Newfoundland and Labrador Studies

COVID Disrupted My Wedding Plans
A Sociological Examination of Wedding Plans Derailed due to COVID-19 in Newfoundland and Labrador

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Introduction/Research Problem

The COVID-19 crisis represented a shift in how our world functioned, at a global level. We watched the virus spread from country to country and media kept us appraised of the government restrictions that accompanied that spread. As the virus was first detected in Newfoundland and Labrador, we saw the immediate, and prolonged, shut down of non-essential services along with new government restrictions on many aspects of our lives. Suddenly, our highly predictable and dependable world changed, and we could no longer assume that the world we lived in yesterday would be the same as the world tomorrow. This paper takes a closer look at one specific aspect of this shift: how the COVID-19 crisis affected wedding planning in Newfoundland and Labrador. Specifically, in what ways were brides who planned their wedding before COVID forced to engage with the shifting uncertainty of the pandemic through their wedding planning preparations.

Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

Weddings: The Way Things Were

When a couple has a wedding ceremony, they are making a public, interactive commitment to each other (Akanle et al. 2019; Liu et al. 2017; Ogletree 2010). "Weddings serve as means of sending a message to the general public that the wedded individuals are no longer in the singles/unmarried circle and that the bride/groom is no longer available for marriage to other persons" (Akanle et al. 2019, 4694). The act of getting married in front of a public audience of friends and family serves as notice to those in attendance and to the world at large that the individuals have entered a committed and exclusive relationship with each other, and they want others to be aware of their commitment and decision. In turn, friends and family signify their approval of the union by attending the ceremony (Akanle et al. 2019).

The marriage brings with it commitments and expectations for both individuals. Getting married signifies the formation of a family unit (Akanle et al. 2019; Brown et al. 2020; Huston and Melz 2004; Liu et al. 2017) and with it the formation of new familial groups; the couple to each other, but also the couple to their in-laws, and the in-laws with each other (Akanle et al. 2019). For the couple, the union signifies a rite of passage (Akanle et al. 2019). This is often associated with the transition from child to adult and from single to wedded but it can also indicate the change in status from immature to mature. "Weddings are open displays of arrival and responsibility that announce the success of the individual and families" (Akanle et al. 2019).

The wedding ceremony is steeped in ritual and tradition. Specific venues are essential components, specific invitees, specific attire, specific recitations, etc. (Imber-Black 2020). Rituals connect us with the past through tradition. They provide predictability and continuity; we know how things will unfold and what to expect through tradition and ritual. For example, everyone knows the musical cue that signifies the bride is about to enter, and everyone knows they are to rise before she

is revealed. Rituals provide comfort and familiarity (Imber-Black 2020). This role of tradition means that when a couple decides to have a wedding ceremony, there is already a pre-formed, planned unrolling of events laid out before them. Certainly, couples have choices that add personal touches to their ceremonies, but such touches are often constrained within tradition.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, wedding planning and execution largely depended on established norms and traditions, which allowed couples to rely on these previously established patterns throughout their wedding planning process.

The Pandemic: The Way Things Shifted

The emergence and spread of the COVID-19 virus thrust the world into crisis. Suddenly, the predictability of our world shifted as we were unaware of the potential consequences COVID would bring to bear (Al-Dabbagh 2020). As Woods iterated (2021), during a time of crisis, things are stripped down to their essential components and everything else is pushed aside or put on hold. Certainly, we saw this at both micro and macro levels as governments shut down everything deemed "non-essential," and individuals were required to follow suit by limiting themselves to essential activities and contacts only.

Seemingly overnight, as COVID-19 began to put a stranglehold on country after country, people were thrust into a time of crisis where the rules and predictability of the world changed and continued to change and shift with little to no warning and no delineated safe path through the crisis. How are individuals to grapple with such changes?

According to Swidler (1986), we use our "cultural tool kit" to navigate our way in society by constructing "strategies of action" (Lizardo and Strand 2010) in settled periods, which operate like manuals, guiding the usage of our tools[1] (Forte 2018). However, in unsettled periods[2] our strategies are forced to change and adapt to the changes in the culture that surrounds us. When this happens, the way that we would normally proceed is altered and we must navigate the way without our

well-established procedures. Our tool kit still contains the same instruments as it previously did, but it becomes more difficult to find a tool that is the correct fit. When there was a change in the surroundings (one-way aisles, for example), people adjusted how they conducted themselves (backing up, re-entering the aisle, etc.) based on what they perceived as the available options in their tool kit.

Swidler "suggests that there are differences in the degree of awareness actors bring to the use of tools" (Forte 2018, 53), and this awareness can be considered as existing on a continuum ranging from unawareness of things we take for granted to those things we are highly conscious of. In settled times, we proceed along the established norms and patterns simply because they are established norms and patterns and we are largely unaware of alternative options — we simply do what has previously been done. "A wedding, in our own culture, may seem odd, forced, or unnatural when we actually attend one, for example. But it will still seem the natural way to get married, so that going to a justice of the peace requires special explanation" (Swidler 1986, 279) during settled times. However, during unsettled times, culture changes and the strategies we discern from our tool kit change along with them. The COVID-19 crisis marked an unsettled cultural period (Johnston et al. 2022), and consequently, how people interacted with their cultural tool kit shifted. This cultural shift opened the way for ingenuity and a higher level of active participation in wedding planning decisions for brides as they were unable to rely on previously established wedding tradition throughout their planning process. While this shift meant that brides were unable to have the same sort of wedding that brides from 2019 could have, it also led to active creativity (Imber-Black 2020) in the wedding planning process, which highlighted brides' resilience in the face of crisis (Fuld 2021). As Imber-Black (2020, 920) points out, "rituals bent but did not break during COVID-19," and neither did the brides or their weddings.

Methods/Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with 15 brides and would-be brides using a symbolic interactionist lens of analysis (Blumer 1969). After all, those who have lived through a situation are the experts about that situation, their understanding of it, and the meaning they attribute to it (van den Hoonaard and van den Scott 2022). My role was to listen to their stories and understand the meaning they attributed to their circumstances.

I collected the data for this research using qualitative, semi-structured interviews. The 15 interviewees all resided within the island portion of Newfoundland and Labrador. Demographics for interviewees can be found in Table 1. It should be pointed out that my data and analysis are not representative of the population, nor do they purport to be. Qualitative analysis of this type explores the situation and experience for those who are part of the data collection process only (Mason 2002; van den Hoonaard and van den Scott 2022).

Interviewees were offered various methods of distanced interviewing, due to COVID-19 precautions (such as Zoom, telephone, Facetime, etc.). All interviewees opted for telephone interviewing. Each was asked general times for their availability and were given several specific times based on their answers. For example, if someone said she was available after regular business hours on weekdays, she was offered several different times over several different days that fit her general availability to ensure a minimal amount of imposition. Interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes up to one hour. Interviews with those who proceeded with their weddings were generally longer in length than those who had postponed. I began the interviews with a general outline of the topics to be covered and an open-ended question asking them to tell me about their wedding plans. Often, the interviewees answered a substantial number of my questions as they related their narrative. As interviewing progressed, questions were added based on information that interviewees provided. For example, after several interviewees commented on their decisions in hindsight, I

added a question asking them how they felt about the decisions they had made regarding their wedding plans. I recorded the interviews on a voice recording device, transferred them to computer via speech-to-text transcription, re-read them for accuracy and editing, then re-read to establish codes. I then input the transcripts into a qualitative data analysis software program (QDA Miner) where codes were put into a digital code book and applied to the interview transcripts.

Keeping COVID-19 precautions in mind, I opted to recruit inter-viewees for my research via social media. I wrote up a Facebook post outlining the purpose of my research and asking for participants. In the interest of confidentiality, I asked that anyone interested in participating should contact me by private message rather than comment directly on the post. I posted this on my Facebook as well as on several Facebook

Table 1

Name	Month of Wedding	Decision	Region
April*	August	Married	Central
Greta	July	Married	Eastern
Bailey	May	Postponed	Central
Jackie	June	Postponed	Eastern
Yvette	October	Postponed	Eastern
Nina	November	Married	Eastern
Anna	April	Married	Eastern
Debra	September	Postponed then decided to marry in December 2020	Eastern
Darlene	August	Married	Central
Paige	July	Postponed	Western
**	September	Postponed	Eastern
Carol	October	Postponed	Western
Justine	July	Postponed	Central
Kelly	August	Postponed	Eastern
Elise	July	Postponed	Eastern

*Interviewees are identified by pseudonyms.
**This interviewee asked that her pseudonym not be used in publication.

commerce groups I am a member of (such as "Bay Roberts & Area Buy and Sell"). Someone suggested that I share it on the "Newfoundland Brides" Facebook group. That group is private and their posted community standards limit membership to upcoming brides only, but the standards also listed a sister "Newfoundland Brides Buy and Sell" group, which was open to membership and posting by anyone. I joined that group and posted my call for participants there as well. Most interviewees were recruited from the "Brides Buy and Sell" group except for a small number whom I knew personally. Anyone who contacted me was provided more details about the research and then asked if they would like to participate. I set up a date and time, and method of interview with those who said they would like to be interviewed, and provided them with their copy of the informed consent via e-mail to ensure they had a chance to review it before the interview began. All recruitment and interviewing took place within a two-week period in mid-December 2020.

Findings/Discussion

Knowing that government regulations in relation to COVID-19 had altered gatherings (including weddings), I set out to find out two things with my research: what decisions people had made regarding their wedding plans and why they made these decisions and what factors determined their choices. The collected data reflect these two things, but I also found other things in my data that I had not expected. Through their decision-making and narratives, the would-be brides related often overlooked ideas behind their decisions and illustrated the depth of complexity of wedding planning during the pandemic crisis. While my findings here touch on the wedding decisions and factors, the bulk of the discussion focuses on the latent findings.

General Results

All brides resided on the island of Newfoundland and all lived with their fiancé prior to getting married. As noted in Table 1, nine of the

interviewees resided in the Eastern Health region, four in Central Health, and two in Western Health. Although none of the brides were asked about their family status, nine indicated that they either had children or were currently pregnant/pregnant at the time of making a decision regarding wedding, one had no children, two were waiting until they were married to start a family, and the status of the remaining three is unknown.

In relation to the brides' original wedding plans, one had planned to marry in each of April, May, June, and November. Four were scheduled to wed in July, three in August, two in September, and two in October. Out of the 15 interviewees, nine had decided to delay their weddings until 2021, five had modified their plans and married in 2020, and the remaining one had initially decided to delay but had changed her mind and was preparing to marry the week after our interview (in December). Of the nine who delayed, seven had subsequently planned to remarry in the summer of 2021 (four in July, one in August, and two in June), one in October and two were undecided on a wedding date. Most of the brides who delayed did so with the hope of having their wedding in 2021 with no COVID-related restrictions; however, each of them indicated that she planned to proceed with her wedding on the rescheduled date — even if COVID restrictions were still in effect. Of the six who proceeded with their wedding, including the participant who was getting married the following week, all of them indicated that their wedding was not complete. They all said that they would do "something" when COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Some of them had plans for a family get-together/gathering to celebrate while others had plans to do/redo their wedding as it was originally planned.

Of the participants who married, four of them indicated that they were glad they went ahead. Of the participants who delayed, five of them said they were unhappy they delayed their wedding while two stated they were happy to have delayed. Figures for this question are incomplete as it was not added until after some of the interviews were conducted, as indicated in "Methods/Data Collection" above.

I was asking my participants about potentially sensitive information, and doing so using an impersonal interview method, therefore I did not want to ask any intrusive questions beyond direct wedding questions. Therefore, I did not ask questions about gender, gender representation, or sexuality. Most of my interviewees were recruited from a social media group for "brides," therefore I infer they likely identified as a bride (traditionally viewed as a female gender role). Each of my interviewees had traditionally feminine names and those who referred to their fiancé by name used a traditionally masculine name. Although I did not ask about gender or sexuality, all such indications in my data conclude that the couples pass as heterosexual (one male representing individual, and one female).

Factors Considered

Eighteen factors were identified in total between the interviews, a breakdown of which is provided in Table 2 by percentage.[3] Most of them, such as travel and venue/gathering restrictions, appear in both those that chose to postpone and those that proceeded with their weddings. Other factors were exclusive to one group or the other, such as weather only being a factor for those who proceeded with their wedding and cancellation/coinciding of other events only being noted as a factor in those who postponed. Additionally, some factors overlapped in multiple categories and were coded into each. For example, when Debra said her decision to postpone was a combination of the "university saying no . . . we're going remote, Iceberg Alley cancelling and Dr. Fitzgerald shuttin' 'er down with mass gatherings," the comment was coded under both venue/gathering restrictions and cancellation/coinciding of other events. The number of factors interviewees referenced ranged from three to 10, with most listing five to six factors.

Table 2

Factors	Married (6)	Postponed (10)*
Travel restrictions	83.3%	90%
Venue/gathering restrictions	100%	100%
Preparations ready	50%	40%
Move forward/start family	66.7%	30%
Opinion of family members	33.3%	40%
Preparations not done	33.3%	20%
Health/safety of guests	16.7%	40%
Someone to officiate	50%	10%
Deposits/money invested	16.7%	80%
Volatility of COVID	16.7%	30%
Wouldn't be as memorable	-	60%
Concerns about rebooking	-	20%
Cancellation/coinciding of other events	-	30%
Health of family members	-	20%
Tech availability	50%	-
Pregnancy	16.7%	-
Weather	16.7%	-
Not wanting to face day w/o getting married	16.7%	-

*Total number adds up to 16 even though only 15 interviews were conducted because the bride who had postponed but had subsequently decided to get married in December spoke about how she initially postponed and why she had now chosen to proceed, so her answers were coded under both categories.

Latent Findings

Wedding planning is nothing new. People have been doing it for a long time. Countless books outline the steps to planning and provide tips and tricks for the process (such as confirming your date before talking with service providers and choosing your attire and floral arrangements before deciding on a cake). But there is no planning guide or how-to manual for preparing for a wedding during a global pandemic,[4] especially not for those who planned their wedding before the

novel coronavirus was discovered. For those brides, between the time they planned their wedding and the time they executed it, the entire world changed. Their stories reflect an incredible amount of resiliency and perseverance in the face of unprecedented circumstances. These implicit findings can be categorized into three headings: resiliency in wedding planning, wedding planning as resistance, and the influence of the pandemic on society.

Resiliency in Wedding Planning

> It has been interesting for me watching people's plans for like postponing things [on social media bride groups] . . . it had like the 2020 brides like "nah man, like we're good. We're sticking with it" and then you have some poor little fart who has a wedding plan for 2023 that's already bumped it down to 2025. (Debra)

Broadly speaking, resiliency refers to the ability of something to maintain function during external changes or disruptions (Adger 2000; Holling 1973). The pandemic was a situation of external disruption and continual changes. The brides I interviewed had to navigate those changes as part of their wedding planning process — they could not ignore the pandemic and continue with their original plans as though it did not exist. They had to respond to ongoing changes and reorient their decisions based on unfolding events and requirements.

For those who proceeded with their weddings, it was obvious during their interviews that doing so required tenacity. Wedding planning is often approached in a linear fashion. Complete step one, move to step two, complete step two, move to step three. And once a step is completed, it is decided and done. But for these brides, COVID-19 and the corresponding government regulations resulted in their being unable to customize their temporal experience in this sequential manner (Flaherty, 2003). For these brides, their linear planning turned into a loop where they continuously had to redo some steps, then redo the

subsequent steps. They melded into each other under one heading of "wedding plans" and required working on different parts at the same time. The COVID-19 crisis and the rapidly changing nature of government guidelines meant that the rules (especially relating to venues and gatherings) were subject to change with little to no notice, and brides who proceeded with their weddings had to be adaptable. These brides exhibited agency over their circumstances by actively making their wedding choices (Mann 2008) rather than relying on the patterns and norms established through tradition.

Although most brides who married touched on the shifting nature of their wedding plans, Anna's story highlighted the complexity of the situation. With plans to get married in April, and COVID establishing its presence in March, her plans required constant reworking. Anna became engaged in October 2019 and began planning her wedding shortly thereafter. She had arranged for 80–90 guests, mostly consisting of family and a small bridal party. According to her, around mid-March the plans started to change. "So, I guess around this time we started trying to make it smaller and smaller. I remember around the end of March in that week where everything shut down like March 15–16 onwards, right, and we said maybe we'll just cancel it . . . we thought about making it smaller. Like could we at least get our parents in." Anna's first plan had been to cancel the wedding but after deciding that they did not want to postpone, they started trying to make the wedding smaller to fit into the ever-changing guidelines for gatherings. Initially, they thought they would be able to keep the same venue and providers but, once they received word that their venue had been ordered to close and would be unable to accommodate the wedding, they were thrown for another loop. At this point, with both sets of parents living in other provinces and now unable to come for their wedding (as travel into the province was restricted), the couple consulted with them to see how they felt about not being there. The parents assured the couple they were fine with them marrying without their attendance. So, they worked to whittle down their guest list and to try to make it work. At one point, it seemed getting their marriage

licence was in jeopardy: "I remember working and calling in during my lunch break to the wedding register like to get your actual certificate that you sign on your wedding day and the woman who distributes those . . . said 'I'm really, really nervous about doing anything 'cause I'm in that older age group and I don't know if I really feel comfortable even giving you the wedding certificate' . . . we thought we could have like 10 or 12 people at the time." Anna commented that she "pulled on her heartstrings a little bit" and they were able to pick up their licence while social distancing. After losing their venue and with the mounting gathering restrictions, they investigated the possibility of renting an Airbnb, which would allow them to have a higher number of guests, but they could not find any willing to rent to them for the occasion and under the circumstances. But they did find a solution.

> We have a really large upstairs bedroom and we moved everything out of it and then we put up lights and some decorations and took pictures in there and did the ceremony in there . . . it was hard to get used to in a sense, but I think once we started to embrace it and put it together, we realized that we didn't want to put it off. That we did want to move forward with the marriage that those kind of things faded a little bit in terms of importance to us. . . . I had borrowed some photography lights from somebody so we put those up in the room so it was well lit the whole time. . . . I remember putting the fairy lights up in like these little like ring decorations in our wedding colours for like several hours one day while listening to Tiger King.

Anna ended up getting married in her bedroom with a total of five people in attendance — the maximum allowable at the time (the couple, the officiant, and two witnesses).

Anna began to make her wedding plans in October 2019, had to start changing them in March 2020, and married in April. Over the course of a month, her entire wedding changed repeatedly, forcing her

to rethink and rearrange her plans multiple times. Although all the brides I interviewed who married had different stories, they all had to deal with the same concept of redoing and rethinking their wedding plans multiple times. For Anna, it was unidirectional — always trying to make things smaller. For others, such as Darlene, wedding planning consisted of making the arrangements smaller and smaller and then expanding them as restrictions relaxed. Each of the brides was left in this wedding planning loop from March until their subsequent wedding dates. For those who have not yet married, they are still left to gauge the situation as it unfolds and try to plan for how to proceed. As one bride mentioned, she planned to write up several guest lists in the upcoming weeks that would reflect who they would invite depending on different potential gathering restrictions.

For those who married, most were able to find satisfaction and peace in their choices. Four of the brides commented that having COVID-19 rearrange their wedding plans ultimately made them better. Greta stated, "I'm so glad that COVID changed my wedding now because it made it like one hundred times better than it ever would have been," after opting to get married on the front lawn of her childhood home overlooking the ocean. All those who stated that COVID made their weddings better commented on the intimacy of the arrangements, since they had to reduce their guest lists. Even Anna, who was reduced to five people, noted that "it was going to be beautiful [anyway] but having it just be me . . . and my future husband riding around on that day in each other's company and being very . . . relaxed. . . . It was just really nice and like taking that time to put the effort in to decorate the place yourself and like getting it all organized it felt like it was more ours in some ways." This change in how weddings were done resulted in a shift in perspective for some of the brides as well. Instead of their weddings being about celebrating with all their family and friends, it became about focusing on a smaller, more intimate group — sometimes just on the two of them. And this refocusing allowed for other situations and circumstances to have priority as well. For example, Anna commented that her fiancé's father was too sick to

travel to Newfoundland for the wedding so he was going to stay behind while the others came to attend but the restrictions meant that none of his family was able to come home and instead, "one really nice thing about this was that [fiancé's] dad got to be surrounded by his family and his wife and watch it with everybody and actually get to experience it as a group moment as opposed to by himself."

Although all the brides I interviewed grappled with the changing nature of COVID-19 restrictions, those who chose to proceed with their wedding plans amid the novel virus and shifting government restrictions exhibited an enormous amount of resiliency. During a time of crisis, they were able to engage in active decision-making related to their wedding plans and found ways to exhibit agency over tradition.

Resiliency was something that ran through many of the narratives, regardless of the choices they made about their weddings; similarly, so was resistance.

Wedding Planning as Resistance

> With the way that everything has been going there's just so much uncertainty that we just need something positive to be able to happen and just be able to make something good come out of this super dreadful year. (Debra)

Resistance requires an active engagement towards some desired outcome and away from or against some other, undesired outcome (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). I visualize resilience and resistance as counterparts of a ship on the open sea, in a storm. Resilience would be the navigational operations the ship uses to balance the pounding of the waves, while resistance would be the desire to withstand the storm. In this situation, the storm is the COVID-19 pandemic, and resistance reflects the desire of the brides to continue with the wedding plans in spite of the pandemic.

As with most themes in these interviews, I noted resistance (van den Scott 2017) in the narratives of both those who chose to postpone

and those who proceeded to get married (to a lesser extent, I also noted passivity in decision-making in some of the interviews). By choosing to get married, those interviewees pushed back against the uncertainty of the pandemic. For those who postponed, they refused to let COVID alter their plans (insofar as possible within the confines of government restrictions) and made their choices on their own terms. I also noted that some of those who chose to marry employed resistance against public health measures without "breaking the rules."

While most of the interviewees referred to their active participation and agency in decision-making, some of them noted instances of passive participation in this decision-making process as well. Bailey noted this lack of agency over her circumstances when she said, "my fiancé and I were glued to the TV and our phones all day every day before we had made the decision [to postpone]. We actually realized that it was consuming our lives so we [went] to our cabin where there was no service to get away from it all . . . we made the decision to cancel but still waited, I think, two days before we announced it." When Bailey realized that they were exhibiting a lack of agency over their circumstances, they took it upon themselves to rectify the situation by purposely unplugging from the news and social media and from there, actively made the decision to postpone their wedding. This active decision-making over her circumstances enabled her to exhibit resistance against the passive imposition of COVID and government restrictions. Paige, on the other hand, cancelled her wedding when her town's Come Home Year was cancelled. For her, the choice of what to do in the circumstances fell upon something other than her own agency and choices. Even when we talked about her plans for 2021, she was uncertain of what may happen. "We have been thinking about doing it because we rescheduled for [August 2021] but I highly doubt we will be going ahead, especially since all my fiancé's groomsmen are in Alberta." Her first decision to cancel her wedding was based on the cancellation of Come Home Year and she expects her second decision will be based on potential travel restrictions. When asked later in the interview if she planned to postpone again, she replied, "right now I

feel like we will get married. Kind of like an elopement. . . . Just us and witnesses, obviously. But I probably will keep [the new date] and just celebrate another time."

All the other interviewees I spoke with were adamant that they were going to get married in 2021. Even those who did not have a date planned were certain about this. The only one who postponed who still seemed unsure of her plans was Paige. In another example, April first thought that they may postpone their wedding: "We were doing our table numbers for our wedding *the night we were told we had to look into postponing the wedding*" [emphasis added]. Instead of the decision being one she actively made, April's comment reflects that someone else had made the decision and told her about it. April did choose to get married on her original wedding date and decided to have her family celebration after the pandemic, which highlights that even though there were elements of passivity in some of the narratives, engaging with passive decision-making in these circumstances still engages active-agency decision-making.

For those who married, making that decision exhibited resistance against the restrictions and uncertainty of COVID. Debra touched on this when she said, "2020 was a shit show. It just ruined absolutely everything and so we needed something positive to come into 2020." She made that happen by proceeding with her wedding plans. Debra first exerted her agency by postponing her wedding and then again by deciding to proceed with it on her timing — despite the continued presence of COVID. Anna noted a similar theme when she said, "we got to get married in an intimate way *in our own terms* and just because our wedding was cancelled our life wasn't cancelled. Our life actually moved forward in a really beautiful way since then" [emphasis added]. Anna and her fiancé had planned to expand their family by trying for a baby after they married, and they got pregnant within a few weeks of their wedding date. Debra and Anna both pointed out their agency in decision-making with their comments. Both made their decision based on the surrounding circumstances of COVID and, in doing so, enacted resistance against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some of the women who married also talked about how they used their wedding plans as a form of resistance against the government regulations without breaking those regulations. Anna mentioned that she had attempted to rent an Airbnb so they could have a larger gathering than just the five people, but her plans were curtailed when no one would rent one at that time. She also talked about visiting friends on her wedding day, despite the restrictions relating to unnecessary travel and maintaining your bubble. She noted that they dressed in their wedding attire in the morning, took some photos with the photographer, and then went to visit with a half dozen friends. They did all their visits outside and socially distant to ensure compliance within their non-compliance. Technically, they were not supposed to travel around to take photos with friends (although travel for wedding purposes seems a grey area between necessary and unnecessary) but, while they did, they ensured that they did not burst any bubbles.[5] Darlene mentioned that she planned her outdoor venue in an area that provided extra parking to ensure that if people could not attend the ceremony, they would be able to watch it from their parked cars in a public parking area. By employing such techniques, the brides were able to exhort greater amounts of agency over their circumstances than restrictions allowed while also allowing themselves the assurance that they were within compliance of the regulations.

These narratives point out the distinction between human agency and social structure determinism (Mann 2008). In addition, they highlight the imposition of social structure — in this case, the restrictions from the pandemic — on the brides and their wedding plans. Most of the brides used the circumstances to exhibit their human agency in decision-making and their active resistance to the government restrictions.

The Influence of the Pandemic on Culture

Necessity breeds innovation and these brides who married during this global crisis certainly demonstrated innovative strategies of navigating

this unprecedented terrain during the pandemic. This merger of balancing "what once was" with wedding planning and "what now must be considered" led to the generation of pandemic wedding culture: tradition and innovation became combined through the pandemic crisis. This generation of culture can be categorized into four areas: adaptations to wedding services, adaptations to wedding photographs, adaptations to receptions, and adaptations to wedding memorabilia. Due to the closely related nature of some of the categories, I will discuss them under two headings rather than four (wedding services and receptions, and wedding photographs and memorabilia).

Adaptations to Wedding Services and Receptions

> I think people might remember our wedding a bit more because it happened at this kind of awkward moment [the beginning of the pandemic] and they got dressed up and went to a Zoom meeting. (Greta)

Although the concept of recording a wedding ceremony has been around for a long time, its function shifted during the pandemic. Traditionally, a wedding video forms part of the memorabilia for the couple; they employ a videographer to record the event, and it becomes a keepsake for them. However, during the COVID crisis, wedding videography took on a new component. Now, video recording and streaming technology was being used to extend our reality. By using technology in this way, couples and their guests were able to transcend the limiting boundaries of time and space and come together in a virtual, extended reality space (Matthews et al. 2021). This shift from video viewing to extended reality participation is most notable in Anna's narrative. Anna set up both a Facebook live feed for her ceremony and a Zoom call. Their closest loved ones were given access to the Zoom while all their other guests and friends were given access to the Facebook live feed. The difference in how these two platforms operate is notable and important. Facebook live involves a much more

passive participation on the part of the viewer; you watch a Facebook live event. There is little opportunity to interact with other participants or the unfolding events. However, a Zoom call is a much more active, engaged form of participation. Those on a Zoom call can see the others on the call, they can talk to each other (as well as talking to the bride and groom), and they are aware that they are also being seen by others. Anna noted this when she commented that "we could hear them (those on the Zoom call) . . . we were outside the door (waiting for the officiant to begin the ceremony) . . . all the old people just started yelling into the computer like 'oh, there's Uncle so and so there's Aunt so and so how are you guys doing?' . . . which was adorable." This indicates the active participation of those on the Zoom call but also reveals this sort of involvement to be novel for them as well — otherwise, seeing other family members would not have inspired such rambunctious response. Conversely, while those viewing from the Facebook live feed were able to see the couple getting married and type comments into the chat, they were unable to see and interact with each other and the couple in real time.

Anna also commented that many of those on the Zoom call had dressed for the occasion so, even though they were not in the same spatial location, they treated the occasion with the same formality as if they were — they wore formal clothing for this formal event. Greta[6] noted this extension of reality when she commented that "they [those watching through Facetime and Facebook] felt like they were there." The rise and adaptation of such technology allow us to feel and be connected with each other while also reducing physical contact (Matthews et al. 2021). Nina and Darlene also had Facebook livestreams of their wedding for those who could not attend, although the location of Darlene's wedding made the streaming choppy and difficult to follow for viewers. Of the brides who had married before we spoke, at least four of them used streaming technology to include those guests who could not attend due to government regulations.[7] The use of extended reality technology was noted both in the execution of the wedding and afterwards. Anna talked about how "afterwards we had like a Zoom

[receiving] line where everybody kind of logged in . . . and we kind of just went through and said hi to them." She commented that they also opened the receiving line to those who had watched via Facebook live and how some of their guests popped champagne and toasted them over their Zoom line, thus further extending this new form of reality.

While this rise in wedding streaming was the most noted change related to wedding ceremonies, there were others as well. Anna spoke about how they had intended for poems to be read by specific family members during their ceremony. However, since they were unable to attend, their readers recorded themselves reading the poems before-hand and they were also streamed as part of the service. Nina and Greta both talked about having their guest layout for their ceremony and reception based on family bubbles, which, as Nina noted, required them to have someone who was familiar with the families to serve as ushers.

Government restrictions surrounding capacity during the pandemic also resulted in some ingenuity among the brides. Greta changed her location from inside to outside to accommodate more guests while Darlene chose an outdoor venue with extra parking when restrictions tightened because "if it was only going to be five people [allowed to attend] I figured . . . everyone could like be in cars and be back in the background at least seeing it." Some also spoke about how the restrictions influenced and altered their meal arrangements. Darlene and Greta both chose barbecued meals for their reception for its ease of preparation in their outdoor settings and with such capacity restrictions. Further to that, Darlene had her reception meals and drinks pre-portioned and placed on the tables before guests were seated so that there was no concern for close contact while serving. Greta asked a few family members to prepare the meal after the ceremony, which allowed her to distribute a hot meal for the reception without adding to the capacity headcount, as these family members were already slated to attend the wedding. Even though such changes go against established norms of wedding ceremonies in our Western culture, the alteration highlights the amalgamation of tradition in settled times with innovation during times of crisis/unsettled times.

Similarly, Darlene highlighted this same idea when she spoke about her difficulties in inviting guests among fluctuating capacity restrictions: "we got down to [a limit of] 20 people we . . . [sent] out a general letter saying ok, at this point we're at 20. These are the people we have chosen . . . and the others are now put on stand-by." As restrictions tightened and Darlene was forced to make her guest list smaller, those who had been invited were sifted into the categories of "still invited" and "stand-by." Conversely, as restrictions loosened before her wedding, she was able to move people from stand-by to invitee. This highlights the merger of tradition with agency, as Darlene took an established concept (the airline stand-by system) and adapted it for use in her guest planning. This shift from tradition to active agency was noted by Anna when she commented that she wished she had thought about connecting her computer up to their big-screen TV so she could better see the attendees. Her comment illustrates the idea that making these against-tradition wedding decisions required a process of development on the part of the brides. This sort of wedding execution was new and, as such, the brides were unable to rely on previously established norms to complete their wedding plans — they had to rely on their ingenuity and sometimes all the available possibilities did not occur to them until later.

Adaptations to Wedding Photographs and Memorabilia

> There was the one amusing thing that changed for us that day was that you know you have your wedding songs kind of picked out. . . . [They are] songs that are important to you. . . . We had a long discussion about that but we had a bunch of songs picked out — our first dance song, our walking-down-the-aisle song, all those things that were supposed to be the songs of our wedding but what ended up happening is the song of our wedding we had found about a week or two before, which we just started singing all day to ourselves; [sings] "speaking moistly, keep two

metres apart" . . . I'm putting the lyrics down of "speaking moistly"[8] next to pictures [in my scrapbook] of us getting married in our bedroom. (Anna)

How the COVID-19 crisis impacted wedding photographs and memorabilia was fascinating because the brides chose to include these aspects of the pandemic into their plans. COVID and government restrictions were imposed upon the brides and then they navigated around those obstacles, but with photographs and memorabilia they actively chose to engage with the reality of the pandemic.[9]

Anna's comment above reflects this idea of actively including aspects of the COVID pandemic into her wedding memorabilia. And this was noted by brides who married and those who chose to postpone their weddings. Anna and her husband drove around to friends' houses the day of the wedding to take socially distant, outdoor, Polaroid photographs with them to include in their wedding scrapbook. As Anna's example illustrates, some brides included aspects of the pandemic in their wedding photographs. In addition to socially distant photos, I also found that some couples included masks in the photos that were colour-coordinated to their wedding attire and pandemic-specific poses, including kissing through masks, refusing to kiss, and visual representations of the directive to "keep two metres apart."[10] Additionally, some of those who married included the pandemic in other ways, such as distributing hand sanitizer and wedding keepsake masks to their guests.

For those who postponed, they commented on how they plan to include the pandemic in their eventual wedding plans. Elise had purchased a Christmas bulb that read "2019: Engaged" and their 2020 bulb was supposed to read "Married." However, since they postponed until 2021, their 2021 bulb would read "Married" and their 2020 bulb read " . . . Still Engaged." Another bride, who had several children close in age in her wedding, noted that she planned to get photographs of the girls handing their dresses down to the younger girls, as they will have outgrown their original dresses by the time the new wedding date arrives. When talking about including COVID into her wedding

plans, Debra said, "as much as I have been in denial about having any-thing COVID in our wedding, you have to . . . it is what it is. This is the world that we're living in so it has to be acknowledged somehow." And she noted two ways that she was including COVID in her ulti-mate plans. First, her new wedding invitations would acknowledge the change in wedding date. She planned to send out invitations with the original date listed but crossed off and the new date written in instead. Also, she marked her original wedding date by giving her fiancé a set of cufflinks for him to wear on their rescheduled wedding date.

The stories of the brides who grappled with the pandemic during their wedding planning were admirable. But those who chose to in-clude the reality of COVID in their plans in ways they did not have to were amazing and are to be commended for their resilience.

Conclusion

Wedding events are steeped in tradition. However, because the tradi-tions related to having a wedding are already established norms in our culture, they carry with them ready-made strategies of how to navigate them. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, people were left to navigate through their wedding plans in an ever-changing world. These brides were forced to navigate the new culture they found them-selves thrust into with tools built for their former, previously stable culture. In the process, they were given the opportunity to fuse previ-ously established ritual and tradition with creativity and ingenuity. Through the simple process of planning a wedding, these would-be brides found themselves facing the pandemic with incredible resilien-cy and strength, two strategies that will no doubt become ever-present important tools in their cultural tool kits. Although things may have bent, they did not break during the COVID-19 crisis. The active input of creativity into wedding ritual and tradition is likely to last long after COVID-19 restrictions become a memory. These brides may not have realized it at the time, but their ingenuity may alter and create new wedding traditions going forward.

Limitations

Weddings and wedding traditions are not exclusive to Newfoundland and Labrador; they are worldwide phenomena, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was a global phenomenon. Wedding traditions vary across cultures and geographic locations, and they varied across these areas during the pandemic as well. This research highlights those changes for my participants who were situated in one geographic location, but their stories form part of a larger narrative, which has been sociologically, qualitatively, unexplored thus far. With the conclusion of the pandemic, such research may not be forthcoming. As of the time of writing, there is not enough published, qualitative, sociological research about weddings and wedding narratives during the pandemic to discuss how the experience was similar or different for my participants as compared to other brides in other areas. Although I would like to discuss such similarities and differences, such discussion is beyond the scope of the available, comparable literature at this time.

Notes

1. When I think of the idea of the cultural tool kit, I envision it as a screwdriver and a screw. During settled periods, there is a close fit between the required tool and the available one, like a Phillips screwdriver matched with a Phillips-head screw. But during unsettled periods, there is a misfit between our available and required tools — like using a flathead screwdriver on a Phillips-head screw. During unsettled periods (that is to say, during times when we are uncertain of the appropriate or acceptable behaviours), we have to use the "tools" (ways of behaving) that we are familiar with, even though they are not perfectly suited for the situation or circumstances.
2. I opt for the term "unsettled periods" as it is the terminology Swidler uses to refer to such instances; however, "crisis" is the term often, and accurately, used in the literature to refer to the pandemic.
3. I decided to use percentage rather than raw numbers because of the difference in totals between those who delayed and those who proceeded.

4.   Although I did find news articles relating to wedding planners who are now offering specialized pandemic wedding planning services.

5.   Government officials at the time used the wording "stay in your bubble and don't burst anyone else's" as imagery for keeping distance from those not in your household.

6.   Greta set up a Facetime for her closest family and a private Facebook group for her invitees where videos were uploaded in real time.

7.   April did not comment on whether she used such technology and, oversight on my part, I did not ask her.

8.   "'Speaking Moistly' is a remix song of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's voice edited by Brock Tyler, known on YouTube as anonymotif. It is based on Trudeau's words from a press conference regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. The quote 'speaking moistly' refers to respiratory droplets that are spit out when one speaks, which can potentially spread COVID-19" ("Speaking Moistly," Wikipedia, n.d.).

9.   To protect the identity of my participants, this section is intentionally vague and an amalgamation of specific examples of photographs from my research and COVID wedding photographs from the Internet via a Google search.

10. Demonstrated in Newfoundland and Labrador as being the distance of two arm's-lengths apart from another person.

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