outside the hotel, as a traditional sign of respect, the family of the bride was waiting to welcome the bridegroom and his family. The two fathers exchanged hugs as did the two mothers. Then there was a small ritual called the *Milni* in which the bride's immediate family members embrace and exchange small gifts with the bridegroom's immediate family members. I learned from Mr. Amit that this ritual symbolises the merging of the two clans or families.

After the *Milni*, the bridegroom, with the assistance of the groomsman, dismounted and proceeded to the entrance with his family. He seemed to be scanning the hotel windows, perhaps searching for a glimpse of the bride. Then both his mother and his mother-in-law joked with him about having to cross certain barriers first. The bridegroom blushed and touched the feet of his in-laws as a gesture of respect. His mother-in-law greeted him with a plate of sweets and a small earthen lamp. He then entered the banquet hall which had been

decorated magnificently by the wedding planning team. The décor included a suspended revolving crystal reflecting a lotus. It descended slowly onto the centre of the stage. The crystal was glittering. Slowly, it opened—and lo and behold, there was the bride. Looking flawless, she emerged from the ice-like crystal in her exquisite attire. Everyone, including the bridegroom, was in awe. He sent a flying kiss towards her. The bride was then escorted by her brothers to the bridegroom. The young couple exchanged garlands in a brief ceremony known as the *jaimala*. There were about three photographers and two videographers on board to capture these beautiful moments of the wedding.

The bride and the bridegroom then proceeded towards the *mandap* for the next set of rituals. The mandap is a structure in the middle of the hall where the bride and the bridegroom have to be seated to solemnise their union. It also consists of an area where the couple can ignite wood to generate fire for the wedding. To ensure safety, prior to the wedding, Mr. Amit and the hotel staff had made special arrangements for the lighting of the fire, including the presence of four boys who were trained to react accordingly in the event of a mishap. Only the bride, bridegroom, their parents and grandparents were permitted to approach the mandap, while the other guests took their seats in the hall. A couple of minutes later, the bride's father poured water into the hands of the bridegroom and then placed his daughter's hand on the hand of her husband-to-be. This action symbolised that the father was now handing over his precious daughter. One of the priests announced that the couple would start the *saat phere*, i.e. the seven rounds of vows near the fire. As the priest chanted the prayers in Sanskrit, the couple walked round the fire, reciting one vow for each round. With each step and each vow, they came closer to sealing their union forever. As the seventh round ended, all the guests rose and started clapping to celebrate the moment. As soon as they finished the seventh round, flowers fluttered down from the ceiling onto the couple to celebrate this moment.

Mr. Amit's assistant, who was standing next to me, explained the significance of this ritual: "Hindus regard fire as their god of purity. They believe it is best to take their vows in front of the fire to start a perfect married life." Then the groom kissed the bride on the forehead and lifted her up in his arms. Turning towards his father-in-law, he remarked jokingly that he had now taken her from her father forever. After receiving blessings from their parents and grandparents, the newlyweds sat down, with the bride to the groom's left, i.e., closer to his heart. At this point, the priest instructed the bridegroom to apply a red powder on the bride's head, and place a mangalsutra (necklace) around her neck, both actions symbolising marriage and the bliss of a married woman. It was then time for everyone to

move towards the second banquet hall where the dinner had been laid out. Mr. Amit waved to the attendants at the door, signalling them to guide the guests to the next banquet hall. He turned towards me and said that he was glad that the timing of the showering of flowers was perfect. Apparently, he had been quite nervous about it at first, since the bride seemed to have slowed down her walk slightly. However, he was very happy that it turned out perfectly. He then instructed the wedding producer to make sure to lock the room later and not to pack up the props and décor until the end of the wedding.

The dinner was another sumptuous spread, with approximately 45 different dishes, this time including a range of dishes from around the world. The guests seemed to be extremely impressed. I overheard one of them say, “For Gupta’s daughter’s wedding, there were only 30 dishes and Persian and Greek cuisines weren’t on the menu at all. But look at this menu. It is very extensive.” Another guest added, “Surely, this wedding is better than Gupta’s wedding. For my son’s wedding, I think I am going to opt for tonight’s caterer. After the wedding, I will ask Mrs. Z the name of the caterer. Maybe I shall give her a call.” The guests then went and congratulated the couple and handed them envelopes containing either cash or cheques as a token of love and appreciation. Mr. Amit mentioned that some of the guests would probably give much more expensive gifts personally at the house of the couple beforehand. He said, “Ragini...It is not safe to gift expensive diamond sets at the wedding, and it is always nice to give the gifts personally in the house of the couple.”

The dinner ended and the groom requested one last dance with his bride before they called an end to the night. The lights were dimmed and the couple started dancing while the crowd cheered. After the dance, both families thanked the guests for coming and everyone prepared to disperse. Before the newlyweds got into their car, the bride turned to her family members, all of whom had tears rolling down their cheeks. They faced the reality that their princess was actually going to leave them and move into the house of her husband. The groom’s father held the hands of his in-laws and reassured them that their daughter would be safe and happy in her new home. He said he would “treat her not as a daughter-in-law but as a daughter”.

When the newlyweds’ car was out of sight, it was already far past midnight. I stood there for a couple of minutes with mixed feelings about the “big Indian wedding” finally coming to a close. The Ocean staff would return to the venue the following day to clear the halls of all the equipment and decorations. It should be noted that the couple later decided to hold an additional reception. Unfortunately, however, I could not attend that event, as the location they chose was Dubai.

4B Emergence of the Community of Wedding Planners

4.1. The Difference Between Marriage and Wedding

The words ‘marriage’ and ‘wedding’ have often been conflated in various cultures. In his book, *Marriage and Morals*, Bertrand Russell explains that, “[m]arriage differs, of course, from other sex relations by the fact that it is a legal institution. It is also in most communities a religious institution, but it is the legal aspect which is essential” (Russell, 1959). Marriage has been described as a social institution, which is recognised either by law or by custom (Westermarck, 1936). On the other hand, a wedding creates the conjugal unit, establishes a new relationship between the relatives and transfers the participants from the adolescent to the adult category (Linton, 1942).

4.2. Evolution of Marriage and Weddings

Although various reasons, including social benefits, family pleasure and financial security, may motivate some individuals to enter into a marital relationship, the main objectives of marriage have been companionship, sexual intimacy and procreation (Stone, 1936). During the 19th century, marriage was accepted as a holy tradition, and the notion of it being a contract between a man and a woman translated into the idea of a union of the husband, wife and God. With the passage of time, each religion integrates its rituals and traditions in the marriage ceremonies of cultures around the globe. Jumping to the 21st century, we find that the institution of marriage has expanded markedly with civil partnerships and later same-sex marriages becoming legalised in England and Wales (Legislation. Gov. U.K., 2004) and various other countries, including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina, South Africa, Taiwan, Costa Rica, Colombia, Iceland, the Netherlands, Finland, Germany, France, Malta, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and so on (Felter & Renwick, 2019). However, for much of recorded history, marriage was not a relationship built on mutual love between the stay-at-home wife and the breadwinner husband; instead, the primary purpose of the institution was the accumulation of wealth, power and property (Coontz, 2006). In fact, marrying for love alone was perplexing to most people, as they considered love as something that would take place outside of marriage (Coontz, 2005). Previously, civilization focused on marriages as a means of satisfying one’s family and economic needs rather than the entire process of getting married or having a wedding (Coontz, 2006). During the 1800s, weddings

were private, and there were very few instances of grand public weddings (Wallace, 2004). It was only after the Second World War that formal weddings became popularised (Quain, 2018). Today, among the upper echelons of society, the traditional ceremonies have faded and made way for the emergence of spectacular 21st century weddings (Winch & Webster, 2012).

4.3. Wedding Planners: A Nascent Occupational Community

This section explains the steps leading to the birth and popularity of the flourishing elite wedding planning industry. It presents the primary and secondary data that I collected to underline the major factors behind the emergence of the wedding planners community. These factors include the romanticisation of weddings, the growing class of families with disposable incomes and the rapidly expanding and powerful role of mass media, most notably social media platforms.

4.3.1. History of Wedding Planning

In the United States, the wedding planning industry as we know it today began to expand noticeably in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Blake, 2008). Interestingly, however, that long before the modern-day wedding planner came into existence, the most affluent members of the society would hire a master of ceremonies (MC) who would assist on the day of the wedding (Blakely, 2007). In the 1920s, bridal salons began providing another service in the form of bridal secretaries. (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). These women would offer guidance to brides about their etiquette, protocol and merchandise obtainable in the nearby areas (Otnes & Pleck, 2003).

The end of World War II marked the beginning of the bridal consulting business. In 1951, the first association for bridal consultants was formed under the name of National Bridal Service (NBS); it has also provided bridal consultant training and operated across 41 states (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). It was followed in 1955 by the Association of Bridal Consultants (ABC). These consultants would help the client by liaising with the vendors and charge commission for it. Initially, members of the society's elite were the major consumers of these services, but gradually, the clientele expanded to the middle class. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the wedding consulting industry began to burgeon. Greater participation of women in the labour force, the demographic boom in men and women of prime marrying age, and the increasing disposable income available among the middle and upper-class families were the major

reasons behind the wedding planning boom during this period (Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Blakely, 2008). Thereafter, with consumption becoming democratised through rising salaries and easier access to financing (Illouz, 1997), more and more people began turning to wedding planners to organise their weddings.

Another factor contributing to the development of the wedding planning industry is the increasing media attention to celebrity culture, including the lavish weddings of the rich and famous. An abundance of magazines began to appear on the market during this time frame—magazines such as *Hello* (first published in 1988) and *O.K.* (first published in 1993) that released a plethora of images of celebrity weddings. In 1981 when Prince Charles and Lady Diana got married, the wedding was viewed by 750 million people across 74 countries (BBC, n.d.). It became embedded in people's minds as a perfect example of a fairytale which included the element of romanticisation (Ingraham, 2008). Just months after this real royal event, Luke Spencer and Laura Baldwin, fictional characters from the American soap opera *General Hospital*, made their long-anticipated trip down the aisle (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). This fictional wedding was photographed for the cover of *Newsweek* (Malcolm, 1999). Here we see how the line between reality and fantasy can become blurred. Such media reports covering celebrity weddings played an important role in promoting the culture of a perfect wedding (Boden, 2003). Later in 2001, at the end of the seventh season of the popular American comedy series *Friends*, when two of the central characters, Monica and Chandler, tied the knot, that episode received 30 million views (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Thus, celebrity weddings, both real and fictional, have the power to intensify the romanticisation of weddings. This romanticisation eventually leads some engaged couples to seek professional help in creating an idyllic wedding. Clearly, the romanticisation of weddings changed the perception of weddings in the cultural landscape.

Colin Campbell's (1987) concept of the romantic ethic draws attention to the emotional and imaginative aspect of weddings. A wedding is no longer just a religious celebration. It exists as a cultural performance to demonstrate the romantic commitment of two individuals (Boden, 2003). Weddings became not only romanticised, but also commercialised and attached to socioeconomic status. Along with displaying one's level in society, weddings started holding importance in symbolising one's quality and quantity of social connections (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Since not every family can afford an exorbitant wedding, the ultra-luxurious wedding became a key tool for communicating one's social prestige (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Hence, the genesis of the wedding planning industry.

4.3.2. Prominence of Wedding Planning

Undoubtedly, weddings have become a spectacle (Boden, 2003; Wallace, 2004).

Consequently, the need for them to be ‘professionally’ managed has increased (Blakely, 2008). As outlined by Otnes and Pleck (2003), an extravagant wedding is now becoming more of a standard than a luxury. The growing yearning for luxury throughout the culture and the simultaneous relaxation of etiquette have contributed to the rising popularity of sumptuous weddings (Otnes and Pleck, 2003), thereafter leading to the increasing prominence of wedding planning and wedding planners. As V. Postrel (2004) highlights in a *New York Times* article, it is understandable that engaged couples today would require assistance as there are far too many detailed choices involved in every aspect.

Additionally, in the 21st century, for many couples, weddings have become a platform to announce their joint identity to the world, and they choose to do so in a grand manner (Coontz, 2005). Otnes and Pleck (2003) also explain that weddings have become a vehicle for demonstrating one’s prestige and social connections. Brides, grooms and their families are extremely keen on presenting a flawless dream wedding, necessitating an enormous expenditure (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). “While a wedding is a celebration of a lifetime, it is a day when dreams come true.” (Davis, 2000, p.8) “Many families save up money for years and spend a considerable sum for the wedding, even though the event itself is short-lived” (Currie, 1993).

As the wedding planning industry is expanding, it continues to emphasise the emotional significance of weddings. Since a wedding is promoted as a ‘once in a lifetime’—or in some cases, twice or thrice in a lifetime event, wedding planning is a flourishing industry (Blakely, 2008). Many people in various cultures still believe in the romantic fairy tale image of ‘happily ever after’. It is this deeply ingrained fairy tale that compels them to put extra effort into making every detail of their wedding day perfect. The concept of wedding planners became widespread with the notion of every woman fulfilling her Cinderella dream (Otnes and Pleck, 2003). As Naomi Wolf (1995) asserts, in keeping with the Cinderella concept, the various bridal magazines perpetuate a fantasy world of “Brideland” in which the wedding planner is positioned as the Cinderella bride’s fairy godmother, while the bride considers herself to be Cinderella whose wish for a dream wedding is going to be fulfilled.

According to Boden (2003), the Cinderella/Princess figure is being endorsed by the wedding industry as ‘ideal’ to entice more clients to opt for a wedding planner who can fulfill their Cinderella dreams. Boden (2003) introduces another concept of the bride: the ‘superbride’,

defined as part bridezilla—i.e. a very demanding, anxious and meticulous bride—and part Cinderella who needs to feel pampered like a princess and wants to see her childhood fantasies materialise. Therefore, a main objective of wedding planners is to tackle the ‘superbride’ element in the brides. In today’s busy and dynamic world, the entire procedure of planning and organising such a momentous event requires endless decisions and tasks that cannot be completed in one’s leisure time. As Cramer and Lafreniere note, although a wedding is deemed a happy occasion, it is consistently ranked in seventh place among 43 of the most stressful life events, especially for the bride (Cramer & Lafreniere, 2003). Also, Robson (2011) asserts that “over the years, [weddings] have become more structured and have required a dedicated person to oversee them.” Thereafter, wedding planners come more prominently into picture. They claim to be able to alleviate all the stress and deliver the most carefree, dream-like event in one’s life.

4.4. Wedding Planning: A Flourishing Industry

The section below highlights the development of the wedding planning industry and the wedding planners community. Over the past few decades, the employment scene has changed markedly. The traditional, secure and long-term forms of employment are being replaced by nontraditional, unstable and varied forms of work (Hollister, 2011). This destabilization of familiar work is not to be regarded as a ‘jobless future’ or the ‘end of work’ (Aronowitz and DiFazio, 1996; Rifkin 2000). Instead, the decline of the mainstream traditional form of work has given rise to new types of employment opportunities (Abbott, 1993; Osnowitz 2010, Osterman, 2001). The non-standard occupation of wedding planners is one such emerging occupational community. The section begins with an overview of the emergence of wedding planners around the world and a discussion of this community’s vast reach and growing importance. The lens is then pointed at the U.S.A., the country considered to be the birthplace of the industry. Next, the focus turns to the wedding planning industry in the U.K and then India, as the fieldwork for this research has been largely conducted in these two countries.

4.4.1. Growth of the Wedding Planners Industry Around the Globe

Recent research indicates the worth of the global wedding industry to be around 300 million dollars (Singh, 2016) Despite the decline in the value of various other industries, the wedding planning industry does not seem to be suffering; in fact, it has been growing steadily each year and expanding its net worth (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). The *Washington*

Examiner declared the wedding industry to be a ‘recession-proof’ industry, as even during recessions, couples did not scale back on their wedding-related expenditures (Blake, 2008). In addition, individuals and families tend to save more than estimated for their big day, often many years in advance. Overall, a recession is no impediment when two people decide to have a dream wedding. Thus, the wedding planning industry continues to prosper (Pedersen, 2010)

4.4.2 Growth of the Wedding Planning Industry in the United States

Today, over 2.4 million couples get married each year in the U.S. and spend over 60 billion dollars (IBISWorld, 2019, Engstrom, 2008, p.60). As per 2012, the average couple in U.S.A is seen to spend around \$26,989 for their wedding (Grossman, 2012). It was projected that there would be an increase in the number of wedding planners from 71,600 in 2010 to 102,900 in 2020 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012-2013).

4.4.3 Growth of the Wedding Planning Industry in United Kingdom

The average wedding in the UK now costs £30,355 as per 2018 (*Independent*, 2018). This represents a 12 percent increase from 2017, when the average cost of a wedding in the U.K was £ 26,989 (*Independent*, 2018). Also, it has been seen that the wedding planning industry has grown considerably in the U.K over the past couple of years, as evidenced by the upsurge in wedding expenditures (*Independent*, 2018). The graph below shows the steady increase in the wedding expenditures across 2015-2019.

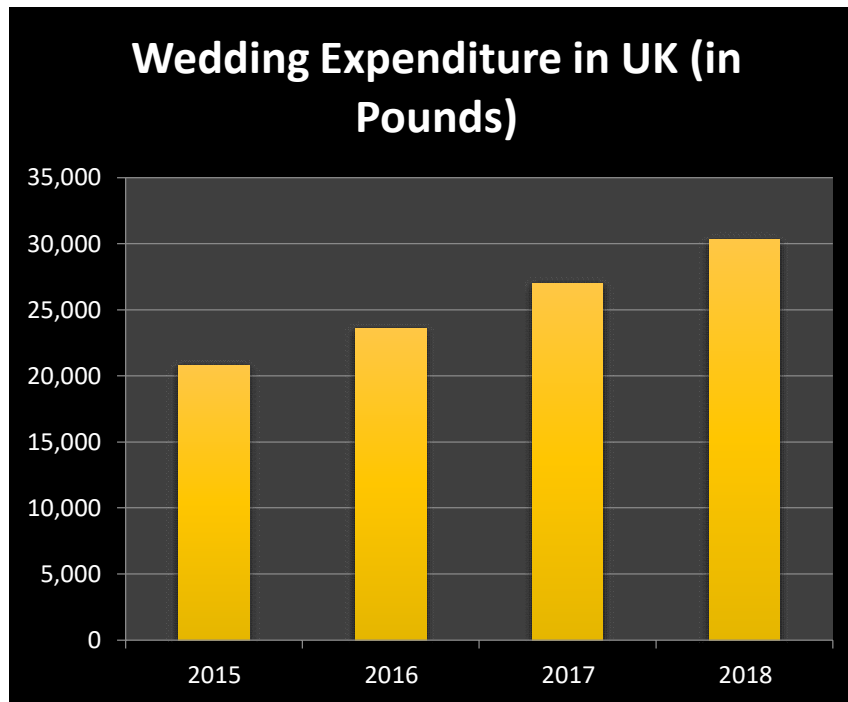


Figure 5: Source: Adopted from the Independent (2018)

4.4.4. Growth of the Wedding Planning Industry in India

The wedding planning industry in India has been extremely robust even during recessions, rendering it a ‘recession-proof’ industry (Madaan, 2015). In India, weddings constitute a barometer of one’s social status and wealth. On average, an Indian family spends as much as one-fifth or more of their wealth on a wedding (Bundhun, 2016), with an average number of 524 invited guests (Wedding Wire, 2019). Furthermore, with the introduction of destination weddings, the economic rate of wedding planners in India has risen dramatically (Vidyalaxmi, 2007). According to a 2018 report released by KPMG, the annual net worth of the weddings in India surpassed the \$40 billion mark (KPMG, 2018), and it is growing by 20-25% each year (Bundhun, 2016). The graph below indicates the steady climb in the expenditure in weddings in India over four years.

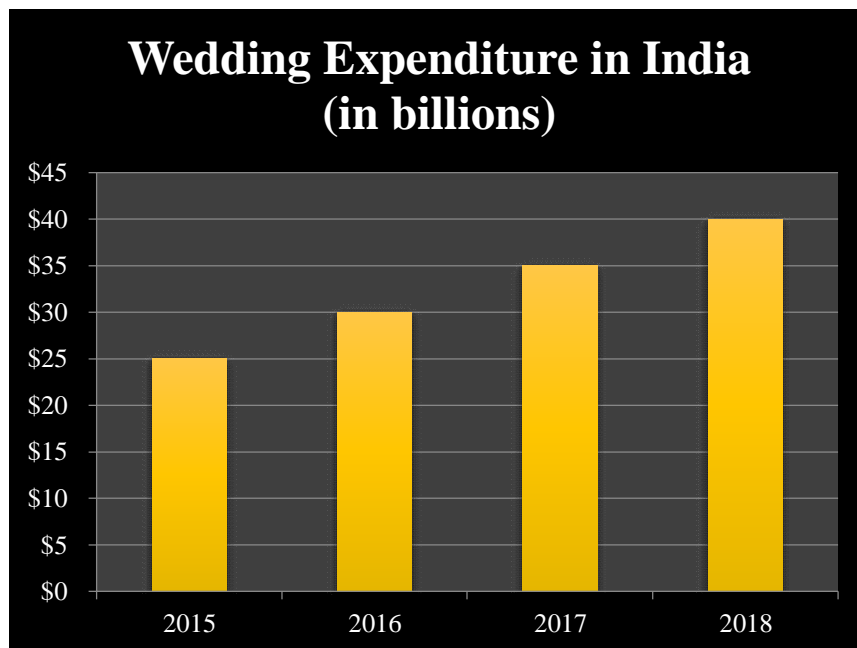


Figure 6: Adapted from Bundhun (2016)

4.5. Becoming Part of the Enchanting Occupational Community of Elite Wedding Planners

To become a wedding planner, there are no mandatory educational qualifications or certifications. Even so, entry into the elite level of the wedding planning industry is not open to just anyone. It is interesting to explore how one becomes a member and establishes oneself as part of this ‘High Status Occupational Community of Elite Wedding Planners’. The section below explores how becoming accepted in this community is primarily contingent on establishing contacts with glamorous HNIs.

4.5.1. Establishing Contacts and Creating Glamour

My data confirms that the most common paths into the nascent occupational community of elite wedding planners is not through certificates and years of professional training. Rather, the gateway into this stratum of the industry is largely constructed through prior connections established with the elite. These connections build trust and are used as access cards. According to the data, previous occupation titles of wedding planners include florists, invitation card printers, caterers and others in the hospitality industry, including high-end wedding cake makers (see table 3.2.4). The importance of previously established HNI

connections is evident in the following excerpt from an interview with a former wedding cake maker:

I had my own the baking business, before I joined the community as an elite wedding planner. I would bake a lot of wedding cakes for my elite clients. By word of mouth, my wedding cakes became very famous, and over the years, I would get so many orders for baking wedding cakes....For a wedding, the wedding cake symbolises prosperity and fertility and is thus paid attention to. As my wedding cakes became well known....I slowly started to enter this wedding world. It was then during the end of 1980s that so many of my clients suggested that I should take up wedding planning...[T]hese clients were so happy and comfortable with me that they suggested that I help them out with their weddings. That's when I entered the world. I had the clients and was known here so it became easier for me...Back then, you needed to serve a certain class to enter in that class to help them out with planning their wedding, Here the acceptance would be greater from the segment you have previously been serving. (Wedding Planner E based in the U.K.)

It is interesting to note that the introduction to this community is not limited to people working in ancillary industries. In fact, it is open to anyone who is well connected with the HNI class. This is how this emerging occupational community of elite wedding planners establishes itself. As one former solicitor exemplifies,

I was working as a solicitor for 10 years before I decided to become a wedding planner. My clients were all high profile and I knew some of them personally. I was invited to attend one of my client's son's wedding....It was after I attended this wedding that I decided to become a wedding planner. My client had previously joked about how I am good with people and I could try to become a wedding planner. So, then I decided to take up wedding planning. Most of my initial clients were my former (law) clients or clients' friends who knew me and trusted me. (Wedding Planner KO based in the U.K.)

In India, another route into this affluent community is via prior association with the glamour of Bollywood. The findings indicate that it much easier to become a wedding planner if one has worked in the Bollywood industry, since weddings and Bollywood/Hollywood share a

common platform of glamourisation. The clients outside that industry seem to feel thrilled with the possibility that anyone with strong celebrity connections would organise their lavish weddings. This finding is substantiated by the following interview excerpts:

I have been associated with the production of Bollywood movies for 30 years now. A decade back in 2009, I decided to take the plunge and enter the wedding planning industry. I knew that actors are difficult to manage, so if the wedding planner knows the actors on a personal level and how to manage these actors that would be a boon for them. I had the market and clients ready the minute I decided to become a wedding planner. (Elite Wedding Planner G based in India)

Coming from the world of Bollywood is a bonus, as you bring in the glam factor with you, and Indians are attracted to that. So if you previously organised parties in Bollywood, people like the idea of you organising their weddings as well. (Elite Wedding Planner T based in India)

I've always love parties and the glam. My parties would always be the best parties that anyone could organise. I would have them every month and organise themes. It wasn't in a professional way but just a gathering for friends. Down the line, I decided to become a wedding planner, I knew that my parties were always talked of and were famous. I wanted to create the party for weddings. My friends... suggested that I should take up wedding planning....I started off with planning weddings for my friends and their friends and children. And it has been amazing so far. (Elite Wedding Planner K based in the U.K.)

A lot of individuals who were socialites then started to opt for wedding planning. These individuals were famous in the society...and their sense of fashion and lifestyle was appreciated by many. This made people keener on having their weddings planned by these individuals. (Elite Wedding Planner C based in the U.K.)

These remarks highlight the different pathways of constructing oneself as part of the high-status occupational community of wedding planners. My findings reflects how some of the elite wedding planners use as a conduit either their connections with the HNIs of the society or the glamour world. Several other wedding planners reported similar experiences when

asked about how they entered this exclusive field. Their comments are consolidated in the table below (see table 4). Here we see that the elite wedding planners have come from diverse backgrounds ranging from caterers, florists to public relations, media, banking, Bollywood production, event organizing, fashion, hospitality, and so on. As there are no compulsory educational qualifications required, the journey into this high-status community is not routed through traditional ways. The common key is a close connection with high net worth individuals.

The following table illustrates the occupational background of elite wedding planners and the main factors contributing to their successful entry into the industry.

Table Key:

Wedding Planner: W.P

Establishment Year: EY

WP	Country	Background	Entry in the Industry	EY	Direct Quotes
W.P. 1	India	Bollywood Event Organiser	Contacts	2013	"Of course, being an event organiser for Bollywood awards and shows has helped. I already know the stars and it becomes much easier in planning their weddings."
W.P. 2	India	Former Miss India	Contacts	2009	"Most of the former Miss Indias or Miss Universes jump into the Bollywood industry and start acting. It is the obvious choice as they become famous and definitely make for a pretty face in the movies. But I decided to use the fame and connections received into becoming a wedding planner."
W.P. 3	India	Travel Tour Company	Contacts + Skills (focus on destination wedding)	2008	"I previously ran a travel tour company organising trips across the world especially Europe. At that time, destination weddings were a very new idea, as people in India would mostly carry out weddings here. It was then I realised that I have a good understanding about the countries in Europe and have some sort of market as I took people on travel tours to different places in Europe and they kept coming back to me for my trips and guidance. Most of my clients were very good financially. So I decided to tap this market of becoming a wedding planner focusing on organising destination weddings in Europe."
W.P. 4	India	Caterer	Contacts	2011	"Indian weddings are famous for the food and the music and the dancing. Food is very important for us. Working as a wedding caterer for 7 years, I decided to explore becoming a wedding planner. I told my clients about this and they told their friends which helped."
W.P. 5	India	Florist	Contacts	2007	"Originally, I entered the wedding industry as a florist. I spent 8 years as a florist bringing the best creation with flowers to the wedding venues. I became well known in the community and with the (wealthy) clients which was useful when I became a planner."
W.P. 6	India	Bollywood Movie Producer	Contacts	2010 - 2011	
W.P. 7	India	Interior Decorator	Skill + Contacts	2009	
W.P. 8	India	Event Organiser, Bollywood	Contacts + Skills	2013	"For everyone we represent the making of the glamorous Bollywood award shows, and this helps when you become a wedding planner. We know how to host big glamorous events and have a good client base already."

W.P. 9	India	Caterer	Contacts	2008	
W.P. 10	India	Bollywood Awards and Parties Organiser	Contacts	2009	“We are a familiar face in the showbiz world and so the people know us and trust us with making their wedding grand.”
W.P. 11	India	Daughter of Industrialist	Contacts	2007	
W.P. 12	India	Florists	Contacts	2006	
W.P. 13	India	Florist	Contacts	2007	“Choosing the flowers which suit the client and the arrangement of the flowers is a major portion in any wedding. Being a florist for 7 years before becoming a wedding planner has been a big advantage as you tend to know the key players in the market.”
W.P. 14	India	Event Planner for luxury brand launches	Contacts	2003	
W.P. 15	India	TV Producer	Contacts + Skills	2008	
W.P. 16	India	Hospitality Industry	Contacts + Skills	2008	“I was one of the banquet managers at a hotel in Jaipur, but I saw such a huge market of weddings being carried out here. I had made associations with people here. Some of them were high net worth clients which benefitted when I became a wedding planner.”
W.P. 17	India	Fashion Designer	Contacts	2007	“People knew me and when I became a wedding planner, they were all aware of my brilliant work as a fashion designer, and I’m sure they knew I would not let them down as a planner as well.”
W.P. 18	India	Movie Producer	Contacts	2009	
W.P. 19	U.K.	Confectionery	Contacts	2000	“My cakes were famous within the wedding circle and this served as a circle of contacts when I became a wedding planner.”
W.P. 20	U.K.	Public	Contacts +	2001	“I would take care of the press and would handle all those tricky questions posed by them as part of my

		Relations	Skills		job descriptions and that really helped when I became a wedding planner.”
W/P.2 1	U.K.	Confectionery	Contacts	2000	“Cake baking business has always been closely connected to the wedding industry. My clients were from the high society and as one of the key players in the wedding confectionery business, jumping into becoming a wedding planner was much easier as I knew everyone.”
W/P.2 2	U.K.	Caterer	Contacts	1999	“What is a wedding event without any food? Before becoming a wedding planner, I was working solely and had earned my name as one of the top caterers in the industry. During that era (90s), everyone wanted to hire a wedding planner to have their perfect wedding. That’s when I decided to become a wedding planner. I was already famous in the wedding industry and had clients. I spread the word through my clients that I have taken up wedding planning and the rest is history.”
W/P.2 3	U.K.	Media	Contacts + Skill	2010	“Before becoming a wedding planner, I was working in media, where you do manage different kinds of people. This has helped me in handling people as wedding planner.”
W/P.2 4	U.K.	Banker	Contacts	2013	“I was managing people’s money before becoming a wedding planner. People with real good money. I had a good relationship with my clients and one day decided to do something different and realised I can assist my rich clients in managing their weddings.”
W/P.2 6	U.K.	Public Relations	Contacts + Skills	2016	
W/P.2 7	U.K.	Public Relations	Contacts + Skills	2013	“My role in PR was organising and attending conferences, exhibitions, press meetings etc. This gave me the skill of managing diverse group of people.”
W/P.2 8	U.K.	Public Relations	Contacts + Skills	2010	“Maintaining a good image of my company was my main task while I worked in PR. The positive image had to be maintained at all times. This can be challenging, but this helped when I took up wedding planning as we often maintain a certain image as wedding planners in the industry and outside.”
W/P.2 9	U.K.	News journalist	Contacts + Skills	1999	
W/P.3 0	U.K.	Solicitor	Contacts	2016	“Being a solicitor for the high net individuals was certainly helpful as my initial wedding clients were some of them.”
W/P.3 1	U.K.	Confectionery	Contacts	2000	“When I started wedding planning in 2000, there were very few wedding planners. I was part of the confectionery unit for weddings and made up on mind to take up wedding planning as I saw more and more people were opting for wedding planners and there were not enough planners out there.”
W/P.3 2	U.K.	Socialite	Contacts	2004	“My parties have always been famous, and people have appreciated these parties. I decided to take my creative parties further and venture into planning weddings.”
W/P.3 3	U.K.	Public Relations	Contacts + Skills	2007	

W.P.3 4	U.K.	Florists	Contacts	2003	"My obsession with flowers turned me into a florist. I worked extensively as a wedding florist and everyone knew me."
W.P.3 5	U.K.	Event planner for Corporate Events	Contacts + Skills	2005	"Having organised corporate events, I realised the growth of the wedding planning industry. That's why in the year 2005 I became a wedding planner. I was into events so it was a known environment."
WP.36	U.K.	Socialite	Contacts	2002	"There was a time when most of my friends were talking about how they and their children wanted a beautiful and perfect wedding. People were crazy about having the best wedding. I decided then to become a planner."
W.P.3 7	U.K.	Hospitality Industry	Skills + Contacts	2003	"I was a manager at a hotel before I became a wedding planner. Being in the hotel industry organising events for clients gave me good exposure and some leads into being able to successfully handle organising weddings."
W.P.3 8	U.K.	Television Producer	Contacts	2004	
W.P.3 9	U.K.	Media	Skills + Contacts	2010	
W.P.4 0	U.S.A.	Florist	Skills + Contacts	1985	
W.P.4 1	U.S.A.	Fund-Raising Events Organiser	Contacts+ skills	1996	"Carrying out fundraising events has been so beneficial as you know how to organise events. I also interacted with people who have later turned out to be my clients."
W.P.4 2	U.S.A.	Caterer	Contacts + Skills	1992	
WP.43	U.S.A.	Invitation Card Business	Contacts	1992	"I would design and print invitation cards for weddings before deciding to become a wedding planner myself. I saw that there was a sudden demand for wedding planners during the 90s and decided to catch that opportunity as I was also involved in the wedding world."
W.P.4	U.S.A.	Event	Contacts +	1989	

4		Planner for Hollywood parties	Skills		
W.P.4 5	India	Interior Designer	Contacts	2009	"I would really transform people's homes with my interior decoration, and one day a client had this bizarre idea that I should decorate and design their son's wedding. It was then I decided to take up wedding planning, I initially started with this client, but then went on and got other clients through referral and here I am today."
W.P.4 6	Spain	Florist	Contacts + Skills	2008	
W.P.4 7	Italy	Travel and Tourism Industry	Skills		
W.P.4 8	Thailand	Hospitality Industry	Contacts + Skills	2008	"I used to work as a GNI (general manager) at a hotel in Thailand. I saw a lot of destination weddings especially from Asia...some at the hotel I worked in. I made some connections that were helpful when I started off as a wedding planner."
W.P.4 9	Nigeria	Hospitality Industry	Contacts + Skills	2007	"I was a hotel manager before I become a wedding planner. There were weddings being organised at the hotel I worked in and the other hotels my friends also worked in. I caught the growing scope of a wedding planner and opted to become one."
W.P.5 0	Australia	Invitation Card Business	Contacts	2009	
W.P.5 1	Mexico	Catering	Contacts	2008	"We love food at our weddings. I would cater to initially small parties and then wedding. I was already part of the wedding world before I became a wedding planner and that was useful."

Table 4: Previous Occupations of Elite Wedding Planners

The table above, presents the diverse backgrounds of the elite wedding planners before they entered the industry. As members of an emerging occupation, the wedding planners do not have any mandatory qualification requirement, nor do they have any stringent apprenticeships or training or any compulsory well-structured examinations to become a wedding planner. Here the entry into this occupation is unrestricted, open to all. However, in my fieldwork I have analysed these individuals who become wedding planners and specifically become elite wedding planners. Even though on the face value, these wedding planners come from diverse backgrounds, one can detect a pattern in the background of these individuals who make it to the top. Irrespective of the heterogenous background of these wedding planners, the critical common factor is the ability to connect with society's high net worth individuals coupled with the ability to create and perpetuate glamour.

5. Task Domains of the Elite Wedding Planners

This section delineates the specific task domains of the elite wedding planners. These task domains appear during the entire wedding planning process. The wedding planning process has been categorised into three stages: the pre-wedding, during wedding and post wedding. In the following section, the specific task domains in each of these stages are identified and explained.

5.1. Pre-wedding Planning: Between Project Management and Glamourisation

This section unfolds the various activities that are carried out prior to the wedding, namely the activities that occur during the stage of planning the wedding. After zooming in and zooming out on the data, the pre-wedding planning activities appear to be a merging of both project management and glamourisation, as highlighted below.

5.1.1. Glamour Creation for the First Client Call/Interaction

This section examines the first interaction that takes place between the client and wedding planner and her/his team which includes the secretary and other assistants. This initial interaction is generally scheduled through an inquiry made via telephone, email or the company website. Generally, the enquiry is answered by either the secretary or the other assistants of the wedding planner. In terms of an enquiry made by telephone, the wedding planner strictly instructs the staff that no initial calls should be directed to him or her. The prospective client does not interact with the wedding planner herself/himself until a later stage in the planning process. As one wedding planner put it, “We need to let the clients know they are trying to get in touch with the wedding planner who is a celebrity and is not always available for everyone.” In other words, the wedding planners aims at creating and perpetuating a certain image in the minds of the clients—that is, positioning themselves as elite by being difficult to get hold of. Other wedding planners have echoed this strategy:

I might even be free, sitting at the office when the first enquiry comes in, but I would still not attend the first enquiry calls because this helps in forming a hype for the clients as they are going to carry out their wedding with a star. You need to show them that you are not someone who is generally available, and their aim to carry out their wedding with us (planner) is a fortunate affair. You need to [communicate] this

status to the clients, which in turn attracts the clients more towards you. (Wedding Planner LM based in the U.K.)

You need to show to the clients that they are about to deal with someone and something very special and not everyone has access to it. That is why I try and maintain this distance to preserve the special element...It is all about creating that aspect which brings the clients towards us. (Wedding Planner BH based in India)

According to the remarks above, wedding planners work at creating a maintaining this aura of elusiveness. Here even if the wedding planner might be free to speak with a client, such a conversation would never happen. The wedding planner must keep the potential client at a distance until the right moment. In other words, the wedding planner cultivates the impression that he or she is a star that clients may or may not be able to reach. Hence, the wedding planners establish their exclusivity.

5.1.2. Selectivity in Client Base

Regarding the preliminary planner-client interaction, the secretary or anyone in the team other than the wedding planner responds to the first phone call or email. During the call, the following information is collected: the names of the bride and the bridegroom, the tentative dates of the wedding, the number of guests expected, the estimated budget, and finally, whether the prospective client has been referred by anyone. According to the wedding planner, in order to move onto the next stage of the pre-wedding, these details are essential. The wedding planner needs to understand the client as thoroughly as possible before the first face-to-face meeting. At the same time, elite wedding planners tend to cherry pick their clients. They must decide whether or not to proceed with a specific client. Maintaining their elite occupational status necessitates this degree of selectivity, as indicated in the following vignette of a first call that I observed during my fieldwork at Galaxy in the U.K:

It was around 12:30 in the afternoon when the office phone rang. The secretary answered this call. It was from someone interested in opting for Galaxy's services. I noticed that the secretary listened patiently to the client and followed up with a series of questions such as, "Ah that's wonderful that you are getting married. So, who is the fortunate bridegroom? Have you thought of a rough figure for this wedding? I'm

so glad you called in and are looking towards opting for our services, but I just wanted to know have you been referred by someone?" I glanced towards my watch and noted that the secretary and the client had been conversing for approximately 20 minutes. I was very curious to know how the secretary managed the conversation flow and how useful the collected details were. When the conversation ended, she looked towards the other employees and said, "This client was a waste of time. She doesn't have the budget required to take up our services. I had to politely tell her this. We cannot take wedding planning services for clients who do not meet the minimum budget requirement.

The next vignette from my fieldnotes offers further insights into this principle of client selectivity:

The next day, there was a meeting scheduled with the Galaxy wedding planner. The team discussed with the star wedding planner a new prospective for the continuity of their business. It was brought to her attention by some of the employees that due to low business in the last few months, the wedding planner should lower the bracket of her target clients and move to accept clients from the upper middle-class society. The wedding planner, after listening to the ideas and concerns, said, "As much as I would like to have more business and have continuous profit coming into the business by taking up upper middle-class clients, this is something which is impossible, if we want to maintain our target clients as the high net worth individuals of the society. If we...step [down] into the world of the upper middle-class clients, we will lose all our HNI clients forever, as they would not want to associate themselves with us."

The wedding planner's words speak volumes on how the occupational community of elite wedding planners is structured around maintaining their elite status for their continued existence. I have observed and listened to similar comments by other wedding planners. The above vignette also reaffirms how the elite wedding planners maintain this power dynamic by positioning themselves as almost unattainable. The Galaxy wedding planner says that the first enquiry made by the client brings forward the information needed, on the basis of which they decide whether they are interested in pursuing future business interactions with the client. She claims that holding the elite status restricts her to an extremely small clientele. Nonetheless, both the wedding planner and the clients aim at exclusivity.

Besides the notion of selectivity and exclusivity, the above vignette sheds light on other significant related points. This selectivity is based on the monetary requirements that the clients need to meet if they wish to be accepted by the elite wedding planner. It has been seen that the wedding planners are in the position to command such requirements from the clients, as they have formed a reputation as the 'elite wedding planners' of the industry. They are often referred to as the 'star personalities' of the industry, and just like film stars, they must keep their admirers at distance. Here the reputation of being a star wedding planner is firmly established when they plan celebrity weddings or weddings that are deemed extremely different and thus trend-setting. Such weddings are highly regarded in the industry. Nevertheless, as these 'star' wedding planners have constructed an image of being elite and exclusive, they now cannot step down and undertake weddings of mere upper middle-class clients. One elite wedding planner explains that their 'reputation as a star and exclusive' planner would be at stake, and they would permanently lose the majority of their clients who come to them precisely for this 'special exclusivity'. Both upholding this reputation and maintaining amicable, harmonious relationships with current and former clients are extremely important, as suggested in the following interview excerpts:

Last year, I had organised the wedding of our client Mr. X , a very important client with an enormous budget for the wedding as well. Just yesterday Mr. X called me personally expressing that his friend's son was getting married, and though it is a small-scale wedding, they would want to take my services for planning the wedding. In this case, I could not refuse. (Elite wedding planner B, based in the U.K.)

I received a call from the secretary of one of the powerful politicians regarding planning the wedding of one of their relatives. In this scenario, I could not decline. (Elite wedding planner M, based in India)

These comments reflect how the occupational community of elite wedding planners is structured around developing and sustaining networks between the elite wedding planners and their privileged clients. Individuals in this elite occupational community depend on their exclusive position within the network of planners and clients. Here much of the networking is through word-of-mouth referrals, exclusivity of contacts, and so on. The exclusivity acts as a

barometer for access regulation for the clients (third party). In addition, it maintains the ‘star’ identity of the elite wedding planners, which attracts new HNI clients.

5.1.3. Golden Rule of Wedding Planning: Know Thy Client

The next step is preparation for the first face-to-face meeting with the client. Usually, this meeting is guided by the information gleaned from the initial client telephone or email enquiry. As discussed earlier, the wedding planner and his/her assistants obtain information such as the name of the bride and the groom, the estimated budget for the wedding, and whether the clients have been referred by anyone. After gathering this information, the team uses it to conduct Internet research to prepare for the first client meeting. The wedding planner delegates the research task to his/her assistants, instructing them to scour both social media and print media to discover further details about the client. After the research has been consolidated, the assistants furnish the wedding planner with a full report. Here the main goal of the wedding planners is to know their clients as thoroughly as possible, as indicated in the following instructions from the Galaxy wedding planner to her team:

You have the names of the bride and the bridegroom, I want you to look into them and into their social media profiles, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Give me as much information as you can regarding their personal interests, preferences, likes, dislikes, habits, food preferences, clothing designers etc. (Mrs. Jessica, U.K.)

As an observer, I watched how two Galaxy team members immediately took out their laptops and started searching online. While one of them took up the job of researching the bride and her family, the other team member concentrated on finding information on the bride groom and his family. During their searches, they also shared with each what they had found in common and what was different. They later noted down everything and presented a comprehensive report to the wedding planner, Mrs. Jessica. She pulled out a flipchart and some pens and said, “Now we are going to start brainstorming these points given in your document, and on this basis, we shall make a tentative guideline regarding how we are going to approach the first client meeting” (Mrs. Jessica, U.K.).

I was eager to see how things would unfold. Mrs. Jessica then drew two columns, one with the heading ‘Bride’, and the other ‘Groom’. She proceeded to list a couple of points

concerning the couple's personal interests, hobbies, food preferences, holiday destinations, political views, styles, clothing preferences, and so on. Some of the compiled details included the bride's passion for Valentino shoes and Prada handbags; favourite travel destinations (gleaned from Instagram). The team also discovered from the bride's many social media posts that she loved Swarovski crystals, parties and generally being in the limelight. By contrast, the bridegroom's social media presence was rather limited. His Instagram contained only 10 posts.

My observations at Galaxy reveal the emergence of a division of labour in the elite wedding planning industry. Although the wedding planners are ultimately accountable for everything, they delegate to their staff the crucial and time-consuming task of finding key information about the bride, bridegroom and their families. Here the wedding planner does not spend any time researching the client but instead comes into the picture later after all the pertinent details have been compiled and consolidated in a document. The wedding planner's overriding objective is to amplify the image of glamour for the various clients. The following comments from the two main wedding planners in this study offer relevant insights:

You see here the aim is to do all the research about the clients, their likes and dislikes so that we...bring forward those ideas which would surely not disappoint them. This does not mean that we do not bring forward any innovative ideas, but it is helpful to know their interest and likes when you walk into the room to propose your wedding plan. (Mr. Amit, India)

From the bride's social posts, we knew that she loved Swarovski, so I decided to pitch the idea of using the Swarovski crystals for the decoration of her wedding. So, this little detail...actually helped me win over the client as she loved the idea, and we got the contract to plan her wedding. (Mrs. Jessica, U.K.)

One of my clients' favourite destinations was Venice, Italy, which we discovered by browsing through the bridegroom's and the bride's Instagram and Facebook profiles. So we used this information to promote a destination wedding in Venice. However, the client's family were not very keen to have a destination wedding and wanted a wedding in India. So, we worked out something that made them happy as well by recreating Venice in India and proposed this to them. (Elite Wedding Planner M, based in India)

Researching the clients has been very beneficial when we need to know whether the bride or the groom is either camera shy or happy to be heavily photographed. In my experience, some brides and bridegrooms...want the paparazzi effect, while others like to keep it low-key...Sometimes the bride and bridegroom do tell us in the beginning what they are looking for, so if we know these details beforehand and tell them, they seem to feel very comfortable, as they feel that we know them in and out...We should just make sure we don't give clients any unpleasant surprises...(Elite Wedding Planner C, based in the U.K.)

As wedding planners, we also have different tastes and preferences which may or may not match the clients. At the end of the day, you need to put words to the client's dreams. Researching them helps us to make ourselves more suitable for the clients. (Mr. Amit, India)

The words of these elite wedding planners reinforce how the wedding planners strive to understand the client to tailor each wedding. First, the wedding planner assigns to her/his coordinators and assistants the task of researching the clients so that during the first client meeting, she/he can project the dream wedding of that specific client. Since selling dream fulfillment is the goal, the wedding planner must ensure that the beautiful dream does not turn into a nightmare. However, the clients are usually unaware of the fact that such intensive research has been conducted. Therefore, when the wedding planner presents them a dream that coincidentally resonates with their interests, they are captivated by the proposal and feel that they have developed a genuine bond with the planner. Mrs. Jessica elaborates:

One of the most critical things we need to understand as wedding planners is whether the clients want to keep it glamorous or whether they prefer a low-key wedding. This varies in terms of the venue, the size of the wedding, decor and even the attire the bride prefers to wear at the wedding. That does not mean that it would be a low-budget wedding, as we would *never* take up low-budget weddings. But it means it is important for us to understand where exactly our potential clients are more likely to spend their money....At the end of the day, the trick is to make the client with the 20 million USD wedding be as satisfied with the 100 million USD wedding even after knowing and seeing both the weddings. The clients should not feel that because they

didn't have a 100 million USD wedding, they are missing something, nor make the 100 Million USD client feel that they could have had a great wedding by spending just 20 million USD.

Being present at the client meetings, I observed how the wedding planners use the financial information obtained from their research not only to estimate the budget for the wedding but also to ensure that they present the ideas to the clients in such a way so that the client feels that the amount they are spending is the best for them. The Ocean wedding planner elucidated this point as follows:

In the past, I have had two types of clients: one who is willing to import fresh flowers from the Netherlands at an additional cost, and the other client who does not want to use any exquisite, imported flowers. Here as I had the budget estimates coupled with the tastes and preferences of the client, it was easier for me to convince the client with a higher budget that the exquisite flowers would add a huge value to their wedding and they should not have a second thought about it. At the same time, for the other client, I did not emphasise that these flowers were necessary for the décor of the wedding. (Mr. Amit, India)

These comments further reinforce how the wedding planners aim to present the same magnitude of glamour that the clients have in their fantasies. The wedding planners use their estimated budget of the clients, coupled with the clients tastes and preferences, to propose the desired but achievable picture of glitz and glamour. The wedding planner offers the clients different levels of glamour depending on each client's budget and background. Mr. Amit and Mrs. Jessica were not the only wedding planners who underlined this point. I heard the same message from other elite wedding planners during informal interviews.

Additionally, as these clients are generally high-profile individuals, the wedding planners have fairly easy access to information about the incomes of the clients and the assets of their companies. The wedding planners then link this rough budget to the client's media presence. They try to make logical guesses about whether the client might prefer a small, low-key wedding or a full-blown one with glitz and glamour. The wedding planner proposes a wedding accordingly to ensure that the clients are satisfied and to give them the impression that they are still getting the best wedding possible no matter what their allotted wedding budget is.

5.1.4. First Client Meeting: When the Elite Meet the Elite

The following remarks from the two main wedding planners whom I shadowed during my fieldwork indicate the crucial emphasis that is placed on creating the right first impression through physical appearance:

The first impression is always the last impression. It is very important, as the first impression can be a deciding factor whether the client wants to take you further as their wedding planner or not. One of the ways to make a good first impression in this industry is to dress like one among them....You cannot expect to have a conversation with the client for a 10-million-dollar wedding, when your appearance doesn't show that you could even afford a 100-dollar wedding. When you dress with the best brands and walk into the room, they should be able to say that you can afford and can make their dreams come true. (Mr. Amit, India)

On the first client meeting, I am planning to take my new limited-edition Chanel bag. As we also saw that the bride is a big fan of Chanel, I guess this is going to be great and as it is a limited edition, it should make a good first impression to connect with her...Please wear formals tomorrow for the client meeting and be groomed well. We need to walk in smart, and the client should feel that we have what it takes to carry the luxury that we are planning to sell them...You cannot wear Primark clothes and promise to manufacture Burberry clothes.
(Mrs. Jessica, UK)

These interview extracts also underscore the need for the clients to feel a sense of connectedness and identification with the wedding planner. They want to believe that the person in charge of planning their wedding is someone who can understand their world. To cultivate this impression, the wedding planner must be seen wearing and carrying luxury brands matching the taste of the clients. Hence, the pre-meeting research is taken very seriously. The elite wedding planners use their own carefully calculated appearance as a tool to project glamour and elitism and thus connect with their elite clientele.

Furthermore, appearance aids in the identity building of the wedding planners as *elite* wedding planners. It distinguishes them from the other wedding planners in the occupational

community, making them part of a different social stratum. For instance, in keeping with this elite identity construction, the first client meeting between the wedding planner and the client often takes place at an extremely upscale restaurant or hotel. The wedding planners explained that this practice is consistent with a dazzling first impression. Mrs. Jessica reported that one mother of the bride once remarked to her, “Yes, meeting at the Ritz-Carlton sounds great to us. In fact, it has always been one of our favourite places. We would love to have the meeting there.”

It was also observed that Mrs. Jessica had office premises in London, England, that matched that same degree of extravagance that most of the clients expected for their weddings. As she revealed to me,

Investment in designing the office is not a dead investment as this reflects us. It is very important that our offices are not located in shady localities and are designed well. I hired an interior decorator to specifically design my office....[It] includes projectors and speakers which are helpful when we are giving the clients a demo of our wedding planning. The office has been tastefully decorated so that the clients are assured about what we can deliver. (Mrs. Jessica, U.K.)

According to Mrs. Jessica and other elite wedding planners in the U.K., the locations of most wedding planners' offices in London are in fairly exclusive neighbourhoods, such as Mayfair, Convent Garden, Westminster, Kensington, Finsbury, and so on. The elite wedding planners reveal that if the initial meeting occurs outside the office, it is at an expensive restaurant, and it is understood that the wedding planners will take care of the bill. As for the exact venue, a couple of options are given to the clients based on their geographical proximity and the wedding planners' prior knowledge of their favourite places. Regardless of where the meeting takes place, the location must be that 'physical space' in which the client feels comfortable and reassured that the wedding planners are familiar with the world of luxury, and by extension, capable of delivering a luxurious wedding.

In stark contrast, in the Indian context, the first client meetings usually take place at the client's home itself instead of at a restaurant or the wedding planner's office. In fact, clients almost never visit the wedding planner's office. Thus, it is not necessary to have a lavishly decorated office. The space consists of one cabin for the elite wedding planner and one open office space with tables and chairs for the assistants. Unlike the offices of the elite wedding planners in the U.K., the average Indian wedding planner's office space is usually not

decorated by any high-end interior designer. This lack of investment in the interior design of their offices can be attributed to the large number of individuals involved in the planning meetings for Indian weddings. In the U.K., it is generally only the engaged couple, sometimes accompanied by their parents, who attend the meetings. Conversely, in India, those meetings could include the extended family as well, bringing the number of participants to an average of 25 family members. In India, weddings are culturally embedded and considered as one of the most important events—not only in the life of the bride and groom, but also for their parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Since holding office meetings with such a large group would be challenging, wedding planners in India prefer to go to the client's home for the initial meeting and all subsequent client meetings. Elite wedding planner O, (based in India) elaborates on this point:

Here in India the client meetings are always at the client's place. This is due to a couple of reasons, one of which is that here weddings are considered as the most important event for the family and is a complete family affair where everyone in the family wants to be involved and have a say. In Indian families, the elderly have a big say at the weddings, and many times the elderly people might have mobility issues as well. So they find it more convenient that we come over to them and discuss things....When you have an entire family of 15 people who want to be part of the discussion, it is not practically possible for us to cater to 15 people at our office, so both we and the clients find it more convenient to have the discussion at the client's house.

In addition, Mr. Amit of Ocean points out that seeing the clients at their own homes offers another advantage. It gives the wedding planners an opportunity to observe the client's tastes and preferences, which is important knowledge to have when brainstorming ideas for the details of the wedding. The vignette below, taken from my daily fieldwork diary, describes one client meeting that I witnessed in India.

As soon as we reached the house, we informed the security guards about our arrival and our appointment scheduled for 3 p.m. The security guards made two calls, took our IDs, and let us in. We reached the entrance of the house and rang the doorbell. As we were entering, the wedding planner signalled to her two employees while looking back at the front door. I was initially confused about Mr. Amit's facial expression, but

later back at the office, I came to know that the wedding planner was signalling to the employees to take notice of the rustic door decoration. In a couple of minutes, the domestic help opened the door and guided us to the living room and told us to have a seat. The two employees and I made ourselves comfortable on the sofa, while the wedding planner walked around the room, looking at the paintings and other pieces of decoration. The wedding planner gave another indication with his eyes to Assistant Planner 2 to come over to him. At the same time, he discreetly pointed to the floor with a gentle wave, and then to Assistant Planner 1. I was quite naïve about all this non-verbal communication...

Later on, when the team met back at the office, Assistant Planner 2 explained: “[Mr. Amit] called me over as he wanted me to observe the paintings and other art objects. I quickly took some pictures of them... They were all antiques. It showed us that this family loves the antique look. If you see the entire décor of the house, it was all set like somewhere around the 50s-60s era. This gave us an idea about the style of the venue, the kind of decoration that the family might like.” Mr. Amit added that he had waved to Assistant Planner 1 to look at the floor to take note of the exotic wood flooring. As he stated, “This flooring is one of the most expensive floorings. The average cost of it is around 15-25 USD per square foot, without any installation cost. When you go to visit a client’s house, little things like this speak volumes about the client. As planners, we can’t neglect anything. Like a good director, we are looking at everything, and once we do our homework, then the film direction actually starts.”

The wedding planner and his team regard the visit to the client’s house as an integral part of their planning process. Mr. Amit’s statement that ‘*As planners we can’t neglect anything. Like a good director we are looking at everything and once we do our homework, then the film direction actually starts*’ shows how the wedding planners use seemingly trivial details about the family to produce a dream that would resonate with the clients. The wedding planners also attempt to judge the purchasing power and willingness of the client to spend freely. Glamour is the dominant feature of the dream-making process. To know well in advance the kind and extent of glitz and glamour preferred by the clients helps the wedding planner to create the perfect wedding for that particular client. He must then try to sell that dream. As Mr. Amit remarked,

At the end of the day it becomes challenging to listen to every family member, so it boils down to who is paying the bill and who are the most emotionally invested in the wedding and close to the bride and the bridegroom. This is tricky to find out, but as wedding planners, we need to pick up clues at our first client meeting and improvise things accordingly....It is all about understanding the hierarchy in the family for both money and emotions, and then we craft things accordingly.

In India, close observation during the client meetings is of vital. The assistants take down details concerning which family member is interacting the most, who speaks in a higher tone, whose word is considered the final word, whom the bride and groom interact with the most, both verbally and non-verbally. This information helps the wedding planner understand the hierarchy in the family. This nuanced knowledge and the minute attention to detail create the impression that the wedding planner is respectful of every family member's opinion. The wedding planners use this 'trust' to their advantage. With their awareness of the family dynamics, they act in favour of those family members who are highly invested either emotionally or financially towards the wedding. Highlighted here is the dream making process by the wedding planner and how the wedding planners and how the dream at any cost.

On the other hand, most wedding planners in the U.K, do not scan the family members in great detail or deeply study the hierarchy and power dynamics in the family, as most client are generally explicit about who is paying the bill. Moreover, the opinions of the bride and the groom are given greater weight than those of their elders. As the following interview excerpt indicates,

Most of the time, the bride walks in with her parents for the first client meeting or maybe the bride and the groom walk in with either one of the parents. So there aren't a lot of people greatly involved in the decision making and planning process of the wedding....I have had brides and grooms walking in with their mothers and/or a sister for the first client meeting, and sometimes the bride and groom with only one parent. They tend to tell you within one or two meetings who is going to pay for the wedding or if it is going to be split.(Elite Wedding Planner Mr. D (based in the U.K)

5.1.5 Subsequent Client Meetings

After the first client meeting, the wedding planner and the employees sit and brainstorm. On the basis of their research and their initial meeting with the client, a document is prepared to send over to the clients. It consists of a graphical presentation or a PowerPoint presentation of the concept of the wedding along with a Word document containing all the information regarding the estimated costs and the terms and conditions of the agreement. The client then goes through it. In case any further clarification is required, the wedding planner is happy to respond to calls or arrange for another meeting upon request. After this stage, the deal is signed and 70% of the payment is generally made up front.

Once the deal is sealed, the wedding planner is officially responsible for planning the entire wedding. This involves not just the design and décor but everything, ranging from the wedding attire, venue booking, invitations, food, beverages, and cake to the make-up, flowers, music, lighting, and so on. On many occasions, the clients need to be physically present to make the decisions. Subsequently, meetings are arranged with the client, vendors and the wedding planner. Here the wedding planner delegates the research regarding the other suppliers in terms of their availabilities and costs. It is after the research is completed by these wedding coordinators or wedding assistants that the wedding planner finalises the suppliers and organises meetings between the clients and the suppliers whenever necessary.

Next is a vignette from my fieldwork diary. It exemplifies the kinds of interactions that can

occur between clients and the wedding planner at meetings with dress designers in India.

The wedding planner had fixed an appointment with the designer to choose the bride's dress for the wedding. On the appointment day, the bride arrives with 10 of her family members. After they are seated, the designer displays his collection. As he is a famous designer, all the pieces were exclusively made, which implies that all of them are one-of-a-kind. I observed that some of the family members liked a particular design, while others rejected it: "No this red is too bright. We need two shades darker for the wedding," says the bride's aunt. Then the bride's grandmother remarks, "But this one has too little embroidery, and that wouldn't be enough for the wedding." I sat there watching as all the family members seemed to reject one dress or the other. Almost two hours had passed. I turned towards the wedding planner and asked how long this process would take as almost two hours had already passed. Mr.

Amit replied, “Ragini, wait for another 30 minutes and you will see that the designer will now take out his best four pieces, and one will be finalised. Noticing my confused look, he added, “Listen, the family will never be satisfied if you give them their dream dress first. Choosing the wedding attire is like a half-day sightseeing tour for the family. They need to spend half the day for the dress or else they will not be satisfied. Trust me. I have experienced this before. so even the designer knows when to play the cards.”

Once the designer took out his “four best pieces”, the bride tried on each of them and presented herself in front of her family. I observed that all the 10 family members had varied preferences. The bride seemed extremely confused, which is when she called in the wedding planner and asked for his opinion. Mr. Amit then said, “See, you look flawless in this attire, an absolute carbon copy of your mother. The red colour really suits you.” Both the grandmother and the father liked this choice as well. The designer then stepped in and said, “This ghaghra (gown) is a perfect blend of traditional and fashionable at the same time, which is rare. He added that a similar dress was worn by Sridevi (an Indian actress) in the old Bollywood movies and that he has reworked the designs in the borders of the ghaghra and the dupatta and added the extra touches to make it look exquisite. Upon hearing this, all the other family members nodded their approval. The wedding planner then remarked, “I am being very honest here. You look like an Indian princess, and nothing short of it, in this ghaghra. You look amazing in the others, but this one is out of the world.” The family members now seem to be more swayed towards the red ghaghra.

Finally, after an extra 20 minutes of discussion with all the family members, they choose the red one. I asked Mr. Amit if it wouldn't have been better to have entered the discussion earlier to voice his opinion. Maybe it would have given the family some clarity and made the entire process faster. To that, the wedding planner replied, “It is not just with the wedding attire, but with every element which requires the clients to make decisions. You can see that there are always so many people to give their opinions about everything. I just sit back and watch all of it happen before I come in. Here I chose the red ghaghra because I had studied the family. In the family, the father of the bride is making all the financial transactions. He has also been

moderating the conversations during our meetings. In some situations in our previous client meetings, he has had the final word.”

Mr. Amit continued: “So, while I observed the family, I had already gotten an indication that the father really liked the red ghaghra. Here the other most important member of the family was the grandmother as the bride seems to be close to the grandmother, I noticed that whenever the bride came out of the changing room, she always made eye contact with her grandmother, signifying that she...wanted her opinion. So I made sure that I chose the gown that both the grandmother and the father of the bride were inclined towards. The designer always backs me up so that this gains the confidence of the rest of the members who up until now....might be of two minds, but after learning that both the designer and I are putting forward the same preference, they would be more likely to be convinced. Yes, I am not denying that there are always some aunts and uncles who still might have an issue. In such cases, I give a non-verbal signal to the designer who then talks them into the choice. See we are just practical. If I start taking all the 10 family members preferences into account, I will fail at planning a wedding. You need to be smart here. This would be the secret formula for success. However, at the same time, I also keep in mind what is best for the bride and the bridegroom and what they would like.”

Mr. Amit’s reasoning in the vignette above was supported by my observations throughout my fieldwork. Clearly, the wedding planner has the role of a trusted advisor. While he may or may not accompany the client on visits to the dress designer, the family often insists on his presence. Obviously, his opinion counts a great deal. Mr. Amit’s understanding of the interrelationships and power dynamics in the family are among the many details that help him craft the plans in a certain direction. As he often reminded me, it is difficult to take into account the many opinions of 10 or more family members. In the case of choosing the ghaghra, for instance, before the family arrived, he had already spoken to the designer and reached an understanding as to how to communicate nonverbally during the selection process so that the designer and the wedding planner are in sync regarding the final selection. The client, of course, is unaware of this tactic, under the impression that the designer and wedding planner are offering separate, independent opinions. Thus, the wedding

planner orchestrates the impression of giving a decision free from any bias or premeditation.

Furthermore, in the vignette of the ghaghra selection, we can see how the designer perpetuates the notion of “glamour” as a sales strategy by mentioning that a similar ghaghra was worn by a Bollywood actress in a movie. It was clear in my observations that this information was instrumental in the family’s decision-making process. Through my close observations that day, I also realised how stressful the wedding planner’s job can be. The entire decision process took close to six hours. During this time, Mr. Amit had been checking his watch on and off when the clients were not looking, and he had taken eight cups of coffee in the process. The moment the ghaghra was finalised, he showed a sign of relief. When I went back to the office, he admitted to me how draining the entire process had been for him.

Mr. Amit’s reaction is not unusual. Other wedding planners whom I interviewed shared similar experiences. However, no matter how tired or frustrated they are, it is of utmost importance that they maintain their composure in front of their clients. Mrs. Jessica, the Galaxy wedding planner, for example, was feeling annoyed with one client’s mother, yet she did not release her emotions until we had left the designer’s venue: “Oh my god, did you see that! The mother of the bridegroom is so picky! She has a problem with everything we propose. It is not even constructive. It is like she keeps finding faults!” However, in front of the clients, she remained remarkably calm. As Mrs. Jessica pointed out to me,

Expressing my emotions or being annoyed or drained out does not help my clients and will do greater damage than good. These clients have opted for my services as they need my guidance and suggestions during this stressful journey, and I cannot show my stress and burden them with my emotions in this case. It is just like if I am counselling someone. I cannot start stressing my patients by telling them about my problems and counselling them at the same time. I need to keep a happy and cheerful face at all times.

The vignette and the interview extracts above demonstrate the flipside of the glamorous wedding industry. The elite wedding planners are under enormous pressure to maintain a polite and pleasant façade with the clients no matter how demanding, indecisive and annoying the clients or their families can be. However, when the wedding planners return to their offices, or when in the absence of the clients, they feel more free to voice their complaints. One of the wedding planners I interviewed described individuals in her profession as being “the Mickey Mouse of Disneyland” who need to smile and laugh with all

the visitors regardless of their actual feelings. In other words, the wedding planners are behaving artificially, carrying out ‘surface acting’. They must suppress their true emotions and fake unfelt emotions (Hochschild, 2012).

In addition, during the subsequent meetings with the client, the wedding planners constantly promote themselves as ‘dream makers’. Elite Wedding Planner S, based in India, notes that having a “grand wedding is a matter of pride”. It represents one’s social status, so it is up to the wedding planners to create the “magnificent wedding” of the client’s dreams. Both Mrs. Jessica and Mr. Amit see it as their mission to do so. They reiterate phrases such as “you owe it to yourself and you deserve it” to perpetuate the dream, creating a make-believe environment in which dreams can come true. Of course, the client is led to believe that the wedding planner is the only one who can ensure that the fantasy is realised. Mrs. Jessica told me that in today’s society, “everyone wants their wedding to be better than their friends’ weddings.” According to her, there is fierce competition in the HNI circle. She remarked, “it is something like ‘the best wedding of the year award’, so for people to execute the best wedding, they need us, because we can deliver the best of the best weddings.”

Thus, we can see how wedding planners manipulate the fantasy of having the most magnificent wedding. According to my data, 13 wedding planners in the U.K, 14 wedding planners in India and 2 wedding planners in the U.S underline this aspect of being an elite wedding planner—that is, the responsibility to make dreams come true. They repeatedly mention that they are like magicians who can make the magic happen in the weddings. The magician identity is one that they themselves construct and work at maintaining.

Delivering the ‘dream of a hassle-free, perfect wedding’ is what the wedding planner promises and what the clients and their families expect. These expectations are clear in the next group of interview extracts:

I’ve always wanted to show the world that my daughter is getting married in a way that nobody would have even thought of. And the wedding planners have helped me bring the glitz to the wedding.” (A mother of the bride in India)

Handling the wedding and the requirements of 500 other people is no joke, It gets extremely stressful, so it is amazing to have someone take this stress away so we can enjoy the wedding.” (A father of the bride in India)

Previously, the parents and family members who were organising the wedding would just be seen running around carrying out all the errands of the wedding. The wedding is a family function to be spent with the loved ones, so here in India the family members could hardly spend time on (organising) the wedding. (Wedding Planner N based in India)

The data in this study confirm that the elite wedding planners in India and the U.K highlight their ability to produce the dream, stress-free wedding that the clients yearn for. The wedding planners again engage in ‘dream making’ to bring their clients on board. While carrying out my fieldwork, I heard the same message repeatedly from clients and wedding planners.

5.2 During Wedding Activities: Wedding Planner in a Glamour War

Exploring the activities that occur on the day of the wedding, this section zooms in on the responsibilities of the wedding planner. It reveals how the wedding planner manages to create a sense of calmness and order amidst the chaos while also injecting the expected glitz and glamour. Additionally, this section provides a tiny glimpse of the emotional impact on wedding planners as they wage the final battle against unforeseen circumstances that may arise on the day of the wedding.

5.2.1. Wedding Planners: Bringing Glamour and Calm Amidst the Chaos

These following interview excerpts underline the fact that the mere presence of the wedding planner on the day of the wedding somehow calms the otherwise hectic atmosphere:

I am very scared of how things are going to unfold at my wedding if you are not going to be around. I know we have planned everything, and everything is prepared for, but I really want *you* to be there on the day of the event. (A client to Mr. Amit, India)

I really need you to be there on my wedding day. I can’t imagine what I’m going to do without you. (A client to Mrs. Jessica, U.K)

While I was looking at myself in the mirror, getting ready, I was very nervous and scared about the big day. I was even nervous to go out and walk down the aisle. Just

then Mr. Amit walked into my room. Seeing him enter immediately gave me a mental peace. Mr. A. had a chat with me. He told me I was looking absolutely beautiful and everything was going to be perfect that day. Speaking to him calmed me down and I felt at ease. (A client speaking about Mr. Amit, India)

The bride's words convey her reliance on Mr. Amit. As the wedding planner had been working previously with the client and the family, they had developed an emotional bond with him. Gradually, the bride and her family began to view him as a confidant. The wedding planner is now no longer the stranger who organises one's glamorous wedding. He or she is the client's most trusted advisor who cannot be substituted with any other member of the wedding planner's team. At the same time, wedding planners are viewed as status symbols that must be on display for the wedding guests. During my fieldwork, several wedding planners and clients told me how the elite wedding planners are considered as stars and their sheer presence at the wedding enhances the overall value of the wedding, as indicated in the following interview extracts:

I wanted Mr. B (wedding planner) present for my daughter's wedding as the guests should know that we have brought on board the best planner in the country for the wedding. It is a matter of pride and honour to have Mr. B (wedding planner) on board as my daughter's wedding planner. (A mother of the bride in India)

I was extremely thrilled to have Mr. X (star wedding planner) for planning my daughter's wedding and being present on the wedding day. Having him on board reassures me that the wedding will be more glamorous than ever before. (Client B in the U.K.)

We (elite wedding planners) are like an appreciating asset for the clients....By hiring us, we not only deliver the best wedding planning services but also raise our client's status, as they are hiring *us* (elite wedding planners) as their wedding planner. (Elite wedding planner P, based in India)

5.2.2. Wedding Planners as Fire Fighters on the Wedding Day

The vignette below from my fieldwork diary in the U.K. offers an example of how the glamour is preserved by the wedding planner at any cost.

The caterer was supposed to reach the venue by 6 p.m., as the food service was going to commence at 8 p.m. However, it was already 7 p.m., and there was no sign of a caterer. Mrs. Jessica learnt that the caterer's truck had broken down, so they couldn't reach the venue on time and were trying to find a way out. Hearing this, the wedding planner got very worried at first. Her face turned pale for five minutes. However, she took a deep breath, calmed down and called some transportation companies that she knew. She requested that they help the caterer deliver the food in their truck. The transportation company finally agreed, but that would delay the entire schedule by one hour and 15 minutes....This meant that the wedding planner needed to go and speak to the clients and make changes in the schedule to accommodate this delay. She seemed a little stressed and called for two glasses of water and wiped her forehead with a napkin. Then she went to the washroom to freshen up. When she came out, she looked more relaxed and composed. Mrs. Jessica then entered the banquet hall to speak to the father of the bride and said, "I was thinking if we could make a slight change in the schedule and have the dinner an hour later than scheduled. The guests had really enjoyed the dance performance by the dance group, so I spoke to the dancers and requested that they perform two more dances for all the guests, followed by a performance by the band. I feel this would be lovely to set the mood before the dinner. I personally think it would be amazing, and I have specially requested this for you and your beautiful daughter and son-in-law. Trust me and see how the guests will love it."

Here the wedding planner does not tell the client about the real catering crisis. She told me that this is the most important and emotional day for the clients, so they might not react well to any mishap. As long as she can handle this situation, there is no need to inform the clients and risk damaging her reputation in the market and the industry. Again, it can be seen that maintaining one's reputation and glamorous image is paramount in the occupational community of elite wedding planners.

Furthermore, this vignette points to the emotionally laborious strategy of surface acting that wedding planners use as a tool in crisis situations. It helps them fight the urge to panic. The wedding planner shows slight signs of being stressed when she hears about this caterer's crisis. She needs water and retreats to the washroom to take a few moments to gather her strength privately. When she emerges, she has a serenely happy expression with no

trace of nervousness. As Mrs. Jessica explains, even though every detail has been planned out, some unanticipated problem could always arise:

We as wedding planners need to be prepared for everything. We are like the firefighters who need to fight the fire, rescue the people, and of course, stay calm during the process, because if I start panicking while saving the people trapped in the fire, it would be complete chaos. Similarly, in crisis situations, deep down, I do get nervous and stressed, but I need to show my team, suppliers and the clients that there is nothing to panic about and things will be taken into control and it will all be fine.

I have observed how the people surrounding the wedding planner on the day of the wedding absorb his or her emotions. This finding gives credence to the phenomenon of *emotional contagion*: “an individual’s tendency to involuntarily imitate and synchronize the facial expressions, tone and movements with those of another individual, which leads to emotions converging between two people” (Barsade, 2002; Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1994, p. 5). Thereafter, the wedding planner’s emotions are absorbed by the surrounding clients, suppliers and the wedding coordinators. By remaining calm and collected, the wedding planner can control the crisis and mitigate any sense of panic.

5.3. Post Wedding: Sustaining Networks and Potential Growth

Hello Mr. Matthew, how have you been doing? I just wanted to wish you a Merry Christmas and a very happy new year. I have sent over some chocolates and greeting cards for you and your family. (Mrs. Jessica, U.K.)

Put it in our To-Do list to distribute Diwali sweets to all our previous clients. Do not forget. (Mr. Amit, India, to her assistants)

We get a lot of new clients, who would have known our previous clients, with who we would have worked with and they tend to enquire from our previous clients about are services. (Elite wedding planner E, based in the U.K.)

In terms of post-wedding communication, the wedding planner and her/his team send out greeting cards and sweets to their past clients to convey their warm wishes during the

Christmas season or Diwali (in India). The wedding planners whom I interviewed concurred that the clients, past and present, are a source of recommendations. It is imperative that they remain on good terms with all their clients. As these HNI clients have many friends, relatives and acquaintances in the same social circle, they are extremely valuable. Therefore, the wedding planners make efforts to sustain friendly relationships with their clients long after the wedding day as their reputation depends on the word of mouth of the clients which is vital for their existence and growth.

5.4. Emerging Division of Labour

The previous sections emphasise that the wedding planners are not only accountable for every detail of the wedding but are also expected to take on the highly significant roles of glamour maker, dream maker, trusted advisor, coach, confidant and guide. While the onus is ultimately on the wedding planner himself/herself to produce the wedding of the client's dreams, many of the more practical, logistical tasks are delegated to the company's wedding assistants or wedding coordinators. The following segment outlines the distinctions among the wedding planner, wedding designer and wedding coordinator. Each role comes with its own tasks. Hence, we can see how the nascent occupational community of wedding planners contains different roles or subspecialties such as wedding planners, wedding designers and wedding coordinators.

5.4.1. Differences Among Wedding Planner, Designer and Coordinator

Quite frequently, the terms wedding planner, wedding designer and wedding coordinator are confused with one another and are used interchangeably. This section is an attempt to clarify the ambiguity among the three terms and explain how they are interpreted in the practical world of wedding planning across the U.K., India and the U.S.A.

Wedding Planner. Basically, a wedding planner is the individual who is in charge of planning the logistics that brings to life the clients' envisaged wedding. This includes all the steps involved right from the very beginning of the planning process. The role of the wedding planner includes helping with budget creation and management, the selection of the venue(s), vendor referrals, making a timeline for the wedding day, the seating arrangements, and so on (Kennedy, 2019). The wedding planner also assumes the role of a trusted advisor on every

aspect of the wedding and oversees everything on the day(s) of the wedding. From deciding the theme and accompanying decorations to providing input on the bride's and groom's attire, to the hair, make-up, music and cuisine, the wedding planner is the one whose advice carries the most weight. In India, for instance, I heard a bride turn to the wedding planner to ask, "Look at this hairstyle in the pamphlet. Do you think this would suit me for my cocktail party?"

Similarly, in the U.K., I heard a bride ask the wedding planner for approval of the cake that the mother of the bride had suggested. My findings also indicate that even the parents of the engaged couple trust the wedding planner for the final word. For example, one father of the bride in India asked Mr. Amit, "So, how many centrepieces do you think we require at the main banquet hall on the day of the wedding?" Finally, in some of the interactions I observed, the clients relied on the wedding planners even for matters beyond the parameters of wedding planning, such as diet tips and spa recommendations.

Wedding Designer. A wedding designer is the person responsible for creating the entire visual aesthetics for the wedding (Kennedy, 2019). This role does not include activities such as contract preparation and price negotiations or accompanying the brides to various appointments. Wedding designers always keep in mind the big picture of the wedding. Consequently, they are like the art directors for movies. Their central responsibility is the overall concept of the wedding décor and other related design considerations. As designer Tracy Taylor Ward (Occasions, 2017) points out, "We specialise in design, consulting on everything from floor plans and lighting design to flowers, furniture, and attire. We help with the decisions that involve making the wedding stylish and grand." The wedding designers also look into how their entire concept is woven through each and every visual segment of the wedding. Wedding designers often work closely with florists, lighting technicians, photographers and videographers to produce the desired look and feel of the event.

Wedding Coordinator. A wedding coordinator is someone who is not intensely involved with the minute details of the wedding planning. Instead, the main duty of a wedding coordinator is to be present on the day/days of the wedding. (It is noted that some weddings, such as most Indian weddings, stretch across three or four days.) Generally, the wedding coordinator just needs to ensure that the events are running smoothly according to the schedule that would have been planned and drafted beforehand. Exact duties may vary, depending on what the client has agreed upon. In some cases, the wedding coordinator is

brought into the picture a month before the actual wedding takes place, while in other cases, they might be brought in only a week before (Brides, 2019). The time frame is contingent on the specific agreement made between the client and the wedding planner.

Summing Up the Differences. In some cases, the demarcations among wedding planners, wedding designers and wedding coordinators are blurred in terms of specific tasks. A wedding planner can also be a wedding coordinator, but a coordinator or designer is not a wedding planner. Similarly, the job of a wedding planner may include the job descriptions of a wedding designer. Conversely, however, a wedding designer does not assume the role of a wedding planner or a wedding coordinator. Thus, the parameters of the wedding planner's task domain can be more flexible than that of a wedding coordinator or wedding designer. The table below summarises the general distribution of tasks.

Division of Labour	Wedding Planner	Wedding Designer	Wedding Coordinator
Tasks of a Wedding Planner		Can accommodate tasks of Wedding Designer	Can accommodate tasks of Wedding Coordinator
Tasks of a Wedding Designer	Cannot accommodate tasks of a Wedding Planner		Cannot accommodate tasks of Wedding Coordinator
Tasks of a Wedding Coordinator	Cannot accommodate tasks of a Wedding Planner	Cannot accommodate tasks of a Wedding Designer	

Table 5: General Distribution of Tasks

5.4.2. The Variable Terminology of Roles in the Wedding Planning Industry

Although the terms ‘wedding planner’, ‘wedding designer’ and ‘wedding coordinator’ are used interchangeably by some people, they are categorically different from one another. However, awareness of these distinctions in terms of the distribution of tasks is not the same from country to country. The potential clientele and even other members of the wedding planning industry may not be familiar with all the different roles. In other words, in some countries, the term wedding planner suffices and includes all the tasks performed by the wedding designer as well as the wedding coordinator. As can be seen in the tables below, the differentiation is primarily present in the U.S., whereas in the U.K. and India, the distinctions are less clear. Also, clients may have a different understanding of the various terms than do industry insiders.

Wedding Planner Roles in the U.S.A.

Industry Perspective	Existence of Wedding Planners is known	Existence of Wedding Designers is known	Existence of Wedding Coordinators is known
Client Perspective	Existence of Wedding Planners is known	Existence of Wedding Designers is known	Existence of Wedding Coordinators is known

Table 6

In general, we can see that both the industry and the clients are cognizant of the differences. As one wedding planner based in the U.S. remarked, “While carrying out our planning, a lot of clients tell us their choice of wedding designer they’d like on board. So, yes! They are well aware of the difference between designer, planners and coordinators.”

Wedding Planner Roles in the U.K.

Industry Perspective	Existence of Wedding Planners is known.	Existence of Wedding Designers is known.	Existence of Wedding Coordinators is known.
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Client Perspective	Existence of Wedding Planners is known.	Existence of Wedding Designer is NOT known.	Existence of Wedding Coordinators is known.

Table 7

Compared to the situation in the United States, the task differentiation is not quite as clear in the U.K. Although both industry insiders and clients seemed to know the difference between wedding planners and wedding coordinators, the majority of the clients were not aware of wedding designers. As Wedding Planner JK of the U.K. stated, “No, the clients are not very aware of who exactly a wedding designer is and how the designers are different from planners. For them, there is only a wedding planner and coordinator.” And one client remarked, “No, I have no idea about a wedding designer. I just knew the wedding planner we wanted and contacted him.”

Wedding Planning Roles in India

Industry Perspective	Existence of Wedding Planners is known.	Existence of Wedding Designers is known.	Existence of Wedding Coordinators is known.
Client Perspective	Existence of Wedding Planners is known.	Existence of Wedding Designer is NOT known.	Existence of Wedding Coordinators is NOT known.

Table 8

According to the data, the existence of wedding designers in India is not prevalent in the industry as this role or subspecialty is fairly new from the client’s perspective. As one client in India put it, “A wedding designer? You mean a wedding *planner*? Yes, before my wedding, I knew exactly who I wanted as my wedding planner and went ahead with that wedding planner.” One wedding planner based in India explained, “Here, for the clients, the

wedding planner is everything. They know nothing about a wedding designer or coordinator.”

Summing up

In the section above (Section 5.4), we learn that there is some confusion among the task-based roles of the wedding planner, wedding designer and wedding coordinator. I have highlighted these differences to explain the task domain of the wedding planners. My findings also suggest that this task-based structuring differs from country to country. In order to understand the emerging occupational community of wedding planners, it is essential to understand this task-based structuring so that the real tasks of the wedding planners across various countries can be traced.

Conclusion

This chapter presents my findings of the tasks entailed in the planning a wedding right from the initial stage of attending the first client call until the day of the wedding. I have used vignettes and interview extracts to present my findings, and in the process the key tasks of the wedding planners are projected. These tasks involve the creation of dreams for the clients, assuring and reassuring them, creating a sense of exclusivity and glamourisation in addition to the meticulous planning of the wedding. The chapter concludes by revealing the division of labour existing in the wedding planning industry and the task-based segregation between them across the U.S.A., U.K. and India.

6. Wedding Planners Conferences

In the previous two Findings sections, we have seen the varied backgrounds of the wedding planners and their routes of entry into the occupational community of wedding planners. To understand this nascent community inside out, I next investigated whether and how wedding planners meet and interact with one another. This section traces the origin of conferences as a vehicle for community building. It not only discusses the reasons for the genesis of the wedding planners conferences, but simultaneously explains why the wedding planners conferences stand out as a platform for ancillary members of the industry. This section is also quite descriptive, zooming in on details of the various events that take place at wedding planners conferences, and then zooming out to focus on two sites of practice: Europe and India. Finally, this section features the events leading to the creation of the wedding planners conferences. Also highlighted are the events leading to the creation of wedding planners conferences and how wedding fairs, wedding galleries and wedding planners association paved the way for the formation of the wedding planning conferences as a community configuring event for the wedding planners' community.

6.1. Emergence of Wedding Planners Associations

Below is a discussion of the evolution of wedding planners associations around the globe, beginning with the first one in the United States, followed by various other wedding planners associations in the U.S. The section continues with a focus on the development of the wedding planners association in the U.K. This section also discusses the reasons leading to the emergence of these associations and their inadequacy of the associations in meeting the real needs of wedding planners. Of particular relevance is the fact that this gap led to the birth of a major community configuring event: the wedding planners conference.

6.1.1. Emergence of Wedding Planners Association in the U.S.A.

The wedding planning industry has been predominant in the United States (Blake, 2008). As noted in Section 4.3.1., the National Bridal Service was established in 1951 as an association for bridal consultants. Then in 1955, the Association of Bridal Consultants (ABC)

was founded by Gerard and Eileen Monaghan. It grew into the largest national American organisation in the industry with approximately 4000 members (Blakely, 2007). ABC is the largest credentialing body and the leading authority on wedding planning in the country. It offers its members three different levels of designation: professional, accredited and master bridal consultant (Blakely, 2007). These levels are standardised across the profession, and the certification process is similar across accrediting associations (Association of Bridal Consultants, 2019). In addition, ABC has a five-part online home study program for professional development. Upon completion of this program, ABC members are allowed to use the title of ‘professional wedding consultant’ (Association of Bridal Consultants, 2019). After three years of ABC membership with this designation, the members are allowed to proceed towards the higher title of ‘bridal consultant’, but not until they have passed a rigorous set of criteria: a proficiency exam which includes an essay question, participation in seminars, workshops and annual conferences as well as furnishing letters of recommendation from three peers and three clients (Association of Bridal Consultants, 2019). The final, most senior designation of ‘master bridal consultant’ requires a publication, television appearance or association service at the state level with more recommendations and a total of six years of membership, including three years at the accredited bridal consultant level (Association of Bridal Consultants, 2019).

Following the formation of ABC, other wedding planners associations were founded. These included the Association of Certified Professional Wedding Consultants established in 1993 (Acpwc.com, 2019), the Association for Wedding Professionals in 1994 (Awp-dc.com, 2019), and the Association of Wedding Consultancy in 2006 (Weddingconsulting.com, 2019). All these wedding planners associations sustain themselves by charging hefty annual membership fees. Nevertheless, all their primary aim to maintain a code of conduct for the members of the community of wedding planners to follow while carrying out their operations.

Additionally, these associations offer some kind of certification that wedding planners hope they can present to clients as proof of their legitimacy and reliability. However, my data suggest that any certification or title received from the various associations do not hold a great deal of significance in the eyes of potential clients. As one client stated, “There isn’t one separate recognised body to provide for any certification, so how do I know which certification is authentic?” (Client B). Another client said, “I didn’t know of any certification until you mentioned it now. I just visit the website and social media and ask around, and I choose the wedding planner I want for my wedding (Client D).

The opinions expressed in the above excerpts indicate that clients have little or no awareness of any certification that is provided to the wedding planners. Approximately 15 clients echoed this finding. According to these clients, there is no one authoritative regulating body that they know of which is recognised by the government. Hence, they are not particularly impressed by certifications. Even though the nascent occupation of wedding planners has attempted to set up some standards for their occupational community, certification is actually of little value. As one wedding planner put it, “This certification is good for knowing more about what the work of a wedding planner entails, but it is not a ticket of entry into the occupational community of wedding planners.”

Overall, in my informal interviews with 18 wedding planners at conferences, I learned that this certification acts more like an information desk, giving an overview of the basic tasks of the wedding planner, but it is not one that can guarantee entry into the community of wedding planners. It is interesting to note that even in this emerging occupational community, credentialing and certification carry little weight. Therefore, this study will now focus on the effective modes of entry.

6.1.2. The Prominent Wedding Planners Associations in the U.K.

This section discusses the wedding planners’ association in the U.K. While much of the data below was collected from secondary sources available online, it also includes primary data gleaned through interviews with the founders of wedding planners associations. In the U.K., the wedding planners associations were formed around the year 2004-2005. The first two were the UK Alliance of Wedding Planners (2004) and the National Association of Professional Wedding Services (2005). The UK Alliance of Wedding Planners (UKAWP) is largely promoted as an association providing advice and support to anyone seeking to enter or acquiring assistance from the wedding industry. It is beneficial to anyone simply looking to be associated with the industry. The UKAWP was launched by Bernadette Chapman, who started her wedding planning business in 2002 (UKAWP, 2019). She states that while running her own wedding planning business, she realised that aspiring and novice wedding planners might need some guidance along the way (UKAWP, 2019). Thus, she decided to start UKAWP to offer wedding industry coaching.

Like ABC in the U.S., UKAWP also provides training facilities for budding wedding planners. They carry out one-to-one training, workshops and webinars (UKAWP, 2019). UKAWP has trained 600 plus wedding planners on various topics ranging from financial

planning for your client, marriage laws, sourcing a dream wedding, duties of the wedding party, etc. (UKAWP, 2019). In addition to the above coaching, by joining the UKAWP membership, the wedding planners can enjoy various benefits such as access to the Facebook groups set up by UKAWP, discounted rates for training and coaching conducted by them, a chance to show their work through the social media of UKAWP, access to the suppliers list, referrals from fellow wedding planners, and a certificate of membership to prove their credibility to prospective clients and suppliers. Further advantages of membership include being listed in the membership directory and having access to the directory of wedding planning vendors, such as photographers, jewellers, entertainers, designers and, decorators, caterers, florists, and so on (UKAWP, 2019).

The UKAWP offers different tiers of membership. The first one is the Associate membership for companies with under two years of trading. To be accepted for this membership, individuals need to complete a UKAWP or a UKAWP-approved course in wedding planning, have insurance and a professional website (UKAWP, 2019). The next tier is the Professional membership, which requires a minimum of two years or more in the business, insurance and a professional website—along with four references verified by UKAWP. The next tier is the Elite Members category which is reserved for those who have been in business for five years or more and have produced more than 25 weddings (UKAWP, 2019). It is expected that all these members should have provided their excellent and exceptional services to the wedding industry (UKAWP, 2019). The next category is that of Destination members, that is, those who have planned weddings outside the United Kingdom. Here UKAWP requires three verified references, proof of public liability insurance and at least 12 months in operation (UKAWP, 2019). The next membership tier is that of the wedding supplier partners. Chosen mainly by the wedding planners members, these suppliers are required to provide three verified references and proof of public liability insurance, and they should have been trading for a minimum of 12 months (UKAWP, 2019).

The second wedding planners association to be established in the U.K. is the National Association of Professional Wedding Services (Theweddingassociation.co.uk, 2019). Founded in 2015, it was the first wedding planners association in England to be formed as a non-profit association with a mission to promote exceptional professional and ethical standards among its members. There is a strict code of practice that all the members are expected to follow. Examples of these codes of conduct are to be truthful in their advertisements, to be honest with their clients about their past work experience in the wedding industry, to respect other wedding planners in the industry, to honour agreements

with clients and suppliers, and to settle any disputes professionally (Theweddingassociation.co.uk, 2019). The National Association of Professional Wedding Planning Services offers three types of membership: Full, Associate and Provisional. The full membership requires that members provide three or more recent references by clients and proof of their business being in operation for more than three years. The associate membership is granted once the members furnish three references from clients or suppliers over the last 12 months as well as proof of their business being in operation for a period of at least 18 months. Last, the provisional membership requires three references from clients or suppliers as well as proof of business operation. The provisional membership exists chiefly to accommodate absolute novices in the business (Theweddingassociation.co.uk, 2019).

Another association that is predominant in the U.K. is the National Association of Wedding Professionals (NAWP), established in the year 2013. This association also aims to promote professionalism and integrity within the wedding planning industry. The NAWP strives to encourage fair practice between suppliers and the wedding planners. NAWP also offers wedding planners different membership levels: Professional, Associate Media, and Enterprise (Nawp-uk.com, 2019).

All the prestigious wedding planners associations in the U.K. were established for two main reasons. First, they aimed to impart wedding coaching and training to aspiring and existing wedding planners as well as to educate the brides and grooms about wedding planning services. The second reason was to promote an ethical code of conduct for their members to follow (UKAWP, 2019) (Theweddingassociations.co.uk, 2019). It is also worth noting that these associations earn revenue by charging membership fees from all their members. Furthermore, the members are charged for attending the training programmes or the coaching offered by the wedding planners associations.

Ultimately, the wedding planners associations in the U.K. exist to legitimise the occupational community of wedding planners. The National Association of Professional Wedding Services states that they want to set ethical standards to elevate the reputation of the wedding planners, the association and its members (Theweddingassociations.co.uk, 2019). These standards are aimed at helping to eliminate unethical practices, such as making false claims, defrauding clients and making disparaging remarks to them about rival wedding planners. The following comments by two wedding planners in the U.K. point to the importance of this need for legitimacy.

It is good to establish some kind of ethical standard for carrying out the wedding planning as some people do not understand ethics. It is good to have an association to educate the wedding planners about this. (Wedding Planner P based in the U.K.)

I completely support the wedding planning associations in the UK and appreciate that they strive to establish a code of conduct for the industry as it can get really tricky to draw a line in the ethics department while carrying out our business. (Wedding Planner K based in the U.K.)

The importance of a code of ethics was also underscored by 15 other wedding planners interviewed for this study. In addition, they mentioned the need for basic training and coaching for aspiring and existing wedding planners, along with the need to educate prospective clients about the available wedding planning services. However, at the same time, I have been told by these wedding planners that the associations still lack a platform for all the members of the wedding industry to meet and interact with one another. The next section discusses how the limitations of the wedding planners associations served as an impetus for the birth of the wedding planners conference.

6.1.3. Limitations of Wedding Planners Associations: Paving the Way for Wedding Planners Conferences

As discussed in the previous section, the eminent wedding planners associations in the U.K. are focused on delivering wedding coaching to the planners, providing information to the brides and grooms as well as promoting and encouraging ethical practices. However, these objectives do not provide an adequate platform for the interaction of all members of the occupational community of wedding planners. This limitation led inevitably to the emergence of wedding planners conferences. As the following interview extracts indicate, there was a widespread desire to meet with various industry colleagues in one place.

Becoming a member of the wedding planner's associations does not necessarily mean that you meet your other colleagues in the industry. Yes, you have access to a database of wedding planners and vendors, but that does not mean that you meet them. It (an association) is not a setting for that. (Wedding Planner L based in the U.K.)

Yes, the association did offer members the chance to connect with all the planners in the country and it provided a database of vendors, but this was not exhaustive. The number of vendors signing up to be a part of the association was limited. And moreover, you could not physically meet the people, which is what we all wanted. (Wedding Planner M based in the U.K.)

The wedding planners interviewed for this research concede that the associations have been useful for setting standards of ethical practice and offering training. In fact, some of the elite wedding planners mentioned that the associations had become like a ‘channel’ allowing them to ‘give back’ to the industry by delivering webinars and workshops for novices in the industry—and for prospective clients. Nevertheless, they also believe that these associations have been inadequate as a medium for networking with the other members of the community. According to the data, the associations in the U.K. have not provided a meaningful platform to develop face-to-face community building, as most of the webinars were delivered by the association, while the occasional training sessions at the association involved only one or two wedding planners in the specific time frame. As a result, there is interaction with only a small fraction of fellow wedding planners. Additionally, in terms of networking with the vendors of the wedding planning industry, the wedding planners state that the list is not exhaustive, and there is no physical space conducive to meeting diverse individuals and conversing freely in any depth.

6.2. Places of Interaction

This section offers insights into other physical spaces of interaction for the wedding planners—i.e., the wedding fairs, wedding shows and the wedding gallery. The section explains how they, too, have not sufficed as a common platform for all members of the wedding planning community.

6.2.1. Wedding Fairs and Wedding Shows: B to C Model of Interaction

While the occupation of wedding planners emerged around the late 1970s and early 1980s (Otnes & Pleck, 2003), my data indicate that the wedding fairs and wedding shows started around the early 1990s. Wedding fairs are a platform for the clients/customers to meet the various vendors of the wedding industry. Wedding fairs provide a setting where the

suppliers can set up their stalls and advertise their services or products. For instance, when attending a wedding fair, visitors have the option to look at a variety of services and products, such as those offered by florists, accessory designers, entertainers, musicians, caterers, jewellery designers, cake designers, hair stylists and so on. The difference between wedding fairs and wedding shows is that the wedding show includes a showcase of wedding fashion as well. At the wedding show, models on the runway wear the latest bridal gowns and other wedding attire to provide a live alternative to merely looking at the same items in glossy catalogues. The individuals attending both the wedding fairs and wedding shows are generally brides, bridegrooms, and their families. All are keen to meet individual vendors so that they can begin putting together their wedding plans. Some of these wedding fairs are located at either wedding venues, such as banquet halls, or at expansive conference centres, such as London's Olympia.

The findings suggest that these wedding fairs cater essentially to those individuals who do not have the budget to hire a wedding planner to organise their weddings. Some of the visitors I met at the wedding fairs disclosed that even though they can afford a wedding planner and have actually decided to opt for the services of a wedding planner, they still enjoy browsing at the wedding fairs to get some idea about this industry. It is clear that the wedding fairs and wedding shows are not designed for the high-net-worth clientele. Neither the elite clients nor the elite wedding planners are seen at these wedding fairs and shows.

In addition, these events cater to a 'B-C' (Business to Client) model of interaction and lack a platform that could facilitate communication among individual wedding planners. In this sense, the wedding fairs and shows have their obvious limitations. As Wedding Planner J, based in India, remarked, "In the wedding fairs and shows, there is so much going on with the clients that you can't talk to the other planners. We wanted an event where we can meet and talk to other planners in the industry." According to this wedding planner, wedding fairs and shows are insufficient as a setting for community building. I have been told the same by various other wedding planners both at the wedding fairs and during my formal interviews. Here we see that this limitation refers back to the central reason behind the emergence of the wedding planners conference: i.e., the need for a community configuring event for the nascent occupation of wedding planners.

Furthermore, my data confirm that wedding fairs and wedding shows fail to attract the 'elite' wedding planners and the elite clients. In fact, when asked about these commercial events, the elite wedding planners use blatantly disparaging and condescending phrases, including *'a fish market'*, *'too many people all over'*, *'not the way I would present myself'*.

Such comments reinforce the fact that the elite stratum of the wedding planning community prefer not to be identified with those wedding planners who would consider setting up stalls at wedding fairs and shows.

Sneak Peek at a Wedding Fair



Figure 7: Cake designers with their stalls at the wedding fair in London



Figure 8: Wedding dress retailers at their stalls at the wedding fair



Figure 9: Wedding stationery suppliers at their stands at wedding fair



Figure 10: Retailers dealing with petal confetti for decorating their stalls

6.2.2. Wedding Gallery: *B to C Setting for Interaction*

Today wedding fairs and wedding shows are not the only place for clients to meet the various suppliers. There are now luxury wedding stores, the first of which opened in London in October 2017. Located in the heart of the city at No.1 Marylebone, this building has dedicated 1860 square metres (approximately 20,000 square feet) to the Wedding Gallery. This is a luxury retail store which brings together aspects of both bridal boutiques store and wedding fairs. A wedding gallery is known as a hybrid retail store as it consolidates both the aspects of purchasing and planning for the wedding. It boasts over 200 brands from the wedding world.

Here the bride and bridegroom can drop into the store for everything from receiving a dress or suit consultation to browsing venues in the library of the gallery, or enjoying a food tasting with wine pairing. They also have the opportunity to listen to recordings of some possible bands that could be hired for their wedding. In addition, a screening room is provided to sample the work of available disc jockeys, photographers and videographers. Finally, the bride-to-be can examine an array of hair accessories, make-up options, wedding rings, necklaces and even honeymoon packages. It was observed that clients/customers looking for a small, less tailored wedding but with luxurious brands could walk into the wedding gallery to find appropriate items.

Although the wedding gallery facilitates one-stop shopping for weddings, it is geared to the practical needs of the couples preparing for their weddings, not the needs of the wedding planners. Consequently, it does not suffice as a platform for communication among the members of the wedding planners community. Also, the wedding gallery cannot be categorised as a community configuring event as it does not necessarily involve the participation of the occupational community of wedding planners. The images below provide a glimpse of the wedding gallery in London.



Figure 11: Consultation room at the wedding gallery where brides and bridegrooms and their families can browse through venues and suppliers in catalogues, books and online.

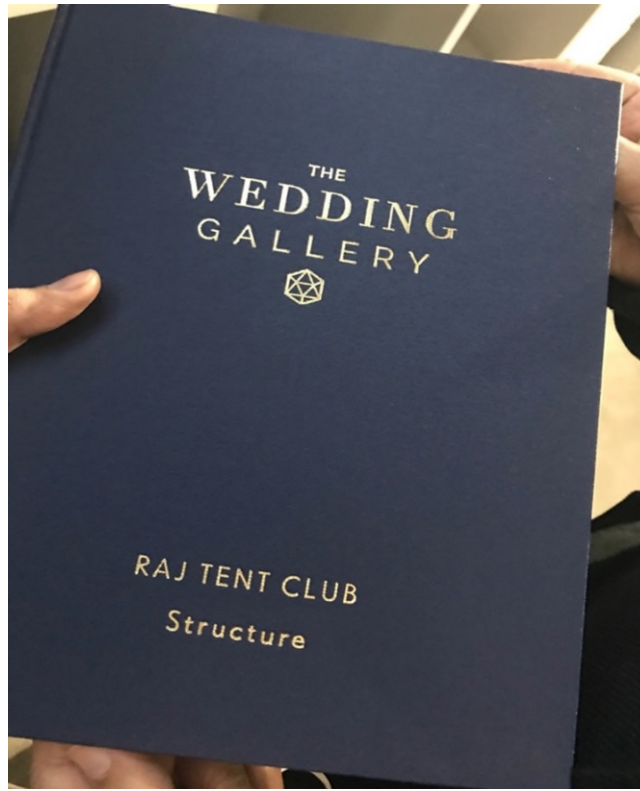


Figure 12: Book from the wedding gallery of one of the vendors available for hire

6.3. Reasons for the Emergence of the Wedding Planners Conferences in the U.K.

6.3.1. Creation of a New Occupation

The emergence of wedding planners conferences in various corners of the world can be attributed to several reasons. As previously acknowledged, the emergence of the conferences has spawned another new occupation in itself: organisers of wedding planners conferences. The organisers of all the wedding planners conferences charge a fee from the participants, However, it has been known that the organisers often waive the participation fee for certain 'star' wedding planners, as their presence at the conferences seems to act as a magnet, which in turn, attracts the other members of the wedding industry. This is an implicit privilege of being a star.

6.3.2. Creation of a Setting for Interaction with All the Members of the Wedding Planning Industry

In addition to the creation of a new occupation, my data suggest that the emergence of wedding planners conferences was a response to the need to provide a setting for all members

of the luxury wedding planning industry to meet each other, share experiences and facilitate business interactions. As the founders of the Engage and DWPC Conferences explain:

We welcome vendors involved in the wedding planning industry to our conference as we realised that it is very difficult to meet the right vendors, and in addition, it is strenuous to find a reliable vendor. So we decided to incorporate this at the conferences. Now the wedding planners have a platform to physically meet the vendors and make a judgement. (Founder of Engage Conference)

We saw that when wedding planners organise weddings, it is so difficult to get all the vendors, and that only if everyone knew the right people to get on board, it would be all sorted. So, here at the conference, we have opened the doors to all the suppliers/departments dealing with the wedding planning industry. (Founder of DWPC Conference)

In these interview extracts, the founders of wedding planners conferences explain that one of the reasons for creating a conference was to provide a platform for all those related to the wedding industry to become acquainted and interact with one another. According to the data, this opinion is shared by all the other conference organisers, namely those of DWPC, EWPC, Engage, Bridelux Symposium. Additionally, 16 other wedding planners reported that they have always wanted a setting where they could engage in conversations and conduct business with others in the wedding planning in the industry. For example, Wedding Planner L from the U.K. stated, “This conference is something I’ve always wanted. It’s the best place for us to meet all the members of the industry hassle-free”. Another participant commented, “Brilliant concept. This is the place to be if you want to excel in this community...and meet and create with fellow members of the wedding industry related to all departments” (Wedding Planner T based in Italy).

According to the founders of the wedding planners conferences, the key rationale was to construct a setting where the community members could feel connected and identify with each other. The wedding planners in my study also substantiate this finding and suggest that the wedding planners conferences have ‘filled the gap’, making them feel like part of a community.

When you have such a busy life of a wedding planner, you hardly get time to catch up with your other colleagues. I remember when I was organising weddings back then. I did not have time to catch up with anyone. There were times when we would miss out on meeting our colleagues over three or four Christmases, and that is quite a while. (Wedding Planner P based in the U.S.A)

Wedding Planners Conferences have provided a platform for us to not only do business but go beyond that and develop personal relationships with the other members of our community. (Wedding Planner S based in the U.K.)

Fifteen other wedding planners interviewed for this thesis echoed the sentiments expressed above. As the wedding planning community is an emerging occupational community, we see that there was no previous platform to bring members of the community together. This finding reflects how members of a nascent occupational community, with limited interaction due to their respective task descriptions, use conferences as community configuring events. They do so to develop business contacts, personal bonds, and a sense of camaraderie. For instance, Wedding Planner Q, based in the U.K., stated, “These conferences bring us all together as one unity, and that’s the best part. I feel I am part of such an amazing community of wedding planners who have the ability to bring joy into people’s lives.” Another conference participant remarked, “These conferences do the impossible. They bring us together in one place. There is so much creativity and enthusiasm thriving at these events, which is what we stand for” (Wedding Planner P based in the U.S.A.). Many other wedding planners whom I met at the conferences used similar phrases, all suggesting a feeling of a shared journey. Their words reinforce how community configuring events such as the conferences help satisfy the need to feel a sense of identity as an occupational community.

6.4. Reasons for Emergence of Wedding Planners Conferences in India

6.4.1. Need for Recognition and Respect

In India, the reasons behind the establishment of wedding planners conferences are the same as in the U.K. and the U.S. However, an added motivation is particularly underscored in the context of India: the need for recognition and respect from other occupational communities and society as a whole. I have been told by several wedding planners based in India that they find it both disappointing and frustrating that the wedding planning industry

has not been acknowledged at the same level as other professions. They state that this reflects an attitude common in Indian culture. From my own experience growing up in India, I can say that people in India, in general, do not accord much value to the arts compared to science and technology. Even children are discouraged from taking a keen interest in the creative arts industries. Perhaps this attitude can be attributed to the nature of jobs which are often categorised under the category of ‘make or break’. The implication is that there is a high degree of risk.

Additionally, we see how the nature of the task and the industry—i.e., in this case, high risk and uncertainty in a non-regulated industry—leads to the need and desire of the members to form a community event. Here the wedding planners use the platform of conferences to try to obtain the same respect and recognition that other communities receive. This motivation is suggested in the following comments:

We live in a society where our industry’s work hasn’t really been looked up to, so we needed a platform to show the society and the world, the magic we can create. So the conferences have been a great way to put that across. (Wedding Planner T based in India)

Though some people have started opting for the ‘road not taken’ most people in India i.e. primarily the low middle-class individuals, prefer more stability over risk. Here you can see how our world is risky. Well, I don’t mean risky in terms of physical harm, but we can be destroyed easily if even one event fails. So people don’t opt for this profession, and we generally don’t get the same respect and recognition like say doctors, lawyers, engineers or even cricketers in India. Forming these wedding planners conferences, I hope people have got the message about our work and how we should be treated on the same par as the others. (Wedding Planner U based in India)

In India the creative industry has never been appreciated and given the same respect as other professions like engineers, lawyers, doctors etc. It has been this way in our society always. It is really sad. We, as wedding planners, want to be appreciated for our work and be given that recognition. (Wedding Planner V based in India)

The opinions expressed in these interview excerpts underline how members of this nascent occupational community feel the lack of official legitimacy and recognition in their society.

Thus, they use events such as these wedding planners conferences to compensate and elevate their status. The wedding planners conference is used as a mechanism to enlighten the outside world about their work and the ‘magic’ they can create. The Indian wedding planners explain that before the advent of the wedding planners conference, unlike the situation in the U.K. and Europe, there were no associations nor organisations in India that acknowledged the value of their work. However, the wedding planners conferences have helped them feel validated.

6.4.2. *Creating a Sense of Belonging*

Conferences made me feel that we planners have a place in the community and the society. It was also nice to talk to other wedding planners and realise that most of us face similar challenges while carrying out our businesses. It just feels good to know that we are together in this. (Wedding Planner J based in India)

Only an artist can truly understand and value the work of another artist. The conferences are something that we enjoy because we can meet our colleagues and share our creative work [with]... an audience who exactly understands it. (Wedding Planner C based in India)

The remarks above illustrate how community configuring events such as wedding planning conferences can provide a setting for the wedding planners to express themselves to a known audience who would understand their experiences and with whom they can communicate freely. To quote Wedding Planner C, ‘only an artist can truly understand and value the work of another artist.’ In addition, I was told by several wedding planners how meeting and interacting with fellow wedding planners at a common forum like the wedding planners conference developed a sense of belonging amongst them. It helped them construct a collective identity and validate themselves to each other and the outside society as well.

6.5. Prestigious Wedding Planners Conferences Around the Globe

In the United States, the first wedding planners conference was organised by ABC in 1981, whereas in the United Kingdom, the first wedding planners conference, known as ‘Engage’, was not organised until the year 2008. Engage was followed by a couple of other wedding planners conferences by independent enterprises such as DWPC, EWPC, Bridelux

Symposium. In addition, NAWP established a conference in the U.K. In India, wedding planners conferences, such as EWPC and DWPC, are prominent and have sizeable participation. While carrying out my ethnography, I attended four different wedding planners conferences in the U.K., Europe and India. While there are a few other conferences in existence, the aforementioned ones boast the highest attendance of elite wedding planners.

6.5.1. Categorisation of Different Wedding Planners Conferences

In the course of my fieldwork, of all the conferences that I attended, the Engage conference mirrors most closely the grandeur of the elite wedding industry, particularly in terms of its social structure and aesthetic design. The ABC (U.S.A.) and EWPC (India) are not quite as glamorous. While the DWPC does offer the glamour element, it is not as grand as the Engage conference. Another wedding planners conference is the Bridelux symposium which was founded in 2018 by James Lord, who has previously been a main organiser of the famous Engage conference. While similar to Engage in terms of glamour and grandeur, the Bridelux symposium has only organised two conferences to date (i.e. October 2018 and October 2019). Consequently, it has not yet been sought out by all the star wedding planners. Established in the U.K. in 2008, Engage continues to be viewed as the conference that replicates the magnificence of the elite wedding planners' world. It is also the U.K.'s first wedding planners conference. It was established by two women named Rebecca and Kathryn who first met while they were working on the launch of the Disney Fairy Tale weddings at the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. Both of them saw the need in the market to connect industry leaders and innovators in a meaningful and productive way. This was when the Engage conference was spawned.

Engage holds two/three-day conferences three times a year: one in Europe, one in the U.S., and the third could be in Dubai, the Bahamas, or anywhere else in the world that the founders deem appropriate. Having a variety of locations attracts a diverse spectrum of participants. Engage has also proven to be the most sought-after conference, boasting the largest number of 'star' wedding planners. In fact, the Engage website refers to the conferences as 'summits'. Additionally, the conference has the largest turnout. Being promoted by the founders as a luxury wedding planners conference, the star wedding planners note that they make every effort to attend the conference every year. Given its association with glamour, Engage is the most highly respected conference in the luxury wedding business. I have been told by 24 other wedding planners that the presence of a high

number of ‘star’ wedding planners at the conferences makes Engage instinctively attractive to them and the other members of the wedding community.

Oh yes, I know about the Engage conferences and have been looking forward to being a part of that luxury wedding planners conference. Being part of the Engage conference is an experience in itself. (Wedding Planner R based in the U.K.)

The first thing that comes in my mind when someone says ‘Engage Conference’ is us. It defines us, and our community. Engage is the epitome of luxury and shows the world and us what we stand for and what we are here to achieve. (Wedding Planner N based in the U.S.A.)

I haven’t got the opportunity to attend any of the Engage conferences, but yes, I have heard a lot about these conferences, and I am waiting eagerly to attend one. (Wedding Planner G based in Europe)

Out of the five wedding planners conferences, only the EWPC conference is hosted in India every year. This conference was founded by a company called Exito, which is owned by Rishikesh Shetty. The EWPC founder and managing director aims to attract elite wedding planners, especially those based in India. He established Exito in 2010 (Exito, 2019) with the main objective of providing a platform for conferences, exhibitions, forums and networking events for various businesses and corporations (Exito, 2019). As part of this mandate, he launched the Exotic Wedding Planning Conference (EWPC) four years later in 2014. Today EWPC hosts three wedding planners conferences every year. One is always hosted in India, the second in UAE, and the third one is in Europe (EWPC – Exotic Wedding Planning Conference, 2019).

Conference Name	Year the conference is founded	Category of Conference	Frequency of Conference	Venue of the Conference	Year of Attendance by the researcher	Number of Attendees

Engage	2008	Social and Aesthetic Design	3 times per year	Each year, one destination is always Europe, the second one the U.S.A, and the third any other destination decided by the organisers.	October 2016 (in Italy)	Approx. 250 attendees Representation from over 50 different countries.
DWPC	2014	Mix of Traditional + Social and Aesthetic Design	Annually	Annually in different countries every year	April 2016 (in Italy)	Approximately 250 attendees Representation from over 70 different countries
EWPC	2014	Mix of Traditional + Social and Aesthetic Design	3 times per year	Each year, one destination is always India, The second one is always Europe, and the third is	July 2016 (India) + August 2017 (India)	Approximately 200 attendees

				the UAE.		
Bridelux Symposium	2018	Social and Aesthetic Design	Annually	Takes place annually in the UK	October 2018 (London)	Approximately 150 attendees
ABC	1981	Traditional Design	Annually	Generally, in the USA or neighbouring countries.	N/A	Representation from attendees largely based in the USA

Table 9



Figure 13: Fine Dining Setting of the Engage Conference held in 2016



Figure 14: Entrance to the Dining Hall in Bridelux Symposium

6.6 Keeping the Occupational Community Inclusive and Exclusive Simultaneously

We have previously understood in the literature that nascent occupations have little or no restrictions for entrance into the community. Interestingly, however, the wedding planners community is ambiguous, as it is both inclusive and exclusive. The coveted invitation to attend certain conferences constitutes one example of this ambiguity.

To understand this inclusive and exclusive mechanism, it is useful to explore the two routes by which ‘elite’ wedding planners earn their ‘elite’ designation. One pathway is by creating a stunningly innovative wedding, one that is bound to gain wide recognition and admiration from fellow wedding planners. A prime example that I learned of from various wedding planners is the dazzling wedding created by Mr. K. The entire wedding pavilion was covered with genuine Swarovski crystals. This one ground-breaking, original concept garnered Mr. K. immediate respect and ‘elite’ status. The second method of earning entry into this exclusive echelon of wedding planners is by having among your clientele the richest of the rich: society’s HNIs and the most popular celebrities.

6.6.1. Invitation to the Conference

During my observations at four wedding planners conferences in the U.K. Europe and India, I gathered robust data on the industry, including valuable information about the invitation process. Ostensibly, these conferences are inclusive, as they are open to all

wedding planners as well as vendors connected to the wedding planning industry. Nevertheless, all the conferences—specifically, Engage, DWPC, EWPC and Bridelux—are strictly ‘invitee only’ events. Therefore, anyone who wishes to attend must first manage to garner a coveted invitation. There are various ways to achieve this goal.

The first one is the automatic invitation. As soon as the date, location and other basic aspects of the conference are finalised, the organisers send out invitations to selected individuals: the star wedding planners and high-profile vendors. It is important to grasp the elite of the elite wedding planning community early, as they are usually asked to be the keynote speakers of the events. As the founders of the DWPC Conference noted, “These wedding planners and vendors who organise weddings for [the rich and famous] are stars themselves. For the industry, they are the celebrity figures, so we...try and get these stars on board.”

The founders of the wedding planning conferences explain that as soon as the date is set, they speak to these top wedding planners about three to five months in advance so that they can try and clear their schedules. Even if some of the stars might have other commitments, they tend to prioritise the conference. I have been told by all the founders of the conferences and several elite wedding planners that the stars are highly motivated to come to these conferences, as key note speakers. Through my interviews with over 20 star wedding planners, I learned that the sharing of their success stories makes them feel accepted as part of the community. Several of these stars also revealed that the admiration they receive from the fellow wedding planners makes them feel valued and thus more motivated to produce even greater weddings. As one of them remarked, “I am eager to attend [these] conferences as I get to meet everyone in the community and share my personal journey, and I think that is something wonderful” (Star Elite Wedding Planner R).

The second pathway into the conference is ‘invitation by contacts’. Here the invitation is through a formal referral. For instance, some of them have friends who know the founders or the organisers of the conference. In some cases, if some vendors have worked with certain elite wedding planners, those wedding planners are happy to extend the invitation to them. I have been told by many wedding planners that they managed to win an invitation simply by knowing a certain elite wedding planner. As Wedding Planner L (based in India) stated, “She was one of the best planners here, so she put a word through for a couple of us.”

The next route through which individuals can get on board to this conference is via ‘sponsorship.’ The vendors can offer to help with different elements of the wedding planning conference and sponsor that aspect of it. The following interview extract focuses on a vendor

who approached the founders of the wedding planners conference to offer the sponsorship of exotic cocktails for the event. Various other vendors attending the wedding planners conferences shared similar stories with me:

I have been the vendor for a couple of weddings across U.K., and I had known about this conference. I had my eye out for it, so this year I decided to approach them (the organisers of the conference). I spoke to them about my past experience and offered to sponsor all the cocktails throughout the three days of the conference. I had to call them in for the tasting day as well, and then they (organisers of the conference) really liked my cocktails, so here I am.

The vendor who offered the comment above also mentioned that he finds this idea very beneficial for both the wedding planners and for himself. He feels that this gives him the platform to serve his exotic cocktails to everyone in the industry, so they can get a taste of his drinks, and if they find them good, they can contact him for future weddings. This sequence of events was corroborated by wedding planners I met at the conference. They explained that they approach the vendors who might have sponsored some element in the conference as they feel more confident to now hire them after having sampled their work. Here we see the importance of these conferences as places where both the wedding planners and the vendors can network in person and gain some advantage. As one wedding planner remarked,

This conference is the best place to get life experience from the vendors on what they have to offer. Vendors serving us range from the hospitality industry, to caterers, live bands, DJs, lighting and sound [technicians], florists, etc. So if I see the band playing or the work of the florists or taste the food of the caterer, I approach them as well. So now I am more confident about who to choose. (Wedding Planner TK based in the U.K.).

By being a sponsor at the conferences, the vendors can promote their businesses. The vendor who sponsored the cocktails, for instance, mentioned that he signed a contract with one of the elite wedding planners he met at the conference to supply all the drinks for an upcoming wedding. My interviews at the wedding conferences reinforced that these conferences serve as a setting for the ancillary occupational communities as well. Here different vendors look forward to attaining the sponsorships for the conference because of the

enormous boost not only to their businesses but also their respective occupational communities.

The last gateway into the wedding planners conference is ‘invitation through application’. Here the applicants may be budding and mid-size wedding planners or suppliers who have not yet managed to find other means of entry through connections. In this case, these individuals may now apply through this application process. They need to register their interest in attending the particular conference. Then they receive an email from the organisers with more detailed information and an application form. They are required to provide various facts about their company, including years of operation, turnover rate, social media presence, and so on. In addition, they are asked to state their motivation for attending the wedding planners conference and what they hope to take away from it. The organisers then examine and verify each applicant’s details and decide whether an invitation should be sent.

The conference organisers conduct this cherry picking process to ensure that the applicants are actually legitimate members of the wedding planning industry and that all the attendees are reliable individuals who have a genuine wish to join such an exclusive community and learn from the experienced members. As Fergie, the founder of a wedding planners conference in Europe, put it, “We do this initial screening process as we want everyone who comes and attends the conference to be [people who] want to be part of this community and industry. We want to make sure it is genuine from their end.”

The founders explained to me that it is not that they accept applications from only established wedding planners. They also give an opportunity to aspiring wedding planners or vendors who would like to learn more about the industry. They simply require that these aspiring wedding planners show proof of interest in the industry to be able to come on board for the conference. This proof could be their new website, the registration of their company, and so on. Thus, we can see how the wedding planners, as a community, maintain exclusivity and inclusivity at the same time. They use this duality as a measure for entry into their occupational community rather than relying on regulated training, socialisation or admission tests.

6.7. Events Carried Out at Wedding Planning Conferences

This section categorises the activities carried out at the wedding planners conferences into ‘business events’ and ‘entertainment events’. Here we see that in the prominent wedding

planners conferences listed earlier, although the business events are common to all the conferences, the scale and grandeur of the entertainment events vary according to the different conferences.

6.7.1. ‘Business’ Events at the Conference

The business events at all the wedding planners conferences are divided into two segments. The first one consists of talks by the top wedding planners, while the second part is the breakout sessions by these stars. All the conferences generally last for two to three days. The talks by the star wedding planners are usually held on the second day of the conference. This segment is open to all the attendees. For the breakout sessions or workshops, the attendees receive a list of specific topics from which to choose. These sessions usually take place on the final day of the conference. In both ‘business’ segments of the conference, the star wedding planners or other high-profile individuals from the wedding industry start with a presentation about their work, followed by a Q & A.

6.7.1.1. Creation and Retention of the Star Status. The following vignette offers a glimpse into the power of stardom that I observed at one of the conferences:

I entered the hotel banquet hall where the talks with the keynote speakers were going to take place. There were still 18 minutes to go until the event commenced. I glanced around and saw that about 90% of the hall was filled. Hoping to be able to grab a good seat, I walked towards the front of the hall. To my despair, all the seats in the first three rows were full, and the empty ones were labelled ‘reserved’. I look around and saw one empty seat in the fourth row. I quickly made my way to grab it before anyone else noticed it. As I got myself seated, I turned towards the person sitting next to me and nodded. We exchanged greetings and introductions. Johanna (a pseudonym) was a wedding planner based in Italy. She also told me that this was her third conference. She always looks forward to these conferences and the keynote speakers as she follows their work. She said that they are the ‘star wedding planners’. As she spoke about them, her eyes lit up. Later on, I asked Johanna about the reserved seats in the front rows. She informed me that they were for the “star wedding planners”, the “star suppliers”, and the keynote speakers, as was the case at all the other conferences she had attended.

Being able to hear and see the “stars” of the industry is definitely a main attraction for the conference attendees, the reason why they keep coming year after year. Having attended various other conferences, such as DWPC, EWPC, Engage and Bride Lux Symposium, I can say that the scenario noted above with the reserved seats for the stars is typical. The conference attendees wait eagerly to see how the stars are dressed and to hear what they have to say. Many attendees arrive well in advance so they do not miss any part of the talks. In addition, I have observed that audience members are so attentive that they refrain from browsing or texting on their smartphones while the stars are speaking. I have also heard these fans speak about certain wedding planners as if they were famous actors or singers: “They’re my idols”; “I’m absolutely thrilled to meet them”; “I’m extremely excited to interact with the stars.” It is this perception of stardom that enables the elite and the stars to retain their status within the occupational community. Further supporting this finding are the extracts below from informal interviews with wedding planners at two different conferences:

Sitting in the same room with my idols, has been absolutely incredible. In our world of wedding planners, they have been the pioneers of the industry. I’ve come for this conference all the way from Australia, but it is totally worth it as I get to meet the ‘stars’ as well. (A wedding planner from Australia at Engage conference)

I have been a fan of Mr. Josh’s (pseudonym) work since I decided to be a wedding planner. And to see him right up there on the stage has been so exciting and emotional for me that I can’t explain in words. I am so glad I got to hear him talk about his journey, and it makes me feel that I know him even better now. I am actually looking forward to and hoping to talk to him after the dinner tonight.

(A wedding planner from the U.K. at Bridelux conference)

Furthermore, the enthusiasm for these prestigious wedding conferences is evidenced by the turnout. The attendance at the talks given by the ‘stars’ is about 90 percent, with most of the attendees longing to be seated at the front of the hall in order to get a closer look at the stars and catch every word. The high attendance confirms the popularity of these particular star wedding planners within the industry, thereby increasing their market value, which in turn boosts their star status and contributes to the stratification of the industry’s elitism. Here the infrastructure, such as the seating arrangement, creates the demarcation between the ‘stars’ and the other wedding planners and attendees. As previously mentioned, the first two

to three rows are reserved for only these ‘stars’, and no other attendees are allowed—even if a seat is unoccupied, thereby reinforcing the stratification. This policy has been accepted by the industry, as all the other members feel that these ‘star’ wedding planners have earned respect and the special privileges that come with their high status. Here it has been noted how physical space contributes to constructing different levels of elitism within occupational communities.

6.7.1.2. Star Power in Community Building and Identity Construction of the Occupational Community. The business-like events are a platform where the “star wedding planners” share personal narratives, including any problems they might have faced along the way. After listening to them, many members of the audience reported feeling more connected with the stars on an intimate level and thus less hesitant about approaching them.

I observed that later during the evening activity sessions, these stars were approached by several attendees. The attendees used the information from the speeches as conversation starters, which seemed to impress the stars. They smiled and told their fans that they were glad that their stories had been helpful. Throughout the conference, I noticed that nobody seemed to be milling about looking isolated. All the attendees were engaged in conversation with each other and with the stars. The stars I spoke with reported that they felt good to be able to serve as an inspiration for less experienced members of the industry and to contribute to the community building. It was apparent to me that the conferences are instrumental in producing a feeling of camaraderie and oneness. As one attendee told me, “Attending these conferences helped me identify myself with my people. I now actually have people who I could catch up with for a drink and talk about our similar problems in the business, which is so relieving for me.” (Wedding Planner AD based in the U.K.)

Several attendees noted how these conferences have made them realise that members of the industry confront common challenges. Prior to these conferences, they did not have a setting in which to interact with the fellow wedding planners and other members of the industry. According to the individuals I met, simply knowing how these elite wedding planners would tackle specific situations has broadened their perspectives. Many of them also felt that they were a collective community and their trust in the industry and the community had started to develop. As one participant expressed it,

After these conferences, it is not a hello-hi relationship that I have with the fellow members of the wedding planners industry. During these conferences, we spend one

to three days together. We tend to bond with some and develop a relationship which goes beyond just a formal one. (Wedding Planner H based in the U.K.)

The budding wedding planners also told me that prior to the conferences, they used to feel that they were shooting arrows in the dark, but now they feel they have a sense of direction. They said that they often ended up maintaining contact with individuals whom they met at the conferences. Several attendees also emphasised the value of breakout sessions, as indicated in the following interview excerpts:

I wouldn't have had the opportunity to know how wedding planner Martin made it here. It has been great knowing his side of the story. It broadened my thinking how the different ways we could use social media platforms. (Wedding Planner K based in the U.S.)

I had several inhibitions about Instagram as my social media platform, and I didn't know who to go to or even take advice from, but attending the break out session on social media by the star wedding planner himself was so constructive. (Wedding Planner HS based in India)

In addition, various individuals reported that through these breakout sessions, they realised how often they find themselves in the difficult situations that the wedding planners describe, whether it is an elite wedding planner or someone just starting or a mid-sized wedding planner. Again, this shared experience contributes to a sense of unity and community. At the same time, being relied on for advice brings satisfaction to the star wedding planners. As one of the stars stated, "I feel that I have actually accomplished something in this industry" Another echoed this sentiment, saying "It satisfies the soul when people appreciate our work." Also, Star Wedding Planner RT from the U.S., reported:

After my talk at the wedding planners conference, one of the attendees uploaded a part of my speech which went viral and in a couple of hours I had an increase of 150 Instagram followers. This made me feel that people look up to our work and appreciate it. It is a great feeling.

It can be concluded that the conferences not only provide an opportunity for all levels of the

elite wedding planning industry to meet each other, but they also foster a sense of connectedness as members of the same occupational community. Finally, they reinforce for the most elite wedding planners the feeling of ‘being a star’.

6.7.2. ‘Entertainment’ Events at the Conference

Along with the business-like events, the wedding planners conferences include another segment of events classified as the ‘entertainment’ events. This segment includes dinners, extravagant parties and balls, after parties and various recreational activities for the attendees of the conference. Such activities include vintage car rides, golfing, wine tasting, and so on. The list of such entertainment and recreational events offered by Engage is extensive when compared to the social and recreational activities provided at other wedding planners conferences (namely DWPC, EWPC and Bridelux Symposium) where the entertainment segment is limited to dinner and after parties. The next section outlines some of the activities I observed at the conferences.

6.7.2.1. Are You Elite Enough? *Day 2. Time: 8 p.m. Venue: banquet hall for the ball. I reached the hall around 8:15 to attend the ball organised for all the attendees of the wedding planners conference. As I reached the entrance, I saw a huge tree (a prop) with small envelopes hanging from the branches. One helper came to me and said that I was to pick the envelope with my last name on it, and in the envelope, would be my assigned table number. I then searched for my envelope among the branches and opened it. I was supposed to sit at Table 18. Proceeding to my table, I looked around and noticed that there were seven people seated at each table and a total of 20 tables. By around 8:30 p.m., most of the attendees had taken their respective seats. I looked around and noticed that there weren’t any “star” wedding planners or suppliers at my table. I wondered where they were seated. I then observed that all the “stars” were seated at tables together. There were two tables which were strictly reserved for the stars.*

As indicated in my fieldwork diary vignette, the organisers are responsible for assigning the seating for all the attendees. Here the table allotment is supposed to be random. However, in the scenario that I witnessed, there were two tables exclusively reserved for and occupied by the stars of the conference—and there were no stars seated anywhere else in the

banquet hall. This is another example of how a separate physical space for the ‘stars’ serves to project elitism within the community. Even though these stars are invited to participate in the conference, they are set apart from the other conference attendees. This segregation can be seen as the construction of a new elite class within the already elite stratum of the wedding planning community. Only if the attendees are elite enough are they allowed to sit in certain spaces.

Following the sit-down dinner, the dance floor is open for the attendees to move freely to the rhythm of the music for the rest of the evening. Now all the attendees, including the stars, can mingle with each other. There is also an open bar by the dance floor where all the attendees can grab a drink. I observed that many attendees (including the less elite members) make an attempt here to engage not only with one another but also with the stars. The demarcations between the different levels of elitism are blurred in this space. Thus, the ball and other recreational events give attendees the opportunity to approach the stars and engage in one-to-one chats. When the ball ends, usually around midnight, there is an exclusive ‘non-advertised’ after party for the stars, which is generally hosted by one of the stars.

The clock strikes midnight, and the Master of the Ceremonies announces that the next song will be the last song for the night. A huge cheer from the crowd is heard and everybody comes to the dance floor for the last dance. After the dance, the ball concludes and people start proceeding towards the exit. I grabbed my purse and started moving towards the exit as well. Just then, I see that even though most of the attendees are proceeding towards their rooms at the hotel, there is a bunch of the people, consisting of the ‘stars’ and some other attendees, who are still standing by the bar. I glance towards them and grow very curious to know why they are still there, as it didn’t look like any of them were ready to call it a night any time soon. To find answers to my questions, I go back into the hall pretending to have lost my mobile phone by the bar. While standing near the bar and pretending to search for my phone, I overhear one of the star wedding planners say, “Oh, let’s take this after party to the leisure room of the hotel, and then after that, let’s take it back to my suite” (‘Star’ Wedding Planner BT). Then another person responds, “Oh yes the after parties have always been amazing. I would love to have one this year as well.” (Star Wedding Planner JK). Then, all the members of this group walk towards the leisure room of the hotel, where one of the stars had called the hotel staff earlier and had the room arranged with bar snacks, light music and a rack of liquor for their party. (Vignette from

researcher's fieldwork diary)

The vignette above suggests that the after-party event is organised for a highly exclusive set of guests, consisting mainly of the 'stars' of the conference. This after party is decided and mutually agreed upon by the stars of the conference. Here the stars of the wedding planners industry gather to spend private time with one another. Although it is not openly promoted to all, most of the attendees are aware of it and strive to get an invite. These after parties again reflect whether one is elite enough to be invited. Hence, in the occupational community of elite wedding planners, being invited to these parties acts as an indicator of one's elitism and connections. As Wedding Planner C stated, "I haven't attended an after party at the conference yet, but I have heard about them. In fact, everybody knows about them. It's the VIP ticket to be part of the star circle." This sentiment is echoed by another wedding planner I met: "If you are a non-star of the industry and are invited to these after parties, it is massive news, so this is like a golden pass to promising future opportunities if used well" (Wedding Planner J). Here the after party is viewed as a status symbol by all conference participants. It represents an implicit demarcation between the stars and non-star attendees through the emergence of another stratum: the *crème de la crème* of the industry.

6.7.2.2. Blending in with the Elite. This section discusses the recreational activities, such as vintage car rides, golfing, wine tasting, and so on, that are part of the wedding planners conference. It has been observed that these activities in themselves project an image of a higher socioeconomic level in the society in general, as they are often depicted in the media as activities popular with the HNI class. In the minds of conference attendees, since these activities already represent elitism, they indicate both acceptance to the inner circle as well as the projection of this elite industry to the non-attendees and potential clients. Here some attendees who do not have much knowledge and experience in the sport of golf, for example, make an effort to learn more about it before attending the events so that they can blend in with the elite members of the occupational community.

The importance of familiarity with recreational activities of the HNI class is evidenced in the following excerpt from an interview with a wedding planner named Payal (pseudonym):

I came to this conference last year and I had signed up for the wine tasting tour. I thought it would be fun. I actually knew nothing about wine, so I thought that it

would be a great idea to try it out. The wine tasting experience was good, but since I didn't know much about wines, I felt excluded from the discussions with the other attendees and the "stars" of the conference. Afterwards, the other attendees were discussing things like flavour pairing, the different glasses used for the different types of wines, their favourite vineyards across the world, etc. They were talking about the "Chateau Ducru-Beaucaillou in France, the Lavaux Vineyards in Switzerland, Chateau Montelena in California" and their trips and experiences to those vineyards. Unfortunately, I was quite naïve to all this, and I feel that maybe if I had some idea about these things, I would be able to enjoy more and also engage in conversations with the other attendees.

In this example, Payal is a wedding planner who had been in business for only two years. Today she is still considered a small scale wedding planner. She mentions that during her first experience of attending the wine tasting event at a wedding planning conference, she felt quite isolated and was reticent about participating in conversations. Although she was not familiar with the subject of wine, she still opted for this activity in order to try something new. She says that she did not do much thinking when selecting an activity for the entertainment segment, so she did not realise that in-depth knowledge about wine tasting could lead to developing a bond with the other participants who were primarily the elite wedding planners who mingle with some of the wealthiest members of society around the world. Thus, these elitist recreational activities at conferences can be simultaneously both an open and closed gateway of entrance into the highest stratum of the wedding planning community. A further example of this paradoxical situation is illustrated in the following vignette from my fieldwork diary:

I had signed up for golf as my entertainment activity as I had always wanted to try it but never got the opportunity. I thought that this would be the perfect chance for me to try it. I reached the lobby at 7 a.m. and waited to be taken to the golf course. There were 12 others who had signed up for golf. While we waited for the golf buggy to take us to the course, I looked around and observed that out of 12 attendees, 10 were dressed in the appropriate golf attire. As I had no experience of playing golf, I did not own a 'golf outfit'. I had just grabbed a pair of jeans and a top. When I arrived, I noticed that all the others were wearing a shirt and pants similar to the celebrity golfers I had seen in the media. Some had a nice cap on as well. Here I realised that

not being dressed correctly for golf delivers a feeling of being an outsider. Even before the activity started, I could see the other attendees, staring at me in surprise. Some of them literally raised their eyebrows or rolled their eyes, reinforcing my feeling of not belonging. Upon reaching the golf course, we were handed golf clubs and were expected to go ahead and play. As I was clueless, I stood in one corner and looked around desperately for a way out. Just then, I saw another attendee who appeared to be in the same boat, awkward and confused. I later came to know that she also had never played golf before. On the other hand, I observed that the other attendees had taken out their golf clubs and were talking to each other about their game. I tried to listen carefully and overheard the attendees discussing which brand of golf clubs they owned and why they preferred that specific brand. They talked about the various tournaments, such as the PGA Tour, the U.S. Open and the Masters. They also mentioned their respective 'handicaps'. (I later Googled the meaning of handicaps and learned that this is a numerical measure of a golfer's estimated ability in the sport.)

As with wine tasting tours, golf is a shared activity of the HNI. It is just assumed that if you are of that socioeconomic class, you are familiar with the sport, as indicated in the following words of an American elite wedding planner:

Oh, what a great game that was! Playing golf here with all these people has been amazing. It's great to meet others with the same level of love and enthusiasm towards the golf. We have formed such an extraordinary connection with one another that we are all planning to attend the PGA Tour this year. I think that would be a great trip. I am really happy about it. (Wedding Planner R based in the U.S.A.)

Clearly, being ignorant about this elite sport acted as a barrier to inclusion in the star circle within the wedding planners' community. I interacted with some 'non-star' wedding planners who were equally ignorant about the common recreational activities of the super rich. They admitted that participating in such activities at the conferences made them feel alone. Clearly, these activities in themselves are elitist. Indirectly, they are used to gain entry into the upper echelons of the elite wedding planning community. They serve as a platform to build and sustain relationships among the stars of this occupational community. The elite wedding planners who actively participate in these activities with enthusiasm and interest do not do so

only at conferences. They often plan to meet for golf trips, ski trips or wine-tasting trips around the world.

6.8. Role of Aesthetics at the Wedding Planners Conferences

Aesthetics is the art of producing positive reactions, not with words but through the look and the feel of people, places and things (Postrel, 2003). Aesthetics show instead of telling, captivate rather than command (Postrel, 2003). The next segment will start by drawing attention to the physical glamourisation of the conference and then conclude with details on how glamourisation is created by the members of the occupational community of wedding planners.

6.8.1. Intentionally Glamourised Conferences

This section highlights the aspects from the data that demonstrate how wedding planners conferences are intentionally glamourised. To begin, what does the phrase “intentionally glamourised” denote? Quite simply, the word “intentionally” means “deliberately or purposely”, while ‘glamourised’ means ‘making something appear attractive or enchanted’. According to my research, it can be seen that the aesthetic appeal of the wedding planners conferences is achieved through the magnificence and luxury these conferences offer. In this thesis, aesthetics is seen to be a tool to represent the wedding planners. As Thrift (2008) notes, aesthetics can be viewed as a hallmark of allure and one particular technology of allure is glamour. Therefore, ‘glamourization’ helps the nascent occupational community of wedding planners identify with themselves and the community. The following photographs from the wedding planners conferences illustrate how glamour is projected.



Figure 15: Engage Wedding Planners Conference, October 2018



Figure 16: Engage Wedding Planners Conference, October 2018



Figure 17: Engage Wedding Planners Conference, December 2017



Figure 18: Bridelux symposium October 2018

My informal interviews at the conferences offered further insights into this phenomenon of glamour construction. Wedding Planner E, for instance, stated, “All the

highlights on social media have made me want to be part of this splendid conference. These events are great as they give a glimpse of the lavish events that we as wedding planners can create.” Another wedding planner remarked, “Wedding Planners Conferences like this (Engage) show the world the magic we, the wedding planners, can create (Wedding Planner O). It should also be noted that photographs from the conferences are accessible to clients and have a positive impact. One client I spoke with commented, “When I saw the pictures from the wedding planners conference, I was fascinated by all the majestic décor, the spread for the meals, and I felt assured that this community can create wonders” (Client P).

In brief, the conferences give wedding planning a standard of glamour to which they can aspire. All the participants emphasised how the aesthetics of the presentations at the conferences made them feel connected. They viewed the degree of glamour represented there as an accurate reflection of what they were capable of themselves. Also, when the clients look at the media posts regarding the wedding planners conferences, they gain reassurance about the degree of professionalism in the elite wedding planning industry. To the outside world, these glamorous conferences present wedding planners as a united community with the capacity to deliver dreams.

6.8.2 Presentation at the Conference: Dress to Impress

Glamour is not beauty or luxury, as such feature are only specific demonstrations for particular audiences (Postrel, 2006). Prendergast writes that part of the allure of glamour is that “the poor are excluded and the spectacle and pleasures it promises are a matter of class” (Prendergast, 1992). This section underscores how the star invitees and the other attendees present themselves at the conference. This includes the way they dress up and the cars they use for their commute. This glamorous presentation is seen to project one’s status within the occupational community.

Day 1 of the Conference: In keeping with the conference schedule, all the attendees were expected to arrive at the venue between 3-5 p.m. I left for the venue and reached there by 3:30. Upon my arrival, I was asked to wait so that one of the helpers could assist me with the paper work and other details regarding the next three-day conference. While I was waiting patiently in the hotel lobby, I noticed other attendees arriving. There was a continuous hustle and bustle at the lobby as many attendees were checking in around the same time. I observed that many of them arrived at the venue in luxury cars such as Mercedes, BMW and Rolls Royce. Most of the ‘stars’ had chauffeurs. Upon reaching the

venue, the chauffeurs would get out of the car and rush to open the car door for the stars to step out. I also noticed that most of the attendees carried high-end bags and gadgets and wore luxury brand clothes. Some of the attendees seemed to be familiar with each other and exchanged friendly greetings.

While waiting in the lobby, I overheard some of their conversations, most of which began with comments about each other's appearance. Compliments on new designer bags, shoes and outfits were flying back and forth:

Ah, I see you have picked by the new Valentino heels. I was thinking of buying them.

Do you feel it is a good buy?

You look lovely in this jumpsuit, I love the Gucci spring collection and this looks amazing on you.

I am planning to buy a new purse, I quite like the Prada one you are carrying. It does give a very fresh look.

The comments noted above are typical of how the elite wedding planners and the other conference attendees present themselves. Here 'glamour' is a key element in the persona they attempt to project. Luxury cars, chauffeurs, high-end, designer shoes, dresses, bags, and jewellery—all these are necessary components of glamour. Furthermore, approximately 60% of the attendees, including the star wedding planners, were dressed and accessorised in the most exclusive brands throughout the conference.

I observed that glamour itself constructs status within the occupational community. From an organisational viewpoint, the stratification is mainly based on the movement of individuals (or lack of it) within a hierarchy, a set series of ascending positions (Van Mannen and Barley, 1984). However, from an occupational viewpoint, people form their perspectives on work and careers based on their current social, moral, physical and intellectual characterisation of the 'work itself' (Van Mannen and Barley, 1984). Given the findings of this research, it is interesting to see how glamourisation forms a basis for stratification in this nascent occupational community, as suggested in these extracts from interviews with conference attendees:

I don't know if being glamorous in my appearances affects the others, but I surely feel that I tend to have low confidence while approaching the others as I feel I am not one among them. (Wedding Planning J)

I have just started my wedding planning company two years back and this is my first conference, I realise that being dressed up is helpful when you come to conferences such as these. (Wedding Planner S)

Thus, we see that the ‘glamorous’ appearance is considered as a kind of a uniform for the occupational community of wedding planners. It is how they need to present themselves both within the community as well as outside to the clients. Previous studies have suggested how the consumption of high-end commodities carries the potential for obtaining an elite status (Douglas, 2009). This finding is certainly borne out by the observations and interview data collected for this study. The wedding planners’ luxury cars, clothing and accessories are all orchestrated to construct glamour and establish their status within their occupational community—and to the outside world.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

This chapter offers a more detailed, expanded explanation and analysis of the findings. Based on the findings developed in the previous three chapters, the overriding aim of this chapter is to develop a theory about nascent occupational communities. In this context, the literature is revisited to make connections between the theoretical framework and the empirical research and to construct a cohesive thematic structure. The chapter begins by presenting the themes that have emerged from the findings. Then it moves on to a discussion of the contributions of this thesis to the existing literature. Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining the scope of this study and avenues for future research.

7.2. Wedding Planner: An Emerging Occupation Built on Glamourisation

This section begins by highlighting the emerging occupational community of wedding planners and explaining its division of labour which is perhaps more complicated than it may seem on the surface. It then discusses the task domains of the wedding planners which revolves around glamourisation.

7.2.1. A New Occupation Still in the Making

My findings suggest that the occupation of wedding planning is still emerging. It is an occupation in the making. As noted in previous chapters, to become a wedding planner, there are no established apprenticeships or mandatory training periods available, and the pathways to this career remain blurred and varied. It has been established in the literature that occupational communities lack the traditional formalised training, credentials, professional memberships, well-structured examination mechanisms, and stringent gatekeeping associated with other occupations (Cannon, 1967; Gerstl, 1961; Salaman, 1971; Kleiner & Krueger, 2010). Furthermore, it has been stressed by scholars (Dingwall, 1983, Nelson & Barley, 1997; Sherman, 2010) that how occupations originate and become recognised is nebulous; hence research on their origins remains largely neglected (Fayard, Stigliani & Bechky, 2016). Keeping in mind the diverse nature of emerging occupational communities and the paucity of data on the evolution of these occupations, I set out to collect data pertaining to the initial

emergence of 50 elite wedding planners in diverse parts of the world (see Findings, Chapter 4B, Section 4.5.2.)

The accumulated data indicate that elite wedding planners are not homogeneous in terms of their education, gender or former occupational backgrounds. While some of them have had prior experience in the hospitality sector and event organising, others entered the business from an array of fields, including movie production, television production, fashion design, interior decorating, public relations, floral design, the financial sector, and travel and tourism. However, irrespective of their training and credentials, or any other items on their résumés, these elite wedding planners share one salient, decisive factor that can be credited as their gateway. Entry into this exclusive occupational community is largely dependent on the individual's ability to connect socially with members of the higher strata of society—and the ability to produce and perpetuate glamour.

My findings study also show how the emergence of wedding planners spawns other related roles or subspecialties. Here the emergence of these offshoots results from what has been referred to as the 'hiving off' of tasks. In other words, a similar phenomenon has been seen in the literature wherein a new occupation is formed out of necessity to take up the tasks that were 'hived off' by the existing occupation (Hughes, 1958); such tasks are usually the routine ones that eventually lead to the development of a distinct occupation (Nelsen & Barley, 1997). This phenomenon can be witnessed in the painstaking planning involved in elite wedding planning. As stated in Chapter 1 of the Findings, the meticulous attention to detail leads inevitably to a division of labour. As a consequence, with the emergence of the new subspecialties of wedding planners, the new occupations of 'wedding designers' and 'wedding coordinators' eventually evolved.

The next section is devoted to explaining the critical tasks of these elite wedding planners apart from careful planning. An examination of these tasks helps shed light on how individuals with certain backgrounds enter the exclusive world of glamour and affluence and how that segue leads them in the direction of wedding planning specifically.

7.2.2. What Wedding Planners Do

One of the surprising and significant findings of my study is that the wedding planners are not limited to planning and directing weddings. In fact, albeit an expected and crucial responsibility, the detailed duties and decisions are often delegated to wedding coordinators and designers, while other tasks are delegated further down the line to assistants.

Instead, the elite wedding planners focus primarily on what are considered the vital tasks—that is, creating exclusivity, assuring and reassuring clients, establishing a sense of regal glamour, and constructing dreams. Some of these tasks are specific to a wedding, whereas others are more general.

7.2.2.1. Wedding Planners Provide Assurance and Reassurance. One of the dominant tasks of the elite wedding planners is assuring and reassuring their clients at every stage of the wedding planning process that all aspects of the dream event will unfold as planned and promised. The elite wedding planner acts not only as a trusted advisor and a confidant to the clients, but also as a crisis manager should any unexpected situation arise before or during the wedding. The wedding planner expends a great deal of time and energy assuaging the clients fears of mishaps, reassuring them that their unique wedding will be carried out perfectly and stand out in the minds of their friends and relatives and in the minds of the general public.

Once a bond of trust develops between the wedding planner and his or her clients, the role of advisor and confidant is strengthened, as the clients rely on the wedding planner for approval on every aspect of the event. For example, as noted in Chapter 2, many clients look to the elite wedding planner for the final decision on the bridal dress. Even though the client may have already chosen a particular gown, validation from the wedding planner is still sought. This same reliance on the wedding planner's opinion was also observed when finalising decisions regarding the wedding cake, cuisine, and even the rings. Consequently, the role of ultimate advisor-confidant is of utmost importance.

Additionally, according to the findings reveal (see Chapter 2, Section 1.2) that elite wedding planners provide assurance and reassurance to the clients not only during the planning process but also on the day of their wedding. The mere presence of the elite wedding planner on the day of the wedding—even during the make-up sessions and clothing changes—brings the client a sense of comfort and serenity. Some clients even request that their wedding planner stay close to them in those nerve-racking seconds before they walk down the aisle. Apparently, the presence of this trusted confidant helps reduce their nervousness.

Indeed, it is the elite wedding planner who is relied on to maintain a sense of order and tranquility in a situation that is often vulnerable to unexpected missteps and thus panic. The onus is on this one individual to generate an atmosphere of calmness and control in the eyes of both the clients and the members of the wedding planning team. According to the findings (see Chapter 2, Section 1.2.2), these wedding planners are regarded as 'the glue that

holds things together’. Although some of them later disclosed to me they were feeling genuine worry at certain crisis moments, they were careful to maintain a façade of composure, professionalism and self-confidence in front of their employees and clients. It is vital that they sustain this impression. They make a concerted effort to project it through their body language, tone of voice, choice words and facial expressions. If they were to react negatively and become flustered when confronted with an unexpected challenge, their anxiety would be infectious and adversely affect the delivery of a perfect wedding. Thus, the key tasks of the elite wedding planners include continuous reassurance to both their team and their clients that everything will proceed ‘like clockwork’ regardless of any unanticipated hurdles along the way.

7.2.2.2. Wedding Planners Create Dreams. Another crucial responsibility of the elite wedding planners is to construct dreams for their clients. In order to deliver the dream wedding, the wedding planners need to understand their clients thoroughly and exploit that information through psychological tactics. The elite wedding planners accomplish this mission by manipulating exclusivity and glamour simultaneously.

The findings presented in Section 1.1.3 of Chapter 2 demonstrate how the elite wedding planners make all attempts to know their clients inside out. This profile includes information such as likes and dislikes, lifestyle choices, hobbies, personality traits, favourite celebrities, favourite colours, favourite dishes, favourite holiday destinations, and so on. Taking into account these details, clients can be presented with a wedding that is tailored to their dreams in every way possible. The ultimate goal is to materialise the clients’ dreams. In order to ‘sell’ these dreams, the trusted advisors go far beyond reasonable expectations. In fact, they compare themselves to serious film directors who spend months doing extensive research before they actually commence shooting their films. Like such directors, the elite wedding planners do their research to develop a multifaceted portrait of their clients.

This dream construction is only possible after the clients have been convinced that they deserve to have an extraordinary wedding that is perfect in every way: an unforgettable event that lives up to whatever they had envisaged, regardless of the cost. Using phrases such as “you owe it to yourself” and “you deserve this dream wedding”, the wedding planners constantly remind their clients that opting for an extravagant wedding is completely justified, the best decision they could ever make. Clearly, all these psychological strategies are designed to appeal to the clients’ personal insecurities and ensure that they do not have any second thoughts about the enormous financial investment. As laid out in Findings, Chapter 5,

clients and members of their social circles consider lavish weddings as a symbol of one's pride and affluence. Like a limited-edition designer bag or luxury car, an extravagant dream wedding produced by a renowned wedding planner is a conspicuous product and status symbol.

7.2.2.3. Wedding Planners Create a Sense of Exclusivity. In the literature, status and conspicuous consumption are frequently regarded as inherently the same phenomenon (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). As far back as 1834, a theorist named John Rae drew the link between vanity and 'conspicuous consumption', that is, the acquisition and display of exorbitant goods and services to create a certain public image, assert one's financial power and thus enhance one's overall socioeconomic status (Rae, 1834; Veblen, 1922). Given the lengths to which the elite wedding planners in this study groom themselves and decorate their premises to create an aura of luxury and elegance, it can be argued that they, as individuals, are commodifying themselves like 'conspicuous products' that are accessible only to the uppermost echelon of society.

In the effort to project this notion of exclusivity, the elite wedding planners make a point of wearing specific brands of clothing and driving specific makes of cars that are internationally associated with the apex of luxury. In fact, to reinforce this exclusivity, some manufacturers of these brands avoid mass production. For instance, Ferrari chooses not to manufacture more than 4300 vehicles in spite of the popularity and high demand, as evidenced by the two-year waiting list for their cars (Betts, 2002). Similarly, the elite wedding planners project themselves as being exclusive by carefully selecting their clients. As noted in my empirical findings in Chapter 5, clients are cherry picked on the basis of a minimum expenditure towards the wedding as well as a positive reference from past clients. Being recognisable as a powerful member of the society's elite is also a decisive factor that would give a potential client access. Thus, by filtering their clients and maintaining their uniqueness within the community, wedding planners uphold and heighten their market positioning.

Furthermore, the elite wedding planners orchestrate a sense of mystery and anticipation by making the clients wait. In the empirical findings (Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1.), we see how they do not make an appearance during the preliminary meeting with the clients—even if they happen to be available at that time. Instead, they entrust their assistants/coordinators with the introductory appointment. This is clearly a strategic decision. It is intended to establish an impression of elusiveness and exclusivity that is part of the wedding planner's self-branding. In other words, by meeting with only a selected few further

along in the planning process, he or she is out of reach, ‘hard to get’. The meetings take place not necessarily at the client’s convenience but when the wedding planner finds space in his or her busy schedule. Like a celebrated fashion designer who creates one-of-a-kind gowns only for the most highly paid Hollywood actresses to wear to an awards ceremony, the wedding planner creates weddings only for certain clients who represent prestige and power.

It is also evident from the data (Chapter 5) that besides producing a dazzling and enchanting wedding, the wedding planners contribute to the overall impact of the event simply with their physical presence. A common remark by the clients is that the presence of the wedding planner is akin to ‘icing on the cake’, enhancing the overall sense of glamour. Hence, this coveted advisor wedding planner is treated as a commodified celebrity—someone whom the clients can “show off” to their friends and relatives (Section 5.2.1). In fact, the elite wedding planners acknowledge their own power, referring to themselves as precious commodities. As an illustration, one of the wedding planners in my study proudly declared, “We raise the client’s status.” Members of this emerging occupational community work assiduously at upholding a reputation of being conspicuous products on their own, products to which only a selected few have access. As Podoshen et al. (2011) and Mullins (1999) suggest, ‘conspicuous products’ are those that are consumed with the hope that one is seen to be at a higher level on the social hierarchy, thus perpetuating exclusivity.

7.2.2.4. Wedding Planners Add Glamour. To reiterate, one of the most critical and requisite tasks of the elite wedding planners is glamourisation. In their minds, the task includes not only the glamourisation of the wedding production and the clients, but also of themselves as individual actors in the exclusive society in which they operate. In the extant literature, glamour is involved in manipulating the ideals, dreams and the fantasies to provide “escape routes” (Skeggs, 2015, p. 132) from the tedium of one’s daily routine (Huopalaainen, 2016). Additionally, according to Huopalaainen (2016), glamour can be viewed and projected in different ways: subjective, relative or contextual; it is an outcome of calculated and insidious acts that require substantial effort to make objects, surfaces and people look magical and elegant, that is, different from their actual states. Huopalaainen’s (2016) research on the phenomenon of glamour is corroborated by Thrift (2008, 2010) who refers to it as the result of performative acts of manipulation that strive to enchant and involve the audience in sensory ways.

During the course of my field work, I observed the phenomenon of glamourisation as one of the most significant tasks of the elite wedding planners. As Skegg (2015) has argued,

glamour constitutes an escape route from the mundane. This rationale is apparent in the concerted effort that these wedding planners make to present themselves to their clients and potential clients. For instance, prior to meetings with their affluent clients, they instruct their teams on precisely how to walk, talk and dress. As one of the wedding planners put it, “We make clients feel that we have what it takes to carry the luxury.” Another one remarks, “You cannot wear Primark clothes and promise to manufacture Burberry clothes.” Indeed, the obsession with glamour was palpable throughout my field work. This finding supports the contention of sociologist Georg Simmel (1971) that dressing fashionably makes one’s personal aura more dynamic and striking and thus often connotes power. Furthermore, as nascent occupational communities do not contain rigid bureaucratic structures, glamour is used as a mechanism to establish an implicit hierarchy for the occupational community of wedding planners. In other words, the high degree of glamour manifested by the elite wedding planners accords them superiority over other wedding planners. Therefore, being more glamorous is considered as the major criterion bringing a particular wedding planner to the pinnacle of this nascent occupational community without bureaucratic structures.

Moreover, this glamorous representation of oneself is not confined to the elite wedding planners’ attire. It is extended to their lifestyle in totality. This includes their cars, handbags, watches, jewellery and where and with whom they are seen in public. Everything is an essential component of the image that they project when they interact with the clients. It follows that the physical spaces occupied that they occupy must be commensurate with this image. Accordingly, their offices are located in neighbourhoods of the city that immediately signal opulence and exclusivity. The elite wedding planners ensure that glamour speaks through every inch of their office décor. At the same time, despite the efforts made to create a luxurious office, most of the meetings with clients actually take place in five-star hotels and restaurants selected by the elite wedding planner. It is implicit that he or she will cover all the expenses incurred at such meetings.

The ability to pay for an exorbitant meal is yet another aspect of the superficial world of glamour. It is a world inhabited by not only the clients but also the wedding planner who must demonstrate the capability of delivering. Frequenting expensive restaurants, carrying brand name bags and driving luxury cars—all these behaviours are connected to the act of creating an illusion that can dazzle and bewitch the clients. As the literature states, glamour has a magical capacity to shape and reshape the objects right in front of us to make them seem more exciting (Stevens et al., 2015). Interestingly, this association between glamour and magic is cited in the Oxford Dictionary in reference to the eighteenth century: “when

devils, wizards or jugglers deceive the sight, they are said to cast a glamor over the eye of the spectators” (Wilson, 2007).

The findings of the current study give credence to the enormous power of glamour (Section 5.1.5), as the observed wedding planners calculate ways to promote it on the frontline to the clients to persuade them to make vital decisions in terms of expenditures. For example, Mr. Amit and the dress designer discuss the wedding attire worn by a particular Bollywood actress in a specific film. In India, and perhaps in other parts of South Asia, Bollywood and glamour are synonymous. As a consequence, it is not surprising that the client would get drawn into selecting the wedding clothes worn by the idolised Bollywood star. Thereafter we see how elite wedding planners use glamour to present themselves and satisfy their clients. Glamour constitutes a tool to cast a spell over the eyes of the spectators. In a sense, they are almost hypnotised by it. Under this influence, they make certain extravagant choices.

Additionally, the findings reinforce the notion that having one’s wedding planned by an elite wedding planner is a status symbol. Previous studies have described glamour as a phenomenon to which only the elite of society are entitled (Wilson, 2007). Wilson argues that the elitism of glamour sends the message that not just anyone can be deemed glamorous. Despite a person’s efforts to reach the stars, only a select few are ever successful (Wilson, 2007). Hence, in the nascent occupational community of wedding planners where there are no rigid organisational structures, glamour is used as a mechanism for the construction of this elite, which in turn leads to the structuring of the nascent occupational community.

To summarise, in the sections above, the tasks of the wedding planners have been explained. I have observed that there are several commonalities in the way the wedding planners carry out their tasks and, in the way, that the community configuring events are conducted. The central parallel here is the focus on constructing dreams, strengthening a sense of exclusivity and creating glamour. Wedding planners commodify themselves as ‘conspicuous products’. This self-commodification is reflected in how they behave both while carrying out their tasks as shown above in (see Section 7.2.2.3. and 7.2.2.5) as well as how the community constitutes itself, which is discussed in the next section.

7.3. The Centrality of Events for the Community

Another significant finding is the number of specialised events and spaces that have arisen to cater to the flourishing wedding planning industry. These events include wedding fairs, wedding trade shows, wedding galleries and wedding planners' conferences. Wedding fairs, trade shows and galleries are designed to provide opportunities for wedding planners to promote their services and products to prospective clients. However, the conferences are geared more towards the wedding planners themselves. For instance, it is interesting to note that various associations of wedding planners exist, that is, bodies that help to maintain a code of conduct. Membership in such associations has never been mandatory, partly because the wedding planners and the events structured by these associations have lacked an official platform for the members of the occupation to meet and interact with one other. The absence of one regulatory association or platform eventually led to the creation of wedding planners' conferences to provide an opportunity for a wide spectrum of members to connect in one place. This section discusses the centrality of these conferences as community configuring events for the community of wedding planners. It does so by drawing attention to the critical aspects of the nature and purpose of these events.

7.3.1. Nature and Purpose of Events for the Wedding Planners Community

The nature and the main objective of the community configuring events are the focus of this section. The findings reveal that these events have a dual purpose: externally facing as well as internally facing functions. The section below provides an explanation of this dual functionality of community configuring events.

7.3.1.1. Externally Facing Functions. The literature affirms that conferences are important venues where associations are made (Garud, 2008). Conferences, in general, have largely been studied in the literature of field configuring events, where individuals from various firms come together to interact with the intention of exchanging information and making sense of complicated field dynamics (Garud, 2008). Drawing from some of the existing literature on field configuring events, we learn that the individuals attending wedding planners conference might or might not work in the same firm, yet the singular commonality is that they are part of the same *occupational* community. I have observed that these wedding planners' conferences are also venues where individuals from diverse branches of the

wedding planning industry meet and interact. These conferences are divided into ‘business events’ and ‘entertainment events’. As shown in Section 6.7.1. of the findings, the business events mainly include speeches by the star wedding planners and breakout sessions or workshops, each of which focuses on a particular topic. Participants can choose from a fairly long list of topics. At the end of both the workshops and the speeches, all the participants have ample opportunities to converse informally. The running objective of these events is not only to obtain more information about the wedding industry but also to generate business.

I have often observed wedding planners at these events speaking with industry suppliers, including photographers, bridal gown designers, videographers, florists, sound designers, light designers, caterers, and so on. It was as if they were interviewing them for future reference, evaluating whether these suppliers had the potential to be considered for business deals. The credibility of these suppliers is endorsed by other wedding planners present at the conference. In addition, their work is on display at the conference and can be directly sampled, particularly if the suppliers have sponsored certain segments of the conference. In this manner, the wedding conferences provide a setting for the wedding planners to identify reliable partners for their businesses.

The findings further suggest that besides the potential business deals that can be made there, the conferences actually serve a second equally significant purpose. To convince clients to entrust the wedding planner with exorbitant sums of money to produce a dream wedding, the wedding planner must assert the legitimacy of wedding planning as an occupation by elevating it to a professional level. To encourage people to pay for a service, that service must be perceived as a responsibility that one cannot handle on one’s own or with only the assistance of friends and family (Hoschschild, 2012). The existing literature points out how previously undefined, ‘non-work’ activities, such as housekeeping and volunteering (Daniels, 1988; Rollins, 1987)—albeit socially valuable services (Vallas, 2012)—attempt to define themselves.

In the case of the elite wedding planners, community configuring events such as conferences provide a platform for the members of this community to project the importance of their work in order to attract clients. As outlined in Chapter 6, the aesthetics of the conference are designed to replicate the grandeur of the weddings that the wedding planners have the ability to create. Here aesthetics at the conferences are not merely beautiful decorations but representative of the occupational community itself. The aesthetic dimension merits close attention because it speaks to the “practical knowledge, passion and taste which

are socially constructed and are used to understand individuals and every collectivity including occupations” (Strati, 2008, p. 235).

The members of nascent occupational communities do not have the same security as that enjoyed by respected, white-collar professionals, such as lawyers and doctors who acquire their status through a commitment to their service above their own interests, a distinct set of legally binding educational qualifications and strict gate keeping mechanisms (Brint, 1994; Halliday, 1987; Larson, 1997). Consequently, these wedding planners conferences as community configuring events constitute a necessary tool to help wedding planners project an image of professionalism to the outside world and elevate the status and reputation of their occupation. Thus, it is observed that these events are mechanisms to maintain and sustain the occupational community of wedding planners by generating business: both finding future partners to work with as well as attracting clients.

7.3.1.2. Internally Facing Functions. In addition to the externally facing functions mentioned above, the conferences serve several internal facing functions. As mentioned previously, one of the objectives of these events is to provide a space for the members of the occupational community to forge social and business connections. Since nascent occupational communities lack any formal structures, George (2013) argues that one of the challenges faced by the emerging occupational communities is the creation of a clear definition and place for nascent occupations. Here we see that community configuring events, such as conferences, offer a legitimate platform for the occupational community of wedding planners to keep the community together. The members of the community interact at both business events and entertainment events. While there is time allotted for formal networking during the business events, there are also many entertainment and recreational events that provide valuable opportunities for unstructured conversation among the conference attendees. Such events include dinners, lunches, parties, golf, tennis and wine tasting. Before the advent of the wedding planners’ conferences, there had been no specific venues or settings where numerous members of this emerging occupational community could become acquainted informally. However, the creation of the wedding planners’ conferences has addressed this need and helped to nurture a sense of unity.

Being an emerging occupational community, the wedding planners’ community does not have any fixed structures in place, for instance, high skilled training, strict examinations, highly structured apprenticeships or legally bindings unions (Bilginsoy, 2003). As a result, the conferences provide a venue where the members of the occupational community can

carry out the process of socialisation to begin structuring their community. In the case of occupational communities, the informal forms of reproduction are primarily apprenticeships and social networks (Sanders, 1989; Maroto, 2011). According to my observations, conferences facilitate a fluid socialisation process by organising activities into business events and entertainment events. As illustrated in Chapter 4B, to become part of the enchanting occupational community of wedding planners, one of the key mechanisms is to establish contacts with the elite members of that community. These events allow participants the rare chance to meet a vast number of individuals involved in the community, including the star members. Interaction with these star members and other members of the occupational community facilitates the socialisation process of acquiring their personal identity and learning more about the behaviour of the ‘star planners’ and the community as a collective community.

Another striking functionality of these conferences as community configuring events is the creation and perpetuation of a hierarchy. The literature suggests that it is the elite members of society who represent the apex of any organisation (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). The elite are regarded as being able to maintain the social structure of organisations (Domhoff & Dye, 1987). The existing literature on occupational communities suggests that as work structures become fluid and work processes less formal, the forms of control are no longer limited to bureaucratic control (Kalleberg, 2001). Since such communities lack institutional status (Van Maanen, 2010), normative forms of control are constructed (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). This phenomenon is evidenced in the case of the nascent occupational community of wedding planners—specifically, in the creation of a social hierarchy with the elite wedding planners at the pinnacle. In my research, we see how they are deemed the best of the best, a designation that leads to the formation of a connection between elitism and hierarchy (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). This connection is reinforced by my study.

I have observed that the conferences are used not only for networking with peers and conducting business but also for self-promotion, to showcase one’s capabilities. As discussed in the findings chapter, the elite wedding planners are invariably chosen to be keynote speakers at the conferences, and they usually speak about themselves: their journey, challenges and achievements. In these speeches, they project their accomplishments to all the attendees, thereby cementing their status as successful stars of the industry, people to be emulated. The findings reveal that the participants of the conferences pay close attention to

the speeches, arriving early to secure a good seat, consciously refraining from using their phones during the speeches and keeping their eyes glued to the celebrity planners on stage.

The participants are star-struck. Throughout the conference, the stars are lavished with attention and V.I.P. treatment that places them on a pedestal higher than the level of the other elite members. Inevitably, this special treatment creates an implicit hierarchy within the occupational community. To illustrate, many of the conference attendees in this study expressed excitement and adulation at the thought of ‘rubbing elbows’ with some of the most glorified elite wedding planners. In reference to these stars, they made remarks such as “my idols”, “I’m a fan” and “sitting in the same room as my idols is incredible”. According to the findings, the stars are seen to be segregated from the rest of the community via an array of other mechanisms as well. For example, just as the most prestigious Hollywood actors are seated in the first few rows at awards ceremonies, the front two rows in conference halls or prominent tables in the dining rooms are reserved for those individuals at the top stratum of the wedding planning world. Hence, these findings reaffirm the notion that the conferences are instrumental in shaping and sustaining the celebrity image of the elite wedding planners. Here we see not only the production of a social hierarchy but also its reproduction.

Additionally, the conferences bolster the image and self-image of the entire community through the mechanism of mirroring. Indeed, the wedding planners are an emerging occupational community built on glamourisation. They use it to carry out their task of wedding planning. However, I have also observed how this glamourisation serves as a mechanism to reinforce the image and the self-image of the occupational community itself. The star wedding planners comprise roughly 60 percent of the wedding planners attending these conferences, and they go to all lengths to glamourise themselves. This self-presentation includes carrying high-end designer bags, wearing exorbitant designer clothes and shoes, and adorning themselves with expensive jewellery. The star wedding planners are also observed arriving at the conferences in chauffeur-driven luxury vehicles. Here the wedding planners use glamour as an indispensable tool for the calculated crafting of their self-image and the image of the community. This glamourisation extends to the physical space of the conference. As evidenced in the findings, the grandeur and glitz they project at these conferences underscores their potential to produce a glamorous wedding on a similar scale. We observe how glamour is painted in every aspect of the conference to create an exact representation of the world of the wedding planners. The glamour observed at the conferences mirrors the potential glamour that the elite wedding planners are capable of constructing for their affluent clients.

7.4. Contributions

This section delineates the two key theoretical contributions that my study makes. First, it develops a novel concept of ‘community configuring events’ which can be used as a mechanism for understanding how occupational community constitute and sustain themselves. The second contribution of my research is the development of a notion called the *mirroring effect*, which explains how the task of the occupational community is mirrored in the manner in which members of the occupational community constitute themselves at these community configuring events. Overall, my aim is to develop a better understanding of how the occupational community organises itself.

7.4.1. Community Configuring Events

Based on my ethnographic research in the emerging occupational community of wedding planners, coupled with my literature review on occupational communities and the role of conferences, ceremonies, and trade shows as field configuring events, I put forward a novel concept that I call a *community configuring event*. It is established in situations where such an event constitutes a setting for members of the occupational community to converge and interact with one another, leading to wider impacts such as a deeper understanding of the emergence of the occupational community, how these nascent occupational communities are organised, and how these events can be used to configure the occupational communities.

To deepen understanding of the wedding planners’ conferences, I draw from the notion of conferences as field configuring events. The literature describes conferences, in general, as settings where participants from different firms come together to interact with one another with the key motive of exchanging information and making sense of the complex field dynamics (Garud, 2003), Rao describes conferences as “ubiquitous strategies of claim making that link diverse participants together in a collective way” (Rao, 2001, p. 266). Meyer, Gaba and Colwell (2005) refer to these events as “places where business cards are exchanged, networked constructed, reputations advanced, deals struck and standards set” (2005:467). My research offers evidence that wedding planners conferences fit this general description in terms of making connections. We see that the wedding planners, suppliers and other individuals associated with the wedding industry converge at the conferences to interact with one another. Here the participants can be seen exchanging business cards and making

deals for the future. The established theory on occupational communities views socialisation and the production of knowledge as processes occurring within institutions of higher learning (Anteby, 2013; Becker, Geer, Hughes & Strauss, 1961) and in formal organisations through credentialing and memberships. (Anteby et al., 2016; Beckhy, 2013; Michel, 2011; Van Maanen, 1975) While memberships still exist in the case of elite wedding planners, my data (see Findings, Chapter 6) point out that these memberships are neither mandatory nor coveted. In the case of the elite wedding planners, I have observed that wedding planner associations do not necessarily facilitate the socialisation of this occupational community. Rather, it is the conferences that serve as a platform facilitating socialisation among members of this nascent occupational community.

However, while meeting and interacting with the other participants has been successfully carried out at different conferences in the past, in the existing literature, the key focus of these field configuring events has been *field* level institutional innovations with an emphasis on knowledge and learning (Schübler et al., 2015). As an illustration is the conference of Jewish lawyers in 1944 that established an independent legal profession in the newly establishing state of Israel (Oliver and Montgomery, 2008). Another example is the series of three conferences that established the standards for cochlear implants and attracted a variety of professionals to discuss common criteria to gauge the safety of cochlear implants, aimed at institutionalising the meaning of assisting the deaf and the specific barometers against which this functioning can be measured (Garud, 2008). A further example can be seen in the semiconductor industry where conference participants utilised the conferences to create new collective practices to manage and keep pace with the uncertainty in the markets (Zilber, 2011).

These conferences have focused on institutional innovations such as making major changes in their particular fields and focusing on knowledge and learning for targeting mass markets, co-production or promotion and selection of innovative products (Foster et al., 2011).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) state that in their study of field configuring events, the boundaries, roles, and shared interdependencies are largely acknowledged. Here the organisational fields are already materialised, that is, after agreement has been reached on the categorisation of pertinent artefacts, actors, and the relationships between them, and after the boundaries have been demarcated in the domain of the field (Guard, 2008). Thus, although my proposed concept of conferences as community configuring events does share some characteristics of conferences as field configuring events, it differs from the concept of

field configuring events in this regard. My study explores *nascent* occupational communities where the institutionalisation has not yet taken place.

I found that the wedding planners conferences are not used primarily as a mechanism to enhance institutionalisation of the fields. To begin with, the wedding planners' conferences are venues for members of an emerging occupational community to meet and interact with one another. Being nascent, these occupational communities, unlike institutionalised organisations, do not have distinct hierarchical structures or roles laid out. This lack of a formalised hierarchy can be attributed to the absence of official criteria, such as mandatory educational qualifications, trainings, associations or certifications, or a strict mechanism for gate keeping. (Larson, 1997). Even so, my findings indicate that the conferences are settings where the structuring of the nascent occupational community is evident in less formal ways. The selectivity for entry into these wedding planners' conferences projects the inclusive and exclusivity of this specific nascent occupational community.

Oh yes, not everyone can sit in the front seats in these conferences, those are reserved for the star wedding planners. (A wedding planner from U.K. at Engage Conference)
It is a dream come true for me to meet the Mr.GT. I mean he has organised weddings of so many celebrities and is a true star (A wedding planner from India at EWPC Conference).

Extracted from my collected data, these quotes suggest that the elite wedding planners conferences not only contribute to the structuring of a hierarchy but also aid in sustaining it. Remarks similar to the ones above can be found in earlier chapters of this thesis, all pointing to the pivotal role of wedding planners' conferences in the structuring of the nascent occupational community. Hereby, my proposed concept of conferences as community configuring events is useful to understand the stratification taking place in nascent occupational communities where the institutionalisation has not yet taken place.

Who can be categorised as elite, and what does the designation "elite" constitute? These are increasingly complicated questions (Shore, 2002) in the context of a diverse society, which is characterised by division of labour, specialisation and varied areas of activities. Therefore, identification of elites often tends to be a tricky issue (Harvey, 2002). In the established literature, it is easier to identify these elites in structured and institutionalised settings (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006), over non-institutional settings. In my study, we see that the community configuring events; i.e., the wedding planners' conferences, reveal the

power structures of the nascent occupational community and facilitate the identification of these elite members in the occupational community. At the same time, these conferences also help to reproduce those power structures, as evidenced in many ways in my study.

Traditionally, the primary tools to identify the elites is the unequal distribution of resources, such a means of production, the financial capital or the land that the elites might possess (e.g., Marx, 2007) or through intellectual knowledge (e.g., Dogan, 2003). My study explores how elitism, or the star status, is created and maintained at the wedding planners' conferences.

To begin, it should be acknowledged that keeping the entrance to these conferences restricted to a chosen fraction of the industry automatically projects a basic level of elitism. While at the conferences, the star wedding planners are given preferential treatment in terms of space, i.e., reservation of separate seating arrangements for the stars at the business events as well as separate seating for dining, and exclusive after parties. Also, the honour of being a keynote speaker is invariably given to only the most famous and respected wedding planners. At the outset, this shaping of exclusivity and distinctiveness is indicative of superiority and status (Bourdieu 1994; Daloz, 2007, 2010), and it is conspicuous at the wedding planners conferences.

As my research confirms, the other attendees revere the star elite wedding planners, thereby ensuring that these stars will remain on a higher pedestal than the various other elite wedding planners. This finding resonates with a statement made by Mauss (1972, p. 40), i.e., "it is public opinion that makes the magician and creates the power fields". Thus, my thesis reveals that the manner in which the 'star' wedding planners are treated at these wedding planners conferences by both the organisers and the attendees, leads the star wedding planners to 'believe that they are a chosen elite and belong to a collective of special individuals' (Kärreman and Alvesson; 2009; 1128).

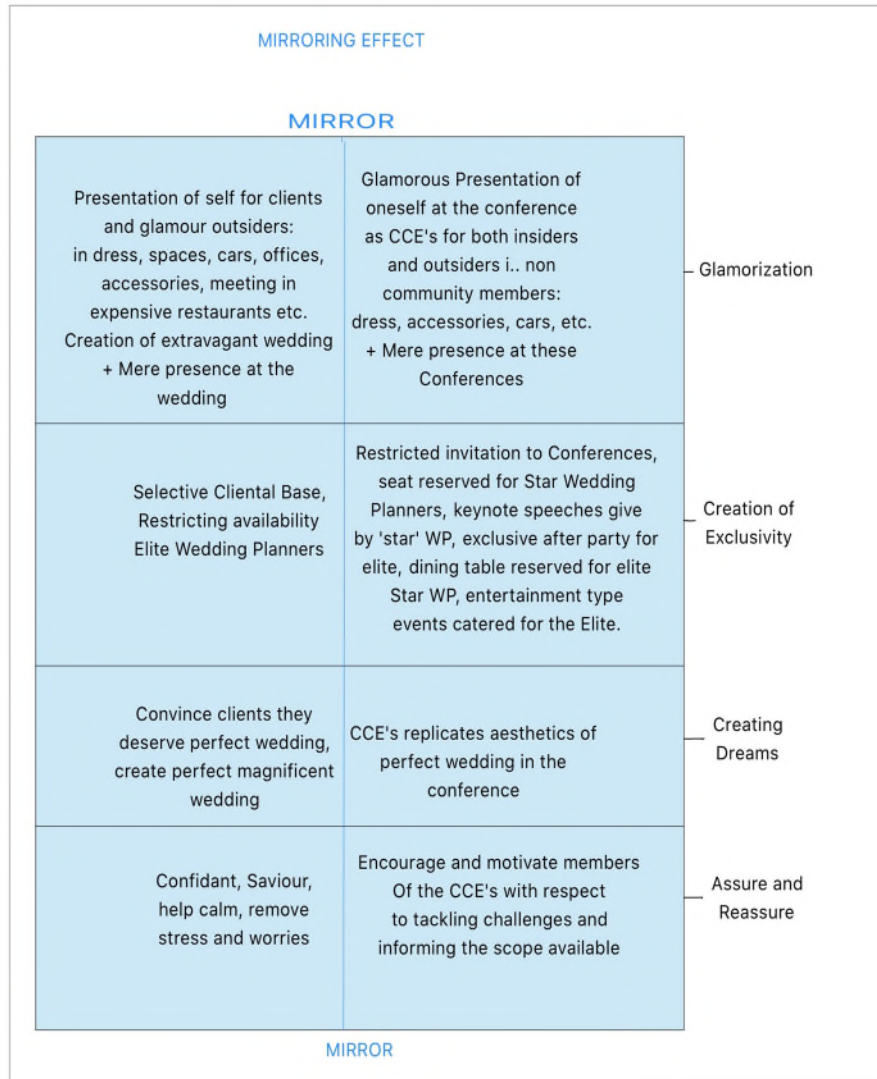
Flowing from this study are several implications for the need to theorise a novel concept of community configuring events. Such a concept serves as platform for socialisation among the members of nascent occupational community. While the concept of the field configuring event shares certain features of the community configuring event, most obviously in the opportunities for interaction, the two are distinct from each other in term of structure. The field configuring event is structured in accordance with the institutional logic of the particular field and the recognised institutional life (Thornton et al., 2012; Lampel and Meyer, 2008). However, my research demonstrates how community configuring events go beyond professional networking or information sharing. The concept of the community

configuring event furthers our understanding of the structuring of nascent occupational communities. The theorisation of this concept reveals the power structure and social stratification taking place in nascent occupational communities and the mechanisms of reproduction of this process. This concept can deepen our understanding of how emerging occupational communities configure themselves. In addition, the wedding planners conference as a community configuring event leads to the development of a novel phenomenon known as the ‘mirroring effect’, which is explained in the next section.

7.4.2. Mirroring Effect

In the sections above, two key revelations emerge from the analysis of the findings. First, one would assume that the execution of a perfect and extravagant wedding would be the guiding objective of the emerging occupational community of elite wedding planners. On the contrary, however, it is the perpetuation of glamour and exclusivity that has also emerged an overriding priority for the wedding planners. An attendant focus is the continual need to reassure the clients and create dreams for them to hold onto. The second salient finding of my analysis is how wedding planners conferences can be perceived as community configuring events directed towards two different audiences: one for the insiders (i.e. the members of the occupation) and one for the outsiders (non-members of the occupation). By zooming in and out on these pivotal points, I argue that there is a direct relationship between the real task domain/nature of the task carried out by the wedding planners (i.e. glamourisation, exclusivity, creation of dreams, assurance and reassurance) and the manner in which the wedding planners constitute themselves at these conferences as community configuring events. This relationship is clarified in the chart below.

Figure 19: Mirroring Effect



The above chart illustrates how the nature of the elite wedding planners' tasks during the planning process is mirrored in the actual structuring of these conferences (community configuring events) for the nascent occupational community. The major task domains are glamourisation, the creation of exclusivity, the creation of dreams, and assurance and reassurance. They are all mirrored at by conferences. This mirroring effect is strictly related to the task domain of the occupational community. As Anteby (2016) has suggested, tasks are critical for defining the individuals as part of the occupational community according to what they do. The task renders the individuals part of an occupational community as it gives them a sense of uniqueness (Marschall, 2002).

From the perspective of the first task domain, glamourisation, the findings demonstrate that the process of glamourisation is carried out by the elite wedding planners in all aspects of how they operate and present themselves. Every superficial detail of their

marketable image is carefully orchestrated: their clothes, handbags, accessories, cars, office décor and restaurant choices for meetings. Exuding stunning glamour is their overall objective. Likewise, at the wedding planners' conferences, the elite wedding planners dress and behave like superstars. Regardless of their location, they put themselves on display for 'conspicuous consumption'. This notion of conspicuous consumption is often highlighted in the media in relation to celebrity weddings (Winch & Webster, 2012). In the case of elite wedding planners, we see how the overlapping of glamour and exclusivity in the wedding planners themselves turns them into objects of conspicuous consumption.

Proceeding to the next task domain of creating exclusivity, as explained in Section 7.3.2. of this chapter, exclusivity is created at the conferences in a variety of ways. These include restrictive entry by invitation, reserved seating for the elite members, keynote speeches only by the elite, and the prestigious seating allocation at dinners and after parties. Access to the after parties is permitted only to the elite members of the community or through close connections to these members. While the manipulative construction of privilege may not be generally visible to the outsiders of the occupational community, I have observed that this exclusivity is reinforced in both the execution of tasks and the community configuring events.

Exclusivity also acts as a boundary. As Weststar (2015) asserts, in occupational communities, such boundaries are formed through internally constructed connotative notions of belonging that are socially meaningful to the insider members of the particular occupational community. Here the projection of exclusivity reflects the characteristics of the members of the occupational community, wherein the members are deemed to be part of that community through the display of behavioural enactment rather than the traditional notion of labelling according to geographical proximity, shared employer or shared occupational title (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984, p. 295). Furthermore, the chart on the mirroring effect illustrates how the task of creating dreams is mimicked by the elite wedding planners both in the nature of the tasks they undertake and in the configuration of the community through conferences. Section 7.3.3 explains how the manufacturing of dreams is a central task of elite wedding planners. Like the dream wedding, the dream conference is a place of magical glamour.

Moreover, the findings indicate that the elite wedding planners are ultimately responsible for assuring and reassuring their team members, their clients and the entire wedding planning community that they can handle everything and anything with the utmost degree of professionalism. They also assume the role of trusted confidants to clients and

serve as role models to motivate other members of the wedding planners' community. For example, after listening to a speech by an elite wedding planner at a conference, some of the participants felt encouraged and offered comments such as the following: "I feel pumped up" and "Never thought of carrying out weddings in Australia, but after listening to elite wedding planner John, I am willing to take the risk." Such remarks further support the notion that the task of assuring and reassuring is both a component of the elite wedding planner's task domain and a tool used for the configuration of the occupation at the conferences.

To summarise, a mirroring effect is present in how the elite wedding planners carry out their work practices and in how the conferences are structured. This mirroring effect can expand our understanding of the way in which the emerging occupational communities are configured despite the absence of formalised structures. As emerging occupational communities have fluid work structures and lack stringent methods of control, the mirroring effect deepens our insights into the social hierarchy among wedding planners and how this hierarchical structure configures the occupational community.

7.4.2.1. Mirroring Effect and Competitive Boundary. As discussed in the section above, the Mirroring Effect projects the direct relationship between the real task domain/nature of the tasks carried out by the wedding planners and the manner in which the elite wedding planners constitute themselves at the conferences as community configuring events. While bringing forward this Mirroring Effect phenomenon, several implications of the use of objects are seen at both dimensions: how the wedding planners carry out their tasks and how they constitute themselves at the conferences.

My findings highlight the predominant role of objects during the processes of glamourisation, creating exclusivity and manufacturing dreams. By zooming into the role of objects, the study projects that competitive boundaries are drawn. As explained by Langley et al. (2019), competitive boundaries revolve around how individuals create, protect or extend boundaries to distinguish themselves from others. This also includes creating and defining an exclusive territory in order to secure some kind of advantage. According to my findings, this competitive boundary is established at various stages. What stands out is that elite wedding planners use glamorous objects, including ultra-luxury cars, clothes, accessories, bags, gadgets, as well as glamorous meeting spaces, such as extravagant restaurants and hotels, to set themselves apart from the other members of the occupational community. In addition, my findings (for example e.g. figure 13, 14) provide ample evidence of the heavily glamourised aesthetics of the wedding planners' conferences.

In my study, it is evident that glamorous objects and spaces act as a crucial key in differentiating between the elite wedding planners and the other members of the nascent occupational community. This finding corroborates the work of Wilson (2007) who argues that glamour is representative of elitism. It is something that not everyone can possess. Being glamorous is compared to being able to reach for the stars; while everyone might dream of reaching the stars, not all are able to touch them (Wilson, 2007). Being glamorous includes a mix of human and nonhuman elements attempting to capture one's captivity (Thrift, 2008). This phenomenon can be seen in the glamorous lifestyle projected by the elite wedding planners. According to Postrel (2004), it is natural for individuals to have aspirations that can probably never be achieved. In reality, for many people, this elusive dream is often the acquisition of some kind of object, for example, the perfect diamond ring, perfect car, perfect house, which is often explained as striving to become glamorous (Postrel, 2004). My study reveals how the lifestyle and work of the elite wedding planners resonate with the perfect and glamorous wedding that the affluent clients covet. Thus, they are drawn towards the most glamorous wedding planners. Glamour is projected as a form of competitive boundary and maintaining the power relations in the occupational community (Allen, 2000; Langley & Reay, 2016). The elite wedding planners are clearly differentiated from the other members of the occupational community.

Furthermore, the evidence from my study projects that the wedding planners' conference can be categorised as a boundary in itself, since entry to the conference validates membership for some and excludes others, similar to the work of competitive boundaries (Ashuri & Bar-Ilan, 2016; Mikes, 2011). Here wedding planners' conferences act as a boundary possessing the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Only cherry-picked individuals from the occupational community of wedding planners merit an invitation. This exclusivity is also extended in the manner in which the wedding planners conferences are organised. The star wedding planners are given special access to coveted spaces both during the business events (e.g. keynote speeches, workshops) and entertainment events (e.g., private after parties).

My study presents a symbolic relationship of glamour being used to establish a form of distinctiveness and to form connections with other powerful individuals (Edlinger, 2015; Mikes, 2011). Glamour can be viewed as a marker of a competitive boundary—as a mechanism to clarify the differences as well as set out the differences (Abbott, 1988). In my study, the elite wedding planners use this boundary in order to conserve their power over the

occupational community, thereby resulting in the reproduction of their status and the perpetuation of the existing power dynamics (see Hazgui & Gendron, 2015; Murray, 2010)

7.5. Summary

To conclude, the sections in this chapter offer a theoretical analysis of my findings (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). In doing so, two important contributions have been made to the literature on occupational communities. First, through this analysis, I have developed a novel concept and coined it as a *community configuring event*. This projected setting is where members of an occupational community come together to interact with one another. Though this aspect draws parallels to a similar existing concept known as Field configuring events, these field configuring events are focused on field and institutional level evolution and innovations (Schübler et al., 2015; Garud, 2008; Oliver and Montgomery, 2008). On the other hand, while community configuring events does provide for a platform for socialization of the members of the community, it also provides deeper, multi-faceted insights into how an emerging occupational community configures itself. These events assist in the creation and upholding of the social hierarchy. The novel concept of community configuring events can expand our awareness of how the occupational community reproduces itself and sustains itself as an occupational community.

The second contribution of my thesis is the development of a phenomenon known as the *Mirroring effect*. My study argues that there is a mirroring effect taking place between the manner in which the members of the occupational community conduct themselves—in other words, the task domain—and the manner in which the aforementioned community configuring events are structured. It also explores glamour as a competitive boundary, maintaining inclusivity and exclusivity and power relations in the occupational community. This mirroring effect can be extremely helpful in discovering new dimensions concerning how various nascent occupational communities organise themselves.

7.6. Scope of the Study

This research took a qualitative, inductive approach to achieve a more multi-layered appreciation of nascent occupational communities. The strength of my thesis lies in its rich narratives and vignettes that allow the reader to understand the doing and becoming of the emerging occupational community of elite wedding planners. The rich data facilitates the formation of empirically driven research questions which allow for the development of new

conceptual insights. The question that comes to light is whether the findings from this research can be applied to other research settings (Gioia et al., 2012). In the analysis of the findings and the discussion, the study has attempted to compare and contrast the findings of the research with the existing literature.

Although the elite wedding planners' occupational community has some distinctive elements, it is not treated as an exceptional case. Elements of my study—for example, an occupational community consisting of individuals who largely depend on their reputation for the continuation of their business—might be found in diverse research settings as well as in the entertainment and event management industries, and among elite fashion designers, jewelry designers, service designers. Furthermore, with an increasing shift in trends from an organisational to occupational perspective (Damarin, 2006), there is a rise in unconventional and new occupations (Damarin, 2006), leading to a need to understand the emergence and sustainment of these new occupations. Consequently, the novel notion of community configuring events and the phenomenon of the mirroring effect provide a deeper understanding of the same, which could help practitioners carry out research on other new occupations.

The scope of this research was constrained by both theoretical and methodological choices. In terms of the theoretical limitation, during the fieldwork, I looked into the 'doing' (Anteby, 2016) of the elite wedding planners, i.e. their everyday activities and interactions with their clients and staff. Additionally, while I have conducted my investigation at community configuring events such as conferences, I have not focused on the collaborative relations that are built with other occupational and non-occupational groups. For instance, in examining the everyday activities of the wedding planners, I have limited this research to their interactions with their clients and other members of the occupational communities. I have not looked into their interactions and sites of practice that involve contact with florists, caterers, sound engineers, light engineers, and various other service providers associated with the industry. Such interaction is touched upon, but it is not elaborated. My focus was on particular sites of practice rather than the whole ecology (Swan, Newell & Nicolini, 2016). For future research projects on the wedding planning industry, one might be able to focus on the aforementioned aspects from 'relating lenses' (Anteby, et al., 2016) in order to deepen understanding of these relationships.

In terms of the methodological decisions, the study is limited by my concentration on the operations of the nascent occupational community in the U.K. and India. Due to pragmatic constraints such as time and budget limits, it was not possible to conduct my

fieldwork at multiple elite wedding planner firms in other countries, such as the United States. Therefore, I decided to adhere mainly to only two wedding planning firms. At the same time, this approach allowed me, as an ethnographer, the valuable opportunity to study these two interesting and insightful cases in meaningful depth.

7.7. Avenues for Future Research

The first avenue for future research is related to my contributions of the novel ‘community configuring event’ and a new dimension of the ‘mirroring effect’. These concepts could be used as interrelated tools in the future to understand other occupations emerging with the change in work structures (Hollister, 2011). Assuming that how the members conduct themselves at work is mirrored in how the community configuring events are configured, this mirroring effect can be used to study occupational communities that might have high restrictions in allowing the researcher to carry out ethnographic fieldwork over a period of time. For example, future studies could be conducted on certain high status but under-researched occupational communities. The researcher can use the site of community configuring events, such as industry conferences, to study the behaviour of members of such occupational communities.

In addition, through the course of my study, I observed the various divisions of labour that have formed, e.g. wedding designers and wedding coordinators. For the purposes of future research, one could explore the unanswered question of when various specialists become an occupational community and when one could classify different subspecialties within an occupational community.

The wedding planning industry as a research setting opens up an array of compelling opportunities for future study. Given the growing importance of this industry and the fact that it is still under-researched in the Management and Organisational Studies field, it can offer robust possibilities for future researchers. While conducting my fieldwork, I realised some potential areas of research interest, such as the growing presence of the gay community among wedding planners in diverse countries. The aspect of sexual orientation could be explored further in terms of how this community within a community is perceived across Asian and Western contexts. My research also gave me glimpses into the psychology of wedding planners. I noted how in spite of being stressed and exhausted in their efforts to please their clients, the wedding planners always managed to maintain their composure and a

smile on their faces. Therefore, the emotional labour element in this occupational community is worth exploring in the future.

7.8. Concluding Words

In brief, I set out to investigate the emerging occupational community of wedding planners. Through the execution of a multi-sited ethnography, I zoom in and zoom out on various sites of practice of the wedding planners across two different countries: the U.K. and India. The multiple sites of practice have helped me obtain a well-rounded understanding of this occupational community. In this thesis, I explore the task domain of the wedding planners and the wedding planners' conferences with the aim of answering my research questions. The significant contributions of my study are the novel concept of community configuring events and the development of the phenomenon of the mirroring effect. It is my hope that my contributions can assist in developing a multi-faceted understanding of emerging occupational communities and how they organise and configure themselves.

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Appendix A – Research Access information

Consent Form

Participant identification number where applicable

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: In Transition: An Ethnographic Exploration into an Emerging Occupational Community of Elite Wedding Planners

Name of Researcher: Ragini Kapoor

Name of Supervisors: Professor Jacky Swan and Profession Davide Nicolini

Date:

Please initial box

I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet dated [10/11/16] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions of a member of the research team and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

☐

I understand that that my information will be held and processed for the following purposes: to be analysed by the researcher for the purposes of completing their PhD research and, where relevant, for the writing of associated academic journal articles or monographs.

☐

I agree to take part in the above named study and I am willing to be interviewed

☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Project Information Sheet

Researcher: Ragini Kapoor ()

Supervisor: Jacky Swan () & Davide Nicolini ()

Project Information Sheet

Essential Information

This is a research project investigating the emerging occupational community of elite wedding planners. The project involves the understanding of the emergence of this community and how do the elite wedding planners project such extravagant weddings. This project involves carrying out an ethnographic study at two elite wedding planners firms; one in the U.K. and one in India. Being the best elite wedding planners, you have been chosen to be part of the study of this extremely fascinating and nascent occupation. As you have agreed to take part in this research, this document will explain what is being done and what it may involve.

What is the purpose of the study?

Your participation in the study will help to explore how do individuals come elite wedding planners, how do the elite wedding planners create dreams larger than lives, how does this occupational community function, how do they meet and interact with other members of the occupation, form connections and continue their existence.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this research at any time, with no negative repercussion to yourself or the firm for which you work.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

Participation in this project will include being interviewed by the above named researcher on the subject of deeper understanding of the nascent occupational community of elite wedding planners.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

It is not expected that you will encounter any risks by taking part in this project. Data will be anonymised from the beginning, with no names or particular positions recorded as part of the interview data. The consent form signed by you will be kept in a locked office at the University of Warwick, and the transcripts of interview data will be anonymised before printing it and it will be stored in the same location at the university. The transcripts will also be stored electronically on the researcher's password-protected laptop. All these materials will be destroyed after 10 years from the completion of the research. The data collected from this research may be published. You can request a copy of this publication from the researcher.

What are the benefits of taking part?

Your participation in the present research would bring the well-deserved recognition and respect towards this emerging occupational community and would elevate the status on this occupational community in the world of academia as well. Should you have any additional questions about this research, please contact Ragini Kapoor ([REDACTED]) or Jacky Swan ([REDACTED]) or Davide Nicolini ([REDACTED])

You may also get in touch with the WBS Research Office should you have wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the researcher.