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# Masculinity, Tourism and Transgression: a qualitative study of British stag tourism in an Eastern European City

by

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## **Declaration**

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

During my PhD registration period, I have presented findings from this research at several conferences, although none have appeared in any publications.

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the recent phenomenon of premarital stag party tours made to Eastern European cities by groups of British men. It is based on ethnographic field research in Krakow, Poland, conducted over the course of one year. The use of qualitative methods, primarily participant-observation, allows for the exploration of the in situ meanings and social interactions which define the stag weekend. The thesis argues that the behaviour of stag tour groups offers considerable insight into masculinity and that the meanings attributed to such behaviour reveal complex construction of contemporary British masculinities. It is argued that the Eastern European stag tour is both sold and consumed on the premise that it represents a distinct physical, social and symbolic space and time within which masculine behaviour can be enacted. This is seen as a liminal space within which an exaggerated hyper-masculinity based on a carnivalesque social transgression becomes possible and desired. It is argued that the stag tour is both performative and embodied. The male body plays a central role through the consumption of alcohol, its effects upon the body and the use of bodies by stag tourists to foster an ethos of playfulness and enact a transgressive release from social restraint. Intimacy, sociability and group cohesion play a significant role in shaping the meaning of the stag weekend for tour participants. The thesis concludes that the stag tour represents a meaningful and symbolic moment for its participants, which is mediated by notions of masculinity and homosociality.

While the stag tour represents a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity in a narrow sense, it also highlights the adaptability, rather than 'crisis', of masculinity for the men involved.



# 1. Introduction

The stag party has come to occupy a specific location in the public consciousness as something which represents male behaviour which is out of control and unrestrained, hedonistic, drunken and boisterous. The image of the stag and his followers, crudely drunk and out of control, resonates with concerns over the way men act or, have the potential to act. Yet, frequently this is coupled with an apparent sense that such behaviour is in some way typical of men and, further still, typical of British men. Over the years, contempt and concern for such behaviour has been tempered with a willing acceptance and a quick recourse to the caveat that 'boys will be boys'.

Stag tourism, the subject of the thesis, therefore might symbolise a particularly errant British masculinity in several ways. Firstly, the behaviour is seen to epitomise the reckless, inconsiderate and hedonistic pursuits of young, and sometimes not so young, men. Secondly, stag tourism relates to a particular concern with how tourists are seen to behave based on a well worn distinction between 'good' and 'bad' tourism. Good tourists being noted for their positive impact, even if only financially, on the destination country or community and bad tourists, in contrast, being widely maligned as being unaware of or indifferent to any negative impact they have on the host community. Thirdly, given the fact that this behaviour is conducted in a foreign

country and is readily seen as a particularly British phenomenon, ideas of negative national stereotypes pervade media coverage of stag tourism and link to wider concerns about cross cultural interaction.

Stag tourism might seem to represent a triumvirate of bad tourism, bad Britishness and bad masculinity. This thesis, therefore, concerns why and how the British all-male stag tour to Eastern Europe phenomenon is constructed and experienced as a uniquely masculine event and what significance this has for the men who partake in it.

### **The rise of the stag party and the emergence of stag tourism**

In terms of etymology, the expression 'stag' is argued to derive from the Old English *stagga* for a male animal in its prime but also may have been used more widely in reference to adult male qualities or aspects. Unsurprisingly, then, the linking of 'stag' to marital and male rite of passage ritual does so by invoking male virility and fertility and also adulthood or a coming of age. It seems that the stag party in its modern form evolved out of a range of localised rite of passage traditions centred on working class communities and, in particular, the factory working community (Monger, 1971). Further, such rites frequently involved some form of ritualised humiliation, such as covering the would-be groom with syrup and feathers, which served to mark the passing of the young man into adult life and often mirrored similar rituals

which marked the completion of factory apprenticeships (Monger, 1975). Even at this early stage, alcohol was a significant element, with the young man often himself buying a round of drinks for his colleagues the day before his wedding (Monger, 1975).

Recent years have seen the scale, duration and cost of such celebrations escalate. Indeed, media coverage has been quick to draw a distinction between the excesses of contemporary stag tourists and what is perceived to be the more sedate stag of previous generations (Rohrer, 2006). Over the past decade, then, there is a perceived upward spiral of each stag party needing to be better than others with the resulting intensification of the event in terms of what is done, how much is spent and for how long. For example, in August 2004 the *Manchester Evening News* (2004) reported on research produced by the Morgan Stanley Credit Card company which showed an average expenditure for stag guests of £365 as well as claiming that 3.3 million Britons would attend a stag or hen party that year.

Unsurprisingly, coverage of stag parties and stag tourism has frequently highlighted its negative or disruptive elements. Examples of such include news reports on the strain placed on police resources caused by stag parties in the British city of Nottingham (BBC News, 2002) and the death of a stag party member during a drunken brawl in Northampton (Sky News, 2006). Similarly, in April 2008, Prince William was the subject of considerable media

attention after flying a Royal Air Force helicopter to the Isle of White to participate in a cousin's stag weekend (for example, Sky News, 2008). Although the use of the military aircraft was defended by the Ministry of Defence as a legitimate operation for the newly qualified prince, tabloid coverage framed the event as a stunt typical of the drunken antics of the stag weekend (Larcombe, 2008).

However, of particular concern, it seems, is that the increasing trend during the past decade for stag tours to be made abroad means that such problems are amplified. Thus, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2005) issued a report in August 2005 featuring guidelines in an attempt to highlight the potential for harm and damage on overseas stag and hen tours. For example, the report stated that 70% of young Britons would now prefer to celebrate such an occasion abroad and that, in the process, some 24% would experience some form of trouble. The report also stressed that many problems stem from the lack of organisation and planning which characterises such trips, stating that nearly half travel without travel insurance cover and less than a third take with them copies of passports and other travel documents. Further, more than half were found to arrive with little knowledge of the destination, having relied on another person to organise and plan the trip. Further still, in September 2007, Channel 4 News reported on the high instances of hospitalisation and need for 'serious consular assistance' amongst British stag tourists (Channel 4 News, September 20<sup>th</sup> 2007).

Likewise, a story in *The Times* (Sherman, 2006), reported that British consulates in certain cities were being urged to charge for their services in the case of assisting negligent stag and hen party members.

Media coverage of stag tourism inevitably raises concerns of how such men, and their associated behaviour, are received by host cities. In particular, there is a common reference to 'drunken invaders' (Rohrer, 2006). For example, one recent article asserted that as Eastern European countries became more open to international tourism they 'found a new type of invader on their streets; the foreign stag party' (Broad, 2009). In this sense, journalistic interest in the stag tourism phenomenon is quick to identify the behaviour of individual groups as part of a wider problem which concerns national identity, Britishness and how such is perceived from abroad. In August 2009, concerns raised by the Mayor of the Latvian capital Riga led to significant coverage of the continued issues of disruptive stag tour behaviour in the city. The BBC reported that the city has 'run out of patience with unruly British tourists who misbehave' (BBC News, 2009), citing the problem of drunken urination on Riga's Freedom Monument which commemorates lives lost during the country's struggle for independence (BBC News, 2009; Boyes, 2009). Notably, this coverage again invoked the image of debauched and insensitive masses thinking little of local customs or history. Thus, Richard Boyes (2009), writing in *The Times*, observed that, in Riga's old town, 'the pride of British youth can be seen parading in tutus, bras and jockstraps' and, further still,

that ‘cathedrals, lovingly protected during decades of atheistic communist rule, promise useful cover for projectile vomiting’ (Boyes, 2009). Despite a following article in *The Times* (The Times, 2009), suggesting that such acts of public drunkenness were not limited to British tourists, the debate around stag tourism clearly places the phenomenon as a contentious and negative example of British masculinity that is out of control.

Unsurprisingly, such sentiments are mirrored in media coverage of stag tourism in Eastern European countries. Thus, one article depicts stag tour groups as ‘renting the cheapest hotels, they set off on nightly pub crawls of the city’ before suggesting that ‘if they do see any historical sites, it happens on the way to the night clubs’ (Danko, 2006). Similarly, another article, also in the prominent national newspaper the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, describes typical stag behaviour as ‘pulling down one’s underwear, loud drunken singing, peeing in beer mugs – all in the centre of Krakow’ and that, further still, ‘this is the behaviour of a large number of English tourists, who, within the last year, have numbered in the hundreds of thousands in Krakow’ (Romanowski, 2007). Articles such as these seem to foreground the stag phenomenon as something out of control and offensive. An interesting further example of this, and one which attests as much to public perception as it does a media driven desire for good copy, is an online survey conducted in 2007 by the popular Polish website *naszemiasto.pl* asking ‘Are you bothered by the behaviour of

English “tourists” in Krakow?’<sup>1</sup>. Typically, many responses focused on the drunken behaviour of stag tour groups in public places. For example, one respondent asked ‘does drinking have to be synonymous with lude, crude, aggressive behaviour? Have some decency boys!’ while another warned stags to ‘know your limits and have a bit of taste’.

## **Tourism in Eastern Europe**

For post-socialist Eastern European states, tourism in general was seen to play a key role in recovery from the economic crisis of the 1980s. Prior to the fall of state socialism, tourism was seen as ‘valuable in international cooperation, intensifying the tendencies towards integration of the socialist countries, and leading to peaceful cooperation with others, including particularly the European Countries’ (Ostrowski, 1985:289). Yet, in practice the benefits of tourism were invariably limited due to the characteristic bureaucracy and inflexibility of centralised government (Hall, 1992). Derek Hall notes that the years immediately succeeding the collapse of socialism were characterised by four significant factors in the increase of international tourism, these being: an easing of entrance and exit restrictions; a greater interest and a changed image of the region in the Western media; increasing Western involvement in tourism development; and, lastly, the increased mobility of many Eastern European citizens (Hall, 1992). Within this context

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<sup>1</sup> <http://krakow.naszemiasto.pl/forum/wiadomosci/260814.html>

the nature and scope of tourism in such states changed significantly during the 1990s. For example, in Poland a notable change in the late 1990s saw inbound tourism which was once dominated by visitors with personal links to the country shift to a more pleasure orientated holiday maker market (Langlois, *et al* 1999).

Beyond economic growth and restructuring, tourism in the region can also be seen to play a part in asserting both new national cultural identities and, at the same time, stronger association with a wider European identity. For an example of this, one case study noted that the general perception amongst residents of Riga, Latvia, was that during the 1990s 'friendliness, honesty, and trust in people had greatly improved with the advent of tourism' (Upchurch and Tevicane, 2000:504). Further, Hughes and Allen suggest that, in Central and Eastern European countries, tourism and, in particular, cultural tourism 'have been utilised to display a break with the past, to promote particular national identities and to demonstrate a new openness and willingness and eagerness to embrace a wider European identity' (Hughes and Allen, 2005:175).

Unsurprisingly, such developments in the area over the last few decades have raised certain issues relating to the impact of international tourism on the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the host societies. As early as the mid 1980s, concerns were voiced over the potential impact of tourism



on the environment in Poland (Ostrowski, 1984). Taking Krakow, Poland, as a case study, the conference proceedings volume entitled *Managing Tourism in Historic Cities* illuminates several key concerns relating to the rapid development of international tourism in Eastern European cities (Bronski, 1993). As such, one contributor notes that 'the physical, social and economic carrying capacity of a historical city such as Krakow is by definition limited' (Jansen-Verbeke, 1993:78). Although these points are evidently symptomatic of the uncertainty and rapid change characterising the time in which they were made, such concerns are ongoing and are perhaps now even more pertinent given the contemporary context, in particular the 2004 accession of Poland and other Eastern European states into the European Union.

### **Stag tourism in Eastern Europe**

Intertwined with this more general picture of tourism in the post-Socialist states of Eastern Europe is the emergence of stag tourism and the related development of innumerable companies offering some form of service related to it. In order to provide an overview of the stag tour industry, a survey of companies was conducted. Using the Google search engine and simple terms such as 'stag weekend' and 'stag Eastern Europe', a list of 30 stag company websites was produced. This served to indicate typical services offered, how such services are branded and marketed, and common destinations. Taking

the latter, notable hubs for stag tourism in Eastern Europe are Budapest, Prague, Krakow, Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Some other Eastern European cities featured include Bratislava and the capital cities of Poland and Slovenia, Warsaw and Ljubljana respectively. Further, naming of companies is also of interest, given that many seem chosen specifically to evoke a loss of control (e.g. Go Bananas<sup>2</sup>, Budapest Madness<sup>3</sup> and Mad Krakow<sup>4</sup>) or, more specifically, escape (e.g. Last Night of Freedom<sup>5</sup> and Play Away Weekends<sup>6</sup>).

An overview of these companies sees two sorts of operation. Firstly, a UK based travel broker, operating as middleman or agent. These either buy wholesale accommodation and activity spaces to be repackaged specifically for the stag market or simply take a cut of commissions on sales of affiliate companies made through their website. Such companies are characterised by a large range of destinations and activities, a professional website and a relatively large and predominantly UK based team. An example of such an operator is Eclipse Leisure<sup>7</sup>. Founded in 1999 and based in Brighton, the company offers a range of stag and hen packages for both British and European destinations.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.gobananas.co.uk](http://www.gobananas.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> [www.budapestmadness.com](http://www.budapestmadness.com)

<sup>4</sup> [www.madkrakow.com](http://www.madkrakow.com)

<sup>5</sup> [www.lastnightoffreedom.co.uk](http://www.lastnightoffreedom.co.uk)

<sup>6</sup> [www.playawayweekends.co.uk](http://www.playawayweekends.co.uk)

<sup>7</sup> [www.eclipseleisure.co.uk](http://www.eclipseleisure.co.uk)

Secondly, there are a number of companies with a more established base 'on the ground' in the actual destination. Such companies nearly always focus on their local knowledge and dedicated services and usually involve providing a local representative who acts as guide for part or all of the customers' trip. A prominent example of such a company is Pissup<sup>8</sup>, whose steadily growing roster of destinations cities in Eastern Europe are all based around a dedicated office in each location. Likewise, Stag Republic<sup>9</sup> has expanded from its initial operation in Budapest to include other cities, although retaining the focus on local knowledge and on the ground service. It also appears common for such businesses to work as affiliates with the larger, broker style, companies. A package bought from Eclipse Leisure might, therefore, on arrival in the host city, partly or entirely constitute services offered by a company like Stag Republic.

The majority of companies primarily offer a combined package of accommodation, usually at 2\* and 3\* hotels, hostels or in apartments, as well as airport transfers by minibus or coach. Additionally, most packages will involve some sort of activity, ranging from a simple welcome drink at a local bar to an extensive bar and nightclub 'crawl' following a packed schedule of sports and brewery tours or vodka tasting and leading to a visit to a strip club. This range is quickly summarised along thematic lines based on the most common and frequently cited activities offered by the 30 companies reviewed.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.pissup.com](http://www.pissup.com)

<sup>9</sup> [www.stagrepUBLIC.co.uk](http://www.stagrepUBLIC.co.uk)

The table below (fig. 1.1) shows how activities offered fall, generally, within clear categorical groupings.

**Figure 1.1. Breakdown of common activities offered by stag tour companies**

Day time Activities:	
▪ Gun Sports:	<i>Pistol shooting, rifle shooting, laser games, paintball, clay-pigeon shooting,</i>
▪ Ball Sports:	<i>Five-a-side football, beach volleyball, human table football.</i>
▪ Water Sports:	<i>White water rafting, wake boarding</i>
▪ Motor Sports:	<i>Quad biking, 4x4 off road driving, go-carting, tank driving, hovercraft, flight in a military jet,</i>
▪ Winter Sports:	<i>Bobsleigh, skiing</i>
▪ Extreme Sports:	<i>Parachute, tandem skydive, bungee jump</i>
▪ ‘Cultural’ Activities:	<i>Brewery tours, Auschwitz tour (Krakow), torture/kidnap simulation (Baltic States)</i>
▪ Spectator Sports:	<i>League football match, ice hockey match.</i>
Night time Activities:	
▪ Food based:	<i>‘Local’ meal, medieval banquet, hog roast</i>
▪ Bar and Club:	<i>VIP club entrance with guest list places, guided pub/bar crawl</i>
▪ ‘Adult’ entertainment:	<i>Lap dance/strip club with dance included, Lap dance/strip club entry only, limo strip tour</i>

What becomes clear is that the stag tour is geared towards a very narrow cache of typically 'male' interests. This is reflected in the general pattern of marketing by such companies which focus on alcohol, bar and club-hopping and the overt use of images of Eastern European women as part of a branding of destination cities. Interestingly, many companies offer both stag and hen packages. However, it was common for such companies to split their site clearly between stag and hen areas, the assumed intention being both to direct potential customers to the relevant content but also to build a sense of gender segregated exclusivity. For example, the Maximise homepage<sup>10</sup> presents a very clear distinction where separate click-through links for stags and hens immediately direct the potential customer to the relevant gender specific list of destinations and activities. While hen party elements of such sites predominantly feature images of smiling groups of female friends gathering around ostentatious cocktails, on the corresponding stag pages heavily sexualised images of women proliferate.

The use of such heavily sexualised images of women in stag company websites is, therefore, immediately apparent and consistent across the stag tour company websites surveyed. A prime example of the use of images in stag tour promotion is the website for Chillisauce, a London based company offering a large range of UK and European stag and hen tours. Of particular

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<sup>10</sup> [www.maximise.co.uk](http://www.maximise.co.uk)

interest is the page listing European destinations<sup>11</sup>, where each city is symbolised by an image supposedly indicative of that city. Thus, Krakow is represented by a woman brandishing a pistol and wearing a Soviet style fur rimmed hat and Bratislava is depicted by a mud drenched naked women. Interestingly, cities such as Amsterdam and Madrid, having a more readily appropriated iconography, are pictured as a night time canal scene and vibrant bullfighter respectively. The cities of Eastern European countries, however, rarely feature such architectural or cultural allusions, focusing instead on the depiction of Eastern European women as the main signifiers for such cities. Perhaps the most flagrant example of this is one site<sup>12</sup> that offers detailed and hyperbolic descriptions of 'Budapest Girls' where 'sexiness comes naturally to the Hungarian lady' and that 'the Magyar mammary is larger and perter than the European average and that the lingerie of choice is the black thong, preferably visible through a pair of figure-hugging white trousers'. The text, accompanied by a set of images of supposedly typical and, again supposedly, waiting, willing and available, Hungarian women, serves to sell the destination through its sexualisation.

## **Background, motivation and context for the study**

My initial interest and, certainly, awareness of the presence of stag tourism in Eastern European cities came from my own travels in Poland, Czech

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<sup>11</sup> [www.chillisauce.co.uk/stag-weekends/european-destinations](http://www.chillisauce.co.uk/stag-weekends/european-destinations)

<sup>12</sup> [www.stagrepulic.co.uk/budapest/girls](http://www.stagrepulic.co.uk/budapest/girls)

Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Croatia since 2000. Of these trips, Krakow and Prague in particular exposed me to loud, boisterous stag tour groups and piqued my sociological interest in the stag tourism phenomenon. I might juxtapose my first trip to Krakow in 2000, with a trip made during 2006 which would be my last visit prior to starting research on stag tourism in the city. In the space of six years between these two visits, I felt the emergence of a clear feeling of, first, greater awareness of British tourists and, second, that that awareness was often linked to negative feelings. Thus, it was on the latter trip that I heard with greater frequency negative comments where the stereotype of the drunken unruly Englishman was invoked both from local Poles and other tourists.

Taking these and other concerns into account, a study of stag tourism in Eastern Europe is distinctive and timely in several respects. Firstly, the timing of the project is apt due to the significance of interactions between West and East Europe. With Britain in particular having a newly redefined relationship with Poland as migrant works come to Britain, and subsequently return to Poland, tourists arriving in Poland and their interactions with the 'host' community represent a significant yet under-analysed facet of the changing relationships between these two countries. Secondly, the research captures the experiences of some of the young men who are the first generation of British men to make the transition to adult life under the cloak of a 'lad' culture characterised by commercialisation, change and a degree of uncertainty.

Thirdly, the research is a unique undertaking which can bring together the various strands of thought in the emergent fields of the study of men and masculinities and of leisure and tourism. In this sense, as an intellectual endeavour the thesis represents a drawing together of two areas of analytical interest the links between which have seldom been explored.

Although perhaps too broad a terminology to be analytically useful without at least some prior qualification, tourism is here used to refer simply to the act of travelling to a different country for the purpose of some form of leisure or recreation practice. A tourist, similarly defined, is someone who undertakes this act. However, as shall be explained further during the first part of the engagement with the literature, the simple term does a lot to mask a wider spectrum of factors and diversity which make this picture more complex than it might first appear. Thus, tourism can be undertaken individually, in pairs, in family units or, as is the case here, in a collective group of a sizeable number. Similarly, the tourist might seek out and engage in specific activities or interactions which create a miscellany of social interactions based on gender, class, ethnicity and age. What, in part, drives this study is a desire to better understand this variety of social interaction which tourism creates.

Underwriting this study, therefore, is a conviction that tourism, rather than being a banal aspect of modernity is a social phenomenon that, in all its different forms, may tell us much about contemporary social life. As such,



tourism is seen as a lens through which to explore themes and issues relating to contemporary British masculinity. Rather than an at times unruly triviality, the study focuses on the stag weekend as a rich social phenomenon and as a significant and symbolic event in the lives of its participants. Therefore, as will be discussed in the methodology chapter, participant observation research provides the detail and vitality from which to draw insight and sociological analysis from which to give full weight to the meanings attributed to the experience of stag tourism by those who participate in the social phenomenon.

### **Outline of the thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis will be structured over eight chapters as follows:

Chapter two reviews the variety of literature relating to tourism and tourist experience in order to locate the study in relation to understandings of tourism in theory and practice. Primarily, it outlines the various ways in which 'the tourist', and tourism have been seen as analytical categories. Beyond this, the chapter explores how tourism has been constructed as a social practice and how tourist space is configured as distinct in space, time and imagination. The

chapter concludes by drawing on a variety of literature which frame the ways in which stag tourism can be seen as transgressive.

Then, completing the engagement with the literature, chapter three focuses on how understandings of men and masculinity have been conceptualised and theorised. Here, the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and masculinity in 'crisis' are explored and used to establish a theoretical framework of the study. Additionally, the second section of this chapter explores several key substantive themes related to masculinity in order to add contextual detail to this theoretical picture. These themes are: male friendship; masculinity and alcohol; and men, masculinity and the body.

Chapter four outlines the methodological decisions made during the course of the research and draws out the implications of some of the challenges the research presented. In particular, the specific challenges of conducting research with men on masculinity are addressed. Also, there is a discussion of the embodied nature of the research and how this has contributed to and, at other times, hindered the study of stag tourism as a practical research undertaking. Following this, chapter five represents the first attempt to engage with the data, although remains largely descriptive with the intention of creating a vivid image of the stag phenomenon. Based around a series of illustrative vignettes taken from the field work, the chapter offers an insight into the stag tour and is intended to allow the reader a more developed

understanding of the sites, sounds, actions and interactions of what might tentatively be called the 'typical' stag tour.

In the first of three analytical chapters, chapter six explores the relationship between stag tourism and the three interrelated topics of space, place and time. It is argued that the places, events and moments of stag tour experience illuminate the spatial and temporal configurations of stag tour meaning and, as such, highlight stag tour behaviour as sociologically significant. Chapter seven splits into two sections, the first considering the salience of performance and analogies of performativity in stag tour experience, while the second develops this theme in relation to the male body by exploring how stag tour participants act through and upon their bodies in, it is argued, destructive yet symbolic ways. In the final analytical chapter, chapter eight centres the discussion on men and masculinities, using the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and the notion of an apparent 'crisis' in masculinity to explore how stag tourism can illuminate discussion of contemporary British masculinity. Initially, this chapter engages with the importance of friendship, intimacy and male bonding in the context of stag tourism before widening the discussion along more theoretical lines.

The thesis concludes, in chapter 9, by drawing together the themes of the preceding chapters as well as evaluating them in relation to the research process and possible implications for future research.

## **2. The great escape?: Locating tourism in theory and practice**

The aim of this chapter is to locate and outline the theoretical framework of this thesis in relation to sociological understandings of tourism and to consider how previous studies have explored tourism and tourist practice. The chapter will be divided between five sections. The first section will consider the initial attempts to place tourism and 'the tourist' within a theoretical understanding of society. Such can be seen to parallel the early moves in the emergent discipline to unravel the ontological nature of 'the tourist' as a reflection of and/or reaction to conditions of modernity. As becomes apparent, these early texts largely ignored the task of locating the subjective individual within the phenomenon of modern tourism in favour of abstracted theorisation. The nature of tourism as an inherently social practice is frequently overlooked in favour of a detached, thoroughly Western, middleclass, tourist observer.

Yet tourism is characteristically relational. The second section, therefore, will address how tourism can and should be understood as based on implicit interactions mediated by gender, race and class. Given the topic of this thesis, primary focus will be given to gender and sexuality in relation to tourism and, as becomes apparent, the relative infrequency or inadequacy of attempts to clearly unpack and analyse such relations. The third section leads into discussion of how gender, sex and romance relate to tourism.

Further, it cannot be ignored that the experiences of tourists and the relations amongst tourists, hosts, tourism workers and locals happens within a specific socially constructed spatial environment. The fourth section will, therefore, outline the way in which tourism settings and spaces might be understood. Given that tourism is a highly imaginative and symbolic practice, a broad conception of space and place is needed as the physical locations of tourist behaviour and interaction are irrevocably coupled with culturally inscribed meanings about those places. Insights into the use of tourist space by individuals and groups, how the meanings attributed to a given site affect tourist behaviour and how tourists actively engage with the spatial aspects of the tourist setting are, therefore, all of use in laying the foundations for the analysis of the spatial practice of stag tourists. Moving from this understanding that tourist spaces and tourist behaviour are irrevocably linked, the final section will consider some of the ways in which tourism and leisure practices which are seen as 'bad' or in some way transgressive have been approached. From this, the concept of transgression is identified as a significant analytical tool in understanding the stag tour phenomenon where participant behaviour is disinhibited and social roles and rules are overstepped and actively played with.

## **'The Tourist' as analytical concept**

In order to understand the stag tourism phenomenon, it is important to first summarise the ways in which modern tourism has been understood sociologically. As such, a shared characteristic of the early attempts to theorise the nature of tourism as a social phenomenon (Boorstin, 1961: MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990/2000) is a concern with the ontological status of tourism and what, as an analytical category, 'the tourist' might tell us about modern society. The tourist, as opposed to the explorers and adventurers of the past, is distinctly modern and characteristic of a state of modernity. It was with this in mind that the field of tourism studies emerged from such seminal works during the latter half of the twentieth century.

For Daniel Boorstin, the American historian and social theorist, tourism highlighted the tendency for 'men [sic] who live in a secure, rich, and decent society travel to escape boredom, to elude the familiar, and to discover the exotic' (Boorstin, 1961:78). From this early conception, then, tourism has retained at its root a grain of dissatisfaction with modernity that leads individuals to seek out new experiences and exotic locations in an attempt to escape from the prosaic everyday modern life. However, for Boorstin, this search for the unfamiliar has, in modern times, become distilled and misguided leading to a sanitised and brash satisfaction with 'pseudo-events' (Boorstin, 1961). Thus, Boorstin presents an important but much criticised,

and pre-eminently pessimistic, social history in which the spirit of adventure and exploration which, supposedly, comes so readily to the citizens of prosperous modern nations is recast as a banal search for the flash and ostentatious. Interestingly, the spectre of the 'bad' tourist, seen as a shallow and undiscerning pleasure seeker, persist to this day and, perhaps, in the image of the drunken stag tourist finds a new and controversial iteration.

Boorstin, and much writing on tourism phenomenon since, was quick to identify tourism, and the hypothetical tourist, as a lamentable aspect of modernity. It was in recognition of this that Dean MacCannell (MacCannell, 1976) sought to reinstate the tourist as a sociological subject with a greater complex of hopes and aspirations. Whilst retaining the image of the tourist as in some way a complex product of modernity, MacCannell attempted to highlight the aspects of tourism that sought greater engagement and a deeper involvement with places, people and experiences. MacCannell primarily associated this with a search for authenticity in 'premodern' places, cultures and peoples. For MacCannell, 'modern man has been condemned to look elsewhere, everywhere, for his authenticity, to see if he can catch a glimpse of it reflected in the simplicity, poverty, chastity or purity of others' (MacCannell, 1976:41). Thus, Boorstin and MacCannell's premises are much the same in seeing tourism as offering an escape or, at least, reprieve from the banality of modern life. The outcome for the two theorists, however, is the near polar

opposites of, on the one hand, satisfaction with flashy superficiality and, on the other, a yearning for the real and meaningful.

MacCannell, however, was also, to a degree, sceptical of how the authentic experiences desired by tourists were actually achieved. Thus, his influential idea of staged authenticity in the tourist setting, drawing on Goffman's notions of front and backstage, problematises his initial stance (MacCannell, 1973; MacCannell, 1976). While the tourist might seek to experience authenticity and traditional customs, what they invariably found and to a great or lesser extent were aware of was a carefully composed presentation or performance. The tourist is offered that which others, such as tour providers and those who make a living from tourists, recognise as desirable to the touristic disposition while any preparations or elements which might discredit the performance are kept 'backstage' and out of sight. This introduces a further dynamic, picked up by those following MacCannell's lead; a stratifying of tourists in regard to the extent to which they accept and are satisfied by such staged performances.

MacCannell's analysis, later heralded by some to be 'predicated on a false dichotomy between the non-modern, viewed as the authentic, and the modern, viewed as the inauthentic', remains pervasive (Meethan, 2001:90). Further still, his use of *The Tourist* as an ideal type analytical entity clearly posited tourism as the preserve of white, middle-class, males. Gender, class and ethnicity are all notably absent from MacCannell's analysis (Schudson,



1979). While the work of both theorists is rightly regarded as seminal, and does good work in foregrounding the motivations and experiences which constitute the phenomenon of modern tourism, it can be argued that neither Boorstin's nor MacCannell's work keeps pace with the contemporary situation of tourism characterised by huge diversity of forms and experiences.

Perhaps the most prominent work on tourism during the later part of the twentieth century, John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze*, has become a benchmark in tourism studies. As such, Urry boldly sets up tourism as leisure practice 'which presumes its opposite, namely regulated and organised work' (Urry, 1990:2). In a similar manner to that identified by MacCannell, Urry sees tourism as a movement of people to destinations which are seen as pertinently different from the world of work and home life. However, rather than being limited by the modern/premodern dichotomy of authenticity, Urry suggests that tourism is principally an act of gazing upon places or things which are understood to be symbolically 'different' or extraordinary. For Urry, then, tourism is a socially inscribed practice of viewing where the very action of viewing, 'the tourist gaze' itself, is the central component of attempts to experience the extraordinary and that which is symbolically marked as different from the familiar. In the same manner as Boorstin and MacCannell, Urry's reading of tourism can easily be criticised as being one of a phenomenon which is distinctly Western and middle-class and, further still, characteristically individual, at least in the act of gazing if not in the actual

sites which are subjected to the collective gaze of individuals. Such leads to the inevitable question, then, what about those tourists, such as stag tourists, who seek not to gaze but to *do* and to consume?

Urry's notion of the tourist gaze has been widely criticised and, recently, used by many tourism scholars as a springboard to move away from a conception of tourism fixated on the visual. Most notably, Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen's ambitious narrative driven article sought to emphasise the absence of the body in the seminal works of tourism studies. As such, Urry is pilloried for his positioning as detached observer while the authors state that they 'could not squeeze anything on the body out of MacCannell' (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994:131). Moving away from the focus on the visual, therefore, involves a necessary focus on the body and the senses; on what the tourist *does*, as 'the tourist 'doing tourism'' (Crouch *et al*, 2001:254). In this light, Crouch and Desforges have identified Urry's contribution as part of 'the trajectory of theorizations of touristic experience' from which the subsequent expansion from emphasis on the purely visual to the sensual has developed (Crouch and Desforges, 2003:7). Such an emphasis is typified by the collection *Tourism: Between Place and Performance* which, as editors Simon Coleman and Mike Crang rightly point out, 'highlights a more dynamic sense of embodied and performed as well as visualised engagement with places and tourist activities' (Coleman and Crang, 2002:7).

Of the seminal theorists working in the emergent field of tourism studies during the 1970s and beyond, Erik Cohen has perhaps done most to advance a conceptualisation of tourism and tourist experience which readily accounts for distinction within tourist forms. Here, Cohen has offered a typology of modes of experience for the traveller ranging from the purely recreational mode to the existential mode, with each drawing on a different level of involvement and seeking a relatively high or low intensity of experience (Cohen, 1979). Beyond a mere stocktaking of different modes of tourism, Cohen's categorical distinctions are based on the relationship between the tourist and the familiar home culture or 'centre'. For example, the recreational mode of tourism sees the tourist take a restorative break from the 'centre' while, at the other end of the spectrum, the existential mode of tourism sees the individual looking for and finding an 'elective centre' away from that which they have left behind (Cohen, 1979). Although still largely theoretical ideal types, Cohen's categories provide a base from which the growing diversity of tourist practices could be explored and understood.

It is important to see such distinctions not as stilted artificial categorisations, but something felt and lived by actual tourists, travellers, drifters, backpackers as well as those who reject such monikers altogether. It appears that the mode, manner and motivation for travelling are all seen as indicative of a deeper process of asserting one's identity. The way you travel is seen as an expression of who you are and, importantly, how others should see you. Here

we see an important conceptual leap that reintegrates the touristic experience into the lives of individuals where such is seen not simply as a temporary flight from routine and normality, and the bastions of home and work, but as integral to the life course and identity of individuals. Such is similarly considered by Luke Desforges who, following in-depth interviews with young travellers, asserts the notion of collecting experiences and bringing them home to use 'in the narration of identity' (Desforges, 1998:176). Further still, Munt highlights that an individual's choice of destination and mode of travel not only serve to signal taste and distinction but to highlight 'personal qualities in the individual, such as strength of character, adaptability, sensitivity or even 'worldliness'' (Munt, 1994:109). Once again, however, we see an underlying distinction between 'good' and 'bad' tourist in relation to which experiences are seen as worthy and which are not. In relation to stag tourism, then, does participation in such 'bad' tourist practice readily equate to negative assumptions about the identity of those who participate in it?

Out of this context, contemporary research into tourism and tourist practice and experience has emerged. Erik Cohen (1988:43) suggests a 'research program which would simultaneously take account of, and compare, the tourist's psychological needs and experiences, the socio-structural features of the tourist settings, and the cultural symbols expressed in the touristic process'. It is the possibility of linking together these different levels that makes tourism an interesting and fruitful area of sociological inquiry. As the

following sections will address, beyond considering tourism as personified in an abstract and theoretical ideal type or as a quirk or litmus test of modernity, tourist settings are rich backdrops on which an array of actions, interactions, imaginings and performances are played out. Generally following the evident shift of the discipline, then, the rest of this chapter will move away from such theoretical and analytical work on tourism and consider more substantive themes and issues.

### **Tourism as social practice**

While Boorstin and MacCannell have emphasised the individual nature of tourism and Urry has focused on the primary sensorial act of gazing, little is made by these important theorists of interaction and the social nature of tourism. Thus, analysis of tourism needs to pay more attention to the ways in which tourism is an inescapably social action which not only relates to the subjective meanings of identity work of individuals but is implicitly relational and inescapably involves a wealth of interactions between a variety of individuals and groups. Given the predominant emphasis on understanding tourist motivation and experience on an individual level, there is considerable credence to the observation that 'possibly tourism academics have overlooked a fundamental issue, and that is that the quality of holiday experience depends upon the degree of intimacy that exists between travellers' (Trauer and Ryan, 2005:490). It would appear that this coming

together of individuals in an ongoing process of attachment formation and dissolution is frequently neglected in favour of the perhaps overly idealised autonomous tourist who is motivated to travel according to individual desires and whose fulfilment of those desires can be understood independently from those she or he comes into contact with.

It thus seems important that tourism should be seen as a process of interaction between multiple actors from diverse backgrounds and cultures. As such, Gavin Jack and Alison Phipps, in their work on *Tourism and Intercultural Exchange*, explore the minutia of tourist interactions as a vehicle for and facilitator of interaction between members of different cultures and for the exchange of cultural materials (Jack and Phipps, 2005). Work such as that of Jack and Phipps leaves behind the abstract and individual tourist in favour of an array of socio-cultural interactions which make tourism possible. Such interactions can take many forms from extreme conflict to peaceful harmony (Jack and Phipps, 2005). Using their analogy, tourism is an often problematic yet often rewarding opportunity to 'pack', move, exchange, negotiate and reinterpret cultures. According to this position, tourism ought to be seen as a meeting ground for social interaction and cultural exchange.

However, this approach, for all its worth in attempting to re-engage with an understanding of the complex multi-participant interactions that make up tourists' experiences, often appears naively optimistic. It is evident that

cultural exchange is rarely an equal process and, rather, frequently involves an erosion of and detrimental impact on local mores and customs. As an example, the hedonism and materialism of luxury Caribbean resorts creates great tensions in tourist host communities as it 'runs counter to the traditional values of hospitality and concerns for others and to the need for discipline and hard work which is essential to national development' (Momsen, 1994:117). Similarly, the case of stag tourism itself raises concerns about the malign impact which tourist interactions bring. To suggest that tourism provides an open and accessible arena for the negotiation of meaning and exchange of culture potentially ignores the power imbalances inherent in distinctions based on wealth, nationality, class, ethnicity and gender. Equally important, then, is the fact that many of the meanings attributed to tourist experiences are given or imposed by those in a position of power or authority rather than freely negotiated.

While neither solely a one-way nor a free and equal process, the nature of the interactions which often constitute tourist practice and experience are evidently negotiated or, at least, precariously balanced. It is worth considering, therefore, the times when the gendered nature of much tourist experience becomes salient, primarily in the unequal relations between host and guest. The implicitly gendered nature of international tourism has been addressed within the literature on several, but seemingly too few, occasions (Enloe, 1989; Kinnaird and Hall, 1994; Swain, 1995; Sinclair, 1997). For

example, Enloe noted that the very idea of tourism is often founded on normative notions which associate men and masculinity with adventure and exploration and women with safety and domesticity (Enloe, 1989). Further still, Pritchard and Morgan (2000) argue that the tourist gaze is invariably that of the privileged and heterosexual male, with tourist images and symbolism ordered to fit such. Similarly, noting the specific case of Scottish heritage sites, Edensor and Kothari (1994:185) argue that because of a 'male, conservative, hegemonic interpretation of heritage', some tourist sites, such as the William Wallace statue and Stirling Castle, become deeply masculinised. Thus, given that tourism is an intensely imaginative practice, the constituent 'signs and symbols, myths and fantasies are often male orientated' (Kinnaird and Hall, 1994:14).

However, it is apparent that gender divisions within tourism go far beyond the fact that the vast majority of tourist images and symbols can be seen as inherently masculine. Kinnaird and Hall have called for a framework 'based on the recognition that tourism processes are gendered in their construction, presentation and consumptions, and the form of this gendering is configured in different and diverse ways which are both temporally and spatially specific' (Kinnaird and Hall, 1994:2). The value here is to acknowledge that gender pervades all levels of the tourism industry and of tourism practice. We may, therefore, go as far as to say that tourism 'is built of human relations, and thus impacts and is impacted by global and local gender relations' (Swain,



1995:247). This position firstly recognises that in being made up of gendered human relations tourism is itself inescapably gendered and that, secondly, the highly gendered nature of tourism is both shaped by and has the power to shape gender relationships and roles at all levels. It would appear, then, that stag tourism is both a characteristically masculine pursuit but also dependent on the gendered and sexualised relationship to the women who work in the pubs, bars, clubs and strip clubs which play host to them. As will now be considered in relation to what might be called 'sex tourism', tourism provides for, encourages and allows the negotiation and sometimes dramatic reconfiguration of gender relations in an array of contexts and settings.

### **Tourism, gender, sex and romance**

Perhaps the earliest study of sex tourism, and still an important one in regard of the issues it illustrates, is Erik Cohen's study of Thai sex workers and their foreign 'farang' male clients (Cohen, 1982). Cohen identified the ambiguous relationship between farang and Thai girl, looking beyond mere financial transaction with sex as a product for sale. He sought an understanding of the symbolic value of an eroticised 'other' both as intrinsic to the sexualised exchange and the tourist experience itself, citing a culturally perpetuated myth of the land of 'instantly available women' (Cohen, 1982:407). Further, he observed that the farangs' 'attitude to girls is influenced by the image widely disseminated in the mass media and advertising' (Cohen, 1982:420). This link

between destination country being symbolically sexualised, its women being culturally inscribed as sexually desirable and available and, hence, the specific practices of male visitors, is clear.

Considering the sexualised nature of tourism and much tourist practice is, therefore, important. Cynthia Enloe, like Cohen drawing on the case of sex tourism in Southeast Asia, observes that 'sex tourism is not an anomaly, it is one strand of the gendered tourism industry' (Enloe, 1989:36). Here, the way women of other cultures are seen by the more affluent and, hence, dominant sending society is based not only on sexual desirability and availability, which might easily be alluded to in any number of eroticised travel images, but on passivity and being the weaker side of an unequal power relation. Thus, Enloe asserts that sex tourism 'requires men from affluent societies to imagine certain women, usually women of color, to be more available and submissive than the women of their own countries' (Enloe, 1989:36). Further to this, Enloe critiques the fact that far from being a problematic informal sector which host countries struggle to control, sex tourism is in many cases encouraged as a strategy for development.

The power imbalance implicit in much of the literature on sex tourism is, importantly, a mix of economic and cultural domination. Here, Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor is clear on both points. Firstly, she states that 'the obscene disparity of wealth between rich and poor nations means that even relatively

low-paid workers from affluent countries can 'live like kings/playboys' in the Third World countries they visit, and enjoy the kind of economic power they cannot hope to enjoy at home' (Sanchez Taylor, 2000:40). Secondly, she observes that frequently the gendered power relation between male tourist and female sex worker is seen by the former to be 'as it should be'; 'in this sense, sex tourists find that their masculinity and racialized power is affirmed in ways that it is not at home' (Sanchez Taylor, 2000:43). O'Connell Davidson also asserts that racial ideology underpins many encounters one might describe as sex tourism. In the case of Cuban sex tourism, many men reported a dualistic sense of aversion and attraction based on the mutual notions of 'white' superiority and 'black' otherness (O'Connell Davidson, 1996). As such, the invariably male tourist is economically in a position of power over the female host and, further, this economic power is bound up with certain notions of gendered and racial superiority.

However, women too can and do travel for sex or travel with the possibility of sexual encounters in mind. A small but growing body of literature is considering the gendered and often hazy power relations that feature in such encounters. In her work on beach boys in The Gambia, Naomi Brown has argued that sexual intercourse will take place under the definition of companionship or 'friendship' and that, primarily, such men act as cultural brokers for the women they engage, acting as guide and interpreter as well as lover (Brown, 1992). Pruitt and LaFont have, from their study of female

tourists from Western European and North American countries entering into holiday relationships with Caribbean men, identified such as 'romance tourism' (Pruitt and LaFont, 1993:423). This terminology, they argued, was to describe a situation, described also by others (Meisch, 1995; Herold *et al*, 2001), where relationships were as much about emotional content and intimacy as mere sexual gratification and involved informal and ad hoc rewards and incentives such as meals, new clothes and alcoholic drinks rather than cash transactions. However, this can be seen as an uncritical attempt to desexualise such encounters (Sanchez Taylor, 2000). Further, a problem with 'the male sex tourism/female romance tourism distinction is that it rests on and reproduces essentialist understandings of male and female sexuality' (Sanchez Taylor, 2001:759). While there is an apparent need to acknowledge the frequently more ambiguous forms of female tourist-male sex worker relationship, one great insight offered by this and other work in the area is that such encounters are as pervaded with power inequality as forms of male sex tourism are. Thus, a female tourist can be predatory and exploitative just as much as a male sex tourist who is equally likely to frame experience of commercial sexual relations in terms of intimacy and romance.

The links between sex and tourism or travel are well noted (Littlewood, 2001). Yet, the relative wealth of study into the various instances of commercial sex tourism and prostitution, as illustrated above, is not replicated in the study of the more general links between sex, romance and tourism. One collection

which does consider such, however, is Thomas Bauer and Bob McKercher's (2003) edited volume *Sex and Tourism: Journeys of Romance, Love, and Lust*. Thus, in deploying a conceptual framework which posits a strong link between sex and tourism, Bauer and McKercher seek to move away from the misconception that only commercial sex tourists engage in sex when they travel or, equally, are the only tourists for whom sex or the potential for sex, romance, love and intimacy are factors which motivate them to travel and influence their behaviour when they do so. Here the relationship between sex and tourism is seen to have several dimensions, these being: firstly, the possibility or guarantee of sex as a motivator to travel; secondly, the influence tourism practice and settings can exert over the nature of sexual or romantic encounters; and, lastly, the role tourism can be seen to play as facilitator of romantic and sexual encounters (Bauer and McKercher, 2003:5). As such, and perhaps incorporating all three of these dimensions, tourism allows a space for individuals to seek out, discover and otherwise engage in sex and sexual practices which, given their specific setting, are often vastly different from those of the home setting, being more secretive or more flagrant, achieved with greater ease or with greater risk or consummated with unaccustomed triviality or with a heightened sense of romantic significance.

From this, we might take up Bauer and McKercher's assertion that 'the most important role that tourism, as a phenomenon, plays in sexual relationships is that it offers a liminal environment away from the constraints of home, which

reduces inhibitions and provides increased opportunity for sex' (Bauer and McKercher, 2003:10). In the same volume, it is also suggested that tourist settings, such as the beach resort holiday, can offer a distinct time and space within which behaviour and meanings can become relaxed and reworked (Selänniemi, 2003). Indeed, a common concern or fear in relation to stag tourism is that the men involved, once away from home and thrust into a conducive environment, will be subject to such a release from restraint as to pursue risky or indiscriminate sexual encounters. From this, then, there is a need to consider the spatial nature of tourist settings in greater depth.

### **Tourism as spatial practice**

One of the earliest and still most insightful attempts to analyse the specific characteristics of tourist destinations, as well as the specific behaviour and social relations that take place within such settings, was Turner and Ash's book *The Golden Hordes* (Turner and Ash, 1975). Central to the work was the development and characteristics of what they termed 'the pleasure periphery', a predesignated space, 'both social and geographical', in which specific touristic behaviour could be undertaken (Turner and Ash, 1975:11). Thus, Italy, in the eighteenth century, and then the French Riviera spas and seaside resorts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became places with specific cultural meanings relating to escape and indulgence. Central to this analysis is the differential nature of the tourist setting when compared with the

climate of mores and manners of the home society. So, for members of certain leisured classes of eighteenth century Europe, Italy came to 'represent liberation from the taboos of the tourist's home society' (Turner and Ash, 1975:46). Similarly, the French Riviera became the setting for the pursuit of activities such as gambling, bathing, dancing and courting with zeal not possible at home.

There are several themes that can be drawn from Turner and Ash's text which are still of use in understanding contemporary tourist phenomena. Firstly, we see a process where 'a new style of leisure was being created, a style which, for all its sophistications, goes back to the childish idea of pure play' (Turner and Ash, 1975:76). This notion of play can at once be recognised as the escape from social pressures of home, again reiterating the co-dependent bond between home and away, work and play (Kjølsrød, 2003, offers an interesting analysis of adult play as an escape from the pressures of daily life). At variance with MacCannell's touristic search for authentic experiences in the cultural life of others or Urry's notion of pleasure in the simple act of gazing, here we see the shedding of inhibitions and restrictions as the individual at play finds, or feels they find, a liberated and purer self. The pleasure periphery, as Turner and Ash conceive it, acts both to draw certain people and condone certain conduct. At the same time, it is shaped by that very conduct by being changed and managed in an attempt to provide a more refined setting in which such behaviour can be pursued. Certainly, in relation

to the emergence of certain European cities as stag tour destinations, with an attendant and rapidly developed reputation for drunken and hedonistic behaviour, Turner and Ash's observations retain their relevance.

What Turner and Ash offered was a clear link between the physical space of tourist settings and the social practice within those spaces. A study which highlights this spatially defined nature of tourist behaviour, as well as the fragmentation between different groups, is Tim Edensor's ethnographic study of tourist behaviour at India's Taj Mahal (Edensor, 1998; Edensor, 2002a). Edensor gives vital importance to the spatial ordering of tourist sites and, through extensive observation of tourist behaviour patterns at and around the Taj Mahal temple, develops a theoretical statement about the temple's contested uses by different tourists, postulating an analytical metaphor which compares tourist behaviour to performance and choreography (Edensor, 2002a). Thus, young independent travellers or backpackers place different emphases upon certain aspects of the site and certain activities which can be enacted there such as meditation, reading or sketching while middle-aged members of package tours allow their movement and behaviour to be dictated by their guide along set routes of key sights. The use of space by tourists, the pace and manner of their movement within the setting and their relation to other groups of tourists and locals are, for Edensor, all indicative of the performative nature of tourist experiences. Further, it is impossible to seek an understanding of this performance in abstractions from its stage and setting.



Put succinctly elsewhere, Edensor asserts that 'in theoretical terms tourism encourages the production of distinct kinds of stage and is an activity which sustains a host of competing performative norms' (Edensor, 2002b:84). On this basis, it is suggested here that tourist perceptions of a tourist site will in turn frame the performative behaviour of tourists once in the given setting.

In light of this, it is unsurprising that modern tourism has given rise to spatially segregated tourist enclaves where the performances of tourists can be more acutely stage managed (Minca, 2000). However, beyond such exclusive and exclusionary resorts, much tourist space remains a location of numerous and at times antagonistic spatialised interactions. An interesting example of such is Robert Preston-Whyte's (2001) study of the beach resort area in the South African city of Durban. Taking a historical view of the changes in usage during the twentieth century, Preston-Whyte describes how Durban's beach spaces are spatially ordered along ethnic, religious, age, class and gendered lines. Complex social boundaries are projected and subject to ongoing negotiation on the physical space of the beach. Similarly, the work of Tom Mordue in relation to the various performative and spatial practices of tourists and others in the historic city centre of the English city of York further illustrates the complex negotiations and, at times, antagonism in the use of tourist spaces (Mordue, 2005). Of particular interest is the fact that Mordue attributes to tourists a desire or, at least, a potential to 'fit in', observing that consumers of tourist spaces can with varying degrees of success 'read' the space they

occupy and interpret an appropriate and acceptable performance. Those who do not, Mordue asserts, will be subject of continued struggles to 'control both their behaviour and their numbers' (Mordue, 2005:197). This analysis of how the *physical* space of tourist sites is interpreted and responded to *socially* (and therefore in notably different and potentially antagonistic ways by different groups within the setting) will be returned to in considering the spatial nature of stag tourist behaviour and practice.

Expanding on this theme, and linking it to the notion of the gendered nature of tourist interaction explored above, Jordan (2008) highlights the nature of tourist spaces as often implicitly inclusive or exclusive. Through her work on single female travellers she highlights the example of the contested space of dining tables in tourist hotels where a 'table for one' falls outside of the heteronormative script. Similarly, Binnie *et al* (2007), in their overview of 'mundane mobilities', highlight the need to temper suggestions of the supposed freedom of tourist mobilities with a consideration of the real restrictions facing many on the basis of gender, disability or ethnicity. In this respect the stag tourists represent a rather privileged group, whose status as white males allows them the safe access to many areas which might prove exclusionary to others.

What becomes apparent is that tourist space is often contested and subject to differing uses and interpretations. An interesting example of the interplay of

national cultural practices and symbols is found in the work of Hazel Andrews (2005; 2006), whose ethnographic research on the Balearic island of Mallorca explores the experiences of British tourist. Andrews finds that the resorts of Palma Nova and Magaluf are 'landscapes characterized by signs of Britishness' with both an implicit and explicit symbolic display of ethnicity (Andrews, 2006:223). Through the conspicuous pub names and the readily available supply of British food, drink and culture, national identity is reinforced and maintained despite the distance from home. From such work, we might begin to see the complexity of interpretations of tourist space which is not neutral but subject to various and dynamic social practices. The fact that a holiday resort on a Spanish island can, in some ways, reflect the antithesis of 'home' for many tourists, for example through the sun and the laid back pace of life, while, in other ways, be inscribed with an array of images and symbols which are familiar from home, illustrates the complexity apparent in the construction of tourist spaces. Certainly, in relation to stag tourism, the controversial use of public space by stag tourists and the associated discourse of 'invasion' presented in both British and foreign media sources would seem to indicate a contested use of space.

Taking the above observations and returning to an understanding of tourism and tourist practice and behaviour defined as distinct from, but always framed with reference to the established social order and normality of home, tourist settings allow for new or creative social behaviour to be enacted. One

example of this is Linda Malam's study of the performance of gender and identity in Thailand's beach resorts (Malam, 2004). Here, the close relationship between tourist space and identity, both for locals and tourists, is evident. Malam argues that particularly for the Thai men who staff the bars, bungalows and hotels and who enter into various practices centred on alcohol, drugs and sex, the tourist setting is a site which allows for transgression and identity negotiation. Likewise, for the tourists who come to Thailand from Europe, Australia and North America, the beaches and bars of Thai island and coast resorts allow for a loosening of social propriety and behavioural expectations. In this sense, the clearest example of this is Thailand's now notorious Full Moon parties. Malam's analysis of these events is illuminating and worth citing at length. Thus:

‘[The Full Moon party] is a carnivalesque space where transgression of social mores is the norm...particular opportunities are opened up for exploring the intertextualities of space, identity and power [...] they are spaces where many different imaginings of place intersect in ways that allow for the permeation of boundaries around mores, behaviours and subjectivities’ (Malam, 2004:457).

This example highlights the links between physical space, social space, space as it is imagined by a diversity of tourists and non-tourists and, above all, human action and interaction.

In a similar fashion, these themes have also been studied by Rob Shields in his illuminating analysis of the spatial and social distinction of certain places as 'places on the margin' (Shields, 1991). Drawing on a wealth of theoretical writings on the social construction and function of space, Shields describes how 'the same place, at one and the same time, can be made to *symbolise* a whole variety of social statuses, personal conditions, and social attitudes' (Shields, 1991:22, original emphasis). While his discussion is not limited to the specifically touristic, Shields finds his most insightful case study in the British tourist resort of Brighton. Thus, he describes how 'Brighton came to be associated with pleasure, with the liminal and with the carnivalesque' (Shields, 1991:73). Not only is the town seen as removed from the London metropolis, the beach itself is seen as further removed still from the restrictions of normal life, the everyday, the routine and the socially correct. Brighton becomes the setting for corporeal pleasures and for the release from inhibitions, the natural habitat of transgression, innuendo and the 'dirty weekend'. For Shields, 'collectively a set of place-images forms a place-myth' and it is this 'place-myth' which allows a space, geographically distinct, to become an imagined space, socially and culturally singular in the popular consciousness as setting for specific behaviour and, further, as synonymous with that behaviour (Shields, 1991:61).

The power of Shields' analysis, certainly in the context of understanding tourism and touristic experiences, is its ability to tap into a dynamic

intertwining of cultural, historical and imaginative representations of place. A further example of this process is found in John Urry's discussion of the English Lake District which goes from barren wilderness to romantic symbol of a potential return to nature, to health and the curative powers of the great outdoors (Urry, 1995). Here, there is a cumulative and collective aspect to the individual tourist imagination. The 'place-myth' of a destination is contingent upon not only individual perceptions but processes where such perceptions and expectations become socially and culturally manifest. It is from 'the litter of historical popular cultures' that Shields sees such 'place-myths' emerging, from the collective symbolic presence of 'postcards, advertising images, song lyrics and in the settings of novels' (Shields, 1991:47). However, this does seem to indicate that the meanings attributed to tourist spaces are largely proscriptive, rather than the free-floating choices of individuals. An acute example of this is seen in Richard Sharpley's analysis of the rise and dramatic fall of Cyprus at the end of the 1990s as host to a thriving night club counter culture (Sharpley, 2004). As such, the images of the island as a hedonistic paradise in the sun quickly permeated through the popular awareness via newspaper, television and advertising and, just as quickly, turned sour in the form of reports of inane extravagance and overdevelopment.

To what extent a particular tourist setting derives its meanings or 'place-myth' from ongoing historical cultural representation (e.g. postcards, advertising, representations in the print media, on television and in films) and to what

extent such meanings are open for interpretation through the actual in situ behaviour of tourists is open to question. Certainly, in the case of stag tourism, the image of a hyper-masculine and unrestrained 'wild east' depicted by the media and fostered by the stag tour companies themselves must be based on the actual behaviour of individuals yet it also encourages or scripts that behaviour. Rather, the relationship appears to be a dialectic one with wider discourse and the behaviour of individuals feeding into and modifying each other. Further, many tourist spaces are characterised by a release from inhibition and a degree of elasticity in the meanings which any individual might choose to adopt in and for that setting. The meaning of 'escape' or 'release', however, becomes reified and itself becomes prescribed or dominant. For example, a middle-aged couple expecting a quiet restorative after dinner walk on a moonlit beach in Thailand might be overwhelmed by the hedonistic play of younger travellers and tourists. To say, then, that individuals are free to choose their meanings within tourist settings overlooks the fact that tourist behaviour, even when that behaviour is characterised as 'liminal' or 'carnavalesque', is invariably prescribed and generated at least to some extent at a level beyond the individual's control.

From the above discussions, we see that tourist spaces are socially inscribed with symbolic meanings and imagined in certain dynamic ways. The meanings given to tourist spaces act directly upon behaviour, often encouraging or condoning certain forms of 'liminal' or out of the ordinary

behaviour. Further, sites are spatially ordered and enacted and engaged with in different ways by different people, giving rise to potential performative conflicts.

Such insights hold an evident potential to be applied to stag tourism which, from the outset, appears to be a tourist practice which links the physical space of the tourist setting, in this case the centres of Eastern European cities, to the (anti-)social behaviour that is permissible or encouraged. Based on an apparent stag tourism 'place-myth', sites are imagined in a certain way and expectations based on these meanings dictate behaviour and interactions within the space. The fact that many people view much stag tourist behaviour negatively as being disruptive and insensitive, therefore, calls for an understanding of how such behaviour is spatially ordered and experienced.

### **'Bad tourism' and social transgression**

The final section of this chapter will consider some examples of tourism or leisure practice which, like stag tourism, have fostered public, media and academic attention primarily for being associated with behaviour which is, in some way, seen as normatively 'bad' and/or transgressive of expected social behaviour. As such, this adds to the above discussion concerning tourist spaces which encourage or allow a loosening of inhibitions or a 'liminal' state



within which certain behaviour, which at other times, and in other places might not be permissible, can take place.

One example of an apparently transgressive leisure practice is the North American Spring Break. Here, sexual as well as alcohol and drug related behaviour is open to experimentation for young college students who travel to tourist resort settings en masse each Easter vacation. An otherwise conscientious student enters a setting where there is an evident loosening of mores relating to intoxication and promiscuity and sexual experimentation. These misadventures are a deeply ingrained and much anticipated aspect of the Spring Break phenomenon, and thus a constituent part of the Spring Break 'script' (Josiam *et al*, 1998). Further, such behaviour is often contested via disapproving and sensational media coverage and heightening of local law enforcement as was seen in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in the late 1980s following a spate of drug related deaths (Josiam *et al*, 1998:502). In other work on the phenomenon, Sönmez *et al*'s (2006:896) quantitative study of attitudes to binge drinking and casual sex as part of American college Spring Break argues that such tourism is characterised by 'situational disinhibition'. The peripheral status of destinations is heavily scripted as sites for behaviour which individuals would not consider appropriate at home. The Spring Break phenomenon, then, is similar to stag tourism in that it generates a general concern that the setting, maybe a Caribbean beach in the former case and an

Eastern European old town centre in the latter, combined with copious consumption of alcohol will generate transgressive and damaging behaviour.

The links between tourism and alcohol are worth exploring further. David Bell's (2008) recent overview of 'alcotourism' serves to state the importance and general interconnectedness of alcohol and tourism. He defines alcotourism as 'the assorted ways of travelling to drink, travelling while drinking, drinking to travel, and so on' (Bell, 2008:291). Within this assertion he identifies some interesting issues, in particular that drinking alcohol is a significant way of 'consuming place' (Bell, 2008:294). The consumption of local beverages and participation in local drinking culture are an important element of how many tourists experience the locality of the destination. To this he adds that, on returning home, there is potential for reconnecting with memories of holiday experiences through consumption of holiday drinks. In addition to this, the role alcohol plays in tourists' experiences offers both escape and constraint or, as Bell describes it, 'a scripted liminality that is serially reproduced from report to resort, holiday to holiday' (Bell, 2008:293). This balance, between release and constraint, is evident in much holiday drinking and its associated behaviour. Certainly in the cases of Spring Break and Thailand's Full Moon parties, considered above, alcohol is an essential ingredient in achieving the states of release and disinhibition that characterise those forms of tourism. So too, with stag tourism, alcohol is a central factor.

Although focussing on leisure practice rather than tourism, the temporal and spatial nature of heavy drinking was also revealed by Joyce Wolburg and Debbie Treise in their study of the heavy drinking patterns of college students and alcoholics (Wolburg and Treise, 2004). Drawing on a functional model of ritual, they explain how certain events and times trigger drinking in certain places (an example being the weekend football match being used as the initial prompt and reason to commence drinking in a particular bar in a particular area of town). They also found that spatial and temporal cues play a significant role in ordering drinking rituals (Wolburg and Treise, 2004). What can, then, at first instance appear chaotic is in fact a product of a highly scripted ritual that orders what is drunk, when drinking may begin and for how long it will last and how individuals should act once drunk. Similarly, work on consumption and regulation of the night-time economy in Britain has illustrated the creation of environments 'based on the allure of liminal opportunities' (Hobbs *et al*, 2000:701), where drunkenness is encouraged in night time spaces, or 'playscapes' (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002), and where loss of restraint is facilitated even while it may be successfully controlled and policed within certain limits.

Public drinking and its control frequently involve conflicting values and the contested use of public space (Tomsen, 1997; Hadfield, 2006). What often appears as chaotic behaviour can, however, be seen as presenting its own structure revolving around an ethos of release and the transgression of norms

and social boundaries. Here, Stephen Tomsen's (1997) study of collective disorder and drinking violence is of use. He states that, 'rowdy acts of behaviour, like pushing, arguing, swearing, loudness and obscenity, are all valued for being part of a continuum of social rule-breaking which heightens the pleasurable experience of drinking as time out' (Tomsen, 1997: 96-97). Further, acts of public urination, vomiting and spitting can be seen as symbolic protests and a playful denial of the normative values which, while upheld in everyday life, become open to knowing transgression in the context of collective drunkenness (Tomsen, 1997:99). Similarly, Rocco Capraro (2000) identifies the drinking habits of American college males as allowing a space within which social norms can be transgressed or rejected with playful abandon.

The consumption of alcohol and experience of drunkenness is a significant facet of much leisure practice which is seen as 'bad' or transgressive. Relevant to this study, as shall be discussed in analysing the drunken behaviour of stag tourists, is that collective drinking and the feelings of camaraderie associated with drunkenness hold the potential for a release from inhibition (Gefou-Madianou, 1992). Thus drinking can often act as a collective 'catharsis' from the strains of normative everyday roles (Bjeren, 1992:165). Recent research has highlighted this in relation to the 'passing out stories' of British young people (Griffin *et al*, 2009). Heavy drinking with the intention of losing control, awareness and responsibility are seen both as a

'time out' from everyday pressures and a way of peer group bonding. Thus, 'part of the allure [of such drunkenness] lay in the integral relationship between excessive drinking and 'fun' as central to the cohesiveness, intimacy and care provided by young people's social friendship groups' (Griffin *et al*, 2009:470). In short, the heavy drinking which leads to a loss of individual control actually acts to bind the social group collectively.

More broadly than this, some other sites of transgressive leisure activity encourage and allow for playful interpretations of identity and a degree of loss of social restraint. For example, the carnival is a potent symbol of a transgressive loosening of social norms through ritual and celebration. Wesley Shrum's analysis of the ritualistic acts of public nudity and exhibitionism during the New Orleans Mardi Gras carnival parades interestingly reveals how symbolic value is conferred upon the beads which are exchanged for 'ceremonial disrobement' (Shrum, 2004). Further, Shrum also details how such acts are ordered along spatial lines with those in elevated positions on balconies or parade floats gaining symbolic ascendancy of those in the crowd. In another work focusing on the social and symbolic significances of the New Orleans Mardi Gras, Joseph Roach examines the symbolic and ritualistic nature of the event in terms of history, memory and politics, focusing in particular on the use of performance (Roach, 1996). For Roach, the costumes worn by Carnival Kings can be seen to occupy a performative and liminal moment where roles, in this case of authority figures, are parodied and

subverted through the use of 'crudely fabricated' figures (Roach, 1996:36). Similarly, Sherry and Kozinets (2004) draw on ethnographic research at the Burning Man alternative festival, held annually in the Nevada Dessert and culminating in the spectacular destruction of a symbolic effigy. As with carnival, the Burning Man festival offers an example of a time and space for carnivalesque behaviour where social propriety is frequently overstepped and taken for granted rules and assumptions are played with or encouraged to be broken. Thus, at Burning Man every aspect of the site is suffused with irony, satire and pastiche whilst the 'carnivalesque ethos' of the festival turns each participant into 'a sacred clown' (Sherry and Kozinets, 2004:309).

What insight, then, do these rather disparate studies offer in relation to stag tourism? Interestingly, the notions of liminality, transgression and carnivalesque role reversal or subversion have been central to several of the few studies to attempt a sociological understanding of premarital rituals. William's study of American bachelor parties highlights just this notion of carnivalesque transgression where the 'bachelor' who is about to marry is subject to ritualistic punishment which serves to humiliate and feminise (Williams, 1994). Similarly, although perhaps with very different connotations in regards to gender and patriarchy, the female premarital 'hen' or 'bachelorette' party creates a carnivalesque or liminal space within which notions of femininity are played with and at times subverted. During the bachelorette party, Tye and Powers observed, 'young women play with their

own sexual objectification through symbolic reversal' (Tye and Powers, 1998:555). Further, for women as for men, the consumption of alcohol allows disinhibited participation in symbolic games, fancy dress and humiliation rituals (Montemurro and McClure, 2005). From this, Eldridge and Roberts suggest that the female hen party might represent 'a new and possibly unique optic for thinking about the articulation of women, public spaces and alcohol consumption' (Eldridge and Roberts, 2008:324). Unlike Tye and Powers, however, Eldridge and Roberts retain a degree of ambivalence where, rather than being a transgressive subversion of gender expectations, the hen party actually serves to label participants as 'the subject of amusement and voyeurism' and, therefore, reinstates notions of desired and undesired femininity (Eldridge and Roberts, 2008:327). Thus, while the idea that gender roles are actively subverted and reconfigured during premarital rituals is pervasive, the significance of such ritualised transgression remains disputed.

It is worth further delineating the notion of transgression as it is used in this study. Most notably, the conception gleaned from the insights explored above is not limited to the transgression of gender roles. The conceptualisation of transgression used in this thesis should be set apart from that which the likes of Judith Butler have developed (Butler, 1990; Butler, 1991). Primarily, in relation to what she describes as subversive bodily acts, Butler has theorised certain performative and parodic acts, most notably drag and gender imitation, as transgressive of heteronormative gender categories. She argues that 'in

imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency’ (Butler, 1990:137). What is suggested here is a wider use of the notion of transgression that is not limited to the transgression of gender norms and does not necessarily signal the subversion of those norms but, rather, refers to a constellation of ritualistic rule breaking where social propriety is overstepped and certain behaviour pursued with greater freedom and release. In this sense, transgression in relation to stag tourism should not be conflated with that developed in Queer Theory which sees the transgression of normative gender categories as indicative of identity being ‘arbitrary, unstable, and exclusionary’ (Seidman, 1996:11). Indeed, transgression in this usage, as will become apparent during the analysis chapters of this study, is not necessarily subversive nor challenging of dominant norms and often involves the enactment of normative heterosexual and masculine roles to such excess that, in fact, such transgression often appears to highlight and reinstate social rules albeit in their overstepping.

The notion of transgression, then, might be of use in describing the various acts of disinhibited, unruly and disruptive hyper-masculine behaviour associated with stag tourism in Eastern Europe. Further, such would indicate the symbolic and ritualistic importance of such rule and role breaking. What many of the studies considered above illustrate is the potential for certain locations (Turner and Ash, 1975; Shields, 1991; Malam, 2004) and certain behaviour, in particular the drinking of alcohol (Gefou-Madianou, 1992;



Tomsen, 1997; Josiam *et al*, 1998; Wolburg and Treise, 2004; Sönmez *et al*, 2006; Bell, 2008; Griffin *et al*, 2009), to produce behaviour which in some way breaks, oversteps or subverts expected social norms and propriety. Specifically, premarital rituals can be seen as involving disinhibited behaviour which acts, or at least has the potential to act, to subvert and transgress gender roles (Williams, 1994; Tye and Powers, 1996; Montemurro and McClure, 2005; Eldridge and Roberts, 2008). To conceptualise this quality as transgression helps to link these studies to a common theme which will provide a useful analytical tool in exploring stag tourism and the behaviour of stag tourists.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter has considered the ways in which tourism, as a social phenomenon, has been theorised and understood. From the early attempts to describe 'the tourist' as an analytical category which in some way reflects the wider forces of modernity, more attention is paid to the study of the social and spatial aspects of a diverse and varied array of tourist experience. The locations of tourist practice and the actions and interactions which characterise those spaces are subject to rich and dynamic social processes. In particular, gender is an ever present yet only thinly or sporadically addressed aspect of this process. Notably in the fascinating research conducted on sex tourism but also in various other studies, the

interplay of gender, sexuality and romance are essential to understanding many tourist phenomena.

This chapter has also sought to highlight how notions of liminality, transgression and the carnivalesque help develop an insight into tourist phenomenon that promote, encourage or allow certain forms of disinhibited behaviour. Particular tourist spaces, it is argued, provide settings which facilitate transgressive behaviour. In relation to stag tourism there is an evident need to develop an insight into forms of tourism which are seen as negative, as 'bad' and as having a detrimental impact on all those involved. Because of this, the final section of the chapter drew on a variety of studies to situate the research in relation to various tourism and leisure sites of transgressive or carnivalesque social practice which, it is argued, offer a valuable insight into the behaviour of stag tour participants.

In this light, the research is framed by several questions which, although specific to tourism and tourist practice, will intertwine with concerns and questions relating to men and masculinity outlined in the next chapter. Beyond merely asking why cities such as Krakow prove to be popular sites for stag tourism, we must ask what the actions and interactions of British stag tourists in Eastern European cities look like and how this can be understood as social, spatial and gendered practice. What kind of interactions take place between group members, both within groups and between groups and outsiders? What

does this tell us about stag tourism as a social phenomenon and what meanings do participants attribute to it? Finally, in what ways does stag tourism promote and, indeed, rely on transgressive behaviour as part of its construction as an extraordinary event which offers, it might be speculated, an escape from the normal and the everyday in a way that is symbolically meaningful to tour participants?

### **3. The problem with men: problematising and understanding men and masculinities**

Although the genesis of this research concerned stag tourism as an interesting new form of tourist practice, the importance of masculinity and gender in understanding the stag phenomenon were clear from the outset. The stag tour, as an event and social phenomenon, includes exclusively male groups partaking in what are widely perceived to be and accepted as 'typically' masculine behaviour. Further still, as explored in the Introduction, the presentation of much stag tour industry promotional material serves to sexualise the destinations and to create an image of an eroticised 'other' represented by the supposedly omnipresence of numerous attractive and available local women. Stag tourism is therefore an inescapably gendered phenomenon. Further, the stag tour is held up, by the media in particular, as an example of a bad masculinity which is brash, loutish and out of control. Such can be held to represent the worst excesses of a dominant masculinity which idealises the pursuit of beer, girls and good times with friends whilst also, in many ways, being accepted as 'normal' or 'typical' and expected. This problematic drives the research in its relation to gender and masculinity.

The chapter will therefore be divided into sections which address the topic of men and masculinity. First, it is necessary to explore some of the central and key theories which have developed in relation to problematising and

understanding men and masculinities. This first section primarily engages with Connell's influential though frequently critiqued notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Following this, the second section will explore another central theme of much study of men and masculinity: the notion that contemporary masculinity is, in some way, passing through or subject to a 'crisis'. An exploration of this is necessary given the starting belief that stag tourism can, in various ways, be seen as a symptom of either 'crisis' (that men must travel to distant countries to engage in hyperbolic expressions of masculinity) or strength (that such men are free to engage in such practices which are to a considerable degree accepted as 'normal'). It will be argued that the concept of hegemonic masculinity, at least in its recent reconfiguration in light of particular criticisms, is of use in understanding stag tourism. Further, and linked to this, the notion of 'crisis', more than anything, indicates by turns the degrees of uncertainty, flexibility, loss and reaction which seem to characterise contemporary masculinities.

Following this, the final sections of the chapter will address three themes which inform the study of stag tourism. These are: how men and masculinity relates to male friendship; how men and masculinity relates to alcohol and drunkenness; and, lastly, how men and masculinity relates to understandings of gendered performance and of the male body. The pertinence of these themes to the study of stag tourism is based on the inherently homosocial

character of stag tourism and that, as an element of this, the collective practice of alcohol consumption is pervasive and integral to the stag experience. Further to this, given that stag tourism is evidently a bodily practice, based around corporeal pleasures and recognisable immediately for its physicality, a need to theorise the male body is essential to a sociological analysis of the stag tour phenomenon. In light of discussion in these sections, the stag tourism phenomenon is seen as showing considerable scope in illuminating the empirical workings of male-male friendship and bonding, particularly where it concerns alcohol consumption and collective acts of drunkenness and, lastly, the male body a central facet of much masculine leisure practice.

### **Connell's hegemonic masculinity**

An obvious starting point for tracking the development of the concept of hegemonic masculinity is the article by Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) which introduced the term largely through its discussion, and rejection, of sex role theory. While sex role theory served to highlight the socially constructed nature of masculinity, for Carrigan, Connell and Lee it was unsuccessful in several significant ways. Firstly, the distinction between male and female roles was one always based on an implicit and unavoidable difference, rather than the relational approach which would later be asserted. Secondly, sex role theory prescribed a form of masculinity from which all others were seen as

deviant. This insistence on the existence of a normative male role allowed little room to conceptualise either diversity or difference. Thirdly, though related to this, the concept of change was clearly given little space within a theory which espouses a single construction of the male role and of how a man should be. If there was one way of being a man, the male role, and deviation from this was seen as aberrant, how could change over time be accounted for? Sex role theory, therefore, provided an overly rigid conception of masculinity which failed to 'grasp change as a dialectic arising within gender relations themselves' (Carrigan *et al*, 1985:580). Tellingly this would become a criticism of the hegemonic masculinity concept too.

With sex role theory seen as 'neither a conceptually stable nor a practically and empirically adequate basis for the analysis of gender', a more dynamic conception of masculinity was sought (Carrigan *et al*, 1985:581). It was not enough to simply say, as sex role theory might, that there is a commonly accepted way of being masculine and that anything that strays from this is seen as deviant. Rather, the three authors located the power of the gender order in this very area in a relational definition of masculinity. Thus, they stated, 'the ability to impose a particular definition on other kinds of masculinity is part of what we mean by 'hegemony'' (Carrigan *et al*, 1985:592). The construction of a preferable masculinity or maleness was not something which floated free of social interaction as an ever-present and preset pattern or role.

This notion of hegemonic masculinity, one that could 'be put in a few paragraphs' (Connell, 1987:183), is one that Connell would return to repeatedly and that, in its wide and varied uses, would shape and define the emerging field of critical studies of men and masculinities. Drawn from the concept of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, the notion of hegemony in relation to gender described 'a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organisation of private lives and cultural processes' (Connell, 1987:184). Power was therefore central to the concept. Being far broader and more pervasive in scope than the imposition of mere brute strength, hegemony involved the creation of acceptance, legitimacy and consent. Yet, this power was also, for Connell, by no means total. Just as the assertion of hegemonic power is ongoing, the resistance to it is also persistent. The conception of power implicit to hegemonic masculinity is unlike the earlier conceptual efforts of sex role theory, as it is never without a countervailing threat to that dominance; this renders the dominance of hegemonic masculinity 'a position always contestable' (Connell, 1995:76).

One part of the success of Connell's conception was its ability to take account of the multiple ways in which masculinity might and could, with greater or lesser degrees of acceptability, become manifest. Connell provided a framework onto which others could apply what was already becoming widely realised, that masculinity should be seen as plural and, therefore, replaced



with the more suitable term masculinities. Thus, Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, in their collected edition *Dislocating Masculinity*, sought to destabilise 'an apparent certainty: that 'a man is a man' everywhere, and everywhere this means the same thing' (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994:3). Rather than simply being made via a process of socialisation into 'proper' modes of masculine behaviour, 'masculinity appears as an essence or commodity, which can be measured, possessed or lost' (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994:12). In illustration of this, in the same volume Peter Loizos (1994) draws on the example of Greek masculinity which, although dominating the public space of the coffee shop, defers to the patriarchal dominance of the family home. Chenjerai Shire similarly considers the discursive and contingent qualities of 'linguistic and spatial representations of masculinities in Zimbabwe' (Shire, 1994:147). In both these cases, masculinity is not a status that, once achieved cannot be lost, but, even when powerful and dominant, is based on a succession of negotiated actions and an ever-changing convergence of symbols dependent on context, location and social interaction.

Perhaps the most notable shift in the conceptualisation of masculinity and maleness in the past decades has been the recognition of masculinity as fragmented, plural and contestable. In this sense, it has become 'fashionable' (Beynon, 2002:1) to speak of masculinities and, as such, recognise a multiplicity which includes working-class masculinity as well as middle-class

masculinity, 'black' masculinity as well as white masculinity, gay masculinity as well as heterosexual masculinity and even, with the advances in information technology, online masculinity. However, it can be argued that such a conceptual pluralisation detracts from the perseverance of a masculine ideal against which masculinity is measured. If we return to Loizos' observation cited above, that 'masculinity is not a stable essence' and is instead a complexity of performed and negotiated identities which do and mean different things at different stages of an individual's life and in different settings at any one time, we begin to problematise this conception of hegemonic masculinity (Loizos, 1994:67). In this sense, where a man might comply with an ideal of hegemonic masculinity in one setting, they might manifestly fail to do so in another setting. Thus, what emerges is the question how does a dominant hegemonic masculinity, based around heterosexuality, rationality, self-control and competitiveness, relate to other masculinities and femininities which, in any number of ways, contradict or fail to fit in with it.

Expanding on his initial attempt, Connell further set out his conception of hegemonic masculinity in his work *Masculinities* (1995/2005). Hegemonic masculinity is therefore a significant element of the wider patriarchal gender structure for it is 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (Connell, 1995:77). Looking more closely at this

hierarchy set out by Connell, we see hegemonic masculinity held aloft; a position from which there is the power to legitimate this given construction of gender over others. As Donaldson observes the transmission of hegemonic masculinity is most frequently via 'influential agents', the most notable being 'priests, journalists, advertisers, playwrights, film makers, actors, novelists, musicians, activists, academics, coaches, and sportsman' (Donaldson, 1993:646). Thus, while few men might fully and unproblematically be said to possess or exhibit hegemonic masculinity, a point that will be returned to later, many men, through their cultural approval of this hegemonic ideal, can be seen as complicit with it. Further, through their complicity, the majority of men benefit from what Connell terms the 'patriarchal dividend' where the general privileges that hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy make available to most men are enjoyed by those men whether they are seen to be directly in power or not (Connell, 1987; Connell, 1995).

On this basis hegemonic masculinity is defined as legitimate and authoritative with constant and oppositional reference to the women and men it subordinates. Thus, an inescapable part of the maintenance of ongoing authority in this hierarchy is the *delegitimation* of alternatives to it. Mike Donaldson, taking his lead from Connell, asserts that 'heterosexuality and homophobia are the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity' in that the primacy of the former posits women as a subsidiary compliment to hegemonic masculinity and the latter a response to the homosexuality which is seen to

threaten this (Donaldson, 1993:645). Additional to this, for Connell, the system on which hegemonic masculinity depends also necessarily excludes certain male groups and their associated masculinity and in doing so creates the 'marginalization' of the likes of what might be seen as potentially troubling working-class or black masculinities (Connell, 1995:80). Again, the central ordering concept of hegemonic masculinity and the gendered hierarchy it sits atop of is power. This is as much a matter of cultural power as it is economic, political or martial and physical power.

As discussed above, through cultural and social practice hegemonic masculinity becomes normalised. White, heterosexual and inevitably middleclass masculinity establishes itself as the accepted standard while homosexual, 'black' and some working-class masculinities are seen as marginalised and, importantly, threatening. Similarly, femininity is seen to be in polar opposition to masculinity and, as such, invariably central to definitions of what masculinity *is not*. The frequent lampooning of effete homosexual men or subservient or emasculated ethnic minority males serves both to distance other forms of masculinity and to reassert the dominant mode. Yet, this very process itself reveals the central dynamic of hegemonic masculinity, that what is presented as fixed and stable is in fact frequently threatened and necessarily in a continuous process of reassertion.

The success of Connell's conception has, it seems, meant that 'hegemonic masculinity has been taken into the literature somewhat uncritically' (Ramazanoglu, 1992:344). Jeff Hearn (1996) has been quick to point out a number of problems with, if not the concept itself in its original formulation, then its variety and the frequent imprecision of its uses in the voluminous works in which it has been applied (Hearn, 1996). Further, hegemonic masculinity as a conceptual tool poses the threat of becoming shorthand for a wide range of social issues and, therefore, might be used as the 'primary and underlying cause of other social effects' (Hearn, 1996:203). One of his primary concerns was that the growing prevalence of the concept at that time would, through its 'exclusionary tendency', 'divert attention away from women' and their experiences of the material practices of men (Hearn, 1996:203). From this, Hearn makes four proposals (Hearn, 1996:214). First, that greater precision and particularity should mitigate too unthinking or too broad a use of the concept. Second, that analysis should be based on 'men', and presumably their everyday experiences, rather than the more abstract masculinity. Third, given that masculinity is actively talked of and about, analysis of hegemonic masculinity should explore these discourses. Fourth, concepts should be found that better describe how both men and women experience men.

Regarding the apparent criticism that Connell's concept lacks theoretical precision, Tony Jefferson has also asserted that 'the time appears to be ripe for a bit of conceptual stock-taking' (Jefferson, 2002:66). From this starting

assertion, Jefferson's criticisms are developed in relation to several key issues. For example, although Connell has taken great care to emphasise his theory as being relational, for Jefferson, the concept has too easily been used to return to an attributional definition of masculinity where hegemonic masculinity is described as though a checklist of 'manly' characteristics are being ticked off. Further still, there is a tendency for the concept to not give much space for the consideration of what Jefferson calls 'context-specific hegemonic strategies' (Jefferson, 2002: 72). The upshot of this is that hegemonic masculinity as defined by Connell is a useful concept yet one which is too easily reified in its frequent failure to account for the lived experiences of men, what Jefferson refers to as the psychosocial and emotive aspects of masculinity. Connell's emphasis on power structures and hierarchies, it seems, threatens to overlook the actual lives of men. Again, we see here that Jefferson, as with Hearn, seeks to recover the concept of hegemonic masculinity from its regular misuse through abstracted or overly-narrow application.

Perhaps the most productive and focused engagement with Connell's work, and one that addresses the need for greater theoretical clarity, is that of Demetrakis Demetriou (2001). Although critical of Connell, Demetriou's main task seems to be to reconcile some of the inconsistencies of the concept of hegemonic masculinity with particular focus on how such can be said to be dominant yet change considerably and widely over time. Here, returning to the

theories of Gramsci, Demetriou deploys the term 'historic bloc', arguing that 'hegemonic masculinity is not a purely white or heterosexual configuration of practice but it is a hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy' (Demetriou, 2001:337). Further, a clearer distinction is made between 'external hegemonic masculinity' and 'internal hegemonic masculinity', with the former corresponding to power and legitimacy over women and the latter as power and legitimacy over other men (Demetriou, 2001:341). It is here that Demetriou finds space for greater insight. He suggests that a more accurate reading of Gramsci than Connell's should stress the relationship between hegemonic and subordinate classes as 'a dialectical one that involves reciprocity and mutual interaction', where the dominant group 'appropriates what appears pragmatically useful and constructive for the project of domination at a particular historical moment' (Demetriou, 2001:345). The authority of hegemony therefore comes in part from its ready ability to incorporate aspects of alternative and at times threatening cultures as, in the example drawn by Demetriou, elements of gay culture being reconfigured within the mainstream of hegemonic masculinity. As Donaldson's pithy earlier observation suggests, hegemonic masculinity is 'resilient, it incorporates its own critiques' (Donaldson, 1993:646).

Given these and other attempts to critique Connell's work, it is unsurprising the author should attempt a response alongside a systematic reformulation of

the concept itself (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). As above in the work of both Jeff Hearn and Tony Jefferson, Connell and Messerschmidt concur that the concept might be marked by too much ambiguity and overlap, raising questions of whom or what is actually hegemonically masculine. However, they stress, the concept is inherently and necessarily 'flexible' for the very reason that hegemonic masculinity acts differently between different levels and in different situations (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:838). Interestingly, they also note the apparent conflation of hegemonic masculinity, by many who adopted the term, with the masculine subject when it, in fact, refers to the practices through which the subject might constitute itself in a number of ways.

On the basis of the above, Connell and Messerschmidt develop a reformulation of hegemonic masculinity. After stating that plural and hierarchical understandings of masculinity ought to be retained, and that any use of the concept to define a single pattern or model of gender relations and global dominance should be rejected, they focus on clarifying how, exactly, the concept might better respond to the associated criticisms and misuse of recent years. For example, they assert that a greater degree of agency can be attributed to subordinate and marginalised masculinities within the gender hierarchy whilst, also, recognising the role played by women in the construction of masculinity amongst men. On this point, it would seem their main aim is to retain the hierarchical structure of gender relations yet



introduce and acknowledge far greater interplay between levels, as Demetriou had suggested, while once again restating the relational as the main feature of gender hierarchy. Further, they go on to consider what they call 'the geography of masculinities' which are ordered over a local, regional and global level (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:849). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity can be seen to act on, through and across scales. While the regional level of cultural discourse and nation-state politics and policy provides a particular iteration of hegemonic masculinity, the local level of social interaction in families and organisations provides ground for hegemonic masculinity to emerge in varied ways. It is therefore not problematic to speak of multiple manifestations of hegemonic masculinity, given that 'although local models of hegemonic masculinity may differ from each other, they generally overlap' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:850).

Through the focus on a multilevel geography of masculinities, the plurality at a local interactional level does not signal a weakness in the singularity of hegemony at a regional or national level but, rather, a more elaborate way of considering how masculinity is constituted at different levels. Hegemonic masculinity, therefore, is necessarily seen as something pervasive which can surface at numerous levels and in numerous ways, both through structures and in the practices of agents. The practice of individuals might 'represent compromise formations between contradictory desires or emotions, or results of uncertain calculations about the costs and benefits of different gender

strategies' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:852). Connell's reaction to the criticisms levelled in recent years has been to embrace, but further elaborate, the complexities which others have taken for ambiguity.

Given the above, there is a patent need for any application of hegemonic masculinity as a concept to remain aware of how the ideological formation of a legitimating ideal of masculinity and the agency of individuals is balanced. Is it simply a case of looking at a given group of men and deciding whether they are, or are seen to possess, hegemonic masculinity? Or, beyond this, should analysis focus on how the hegemonic ideal is simultaneously aspired to, rejected or negotiated and how individuals or groups strategically align themselves in relation to cultural and political ideals of masculinity? Do stag tourists, with their rowdy heteronormative and apparently hyper-masculine behaviour embody hegemonic masculinity as it is handed down to them or is there a degree of interpretation? More specifically, is the 'lad culture' which so clearly informs the stag phenomenon adopted and enacted by men unproblematically or with varying degrees of acceptance and resistance?

Of concern, therefore, is the relationship between hegemony as a political or cultural mechanism and its real life interpretations. Christine Beasley recently identified what she read as a frequent 'slippages' in Connell's use of hegemonic masculinity to refer at one time to a political mechanism of control which secures and perpetuates legitimacy, at another more straightforwardly

to the most dominant or common form of masculinity and, at yet another time, to an actual empirical group of powerful men (Beasley, 2008:88). On this basis, she asserts the need to *narrow* the definition of hegemonic masculinity to refer exclusively to the political ideology which legitimises a certain form of masculinity. Given this reading, one should be careful to, for example, say that the men that go on stag tours might be subject to hegemonic masculine ideology, and that their behaviour is informed or even dictated by this, yet they themselves are not hegemonic masculinity *per se*.

Beasley's work aptly highlights the need for care and awareness when drawing lines of distinction between hegemonic masculinity as an ideology or political mechanism and how it is lived out, successfully or otherwise, by actual individuals. However, James Messerschmidt (2008), co-author of Connell's 2005 conceptual reformulation of hegemonic masculinity, rightly points out in response to Beasley's critique that to allow the concept to be narrowed to an exclusively ideological political mechanism is to overlook the myriad and unavoidably complex ways (not to mention the who's, when's, where's and why's) in which hegemonic masculinity becomes common in practice, in the lived behaviour and experiences of actual men. Similarly, Richard Howson suggests that what Beasley identifies as 'slippages' are in fact complexities which are 'dialectically "sutured" within hegemony' (Howson, 2008:109). In light of such a debate, then, it seems that while hegemonic masculinity, as a concept, has developed considerably both through empirical

application and occasional misuse, its apparent flexibility is a required trait in understanding masculinity which itself is flexible and subject to change. Consideration of how masculinity, hegemonic or otherwise, might be seen to change or adapt is addressed in the following section in relation to what is widely referred to in both academic and popular discourse as a, or the, 'crisis' in masculinity.

### **Locating the 'crisis' of masculinity**

The notion of masculinity being in, or having passed through, some form of 'crisis' is, as John Beynon observes, accepted widely as 'fact' (Beynon, 2002:76). Further, this notion of 'crisis' is integral to the development of the field of masculinities and men's studies and is built on a general premise that 'men are changing' (Kimmel, 1987:9). Yet, on the face of it, hegemonic masculinity remains strong and the dominance of man, of patriarchy, still prevails. There is therefore an apparent paradox. While many talk of a 'crisis' in or of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity endures and appears to be 'successfully riding the waves' of any upheavals (Jefferson, 2002:66). Similarly, Hearn has referred to the 'stubborn stability of men's structural power' (Hearn, 1999:164). It is therefore pertinent to consider formulations of this apparent 'crisis', its causes and explanations.

This concept reflects the assumed impact of the second half of the twentieth century in which the authority of the white male ruling classes were significantly challenged by successive waves of feminism, the civil rights movement, the collapse of industrial production and the instability of values based on marriage, family and the breadwinning male figure (Morgan, 2006:111). The prevailing feeling, then, that there is some form of 'crisis' in masculinity stems from significant changes in the structural conditions which have traditionally supported hegemonic masculinity. Linda McDowell (2003) expertly raises the issue of working class masculinity's precarious position in contemporary times given the changes to work and employment. She suggests that young men in service sector economies have less opportunities for stable employment and, certainly, fewer chances of building a coherent masculine identity through their work (McDowell, 2003). Changes such as those in industrial manufacturing are seen to impact the way in which men can sustain an authoritative masculine identity in their everyday lives. A similar account is offered by Simon Winlow in his study of criminality in the post-industrial North-East of England, *Badfellas* (Winlow, 2001). He observes that, 'as traditional structures have been eroded and the world has changed, North-Eastern working-class men have been forced to develop and recognize new means of masculine expression' (Winlow, 2001:161).

Further, beyond this decline in industrial manufacturing the flexibility of post-Fordist employment (which has replaced it as central to the economy)

demands a complementary flexibility from men (Hearn, 1999). Whether such is seen as a 'crisis' or not, it is clear that as men's lives change, changes in work and employment being one immediate example, so too may their conception of their own masculine identity. Yet, arguably traditional gender assumptions are carried readily into new spheres of work, such as the risk-taking competitiveness of financial trading which, although fully computerised, still stresses the masculine body and the bearer's faith in 'gut feelings' (Rasmussen, 2005). While such examples are readily at hand, there is a necessary task of locating this 'crisis' and considering how it might be formulated theoretically.

As outlined in the previous section, it is understood that masculinity is socially constructed and based around culturally normalised ideals. There is, therefore, an apparent codependence of ideological and material levels of masculinity. The current discourse of 'crisis' in masculinity seems to readily read problems in the material lives of men, for example worklessness or suicide, as symptoms of a comparative problem in masculinity at the ideological level of hegemony. Additionally, it is seen that while a readily apparent notion of hegemonic masculinity can be formulated at the very same time notions of 'crisis' have predominated. I will suggest here, then, that it is the relationship between this socially constructed reality and culturally mediated ideal that needs to be considered if a more rigorous understanding of the supposed 'crisis' in masculinity is to be developed.

An interesting approach to this can be found in the analysis outlined by John MacInnes in *The End of Masculinity* (MacInnes, 1998). Central to MacInnes' thesis is the proposition that modernity is itself antithetical to the ideological positions of modernity. Modernity, MacInnes explains, is built around a supposed equality for all where modern societies become less based upon gendered roles and more rationalised through the increasing powers of the market and bureaucracy. The role of masculinity is a legacy of patriarchal pre-modernity and functions as an indicator and response to 'the fundamental incompatibility between the core principles of modernity that all human beings are essentially equal (regardless of their sex) and the core tenet of patriarchy that men are naturally superior to women and thus destined to rule over them' (MacInnes, 1998:11). Under this conception of a crisis in masculinity, men might be seen to experience difficulty in their lives as they attempt to live up to an outmoded or moribund masculine ideal.

However, this would appear to place primacy on the success of feminism and other movements for social change to have actively changed the cultural ideal of masculinity which is engrained in society. We must also consider the possibility that while the ideal of masculinity, its hegemonic form, may have to a lesser or greater extent been attacked it is still in fact strong and continues to act as a prevailing norm to which men aspire or, at least, in many ways benefit from. In this sense, then, greater importance is placed on the problems men face in their day-to-day lives whilst at the same time aspiring to a

hegemonic masculine ideal. As such, the ideological norm of masculinity has persisted while, on the other hand, men's lives have changed in a way that they no longer reflect that norm. For example, the decline of industrial manufacturing in the UK, along with many other Western societies, has, as considered above, had the effect of denying many men the option of asserting a masculine identity through labour (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003). Yet, arguably, the connotations which link physical work and technical competence with masculinity persist, still ingrained into normative understandings of gender, with the result that many men actively pursue an ideological goal which is no longer achievable in material terms. We might, however, consider the way in which more traditional notions of masculinity are superimposed onto new forms of men's experience. For example, the ability to master and manipulate data draws on an image of masculine mastery derived from industrial craftsmanship and the supposedly masculine domain of tools and raw materials. As such, there is an evident flexibility in how hegemonic masculinity might be manifest where masculine attributes such as rationality, instrumentality and assertiveness can conceivably be mapped onto most aspects of contemporary social life.

However, the ability to aspire to hegemonic masculinity is evidently not unproblematic. Such an approach is well represented in Tony Blackshaw's insightful and detailed ethnography of the leisure pursuits of a group of working class Leeds' men and, as such, outlines 'the salience of leisure for



working-class men in a sociality undergoing profound transformations' (Blackshaw, 2003:7). The leisure world of the men of Blackshaw's study, a familiar array of dingy pubs, social clubs and bars, represent an escape from the uncertainties of work and home lives where masculine ideals are seen as threatened or, indeed, as in 'crisis'. As Blackshaw asserts in reference to Bauman's notion of a liquid modernity which is both flexible and uncertain 'leisure is the keystone of this predicament, as it provides the time and space for the making and the articulation of a spurious sense of certainty' (Blackshaw, 2003:12). In a similarly fashion, Alfred Aversa (1990) found in his research on class and leisure in a New York yacht club that interactions within the leisure setting are, as well as being heavily mediated by social class, seen as a site for the construction of masculine identity around which a sense of certainty can be experienced. Thus, for all the changes in contemporary society which appear to be in opposition to such, the assertion of a traditional masculine identity is still possible in certain spheres and, it might be added, men may adapt to such with relative ease. The question, then, is maybe not one of 'crisis' but of change. More accurately, who does this change affect and where does it have a salient impact on men's lives?

A further example of this idea of masculinity in retreat might be the emergence of men's lifestyle magazines during the 1990s which are frequently cited as illustrative of changing standards of masculinity. As such, titles such as *Loaded* and *FHM* offered men a degree of escapism from a

world of changing social relations and gender roles. Football, sexist humour, beer and girls, the mainstays of such magazines, all offer a simulation of male experience which is, for its male readers, reassuring in its simplicity even if it is open to a feminist critique. Indeed, Imelda Whelehan succinctly posits that 'Loaded in particular self-consciously establishes a masculine personal space which fences off feminist criticism and politics, delighting in its retreat from outside accountability' (Whelehan, 2000:59). Additionally, the self-awareness and self-mockery which is an ever present idiom through such magazines can be read as a further defence against the changing relationships that men experience in their daily lives. Irony, Bethan Benwell asserts, 'is perhaps one of the most common ways in which the accommodation (and transformations) of feminist discourses is achieved in men's magazines' (Benwell, 2003:20).

Taking the above discussion into account, the notion of a 'crisis' in masculinity serves to draw popular and academic attention to changes in the way masculinity is constituted on a normative level but also in the everyday lives of men. While to a certain extent a clear normative masculine ideal persists and, in many spheres of their lives, men can still successfully articulate a strong masculine identity, it is the relationship between these two that has become strained. Indeed, it is the increasingly problematic relationship between ideology and lived experience which results in the situation where masculinity is widely considered to be in 'crisis'. One way in which this is manifest is in an apparent proliferation of masculine scripts or ways of doing a socially viable

masculinity. While it has never been easy for lived male experiences to mirror a culturally espoused ideal, it is possible to convincingly argue that the options of how that ideal can be interpreted are more varied and flexible now than ever before. This proliferation of images of masculinity is referred to by Hearn as a complexity of representations. He asserts that 'imagining men is now a matter of both fiercely reaffirming boring old Rambos and their like, in film, computer games and comics, and presenting ever-more ambiguous homo-het, man-women pictures of 'men' in both mainstream and alternative media' (Hearn, 1999:150). Through complexity of interpretations comes a lack of regulation or a degree of anomie where the old regulative images of masculinity become exploded and, while fragments of the old masculine ideal can still be found as strong as ever, their composition is less clear, more disparate, and as a result more malleable than ever. An interesting example might be found in Cashmore and Parker's discussion of the fluidity of footballer David Beckham's masculine identity which 'embodies cultural change that has transpired over the past three decades' (Cashmore and Parker, 2003:215). The 'crisis' of masculinity is therefore also a reflection of the speed and frequency with which men are bombarded with images of what they should be like, should do or should achieve and the relatively limitless permutations for stitching these fragments together.

This conception of changes in masculinity might provide greater flexibility in accounting for why some groups of men appear to be experiencing a greater

'crisis' than others. Indeed, David Morgan, amongst others, notes that any apparent 'crisis' largely fails to affect certain groups, such as white middle-class boys and men, who possess the cultural, social and economic capital to adapt to changes and exploit the apparent flexibility (Morgan, 2006). In this analysis the malleability of masculine identities available nowadays can only be exploited successfully by men in certain positions who can adjust and stylise their responses in a certain way according to the resources, both material and cultural, available to them. Similarly, Linda McDowell asserts that 'what seems to be emerging in Britain, rather than a crisis *per se*, is an uneven challenge to the automatic associations between masculinity and privilege which has particular impacts on different groups of men' (McDowell, 2003:91).

The approach of this section has been to explore in greater detail the notion that masculinity is in, or has passed through, a 'crisis'. In doing so, I have drawn on some of the themes explored in the previous section, primarily that masculinity is socially constructed and articulated via culturally ingrained and legitimating ideals. Following Connell, this may be described as hegemonic masculinity and it is in relation to this that other forms of masculinity are compared and, often, subordinated. An understanding of the contemporary state of masculinities should, whether described as a 'crisis' or not, therefore incorporate a detailed understanding of the ways in which men live their lives and aspire to or reject dominant ideals of masculinity. Thus, in the favoured

interpretation of 'crisis' offered here, masculinity is marked by plural interpretations and representations and by a flexibility which might, at different times, foster uncertainty or allow space for the persistence of hegemonic masculine norms. While examples of hegemonic or hyper-masculine ideals might be found in some places, examples of weakness and uncertainty can be found elsewhere. It is how men negotiate the current climate of change, plurality and fluidity which is, therefore, the most potentially insightful area of masculinities studies.

### **Men, masculinity and friendship**

The first two sections of this chapter have sought to conceptualise what is meant by hegemonic masculinity and 'crisis' in masculinity and, thus, to provide a context and a theoretical framework with which to understand the masculinity which stag tourism represents. The remainder of this chapter will now explore sites of masculinity, common points where masculinity is articulated or, for various reasons, made particularly salient. There are three substantive areas of interest where the masculinity of stag tourism can be seen to become particularly visible: male friendship; masculinity and the consumption of alcohol; and masculinity and the male body.

The topic of male friendship has arisen, either explicitly or implicitly, in many works during the development of men and masculinities as a field of study.

For example, Jim Walker's ethnography of Australian high school boys, *Louts and Legends*, focused prominently on a closely bonded friendship group of boys as they went through their last year of compulsory education and subsequent transition to work (Walker, 1988). Findings suggested that not only did the identity of these young men depend heavily on their bonds of friendship but these bonds were dictated by gender, ethnicity and class. Within this, Walker portrays an uneasy context within which the boys depend on each other for affirmation of their gendered, and classed, identity. He states that 'the assertive masculinity informing it worked as a repertoire of solutions to short-term problems of personal identity, self-esteem, legitimating of one's actions and individual worth, in very concrete practical contexts involving eating, drinking, moving, sex/gender relations and the pressures of obdurate social realities' (Walker, 1988:44). In short, the boys in Walker's study help reinforce their constructions of a viable masculine self through their friendships with other boys.

In relation to male friendship we must consider an apparent paradox. While the hegemonic norm dictates men should desire a strong bond between men, often with the implicit wholesale exclusion of women, the boundaries policed by homophobia and heteronormativity are forcibly maintained. As such, with certain exemptions such as some situations of a heightened emotional nature, such as weddings and funerals (Morman and Ford, 1998), male-male friendship and affection are often viewed as suspect. *Social desire* between

men can be readily misconstrued as *sexual desire* (Kiesling, 2005). In this sense, male friendship is an interesting substantive issue to be addressed in relation to stag tourism. Given that the stag tour is essentially a coming together of male friends, in what ways does this paradox play out in stag tour settings?

One way in which this problematic is overcome is through the use of what is called 'indirectness' (Kiesling, 2005). According to Kiesling, this becomes manifest in one of three ways. Firstly, through adopting an alternative social arrangement such as conflict rather than connection. Thus, men frequently engage in staged acts of confrontation, name calling or 'piss-taking' rather than showing direct fondness and friendship. Secondly, through addressing a different person while the 'real' addressee is present as an overhearer, men can indirectly express feelings of togetherness and bonding. Finally, through indirectness of topic where a different subject, such as sport or car mechanics, serves as a vehicle to indirectly support and maintain the desired focus of male friendship. It is evident, then, that 'shared experiences' are central to male friendship (Kiesling, 2005:716), for they provide topics of conversation and a safe site for expressing affection or connection, even though sometimes that connection might be masked as conflict.

Building on this, it has been suggested that men's talk maintains and sustains the construction of masculine identity and is integral to homosocial bonding

(Coates, 2003). For example, in their study of the drinking talk of a group of young men Gough and Edwards found that 'the emphasis is usually on humour, with the most original, outlandish or controversial contributions generally securing the all important big laughs' (Gough and Edwards, 1998:413). It is through the details of conversations between men that what is considered an acceptable and desirable masculinity is identified and maintained. Stories told collectively between men about past shared experiences are a way of expressing 'connectedness' and establishing continuity between the group and a shared gender identity (Coates, 2003:198). Further still, men's talk is often 'a means for constructing heterosexual identity' (Cameron and Kulick, 2003:59). Thus, masculine talk is implicitly heterosexual talk. Sexual and sexist joking, therefore, play an unsurprisingly prominent role in establishing male heterosexual identity and facilitating male group bonding (Kimmel, 1987). Again, we see that groups of men, through their homosocial bonding and friendship, actively deploy and develop their masculine identity.

Similar to the patterns of sexualised talk which are said to characterise much men's talk, practices such as 'girl watching' can also act to buttress the masculine and heterosexual identity of men, whereby the gaze of male sexual desire is used to actively display a facet of heterosexual masculinity for the benefit of a complicit male audience (Quinn, 2002). Similarly, David Grazian's analysis of the collective and performative rituals of 'the girl hunt' for groups of



young American men stresses that much of the bravado associated with the, more often than not unsuccessful, pursuit of sexual encounters with women is as much about establishing a clear homosocial bond between friends as it is actual heterosexual desire. Thus, he states that, 'one's male peers are the intended audience for competitive fames of sexual reputation and peer status, public displays of situational dominance and rule transgression, and in-group rituals of solidarity and loyalty' (Grazian, 2007:224).

Given the above observations, we can consider the assertion that drinking and women are essential bonding mechanisms for many men (Salzman *et al*, 2005:68). There is also a strong connection, one further facilitated by collective alcohol consumption, between male bonding and humour (Gough and Edwards, 1998). Not only can humour strengthen the internal identity of the group, it can also act to distance those outside of the group and, further still, act as a defence mechanism against allegations of political incorrectness, chauvinism and sexism (Whelehan, 2000; Benwell, 2003; Benwell, 2004). As noted in the previous section, this is particularly evident in the British 'lad culture' of the 1990s which exalted 'having a laugh', actively condoned 'the errant side of masculinity' (Beynon, 2002:112) and 'delighted in its retreat from outside accountability' (Whelehan, 2000:59). Additionally, some writers have suggested that male friendship and the leisure spaces which often form its setting are in themselves places where men can escape to as a retreat

from increasingly complex and uncertain gender relations in everyday life (Blackshaw, 2003; Salzman *et al*, 2005).

### **Men, masculinity and alcohol**

The link between masculinity, friendship and alcohol consumption is evidently central to many men's lives. For example, the frequent recourse to 'buddy' imagery in alcohol advertising emphasises the links between alcohol consumption and homosociality, especially when supported by a unifying element such as either watching or playing sport (Wolburg and Treise, 2004). The role of alcohol, its consumption and its effects seems to occupy a particularly privileged position in relation to masculinity. There is therefore a considerable need to explore the themes of alcohol consumption and drunkenness and how this relates to men and masculinities. The connections between masculinity and alcohol are clear and often stated (Lemle and Mishkind, 1989; Gefou-Madianou, 1992). Not only does drinking frequently take place in specifically male domains (Capraro, 2000), such domains are invariably public spaces of leisure such as pubs, bars and cafes which can be seen in contrast to the feminine domains of the home and the family (Loizos, 1994). Such public and semi-public leisure spaces comprise a strikingly gendered geography (McDowell, 1999). Lemle and Mishkind have identified that this link can be centred on three central propositions. Firstly, that drinking is a social act which is generally perceived as implicitly masculine. Secondly,

that this assumption is perpetually restated through media representations linking ideal masculinity to alcohol consumption and, thirdly, that alcohol is linked to other behaviour which is considered to be masculine such as risk-taking and aggression (Lemle and Mishkind, 1989:214). However, this relationship is far from unproblematic. Thus, it is supposed that alcohol might often play a compensatory role whereby 'men who drink alcohol excessively are those who experience themselves as relatively powerless and who use alcohol to gain a sense of power' (Lemle and Mishkind, 1989:218).

Two interesting studies which explore the workings of gendered interaction in leisure spaces are Spradley and Mann's study of an American cocktail bar (Spradley and Mann, 1975) and, more recently, Anne Allison's insightful ethnographic study of corporate masculinity in Japanese hostess clubs (Allison, 1994). In both cases, the role of alcohol and the presence of gender in ordering the social relations and interactions of the respective leisure spaces are ever-present. Spradley and Mann observed that 'the cultural roles and rituals of bar life reaffirm the definitions and status attached to masculinity and femininity' (Spradley and Mann, 1975:3). In this sense, the space of the bar provides a location for masculinity to be enacted and reinforced by male customers while female waitresses act as an adjunct to such constructions. Similarly, Allison's work describes the complex constructions of corporate masculinity which take place within the hostess clubs of Tokyo where the

combination of alcohol and the staged flattery of hostesses allows the male patron to 'feel like a man' (Allison, 1994:8).

It is clear that the practice of alcohol consumption and the sites of such consumption and its associated behaviour become heavily inscribed as masculine and, further, are seen as the appropriate locations for masculinity to be established and affirmed. In a study of alcohol use amongst North American college students, Robert Peralta (2007) stresses the role of testing endurance through alcohol consumption as the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. The ability to 'hold alcohol' and remain in control of one's body rather than submitting to weakening physical effects is to prove to be bodily and socially masculine. In particular, drinking stories become badges of masculine honour akin to 'battle stories' which show individuals as capable men who can test their body and prove their masculinity in spite of potential damage and injury (Peralta, 2007:746). Seen in relation to stag drinking, the desire to test the body and push corporeal limits through excess alcohol consumption is paralleled by a physical punishment of the body.

On this basis, sites of public drinking are also, for many men, sites for the construction, maintenance and defence of their masculine identity. Henk Driessen notes the important social function of the Andalusian bar or tavern as 'a social context for the creation and maintenance of friendship and the celebration of masculinity' (Driessen, 1992:73). Further, Hugh Campbell

(2000) has deployed the term 'pub(lic) masculinity' to highlight the role of public houses and other drinking establishments as sites for the construction, negotiation and enactment of masculine identities. The pub is, as such, a site where men engage in ongoing processes of social construction and gender performance and where learning to drink and learning to be masculine are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Collective drinking, therefore, plays a pivotal role in group solidarity which, further, is heavily spatialised (Hunt *et al*, 2005). The overlap, both socially and physically, between spaces which are culturally designated for the production of masculinity and group identity and those designated for collective alcohol consumption is clear.

### **Masculinity, performance and the male body**

The final theme for consideration in this chapter is how understandings of men and masculinity necessarily draw on notions of performance and embodiment. Tim Edwards has noted the influence upon masculinities studies by third wave feminism which in turn is 'clearly influenced by the advent of post-structural theory, particularly as it relates to gender in terms of questions of normativity, performativity and sexuality' (Edwards, 2006:3). The work of Judith Butler is highly influential in drawing attention to the repetitive and routine ways in which gender is performed and embodied. Butler states that 'the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures,

movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self' (Butler, 1990: 140). In this sense, gender must be seen as an unavoidable 'routine, methodological, and recurring accomplishment' (West and Zimmerman, 1987:126). Adding to this, David Morgan asserts that 'gender and masculinities may be understood as part of a Goffmanesque presentation of self, something which is negotiated (implicitly or explicitly) over a whole range of situations' (Morgan, 1992:47).

Within these observations, however, there is a tension between seeing gender and masculinity as routine and, alternatively, as knowingly enacted as performance. As Beynon observes, it is important not to overlook the fact that 'in thinking of 'masculinity-as-enactment' it must be remembered that those who do not perform their masculinity in a culturally approved manner are liable to be ostracized, even punished' (Beynon, 2002:11). Indeed, any analysis which sees masculinity as an unproblematic choice of when and which masculine forms to enact, does so at the risk of silencing the power dynamics which marginalise and prohibit certain behaviour. For example, a homosexual man who serves in the military, or any such hierarchal institution, might freely *choose* to enact a gay identity only at the potential cost of possible reproach of his fellow soldiers and his superiors. In this case, then, a negotiated performance of heterosexuality or, at least, some attributes which are seen to indicate heterosexuality would allow that individual to integrate

with less difficulty into that particular social milieu. In contrast, other social settings might allow or actively encourage an open display of gay masculinity.

Linked to this interest in masculinity and performativity is an increasing theoretical interest in the male body and the body in relation to gender. Previously there has perhaps been a worry that any research broaching the issue of the male body might be misinterpreted as seeking a return to biodeterministic conceptions of gender. Yet, recent years have seen a greater concern with the understanding of the male body as a physical, social and cultural entity. There is a need for a balance between seeing the body as a social construct and as a physical actuality (Davis, 1997) and, further, to take account of the body beyond the few certain times when it becomes self-evident such as in cases of chronic illness (Watson, 1998:165). For example, Carol Wolkowitz's conception of body work highlights the need to consider the centrality of the body in everyday practice, namely, work and employment (Wolkowitz, 2006). She identifies the need to be wary of conceptions of the body that either overemphasise individual agency, as in Goffman, or that see the body, following Foucault, as 'docile' and incapable of subjective agency. We must, rather, consider what Wolkowitz refers to as 'the gender, class and race-specific connotations of the working body' (Wolkowitz, 2006:43), both in relation to representations of the body and in understanding the corporeal nature of everyday lived experiences.

This emergence of interest in the role of the body in everyday social practices and interactions, what we might call 'putting the body's feet on the ground' (Jackson and Scott, 2001:10), also highlights a desire to return to understandings of gender as a lived, corporeal and sensorial experience. Thus, the embodiment of everyday practice is becoming increasingly salient as a means of studying masculinity. Nick Crossley, drawing on the work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, has argued for a carnal sociology of the body where both what is done to the body and what the body does is considered as interrelated (Crossley, 1995a). In this sense, Crossley emphasises a need to recognise that 'the social is embodied and that the body is social' (Crossley, 1995a:44).

Crossley's conception of the body is an interesting one. He draws on Mauss' notion of body techniques which considers how we know how to use our bodies in certain repetitive ways, such as how to sit or to walk, and Merleau-Ponty's notion of *intercorporeality* which sees the body not as object but as phenomenological source of a relational subjectivity. He sees Merleau-Ponty's understanding of 'an overlapping of sentient-sensible beings' (Crossley, 1995b:144) as overcoming the limitations of Mauss' notion that even the smallest bodily movement or gesture is a learnt and habituated practice. Taken together, and explored in relation to Goffman's *Relations in Public*, the virtue of this approach is to give the individual body subject agency while not denying the implicitly social, relational, constitution of bodily practice. For



example, in relation to behaviour in public places, the individual acts bodily in the given situation yet does so in light of ongoing interaction with other bodies. Crossley observes that 'agents who are not corporeally equipped and competent to deal with the practical exigencies posed by vehicular participation in public spaces are unlikely to be able to sustain a definition of themselves as normal, worthy, etc., unless attenuating circumstances (such as drunkenness) can be proven' (Crossley, 1995b:139). While some bodily practice might be enacted knowingly, rather than simply habitually, by an agent it is done so within the limits of accepted social interaction.

The performative enactments of the gendered body, then, are of interest to understanding masculinity. In relation to gender there is an apparent dualism which equates the male with rationality and the female with the body and emotion, and, further still, the male body with the public and the female body with the private (Morgan, 1993). Thus, while masculine embodiment is seen as public and physical, female embodiment has been associated with the home and with the private sphere. In Iris Young's influential analysis of feminine bodily comportment the masculine body is seen as one that extends into and exerts influence over the world while the feminine body is one which is carried with tentativeness and inhibition (Young, 1980).

These normative ideals filter into everyday practices and dictate the relationships men have with their bodies. For example, through research on

body image amongst boys and young men, Grogan and Richards (2002) found a desire to meet certain ideals of the male body as strong, athletic, lean and muscular, without appearing to others to care too much. Similarly, Frith and Gleeson (2004) found from their work on male body image and appearance management that men use clothing situationally both to heighten or to conceal either desirable or undesirable aspects of the body in line with pervasive ideals. Interestingly, this work also indicated that men felt they are at the centre of 'competing demands' which ask them 'to be both mindful and unconcerned about their appearance' (Frith and Gleeson, 2004:46). To be concerned with appearance would be seen as narcissistic and, as such, tantamount to the femininity which hegemonic masculinity demarcates as taboo. Furthermore, the emergence of men's lifestyle and fitness magazines and advertisements target men's insecurities about their bodies whilst offering solutions or alternatives (Alexander, 2003). An additional paradox, here, is that such physical strength has become all the more desired at a time when fewer and fewer jobs require the application of manual bodily power. Gill *et al* (2005:40) observe that 'we are witnessing an extraordinary fetishization of muscles and muscularity in young men at precisely the moment that fewer traditional male manual jobs exist, and those that do require less physical strength than ever before'.

The male body, then, should not be seen as socially neutral. Rather, the male body is arguably subject of increasing demands as a 'site of identity'

(Brubaker and Johnson, 2008:131). An example of this is the pursuit of a suitably macho body which sees men neglect their health and undertake undue and potentially damaging risks (Watson, 1998; Robertson, 2003) and acting tough in relation to emotions and pain (Bendelow and Williams, 1998). Indeed, it has been argued that times when the male body suffers are notably times when the male body becomes more salient. Interesting examples of this are the physical torments of the motion picture action heroes, such as those portrayed by Mel Gibson (Brown, 2002), and the fascination with the aggressive and punished bodies of male boxers which are both dangerous and endangered (Jefferson, 1998).

Thus, it seems that the relationship between masculinity and the male body and between men and their own bodies and those of other men is one riddled with contradictions. What becomes apparent is that the male body is evidently a site of both potential risk and necessary control. Control of the body can generally be linked to the upholding of a cohesive self and identity (Jackson and Scott, 2001). The drive for bodily self-control sets up the male body which fails to be controlled as something outside of the rational and civilised or, as Tony Morgan observes, something grotesque (Morgan, 1993). However, equally, modernity might also be seen as a potential threat to this conception of bodily masculinity as an increasingly sedentary lifestyle and consumptive practices pose the threat of bodily atrophy and the undoing of male corporeal vigour (Forth, 2007).

As is particularly evident in the work of Vic Seidler, the modern relationship between man and the male body is one characterised by rationality and control with the result that 'dominant masculinities have learned a disavowal of bodies, sexualities, and emotional lives that are expelled as elements of an "animal nature" that needs to be controlled' (Seidler, 2007:9). In this sense, despite its apparent association with strength and aggression, the male body is seen to function and to achieve on an 'instrumental' rather than sensual or emotive level (Seidler, 2007:15). This presents a paradox, which Susan Bordo, with specific reference to the male body, has called 'the double bind of masculinity (Bordo, 1999:242). Conflicting expectations of a male body that is hard and capable of aggression but, at one and the same time, is rational and logical must surely be only problematically reconciled in the actual relationships men have with their bodies.

The problematic nature of masculine embodiment and the male body is evident in recent research on topics as diverse as the bodily extremes and great risks of male bodybuilding (Monaghan, 2001), the windsurfing subculture (Wheaton, 2000), the bodily control, contemplation and slow paced thoughtfulness of angling (Morgan, 1993) and even youth movements which reject dangerous masculine fixations with alcohol, drugs, casual sex and physical domination of women and other men (Haenfler, 2004). However, one criticism of this emergent concern with the male body is that much of the recent interest can also be said to reify the male body as a single construct

and thereby undermine or ignore diverse variations (Stephens and Lorentzen, 2007). There is a critique that such works do not include a concern for the young male body, the disabled male body or the male bodies of other marginalised groups.

Further still, there is an apparent need to consider the male body not as a static entity but as something which, changes over time and the life course, as do men's relationship with it. It is, therefore, pertinent to consider that the relationships men have with their bodies may change greatly over time. For example, sites such as school call on boys to enact masculinity in a certain way, learning to position their bodies in a manner that projects accepted heterosexuality (Kehily, 2001) while marriage might be seen as a time when men settle down and let go of their bodies (Watson, 1998).

There is an evident need to see the male body as socially constructed and interpreted yet still a felt physicality through which emotions and feelings are experienced and with which men have an intimate and at times problematic relationship. This line is well taken in Connell's notion of 'body-reflexive practice' (Connell, 1995). Connell sees bodies as 'both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined' (Connell, 1995:62). Connell envisages bodily-reflexive practices as a circuit which links the physiological body, the emotional and physiological self and the social being. The male body is not

simply there, nor is it simply a social construct, rather, the male body is a central node to which, on which, through which and from which masculinity is felt, acted upon and experienced.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to contextualise the study of stag tourism through an engagement with the now copious literature on the study of men and masculinities. This field has been dominated by the work of Connell, whose conception of hegemonic masculinity is here, therefore, necessarily evaluated. Following on from this, the second section of the chapter has considered some of the ways in which a perceived 'crisis' in masculinity has been theorised. Based on this discussion, it is argued that what is referred to in both popular and academic discourse as a 'crisis' in fact takes in numerous changes in both the ideological and material constitution of masculinity. Based on these changes, masculinity is seen as being more flexible, for some, than in the past and leading to a contemporary situation where some men can profit from such flexibility while others fail to do so. Beyond this, the chapter has outlined how men and masculinity can be seen to relate with theories and research on male friendship, and, related to this, men and alcohol use and drunkenness. Finally, through considering how the male body and masculine embodiment have been considered, the chapter seeks to highlight the

importance of seeing masculinity not just as an abstract power relation but as a flexible social practice which is both performative and embodied.

From this, then, emerge certain questions that concern the study of stag tourism. Firstly, to what extent is the stag tourism phenomenon a product or performance of hegemonic masculinity and, further, to what extent might this be seen as a reflection of a 'crisis' in masculinity? Hence, should the actions and behaviour of stag tourists be read as a regressive response to or retreat from an apparent 'crisis', merely a recurrent manifestation of a dominant ideal or an ongoing dynamic reworking of that ideal? There is also a need to consider what role intimacy, sociability and heterosexuality play in shaping the meaning of stag tours? As these themes are interlinked with the construction of masculine identity, they are central to understanding stag tourism as an inherently gendered phenomenon. In addition, then, we might ask what does understanding the stag tourism phenomenon tell us about British masculinity and how can this be used to reflect upon the contemporary situation of British men?

This research concerns social interaction. This is based on the view, derived from engaging with the literature in both the fields of tourism studies and critical studies of men and masculinity, that tourism and tourist practice and the social construction of masculinity are both implicitly relational and social phenomenon. Neither, therefore, can be understood without first

understanding the complexity of interactions, meanings, imaginings, embodiments and performances of which they are comprised. The following chapter will therefore set out how, through ethnographic participant observation, in depth qualitative data was sought and how and on what methodological basis the research was conducted, interpreted and analysed.



## **4. Research methods and methodology**

Stag tourism is a heavily gendered and at times controversial social phenomenon, so it is unavoidable that the quest for understanding the nature and form of the phenomenon should involve seeking to interpret the various meanings which are attributed to it. Stag tourism is of sociological interest largely due to this richness of meaning and of the normative understandings which gravitate to it. Hence, we need to ask what meanings and interpretations abound for something which is seen as 'bad' by many yet still desired by those who participate and accepted widely by others. Further, given the apparent immediacy of stag tour behaviour, based around notions of fun, play, drunkenness and humour, it was, from the outset, evident that any research bent on gaining an insight into the stag tour phenomenon as it is lived and experienced would necessitate qualitative methods and an interpretative methodology. How best to capture this vitality is a topic I shall return to later in this chapter.

### **Observing the stag: Ethnography, participant observation and stag tourism**

Given the broad application of the term ethnography, it makes sense to initially clarify the usage and understanding of the term as it is utilised in this thesis. I subscribe to Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995:1) 'liberal'

interpretation of the term which 'in its most characteristic form involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:1). Ethnography involves a researcher entering into a research setting and interacting, to some extent, with individuals and groups in order to gain an in-depth insight into their lives as they are lived out from day to day. In this sense, then, 'the researcher strives to be a participant in and a witness to the lives of others' on the basis that 'a great many aspects of social life can be seen, felt and analytically articulated only in this manner' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995:3). This stance rests on the understanding that while the given research setting is of interest to the researcher, she or he is in a starting position of relative unfamiliarity. What follows, therefore, is a protracted search for meaning and understanding, the pursuit of which might call on a variety of sources. Ethnography is characterised by a diversity of sources, with the researcher one minute focusing on the intricacies of a specific conversation and the next on the minutiae of the rituals of day to day life. Given the interest in the performances of tourists within tourist settings and the role of the male body in masculine leisure practices, such observation based inquiry is seen as most suitable in the case of studying stag tourism.

Using this interpretation as a starting point, it is worth exploring further how ethnographic research, as a method and as an epistemological position, was considered suitable for the study of stag tourism in Eastern Europe. Thus, from the outset it was clear that stag tourism takes place in specific locations and at certain times and, further, that these settings are evidently bound up with the sorts of behaviour specific to stag tourists. As explored through the last two chapters, the research sought to frame stag tourism as, first, a situated tourist experience which takes place in a socially demarcated space and time and, secondly, that masculinity is itself situational, performative and embodied. There is therefore no possibility of abstracting the research participants or the meanings they attribute to their experiences from the given setting. A study of stag tourism calls for a methodological approach which 'stresses the importance of context and direct experience' and 'collecting data in natural settings' (Pole and Lampard, 2002:71). Further still, individuals often behave differently in one setting from how they would in another setting either on their own or with different people. Equally, the meanings attributed to those actions are likely to be constructed in markedly different ways. Thus, in many ways we cannot make sociological sense of an individual's actions, or the meanings they attribute to those actions, if we attempt to study them in isolation from both the physical and social setting in which those actions occur and the other individuals who populate that setting. Further, given the initial speculation that much stag tourist behaviour is situational in terms of the

escape or release from inhibitions in a setting which makes certain behaviour permissible, the topic of the research is irrevocably linked to the setting.

As an interpretative enterprise, then, ethnographic research seeks to understand and come to know better the specific workings of a given culture - here meaning a constellation of learned values and meanings - which is collectively supported by the group being studied. This might be of a 'primitive' society, an organisation, a family or social group. What remains consistent regardless of the apparent size of the research subject grouping is the ethnographic imperative to find connections and complexity, to not see social facts as stand-alone objectified entities. A virtue of an ethnographic account, then, 'does not rest on its author's ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask or a carving, but on the degree to which he is able to clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce puzzlement - what manner of men are these?' (Geertz, 1973:16). Such a comment is of particular pertinence when considering stag tourism, not least because of Geertz's chance but unproblematic use of the term 'men'. One core objective of the study was the demystification of the 'boys will be boys' attitude with which stag tourist and, more generally, much male behaviour is often met. Ethnography has the benefit of taking a social phenomenon, be it seemingly familiar or strange, and generating an understanding which is characterised by greater depth, complexity and sensitivity. Ethnographic research, therefore, is predominantly engaged with 'producing descriptions and explanations of

particular phenomenon' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:25). This search for detail and meaning, or 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) is implicit to ethnographic research.

Such in-depth, contextualised, qualitative research is suitable given the mix of meanings and interpretations involved in tourism settings and experiences (Lanfant, 1993; Phillimore and Goodson, 2004; Duijnhoven and Roessingh, 2006). For example, in her study of experiences of national identity through several English heritage tourism sites, Catherine Palmer (2005) adopts an ethnographic approach in conducting in situ, qualitative research. For Palmer, ethnographic research methods suit the 'wide, and often complex, array of social settings and interactions' tourism creates 'between the tourist and the local population, between an individual tourist and groups of other tourists and between the tourist and the environment in which he/she finds themselves' (Palmer, 2001:310). Palmer's observation is that tourism and tourist sites involve a coming together of people and specific, though varied, interaction. One concern of this research, evident from the outset, was the desire to see stag tourism as an implicitly relational phenomenon. Hence, while prominent though not exclusive focus is given to the meanings stag tourists attach to their actions and experiences, the views of others and interactions with others is never far from the concerns of the research and, indeed, essential to understanding how stag tourists perceive and interpret the meaning of their experiences.

The research setting is key, at least in part, to an understanding of stag tourism and is defined by a number of factors. First, the array of physical spaces, primarily the pubs, bars, night clubs and other leisure spaces frequented by stag groups situated largely but not exclusively in Krakow's old town centre. Secondly, in recognition that the travelling to and from the city are an integral part of the stag weekend experience, the airport, plane, train or bus that allow groups to reach Krakow were also sites of valuable observations and, indeed, my own means of reaching the city. Thirdly, the rhythms and ambiance of the city itself encircle the more specific physical research settings. While weekdays in Krakow are free of stag groups, the changing pace and atmosphere of the city centre still proved an interesting site from which to position stag tourism that takes places exclusively on weekends. Finally, in a broader and perhaps more abstract sense, the stag weekend is a distinct entity in itself which is precisely imagined and idealised.

Contemporary ethnography, in particular as undertaken here, presents boundaries to the research setting that are in many ways imprecise and fluid. As Michael Burawoy has suggested, if ethnography is to respond to 'the recomposition of time and space' implicit to the globalised world then ethnographers must 'attune themselves to the horizons and rhythms of their subjects' existence' (Burawoy, 2000:4). In this sense, qualitative researchers in the field of tourism studies are keenly aware of a more general sense that ethnographic research must approach the world in a manner more fitting

contemporary social life. From a practical point of view, then, this research places the stag tour phenomenon in a given space, the city centre of Krakow, but also recognises that it involves movement between places and a negotiation of time and space. This methodological consideration is twinned with an analytical interest in the spatial and temporal ordering of the phenomenon which is explored in greater depth in chapter six.

### **The research journey**

From the outset, it was clear that the stag tour weekend was socially constructed, and commercially marketed, as a unique and extraordinary event. The specific meanings and practice which take place in the setting, heavily influenced by the dictates of ideas of leisure, fun and play as well as masculine or manly activities and behaviour, provided a rich social setting in which to conduct sociological research which is ethnographically inspired. Indeed, from the outset it was apparent that gaining some inside account of these moments is essential to understanding what underpins stag tourism as a social phenomenon. Field work, as shall be detailed below, therefore took two forms. The participant-observation element of fieldwork provided, through direct contact and interaction with stag tour groups, a chance to engage with the moments, places and events that constitute the stag weekend. Secondly, the role of a more removed covert observer of stag behaviour in public places allowed for the production of insights from different vantage points. The link

between these two elements is important given the emphasis of the research on performative and embodied practices. Moving between participant and observer roles allowed a more nuanced understanding of the group dynamic, both from the within and from the outside.

In overcoming the difficulty of finding stag groups willing to participate in research I was presented with several options. First, I could rely on personal contacts from friends and family in order to find suitable groups for participant observation. Second, I could place adverts online or in appropriate publications asking for potential stag groups willing to participate in research. Third, there was the least desirable possibility of approaching groups in the field and, after appropriate introductions, asking to join in. However, because of the need for informed consent, it was felt that some amount of prior arrangement would be necessary, as approaching groups solely for the first time in the field could be problematic. Lastly, then, access could be found through the stag tour companies which promote and provide stag tour packages to would be groups.

As detailed in the introduction chapter, an initial survey was made of tour companies offering some form of stag tour package or service in Central and Eastern Europe. This proved a useful entry point into assessing the market for stag tour holidays and, based on company promotion material and websites, provided an insight into the services and activities offered and, importantly,



how they are presented. From this initial overview, it became apparent that companies could be positioned in two broad categories, those acting as third-party brokers who would package together a range of services and those offering packages directly inclusive of a personal guide for some parts of the trip. Of the two, the second necessarily had an actual presence on the ground in the cities they served in the form of tour guides or reps who collected groups from the airport, oversaw transfers to hotels, orientation to the destination and a varied range of day and night time activities. Such companies characteristically served one city or country, although many were under considerable expansion at the time of research. It became apparent that while both types of company might provide an access point to stag groups, it was the latter that were more involved with the groups on the ground and, generally, more actively engaged with the tourism or leisure industry of the host cities.

Focusing primarily on this type of tour company, initial contact was made with a range of companies. At this stage, selection was not limited by country or city as it was felt necessary to establish contacts with as many companies as possible, not least because it was rightly anticipated that positive responses would be few. From initial contact with seven companies seen as suitable, three responded. These companies were based in Hungary, Latvia and Poland. From the outset, this initial contact aimed mainly to establish a working relationship with the companies and gain some insight into the stag

tour business. Once contact was established a fourteen question survey was sent via email to each of the three companies addressing the companies' operations and other characteristics. One company also agreed to speak to me on the phone. Beyond the information elicited by this survey, the contact with companies allowed a dialogue to be established which, in the case of the Polish and Latvian companies, paved the way for negotiating access to groups in the field, although contact with the Hungarian company died off after the survey response.

Throughout, this period of contact with stag tour companies was of clear benefit in feeding into early ideas about research questions and what specifically made the stag tour phenomenon sociologically interesting. For example it became clear that the standard manner of marketing stag tourism in Eastern Europe drew on specific representation of Eastern European countries as in some way alien and bizarre. Further, the omnipresence of the female form on website material made it clear that stag tourism is highly sexualised and, like much tourism, invokes an array of assumptions about the potential sexual adventures such a tour might present. This, with the addition of frequent images or text relating to alcohol, sport and weaponry, presented an immediate feeling of how narrow a conception of masculine desires and pursuits the stag tour involved.

From this process, by August 2007, provisional access had been negotiated with two companies; Party Poland<sup>13</sup>, based in the Polish capital Warsaw though predominantly doing business in the southern city of Krakow, and Stag City, operating in Riga, Latvia and Tallinn, Estonia, with an office in the latter. Of the two, Stag City initially proved receptive given the enthusiasm of John, the English owner, to foster a good reputation for stag tourism in the Baltic States. However, it transpired that the ebb and flow of the stag tour market meant that John and the company swung between periods of intense activity during certain months, with many stag tour groups arriving each weekend, and much quieter down times. As a result, contact with John was episodic and it often took a month at a time to begin to negotiate plans for an initial field visit which would then, for a range of reasons of both mine and John's, prove impractical. This pattern continued into 2008 and, due to the time constraints of the doctoral programme, ultimately led to the decision that no research would be conducted through Stag City.

Meanwhile, with negotiations with Party Poland ongoing, the first field trips to Krakow were arranged for September and November of 2007. On the first of these trips, the express intention had been to make contact with the company and its tour representatives and assess the viability of gaining access to the stag groups themselves as they roamed the city. However, access proved quicker than expected and I was soon set up with a stag group for the

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<sup>13</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all companies and staff

weekend. Here, the vital gatekeeper was the Party Poland office manager Paulina who was in a unique position to consult the groups on my behalf, as she regularly commuted from Warsaw to Krakow for the busy weekends and remained in contact with stag groups from first contact through booking and arrival. An arrangement was established on this first weekend that would last for the majority of subsequent field trips. Prior to my arrival, Paulina would be able to establish some contact with the groups and raise the possibility of myself, a sociology postgraduate conducting research on stag tourism in Poland, meeting the group during the weekend. Based on this provisional consent, it was then possible for me to meet the group at a point early in the weekend to further introduce myself and clarify my research.

In terms of access, the research presented a specific problem. From the outset it was apparent that the group undertaking a stag weekend was made up largely of close friends. To access these tightly knit groups based on long-term friendships would be difficult on several grounds. Firstly, it is fair to assume that many such friendship groups hold their own cohesion or inner logic which, particularly evident with all male groups, becomes manifest in an array of shared cultural references and a shared history such as in-jokes, nicknames, anecdotes based on shared experiences and common interests. Second, as would be frequently apparent during fieldwork, such groups often either overtly or intuitively police their own borders, all the while being aware and protective of the boundaries between group members and 'outsiders'.

Thirdly, entering this close social grouping was to take place over a rather limited timeframe, a weekend, after which the group would return to the UK and, characteristically, disband to their different homes, families and workplaces.

However, despite these expectations, all of which were frequently apparent and called for ongoing access negotiation, there were a number of factors that, given the specific setting of the research undertaking, made access possible and in some cases far easier than expected. It will later be described how the stag weekend is constructed by the group as a unique and extraordinary event. Because of this many individuals were apparently overjoyed that a sociologist would want to study their group as it seemed to attest to the spontaneity and 'randomness' of the weekend's proceedings. Second, unpacking this further, many individuals, in being conscious of the negative images of stag tourists, were keen to show the 'true picture' of stag tourism. This would often involve proclamations of 'stick with us, we're the good guys' but equally often 'you got the right lads here, we'll show you how bad it'll get'. Thirdly, for all its limitations which will be explored further on in this chapter, the leisure space setting of the research meant that rapport and acceptance into the group – at least in preparatory fashion – could develop in a manner far more accelerated than in other settings where, for example, individuals might be concerned with work or family duties. While the consumption of alcohol obviously can add to openness and welcoming

disposition, the very settings within which research was undertaken lent themselves to social interaction and joviality. Nightclubs, restaurants and bars are all physically and socially constructed as settings for heightened sociability in contrast to, say, workplace settings where an aura of professionalism or distance might be maintained.

Following these initial trips, further trips to Krakow were made resulting in, between September 2007 and July 2009, seven trips totalling over ten weeks in the field. During this time, the primary method of research was split into two related tasks: on the one hand participant-observation with groups to which access was gained through Party Poland and on the other hand a more removed observation of other groups in the city. In addition to the groups with whom access was secured through Party Poland, three groups were found in the field independently of the company. Participant-observation was conducted with a total of eight groups, details of which are summarised in Appendix A. Observation of stag tourism in its various forms totalled in excess of two hundred hours over all trips. Although a precise count is difficult to produce, notes were made of all groups observed in terms of numbers. It is therefore estimated that throughout the research over one hundred separate groups and in excess of one thousand four hundred individual stag tourists were observed for the purposes of research.

A significant amount of research was based on a more removed observer role without direct contact with the groups. Equally, to an extent such observation was inevitable given the visibility of stag groups in the city, particularly during the busier autumn and summer months. It would have proved impossible to avoid stag groups in the city and fail to take in and witness some of the behaviour of other groups. Further, as mentioned above, such is a reflection of the need to balance both participant and observer elements of the study. As such, the more detached role allowed time to observe particular elements of group behaviour, for example, spatial organisation in terms of who sits where and in what numbers. Significantly, it also allowed a vantage point from which to observe the responses and reactions of locals and other tourists who, in sitting near or walking past the stag group in question, to a greater or lesser extent temporarily fall within their social-spatial-temporal sphere of influence. Notably, such observation was primarily conducted in the public spaces of Krakow's old town area, principally the Rynek Główny and adjoining streets. It was felt that as observations would not reveal specific details about the groups (for example, the names of tour shirts that might give away their identity), the risk of covert observation was minimal.

Participant observation allowed the researcher to come into direct contact with groups and participate in their actions. Interactions within the group (drinking, dancing, talking, joking and laughing) were of central interest when addressing concerns of hegemonic masculinity. Of particular importance was

the close observation of how certain behaviour or actions were defined as desirable and condoned *within* the group, even whilst such might at the very same time be seen as undesirable from *outside* of the group. The core of the research undertaking was these periods of participant-observation with the eight groups. It was at these times that the degree of involvement in the group allowed a more detailed understanding of the group dynamic and the group construction of meaning to be developed.

Adopting the role of 'novice' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) or a 'naïve stance' (Lofland, 1976) in the field is often an appropriate way to allow research participants to guide and inform the researchers developing understanding of the how's, who's and why's of the research setting. At the same time, in adopting this role the researcher can attempt to maintain an open interpretation of the setting as she or he not too readily allows preconceptions to narrow or focus their investigations. Certainly, in my own case, the novice role allowed stag group members to talk me through their interpretations of events and actions, often elaborating with a gusto that might not have been evident if I'd set myself up as expert on all things to do with stag tourism.

Beyond the interactions between members of the immediate stag group, participant-observation also allowed the interaction between the group and third parties to be observed and experienced. One specific aspect of this is



the interaction between group members and the numerous service providers who cater to their needs. It soon became apparent that although being manifestly group orientated much stag behaviour was aimed at, or at least reliant upon, the presence of an audience. Further, as outlined in previous literature, performativity and embodiment are central aspects to developing a qualitative understanding of masculinity. Methodologically, this concurs with Spradley and Mann's observations of conducting research in the masculinised space of an American cocktail bar. They suggest that 'the patterns of spatial arrangement such as table locations, human movement, crowding, backstage areas, and restricted places were easy to observe but also easy to take for granted' (Spradley and Mann, 1975:102). Thus, the pages of my field diary were soon littered with sketches of physical distribution and characteristics, clothes or lack of them and fancy dress costumes.

In the case of stag tour guides, a small group of interviews was also conducted. This was seen as a necessary way to develop rapport with tour guides and also to gain a valuable insight into both their role as mediators in stag tourism and their own personal viewpoints in relation to stag behaviour. Additionally, these interviews allowed for a degree of triangulation where guides could be asked to explain typical behaviour or comment on the behaviour of groups and the observations of the researcher. Such interviews were also viewed as a suitable way to ensure the inclusion of the voices of female service providers in the study that otherwise prioritises those of the

male participants. On this basis, four interviews were conducted with tour guides Magda, Anna and Marta and also Paulina, the Party Poland office manager and herself a former guide.

Attempts were also made during the research process to secure follow up interviews, initially conceived as after the event focus groups, with participant stag tour groups. However, this proved difficult. While in most cases some form of contact was retained following the weekend (usually via email and, in two cases, phone conversations), the very nature of the stag tour seemed to restrict the possibility of conducting such interviews. This occurs for many reasons. For example, as shall be explored during analysis, the stag weekend is a bounded event in terms of space and time; once it has ended, attention moves to preparations for the wedding day and the men involved return to their work and, for some, family lives. In this sense the coherent collectivity that is the stag tour quickly dissipates following the event. Notable, many stag groups were comprised of multiple friendship groups common to the stag but, often, drawn from different areas of the stag's life. For example, old school or home town friends might live some distance from the stag and his current work or social club friends. Thus, attempts to conduct follow up interviews and focus groups, in particular, were met with considerable, and ultimately prohibitive, logistical problems.

## **Problems and challenges**

As described above, contact was made with the groups through the office manager and then through the tour guides of the stag tour company. The imperative remained, though, to ensure that the moment and manner of introduction to the group was carefully chosen and that informed consent could be ensured. Although drinking amongst groups would often start early, before the flight over from the UK, there was to a notable extent a suitable moment when the night out would begin. Meeting the group at the same time as or not long after the tour guide proved useful in both establishing legitimacy in the eyes of the group and being less intrusive for the guides as they went about their work. At this point the stag groups are generally relatively sober and unchaotic, in terms of alcohol consumption and group behaviour.

From the outset the expectation was that entering the group would be difficult. On several occasions however, this appeared easier than expected as disparate groups of school, university, work friends and family members naturally left gaps which the groups various sub-groups tried to fill and bond within. Allowing everyone to get to know the other members of the group seemed a natural task for many groups and this, offered the space for my own initial introductions and attempts to build rapport. This brought out several issues in terms of impression management and dress. Wearing a shirt and passably smart leather shoes or at least an expected degree of style or

conformity to dominant male high street fashions seemed a prerequisite for entry into some clubs. Being tall and relatively well built, and able to adopt a suitably masculine comportment aided my acceptance within the groups, as did getting a shorter haircut and giving some thought to how I presented myself within the groups.

A significant aspect of this impression management was how I, both as a researcher and a participant in the group, would handle alcohol. Thus, it was clear from the first episode of participation that group involvement necessitated alcohol consumption and that, even whilst occupying the role of researcher, I would not be able to avoid drinking some alcohol. Being seen to drink, seen to handle drink and actively enjoy and commit to drinking were therefore also an element of the impression management essential to this participant-observation project. This led to its own problems of conducting research into leisure activities in a night-time economy setting. At times I had to adapt to a near nocturnal lifestyle very quickly. The consumption of alcohol and disruption of lifestyle meant that periods of field work were invariably followed by necessary rest and recuperation on returning to the UK.

It soon became evident that the consumption of alcohol was a prerequisite of entry into the group and a mediating factor in much stag group behaviour. There was therefore an evident need to maintain alcohol as a central element in observations. Noting the pace, type and manner of drinking soon became a

ubiquitous and monotonous element of note taking, because consumption of alcohol is undoubtedly central to group bonding and, further, as shall be explored during analysis, marks the pace and timing of the weekend in highs and lows. Similarly, humour and joking are essential elements to group bonding and are, thus, essential to understand stag tour experiences. As with the apparent chaotic order brought about by heavy alcohol consumption, it was felt there was a danger that the spontaneity and irreverence of group humour and repartee might be lost within the wider concerns of the study and, more specifically, the stylistic constraints of the academic medium. How to write drunkenness, and portray the significance of heightened moments of joy and playfulness, was an ever present concern. In light of this, the following chapter represents an initial and largely descriptive attempt to illuminate the sights and sounds of the stag weekend.

Another quirk of the research setting was that in-situ note taking became near impossible. Holding and using a notepad at such times would have appeared highly conspicuous and, in relation to much of stag behaviour which is perceived to be transgressive, risked raising suspicions of the group and others. However, it was possible to retire from the research setting at regular intervals to write up field notes in nearby cafes or bars, in the hostel bedroom, or even in nightclub toilets while the group's festivities carried on outside. Additionally, the copious email correspondences kept with my partner during my field trips also, on reflection, proved to be a valuable source of insight into

my emotive and embodied experience of the research process. While many researchers use field diaries for such a purpose, not everyone can contrive such candid intimacy with themselves through writing alone. Thus, considerable amount of note taking was done from memory as soon after the event as possible. However, interestingly, in several instances, research participants actually commented on the lack of note taking I undertook, assuming that a 'proper' researcher ought to be surrounded with the paraphernalia of his or her trade. My lack of notebooks, tape recorders and even cameras was occasionally seen, at times only jokingly so, to undermine my legitimacy as a researcher.

Expanding on this, it also seems that conducting social research on tourism and leisure (activities implicitly associated with fun and enjoyment) raised a degree of suspicion or disbelief. Thus, reactions of sarcasm ('oh that's tough for you!'), disbelief ('you're kidding me!') or suspicion ('you're not a Daily Express journalist are you?") were common on first introducing myself as a researcher interested in understanding the stag tourism phenomenon. Karen O'Reilly had noted similar responses from participants and colleagues in relation to her ethnographic work on British expatriates on Spain's Costa del Sol, observing that a frequent response would be 'oh, that's a good excuse for a year in the sun' (O'Reilly, 2000). Here, the perceived triviality of tourism as 'research' was seen, by some, to be a convenient excuse to take a subsidised holiday. This theme will be expanded on in the following section.

## **‘You mean all you do is hang around a bunch of lads drinking?’: The perils and pleasures of researching men and masculinity**

Caroline Ramazanoglu asserts that ‘empirical research is necessary for the deconstruction of masculinity and the exploration of what is meant by contradictions in the construction of masculinity’ (Ramazanoglu, 1992:348). Likewise, Les Back has observed that ‘it is not a matter of trying to ‘overcome’ the effects which the gender of the researcher has on a particular field situation, but to explore how the participant observer’s gender identity becomes intertwined with the process of knowing’ (Back, 1993:218). However, within this process of research and deconstruction, there are some specific issues, raised throughout this project, which are particularly salient and worth exploring further.

Researching tourism, tourists or tourist experiences clearly raises some interesting issues relating to the relationship between researcher, researched and their mutual involvement in the research process. However, it was the research focus on men and masculinities rather than tourism and tourist practice or experience which presented the most specific problems and challenges. The subject of men, masculinity, male behaviour and what it means and involves to be a man all raise specific concerns for the research process. In this and the following section, I will expand upon the implications of some of these themes in relation to doing research with men and, more

specifically, doing research with groups of young men as they partake in and experience the leisure spaces of the night-time economy.

As noted above, I am, on the face of it, well positioned to carry out research given that I'm a white, heterosexual male, of a similar or slightly younger age to my participants (25 at the time of the research), tall and confident and English. In particular regarding age it was apparent that my own relative youth perhaps allowed me to participate in a way that an older, more established, academic might not have been able to. A similar observation was made by Simon Winlow in relation to research on young men and criminality in North-East England that he conducted during his early twenties (Winlow, 2001). However, as a teenager and into my twenties, I have never felt particularly in tune with collective masculine orientations and behaviour. Indeed, part of my intellectual interest in masculinity as a topic of research, perhaps, stems from my earlier inability to fathom the displays of strutting male bravado that pervaded school. From the outset, then, I felt the importance or, indeed, inevitability of reflection in that addressing the topics of young men and their masculinity through qualitative research should, inescapably, lead to my own contemplation, as a young man, on my own masculinity. On this note, Victor Seidler has stressed the importance of personal reflection and reflexive practices. He states that:

'As researchers, men and women engaged in critical work in relation to men and masculinities must explore their personal investment in the



issues they are working on. Sometimes this involves writing about their own individual experiences in autobiographical terms. This can be a way of becoming aware of what they are bringing into their research' (Seidler, 2006:57).

In light of this, then, my own feelings and reflections on my own gendered identity are a significant element of the research process.

Beyond this, the intellectual pursuits and academic pretensions of conducting doctoral research might easily be seen as unmanly and, in the leisure setting of Krakow's night-time economy and the stag tour itself, doubly so as not being within the bounded limits of leisure and play. Further still, as McKeganey and Bloor (1991:204) have observed, research addressing issues of homosociality can often raise 'fears of misinterpretation and misidentification'. Thus, the male researcher is in fact subject to the same restrictions and rules concerning much homosocial interaction as those he studies. For example, asking questions relating to another man's emotions or 'feelings' might be read as markedly feminine or unmanly, while raising the topic of male friendships and intimacy might lead male participants to defensive and emotionally caged response.

From the outset, there was a concern that any rapport developed between male researcher and male participants would inevitably lean towards a certain

restricted empathy. There was some worry then that the shared gender of researcher and researched might lead too readily to empathy or understanding being taken for granted. For example, as female and male researchers respectively, Christine Williams and Joel Heikes (1993) found when comparing their interviews on a shared subject, male nurses in America, that interviewees were likely to be more direct and forceful when talking to a male rather than a female interviewer. Furthermore, they found that 'people used the interviewer's gender as a cue to gauge the interviewer's orientations and opinions, and they developed their responses within that gendered context' (Williams and Heikes, 1993:288). Similarly, Patricia Martin observes in relation to her research on women's experiences of men's mobilisation of masculinity in the work place that 'a man in my place might have elicited different stories from women and/or interpreted them differently' (Martin, 2001:590). Based on the premises that some form of empathy and, indeed, sympathy is unavoidable during ethnographic or participant-observation research, and that much of the behaviour of stag tourists is clearly controversial or at least calls forth a normative response, it seems to place the researcher in a precarious position. Further, while the dangers for a female researcher working with male participants is clear (e.g. Lee, 1997), the issues for a male researcher are different but still worthy of consideration.

There was also the problem of how as a researcher to react to frequent sexist behaviour. At times this was manifest in a seemingly banal low level repertoire

of jokes, curses and banter which never strayed too far from a well developed playground/sports club background noise. Victor Seidler also raises the concern that 'if men are keen to answer questions in ways that show them in a good light, and are concerned not to show their 'bad' emotions or 'ugly' dreams, then they will carefully regulate their responses (Seidler, 2006:55). Although these examples are raised in relation to interviews, the use of participant-observation also raises the problem of reactivity, that participants might manage or mitigate their behaviour on the basis of assumptions about the researcher's interests and sentiments or, indeed, merely their very presence itself. This raises an interesting issue in relation to researching stag tour behaviour, namely, is it appropriate, desirable or prudent to refrain from critical pronouncements on men's behaviour in order to ensure and maintain access and so as to limit the effects of reactivity or, alternatively, is the researcher required to either intervene or voice any criticisms that might arise?

Steven Schacht in his study involving participant-observation, both on and off field, with a college rugby team in the United States (1997) expressed a similar dilemma. He explores the paradox that 'researchers often stumble upon ethnographic settings that are rich in theoretical potential but are inherently grounded in participants' views that directly oppose their own' (Schacht, 1997:341). Sexist attitudes and behaviour, therefore, may be antithetical to the researcher's own dispositions yet integrally bound to what it

is that makes that particular setting or group sociologically interesting. Schacht's response was one of impression management where his own contrary outlook was not disclosed and was carefully hidden. He realised that while not actively encouraging and condoning sexist behaviour was possible, to openly contest such would inescapably compromise his access to the group and, therefore, his ongoing research. Further still, Schacht, as a researcher, appeared to develop even a form of internal regulation of disposition in order to '*temporarily* become a sylph – a being without a soul' (Schacht, 1997:345 Original emphasis). While this might appear hyperbolic to say the least, the point made is an interesting one, in that the ethnographic researcher is often presented with situations where his or her personal values clash with those of research participants and, therefore, some sort of response is called for.

In a wider sense also, writing up an ethnographic account of the behaviour and actions of groups who frequently display sexist, culturally insensitive or offensive behaviour presents the task of balancing explanation and justification. Much of the observed conduct of stag tourists can clearly be seen as irresponsible, disruptive and at times simply idiotic. It is unsurprising, then, that the process of researching such individuals and the reasons for and meanings ascribed to such actions should call forth some form of moral reaction. In recognition of this, Lofland and Lofland reflected that, in their view, their goal as researchers should be 'neither moral judgement nor immediate

reform, but *understanding*' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995:44, original emphasis). More specifically, it has been a frequent criticism of many tourism scholars that their work is used to attack the tastes and general poor conduct of those 'bad' tourists who are studied with scarcely concealed derision. With this in mind I considered it important to refrain from communicating any judgement but to always consider the subjective meanings behind actions. Wider still there is a concern that, as Fine and Weis (1996) have suggested, researchers might even go as far as to theorise some voices but not others as an act of narrative affirmative action, downplaying or theorizing away the voices of white men where they would let other voices remain unframed.

When talking with many locals about stag tourism, I was often called on to express disdain for negative aspects such as lewd drunken behaviour and social impropriety towards Krakow residents. Once again, I felt the pressure to produce an analytically nuanced opinion, one which took account of the subjectivity of participants, yet at the same time was in danger of appearing to justify such behaviour. There is an apparent paradox in trying to uncover motivation and meaning without justifying such behaviour as, relatively, understandable and acceptable. My motivation for studying the phenomenon was to uncover the details and complexities of stag tourist motivation, behaviour and experience in the face of the narrow jaundiced and wholly negative media and popular image, so it was vitally important that, as a

researcher, I stood outside of the phenomenon while remaining in contact with it.

The question raised by friends, family and colleagues throughout the course of the study was simply, 'do you like them?'. Indeed, throughout the process of research I was subject to changing personal opinions; at times 'liking' my participants and enjoying their company whilst, at other times, finding their behaviour lamentable and having to hold back my own feelings of animosity towards them. How, then, to foster understanding and rapport without, in some ways, also imbibing the culture of the group and, in some cases, partaking in the very same actions and behaviour that others, and importantly even yourself prior to the research undertaking, would forthrightly malign? This is not to suggest that, for example, researchers of racism cannot avoid becoming racists themselves through the course of their research (far from it!). Rather it reflects the matrix of understanding, empathy, insight and justification which are part and parcel of the research process. Understanding does not mean normative acceptance.

Another evident concern when researching aspects of men and masculinity is that, for many men, reflection on their own gendered conduct and sense of self is either not desirable, not allowed by their situation or, indeed, not possible due to their own lack of self-reflexivity. As Robinson notes, there is an attendant concern, when studying men and men's lives that they may or

may not possess the ability to reflect on their own masculinity and, hence, the taken-for-granted nature of masculinity can act as a reflexive barrier (Robinson, 2008). Certainly, in the case of research participants, the ability or desire to consider the experience of stag tour participation in relation to their own masculine identity was varied, with some proving to be readily reflexive. Also, it has frequently been observed that through the very process of enquiry a 'threat can arise from questions that might expose the masculine self as illusory' (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001:91). While it was found during this research that much of the behaviour of stag groups is interpreted and spoken of by the groups themselves as, for example, either highly spontaneous and humorous or extreme and raucous, much of that behaviour was in fact largely predictable and at times banal. Would, then, the exposure of this be seen as an act of betrayal? Would revealing the 'false' nature of the men's conceptions of themselves as lads-about-town be desirable? If so, how might this be negotiated both in the setting and retrospectively through the written ethnographic output?

### **'Drunk and disorderly and lovin' it!': Capturing alcohol, humour and the heightened experiences of stag tourists and the embodied practice of research**

In this section I will reflect on the need that became evident during my research to pay due regard to the immediacy or, indeed, vitality of stag experience and to capture the sensory and bodily qualities of the experience.

The choice of in situ, qualitative and, above all, participatory research methods led inevitably to my own experiences of conducting research and taking part in the late nights, some of the heavy drinking and the general excitement of the group. On reflection, these elements of the research journey were clearly essential components of how my own insight into the stag experience was constructed and, indeed, in itself an important tool for knowledge production.

Ben Malbon, in his study of London clubbers, saw the need to immerse himself in the in situ practices of the night club culture while seeking to discover 'how is clubbing constituted through the practices, imaginations and emotions of the clubbers themselves?' (Malbon, 1999:3). Further, Malbon book-ended his participant-observation with interviews before and after the nights out allowing time to develop rapport before hand and space to explore meanings and subjectivities after the event (Malbon, 1999). Interestingly, however, Sarah Thornton in her study of clubbing in London, sought a similar level of immersion through participation but noted the tensions of trying to retain an analytical frame of mind whilst also letting go to the experience of the event and the act of clubbing (Thornton, 1995). What is conveyed in both Malbon's and Thornton's works, especially in the various vignettes used to illuminate the experience of the night out clubbing, is the extent to which the researcher's body can be seen as a tool within the research process. It is inconceivable that Malbon could have undertaken the research he did and



produce the book, and insights, he did without submitting his own body to the experience of clubbing.

From this, we can see why Amanda Coffey has sought to highlight the fact that 'fieldwork is necessarily an embodied activity' and, further, 'how social settings provide physical and cultural spaces for their performance and management of the body' (Coffey, 1999:59). Likewise, Judith Oakley (2007) has written convincingly on the importance of bodily knowledge in fieldwork practice. Here, the physicality of participation allows the researcher to generate knowledge through their own bodily practice and to literally learn through the senses. In the case of my own research, the late nights, hangovers and fatigue all added to my developing sense of the stag tour experience as both conducted and felt through the male body.

Hazel Andrews, in her research on British expatriates and tourists in Mallorca, similarly reflected on the embodied practices of research, noting that she 'was not afforded the time to be an apprentice and learn the workings of the new habitus in which [she] found herself' (Andrews, 2005:250). The importance of bodies in tourist practice does therefore not exempt the researcher who seeks to immerse themselves in the tourist environment from bodily and sensory participation. For Andrews, the bodily practices and sensory experiences of the setting, such as the smelling of vomit, are part of establishing an embodied sense of place as part of the research process. Equally, the

enforced participation in highly gendered practices of pub crawls and heavy drinking, with the associated bodily sensations and stresses, were a testing yet vital aspect of gaining an in-depth insight into the subject (Andrews, 2006).

Indeed, given that much tourist practice is marked by an 'articulating of corporeality' in terms of bodily practices of singing, dancing, eating and drinking (Selänniemi, 2003:26), it is logical that drawing these embodied aspects of the research process within the remit of sociological analysis should add significantly to understandings of the stag tourism phenomenon. David Bell's (2008) work on alcotourism, linking tourist experience with alcohol consumptive practices, also stresses this need for research subjects to be approached in a manner which allows the researcher to understand and to 'get at' the sensory experience of participants. He states that 'in terms of alcotourism research, there is a need to consider the 'feel' and experience of drinking on holiday, for a phenomenology of alcotourism' (Bell, 2008:301).

Studying stag tourism involved attempting to understand and convey a sense of heightened excitement and playfulness brought about by situation and circumstances and perceived through an array of sensory, emotive and bodily experiences. The collective consumption of alcohol, the liminal spaces of the night-time economy leisure settings and the often finely honed shared humour and joking of group members all represent specific details integral to understanding the stag tour experience. For all these examples there is an

attached concern that their special qualities, that which makes them of interest and integral to the study, will be lost through the research process of observation, analysis and presentation. Thus, Geertz noted the danger that research can 'bleach human behaviour of the very properties that interest us before we begin to examine it' (Geertz, 1973:17).

There is, of course, the observation that 'theory, writing, and ethnography are inseparable material practices' (Denzin, 1997:ii). In this sense, the co-dependencies of the processes of undertaking research, building or relating findings to sociologically coherent theory, and writing an account in a manner to convey as fully as possible the depth of these understandings is common to all ethnographic research. However, Deborah Britzman's (1995) observations offer an interesting insight into how the emergence of poststructuralism has significantly problematised ethnographic authority. She asserts that 'the tradition of ethnographic authority derived from participant observation becomes a site of doubt rather than a confirmation of what exists prior to representation' and, from this, highlights the need to recognise that ones' 'telling is partial and governed by the discourse of my time and place' (Britzman, 1995:232).

In this light, while attempting to convey the sense of excitement and joviality of the setting there was an additional need to retain an awareness that the research process and, in particular, the production of written accounts of

social phenomenon is inescapably a task of representation. An example of this is that there were times during the writing of the thesis where the use of language came to the fore, primarily what to do with the rich use of slang and idioms of the groups. For example, while 'intoxicated' remains physiological, 'pissed' is inescapably social in its implication. Being 'pissed' or being 'on the piss' both bring to mind an array of vivid characteristics and, although possibly dismissed as literary devices, better capture the experience and interpretation of the social world of participants than more neutral words or phrases might. Likewise, the use of 'lads' or 'blokes' reflects the general self definition of the research participants who would be unlikely to refer to themselves, as men. 'Birds', however, is derogatory and the decision was made to refrain from using the term apart from in direct quotation from field notes. Therefore, it was important to balance a desire to capture the vivid or 'thick description' without straying too far into the realms of complicity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has given an overview of the methods used during this research and the methodological choices and decisions that underpin their use. It has also sought to describe the research process in terms of gaining access to the field, establishing rapport with the groups and deriving sociological insight from both observation and participation. The specific problems and issues that this process raised include, as discussed here, the taking of notes,

establishing and maintaining a viable role in the groups both as researcher and participant and the consumption of alcohol as an inescapable part of involvement in the setting. Relating this specifically to the concerns of the study, then, I have also reflected on the way in which the research enterprise can be seen as antithetical to tourist or leisure activities. Therefore, conducting research can often be at odds with the pervading ethos of the stag tour phenomenon, of manly fun and frivolity amongst 'mates', and, at least, illustrates the need to reflect on the research process. In addition the study of and reflection upon men and masculinity may engender tensions for men themselves whether as participant or researcher.

It has also been argued that the research process is embodied and sensory. As such, conducting research on stag tourism involved the consumption of alcohol, feelings of drunkenness, disorientation and fatigue which, it will be argued in chapter seven, are an essential element of the stag experience. Added to this, the experience of conducting research on the topic of men and masculinities invariably involves some reflection on the part of the researcher on their own gendered identity. Thus, there was an apparent need to manage, be aware of and reflect upon my own feelings, both as a researcher and as an individual, in relation to the at times sexist or insensitive behaviour of tour groups.

Lastly, the chapter has highlighted the need to be aware of how the rich and meaningful complexities of the social research subject are represented. In relation to the study of stag tourism, therefore, there was a desire to retain some of the immediacy, spontaneity and playfulness of participant groups' behaviour. For this reason, the following chapter, the first which directly addresses data generated from field work, will provide a descriptive impression of events from which analysis will proceed in the following three chapters.

## **5. Framing the big weekend: episodes from fieldwork**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an insight into the stag tourism phenomenon through description of some of the scenes observed during the course of fieldwork, and so begin to build a coherent picture of what it is that happens during such times. The purpose is to provide a descriptive frame from which the analysis of the following three chapters will build. The episodes recounted here have been chosen to highlight different times, different field trips and both observer and participant-observer vantage points with different groups. The intention is to provide not just descriptive data of a typical stag weekend in Krakow, but an impressionistic 'feel' for the moments, utterance, events, action, interactions and behaviour which epitomise the stag weekend. The chronology within this chapter takes the reader on a journey which parallels that made by the stag groups: from home, arriving in the city, their first night out in the bars and clubs, recovering during the day, building up again for the night ahead and, inevitably, the dénouement of returning home. While much of what happens is in many ways predictable, the precise meanings and significance of what it is that happens necessitates a fuller or thicker description upon which to build analysis in the succeeding three chapters. The scenes recounted here are therefore illustrative vignettes upon which to develop the themes and understanding of the wider analysis of the stag phenomenon.

## Getting there, getting started

“Ten o’clock on a Friday morning in June and a group of four men in their late twenties drop their bags at a café in Luton airport. One of them carries a larger bag which he proceeds to unzip and rummage through, pulling out flat plastic packages and distributing them to the others. At this moment three other men of similar age trot across the tiled airport floor and, with a cheer, bear hug the man still half crouched over the bag with packages in either hand. The packages each contain an Elvis Presley fancy dress costume consisting of an all in one jump suit with wide collars and a plastic quif wig.

“One lad, tall and well built, returns from the café bar with a pint of lager in one hand and three packs of Walkers crisps in the other. As he drops the packets on the table and takes a long pull on the beer the others chip in with ‘bloody hell, thought you was meant to be in training’ and ‘yeah, look at the so-called athlete! You’re an advert, your body is a temple right?!’. The first lad’s response to this is to take a second even longer pull on the beer and tear open the first bag of cheese and onion. ‘Mate, this weekend is going to be so wrong, get the beers in boys, come on...it’s started! Yes!’.



“The two tables are by now filling up with empty and half drunk pint glasses and crisp packets. The group are at the centre of an oval of seating adjacent to the café-bar. A middle age couple struggle past the group whose bodies and bags are blocking most of the entrance to the café’s seating area. One lad stoops to shove a bag out the way and apologises to the couple. As the group slip on their matching Elvis costumes – one of the larger lads joking ‘one size fits all, fuck it, I’m going to split this down the arse’ – many passers-by slow to look and one group of Italian girls in their late teens take a picture on a camera phone as those members of the group who are not too preoccupied with drinking or pulling on their Elvis wigs and sunglasses grin back. As the group proceed to second and third beers, the frequency and volume of laughter increase as several more friends arrive.”

*(Observations from field work, Friday June 20<sup>th</sup> 2008)*

This scene is a fairly ‘typical’ start to a stag weekend in which all the constituent parts are present. A group of male friends in their late twenties or early twenties meet at one of Britain’s airports serviced by budget airline carriers such as EasyJet, RyanAir or Sky Europe. Although early in the day, alcohol is already being consumed and is a central feature of the group’s activity. The group is clearly having fun and, one would assume from their talk and anticipation of the coming weekend, will continue to have fun. By the time this group of nine finishes up their beers and heads to the departure gate,

they have been joined by four more friends who were delayed in traffic on their way to the airport. Their group, now numbering thirteen, is towards the lower end of the range of stag group sizes observed; the smallest observed being six and the largest being in excess of thirty. Once on board the plane, the good humour, joking and drinking typically continues. The following example from another group illustrates this.

“As the stewardesses conduct the safety demonstration prior to take off there is a fair amount of nudging and winking between the three lads, members of a stag tour from the English Midlands, followed by attempts to catch the attention of the rest of their group who are scattered throughout the rear section of the plane. James, is in his early thirties and wearing a leather jacket. He soon removes it to try and fashion a pillow on which to sleep against the window; he is the only member of the group sitting alone. ‘Look Jimmy’s on his own...Oi, Jimmy no friends’, one of the others shouts from the back of the plane.

“Although the group is scattered throughout the rear half of the plane, towards the end of the flight a substantial group have gathered at the back row where three of the lads are sitting watching a video playing on a laptop computer one of them pulls from a bag. The four standing in the aisle laugh as a promotional video for a stag tour company plays. Watching the footage of go-carting and pistol shooting, they joke ‘oh

no, we're going to die, we'll be too pissed to hold the gun straight' and 'the stag has to lose, everyone has to try and run him off the road'. Several of the group have beers in their hands and the three who are seated are drinking double vodkas with orange juice 'for breakfast'.

"A while later and the laptop has been put away and the others return to their seats leaving the three seated across the back row. As the plane comes in to land, the three lads are visibly excited and have been planning what to do first in the city. 'Simple', one of them suggests, 'beer, beer, steak, beer, vodka, beer', before breaking into a grin. They discuss further as the plane lands (raising cheers from some of the group sitting further up the plane). They will be collected from the airport by a tour rep, who will then take them to their hotel and show them the city."

*(Observations from field work, Friday May 30<sup>th</sup> 2008)*

The task of catching the flight to Poland is clearly part of the build up to the weekend and the fun the group crave. Again, alcohol is present and the group is busy talking and joking throughout the two and a quarter hour flight to Krakow. Fairly typically, the lads at the back did not know much regarding the logistics of the trip. Typically the best man had organised things with the company over the preceding weeks building up to the trip whilst keeping some

things secret from the Stag and others to maximise anticipation. The group quickly (and characteristically) begins talking up their intentions for the weekend in terms of anticipating high degrees of drunken fun.

This group, like many others, will be met at the airport by a representative from the tour company through which they have arranged their weekend package. Although many groups do make their own plans independently of any travel agency, the added virtues of local knowledge and the ease with which the group will be couriered the eleven kilometres into the city centre of Krakow and their designated hotel means that significant numbers of groups pay the tour companies for at least airport transfer and accommodation. Other options include a range of day and night time activities: including, go-carting, paintball and pistol shooting in the day, and bar crawls, 'medieval feast' meals and entry to strip clubs at night. However, for the majority of groups who arrive at some time on the Friday of their weekend, the priority will be getting directly into the city and to begin or, in most cases, continue drinking.

### **Hitting the town**

“Having been eight hours in transit, the group finally reach their accommodation for the weekend, a three star hotel near the city’s main train station, and drop their bags. The group are split between twin rooms with some of them in a family room with one double and two

single beds. As the sun is out, several of the group change into shorts, flip-flops and shades.

“Anna, the tour company guide who met them from the airport and dropped them at the hotel, gave them fairly unequivocal directions to get into the centre of town and, after a short ten minute walk, the lads walk out onto the Rynek Główny market square amongst pigeons, tourists, locals, horse drawn carriages and various street musicians and performers.

“Walking proudly ahead as the group snakes through the crowds, Ben, the best man, spots two empty tables and rushes over to claim them. Plunging himself into the large wicker chair, he throws his arms wide to draw in the circle of chairs and the expanse of the square. ‘Fucking brilliant! Look at this!’. Grinning from ear to ear as the others take their seats he’s swivelling in his chair to catch the eye of a waitress. One of three waitresses working the tables comes over and asks for the groups’ order in English. ‘You want beers? Large?’, seeming to easily anticipate the group’s drinking tastes.

“By the time the beers arrive the group is in full praise of the city, comments including ‘look at this place! Amazing’ and ‘look at all these

bars, we'll have to try loads yeah?' another adds in response, 'fuck, we'll just end up stuck here all weekend, why leave? This is sweet'. From time to time as women pass one of the group nods towards them and grins to the others, adding 'like, every bird here under 30 is hot'."

*(Observations from field work, Friday June 27<sup>th</sup> 2008)*

The market square, or Rynek Główny, provides a focus for much of the weekend's activities, the pedestrianised streets which radiate away from it, home to the majority of clubs and bars frequented by stag groups. Visually, the square is undeniably impressive and, on a sunny afternoon such as the one recounted here, there are few places in the city better to sit and watch the world pass by. Here the group warm up for the coming weekend, getting their first tastes of Polish beer and taking in the environment from the comfort of the tabled café area. From their reaction, it is clear the group is satisfied with how Polish women have met their expectations and much of the talk turns to the night ahead.

As will be explored further in the following chapter, the Rynek Główny acts as a convenient location from which groups can quickly orientate themselves. This is also a meeting place for groups to rendezvous with their tour company representative who will later meet them before walking them to the first of many bars on the pub crawl in which she will act as guide and instigator.

Earlier on, during the minibus ride into the city from the airport, the guide will have asked the group for their preferences for night clubs and bars, asking what music they like, if they like to dance and if they want to party hard. Even so, many of the tour companies appear to return time and again with different groups to the same bars and clubs, knowing only too well that the cheap and strong beers and vodkas on offer will satisfy the majority of groups. Asking such questions, priming the group, also enables the guide to judge the group's character and predict any bad behaviour as well as identifying potential troublemakers.

“As we enter the club, typical of one of Krakow's many bars and clubs descending numerous stairs into vaulted cellar, Anna, the guide for the evening pub crawl, hurries ahead. As we reach the bottom of the stairs she is talking to a member of staff who is pointing out some seating in the smaller of two rooms where a DJ plays loud house music from an elevated platform overlooking a relatively small and nearly empty dance floor. Most of the group take seats as Smith, the kitty holder for the night, goes up to the bar and starts to order. Anna helps him order some shots of vodka along with a dozen beers.

“A while later and some of the group are taking it in turns to chat to three Irish girls who are in Krakow on a weekend city break and stand with long vodka mixers near the dance floor. Walking away from this

and back to the table where most of the group are sitting drinking, one says 'I didn't come out here to be chatting to some Irish bird, get enough of them back home'. Meanwhile, four Polish girls have been ushered over from the adjacent room by Anna who seems to know them. They sit in between the lads and start talking as a tray of bright blue shots arrives. The girls all take one, encouraging the lads next to them to do likewise.

"Talking to three of the lads, one is concerned that a group of Polish men have been looking at them threateningly. Eyeing a large Polish guy standing in the arched entrance to the room watching the dance floor, he says 'don't like the look of that big fucker, looks fucking nuts', and then adds to me specifically, 'since we got here, there's been a few places we think we're going to get our heads kicked in for sure, think they want to protect their women or something'.

"Phil, the Stag is very tall and dancing in the middle of the dance floor. He unbuttons the top 3 buttons on his brown striped shirt and reveals a mass of chest hair, running his fingers across his chest in mock seduction to a chorus of ironic wolf whistles from the lads. Most of the group, apart from the ones still talking to the girls, are up on their feet with their hands in the air. The group close in on the stag, hugging and hitting him. Half bemused, half amused, but still dancing vaguely, he's



presented with one of the blue shots and washes it back. Scot, in his mid-twenties, sidles up to me and in his thick London accent bellows 'look at all this, look at the boys LOVING IT, got the beers in, hit the dance floor, see the girls, amazing mate, incredible'."

*(Observations from field work, Friday November 15<sup>th</sup> 2007)*

The passage above from field notes during participant-observation captures a stag group early in a typical first night out in Krakow. Overseen by a young female guide from the stag tour company they are in the middle of a guided bar crawl which will take them to a total of five bars and two nightclubs. Anna, the guide, oversees the group getting seats, ordering drinks and, interestingly, bringing over some female company. For some of the group who were unimpressed by the presence of the Irish girls, their imperative for the weekend is clearly focused on chasing local girls. Yet, fairly typically of stag experiences, the group is mainly focused on being together and collectively enjoying the weekend. As Scot attests, the building enjoyment of the weekend focuses primarily on the lads being together, being drunk and 'loving it'.

Characteristically, and perhaps unlike Britain, many of Krakow's bars resemble a hybrid between the typical pub focus of sitting, drinking and talking and the more dance and music orientated atmosphere of the nightclub. Being to an extent hidden underground in the vaulted cellars beneath the streets

surrounding the Rynek Główny, many such bars and clubs would be difficult to find without prior knowledge or, at least, detailed directions. Certainly, as many group members benefiting from the tour guide's direction attest, the lads would be unlikely to have found such places on their own. A successful guide (from the point of view of the participants) is reactive to the moods and demands of the group, all the time monitoring the group to ensure all are enjoying themselves, none are left out and that any complaints (for instance that there were no girls in the bar on their arrival) are quickly dealt with. Typical of such guided pub crawls, before long Anna moves the group on to another bar a short walk down the road. During the walk she counts heads to make sure the group are all together and talks excitedly about how much the lads will like the next bar. She also deals with one of the group's sexual advances via an off the cuff put down.

### **'No rest for the wicked': the weekend continues**

“At last! Come on you guys, you're like so late!’ Magda, the tour guide, calls across the street as Kev and Wilson emerge from the hotel lobby still looking bleary eyed and carrying black coffee in paper cups. ‘Where are the rest? It's *eleven* already and the bus driver is waiting’. As she speaks the rest of the group round the corner, some are still finishing the ends of their MacDonald's breakfasts. ‘Didn't fancy that hotel stuff’ one of them mutters as they shuffle into the minibus which

starts up and swings a sharp U turn to begin the drive out to the suburb where the go-cart track is.

“On the way there is considerable chat about the previous night. ‘All I remember is that fucking club with the cages’ and ‘I came back to the hotel at half four and found him hanging about trying to chat up that girl at reception’. After a fifteen minute drive, the bus pulls up at a warehouse at the back of several similar grey functional buildings and as the van pulls up its more than obvious that some of the lads are still struggling with their hangovers. Wilson, ensconced on the back row of seats, shouts out ‘well you lot have a good time, Magda, I’m staying here for a sleep, yeah?’. Laughing, two of the others make a move to pull him out but he throws his hands up in mock protest and drags himself from the bus, with the characteristic sign of a hangover, looking carefully so as not to move his head too fast.

“After a brief talk-through by the track owner, the lads are into their carts and onto the track and racing laps, four racers at a time. A screen displays lap times and as the carts speed round the track, the others cheer a running commentary. Rob, the stag is in the lead but with Craig close behind him. As Rob approaches a tight corner he over-steers, bumping the cart with a jolt into the wall of piled tyres which marks the course boundary. At this there’s a huge cheer from the others and

laughter as the remaining drivers finish their final lap before being signalled into the pit lane.

“Jumping up from the cart, Rob whips his helmet off and dashes for the exit, brushing past the crowd of lads. ‘You going to puke?!’ one asks with barely concealed joy, ‘Dave, get the fucking camera!’. More than half the group rush outside where Rob is crouched near a fence, coughing the last of his vomit to the ground. Wiping his chin on his sleeve, Rob gasps ‘Ah fuck, let’s have some of that water’ and Wilson hands him a bottle of mineral water bought from the Hotel vending machine. After a brief break, Rob is back on the track and narrowly losing out in the final race to Kev. The winner is presented with a bottle of flavoured Polish vodka by Magda and most of the group manage to knock back shots with much coughing.”

*(Observations from field work, Saturday September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007)*

For Rob and his group, carrying on the day after the previous nights celebrations is not easy. In this case, without the insistence from Magda the tour guide it is unlikely they would have left the hotel before mid-afternoon. It was in anticipation of the prearranged activity that the group went in search of breakfast to ‘sort themselves out’. Rob’s vomiting at the track is a source of great amusement and, as the best man later suggests, would definitely be

relived in the wedding speeches. Being the stag, Rob was also the target of much competition and more than a little malicious practice on the track as his friends tried their best to beat and, better still, embarrass him. Common to many of the activities arranged by the stag tour company, alcohol is again involved and, despite their fragile states, the winner is given a prize of a bottle of vodka which the entire group are encouraged and agree to drink immediately.

The centrality of the consumption of alcohol was, with all groups, beyond question. Although some groups were observed to be particularly heavy drinking (in terms of quantity, frequency and duration), the drinking patterns of all stag groups was notable. The pervasive way in which alcohol becomes the requisite addition to all other activities, such as catching the flight, go-carting or eating an evening meal, signals drinking and drunkenness as key themes of the research and integral, on all levels, to the stag experience.

“Mid afternoon on a Saturday in April, it’s warm enough for the group to be sitting outside, occupying three tables at the front of a café on the West side of the Rynek. A small group of Polish boys are kicking a ball around the square fairly aimlessly, sending pigeons flying and at one point nearly hitting an elderly tourist as she poses for a picture. This brings laughter from the stag group and one of them heaves himself to his feet and with a beer in his hand staggers towards the kids, ‘come

on then, pass it here'. He struggles to control the boy's pass and then hits a looping shot over the boys who run to catch up with the ball; the other watching stags laugh loudly and a few get up to join in. 'Sorry lads, come on and again...pass it here'.

"The remaining eight at the tables are watching and laughing when a waitress approaches and signals to the group for more beers. One of the guys responds in perhaps unnecessarily loud and truncated English, '5 beers...big'. He signals the height of a large glass and then, with a smile, raises his hands further and further apart to mimic an enormous glass, 'big yeah, biggest, cheers...thanks'. The waitress, who is in her forties and covering another dozen tables besides those of the group, nods in recognition but raises an eyebrow at the guy's exaggerated gestures. The attention of the seated members of the group drifts back to the impromptu football game which has now taken on a life of its own with several of the lads removing their shirts to use as goal post markers. One of the Polish boys flicks the ball with some skill into the makeshift goal and runs to his friends in celebration before holding his hand up to clap a high-five. The two members of the stag group involved in the kick around shake their heads in mock disappointment at being embarrassed by the boy, who can't be older than twelve, but then launch into an exaggerate series of handshakes

and backslaps with the Polish boys before rejoining the rest of the group at the table.”

*(Observations from field work, Saturday April 12<sup>th</sup> 2008)*

In this episode, taken from field notes made during observation, the Rynek Główny town square is the focus of this group’s activity. Whereas the earlier episode shows a group in the process of building up excitement, having just arrived, the pace here is somewhat slower as the men sit around and drink to pass the time. The spontaneous game of football that emerges with the Polish children is light-hearted, keeping the others drinking at the tables amused.

The scene above marks a shift in field work where a big difference was noted between the colder winter months and warmer summer months with, notably, the warmer weather allowing for more time to be spent by the groups outside, usually on the Rynek Główny and surrounding streets. In this respect, the change in weather signals a change in the use of the city as leisure space and creates greater potential for conflicting uses of the city’s streets and squares. As noted by several stag tour guides, during the winter months the guide’s main role is getting the groups safely into clubs while, during the summer months with groups tending to linger outside more, particularly in the busy market square and its side streets, more work is done to maintain the group’s behaviour in the more visible public spaces.

“It’s Saturday evening around eight o’clock and a meal has been arranged by the tour company as part of the group’s package. The venue is a basement restaurant and Austrian styled beer hall with specialty beers brewed on site and sold in vast quantities to both locals and tourists. The group of twelve has been seated at a table in the restaurant adjoining the more cavernous and less salubrious beer hall for around an hour; they are eating generous servings of steaks and potatoes, rich Polish soups, and dumplings. ‘Not a vegetable in sight’, one jokes as he mops up the last of a sizable pork steak. The table is now littered with food plates, glasses and dominated by two large five litre beer towers, plastic tubes over a metre and a half high with a tap at the base from which to pour off the beer into individual glasses.

“Several lads at my end are recounting travelling stories from a previous trip together following finishing university, by train through Ukraine to Moscow and aboard the trans-Siberian train to Beijing. In the Ukrainian town of Lviv, one recalls, the group narrowly avoided a confrontation with a group of youths outside a McDonalds. ‘Crazy fucking Slavs’, he adds, ‘he was just watching us and holding this knife like this’. He mimics the youth’s confrontational posture and aggressive grimace as the other two who were on the trip laugh loudly. One of them, the smallest of the three by some way, throws a mock right hook at his chin shouting, ‘I could have had him, I was going to do him in but



you pussies ran off'. He breaks into laughter again as the others protest against his supposed bravado.

“From time to time when the group’s cheering gets too loud the waiter, a Polish man of around 40, comes over and signals with hands open and flapping downwards to quieten down. He also gestures toward the only other occupied table in this section of the restaurant where a Polish family are eating in silence; they exchange a thankful look with the waiter.

“With the food finished, a drinking contest is proposed to see off the last of the beer towers. Craig, the best man, stands up and shouts down the table, ‘come on, let’s get these done, two teams now, us lot verses you posh twats’. Drinking directly from the towers and tilting their heads to get underneath the tap, several lads end up with considerable amounts of beer spilling out their mouths and across their shirts. After a few minutes of this the contest ends with both teams finishing their tower almost exactly at the same time, but with considerable animated debate about who won and who cheated. ‘Look at the state of him’ one adds, pointing at another whose shirt and hair are damp with beer and then, with a laugh, ‘sort yourself out boy, gotta’ look sharp for the ladies’.”

*(Observations from field work, Saturday September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007)*

Whilst drinking, there is a considerable amount of talk on a variety of topics, some trivial and some more personal. One commonality, however, of much talk amongst different stag groups is the shared experience of friends. In this instance one end of the table recount shared travel stories while the others, at this time, were busy talking through the 'old days' of under age drinking and teenage house parties. Throughout the weekend there are moments like this which acted as a reminder of how closely knit the stag groups often were and for how many years they had been friends. Despite this, the group could at any point break into playful competition with copious and often foul name-calling.

The group dynamic interestingly often integrates several sub-groups of friendship into the larger group with the stag being the common link. University friends, work friends, school or hometown friends and other family members all come together during the stag weekend and, with varying degrees of success, enact a unified group. In the episode above, the group act up to the division between members of the group who had public and private educations. This moment of competition ends with the entire group laughing and clearly ready to tackle the first bar of the night. The second night of the weekend follows much the same pattern as the first, as the group move from bar to bar and then on to nightclubs.

## **'The last man standing...and still drinking too!'**

“Late Sunday morning sees Ian passed out on the sofa in the common room of a hostel on the third floor of one of the buildings just off the market square. He’s woken by the hostel cleaner who has the tact to bang the coffee table with her broom, the noise waking him. Slowly and, by the look of it, painfully, he sits up and looks around the room blinking and lets out a long sigh that turns into a drawn out ‘fuuuuuuck’ towards the end. Picking up his shoes, wallet and phone from the floor where they were dropped unceremoniously the night before, he shuffles through the kitchen and out onto the hostel balcony. Blinking in the sunlight, he pulls a squashed packet of cigarettes from his back pocket.

“A shorter lad puts his head through the window onto the balcony, ‘hey, have you seen Alex? He’s a fucking state’. At this the two jump up and run into the corridor where Alex is emerging from the toilets and groaning ‘lend us one of those Imodium<sup>14</sup>, come on, I’m fucking pissing out my arse’. Chris, a big man who’s just turned thirty, makes a show of taking vodka out to the balcony to drink, spinning the cap off and waving it under Alex’s nose as he passes. Alex gags, shouting ‘fuck off

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<sup>14</sup> A common brand of anti-diuretic medication.

you cunt, not having that, wanker'. Chris laughs at Alex's reaction, adding, 'look at me, last man standing...and still drinking too!'

"The group will fly into Glasgow on a late flight, one of them explains, so will spend the day killing time at the hostel. One of the group brings out playing cards and they continue to drink and smoke for an hour or two before leaving the hostel to get 'one last feed'."

*(Observations from field work, Sunday June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008)*

This group's presence at the hostel is fairly uncommon, as the manager particularly discourages large group bookings from Britain. Interestingly, the group's time in Krakow had been characterised by difficulties in getting into nightclubs, usually due to their level of drunkenness on entry. Nevertheless, the previous night they managed to spend most of the night in one of the city's larger clubs and carried on drinking on their return to the hostel.

The consecutive nights of heavy drinking, smoking and junk food have taken their toll as the group are tired, sick and smelly and seem ready to return home. Nonetheless, the chief way of seeing out their last few hours in the city is to finish off a bottle of vodka. Through the accumulative impact of excessive alcohol consumption and general fatigue, the bodily reactions of the stag participants become a central element of the stag tour experience. Further,

the visibility of such bodily functions becomes signalled as significant through frequent profanity.

“It’s early afternoon Sunday and after a McDonald’s breakfast I walk around the town centre with three of the group from the night before. Two have coffees and one carries a litre juice carton bought from a corner shop next to his hotel. All wear sunglasses and look hung-over. ‘All we’ve seen is fucking bars, its about time we actually saw some stuff’, with another adding, ‘yeah, we best take back some pictures that aren’t just you two with your arses out in some dirty fucking club’.

“Walking onto the square one of them stops and looking up says ‘fuck there’s a cathedral, is there?!’. The others laugh and remind him they’ve been past it several times but ‘you were too pissed to remember mate, actually isn’t it right here where you dropped your kebab’. ‘Knob head’ jokes the other and, after posing for a few photos in front of the cathedral, they walk on, browsing market stalls looking for souvenirs for girlfriends.

“Another lad walks towards them looking dazed. All three break into a chorus of ‘where the fuck have you been?!’ and ‘Here he is, he is alive after all’. The new lad then recounts how he got lost on the way back

from the club. 'Fucking no idea where I was, wherever I walked I ended up back at that pizza place on the corner...in the end just got another slice of pizza and taxi back, got in about half 6...slept till just now, woke up and people had left already'. Reunited, the four of them carry on towards the castle and, after more pictures, stop for a couple of beers on the square before returning to the hotel to pack for home."

*(Observations from field work, Sunday May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008)*

While it seems few stag tourists have the active intention of not seeing anything of the city, the stresses of the night before and the recovery required to resume drinking again the following day often mean many stag tourists will spend much of the day in the hotel asleep or sitting around in cafes. In this crowded itinerary of drinking and recovery, little if any time is reserved for traditional sightseeing. In the above episode, the friend joining them seems to regret missing out on part of the day with his friends but clearly revels in recounting his late night. By this point in the weekend, beer drinking has become an almost reflex reaction and the lads stop for a few last beers aware that they will be picked up by minibus from the hotel for the airport in only a few hours time.

## **Battered and beaten: returning home**

“Its nearing midnight on a Sunday and its raining at Stansted airport as a stag group of fifteen finally arrive back in Britain after their weekend in Krakow. Without exception, the group all looks tired and rundown. ‘Oh god I look like fucking shit’ one of them chips in coming out of the airport toilet. ‘You still dropping ‘em?’ asks another. ‘Yeah, messy mate, really messy, I’m totally ruined’. Having retrieved their cases from the luggage carrousel, they slowly make their way out of the building to the taxi pickup lane outside where one of them lights a cigar, saying ‘last one, one for the road’.

“One lad is still wearing a tour t-shirt bearing a picture of a semi-naked stag and at least half the group are carrying bags from the airport shop containing cartons of cigarettes and bottles of vodka, as gifts for friends or, as one comments, ‘fuck it, just drink the lot and remind me of the mental weekend in Poland’. ‘Will your missus be waiting up?’ one of the group asks the other who responds with a resounding ‘naahhh’. ‘Mine will be, reckon she’ll want to know all the details...as if’. The group waits around outside now as some of them need to collect their car which will be brought up from the car park by a valet. The others will all catch a late train into central London. This is the moment the group separates and goes home to recover. Most of them, the ones

without the foresight to book time off for recovery, will be, in their own words, 'back at work tomorrow, for fucks sake'."

*(Observations from field work, Sunday November 17<sup>th</sup> 2007)*

Following two nights of drinking in Krakow this group returns home on a Sunday evening flight. As with flights to Krakow on a Friday, flights returning from the Polish city on a Sunday usually, depending on the time of year, carry at least one stag group. Those with energy to spare still carry on with running jokes and the repetitive banter of the weekend while, for others, their minds are clearly starting to turn to thoughts of getting home and recovering from the weekend. Typically, the stag weekend will have been planned to fall several weeks ahead of the day of the wedding. For the stag, returning home will signal the need to recover from the weekend and commence preparation for the 'big day'.

Commonly, however, the stag tour experience will be extended beyond the weekend itself as pictures and memories (or lack of memories) are circulated via email and key events are told and retold with increasing elaboration and detail. Such must, however, fall within the oft-quoted principle of 'what happens on tour, stays on tour'.



## **Conclusion**

The episodes described here give an insight into the highs and lows of the stag tour. The events depicted here are largely typical of groups observed during fieldwork in Krakow. Upon arrival, the group begin to orientate themselves to the city, explore the old town centre and its numerous bars and cafés, with or without the help of a guide, and move on to nightclubs as the evening progresses and levels of intoxication rise. The next day is spent recovering, participating in prearranged activities such as go-carting, and building up to the second night of drinking and bar hopping. It is clear that the space of Krakow city centre provides an arena for stag tourism, so it is important to consider in what ways stag behaviour is encouraged, facilitated or allowed by the physical environment of the city. This will be considered further in the next chapter. Further, the rise and falls and highs and lows as excitement builds and as intoxication heightens and takes its toll physically highlight the importance of considering how the weekend is arranged temporally. The concept of 'pace' will, therefore, also be developed in the following chapter.

In all the episodes recounted here, the group's interactions with each other are based around humour, excitement and friendship, although the latter is at times manifest in an array of name-calling and, particularly where the stag is concerned, pleasure in teasing or embarrassing others. How members of stag

groups play up to and act out a particular kind of boisterous drunken masculinity is an additional theme which the following analysis must address. Additionally, in several episodes we have seen how the bodies of stag tourists are battered and defeated and made sick and smelly. The role of the body in stag experience is, therefore, another interesting topic for analysis.

Finally, to return to the central concern with masculinity, the episodes in this chapter begin to highlight how much stag behaviour is characteristically masculine and how, within this, there is scope for sociological analysis of how the men observed in the study can be seen to act out or live up to certain notions of suitably masculine behaviour.

## 6. Locating the Stag in time and space

Using episodes from field observations, the previous chapter illustrated how, as a tourist practice, the stag tour is geared towards notions of fun and excitement, release and the excesses of collective drinking and drunkenness. As groups make their way to Krakow, arrive in the city, make their way from hotels to bars and on to clubs, stag tourism unavoidably involves an engagement with the physical environment of the city. A full understanding of how both place and space are socially constructed as suitable for stag tourism is essential for a true understanding of the phenomenon. 'Place' refers to how a location, in this case Poland and the Polish city of Krakow, becomes represented as a certain kind of place that is given embodied meanings. Shield's notion of 'place-myth' is useful in understanding how Krakow, Poland and Eastern Europe are represented and imagined and given specific meanings (Shields, 1991). 'Space' is social as well as physical; the streets of a city as much as any other location are open to interpretation and negotiation, in some ways allowing and in others inhibiting specific social action. This thesis draws on the work of Tim Edensor, and others, who see tourist settings as sites of conflicting spatial practice (Edensor, 1998; Edensor, 2000a; Preston-Whyte, R. 2001; Mordue, 2005).

This chapter will explore these notions by considering how Krakow is perceived to be and experienced as both a *place* and *space* suitable for the

masculine interests of stag tourists. As such, Krakow represents a time and space socially marked as suitable for the hyper-masculine behaviour stag tourism represents. The chapter will, therefore, also consider the 'pace' of the stag weekend and how individuals and groups work collectively to achieve and sustain a heightened level of excitement. The second half of this chapter will develop and expand on this theme to understand how the stag tour is crafted as a unique event. Using the concept of 'liminality', this chapter will also look at how stag tourists are placed in a state of in-betweenness where the unsteady balance between control and restraint can give way to acts of transgressive behaviour. A central dynamic of the weekend is that this behaviour is seen as desirable and as an essential element of stag tourism for such transgression attests to the sense of the weekend as something extraordinary. However, the chapter will close with a discussion of the banality of stag tourism which the group must, at certain times, work collectively to overcome or redefine.

### ***6.1 Place, Space and Pace***

From its inception, this project was about tourist movement and tourist space. An initial impetus was, therefore, to understand why so many individuals, albeit as tightly knit groups, travel to the other side of Europe to pursue and perform a certain form of leisure endorsed as ideal by the codes of hegemonic masculinity and perpetuated by the ascendancy, in recent years, of 'lad'

culture. From this, and the insight from relevant tourism studies literature drawn upon in chapter two, it is certain that space and place are central to understanding tourist phenomena and, in this case, these important concepts provide a suitable starting point for analysis.

### **Imagining Krakow as stag tourism destination**

Eastern Europe is assumed, often based on very little but blind faith in stag tour company promotional material, to be a veritable promised land where beer is cheap, strong and plentiful and the nightclubs are full of attractive and available beautiful women. The circulation of this stag myth, through word of mouth, media sensationalism and company promotions, during the past decade has told of alcohol at rock bottom prices and women easily charmed by the well-dressed and affluent foreign men. This process of imagining a place so fitting for stag tourist behaviour is pervasive in the advertising that abounds the internet from stag tour companies. Promotion of stag tour weekends by the companies is perhaps the example *par excellence* of how stag tourism is defined within remarkably narrow brackets of a perceived hyper-masculinity. If hegemonic masculinity prioritises the pursuit of women, the consumption of alcohol and of being a man amongst men, then the stag destination cities such as Krakow have come to represent such aspects of masculinity in both a heightened and a narrowed way. Krakow, as an imagined place, is therefore a place where hegemonic masculinity prevails.

Normally planned several months in advance, the stag weekend will be eagerly anticipated. This anticipation of the weekend, then, focuses on the collective imagining of Krakow as a place for the fulfilment of these ambitions. Electronic communication through group emails and social networking sites seemed, amongst the eight groups studied, a popular way to manage the logistic planning of the weekend in terms of booking and arranging payments, and also to build anticipation and feelings of excitement. Talking up the 'beer and birds' side of the weekend, ahead of the event itself, also acts to collectively define the ethos of the weekend, clearly setting out and legitimising much of the chaotic behaviour to follow. So, at the point of arrival in the city, the group definition of the weekend, in terms of interests and expected behaviour, is already well primed amongst group members. Anticipation is telling in terms of how it illuminates the motivation of the group. The stag groups normally suggest girls and alcohol as motivation for travelling to Krakow. For example James had heard accounts from Polish colleagues in his IT firm in London recommending the city for its nightlife and, in James' own words, 'the quality of the birds' (Saturday May 31<sup>st</sup> 2008, field notes). Further still, in quite a few cases, individuals, if not whole groups, had been on previous stag tour weekends in other cities and, certainly, knew what to expect.

So, we see that building up to the event and prior to arrival, much of the time taken to travel to the city – in the airport, on the plane and on transfer buses – is spent in collectively defining the remit of the weekend. An array of joking, teasing and play-acting at the airport are ‘just the start of things’, a foretaste of how much fun the group are going to have; drinking on the plane is seen as ‘the first of many’ or ‘starting as you mean to go on’. Those individuals drinking juice or coffee rather than beer at the airport or on the plane are not just seen to be not meeting the challenge of heavy drinking, but also falling short of the collective expectation of the group. Such behaviour is mocked ferociously by other members of the group. This pervasive and reoccurring definition of expected behaviour is closely linked to the temporal and spatial significance of the stag weekend, for being on the plane is the start of the weekend and, having left home, the start of the group’s time away. From the outset, the weekend is marked as distinct from home and work and from wives and girlfriends.

This largely concurs with the early work in the field of tourism literature that asserted tourism to be defined in relation to its polar others, namely the spheres of ‘home’ and ‘work’, the familiarity of which is the counterpoint by which tourist experience is defined and measured (Boorstin, 1961: MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990). Compared to ‘home’, Krakow is an exotic or unknown ‘away’. More than just a site away from home in which to enact masculine behaviour, it is also an imagined and anticipated place – ‘the wild

East' – onto which certain hopes and desires can be projected. Anna, a tour guide for one of the Krakow tour companies, explained that the men commonly arrive full of questions. Eager to test their expectations, they ask her about the price of beer, which clubs are good, how late they can drink and where they can go to eat. Such questions serve to ease or, perhaps, extenuate the transition from imagined place to actual place.

Closely linked to these imagined expectations of Krakow were some evident negative perceptions of Poland. In one example (Friday June 20<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes), as a flight from Luton comes in to land members of a group commented on the farm land and houses that surround the airport as being like 'a bloody third world country'. In another example (Saturday May 31<sup>st</sup> 2008, field notes), a stag was dressed in pink hot pants and a tight vest and had a set of pink fluffy angel wings on his back as he walked through the crowded market square at the head of a line of friends. The two friends walking just behind him called out 'you buy my friend, sexy man for you' and 'nice, how much? Special price for sexy time' in the caricature accent of comedian Sacha-Baron Cohen's character Borat. In this and other moments we see a playing out of the meanings inscribed on the place by the stag tourists – Eastern Europe as strange, perhaps backwards, but full of excitement and possibility – in how the city of Krakow as it is actually experienced.



Many participants seemed to share a strong image of Eastern Europe and of Poland, as in some way pertinently different from the rest of Europe and, in particular, Britain. As observed by Trauer and Ryan (2005) and Jack and Phipps (2005), tourist spaces often involve the coming together of different groups and, with this, a degree of cultural interaction or, at least, a meeting point of intercultural assumptions and understandings. One interesting element of this was that Krakow was seen to be in some way strange or eccentric. The strangeness of the place is narrated and a high significance placed on 'random' or unusual events that both attest to the uniqueness of the trip as an experience and the place as setting for that experience. An example of this occurred with several different groups. A restaurant and beer hall near the Wawel castle uses a person in a giant beer mug costume to promote their special offers while walking around the square handing out leaflets and carrying a sign advertising 'free beer'. When confronted with this, it is common for stag groups to pose for photos or attempt to tackle or hug the glass. While a central aspect of this is performative and will be considered in the following chapter, it is clear that the positioning of the costumed person is similar to the stag tourists in that he is highly visible and, through the abnormality of costume, marked as unusual and distinct. Further, there is an interesting tension between the apparent construction of such events as unique and unusual by individual groups and the similarity and, indeed, predictability of group behaviour as a whole.

## **Krakow as hyper-masculine space**

So, how does this anticipation of Krakow as an imagined place relate to Krakow as a space, both physical and social, which is experienced by stag tourists in actuality? As a city, Krakow is remarkably suited to stag tourism, and tourism in general. The aesthetics of the old town area are matched by the practicality of pedestrianised streets, well appointed with cafés, restaurants and bars. During warmer months, drinking establishments spill out onto the streets and squares in designated seating areas and parasol tables. During the cold winter months the innumerable cellar bars that lie beneath the city's buildings are hideaways from the winter cold. Additionally, when compared to the night time economy of British cities which is characterised by a degree of commercialisation and homogeneity (Hobbs et al, 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002; Hollands, 2002), Krakow's offers a considerable array of alternatives in the form of diverse bars, pubs, clubs and cafes. For this reason many participants contrasted the city favourably with British high streets dominated by chain super pubs and generic night clubs.

Although Krakow could never live up to their exaggerated expectations, it is, perhaps, at once striking how suitable the city is to the needs and wants of stag tourists. Not only are there numerous bars and clubs, and a suitable array of budget hotels, but these are all located centrally amongst the streets of the old town with very little navigation or use of public transport necessary. For the frequently drunk and disorientated stag tourist, the ability to stumble

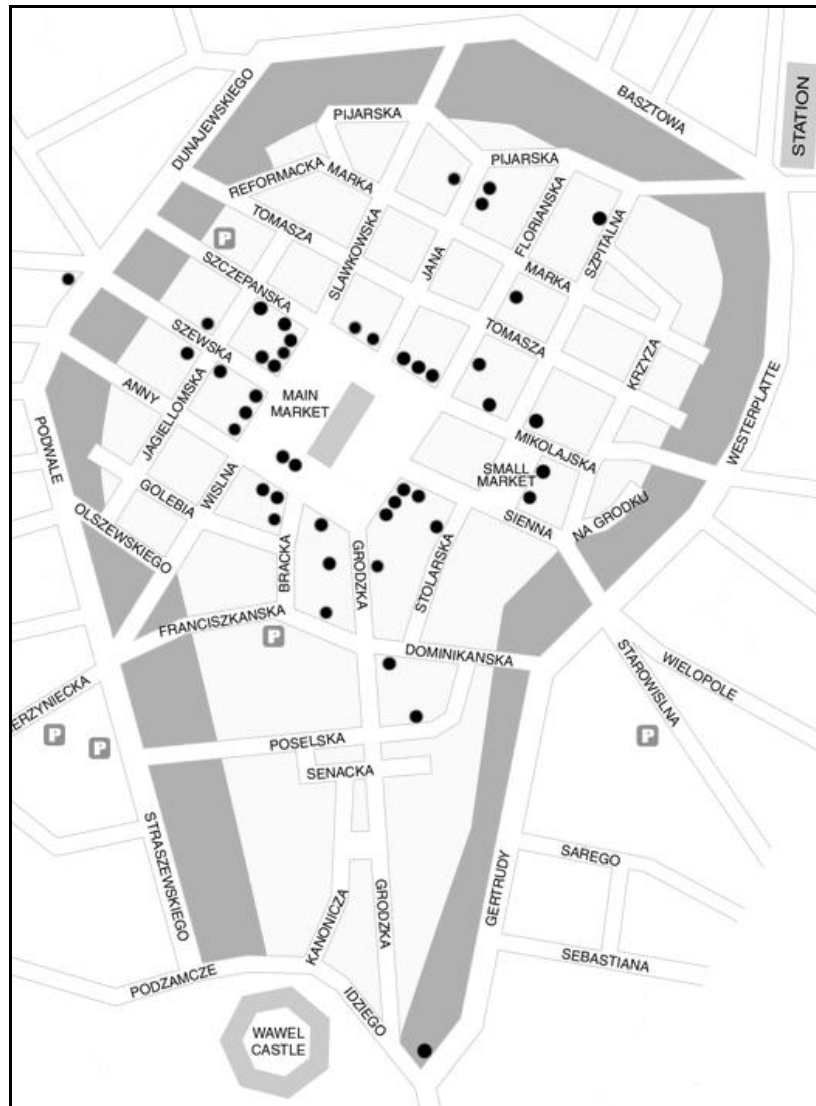
from hotel to pub to club and back again clearly resonate with the ethos of fun, not having to be overly concerned with transport or navigation. During periods of participant observation it was common for stag group members to talk to me about how much they like the city. For example, Phil said: 'been here like four hours now but fucking love it, we just got in and went straight to the pubs, just stumbled along to the next one like' (Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2007, field notes). In this case, Phil was clearly content with the layout of the city permitting a very carefree attitude where the group could walk from hotel to bar to club and onwards. The space of Krakow is also easily accessed when one considers the impact of budget air travel which allows flights from numerous regional UK airports to the newly expanded Krakow airport. Numerous stag tourists referred to it being as easy for them to get from, for example, Liverpool, to Krakow as it would to London.

Although the city is laid out felicitously, the crowds of people make it difficult for visitors, particularly when drunk, to negotiate the spaces of the city. As such, tour guide Anna reflected during an interview that, in 'Krakow you have everything around the main square, but it's always difficult and the biggest problem in the world is to walk across the main square. Once I was walking one hour from the hotel over here to the CK Brower. I thought they would die!'. Here, she refers to the difficulty in her task of managing a large group of men in getting them across the Rynek Główny to the next bar. Going on to recount how by the time she had half the group together and walking in the

right direction the other half would have stopped to pull rude poses for photographs in front of a statue, Anna also shows a perceptive awareness that the public spaces of the market square and streets allow space and time for the group's drunken behaviour.

Considering the spatial layout, as shown in figure 6.1, and character of the city, the Rynek Główny, or old town market square, is the focal point of much stag tour group behaviour. The cafes and bars that line the four sides of the square are common locations for stag groups to drink and eat. The streets leading away from the square, particularly Szewska to the West and Florianska to the North, also draw numbers of stag groups to their bars and cellar clubs. Moving further out still, there are several key streets around the Irish Mbasz, a sizable Irish theme pub popular with stag groups, and the smaller Nova Square. Beyond the city centre, are the city's two most prominent strip clubs, Gold Club and Club 66, are located four kilometres southwest and nearly five kilometres north of the old town square respectively. Characteristically, Krakow's bars and clubs, where much of the stag groups' time is spent, are never in purpose built buildings and are comparatively small in relation to clubs in other cities; Warsaw's clubs, for example, and the super clubs of British cities are all much larger. The majority of clubs are small two or three room affairs, laid out in a way that the presence of a stag group is obvious to everyone in the establishment.

Figure 6.1 Map of Krakow Old Town showing location of notable cafés, bars and clubs



Evidently, both from observations and directly questioning the stag tour group members, this helps to facilitate the stag tour experience as groups stay together and, through their domination of space, often become the centre of

attention. However, this also led to evident problems when a club was seen as too small, too quiet or boring and, hence, not in keeping with the high levels of expectation.

The main square is also frequently the site of an array of events such as concerts on national holidays, marches and markets. In one example (Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2008, field notes), a group of 12 stag tourists, all in fancy dress costumes decided to follow behind a military parade as it marched around the square. Traipsing behind dressed as, amongst other things, Mini Mouse and Sumo wrestlers, they looked surreal and got considerable attention – a mixture of amusement and anger – from the watching crowds. The market square was originally designed as a meeting place of people and still serves that function, albeit with leisure replacing commerce and trade as the defining ethos. For tourists and locals alike, the Rynek Główny is frequently the place to meet people, watch people, enjoy food or drinks and to simply stroll around. In some sense, then, the Rynek Główny is analogous to a stage or playground, a place where stag tourists can perform their errant masculinity.

Stressing this side of the spatial aspects of Krakow as a stag destination brings together the collective and the physical experience of the city. Following Tim Edensor (1998; 2002a) and Robert Preston-Whyte (2001), tourist space is experienced and occupied differently by different tourists. It is clear from the start that stag tour groups 'use' the space they occupy in

different ways. There is a clear sense that they dominate the space more than other tourists both in the numerical size of the groups and their tendency to be loud and visible. They visually and audibly dominate the space they occupy. Given the size of stag tour groups, it is out of practicality as much as anything that establishments are chosen on the basis of accommodating the members of the group. For example, the Irish Mbasz pub stretches over three floors with numerous seating areas, tables and large screens showing British and Irish football and Rugby. To link this to some of the initial episodes observed in chapter five, the group waiting at the airport *fill* several tables with glasses and the floor with their bags (Friday June 20<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes), the group on the plane stand in the aisle drinking and joking (Friday May 30<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes), and, arriving on the market square, at once claim a prominent position from where they can survey the crowds and, in particular, the passing women (Friday June 27<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes). In these examples there is a sense of spatial propriety being overstepped – being too loud, too large and too visible – the groups occupy spaces in ways that others do not and that others might consider inappropriate.

Much of this use of space is dictated by the collective definition of the weekend. It is not simply a matter of finding somewhere to drink, but finding a space where the entire group can drink and where the group can watch and be watched. Although large, the middle of the Rynek Główny square is dominated by the Cloth Hall and, hence, most traffic and pedestrian

movement is channelled around the edge of the square in the area immediately in front of the cafés and tabled areas. As a result, these seats are prized locations for the activity of people watching. This space is already highly stratified, with certain bars with the better locations charging more to stag tourist and locals alike. Beyond this though, there is an apparent desire to be the centre of attention. As noted above, the tendency for clubs and bars to be relatively small means that any given stag group will invariably dominate or at least physically fill much of the space they occupy. There is an uneasy tension, then, in the uses of space by stag groups. Many bars and clubs deny groups access either as a matter of course or, on a case-by-case basis, depending on the state and order of the group. For example, the waitress working the tables in front of one café bar on the south-western corner of the market square turned away a group of ten, some of whom were in fancy dress and with the stag dressed as a leprechaun (Saturday April 12<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes). While the group move on, joking about all the bars having 'no leprechaun' policies, the waitress exchanges a knowing nod with her colleague waiting the adjacent tables.

Given the above, it is apparent that many stag tour groups are limited to certain spaces within the city. Interestingly, the former Jewish Quarter of Kazimierz, although only twenty minutes on foot from the old town centre, easily accessible by taxi, bus or tram and a hive of increasing numbers of bars and clubs, is rarely visited by stag groups. There is a feeling that



Kazimierz is a welcome alternative for locals and others who wish to escape the areas of the old town dominated by stag groups at certain times. For example, Agnieszka, a tourist information office worker born and raised in Krakow, said that 'I do not see them much and if people want I can tell them where to find them or not to find them, because they go to the same places, always always the same places' (Monday April 14<sup>th</sup>, field notes from personal conversation). From this, she made clear that although, in their given space, the groups are clearly dominant, their spatial experience of the city is limited enough to enable anyone who desires to easily avoid them. The fact that all the groups end up in very similar places can be attributed to both the narrow, somewhat predictable, nature of the stag weekend and also the fact that of the hundreds of bars, only a minority are 'found' by the stag tour groups and many in fact deny them entrance. What we see then is a limitation to the spaces occupied by stag tour groups. Nevertheless the spaces they do occupy tend to be central to the old town and are often highly visible. Again, the social ordering of the spatial practices of tourism, as expressed by the likes of Edensor (1998; 2002a) becomes salient. As Tom Mordue (2005) notes, the control of space in tourist settings is, in some senses, an inevitable consequence of differences in tourist practice and the various interpretations of the physical space that abound in such settings. MacCannell's Goffmanesque notion of front and back stage (MacCannell, 1973; MacCannell, 1976) offers a way of viewing the stag groups and the local

community. Further, there are clearly leisure spaces in Krakow that are primarily tourist focused and those that are orientated towards locals only.

Far from being a freely negotiated space, the city is riddled with contradictions and attempts to control the use of space in a way that is not open to negotiation by stag groups. Unsurprisingly, this, coupled with wider concerns about stag tourists' behaviour, indicates that while stag tourists and the stag tour industry might imagine the place and space of Krakow in one way, many others are involved in alternative constructions. The work of police and night club staff in restricting stag tourist behaviour and its impact on the city are, therefore, part of the ongoing negotiation of how the city as a space and place is defined. In relation to developing patterns of sociability in metropolitan areas, John Montgomery has observed that manners and behaviour in public are tied to how a place is perceived and experienced (Montgomery, 2008). Unsurprisingly then, much media coverage focusing on the transgressions of stag tourists is laced with concerns that such behaviour reflects badly on the cities which host such behaviour. Similarly, Madeline Hurd's historical account of attempts to restrain the behaviour of the urban working-class in the public spaces of the city indicates not just the physical control of public space but their ideological control (Hurd, 2000). Interestingly then, stag tourists are described in Polish newspapers as being of a lower class despite the fact that many are ostensibly middle-class. The jump of logic seems to readily see bad behaviour in public places as an indicator of a lower class status.

In spite of this evident control, there is for the stag groups an apparent balance between spontaneity, with a desire to move through the space of the city as discovery, and familiarity. In the case of the former there is a feeling that not knowing where they are or where they might end up is valued by the group for its sense of adventure and impulsiveness. However, in the case of the latter, there are numerous examples of stag groups rapidly claiming, through repeat visits, a bar or club as 'theirs'. Yet it was also noted that some groups, being barred entry to numerous locations, experienced lengthy periods of trying to find bars or clubs that would allow them access. One group from Scotland resorted to drinking at their hostel after many attempts to get into clubs failed after bouncers denied them access on the basis of their dress and behaviour. Obviously there are certain bars and clubs where drunkenness is more acceptable than others. Stag groups are unlikely to visit the more upmarket wine bars and night clubs. Clubs with door staff and dress codes seem a particular problem where, even if the group are well dressed and behaved, they are too easily singled out as stag tours and refused entrance. However, often the stag tour representative can be central to gaining access. Rob's stag group from the Midlands, having spent the previous night guided by tour rep Justyna, found their Saturday night, without Justyna's guidance, to be marked by difficulty in getting into suitable clubs (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2007, field notes). In this case, the group went back to some of the same bars as the night before. Interestingly, some of the

group were keen to move on rather than 'hang around the same places again' while others were content to stay knowing 'this place has got all we need'.

### **Pacing the stag tour**

The above discussion serves to illustrate that the physical space of Krakow, its bars, clubs and cafes, are not neutral spaces but are socially constructed, organised and, at times, contested. Within this dynamic, the stag groups make their way through the space of the city, their behaviour at times barring their progress. Evidently, their behaviour and use of space is different from that of locals and most other tourists. In this sense, the spatial ordering of the stag tour experience is irrevocably linked to how the groups behave during their time in Krakow. Beyond this, however, it is apparent that the temporal nature of stag tour experience is also a contributing factor. Hence, the stag weekend represents a short but intense tourist experience: the pace of stag tourism seems quite at odds with any conception of tourism as a pursuit of recreation and relaxation. Drinking can start in the morning and go on until late that night and then begin again the next day after minimal rest. This pace is dependent on the definition of the stag weekend as a time of excitement and release. It became evident, however, that the hectic pace of drinking and partying is not easily sustained throughout the weekend and at times gives way to moments of less excitement and greater sobriety.

When and where alcoholic drinks are consumed signifies important moments in the pacing of the weekend, signalling arrival in the city, the start of the evening's festivities and moments where the heightened euphoria of collective drunkenness is transferred into the spectacular events, moments and episodes that are seen as central to the successful stag tour.

The weekend is planned in advance and is eagerly anticipated. With the date set, the weekend is counted down to by the group and, when it arrives, seen as a big weekend. In the observed episode at the airport (Friday June 20<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes), recounted in the previous chapter, the group almost ceremoniously usher in the start of the weekend, changing into fancy dress costumes, choosing beer over all else and already talking up the expectation of the coming fun and excitement. An example of this was one member of that group asserting, 'this weekend is going to be so wrong' and an emphatic call of 'it's started!' and, in doing so, clearly marking the beginning of the stag tour as an event. Similarly, watching promotional videos on the plane and talking up the coming activities also serve to increase anticipation and readiness for the heightened pace of drinking that will fill the coming days and evenings. In this sense, the heightened moments of fun and release that the stag tour entails are actively sought and created both by individuals and collectively as a group.

The progression from cafés to bars and pubs to nightclubs indicates a building up of involvement and excitement. In many ways, this process is especially protracted in the case of stag tourism; the groups invariably start early and finish late. Notably, clubs in Krakow are open much later than many of those in the UK, allowing the opportunity for extended drinking until the early hours of the following morning. However, there are still evident highs and lows associated with the ebb and flow of experiences and inevitable lulls after drinking. Recovery time in the morning calls for a slower pace, sleeping in or resting at the hotel; yet often individuals force themselves and each other to get up and out of the hotel. The feeling that time was precious and that 'there's time to sleep back home' was evident in many groups who seemed to equate time spent in the hotel as down time or even wasted time. As will be explored further in the following chapter, the testing nature of this pace and its effects on the body offer a further interesting insight into the stag tour experience in relation to hegemonic masculinity.

One strategy to minimise the amount of perceived down-time was to incorporate recovery and rest time into experiences of the city, significantly, allowing the pace to build up again. A common example of this was the group basing itself in one of the city pubs serving food and showing football. Numerous groups spoke of having 'holed up' in the Irish Mbas (or similar establishment) where they could 'get a proper breakfast, watch the footie and get things going with a few more beers' (Saturday April 12<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes).

This seemed an astute compromise between the desire to be continually in pursuit of fast paced excitement and the necessity to recover from the previous night. The task of recovery and building up the pace for successive evenings of heavy drinking and excitement was therefore a recurrent characteristic of stag behaviour. For example, when talking to Craig and Simon at the start of a Saturday evening, both seemed at a loss as to how they could carry on given their heavy drinking session of the night before (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2007, field notes). Within a matter of minutes, however, Craig suggests adding vodka to his and Simon's Red Bull energy drinks to wake them up and 'get them on it'.

Combining spatial and temporal management, the groups used restaurants just off the square as a building up and starting off point before, as the evening progresses and the mood heightens, moving into the square or adjoining streets. So, although there are prolonged periods of heightened excitement, there are also evidently moments that fail to live up to the high expectations placed on the weekend. There are moments or incidents which are marked by the group as high or extraordinary and, equally, there are times that are seen as low and failing to meet expectations. Although the bars and clubs of Krakow offer a wealth of spatial options for the group, they are often denied access to certain spaces. In this sense, failure to gain entry to a club is an irritation but getting into a good club produces a correspondingly bigger high.

There is, therefore, an apparent meeting of the social significance of time and space in stag experience where failing to get into clubs results in walking around and 'wasting' their night. Equally, getting lost is, in itself, certainly a threat to the spirit of excitement if it means disorientation and spending too much of the evening finding one's way. In many ways this down time, as banality, contradicts the prevailing definition of the weekend and the associated expectations. How stag tourists react to these banal and familiar aspects of the experience of stag tourism will be addressed further in the next section.

Pace can be spoken of as a way of considering the socially malleable aspect of time. If the stag weekend is 48 or more hours for the pursuit of escapist hyper-masculine pleasure, it is so partly due to the group's ability to collectively mark that time as significant and unique. As with Krakow as an imagined place, the stag weekend as a temporal unit or entity is distinguished socially as a time for escape, for play and for excitement. In terms of the temporal location of stag tour groups, then, their presence in the city is very much limited to the weekend. Sunday afternoon sees a mass departure from the city and the space becomes once again stag free. For the stag tourists themselves the end of the weekend signals a return to home and, invariably, work. Thus, if we are to reiterate the co-dependency of notions of home and away in understanding tourist phenomena, the demarcation of the weekend, as a distinct time for play and escape, is invariably tied to an end of that given



space in time and a return to home. This is perhaps more evident in stag tourism than it is with other forms of tourism as the duration of the trip is invariably short; yet, the time that is spent 'away' is socially constructed as heightened and extraordinary. There are, as shall be discussed in the following section, inescapably moments that are necessarily slower paced and that fail to reach the high expectation set.

## ***6.2 Liminality and Banality***

### **Stag tourism and liminality**

The concept of liminality has been used by various studies of tourist behaviour to explain the state of in-betweenness which tourists often find themselves in (Shields, 1991; Malam, 2004). Stag tourism is no exception to this and we come to see that, firstly, much of the behaviour enacted is loosened from expected social restraint and, secondly, restricted or shaped in unfamiliar ways. As illustrated in the discussion above, the temporal and, in particular, spatial dynamics of the tourist setting are intertwined with tourist practice, allowing some behaviour while restricting others. There is, therefore, a fuzzy boundary between known and unknown social codes and roles, and it is in this grey area that a 'carnavalesque' undoing of social propriety takes place (Shields, 1991). Further still Krakow as a prominent site of stag tourism is not a static entity but is subject to spatial and temporal social construction

which renders the city its own 'place-myth', imagined and inscribed with specific meaning. This meaning, mediated by notions of play and escape, both encourages and directs certain behaviour. This is a further complication to the social milieu that inevitably places the stag tourist somewhere between his own social climate, that of the host setting and that of his expected and imagined interpretation of that setting.

Stag tourists specifically, and tourists more generally, experience the city in a very different way from locals or others with higher degrees of familiarity and a different subjective alignment with the city as a place and as a space. With a lack of familiarity it becomes easier for tourists to produce a more fluid interpretation of the place to be experienced phenomenologically. A characteristic of liminality, therefore, is an inability to fit in with the prevailing social climate one finds oneself in, sometimes despite attempts to do so, coupled with a sense of disengagement from one's own social milieu. The resulting social disorientation can be both threatening and liberating, with opportunities for the subversion of roles and identity both intentionally and unintentionally. Further, in the case of stag tourists there is an evident desire *not* to fit in and behaviour which contradicts the local social codes is cherished by the group for its humour and perceived spontaneity. This playing up to the transgression of social codes is explored further in the following chapter.

This sense of fluidity, with the stag tourist as peripheral to or at least loosely bound to the prevailing social order, is apparent in several ways. Not knowing the language puts the individual in a position of insecurity or, at least, dependency on others to speak English to them. Further, not knowing the currency well, many stag tourists seemed unsure of the going rate when purchasing drinks and food. In this instance many reported being unsure of how much to pay or what the notes in their wallet were worth. The practice of overcharging stag groups for drinks is not widely evident but, certainly, many bars and clubs deemed 'stag friendly' would usually raise their prices above the average accordingly. It seemed those groups who were under the guidance of a stag tour company representative were less likely to fall foul of this, as they would either allow the tour guide to make the order or would, under direction of the representative, avoid the establishments which overcharge. Nevertheless, stag tourists paying for drinks with large notes and paying little regard to counting change was a common sight.

The role of mediators in the production and consumption of tourist space is an interesting one. As Mordue observed, 'onsite brokers' as tour guides and attraction employees act to 'direct, choreograph, interpret, educate, manage and monitor tourists' (Mordue, 2005:182). The tension that Mordue observed in relation to the various spatial configurations of the English tourist destination of York is also evident in Krakow: the behaviour and bodily practices of stag tourists are accepted, restricted, managed or reconfigured by

a range of actors. Also, Fine and Speer (1985) assert that tour guides play a central role in signifying what tourists should consider worthy of their attention. An understanding of this was expressed by the tour guide Magda during an interview, where she stated that:

‘Like, you know, ‘mama Magda!’’, like children everywhere, like a class room, counting all the time, are they still here? Are they coming or are they going or they stay or they’re too drunk to go anywhere else. All this time even if I’m a little bit drunk I always have to remember that at any time if he doesn’t really look good, taxi home. It’s over for you for tonight’.

Here the guide appears in a position of maternal authority over the group, maintaining control and attempting to monitor the somewhat troublesome elements of group behaviour. Indeed, we see that the guide is in a position to curtail an individual’s participation in the night’s activities, if he is deemed too drunk to toe the established line. Further, despite in some ways dominating and exerting power over spaces through their behaviour, stag tourists are also in a notable position of dependence, their tour guide in a mother role to their immaturity.

We see, then, that stag tourists occupy a middle ground between control and restraint, between autonomy and dependence, oscillating between one and the other depending on a variety of factors. Stag tourists seem openly to play with this by subverting their own lack of knowledge, for example, by playing

with the language. An individual from one group that was observed on the Rynek, made several attempts to pronounce 'Dziekuje' (phonetically pronounced as *jan-koo-ye*), "thank you" in Polish, to a waitress before adding 'dukoona', and then 'Dubrovnik' in an apparent ironic attempt to parody his own lack of language skills. Further, many attempts by stag tourists to learn some Polish phrases were framed by the pursuit of women. Several of the tour representatives mentioned that they were frequently asked to teach complementary or suggestive phrases in Polish. Further, there are several Polish phrases used by Sacha Baron-Cohen's Borat character, his mix of Polish and Hebrew intended to stand as a comic imitation of the Kazakh language, which are adopted with apparent irony and great amusement by many stag tour groups. For example, 'Jak sie masz' (pronounced *jak she mash*) with an approximate meaning of 'how do you do?', was frequently used by stag tourists.

One effect of this liminality is a combination of unruliness and dependency – on each other, on tour guides, on the ability of others to speak their language – which seems to characterise the groups as precariously placed between control and release. Indeed, what is striking is that the playfulness that stag groups exhibit is remarkably infantile in many ways. Stag tourists often, through their own drunkenness and lack of preparation, put themselves in a position of dependency on the representative in her role of guide and mother. However, during the fieldwork it soon became apparent that stag tours that

chose to be guided as part of a package were invariably better behaved when called upon to be so. The tour guide acts to restrict much of the social transgression but also, all the while, does encourage the expected heightened sense of playfulness. Herein lies an interesting paradox: transgression is accepted and even encouraged but within certain limits and restrictions, which are often controlled by the tour guide.

Having considered the ways in which the concept of liminality might be applicable to the situation of stag tourists, there is an apparent fuzziness between viability and anonymity, between release from social habits and restrictions and between unruliness and dependency. However, there remains a question as to how much this state is sought out and striven for by the groups. Certainly, the tendency for stag tourists to be largely uninformed and ill-prepared for their trip is a corollary of the pervasive attitude, perhaps stemming from hegemonic masculine ideals, that men should be adventurous and not overly concerned with the details of planning. Further, it is usual for only one or two of the group to be involved with the process of booking accommodation and activities and, as such, the majority of the group may hold little prior information about the city. But, beyond all this, it is apparent that much stag tourist behaviour actively encourages this sense of inbetweenness.

Liminality, or a carnivalesque loosening of social propriety and roles, is, therefore, bestowed upon the group but also actively sought and fostered. The most prominent example is the consumption of alcohol which necessarily places the drinker in a precarious position in relation to the given social order. The attendant disorientation experienced with heavy drunkenness is anticipated and desired. Further still, the wearing of coordinated shirts or fancy dress costumes, both furthering the mixture of anonymity and visibility, mark the stag tour groups as distinct and as spectacular. This notion of the performativity of stag tourism is pursued further in the following chapter. As is explored more fully in chapter eight, with this liminal loosening there is scope for bonding and achieving a heightened sense of togetherness. Further to this, with such liminality comes the potential for social transgression which, indeed, may also serve to bind the group together and also to foster the feeling of a unique or extraordinary experience desired by the group. Although certain instances of socially transgressive behaviour will be explored in the following chapter, it is here worth noting that, for some of the above reasons, the stag weekend in many cases becomes a time and space for such liminal behaviour.

Previous studies of tourist liminality have invariably implied an individual who experiences such a loosening of social restraint in relation to themselves and to others (in particular, Malam, 2004). But what of the stag tour group as a collectivity? The fieldwork clearly demonstrates how they bring with them

their own jokes, shared histories, language, behaviour and interest so that even if they are marginal in one sense they also carry with them many of their own referents. Indeed, it should be questioned to what extent there is any loosening of roles, rather just an outright celebration of values of play and laddishness already well instilled and, in this time and space, allowed free reign. Just as Malam's work on the Thai beach scene highlights a degree of flexibility and liminal behaviour (Malam, 2004), the squares, pubs, bars and clubs of Krakow seem to encourage a release from inhibition. However, there is clearly not a total freedom and, indeed, the behaviour of stag tourists is far from the creative identity negotiation Malam describes. Rather, there appears to be a more grounded sense of liminality where the inbetweenness can breed both release and constraint, between which individuals seem to oscillate.

As a collective tourist experience, then, stag tourism is markedly different from other forms of tourism that are experienced either individually or in small family units. The majority of stag tourists are travelling with a large number of good friends and carry with them a related array of social connections and shared meanings. It makes sense, therefore, that although some aspects of stag tourism might seem to promote a sense of liminal in-betweenness and the attendant possibility for social transgression, many facets of the stag tour phenomenon are in fact familiar and relatively banal. It is this notion that will be explored in the following section.



## **The banality of stag tourism**

It is clear that much effort is made by individual stag tourists and collectively by groups to create the feeling that the events and experiences of the trip are extraordinary and unique. Pursuing a heightened pace of activity, based around collective, near ritualised, drinking, demarcates the weekend as clearly belonging in the realms of escape and of leisure or play. Yet, despite the imaginative inscription of the destination as a site for play, escape and spectacularity, the reality is at times one of normality. Indeed, much behaviour is prosaic and no different from that which a group of friends, under the influence of collective drinking, might enact in their home cities in the UK. Further, such behaviour is evidently similar from group to group and therefore indicates a lack of uniqueness in actuality even if individual groups seek to foster and maintain the feeling that their group's behaviour is unique. Thus, the lager served in Krakow bars, the music played in Krakow nightclubs and the food available from only recently open international franchises such as Subway and McDonalds or, equally, the omnipotent and geographically unspecific kebab all indicate a high level of familiarity. Again, MacCannell's notion of a 'staged authenticity' seems applicable (MacCannell, 1973; MacCannell, 1976).

Perhaps this is due in part to the tendency to dumb down collective tastes. For example, members of one group had heard about a Polish style 'peasant'

eatery where soups, meats and dumplings are served. Yet, others in the group insisted on returning to McDonalds; protesting that they should not waste time, saying they are 'not going to spend the whole night in some restaurant lets just grab maccas<sup>15</sup> on the way to the club'. In one case, the Scottish group made repeat visits to Roosters, an American style restaurant where diners are served by young women in regulation hot pants and tight vest tops who are, presumably, hired on the basis of their physical appearance as much as their waitressing ability. Trying to convince the group, Alex talks this up saying 'steak and titties for a fiver or whatever, why bother wit' anywhere else?!' while the others, Dave in particular, are less keen, adding 'it's only 'cause we don't know any other fucking place to go' (Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2008, field notes).

Based on such observations some moments or events are clearly marked by banality rather than liminality and, as such, at times could be seen as failing to live up to the high expectations of the groups. For example, one group (Friday 2nd November 2007, field notes) arrived at the first stop on their pub crawl in high spirits but, when asked to sit and wait for beer to be brought to the table, soon became more subdued. After waiting for over ten minutes, Jack asked the guide, 'look, can I just go up and get them?', to which others pitched in with calls of 'yeah, I'm ready, let's get going'. Just as the group's impatience was increasing a waitress arrived with the beer in a large tube with a tap at

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<sup>15</sup> Colloquial name for the McDonalds fast-food restaurant chain.

the bottom. On the tour guides insistence, the beer ordered was a house speciality wheat beer, brewed on site. With the group cheering, and as one began to pour out beer into half pint glasses, the others posed for pictures, pulling faces and sticking out their tongues. Following a toast, the group began to drink but after a few sips some started to comment on the beer being cloudy and not too good, one suggesting that 'it's probably gone off'. In this case the group's keenly developed anticipation and growing excitement are temporarily abated by the lengthy wait for their drinks which, when they arrived, were not to their tastes.

What becomes apparent is that for all the anticipation placed on the weekend as a time and space for spectacularity, many stag tourists find themselves, at times, confronted with the reality that their experience is not living up to their expectations. For example, quite frequently stag groups entered clubs which were virtually empty. This might be attributed to several things. Firstly, given the architectural layout of the city, many of Krakow's bars and clubs are in underground cellars only accessed by several flights of stairs. This prevents the groups from seeing if the clubs are busy or not before entering. This emphasis on, or apparent need for, clubs or bars to be busy and for the group to be around, if not surrounded by, others also attests to a certain desire for stimulation and activity. Further, it was observed that Krakowian night life generally starts much later than in the UK, with clubs not becoming busy until ten o'clock or even past midnight. Given the emphasis on starting early and

finishing late, many stag tourists are entering the clubs before many others are and, hence, find themselves in near empty clubs. Entry into many clubs or bars prompts a rapid and collective appraisal by the group, with discussion or merely nods, gestures and facial expressions revealing a like or dislike of a particular establishment.

It is inescapable that some of the weekend will take place at a slower pace to the hours of more heightened excitement and drinking. For example, much of the travelling to and from the city is considerably mundane. But, as discussed, the flight out is invariably infused with the collective anticipation and talking up of the coming weekend. Coming back also is a time for recurring in-jokes and telling and retelling of anecdotes from the trip. Similarly, throughout the weekend there are attempts to overcome events the group feel are slow paced or banal. In an example in the previous chapter, the slow paced drinking during the meal gives way to a frantic drinking race with two teams, and the inevitable competitive banter. Here and elsewhere, drinking games heighten sense of fun rather than just drinking as a familiar and repetitive act. Another example of this was observed on the Rynek Główny (Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008, field notes) and involved a group standing in turn and repeating a series of words, gestures and sounds which are built up as the game progresses, with the downing of beer and shots as forfeit for any incorrect responses. Examples such as these might be considered as moments when the group work collectively to redefine situations, turning what might be seen as a dull or

low-key event such as catching the bus to the airport or waiting for drinks to be served to the group's table into another moment of excitement and fun. Such is reminiscent of Berk's observations at American singles dances during the 1970s, where both event staff and patrons of dances attempt to redefine what can be a discrediting or socially stigmatising event (Berk, 1977).

One area where this is telling is when more than one stag group come to occupy the same space. In this case, there can be a considerable symbolic clash if both groups seek to maintain the uniqueness of their experience. For example, in this situation one stag tour member exclaimed 'come on, fuck this, we didn't come out here to hang out with pissed English blokes', here clearly expressing frustration with the situation that seemed to undermine their own group sense of uniqueness (Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2007, field notes). Much of the behaviour of any given group, although believed to be unique by members of the group, is in fact not dissimilar from others. It is unsurprising, given the narrow remit of hegemonic masculinity here as hyper-masculine play, that many groups seem to do similar things, act and talk in a similar way and respond similarly to the same stimuli. While most, but not all, stag groups generally drink more heavily, are more visible and make more noise than other tourists and locals, a lot of stag behaviour is often prosaic and mundane. The fieldwork shows clearly that the stag weekend is written through with normality.

In another case, knowing that I had made several visits to the city prior to my research, several members of a group asked which clubs I liked the most. On hearing a few of my suggestions, they realised they had not been to any of them (Saturday September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007, field notes). 'Oh mate, told you we've not been to the good places!' one shouted to the other, and, in response, 'well that place with the cage above the dance floor was decent, you fucking loved it'. Also, there was a bit of fascination from groups as to what I had observed of other groups. Yet, this often resulted in them feeling put out if I implied that the other groups did pretty much the same thing as them. To take MacCannell's notion of 'authenticity' (MacCannell, 1976), the spirit in which the group pursue their weekend is undermined by the suggestion that either their behaviour is similar to that of others or that they have, in fact, not been to the better places and, instead, been content with the 'front stage' of bars and clubs provided for tourists.

In one case I was talking to several members of a stag group from the North East of England, when I suggested that I found, in spite of the stereotypes, that many groups to be very friendly and not too disruptive (Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2007, field notes). Scott exclaimed 'we're fucking not, we're bad, look at the state of us!'. The implication being that I had both affronted their sense of uniqueness by comparing them to other groups and, further, suggesting a reading of their behaviour that did not comply with their feelings of being 'messy' and 'out of control'. Similarly, with another group, the tour

guide told the group that they were crazy but said to me, as an aside, that they are 'very quiet' and 'no trouble just like nice guys but not crazy at all'. Again, the role of the tour guide is an interesting one, clearly adding to the group's desire to be seen as boisterous and out of control despite her admission to the contrary and, further still, her professional commitment not to let the group's behaviour actually become too wild.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we see that the space and time for stag behaviour is socially constructed and mediated not only by the groups themselves but by other actors such as tour guides, bouncers, bar owners, waitresses and locals. From the build up of expectation to the excitement of arrival, the weekend is seen by the groups as a time and place distinct from 'work' and from 'home'. Within this, groups seek a sense of heightened pace and excitement, of uniqueness and fun centred on late nights of fast and heavy drinking, dancing and laughing. Importantly, the spatial setting of Krakow, in particular the Rynek Główny old town market square, greatly facilitates the desired experience of the groups.

Yet, while the stag groups dominate some spaces others are denied to them. From this we see that although the possibilities for transgressive behaviour are made available, they also negotiate certain restraints, resulting in a sense

of inbetweenness or liminality. However, their focus is on a more practical and grounded liminality than that proposed by Linda Malam (2004). Where Malam's involves a creative and rather free-floating negotiating of individuals identities, here we see that through the spatial arrangement of the city, combined with the disorientation of language and culture and, above all, drunkenness, stag tourists can and do act out a lack of restraint, up to a point. Rather than Malam's more creative conception of liminality, much of the transgressive behaviour of stag groups is not indicative of some level of creative identity reconstruction, merely a carnivalesque lack of restraint which, even still, is at times thoroughly predictable and banal. This analysis is clearly closer to David Bell's notion of 'scripted liminality' (Bell, 2008:293), where, although a loss of control is encouraged and made possible, it is largely predictable and expected in the tourist setting.

Above all, the chapter serves to illustrate that the stag tour is not without its efforts. The group collectively work to overcome more banal aspects of the weekend and, thus, maintain the desired feeling of extraordinary experience. The meanings groups attribute to their behaviour are, clearly, subject to negotiation as well as threat. Much of this is based on the desire, need or compulsion to pursue transgressive behaviour and to be seen to be, and feel to be, out of control. The following chapter will further develop this in relation to the performative and embodied nature of stag tourist behaviour.



## **7. Stag tourism performed and embodied**

In the previous chapter it was argued that the behaviour of stag tourists, which is often chaotic, playful or offensive to different degrees, is heavily influenced by the spatial context of the setting and the expectations of the group. This is based on a dynamic of release and restraint. The previous chapter also highlighted that much work is done by the stag tourists themselves to heighten and maintain their experience and to overcome or redefine what might be seen as more banal moments. It was proposed that this work involves acting out or acting up to a certain interpretation of any given situation. Further, the collective nature of the stag experience means that as the group works to maintain the dominant interpretation of events of the stag tour as being a heightened moment of escape characterised by fun and play, the roles and actions that play out within the group often take on a notably performative quality. These two concepts – performance and performativity – are essential to an understanding of stag behaviour. Research has shown that many men actively perform their masculinity through their speech (e.g. Cameron and Kulick, 2003; Coates, 2003) and behaviour (e.g. Quinn, 2002; Grazian, 2007) while, further still, much of the ‘doing’ of gender is repetitive and intuitive to individuals (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990). The first section of this chapter will therefore explore the performative qualities of stag behaviour.

Linked to the notion of performance is an interest in the male body and in how masculinity becomes embodied. Much of the behaviour of stag tourists, in particular drunkenness and its corollary effects (Campbell, 2000; Peralta, 2007), bring to the fore the male body and its function. Thus, rather than being a by-product of the stag experience, the second section of this chapter argues that such corporeal pleasure and bodily transgression are an essential element of stag experience and, as such, carry a symbolic significance particularly where these relate to the ritualistic abasement of the stag himself. This is of particular interest given the noted development of the male body as a 'site of identity' (Brubaker and Johnson, 2008:131) and what Bordo has referred to as 'the double bind of masculinity' (Bordo, 1999:242).

### ***7.1 Stag Tourism, Performance and Performativity***

Judith Butler's (1990) conception of the performativity of gender describes gender as done through continual and repetitive gendered enactments. As such, men can be seen to habitually reproduce the correct gendered manner (for example, how to walk, sit or gesticulate), to the point of an unconscious performance of gender through the body. The behaviour of stag tourists serves to illustrate this performativity in the sense that the men are observed as conducting themselves in ways instantly recognisable as 'masculine'. However, problematically, much stag behaviour is difficult to locate within this being at the same time notably masculine yet relatively unique and

presumably not repeated endlessly. Men are, in many situations, clearly aware of their enactment of masculine behaviour and, indeed, knowingly play up to such acts of masculinity. The performative analogy is evidently useful but how does it fit with observed stag behaviour? First of all, it is worth considering some examples of stag tour behaviour which illustrate a more overt and intentional, and indeed literal, form of performance.

### **The performative nature of stag tourist behaviour**

“On the Eastern side of the Rynek Główny a large space between the Cathedral and cloth hall allows for various street performances. In preparation for one of their regular performances, the local break dancing troupe, a common sight on this part of the square, tape card mats to the ground while loud dance music plays over a portable stereo system. The group of around eight dancers, wearing coordinated blue t-shirts or vest style tops stretch and limber up as a growing crowd of onlookers circles them in anticipation. The leader of the group, wearing a top hat from under which a mass of dread locks fall, instructs the massed audience, of over 50 and still rising as more passers-by join, to form a large circle around their performance area as they launch into a routine set to music. Stepping into this circle, two members of a passing stag group, dressed in t-shirts, baggy shorts and flip-flops, jig their way forward toward the dancers in crude imitation. Applause goes

up from the crowd and the rest of the stag group, laughing considerably and pushing to the front of the audience, cheer their friends on. 'Hey, hey...ok please move! This is our show' the leader says walking over to them as they continue to dance a series of increasingly farcical dance moves. Another member of the dance troupe turns off the music and both stags stop, frozen mid gesture. Another cheer from the crowd, more complaints from the dance troupe and more and even greater laughter from the rest of the stag group as pictures are taken. The pair hold their poses for several minutes. As the troupe attempt to carry on with their performance, the music starts again and both spring back into life only to freeze a few seconds later when the music is turned off again. This time a laugh goes up all round, even amongst some of the dance troupe. Again the music comes on with the two jumping into life, one of them losing the sunglasses from his face, only to freeze moments later as the music again turns off. By now a member of the stag group is standing just a few feet away filming the scene on his digital camera and several of the stag group are cheering, clapping and gesturing in an attempt to get the crowd to applaud more. Losing patience now, several members of the troupe walk over to the pair saying, more aggressively now, 'ok BYE now! Time to go!'. Members of the stag group and a minority of the crowd boo and cat call at this but the pair finally begin to walk away grinning from ear to ear. Walking

back to their group, their friends greet them back with 'nice one mate, quality' and 'so fucking funny, got all of that on film, you legend'."

*(Field notes, from observation, Friday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2008).*

It is worth quoting this example at length because it highlights many things. The performance in this case is quite literal, with the stag group taking over the space set up for the break dancing and the two men's ironic dancing for the benefit of the amassed audience and their friends. It also takes place in the public space of the main market square which, as highlighted in the previous chapter, becomes the focus of much stag tourist behaviour and, further still, implicitly involves an interaction with a range of other groups. It is unlikely that this behaviour would not normally take place outside the context of the stag tour, and by its nature is consciously and specifically transgressive. The contested use of public space is apparent as the street performers, themselves in some ways subverting the status quo of the public space with loud music and the extravagant movements of their dance, find themselves at odds with the stag group who literally upstage their performance and in doing so move the attention of the crowd away from them as performers. In this sense, as soon as the pair of stag tourists breaks the spontaneously imposed boundary around the performance space they are visibly and knowingly transgressing the mutually defined situation. The fact the pair have been drinking and are visibly drunk also suggests a degree of disinhibition. However, beyond interrupting the troupe's performance the

episode is largely taken to be light-hearted by both the crowd and the stag group. This is in keeping with the aura of fun and playfulness many stag groups seek to exhibit and the emphasis on humour which, throughout fieldwork, emerged as an essential ingredient of stag tour group meaning. In this sense much stag tourist behaviour goes beyond 'doing', and includes an element of knowing acting up or showing off. Following their committed performance, the pair gives way to satisfied grins as they finish and clearly revel in the praise coming from their group. What becomes apparent here, as in the following examples, is that much of the behaviour of stag tourists is both performative and transgressive.

Another example involved Dave, in his early thirties and part of a particularly heavy drinking group, as he and the group drank at their hostel on a Saturday afternoon:

"The hostel, situated on the top of four floors of a building on one of the rounds leading off from the main square backs onto a small court yard in which several cafés have tables set out for their customers. Mounted on the wall above the door of one of these cafes is a speaker which plays a mix of background music as people sit with coffees, beers or food brought out by waitresses from the adjacent buildings. Having been drinking for several hours already, Dave and a couple of others were visibly drunk –'more than a little merry' in his own words– and had set up their own CD player attached to portable speakers. Turning the

volume to maximum, Oasis's *Rock and Roll Star* echoes out over the courtyard below with Dave adding his own enthusiastic rendition over the top. Seeing people in the square look up from their coffees, Dave throws his hands in the air and leans forwards over the balcony rail, singing now at the top of his voice and then breaking into laughter before turning back to find Alex has joined him on the balcony. He hands him a can of beer from a shopping bag and begins to complain about Dave's 'pale as a ghost' body and ginger chest hair, shaking his head but grinning, clearly amused with his friend's singing."

*(Field notes, from observation, Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2008)*

Of course, one central aspect of this performative behaviour is the presence of an audience which witnesses and responds to the performative act. Both the above examples took place in public and were witnessed by members of the stag group, who we might assume are the primary audience, and other strangers and passers-by. In the case of Dave, his behaviour on the balcony draws the attention from the café customers and, from his laughter at the bemused looks of those below, it appears his act was intentionally aimed at grabbing their attention. Thus, the importance of the role of audience is evident because it also often signifies the intention of the performer, whether this is to make them laugh or simply the act of being watched. Although Alex makes at least some show of rebuking Dave for his behaviour, his over the top gestures and impassioned singing clearly amused him. Another example

of the performative nature of stag behaviour and, indeed, the centrality to this of humour and spontaneity, is that of a group sitting at the café tables that run along the north side of the main Rynek Główny. One member of the group having bought a plastic recorder from a nearby souvenir stand tries to play various tunes on it including *Amazing Grace* whilst joking about his limited musical ability. Later, as a parade passes through the square, he improvises a tune along with the rhythm of the marching band. His friends laugh as do a few people sitting at nearby tables. (Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008, field notes). Again, here the performance act is initially for the benefit of the group but is also affirmed beyond the group. That the waitress attending their table joked, as she brought them another round of drinks, that he is 'a very talented musician' clearly demonstrates his act is taken as light hearted and within acceptable limits of public behaviour.

However, not all stag behaviour is enacted for the benefit of an outside audience, frequently such was seen to be solely for the benefit of the group. Observations made during fieldwork showed that it is often these performances which are contentious or viewed negatively by others. A relatively low key example of this happened when a group that was walking through the market square one early evening, paused at the corner of Ulica Bracka, a side road leading off the square. The majority of the group wanted to walk further along the square but several stopped and pointed down the side street to some bars a few hundred meters away. Calling to the others,



James shouted 'go where the fuck you like, I've got the fucking kitty!'. To this, Mark, who had previously been keen to stay on the square turned on his heels and theatrically ran towards the kitty holder, diving at him with his arms open in a bear hug (Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008, field notes). This comical response, playing up to the fact the individual holding the kitty has significant power within the group, was not interpreted as comic, and more likely was not understood, outside of the group. Indeed, several passers-by frowned at his use of profanity; and one couple, again frowning and shaking their heads in disapproval, had to sidestep away from him as he ran across their path. In this case, the performance was clearly for the benefit of the group rather than any implicit audience.

Observation of the groups strongly suggest that some stag behaviour, which is essentially performative, is solely for the benefit of the group themselves and, further, that members often remain largely oblivious to how that performance is witnessed and perceived outside of the group. Here, a parallel could be made with Patricia Martin's work (2001) on women's experiences of men's mobilisations of masculinity in the workplace, which notes that different enactments of masculinity can be directed towards a primary audience of men, of women, or of both. This can, however, easily give rise to problematic situations. She observes that 'what is 'mysterious', and difficult to see or name overtly, is men's behaviour not primarily directed towards women, but enacted in the presence of women, that men see as natural or harmless, but women

often experience as harmful' (Martin, 2001:589). Expanding on this, then, it is not merely enough to say that some stag behaviour is, while being possibly offensive to onlookers, is solely for the benefit of the group and therefore unproblematic. Indeed, as shall be considered in the next chapter, much stag behaviour serves to make female passers-by the subject of a heterosexual gaze and, as such, should be seen as problematic.

Beyond this, there are other moments when the performative nature of stag tourist behaviour becomes evident. In certain instances, there was an unmistakable desire on the part of stag tourists to play up to their lack of concern with standard tourist practices such as site-seeing or paying interest to cultural attractions. Many groups make this a central feature as they, in a way, perform being bad tourists. A good example of this is one group who played up to their own lack of awareness of the cathedral as they had been 'too pissed' to notice. In another example, Jon's group from the South East of England are sitting waiting to order breakfast in one of the city's Irish themed pubs (Saturday April 12<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes). Talking over what to order, Rich says 'gotta be a full English', to which Jon quips 'don't you mean full Irish'. Looking over the menu and then around the Irish themed bar, Rich retorts 'whatever, definitely not a fucking full Polish!'. When the waitress approaches the table to take their orders, each in turn and with some apparent thought ordered a full cooked breakfast and a beer, resulting in the waitress laughing and saying 'ok, so ten breakfast, ten beers? Very easy'. With members of the

group muttering sarcastically about 'expanding my horizons' and 'oh, I like to try new things, you know?' they wait for their breakfasts to arrive. Hence, the groups' failure to investigate local culture and opt instead for familiarity would certainly fall within many people's definitions of 'bad', or at least banal, tourist practice. Further, their commentary on this fact shows their awareness of and willingness to celebrate, through ironic self parody, their status as both 'bad' tourists and 'typical' men.

Interestingly, the above episode was eagerly recorded by the group with photographs being taken when the plates of food and beer arrived at the table, coupled with more discussion of how everyone at home will know they were drinking beer with breakfast at ten in the morning. Similarly, in the opening example involving the break dancing troupe, members of the stag group were quick to capture their friends' performances on camera. Furthermore, walking away from the scene one of the first questions asked by one of the stag 'dancers' was 'did you get that on camera?' Here, the role of cameras as witness or audience is interesting and worth further discussion. In the previous chapter, an incident was recounted in which Dave's group were unhappy to wait for drinks to be served and then, when the beer arrived, were dissatisfied with the taste of the wheat beer which the bar served as one of their specialties (Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2007, field notes). This was taken as an example of how groups often react to situations that fail to live up to their expectations. However, significantly the group would still pose for pictures

during this time and seemingly exaggerate their excitement for the sake of the camera; their complaints about the beer being cloudy being momentarily interrupted by repeated poses for cameras with thumbs up and smiles.

The question is who benefits from this type of performance for the camera, who is the audience? Elsewhere, Steve (Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2008, field notes), mentioned that he expected the photographs taken to be used by the group long after the trip to remind them of their time in Krakow. In many ways this is standard tourist practice. Similarly, during the drive to the go-carting track, members of Rob's group looked through pictures taken the night before and offered a running commentary to some of the others, for example, 'ah I'd forgotten about that!' and 'here's Peter! Pete's not too happy with that, look at him!', to which Peter, from the back of the mini-bus recounted how he'd been harassed by a drunk local when one of the others was taking pictures (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2007, field notes). In this case, the use of pictures taken the previous evening is channelled directly back into the experience of the weekend, with the act of recounting and commenting on the pictures part of talking up the previous night's events as significant. While there is not sufficient space here to consider the wider implications of the emergence of digital photography, it can be speculated that the immediacy of the now dominant format in effect speeds up and creates a new role for photograph taking in the tourist experience. Where previously tourists would wait to return

home to develop their photographic 'memories', here such images are immediately put to use in the narrative of the tourist experience.

Beyond this, many of the groups mentioned that some pictures would be placed online to be viewed by other friends and even by the fiancé and family members. With the growth of online platforms for sharing or exhibiting images such as Facebook and MySpace, many groups would use pictures to recount their weekend to others. With that said, there was considerable awareness of the fact that the choice of images shown might be highly selective so as not to prove incriminating. This seems to imply certain boundaries to some of the actions with the camera allowing an intentional remote audience but also raising the issue of an unwanted audience, for example, the stag's parents or, particularly, the fiancé. What does become apparent, though, is that photographs in particular are clear signifiers of the given moments that the members of a group wish to bestow particular value to. Thus, eating a breakfast and drinking early in the day, acting up on the square or arriving at the first bar on the pub-crawl are all moments marked by the taking of pictures. Consideration of who will see those pictures brings a new audience into the stag performance experience alongside their friends, locals and other strangers; friends and family at home become part of an implicit audience.

## **Stag tourism and transgressive performances**

From the examples explored above, we see how much stag group behaviour involves an element of performance which, rather than Butler's (1990) sense of a repetitive and habituated way of 'doing' gender, involves an intentional and often ironic acting out of behaviour that is seemingly in keeping with the heightened excitement of the stag weekend and its mediating notions of fun, play and spontaneity. To explore this further, the example below illustrates, firstly, how such performances can be linked to both the spatial setting, as explored in the previous chapter, and, secondly, the notion of transgression which stag tourists value for its sense of letting go and release.

"The Stag, Rob, is dressed as Princess Leia from the Star Wars movies and wears nothing but a gold bikini, brown robes and a wig. Of average height but well built with copious body hair, he looks, as one member of the group points out 'fucking ridiculous'. The others all wear white shirts and 'storm trooper' masks. After eating and drinking for several hours in a basement restaurant, they emerge and walk the length of Szewska, a wide pedestrianised street lined with numerous clubs and bars and ending at the old town square. People on the street stop to look, some laughing and others frowning. One of the group throws his mask to the floor and jokingly asks Rob to pick it up. Playing along, Rob bends over in mock seduction, exposing his rear to the

street. Most of the group is laughing, walking in a long line spread out shoulder to shoulder across the street. A few are not so keen and drop to the sides. Some of the bars along Szewska refuse them entry. One bouncer says 'you all ok, but not him – he must wear clothes'. Those who talk to the bouncers don't protest but try to seem reasonable saying 'fair enough mate, look at the state of us lot, it's understandable'. The group slows down and some of them seem to sober up a bit. Craig, the best man, and a few others now seem preoccupied with getting Rob, who is by now very drunk, looking decent by tying up his robes and removing the Princess Leia wig. After a few more attempts the group gets into a bar where the bouncers are ok but the group is now visibly playing down their drunkenness so as to get access."

*(Observations from field notes, Saturday September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007).*

As the group moves between private, semi-public and public spaces the behaviour enacted changes in line with the context such stages provide. Prior to entry onto the public space of one of the city's busiest night time streets, the group consume considerable quantities of beer and vodka and, as their spirits become lifted, emerge onto the street in a state of considerable excitement. In this sense, the bravado brought on by collective alcohol consumption plays a key role in facilitating the enactment in public of behaviour that would not be undertaken when sober. Thus, Rob's initial

evident embarrassment soon gave way to a drunken confidence and disregard for his state of undress. Similarly, Montemurro and McClure (2005) found that drinking played a pivotal role in disinhibiting participants of bachelorette parties as they partake in sexualised party games and fancy-dress.

We also see how regaining access to the semi-public spaces of bars along the street involves the group undertaking a further shift in their performance where drunkenness and playfulness must be subdued, albeit momentarily, in order to ensure access to the desired space. Thus, control of some spaces and experience of some spaces is dependent on acceptable performance. For example, tour guide Anna recalled in an interview 'this week I was having a group, they were nice, but they were drinking a lot, but they were nice even when they were drunk and I was trying to take them to Rdza [a central bar and club popular with stag groups], and this guys was so drunk I told him that if they let him enter it will be a miracle. I have no idea what happened but in the one second he was absolutely not drunk, he was perfect, when he went inside he was walking like, you know, very drunk' (Anna, Tour Guide Interview). This illuminating example further shows how stag tourists can manage their behaviour in public and, when called upon to do so, change their performance if needed.



Thus far, it has been argued that transgressive behaviour and a drunken masculinity is enacted quite knowingly by stag tourists. However, that is not to say that group performances are always homogeneous; it is not always possible for all members of the group to enact the same performance. In the episode recounted above, several members of Rob's group allow themselves to drop to the sides of the main performance or seem to act out some form of mitigating gesture such as shaking their head or frowning to show their acceptance of the action of the others is not total. Of course, such refusal to enact the dominant script frequently results in members being seen as not 'up for a laugh' and, invariably, they become the focus of further encouragements to drink and attain the level of drunkenness experienced by the rest of the group. The role of alcohol is a central facilitator in achieving successful performances of playful masculinity, with many only becoming visibly performative once drunk. This also begins to highlight how some elements of the performance of this masculinity are enacted of their own choosing and at other times individuals let themselves go to an unrestrained performance. Indeed, in many cases it can be said that members of stag tours are involved in performing restraint for the sake of control, in not wanting to be seen as not being able to handle their alcohol, while, equally, at other times seen to be performing release and a loss of control as part of the knowing enactment of transgressive behaviour.

However, there does seem to be a somewhat circular logic that stag behaviour is transgressive because of drunkenness yet drunkenness is pursued knowingly for its disinhibiting function which allows individuals to let go to the act of transgression. In relation to drinking, it is worth returning to Joyce Wolburg and Debbie Treise's (2004:13) observation of the transformative quality of heavy drinking, that alcohol 'allows people to release inhibitions, induce relaxation, and assume a different identity'. Alcohol might appear the underlying cause for much transgressive behaviour, but it is also evident that alcohol is intentionally consumed, and drunkenness actively pursued, as a means of ensuring such. Drunken rule breaking, as Tomsen suggests, can be a goal both in and of itself (Tomsen, 1997). This dynamic blurs the distinctions between instinctive and intended performances. Again, there is an apparent paradox between release and restraint, and between performance as intentional and performance merely as a letting go of control. In this sense, the behaviour is broadly speaking intentional but only achieved through the active letting go to drunkenness. The stag tourists desire the chaotic release of drunkenness but only achieve this through the intentional heavy drinking, a great part of which is marked by a lack of control. Acting the part of being a drunken lad about town, therefore, might be seen as a step on the way to a more uninhibited release to that very behaviour.

Beyond the consumption of alcohol, other factors characteristic of stag tour groups seem also to provide a space for unrestrained performative and

transgressive behaviour. As will be explored further in the following section, the role of fancy dress often acts to make the groups highly visible yet in many ways anonymous. As an example of this, in one group all members were wearing a different costume such as Mini Mouse, Superman or a gorilla costume (Friday 20th June 2008, field notes). During the day, the group walked across the square and exchanged waves and high fives with a group of young school children. Later that day, the same group was seen, still in costume but noticeably more intoxicated, walking past a row of café tables where a mixture of locals and tourists sat for an early evening drink. As members of the group posed for pictures for tourists sitting at the table, one dressed as a nurse turned around and pulled up their dress to 'moon' the camera. Here, the suggestion is that fancy dress, as well as drunkenness, encourages disinhibition. Again, the distinction between knowing performance and simple unrestrained loutishness is a fine one.

This analysis has tended to view the stag tour as performative in a more Goffmanesque sense than that espoused by Judith Butler (1990) of performance as learnt and habituated repetition. However, there is clearly a balance of both. For example, it was shown in the last chapter how the men of stag tours dominate the spaces they occupy, walking through the Krakow streets in a confident and dominant manner instantly recognisable as masculine. Such concurs with Butler's notion of men's embodied practices and, in particular, with Iris Young's suggestion that while female bodies are

inhibited in their intentionality, masculine bodies learn to extend into the world (Young, 1980). Similarly, then, the more overtly performative scenes illustrated above give a lucid example of men acting up, ironically or otherwise, to an unruly and boisterous masculinity. Yet, the more mundane aspects (such as how the men hold their beer glasses, how they sit or move their limbs) are all as important in constituting the performance of masculinity. Here, in particular, the male body is of central importance and, as shall be argued in the second section of this chapter, the relationship men have with their bodies becomes particularly salient during stag tourism.

This does, however, leave some ambiguity regarding to what extent individual agency figures in this formulation (Brickell, 2005). What Chris Brickell refers to as Butler's refusal of, or at least reluctance to locate, a 'volitional or prior subject' leads to a conceptual ambiguity where performativity is something done without desire or decision by the subject themselves, more out of inertia than consciousness (Brickell, 2005:28). Certainly, as will be explored in the following chapter, there is an apparent grey area between the masculinity men do as part of a volitional self, and therefore part of a knowing act, and that which they do as part of an ingrained instinctiveness. While the masculinity enacted by stag tourists is often offensive or transgressive of acceptable social behaviour, some aspects of this behaviour are clear and knowing performances rather than habitual and intuitive repetitions. And yet, even in this performance we can identify a certain narrowness or predictability

about the behaviour of stag tourists and what it is they enact. The episode involving what might be seen as the subversion of the break-dance performance by the stag group was, in fact, just one of several such similar instances observed during fieldwork. This act, although seen as spontaneous by the group, is in fact relatively routine.

Many of these recurring acts, particularly those relating to being drunk or being seen to be drunk, are knowingly anticipated even though at the time they may seem spontaneous. The script of both drunkenness and masculinity which is evident in many stag tourists' behaviour and talk of their own behaviour is invariably a narrow one. Although frequently transgressive (as the next section will consider in relation to the male body) this transgression is enacted along familiar lines: masculine performances as repetition and performance as knowing and intentional act are both readily identifiable. Thus, with much of the behaviour evidently habitual, the stag ethos seems to reserve special reverence for the more Goffmanesque performative masculinity which plays up to, and sometimes ironically sends up, the image of a lad as drunk, boisterous and out of control. The second section of this chapter will consider the role of the male body within this performance and how this relates to the frequently transgressive behaviour of stag tour groups.

## ***7.2: Stag Tourism, the male body and masculinity embodied***

As explored in chapter six, the physical environment of Krakow, in which the stag tourist experience is set, relies greatly on the ability of that spatial context to facilitate and allow the enactment of masculinity and, specifically, playful or carnivalesque behaviour. It is here worth, initially, returning to this theme in order to situate the male body, as a physical presence, within this setting. The male body is central to understanding stag tourism as it is through the body that sensory experiences are felt and from the body that masculinity is performed and exhibited. The role of the male body in the construction of masculinity is, thus, integral to understanding stag tourism as a specific, we might say embodied, masculine experience. Paula Black (2001) has similarly noted the need to focus on the role of the body in tourist experience, in particular the role of corporeal pleasures. There is a need to retain this notion of bodily pleasure and observe that the copious and excessive consumption of food and alcohol as part of the stag tour are corporeal pleasures. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the various ways in which the male body is both an essential element of the stag tourism experience and, further still, how such acts to make the male body more noticeable.

## **The role of the male body in stag tourism**

It has already been noted that there was an observed tendency for stag tour groups to dominate the space they occupy. In many ways, therefore, the physical presence of a stag group is inevitably overt. The size of the groups involved, their unitary gender and their focus on the pursuit of bodily pleasure mean that the body is ever-present and the stag experience is implicitly physical. Put simply, the stag group is a collection of male bodies in space; they tend to dominate this space, filling any given café, bar, club or restaurant with male bodies. This might be seen generally to reflect the observation that white male bodies have the privilege to 'navigate social space – both public and private – unobstructed, un(re)marked' (Peckinson, 1992:174). Although tourism by definition involves the movement of bodies between places and within spaces, this observation is particularly salient given the emphasis of group or collective tourist experience. Yet, we also see how access to certain spaces is denied to groups on the basis of their bodily appearance (for example being in tasteless or revealing fancy dress) and comportment (for example being too drunk to stand or walk straight). Returning to Peckinson's observation, then, it is clear that while freedom of movement generally accorded to the white male body, that movement, in the case of stag tourism, is not unproblematic. In this sense, performance and embodiment are inescapably linked. The relation between physical space, the built environment of the city, and the bodily presence of the stag groups is of considerable interest.

Outwardly, the physicality of the group can be intimidating. Within the group, however, the physical positioning of bodies and material proximity can act to heighten mood and allow bonding and group cohesion. Beyond requiring enough seating to accommodate the large group, the selection of seating is often clearly made in accordance with the wish to occupy a prominent public position with views across the square, street or club where the group find themselves. The tendency for central seats or prominent spaces to be reserved for the stag and the best man suggests a physical ordering of bodies to represent the prevailing status within the group. This was often the case when groups were evidently aware of needing to sit the stag in a prominent position such as the head of the table or the middle of a line of chairs at a bar. The male bodies which constitute the group are, therefore, indicative of the groups as a social unit through the way they are ordered.

In terms of their visibility, the bodies of stag tourists are often covered with matching clothing or 'team' uniform. This would most commonly be one of a set of pre-printed polo shirts or t-shirts, customised with the name of the stag, a group motto or logo and individual nicknames for members of the group. The body is adorned to accentuate group identity and to draw attention to the group as well as signal the special status of the group as celebrating a stag tour. Hence, the individual male body is literally signalled to be part of a group. Further, the team clothing acts to minimise physical differences within the group and in many ways can be seen to, one would assume,



unintentionally add to the intimidating physicality of the unified group. Indeed, it is unsurprising that such uniformly dressed stag groups draw frequent comparisons from locals to armies or football hooligans<sup>16</sup>. This, then, returns to the analogy of 'invading' hordes which is frequently deployed in media discussions of stag tourism.

Within the group, however, the physical distribution of bodies and the adornment of those bodies with uniforms or costumes seem to go a long way to promote a feeling of togetherness and group unity. As recognised in the previous chapter, this feeling of togetherness and group identity is integral to the stag tourism experience, being actively worked towards collectively by the group. Further, in the next chapter, I will explore the specific workings of this group solidarity and how stag tourism can be seen as a moment of heightened male friendship and bonding and in which, indeed, the body is often central to such moments.

Considering the other elements integral to a successful stag weekend, it is striking that the body is invariably the central source of the experience of stag masculinity. In sensory terms, then, the body is the conduit through which the stag weekend is experienced: the satisfaction of appetites in the consumption

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<sup>16</sup> The invading army analogy is one repeatedly invoked in Polish media coverage of stag tourism, establishing such as a phenomenon which calls for some reaction or resistance. For example, a news item for Radio Polonia (21.08.2006) took the stance that the city 'has to take the force of inebriated Brits' and withstand 'the onslaught of drunk Englishmen'.

of alcohol and food, the visual and audible stimulation of nightclub dancing and the tactility of play fights, backslaps and bear hugs. Additionally, it is clear from fieldwork that the detrimental effects of excessive drinking, eating, smoking and lack of sleep and proper rest place considerable bodily strain upon the stag tour participants, so bringing the male body to the fore. A good example of this was the episode related earlier (chapter five) involving the group whose tired, smelly and sickening bodies are testament to the excesses they have undertaken. Here, the gases, excretions, vomit and aching bodies of the participants are central and, at this point in the weekend, could not be marginalised even if they wished them to be. Chris's relative joy that he finds his body has withstood events with greater ease than his friends is matched by his friend Alex's assertion that his illness shows he has made the most of the weekend, eating and drinking to excess when the others might have held back. This antagonism, which sees the stag tour as necessarily involving both a testing of bodily restraint and, in another sense, a succumbing to both bodily pleasures and exertions is central to the stag tour experience and will be explored further in this and the next chapter.

### **Bodily transgression and the out of control male body**

There is an apparent dualism between seeing the male body as raw, natural and aggressive and seeing the male body as marginalised by a rational controlling masculinity (Bordo, 1999). What, then, becomes striking about the

stag tour is that it is primarily a celebration of the loss of control and, as discussed previously, a location in both space and time for the cessation of rational concerns emanating from the world of work, home or family. Like much tourist experience, the stag tour is a time of indulgence and the relaxation of certain constraints associated with home. However, there is perhaps a greater complexity to this loss of control than first appears. For example, it has already been observed that much of the transgressive behaviour is pursued knowingly and acted up to with, at least, a degree of intention. In many cases, the act of transgression is in fact relatively minor although is attributed significant status amongst the groups as symbolising the type of playful and humorous abandon which stag tourism is seen to represent. Further still, the apparent loss of control evidently does not illustrate an absence of rules for the participants, but rather a knowing suspension of rules, the overstepping of which are momentarily accorded a ritualistic and symbolic significance. An interesting example of this balance, and the focus of this section, is the various bodily transgressions witnessed amongst stag tourists.

Through the consumption of alcohol, the individual's ability to control the body is diminished. Co-ordination is lost and the ability or willingness of individuals to exert control over their body's functions and actions becomes evidently lowered. In this sense one of the most striking features of stag tourist behaviour is the transgressions which prodigious consumption of alcohol

encourage. These transgressions are not exclusively of the body but, as I will argue, it is the body which provides the site for many of the most overt and visible aspects of the socially transgressive behaviour of stag tourists. I will, therefore, consider some of these bodily transgressions in turn, theorising as to why they are such common occurrences during stag tours. I will also consider why such transgressions are central to stag tourism experience and implicit in the stag masculinity here seen as a prevailing ethos of fun, playfulness and release.

The most common bodily transgressive behaviour witnessed during field work was that of urination and, specifically, urination in public places such as streets and courtyards. An example of this was James, a member of a stag group from the North of England (Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008, field notes). Emerging from a club and peeling off from the group as they walked towards the next stop on the bar crawl, he tucked in behind the arched entrance to a courtyard and began to urinate while whistling loudly. To this, some of the group turned and laughed, drawing attention to the amount of urine pouring across the pavement in two streams, one shouting out 'ah, he's standing in it!' and 'couldn't you hold it in man?' to which he responded 'nah, next club's probably got a massive queue like the last, not going to stand in line like a girl all night'. Even though this incident is fairly unremarkable, although undoubtedly less so for whomever's doorway served for James' toilet, it exemplifies several things. Firstly, the inevitable consequence of drinking lots

of liquid is to pass lots of liquid which must, as at other times, be released from the body. Further, James would rather not allow this to inconvenience his evening by forcing him to wait in line for the toilets at the previous or next stop on the bar crawl. Many of the clubs and bars have less than adequate toilet facilities, so that the need to queue is common place, but, this is anathema to stag tourists who want to be with their friends rather than on their own. The reaction of other members of the group to James's act of public urination is predominantly one of good humour and mock disgust. Catching up with the group, James wedged himself between Dave and Johnny and swung his arms over their shoulders. As Johnny realised James' unwashed hands were near his face, he pushed his arm away and shouted, 'get out of it you dirty bastard'.

The antagonistic nature of such public urination is apparent and might be seen as a sign of both lack of concern for locality and of a lack of knowledge of that locality: not knowing where to find a public toilet is also matched by a willingness to relieve oneself wherever necessary without regard to its impact on the local environment. It is unsurprising that much local opposition to stag tourism should be mobilised around street urination as an act of insensitivity towards locality which typifies the malign impact of stag tourists on the city.

Similarly, there is the variety of public nudity and bodily exposure that is an oft cited example of the lack of social propriety exhibited by stag tourists. In this sense there might be a divide between a willingness on the part of stag

tourists to expose the body and the lack of heed paid by stag tourists to the normal social codes concerning covering up the body. This exhibitionism of the stag groups was demonstrated by three members of a stag group, wearing their team polo shirts rolled back over their heads to expose their stomachs to the mid-June sun. They did this as they waited for the rest of the group to emerge from their hostel. All three were of athletic physique and one drew attention to his prominent stomach muscles, or 'six-pack', grinning at two passing women who he catches looking in his direction. This incident can again be seen as an example of the evident ability of the male body to monopolise or dominate the physical space of the street.

To take a third example, vomiting was a common occurrence amongst stag tourists. Primarily, in a similar manner to urination, we can see the frequency of stag tourists being sick as a natural reaction to alcohol consumption. However, in many cases it was seen by the group as a marker of being sufficiently committed to the collective pursuit of the stag experience, particularly if one could pull off being sick without letting it compromise bodily composure. Thus, in one case Daniel returned from the toilet of a nightclub to announce to the group 'just fucking puked, didn't I!' before shaking his head theatrically and reaching for another beer (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2007, field notes). The inevitable cheer from the rest of the group signalled both their amusement at Daniel's apparent disregard for his body's rejection of alcohol and also their strong sense that he was showing commitment to the

group's ongoing goals. In another case, also involving the same group, Rob rushed for the bar's toilets following a particularly lethal round of vodka shots mixed with Burn, a strong energy drink similar to Red Bull. In response to this, two of the group followed to help clear up and 'sort him out' while several others ran through merely to laugh. In both these cases the experience of bodily transgression of vomiting is experienced collectively, rather than an individual physiological reaction to alcohol consumption. The reaction from others in both cases situates the act of vomiting as both part of the expected ritual of the weekend and as an integral and, for some of them, highly humorous element of the stag experience.

Certainly in the case of the latter, Rob's reaction to the round of drinking with sudden and copious sickness was a recurrent theme of the group's later talk and, by the second day, was rotating as a fully functional anecdote. Similarly, in the case of the Scottish group, the sickness and diarrhoea experienced by some of the group on the final day of the trip are acted out almost like comedic tableaux where the pain, suffering and general messiness of the body are exaggerated by the running commentary kept up by the group. Frequently this anecdotal 'talking up' of such bodily transgressions continues long after the act and, recounted like battle stories, accentuates such physical evidence of the unruly male body as part of the stag experience itself. As one tour guide observed in reaction to a running debate about the smell and

consistency of one stag group member's faeces, 'it's all piss and shit with you guys' (Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2007, field notes).

All the above transgressions are implicit taboos that the stag tour allows to be released and even, in some senses, encouraged. Interestingly, the social rules or mores which are overstepped in the cases of nudity, urination and vomiting as well as how one eats and drinks in public all concur with the insights of Norbert Elias's work on the development of manners (Elias, 1978). Further still, in the above scenes, the bodily transgression of individuals is experienced as a collective transgression; such transgressions are an inescapably social act. Members of the group react to such bodily acts in ways that apparently condone that behaviour and signal it as actively part of the stag experience. The cheers or laughter that accompany a bout of drunken vomiting or public urination are part of the group dynamic which normalises what are, by and large, undesirable social actions. Sensing the fact that the groups often actively encourage such displays of bodily transgression, tour guide Anna joked during an interview, asking 'tell me, maybe you know, I ask everyone, is it a part of your culture or tradition that English people have a complex, they love to be naked. Why?', before going on to explain how many groups seem to love seeing their friends 'get naked' even when it's clearly not acceptable to do so (Anna, Tour Guide Interview).



Adding to the above, it is often the reaction of those outside the group that further frames the transgressive behaviour of stag tourists. As discussed previously, this sense of audience is frequently implicit. Taking the example of the men exposing their stomachs to the sun and the street, the reaction of the passing girls is to first look and then, in reaction to the return grin, exchange nervous laughter and increase their pace of walking to pass the scene of embarrassment. Again, it seems that the transgression does not entail an abandonment of social rules, rather a knowing overstepping of those rules. The fact that others, such as passing locals, might direct negative attention to the group further serves to define the boundary which the group has gone beyond.

While such reactions to stag tour group behaviour are interesting, it is particularly illuminating to look at the responses to bodily transgression by those who are called upon by their position to control such behaviour. In the restaurant episode recounted earlier, the waiter has the undesirable job of serving the group at the table but also, for the benefit of the restaurant's other customers, monitoring and attempting to control the group. This is largely based on how they use their bodies, standing up from the table, shouting and throwing objects are all examples of overstepping expected behavioural codes. Interestingly, the group in this case is also physically removed from the majority of customers in being positioned in a quieter side room, in all likelihood due to the restaurant staff's anticipation of such behaviour. In other

cases, nightclub door staff personnel were often charged with accepting or rejecting the bodily comportment of stag tour groups in allowing them into a given nightclub. The deference shown by group members on such occasions is also an evident example of the persistent awareness of the boundaries or rules that are being transgressed as opposed to those which are merely forgotten or not known.

### **Self-destruction, self-parody and the male 'effigy'**

Many of the markers of the success of a stag weekend are measured in terms of what is done to or denied from the body; alcohol consumption and lack of sleep are the prominent examples of this respectively. The more beers or vodkas that are drunk, the later the return to the hotel, the more crippling the hangovers and the messier the stories, the better the group's weekend. For example, one stag said the morning after their second night drinking, 'if I feel *this* bad, it must have been a good night' (Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2008, field notes). What is evident in this statement and much of the above discussion – and certainly a common reaction when introducing the stag tourism concept to people – is that a lot of what takes place under the rubric of the 'big weekend' is self-destructive and, for most people, one would assume undesirable. Yet, for the members of the group, within the negotiated interpretation of the weekend, these things do in fact become desirable. Interestingly, these observations concur with recent work on young people's drinking patterns

and, in particular, their loss of control and awareness in so called 'passing out stories' (Griffin *et al*, 2009). Central to this study was the effect of heavy drinking in binding groups together in a sense of 'fun', release and mutual support. There is, therefore, an apparent need to push limits and to go beyond a normal night out to, in some way, instil the event of the stag tour with a sense of uniqueness or spectacularity.

An obvious reading of this is that the hegemonic ideal of the male body is one that endures hardship and can exhibit itself as strong and powerful, particularly in terms of holding one's alcohol (Peralta, 2007). Quotes from stag participants have clearly shown that holding your own in terms of drinking quantity and pace is an example of both one's social and physical determination and commitment to the group. Much of the heavy drinking of stag groups is an image of bodily strength and endurance where the male body is pitted against the pleasurable but detrimental effects of alcohol. However, as is clear, the bodily comportment of stag tourists is not merely about withstanding the test of heavy alcohol consumption. The other pole of this dynamic is the apparent bodily disregard shown by most stag tourists. Much stag experience involves the pursuit of bodily and sensory pleasures yet frequently also involves the discomfort of hangovers and illness. The loss of control over the body in the scenes and episodes detailed above are surprisingly contradictory to a straight forward reading of alcohol as a test of bodily strength and endurance. So, while drinking and the feeling of

drunkenness might be sited by stag tourists as simple and unproblematic, and few would be happy to be labelled as weak or lightweight by their peers, there is evidently much celebration of the inability of the male body to cope with the challenges presented to it. Headaches, loss of memory, injuries, sickness, diarrhoea, dehydration are all signs of the body's rejection of the idea that real men can drink indefinitely as long as the challenge is presented to them. It should, therefore, be argued that while stag tourism to some extent requires the male body to be tested it is also evidently celebratory of any failure of such a test.

A specific instance of this paradox is the situation in which the stag often finds himself. It seems there is an unwritten rule that the stag cannot care too much about himself and should submit to whatever embarrassments and practical jokes his friends have planned. For all the backslapping, bear hugs and play fights you can be forgiven for thinking that men had a claim over their other friends' bodies. Thus, in many ways, the stag surrenders control over his body for a period of time and, equally, other group members take on responsibility for pushing him to bodily limits. The stag must endure and tolerate his trials yet all the while disregard his body as in anyway meaningful or precious. Throughout this the stag must go along with this ritual humiliation and show that he can both take the abuse and laugh at himself willingly. An example of this *par excellence* is the 'stag kidnapping' offered by one tour company where the stag is grabbed by masked assailants and forced into the back of a

van to be gagged and blindfolded. The stag's anticipated panic and disorientation is then revealed moments later when he is discharged unceremoniously at a prearranged drop off to be met by the group and showered with drinks and recollections of 'the look on your face'.

A more prosaic example of this is the act of buying drinks for the stag, and sometimes forcing consumption. In the vast majority of stag groups encountered, the stag would rarely have to buy his own drinks, although sometimes would still have to contribute to the collective kitty. Moreover, in many cases the stag was often in a state where he was unable to buy drinks and would be ceremoniously presented with and encouraged to see off, usually as quickly as possible, a series of drinks. Pushing this to extremes, groups used the 'mucky pint' or mystery drink, concocted from a myriad of spirits and liquors, to force the stag to drink something with the specific intention of turning his stomach or at least ensuring sudden and rapid drunkenness. For the stag to be sick, disorientated or too drunk to maintain reasonable body comportment (for example, falling over or walking with difficulty) is to offer highly viable and, for the group, comic proof that the stag's weekend is living up to expectation. Again this shows the male body as a central element of both the doing of stag masculinity and of experiencing what stag masculinity does to the body.

This relationship between the men and their bodies might also be seen as, at times, bordering on self-parody where behaviour draws attention to and accentuates the body's failings. This, in particular, offers a strong link between masculine performance and male embodiment as tied together through the, at times ironic or over the top, use of the male body. As the incident with the exposed torsos demonstrates, common nudity played out both as a revelation of the male body and as a sign of not caring about one's appearance. In several incidences, stag group members draw attention to their beer bellies, body hair or balding heads, to some extent revelling in the lack of their body's concordance with the ideal of a firm and trim musculature. Further still, as explored in the previous section in relation to performance, the common use of fancy dress to parody the male form is evident. The costumes chosen for the stag tend to fall into either the hyper-masculine ideal of superheroes (such as Batman and Superman) or icons (such as Elvis and Top Gun fighter pilots) or the pseudo-feminine 'drag' (bikinis, 'Hooters'<sup>17</sup> girl's hot pants and vest, and pink fairies). In this sense, fancy dress can represent the meeting ground of performance and embodiment; it is used simultaneously to mark the male body as ridiculous or failing to meet certain ideals and at the same time in a way liberate, through performance, the stag from his own body. Thus, the dressing of the stag in fancy dress costumes often bestows a degree of

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<sup>17</sup> Hooters is a popular American restaurant franchise where all-female waitress staff wear a distinctive uniform of short hot pants and tight vest top and are encouraged as part of their job description to emphasise their sex appeal to the largely male clientele. Roosters, an imitation of the Hooters 'concept' has two restaurants in Krakow which are both popular with stag tour groups.

anonymity upon him whilst also marking him out as the centre of attention for the group and the group's perceived audience.

Jana Pershing (2006) has identified such punishment rituals or 'hazing' as a central and largely accepted bonding mechanism and admittance rite in male-dominated institutions such as the Naval Academy. The symbolic punishment of new arrivals to the group ultimately acts to test and then signal acceptance into the bonded group. In the case of the stag tours and the apparent humiliation and bodily punishment acted out, the reverse might be seen, that a member is seen to be leaving the bonded group, and that this fact needs to be symbolically marked. Williams (1994) identifies this need for the ceremonial marking of the removal of a member of the group, the stag or bachelor, as a process of marking him as 'Other' through humiliation and debasement. These 'carnavalesque humiliations and reversals' work to both offer men an outlet for the affection for their friend and also to denote the loss of one of the male group to a group perceived as oppositional or antagonistic (Williams, 1994:115).

In light of the above discussion, such bodily debasement, whether it be through drunkenness, disrobement or the wearing of embarrassing costumes, acts symbolically to mark the changing status of the stag and also, perhaps, offer a cathartic way for his friends to express their intimacy. Joseph Roach's concept of 'the effigy' may have something to offer here. He develops this in

his analysis of ritual, memory and performance at Mardi Gras and carnivals (Roach, 1996). For Roach, an effigy is a copy or crude imitation and is something destroyed in place of an original, offering us some reflection on our conception of that original. Roach says that such ritual destructions 'make publicly visible through symbolic action both the tangible existence of social boundaries and, at the same time, the contingency of those boundaries on fictions of identity, their shoddy construction out of inaccurate otherness, and, consequently, their anxiety-inducing instability' (Roach, 1996:39). In the context of stag activities the male body of the stag is subjected to a symbolic destruction as part of the ceremonial purposes of the stag weekend. But the male body that is referenced for destruction is sometimes the ideal body, or more realistically the natural variation from that ideal. There is something implicitly comic, but also telling, about someone dressed as a masculine ideal such as Superhero Batman, or Top Gun fighter pilots, debased by alcohol. Roach therefore draws out the ritualistic significance of the substitution of likenesses at moments of specific importance in terms of memory and performance. It is clear that the stag tour is for the central players a highly significant moment. As I shall explore in the next chapter, there is an undercurrent of loss and imminent change. In this sense, the marking of the stag as liminal in his changing status through the use of costume and ritualistic destruction and parody attest to the symbolic richness of the stag tour.



Central to any sociological understanding of the phenomenon that is stag tourism is the appreciation that through all these moments the body has in some way become a site for the negotiation or, at least, chaotic exploration, of masculine identity, and that masculine bodily ideals, the rejection or parody of these ideals and actual male bodies are all intertwined in a way and central to the meanings of play and release evidenced in stag tourism.

Given the apparent paradox of trying to present a tough enduring body and also an unruly transgressive one, the moment when the stag, or any of the other group members, suddenly switch polarities and becomes 'out of control' is often identified by members of a group as the highlight of the weekend. The stag tourists, and we might add many young men in general, occupy the precarious ground between caring and not caring about their own bodies. Either way, the body is central to this iteration of hegemonic masculinity. Even in their apparent disregard for bodily control and welfare the stag tourists are arguably enacting masculinity in a way that highlights the limits of the male body and, further still, illuminates the significance of the body in their frequent disregard for it. In this case, the apparent paradox of the male relationship with the body is, in the 'doing' of stag tourist masculinity, a win-win duality where the men can either prove their masculinity in the toughness of their body or, should they fail at this, in their disregard for bodily control. Yet, we might also see this as a fine line which many men walk in relation to their bodies. Thus, Gill *et al* (2005:55) describes, in relation to male embodiment,

this 'delicate path' as one where 'if they appeared too concerned about their bodies or their looks they laid themselves open to accusations of vanity or obsession; if they seemed unconcerned they were at risk of being accused of 'letting themselves go''. The treatment of male bodies in stag tourism reflects a letting go from this boundary which men now seem to so finely tread, relief from the need to be in control and strong.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the body is central to the experience of stag tourism which involves varying degrees of both knowing and habitual performance. Not only are bodily feelings important, but 'acting' and 'doing' stag masculinity makes it necessary to relate to the body in a certain way. Both feeling drunk and feeling ill from drink correspond to embedded feelings of masculinity. Further, masculinity is understood in this iteration of hegemonic masculinity – we might call it hyper masculinity or stag masculinity – to include a problematic relationship with the body. The stag tour participant, and young men in general, must deploy their body performatively in this way without showing too much care for it. They must learn to be out of control and often perform this loss of control in a strategic, even predictable, manner. So, bringing together the two themes of this chapter, performance and embodiment, the 'doing' of masculinity by stag tourists is both an outward enactment and an inward feeling intertwined.

To use a term coined by Connell (1995), the 'body-reflexive practice' of stag groups constitutes both doing masculinity through the body and having masculinity done to the body. Thus, masculinity is consumed by and projected from the male body of the stag tourist. If the media focus heavily on the overt chaos of male bodies and bodily actions that the stag tour represents, it is unsurprising given that the body can be seen to pinpoint the intersection of masculinity from within and as enforced from without. The tension between needing to present a tough enduring body yet also, equally, to present a performance of the male body at play is one finally balanced in the behaviour of stag tourists. Alcohol consumption, it would seem, is the primary way in which the male body is both tested and given the impetus for transgression. As such, the bodily transgressions of nudity, vomiting and urination are not, necessarily, taken as signs of a weakened male body, rather of a transgressive male body which is submitted to the ethos of the event and, particularly in the stag's case, the whim of friends whose ritualistic punishment of his body serve to symbolise his impending withdrawal from the group. Moving from this, the next chapter will consider further the gendered construction of stag behaviour and, in particular, focus on the importance of friendship, intimacy and group cohesion to stag experience.

## **8. Stag tourism, men and masculinity**

The last chapter explored how the stag tour weekend offers chances for the performative enactment of a certain masculine comportment which works both through and upon the male body. The male body is inevitably central to stag experience. Further, in chapter six it was argued that the stag tour works as a temporal-spatial construction which defines the weekend in Krakow as a place, space and time for the collective pursuit of a highly gendered notion of fun, playfulness and escape. Throughout this there is the implicit and inescapable role of friendship. This chapter returns to the theme of masculinity to explore the role of male friendship, bonding and group cohesion in stag tourism, describing how this is essential to defining stag tourism as a masculine pursuit.

Consistently, the groups showed an awareness of themselves as engaging in something typically masculine, albeit frequently, as became evident, in ironic or exaggerated ways. Throughout fieldwork, the presence of gender as a mediator of social action and interaction ensured that masculinity was a significant theme in all findings. An aim of this chapter is, therefore, to show how the actions and interaction of stag tourists can be best understood as a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity. It will therefore be argued that the gendered interaction of stag groups with both local women and local men serve to produce and reinforce an understanding of stag tourism as a

masculine experience. On this basis, then, it is possible to address how the stag tour is a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity and how, related to this, the emergence of stag tourism might be seen, to some extent, to relate to a 'crisis' in masculinity.

### ***8.1 Friendship and male bonding ritual***

One consistently important theme of the stag tour experience is the essentially collective nature of it. One early observation of stag tourism is that much of the time the group are necessarily occupied with activities or mutual tasks such as go-carting or, quintessentially, collective drinking. The stag tour is, therefore, a coming together of friends of the stag in celebration, if not of the impending wedding itself then of the bonds of friendship within the group. It is unsurprising then that the stag tour should be a time for intimacy between friends. Exploring the themes of friendship and intimacy within the group is, then, a suitable starting point in considering how the stag tour weekend acts as a moment of homosocial bonding and a space for the enactment of masculinity.

#### **Intimacy and indirectness**

It has been noted that alcohol offers men a viable way of being together, free from the suspicion that more direct expressions of friendship might raise and,

further, sites of alcohol consumption are often central for the construction of collective masculine identities and friendships (Spradley and Mann, 1975; Lemle and Mishkind, 1989; Allison, 1994; Campbell, 2000; Peralta, 2007). The stag tour is symbolically marked as a time and space for men to be together and pursue a range of notably male interests, primarily the consumption of alcohol and the pursuit of drunkenness. Beyond alcohol, the stag tour also evidently provides a range of activities that groups experience collectively such as, for example, go-carting and pistol shooting. Indeed, the explicitly masculine nature of these activities was clear from the outset and one of the central factors in signalling stag tourism as an interesting social phenomenon. Additionally, we see an array of ways for male friendship to find expression through the stag tour such as competition, drinking rituals and transgressive humour.

A small yet telling example of this is found in Dave's group who, while at their hostel preparing for the night ahead, brought cans of beers from the communal kitchen fridge and passed them round with an apparent sense of ceremony making sure, with some care, that each member of the group got one (Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2008, field notes). Alcohol consumption, and the other activities which fill up the group's time during the weekend, is an example of Kiesling's (2005) notion of 'indirectness' which posits that much homosocial behaviour is necessarily channelled through an intermediate activity such as watching sport or talking about mutual interests. According to

Kiesling, rather than express connection or intimacy directly, and therefore risk homosocial desire being misconstrued as homosexual desire, men chose largely to mediate friendship through mutual activities or interests. The purchasing and consumption of alcohol and strong statements attesting to just how drunk individuals are serve as ways in which a sense of mutual connection is expressed and experienced not *directly* but *indirectly* through alcohol. As explored in the previous chapter, friendship for the stag is also expressed by members of his group through the buying of drinks in what amounts to a ritualistic punishment: the drunker the stag gets or, rather, the drunker his friends make him, the stronger the expression of friendship. Further, the establishment of the stag group as a collective entity can be seen as an example of what Kiesling would call *addressee* indirectness. Here, 'taking one for the team' or expressing a strong loyalty to 'the tour' are all ways of expressing feelings of connection without directly addressing the intended addressees, the other individual group members. Again, we are reminded of the team shirts and shared lexicon which all bind the group together. Expressions of loyalty to the group as a collectivity are more easily deployed within the hegemonic masculine sphere than individual expressions of intimacy between friends which are potentially seen as effeminate and, therefore, unmasculine.

Yet, this is not to assume that intimacy is never sought directly. For example, a common occurrence amongst all groups was some form of speech making.

Thus during their first evening in the main room of a cellar bar members of Ryan's group took it in turns to give speeches, circling Ryan while Ryan looked slightly overwhelmed in the middle. All the while the group drank beers and vodka shots from a large tray brought out from the bar. Responding to the shouts of 'Michael, speech', Mike, the best man, taking up the challenge, called out over the general noise of the busy bar, 'what can I say? I fucking love you mate...[others laugh]...you're a legend, I've known you...*way too long!*'. After further expressions of friendship from Michael to Ryan, the best man also used the speech to organise and signal the arrangements for the weekend, saying 'you all know what the plan is, let's make it a big one and give Ryan the send off he deserves'. (Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2007, field notes). Here are clear and direct expressions of intimacy which attest to the significance of friendship as a central facet of the stag tour experience. However, the straight forward expression of friendship is met with some laughter which signals intimacy as a potential taboo. Additionally, the speech is still mixed with references to drinking and frequent recourse to profanity indicating that the speaker should not be taken too seriously. Here, again, drinking is signified as a suitable way for the group to demonstrate their friendship to the stag.

In the previous chapter it was discussed how the male body, particularly that of the stag, is tested and tasked with enduring heavy alcohol consumption. The symbolic and physical punishment metered out to the stag as an



expression of friendship is, however, eventually abated by a need to look after the stag, reasserting a close bond of friendship. In several cases then the desire to force the stag to a higher level of drunkenness and loss of control reverts once that level is reached to the concerns of friendship. For example, in the case of Rob being sick in a club and feeling too drunk to carry on, several others including the best man Craig took time to clean him up, fetch him some water to clear his throat and, even, carried a change of clothes that he could use once his fancy dress bikini and robes had become too uncomfortable or unacceptable to wear (Saturday September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007, field notes). As noted in chapter six, points in the tour where the pace slows are seen to be out of keeping with the desired aura of heightened fun and excitement. In particular, on several occasions the stag was observed to be notably downcast and often overwhelmed. In these cases friends would talk with the stag and help lift his mood again. These and other similar incidents seem to attest to a degree of camaraderie and, further, mutual support which could be seen as expressions of direct intimacy.

It is clear that such expressions of intimacy as illustrated above allow the group collectively to work towards the pre-determined definition of the weekend as a time for fun and enjoyment which is, importantly, experienced as a collectivity. Interestingly, however, it is not the case that displays of emotion are outlawed, as a straightforward reading of hegemonic masculinity might predict, but that they are in fact encouraged to an extent, but crucially at

certain closely-defined moments. In the example of Ryan's group making speeches or the late night confessions of friendship at the bar it is evident that there is a lot of space for emotion, indeed, it can be one of the ways in which the desired pace of the evening is set and maintained. Intimacy, friendship and a sense of togetherness are therefore central to a successful stag experience and, as shall be explored below, moments when this is either achieved or not can be seen to correlate with the perceived success or failure of the stag tour.

### **Friendship and group cohesion**

The fun and frivolity that are seen as central components of the stag weekend are collectively established. The cohesion or togetherness of the group during these times is central to the ethos of the stag tour. Further, the stag group offers a chance for male bonding and for friendships to be asserted and, importantly, reasserted. The logic of the stag weekend dictates that the experience is a collective one and, therefore, such expressions of togetherness and connection are a central motif of stag experience. As such, moments when fractures within this sense of togetherness emerge are seen to negate the pervading ideal of friendship and bonding which a successful stag tour necessitates. Importantly, then, beyond the stag tour offering space for intimacy and male bonding, it also acts to cultivate a group solidarity or

cohesion. As with individual group members needing to be picked up or talked up by the group, this sense of cohesion is also something the group must actively foster in order to achieve the desired experience. Similarly, the tour guides are also, evidently, aware of the need to establish a collective experience from which few are left out. Thus, Paulina, reflected that ‘one of our rules is you can’t stay with one guy on the group because he likes and does everything and he enjoy all the time, you need to find the most sad person in the group and try to persuade him to join in everything’ (Paulina, Tour Guide Interview). The notion of ‘pace’ deployed in chapter six often parallels this rise and fall in the cohesion of the group. As such, moments of cohesion and symbolic unity – the first drink prior to the flight marking the group’s coming together or moving onto the dance floor of the first club, for example – are also moments of heightened pace, in keeping with the prevailing desired ethos of fun and release.

Beyond this pacing within the tour itself, it is fair to suggest that the stag tour represents a moment of great significance in the history of the group of friends. Thus, Tony Blackshaw spoke of a group ‘myth’ created amongst the closely bonded group of friends in his study of lad culture in Leeds (2003). Similarly, many of the groups in this study were seen to have their own sense of group history constructed around moments of significance and shared experience. The stag tour which marks the passing into marriage of a key member of the group is, therefore, unsurprisingly, a significant moment within

the group. Further, at the same time the marriage of a key group member is a possible threat to the group's sense of togetherness but also a chance for the reassertion of the group collectivity. For several of the groups in particular, growing older and the move from school to university and to work life, had meant that times to be together with male friends had become more infrequent. This became evident in that for some groups the early stages of the stag weekend seemed given over to catching up with old friends, having not seen each other recently due to other responsibilities, and reasserting bonds of friendship. This is perhaps reminiscent of Jim Walker's observation in his study of Australian high school boys that, on leaving the confined social setting of school, the young men's ties of friendship would often loosen and become more flexible as individuals went their different ways in terms of further education, careers, family and social life (Walker, 1988). Thus, many of the stag groups who have this characteristic mixed friendship group could expect to be attempting to hold together a cohesive unit which has, perhaps, not existed unproblematically since school days.

So far the group have been considered as having a shared history, a situation which is desired but not necessarily true for many groups. Of all the groups with which some level of participant-observation was carried out, all but two had such multiple friendship groups. Invariably this meant that many members of each group were not overly familiar with each other but, rather, had a mutual connection through the stag. The picture of male bonding and the

significance of the group dynamic is further complicated, then, when considering that stag groups are frequently of a mixed composition, comprising members of the stag's family and friends drawn from university, work, school or different sports or social clubs. Thus, the degree to which stag group members are familiar with each other prior to the trip can vary greatly, with different sets of friends within the group having little prior knowledge of each other. What to the causal observer appear to be cohesive groups often, in fact, bear closer resemblance to several interconnected groups, albeit groups in the process of becoming one bonded entity. For stags with such multiple friendship groups from school, university, work and family circles the chance was sought for the stag tour to provide cohesion between the sub-groups. For example, Jay spoke of the stag weekend as a good chance for his various friends to get together and get to know each other more before the wedding (Friday May 30<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes). Similarly, during an interview tour guide Marta reflected on her initial astonishment, saying 'I was a little surprised because I thought if you were going to go on a stag weekend you'd at least know the stag...they'll often be like, "oh yeah, these three people are friends of friends, they don't even know the stag" (Marta, Tour Guide Interview).

Adding to the use of Kiesling's concept of indirectness outlined above, there is some suggestion that much of the mutual activity of the stag tour in fact serves to bind an initially somewhat disparate group. The stag tour appears to

allow a space and time more generally for men quickly to bond and share in mutual activities and experiences. From earlier descriptions of interactions between group members it is clear that much work is done by stag tourists to make the stag experience 'work' in the desired manner by encouraging certain behaviour and high paced enjoyment. Implicit in this then is that there is much effort in keeping the group together and cohesive. Group cohesion is often marked by a high degree of validation internal to the group, with certain acts or behaviour being labelled as significant to the group. The retelling of stories or, after an episode during the weekend the group deem particularly significant, calls of 'nice one, mate' and, for example, 'Wilson, you legend' (Saturday September 22nd 2007, field notes). These and other examples show a fairly consistent process of signifying what behaviour is desirable and how that behaviour should be interpreted by the group as part of a coherent definition of the weekend. This seems to support observations by Cameron and Kulick (2003) and Coates (2003) that men's talk about shared experiences serves to foster group solidarity and collective identity.

This is not to say there was not evident competition between tour members. Sometimes, this competitiveness seemed put on and in fact a proof of great familiarity between group members, when, for example, Rob's group acted up the public/private school split between group members as the basis for 'teams' for drinking games. Similarly, Ryan's group talked up an apparent split in the group between fans of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and London

rival's Chelsea (Saturday 3rd November 2007, field notes). Such verbal repartee, in its apparent repetitiveness and familiarity, again attests to Kiesling's (2005) conception of indirectness, with confrontation standing in for the expression of intimacy or friendship. Thus, such joking, although competitive, in fact illustrates familiarity and connection between individuals. Yet, one prominent example of actual confrontation was the group from Scotland who fell out on several occasions. Fin (in his late 20s), explained one of these incidents by saying 'been here one night and already a few altercations, nothing much, just arguments, you know, fisticuffs'. Going on, he adds, 'all of us grew up together, you know, now we're just acting like we're fifteen again, drinking and that, right and wrong goes out the window y'know?' (Friday June 20<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes). Of course, there is the distinct possibility that this is something common for this group, that their physical confrontation is just an extension of the usual group dynamic merely taking a step further than the more prosaic play fighting and bear hugging of the other groups.

A somewhat less dramatic example of this is Jon's group, whose weekend was marked by a lack of cohesion. For example, taking separate meals was talked of as a way to let people do what they wanted and accommodate different recovery rates from previous drinking but was also seen as breaking up the group and allowing some to become marginalised. Talking to Darren and Ali on the Sunday afternoon, they spoke of the previous night when Jon the stag, the best man Rich and several others had started dinner in a small

restaurant off the Rynek Główny without letting the others know, resulting in the remaining group members being split between two other near by restaurants. Similarly, both Darren and Ali had booked different return flights from the others and consequently were still 'killing time' in Krakow during the Sunday afternoon after the others had left that morning. 'It was great on the Friday but after that it just got a bit crap really, trying to keep the group together', to which Darren added, 'yeah, the others just didn't give a shit about keeping us all together as a group and y'know that's why we came out here, so to be honest with you I'm a bit annoyed to come out here *not* to be part of it all' (Sunday April 13<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes). This seems to indicate that in spite of the evident drive for establishing and maintaining group unity, some group members do indeed become somewhat peripheral or marginalised from the central core of the group.

If the stag tour represents a time and space for male bonding and for the construction of peer group cohesion, a common theme is also unavoidably its transitory nature. This becomes evident on several levels, firstly, in terms of the stag weekend itself being relatively short and high paced and, secondly, the stag's impending marriage acts to frame the temporal limits of the group's time together. The stag tour, therefore, acts as a symbolic moment for many of its participants and seems, at times, charged with a sense of loss or change. Amongst the good times is a real sense of the passing away of those times as growing older signals less time for friendship or, at least, greater



limits and responsibilities. As noted earlier, this could be as much a matter of perception as of fact.

As discussed above, many male friendship groups develop their own complicated collective history or mythology based around previous shared experiences and mutual familiarity as manifest in in-jokes, nicknames and told and retold common stories. Expressions of nostalgia, then, were a common occurrence amongst groups. These might take the form of recounting anecdotes from previous group holidays, recounting the heroic drinking feats of university days or sharing memories of a particular club or pub at home once claimed as the group's very own territory. While much of this talk, as illustrated above, serves to reinforce the groups' sense of collectivity, it also highlights what are felt as very real changes in the men's lives. Therefore, such talk was frequently linked to a present sense of loss whereby the previous times of togetherness amongst the group are held in contrast to the contemporary situation where jobs and family might be making increasing inroads into their time. One example of this is the comparison drawn by Clarke, one of the prominent members of Tom's group. Recalling school days and how the different friends came to know each other, he stated that the current situation was 'not like the old days sitting around drinking cheap lager talking shit, these days everybody's got less time' then adding 'maybe more money but less time' (Friday November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, field notes). Clarke's observation is particularly insightful given that this nexus between time and

money can in fact be seen as one aspect of the men's lives which drives this intensification of their leisure time. Knowing that they seldom have the time together as they used to, the time they do have together as a group of friends, away from work and family life or relationships, becomes all the more valuable.

This sense of growing old or settling down was also something apparently addressed directly by some stags. For some groups, particularly those made up of men in their thirties, there seemed an apparent desire to show that they still had the ability to partake in the heavy drinking which they saw as characterising their youth. In this sense, there was an evident awareness of a perceived conflict between settling down on the one hand and retaining a largely carefree leisure life on the other. It is this antagonism which underwrites much of the need to delineate the stag weekend as a space and time distinct from other responsibilities such as family or work. A further interesting example of this is found in reaction to those who could not make it to the stag tour, such as friends who were only able to spare or afford one holiday a year and chose to spend it with their girlfriend or partner. In such cases there was an expected degree of 'piss-taking' relating to absent others being 'under the thumb' or, even, not smart enough to convince their partner to allow them the weekend away. However, there was also an apparent sense of loss in many friends beginning to settle down signalling a break-up of long established friendship groups.

## ***8.2 Stag tourism and gender relations***

The themes addressed throughout illustrate the prevalence of gender as a central aspect of the stag tour experience and an essential element of the stag phenomenon as a whole. Throughout the fieldwork the participants (with varying degrees of critical reflection) clearly showed an awareness of the stag tour phenomenon as an implicitly, and intensely, male phenomenon. But how best can this be made sense of? One possible area where this might be drawn out in greater analytical depth is through looking at the various gender relations and interactions within the group and, importantly, between the group and those outsiders they come into contact with. It is necessary for a fuller understanding of the phenomenon to explore how the masculinity evidenced by stag tourism is enacted referentially with other male and female groups. This is necessary so as to return to a relational understanding of gender; it is not enough merely to label stag tour behaviour and experiences as masculine or, indeed, hegemonically masculine, we must see how this is played out in relation to others in what Demetriou (2001) refers to as internal and external hegemony. The respective gendered power relations between men and between men and women are here a necessary part of discussing the masculinity of stag tourists. Further, we see the added complexity brought by the spectre of national identity and stereotypes. As explored previously, interactions with locals are often written through with assumptions highly mediated by preconceived ideas of Eastern Europeanness or Polishness. It is worth exploring the character of these relations or interactions further.

## **Gendered interaction with local women**

Local women, alongside local beer, are frequently cited as motivators for travelling to Eastern Europe for the stag tour. Indeed, many stag tour activities in one way or another involve some level of interaction with local women and, in attending strip and lap dance clubs, can take a commercialised and highly sexualised form. Readily apparent, then, is the fairly pervasive and persistent girl watching, as well as talk of seducing local girls and drawing, invariably favourable, comparisons between them and British women. For example, the episode, recounted earlier, involving Dave's group, seated on the Rynek main square and watching local women pass while making associated comments (Friday June 27<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes), highlights the prominence of local women as an object of the male gaze of the stag group. Drawing direct comparisons between Polish women and British women was common and evidently served to highlight the apparent difference of local women as something desirable, exotic and available. In this sense, talking about and looking at local girls was a persistent and common activity amongst stag groups. Further, this was generally collective, with individuals 'doing' their girl watching in such a way as to be seen by others and also to draw affirmation from others. However, this is not to say that interaction between stag tours and others is limited simply to gazing. For example, during an evening spent with Rob's group, a waitress trying to clear the table of glasses became the focus of attention. The attempts to initiate conversation by some of the group, including one touching her back whilst trying to ask her name, were rebuffed by the waitress, first by

shaking her head, then by shooting a 'don't-mess-with-me' glance and walking away. To this, one group member in particular launched into a string of comments about the waitress, saying: 'stuck up bitch, bet she's a virgin!' and 'bet she's got a tight cunt...wouldn't mind breaking her in, put a fucking smile on her face' (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2007, field notes).

This emphasis on local females as objects of a sexualised 'gaze' and subject to unwanted sexual attention is important, if a little unsurprising. As with Beth Quinn's (2002) discussion of 'girl watching', much of this behaviour serves to enact and establish a viable heterosexual identity for those doing the watching, the female subject of the gaze being largely peripheral. Added to this, local women are evidently mobilised as part of the associated 'place myth', to use Shields' term (1991), of Poland and Eastern Europe and therefore embody many of the imaginative practices of stag tourists which are projected onto them. Thus, getting local girls to pose with the group was also seen as desirable and, perhaps, a way of engaging with the place myth of Krakow. An example of this was 'Woody', a member of Ryan's group, who spoke of seeing 'the hottest girl ever' serving pizzas in a restaurant and just wanted 'to grab her and take her away back to England where she could be a model or something', thus expressing his apparent disbelief that a woman of her looks would have an ordinary job in Poland (Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2007, field notes). Talk of such rescue fantasies was not uncommon and highlighted the salience of both gender and nationality as ordering concepts. This

problematic relationship between stag tourists and Polish women was commented on by the tour guide Anna during an interview. She observed that 'Polish girls do not like it anymore...at the beginning when the guys were coming here the girls were happy, yeah, because it was something else, different. And now, they hate, especially when the guys are coming here and flashing the money' (Anna, Tour Guide Interview). Interestingly, Anna's observation highlights how the perceived inequality between British men and Polish women, that means some men try to use money and their apparent affluence to attract local women, had led to resentment of stag tourists by many local women.

In terms of interaction between stag tourists and local women, the presence and general visibility of the stag group would often draw attention from groups of female locals, with stag group members using the stag as a way to introduce themselves or 'break the ice'. An example of this was one stag tourist asking a local girl for directions but then adding 'that's my best mate there, he's getting married, come and have some drinks with us' (Friday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2008, field notes). This unsuccessful attempt to initiate contact with local women is fairly typical of observed stag behaviour. However, another interesting example is of group members 'chatting up' girls for another friend. In this sense some men within relationships still engaged in the thrill of 'the chase' without being unfaithful. For example, Tim and Ben, both with long-term girlfriends back in England, did not try directly to 'chat up' local girls but

would often be the first to talk to groups of girls. When asked to reflect on this they both said that it was fun for them and that girl would see them as 'non-threatening' (Saturday June 28<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes). Their role in breaking the ice or finding girls for others can be seen as a way for them to show their heterosexuality indirectly through their ability to chat to and charm women without their need for them to take 'the chase' any further. This seems to concur with observations made by David Grazian in his study of North American college men's collective pursuit of sexual encounters with women (Grazian, 2007). Thus, he refers to a group of men "loving" the vicarious thrill of watching their comrade succeed in commanding the young woman's attention' (Grazian, 2007:232). Additionally, then, the theme of male friendship arises as individuals show their ability to be a good 'wingman' in helping their mates in their goal of seducing local women, albeit without actually doing so themselves or simply in tacking pleasure in the success of others.

The observed tendency for local women to be talked about and looked at more than interacted with is perhaps an indicator of the apparent need for men, even amongst close friends, to clearly exhibit heterosexuality. This, then, to an extent concurs with previous theories of how men use 'men's talk' as a tool for constructing a viable heterosexual masculine identity (Cameron and Kulick, 2003; Coates, 2003). An interesting example of this is strip clubs. While all groups spoke of plans to visit a strip club, very few of them actually made it there or only did so very late once some members of the group had

returned to the hotel or decided to stay in the centre of town drinking. This is partly due to the layout of Krakow and its associated night time economy which sees the few strip clubs dispersed in most cases quite far from the city centre. The need to organise taxis to an out of town address, exacerbated by the groups' levels of drunkenness and general disorder, often seems to prohibit the visit. Although Krakow does have a number of escort agencies, of the members of the eight groups I had contact with through participant-observation none were known to have visited any of these establishments. Indeed, the visibility of prostitution in other cities favoured for stag tourism, such as Prague, or previously favoured for stag tourism, such as Amsterdam, was not evident in Krakow.

Yet, it is important not to be too ready to downplay the actual felt desire that subjective sexuality bestows on an individual. The fact is that some of the groups did indeed go to strip clubs even though others in their group declined and they themselves would clearly have been able not to go. Similarly, many stag tourists do evidently pursue local women with great persistence and some success. For example, one stag party member spoke of how another member, a close friend from his time at university, had 'got lucky right at the start with some Polish girl and fucked off to get his end away<sup>18</sup>' (Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008, field notes). While the assumption would be that the heteronormative imperative of the group would be to praise those succeeding

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<sup>18</sup> Euphemism for sexual intercourse



in the quest for sexual gratification, here the ability of one member successfully to seduce a local girl was interpreted as a breach of group unity. Thus, in the words of another member, 'his loss, you can get a shag<sup>19</sup> any time back home but he'll be missing the whole night, missing all the fun'. Here, there is evidently a balance or, indeed, antagonism between predatory heterosexuality and group loyalty. On the other hand, such comments might also be interpreted as the jealousy of the friend who has not had any success with women.

What becomes apparent is that although interactions between local women and the British stag tourist are often antagonistic, many women do, indeed, participate and interact favourably with such men. Paulina, once a tour guide but now office manager for Party Poland, observed in an interview that:

'Yeah, because you know sometimes the girls are happy when English guys are coming and, you know, English guys can join everything and can have fun all the time, that's the reason, because when you are going out in the evenings all the time they are having good time, laughing, drinking, everything, and they are loud and maybe that's the reason that sometimes the Polish guys don't understand that'.

Here, in fact, the participation of Polish women in stag tourism is based on the observation that, in contrast to Polish men, the jovial behaviour of many British men on stag tours is received well by some local women.

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<sup>19</sup> As above

Given the above, it becomes clear that interaction between stag tourists and local women is often based not just on gender but also on class and ethnicity or nationality. As such, the expectation that men talk frequently about women in sexualised ways is always, here inflected with reference to the perceived difference or 'otherness' of those women. Similarly, from the way the groups speak it can be seen that many of the assumptions made about local women by the stag tourists imply a sense of class. This may be, at least in part because of the women the men come into contact with are primarily the barmaids and waitresses of the service economy. Thus, the comments made above by 'Woody' concerning a particularly desirable local girl working in a restaurant and by Anna regarding the ostentatious behaviour of some British men in trying to impress local women both attest to an implicitly classed relationship.

### **Gendered interaction between stag tourists and local men**

Beyond the above consideration of the role that reference to and interaction with local women plays in allowing stag tourists to establish an apparent collective masculine identity, the relational quality of masculinity also necessitates some consideration of how masculinity is framed in relations between men. In particular, is stag behaviour a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity? If so, how and why does it make evident the power relations between men? What Demetriou (2001) refers to as internal hegemonic

masculinity is worth exploring in further detail by looking at the relationship and interaction between stag tourists and local men and also between men of the group.

Through observation of group behaviour it became apparent that the masculinity of the tour group was often framed in reference to that of local men by, for example, feeling intimidated or threatened by potentially aggressive Polish men. Members of Phil's group, for example, responded to the perceived threat of local men in the club, by saying 'don't like the look of that big fucker, looks fucking nuts', and 'since we got here there's been a few places we think we're going to get our heads kicked in for sure, think they want to protect their women or something' (Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2007, field notes). To an extent this represents a relatively common need for tourists to negotiate their feelings of danger or fear when confronted with an unknown locality and its associated risks. However, the perceived threat of local men attests to a gendered working of this feeling of risk. Indeed, this sense of uncertainty or potential risk seems to add to the excitement which the stag tourist sought to capture and highlights the articulation of a place myth which imagines Eastern Europe to be unconventional and potentially risky. Similarly, some stag tour members seemed to express an almost territorial understanding; knowing that if a group of Polish men were to walk into 'their' pub at home they would feel the need to assert their authority. Having learnt from experience, it appears, tour guide Anna was aware that interaction

between stag tourists and local men could be problematic and potentially dangerous. Thus, she reflected during an interview that she would 'always tell the groups, don't talk to the Polish guys. You don't have to, don't talk to them, don't look at them, they don't like you, you don't need them to be happy' (Anna, Tour Guide Interview).

Amongst stag groups there was also to some degree a sense of needing to test if they measure up to local men. The supposed strength, drinking ability or simply 'craziness' of Polish men was taken as a high standard with some groups expressing their desire to match them and show they can match their drinking. Whereas other groups simply stated they have 'no chance' of out drinking the locals. There were, however, evidently quite a lot of potential for benign interaction between stag tourists and local men. For example, the relative small size of Ben's group seemed to mean they were less likely to be met with animosity from local males. Indeed, Ben and Dave recounted how on several occasions they had been drinking with Polish men who they started talking to on the Saturday night and who recommended clubs to them (Saturday June 28<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes). Interestingly, here also some of the conversation was directed at Polish women, with members of the stag group voicing their appreciation of Polish women to the local men through expressions of jealousy. Similarly, one of the leading stag tour companies had a Polish male driver who also sometimes acted, either formally or informally, as a tour guide for groups. In reference to this, the tour guide Marta observed

during an interview that 'they kind of feel like the guy is their buddy and is really going to give them the secret tips on how to pick up Polish women and even help them and be their wingman, you know. So we have a few male guides who are ok, but usually with the pub crawls we do give girls' (Marta, Tour Guide Interview). Here, the dynamic of group and a male driver and/or guide was always one of friendship, with the male guide being spoken of as 'our crazy Polish drinking buddy' who can either show the group 'how to drink like the locals' or introduce the group to some attractive local women. Again we see the link between gender and nationality or national cultural stereotypes.

Leading on from this, one frequent point of reference was the physicality of some Polish men. Some group conversations focused on a stereotypical image of Polish men with short cropped hair, muscular build and general masculine comportment. There was, however, some ambivalence towards this with stag group attitudes moving between a sense of threat and a more derogatory mocking and back again. Disparaging comments like 'meatheads' or comparing them to gorillas for their overdeveloped muscular bodies and aggressive comportment were common. In particular, the latter often proved a point of reference for some of the British men of the stag groups who felt they compared favourably to local men in terms of style of dress, sense of fun and their open-mindedness. The act of stereotyping local men as slow, muscle-bound 'meatheads' also serves to marginalise them as a group. Deploying the

binary between mind and body, such talk acts to marginalise Polish men as being physically developed at the expense of mental qualities such as intelligence, humour, charisma and sociability and, as such, is a clear process of 'othering'.

### ***8.3 Stag tourism as hegemonic masculinity***

So far this chapter has addressed the theme of male friendship and group bonding or cohesion which pervades the stag tour experience. It has also focussed on the ways in which the groups' interactions with both local men and women are highly gendered, as well as informed by presumptions relating to national stereotypes. This begins to foreground masculinity as the primary ordering concept or theme of the stag tour phenomenon. On the face of it, then, the stag tour is a clear manifestation of hegemonic masculinity. The participants are with few exceptions white British, middle or working class, and heterosexual. Added to this they are young, the majority being in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, assertive and in the most part dominant in terms of the space they occupy and the confidence they project. Further still, the stag tour is inescapably part of the heteronormative institution of marriage; the very fact that the moment marks the soon-to-be-married status of the stag means that the heteronormative bond is implicit. Taken together, it is clear that the stag tour phenomenon rests upon many of the key principles that support hegemonic masculinity. What is of greater interest, however, is to

consider how the ideological principles of hegemonic masculinity, that which establishes a given form of masculinity as legitimate and dominant, become manifest in the actual workings of the stag tour and in the behaviour of stag tour groups.

Central to this concern, it is important to consider how the masculinity represented by the stag tour is enforced or policed within the group and how the consent of others is established. Indeed, many local women were seen to respond to stag behaviour and to partake in it, for example, encouraging the men to drink, dancing with them or posing for photographs. It is therefore not possible to discuss how hegemonic masculinity, as a concept, can be applied to stag tour groups without considering power both within the groups and between the groups and others. In terms of internal power within the group, it is evident that the stag tour is seen as a time of fun and friendship and, one might therefore infer, a lack of need for members of the group to assert authority over others. As considered above any competition (such as drinking game 'teams' or the familiar repartee of mutual 'piss taking') seems to strengthen bonds within the group. Yet, it is clear that there is considerable space within groups for some men to assert power or authority over others while some members are marginalised or, at least, seem not to have much status. Equally, the fact that most groups do, in fact, seem to work towards a dominant and clear ideal of masculine behaviour implies that all within the group are complicit in the construction of the weekend as a hyper-masculine

event. Much of this serves to establish and maintain a dominant definition of masculinity over others.

So, in order to explore how the concept of hegemonic masculinity relates to the study of stag tourism, it is important to consider the ways in which group interactions negotiate power with and without the group. Firstly, then, a considerable amount of 'piss-taking' and verbal repartee which would pervade much stag group conversation is worth further discussion. As such, numerous cases were observed of some group members drinking slower than others; this would prompt accusations of being 'lame' or 'lightweight'. This interaction acts as a patent reminder that the presiding definition of the weekend is one of fun and frivolity with attempts to slow the drinking pace were clearly seen as going against this. Further still, the accusations also highlight the subtle control within the group which sees certain members of the group dominate as key players while others attempt to comply as much as possible though at times failing to do so. It was also evident in field observations that kitty holders had enhanced power and status within their group. They may have been chosen in part because they already had high status, but also benefiting from significant importance by virtue of the role itself. For example, kitty holder James held considerable authority in his group, and this was symbolically and dramatically enacted by Mark running over in a hyperbolic display of loyalty (Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008, field notes). This incident points to the importance of the shifting dynamics within the group. Indeed, as explored above, the



cohesion of the group is often interrupted leading to fragmentation within the group. In such cases, the need for the high-status men of the group to exhibit direct or indirect power becomes more salient than at other times when the aura of fun and a sense of togetherness act to obscure such power dynamics.

An example of how apparent group cohesion can also act to marginalise some members was evident in the treatment of Andrew, a member of Rob's group and brother of the fiancé. Andrew's occupation in the Navy and marginal relationship to the group, being linked by the fiancé's family rather than direct friendship with the stag, were commented on by other group members on several occasions. For example, one of Andrew's attempts to instigate a drinking game early on the Saturday night were shouted down by other members of the group, one of them adding 'gotta be careful and not get you Navy boys too pissed, know you all get naked and wrestle each other' (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2007, field notes). This response from the group is particularly interesting given that their earlier behaviour showed support for competitive drinking and nudity: prior to arriving at the club they had already partaken in competitive drinking and Rob's revealing fancy-dress outfit had been the subject of approval. It seems that Andrew's marginal status meant that he was not in the position for his supposed penchant for drunken nudity to remain unquestioned, whereas Rob's status as Stag and general centrality to the group mean his own nudity is unchallenged and even praised within the remit of stag transgression.

A form of marginalisation was also evident on occasions when stag groups met other British stag tour groups in clubs or bars. As discussed in chapter six, the attempt to cultivate uniqueness amongst a stag tour group can mean that the presence of another group may act referentially to invalidate this authenticity if they are seen to be having similar or 'better' experiences. In order to establish a hegemonic masculine identity within the group, other groups are often positioned as inauthentic even while doing much the same in terms of behaviour and masculine enactment. Attempts to distance the masculinity of other stag groups, occasioned when two groups were in the same bar or club, would often lead to negative statements about the other group being a 'bunch of wankers' or drawing on regional differences, for example in the labelling of the group as 'northern monkeys' (Friday April 11<sup>th</sup> 2008, field notes).

There is therefore a strange paradox that groups attempt to assert masculinity as unique whilst doing so in very similar, and indeed predictable, ways to that of other groups. Again, the implication here is that hegemonic masculinity is relational and the dominant position of some is inconceivable without the subordinate position of others. The sense of uniqueness fostered by a given group is based on an associated derision of others. That this becomes more visible at certain times, such as when in proximity to another British stag group or a group of Polish men considered to be threatening, adds

significantly to the dynamic; the group has to cultivate their own collective masculine identity through ongoing negotiation and gender work.

A final example of the power dynamic within stag tour groups is that of Peter and Josh, two members of Rob's group who were both openly gay. In the case of Josh, his characteristically camp attitude was often mocked, albeit playfully, by others which, at times, resulted in him seeming marginal to the main group and its activities. Peter, however, was predominantly straight-acting and in terms of his good looks, sense of humour and style seemed to be given considerable status in the group. On this topic, Peter observed that 'obviously they're not going to want to go to a gay bar or anything but they know I'm gay and don't mind', adding 'we're all good mates, I can out drink most of them anyway and I don't take any stick' (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2007, field notes). This comment appears to establish Peter's masculinity, despite his sexuality, as viable within the group. Interestingly, then, whilst the notion of hegemonic masculinity is constructed around an implicit heterosexuality, as observed here homosexuality is by no means a barrier to stag tour participation.

From speaking to tour guides, it seemed that having some homosexual or bisexual members of stag groups was not uncommon. Hence, Magda recollected that:

'We were in the strip club and the two guys were just sitting there...bored. So I ask them why are you not enjoying it, you book it but don't like it. "Magda, we're together" [laughs] "so we do not want to look at girls". Alright, you can join us if you don't like girls, so the three of us were sitting there. All the other guys were having private dances and in the middle stage I was sitting with those gays and having the best time in the strip club ever'.

Here, Magda's account of two gay members of a stag group who are in a homosexual relationship sees them as being marginalised by the activity of watching the dancing at the strip club and, instead, sitting and drinking with the female tour guide. In such a case there is a clear division between the heterosexual activities of the main group at the strip bar and the female guide and the two gay group members who are positioned as marginal.

### **Doing 'lad' hegemonic masculinity**

In the previous chapter it was observed that there are different ways of doing masculinity through the body, namely withstanding or submitting to the various strains and tests of alcohol consumption to either maintain or lose control. From the outset it became apparent that the behaviour of stag tour groups was readily described by the ethos of 'new lad' culture which favours frivolity and the pursuit of 'birds', 'booze', football and good times with exclusively male friends (Whelehan, 2000; Blackshaw, 2003; Benwell, 2003).

The existing literature posits this phenomenon as either a real and troubling development in masculinity or as a media fabrication which, nonetheless, reflects contemporary concerns relating to masculinity, in particular that of boys and young men. However, rather than being a media fabrication, the new lad culture of the 1990s and 2000s which the men of this study with few exceptions grew up with does in fact appear to translate into actual behaviour. While the 'new lad' himself is evidently an ideal type that few actual individuals would ascribe to in its entirety, much of the lad culture does seem to underwrite lots of stag behaviour, including heavy drinking, chasing or simply talking about women and being valued by peers for being 'a laugh' and 'up for it'. The use of performative analogies help to explain how in some ways this lad culture can be imbibed and repeated intuitively and, in other ways, articulated through a much more knowing performance as an intentional drive to act up to the 'lad' ideal.

Another way of seeing this is that despite its narrow remit, the masculinity of 'lad culture' in fact allows for considerable flexibility. Group members can act out their heavy drinking, their overt heterosexuality or their sense of humour and ability to give and take 'the piss'. For example, it was noted that in relation to the male body and drinking there is a degree of flexibility. If the men take and hold their drink they are seen as possessing a strong and resilient, and therefore masculine, body. Equally, taking in the drink but then letting go to transgressive acts is also seen as part of the definition of 'lad culture' or

masculinity which endorses a lack of restraint and a commitment to pleasure and fun.

Similarly, it became apparent that although heterosexuality was valourised as an important aspect of the groups' collective masculine identity, individuals were not observed to be compelled to chase women or to prove themselves through predatory heterosexual acts. Drinking to excess was ever-present, yet some individuals drank less or expressed a desire to remain in relative control in order to 'chat up' girls. Some of these individuals managed their alcohol intake in order to stay capable in case of potential opportunities for seduction. Yet, equally, the rejection of this was common with many saying that the weekend was not, in fact, about chasing girls and was more about 'getting messy with mates' (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2007, field notes). On this basis, while the heteronormative basis of hegemonic masculinity is readily apparent in the case of stag tourism, this did not necessarily translate into social pressures to act out and prove heterosexual desires. What is perhaps most striking is the preference for heteronormative activities such as 'girl watching' which, as explored previously, could be enacted collectively.

Moving on, it is noteworthy that much of the observed 'doing' of masculinity was tinged with irony. Examples of this include knowing references to gun shooting as a manly activity or reference by the group to themselves as 'just a bunch of pissed-up blokes'. This ironic discourse has been highlighted by

Imelda Whelehan's (2000) work on lad's magazines and popular culture but is here frequently apparent. One element of this is of the men knowingly engaging in what is essentially sexist behaviour whilst using humour as a defence, as a way of distancing criticism. Further, it seems that the masculinity enacted by stag tourists is often hyperbolic, with overtly masculine or manly aspects being acted, indeed over-acted. Further, to take up Whelehan's observation that such ironic discourse serves to excuse insensitive behaviour and distance responsibility, the stag weekend being demarcated as a highly masculine space is seen by the groups to exclude censure. The presiding ethos of fun and frivolity, therefore, acts to reject responsibilities. The self-debasement of some stag tourists can therefore be seen as a defence mechanism against claims that stag behaviour, and lad culture more generally, are considered uncouth, insensitive or sexist and as such aberrant.

#### ***8.4 Crisis? What crisis?***

At the outset of this research it was presumed that the mass movement of British men to Eastern European cities such as Krakow was in some way symptomatic of a perceived threat to or 'crisis' in established masculine roles and an associated need to reassert such. However, throughout the fieldwork, this assertion became increasingly problematic. While, in many senses, the leisure environment and the night-time economy provide spaces for the

enactment of stereotypically masculine behaviour, much of this hinted at a degree of flexibility for the masculinity of group members. Thus, many appeared to feel that they can 'play the game' and retain masculine spaces for homosocial bonding while not allowing those times to encroach on their relationships in the work and family sphere. To better understand this we can return to Tony Jefferson's notion of 'context-specific hegemonic strategies' (Jefferson, 2002: 72). Clearly the stag tourists are largely knowing and aware of their enactment of hegemonic masculinity or lad culture, yet, as outlined in relation to space, place and time in chapter six, it is the physical and social context which makes this so readily possible.

Masculinity as a script is evidently strong, in that members of the stag group can act up to a well-known way of being masculine. However, this hides some of the more subtle ways in which the lad culture of 'birds', 'booze', mates and football is knowingly played with and, indeed, utilised at some times and not others. Occasions where 'work' talk was checked within the group to maintain a boundary between the stag tour as time and place of fun and frivolity and home was common. It was suggested that this functioned to maintain the definition of the stag tour and to ensure the desired pace. Beyond this, such acts helped compartmentalise the men's behaviour. Indeed, on numerous occasions individuals, clearly aware of the negative reputation of stag tourists, expressed how their behaviour during the stag tour bore very little similarity to their behaviour at home and in other situations. Further, many participants



went as far as to eagerly reassure me that they were in caring relationships at home and this was merely 'time out' with friends. Indeed, sometimes home, work, or relationships were used as a foil to emphasise the uniqueness of the weekend, for example reinforcing the element of release or escapism through referring to not being at work or not being under the watch of a girlfriend or wife as at home. Being 'off the leash' was a frequently employed term by the men with partners or wives at home.

For these reasons talking of the stag tour and other homosocial leisure spaces as offering a sense of certainty for men glosses over the fact that such spaces allow quite a degree of flexibility in the way hegemonic masculinity is interpreted and performed. However, many participants seemed to idealise a work-hard-play-hard attitude as they balanced careers and relationships but still sought to retain time for their male friendship group and collective activities of their leisure life. In particular, members of Rob and Tom's groups were predominantly in well paid graduate jobs and, being in their late twenties, eager to ascend their chosen career ladders. Certainly, given the predominance of such well paid and status driven occupations amongst the men, it seems far from apt to apply accounts of urban or working-class masculine alienation such as those offered by McDowell (2003) and Winlow (2001). However, the insight from these studies regarding the erosion of connections between the workplace and traditional masculine identities does offer some mileage in making sense of why stag tourism can offer middle-

class men a favourable context within which to buttress their sense of masculine identity. The leisure sphere can therefore become an increasingly important outlet for masculine behaviour (Blackshaw, 2003) and identity in general (Hollands, 2002) as employment patterns change, particularly for the young. According to MacInnes, with increased service, tertiary and knowledge based employment there comes less opportunity for implicitly masculine work (MacInnes, 1998). This line of inquiry again brings us to Blackshaw and others who have identified the leisure activities of men as viable locations for the articulation of masculine identity and also as a source of certainty. For many of the men in this study, long term relationships and the pressures of careers will necessitate a shortening but intensification of the time that men spend with their friends.

What becomes apparent is that much of the effort to define the stag tour as a masculine space and time indicate that the stag tour is just one moment or node amongst many others. There is an evident need to recognise masculinity as situational. Connell and Messerschmidt's conception of 'the geography of masculinities' as ordered over local, regional and global levels appears to be useful here (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). As such, the local interpretations of the men of these stag groups are subject to flexibility, variety and transformation over time precisely because the regional iteration of hegemonic masculinity remains strong. Similarly, on the local and national level stag tour groups exhibit a British version of hegemonic masculinity which

in some ways concurs and some ways contradicts the local (the specific men and male groups the stag tourist interact with) and regional (Polish masculinity more generally and structurally). Stag tours bring with them their own referents, and are therefore easily labelled as bad tourists. They are also evidently playing out a local level masculinity which is sometimes at odds with that of local men.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to explore the ways in which the stag tour works as a space or moment of homosocial bonding. Within this, it has shown how the group dynamic is played out in relation to masculinity and, further, how the groups relate outwardly to others, particularly local men and women, in significantly gendered terms. This ultimately leads to the necessary discussion of how stag tourism relates to the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and 'crisis' in masculinity. The aim has therefore been to answer two questions: first, to what extent is stag tourism evidence for or an example of hegemonic masculinity and, secondly, to what extent, based on initial postulations, is stag tourism evidence of a 'crisis' in masculinity.

There seems a strong case to suggest stag tourism is both a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity, albeit refracted through the specific iteration of British lad culture, and an example of a situational masculinity which, 'crisis' or not,

finds space for hyper-masculine behaviour to be enacted and experienced. As such, we may not straightforwardly label stag tourism as a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, to do so would risk returning to attributional models of masculinity and, further, the reification of complex gendered interactions. Rather, we can say that the phenomenon of stag tourism is dependent on many of the essential facets of hegemonic masculinity (for example, the importance of male-male friendships and the overt expression of heterosexuality) in the construction of its meaning. There is, however, far greater flexibility within this than might be seen at first viewing. For example, power relations within the group are at times more visible than at others and while much of the behaviour of the groups is focused inwards, for the benefit of other group members, the groups are frequently dependent on others (such as tour guides or, even, the passers-by who stop to watch, and therefore give audience to, their misbehaviour) to sustain the meaning they attribute to the stag tour as a collective masculine experience.

Drawing at least some distinction between local, regional, global levels of masculinity is central to understanding these contradictions. The masculinity of the stag tour can make sense at a local subjective level and, to a greater or lesser extent, succeed in achieving a regional ideal whilst, at one and the same time, exposing contradictions or changes in the global level of hegemonic masculinity.

## **9. Conclusion: stag tourism, transgression and masculinity: making the connections and looking to the future**

The work of this thesis began with the task of outlining relevant literature in relation to first tourism and then men and masculinities, and to illuminate some of the intersections and potential connections between these two areas. It became apparent that the increased focus on space and embodiment within both these fields offered an interesting approach to the empirical study of stag tourism as a phenomenon. Certainly, through looking at the spatial-temporal-social axis of stag behaviour, the thesis has managed to develop a more nuanced understanding of the masculine behaviour that takes place within tourist settings. Further still, while much work has shown the linkages between masculinity and work, usually in the form of bodily or rational-mental labour, the research has begun to address the lack of work done to explore the nature of the male leisured body.

The progression of analysis has been, following the more descriptive and illuminative vignettes of chapter five, to move from a broad focus on the spatial and temporal factors which permeate the stag tour experience to a smaller scale focus on the nature of stag behaviour as seen as performative and embodied (chapters six and seven respectively). Again focusing primarily on the group scale, but also considering relations and interactions with others the groups encountered, chapter eight then moves to a wider, more

theoretical basis of analysis in considering the application of hegemonic masculinity and 'crisis in masculinity', as concepts, relevant to an understanding of the stag phenomenon. However, there is a clear need to retain a discussion rooted in the observational data generated during fieldwork, and therefore actual events from men's lives. The themes of male friendship, group cohesion and group interaction were studied in depth, as they are vital in illuminating how hegemonic masculinity, as well as any 'crisis', becomes manifest through the stag tour phenomenon. The central problematic of how and why stag tourism is experienced, interpreted and understood as a collective masculine event has therefore been approached from different angles and on different scales, focussing at times on stag tourism as a tourist phenomenon and, at other times, as a gendered phenomenon.

Following a brief review of the main analytical themes and findings, this concluding chapter will draw together the main concerns of the thesis. It will also reflect on the successes and various limitations of the study and suggest some of the issues and ideas that have been identified as meriting future research and inquiry.

Stag tourism is experienced within a specific social space and time, identified, through an ongoing process, as a spatial-temporal location for the enactment of a certain form of playful and at times transgressive masculinity. The social

action and interaction that takes place within this time and space is in various ways seen as liminal and characterised by a situational, although not total, loosening of inhibition, restraint and control. This feeds into the stag tour group's construction of their experience of the weekend as extraordinary and spectacular. Moments of banality, however, appear to threaten this interpretation and are dealt with by members of the group as they work collectively and, in some cases, with the help of others (such as tour guides) to maintain the desired definition of the weekend and the events and situations which constitute it.

Within this understanding of the temporal-spatial setting of stag tourism, the actions and behaviour of stag tourists can be understood as performative. At times this is an apparent, knowing, and often ironic playing up to or enactment of out of control 'hyper'-masculinity while at others is, following Butler (1990), more of an embedded and repetitive 'doing' of masculinity. However, fieldwork observation shows that control is never fully lost and the boundary between performance and disorder is maintained both by the group and others, in particular by stag tour representatives and other third parties. Building on this, the male body is central to the stag tour experience. It is both a conduit for the corporeal pleasures of drinking, eating, laughing and dancing and the subject of various tensions and stresses. Sick, hung-over and deprived of sleep and rest, the male body is tested. Yet, beyond merely maintaining bodily discipline, the bodily transgressions of public urination, vomiting, nudity and

general dishevelment are condoned and even praised as part of a self-destructive and self-deprecating ideal.

Friendship and male bonding is a central element of stag tour experience and one which orders much stag tourist behaviour. Group cohesion and successful group bonding are therefore key concerns for a successful stag tour in spite of potential schisms and friendship groupings which can, at first, be fractious and only linked through common friendship with the stag. Both within the group and between the group and others the frequency of gendered interaction gives a useful insight into the nature of stag tour groups as hegemonic masculinity in action. The dynamic of power within the group is, therefore, subtly negotiated while a collectively constructed gendered identity is established relationally to the perceived gender of both local women and local men. Both these relationships (with local women or with local men) are frequently characterised by some level of marking as 'other' through reference to national stereotypes. In exploring the relevance of the concept of hegemonic masculinity to understanding stag tourism, it is clear that gendered power relations do underpin much of the stag phenomenon, as do national stereotypes. The at times uneasy consensus that accepts stag behaviour as 'normal' or in some way typical of what men want, think and feel indicates the structural power which established hegemonic masculinity as dominant. However, within this there are potential weaknesses and challenges.



In relation to the concept of 'crisis', the research has highlighted how the stag weekend represents a spatially and temporally bounded moment within which highly masculinised behaviour takes place. From this it was argued that the masculinity evidenced during the stag tour is highly situational. The stag tour is socially constructed to offer a space for the unproblematic assertion and at times ironic enactment of normative masculinity and, thus, provides a degree of certainty. In this it is more aligned with conceptions of a 'crisis' which sees, not a wholesale erosion of masculine identity, but rather a shift to assertions of masculinity which are more compartmentalised, working within the flexibility which is evident in the identity constructions of many men.

### **Masculinity, tourism and transgression: three themes revisited**

This research undertaking was conceived with the awareness that there has been scant attempt to look at the relationships and linkages between leisure and tourism and men and masculinity. The phenomenon of stag tourism was, therefore, seen as an empirical case which could potentially highlight some of the intersections of these areas of sociological inquiry. In particular, the overlaps between three themes became clear, these being, as the thesis title indicates: masculinity, tourism and transgression.

Taking the initial two themes, as noted in the overview above, the tourist setting of stag tourism provides the men who partake in stag tours with a

space and time for engaging in behaviour explicitly coded as masculine. Equally, the dictates of hegemonic masculinity signal the leisure pursuits of stag tourism, notably heavy collective drinking and drunkenness, as desirable activities for men to pursue and a desirable social space within which male bonding can be established and affirmed. Given the apparent desire for such an experience to 'live up to' expectations both in terms of it being a tourist experience and a masculine activity, there is considerable work done by stag groups to ensure that the weekend is high paced and extraordinary.

The concept of transgression is central, as it binds together many of the insights of the study. The fieldwork showed that transgressive acts are perceived and valued by the stag groups as significant; they are also perceived as significant by locals but are valued as examples of offence. Transgression, often interpreted as a loss of control, was a recurring theme throughout the research. However, there is perhaps a greater complexity to this loss of control than first appears. The apparent loss of control evidently does not illustrate an absence of rules, rather a knowing suspension of rules, the overstepping of which are momentarily accorded a ritualistic and symbolic significance. In that sense there is no loss of control, even though this may be how it is interpreted on first viewing. Tourist spaces, it appears, are particularly well suited to facilitating such rule breaking. The concept of 'liminality' can therefore be seen in action in numerous ways that loosen the stag tourist's ties to an established social order.

The transgression, however small, is what makes such themes salient and socially visible. Hence, while 'good' tourists succeed or, at least, attempt to 'fit in', 'bad' tourists such as stag tourists are continually perceived to be overstepping acceptable social boundaries, being *too* loud, *too* drunk, *too* insensitive and not considerate *enough*. Similarly, they are considered 'bad' men, or to exhibit a 'bad' masculinity, because they fail to recognise the limits of acceptable propriety, being overly lecherous, mischievous, intimidating or aggressive. Tying this together is the evident omnipresence of nationality and national stereotypes which means the behaviour of stag tourists is typified as a British phenomenon. This in itself acts to amplify the perceived grievance of any transgression. The notion of transgression offers a common link between tourism, masculinity and nationality where, in the case of stag tourism, all three are to some extent amplified and extended, brought to the fore and made all the more visible, through frequent, although sometimes in themselves minimal, social transgressions.

### **Reflections on the research process**

The research has produced a qualitative insight into the stag tourism phenomenon that has gone beyond the shallow description of much media coverage which was, essentially, the only prior source of knowledge about this social phenomenon. Participant-observation research has allowed analysis of embodied and performative aspects of the stag experience as well

as the development of a greater insight of what participation in the stag tour means to the men involved.

However, within this, certain limitations of the research must be acknowledged. Primarily, the decision to focus on the stag tour in itself as a discrete event and to prioritise in situ, qualitative insights undoubtedly leads to some of the build up to and anticipation of the stag weekend to be paid less regard. Further still, it is difficult to place the stag weekend with much certainty in the wider life courses of the men involved. There is an evident tension between the methodological concerns of tourism research and masculinity studies. Researching tourism and tourist practice often calls for rich descriptive data from 'within' the event itself, whereas men and masculinity research can focus on such distinct moments but can equally look more broadly at longitudinal constructions of identities, memories, personal histories and narratives. Therefore, while speaking and interacting with participants during the weekend itself gave important insight into the value they placed on the weekend, the significance of their friendships and some sense of the long term history of those friendships, the research focus on the weekend itself necessarily gave less regard to longitudinal constructions of masculinity.

This leads to a second major limitation, the fact that stressing the importance of sociological knowledge of the weekend itself gave priority to the collective actions and experiences of the group over individual narratives of stag

experience. While this decision was consciously made, it is clear that a considerable contribution to understanding the stag tourism phenomenon could be made through gaining insights into individual accounts, particularly of the stag himself, the best man and other key players in the group. While, as outlined in the methodological discussion, attempts were made to secure personal interviews, the bounded nature of the stag weekend coupled with the general time constraints of individuals (primarily the looming wedding day and subsequent honeymoon that follows soon after the stag weekend) meant such post-event interviews were near impossible to secure.

Methodologically, this thesis has sought to highlight, engage with and reflect upon various aspects of the process of researching men and masculinity. An interesting aspect of researching stag tourism was always its malign reputation. Whilst in no way seeking to justify, and thereby forgive, some of the bad and antisocial behaviour of some stag tourists, there was an evident need or challenge to develop a broader picture which brought forth some of the beneficial aspects of the phenomenon. As such, the vitality, humour and camaraderie of the groups were somewhat endearing, as was the evident celebration of strong friendships. With that said, numerous moments when research involved balancing personal feelings of distaste or antipathy with the need to 'fit in' illustrate the challenge of researching such groups.

A final, yet significant, consideration relates to the generalisability of the findings of the research. To what extent Krakow is a typical stag tour destination city is difficult to assess. Stag tourism in such cities seems to go through a relatively short lifecycle from novelty to begrudging tolerance to saturation and decline. The research in Krakow took place roughly around the peak of this curve. From media coverage and from conversations with locals, tour guides and the stag tourists themselves, it was evident that tolerance for the groups' presence in the city was reaching its limit following previous years when the few visiting stag groups were seen as somewhat of a novelty, and a potentially profitable one at that. The research was clearly a product of this context, and the findings presented here are irrevocably tied to such changes. How might, for example, stag tourism take shape in a newly emerging destination, before the weight of numbers alone has pushed that city and its inhabitants to the limits of their tolerance? Taking this into account, there is a considerable need to frame this study as a case study specific to Krakow and, as noted, specific to this certain time. Thinking more broadly, however, how can the findings presented here be seen as, on the one hand, unique and, on the other hand, general?

There is some suggestion that the city has a notably less visible sex industry than other cities such as Prague in the Czech Republic and Riga in Latvia. As noted, the relatively low visibility of strip clubs in Krakow meant that sex industry entertainment was perhaps less prominent in the case of Krakow

stag tourism than it might be in other cities. This does certainly mean that the overt consumption of the sex industry, from strip clubs to pornography and prostitution, is a lesser factor in this study. This is, however, also seen as a virtue in that it has allowed a greater focus on the dynamics of the group, the centrality of friendship and playfulness, and the use of humour, alcohol and the male body. It is quite conceivable, then, that focusing on a different city would have thrown up some different themes or, at least, led analysis down different avenues and brought forth different foci. Further, an equally important caveat is that a female researcher would, in all likelihood, have generated a different set of observations and analytical themes.

Expanding on such speculations, it is worth noting that the research, although taking place in Poland, was conducted by a British researcher and of exclusively British groups. While taking stag tourism to be a British phenomenon, premarital all-male groups from other countries were noted, albeit infrequently and in smaller numbers. What scope would there be, then, in seeking comparisons with men from other countries? How might the experience of a group of male friends from Italy on a premarital tour to Poland differ in its content and meaning from that of men from Britain?

Taken together, the above observations act as a reminder that the research presented here is product of a specific time, place and composition. How, then, might the stag tour phenomenon be changing over time? For example,

there is some suggestion that stag tourism in Krakow, and Eastern Europe more widely, might be slowing. Prior to Krakow, Prague and Budapest and, before them, Dublin and Amsterdam have all had their moment as the stand out destination for stag tourism. However, it is difficult to see which cities will take up this mantle from Krakow, Riga and Tallinn. Perhaps most plausible, are the Ukrainian cities of Kiev and Lviv which seem to offer suitable budget drinking and nightlife. Yet, a lack of budget travel options considerably limits the potential for stag tourism in these cities. More generally, the global economic crisis that began to take hold whilst the study was being conducted, threatens to change the shape of stag tourism. In February 2009 the *BBC News* carried an article citing the declining value of the pound as stemming the 'stag party flood' in Eastern European countries and suggesting that many potential stag tourists were now finding better deals in UK cities (Broad, 2009). Mindful of this, it is apparent that the stag tourism phenomenon is just that, a brief moment in a changing pattern that could see, in the near future, the cities of Eastern Europe left 'in peace' or, even more fascinatingly, new forms of collective male leisure practice emerge. Time will tell whether the stag tour boom in cities like Krakow can survive large scale economic and social changes. Can it also survive low level changes in tolerance, or the lack of it, for stag tour groups whose behaviour, we might assume, will continue to court distaste and controversy?



## **Implications for future research**

As noted in the previous section, there is a need to provide caveats for the research presented here through considering the scope and limitations. For example, how might the findings of this research be seen to relate to other social contexts, such as travelling sports supporters or amateur club tours (Morgan, 2007), which might exhibit some or many of the characteristics of stag tourism? Similarly, if young travellers and backpackers use the freedom which 'liminal' tourist spaces offer to experiment with alcohol, drugs, and to pursue transgressive behaviour, how does this relate to the excesses of stag tourists? In what sense might the collective transgression of stag tourists relate to the individualised transgressions of backpackers in South-East Asia?

In terms of the study of what are widely perceived to be negative tourism phenomena, such as sex tourism and tourism involving alcohol and drunkenness, what is needed is in fact a greater understanding of and sensitivity towards what might normatively be described as 'bad' tourism or 'bad' tourists. Without condoning or merely justifying through explanation, there is a need to engage with what is happening here. Research on sex tourism has shown greater depth and complexity than is evident from media portrayals. As Jacquie Sanchez Taylor (2000) and Julia O'Connell Davidson (1996) have shown with sex tourism and David Bell (2008) has suggested

with his exploratory paper on 'alcotourism', the controversy surrounding these much maligned forms of tourism should encourage not deter social research.

However, this is not to suggest that stag tourism itself does not offer further ground for sociological inquiry. Indeed, as noted above, the research conducted here is limited in many respects. Thus, while the focus here has been predominantly on the groups themselves, future research might look with greater depth at the experiences of others who play a role in or are affected by the stag tour phenomenon. Although some voice has been given throughout to the female tour guides, who evidently play a significant role, future research into stag tourism could usefully focus on the experiences of such tour guides who act as cultural brokers and, further still, whose work might be understood as emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) and bodily labour (Wolkowitz, 2006). Equally, those who find work in the developing service sector which caters for stag tourists, and tourists more generally, could provide a considerable sociological insight into changes in employment experiences in Eastern European countries.

The study of stag tourism has been both topical and opportunistic but, by virtue of this, highlights both tourism as meaningful social practice and masculinity as it is acted out and played up to, sometimes to excess, by men in a specific leisure setting. Future research, we might assume, can draw on a variety of new and emerging leisure practices to gain greater and more

nuanced insights into men's lives and the changing complexities of contemporary masculinities.

The thesis has explored stag tourism as a rich and meaningful social practice. Rather than being chaotic and disorganised the stag weekend is ordered along spatial and temporal lines which are mutually enacted by members of groups and collectively maintained. Likewise, the actions and interactions of stag tourist illustrate the importance of the embodied and performative nature of stag tourism. Within this ritualistic fluctuation between control and release a space is opened up within which intimacy, friendship and bonding becomes salient and understandings of masculinity become salient, if not challenged or recast. Bringing these themes together, the study has provided an important contribution to understandings of the intersections between gender and tourism practice. Further still, the stag tourism phenomenon, portrayed in media coverage as singularly malignant and errant, and the product of a 'boys will be boys' normative caveat, has here been understood with greater subtlety and depth than previously attempted.

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## Appendix A: Table of key participant groups

Stag	Best man	Other key members	Group size	Composition	Age range	Location	Background
Rob	Craig	Kev, Wilson, Dave, Simon, Andrew, Peter	12	University friends, school friends, work colleagues	Mid to late twenties	Mainly West Midlands; some London and Southeast	University educated; some independent education; graduate jobs in banking and finance
Tom	Jack	Dave Clarke	14	University friends, school friends, family	Late twenties	Various	University educated; jobs in banking and law
Phil	Harry	Smith, Scott, Haz, Ed, Josh	19 (2 missed flight)	School friends, rugby team, family	Mid-twenties	Northeast England	Some university educated
Jon	Rich	Ali, Steve, Darren	10	University friends, work friends	Early thirties	Southeast England	Stag and others civil service
Craig	Chris	Fin, Alex, Dave, Ian	8	School and childhood friends	Early thirties	Western Scotland	Mainly skilled trades, some own small businesses
Jason (Jay)	James	Johnny, Dave, Daniel, Mark	13	University friends, school friends, family	Mid-twenties	North England	University educated, some still in education, graduate jobs
Ryan	Michael (Mike)	Steve "Woody" Wood, Daryl, Joe	9	School friends	Early twenties	London	Some in vocational training, others in retail and services
Dave	Ben	Tim, Matthew, Stuart	8	University friends, Hometown friends	Late twenties	London, some from originally Midlands	University educated, two solicitors