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Tying the Knot in Times of COVID-19: a Cultural Comparison between the United States of America and France

How has the wedding industry changed in the last two years and how is this determined by culture?



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Introduction

When we think about weddings, we can imagine it as the most important day for anyone. It is a life-changing day, when the rest of your life begins. We cannot deny that marriage has traditionally been part of the life cycle for most people and that a wedding is not only about the transition from singleness to a life as a couple. It is also a ceremony that has a long history and all kinds of traditions that can vary depending on our culture, our beliefs, our nationality, and even our religion.

It is impossible not to talk about weddings without talking about marriage. Nowadays, we know marriage as the union of two people who love each other, and decide to spend the rest of their lives together. And to commemorate the beginning of their journey as a couple, they decide to celebrate it with a big party. But can you believe that marriage and weddings have not always been like this? The truth is that marriage has existed since the beginning of time and has changed over time, together with the rituals of weddings.

Most people believe that the history of weddings, marriage, and divorce started in ancient Mesopotamia and Babylonia;¹ where the marriage was a contract between the father and the groom, and to close the deal they celebrated with the wedding. Of course the bride did not know her future husband, and she was not allowed to object to the decision. And what if we go a little further back in history? Such as 4,350 years ago, when families were made up of 30 people, where women and children were shared among quite a lot of males.² This is nothing compared to what we know today as marriage, which can be viewed in different ways by society, and exists in different contexts such as monogamy or polygamy.³

Now that I have mentioned a little of the origin of marriage and how weddings have evolved, I would like to emphasize the differences between the ways weddings are celebrated in the United States of America (USA) and France. Clearly, these are two countries that not only have a different culture but also different laws, and religions, to name a few differences.

¹ NARANJO, Roberto, "Marriage in Ancient Mesopotamia and Babylonia," *ehistory*, <https://ehistory.osu.edu/articles/marriage-ancient-mesopotamia-and-babylonia> [retrieved: January 5, 2022]

² "The origins of marriage," *The Week*, January 9, 2015 <https://theweek.com/articles/528746/origins-marriage> [retrieved January 4, 2022]

³ CROSSMAN, Ashley, "The Definition of Marriage in Sociology," *ThoughtCo.*, November 01, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/marriage-3026396> [retrieved January 10, 2022]

Unfortunately, a couple of years ago, a virus came to change our lives in a way that we could not imagine. Due to COVID-19 most of the weddings that were planned for 2020 had to be suspended, reduced in their number of guests or even canceled.⁴ This has been a big shock for the wedding industry.

In such a context, how has the wedding industry changed in the last two years and how is this determined by culture? To answer this question, I will first discuss the differences between France and the USA in regard to wedding rituals. And finally, I will turn to the issue of the consequences of COVID-19 on the wedding industry.

Although both countries have different laws and ways to celebrate a wedding, it is evident that the wedding industry worldwide has undergone a radical change, and it has had to adapt to the new health regulations. This has given way to new strategies – with the help of social media – to celebrate a wedding.

⁴ “2020 Covid-19 Wedding Market Impact,” *Wedding Report*, https://wedding.report/index.cfm/action/blog/view/post/pid/1490/title/2020_Covid_19_Wedding_Market_Impact [retrieved January 10, 2022]

PART I. Wedding Rituals: Differences between France and the USA

Today, thanks to the new technologies, we are more connected to the world and we can realize that there is more in it than we thought. As a result of globalization, people passing from China, India, Spain, Mexico, to the United States have started to adopt similar customs. For example, people from different parts of the world have tried or have heard about tacos, paella, dumplings, or even love curry on their plates. However, something that every social group may not adopt from other countries is the way to celebrate the union of two people.

Wedding rituals around the world differ based on their customs, beliefs, and traditions, in a word: culture. A wedding in Kenyan culture is not the same as a wedding in Mexico, because both countries do not share the same culture. That is why before I start talking about weddings, I consider that it is important to talk about culture and traditions. Certainly, culture and traditions are related in defining a social group.⁵ Although most people assume that these two are exactly the same thing, the truth is that they are connected but are not the same. And it is evident that marriages, and perhaps also the planning of a wedding will depend on the couple's culture and traditions.

On the one hand, culture is a concept that is hard to define since it has so many components. But according to UNESCO,⁶ culture “*may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group.*” It could be said that everything related to religion, food, language, and expressions we have grown up with and we believe in, defines part of our culture.

On the other hand, traditions are defined by the Cambridge Dictionary⁷ as “*a belief, principle, or way of acting that people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time, or all of these beliefs, etc. in a particular society or group.*” In other words, traditions are ideas or beliefs that are passed from generation to generation, usually, within families or even social events. To put it briefly, they provide ways to show respect and treat with honor our ancestors and their culture.

⁵ “Differences between Culture and Tradition,” Pediaa, October 14, 2015, <https://pediaa.com/difference-between-culture-and-tradition/> [retrieved: February 19, 2022]

⁶ UNESCO, “Declaración de México sobre las Políticas Culturales,” Cultural Rights, Mexico City, 26 July - 6 August 1982 https://culturalrights.net/descargas/drets_culturals400.pdf [retrieved: February 19, 2022]

⁷ “Tradition,” Definition, Cambridge Dictionary, (n.d.) <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tradition> [retrieved: February 28, 2019]

On this occasion, I will emphasize two countries: the United States of America and France. These two countries are located on different continents, and we can assume that the culture, religion, laws, and traditions are different. However, both countries are in the same set of cultures, called “Western culture.”⁸ As countries originating from and influenced by Western civilization, they get to share elements such as social norms, ethical values, and religious beliefs, among others.

In Western cultures, wedding traditions and rituals come from a long time ago. For example, in Ancient Rome⁹ men in their late twenties and thirties could marry a younger woman who would be healthy and strong enough to give birth. Marriage consisted of a contract between the father of the bride and the groom. It was the father who decided if the future husband was perfect for his daughter, in regard to the benefit for the families. Marriage included an engagement party where the groom would give an iron ring to his future wife. Then, a wedding ceremony was performed at night, in which the groom would go to his house and wait for the bride who would carry a lit torch from her house. In their new home, they would then receive a new torch and water that represented the ideal combination of fire and water “*aquae et ignis communicatio*.” Then, holding their right hands, the couple would say their vows giving their consent and promising children, which were an essential part of Roman marriage at the time.

Let us move forward to the time of the Viking Age,¹⁰ the time when the Vikings took possession of the lands and wealth of the weaker people of Europe. In France, during the reign of Charles III and with the threat of invasion of Scandinavian Vikings, the Viking leader Rollo swore to be loyal to the king, to protect his lands from other Vikings, and to become Christian by marrying his daughter in exchange for the dukedom of Normandy. This was regardless of the fact that Rollo was already married, thus giving way to the “more danico” marriage,¹¹ which refers to polygynous marriage, where a man has two or more wives at the same time. In the Middle Ages, Christian marriage was a sacrament of importance and it was

⁸ BAUER, Patricia, “Westernization,” *Britannica*, last updated February 14, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Westernization> [retrieved: March 3, 2022]

⁹ “The History of the wedding Ceremony!,” *History Naked*, March 27, 2016, <http://www.historynaked.com/history-wedding-ceremony/> [retrieved: February 28, 2022]

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ REYNOLDS, Philip, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods*, BRILL, 2001

not allowed to be dissolved, contrary to Ancient Age times when it was possible. Evidently, time has passed and marriage has evolved, but there are some things that current society keeps as part of their traditions.

With this in mind, it is necessary to identify the types of marriages in both countries. Although they do share some cultural aspects, marriages and weddings have some elements that vary according to their traditions. In the matter of wedding celebrations, France has three types: civil, religious, and symbolic.¹² In addition, the country also has a civil union called PACS (in French: *Pacte Civil de Solidarité*) which implies the same responsibilities and rights but is less than a marriage. The USA has four kinds of wedding celebrations: traditional, destination, military, and elopement.

Chapter 1: The Elegance of France

Before I start talking about marriages and weddings in France, I consider it important to take a look at its culture and traditions, since I believe they have a huge influence when it comes to saying “yes, I do.” One of the world powers of Western Europe, France is characterized by its elegance, its sophistication, and of course, its culture. As I noted previously, there are a lot of elements involved in culture, and France has an extensive legacy, which has been enforced over time and history. It is a country that has influenced the entire world, culturally and/or politically.

French culture is considered important thanks to its gastronomic diversity, its contributions in science, art and literature, and its festivities. France is recognized as one of the countries with the best food in the world, with a great variety of typical food that is different in every region, and also wine. It is also the land of artists like Claude Monet, Auguste Rodin, Molière, and Honoré de Balzac, to name a few. Additionally, France is a great fashion reference, with its “haute couture” like Dior, Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Hermes.

¹² WARD, Clementine, Mark, “The different types of wedding ceremonies in France for destination weddings,” *Award Weddings*, January 31, 2018 <https://www.awardweddings.fr/single-post/2018/01/31/the-different-types-of-wedding-ceremonies-in-france-for-destination-weddings-e2-80-93-gu> [retrieved: March 1, 2022]

Other equally significant aspects of French culture are its values and its religion. Although France is a secular country, most of its population is Christian, followed by those who do not have a religion. However, there are other religions such as Islamic, Jewish, and Buddhists.¹³

Besides those already mentioned, I believe that the most significant aspects that made France well-known are its values and persistence. The history of this country lets us know how far the people have come fighting for their rights and making a difference for other nations. Its motto “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*” (Freedom, Equality, Fraternity) is the representation of those values.¹⁴

As I already mentioned, French people celebrate three types of weddings: civil, religious, and symbolic.¹⁵ But not all of them can take place at the same time. They depend on the couple’s choice. Remember that one of the values is “*Liberté*” therefore they are free to choose how to celebrate their union. Considering that these celebrations are celebrated differently, I am going to draw attention to each one of them.

Civil marriage

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, civil marriage is “*a legally recognized marriage that takes place without a religious ceremony.*”¹⁶ In other words, it is the union of two people regulated by laws. These laws can change depending on the country the couple lives in. In the case of France, the Civil Code¹⁷ rules the status of people, properties, and relationships between citizens. Therefore, if two people want to get married, they have to follow some conditions before taking the big step:¹⁸

¹³ “Religion of France,” *Britannica*, (n.d.) <https://www.britannica.com/place/France/Religion> [retrieved: March 2, 2022]

¹⁴ “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité,” *Élysée*, (n.d.) <https://www.elysee.fr/la-presidence/liberte-egalite-fraternite> [retrieved: March 3, 2022]

¹⁵ WARD, Clementine, Mark, op.cit.

¹⁶ “Civil Marriage, Definition,” *Cambridge Dictionary*, (n.d.) <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/civil-mariage> [retrieved: March 3, 2022]

¹⁷ “Code Civil,” *Légifrance*, version en vigueur au 08 mars 2022, https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/texte_lc/LEGITEXT000006070721/2022-03-08/ [retrieved: March 5, 2022]

¹⁸ “Mariage en France,” *Ministère de l’Intérieur*, August 31, 2021, <https://www.demarches.interieur.gouv.fr/particuliers/mariage-france> [retrieved: March 5, 2022]

1. They both must be of legal age, which is 18 years. In case someone wants to get married under the legal age, they need to have the consent of the parents or one of the parents of the person who is under-aged, and special permission by a public prosecutor based on serious reasons.
2. It is prohibited to marry if the couple already has a family relationship. Marriage is not allowed if there is a blood link between the couple.
3. Both parties must be in agreement with the union, which is to say that the couple have to give their consent to marriage. According to article 146 of the Civil Code¹⁹ “*It is not possible to marry if there is no consent.*”

Furthermore, since 2013, France is a country where two people of the same sex are allowed to marry,²⁰ it is the 9th European country to approve homosexual marriage. Besides getting married, couples from both genders are also allowed to adopt or to inherit. But, if a couple wants to marry and they fulfill the requirements already mentioned, they have to be prepared for the paperwork.

The couple must present a valid document of identification like a passport or a French resident permit (in case they are foreign). Also, they need to provide their birth certificate, which must be less than three or six months depending on their nationality, proof of domicile address like any household bill, together with a “*certificat de coutume*” and a “*certificat de célibat*.” These two last documents are required to prove that neither member of the couple is currently married with someone else and is free to marry. Additionally, the couple must provide information for each of their witnesses, such as full names, date and place of birth, profession, residence, and a copy of their identity document.

The following step is to submit those papers to the respective city hall (*Mairie*), either the city hall of the residence of one of the future spouses or the residence of one of their parents. It should be noted that at least one of the two people to be married must have lived at least a month before the marriage in France. This file is then analyzed by the civil official, who will also interview the couple jointly or individually if it is necessary. Once the marriage file is accepted, the city hall will announce the publication of the banns. Then, the couple can marry

¹⁹ “Code Civil,” *Légifrance*, version en vigueur au 08 mars 2022, op.cit. chapitre IV

²⁰ “Le mariage pour tous,” *Gouvernement*, November 8, 2021, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/action/le-mariage-pour-tous#:~:text=Avec%20la%20loi%20du%2017.et%20de%20partage%20des%20libert%C3%A9s>. [retrieved: March 5, 2022]

ten days after or up to one year after the announcement. The marriage will take place in a room open to the public at the city hall the day fixed in accordance with the city hall and the future married couple. The celebration must be given by the mayor, with the presence of future spouses and their witnesses.

Religious marriage

Since France is a secular²¹ country, religious marriage has had no legal value since 1791.²² Civil marriage is a mandatory prerequisite before celebrating any religious wedding. Even though it is a secular country, France has religions such as Christian Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism, among others, with the largest population Christian Catholics.²³ This allows couples to hold their ceremony at a place according to traditions and beliefs of their religion. For example, Christians will marry in a church, Muslims in the mosque, and so on. It is important to point out that, according to article 433-21 from the Penal Code “*Any minister of a cult who will proceed, in a usual way, to the religious ceremonies of marriage without having justified beforehand the act of marriage from the civil officers will be punished with one year in jail and a 7,500 euro fine.*”²⁴

Although there are a variety of religions, I am only going to highlight three of them since they are the most popular religions in France: Christian Catholic, Islamic, and Jewish. To celebrate a marriage in the Christian Catholic religion, the ritual consists of performing the union at a church²⁵. The religious wedding involves multiple phases which are prepared by the priest and the couple months before the ceremony. These phases consist of meetings to reinforce concepts like loyalty and love in the couple. Also, one of the future spouses must be baptized to proceed with the wedding. The day of the wedding, the guests arrive at the church

²¹ Something or someone that does not have connection with religion.

²² “Le mariage religieux est-il reconnu à sa juste valeur ?,” *Subtil Diamant*, (n.d.), <https://www.subtil-diamant.com/guide-le-mariage-religieux-161.htm#:~:text=Le%20mariage%20religieux%20en%20France.marier%20civilement%2C%20%C3%A0%20la%20mairie.&text=Toutes%20ces%20formes%20de%20mariage.la%20religion%20de%20chaque%20personne>. [retrieved: March 5, 2022]

²³ “Population by religion in France 2020,” *Statista*, March 6, 2022, <https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/472017/population-religion-france/> [retrieved: March 8, 2022]

²⁴ “Code Penal,” *Légifrance*, version en vigueur depuis le 26 août 2021, https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section_lc/LEGITEXT000006070719/LEGISCTA000006165376?init=true&page=1&query=433-21&searchField=ALL&tab_selection=code&anchor=LEGIARTI000043983043#LEGIARTI000043983043 [retrieved: March 5, 2022]

²⁵ DAURAGE, Marie, “Comment se déroule la cérémonie de mariage religieux ?,” *Mariage.net*, 13 janvier 2022, <https://www.mariages.net/articles/le-deroulement-de-la-ceremonie-religieuse--c3825> [retrieved: March 5, 2022]

and are received by the groom's family. The bride's guests are situated on the left and the groom's on the right of the aisle. The entrance and the dismissal are the two remarkable moments for both the couple and the guests. The groom makes his entrance walking together with his mother, up the aisle to the altar, where he will wait alone for the bride to come. The bride's mother and the groom's father walk together behind.²⁶ The most awaited entrance is that of the bride, who walks on the arm of her father. At the altar, the bride's father entrusts her to the groom. The entrance of the bride is awaited since everybody is going to see her walk to the altar in her white dress, which is one of the important elements of Western weddings.

The white dress has some history behind it.²⁷ It is believed that it represents the purity of the bride. But before 1840, brides used to wear their best dress no matter what the color, since she felt it appropriate and there would be the possibility to wear it more than once. Also, wearing a white dress was considered a sign of wealth and it was criticized if the bride spent money on a dress to wear only once. But it was with the marriage of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert that everything changed (Figure 1). Although there had already been brides of the nobility that had already worn a white dress, it was the Queen's dress that made the difference and set the trend. Given that it was also a royal wedding, pictures became widely known, and her dress was opposite of what was usual at the time by its shape and ornaments.

Figure 1: Illustration of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's wedding in 1840.

FROM CULTURE CLUB/GETTY IMAGES.²⁸



²⁶ DAURAGE, Marie, "Comment se déroule la cérémonie de mariage religieux ?," op.cit.

²⁷ FORREST, Kim, "The (Surprising!) History of the White Wedding Dress," *WeddingWire*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.weddingwire.com/wedding-ideas/white-wedding-dress-history> [March 8, 2022]

²⁸ MILLER, Julie, "How 20-Year-Old Queen Victoria Forever Changed Wedding Fashion," *Vanity Fair*, April 3, 2018 <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2018/04/queen-victoria-royal-wedding> [retrieved: March 8, 2022]

Once the ceremony starts, it can last between 30 minutes and two hours, depending on the couple's choice. If they are not very religious or one of them is not Catholic, the sacrament will last 30 minutes, but if both are regular churchgoers it will take longer due to the sermon. At the end of the ceremony, the spouses and witnesses sign the marriage certificate while the guests leave the church. The married couple is the last to leave the church²⁹. The guests then will receive them with a round of applause and sometimes throw them rice.³⁰ This tradition of throwing rice to the newlyweds is considered a good-luck charm symbolizing prosperity, happiness, and fertility.

In the case of an Islam marriage, one of the traditions involves a change of dress. In some cases the bride changes her dress seven times (as part of the tradition). Sometimes the groom joins her in this tradition. Another tradition involves henna³¹ (Figure 2). Henna means “*find the grace*” and it is used as a body tattoo. The tradition of a bride wearing henna in marriage means that her husband will see her beauty with all her grace. There is also a symbolic ceremony around the henna which starts either one week or just the day before the wedding. The *nekacha* (tattoo artist) is in charge of drawing the bride's hands and feet with the purpose of embellishing her. This shows others that she is passing from being the girlfriend to being the wife.

Figure 2: Henna Bride. FROM MARIAGES.³²



²⁹ DAURAGE, Marie, “Comment se déroule la cérémonie de mariage religieux ?,” op.cit.

³⁰ “Pourquoi jette-t-on du riz sur les mariés à la sortie de l'église ?,” *Le Mag du Mariage*, (n.d) [https://www.lemagdumariage.com/dossier-22-pourquoi-jette-on-riz-maries-sortie-eglise.html#:~:text=Le%20lan cer%20de%20riz%2C%20un%20rituel%20symbolique&text=Cet%20acte%20volontaire%20est%20une,n'est%20pas%20un%20folklore](https://www.lemagdumariage.com/dossier-22-pourquoi-jette-on-riz-maries-sortie-eglise.html#:~:text=Le%20lan cer%20de%20riz%2C%20un%20rituel%20symbolique&text=Cet%20acte%20volontaire%20est%20une,n'est%20pas%20un%20folklore.). [Retrieved: March 8, 2022]

³¹ FERRIER, Astrid, “Le henné de A à Z,” *Mariages.net*, 10 August, 2016 <https://www.mariages.net/articles/le-henne-de-a-a-z--c3644> [retrieved: March, 8, 2022]

³² op.cit.

Generally, the couple marry at a mosque or at one of the parents' houses,³³ and during the ceremony and reception men and women have to stay separated. The ceremony will be officiated by an imam, who leads prayers in a mosque. In the Islam religion, the bride and the groom also sign a contract where the groom must specify the amount of money he will give to his wife for life. This is part of the vows to show the guests, as a gift, the groom's affection towards the bride. The gift sometimes can be money, land, jewelry, or even education. In addition, the witnesses must be two men who are chosen by the imam or the couple. The marriage celebration can continue for three days or even a week if the family wants. In France, this celebration takes place on Saturday and Sunday.

Concerning the Jewish ceremony, marriage is, like all religious weddings, a sacred rite. On the celebration day, both bride and groom, fast since for them it is a purification day and also a day for forgiveness. In that way, by the time they eat, it will be their first meal as a couple. The ceremony can take place indoors or outdoors but the couple and the rabbi must always be under a "*Chuppah*," which is a canopy structure with a cloth supported by four bases (Figure 3), representing their new home and life as a couple.³⁴

Figure 3: *Chuppah*. FROM DREAMSTIME.³⁵



³³ DIEGO, Christine, "Le mariage religieux," *Parents*, décembre 27, 2021 <https://www.parents.fr/etre-parent/droits-et-administratif/pacs-et-mariage/le-mariage-religieux-79771> [retrieved: March 8, 2022]

³⁴ MACKEY, Jaimie, "13 Jewish Wedding Traditions and Rituals You Need to Know," *Brides*, Updated on September 10, 2021, <https://www.brides.com/jewish-wedding-traditions-4783360> [retrieved: March 12, 2022]

³⁵ "Jewish wedding chuppah," *Dreamstime*, (n.d) <https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photo-jewish-wedding-chuppah-israel-image65310598> [retrieved: March 12, 2022]

The Jewish wedding is also known as “*Kiddushin*”³⁶ and it is officiated by a rabbi. It has two blessings: the first is the engagement part or “*Erusin*,” where the groom presents the ring to the bride in front of two male witnesses other than family members. The second is the marriage part or “*Nisuin*,” which consists of other blessings and rituals that I will mention below. Between these two blessings, there is a pause where the couple signs a contract called “*Ketubah*,” where the groom promises to take care of his future wife and respect her.

To emphasize a little bit more the “*Nisuin*,” I am going to mention the rituals around it. Once the *Ketubah* is signed, there are seven blessings recited by the rabbi, family and friends, wishing the couple joy, peace and love while the couple drink wine. At the end of the blessings, the groom is invited to put the glass of wine into a cloth bag with the intention to break the glass and symbolically break the Jerusalem temple. With this intention, the Jewish people are reminded that Jerusalem is above all personal joy and that sadness is present even in moments of happiness.³⁷ Following the breaking of the glass, the guests cheer “*Mazel tov!*” which means good luck and congratulations.

Symbolic marriage

This kind of wedding is typical among the couples that do not have a religion. Instead of proclaiming their love to any God, they do it to their family and friends. The couple decides how the ceremony is carried out. The couple is in charge of finding a place that has a meaning for them. The symbolic marriage is very different from the others because the traditions and rituals are very personal to the couple.³⁸

The PACS

The PACS (*Pacte Civil de Solidarité*) is another way of civil union, next to civil marriage, and it appears as part of the Civil Code.³⁹ This law was approved in 1999, and it was initially

³⁶ DIEGO, Christine, “Le mariage religieux,” *Parents*, op.cit.

³⁷ KRUEGER, Alyson, “6 American Wedding Traditions You Need to Know,” *Brides*, updated on September 01, 2021, <https://www.brides.com/american-wedding-traditions-5199242> [retrieved: February 28, 2022].

³⁸ “Comment organiser une cérémonie de mariage laïque?,” *Marie Claire*, (n.d.), https://www.marieclaire.fr/_comment-organiser-une-ceremonie-de-mariage-laique.781961.asp [retrieved: March 12, 2022]

³⁹ “Code Civil,” Légifrance, version en vigueur au 08 mars 2022, op.cit. Titre XIII : Du pacte civil de solidarité et du concubinage (Articles 515-1 à 515-8)

created to offer a kind of legal status to same-sex couples, and form a single tax household. It should be noted that different sex couples can also do a “Pacs” convention.

The procedure is the same as civil marriage. The couple has to send the same papers to their local city hall. Then, the civil official gives them a date, and they have to go on the day they are assigned to sign. Additionally, this contract can be dissolved any time as long as there is a mutual agreement between the couple.

In conclusion, France is a country in which it is possible to find different cultures, it gives its citizens the freedom to join their lives in marriage regardless of their culture. The most important thing in France with respect to marriages is to do it legally. Religion and beliefs take a back seat and are reflected in the celebration of the union. It should also be noted that many benefits are given to couples who have opted to do the “Pacs.”

Chapter 2: The Ostentation of the USA

Considering that the United States of America is the third-largest country in the world, after Canada and Russia, it has an extensive population. Although it had a population of Native Americans, the vast majority died from diseases brought from Europe during colonization.⁴⁰ As a colonized and immigrant country, it certainly has been influenced by a number of other cultures, making it one of the most culturally diverse countries around the world.

The United States is well known as the country where dreams come true. Everybody dreams of the “American Dream.” I believe this is the reason why people from different countries travel to the US in search of a better future. In addition, the whole world has been able to witness the cultural diversity of the country thanks to all kinds of media, such as films and television, which always seek to highlight its gastronomy, art, and other cultural elements.

Regarding cuisine, the United States has a wide variety of food and I believe that this goes hand in hand with its holidays. For example, one of the most important holidays is Thanksgiving, and it is the occasion when the entire family gathers to give thanks around a

⁴⁰ NUNN, Nathan, QIAN, Nancy, “The Columbian Exchange: A History of Disease, Food, and Ideas,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*—Volume 24, Number 2—Spring 2010—Pages 163–188. <https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/qian/resources/NunnQianJEP.pdf> [retrieved: March 16, 2022]

table full of food. The most important part of the dinner is the roast or baked turkey which is served with cranberry sauce, potatoes and vegetables. Although America is a rich territory and produces crops such as potatoes, tomatoes, corn, cacao, and others, the arrival of the Europeans led to innovation and fusion in cooking.⁴¹ Nowadays, under the influence of many countries, the US is a country where we can find a great variety of dishes. I could add that the most popular food is junk food, such as hamburgers, and pizzas.

As I just mentioned, festivities are also a significant part of its cultural diversity. Days such as Thanksgiving and Independence Day are two of the holidays that are most important in American culture. However, they have adopted other celebrations from other cultures, like St. Patrick's Day, Easter, and so on.

Now, in terms of weddings, the United States has also similar types of weddings to those in France. Thus, I will divide them into four kinds of celebrations: traditional, destination, military, and elopement.

Traditional wedding

This wedding celebration consists of the above mentioned religious marriage. This is the most common type of marriage in the USA. To get married in the U.S. there are also certain requirements. While French laws apply to the entire French territory and may change according to its overseas territories, the US laws vary depending on the state, which means that each state has its own laws.

The general requirements to get married in the USA include: being of legal age, not having a close family relationship with the couple, having the mental capacity to consent to marriage, and not being married. There are states in which the legal age is considered 18 years old, and in others it is 21 years old. If one member of the couple is a minor in the state where they are getting married, they must present the permission of the minor's legal guardian. Also, in some states it is possible to marry first cousins.⁴²

⁴¹ NUNN, Nathan, QIAN, Nancy, "The Columbian Exchange: A History of Disease, Food, and Ideas," op.cit.

⁴² PANTEKOEK, Kellie, "Legal Marriage Requirements FAQs," *FindLaw*, Last updated August 25, 2020. <https://www.findlaw.com/family/marriage/legal-requirements-for-marriage-faq-s.html> [retrieved: March 18 2022]

Another important requirement is the marriage license, which is issued by the county clerk: the local civil authority. It is obtained if the couple fulfill the required documents: an identity document, a birth certificate, and – if one of the couple was previously married – a valid divorce decree. This license also has a deadline and it may take between one month and one year to be authorized.

The traditional wedding usually takes place in the couple's house of worship. Along with France, the USA is a secular country but unlike France, in the United States there is no need to separate civil and religious marriage. Therefore, the future spouses can carry out one ceremony, as long as there is an authorized officiant by the law. As an immigrant country, religious diversity is also present, with Christianity being the religion most followed by the American population.⁴³ Other religions present in the country are the Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism.

Destination wedding

This type of wedding is celebrated in a different location far from the couple's hometown. Many couples choose this type of celebration because the event can be less expensive than in the hometown itself. At the same time, couples choose this type of wedding according to their honeymoon destination, which is why this type of wedding is also known as “weddingmoon.”⁴⁴

Although this can be a good way to save money, it is also important that couples verify the place where their wedding will take place since there are places that require an extended stay or a type of residency in order to legalize the wedding. For example, France is a country where couples can marry if there is a previous residence of one month before the marriage application.

⁴³ “American Culture, Religion,” *Cultural Atlas*, (n.d.) <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/american-culture/american-culture-religion> [retrieved: March 18, 2022]

⁴⁴ “What is a weddingmoon and should I have one?,” *Just Marry*, May 31, 2016. <https://justmarry.com/what-is-a-weddingmoon-and-should-i-have-one/#:~:text=A%20weddingmoon%20is%20a%20wedding,appreciate%20about%20this%20novel%20concept>. [retrieved: March 19, 2022]

When a couple decides to have a destination wedding, they have to inform the guests eight or twelve months in advance.⁴⁵ In this way, the couple can have an idea of the exact number of people invited. Sometimes, being invited to an out-of-town wedding can be more expensive for the guests since they have to pay extra for the travel expenses. In most cases, these weddings turn out to be intimate, and the couple celebrates with their family and closest friends.

Military wedding

This kind of wedding usually occurs when the groom is a member of the US armed forces, whether Army, Air Force, Navy or Marine Corps.⁴⁶ The ceremony can take place either in a church or a military chapel. The requisite to get married in a military chapel into the service academy is to be a graduated member of the armed forces.

The ceremony takes place in the same way as a religious wedding. The differences that can be found in these weddings are: the groom's suit, which is normally the formal uniform of the branch of service. The guests who are part of the military personnel may be dressed in formal uniforms as well. This is the only type of wedding in which the groom stands to the left of the bride and not to the right since the groom can carry a saber or cutlass.

Figure 4: The Arch of Sabers. FROM TRUE PHOTOGRAPHY⁴⁷



⁴⁵ “What to Know When Planning a Destination Wedding,” *The Knot*, updated May 26, 2020 <https://www.theknot.com/content/must-read-destination-wedding-tips> [retrieved: March 19, 2022]

⁴⁶ “Military Wedding Traditions,” *Wedding Details*, (n.d.) <https://www.weddingdetails.com/wedding-traditions/u-s-military-traditions/#dresses> [retrieved: March 19, 2022]

⁴⁷ “Military-Wedding-Ceremony,” *The True Photography*, (n.d.) <https://www.truephotography.com/blog/weddings/san-diego-military-wedding-photographer/attachment/military-wedding-ceremony-with-true-photography/> [retrieved: March 19, 2022]

Also, at the end of the ceremony the newlyweds are received with an Arch of Sabers (figure 4), symbolizing a secure path in their new life as a couple.⁴⁸ Equally, the newlyweds are welcomed to the reception with the same kind of Arch. The saber carried by the groom is also part of the military tradition since it is the utensil with which the spouses cut the cake.

Elopement wedding

It is undoubtedly the most contradictory type of wedding so far. Usually, the wedding celebration is not only about the union but also about sharing the moment with family and friends. The Cambridge dictionary defines elopement as “*the act of leaving home secretly in order to get married.*”⁴⁹ In other words, in this type of marriage, the couple marries only with the witnesses, and family and friends have no knowledge of the marriage. As it is a secret marriage, there is only the ceremony and no reception.⁵⁰

There exist some reasons why a couple choose to have an elopement wedding. One of the most common is that the parents do not agree with the union. Also, it is a way to save on expenses, especially when it comes to weddings, which can often be the most expensive cost in life. This can be the best option if the couple wants something very intimate and their goals require saving the wedding money, such as for a mortgage.

Now, regarding the comparison of the marriage industry in both countries, the USA and France, it shows significant differences. According to the article by “*Mariage en Normandie*”⁵¹ (Weddings in Normandie, a region in France), one of the differences between weddings in the USA and France is that American couples are more concerned that everything goes perfectly and care for the smallest detail. That could be why couples hire a wedding planner, so they ensure that every detail will be perfect. The article also suggests

⁴⁸ MILES, Jamie, “Tips for Planning a Military Wedding,” updated July 16, 2020. <https://www.theknot.com/content/military-wedding-ceremony-and-reception> [retrieved: March 19, 2022]

⁴⁹ “Elopement,” Definition, *Cambridge Dictionary*, (n.d.) <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/elopement> [retrieved: March 19, 2022]

⁵⁰ NORIAN, Karen, “What is an Elopement Wedding?,” *Simply Eloped*, January 09, 2020 <https://simplyeloped.com/elopement-wedding/> [retrieved: March 19, 2022]

⁵¹ “Quelles sont les différences entre un mariage français et un mariage américain,” *Mariage en Normandie*, (n.d.) <https://www.mariage-en-normandie.fr/fr/Quelles-sont-les-differences-entre-un-mariage-francais-et-un-mariage-americain#:~:text=Un%20mariage%20pour%20les%20mari%C3%A9s,grande%20place%20dans%20leur%20organisation> [retrieved: February 16, 2022]

that “French engaged couples will find it more difficult than American brides and grooms to delegate their entire wedding planning to a wedding planner.”⁵²

Another difference is with respect to invitations and wedding events. While in the USA the guests receive an invitation which covers everything that happens at the wedding from the Mass to the dinner and the party. In contrast, in France, only a few guests receive two invitations, one for the Mass, for which it is not necessary to reserve, and another for dinner, for which guests must respond to know in advance the number of dishes for dinner.⁵³

Another remarkable difference is about food, as the wedding planner from French Wedding Director, Lauren Brown answered to my question “*What are the must haves for a traditional French wedding?*” She said: “*Amazing traditional food and wine! Truffles, macarons, pâtisserie, croquembouche, champagne towers, foie gras, canapés...*”⁵⁴

To conclude, there are a lot of ways to get married and religion, as part of the culture, has a huge influence on this celebration day. In this part of the dissertation I wanted to emphasize the different weddings celebrated in France and the United States. Since both countries are secular, the traditions and beliefs take second place, but this does not prevent couples from expressing their union in the traditions they grew up with. In the second part of this dissertation, I will draw attention to the wedding industry and the huge impact of the pandemic.

⁵² op.cit.

⁵³ HENDRICKS, Sara, “The 16 biggest differences between French and American weddings,” Insider, January 25, 2018, <https://www.insider.com/biggest-differences-weddings-france-america-2018-1> [retrieved: February 28, 2022]

⁵⁴ BROWN, Lauren. Interview. 28 February 2022. See appendix A. p.41

PART II. Consequences of COVID-19 on the Wedding Industry

Before the pandemic, some people used to live a life of excess. They bought things unnecessarily, invested in other things that might not even have a future, and did not care. With the arrival of COVID-19, everyone began to change. Some people took advantage of their time exploiting their creativity, creating business ways to support their expenses. And some others became obsessed with online shopping or made social media a lifesaver by sharing their daily life during the lockdown, recipes, dancing, sharing exercise routines, etc.

A few years ago, we thought that technologies were “destroying us” because they made us less intelligent in a certain way. I have always heard it said that instead of making progress, we are going backward because now, people do not know how to do anything without the help of technology. For example, someone forgets how to divide, and they resort to using the calculator on their cellphones. Everybody is becoming increasingly dependent on technology and social networks, and all have reached a point where they have to be connected constantly. However, thanks to technology and social media, most people managed to withstand the pandemic lockdown. Social media helped everybody to be more connected to family and friends. Although COVID-19 took away many loved ones, and they could not have a proper farewell, social networks were there so that others would not miss out on the events in the world.

It is not a secret that there is life before and after the pandemic. Lots of things have changed since December 2019, and the wedding industry is not the exception. There are couples that decided to postpone or even cancel their wedding because of this sanitary situation. Now, to fully understand how this industry has changed in the wake of COVID-19, I consider it crucial to explain everything involved in this field, which companies rely on to generate revenue.

In this part of the dissertation, I will try to explain the difference between weddings before and after the arrival of COVID-19. To do this, I will use both statistics and interviews with wedding planners and couples who got married in the middle of the pandemic, and how social networks have become important when it comes to celebrating marriage.

Chapter 1: Pre-pandemic and Post-pandemic Weddings

Every event, no matter how large or small it is, requires thorough preparation to ensure that it is a memorable one. In an event like a wedding, which is very significant in a couple's life, every aspect plays a crucial role. Its organization may take several months to complete and it depends exclusively on the couple, their tastes, their traditions, and even if they have a religion.

The wedding industry involves everything related to the celebration of the union of two people, and it also has several small businesses that belong to a variety of industries. Some of these industries are clothing, jewelry, catering, photographers, hair and makeup artists, wedding planners, venues, favors,⁵⁵ and music. That is why all the wedding journey starts with the proposal, from that moment on there are quite a few logistics that a couple must organize: the number of guests, the bride's dress and the groom's suit, the floral decorations, the food, the party, etc.

As I mentioned in the first part of this dissertation, wedding planners are a great help when it comes to organizing this event, especially for American couples. Often, they are the ones who have the suppliers to carry out each of the wishes and sometimes whims of the wedding couples. With the pandemic, industries around weddings suffered losses like any other sector that was not of prime necessity. Therefore, a date as important as the union took a back seat in the list of priorities, which led many to-be-weds to suspend or perhaps cancel their weddings.

Weddings before COVID-19

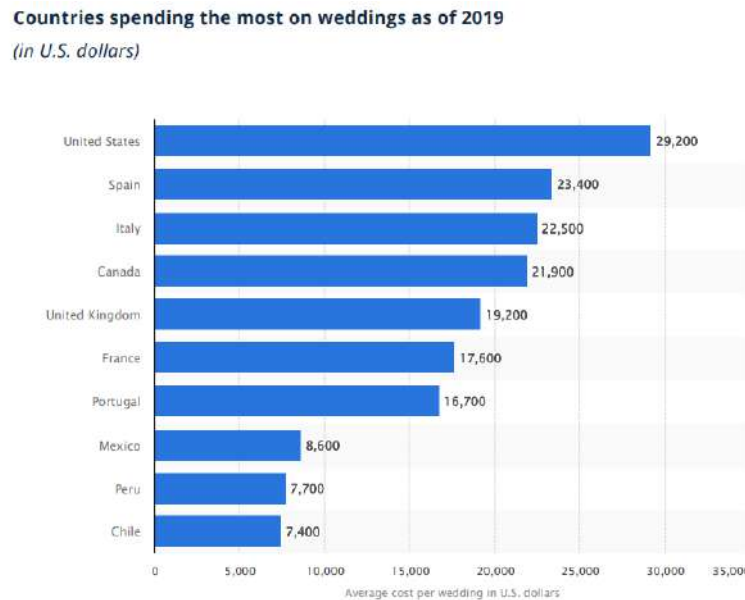
There exist plenty of statistics on weddings in the United States compared with France. In 2019, according to Varella,⁵⁶ the United States ranked first among the countries that invested the most in tying the knot at nearly \$30,000 (€28 450,50). Meanwhile, France was in sixth place with approximately \$18,000 (€17 070). This is because France, unlike the United

⁵⁵ A favor is a gift that couples give to the party guests to remember the special event.

⁵⁶ VARELLA, Simona, "Countries spending the most on weddings as of 2019", *Statista*, April 8, 2021 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1226472/countries-spending-the-most-on-weddings/> [retrieved: April 18, 2022]

States, is not willing to pay large amounts for weddings. As shown in figure 5, the countries above France are Spain, Italy, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Figure 5: Countries spending the most on weddings 2019. FROM STATISTA⁵⁷



There is also the case of the website *WeddingWire*,⁵⁸ which shows data collected in 2018 of more than 18,000 newlywed couples in the USA when planning their wedding. Some of the data collected include statistics related to engagement, planning, wedded couples, traditions, and costs around a wedding. Namely, an engagement ring ranged close to \$5,000 (€4742), most couples got engaged on Christmas Day or close to that day, and 64% of couples shared on social media their engagement just a few hours after the proposal. In addition, most of the 2019 weddings took place on October 19th, followed by September 14th.⁵⁹

As I mentioned above, every couple and wedding celebration is different, and the number of guests will also depend entirely on the couple's decision. There are some to-be-weds who prefer a private ceremony with a little less than 100 people, including family and friends. However, there are others who prefer a large wedding with at least 200 guests. According to

⁵⁷ VARELLA, Simona, "Countries spending the most on weddings as of 2019", op.cit

⁵⁸ "Newlywed Report 2019," *WeddingWire*, (n.d.) <https://go.weddingwire.com/newlywed-report/2019> [retrieved: April 15, 2022]

⁵⁹ op.cit

the data collected by WeddingWire, the average number of guests was nearly 130 people per wedding.⁶⁰

Something important that I have not talked about in this dissertation is the wedding party, which also plays a role in weddings. “Wedding party” does not refer to the party after the ceremony, but it *“is a group of people chosen by the couple to support and celebrate them throughout their journey from engagement to marriage. The people chosen to be in a wedding party are typically close friends and family members of the bride(s) or groom(s).”*⁶¹ Among this group, there are some children like the ring bearer and the flower girls, the bridesmaids, groomsmen, maid of honor, and best man. The latter two are responsible for supporting the bride and groom in decisions such as the dress selection, the bachelor/bachelorette parties, the planning, etc.

Additionally, in 2019 it was reported that 65% of American couples *“got ready with the wedding party”* on their wedding day.⁶² This tradition consists of the bride having hair and makeup done with her bridesmaids and the groom getting ready with his groomsmen (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Getting ready with the Wedding Party. FROM INSIDE WEDDINGS⁶³



⁶⁰ ibid

⁶¹ “Bridal Party vs. Wedding Party: What's the Difference?” Zola, (n.d.) <https://www.zola.com/expert-advice/what-is-a-wedding-party-and-do-you-need-one> [retrieved: April 28, 2022]

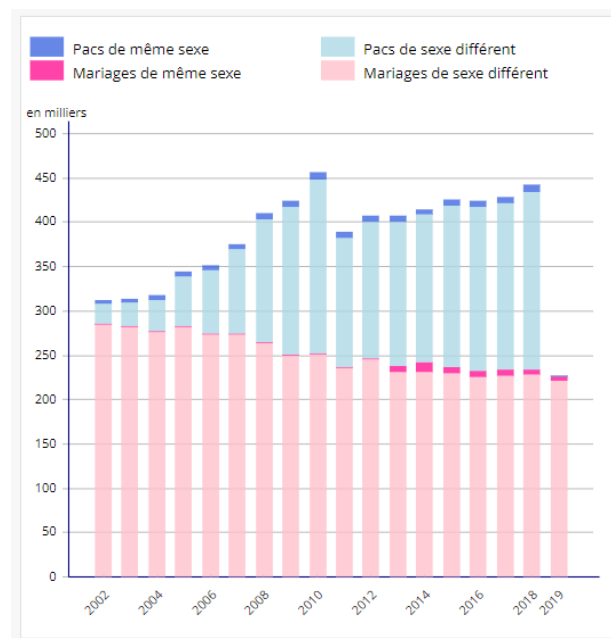
⁶² “Newlywed Report 2019,” *WeddingWire*, ibid.

⁶³ “10 Touching Shots of Getting Ready for Weddings,” *Inside Weddings*, (n.d.) <https://www.insideweddings.com/news/planning-design/10-touching-shots-of-getting-ready-for-weddings/43273/> [retrieved: April 28, 2022]

In the case of France, it is not only marriages that have to be considered but also the union of the “Pacs.” On the one hand, the Insee report indicates a significant number of marriage unions, “in 2019, 227k marriages were celebrated, including 221k people of different sex and 6,000 between people of the same sex.”⁶⁴ It also states that between 2013 and 2018, there were about 230k marriages per year of couples of different sex. But this stable figure began to decrease in 2019. On the other hand, it indicates that the union of “Pacs” increased rapidly from its implementation in 1999 to 2010. “In 2018, were concluded nearly 209k ‘Pacs’, of which just over 8,600 were between people of the same sex.”⁶⁵

The chart shows the impact of “Pacs” and marriage unions in France over the last decades more clearly (Figure 7). Although the decrease in the number of marriages may not be as noticeable, the increase in the number of unions by “Pacs” is increasingly on the rise. However, it should be pointed out that the 2019 figures are incomplete, the data on “Pacs” were not reported, and marriage data was provisional.

Figure 7: Marriages and Pacs concluded from 2002 to 2019. FROM INSEE⁶⁶



⁶⁴ “Mariages - Pacs - Divorces,” *Insee*, February 27, 2020 <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4277624?sommaire=4318291#graphique-figure2> [retrieved: April 26, 2022]

⁶⁵ op.cit.

⁶⁶ ibid

Weddings after COVID-19

When the New Year 2020 arrived, people received it with great excitement. A new decade was beginning, with new goals and dreams to fulfill. Everyone was ready to live at a mile a minute. No one expected that year that the whole world would have to come to a complete halt and take a break. Thousands of people were dying every day, and health specialists were doing their best to save lives even if it meant risking their own lives. Each passing day ended with a round of applause from the balconies or windows. It was in appreciation for those doctors who never stopped fighting.

With the arrival of COVID-19, all events became uncertain. It made everyone decide whether to go ahead with their wedding plans or postpone them for the health and well-being of their loved ones. But that did not stop some engaged couples from continuing with their desires to live their happily ever after. Over the course of this part, I will share some examples from the -interviews I gathered regarding weddings in times of COVID-19. I contacted two couples who got married in the United States, one couple who got married in France, and two who did the “Pacs.”⁶⁷ These couples told me about their experience and why they decided to marry in the middle of a pandemic.

According to the *Wedding Report*, the wedding industry in the USA suffered a massive impact due to COVID-19. It has left losses never seen before, with 49% less of weddings during 2020, which will take a few years to recover. “*We also believe that 2022 will see a slight surge of about 50k weddings, carry over from 2020 postponements, and spending will not return to 2019 levels until about 2024.*”⁶⁸

With a situation of this magnitude due to the pandemic, everyone has to become more versatile and adapt to the changing circumstances. One of these changes was the venue, all due to the health standards required by the different countries. One of the recommendations was not to be in closed places with more than a certain number of people, which led couples to look for open spaces to get married once the contagions had subsided. As confirmed by the WeddingWire report:

⁶⁷ See appendices p.41-49

⁶⁸ “2020 Covid-19 Wedding Market Impact,” *Wedding Report*, op.cit

“Roughly 45% had to change their wedding venue location and one in five had to go as far as changing the city, state or even country in which they got married (21%) (...) COVID-19 also caused couples to lean heavily into the use of outdoor locations for their celebrations—from their backyards to barn/farms (the top reception venue of 2020) (...) In fact, in 2020 nearly 60% of receptions were either fully or partially outside, compared to 43% in 2019.”⁶⁹

Figure 8: Newlywed in times of COVID-19. FROM BRIDE MAGAZINE⁷⁰



I could confirm this in the course of the interviews since the couples who opted for marriage did so outdoors. As Stefanny, who got married in the house garden of the groom’s parents, said: *“The reunion was at his parents' house. They have a big garden. It was a great help to have his parents' garden because there were no ballrooms to rent; they were all closed. If we had not had the backyard, we would not have had the party at all.”⁷¹*

Additionally to the change of venue, couples faced a sudden change in the number of people. More than half of the guests canceled at the last minute, even though the couples had adequate space to receive the number of guests they had planned and had the necessary security measures in place. There is the case of Bri and her husband, who got married at Bri’s workplace, and more than half of the guests did not attend.

“We got married at my place of work, the Memphis Botanic Garden. We planned for an outdoor wedding and indoor reception. We invited 200 people, 160 RSVPd, 42 showed up on the day. We

⁶⁹ “2021 WeddingWire Newlywed Report: COVID-19 EDITION,” *WeddingWire*, (n.d.) <https://www.wedinsights.com/report/weddingwire-newlywed-report-covid> [retrieved: April 29, 2022]

⁷⁰ “Weddings and Covid-19 - a year on,” *Brides Magazine*, March 23, 2021, <https://www.bridemagazine.co.uk/articles/weddings-and-covid-19-a-year-on> [retrieved: April 29, 2022]

⁷¹ Stefanny. Interview April 15, 2022. See appendix C p.44

received a ton of texts that morning saying that because of COVID, people were too scared to travel. My husband had no one from his family present. It was heartbreaking.”⁷²

Although, there were couples who faced the changes and decided to go ahead with their weddings. 45% of couples who planned to get married in 2020 decided to postpone their wedding to 2021.⁷³ However, at least 20% of the weddings planned for 2021 were rescheduled by 2022.⁷⁴ According to Lauren, a wedding planner in France and the United Kingdom, “over 85% of weddings were canceled due to Covid and about 50% of those are rescheduled and the others have just got married in the UK or just registry offices.”⁷⁵ When I asked her for the solutions given to the couples who planned to get married during 2020 and 2021 she said:

“Just to postpone to 2021-2022 and hope like the rest of the world that Covid will not be an issue this season. Weddings and booking are at an all-time high. Most venues are fully booked for 2022 due to the lack of availability for 2021 and we are getting bookings even for 23/24 so people are really looking ahead.”⁷⁶

However, this was not the only solution for weddings in times of COVID-19. “Microweddings”⁷⁷ and “Minimonies”⁷⁸ have become trendy. On the one hand, minimonies are more according to the times of COVID-19, since not only is a select and reduced group of guests invited, but even the officiant can perform the wedding online⁷⁹. The expenses, in this case, are minimal as well, since everything is cut down.

On the other hand, in micro weddings, the number of guests is smaller, so the experience that the guests receive is truly unique. Here, even the smallest detail counts. Instead of organizing a wedding for more than 150 guests with something typical, couples plan this kind of

⁷² Bri. Interview April 24, 2022. See appendix D p. 47

⁷³ “2020 Covid-19 Wedding Market Impact,” *Wedding Report*, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ “2021 Covid-19 Wedding Market Update,” *Wedding Report*, https://weddingreport/index.cfm/action/blog/view/post/pid/1606/title/2021_Covid_19_Wedding_Market_Update [retrieved: March 3, 2022]

⁷⁵ BROWN, Lauren. Interview. *op.cit*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ A microwedding is a wedding that includes only 50 guests, which are mostly family and really close friends.

⁷⁸ A minimony is a commitment ceremony between a couple that includes a maximum of 10 people –as long as the social distancing measures are respected.

⁷⁹ LEE, Esther, “What Is a Minimony Compared to a Microwedding? Here's Why It Might Be Best for You,” *The Knot*, Updated September 22, 2020 <https://www.theknot.com/content/what-is-a-microwedding> [retrieved: April 30, 2022]

wedding for 50 people with extraordinary things like favors and food.⁸⁰ In this way, couples still have the same budget to celebrate their day and make it memorable for themselves and their guests.

I also collected some information from the interviews regarding the union by “Pacs.” In both Angela’s and Aylin’s cases, they found love while on a cultural exchange. On one side, when I asked Angela why she and her boyfriend decided to do the “Pacs” and not the civil marriage after having been in a relationship for four years, she replied:

“Since neither of us believes much in marriage, the most logical thing for us was to do the “Pacs”. So we could have a way to stay calm in terms of paperwork. It is also by ideology. The only way I would decide to get married is if I get pregnant, to give my children legal security. But as long as I do not have that need or concern to be responsible for someone other than myself, I am not going to do it.”⁸¹

On the other hand, Aylin was about to finish her cultural exchange and was thinking of traveling to another country, but her boyfriend proposed to her to stay in France. Their relationship began during the pandemic, and when I asked why they had decided to do the “Pacs”, her response was: *“For economic reasons and because we could not reunite the two families during the pandemic. We could not do something big. He wanted to have a big party and invite everyone, and it was not possible.”⁸²* Unlike Angela, Aylin and her boyfriend do believe in marriage. It is just that their plan to get married does not figure in their immediate plans.

Briefly, the arrival of COVID-19 drastically changed the way of organizing weddings. It did not only affect such a large industry leaving losses that will not recover before a couple of years, but it also made couples look for alternatives and give themselves new options to have the wedding of their dreams.

⁸⁰ op.cit.

⁸¹ Angela. Interview April 5, 2022. See appendix E p.49

⁸² Aylin. Interview April 22, 2022. See appendix E p.49

Chapter 2: The Central Role of Social Media during COVID-19

Technology is increasingly present in our daily lives. It simplifies our tasks and it is not only a source of information but also serves as a distraction. The advance of technologies has been of great advantage in recent times. Technologies have increased the way people can stay closer to their loved ones, whether they are on the other side of the world, but it also keeps people informed in seconds of what is happening anywhere across the globe. Actually, it was thanks to new technologies, especially social media, that the events came to light, such as a strange virus in Wuhan, China, that was affecting too many people to the point of some fainting in the middle of the streets.

Due to COVID-19, the entire world had to live in confinement for months, and social media helped people to cope with this situation. Social media became a source of information, keeping the whole world aware of the advance of the virus, but it was also a source of disinformation. Everyone was making up things that were supposed to be the cure for COVID-19, that the virus was just conspiracies, and much more.⁸³

People also started to use social media more continuously. Apps such as TikTok, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, and Instagram, among others, were the way to share their daily lives. However, there were people who decided not to post things that reflected happiness during such a difficult time, where there were millions of deaths daily.⁸⁴

Social media not only went viral but also entertainment apps like Netflix, Disney plus, and even online shopping through Amazon. The lockdown made it possible to find ways to keep up with normality by using social networks. There were strategies such as teleworking, distance learning, and even meetings and parties via video calls.⁸⁵

⁸³ KUSHNER, Jackson, "The role of social media during the pandemic," *Kohoros*, March 25, 2020, <https://khoros.com/blog/social-medias-role-during-covid-19> [retrieved: April 30, 2022]

⁸⁴ MOLLA, Rani, "Posting less, posting more, and tired of it all: How the pandemic has changed social media," *Vox, Recorde*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/recode/22295131/social-media-use-pandemic-covid-19-instagram-tiktok> [retrieved: April 29, 2022]

⁸⁵ KOEZE, Ella, POPPER, Nathaniel, "The Virus Changed the Way We Internet," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/07/technology/coronavirus-internet-use.html> [retrieved: April 29, 2022]

In terms of weddings, technologies and social networks were already connected before the virus's arrival, making it easier to organize this event. “Thanks to wedding technology, many traditional wedding planning processes have become easier, accessible and fun. There are online and mobile tools not only for professional wedding planners but also for couples who want to venture in planning themselves.”⁸⁶ Before the pandemic, engaged couples used digital tools for wedding planning, creating websites, looking for inspiration for decorations and favors, sending invitations, etc.

From the moment of the proposal, social networks are a fundamental part of weddings. As I mentioned earlier, in the United States, more than half of the brides post on social media a photo of the engagement ring a few hours later. Along with social media come the well-known “#hashtags”, which became a fundamental part of sites such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. Thanks to hashtags, people can find information quicker from specific subject matter such as products to services and communications.⁸⁷

Hashtags have also gained popularity at weddings. Wedding couples usually create their hashtag with their first or last names to add a fun touch to the ceremony and allow guests to share photos and videos of the event. During the pandemic, the hashtags did not wait, and according to *Wedding Forward*, some of the most common hashtags used over the past years at the COVID-19 weddings included: #coronaviruswedding #loveisntcancelled #covid19wedding #loveisnotcancelled #pandemicwedding #stillgettingmarried #covid19bride #socialdistancewedding.⁸⁸

Contrary to the years previous to COVID-19, social networks have been more present in the last two years. As I mentioned before, the virus did not allow the engaged couples to have a proper wedding, and they had to look for new alternatives. One of these alternatives also involves social networks, as some to-be-weds decided to live-stream their celebration or do it directly online. In the case of the information I collected from the interviews, none of the

⁸⁶ NIKOLAEVA, Sofia, “How WedTech is Changing the Wedding Industry,” *EventMB*, September 23, 2015 <https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/wedtech-changing-wedding-industry/> [retrieved: February 14, 2022]

⁸⁷ TAYLOR, Nancy, “Why Are #Hashtags So Darn Important?” *Naylor*, June 12, 2015, <https://www.naylor.com/associationadviser/why-are-hashtags-important/#:~:text=words%20without%20spaces,-.A%20hashtag%20is%20a%20label%20used%20on%20social%20media%20sites,to%20help%20members%20filter%20information> [retrieved: May 1, 2022]

⁸⁸ ISTOMINA, Valeriya, “Trendy and Creative COVID Wedding Ideas,” *Wedding Forward*, Updated: April 26, 2022 <https://www.weddingforward.com/covid-wedding-ideas/> [retrieved: May 1, 2022]

people interviewed live-streamed their ceremony. But the vast majority said that after the ceremony, they contacted their loved ones via FaceTime or WhatsApp.

Figure 9: Couple getting married online. FROM ⁸⁹



Finally, getting married in the middle of a pandemic may have become a struggle for the bride and groom. On one hand, they had to decide whether to go ahead with their wedding and, if they did, hoped that their guests would be able to attend. On the other hand, they had to take care of the safety of their guests and seek the maximum precautions to avoid more contagion during the event. Although the alternative of doing a wedding online is a good option, I consider it can become emotionally difficult to celebrate this day without some of their loved ones.

⁸⁹ ISTOMINA, Valeriya, "Covid Wedding Ideas," op.cit

Conclusion

Nowadays, there are countless ways to celebrate a union, whether religious, symbolic or simply civil. Based on the United States and France, I realized that both countries have to consider overall the legal administration, making it mandatory to have a civil marriage before any other type of ceremony. Most couples choose to have only a civil marriage, although many others usually complement it with a small ceremony, either religious or symbolic, depending on their beliefs. Additionally, traditions also play an important role when it comes to celebrating a marriage, especially if they are linked to religion. There are couples who, when organizing their wedding with the help of their parents, choose to follow long-lasting family traditions. However, today some people are religious but not practicing and therefore opt for alternative ways of getting married.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I wanted to know the impact on the wedding industry in both countries. I realized that France had been a significant political and cultural influence on several countries, including the United States. In addition, both countries share secular ideologies, which means that weddings, on some level, end up being very similar in legal matters. The big difference I found was the union by “Pacs”, which is increasing every day.

Throughout this dissertation and with the interviews that were conducted, I could notice that although nowadays the main reason for marriage is love, economic or legal security plays a role in the reasons for marriage. In the case of France, this explains not only marriage but also the union by the “Pacs”. The latter is a way of being in a couple and living together like a marriage, but with the difference that if things do not work out, it is easier to dissolve and has fewer complications than a divorce.

COVID-19 affected people not only politically and economically but, above all, socially. Lockdown was not easy, but it helped many among us to appreciate the little things. It also served to bring us closer together as a community, to get us closer to our loved ones. In a way, COVID-19 left some positive things. We learned to prioritize our time, adapt to changes, improvise, and solve difficulties. In terms of weddings, we opted for more minimalist things such as micro weddings and minimonies, and social networks are becoming more and more meaningful.

In addition, social media not only played a crucial role throughout the lockdown, but it allowed some couples to share this special day with their loved ones from anywhere in the world. I could say that a wedding is a perfect excuse to be with the couples in this new cycle of their lives. At the same time, like any event, it is the perfect opportunity to reunite with loved ones and meet new people. However, what social media did not allow everybody to do was hug these loved ones, share a dance or even enjoy a nice feast.

Finally, pandemic times have not been easy, but they have served, in some way, to be more present. And new technologies show how easy it is to get closer, especially in situations where everybody must isolate without being able to have physical contact. Nowadays, some studies show that people have learned to live more hand in hand with technology and social networks, but it will never compensate for human warmth and physically feeling the love of loved ones.⁹⁰⁹¹ There will come a time when everyone will be able to reunite and, perhaps, celebrate their weddings again with their loved ones in real life and not through a screen. As a result, the wedding industry may not only grow stronger in the coming years but also come up with new alternatives to celebrate this special day.

⁹⁰ SONG, Ji Hee, HOLLENBECK, Candice R. and ZINKHAN, George M. “The Value of Human Warmth: Social Presence Cues and Computer-Mediated Communications,” *The Association for Consumer Research*, 2008, <https://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13502/volumes/v35/NA-35> [retrieved: May 2, 2022]

⁹¹ BOHN, Katie, “How social media is changing the way people get to know one another,” *The Pennsylvania State University*, October 26, 2021, <https://www.psu.edu/news/research/story/how-social-media-changing-way-people-get-know-one-another/> [retrieved: May 2, 2022]

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Appendices

Appendix A: Email interview with Lauren Brown, Director from FRENCH WEDDING VENUES. February 28th, 2022

From: Karen tatiana Sanchez sanchez [mailto:40015772@parisnante.fr]

Sent: 28 February 2022 22:24

To: French Wedding Venues

Subject: Re: Interview about weddings in times of covid

Dear Lauren,

First of all, I want to apologise for the delay, these weeks have been busy for me too. I also want to thank you for taking the time to answer my questions. I would like to start with some questions about the traditions of a French wedding. I am not originally from France and I would like to know everything about the original French weddings. For example:

- What are the must haves for a traditional French wedding?

Amazing traditional food and wine! Truffles, macarons, patisserie, crochembouche, champagne towers, foie gras, canapés

Fairytale chateau and vineyards weddings are also most popular

- Is it very common to have bridesmaids and groomsmen in a French wedding? How many of them are considered "enough"?

Yes absolutely! We mainly work with English speaking couples from all over the world but this is a common thing. I would say most have a minimum of two bridesmaids and 2 groomsmen.

- Also, how is the reception? How long is it?

French weddings traditionally go on into the early hours of morning 2-3am. They are an all day event!

- Where do French couples decide to marry most of the time in castles, in hotels or any other location?

I would say that it is a complete mix. I wouldn't say one of another. The only thing I would say is that they will mainly get married locally and therefore not need such a big venue to host all the family as they won't necessarily stay on site. UK couples want much larger venues as will have a 2-3 day event with brunches and pool parties etc. You also have to consider beach front, vineyard weddings are very popular not just your classic chateau.

I know this pandemic situation has affected everybody and future married couples are not the exception. That's why my following questions:

- How many weddings were canceled and how many were postponed because of Covid-19?

I would say that over 85% of weddings were canceled due to covid and about 50% of those are rescheduled and the others have just got married in the UK or just registry offices.

- How many weddings did you plan before, and how many after Covid-19? Do you have an average of weddings in 2018 and 2019 compared to those in 2020 and 2021?

https://weddingreport/index.cfm/action/blog/view/post/pid/1606/title/2021_Covid_19_Wedding_Market_Update

This report might help you with some more accurate facts and figures though to quote.

- Do you have a policy when cancelling or postponing a wedding?

We work directly with the venues so our deals are set and non-refundable. However the general consensus with our venues are that the couples pay a non-refundable deposit and then any overpayments up to maybe 4 weeks before would be returned in the case that the wedding can not go ahead due to covid.

- What were the solutions you planned for couples during 2020 and 2021 to get married?

Just to postpone to 2021-2022 and hope like the rest of the world that covid will not be an issue this season. Weddings and booking are at an all time high. Most venues are fully booked for 2022 due to the lack of availability for 2021 and we are getting bookings even for 23/24 so people are really looking ahead.

Thank you again in advance for taking your time and answering my questions.

Best regards,

Tatiana Sánchez

Appendix B: Questions Maria. April 5, 2022

She lives in Michigan, USA. She got married in May 2021. I contacted her via Facebook. Due to the time difference, I sent her the questions and she answered me back. Here is a screenshot from our first contact.



➤ Karen • Maria

➤ **Where in the US do you live?**

- Our home is in Farmington Hills, MI. But we have lived in Washington and California

➤ **How did you and your partner meet?**

- We met on fb dating

➤ **Do you share the same culture?**

- We don't share the same culture, but over time my husband learned Spanish to communicate with my family.

➤ **Where are you from?**

- He was born in Maryland, but grew up in Green Bay, Wisconsin. I was born in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico.

➤ **Did you plan to get married before the pandemic?**

- Our whole relationship happened in pandemic time. So we decided to get married in pandemic time.

- **Why did you decide to get married in the middle of a pandemic?**
 - We decided to get married because my husband didn't want to have a long distance relationship. I wanted to go back to Mexico but he was torn between leaving with me or getting married here.

- **What motivated you to get married?**
 - We were motivated by the fact that we both loved each other and still love each other very much. And we were both at an age where we wanted stability. I was 29 and he was 31. We also shared many values and interests in common.

- **Where was the venue?**
 - We got married at Woodland Rose Park in Seattle, Washington.

- **Do you follow any religion? If you have, was the wedding related to it?**
 - We are both Catholics and we like to go to mass every Sunday together. We just had a civil wedding. Our religious wedding will be celebrated in Mexico where his family will fly to visit my country and celebrate the mass where my father's ashes are. For me that is very important.

- **Did you have a wedding planner or any other help in the organization?**
 - We did not have a wedding planner, we organized everything by ourselves. But in Mexico we will work with a wedding planner.

- **What were the things you struggled with the most during the organization?**
 - Our difficulty was figuring out how our families could fly in times of pandemic.

- **Did you have to change a lot of what you had planned or was it as you expected? Like the venue, catering, number of guests, etc.**
 - We got married in a gazebo, in the middle of the rose garden. We had our family and friends as witnesses with the sunset of an amazing day. We also streamed it on a zoom call for all of our friends who couldn't travel. It definitely was what we were hoping for, something simple and intimate for the civil wedding. Then we had dinner with our guests at a restaurant across from Lake Washington, where we all sat down together to eat while watching the beautiful sunset together.

- **What were the traditions you had the day of your wedding?**
 - Not many, perhaps for me, it was that his whole family sent greeting cards with money. Maybe we will adapt more in our wedding in Mexico, where I will have to play that music that Americans love to dance at weddings and in Mexico we don't play lol. I really believe that the relationship between people from two different countries is culturally rich.

Appendix C: Transcription from the video call with Stefanny. April 15, 2022

I contacted her via Facebook. She has been living in France for two years and she got married in June 2020. The transcription is in Spanish but I translated the most relevant fragments for use during the dissertation. Here is a screenshot from our first contact.



➤ Karen ■ Stefanny

➤ **¿Hace cuánto estás en Francia?**

■ Hace dos años, llegué en febrero del 2020

➤ **Wow, justo para la pandemia.**

■ Sí, llegué con la pandemia detrás de mí. Porque llegué en febrero y ya en marzo estábamos confinados así que tuvieron que cambiar muchos planes

➤ **Claro! Y bueno, tú estás casada o te pacesaste?**

■ Yo estoy casada, por matrimonio civil

➤ **¡Ah, súper ! ¿Sólo el civil?**

■ Sí, sólo el civil, el religioso todavía no por el momento.

➤ **Ok, ¿y cuándo se casaron?**

■ Ah, ¿la fecha final? Fue en junio del 2020. Fue justo después que se levantó el primer confinamiento aquí en Francia.

➤ **Ah, OK y Tenían planeado casarse antes de la pandemia?**

■ Si, de hecho tuvimos que cambiar dos veces la fecha. La primera fecha que habíamos previsto fue el 24 de abril del 2020 y pues como en esa fecha estábamos confinados, la *mairie* nos contactó para decirnos que podíamos cambiar de fecha y nos daban las opciones. Entonces pues nosotros elegimos en el mes de mayo, no recuerdo bien qué fecha, creo que

era 5 de mayo o algo así. Pero como seguíamos confinados al final decidimos para el 12 de junio. Bueno, la facilidad de nuestro cambio, no sé si te pueda ayudar mucho ahí es que nosotros no habíamos planeado una gran fiesta sino que queríamos más una ceremonia privada sólo para nosotros e invitar algunos de otros amigos.

➤ **Y ¿Por qué decidieron casarse en medio de una pandemia?**

- Porque eso cambió mis planes para estar aquí porque yo vine con visa de turista, ya antes había intentado hacerlo por otros medios, como la visa de estudiante pero como me habían rechazado, planeamos que iba a sacar mi visa “vie privé familiale” porque igual el punto era estar juntos. Y por eso decidimos casarnos por lo civil.

➤ **¿Qué los motivó a hacerlo?**

- Bueno antes de la pandemia eso no estaba en consideración, pero pues nosotros ya habíamos establecido la fecha del 24 de abril y como yo me vine con visa de turista pues yo solamente tenía 3 meses para estar aquí, así que como empezó la pandemia pues era todo incierto y pues queríamos casarnos lo más pronto posible para que yo no estuviera de irregular para que pudiera pedir mi visa lo más pronto posible

➤ **Ah ok, pero igual se conocían desde antes.**

- Sí claro, nosotros nos conocíamos desde el 2014. Hace 8 años

➤ **Y antes del matrimonio, ya habías venido a Francia? Cuando viniste en febrero ¿Ya estaba entre tus planes quedarte?**

- Cuando vine en febrero del 2020 sí ya estaba más o menos viendo quedarme aquí porque ya habíamos estado algunos años en relación a distancia y pues quisimos dar un paso más para estar juntos. Porque también tener una relación a distancia es un poco complicado entonces por eso yo decidí venir aquí porque claro, la calidad de vida aquí es mejor y podía tener más oportunidades.

➤ **¿siguen alguna religión? ¿cuál?**

- Religión como tal no, pero nuestras familias nos han heredado la religión católica, así que en Navidad lo celebramos con nuestras familias. Bueno creo que navidad es la fecha más importante. Y de mi lado mi familia es más católica, yo vengo de Perú y allá las familias son más católicas, más apegadas a las costumbres digamos van a misa por pascua, van a misa por Navidad, en sea a Santa están los 12 platos

➤ **¿Piensan en algún momento hacer una boda religiosa?**

- No, la verdad no está en nuestros planes porque no cambiaría nada el hecho de que estemos juntos, de que haya una boda religiosa no cambia nada. Así que no hemos pensado en eso, no está en nuestros planes.

➤ **Bueno y cómo fue la celebración de la boda? Me dijiste que fue en la mairie pero cómo fue todo ese día?**

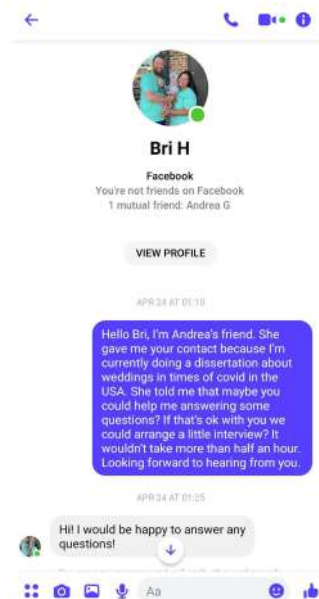
- Sí, nos casamos en la mairie, la celebración fue super rápida, duró como 5 minutos y eso es mucho. La maire adjoint leyó 2 párrafos de lo que es la convivencia, de lo que es el matrimonio civil y luego dijo “la aceptas” - sí “lo aceptas” - sí “pues ya está” eso fue todo. La ceremonia se celebró en la mañana a eso de las 11h15 más o menos sólo nos permitieron ingresar a 20 personas, así que desde ya la cantidad de personas invitadas ya estaba reducida porque nosotros contábamos como 2 personas, luego sus papás, éramos 4. Luego algunos familiares, los testigos que tenían que ser 2 testigos para mí y 2 testigos para él. Pues al final creo que invitamos sólo a 4 amigos y el resto era la familia que pudo llegar. Mi familia no pudo venir porque claramente ellos no podían viajar por la pandemia así que solamente estábamos 20 personas en la ceremonia.

➤ **¿Y hicieron alguna transmisión o usaron alguna red social para que tus papás pudieran estar presentes?**

- !no, no lo hicimos. Hubiésemos podido pensar en eso pero no habían muchas personas que se pudieran encargar de eso ya que incluso su papá y uno de sus tíos nos ayudaron con eso de las fotos. Porque el hecho de que la cantidad de personas invitadas esté limitada, no nos podíamos dar el gusto de invitar a un fotógrafo en lugar de un amigo.
- **Claro,**
- Entonces no hicimos transmisión en vivo pero sí llamé a mis papás después de la ceremonia porque allá era de madrugada y estaban durmiendo. Eran como las 3 de la madrugada entonces tampoco quería molestarlos.
- **¿Tenían wedding planner o alguien que les ayudara con el proceso?**
- Su mamá nos ayudó a organizar, a pesar de que era algo pequeño siempre había cosas que preparar. Con ella fuimos a comprar mi vestido, accesorios, todo. Ella también nos ayudó a llamar al traiteur para adquirir toda la comida y la torta para el matrimonio, porque después del matrimonio tuvimos una pequeña recepción/fiesta con los amigos. Ahí ya invitamos a más amigos y fueron más o menos 34 invitados y pues la reunión fue en casa de sus papás que tiene un jardín grande. Contratamos también un servicio de catering que ayudarán también con todo lo de la organización, mesas, comida, etc.
- **El número de personas que estuvo presente era el número de personas que habían planeado?**
- Sí, incluso fueron unas menos. Hubiésemos querido que algunos más de sus familiares viniesen. Yo ya sabía que no iba a invitar a mis papás, porque no podían venir y no iban a poder entrar a Francia. Inclusive familiares de mi esposo no pudieron venir incluso si vivían aquí en Francia por miedo a que los parara la policía.
- **¿Qué dificultades tuvieron en la planeación?**
- Aparte de posponer la fecha dos veces fue un documento del dossier. Pero después llamaron que hacía falta un documento. Era un documento del banco del cual se necesitaban dos copias y sólo habíamos presentado una.
- **¿Con el servicio de catering tuvieron algún inconveniente?**
- No, o bueno tal vez a la hora de calcular la cantidad de invitados porque no sabíamos cuántos iban a poder venir. Al principio queríamos contratar un buffet pero necesitábamos el número exacto de invitados y pues por la pandemia no teníamos claro.
- **¿Qué era lo que esperaban en cuanto al número de personas?**
- Al principio queríamos invitar a 30-35 personas y al final algunas personas no vinieron porque tenían miedo de venir y ser arrestados porque estaban viajando desde Marsella hasta aquí (París), ya que no era un motif impéieux. Digamos que fue de gran ayuda el tener el jardín de los papás porque en ese momento no habían salones de baile que se alquilan estaban cerrados. De no haber contado con el jardín ni hubiésemos hecho la fiesta, igual queríamos algo pequeño.
- **En cuanto a las tradiciones, al casarse con franceses ¿qué diferencias culturales encontraron?**
- No muchas, ambos somos católicos y hay muchas cosas similares. En cuanto a la ceremonia no estaba segura del protocolo francés porque no había asistido a un matrimonio francés. La ventaja de ser un matrimonio pequeño era fácil de gestionar y la mamá y amigas me ayudaron. Porque no sabía cómo en qué momento tocaba hacer ciertas cosas, como cortar el pastel, pasar por las mesas y tomar las fotos, abrir los regalos, etc. Fue su mamá la que ayudó a gestionar todo. De resto vi que no había mucha diferencia, sólo que no sabía en qué momento iba qué. Los regalos, aquí hacen “cagnottes” donde regalan algo entre todos mientras que en mi país cada invitado lleva su propio regalo.

Appendix D: Questions Bri H, April 24, 2022

I was able to contact Bri thanks to a friend we have in common. She lives in Memphis, USA. She got married on March 21, 2022. Due to the time difference, I sent her the questions via Facebook and she answered me back. Here is a screenshot from our first contact.



➤ Karen ○ Bri

➤ **Did you plan to get married before the pandemic?**

- Yes. We got engaged in January of 2019.

➤ **Why did you decide to get married in the middle of a pandemic?**

- It wasn't our intention, but we had already planned everything, paid for it all, and were 100% ready to go when COVID started to shut the world down.

➤ **Do you follow any religion? If you have, was the wedding related to it?**

- My husband is catholic but we had a non-denominational wedding.

➤ **Where and how was the venue? Could you please give me some details? Like how big, the location, the guests, etc.**

- We got married at my place of work, the Memphis Botanic Garden. We planned for an outdoor wedding and indoor reception. We invited 200 people, 160 RSVP'd, 42 showed up on the day. We received a ton of texts that morning saying that because of COVID, people were too scared to travel. My husband had no one from his family present. It was heartbreaking.

➤ **Did you have a wedding planner or any other help in the organization?**

- I planned it all myself.

- **What were the things you struggled with the most during the organization? And what were your biggest difficulties and/or obstacles?**
 - I did it all myself, so my biggest difficulty was just knowing where to start. There is so much information out there to help plan a wedding which helped a lot.

- **What solutions did you find?**
 - Lots of lists! I had a giant binder and kept ten or so lists at all times.

- **Did you have to change a lot of what you had planned or was it as you expected? Like the venue, catering, number of guests, etc.**
 - We had less than half of our intended number show up- but because they didn't let us know beforehand we had already paid and planned for the largest amount. We went forward as planned with everything.

- **What were the traditions you had the day of your wedding?**
 - We did not follow many traditions (no father daughter/mother son dance, no bouquet toss, etc.).

- **How much did you spend on your wedding?**
 - \$25,000

- **Was the budget what you expected? Did you spend less or more than you had planned?**
 - We went in not knowing the budget. We spent right about what we were comfortable with. We were fortunate to have a free venue so I was able to allocate the money elsewhere.

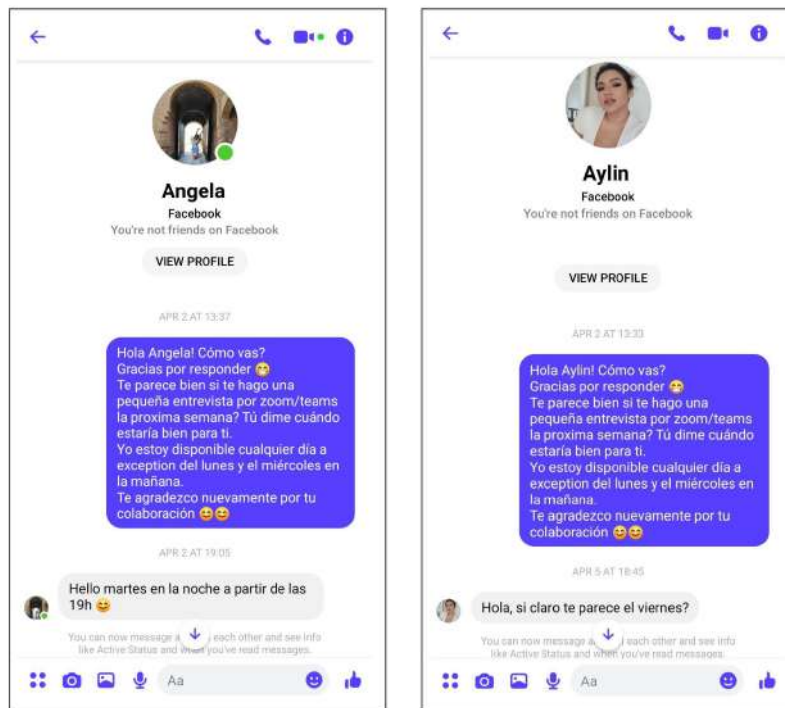
- **Did you use any social network, like YouTube or Instagram to stream the wedding?**
 - We did not. We FaceTime people immediately after the ceremony.

- **How involved were social media during the whole process? From the proposal to the wedding party.**
 - It was helpful but not necessary. I used a wedding website to list the venue, photos, virtual guestbook, and registry.
Here's a photo of the ceremony- you can see the many empty chairs. It was an amazing day and I am glad we did it when we did- but it was definitely sad in terms of what I envisioned.



Appendix E: Questions Aylin and Angela. April 5, April 22, 2022

Both did the “Pacs” in times of COVID-19. Angela in March 2021 and Aylin in May 2021. Both have been living in France for three and four years, respectively. I contacted them both via Facebook and then we did a video call. This is a screenshot of our contact, and the questions that I asked them.



- Did you plan to do the “Pacs” before the pandemic?
- Why did you do the “Pacs” and not the civil marriage?
- Why in the middle of the pandemic?
- Do you follow any religion? If you have, which one?
- Do you plan to get married later?
- How was the “Pacs” celebration?
- Apart from the signing of the “Pacs”, was there any special celebration?
- Did you have someone to help you in the process?
- And what were your biggest difficulties and/or obstacles? What solutions did you find?
- In terms of traditions, what cultural differences did you find during the celebration? What traditions did you adopt?