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Hen Dos and Don'ts: lifting the veil on tensions in consumer rituals

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ABSTRACT

Consumer research has established a rich understanding of dominant consumption rituals, yet the tensions that emerge during celebratory rituals remain under-researched. Through the context of hen party rituals, we examine the emergent tensions in consumption rituals. Our insights are developed from in-depth interviews with hen party participants and netnography of Reddit forums on hen party planning and experiences. Our prioritisation of emergent tensions of rituals contributes to richer understandings of consumer ritual performance. We find consumers deploy self-policing as a form of boundary-work to reduce emergent tensions during ritual performance. We identify two forms of self-policing: shielding and remedying. In doing so, we contend that the evolution of hen party rituals can be both a celebration and a burden, steeped in feelings of anticipation and obligation.

Introduction

Consumer research reveals a broad range of celebratory rituals that consumers engage with to mark significant life events. This work demonstrates consumers use rituals as rites of passage (Arnould & Price, 1993), a means of social bonding (R. W. Belk & Costa, 1998; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and communal celebration (Cayla et al., 2013; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991; Weinberger, 2015; Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). This literature tends to prioritise the performance of rituals (Rook, 1985) or routinisation (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Dyen et al., 2018). However, the darker side of celebratory rituals remains under-researched (Kleppe et al., 2018) in terms of both negative consumer experiences and potentially destructive consumer actions (Kleppe et al., 2018). Through the context of hen party rituals, we examine consumer responses to the emergent tensions of celebratory consumption rituals.

The hen party has become an established and widely observed ritual tradition. Scholars have defined this rite-of-passage ritual in various ways, rarely framing it in a positive light. Indeed, Eldridge and Roberts (2008) describe the hen party as 'a night of drunken excess and embarrassing misdemeanours. Serving as an opportunity for women to run amok, both here and abroad' (p. 324). However, Eldridge and Roberts (2008) also acknowledge that this

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definition may be more of a 'caricature' (p. 326), and call for examination of a broader outing that can 'take many forms' (p. 327). In the UK, the hen party has increased in terms of popularity and cultural visibility (Thurnell-Read & Young, 2022) becoming a 'central feature of the lives of many adolescents and young adults' (p. 179). It has now expanded into a multi-million-pound growth industry (Winter, 2022), worth over £300 million a year industry in the UK (Hirsch, 2017). These rituals have expanded from a singular evening event to overnight stays that may last an entire week (Hirsch, 2017). Consumers' spending for hen parties in the UK cost on average £464, whereas abroad hen trips cost on average £998 (Packham, 2019). Despite the financial cost, the ritual has evolved in popularity. As Young (2019) explains, 'just as everyone *needs* to buy the latest smartphone, so they *need* to have a hen party. It is a commodity – one which society deems it necessary to buy into' (p. 10). We examine the evolution of hen party rituals to reveal emergent tensions concerning their increased marketisation and distancing from heteronormative gender expressions. In doing so, we contribute towards the limited consumer research on the changing nature and contemporary complexity of consumer rituals (Tinson & Nuttall, 2011).

Changes in consumer attitudes towards hen party rituals have been compounded by a shift in marriage trends. The number of same-sex married couples quadrupled from 2014–2019 (Hill, 2019). Couples who elect to marry, are choosing to do so later in life and frequently live together beforehand (Hirsch, 2017). Within a UK context, the average age at which heterosexual couples marry has reached an all-time high of 35.7 years for women and 38 years for men (Bowcott, 2020). In contemporary society, the bride may be the breadwinner of the household (Hirsch, 2017) and not dependent on spousal income. As Montemurro (2006) explains, 'women have developed identities beyond wife and mother, as they have been able to bring more to a marriage financially, they have expressed, publicly and symbolically, ambivalence about getting married' (p. 197). The hen party therefore provides a particularly interesting case study through which to explore tensions as it constitutes a ritual that has been long associated with heteronormative and traditional ideals.

Consumer research highlights the importance of ritual artefacts to convey symbolic meaning (Rook, 1985). Hen party artefacts (such as L-plate and veil) have strong connotations of sexual inexperience and virginal purity. Such connotations appear to counter depictions of the ritual as a means to establish gender equality and sexual freedom (see Montemurro, 2006) and instead may reinforce older tropes of female subordination in marriage (Westwood, 1984). During the ritual of the hen party (hereafter referred to as 'hen ritual'), brides-to-be would be costumed in a decorated coat 'festooned with slips of paper bearing suggestive remarks [with] L-plates attached to her typewriter' (Dyer, 1979, pp. 34–35). This disparity of ritualised imagery is more visible when juxtaposed against ritual artefacts of the hen party's male equivalent, the 'stag'. Popular stag ritual artefacts (such as plastic handcuffs and ball-and-chains) may denote feelings of imprisonment and a sacrifice of sexual freedom (Montemurro, 2006). Arend (2016, p. 145) argues the bachelorette party, whilst seemingly is meant to 'challenge white wedding traditions', may actually reinforce gendered nature of rituals. In this article, we question why the popularity of the hen party ritual continues to grow despite its associations with arguably outdated practices and patriarchal traditions.

We contend that hen party rituals can be both a celebration and a burden, steeped in feelings of anticipation and obligation. Consumer research on pre-nuptials rituals remains

limited, and prior studies have focused predominantly on the US market (Montemurro, 2006). The hen party constitutes an interesting example for ritual study given that it is a relatively recent consumption ritual, but one that has evolved substantially since its inception (Packham, 2019). We build on prior research on consumption rituals to prioritise the emergent tensions of celebratory rituals. We are guided by two research questions: How does the evolution of celebratory rituals generate negative consumption experiences? How do consumers manage emergent tensions of celebratory rituals? Drawing on consumption ritual literature, we explore the evolution of the hen party ritual to reveal the emergent tensions of celebratory rituals. Our insights are developed from in-depth interviews with hen party participants and a netnography of *Reddit* forums on hen party planning and experiences.

By means of contribution, our focus on ritual evolution reveals the complexity of contemporary rituals performed within evolving consumer cultures. We identify four tensions that emerge during the planning and performance of hen rituals that contribute to a richer understanding of consumer ritual performance. Further, we reveal four associated consumer responses that consumers deploy to manage emergent tensions. Specifically, we introduce two forms of self-policing that consumers deploy to manage emergent tensions during ritual performance: 'shielding' in which hen party attendees will shield the bride from negative experiences and from attendees who fail to remain in character, and 'remedying' in which hen party attendees will manage tensions within the group at the sacrifice of their own enjoyment. We conceptualise such self-policing as a form of boundary-work in which the collective reincorporates attendees into appropriate ritual role performances.

Literature review

This review explores the growth of the hen party phenomenon and the consumer rituals that have come to be associated with it over time. We begin by exploring the sociocultural roots of the hen party ritual within a UK context before examining how it has evolved into its contemporary expression. We are informed both by Rook's (1985) theorisation of consumption rituals and Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical work to examine consumers' ritual role performances and deployment of ritual artefacts. Rook (1985) identifies four elements of rituals: ritual artefacts, scripts, performance roles, and audience. Within the context of the hen party, ritual artefacts typically constitute the games, gifts, decorations or costumes employed as part of the event (Young, 2019); scripts typically refer to the social norms that dictate consumer behaviour during the celebrations (Otnes et al., 1997); and performance roles and audience describes the displays of performance (Lewis, 2013) to the wider public inclusive of social media. We then examine stigmatisation of cultural rituals (Kleppe et al., 2018) to interrogate the 'dark side' of the hen party ritual and tensions surrounding it. In doing so, we redress limited consumer research relating to negative consumer experience of rituals and why the hen party has continued to thrive despite its negative associations.

The sociocultural roots of the hen party

Prenuptial rituals, in their various forms, have existed for as long as the institution of marriage itself (Young, 2019). However, one of the most prevalent examples of a prenuptial ritual – the hen party – is a surprisingly recent phenomenon, with current

terminology only emerging in the latter half of the 20th century (Montemurro, 2006). Hen parties, also known as bachelorette parties, are modelled after the long-established tradition of male bachelor or 'stag' party, emanating from the sexual revolution of the 1960s as part of a movement for gender equality (Montemurro & McClure, 2005). This ritual was considered as both a means to embrace and 'break away' from masculinised ritual performance (Buettner & Khurana, 2014, p. 219). From its earliest conceptions, hen rituals were viewed as a rite-of-passage ritual for women who would be expected to leave paid employment for the domesticity of married life (Dyer, 1979). Hen parties were commonly the domain of the working classes. These parties were a 'relatively simple, inexpensive ritual, lasting only one evening, generally for young working-class women' (Young, 2019, p. 28). However, in its contemporary expression, the hen party is typically celebrated by women from a variety of generations and socio-economic backgrounds.

The contemporary hen party ritual

The hen party has undergone significant change over the past 20–30 years, having evolved into the complex and multi-faceted event it is today (Montemurro, 2006). The contemporary hen has evolved into a 'complex ritual, with multiple practically statutory elements (clothing, gifting, eating, and drinking, playing games)' (Young, 2019, p. 28). The hen party ritual is now widely depicted in both US and UK film and television (e.g. 2011 movie *Bridesmaids*, and 2017's *Rough Night*), with hen parties considered to be 'a necessary ritual by many' (Waxman, 2017, p. 1). The growth of the hen party phenomenon is not owing to a singular event, but instead to a culture of commerce with hen party expansion in line with the emergence of a thriving service economy. As Young (2019) explains, 'rituals which lend themselves well to commodification, such as the hen party, are growing in popularity. It is both ritual and commodity, and as such can be marketed, bought and sold' (p. 171). It is certainly true that a plethora of services, accommodation packages and retail stores and websites have sprung up in support of the event (Buettner & Khurana, 2014). Cooke (2015) further expands on this, arguing that many of the changes to hen parties, particularly in relation to heavy consumption of alcohol, directly relate to the number of establishments now available to facilitate and encourage such behaviours. As such, prior research indicates that consumption practices are largely dictated by the availability of goods and services within that particular market and how consumers are choosing to incorporate those goods and services into their existing social practices (Boden, 2003).

Hen party ritual artefacts and performances

While gift-giving is perhaps more traditionally associated with weddings rather than hen parties, gifting has become increasingly commonplace, with many hen party organisers opting to provide attendees with party bags and other such small keepsakes (Montemurro, 2006). Young (2019, p. 120) further posits that 'the ultimate gift is the hen party itself', both in terms of the time and effort involved in organisation but also in a monetary sense with party attendees often electing to cover the bride's costs. Unlike traditional wedding gifts, the gifts exchanged at hen parties are typically of low financial value or are even hand-crafted and

personalised (Montemurro & McClure, 2005). Hen party organisers generally draw on their own particular strengths to contribute something unique to the event, and make temporal, emotional, and monetary sacrifices in order to deliver a successful party (Young, 2019). Such non-material gifts act as 'a way of symbolically forming and demonstrating attachment' (R. W. Belk & Coon, 1993, p. 406), and as a means of creating 'intimate and interpersonal relationships with others' (Makkar et al., 2021, p. 1386). This form of gift-giving can be an expression of love or friendship (R. Belk, 2020; Carrier, 1990; Weinberger, 2015) that Cheal (1987, p. 130) regards as a ritual offering and a 'sign of *involvement* in and connectedness to another'.

Performance and play have long been associated with consumer rituals (Bell, 2009; Turner, 1982), with Lewis (2013) describing ritualised events such as hen parties as 'the most important kind of social event performed by the members of any given human social group' (p. 43). Aligned with Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical work, Young (2019) equates hen party rituals with a kind of 'pop-up street theatre [consisting of] various acts, stage sets and scenes, as well as principal actors, stage managers, supplementary actors, stagehands and spectators' (p. 15). As in a theatrical setting, in which a set stage, props, and costumes help to bring the performance to life, modern hen parties often incorporate similar elements in the form of decorations, matching outfits, and gameplay.

The hen party ritual comprises complex bundles of artefacts, roles, scripts, and audiences that require attendees to adopt various organisational and performative roles. Drawing on a dramaturgical lens (Goffman, 1990), organisational performances may be considered as backstage whereas performative roles (such as gameplay and costuming) may be considered as frontstage. Indeed, Young (2019) observes as hen party rituals become more complex involving overnight accommodation and trips abroad, this creates sanctioned or 'transient space[s] associated with excitement, naughtiness, risk-taking, fun, and amusement' (p. 65). These sanctioned spaces afford attendees a sense of anonymity and separation from their everyday lives, allowing them the freedom to adopt new role performances (Goffman, 1990). Such settings, outside of the everyday and mundane, can facilitate ludic experiences and make certain behaviours and consumption practices appear more acceptable (Kozinets, 2002a).

However, scholars have identified potential emotional burdens associated with gameplay and activities within the context of the hen party, likening them to a college hazing ritual (Bronner, 2012; Montemurro, 2006; Turner, 1982). Bronner (2015) suggests that lifecycle traditions can be ritualised through the addition of an ordeal or humiliation intended to show commitment and readiness for a new stage in life. Montemurro (2006) supports this view, suggesting that games and forfeits have been added to hen parties as a means of embarrassing the bride, 'to show that she is fully cognisant of her impending commitment' (pp. 4–5). Such suppositions align with previous hen party traditions; for example, use of arguably misogynistic artefacts such as the L-plate and white bridal veil and the inclusion of dares and forfeits within the night out (Montemurro, 2006). We build on this work by examining changing consumer expectations to reveal how some ritual performances that have persisted and others have been abandoned over time.

The 'dark side' of the hen

The hen party has developed a somewhat negative reputation and is frequently demonised within popular culture and media. Hen parties have featured in the plotlines of various films, reality TV shows, and British soap operas, often 'involving some form of drama around jealousy or broken friendships' (Young, 2019, p. 4). In fact, such negative associations of the hen party ritual date back to the very origin of its terminology. The term 'hen party' first appeared in a 1976 *Times* newspaper article about a male stripper 'fined by Leicester Crown Court for acting in a "lewd, obscene and disgusting manner"' (Fowler, 2013). Even the terminology of the event itself appears to reinforce gender stereotypes, given that 'the image conjured up by the word hen elicits thoughts of collectivity, stupidity, clucking, breeding and mothering – very different images to that of the stag' (Young, 2019, p. 3). Indeed, the current lexicon of 'hen night', 'hen do' and 'hen weekend' are described in the Oxford English Dictionary as being a 'now usually *depreciative*' event (OED, 2022).

Modern hen parties are often associated with excessive and unhealthy consumption behaviours such as binge-drinking, public intoxication, and overtly sexualised behaviour. Montemurro and McClure (2005) perceive such behaviour as being both a rebellion against socially ingrained gender norms and an attempt to partake in traditionally masculine activities. Prior studies argue that such behaviours 'tend to be adopted by members of the opposite sex during periods of transition in gender roles and norms' (Buettner & Khurana, 2014, p. 219), which may suggest why a hen party environment may foster this kind of behaviour. However, in contemporary UK culture, it has become relatively commonplace for women to drink in public, even to excess (Montemurro & McClure, 2005). This view is supported by the work of Buettner and Khurana (2014, p. 221), who found hen party attendees' drinking behaviours to be 'highly related to their typical alcohol consumption patterns during the past year' and therefore not atypical of a regular night out. Recent studies further indicate that consumer attitudes towards hen parties are changing, with an apparent rejection of rituals traditionally associated with the event (Packham, 2019). Montemurro (2006) contributes this, in large part, to a post-modern generation of women feeling uncomfortable 'participating in a ritual that emphasises a traditional role that no longer seems relevant to their lives' (p. 195).

Whilst earlier we detail how adopting new roles during hen party rituals may create spaces for ludic play, tensions may also emerge during hen party ritual performance. Extant literature has evidenced the emotional duality of the event, pointing to feelings of obligation, communal tension, and financial stress (Young, 2019). This is also evident in gifting rituals, whereby those who are perhaps culturally ill-informed may be obligated to present gifts that, owing to their novice status, carry negative meanings which may be perceived as an 'attack' by the recipient (Sherry et al., 1993). Weinberger (2015), in contrast, develops this understanding by examining non-participants of the ritual, namely those in minority groups who see adopting different (often conflicted) roles as a way of reinforcing friendship and strengthening social ties. Often attendees, many of whom have not met previously or whose only shared connection is to the bride, are required to spend a prolonged period together in close confines and even share sleeping quarters (Fowler, 2013). As Glaser and Strauss (1971) explain, 'because there are multiple agents, there is always the possibility of divergent views about the most desirable shape of collective

passage' (p. 117). Such role conflict (Goffman, 1990) may surface between the bride, organisers, and attendees regarding differing opinions on what constitutes a successful hen party and how best to deliver one. Otnes et al. (1997) highlights the role the marketplace may play in contributing to conflict and suggests clashes 'can often lead to conflict over the selection of goods and services, and hence to mixed emotions' (Otnes et al., 1997, p. 89).

Prior research suggests that consumer tensions are further heightened within ritualised contexts of sociocultural and financial importance (Driver, 1991; Kravets, 2007; Otnes et al., 1997; Ruth, 1995), with Grimes (2000) noting how 'rites of passage can be rife with face saving, posturing, and empty decorum' (p. 10). This study builds upon previous work by Otnes et al. (1997) through its investigation of how consumers have reconciled feelings of mixed emotion towards the hen party, a ritual that is often seen as having a 'dark side', frequented by 'trouble-makers' (Kravets, 2007), and how the ritual has been shaped as a result. The way in which individuals compensate for, or seek to minimise, tensions resulting from conflicting emotions provides a unique insight into consumer ritual performance.

Methodology

This study follows a mixed qualitative methods approach, combining in-depth semi-structured interviews and online netnography. The methodology is driven by the investigative focus of the study and the exploratory nature of the research aim. Minowa and Belk (2020) support the adoption of a qualitative approach to research relating to a consumer's lifecourse and key moments within their life, noting the rich contextual information that can be provided through oral narrations and interviews as a 'framework for understanding the consumer's past life events as understood by the person' (p. 61). This informed the use of in-depth interviews as a means to gain rich understanding of ritual experience. We follow Rook's (1985) observation that, 'by its very nature, much ritual behaviour invites field observation' (p. 385), and this informs our use of Reddit forums. Kleppe et al. (2018) advocate the exploration of consumer rituals through online communities, acknowledging the role digital forums play in providing 'virtual ritual artefacts', in 'locating ritual scripts' and in extending 'the reach of ritual audiences' (p. 234). Additionally, netnography can enable less obtrusive and more naturistic enquiry that provides researchers with a 'window into culture realities of consumer groups as they live their activities' (Kozinets, 2006, p. 282).

Within the confines of consumer research, netnography constitutes a form of online fieldwork that 'uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 60). The netnography in this study was conducted via Reddit; an online social news website and discussion forum (Reddit, 2022d). Reddit primarily functions as a community-based bulletin board, divided into smaller communities or 'subreddits' based around particular topics or themes (Vickery, 2014). Reddit falls into the category of online community known as a 'Geeking community', in which users typically share 'deeply detailed information about a particular set of activities, but not deeply engaging most of them in meaningful social relationships' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 36). The authors are long-term users of Reddit and familiar with the mechanics of the platform. As

there are several subreddit communities dedicated to discussion of hen and bachelorette parties, often with a focus on the 'dark side' of the event, the platform represented an ideal forum through which to explore this study. Furthermore, because of the relative anonymity afforded by Reddit, users were willing to make more candid disclosures than they may otherwise have been willing to share (Shelton et al., 2015). Suler (2004) argues that the anonymity afforded to users within online communities allows for greater freedom of discussion, online disinhibition, and a richer resulting dataset.

Almost all content on Reddit is user-generated, and posts are categorised via a voting system, resulting in content being arranged by popularity. Users can 'upvote' the posts they favour and 'downvote' those they dislike. Posts with the most upvotes move to the top of the forum and become more visible on the site (Vickery, 2014).

This study focused on four particular subreddit communities; namely *bridezilla*,[1] *AITA*,[2] *AskWomen*, and *weddingplanning*. These particular forums were selected as the main sites for hen party discussion on the platform. The *bridezilla* subreddit is largely restricted to discussion of negative consumer behaviours surrounding weddings and prenuptial events (Reddit, 2022c). The *AITA* community provides users with an opportunity to gather feedback from fellow community members on whether they have acted in accordance with particular social norms; essentially describing a specific scenario and asking users, based on their behaviour, *AITA (Am I The Asshole?)* (Reddit, 2022a). *AskWomen* is intended as a female-only subreddit dedicated to asking women questions about their thoughts and experiences (Reddit, 2022b). Finally, *weddingplanning* is a subreddit dedicated to all aspects of wedding planning, including hen parties and other prenuptial celebrations (Reddit, 2022e). The first author had been embedded in these niche subreddits owing to her role as a new bride and hen party attendee and spent a few hours per week 'hanging out' (Jeffrey et al., 2021, p. 147) over a 6-month period of data collection (Moisander et al., 2013). With the researcher electing to act as a covert observer, remaining as unobtrusive to the discussion as possible (Langer & Beckmann, 2005), data was collected across these four subreddits in the form of archival and fieldnote data. Archival data refers to 'pre-existing computer-mediated communications of online community members', whereas fieldnote data is the researcher's 'own observations of the community, its members, interactions and meanings' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 98).

There has been significant debate surrounding the ethics of a netnographic research approach, particularly with regards to the issue of informed consent (Kozinets, 2002b, 2010; Walther, 2002). However, it is acknowledged in prior netnographic studies that online community analysis does not constitute human subject research 'if the researcher does not record the identity of the communicators, and if the researcher can legally and easily gain access to these communications' (Walther, 2002, p. 207). As the netnography within this study has been conducted using information publicly available in online forums, in which most users adopt pseudonyms or disposable usernames (Jeffrey et al., 2021), the study seeks to minimise any such issues of consent (Shelton et al., 2015). As Walther (2002) explains, 'any person who uses publicly available communication systems on the Internet must be aware that these systems are, at their foundation and by definition, mechanisms for the storage, transmission, and retrieval of comments. While some participants have an expectation of privacy, it is extremely misplaced' (p. 207). Given then that Reddit is a publicly accessible platform, informed consent is arguably implicit in the users' decision to post within a public forum (Kozinets, 2002b). However, further steps

have also been taken within this study to protect the anonymity of Reddit user commentaries, with all usernames having been obscured. Institutional ethical approval was granted for this study and guidance from Adams (2022, p. 13) was followed regarding data gathering, storage and dissemination to ensure 'careful handling and anonymisation of such [Reddit] materials' to maximise ethical research practice.

Rokka (2010) asserts that the expanse of data 'may overwhelm the netnographer and invite poor quality research and hasty interpretations' (p. 383). In order to mitigate such concerns, and avoid hasty interpretation of the data, emergent themes were further explored through the use of 10 in-depth interviews. Each interview was conducted using a semi-standardised approach without a set of particular questions but instead around a series of themes (Berg & Lune, 2012). By conducting in-depth interviews alongside the netnography, understanding of the online observations is broadened, allowing for greater triangulation of the data.

All respondents sampled were female and aged between 25 and 49 (see Table 1 for demographic information). Representative of the surrounding population in central Scotland and Northern Ireland, there is diversity across respondents' ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and place of residence (urban/city). Respondents also fulfilled a variety of roles in their celebration of a hen party, from bride, to organiser, or attendee, resulting in a rich dataset. All respondent names have been pseudonymised. The age range selected was based on the heightened average age at which couples are now choosing to marry, with the average age of marriage for women in England and Wales at 35.7 years old (Bowcott, 2020). An inductive, thematic analysis framework was

Table 1. An overview of the interview participant details.

Participant Pseudonym	Age Range	Occupation	Hen attendance	Role within hen	Notes
Sarah	35–39	Teacher	1	Bride	Discussed a 1-day hen party in Edinburgh, UK.
Elena	30–34	Finance Manager	2	Family member/ guest	Discussed a 4-day hen party in Marbella, Spain and a virtual hen party during the COVID-19 lockdown.
Emily	25–29	Comms Manager	2	Bride	Discussed a 3-day hen party in Marbella, Spain and a follow-up 1-day hen party in Edinburgh, UK.
Charlotte	30–34	Musician	1	Organiser/ Bridesmaid	Discussed a 3-day hen party in Newcastle, UK.
Maria	30–34	Office Manager	2	Organiser/ Bride	Discussed a 3-day hen party in Pitlochry, UK (as the organiser/bridesmaid) and a 3-day hen party in Stirling, UK (as the bride).
Rebecca	30–34	Marketing Consultant	1	Organiser/ Bridesmaid	Discussed a 3-day hen party in Stirling, UK.
Tanya	30–34	Chemical Engineer	2	Bride/ Organiser	Discussed a 3-day hen party in Galway, Ireland (as the bride), and a 2-day hen party in Belfast, UK (as the organiser/bridesmaid).
Laura	45–49	Art Director	3	Bride/ Organiser/ Guest	Discussed a 1-day hen party in East Lothian, UK (as the bride), a 1-day hen party in Edinburgh, UK (as the organiser), and a 1-day hen party in Edinburgh, UK (as a guest).
Lucy	30–34	Medical Doctor	2	Organiser/ Guest	Discussed a 3-day hen party to Mayo, Ireland (as the organiser/bridesmaid) and a 1-day hen party in Omagh, UK (as a guest/family member).
Natasha	35–39	Charity Worker	3	Organiser/ Guest	Discussed a 1-day hen party in London (as organiser); and two 2-day hen parties in the Lake District (again, as organiser).

used to code and interpret the rich dataset of interview and netnographic data (Adams, 2022). This technique, which involves the search of themes or patterns across the data, is the 'foundational method for qualitative analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). This method was adopted for the flexibility it offers in terms of allowing the researcher to summarise a large amount of data in a manageable way without compromising the richness of the data (Kozinets, 2010).

Findings

Our examination of hen party rituals reveals complex bundles of roles, artefacts, and scripts. We identify four tensions that emerge during the planning and performance of hen rituals. Evolution tensions refer to tensions that emerge during ritual planning that concern how hen party rituals have evolved over time, whereas performance tensions refer to tensions that emerge during ritual performance and concern the enactment of roles. For each tension we identify an associated consumer response that consumers deploy to manage tensions.

In evolution tensions, we first examine tensions that emerge due to increased marketisation and the associated consumer response of spotlighting. Second, we examine tensions that emerge due to traditional tropes of sexualisation and the associated consumer response of personalising. In performance tensions, we first examine the tensions that emerge due to script conflict and the associated consumer response of shielding. Second, we examine tensions that emerge due to role conflict and the associated consumer response of remedying.

Evolution tensions

Marketisation of the hen party and spotlighting

The widespread representation of hen parties in popular culture has further grounded them as consumption-orientated rites of passage (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). We witness this in participants' accounts of the proliferation of marketplace offerings associated with the hen experience. For example, Emily describes the range of marketplace artefacts and products that are marketed as necessary for the complete hen party experience:

> [I]n planning a hen party, like most things nowadays, there are a lot of add-ons you are encouraged to buy … gift bags, sashes, costumes, drink packages with meals, games. It's a lot.[. . .] It builds up and builds up to be a lot of money and a lot of activities in a short space of time. (Emily)

Emily highlights that hen party organisers are '*encouraged to buy*' these products as part of the standard hen ritual experience. This reveals the centrality of these market products and the expectations placed on hen organisers to include them in the ritual. For Emily, this creates an expectation to invest time and money via marketplace resources that she regards as significant. This reflects Young's (2019) claim that hen parties have flourished because they are ideally commodified. We interpret this cumulation of artefacts and events as increased marketisation of the hen ritual that creates tension for consumers who feel obliged to invest time and money to perform and participate in the ritual.

Many participants discussed this expansion of hen party events in terms of frequency and scope. Participants accredited the increasing commercialisation of hen parties (Buettner & Khurana, 2014) with a visible rise in marketing, hen party service providers, and travel package operators that shapes their hen experience. Sarah's experience was the most extreme:

> . . . my friend . . . her friend got married and she had five hen nights. And [my friend] was the head bridesmaid and she had to go on them all. [. . .] So her bridesmaids were from different friend groups, so they felt like they wanted to be the main organiser. But then they all had to go to each other's hen night, and they were getting more and more extravagant. (Sarah)

Sarah's reflections highlight the multiplier effect of hen parties that often involve numerous events. Sarah notes the extravagance intensifies with each event where efforts to compete for the best hen experience result in a 'commonly shared hyper-reality' (Tinson & Nuttall, 2011, p. 1017). This move towards multiple hen parties reveals an expansion of the ritual, and further commodification. Duffy (2018, p. 1) notes the shift from the singular 'hen night' to 'a full-blown fully Instagrammed wheelie-suitcase break'. However, the combination of 'away hen' and 'home hen' is often motivated to be inclusive of friends and family who may be unable to afford or travel to overseas locations.

Despite considerations of inclusivity, hen party rituals are inextricably linked to 'status, consumption and materialism' (Montemurro, 2006, p. 10). This is most evident in the conspicuous displays of hen party rituals. Many participants attributed the increasing extravagance to social media and the pressure to create what they perceive as being an Instagram-worthy event:

> People need something to post and show off and . . . I think we live in a very, sort of, visual culture where people just need to make things like, 'Look at all of my friends! And look at the things we're doing'. I think, sadly, a lot of it is more to do with getting the right photo. (Charlotte)

Charlotte associates the need to create social media content with the increased extravagance of hen party rituals. For Charlotte, this is reinforced by the pervasive 'visual culture' that necessitates engaging in rituals to produce attention-grabbing visual material (such as posts and reels). This highlights the conspicuous nature of performative displays (Goffman, 1990) that are not only recorded, but shared on social media platforms for the consuming audiences' gaze.

In an effort to manage the tension of increased marketisation and associated standardisation of experiences, consumers respond by 'spotlighting' the bride during the ritual planning. Participants understand the hen party is a core ritual that is 'part of the whole wedding experience' (Tanya). Natasha explains why the hen party is an extension of the wedding day itself and how the bride adopts the central role:

> . . . [the purpose] is kind of to make [the bride] feel special. This is just an extension of 'The wedding is your day', you know . . . this is suddenly, like, your multiple events, not just your one day. So, think [of it as] making them the centre of attention. (Natasha)

For Natasha, it is necessary for the bride to be the '*centre of attention*' of all activities and as the number of events increase, so does the necessity to focus attention on the bride to ensure it is special to her. This was often achieved by deploying ritual artefacts as symbolic vessels of meaning (Rook, 1985) that are particular to the bride. With the increased

commercialisation of the hen, these objects gain both sacred ritual and profane (R. W. Belk et al., 1989) commercial meaning. Consumers use specific ritual artefacts (such as tiara, sash and veil) to singularise the bride, with hen attendees forming a 'bride tribe'. Ritual artefacts, like the sash, communicate status and generate 'special attention' (Young, 2019, p. 109) to the focal roles within the tribe.

Participants were keenly aware of the importance of the hen party as a transformative ritual for the bride as an individual, rather than as part of a couple. The importance of this '*send-off*' (Emily) for the bride was understood by hen party organisers, as Emily explains:

> It is the kind of send-off – and the celebration, because obviously your wedding day is what it's leading up to, but your wedding day is completely different, and it's focused on you as a couple. Whereas, with your hen or stag do, it's focused on you as an individual. (Emily)

Recalling Emily's earlier discussion of the plethora of marketplace artefacts and games needed to make the hen experience, we find consumers use themes, costumes and games to spotlight the bride and contribute a sense of ceremony. Instead of using performative rituals as a way of hazing the bride (Bronner, 2012; Montemurro, 2006; Turner, 1982), our findings instead suggest they '*are about shining a light on the bride*' (Rebecca) and celebrating her rite of passage to wedded life.

Sexualisation of the hen party and personalising

Whilst rituals are characterised by sequence and repetition (Rook, 1985), they are also subject to transformation over time (Turner, 1969). Participants reflected on the hyper-sexualisation of hen party rituals that were once commonplace but now often deemed 'tacky' (Maria). For example, Laura recalled attending a hen party over 20 years ago with printed T-shirts with '*abusive*' slogans and the mandatory wearing of tiaras. Such ritual artefacts, including L-plates, overtly sexualised objects and gameplay, were initially adopted as part of the ritual as a means of embarrassing the bride (Arend, 2016; Montemurro, 2006; Westwood, 1984), but now these traditional bundles of artefacts are often reframed as problematic by hen attendees. We interpret this reframing as a tension that emerges due to traditional tropes of sexualisation being out of sync with contemporary cultural standards. Maria reflects on how this shift shaped attending hen parties and her own:

> I think she [the bride] just said that she didn't want anything tacky. Like, she didn't want a stripper and she didn't want lots of willy straws and stuff. At mine, they organised this game where everyone had brought an object that reminded them of me, and I had to guess who it was. That was quite nice. (Maria)

Maria's comments highlight that traditional hen party artefacts are often shunned, particularly by brides. Such rejection of gender norms (Packham, 2019) that 'ritualise and dramatise patriarchal and heteronormative gender relations' (Arend, 2016, p. 145) enable hen attendees to distance themselves from overtly sexualised rituals and artefacts and instead reorientate the rituals towards expressions of friendship and personalisation. Reflecting on her own hen, Maria fondly recalls more nostalgic games with objects that serve to create bonds between attendees. Gift-giving remains an important micro-ritual, with gifts being of low financial value but having significant

sentimental importance (R. Belk, 2020). Gifts exchanged are not only symbolic of involvement (Cheal, 1987) but act as reminders of the friendship or as small tokens of affection. We interpret such personalising as a consumer response deployed to manage the tension of sexualisation of the hen ritual.

Our findings reveal both a movement away from traditional rituals whilst simultaneously maintaining others. The micro-ritual of costuming has been reduced in most cases to the subtle inclusion of a sash or temporary tattoo or, in some instances, not included at all. For example, Charlotte reveals how some traditions are completely disregarded whilst others are adapted.

> [The bride] had always made such a point about not wanting to ever look like she was on a hen do. So, I said, 'that's fine'. The only thing was the little tattoo and she had it, like, there [indicates on the inside of her wrist]. And it was gold so you wouldn't even really notice it. (Charlotte)

The subtle inclusion of a small wrist tattoo enables the bride to maintain some hen ritual costuming whilst not being overtly dressed in hen attire. This at the directive of the bride herself, who, in Charlotte's case, '*made such a point*' to visibly not engage with traditional hen-style apparel. In this way, hen party organisers often assume the role of marketplace intermediaries, or what Cronin et al. (2015) refer to as 'surrogate consumers'; tasked with ensuring the bride's 'sense of self is transported to the marketplace and represented in the offerings that are bought' (Cronin et al., 2015, p. 1909). They seek to personalise the ritual to the bride's particular tastes and interests; selectively scrutinising the marketplace and showing resistance to certain customs (Otnes et al., 1997).

We witness personalising as a common consumer response to manage the tension of sexualisation whilst also celebrating more positively associated gender performances. This was reflected in Reddit posts that highlighted the importance of personalising the experience, see A post on the r/AskWomen subreddit, describes personalisation of the hen party and suggests having,

> 'some bits that are sweet and personal about the bride and not just a bunch of plastic cocks' (Reddit User A).

This Reddit post illustrates that '*sweet and personal*' is prioritised over sexualised and generic hen artefacts, in this case '*a bunch of plastic cocks*'. This move towards personalisation and the rejection of the types of artefacts promoted by the hen-market reflects consumer agency that may criticise marketplace offerings (Kozinets, 2002a, p. 33). This becomes emancipatory as hen parties become spaces for '*celebrating her womanhood*' and sites of empowerment and female bonding (Eldridge & Roberts, 2008).

This shift away from sexualised traditions extends to ritual scripts (such as gameplay), with those that remain typically serving a different purpose than originally intended. Although many of the games played at hen parties may retain sexualised undercurrents (e.g. Willy Hoopla, Pin the Penis on the Man, and Mr & Mrs), gameplay is largely kept behind closed doors and not weaponised as a means of humiliation. Instead, these games enable attendees to shed their inhibitions and pave the way for more friendship-based bonding to flourish. This was reflected on Reddit forums that discussed the successes and pitfalls of hen parties:

> 'Going with all the clichés just because that's what people do. Like you don't need to have inflatable naked people and dildos and sex themed games if you don't want to!' (Reddit User B).
> 'Fully agree. We went to an escape room, did some bowling, then went for a meal at mine. After that, we went back to my house and did some silly questionnaire but that was the most cliché thing and, tbh, probably the least fun' (Reddit User C).

Reddit users derided hen party 'clichés' as the least favourable events and instead reveal an increase in more activity-based events (such as bowling, cocktail-making, dance lessons) that have become commonplace. We interpret shifts towards more friendship-centred activities as an active consumer response to manage the tensions regarding sexualised traditional hen rituals. In Emily's words, the hen party becomes '*the chance to celebrate with the people who matter most to you*'. Rather than viewed as the 'last hurrah' or occasion to mourn single life, hen parties offer a means to sustain friendship after marriage (Pittaoulis, 2005). Reorientation towards friendship has also blurred the traditional gender segregation of female-only hen parties, and male-only stag dos. Hen parties are no longer '*stereotypically [sic] with a bunch of girls*' (Rebecca) but can also include a broader mix of gendered friendship groups. This in part has been enabled by distancing away from sexualised artefacts and scripts, and reflects a broader transformation of hen party rituals. Such consumer responses also extend to tensions that emerge around the performance of hen rituals that we explore in the following section.

Performance tensions

Script conflict and shielding

Rituals both intrinsically and extrinsically dictate scripts, or rules, that shape their performance (Rook, 1985). The hen party ritual as a performance creates a pressure amongst attendees to stay in character (Turner, 1982; Young, 2019). Participants revealed a pressure to conform to the hen party ideal of celebration and fun. Attendees are expected to follow a performative script (Goffman, 1990) and act as a collective. However, Elena notes that, under the surface, not all experience the consumption of the hen party in the same way, with participants often recounting negative experiences alongside positive ones:

> I think it was a mixed bag . . . I think some people were like, 'this is a brilliant time', and some people were like 'when is this going to be over?' (Elena)

Elena goes on to note that negative feelings were never '*said out loud*' as they diverge from the scripted hen emotional experience. This is akin to Tumbat and Belk's (2011, p. 57) observation that a common ideological basis may lead consumers to 'not express individual performance concerns'. As such, the societal pressure to follow accepted performance scripts may only serve to exacerbate the mixed emotions (Otnes et al., 1997) of the ritual and act as a further antecedent to feelings of consumer ambivalence. In this way, the emotional duality of the accounts provided as part of this study is noteworthy.

Similarly, in the Reddit post below, the user demonstrates a variety of emotions when recounting their worst experience in attending a hen party:

'Everything else was okay. I could have done without some of the stuff on the itinerary but it wasn't my party so who am I to say anything. Each activity meant more money for me to spend which is really what got me frustrated, but I suppose that's what you sign up for to some degree' (Reddit User D).

In this case, the user notes their frustration at the heavy financial cost of participating in the multiple activities involved in the hen party but rationalises this as '*what you sign up for to some degree*'. They appear dissatisfied with the chosen itinerary but, again, counteract these feelings in reasoning, '*it wasn't my party so who am I to say anything*?'. This reflects Grimes' (2000, p. 10) observation that rites of passage often involve 'face saving posturing' in order to protect the status quo. The experience of mixed emotions is accepted as an expected eventuality of the hen ritual; one that Otnes et al. (1997) interprets as a common coping strategy for mastering consumer ambivalence.

Such pressure to remain in character and maintain 'the line during a performance' (Goffman, 1990, p. 84) extends beyond the temporal and physical boundaries of the hen party itself. Many participants felt the need to defend their own reflections or preface their feelings towards the experience in some way: '*This sounds so ungrateful! I don't mean it that way*' (Charlotte) and '*Is that bad to say?!*' (Emily). Participants also attempted to downplay the workload and stress involved in organising the hen party as being for the common good. When viewed through Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical lens, this could be seen as a form of method acting, with hen party attendees staying 'in character' beyond the confines of the stage. Goffman describes how, 'the performer can be fully taken in by his own act [. . .] sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality' of the event (1990, p. 24). Whilst Otnes et al. (1997, p. 89) considers consumers opting to 'please others rather than themselves' as an expression of consumer ambivalence, we interpret such consumer action as a response to emergent tensions concerning script conflict.

Shielding the bride from negative feelings and experiences was commonplace. Charlotte recalled an incident when a work colleague of the bride was '*really moody*' and '*having a bit of a dip*', so the bridal party agreed to intercept the colleague if they witnessed her approaching the bride:

> . . . what I did was made sure [the colleague] was never alone with [the bride] because she was such a fun sponge [. . .] So we basically . . . we all had a talk and agreed 'Alright if anybody sees [the colleague] approaching [the bride] just make sure you're there too because she'll just like . . . [sighs]. [. . .] I was there the whole time going, like, 'This is not about you right now'. Just crack on even if you're not feeling it; just get on with it. (Charlotte)

Charlotte's reaction enforces the notion that hen party attendees must be seen to be *having fun* and not upsetting the status quo. She casts the moody work colleague as a '*fun sponge*' and highlights the divergence in emotions deemed appropriate for the hen party. We interpret this as a form of consumer discipline (Cronin et al., 2015) or self-policing (Kravets, 2007) performance roles; with anyone who breaks character encouraged to conceal it. We conceptualise this consumer response as a form of self-policing or 'shielding' in which other hen party goers improvise as an ensemble cast (Barnhart & Penaloza, 2013) to shield the bride from negative experiences and attendees who fail to follow the appropriate performance script. This aligns with Cronin et al. (2015, p. 1913) suggestion of

a 'social dimension to consumer discipline' with the group, in this instance, collectively policing the emotions of the evening to ensure the correct performance of hen fun.

Role conflict and remedying

Along with the need to enact appropriate performance scripts, role conflict (Goffman, 1990) between attendees was a common theme across all participants. This was heightened where role conflict was linked to financial cost. Often participants suggested that attendees viewed the hen party as an investment and would subsequently become dissatisfied if they felt they were not getting a fair return on their investment, or if their expectations of the event fell short in terms of what was delivered. Emily describes a disparity in the accommodation sleeping arrangements, with the bride and bridal party staying in a more luxurious part of the villa.

> It was a two-tier thing, so the bottom tier [of the villa] kind of felt like the lower levels of the Titanic [laughs]. And then, the top was like your royalty . . . your rich ones. But when you were all paying the same . . . but you wanted to give the bride and her besties the nicer area. And obviously you don't want the bride to sense any of this, and you're paying for her, so you're trying to put on that front, so there was a lot of [seeking] comfort in each other. (Emily)

Emily notes that the physical disparity in room allocation led to feelings of resentment within the group. It also created the formation of two distinct alliances between organisers and attendees. Such conflict between 'inno-tribe' of organisers and the larger tribe of attendees can be inherent during rituals where expectations are not met (Tinson & Nuttall, 2011). In contrast, the other guests, who are not always privy to the organisational workload behind the scenes, may view such behaviour as divisive and unfair. This can result in role conflict within the group and can create divisions. However, there remains a push to keep this quiet to reduce escalating tensions.

Even when there were instances of division within the group, there appeared to be an understanding that discord should remain unvoiced and arguments should be avoided. For example, Elena recounts an incident in which an attendee purchased alcohol for the wider group but had not yet been repaid. As the situation started to escalate, certain members of the group moved to quash it:

> There was a bit of tension with the money side. It was one girl who had bought a lot of alcohol in the airport and one of the other girls had given her a percentage of it and she was annoyed that the other girls hadn't given theirs. It became a rumbling thing and then we were very aware that [the bride] would catch wind of this very soon, so just nip this in the bud and everyone pay up. (Elena)

Elena remarks that to quash the '*rumbling*' within the group, demands were swiftly made for others to '*pay up*' to further remedy tensions. This form of self-policing moves beyond merely identifying trouble-makers (Kravets, 2007) to involve actively managing trouble-making behaviours through remedying. We define remedying as a consumer response in which hen party attendees will manage tensions within the group at the sacrifice of their own enjoyment. In instances when tensions emerge and threaten to impact the success of the ritual, attendees individually, and collectively, attempt to negotiate and overcome these tensions. Viewing the hen party through Goffman's performative framework (1990), where back- and front-stage access is strictly controlled to retain the integrity of the

performance, 'performers [organisers], audience [bride], and outsiders [attendees] all utilise techniques for saving the show, whether by avoiding likely disruptions or by correcting for unavoided ones' (Goffman, 1990, p. 211). Within the context of the hen party, such boundary-work operates to remedy role conflicts and calm tensions within the group, with attendees simply resigning themselves to the associative financial impact of taking part.

Conclusion

By means of contribution, we reveal the emergent tensions that surface within celebratory rituals that contribute to a richer understanding of consumer ritual performance. Further, we reveal consumer responses deployed to manage these tensions. In doing so, we respond to calls for research (Kleppe et al., 2018) that explores negative experiences and lifts the veil on the darker side of celebratory rituals. We contend that hen party rituals can be both a celebration and a burden, steeped in feelings of anticipation and obligation.

In exploring ritual evolution, we identify two tensions that surface in response to how the ritual has changed. First, the marketisation of the hen ritual creates tensions over time and money. Second, the sexualisation of the hen ritual creates tensions over contemporary gender performances. Our focus on ritual evolution highlights the complexity of contemporary rituals performed within evolving consumer cultures. This addresses the limited consumer research on the changing nature and contemporary complexity of consumer rituals (Tinson & Nuttall, 2011).

While a burgeoning marketplace has formed around the hen party (Packham, 2019), our findings demonstrate tensions that emerge around increased marketisation and the traditional sexualisation of the hen party. Consumers manage these tensions through spotlighting the bride to increase performative attention, and personalising the hen experience in an effort to reorientate the ritual from sexualisation to friendship. Personalisation now plays a significant role in the hen party ritual. This is evidenced physically by the handmade and sentimental gifts exchanged as part of gameplay (R. W. Belk & Coon, 1993; Montemurro & McClure, 2005). Consumers have appropriated gifts, keepsakes and experiences that typically would be catered to alternative celebrations (such as birthdays, anniversaries, etc.) for the hen party. This runs in contrast to previous literature that gives primacy to the marketplace as shaping product and service provision (Boden, 2003; Cooke, 2015) and demonstrates that the consumer takes an active role in shaping contemporary expressions of ritual performance through consumption means.

We build on prior work on ritual participation (Kleppe et al., 2018) by revealing the tensions that emerge around the traditional sexualisation of hen ritual and find consumers use personalising as a means of distancing from heteronormative tropes. Instead, we argue that consumers emancipate themselves from the patriarchal ideals and ingrained gender norms that once defined the hen party ritual. Our findings demonstrate the hen party ritual remains important to consumers in terms of its positioning as a gendered rite of passage. However, consumers appear to have abandoned the patriarchal values and heteronormative performances originally associated with the event and instead seek to enact the ritual in a way that feels authentic to their friendship group. We witness this through consumer-to-consumer discussion

of abandoning the traditional 'rules' and 'clichés', as well as alternative uses of artefacts and activities that were once used to embarrass the bride (Bronner, 2012; Montemurro, 2006) and are now deployed in celebration of friendship. This reflects Otnes et al. (1997) observation that consumers may resist ritual customs and reject traditional artefacts to manage custom and value conflict. Such distancing can be understood as a move to 'enact change in ritual participation' (Kleppe et al., 2018, p. 233) through stigmatising the contentious elements of ritual performance.

In examining ritual performance, we identify two clear tensions that emerge: First, script conflict creates tensions when ritual participants diverge from appropriate performance scripts. Second, role conflict creates tensions when ritual participants deviate from assigned roles. In these instances of 'performance disruption' (Goffman, 1990, p. 214), we identify two consumer responses that we conceptualise as self-policing: 'shielding', in which other hen party attendees will shield the bride from negative experiences and attendees who fail to remain in character; and 'remedying', in which hen party attendees will manage tensions within the group at the sacrifice of their own enjoyment. Our findings reveal that self-policing has become an embedded component of the hen party ritual. Through these methods of self-policing, incidences of conflict appear downplayed and are hidden from the bride as much as possible. Our conceptualisation therefore builds on Goffman's impression management theory, with hen party attendees and organisers working as a team, 'to present to an audience [the bride] a given definition of the situation' (1990, p. 210). The important role played by '*Others*' in staging the ritual performance also supports Cronin et al.'s supposition that self-policing 'does not occur in a vacuum but rather manifests itself as an improvisional group effort' (2015, p. 1913), and contributes towards calls for better understanding of ritual elements that reduce efficaciousness (Kleppe et al., 2018). In reframing Kravets's (2007) conceptualisation of self-policing, we broaden its scope beyond consumer vigilantism to include consumers' deployment as a means of managing the tensions that arise from ritual performances. In doing so, we highlight the importance of examining responses to ritual events at the individual level (Veeck et al., 2018). We extend this focus by also considering the collective response to individual divergence.

Previous research encourages further examination of detrimental outcomes of engaging in consumption rituals and the associated impacts on collective consumer emotions (Kleppe et al., 2018). We extend beyond the emotional response, to raise the importance of consumer emotional management. We conceptualise self-policing as a form of boundary-work in which the collective reincorporate attendees into the ritual role performance. Previous research on ritual-based boundary-work focuses on non-participants of dominant consumption rituals (Weinberger, 2015), we build upon this work by examining the negative experiences that stimulate boundary-work *within* ritual participation. Whilst non-participants may adopt engagement or disengagement ritual strategies (Weinberger, 2015), we shed light on the consumer response to such strategies by the collective, who follow the dominant ritual script.

Future research

Prior research on prenuptial rituals has focused solely on the behaviour and practices of female consumers (Arend, 2016; Montemurro, 2006; Otnes et al., 1997; Young, 2019). Given

that one of the emergent themes of this study was a rejection of patriarchal ritual artefacts and practices, and a move towards mixed-gender celebrations, a cross-gender ritual analysis could provide significant insights. Further, a fruitful area of future research on pre-marital rituals could include a broader range of sexual identities to be inclusive of a spectrum of gender and sexual identities. There were also several comments during the interviews surrounding attitudinal differences between hen and stag party rituals, with some respondents noting that they felt stag parties were less progressive, or that stag party participants had different expectations of the tradition. Such differences would be interesting to explore in greater depth.

Further research should also broaden the notion of self-policing beyond the celebratory ritual. Examining this practice in other contexts beyond the hen party and the sale of counterfeit goods (Kravets, 2007) may add depth to this as not only a form of boundary-work but in fact as a core tenant of collective consumption experiences. Longitudinal work on the transference of these assigned roles would be of ongoing interest. Do the bridesmaids maintain these surveillant roles during the wedding day, and how do they enact their roles after the marital performance is over? The authors note that the concept of self-policing should be examined in other broader rite of passage rituals such as those that are a means of social bonding (R. W. Belk & Costa, 1998; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and communal celebration (Cayla et al., 2013; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991; Weinberger, 2015; Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012).

In addition to this, the authors propose that other tactics deployed during ritual performance should be further scrutinised for a more detailed perspective of each concept. For example, the use of shielding and remedying is clearly evident in other consumption settings, particularly in the service sector by service personnel. For example, in various branded forums (e.g. Apple and Samsung) we see general consumers aid in rectifying consumer issues alongside employees. Where these two contexts converge is the role of admin and moderator, which is placed on a select few consumers with the same responsibility as service staff in policing users and rectifying conflict. Perhaps understanding of service recovery and indeed delivery can be expanded to incorporate these key terms to include both the consumer alongside the service provider.

Notes

1. Colloquial term denoting a bride or bride-to-be who is particularly demanding or difficult to deal with (Merriam-Webster, 2020).
2. Reddit acronym signifying 'Am I The Asshole' (Reddit, 2022a).

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