

1                   **Meaning and Symbolism in Bridal Costumes in Western Saudi Arabia**

2                   Dress is an important cultural tool that can be used as an expression of social and cultural  
3 identity (Barnes & Eicher, 1992). Traditional dress represents national culture and historical  
4 heritage and includes all items, garments, and body modifications (e.g., makeup and perfumes)  
5 that embody the past for particular members of a group (Eicher & Sumberg, 1995; Roach-  
6 Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Characteristics of traditional dress evolve accommodating changes in  
7 contemporary society (Disele, Tyler, & Power 2011; Foster & Johnson, 2003). In Saudi Arabia,  
8 traditional dress has a rich history and plays a significant role in Saudi women's lives,  
9 particularly for special occasions such as weddings (Iskandarani, 2006; Long, 2005). However,  
10 extant research regarding its meaning and symbolism is limited.

11                  In Saudi Arabia, a wedding is a major event that represents a sacred bond governed by  
12 culture and Islamic law. Weddings and subsequent marriages are viewed as paramount to healthy  
13 family relationships and the continuation of a strong and stable Saudi society (Doumato, 2010;  
14 Long, 2005). As such, weddings become public celebrations which are often marked by lavish  
15 spending (Al-Jeraisy, 2008; Al-Munajjed, 1997). The wedding costume is one of the most  
16 important aspects of the Saudi wedding celebration. To many people it reflects the cultural  
17 values of the wedding and the status of the bride and groom's families (Foster & Johnson, 2003).

18                  Several researchers have explored the prominence and the symbolic value of a bride's  
19 traditional dress in different societies (Baldizzone & Baldizzone, 2001; Barber, 1994; Becker,  
20 2003; Foster & Johnson, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Kochuyt, 2012). These researchers have shown  
21 that traditional bridal costume holds significant and diverse cultural meanings that can represent  
22 women's reproductive capabilities, connect generations of families, and ease this rite of passage  
23 into adulthood. It has been suggested that traditional wedding costumes in diverse cultures are

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24 more than objects because of their powerful symbolic value and fundamental role within the  
25 wedding ceremony (Baldizzone & Baldizzone, 2001). In addition, traditional bridal costumes  
26 may give brides a sense of national identity, especially when they live outside of their native  
27 country (Kochuyt, 2012). Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) proposed the term costume for use  
28 in discussions of dress for ceremonies and rituals, thus, we will use the phrase traditional  
29 wedding costumes.

30         The western region of Saudi Arabia, the Hijaz, has its own unique styles and forms of  
31 traditional bridal costumes (Iskandarani, 2006; Yamani, 2004), which are still popular and  
32 widely used today (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013). However, researchers have yet to explore the  
33 symbolic meaning of traditional Hijazi bridal costumes. Within Arabic scholarly literature,  
34 Iskandarani (2006) analyzed the physical appearance of the design lines, fabric, color, textiles,  
35 and patterns used for decorations for traditional bridal costumes in Medina, but did not analyze  
36 the bridal costumes for meaning. Little is published about the meaning of these traditional Hijazi  
37 bridal costumes and their place in today's marriage rituals. Perhaps this is because they are  
38 handmade by a few families who live in the region who own and rent them, and are not mass  
39 produced or available for purchase in stores. Rentals are usually very expensive, ranging from  
40 \$300 to \$800 per night depending on the condition and the materials used for the decoration.  
41 Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the history, significance, and meaning of Hijazi  
42 bridal costumes from the perspective of women who have experienced wearing them. Further,  
43 we explored their continued use in rites of passage from both historical and contemporary  
44 perspectives. The other primary objective was to explore the motivations that influence Saudi  
45 women's decisions to wear traditional dress during the wedding ceremony. The researchers  
46 propose that exploring the meaning of Hijazi bridal costumes from the perspective of women

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47 who have experienced wearing them will contribute to the literature about women's rites of  
48 passage from a global perspective, in particular, the intergenerational meaning of traditional  
49 bridal costumes.

### 50 **Literature Review**

#### 51 **Saudi Arabian Wedding Rituals**

52 The Saudi Arabian region has been under Islamic rule since the birth of Islam in the  
53 seventh century (Long, 2005). After the establishment of Saudi Arabia as a country in 1932,  
54 Saudi law has continued following the rule of Islam in every aspect of life; this includes  
55 marriage, weddings, and dress (Long, 2005). Islam requires men to pay a dowry (a set amount of  
56 money as a gift for his bride). Moreover, Saudi culture requires approval from both the bride's  
57 and groom's families before marriage (Al-Munajjed, 1997; Bin Manie, 1985). Family is a very  
58 important structural unit in Saudi society and familial relationships are strong (Long, 2005). This  
59 closeness makes family events such as weddings major occasions, for which Saudi women pay a  
60 great deal of attention to dress (Al-Munajjed, 1997). The bridal dress in the wedding celebration  
61 represents the bride and her entire family (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013).

62 Traditional Saudi weddings include multiple culturally significant rituals celebrated over  
63 several discontinuous days (Qusay, 2010). These begin with the introduction of the bride and  
64 groom in arranged marriages. After an agreement between the two joining families, the  
65 engagement party is held, during which the groom presents the dowry, engagement ring, and  
66 bridal jewelry on an ornately decorated silver cart (Iskandarani, 2006; Qusay, 2010). As the  
67 wedding day approaches, other celebrations and events take place. In Hijazi culture, the  
68 *Ghomrah* party, a bridal shower, is held a few days before the wedding, during which the bride  
69 wears a traditional bridal costume and henna designs are drawn on her hands and feet

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70 (Iskandarani, 2006). For the wedding ceremony itself, the bride, if not garbed in traditional Saudi  
71 costume, dons a white, Western-style wedding gown (Iskandarani, 2006). The wedding  
72 ceremony, however, is not the conclusion of the wedding-related celebration. Many Hijazi  
73 families hold additional post-wedding parties to congratulate the new couple (Iskandarani, 2006).

74         There have been many 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century changes in Saudi Arabia that have influenced  
75 modern Saudi weddings. Since the discovery of oil in 1938, foreign workers and their families,  
76 customs, and traditions have led to economic growth, modernization and increased Western  
77 influence in the country (Al-Munajjed, 1997; Long, 2005). Western influence in particular could  
78 be seen to be connected to the increase in female educational opportunities and representation in  
79 the workforce (Al-Munajjed, 1997; Pharaon, 2004). Perhaps this explains the change from the  
80 average age of first marriages for Saudi Arabian women at 15 years old in 1935 (Bin Manie,  
81 1985) to an average age of 24 years old in 2007 (Qaundl, 2007). These changes might also  
82 explain the adoption of Western dress for work and casual wear and the use of Western style  
83 wedding dresses for the official wedding ceremony (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013). However, traditional  
84 dress is still preferred by many Saudi women for special occasions (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013).

### 85 **Historical Context of Traditional Hijazi Wedding Dress in Saudi Arabia**

86         Even though Saudi Arabia is a relatively young country in terms of its current national  
87 borders, it has a rich history of clothing and textiles (Long, 2005; Yamani, 2004). For example,  
88 each region in the country used to have its own style of clothing and textiles that were hand made  
89 through weaving, dyeing, embroidery, and sewing. These different styles expressed individual  
90 group belonging and geographical and historical location (Long, 2005; Yamani, 2004). The area  
91 known as Hijaz contains the two holiest Islamic cities, Mecca and Medina, and has attracted  
92 many pilgrims and visitors since the birth of Islam in 610 AD (Long, 2005). As such, the roots of

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93 historical dress in the Hijaz have been influenced by the many cultural backgrounds of pilgrims  
94 and visitors over hundreds of years. Furthermore, the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which ruled the  
95 Hijaz region for over four centuries has exerted an ongoing influence on the styles and customs  
96 of the Hijazi (Iskandarani, 2006; Yamani, 2004).

97 Whereas traditional dress in other geographic areas of Saudi Arabia has undergone rapid changes  
98 or become nearly obsolete since the introduction of Western influence in the 1930s (Long, 2005;  
99 Pompea, 2002; Yamani, 2004), traditional Hijazi bridal costumes have survived the increasing  
100 dominance of Western styles (Iskandarani, 2006). This traditional dress helps forge a visual  
101 connection to the region's rich cultural heritage within an increasingly modernized Saudi Arabia.  
102 In one study, Tawfiq and Ogle (2013) found that Hijazi bridal costumes held a special value and  
103 meaning for participants, and were viewed as a central aspect of the *Ghomrah* or bridal shower  
104 celebration in which the bride often wears a costume including undergarments, outer garments,  
105 and a tiara on her head, all of which are embroidered with gold.

106 In her study of the different stages of the traditional Saudi wedding celebration which  
107 spans several days, Iskandarani (2006) described five distinct bridal costumes. Historically, the  
108 five costumes worn, *al-mentur*, *al-medini*, *al-mahaf*, *al-zabun*, and *al-muskak*, differed in terms  
109 of the number of pieces per dress, color, design, motif, and the detail of the embroidery.  
110 Typically, the main pieces included: under-vest, pants, tiara or head cover, face cover, and an  
111 ankle-length robe with very long, wide sleeves. In addition to these pieces, *al-medini* includes  
112 pearls, hair accessories, and a pillow-like bib wrapped around the neck stuffed with cotton and  
113 heavily decorated with diamonds, gold, pearls, and flowers which are sewn onto it the day it is  
114 worn (see Figure 1). Iskandarani (2006) also described a custom in which, for the first wedding  
115 she attends among relatives after her own, a newly married woman would wear one of the

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116 traditional bridal costumes. It is to be noted that wedding celebrations are gender segregated and  
117 conducted within the private sphere which includes women's interactions with women and their  
118 male next of kin, thus, the hijab is not religiously required (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013).

119 "Place Figure 1 about here."

### 120 **Theoretical Framework**

121 Symbolic interactionism was the theoretical starting point of this study because  
122 traditional wedding attire often has great symbolism, which is negotiated through social  
123 interactions (Eicher & Ling, 2005). Symbolic interaction is defined as the interpretation of the  
124 meanings people apply to the world around them and share through social interaction (Blumer,  
125 1969). Dress is one medium to which people assign meaning; therefore, it is an instrument for an  
126 individual's expression of identity, and to position and develop the self he or she desires to  
127 present to the world (Goffman, 1959; Stone, 1962). According to these shared meanings,  
128 individuals manipulate their appearance to convey their desired identities in social contexts  
129 (Goffman, 1959). In turn, others act towards people based on these meanings, sometimes giving  
130 feedback about appearance that may influence the wearer's future decisions about his or her  
131 appearance (Stone, 1962). To do this, individuals take on the role of "other" in order to construct  
132 themselves by imagining how others see and evaluate them using the "looking-glass self"  
133 (Cooley, 1902). Based on the "looking-glass self," individuals make decisions about how they  
134 should dress for different social contexts (Cooley, 1902; Stone, 1962).

135 Within the theory of symbolic interaction, Solomon (1983) and Belk (1988) explained  
136 that behavior can be guided by the symbolic role of products, thus creating social context.  
137 Solomon (1983) claimed that an object's symbolic meanings help individuals transition into new  
138 roles by accelerating the transition and reducing their uncertainty. Eicher and Ling (2005)

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139 suggested that during wedding rites, dress is used as a symbol for a bride's transfer from one  
140 social identity (unmarried woman) to a new one (wife). Belk's (1988) concept of "extended self"  
141 can provide insight into the ways in which objects and possessions can become sources of  
142 personal identity. According to Belk (1988), the past can be felt through the nostalgia and the  
143 memories attached to possessions; items such as family heirlooms and the traditions they  
144 represent become a part of people's presentation of their identities. Traditional costumes passed  
145 down from generation to generation can enter into a bride's concept of her extended self. These  
146 costumes become part of the ritual of marriage and help brides transition through this important  
147 life passage (Eicher & Ling, 2005).

148 The authors' purpose was to explore the history, significance, and meaning of traditional  
149 Hijazi bridal costumes and answer the following questions: What factors contributed to the  
150 decision to wear bridal costumes for marriage celebrations? What were participants' construction  
151 of the cultural meaning of the traditional costume? Do individuals of different generations hold  
152 distinct perceptions of the Hijazi bridal costumes? How do interactions between the generations  
153 help shape the continuation of these bridal costumes in Hijazi culture?

### 154 **Method**

155 After receiving Institutional Review Board approval (ID 15-079), a qualitative approach was  
156 used and data were collected via in-depth interviews (Esterberg, 2002) from 22 married Saudi  
157 women. A purposive, snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit research participants and  
158 ensure collection of relevant data (Esterberg, 2002). An initial list of potential participants was  
159 obtained from a key Saudi informant. After each interview, the primary researcher asked each  
160 participant to suggest other participants among their family and acquaintances. Each of the  
161 participants had worn at least one of the traditional bridal costumes (Table 1).

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162 “Place Table 1 about here.”

163 The participants were invited to bring photos of themselves wearing their bridal costumes to  
164 guide the interview discussion and in order for the researchers to corroborate the interview data.  
165 After gaining permission for reproduction from the owners of the pictures, some were scanned  
166 by the primary researcher with faces obscured to protect the participants’ anonymity.

167 Interviews were conducted face-to-face in Saudi Arabia in the homes of the interviewees.  
168 Interview questions focused on (a) the physical appearance of the costumes and the process of  
169 donning them, (b) the occasion(s) for which the costumes were worn, (c) how participants made  
170 decisions about which bridal costumes to wear, and (d) how participants viewed wearing  
171 traditional bridal costumes within weddings today. Interviews lasted between 34 and 115  
172 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, translated into English, and reviewed by three  
173 readers fluent in Arabic and English. Extra attention was given to the cultural nuances of these  
174 personal conversations in order to make the translations as precise as possible.

### 175 **Analysis**

176 The interview transcripts were coded by breaking down into meaningful fragments words,  
177 phrases, and ideas considered relevant to the study. Each fragment was assigned to a code or  
178 category (Esterberg, 2002). Next, to display the data, a coding guide was developed to  
179 summarize these categories and the interviews were reread, searching for statements that might  
180 fit into any of the categories (Esterberg, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the final stage  
181 of analysis, the researchers looked for patterns, explanations, contradictions, and confirmations  
182 to develop conclusions for the study (Esterberg, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To establish  
183 trustworthiness and dependability of the data collection and analysis, the primary researcher used  
184 reflexivity, writing memos throughout the data collection and analysis processes to acknowledge



185 self-criticism and help foster reflection and interpretation of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).  
186 Additionally, the researchers negotiated meanings during coding until agreement was reached.

## 187 **Findings**

### 188 **Emergent Themes**

189 Our findings revealed that interviewees' weddings were deeply rooted in traditional  
190 customs and shown through the bridal costumes. Specifically, four key themes emerged relating  
191 to the significance and meaning of these costumes: (a) Physical appearance and process of  
192 wearing them, (b) Meanings and beliefs assigned to the costumes' components, (c) Appropriate  
193 occasions for which the costumes could be worn, and (d) Motivations negotiated within families.

194 **Physical appearance and process of wearing the traditional costumes.** Participants  
195 recognized the uniqueness of Saudi traditional costumes' designs and their rich historical  
196 context. Participant 11 explained, "the traditional bridal costumes reminds me of the old days."  
197 While not knowing the exact meaning of the costume, Participant 1 stated, "My belief is that its'  
198 connected to our roots and history, which bring back happy memories." Participant 2B indicated,

199 Since my mother was from Hadramawt and we lived in Saudi Arabia I wanted to strike a  
200 balance between these two backgrounds. Thus, I started off with wearing the *hathiri*  
201 costume and ended the party with wearing the Hijazi, Saudi Arabian costume; I saved the  
202 best for last.

203 She went on to explain a bit of the costume's history, stating, "We just saw our grandparents and  
204 parents wear it and did the same. Many of the *medini* costumes are influenced by the Ottoman  
205 Empire when these costumes were associated with the high status and the elite."

206 Participants described their costumes' components, such as design, color, material, and  
207 decorations, as well as the complicated and time-consuming process of correctly donning the

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208 bridal costumes. Participant 4 explained, “It needs someone who had the knowledge and training  
209 with the process of dressing in traditional bridal costumes. From my experience, I found it to be  
210 a difficult process and couldn’t have done it alone.” Another participant, 3c, described *al-*  
211 *medini*, which she wore at her *Ghomrah*:

212           It was a challenge to put it on with so many pieces. A dress on top with lots of  
213           embroidery, pants underneath, vest, and a head cover that included a tiara with flowers  
214           that supported it. Above all these pieces, there was a long fabric which covered me from  
215           head to toe and that I held with my hands.

216           Participants were cognizant of not just the costumes’ physical elements, but also the  
217           social rules that dictated how to wear them. Within the framework of symbolic interactionism,  
218           women are encouraged to use the shared meanings of the dress to present their desired identities  
219           and prepare themselves in culturally prescribed ways (Goffman, 1959; Stone, 1962). As noted,  
220           symbolic interaction theory explains how meanings develop through interactions and become a  
221           common or shared perspective over a period of time within a given cultural context (Charon,  
222           1998; Stone, 1962). As described to the primary researcher, the process of donning the  
223           traditional Saudi Arabian bridal costumes allowed for interaction between the women who  
224           helped prepare the bride for the event. These interactions may be symbolic of the brides’  
225           transitioning identities, which required the help of others to fully execute. These shared  
226           meanings were passed down from generation to generation through photos, stories, and  
227           experiences seeing older relatives in the family wear these costumes. One of the women who  
228           makes and rents bridal costumes explained the lengthy dressing process:

229           Typically, the process takes 30 minutes from beginning to end. When I dress the bride I  
230           try to create a pleasant environment. I ask my assistant to help entertain the bride to make

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231 her comfortable. We start with the undergarment, then the inner dress, the vest, then we  
232 let her sit on a chair while we prepare the head cover. Originally, the head cover piece  
233 was sewn on but I use bobby pins with pearls to attach it. Lastly, we apply the face  
234 cover...I specifically explain and teach the brides about the names and customs of each  
235 piece when dressing them. (Participant 14)

236 From the interviews and photos, it was found that the appearance of the costumes through  
237 generations has changed only slightly, with differences in color, fabric, and embroidery materials  
238 (see Figures 2). Silk was at one time exclusively used, but the use of polyester has made the  
239 garments more affordable, lighter, and easier to wear. While some participants, such as  
240 Participant 4, indicated these changes “were subtle and do not affect [the costume’s] original  
241 form in significant ways. The overall look is the same,” others were quite concerned regarding  
242 any changes. According to Participant 3b:

243 The stupid change is decreasing their value. They use cheaper materials and you can see  
244 the difference...people would use real gold and diamonds but now they use gold plating  
245 and fake gemstones...They say they are changing, modifying, and renewing it. No, this is  
246 not a change; this is irreverence.

247 Participant 11 concurred that changes would violate “the rules” of traditional bridal costumes:  
248 “to preserve them as they are and not try to change them or modify them, because their beauty is  
249 in their originality and inveterate tradition.” The strong beliefs regarding the impropriety of  
250 change may be due to the valued symbolism of these costumes, possibly creating resistance to  
251 change. Belk’s (1988) concepts of extended self and connection to the past can be used to  
252 explain the special connection some participants had with traditional bridal costumes, which they

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253 valued more than the modified costumes. People may relate possessions to their sense of the past  
254 to help them remember their pasts and enjoy the present (Belk, 1988).

255 “Place Figure 2 about here.”

256 **Meanings and beliefs assigned to the costumes’ components.** Participants not only  
257 identified the physical descriptions of bridal costumes’ different components, but also the  
258 meanings and beliefs behind them. Meanings ranged from cultural significance, such as  
259 demonstrations of Islamic modesty and “the bride’s shyness” (Participant 7), to emotions,  
260 beliefs, and social significance of what these costumes conveyed to others.

261 Within symbolic interaction theory, Goffman (1959) explained how people present  
262 themselves through their appearance in ways that are socially accepted and expected. As  
263 previously discussed, Islam influences all of Saudi life (Long, 2005) and is part of the rich  
264 meanings associated with traditional bridal costumes. This explains why some pieces and aspects  
265 of the costumes (e.g., face cover and costume length) represented modesty or “shyness and  
266 purity” (Participant P6a), in accordance with religious beliefs: “I don’t even like to look at the  
267 brides who wear the Western style that is revealing. Traditional bridal costumes are modest.  
268 They even cover the head, the face, and everything else” (Participant 13). Due to the private  
269 nature and gender segregated ceremony, the face veiling is not religiously prescribed, but rather a  
270 function of cultural modesty and shyness, which some participants expressed a desire for:

271 The traditional bridal costumes are modest, long sleeved, loose fitting, and have a head  
272 cover. The purpose of it is to instill shyness from a young age and conserve the women.  
273 Modesty has been called a part of the faith. Modest clothing is not only a symbol of  
274 shyness but is known to be associated with the high class worldwide. On the other hand,

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275 revealing clothing is for trashy people. The more you reveal the lower down the class  
276 chain you get. (Participant 6c).

277 An additional symbolism of the face cover that participants spoke of is “protection from  
278 the evil eye,” (Participant 1), indicated by its embroidered phrase Mashallah (God has willed it).  
279 The costumes’ various colors were also said to hold meaning; for example, pink represented  
280 “good luck” (Participant 3b) and “innocence and femininity” (Participant 12). The garland made  
281 of tiny green apples worn around the neck was thought to be “good luck” and to promote  
282 “fertility” (Participant 8b). Two other pieces with symbolic meanings were the tiara and stool  
283 procession, whose “splendor” (Participant 7) made the bride “feel like a queen” (Participant 1).  
284 Participant 12 explained the stool procession as a part of the actual bridal costume: “When the  
285 bride does the wedding procession in the traditional gown, there are two stools that she stands on  
286 with a bridesmaid on each side [one from her family and one from the groom’s family] and for  
287 every step they bring the stool from behind for her to step forwards onto until she reaches her  
288 bridal throne.” As discussed by Solomon (1983), individuals employ material symbols, such as  
289 dress, to assist them in determining their transitions into a new stage of life. This stool procession  
290 symbolizes the transition from her family’s house to her new home: “the first [stool] should  
291 begin at her parent’s house (the existing stool) and last one should end up at her husband’s house  
292 (entering stool),” (Participant 5). With every step of the stool procession, the bride is reminded of  
293 her changing role from a single woman to a wife. According to Participant 7:

294 The *Ghomrah* is not only a marriage celebration, it goes beyond this because it is a  
295 passage of ritual where a girl is transformed from a daughter living in her parent’s home  
296 to a women becoming a wife and moving into her husband’s home. Given this  
297 atmosphere, traditions are necessary because this is how traditions are carried on. A girl

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298           learns the tradition by seeing what her mom wears and she later wears it. This way she  
299           learns how to be a bride.

300           Another piece that held significant value was the padded pillow, or bib, which was made  
301           of layered satin and cotton fabric with gold jewelry attached to it (see Figure 3). This was  
302           considered unique to Hijaz by several participants and used to represent the bride's "social class"  
303           (Participant 15) and emphasize her "feminine physique" (Participant 12). Typically, the more  
304           jewelry and gold on the padded bib, the higher a bride's social class.

305           Moreover, participants recognized the ephemeral aspects of the bridal costume as  
306           essential. For example, the *ghomrah* celebration "used to be called henna party" (Participant 13)  
307           "to beautify the bride and to show happiness" (Participant 17b). Before applying henna on the  
308           bride's hand and legs there were special bathing rituals that included a mixture of "exotic flowers  
309           such as *medini* flower pedals and purple *rehan* (basil) that were dried, ground, and mixed with  
310           rose water then applied on the bride's body like a body wash. Afterwards, the bride smells  
311           beautiful and body feels smooth" (Participant 14). The *medini* and *rehan* flowers were used in  
312           the *Al-medini* costume "to make a flower garland sewn on the bib and in the back of the tiara to  
313           support it, which give off a pleasant smell to the bride" (Participant 15).

314           In characterizing the meaning and symbolism behind the pieces of the bridal costume,  
315           participants also spoke of the benefits when wearing them, such as concealing the bride's beauty  
316           via the face covering until the face is exposed on the wedding day, and the emotions felt while  
317           wearing the costumes. Participant 17c shared her positive feelings when she wore the costumes:  
318           "I feel so proud and unique and like I'm floating on air." Participant explained:

319           I had a wonderful indescribable feeling like I lived in the old time. Even though I was not  
320           that shy, when I dress *al-medini*, I felt I was shy and acted like as if I was a bride living in

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321 my mother's time. I think these are not just traditional bridal costumes. They are  
322 connected feelings. It is weird but they do influence how a bride feels and acts like as if  
323 they were alive. (Participant 11)

324 All participants emphasized the meaning of concealing the bride's beauty at the *Ghomrah*  
325 party until the wedding day: "precious things are always covered, just like the bride" (Participant  
326 17c). This enabled a bride to appear "surprisingly beautiful" (Participant 13) on her wedding  
327 day: "*Al-medini* covers the bride completely like a gift-wrapped surprise until the wedding day  
328 and highlights her beauty" (Participant 16).

329 Regardless of the meanings, some participants stated that while not knowing specific  
330 significance, they held strong convictions about who could wear the bridal costumes and to  
331 which occasions they could be worn. This may be explained through their past experiences with  
332 the costumes, viewing older relatives and friends marrying and how these memories of the bridal  
333 traditional have become part of their identities (see Belk, 1988).

334 "Place Figure 3 about here."

335 **Appropriate alternative occasions for wearing bridal costumes.** As participants  
336 described the different occasions, they discussed the shared meanings and when and where bridal  
337 costumes could be worn in the past and today. As noted in the literature review, traditional Hijazi  
338 wedding celebrations last several days, and each day had its own specific traditional bridal  
339 costume (Iskandarani, 2006). In the past, there were rules and specially assigned costumes for  
340 each day of the "seven-day marriage celebrations" (Participant 2b). Today, however, these rules  
341 are more flexible. Thus, the costumes could be worn for major celebrations outside of weddings  
342 by the guest of honor, whose role is in transition. Solomon (1983) explained how dress can be  
343 used to support role changes and accelerate this transition. For example, a celebration called

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344 *Saabe* (arrival of a new baby), a graduation party, and post-wedding events are all occasions  
345 when some of these costumes may be worn in the present day. At all of these events, participants  
346 experienced a degree of identity construction and used one of their traditional bridal costumes to  
347 help them perform their new role (Goffman 1959; Solomon, 1983). Despite some flexibility in  
348 their use, Participant 4 explained that the shared meanings and significance of wearing these  
349 costumes for specific events must still be respected: “The traditional costume holds certain rules  
350 and expectations with it. It can’t be worn by just anyone and to any event.” Further, Participant  
351 8b said the traditional costumes would “lose [their] meaning” if they are not worn at times to  
352 which people are “accustomed.”

353         Because all participants valued the importance of wearing these traditional costumes,  
354 some participants felt that modern flexibility allows those who did not wear traditional costumes  
355 for their wedding celebrations to have another opportunity to experience wearing them.

356         Originally *al-zabun* (see Figure 4) should be worn on *Sabha* (the day after the wedding).  
357         Today, it has been worn on different occasions because not everyone celebrates *Sabha*,  
358         the bride and groom go straight to the honeymoon... People still wear different bridal  
359         costumes but not for the same things (participant 12).

360         However, some participants believed that traditional costumes should only be worn for wedding  
361         celebrations: “Other than the wedding celebrations, I think it would be too much to wear it  
362         because it is meant to be only for the bride” (Participant 17b). Perhaps these feelings stem from  
363         beliefs that because bridal costumes symbolize the transition to the new role of wife, they should  
364         be restricted to wedding celebrations. For example, the traditional costumes “which are known to  
365         be for brides can only be worn at the *Ghomrah*,” according to Participant 6c.





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389 From the day I got engaged, I decided that I wanted a *Ghomrah*. I even went to my  
390 grandmother and told her that the time has come that I wear something from your  
391 treasure box like my relatives.

392 As mentioned in the literature review, weddings in Saudi Arabia are representative of the  
393 entire family, not just the bride-to-be (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013). Thus, participants spoke of the  
394 expensive cost of the costumes demonstrating “high class” or families’ wealth, “prestige,” and  
395 “class.” Participant 3b stated, “*Al-medini* was a must. It’s something everyone wore and those  
396 who didn’t were considered lower class.” Another participant expressed that “its distinctive  
397 shape... made me feel like royalty and walk with [my] head held up high” (Participant 4).

398 Many of the participants viewed the bridal costumes as part of a larger heritage, so that  
399 wearing them fulfilled a tradition in which women became a part of a regional “dynasty”  
400 (Participant 8c). Participant 8b described the traditional bridal costume in this context:

401 [It] represents genuineness, brings about nostalgia, and [is] redolent of history... if we do  
402 not preserve our traditional costumes we will lose our identity. In my opinion these  
403 costumes show that the person is an authentic, sincere, and noble person; it shows how  
404 much the person is proud and attached to their tradition. It is like a tree without roots that  
405 will soon die. We have to be proud of our tradition. Some Saudi people are proud of their  
406 roots while others are denying their roots and are embarrassed about [them]. People who  
407 do not wear their traditional costumes are detached from their roots.

408 Several participants regarded the Western-style dresses for the bride as “lost and brainwashed by  
409 the Western fashion and are missing out on a lot. The genuine people never forget their tradition  
410 and they preserve and appreciate its value” (Participant 16).

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411           The family’s encouragement became an integral part of how these women shaped their  
412 views in deciding to wear traditional costumes. For families who owned the bridal costumes,  
413 following their wearing of Hijazi costumes, many of the participants shared the traditional  
414 wedding customs with multiple generations of family and friends. All participants asserted the  
415 importance of “keeping [these traditional costumes] from vanishing” (Participant 16) by passing  
416 them down through the generations. Participant 11 stated, “Each mother plays a major role in  
417 communicating the information about these traditional bridal costumes to their daughters and  
418 making them look beautiful in their eyes as our mothers did with us.” Participant 17b added “the  
419 mother has to convince her daughter to wear it and the daughter has to pass it along to her  
420 daughter, so it is passed down from generation to generation.”

421           Not all participants, however, viewed these costumes positively. The middle -aged  
422 women interviewed, in particular, expressed negative feelings associated with the traditional  
423 costumes, for example, Participant 12 stated:

424           On the day of *Ghomrah*, my mother advised me to wear the traditional bridal dress but I  
425 refused because I was young and looking for something modern. Also, the traditional  
426 dress had a funny camel’s hump [referring to the fabric train piece that attached to the  
427 tiara and covers the bride from head to toes]. My mother in law objected to the idea and  
428 was upset about me not wearing the traditional *al-medini* as it represents the entire clan.

429 A millennial woman shared this perspective, viewing the traditional costumes as outdated:

430           As a young girl from the new generation, I do not see anything special about it. However,  
431 parents and grandparents see it as special and unique and they feel so happy and proud  
432 when they see their daughters wear it. Therefore, I wore it for my mom’s sake. I’m not  
433 really interested in it. It’s so heavy. I spent an hour or two to put it on, and then another

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434 hour or two to take it off. It feels as though you have 100 pounds on your head and it's  
435 very itchy, yet it was a once in a lifetime experience. It looks beautiful but it doesn't feel  
436 comfortable. (Participant 3c)

437 Some participants had to negotiate between multiple influences (what they wanted, what their  
438 family wanted, and cultural norms) that may have been contradictory, sometimes making them  
439 feel torn between opposing influences. Many of the participants discussed the way in which  
440 throughout their life, from childhood to present day, family members shared memories and their  
441 "treasure boxes" (Participant 8c) of bridal memorabilia, and felt influenced to wear the  
442 traditional costumes. Through the use of the "looking-glass self" or social interactions with older  
443 family members, participants dressed in traditional costume, in part, to fulfill familial obligations  
444 and expectations (see Cooley, 1902; Al-Munajjed, 1997). The use of the costumes helped  
445 reinforce the transmission of the bridal costume tradition through and between generations.

446 Interestingly, the older and the younger women interviewed, were most favourable of the  
447 traditional costumes. Our findings revealed that the beliefs and symbolism about these traditional  
448 Hijazi bridal costumes were communicated between and within generations. Preservation of  
449 traditional bridal costumes allowed brides to connect to their heritage, adding valuable memories  
450 to the costumes that became a part of themselves and their memories of their wedding (see Belk,  
451 1988). The Hijazi bridal costumes have deep historical roots in Saudi Arabian culture, which  
452 continues to play a significant role in today's marriage rituals.

### 453 **Discussion and Conclusions**

454 Our findings are consistent with and extend prior work suggesting that traditional bridal  
455 dress has different cultural meanings representative of familial ties and womanhood, which are  
456 rooted within the context of place and time (Baldizzone & Baldizzone, 2001; Barber, 1994;

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457 Becker, 2003; Foster & Johnson, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Kochuyt, 2012). Our study added to the  
458 understanding of how traditional costumes are used to construct new identities through the  
459 meanings associated with these costumes, which help accelerate transitions between roles (see  
460 Solomon, 1983). These shared meanings are learned by younger generations from their elders.  
461 The use of these traditional costumes for wedding celebrations, as described by older family  
462 members, influenced and confirmed the younger generation decisions and helped them learn the  
463 roles of bride and newlywed. Our findings provided insight to understand existing theory within  
464 the context of role transitions as a symbolic interactionism perspective. Solomon (1983)  
465 explained how dress can be used to aid in role transitions, particularly, in significant rites of  
466 passage like marriage (Belk, 1988). Symbolism inherent in the traditional wedding costumes  
467 affirmed the participants' separation from their parents and transition into a new life.

468         Participants compared the past and present of traditional bridal costumes with regards to  
469 appropriate occasions for wearing them, the physical look of them, and the traditions related to  
470 them. All of the participants sought to maintain the physical look of these costumes and allowed  
471 only minor modifications, such as fabric type and embroidery permissible. Many participants  
472 considered larger changes and modifications of these costumes as violation of the traditional  
473 rule. However, most participants were flexible as to other occasions for which the costumes  
474 could be worn. Maintaining the physical look of the costumes was similar to the findings of  
475 Hughes, Torntore, and Ogle (2015). In their work, Black Forest, Germany participants  
476 maintained Trachten traditional dress to help keep their culture alive and express their cultural  
477 identity, but allowed for some changes related to contemporary life. Originally, in Saudi Arabian  
478 culture, the meanings assigned to the costumes were only wedding-related. The participants  
479 expressed the importance of experiencing these traditional costumes. Today, different meanings

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480 have been added however, such as extravagance and happiness, allowing participants to create a  
481 new, shared meanings that enable women to wear these costumes at occasions other than their  
482 traditional marriage celebrations. Translating the culturally shared meanings of the costumes  
483 supplements women's performances in significant, transitioning roles at other occasions  
484 (Goffman, 1959; Solomon, 1983). Not all participants revered traditional costumes because they  
485 were thought of as uncomfortable and outdated, but they still underwent some level of  
486 negotiation with feedback when deciding whether or not to wear them. The feedback participants  
487 received from older family members influenced their choices to wear traditional costumes  
488 regardless of the brides' positive or negative feelings about the costumes (see Stone, 1962).

489         Limitations for this study include the translation process from Arabic to English. Despite  
490 having multiple, fluent readers who reviewed the translations, some of the richness of the data  
491 may have been lost. While the multiple generations interviewed allowed for an understanding of  
492 diverse perspectives, interviewing younger women may have provided opinions of those exposed  
493 to more options and influences through globalization. Therefore, future research focused on the  
494 millennial generation views of traditional bridal costumes should be conducted.

495         In addition, future researchers could explore cultural wedding dress of other regions  
496 within Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the scope could be broadened to include other cultures, such  
497 as Morocco, which has rules associated with their traditional wedding dress and practices that are  
498 comparable to Saudi Arabia. A cross-cultural comparison of the meanings and practices  
499 associated with traditional wedding dress through generations would help researchers to better  
500 understand their significance. More research on traditional bridal costumes for immigrants who  
501 live outside of their native-born country, similar to Kochuyt (2012), to see if and how traditional  
502 costumes' values and meanings change, would also be beneficial.

503

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