

'Court' the Act: The Informal Reproduction of Male Power in Pennant Squash

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There already exists an extensive literature documenting the formal barriers which define and limit women's participation in sport in Australia.¹ Yet, insufficient research has been done to explore the personal politics of Australian sporting practices at the everyday level, what might be referred to as informal practices which reproduce patriarchal gender relations. Squash presents a particularly interesting case study in this regard because it is a 'mixed' sport with reasonably high-level female participation, in which women *appear* to be accepted as equals to men. This article investigates the role of both informal and formal barriers to female participation in a particular sport using ethnographic material from a suburban Perth squash club. Structural relations and institutionalised sporting organisations as well as face-to-face interpersonal relations are investigated as sites for the construction of gender relations.

In Australia, women have been prominent and visible in squash for almost as long as men. The first Australian squash championships for women, for example were held in Victoria in 1932, only a year after the men's first championships.² More recently, Heather McKay (sixteen times world champion) and Michelle Martin (current world champion and Australian Sportswoman of the Year in 1993) have been at least as prominent as any Australian male squash players. At the local club level, although competition is gender segregated, women and men mix in terms of club structure and social squash. Unlike football, where women are only welcomed as observers and supporters, in squash women are welcome as participants and 'belong' to the club in the same sense as male members. The proportion of males to females registered in organised sport nationally is over three to one,³ while in Western Australia the proportion is two to one.⁴ Comparable figures for squash in Western Australia are slightly less than this (1.7 to one), comparing favourably with a male-dominated sport such as football (47.8 to one in WA).⁵

On the surface, it may appear that there is less ideological bias against women in squash than in some other sports. Yet much of the ethnographic material which was gathered for this project indicated that, while not as overtly masculinist as sports such as football, squash contributes to the maintenance of male hegemony. Like other sports, squash includes formal gender bias, such as structural inequality embedded in committee structures, grading systems and the allocation of prize monies. A central argument of this article is that informal (unstated, unconscious and largely undocumented) biases can be mobilised against women even in a mixed sport such as squash.

While it is important to consider the number of female participants in sport, and develop strategies to expand female numbers, this in itself does not ensure that sport is no longer a sexist arena because, as Bryson has argued, sport serves to 'ritually support an aura of male competence and superiority in publicly acclaimed skills while at the same time inferiorising women and their skills'.⁶ Therefore, like Bryson, my interest is 'not in the liberating possibilities of sport for women, but rather in its potential to oppress'.⁷ To date, there have been no sustained accounts of squash which seriously consider some of the ways in which sport 'contributes to male dominance in general, rather than merely to the perpetuation of sport's own internal, unequal structure'.⁸

Most of the empirical material for this article was gathered through intensive participant observation, although some very useful ethnographic material was also gained during interviews with other participants. Over the past three years my role as a participant at the Enfield Squash Club (usually referred to as Enfield⁹), was considerable. I was a pennant player who played and practised at Enfield several times per week, regularly attended the weekly social Club Play, participated in all of Enfield's internal competitions, entered many of the local Perth squash tournaments as well as several country tournaments and, from 1995 to 1996, was Club President.

The Organisation of Pennant Squash: The Formal Reproduction of Male Power

Pennant squash in Perth is regulated by a chain of authority which tightly governs and regulates competition squash. In Western Australia the squash authority is WA Squash, whose main purpose is to 'promote and regulate the game of Squash Rackets in Western Australia',¹⁰ as a full member of the national body, Squash Australia which is, in turn, a full

member of the World Squash Foundation (WSF). While individual players join the squash club of their choice, pay their club membership and identify as a representative of that club on pennant nights, each player must also register with WA Squash (via the club) which controls all matters relating to the pennant competition. For example, it is the responsibility of WA Squash to 'uphold the rules of the game of Squash Rackets such as are determined by the WSF'.¹¹ These rules include stipulations of the starting times of fixtures, player eligibility, reserve eligibility, clothing requirements and so on. It is WA Squash which settles all disputes in pennant squash.¹² The everyday experiences of competition squash, therefore, occur within a highly-structured environment.

These rules and regulations, however, do not develop in a cultural vacuum. For example, Carol, an A-grade player who is on many squash committees around Australia, pointed out that being the only woman on these committees is a disadvantage because most of the important decisions are made by the male committee members late at night in a hotel room, in the bar after a meeting or sometimes even in the men's toilet. While she is usually invited to these informal sessions (except, of course, those held in the toilet), she mostly refuses to attend informal sessions because she would not feel comfortable in such a situation.

Carol also reported that the mostly-male conference committee of the Professional Squash Coaches Association of Australia (PSCAA) 8th National Coaching Conference (June 1995) refused to provide funds for the Women's Forum. They also scheduled the Women's Forum at the same time as the quarter-finals of a tournament running concurrently with the Conference, creating a dilemma for those who wished to attend both. The organisers of the Forum made gender relations worse by sending invitations only to women and thereby actively marginalising and infuriating the men. The men's resistance, however, began before the women actively ostracised them from the Forum and cannot therefore be explained by this. As Carol pointed out at the Forum, if the female coaches want the attitude of the male coaches to change, then the men must be included in the negotiations. Thus, there is very often tension between individuals and structures and, although the contest is heavily weighted in favour of traditionally male hegemonic institutions, there is room for individual agency. At a dinner held after the Women's Forum, for instance, Carol was quizzed by the new National Development

Officer about what had been discussed in the Women's Forum because he expressed a keen interest in promoting women's squash at all levels. Hegemony is *never* complete.

Grading Men's and Women's Teams: Formal Gender Distinctions

Structural relationships can also be illustrated through the process of grading. Competition squash players are graded by WA Squash to ensure that, except in the men's B1-grade, women's and men's squash are maintained as structurally separate. Men are graded from F-grade (lowest) to A-grade (highest) and women are graded from E-grade (lowest) to A-grade (highest). Different values are used to grade men's and women's squash. For example, the standard of F-grade men is similar to that of E-grade women. This pattern of uneven grading continues all the way up to men's B-grade. Not only do B-grade male players appear to be similar in standard to female A-grade players but some A-grade women actually play in the men's B1-grade teams.¹³ Besides State 1 and State 2 grades, B-1 is the only other grade in which WA Squash allow mixed-sex competition, on the strict condition that the women remain in a women's team of the appropriate grade, thereby formally acknowledging that their presence in the men's grade is abnormal, anomalous and temporary, ensuring there is no ambiguity about their 'just visiting' status. In this way WA Squash has structured these mixed teams in a way which 'allows' A-grade women to be 'men' for one night and therefore avoids placing the male hegemonic 'system' at risk.

How can this different system of grading be explained? If A equals A in one instance but A also equals B in another instance, then what does A equal? Perhaps an easier way to put it would be to say that if gendered segregation was removed from competition squash there would be two options. The first would be to amalgamate the A-grade women with the B-grade men and so on down the ladder to make an even competition within which men and women were graded using the same selection criteria. The second option would be to amalgamate A-grade men with A-grade women and so on, which would make a very uneven competition in which the men would generally win because they would be of a higher standard. Using mathematical logic, the grading of pennant squash does not make sense because 'A' cannot equal 'B' unless there is another element in the equation. My argument is that that element is male hegemony. Thus, the equation now reads: 'A' equals "B" whenever

it is so determined by the cultural norm which dictates that all sportsmen are "naturally" superior to all sportswomen', thereby making male squash player's 'innate superiority' a culturally-constructed reality.

Although men as a group are generally stronger than women as a group, squash is not a game where the strongest player always wins. Further, while there is a gap between male and female players at the top levels of the sport (for the moment at least), at other levels there is an enormous overlap where both men and women are evenly matched. Or, at least they would be if men's and women's grading were the same. If women were allowed to compete as equals with men, judged solely on ability, then except at the highest levels, sport would no longer be effective in ritually celebrating masculinity. As the much-quoted male cliff-diver said of the woman who qualified for the 1978 Cliff Diving Championships in Acapulco but who was later disqualified when the male competitors threatened to withdraw if she did not: *'This is a death-defying activity—the men are taking a great gamble to prove their courage. What would be the point if everyone saw that a woman could do the same.'*¹⁴ As Connell points out, masculinity and femininity are 'inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition'.¹⁵

Merely forcing men and women into mixed teams of the same level would not automatically negate sexism in squash because patriarchal relations in sport are not simply imposed from above by formal structures but are also enthusiastically maintained at an informal level on an everyday basis by players themselves. Wendy Ey found this out as Manager of the South Australian Junior Sports Unit when she piloted a mixed-sex competition in organised sport for children under twelve. This new direction in policy was taken on the basis that up to the age of twelve years, there should be no difference in strength, stamina or physique between girls and boys.¹⁶ However, there very often are differences because boys are generally encouraged more by parents, the media and others to play sport and therefore spend more hours practising skills and developing strength and fitness than girls. Furthermore, boys learn from a very young age that playing sport 'makes boys into men'. Thus boys often intimidate, denigrate, dominate and marginalise girls in sporting situations simply because the presence of girls in the supposedly all-male sporting arena presents a direct threat to their perceived masculinity. Despite imposed limits on the number of girls and boys in

teams, the result of the South Australian program was that, overall, girls had been unable to move into traditional boys' sports in a meaningful way while boys forced many girls out of the teams of traditional girls' sports.¹⁷ For the same reasons, forced 'mixing' in competition squash (or any sport for that matter) is unlikely to result in a successful challenge to male hegemony. As Bryson advises, although structural change is important, 'ultimately there is a dimension of oppressive social relationships that must be tackled directly at the personal level'.¹⁸

Setting the Scene-Enfield Squash Club

In 1995 Enfield was made up of 110 members, fifty-five male and fifty-five female. This equality of numbers is unusual and, in fact, was achieved by the concerted effort of a new Women's Captain who went on a recruitment drive for high-grade female players. (Before and after her term as Women's Captain, Enfield had a higher proportion of male players). Enfield is run by a voluntary committee which acts as an administrative liaison between its members and WA Squash. This involves processing forfeit fees, submitting team orders and collecting fees from its members. With these fees, the Committee registers its members with WA Squash and provides a social arena for them by organising social events and providing club room facilities. In 1995, the committee was made up of three men and three women although this was not a conscious egalitarian policy of the Club. It occurred because few members were keen to volunteer for club administration. For many years one person, Trevor, acted as Men's and Women's Captain, Resident and Activities Vice-President.

Pennant squash enables players to compete in an inter-club graded competition. There are two seasons per year-the autumn competition (February to June) and the spring competition (August to December). Each season consists of fourteen or fifteen rounds of home and away games, followed by three weeks of finals. A team usually consists of five or six players, of which four will play in any one pennant match.¹⁹ The strongest player is number one player and so on down to the weakest. When two teams meet on a pennant evening, the number one player from each team meet one another and so on. Matches are played on week nights but there is also a Junior competition, a mixed-Day League (which was until recently only for women) and a more social mixed competition for players over thirty-five. Participant observation for this

article was carried out primarily in the context of my involvement in the evening pennant competition.

Unlike competition tennis where women play best-of-three and men play best-of-five, in squash both men and women are considered capable of playing best-of-five matches by the organising bodies. On pennant evenings, each match has a referee from one team and a scorer from the other. These duties are alternated for each match so that one team does not have an unfair advantage. When a player is not refereeing, scoring or playing, he or she is watching the match underway and supporting his or her team-mate. It is standard for team members to go down to the courts during the one-and-a-half minute rest period between each game to give support to their team-mate. After all matches have been played, both teams adjourn to the club room for a supper, provided by the home team. In this way, pennant evenings are structured to promote the social as well as competitive side of squash by setting up a situation in which one team plays the role of host and the other of guest.

Invisible and Informal Boundaries

On pennant evenings, there is no meaningful interaction between men's and women's pennant teams. This is imposed structurally by the separation of the women's and men's leagues but it is also voluntarily maintained at the everyday level by pennant players of both genders. While occasionally men and women will take an interest in one another's games, there is generally not a lot of meaningful interaction. It is non-discursively understood that men's competition squash is men's business and women's match play is their business. This reflects the popular belief that men's sport is different from, and superior to, women's sport. It is considered unmanly for men to show too much interest in, or talk about, women's squash which is generally considered by most male players (and some women) 'at best an adjunct to men's sporting activities, at worst a social threat to them'.²⁰ The maintenance of an invisible gendered boundary by both men and women reinforces patriarchal ideology.

While suppers may be a short session of mutual politeness between two teams fulfilling their social obligations, they can also be successful in nurturing a healthy social relationship between teams and individuals. Interestingly though, suppers do not promote interaction between men's and women's teams. To begin with, the women and men sit at different

tables and, while there may be the odd comment passed between the tables about food or polite enquiries about which team won, the boundaries which demarcate the men's and women's leagues are never seriously crossed. Any socialising between individual men and women tends to happen, not at the sanctity of one another's tables, but in the neutral territory around the sink area. When I sometimes talked about Committee business or even just socially with Peter, a Committee member, we never sat at one another's tables. Meaningful interaction between two home teams of the same gender is much more common.

Even for those club members like myself who have partners who also play pennants for the same club, it is unusual, to sit at one another's tables at supper or to mingle with one another's teams during the matches. On the one occasion in three years that I sat with my partner's team, I felt as if I didn't belong and was treated as his partner rather than as a squash player. If I offered unsolicited opinions on squash matters, a silence fell upon the table because to include me in talk on men's squash would be to acknowledge that a woman might know something about men's squash.

Similarly, male partners of players from opposing clubs are welcomed to supper by my team, but again, it is assumed that they are only present as a supportive partner of our opponent rather than as someone seriously interested in women's squash. When we talk to a player's partner it is mostly about non-squash related matters: such as what they do for a living. Very often they do not want to be included in serious conversations about women's squash. On one occasion, when I asked the partner of an opponent if he had watched his partner play before, he made it very clear that he wasn't interested in her squash and that he liked 'footy'. On another occasion, when I asked the partner of another opponent if he thought his partner had played well, he stated that she was improving and was at pains to point out that he played at a much higher level of squash and was 'coaching' her.

Gendered palates

This active maintenance of gendered boundaries at supper even extends to the food eaten. The women usually take chips or vegetables and dip, nachos, quiche, savoury pastries, pizza or sandwiches and cake, biscuits or fruit for sweets. They usually have either tea, coffee or wine with their supper. The men, on the other hand, usually buy whole-cooked chickens,

pizzas, pies or sausage rolls, but rarely bring sweets (preferring to 'eye-off any left-overs from the women's teams). Most men's teams bring beer to drink and, I suspect, to further boost their masculine identities. Furthermore, challenges to the gendered palate would not go unnoticed without comment by team-mates, opponents or members of the opposite gender. For example, when Jim (a B1-men's player) occasionally takes a plate of nibbles, such as cheese, carrot sticks, savoury biscuits, dip and salami, his team-mates, who know he is not married, say '*Jees, your wife must have taken a lot of time making that*'. Here Jim's team-mates are actively reinforcing the patriarchal divide between homemaker and breadwinner through a potentially emasculating comment which suggests that only a woman would have gone to all that trouble to prepare, rather than merely buy, food. The intimation is that if Jim had prepared the supper himself (which his team mates knew he had) he must be 'feminine' and therefore not a 'real man'. Jim, however, generally responds by saying '*No, I did it myself*'. To which the others respond, '*Yeah, sure*', as if they do not believe him. It is not uncommon for the wives or partners of male pennant players to prepare suppers for their husbands or partners. If the food they bring is prepared rather than bought, most (unlike Jim) make it clear that their wives prepared it, so as to maintain their masculine 'breadwinner' image. In over three years as a pennant player, I have never come across a woman whose husband or partner has prepared her supper.²¹

When Jim begins to wash the dishes (something which each home team has to do on pennant evenings) other men at the supper table sometimes retort, '*That's a bit domesticated isn't it*'. Sometimes, when I have been doing my team's dishes, men who do not know me have yelled out, '*Hey, while you're up there*'. I always refuse such tempting offers to do other people's dishes but have seen some women accept. On one occasion, I was heating something in the microwave and also cleaning and organising the sink area. Our opponents noticed this and said: '*You must be the only married member of the team because you are domesticated*'. How wrong they were. Sometimes too, my team-mates have seen a mess in the Club Rooms and said, '*Huh! Must have been the guys in here last*'.

The limited interaction between men and women on pennant nights is strictly gendered. On pennant evenings both men and women reinforce the culturally-constructed dichotomies of homemaker/

breadwinner and domesticated/undomesticated. This is done both through everyday talk and action by individual pennant players but happens within the context of the pennant competition structure.

Unequal partners

Social squash is different in both structure and cultural meaning to pennant squash. It is played as a form of practice for pennants or simply for fun, exercise or socialising. Many, although not all, Enfield members who play pennants also regularly play social squash during the week as a form of training. This is done either by organising private matches between individual members and/or by attending Club Play²² on the weekend.

For pennant players the general motivation to play social squash is to improve their pennant game and therefore the idea is to find a partner who is close in ability to themselves or better. I have noticed that this logic is generally adhered to between same-sex partners but does not very often inform the selection of mixed-sex partners. With most, but not all, of the mixed-sex social practice partners I know, the male practice partner generally has the edge over the female. Although there are some male players at Enfield whom I have beaten at Club Play, all those who have asked me to practice with them have been better players than me. Furthermore, I have lost male practice partners once I have begun to beat them. Even Jenny, who plays in both the women's State-1 and the men's State-2 grades, says she has a lot of difficulty finding suitable male practice players. It appears that this is because playing a woman of a lower standard fits comfortably into the dominant belief that men are simply better at sport than women but playing a woman of a higher standard creates a potentially emasculating situation. It is clearly wrong to assume that by simply playing sport together, males and females automatically achieve some type of equality because unequal power relations can be, and very often are, still maintained at an informal level.

My partner, who is also a member of Enfield, always asks me to attend his team's finals matches. The partners of his team-mates and the opposing teams also usually always attend finals. He said that in his experience this was common practice in all men's teams. This was certainly not the practice of any of my teams and although some of our opponents occasionally brought their partners along to finals matches, it was unusual. Even though women are welcome at the Club as players in

their own right, they are still expected to play the supporting role, as is the case with more macho sports such as cricket, football and rugby, in which women glamorise male sport through their sexuality, experience vicarious pleasure through the achievements of their male partners and confirm their partner's heterosexuality.

A Sense of Belonging

During my fieldwork it became evident that many egalitarian relationships also flourished alongside patriarchal relationships. The most noticeable of these was that both men and women were welcome as full members, not only in the formal sense (that is, paying full fees) but in the informal sense of being accepted, not as honorary men or marginal members, but as individuals. Having women on the Committee, in particular a female President, also illustrates this point.

During the evenings there is a strong club atmosphere at Enfield because the courts are crowded with club members who are either playing pennants or practice matches. Not all members practice for pennants but there is a solid core of players who play practice matches every week with the same partner(s). These members, both men and women, know one another quite well and often talk and socialise between games or after their matches. Squash, of course, is the major topic of conversation because squash is what all members have in common. They talk about how each player thinks he or she performed in the practice match they have just played, the performance of their pennant teams that season and they relate pennant anecdotes. This is what Goffman describes as 'focused interaction', which occurs when a close face-to-face circle of contributors 'effectively agree to sustain for a time a single focus of cognitive and visual attention'.²³

Often, when a small crowd of regular members develops at the courts, shared histories and communal boundaries are actively maintained by using one another's nicknames, remembering past events and/or by publicly roasting people for their idiosyncrasies. For example, when I first became President, people often jokingly said things like, '*Do we have to salute you now El Presidente?*', to which I replied, '*I think you mean La Presidenta*', as a way of caricaturing myself as a stereotypically-humourless feminist. This type of public roasting enhances a feeling for many of the 'regulars', including women like myself, of a sense of acceptance 'warts and all' and, most importantly, a sense of belonging to the club.

Club Play runs for a few hours every weekend providing a chance for members to play other members of different levels. While there is a tendency for men to want to be paired with other men, when they are paired with women of a similar or higher ability than themselves, they soon realise that they have to try just as hard to beat a woman of similar ability as they do another man. In this way, Club Play actively (although not consciously) challenges patriarchal notions. The majority of male players at Enfield felt threatened and emasculated by female players who either beat them or played at their own level. These same players generally made assumptions that they were better players than all females (before they played them) and would become extremely irate when beaten by women. Having said this though, I have regularly played several men (who are a minority) at Club Play whom, although I generally beat them, have enjoyed our matches because they have been close and exciting and they often ask the board person to select me at Club Play.

While club members compete seriously with one another at Club Play, the pressure of the Pennant competition is absent and the atmosphere is more relaxed, Deliberately constructed by the Club to promote the social side of squash, as well as to provide players with a large pool of practice partners, Club Play is an arena within which many people meet and make friends, foster a sense of belonging to the Club, find practice partners and sometimes even form romantic attachments (there are quite a few 'squash couples' at Enfield).

Informal gender negotiations

For Club Play, an in-house competition is run by AI, the squash court attendant (although until recently it had always been run by the Committee). Everyone has their name and grade written on the Club Play Board as they arrive and players are then paired off at twenty-minute intervals in a round-robin situation. Generally speaking, the board person's duty is to pair people of a similar level. There is also a concerted effort to give lower-grade players at least one twenty-minute session with a higher-grade player to improve the skills of the Club's lower-grade players. At Club Play, players score and referee their own games and can either play practice matches, do some drills or they may choose to take advantage of a social coaching session.

When the committee members were running the board, gender was not always the first concern although it was not ignored completely.

If individual club members expressed a desire to the board person to play only men or women, it would generally be acknowledged. When Al first began running the board, he added a 'sex' column to the board. When I arrived at Club Play that day I teased him about adding this category and wrote 'N/A' (not applicable) next to my name and 'XM' (extra-masculine) next to my partner's name. Pam, the Women's Captain, arrived and she wrote 'Yes please' next to her own name and a question mark next to a male club member's name, also teasing Al about the importance he placed on gender in social squash. Pam and I used humour and our good relationship with Al to make a serious point and next week at Club Play Al proudly pointed out that he had removed the offending category from the board. While members were still able to ask Al to pair them with only men or women, by taking the gender column off the board, gender was once more de-emphasised at Club Play. This, however, did not last long. About a month later the 'sex' category was put back on the board. When I again stirred Al about this, he removed it but was not very happy, writing on the board, *'Dear Squashies, due to political correctness, gender has now been removed from the board'*.

Reasserting Male Authority and Superiority

The week before the 'Board incident' the Committee had been discussing the organisation of a club party and Don (Men's Captain) had suggested that the women bring a plate and the men bring a drink. I immediately quashed that idea and also the idea that the men bring a plate and the women, a drink. In the midst of the controversy surrounding the gender category on the Club Play Board, Don, referring back to this instance, said *'I remember the good old days when Jo [the female Treasurer] and I would suggest that the men bring drinks and the women bring a plate to a party and nobody would object'*. To which I replied *'Yes, I remember those days too, when people could call someone a "nigger" and nobody would mind either but thank goodness they're over'*. I sensed the argument was getting heated and deliberately let it die. Shortly after, Don, who had seemed particularly annoyed at what he obviously perceived as my 'going a bit too far with all this feminist stuff', asked me if I wanted to play. I was surprised, because he had never asked to play me at Club Play before (understandable since he was Club Champion and leagues ahead of me in ability). We had been paired together a couple of times before at Club Play by Al but on those occasions Don just gave me some social coaching. This time we played a match and on court, Don's attempts to get me

frustrated with his well-placed shots and accompanying comments, such as *'Gee, that's a bitch of a shot to get isn't it'?*, did not get me the least bit annoyed but the odd winning shot which I played seemed to be frustrating him quite a bit. It appeared that Don was trying to reassert his authority, after I had had the last word over the plates issue. In this way, sport can be used at the everyday level to tacitly assert the superiority of one person, gender or 'race' over another.²⁴

Another way to assert male superiority is through diminishing women to sexual objects. One interview with a male player at Enfield revealed that, while watching women playing squash in the glass-backed courts, some men make comments to other men which infer that it is not a woman's ability to play squash which is important but her looks. Comments included: *'Oi, come and have a look at this'*, *'Great set of legs on this one'* or *'All the women that play squash are hags'*. While this is not the standard attitude of all the male members of Enfield, my informant had never heard men rebuking one another for making such sexist comments (nor had he done so himself). To do this would be to challenge the hegemonic masculinity in front of another man and thus risk emasculation. (Naturally, women are very rarely privy to such exchanges).

Conclusions

It is an anthropologist's task to show how people construe their world, invest it with meaning and infuse it with emotion, to show how they organise reality in their minds and express it in their behaviour.²⁵ With this in mind, this article has explored how squash is not 'just a game' or a politically-innocent pastime which occurs in a cultural vacuum, but is a social activity which has cultural meanings which are both attributed to it and lived and which go much further than simply 'play' or leisure'. What Geertz says about the social meanings of cockfighting in Balinese society can easily be applied here to the social meanings of sport in Western society:

...to regard such forms as 'saying something of something', and saying it to somebody, is at least to open up the possibility of an analysis which attends to their substance rather than to reductive formulas to account for them.²⁶

Gender is implicated throughout the structure and context of squash in Perth from the top, in heavily-structured organising bodies, to the grass

roots, of local squash club committees and everyday interactions between individual players. The purpose of this article, however, is not simply to show that club-level squash tacitly supports male hegemony. An additional argument is that patriarchal relations are not merely imposed from above by social structures but are produced, along with non-patriarchal relations, at an interpersonal level in particular historical and local contexts. To be maintained, patriarchal relations must be continually constructed, defended and reproduced at an everyday level through informal as well as formal channels. With more extensive research on everyday gender negotiations at the interactive level (particularly on masculinity construction through sport and other social institutions), researchers may be able to further their understanding of how hegemonic masculinity is produced and reproduced and, most importantly, how it can be challenged and re-negotiated.²⁷

The implications of the study are much broader than simply a sporting arena. It shows that it is everyday life, in obscure places, in mundane situations where culture 'happens'— it is continually reproduced, negotiated and/or challenged by ordinary people. Therefore an interactionist method of research is useful in researching the negotiation of power between any dominant and subordinate groups, whether they be class, gender or racial groups and should be continually informing theory in a dialectical relationship. One would agree with Burawoy who stated that 'when social scientists are more interested in a dialogue among themselves than with their subjects, they are more likely to have prior commitments to established theoretical perspectives'.²⁸ Theory should not be imposed upon social analyses, rather, it should grow dialectically out of, or be informed by, such interpretations.

Stoddart argues that organised sport in Perth was male dominated between 1890 and 1940 and attempts by women to change that dominance met with suspicion and resistance, thereby restricting the social life of women.²⁹ This remains largely true today and is illustrated most vividly in cases such as the Club Play Board incident, where taken-for-granted notions of the importance of gender (in particular, masculinity) are questioned and challenged. Such challenges are still met with suspicion and resistance.

Geertz believes that societies 'contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them.'³⁰ With this guiding principle in mind, this article has shown the way in which patriarchal

logic is often used to make sense of, and to give meaning to, sporting experiences in the Australian context.

NOTES:

- 1 Jim McKay, *No pain, No Gain? Sport and Australian Culture*, Prentice Hall, Sydney, 1991; Veronica Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion: The Rise of Women's Competitive Swimming in Sydney to 1912*, ASSH Studies in Sports History, no. 9, Sydney, 1992; Brian Stoddart, 'Playing like a Girl: Sport and Sexual Stereotyping', *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in Australian Culture*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1986, to name a few.
- 2 Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling, eds, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, OUP, Melbourne, 1992.
- 3 Australian Sports Commission, *Australian Sports Directory*, ASC, Canberra, 1992.
- 4 Ministry of Sport & Recreation (WA Government), *Sports Census 1993. A survey of state sporting bodies in Western Australia*, AGPS, Perth, 1993, p. 14.
- 5 *Sports Census 1993*, p. 14.
- 6 Lois Bryson, 'Sport and the Oppression of Women', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1983, p. 413.
- 7 Bryson, 'Sport and the Oppression of Women', p. 414.
- 8 Bryson, 'Sport and the Oppression of Women', p. 413.
- 9 Enfield Squash Club is a pseudonym, as are the names of club members, because the author has permission to publish as long as the club and its members are not named.
- 10 Squash Rackets Association of WA, *WA Squash Constitution*, Squash Rackets Association of WA, Perth, 1992.
- 11 Squash Rackets Association of WA.
- 12 Squash Rackets Association of WA.
- 13 A-grade women have been allowed to play in men's B1-grade pennant teams since the 1980s. Due to the small number of women actually playing at this level of pennant squash, being allowed to play B1-grade men gives A-grade women a larger pool of opponents.
- 14 J Kaplan, cited in Bryson, 'Sport and the Oppression of Women', p. 422.
- 15 Bob Connell, *Masculinities*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 44.
- 16 Wendy Ey, 'Opportunities for Girls', *Aussie Sport Action*, vol. 2, no. 3, winter 1991, p. 29.
- 17 Ey, *Opportunities for Girls*, p. 29.
- 18 Lois Bryson, 'Challenges to Male Hegemony in Sport', in Michael Messner and Donald Sabo, eds, *Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, Human Kinetics, Champaign, 1990, p. 184.
- 19 Except on Tuesday nights, which is a three-person-team competition night.
- 20 Stoddart, 'Playing like a Girl', p. 135.
- 21 Regarding the extent to which women service the leisure of others, refer to: Shona Thompson, "'Thank the Ladies for the Plates": The Incorporation of Women in to Sport', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 9, 1990, pp. 135-43; Shona Thompson, 'Men Play Football Women wash the Dirty Socks', *Refractory Girl*, vol. 34, 1992, pp. 2-5; Shona Thompson, *The Gendered Servicing of Children's Tennis: An Investigation of Parental Support*, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra, 1995.
- 22 See below for a description of Club Play.
- 23 Erving Goffman, *Encounters*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p.7.
- 24 For example, Brian Stoddart, 'Play an Australian Game, Mate: Anglo-Saxon Sport in a Multicultural Society', in *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, and Brian Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire', *Comparative*

- Studies in Society and History*, 1988, pp. 649-73.
- 25 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, Vintage, Toronto, 1985, p. 3.
 - 26 Clifford Geertz, 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York, p. 453.
 - 27 Nikki Wedgwood, "Why'd ya let a girl beat ya?", 'The Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity in a Perth Squash Club'. In this article, which is in preparation, further aspects of this topic will be explored.
 - 28 Michael Burawoy, ed., *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991, p.27.
 - 29 Brian Stoddart, 'Sport and Society 1890-1940: a Foray', in Tom Stannage, ed., *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1981, p. 673.
 - 30 Geertz, 'Deep Play', p.453.