

COSMOPOLITAN

SEPTEMBER 2005

WHAT YOU'RE DYING TO KNOW ABOUT

**240 Why There's So Much
Marriage Mania** We examine
the sudden "I do" explosion.

Why There's So Much Marriage Mania

You've probably noticed that nuptial fever is rampant. Everywhere you look, from TV, to the news, to your friend's left hand, people are I-do obsessed. We take a look.

By Julia Gaynor

■ Over the past few months, it's been virtually impossible to avoid hearing, seeing, or uttering the W word (hint: It rhymes with bedding). You've likely read stories, heard newscasts, and participated in conversations—ad nauseam—that covered everything from runaway brides to shotgun weddings to six-figure receptions. Chatter about marriage seems to have reached a fever pitch, which is odd considering it's an institution that's existed for thousands of years. So what's actually going on?

"We're a nation that has become obsessed with weddings," says psychologist Dale Atkins, PhD, coauthor of *Wedding Sanity Savers*. And there are a bunch of contributing factors. "Extravagant details of celebrity weddings, increasing competitive pressure within female peer groups, and the Gen Y desire to fast-track one's lifestyle all add momentum to this shift in the energy we're focusing toward weddings now," explains Atkins. *Cosmo* examines why wedding fervor has accelerated at warp speed.

It Seems Like Every Celeb Is Getting Married

Did you get the memo? Paris has a 24-carat rock! Nicole Richie wants elephant rides, swans, and horse-drawn carriages on her big day. Both Ben and Jen and Renée and Kenny had secret, intimate island ceremonies, while Sophia Bush and Chad Michael Murray got hitched in a lavish seaside event in southern California.

"Today, young female stars' weddings are far more frequent and over-the-top than they were 10 to 15 years ago," says Pamela Paul, author of *The Starter Marriage*. "Additionally, the grand details of celebrity nuptials are more accessible to us than ever before, which makes it hard not to get sucked in."

Sure, it seems like innocent, voyeuristic fun to get an inside peek at these A-list unions, but the constant barrage

of celeb wedding news can seep into your psyche. "Even if you're not thinking about getting married, most women will subconsciously wind up fantasizing about weddings simply because they're bombarded by so many images and news reports," says Beverly Hills psychotherapist Jenn Berman, PsyD. "The focus is often on the dress and the party, rather than the relationship. As a result, people fixate on those superficial details. They use celebrity examples as a yardstick for what they want someday, which makes them feel panicked because they can't live up to it."

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MANIA
SOURCE

Gouged Guests

\$500

The out-of-pocket cost for the average wedding guest.

SOURCE: THEKNOT.COM WEDDING RESEARCH

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Another way celeb nuptials can mess with our minds: They're now happening at a frantic pace. "Everything happens so much faster in Hollywood, which can make us scrutinize our own time frames and fuel the frenzy," says Atkins. "When someone like Katie Holmes makes a choice to get married after six weeks [and only two months after breaking off her engagement to Chris Klein], there are a lot of people who'll say, 'If it's okay for Katie, it's okay for me.' The prob-

to *Life*. "They want to have it all—the career, the house, the husband—while they're still a 20something. But this high-pressure deadline makes them feel like they're running out of time and if they don't get hitched soon, most of the good men will be taken and their chances of having a baby will be slim."

Blame it on a generational backlash: "Young women today spent their childhood being told that they could accomplish anything and to pour their energy



Experts don't know if wedding mania drove runaway bride Jennifer Willbanks over the edge.

"High-pressure deadlines make women feel like they're running out of time to settle down."

lem? "What people fail to realize is that stars have more ability to act on their impulses than we do, and the danger is that people get carried away and end up walking down the aisle before they even know each other," Atkins says.

The New Deadline for Having It All Suddenly Got Younger

Dream-life checklist: Kick-ass career, gorgeous husband, fabulous pad, cute gurgling baby. Timeline: fitting it all in before age 30! It might sound crazy and ridiculously ambitious, but many young women are creating tighter and tighter internal deadlines for themselves. That puts them in a pinch—and creates a feeling of panic. "There's been a generational shift in the way young women approach their goals these days," says Jane Buckingham, president of Youth Intelligence, a trend-forecasting firm, and author of *The Modern Girl's Guide*



into pursuing their own interests," says Paul. "They experienced a prolonged adolescence as they turned their focus away from settling down. But now they are yearning for a sign of adulthood. They crave security and are optimistic that marriage will quickly transition them from their less responsible 20s into a more successful stage. They think it's the fastest way to show their parents that they've officially left the nest."

It doesn't exactly help that we're seeing tons of celebrity multitaskers like Reese Witherspoon, Kate Winslet, and Kate Hudson pull it all off with time to spare. "They've found their soul mates, gotten married, and had babies before 30, and their careers haven't suffered, so it not only looks attainable, but it also puts pressure on real women to get there too," says Buckingham. "Their weddings appear to be the catalyst of everything else they've achieved, which fuels the idea that marrying young is part of what makes you a complete person."

But there is an inherent pitfall in trying to do all this by 30. "What do

Why You Shouldn't Marry Too Young

If you tie the knot at an early age, the odds are stacked against you:

THERE'S A GREATER RISK YOU'LL GROW APART

"You change so much during your 20s," says Beverly Hills psychotherapist Jenn Berman, PsyD. "So when you wait until your late 20s, you've faced those growing pains, and they don't burden your marriage."

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WANT IN A PARTNER

"It's often through having an active dating life that you come to know the type of person who brings out the best in you," says Berman. As a result, by your late 20s, you have a better sense of what you'll compromise on in a mate and what you won't.

YOU CAN'T BE AS SELFISH ABOUT YOUR CAREER

When most of their workplace peers are focusing solely on the job, young spouses have to consider their partners' needs too. "These couples may have to make sacrifices in their careers at a time when they need to be aggressive," says Berman.

YOU SKIP THE SOW-YOUR-WILD-OATS PHASE

One reason experts believe you're more ready to get married in your late 20s is because you've spent time playing the field. "The single world isn't this great unknown, so you can leave it and not look back," says Berman.

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you have to look forward to?" asks Paul. "When you race through your goals without savoring them or taking what you learned from the last experience to refocus your next step, you really miss out." Not to mention, your marriage's chance of surviving is better if you wed in your late 20s rather than earlier.

Weddings Have Never Been More Lavish

Fact: Big-day price tags are getting higher and higher, echoing the competition women increasingly face to outdo

life will be—that's one reason *it has* to be perfect and better than the last celebration they attended," adds Paul.

And the numbers prove it. According to WeddingChanel.com, the average cost of weddings has risen \$11,000 in the past 15 years, from \$15,000 to roughly \$26,000. And to keep up with the spiraling cost of getting hitched, the *Wall Street Journal* reports that some couples are now asking guests for cash—on top of traditional gifts—so they can have their over-the-top nuptials. All this to marry the man you love? Not really.

Brides are taking out loans for their dresses. Couples are flying bands across

you announce your engagement, it's 'How did he do it?' and 'Let's have a look at the ring.' We have more bridal and celebrity magazines than ever, as well as reality TV shows, which all fuel the industry. Weddings overall



have become a focus of consumer culture, so there's a lot more pressure for people to get everything from event planners to wedding Web sites. There's so much more out there now in the marketplace that caters to this."

Unfortunately, a lot of people lose track of the lifelong commitment they're about to make as they figure out whether they want fireworks or a 40-piece orchestra at the reception. "Couples get so caught up in the event that they lose sight of the relationship and their life after the wedding," says Susan Shapiro Barash, author of *The New Wife*. "It's a rude awakening when, after the wedding has been so consuming emotionally, financially, and timewise, the couple returns to each other alone and is no longer treated like royalty. Princess for a day really only lasts one day." ■

"Many women see the wedding as a projection of how their life will be...so it *has* to be perfect."

one another in their walk down the aisle. "Weddings have become the ultimate status symbol for couples today. It drives women to compete with each other, and that one-upmanship fuels the mania," says Atkins. "Many women see the wedding as a projection of how their whole

the country and asking guests to cross state lines and oceans for elaborate destination weddings (which can last for several days) just to make sure their big day is more fabulous than anyone else's.

"People become competitive from the proposal on," says Paul. "As soon as



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SOURCE: APRIL 2005 WEDDINGCHANNEL.COM USER RESEARCH