

A Typology of Casual Leisure at Hen Parties

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Between 2011-2014 I researched hen parties in Northern Scotland as part of my PhD thesis entitled **The Hen Party: a study of the form, meaning and function of a prenuptial ritual for women in North-East Scotland**. In total I gathered around sixty accounts of hen parties from women aged between 17 and 82, who came from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds. All hen parties were given a number, for example, HP1, HP2 etc. All interviews are in the archive of the Elphinstone Institute.

The hen party is made up of constituent parts, one of which is casual leisure (games and activities). Listed below are all of the games and activities which the groups of hens I studied engaged in (Figure 1). They have been sorted in to type, starting with games, and moving on to activities. This list is by no means exhaustive, but represents, I believe, a good cross section of the casual leisure to be found at hen parties today, though note that my research was on hen parties only; there will undoubtedly be some crossover with stag parties, just as there will be some games/activities which are much more common at stag parties than hen parties.

Games	Activities
Mr & Mrs	Buff Butler
Dares	Male Stripper
Drinking Games (6 different games)	Stripogram
Pin the willy on the Man	Thunder Downunder (male striptease show)
Sculpture	Spa Treatments
Dress the Bride	Afternoon Tea
Guess the Giver	Boat Trip
Guess the Engraver	Sightseeing Trip
Guess the Artist	Movie
Guess the Storyteller	<i>Grease</i> Tribute Show
Treasure Hunt	Cocktail Making Class
Riddles	Jewelry Making Class
Karaoke	Cup Cake Decorating Class
Dancing game	Bollywood Dance Class

Pinata	Burlesque Dance Class
Murder Mystery Cluedo	Rock Climbing Class
Musical Chairs/Scavengers	Foam Party
Positions	F*** Me I'm Famous! Party
Charades	Karaoke
Cock a Hoop	Night Out
	Special Night In
	Night In
	Gift giving with story
	Talk/Free Time

Figure 1 – List of games and activities at hen parties

List of Games at Hen Parties

There were 26 different games played at hen parties, which have been sorted into categories.¹

Clue Based Games

Clue based games have questions which require answering, or clues which require solving. They sometimes require general knowledge and thinking skills. There are nine games in this category:

Mr & Mrs Quiz

Mr & Mrs was a TV quiz game which originated from Canada in 1963 and arrived on British TV screens shortly after. It ran from 1964-1988 in the UK, very successfully. It enjoyed a short revival in 1999 and then in 2008 it returned to British screens as *All Star Mr & Mrs* featuring celebrity husband and wife teams, still on TV today. It is then, a familiar game to most generations living in the UK.

The TV game involves husband and wife couples. Each couple is asked three questions separately about their knowledge of their husband or wife's daily habits. As one half of the couple is asked the questions, the other half sits in a sound proofed box listening to music through headphones. Three options are given and the wife/husband has to choose the one he/she thinks the other would have responded. An example of a question might be:

If you were to take your husband/wife out to the movies what type of film would he/she like to see least. Would it be a) Thriller b) Comedy c) SciFi

The structure of the game changes in several ways at a hen party. First of all, there are more questions, normally around a dozen. Second, the questions are open-ended; there are no options to choose from. Third, the groom is not generally present in person to answer them, though he made have been videoed, or his voice may have been recorded answering the questions. Fourth, questions asked on a hen party tend to be considerably more risqué. For example, what's the most adventurous place you've ever had sex with the groom?

A further adaptation of the rules of the game is that there is a reward or punishment system in place depending on whether the bride gets the answers wrong or right. Normally, if she answers a question incorrectly she has to drink a shot. If she gets the answer correct, she nominates someone in the group to drink

¹ Other categories, are of course, possible.

the shot. A variation of this was played at HP7. If the bride answered a question correctly she got to open a small present. If however, she answered it incorrectly she had to do a forfeit. For example, she had to shout out loud, 'I love [husband to be]' or she had to sing the national anthem. At HP1 it was the Buff Butler who took on the role of quizmaster for Mr & Mrs.

The type of 'punishments' meted out are dependent on the location of the game and the participants taking part. For example, HP9 had two hen party experiences on the same day. The first was an afternoon tea at an upmarket hotel to which various family members (including her grandmother and her 7 year old niece) and close friends were invited. They played Mr & Mrs. The groom's answers had been videoed and were shown on a laptop. If the bride got an answer wrong she had to put a jumbo marshmallow in her mouth and try to talk. Drinking shots, the usual punishment for an incorrect answer, would have been inappropriate given the surroundings and the people involved.

Mr & Mrs is normally played by the bride (Central Person), the groom (in absentia) and a quizmaster, often a bridesmaid. The rest of the group is the audience. Several contributors used a combination of questions available freely on hen party websites, together with questions they made up themselves.

Guess the Giver

Each guest had been asked to bring along a gift for the bride. The group sat in a circle and the gifts were put in the centre. The bride was the focus of the attention. She was given a gift from the pile and had to guess who it was from. The gifts could be a variety of different items, for instance small personal gifts reminding the giver of an experience she has had with the bride, or they could be a single item, for example at the HP2 everyone had to bring a pair of knickers for the bride. There could be punishments attached to this game. If the bride guessed incorrectly she might have had to drink a shot.

Guess the Storyteller

Each guest was asked to write a few key words down on a piece of paper, which were clues to a story they had which related to the bride. These were put in a hat in the centre of the circle. The group sat in a circle, and the bride had to pull each piece of paper out of the hat, read out the words and guess who wrote the words. She then had to relate the story behind the words to the group. The clues had to be sufficiently cryptic so as not to make it too easy for the bride to guess the writer.

Guess the Engraver

At HP2 each guest was given a cocktail glass in advance to bring and decorate. The bride had to guess the engraver.

Guess the Artist

At HP9 the participants were given a paper plate and a black felt tip pen. They were asked to draw the bride and groom. Given the composition of the group (mother, grandmother and 7 year old niece present), the location (an upmarket city hotel) and the time of day (the afternoon) the drawings were innocuous. Indeed, the idea was that the 7 year old would win. The bride was the judge.

Treasure Hunts

Treasure hunts are often organised by the bridesmaids, who may go to the location ahead of the main party in order to set up the treasure hunt. A set of clues will be written on a piece of paper and it is the task of each individual or team to solve them. The clues could relate to features in the landscape or cityscape. The individuals/teams often set off at staggered times, so there is less chance of cheating. The group need only write down the answers. There may be a time limit imposed. There may be a winner or winners, for example the first person to complete all the clues correctly. The 'treasure' may or may not be retrievable. There may be prizes awarded to the winners. At HP12 mother made her treasure hunt. The clues were in rhyming couplets. The treasure hunt was set in the city that the bride had lived and studied in, and revolved around important landmarks, such as her old flat, her local pubs and restaurants.

Human Cluedo

Also called Murder Mystery Cluedo. This is based on the commercial board game, *Cluedo*. *Cluedo* was originally patented in 1949. It is a murder mystery board game, in which each player has to try to solve the mystery of who murdered Dr Black, as well as finding out where he was murdered and the weapon he was murdered with. The rules of Human Cluedo are as follows:

All the players names are put into a hat. Each player pulls out a name which they must keep concealed. This is the person that, during the course of the time they are together, they must 'murder'. Then each player must write down a 'weapon' – this need not be a weapon in the normal sense of the word. It could

be anything, as long as it is available in the location the game is taking place in. The names of the 'weapons' are put into a hat and each player draws one out. This is the 'weapon' they must use to 'murder' their victim. Finally, the names of rooms or locations are put into a hat. Once again, they have to be locations which the victim will be in over the time they are together. The players draw out a location. The players now have a victim, a weapon and a location where the 'murder' has to take place. For example, Annabelle, with the lemon, in the kitchen. Or, Sandra, with the corkscrew, in the bathroom. In order to achieve their mission the player has to ensure that the victim touches the weapon in the correct location. The first person to 'murder' their victim is the winner.

HP5 was held in a country house over a weekend. The draw for Human Cluedo took place on the first evening when all the guests had assembled and the game was played for the duration of the weekend.

Charades

Charades is a popular family game. HP1 played charades. The group was split into teams and each person took it in turn to act out the title they were given, which was of a film, book or play. The titles were a little risqué. For example, *Basic Instinct*, *Fifty Shades of Grey* etc.,

Riddles

At HP7 the bridesmaid wrote six riddles which were presented to her over the course of the hen party to direct her to the next venue, as she had no idea of the hen party itinerary. Perhaps more rhyme than riddle they can only loosely be termed a game. Each riddle came in an envelope, named and numbered Surprise 1, Surprise 2 etc, which she had to open and read out to the assembled group. Surprise 2 directed the bride to an art gallery near the quay. She was led to believe she was going to an art exhibition. This was in fact a red herring, as the group was actually boarding a boat to go for a canal trip. The rhyme alluded to this with mention of 'a bottle of rum'.

Task Based Games

Task-based games involve completing a task. There are four games in this category:

Pin the Willy on the Man (also known as *Pin the Tail on the Male/ Junk on the Hunk/Stick a Dick/Pin the Hose on the Fireman*).

This is a parody of the children's game, *Pin the Tail on the Donkey*,² which dates back to 1899 and whose invention is attributed to an American, Charles Zimmerling. In the children's game a picture of a tailless donkey is pinned on the wall. Each participant takes it in turn to be blindfolded and to try pin the tail on the donkey. *Pin the Willy on the Man* is a parody of this game. It can be purchased on the internet, and includes a poster of a nude male, with a selection of comic penises and a blindfold. Each hen chooses a penis, is blindfolded and tries to stick the penis on to the appropriate part of the man's body.

At two hen parties the head of the nude male was swapped with the groom's head. One of brides was duped into believing she was playing *Pin the Tail on the Donkey*. When she was blindfolded the picture of the donkey was swapped with the poster of her husband-to-be.

Cock a Hoop

Also known as *Cock Hoop Hoopla, Penis Hoopla/Dick Head Hoopla* or *Willy Hoopla*. The penis shaped target can be stuck anywhere in the room, or in the case of HP9, it was held in place on her bridesmaid's forehead. Each player had to try to throw the hoops over the target. Failure to do so would result in having to drink a shot.

Piñata

Common in Mexico and other South American countries, a piñata is a container which is made from papier-mâché. It is decorated and filled with sweets or small gifts and then suspended by a string. The person who is at the centre of the celebration is given the task of breaking the piñata open. The contents then spill out. At HP5 the bride smashed open the piñata to reveal small gifts such as lacy underwear, miniatures of alcohol and sweets. The piñata, which was unicorn shaped, was suspended from a branch outside in the garden. The piñata was bought from a shop but filled by the bridesmaids. It came with a stick.

Dares

The bride is normally the Central Person in this task-based game, but it can be adapted so that all the hens can take part. The organiser can make up their own

² <http://gamecatalog.org/gc/printed/gc8.pdf> [accessed 2014]

dares or they can buy dare cards off the internet. Dares could include 'Exchange underwear with a male', 'Rub your face in a man's hairy chest'. To include the entire group dares can be placed into a hat, each person drawing out a dare, and prizes (or punishments) would be awarded to whoever achieves/fails to achieve their dare. Dares are normally played when the hens are out in pubs or clubs, as they usually require the presence of strangers. At Hp11 the bride was given the dare of kissing strangers for money and she had to go round the pubs with a bucket.

Craft Games

These games require the participants to be artistic and creative and to craft or make something. Two different craft games were played:

Dress the Bride

The hens are put into groups of two or three. The bride may be included or she may act as a judge. Teams are given newspaper or toilet roll and sellotape. Each team selects one member to be the bride. The others members of the group have to dress the bride in a bridal gown made from the materials given. The group with the best design and the most expertly made dress in the allotted time wins. One hen party divided the group into two with the mother and mother-in-law of the bride acting as models.

Sculpture

Two groups of hens played this game. The task of Group 1 was to make a sculpture from Playdoh. They could also use any other items they had in their possession to adorn and embellish their sculpture. The theme of their sculpture was 'something which symbolised the wedding couple'. They were put into teams. The bride did not take part. She acted as judge. Entries ranged from very tame (a love heart) to very risqué (a couple copulating).

Group 2 was put into teams of two, though the bride participated as well. Their task was to sculpt the groom's penis out of Playdoh.

Drinking Games

It is not surprising to find drinking games at hen parties as they are a common feature of youth culture and can be played in a pub or club, or at home, as part of 'pre-gaming'.³

Drinking Games can be physical/manipulative or verbal, and in general, drinking games move at speed. Obviously, the more you drink the less competent you become. I identified 6 different drinking games played at hen parties:

Pub Golf

Pub Golf is a recreational drinking game, where possible involving 9 pubs, which are the 'holes'. Each participant is issued with a scorecard (as in golf) with the name of each 'hole' (pub), the yardage (what you have to drink) and a par (how many gulps you have to drink it in). If the hole is a par 4, the yardage is a pint of beer, and you manage to drink it in two gulps, then you are two under par. As with golf, you record this on a scorecard. The winner of each course is the person with the lowest score. There is no referee, or official to keep the group under control. It is generally self-policed. If one participant fails to take a drink or substitutes it for another drink, one of their friends usually notices and they are awarded penalty points.

HP15 played pub golf. There were around 20 hens. They went to 9 pubs, walking between pubs. According to the bride, as time went on many of the scorecards went astray, so the game was not taken terribly seriously.

Flipcup

HP16 played Flipcup. This requires a table and a plastic cup for each participant with some alcohol in it, (often filled up to one third with beer). The group is divided into two teams. Each cup is positioned in front of each player. Player 1 on each team starts, downing the drink as fast as possible, turning the empty cup over and positioning it so that the edge of the cup is over the edge of the table. They then try to flip the cup over so that it stands upright on the table. As soon as player 1 has successfully done this, player 2 takes over and so on until all the players have successfully downed their drink and flipped their cup. The first team to finish are the winners.

³ 'Pre-gaming' means to drink at home before going to a party.

Never Have I Ever

This is perhaps one of the best-known verbal drinking games. The group sits in a circle. They each put three fingers up. Each player in turn has to say 'Never have I ever' and then complete the sentence with something they have never done, for example, 'been arrested'. The idea is that everyone must tell the truth, so anyone in the group who has 'been arrested' puts one of their three fingers down. Once all three fingers are down, you must take a drink.

Improvised Drinking Games

The next three games are improvised drinking games:

1. 'If you said, 'Happy New Year' you had to drink a shot'
2. The game 'where you have to put on a funny voice'.
3. A game 'involving using only one hand'.

The first in this list could be the Banned Words Game. The hens decide at the start of the hen party on a list of banned words that should not be uttered throughout the hen party. Whoever breaks the ban has to either do a dare or drink a shot. The other two are unknowns. They might be drinking games which have not been documented yet. Or, the contributor has not given a true description of the game, so they cannot be properly identified, or they are simply improvised games; games made up on the spot.

From the limited information available they sound like games where the player is required to say/do or not say/not do a word/action. The resulting punishment for failure is to drink a shot.

Electronic Games

These are games played on a Wii, Playstation, or other console. One member of one hen party brought along a Wi and two games, Karaoke and a dancing game. Members of the group competed against each other.

Commodified Games

I have termed any game which is played as part of a hen party package (i.e., commercially organised or purchased and not organised by the hens themselves) a commodified game. These included:

Bingo

One hen party, which attended a cocktail making class were given bingo cards with words instead of numbers. These words were associated with the cocktail making class. When the mixologist mentioned one of the words the hens had to score them out. The first person to score out all their words and shout Bingo was the winner. The winner received a bottle of wine.

Positions (author's name)

The information around this game is somewhat sketchy as the contributor did not take part in the game, as she was preparing a meal in the kitchen. This was a game organised by a Buff Butler who attended a hen party in a self-catering apartment. The group was put into pairs. The bride was paired up with the Buff Butler. The bridesmaids took it in turn to call out a position that each team had to adopt, for example, fireman's lift, wheelbarrow race. The pair who were slowest to get into position had to knock back a shot.

Musical Chairs with a Scavenger Hunt

This game was played by a group of hens at an organised show, popular with hen parties. The show involved dinner, some (pre-show) entertainment, followed by a *Grease* tribute show. This took place at a city centre hotel. Each group, dressed in *Grease* themed costume, sat at their own table for dinner. Following dinner, and as a form of a pre-show warm-up, a compere organised a game of musical chairs/scavenger hunt with all the brides-to-be who were attending the show. They had to go up on to the stage and sit in one of the chairs. Then the scavenger hunt began. They were told to go down into the audience and bring back an item (for example, a pair of socks) as quickly as they could. While they were away one of the chairs was removed. The last person to return with the item to the stage was knocked out. The brides had to get several items, including a bra and a pair of men's trousers. They could get items from any table, and indeed for certain men's items they had to go to other tables. A chair was removed each round and eventually all the brides were eliminated bar one. She was rewarded with a bottle of wine.

List of Activities at Hen Parties

Most hen parties are interspersed with a mix of games and activities. The list of activities available for hen parties is vast, and constantly changing, and the demand for novelty shows no signs of abating because 'the consumer is constantly seeking novel rather, than familiar products regardless of their use-value'.⁴ They have been sorted into categories.⁵

Classes/Lessons

Five activities fit this description. Two involved physical activities, while the other three were craft based.

Burlesque Dancing

This took place in a city centre dance studio in the afternoon of a weekend hen party. The group had to dress up in Burlesque outfits, which they sourced themselves, although there was a 'dressing up box' at the dance studio for those who forgot. The bridesmaid brought clothing along for the bride as the class was a surprise for her. They had some drinks at the bar first to loosen their inhibitions, while they were given a history of Burlesque Dancing. After that they were given instruction on how to do some dances. The workshop lasted 2 hours.

Bollywood Dancing

Bollywood is a Hindi language film industry based in India. Bollywood (a corruption of Hollywood) films often include song and dance. Bollywood dancing took off in the UK following the success of the hit film *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2009.

Bollywood Dancing classes are very popular at hen parties. This class took place in a city centre dance studio in the afternoon of a weekend hen party. It lasted 2 hours.

Cocktail Making Class

Two groups of hens took a Cocktail Making Class. Both were held on the Saturday afternoon of a weekend hen party. One was held in a private room in the hotel that the group was staying in. They organised it themselves. It was not part of a

⁴ Miles, 1998: 49.

⁵ Other categories are, of course, possible. For example, I have put rock climbing into the category Adventure Activities, but it could just as easily be placed in Classes/Lessons.

package. They were split into two groups and were shown how to make alcoholic and non-alcoholic cocktails. They made (and drank) two or three each.

The second group attended a class in a night-club, and also learnt how to make a variety of cocktails and tasted a lot too.

Decorating Cup Cakes

This was an afternoon activity at a weekend hen party. An instructor came to the apartments they were staying in to give them a cup cake decorating class.

Jewellery Making Class

This activity was held on the Saturday afternoon of a weekend hen party in the Bed and Breakfast they were staying in. An instructor came in to run the tutorial. The group made hairbands from feathers and bits of material. This was a two hour activity.

Pamper Sessions

A pamper session is, as the name suggests, one in which the bride and hens are pampered in some way. There is generally no lewd behaviour involved.

Spa Treatments

Spa Treatments are perhaps the most obvious pamper activity. In his article travel writer Frank Barrett documents the extraordinary rise of the Spa as a leisure venue. He estimates that 'there are about 800 day, residential, leisure club and hotel spas in the UK – and it grows week by week' and that 'In the UK more than 35 million Brits a year spend £5.2 billion on spa services and treatments'.⁶ The success of the spa, he explains, is due to the nation's current obsession with de-stressing and wellness.

Contributors of all three hen parties, which included Spa Treatments, talked about including a spa treatment for the de-stressing, relaxation benefits it offered. The first was held in a city centre Spa. The group booked sessions in advance for the final (Sunday) morning of the hen party. Lunch was part of the package. They separated off for their treatments, but came together again for lunch. The treatments were regarded as something of a detox after the over-indulgences of the two previous days.

⁶ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-2424588/Best-spa-holidays-The-rise-relaxing-holiday.html> [accessed 2013]

The other two groups were staying at hotels with spas. In one group they had all pre-booked spa treatments, which they had after lunch on the first day. In the second group only handful of people had opted for treatments; it was one choice of activities among many others.

Afternoon Tea

Afternoon Tea is another activity which has grown in popularity, particularly in the past five years of so as this Daily Mail article shows,

For a country that considers tea their unofficial national drink, it is cause for great celebration that afternoon tea is back in vogue - and in a big way. After years of coffee shops spring up on high streets across the country, the humble brew is fighting back. In fact, afternoon tea has become such big business for leading hotels in the capital, that some are putting on six sittings a day to cope with demand.⁷

It was also considered a self-indulgent practice by the hens themselves, so I have included it here. Three hen parties opted for Afternoon Tea. Afternoon tea is a distinctly British tradition. It is taken mid afternoon, and generally includes a pot of tea, and a selection of savoury and sweet foods, such as sandwiches, scones and cakes, all beautifully displayed on a tiered cake stand. A glass of sparkling wine or champagne is often offered for special occasions.

Two groups went out for Afternoon Tea, the first to an upmarket city hotel, the second to a city café specialising in Afternoon Teas, while the third group made their own at their self catering country house. The first two groups referred to Afternoon Tea as a 'civilised' activity. Neither group took up the option of having alcohol (glass of champagne) with their Afternoon Tea, whereas the third group who organised it themselves in their country house, started off with a shot of Sambucca.

Shows/Parties

This category includes anything which can be called a show, or performance:

⁷ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1373944/Afternoon-tea-popular-hotels-huge-boost-business-thanks-brew.html> [accessed 2011]

Male Stripper

Thirty years ago it was uncommon for women to attend a male strip show. Stripograms (a message delivered by way of a striptease) were starting to become fairly popular by the 1980s, especially for birthdays, stag parties and to a lesser extent, hen parties. They were generally associated with a less educated woman from a lower socio-economic background. Thirty years on and the situation is very different. Stripograms have declined in popularity and been superseded by Buff Butlers and Male Strip Shows. There are still women who haven't seen or wouldn't like to see a male strip show but they could soon be in the minority. When asked if he thought that a Male Stripshow was mainstream now, male stripper Dave replied:

[Dave] Ehm, a lot of the girls I've spoken to over the past several years about this, most of them have seen a stripper at some point whether it's at a show or a mate's birthday or a hen night. If not, they've seen a Buff Butler. But I'd say ... yeah there is a fair percentage of them that haven't, that haven't seen it so. But I still think it's mainstream. I'd say the majority have but there are some that haven't. Maybe it's not their cup of tea.⁸

The strip show lasts around 15 minutes and costs around £100.00. The organiser will have agreed a venue, a costume, and she will also have discussed what will and will not be acceptable to the bride/group. Some organisers do not want the stripper to go the Full Monty (completely naked), though around 80% do.⁹

One hen party had a male stripper. The bride had been consulted first. She had agreed to have one on the understanding that she didn't have to touch him. The bridesmaid 'conveniently forgot' to tell the male stripper that.

Stripogram

The bride at HP10 got married in 1994. The doorbell rang at her house the night she was having her hen party. When she went to the door she was confronted by a 'Policeman', her Stripogram for the evening. A gift from her hens. He stripped down to his underpants, much to her embarrassment and her hens' amusement.

⁸ EI 2011.017 05:30

⁹ Personal Communication by email with Dave, 8/11/11.

Buff Butler

For those who find the idea of a male stripper rather unsavoury the Buff Butler is perhaps a more palatable option. The concept of the Buff Butler was introduced into the UK from the USA in the early 2000s. It is now a very popular activity at house parties. Dave works as a male stripper and Buff Butler. He started doing Buff Butler jobs in about 2005 when it had 'just started getting big in this country [Scotland]'. It is popular with girls 'who're not up for stripping', particularly university educated, professional women. The Buff Butler is regarded as being 'a bit naughty' but not as 'in your face' as a male stripper. His modesty is covered up. It is generally a 'more chilled atmosphere'.¹⁰

The Buff Butler performs the role of butler dressed simply in an apron, a pair of cuffs and a collar. His role is to serve drinks and food, and to entertain the hens by chatting to them or organising games. Two hen parties had variations of the same theme, being entertained by a man in various states of undress. In each case the Buff Butler arrived early evening to the houses that the hen party was being held at, served drinks and food, chatted to the girls, posed for photos and organised or compeered games. One of the hen parties stayed in for dinner and the Buff Butler acted as waiter for that. In both cases the Buff Butler was a surprise for the bride and most of the hens.

Thunder From Downunder

Since the 1980s a number of touring male dance troupes, who perform striptease shows, have come to prominence, such as the Chippendales and their Australian equivalent, Thunder from Down Under. HP14 took place in Las Vegas and one of her guests had paid for the group to attend the Thunder from Down Under Show. The website describes it thus:¹¹

The PERFECT Girl's Night Outback! Australia's HOTTEST Export – **Thunder From Down Under** –hits an intimate Vegas stage every night of the week showing off chiselled bodies, seductive dance routines,

¹⁰ EI 2011.017 21:30

¹¹ <http://www.thunderfromdownunder.com/the-vegas-show/> [accessed 2014]

cheeky humor and boy-next-door charm that you won't be able to resist.

Each sexy performer embodies a different female fantasy and brings it to life turning your wildest dreams into reality. This isn't the type of show you just sit and watch – Thunder is a fully interactive *experience*. The blokes dance on tabletops, make their way through the crowd and even select a few lucky ladies to join in the fun on stage. Don't miss your chance to get up close and personal with these Aussie hunks!

Members of the audience, especially brides to be, are selected to join the troupe on stage. At HP14 the brides in the audience were all taken up on to the stage to be part of the show. '[The bride] was sat on an office chair and straddled by one of the men. He said to her "put your hands on my butt". She was then passed from man to man. But nothing too awful. Some of the other brides had worse things to do such as fake an orgasm', which one contributor felt the bride and the group would have found embarrassing.

Grease Tribute Show

Grease, a film (romantic musical) released in 1978, enjoyed huge box office success and since then has become popular as a tribute show. Those attending are encouraged to dress up in *Grease* costumes, which can be bought on line. The highlight of HP10 was a *Grease* Tribute Show, which took place in a city centre hotel, on the Saturday night of a weekend hen party. The show included dinner. All the guests were encouraged to dress up in *Grease* outfits. The bride dressed as the main female character Sandy. After dinner the tables were moved back to expose the dance floor and the show commenced. The show consisted of a modicum of acting (so that the plot could be understood), singing and dancing. All the hits from the film of 1978 were sung.

Bridesmaids (film from 2011)

HP7 went to the cinema to see *Bridesmaids*, a romantic comedy with a plot revolving around the organization of a bachelorette party and the rivalry between the bridesmaids tasked with organizing that party.

Foam Party

In the 1990s night club owners in Ibiza thought of the idea of filling the dance floor with foam. The idea of foam parties was born. Foam parties are now common

across the world.¹² There is a dress code, mainly to protect good clothing from being ruined by the foam.

HP15 went on a hen party to Spain. Included in the costs were two organized activities, a Foam Party and F*** Me I'm Famous Party (described below).

*F*** Me I'm Famous Party*

The name is probably borrowed from a series of Dance Music CDs called F*** Me I'm Famous – Ibiza Mix by a friend DJ, David Guetta.¹³ By the sounds of it, it is an attention grabbing name for what was essentially simply a pub crawl round town. One hen party visited a number of pubs where they got two free drinks, part of the Hen Party package.

Trips

This involves taking a sightseeing trip around a city, or to a nearby beauty spot or attraction. The group is often taken there in a limousine or a minibus.

Sightseeing trip to a beauty spot

On the Saturday morning of a weekend hen party, HP13 went on a sightseeing tour of nearby beauty spot. They had hired a minibus to take them there. The trip took a couple of hours.

Limousine Tour of a capitol city

HP11's hen weekend involved a limousine ride around the city they were staying in. It simply involved cruising around in a limousine for an hour. According to the bride they were not interested in the sights at all. They just enjoyed listening to music and drinking champagne.

Gift Giving/Storytelling

Gift giving is an important aspect of friendship rituals. This category includes the giving of gifts, and the telling of stories associated with the bride.

At HP10 the group sat in a circle and each member of the group in turn had to give the bride a small personal gift, saying a few words of explanation as she did so. The gift was to be something that reminded them of the bride and their friendship with her. At HP5 the group sat in a circle and recounted an amusing story of a time they had shared with the bride.

¹² http://www.foam-party.co.uk/ibiza_foam_parties.html [accessed, 2015]

¹³ <http://www.essentialibiza.com/ibiza-club-tickets/f-me-im-famous/> [accessed, 2015]

Adventure Activities

Rock Climbing

HP2 elected to spend an afternoon at a climbing wall, learning how to rock climb.

Talk/Free Time

Talk

Research by Coates and Green on gendered friendships and the role that talk plays in friendship stresses the importance of 'talk' as a leisure activity for women. Coates also stresses the difference in how men and women do friendship,

Women's friendships are characterized by intimacy, mutual self-disclosure and a focus on talk, while men's friendships are characterized by sociability, a lack of self-disclosure, and a focus on activity.¹⁴

Although difficult to estimate, considerable time was spent 'just talking' at weekend hen parties.

Free Time

Activities can be both active or passive. Stebbins calls passive time, 'relaxation' time.¹⁵ This includes napping, strolling, and people watching which are all relaxing activities enjoyed by hens. Periods of relaxation are a feature of hen parties which last more than one evening. On hen parties lasting an evening there is no passive time at all. If the hen party lasts a day and a night, a weekend or longer, some time is generally factored in as 'chill time' when the group can split up and do their own thing for an hour or two, or they can simply relax or catch up on some sleep. While they might regard it as 'doing nothing', they are still to all intents and purposes 'doing'. HP16 did a little shopping on the Saturday morning, and in the afternoon they had a few drinks, listened to music and ate cakes. HP1 went for a stroll round the city on the Saturday morning, sitting in cafés engaging in *flânerie*, which Rojek describes as 'indolently opening up oneself to the sensations that modern life offers'.¹⁶ The *flâneur*, he says 'snips scenes and characters from the social world' in the same way a biologist 'takes specimens from the natural world'.

¹⁴ Coates, 1997: 245.

¹⁵ Stebbins, 1997.

¹⁶ Rojek, 1997: 91.

¹⁷ Some sat in the sun chatting while others did a bit of shopping. HP3 had some free time before dinner on the Saturday, so some people read while others went for a swim in the hotel pool. However, some hens can define passive time very differently. HP8, for instance, considered tennis, trampolining and playing pingpong as unstructured relaxation.

All of the hen parties lasting more than an evening had scheduled in some free time, which can be defined as time which is not already organised or filled by some other activity, and where the choice of activity is one's own. This included, passive entertainment, relaxation and sociable conversation. At HP1 there were two short periods of 'free time' on the Saturday of a weekend hen party. These were filled with strolling, chatting, window-shopping and sitting in the sun. At HP16, Saturday morning and afternoon also contained periods of free time, when people went shopping or stayed in the flat listening to music. The hens at HP10 did a bit of shopping before catching the bus back home to Aberdeen. HP3 spent time on the Saturday afternoon swimming and reading. HP5 spent an hour on the Saturday morning and an hour on the Saturday afternoon walking, napping, chatting, playing tennis or ping-pong and trampolining.

At HP4 the whole of Saturday daytime was free time. They split into groups and either went for a walk, went shopping or for coffee/lunch, or for a swim, or a spa treatment. This was somewhat unusual. As has been seen, at all the other hen parties free time tended to be limited to an hour or two.

The hen party which enjoyed most free time was a group that went abroad for four days and spent a good part of each day doing as they wished, with organised group activities tending to be only at night. To relax they lay by the pool, had a nap, and wandered round the shops.

The Night In and the Night Out

Every hen party had either a night in, a night out, or both. There was generally one main event, which could either be part of a night in or a night out. Pre-c.2000, all hen parties were simply described to me by my contributors as 'a Night Out'. The Night Out generally comprised of a meal at a restaurant, with the rest of the evening spent at either a pub or a club. The bride at HP18 married in 1976. She went out for a meal and then for a pub crawl around some of the city pubs. At HP17 in 1981 the bride had a few drinks at home before going out to a few pubs then back home again. This was described as typical for the time. At HP22 in 2000,

¹⁷ Rojek, 1997: 91.

hen parties were starting to become more popular and commodified. The group went to the nearest city to have a meal. The restaurant had been chosen because it advertised the opportunity to dance on the tables after the meal. After this, they went to a night club.

The Night In

Post-2000 16 hen parties included a Night In or a Night Out, or, on a hen weekend, both. Arrival night was usually the Night In, as people were often arriving in dribs and drabs and it was a chance to get to know other members of the group in quieter surroundings. The following night was usually considered the main night, and was therefore a Night Out, or, if they were staying in a country house in a remote location, a special Night In. The Night In and the Night Out were described by contributors as if they were activities in themselves, yet they could include games, activities and, on a Night In only, relaxation.

Eight hen parties describe a Night In. The first night of HP 1 was a Night In. There was a Polka Dot Party theme and everyone had to wear something spotty. They then had a buffet meal, a few games, lots of chatting and a few drinks.

HP11 also had a Night In on the Friday night. They had pizzas delivered to their apartment, had a few drinks and played some games.

The Friday night at HP5 was a Night in where everyone relaxed and it was a chance for the two very distinct groups to mix. They ate pizza and had a few drinks.

The Night Out and the Special Night In

The Night Out and the Special Night In are regarded by most hens as 'the highlight' or the 'main event', of the hen party. On a weekend this is generally on the Saturday night, when everyone is rested from the journey. HP7 had a few pre-dinner cocktails, then dinner out in a nice French restaurant. The bride describes the evening as a 'very civilised hen do'. HP16 went for cocktails and then clubbing. At HP13 the group went out for dinner, and after dinner the younger members of the group went clubbing while some of the older members went home, and indeed it was quite common for the older members of the group to leave the Night Out early, though not always. Mother of the bride at HP1, for instance, stayed out till 2.30am clubbing at her daughter's hen party.

HP4 took place in the self-catered lodges at a hotel. Their Night Out took place on the Saturday and they went to have dinner in the hotel restaurant. The

evening was themed, and everyone had to dress up. After dinner the group joined the family ceilidh organised by the hotel.

The contributor at HP3 did not know whether to describe the Saturday night as a Night In or a Night Out. They had hired a private room in the country hotel they were staying in, where they had a meal and played games. This was the focal point of their hen weekend. Given that they were dining formally it felt more like a Night Out. The Night In seems to be much more casual, with the hens wearing leisure wear or even pyjamas. They can play games but it is also common to relax and chat, or perhaps watch TV or a movie.

HP5 had a Special Night In in their country house, when they cooked a more elaborate meal and dressed up in something glittery for dinner.

Summary

Casual leisure (a combination of games and activities) are an essential component of the contemporary hen party. As the typology above shows there is considerable choice available for groups of hens when it comes to casual leisure, and companies are continually coming up with new ideas to attract custom. Some games/activities are homemade while others are bought in shops or online. The list above is by no means exhaustive. It merely represents the 38 hen parties I researched.

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