

# Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

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## Abstract

Against a background of unequal power relationships between men and women, and utilising Lukes' three dimensions of power, this paper examines how the wives of shift workers in a small mining town deal with the conflicts that arise over their male partners' use of leisure time. It looks at the range of influence strategies women use to actively negotiate men's manifest power and the coping strategies/forms of resistance which they fall back on when these strategies fail, or when men's latent or hidden power prevents any overt challenge. The data suggest that women not only use a wide range of influence strategies with varying degrees of success, but that they are creative and resilient in finding alternative ways to resist the structures of male power. However, the outcomes of their agency at an individual level are limited by the social, economic and ideological structures of male power at the community level.

## Introduction

Dominant ideologies about marriage have promoted it as a relationship between equals based on companionship, love and consensus. However, feminist analyses (Barrett and McIntosh 1982; Thorne and Yalom 1992; Wearing 1996) have sought to demystify this position, and to focus on the unequal power relations between men and women, whereby men have more power than women in the family because of their gender per se, their traditional position as the head of the household, and their economic and physical power (Wearing 1996: 125). Connell (1987: 123-4) refers to this unequal power relationship as a system of 'domestic patriarchy [which] is dependent on support from its environment', that is, on support from a system of public patriarchy which operates in the wider society. Not surprisingly, such analyses suggest that this 'tangle of love and domination' (Thorne 1992: 24) often leads to conflict rather than consensus, and to marital power struggles, as women attempt to contest men's assumed right to have their interests met. Whilst there are many aspects of everyday life which may cause conflict between partners--from who does the washing-up to who decides where they will spend their holidays--for women in 'Mineton' (a small mining town on the edge of outback New South Wales) the key area of contention is their male partners' use of leisure time.

This paper aims to further our understanding of how women negotiate male power in their marital relationships by exploring how women in Mineton deal with the conflicts that arise over men's leisure activities. It begins by outlining a theoretical framework appropriate to the study of marital power, and reviewing empirical studies of the influence strategies used by men and women in negotiating marital conflict.

## Theorising marital power

Any theory of power that is useful to women must be cognisant of the variety of ways in which less powerful groups and individuals are both incorporated into the maintenance and reproduction of the existing relations of power, and how they go about resisting and changing those power relations. In addition, in the context of marital relationships, the adequacy of any theory of power rests on its ability to incorporate both power and love. As Komter (1989, 1991) and Meyer (1991) note, it is more usual for these two concepts to be seen as opposites than considered together in the same theoretical model. Both these authors cite Lukes' (1974) three-dimensional theory of power as providing a possible way forward, with Meyer (1991: 34) describing it as 'a promising starting point for a relational theory involving power and love'. Komter's (1989) study of the strategies used by marital partners to effect change in different areas of the relationship is a useful example of the insights that can be gained through the application of Lukes' model to a specific research setting.

According to Komter, manifest power parallels Lukes' first dimension, whereby the outcome (in her case whether or not change occurred) relies on the ability of one partner to gain the desired end or thwart the other partner's desired end. In her study it was usually the women who desired change, and 'the husbands' negative responses or negative attitudes' (1989: 212) which prevailed. Whereas manifest power is about decision-making, latent power, which parallels Lukes' second dimension, is about non-decision-making. Here the focus is on potential agendas, that is, on those issues that would arise if the less powerful partner raised them. However, they are not raised because the less powerful partner,

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

usually the woman, anticipates the husband's negative response. Such issues may be discovered by looking for 'grievances harbored by the less-powerful party in the relationship' (Komter 1991: 35). Komter's third kind of power is invisible power. This parallels Lukes' third dimension of power. Here, the focus is again on potential agendas, but this time on issues which are unlikely to be raised, not because of a more or less conscious decision by the less powerful partner (as for latent power), but because the less powerful partner accepts the way things are and the right of the more powerful partner to make decisions. Lukes (1974: 24) refers to this third dimension as 'the supreme and most insidious exercise of power'. No grievances are harboured because the less powerful interpret the situation in ways that 'block alternatives (real or as yet imaginary) from view' (Komter 1991: 35).

Komter's (1989, 1991) analysis suggests that if we are interested in looking at the power strategies women use in their marital relationships, we need to go beyond their use of overt tactics in situations where there is a clear winner and loser. A focus on manifest power both underestimates the structural constraints within which women operate and privileges the kinds of strategies men use, while simultaneously obscuring women's agency and their ability to creatively challenge patriarchy.

### Influence strategies in marital relationships

Most empirical studies concerned with power in marital relationships have focused on the end product of decision-making, in terms of which partner made the decision. Blood and Wolfe's (1960) study is most often cited as the archetypal example. Little or no interest has been shown in exploring the processes involved, that is, in the strategies of influence husbands and wives use to 'get their way'. Komter (1991: 54) suggests that it is these strategies which are the most salient, since they both take account of, and bring to light, the structural inequalities inherent in the marital relationship. While a woman may have less power than her male partner, she is not powerless, and compliance to his wishes is not inevitable. However, the strategies she uses to achieve what she wants are chosen, consciously or unconsciously, within the constraints of patriarchal power. As Kandiyoti (1991: 115) succinctly states, 'women as a rule bargain from a weaker position'.

Earlier studies of university students (Falbo and Peplau 1980) found that women in heterosexual relationships were more likely to use indirect (rather than direct) and unilateral (rather than bilateral) strategies of influence. However, more recent research with non-student married couples has revised these findings. Aida and Falbo (1991) found that husbands and wives did not differ in their use of strategies, but that 'traditional' wives (that is, where the husband was the only or primary breadwinner) used a greater variety of strategies than women in more egalitarian relationships. Frieze and McHugh (1992) found similar results for women married to violent as compared to non-violent husbands. Thus, it seems that while women do not necessarily use different kinds of strategies from men, those in relationships with the greatest power differentials (either economic or physical) may use a wider variety of strategies.

Research undertaken by Howard et al. (1986) with heterosexual and homosexual couples in long-term relationships also studied how the amount of power an individual had in the relationship affected the kinds of influence strategies he or she used. Following Kipnis et al. (1976), Howard et al. characterised strategies of influence as 'strong' or 'weak' according to how successful these were in achieving the desired outcome. They found that women in heterosexual relationships tended to use weak strategies, and attributed this to their relative powerlessness rather than their gender per se. It was being in partnership with a man that elicited weak strategies from women, including manipulation (dropping hints, flattering, behaving seductively, reminding of past favours) and supplication (pleading, crying, acting ill or helpless). By contrast, men in relationships with women used strong strategies such as bullying (making threats, insulting, becoming violent, ridiculing) and autocracy (insisting, claiming greater knowledge, asserting authority). Howard et al. attributed this difference to the fact that men are accorded more power by society and have greater resources to ensure compliance. Lips (1991: 68) agrees: 'men elicit weak rather than strong influence strategies from their intimate partners (not only because of) the legitimate power that comes with being male', but also because of their greater physical power and the 'implicit threat of aggression'.

This latter characteristic of male power is an aspect about which many previous studies have had little to say, in spite of the fact that it is an ever-present reality for many women in their daily lives. Women, therefore, use weak strategies because they feel that they cannot legitimately claim compliance and fear the consequences if they do use strong strategies. Put simply, men have more resources when it comes to sanctioning! Howard et al. (1986) also found that men

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

used the strategy of disengagement (sulking, leaving the scene, trying to make the partner feel guilty) more often than women; this strategy was never used by married women with dependent children. The final strategy of influence identified by Howard et al. was bargaining (reasoning, offering to compromise, offering a trade-off)--a strategy most frequently used by men whose female partners were in employment. Thus, bargaining appeared to be characteristic of more egalitarian relationships.

In exploring the ways in which women in Mineton attempt to influence their male partners' leisure activities, it is proposed to make use of both the theoretical framework on power developed by Komter (1989, 1991) and the categories of influence strategies identified by Howard et al. (1986): bargaining, manipulation, supplication, autocracy, bullying and disengagement. In turn, this analysis will test the relevance of the findings of Howard et al. in the present context.

### Research in Mineton

The data on which this paper is based were collected in 1995 as part of a study investigating the effects of 12-hour shift rosters on mine workers, their families and the wider community(1) (Ballis et al. 1996). During fieldwork in Mineton, interviews were completed with some 45 women and 50 men.(2) They varied in length and structure, from short, semi-structured interviews with individuals identified as key community personnel, to in-depth interviews with mine workers and their partners, and hour-long focus groups involving women from various community organisations. The data reported here focus mainly, though not exclusively, on the interviews with women.(3)

Of the 45 women interviewed, 30 (two-thirds) had male partners who either currently worked, or had previously worked, in the mining industry. Of these, 22 had personal experience of living with men who worked a 12-hour shift roster. We asked these women what they saw as the positive and negative aspects of 12-hour shifts, and how the eight day--four on/four off(4)--pattern of men's work/leisure routine impacted on them, their children and family life in general. We asked them about the adjustments they had had to make and the kinds of strategies they used in their attempts to overcome the negative aspects. The other 23 women who were interviewed spoke to us as professionals working in education, health, welfare and pastoral care, as members of the Mineton Shire Council, or simply as interested members of the Mineton community. The aim was to build up a general picture of women's lives in Mineton in order to contextualise the more detailed individual accounts of how women experienced the 12-hour shifts. Both groups of women spoke at length about the problems of bringing up children and coordinating family life around the shifts. For the more recent arrivals, distance from familiar support networks and difficulties in making friends and finding suitable employment in a small remote town were common.(5) Such experiences were likely to add to women's expectations of companionship from their partners; expectations which, as the following section outlines, were at odds with the patriarchal culture of Mineton.

### Structures of male power in Mineton

While the focus of this paper is on how women negotiate male power in their marital relationships, it is important to understand that the exercise of patriarchal power in the private sphere occurs within, and is supported by, a system of male power in the public sphere. This is nowhere more evident than in Mineton, where the specific form of patriarchal culture is closely related to its economic base and the fact that mining is still very much men's work:

*It's a masculine town ... there's work for men, more ... There's a very traditional division I think (#40-F).*

*[W]omen don't have much say in anything they do or anything they want to do... that's, ah, women in mining towns... It is male dominated in Mineton, of course it is. They're the ones that work; they're the ones that earn the money (#44-F).*

In her study of the coal mining towns of central Queensland, Gibson (1994: 63) notes not only the role of the unions in excluding women from mining, but also suggests such communities 'epitomise the heart of Australia's "blokeland", a cultural landscape dominated by big machinery, big machismo, big drinking, where people are big on sport'. Such a description could equally well apply to Mineton. Both men and women agree that Mineton is very much a man's town where 'the men are men ... in inverted commas' (#47-M) and there are 'no wuss allowed' (#76-M). Attitudes towards

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

women are typically seen as 'male chauvinistic' (#6-F) and as incorporating values which 'belong[ed] in the 50s and 60s, not the 90s' (#42-F). One respondent describes the general expectations of women's role in the following way: 'Stay home and do the housework ... babysit the children, make sure your husband's washing and ironing's done and there is a meal cooked for him as he walks in the door' (#7-F).

Meanwhile, men's roles are essentially defined by their work in the mining industry, and by their relationship with their workmates. One miner explains:

We are a family, the crew ... it's just the industry we're working in. We rely on each other so much and look after each other for our own lives and safety. If one hurts, we all hurt. We get a bloke injured or that, we're all injured 'cause he's dear. We sort of feel guilty 'cause it's our fault, he's a family member sort of thing (#52-M).

This mine worker uses the analogy of the family to emphasise the close emotional bonds between crew members. Sedgwick (1985) suggests that such 'homosocial bonds' are an integral part of a patriarchal society, since they are all about promoting men's interests.(6) Not surprisingly, wives in Mineton are often far from happy when their husbands put the wrong family first.

Bulmer (1975) cited Blauner's (1960) concept of an 'occupational community' as useful in understanding the specific culture of mining communities. The nature of the work, the comparative physical isolation and shiftwork are all implicated in the formation of a relatively self-contained reference group whose members work together and spend their leisure time together. Mining, especially for underground workers, is 'physically most exacting, dangerous and uncertain' (Bulmer 1975: 85). Individual safety depends on others, and solidarity within work crews develops from the 'shared group responsibility for the work below ground and isolated work communities above ground' (Hodson and Sullivan 1990: 203). The location of mining operations and the fact that shiftwork puts individuals out of synchrony with the leisure activities of others in the community, including their own families, exacerbates this isolation (Blyton 1985). Thus, not surprisingly, 'workmates are also leisure companions' (Bulmer 1975: 86). This is true for many shift workers in Mineton, for whom spending time with crew members is very much an integral part of their lives outside of work, and takes priority over time spent with wives and children:

The people that I work with are my close friends, so naturally you drink with your close friends. And I was no different anywhere else anyway (#58-M).

[O]n days off we'll all get together and go, we might go fishing, or we might go down and have a few beers, or ... pop round and see each other. I mean it's pretty good like that really (#54-M).

There is also considerable peer pressure from other miners to conform to the norms of mateship, crew solidarity and the 'macho image' (#48-M). This pressure is frequently experienced in the form of insults, such as 'She's got you under the thumb again' (#24-F), 'You weak bastard' (#50-M), or 'What are you, a wuss?' (#6-F). One interviewee recalls how her husband 'received quite a lot of flack from his colleagues' because he would telephone her to ask 'if he could play golf or go out with the boys' (#39-F). Some crews are seen as worse than others for putting pressure on members to spend leisure time with work mates; the pressure tends to be greatest where there are more single men on a crew, and 'the married ones feel as if they should be there [in the hotel] too ... because they're all part of this team, you know. And they are sometimes made to feel as if there's something wrong if they don't go along' (#15-F).

The result is that men's use of leisure time has the potential to become a key source of tension and conflict within marital relationships already under strain because of taking 'second [place] to the relationship with the guys' (#18-F). These findings parallel those of Williams (1981) in her study of working class marriages in Open Cut. Williams (1981: 137) identified the 'adherence to mateship cliques [as] a main source of unresolved marital unhappiness for wives', and husbands' use of leisure time as a key source of marital friction.

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

In Mineton, the recent introduction of 12-hour shifts appears to have exacerbated the problem because the new roster gives shift workers four continuous days off in every eight. While the men, almost without exception, see 12-hour shifts as 'the best thing since sliced bread' (#58-M) because of the shorter working week and greater amount of leisure time, some of the wives tend to be less enthusiastic. They see boredom as the main problem with the new shift roster--the men have 'too much time' with nothing to do (#6-F), and therefore 'gravitate towards the local club on days off' (#16-F). Women's experiences of the 12-hour shift roster are largely determined by their partners' use of the four days off; whether the men are 'positively occupied doing something either for the family or [themselves], rather than just sitting around doing nothing' (#3-F), and/or spending too much time drinking. Many women in Mineton would no doubt agree with Gibson's (1992: 54) assessment that 'in this model of shift work, the individual physiology and desires of men are privileged over the physiology and desires of family and community'.

We now turn to examine in detail the strategies women in Mineton used in their attempts to influence their partners' use of leisure time, and to minimise the negative effects on themselves and their children of boredom and too much time spent drinking with work mates.

### Women's influence strategies

#### Bargaining

Initially most women attempted to reason with their husbands to spend less time drinking with their work mates and more time at home with their families or in productive leisure pursuits. While such a strategy may have worked for women in more egalitarian relationships, it clearly relied on men's willingness to compromise. When this happened, women were generally happy with the new shift roster: 'We find it a lot better; the whole family love it' (#11-F). However, compromise was unlikely where men held traditional views on masculinity and gender roles, which incorporated their right to leisure and male homosociality:

[I]t's hard bloody work and you give it your all ... and when you're on your days off, you want those days off to do what you want to do, such as play golf ... you don't want to be home babysitting the kids ... that's the way that I look at it (#58-M).

As Dempsey (1989: 43) has shown in his study of Smalltown, an Australian rural community, such ideologies are not unique to mining towns, and wives with more egalitarian attitudes may have a hard time trying to change their partners' behaviour when they get little support from the rest of the community. In the end some of the women in Mineton gave up, not only because they failed to persuade their partners, but also because of the conflict which was involved:

[A]t the beginning you argue, argue, argue ... and then you think: 'Well, bugger it!' ... [now] I just can't be bothered fighting (#6-F).

I just got that way with my husband now, if he says he's going out, then I say: 'Alrighty then, I'll see you when you get home'. And he will go 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. Because ... it's just not worth the argument ... you just can't be bothered no more (#7-F).

So how do we explain the fact that these women backed down? One way is to make use of Hochschild's (1990: 125) concept of 'gender strategies', which offers an insight into how individuals 'put together gender ideology, feelings and action' in real life situations. As applied to the present study, her analysis suggests that women with egalitarian ideologies will pursue direct strategies to achieve changes in their partner's use of their leisure time (whereas women with more traditional attitudes will pursue more indirect strategies). However, Hochschild (1989) also suggests that there may be a conflict between 'feeling rules'--how a woman thinks she should feel according to her gender ideology, and 'feelings'--how a woman actually does feel. Thus, while a woman may subscribe to an egalitarian ideology, she may not be emotionally prepared to pursue a direct strategy at all costs--it simply may not be that important to her when other things are taken into account. Since women are seen to be responsible for the smooth functioning and emotional well-being of the family, it is perhaps not surprising that they backed down when their actions led to conflict and disharmony in the family. It seems

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

that both the power differential in the marital relationship and women's nurturing role, worked against the success of a direct strategy such as bargaining. Some women turned to more indirect tactics.

### Manipulation

If the problem, as they saw it, was that husbands had nothing to do on their days off, then some women attempted to find them things to do; anything 'to keep them busy' (#15-F). This could entail getting a husband interested in a hobby, or finding him things to do around the house. The following interviewee covered both, when she recounted how she had:

known families where mum and the children have saved up to buy golf clubs so he can go and play, learn to play golf, rather than go to the pub during those 4 days ... [or they've] got him to build something in the back yard (#45-F).

The very nature of manipulation meant that women had to go about the strategy of 'keeping him busy' in a fairly surreptitious way. Buying her husband a present of some golf clubs worked for one woman. Another kept her husband busy at home by making a joke of the list of projects she had lined up for him (making a rabbit hutch; replanting the vegetable garden; building the cubby house before the kids got too old to use it)(#5). In another instance a wife paid her husband to do the ironing: 'I keep him busy ... he does my ironing now ... and he gets pocket money for it ... I used to pay someone, now I pay him. I don't care. If he wants to do it, that gives him a couple of extra hours [of something to do]' (#15-F).

This interviewee justified her actions by saying that this strategy rewarded both of them; her husband received extra money to spend on himself and she was happy, because while he was doing the ironing he was not in the pub. The fact that the work was paid made it acceptable, and enabled her husband to keep up his image with his mates. Thus her strategy was a compromise between her egalitarian and his more traditional ideology. However, the interviewee herself emphasised that her husband was 'not a wuss by any standard', and thus in Hochschild's terms it could be that her strategy resolved a conflict between her egalitarian feelings rules and her feelings, that is, between her belief that her husband should use his leisure time productively and share the domestic chores since they both worked, and her feelings that this would make him less of a man.

### Supplication

Holding all-day barbecue and drinking sessions at home after the last shift was a particular area of contention for one wife. However, when either she or the other wives 'were getting a bit upset about it' (#16-F) the men simply went to one of the hotels to continue drinking. Getting upset proved even less effective when it was aimed at similar activities 'during the week ... which usually [went] on until 2 or 3 in the morning' (#16-F). This same interviewee then tried pleading: 'Look, come on, I've got kids trying to sleep'. But even using the children in her appeal failed. In a final bid to put a stop to the men's activities, she not only switched strategies, but also switched from a weak to a strong strategy.

### Autocracy

Putting aside her feelings about not antagonising her husband and steeling herself for a showdown over her feeling rules, this interviewee decided to assert her authority. 'I put my foot down,' she said, recalling how she had simply told the men to: 'Go [home]' (#16-F). In this instance the attempt at autocracy worked. While this shows that women may be able to exercise some influence over what takes place in their own homes, for many that is where their authority begins and ends, as the next example makes clear.

One of the leisure activities the crews liked to do on their four days off was to go fishing, although 'they would do more of this [interviewee lifts an imaginary 'tinnie' to her lips] than they would putting the line in' (#5-F). Women, of course, were not invited. Further, as the same interviewee made clear, 'you wouldn't even have the hide to ask, to suggest to go' (#5-F). Wives were expected to stay home and look after the children. Even if they did try to assert their authority by refusing permission for their husbands to go, they seemed to have little success. One husband recalled how he had gone fishing for three days, even after his wife had insisted he stay at home: 'It was great ... she wouldn't let me go either. So I

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

went, on me own for three days, and I loved it. It was great' [laughs] (#50-M).

However, the following interviewee was more successful in her use of a strong strategy. Her husband, like other men, liked to go away to the 'shoots' on his four days off, but he also liked to spend time with his family. So, initially the whole family went on these shooting trips. However, this made them very expensive, especially considering that the husband was the only one who participated; the rest of the family only watched. The interviewee recalled how eventually she had 'sort of jacked up, cause he was spending all this money on his own enjoyment' while she and the children were 'just in the background' (#29-F). In this instance the strong strategy worked, essentially because the husband was more family-orientated--his feeling rules were more egalitarian and he therefore put up less resistance to the changes his wife was seeking.

### Sanctioning

When all else failed, women resorted to a range of sanctions, especially when it came to limiting the amount of drinking time. Some set clear times for meals and stood by them: 'he knows when tea is dished up and if he's not there to eat it, it's gone! Like he knows the rules' (#5-F). There were also stories told of women who would drive to the hotel and fetch their husbands out of the bar if they were not home by the time the tea was on the table.

Other wives showed disapproval of their husbands' behaviour by making derogatory comments and suggesting that they were not 'man enough' to stand up for themselves. Such ridicule was seen as a particularly useful strategy when the single men on the crew would telephone and try to persuade the married ones to join them at the hotel: 'well, a few times [my husband] said "I'll go," and I said: "Haven't you got a bit of backbone in you to say No" ?' (#5-F). While she was happy for her husband to have a social drink with his mates, it was the seemingly pointless ritual of the 'piss up' which angered one interviewee: 'If he goes and sits at some piss up with someone, I get the shits'(#6). While it was unclear as to whether her anger had much effect, another interviewee told of seeing men 'doing penance' in response to their wives' disapproval or anger at their behaviour:

When a wife really puts her mind to it, she can bring them down to where they should be ... I've seen it... I've seen them looking after the baby the next day, feeling a bit crook, you know. If a man has had a night out that he shouldn't have had and his wife's mad at him, he does anything the next day ... mind the kids ... cook the meals (#44-F).

However, while sanctioning often led to some show of appeasement or short-term behavioural change, it did not effect long-term changes in men's use of leisure time. The sanctions that women had at their disposal did not disturb the status quo of marital power relations, short of putting into action the ultimate threat--leaving.

### Disengagement

There appeared to be a pattern among Mineton women of getting to the stage when they 'just got up and left ... they have had it' (#6-F). When all other strategies failed, and they could not take any more, women left town: 'Yeah, I think the wives [have] just got to get up and do something to make them sort of wake up and realise what they are doing' (#7-F). Most of the women came back, but not all. Two women who came back recalled the decision to leave:

[I]t was getting to the stage where [husband's] drinking was affecting ... like he'd have a binge on the Friday night and Saturday he'd spend in bed, and I was trying to keep the kids quiet or trying to amuse them. And I thought: 'Well, why don't I try the single mother bit because I'm doing a lot of things by myself all the time' (#16-F).

Well, my husband, his crew was that bad about 12 months ago, I ended up leaving him ... packed up and left town for about 4 or 5 months 'cause I couldn't put up with it no more (#7-F).

For both these women their partners' drinking was still very much an issue; while the situation may have improved a little,

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

the real difference was that they felt they were 'better able to cope with it' (#16-F) or had resigned themselves to leading separate lives:

I refuse to go to any [mine] do's with my husband because he gets in with his little crowd and just leaves me sitting there on my own, so I, I'd be better off staying home and watching the telly, so I stay home (#7-F).

In order to understand these changes in the women's strategies we can again make use of Hochschild's (1989; 1990) work. Leaving town required the women to focus on their feeling rules, in a final and very public effort to change their partners' behaviour. When even this strategy failed they turned to focus on their feelings--the continuation of the relationship was what mattered (even if it did not match up to their egalitarian expectations), and it was up to them to change if their partners would not. As the husband of interviewee #16 told her: '[T]hings are the same. It's just that you accept it' (#58-M). It would appear from these examples that any changes in men's leisure activities were relatively short-term, and that after a honeymoon period when their partners first returned they had gradually settled back into their old ways. Thus, in the long term, not even the strategy of disengagement was able to challenge the power of male homosocial bonds.

Overall, the present research provides qualified support for the analysis of Howard et al. (1986). Their six-fold categorisation of influence strategies was found to be empirically useful in making sense of the many different strategies used by women in Mineton. However, the analysis raises questions as to the adequacy of at least one of the descriptors of Howard et al. in the context of a study focusing solely on women's influence strategies. The use of the descriptor 'bullying' would seem to be biased in favour of the kinds of strategies typically used by men--making threats, becoming violent. Women's lesser power, especially their lesser physical power, means that they rarely use such strategies. In recognition of this I have chosen to use 'sanctioning' as a more accurate descriptor of the kinds of strong strategies used by women, that is, by the less powerful--ridicule, getting angry/showing disapproval. The present research also calls into question the original categorisation by Howard et al. of strong (successful) and weak (unsuccessful) strategies, at least as they apply to women. Women used both strong and weak strategies, with mixed outcomes. Of the strong strategies, sanctioning (ridiculing men's weakness in the face of pressure from the male group, making them 'pay' when the drinking got too excessive) was sometimes successful in the short-term, while autocracy (putting a stop to drinking at home, refusing permission for fishing trips) had only limited success. Of the weak strategies, manipulation (keeping men busy at home or finding them hobbies) seemed to be quite successful, while supplication (getting upset with their behaviour or pleading with them to stop) was generally unsuccessful.

While all strategies had varying degrees of success and failure, an important finding of the present research is women's readiness to use a range of strategies and to move between them. For example, interviewee #16 used both weak and strong strategies in her attempts to stop the all-day barbecues and late night drinking, moving from supplication (getting upset and pleading) to autocracy (asserting her authority). She also recalled how she had made use of disengagement when she left town for a few weeks. Interviewee #5 also used a combination of weak and strong strategies; in her case, manipulation and sanctioning. While she made good use of manipulation with the list of jobs for her husband to do around the house, she also used various kinds of sanctioning--standing by her rules on meal times and ridiculing her husband over being easily persuaded to join the single members of his crew at the pub. These observations confirm Frieze and McHugh's (1992) finding that women in unequal relationships tend to make use of a wide range of strategies, and, more generally, that those with less power are, of necessity, more creative and flexible in the strategies they use.

### Men's manifest, latent and hidden power

Thus, women in Mineton used a range of strategies to try and influence their male partners' use of leisure time; sometimes they were successful, sometimes they were not. Sometimes even success was relative. Take for example the interviewee who was upset with the all-day barbecues and drinking sessions at her home. While she was successful in stopping the activity happening in her backyard, she was powerless to stop it all together. Manifest power in many instances was clearly with the men.

The clearest expression of men's latent power can be found in women's reports of their attempts at bargaining. Women described how they gave up trying to reason with their partners because this always ended in arguments, which they

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

invariably lost. Anticipating negative outcomes, they therefore opted to keep quiet. In this way, the issues which they had been in conflict over moved to the status of potential agendas. However, such action on the women's part does suggest that potential agendas could become actual agendas, and feelings about not wanting to cause conflict put aside in favour of egalitarian feeling rules. In other words, it raises the possibility that, if an issue was sufficiently important to her, a woman might choose to go ahead and have a big argument, and maybe even win!

Latent power was also evident in the story about the fishing trips, and in the following interviewee's account of her husband's behaviour: '[He] get[s] home, wake[s] everyone up at 3 o'clock in the morning ... I'd love to do that. Get out of bed at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and spend five hours on the couch. Oh!' (#21-F). While she was clearly unhappy with the situation, this interviewee did not actually challenge her husband's behaviour. Nor did she challenge his right to play soccer on both Saturdays and Sundays when his days off coincided with a weekend, although she was clearly resentful of the intrusion into their time as a family:

I just get a bit cheesed off, we don't seem to spend much time, I mean like it's one thing him and the boys going somewhere, but we don't get much time as a family, don't seem to do much as a family (#21-F).

These feelings of resentment seemed to be the price some women with more traditional ideologies paid for accepting feeling rules which incorporated men's right to leisure and male homosociality.

However, there were also women who did not harbour resentment over such behaviour, and where men's power consequently remained hidden. One interviewee stated quite clearly that she did not resent her husband playing sport most weekends, in spite of the fact that this meant that she and the children never saw him. When asked about her attitude she replied that the reason she did not resent it was 'because I know how much he loves playing' (#34-F). While specific examples of hidden power were rare in the interviews we conducted, some of the women were certainly aware of relationships in Mineton where men's hidden power prevailed:

[A] lot of the females have actually, that I have come across, have accepted that that's the way of life, that when he [the husband] finishes work he spends time in the pub and away from the family, and that's the bottom line (#70-M).

### When influence strategies fail

So, the question now arises as to what women do when their influence strategies fail or when men's latent or hidden power prevents them even attempting to actively challenge men's power. What other kinds of strategies do they make use of in 'negotiating at the margins of power' (Davis and Fisher 1993: 6)? Perhaps not surprisingly, they turn to strategies of coping and adaptation, strategies which will enable them to 'accept and adjust to the situation' (Biener 1987: 339). The adoption of such strategies should not be taken to imply that women are passive. Coping strategies can also be viewed as forms of resistance, and as evidence that women are creative and resilient in finding ways to resist and even undermine the structures of male power under which they live. However, while in general, women's coping strategies or forms of resistance take account of accepted 'models of female deviance' (Cloward and Piven 1979: 656), each woman is also limited by her own personal resources. Cloward and Piven (1979: 652) suggest that while some women may be able to 'defy societal norms in ways that are collective and aggressive ... others are restricted to individualized and self-destructive forms'. Both patterns are evident in Mineton.

For women with few resources, illness may be a way of coping. Such women were well-known to the doctors in Mineton. One doctor told of women presenting with 'medical symptomology', and how it was 'an interpretation [and] a step-by-step process' to gain their confidence and be able to approach the underlying problems (#69-M). A second doctor mentioned women who made frequent attendances at the surgery, presenting with a range of (objectively) minor physical ailments, either of themselves or their children.

While illness was a stereotypical and individualistic coping strategy, whereby some women in Mineton turned their distress inwards on themselves, others chose a less typical and more collective strategy, more aptly described as 'acting

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

out'. To appreciate the full impact of this latter strategy, it is important to note that the hotels in Mineton (with the exception of certain bars and late night discos) are essentially male domains. Just as Dempsey (1992: 51) noted that women who entered the pubs in Smalltown unescorted were assumed to be 'after someone else's man', so in Mineton it is clear that women who frequent such places on their own do so only at the risk of their reputations. With hotels being essentially off limits to women, it is not surprising that one of their coping strategies represents both a clear challenge to men's definition of women's place and an invasion of men's territory. The basis of this form of resistance was the 'girls' night out'. This took several forms, one of which was the 'pub run':

I went to a farewell ... and we had dinner at [Club Y]. And after, a couple of the girls said: 'Right! We're going to [Hotel A]' ... I had never been to any of the pubs ... we decided to do a pub crawl. We walked into [Hotel A], and we literally ran through [there], and [they] proceeded to take me down to [Hotel B], ran me through there. I said: 'Why are we running?'

'You don't want to get caught.'

'So why are we going there?'

'You don't crawl in Mineton, you run!' (#30-F).

A second form of the girls' night out was a more serious attempt to copy the men:

[I]f there's been a group of us gone out, say for tea, and then [Club Z] shuts, and then you go to [Hotel A]. Well, I might get home at 4 a.m. or 5 a.m., depending ... they'll find a party, so we'll all go to this party, we'll gate crash or whatever (#5-F).

[T]here might be 15 of us girls. You know, we'll all go out for dinner ... we might go from one pub to the next sort of thing ... Some of our friends that have come from away and have come out with us, you know, their husbands have never allowed it before, because it has never gone on before (#22-F).

This last interviewee suggested that these girls' nights out were something of a Mineton phenomenon, not necessarily found in other mining towns. However, she also made it clear that participation was dependent on male approval, and not all husbands allowed their wives to participate, even in Mineton. As one woman, whose husband regularly went out until 3 a.m. or 4 a.m., told us: 'if I went out and got home at that time of the morning, I would be in trouble' (#7-F). Although this interviewee did not clarify exactly what she meant by 'trouble', the tone of her voice suggested a real fear of the consequences of such behaviour. As noted above, men's physical power and the threat of violence are ever-present considerations for some women, which clearly constrain their actions and the kinds of resistance in which they engage.

So, how should we interpret the girls' night out? On the one hand, copying men's behaviour can be interpreted as a subversive act that contests men's ownership of the hotels as their territory. Thus, perhaps such acts of resistance can be seen as an indication that women are beginning to challenge men's definition of the world and women's place in it. However, on the other hand, the girls' night out can also be interpreted as condoning the very behaviour that the women are in conflict over, and thus as an activity which undermines their position. Certainly, it is an activity which takes place with men's permission (both at the individual and community level) and under the watchful eye of men (since it takes place in their territory). So, while this may well be an example of 'a struggle over contested meanings and social identities' (Davis and Fisher 1993: 17) its potential to achieve a shift in the balance of power between men and women in Mineton is unclear. However, as Pringle (1988: 266) notes, it is not possible to predict if or when such small and disorganised resistances will develop into 'something larger ... what it will be about or what its outcome will be'.(7) In the meantime, the girls' night out, 'by doubting and questioning the status quo instead of quietly accepting it' (Lips 1991: 8) and doing so in a collective, enjoyable and very and public way, is a more effective coping strategy and form of resistance than illness.

Conclusion

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

Using a three-dimensional theory of power, developed by Komter (1989; 1991) and based on the work of Lukes (1974), the research found that while women in Mineton were not powerless in their marital relationships, many of the outcomes in the conflicts over men's use of leisure time showed that manifest power was clearly with the men. Women used a range of strategies in their attempts to influence men's leisure activities. However, their successes were often limited when weighed against the greater power of their male partners, which was supported by mateship groups and the structures of male power in the community. Hochschild's (1989, 1990) concept of gender strategies was drawn on to explain the strategies used by the women in specific situations, relating their actions to both the normative expectations of individuals holding specific gender ideologies and their emotional preparedness to pursue the desired outcome against their partners' opposition. However, this study did not just concern itself with women's overt attempts at influence, but sought to understand what happened when either such strategies failed or were not even attempted, due to men's latent or hidden power. Where they were unable to oppose it directly, women turned to more covert ways of survival and resistance designed to challenge and disrupt the status quo. Such acts of resistance showed women to be resourceful and resilient in finding ways which 'enabled them to hold back the tide of male domination though not to overthrow it' (Wearing 1996: 32).

### Notes

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(1) This study was commissioned and funded by Peak Gold Mines Pty Ltd. The research team comprised the author, her colleagues Dr Harry Ballis, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Monash University, Gippsland Campus, and Dr Arthur Veno, Centre for Police and Justice Studies, Faculty of Arts, Monash University, Caulfield Campus, and research assistants Ms Lynda Berends and Ms Kathryn Goller.

(2) In the text each interviewee is identified by a number, followed by 'F' (female) or 'M' (male).

(3) A total of 17 women participated in joint interviews with their male partners, who worked at a local mine. These interviews were conducted by Harry Ballis. Some 20 women participated in one of four focus groups: one group was held with women who worked at the local community health centre, a second with women who were the partners of shift workers, and the third and fourth groups with women who belonged to the evening or day VIEW Clubs. The author and Kathryn Goller facilitated these groups. Three of the women who participated in a focus group were also interviewed with their partners. A further eleven women participated in interviews with key community personnel, as representatives of the clergy, school principals, health and welfare professionals, members of the local council. These interviews were conducted by Harry Ballis, Arthur Veno and the author.

(4) While all four on/four off (or 2 x 12) rosters rotate over eight days, the number of night shifts in a row and the placing of the days and nights may vary. There are three main patterns: four days on, four days off, four nights on (4D/4OFF/4N); two days on, two nights on, four days off (2D/2N/4OFF); two nights on, two days on, four days off (2N/2D/4OFF).

(5) Most women come to Mineton as the partners of men who are offered jobs at one of the mines. Excluding other primary industry workers (agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting), most of whom live in the surrounding rural area, some 37 per cent of employed men in the Mineton ABS region (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1991) worked in the mining industry, but only 5 per cent of employed women. The gender segmentation of the work force means that a small resource-based town like Mineton has relatively few openings for women who are concentrated in community services, wholesale and retail trade, and recreational, personal and other services (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1991). Our respondents reported that while women with the appropriate skills and qualifications may find work in the community health, medical, education or welfare fields, there is little on offer for either women with other kinds of professional training or for those with no specialist skills. There are a limited number of clerical jobs at the mines, and other businesses servicing the mining industry, or work in the retail trade.

(6) Sedgwick (1985) also notes that male homosociality is structured around compulsory heterosexuality and an intense fear of homosexuality.

(7) Gibson-Graham (1995) describes one such example of how women's individual resistances within the family grew into

## Marital conflict and men's leisure: how women negotiate male power in a small mining community.

'something larger' over the introduction of a new shift roster in the mining communities of the Upper Hunter Valley, producing both a change in power relationships and gender identities.

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