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Collins, VE and Farrell, AL (2023) "What's She Doing Here?!": Negotiating Gender Identity and Harassment in Gendered, Sexualized, and "Taboo" Research Spaces. Feminist Criminology, 19 (2). pp. 83-106. ISSN 1557-0851

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“What’s She Doing Here?!”: Negotiating Gender Identity and Harassment in Gendered, Sexualized, and “Taboo” Research Spaces

Abstract

Scholarly inquiry into the experiences of women researchers engaged in ethnographic fieldwork is a growing area of study. While important to feminist criminology, most of the literature addressing this topic comes from sociology and anthropology. Drawing on qualitative ethnographic research in the United States, conducted in gendered, sexualized and “taboo” spaces, this study examines two women's experiences. Findings indicate that women researchers engage in significant emotional work to not only gain access to these research sites and spaces, but they rely on several different techniques to mitigate potential harm to their person, including situating the experience outside of the research.

Keywords: feminist methods, field research, ethnography, sexism, positionality

“What’s She Doing Here?!”: Negotiating Gender Identity and Harassment in Gendered, Sexualized, and “Taboo” Research Spaces

There is a long tradition, too exhaustive to adequately address here, of ethnographic researchers providing reflexive and empowering reflections on their experiences in the field (Fine, 1993; Huggins & Glebeek, 2009; Norman, 2018; Van Maanen, 1988). Largely situated in the fields of sociology and anthropology, these reflections often taking a confession-like style (Van Maanen, 1988), share insight into the difficulties revolving around biographical, ethical, practical, historical, social, and relational dimensions presented in their work (Avishai et al., 2013; Huggins & Glebeek, 2009). In this tradition, many ethnographers have highlighted the importance of safety as a consideration when embarking on fieldwork (Williams et al., 1992; Vanderstaay, 2005). Expectedly, the issue of safety, especially as it relates to the threat of sexual violence is of particular importance to women researchers, has been well documented (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Green et al., 1993; Huff, 1997; Huggins & Glebeek, 2009; Mugge, 2013; Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012). Furthermore, there is now a small but growing body of sociological and anthropological literature, that has begun to contend with the larger structural and cultural happenings of the last decade, that markedly impact broader understandings of gender, sexism, and discrimination in the United States (Appert & Lawrence, 2020; King, et al., 2020).

In the last five years, the United States has arguably experienced several significant changes as it relates to women’s rights. These events include, but are not limited to, the election of President Trump which led to significant regulatory rollbacks of protections for women (see Rothe & Collins (2019) for in-depth analyses), the annual Women’s Marches that began in 2017 (Slotkin & Mccammon, 2020), the confirmation of a Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh

amidst accusations of sexual assault and the public vilification and revictimization of the reporting party, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford (Pollino, 2019), the weakening of Title IX protections on university campuses (Butler et al., 2019), the passing of legislation that severely reduces women's access to reproductive health (Diaz & Totenberg, 2021), and the mainstreaming of the #MeToo campaign in 2017. These happenings, especially the #MeToo movement, has brought increased public recognition that sexual harassment[1] is systemic and endures across industries. More plainly stated, the nature of the #MeToo social media campaign allowed for many women, not just those in the public sphere, to share their own stories of sexual violence highlighting the prevalence and pervasiveness of the problem.

In the tradition of Van Maanen's (1988) "confessional tale," the focus here is to reflect on the barriers gender poses in our own feminist research conducted in the United States, in an era where there has arguably been increased public consciousness about issues surrounding gender discrimination and sexual harassment. There is a small, yet growing literature that addresses the impact of the #MeToo movement on academic and research spaces (Appert & Lawrence, 2020; King et al., 2020), as well as the inadequacies of the neoliberal university in dealing with the

[1]We adopt Kloß's (2017) definition of sexual harassment, as "coercive behaviour, which may include gestures, actions, and other modes of verbal or nonverbal communication, with sexual connotations, which intimidate, humiliate, and exercise power over another person" (p.4). Sexual harassment fits on Kelly's (1988) continuum of violence which recognizes the complex and interlinking nature of abuse, harassment, violations, and constraints experienced by women. This spans everyday normalized behaviors such as sexist jokes, male aggression and coercion, all the way to behaviors that are legally recognized as harmful as rape and femicide.

uncertainties, that can include sexual violence, that are core to ethnographic research (Schneider, 2020). Therefore, drawing on field notes from feminist ethnographic research that situated the authors in predominantly male-dominated, “taboo” and sexualized spaces, we examine the emotional labor and techniques employed when navigating situations that impede on feelings of safety, bodily autonomy, and sexualization, that occurred both during and outside our research. We also pay attention to both the feelings these situations evoked, our reaction to these occurrences given not only our identities as feminist criminological researchers, but as women living through significant cultural happenings (i.e., #MeToo and the election to Donald Trump to President), as well as the techniques utilized to mitigate and/or justify these happenings both in real-time (i.e., as they occurred), and later when retelling or reflecting on the incidents in the larger context of the research and our everyday lives.

The ethnographical research centered on varying subcultures surrounding the topics of study, that of fighting sports, policing, and BDSM/kink[2]. While the larger studies from which we draw are interdisciplinary, they all address issues important to criminological inquiry, such as the construction and understanding of violence, physicality, and consent. Two of these topics, albeit not the focus of more orthodox criminal justice research like that of policing, fall within a long-established tradition of critical scholarship questioning dominant conceptions of crime (see Bosworth & Hoyle, 2011; Henry & Lanier, 2001; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1970; Tifft & Sullivan, 1980). As criminologists we are especially interested in the impact of gender

[2] BDSM is the acronym commonly used to encompass the practices of bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism. The term BDSM/kink is used to encompass all sexual practices that can be labelled as alternative, or non-mainstream, such as furries, age play, hypnosis play, etc.

harassment for feminist criminological research in male-dominated, “taboo” and sexualized spaces as they are so oft marked by silence and denial. This is especially important, as despite the increased public consciousness with the aforementioned #MeToo movement, criminology remains relatively quiet on the topic of sexual harassment in the field. First, however, we will provide a brief review of the relevant literature.

Gendered Ethnography: A Brief Review of the Literature

As a method, ethnography “seeks to capture, interpret and explain how a group, organization or community lives, experience and make sense of their lives and their world” (Robson, 2000, p. 89). This requires a sociological *verstehen* allowing for meaning to be garnered from situational contexts, as well as interactions between the researcher and participants. This necessitates an immersion into the researched environment to garner phenomenological insights from the perspective of that group (Krane & Baird, 2005). It is unique as it “permits the researcher to understand the problems of a group in a way that no other method will” (Pryce, 1979, p. 279). However, it has long been recognized that despite the benefits, ethnography is not a singular method as it includes multiple, often competing, and diverse approaches.

Anthropologists, sociologists, and criminologists alike have noted that challenges to ethnographic work are predominantly oriented around epistemological and methodological decision-making, such as navigating political and institutional barriers to gaining entry into the field (Campbell, 2020; Norman, 2018), whether to take an overt or covert approach (Angrosino, 2007), the researcher’s own positioning in the study (i.e., etic versus emic) (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), and the impact of the advancement in technologies that have led to the emergence of what has been termed “netography” (Kozinets, 2010), to mention but a few.

Also, of importance to the practicalities of ethnographic field work, are factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender (Elliott, 2021) as it relates to interactions between researchers and participants, and how their relationships can influence the production of knowledge. It is essential to recognize how the researchers' positionality can shape an interaction, and how power relations manifest, especially as it relates to the body (Letherby, 2020). Furthermore, these structures of power are heavily institutionalized impacting what and whose research is considered legitimate. It has been recognized, that despite the advances of feminist methodologies, the epistemological foundation of not only criminology, but research more broadly, still adheres to a white, androcentric perspective (Berry et al., 2017; Hanson & Richards, 2017). This is reflected in the institutionally supported norms of "good research" and the "good researcher", whereby deviating from this norm is not recognized. This is evidenced by the delegitimization of the voices and scholarship of black women academics, both by the academy, but also in debates led by white feminist scholars that tend to drive institutional conversations about the visibility of women in the academy (Hill Collins, 2000; Lewis, 2013). Feminists have argued that similar institutional barriers exist for gender non-conforming researchers, both as it relates to their own gender expression and interactions with the subjects of their studies (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Hanson & Richards, 2017, 2019). Issues that emerge include discrimination, sexism, harassment, safety, and a lack of institutional recognition and support of their research pursuits.

As Hanson and Richards (2019) argue, "It should perhaps come as little surprise that women researchers face sexual harassment and violence while conducting field research" (p.1). The lack of surprise centers on the knowledge that women commonly take protective measures to guard against men's violence in their everyday lives (Anderson et al., 2020; Cermele, 2010). It

would, therefore, be naïve to assume this does not extend to field research for women ethnographers, especially feminist criminologists who disproportionately undertake research that focuses on dangerous and harmful behaviors (Huggins & Glebbeek, 2009). Consistent with the long historical tradition of providing reflective commentary on their own experiences (Atkinson, 2015; Carrington, 2008; Fine, 1993; Huggins & Glebbeek, 2009; Van Maanen, 1988), women ethnographers have recounted experiences with the intent to empower, educate, and in some instances provide a cautionary tale.

These reflective confessionals focus on a wide variety of gender-based topics, including, but not limited to, the increased emotional labor and navigation of gender dynamics involved when interviewing men (Arendell, 1997; Campbell, 2003; Pini, 2005; Presser, 2005; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012), sexism (Horn, 1997; Smart, 1984), unwanted attention and flirting (Grauerholz et al., 2013; Gurney, 1985; Pini, 2005), harassment (Green et al., 1993; Hanson & Richards, 2017; Huff, 1997; Kloß, 2017; Mugge, 2013), threats of harm both implicit and explicit, and acts of physical and sexual violence (Berry et al., 2017; Elliott, 2021; Sharp & Kremer, 2006). For example, in Pini's (2005) interviews of men in elected positions within an agricultural organization in Australia, she reported being sexually objectified as she shared the same last name as an Australian playboy model. Arendell (1997) also shared being the target of verbal abuse, being subject to inappropriate touches, and even being grabbed around the throat by a subject who was recounting how he strangled his ex-wife. Furthermore, in one of many examples, Sharp and Kremer (2006) share Sharps' experiences of harassment, unwanted overtures and comments about her appearance, sexual objectification, and in one instance being subject to unwanted touching when interviewing a research participant in the cab of his truck – the location of the interview being at the participants insistence. There clearly

exists a spectrum of behavior and abuse women navigate and contend with when embarking on field research.

Despite these well-known threats to women's safety, feminist ethnographers have noted that there is only now a growing acknowledgement of the dangers that are inherent to field research for women (Hanson & Richards, 2019; Moreno, 1995; Sharp & Kremer, 2006), and much of that is outside of criminology (see Presser (2005) for the exception). As noted by Harding and Nordberg (2005), "Androcentrism, Eurocentrism, racism, heterosexism, and bourgeoisie values have generally been shared by research communities. Consequently, these cultural values and interests have tended to persist unnoticed in the social sciences until pointed out by social justice activists" (p. 2010). This is true of criminology, whereby there has been a long-standing favoring of quantitative, positivistic empiricism and a reluctance to engage with the more intuitive methodologies such as feminist methods (Sollund, 2017), something that both feminist and critical criminologists have worked hard address (Smart, 1995; Harding, 1995; Gelsthorpe & Morris, 1990). Despite these efforts, however, the preferencing of the scientific method – objectivity, neutrality, and the separation of the researcher from the researched – continues to prevail in orthodox criminological research (Harding, 1995).

The marginalization of feminist methods is evidenced not only in offering it as an optional course of study (i.e., an elective), but also in the lack of training from departments as to how best to navigate potential dangers that employing such a method may pose to the researcher (Sharp & Kremer, 2006). This leaves researchers to develop their own methods of dealing with such happenings. This is especially relevant to women's bodily research experiences as the role of the researcher is critical in qualitative research (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Indeed, Lincoln and Denzin (2003) note that knowledge is always "partial, incomplete

and situated...All writing reflects a particular standpoint: that of the inquirer/author" (p.17). With this emphasis, yet both a focus on the desirability of detached, neutral, observations and a dearth of training on addressing their own vulnerability, women conducting ethnographic research face a dilemma in reporting their experiences fully. Hahn (2006) summarizes the struggle between the researcher being an active part of the research setting, and embodied in herself, and the positivistic goal of detached objectivity, by stating "you see, I am situated inside of me, I see, I hear, taste, smell, and think this from me. When I take me out to do fieldwork, me always tags along" (p. 88). While we often discuss embodied research theoretically, the reality becomes that, for safety, we may only be embodied to a certain point within research contexts due to constrictions around what is and is not good ethnographic or qualitative scholarship.

Hanson and Richards (2019) "three fixations" (p.28) are also relevant here, as they help explain why bodily experiences of women, specifically as it relates to sexual harassment, are often written out of traditional research. They argue there are three ideological understandings of best practice in the traditional understandings of the ethnographic method that endure: solitude, danger, and intimacy. Solitude is the conceptualization of ethnography as something embarked on alone, and therefore, there is an expectation that the researcher should navigate and deal with the realities of the field, including all hardship and danger, on their own. This perpetuates a cycle where women do not share their experiences, nor do they know of others who have faced similar occurrences. In addition, the topic of gender is absent from university-taught causes on the topic of research methods, contributing to the mythos of the lone fieldworker who forges ahead in their solitary endeavors. Solitude is promoted and reproduced by a patriarchal academy, creating dominant logics that, under the auspices of striving for objectivity, have marginalized, dismissed, or silenced experiences and research approaches which are different. In addressing this myth of

the lone researcher, Berry et al. (2017), argue that "This self-sacrificing subject coincides with the institutionalized notion of fieldwork as a masculinist rite of passage or an exercise of one's endurance". Secondly, the idea that the data must be collected at all costs also persists including the understanding that data is worth any potential dangers posed to the researcher (Anderson, 1999; Nelson, 2013; Scheper-Hughes, 1983; Venkatesh, 2008) and risk is glorified and conflated with "good" or legitimate research. Hanson and Richards (2019) note that this ideological underpinning not only puts the researcher at risk, but also frames research subjects as the exotic other, and valorizes androcentric research approaches.

Coupled with solitude and danger, is the dominance of the idea of intimacy, whereby ethnography prioritizes forging and maintaining strong relationships and connections with people in the field. Traditional qualitative research places values on intimacy as being indicative of quality. Approaches that emphasize participation and embodiment, or guard against exploitation and power differentials through the utility of closeness (i.e., feminist methods), can potentially lead to greater risk of harm for the researcher. Hanson and Richards (2019) argue that in the pursuit of intimacy there is potential for misunderstandings, especially when navigating different cultural and gender customs. Hanson and Richards' (2019) three fixations, help us understand why "good" ethnographic methodology can increase risk for women researchers, and encourage both those directly impacted, and the field more broadly, to remain silent when faced with the realities of these harms. As argued by Moreno (1995) who experienced sexual violence at the hands of her field assistant, women researchers learn to "avoid drawing attention to ourselves as women when we establish our professional identities" (p. 246). This can be particularly relevant when researching spaces, places and cultures that are sexualized.

Gailey and Prohaska (2011) note that the challenges posed by women interviewing men, are even more acute when the topic is related to sex. Green et al. (1993) found that women interviewing men about sexual behaviors must navigate situations that other women researchers do not. An example being men misinterpreting interest about the topic for having a personal interest in them sexually. In their own study on the practice of "hogging" (men seeking out overweight women for sport or sexual gratification), Gailey and Prohaska (2011) reported being subjected to unsolicited compliments, flirting, being interrupted, attempts at asserting dominance to control the interviews, being subject to hostile comments, and sexism. To counter these approaches, Gailey and Prohaska note the considerable gender negotiations and emotional labor required of women researchers, as well as the harms that result.

Similarly, Bachman and Schutt (2011) suggest that the gender of the researcher may be a double-edged sword in the research process, noting that the gender dynamic involved in women interviewing men may facilitate communication and the exchange of information, while Huggins and Glebbeek (2003) found that, in policing contexts in particular, male officers may resist sharing things that they believe are not appropriate for a woman to hear. This is further compounded by a perception of police and police cultures as secretive, violent, and dangerous (Huggins & Glebbeek, 2003, Miller & Tewksbury, 2010). Miller and Tewksbury (2010) further explicate this potential barrier in their discussion of restricted research settings inhabited by those who are unlikely to disclose damaging information to outsiders; this resistance and secrecy may also be related to a notion that existing socio-political power arrangements favor [patriarchal] institutions over individuals and they resist scrutiny in order to protect that privilege of [male] power (Farrell, 2014). In this instance, this indicates negotiating gender, as well as

institutional and occupational norms that may be rooted in misogyny could also require additional labor from women conducting field research (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011).

Like the research 'confessionals,' and the projects that have come before us, this paper draws on the experiences of the two author/s who immersed themselves in research spaces that were predominantly male. The topics/foci of study varied significantly – fighting sports, policing, and the BDSM/kink community – with several of these spaces having histories of being hostile to women. In addition, one of these spaces is a sexualized space, and therefore, poses extra barriers and risks to women researchers. Gender featured strongly across the studies as the research questions for all three studies centered on their ease of access and acceptance in these spaces, their experiences, as well as larger issues of gender as social structure, an organizing category, and as an identity that informs interactional relationships. Gender was also present as it relates to employing feminist research practice through seeking an "egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her subjects" (Stacey, 1991, p. 112). Furthermore, interactions in these spaces were not restricted to just men, as there were women participants in each study. However, as might be expected most interactions focused on in this paper are with men. It should also be noted, that as middle-class cisgendered, white women, our experiences cannot be generalized to other populations, and do not account for the compounded vulnerabilities (i.e., the intersection of gender with race, class, sexual orientation) that many women researchers face[3].

[3] We also recognize that this is not exclusive to women, but also includes non-binary and gender non-conforming persons including LGBTQ+ researchers who may be especially cognizant and vulnerable to threats to their safety. However, though we feel this is an important point to raise,

Reflections from the Field: Current Study

The current study revolves around a re-examination of field notes and previous work by the author/s in three different ethnographic arenas: policing, the BDSM/Kink community, and the fighting sports, particularly boxing. The study on boxing was conducted over the span of three years beginning in 2015 with the aim to better understand women's experience of gender as it intersects with physicality, violence (including violence against women) and consumerism in the boxing gym (see Collins (2020) for a more detailed overview). The study on policing was conducted over the span of five years, beginning in 2009, with the intention of exploring what happens in the aftermath of an officer-involved shooting to the officer, as well as their personal and professional networks (see Farrell (2014), Farrell et al. (2018, 2020) for more detail). Finally, the BDSM/Kink study involved at least two years of pre-research to learn the community before the development of a current, ongoing study that looks at consent violations, disclosure of said violations, reluctance to report to police, and potential relationships between high-risk practices, consent violations and disclosure (see Farrell (2019) for initial autoethnographic reflections). The catalyst for this study were confidential conversations where we were disclosing some of the "behind the scenes" occurrences during our research that had not been documented or held out for public consumption: times where we were deliberately targeted as women and made to feel vulnerable or threatened. As we began to unpick and practice reflexivity, not with regards to our place in and influence on the research environment, but more the influence of the experiences on ourselves and our identities, we realized there were some

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due to space constraints, providing a comprehensive review of the processes and issues specific to LGBTQ+ researchers are beyond the scope of this paper.

similarities across settings and experiences that deserved to be explicated. We also realized that our approaches to our studies were similar as we took great care to 'write in' our experiences.

This paper then, is based on re-evaluations of previous work and research notes that have been arranged and analyzed thematically. The three specifics of the ethnographic methods utilized in each study can be found elsewhere (Collins, 2020; Farrell, 2014, 2019), and involve elements of participant observation, interviews, and records of public commentary. Much of the data utilized here were taken from fieldnotes. Across our studies conscious effort was made to utilize the researcher as a vehicle to scrutinize the subject at hand, while guarding against potential vulnerabilities of research participation by being transparent about events as they occurred, but about our own social identities (i.e., our defining characteristics such as gender, race, age, ethnicity, class, and others). This is in accordance with Becker (1963), who argues that it is necessary to "look at all the people involved in any episode of alleged deviance…all the parties to a situation, and their relationships" (p.183), including the researcher. We present the themes below, paying particular attention to their implications for feminist criminological research.

The Gendered Researcher: Thematic Analysis

Navigating Gender to Gain Access

All three research spaces were predominantly male, often with men acting as gatekeepers, and they involved activities where to gain access there was an inherent expectation to look the part. Gender was found to be a core signal to participants of our legitimacy not only as social actors, but as researchers in the field. Gender is performative (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995), and research spaces are sites where social dynamics, performativity, and relations are given power and meaning. In this context, the body brings power from the abstract to the

material (Fiske, 1992) as the body itself becomes the site for personal expression and empowerment, which includes the constructed performativity of femininity. How we performed or did gender (i.e., femininity), had a profound impact on our research outcomes as it facilitated (or obstructed) access to certain spaces, improved (or marred) social interactions, secured (or distanced) gatekeepers, and created trusting (or distrusting) participant relationships. This, however, was more complicated than emulating the men occupying these spaces as it related to their dress, behavior, and demeanor. In the policing environment, one of the researchers, who is more femme presenting in her personal life, consciously tried to construct and present herself as more androgynous and almost hide more traditional heteronormative presentations of femininity in the research setting. If she had to go to training or present material to an audience, she was always in trousers and flat shoes, wearing minimal make-up and jewelry—no skirts or heels to avoid unwanted attention or assumptions about her professionalism or "seriousness." It was not until years later that the researcher felt comfortable enough to present herself as she wished in professional settings—dressing her body in a way that reflects more hegemonically understood constructions of heteronormative femininity in the United States – i.e., buying and owning skirts, heels, wearing more jewelry, etc.

Another example, in the study on boxing, the researcher found that in fight gyms where adversarial boxing was the focus, women were quickly classified as either serious participants or dismissed outright based on their alignment with constructs of traditional understandings of femininity that was predominantly based on their attire. The expectation was that serious boxers would not be wearing revealing clothing or make-up (although observations suggest the participants only noticed make-up if the woman was wearing a lot of it) and that women should aspire to fit within the masculine aesthetic of the sport. To be taken seriously meant you had to

be “ready to work”, something that was viewed as being in opposition to the tight-fitting clothing and make-up that is typical of marketed women’s gym attire. Furthermore, women boxers could purchase apparel, including boxing gloves, headgear, and more, in colors marketed as being *for* women (i.e., pinks, lilacs, mint green etc.), which further signaled to male gymgoers that they were less serious about the sport. This reductionist classification system echoes two distinct framings of the woman pugilists. The first locates the boxer as a feminist figure utilizing the sport to challenge gender norms and fight for equality. The second constructs boxing as anti-feminist, reducing women boxers to aspirant men. This frame mocks women’s efforts at the sport, suggesting it is a “parody of masculinity” (Boddy, 2014, p.255). In an era of #MeToo, it was surprising that these dated understandings of gender were viewed as indicators of seriousness and skill, independent of the reality of those facts. To earn legitimacy in these spaces the researcher had to ignore larger patriarchal market forces as well as the utility of wearing more closely fitting clothes, in favor of hiding her body and downplaying displays of traditional femininity. Women who ignored these social categories, or performed the more traditionally constructed feminine ideal, were often objectified, with men in the gym saying comments like, “She’s just here to get laid” (Fieldnote, June 20, 2018). This informal social policing of bodies in the gym, used characteristics and performative practices of femininity and masculinity to convey acceptance or hostility to women in these spaces. This was made even more complicated by the underlying assumption by men gymgoers that most women wanted to be seen as attractive to the men in the gym.

On several occasions, as a woman who opted to adhere to the implied dress code of the more serious fighters, one of the researchers was asked “Why don’t you wear shorts?” (Fieldnote, July 2, 2018), and “There are plenty of guys in here who’d like to see you dressed

like that! [making reference to a woman with lesser clothing]" (Fieldnote, July 2, 2018), and "Damn girl, you look thicc in that!" (Fieldnote, September 11, 2018). These comments, although often intended to flatter, made this researcher uncomfortable as she was abruptly made aware that her body was being sexualized and was the topic of male conversation, both behind her back and to her face. Furthermore, it was hard to determine whether the feelings of being uncomfortable stemmed from the objectification of her body, or whether the participant was commenting on her lack of legitimacy in the space. On reflection, the researcher found herself doubting not only the progression of her skill as a boxer, but how others perceived her in the gym. It brought up the uncomfortable realization that despite her own feminist identity, she too was adhering to the sexist categorizing of women based on their appearance. Despite evoking these feelings, she chose to ignore or deflect the comments and prioritize the forging and maintaining of strong relationships and connections with people in the field (Hanson & Richards, 2019). However, in writing about the experience, the researcher took effort to disclose this revelation as having possible impact on not only her lived-experiences in the gym spaces, but her production of knowledge in writing-up and analyzing these happenings.

Gaining access and legitimacy in a notably sexualized environment like the BDSM/kink scene, was even more complex as gender presentation/negotiation and presentation of self can have layers of meanings. In a space where everything from nudity to quite conservative clothing can be deemed acceptable, the researcher was confronted with the challenges of how to present herself to avoid unwanted sexual attention and advances, how to dress to blend in, but still be accepted as a researcher in one-on-one conversations. This was further complicated by wanting to avoid having assumptions made about the researcher's sexual/kink preferences. For example, when attending a BDSM/kink event at a local dungeon (private social club) that was school days

themed, most femme presenting individuals went for the “schoolgirl”[4] look—which is more associated with submissive, brat, or age-play identities, none of which were gendered/sexual presentations the researcher wanted to make. Instead, the researcher chose a knee-length plaid pencil skirt, and a long sleeve cardigan with the top button undone, thinking this would be the safest way to do gender in the space (a relatively conservative outfit considering the space). Unfortunately, this was not the case, as the researcher was touched without consent by an older male, who made comments related to how he appreciated the difference between a woman and girls. In reflecting on these experiences, we had assumed that careful consideration of presentation of self (including dress), as well as the increased cultural attention on the issue of sexual harassment, should have better positioned us in our research to guard against these behaviors. In talking, we realized that despite living through the era of #MeToo, the feelings of solitude and danger still felt like they were ours to bear and navigate alone (Hanson & Richards, 2019). This is especially important to criminology where the topic of study can often demand exposure to risky places and people. Also, as the tendency to question the actions of the researcher as it relates to their professionalism and their choice to put themself in dangerous situations (Schneider, 2017; Schmerler & Steffen, 2018) still remains in criminology. Although intellectually we knew we were not at fault, we are very aware that sexual harassment is

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[4] While the authors recognize there are sensitivities around this due to the sexualization of young women’s bodies and the fetishization of the underage or school age children, please note here we are referring to consenting adults who are either engaging in or trying age play. The problematic nature of the sociocultural fascination with these practices and the underlying belief structures are beyond the scope of this paper.

routinely normalized within the academy, as it has become just a part of the routine everyday life. This is largely due to what Phipps (2020) terms "institutional airbrushing" (p.227), whereby sexual harassment is silenced or concealed because of the institutionalized patriarchal power relations that still dominate not only criminology, but the institution of higher education more broadly (Harries, 2016, 2022).

Navigating Femininity and the Male Gaze

Being smaller, white, and blonde marked one of the researchers as fitting more readily within traditional heteronormative femininity and therefore, impacted interactions with participants, while the other researcher is taller, heavier, with red hair and is more curvaceous, which encompasses some elements of traditional heteronormative femininity, as well as the otherization and negative attention that comes with being a "big girl." However, as the heavier of us has fluctuated in weight across and between research experiences, this has been variable in its impact. Our presentations of self as it related to characteristics of femininity were largely tied to expectations related to misogyny and sexism. For example, one researcher mentioned that she tried to downplay her femininity significantly in the policing environment, because she did not want to be seen as encouraging or inviting attention or the dreaded male gaze. Yet, despite her efforts, she still faced attention from male officers. This included everything from catching officers staring at her chest, to both officers and citizens making comments about her body and dating life. For example, she was sitting on the ground at a police incident, writing notes, and a detective said, "you're going to get ants in your pants…oh, to be those ants!" (Fieldnote, n.d). When attending the serving of a search warrant, a suspect was sitting in a lawn chair, handcuffed, in his front yard, while surrounded by officers. He began to make comments on the researcher's body and what he would like to do to it later (Fieldnote, n.d). On another police

incident in the early morning hours, a detective asked, as everyone was waiting for a warrant to enter the premises, if the researcher was dating anyone. When she answered that she was not, he responded that if she was "his woman" he would have an issue with her "running around with all of these guys in the middle of the night" (Fieldnote, n.d). Years later, this same individual approached the researcher and informed her that he thought there was attraction previously and that, even though he was married, he should have "made a move" on her (Personal Correspondence, 2019).

Additionally, the researcher had to contend with at least two rumors that she was having a sexual relationship with male officers simply because they spoke for an extended period of time. One was a married colleague, who had disclosed some personal struggles—to include sexual dysfunction related to PTSD—and the researcher was assisting him to get access to appropriate resources, and the other was an officer who was a friend but was a senior officer with rank. One evening the researcher had met this friend for dinner and several other off duty officers came into the restaurant together. The researcher's friend, trying to protect the researcher, stated that he would go "distract" the officers while she left the restaurant so rumors would not be spread. Despite these seemingly thoughtful actions, these behaviors can be viewed as a form of protective paternalism as not only was the appropriateness of the researchers' relationship with her participants heavily shaped by gender, but mitigating any potential harm required male protective behavior. The researcher's word or behavior in isolation was not viewed as credible enough to mitigate the spreading of character assassinating rumors. Here it seems, that despite guarding against misogyny and sexism, the researcher was still subjected to it, so much so, a participant took protective actions. This not only speaks to the institutional pervasiveness of

sexism in the criminal justice institutions like the police, but that despite her credentials, research intent, and efforts to not draw male attention, the researcher was still objectified and sexualized.

Yet, in the BDSM/kink arena, performance of gender is less polarized and critiqued. This allowed the same researcher to, oddly, present more in line with "herself" as in being more femme in dress, nodding to her love of vintage clothing styles. This led to some considerations of self that were difficult in terms of honest reflexivity and the researcher's interpretation or reaction to the male gaze professionally—what does it say that in some ways she felt more herself in a sexualized and taboo environment (where the full spectrum of gender and sexual identities were often on display) than in her more standard professional environment (which is still very much a male-dominated career that is very hegemonic)? And why was this occurring? How many more researchers had experienced this? The reality of these questions are that the researcher had been trained to minimize gender in the professional environment, so this means that women had and were continuing to experience this discomfort or outsider within experience in academia, in general, and within the sub-specialization of policing and violent crime investigations, in particular. Much as Hahn (2006) discusses taking "me" into the research environment, and we speak below about leaving "me" the woman behind for safety in the research environments discussed in this manuscript, the knowledge that woman "me" was often minimized, concealed or left behind to gain respect and to appear professional in early career development (acquiescing to the male gaze in multiple, compartmentalized environments beyond just research environments) was a challenge to navigate mentally and emotionally during the analysis for this discussion. In short, the researcher's knowledge and skills should convey regardless of her gender presentation in academia, policing, or the kink community, as she is the same person with the same credentials and experience in all environments, theoretically, but that

even as an aware, embodied feminist researcher, she has subconsciously shrunk to fit the expectations of femininity and professionalism on multiple occasions. Further, this may indicate that the concepts of solitude, isolation and danger (Hanson & Richards, 2019) are not just applicable in field research, but also within the ivory tower or the squad room.

For women, there exists a dichotomy in response to the male gaze as to be subject to it is intimidating and intrusive, where your personhood is reduced to a body object. However, in a patriarchal society, women are socialized from an early age to expect or even desire male attention where beauty is held as the predominant goal for all women. To be denied this can register as a denial of personhood. When women, therefore, exist as *either* sexualized objects of desire, *or* they do not exist at all – they are discarded, being subject to the male gaze can have damaging consequences and lead to a questioning of self as "sexuality necessarily entails intersubjectivity" (Cahill, 2001, p.81). It is not surprising then, that during our research we, as women, were uncomfortable with the increased attention and surveillance from men in these spaces. We also adhered to patriarchal notions of professionalism and dress in more formal environments and felt conflicted when permitted to express ourselves in ways promoted as being gender conforming (i.e., in line with heteronormative expectations of white, middle-class femininity). This was compounded by our engagement in behaviors that historically and socially has been deemed inappropriate for women (boxing, policing, kink).

Conflict in the Research/Participant Dialectic

Another common occurrence was when the research environment exposed us both to sexist and derogatory behavior which often caused internal conflict as to the appropriate response. This was particularly acute when behaviors manifested that conflicted with not only our lived experiences as women but clashed with our understanding of the world around us. For

example, it was not uncommon to hear sexist or disparaging comments made about other women. One of the researchers confronted officers who made comments about a sexual assault victim's employment as an exotic dancer, stating that her employment was not permission or invitation for assault. The officers were visibly startled at being confronted. In such cases, to acknowledge these conflicts is to unveil the self (Chang, 2008), something that is instrumental to ethnographic and autoethnographic work as research cannot be separated from the personal or political (Becker, 1967). As noted by Ferrell and Hamm (2016), research infers a degree of subjectivity in the shared understandings and experiences between the researcher and the research participants. But this can cause difficulties for the researcher, when the spaces, places and people being researched challenge personal and political beliefs.

Sometimes it was difficult to discern when to hold back and when to say something, especially as many of these instances resulted from the participant/s being overly familiar or being too comfortable. This implies an assumption of shared norms or a complicity in holding a certain belief or view. Afterall, saying nothing acts as tacit permission to express problematic or harmful commentary such as sexist, racist, homophobic, agist, and/or ableist views. In certain environments, speaking out however, especially as a woman in a male dominated research space, can further alienate you from participants and limit the research, going against that training to get the data and put the research first, as addressed previously.

It was not uncommon to hear commentary or have questions directed as us about current events, or to even hear stories about people engaging in behaviors outside of the research spaces that challenged our personal understandings of right and wrong. The most frequent manifestation of this for one of the researchers was the comfort with which men in the gym spaces would speak about their views on women – some of which were profoundly sexist. For example, one of the

participants in the boxing study, was fixated on podcaster/youtuber Kevin Samuels who built a career on berating black women. Now deceased, Samuels advanced sexist and misogynistic views resorting to name calling, body shaming, and racist stereotypes (Wiltz, 2022). Having heard an episode, this participant would often bring the of women's worth being tied to men's topic into the gym space, either broaching it directly with women boxers or discussing it with other male gymgoers. When directed at the researcher it was difficult to navigate due to the important status the participant held in the study (i.e., he was a gatekeeper), and in the space (he was a boxing coach). Furthermore, the participant often addressed the researcher as "Professor," using their professional title to justify inviting a conversation, sometimes when others were in earshot. The researcher found the participant's questions, not only factually incorrect but offensive, as they were often thinly veiled efforts at getting her to agree that women were inferior to men. For example, he would often ask women in the gym "what would you rate yourself on a scale of one to ten?" (Fieldnote, November 3, 2018), and if someone responded, he would then argue that they underrated or overrated themselves based on his assessment of their physical characteristics. He was reducing women's self-worth to his assessment of their sexual attractiveness to their faces. It is suspected that the participant was using this as a tool to assess whether the women he targeted were sexually available to him, often rating those he liked higher than they rated themselves. He was persistent and fatiguing and was not well received given not only the intensity of the exchanges, but his relentlessness. Due to his status in the boxing space as a coach, as well as his role as a gatekeeper, it is likely he expected the researcher, as well as other women, to be attentive and acquiesces to his point of view. And due to the established rapport the researcher had with him, she often shut the conversation down by just laughing instead of engaging his questions.

Another example was overhearing a conversation between three men about pronouns and being pansexual, which quickly devolved into homophobia. This presented a situation where the researcher felt the appropriate response was to challenge the derogatory comments. Yet, when she did say something, the conversation quickly refocused on her, making fun of her for having such an opinion. At the time of the incident, the researcher had been in the sport and that research space for over two years and felt she had adequate social capital to speak out and it would not significantly impact her relationships, but had she been at the beginning of her research time, she could well have damaged her relationships and effectively limited, or even halted, her research unintentionally. Both these examples illustrate how the researchers were operating in the intersection between solo researcher, mitigating potential danger (both personal/physical and professional), and navigating potential barriers to establishing intimacy in the research setting (Hanson & Richards, 2019).

Gender, Flirting and Harassment

The physicality required of these areas of study, as well as the proximity to research participants in these activities, meant there were times when participants took this as an invitation for intimacy beyond the parameters of the activity or research relationship. Behaviors that resulted were oversharing, flirting, unwanted touching, and in some instances aggressive sexual overtures. For example, in navigating gym spaces it was not uncommon for one of the researchers to have her space encroached upon, workouts interrupted, her face, hair and body touched without permission (i.e., outside the parameters of the gym activities), or to be subject to unsolicited and sometimes outright strangely inappropriate conversations. One male sparring partner insisted on hugging the researcher, not just in greeting, but before and after every gym interaction. This sometimes amounted to being hugged before and after every round of sparring –

so more than ten times in the space of an hour. Despite discouraging the behavior, exclaiming to the group that she is “not a hugger,” visibly tensing, pushing him off, and displaying body language conveying discomfort, as well as other gym goers commenting things like “For fucks’ sake, leave her alone” (Fieldnote, November 8, 2018) this behavior continued throughout her experience with that individual in that gym space.

Interestingly, and more often than not, these behaviors were situated in humor, one that was often public and at the expense of the woman. This trivialization is not new, rather it is a “major means through which its [sexual harassment] invisibility has been enforced” (MacKinnon, 1979, p.52). Most women know that to challenge these behaviors is to risk being labeled as “overly sensitive,” an already well-established stereotype for women. In addition, and as argued by O’Connor, Ford, and Bannos (2017), in male dominated environments, making fun of or disparaging women, is a vehicle for asserting social dominance. This is especially true when there is a need for in-group bonding in an attempt to affirm male heterosexuality in response to the presence of a threat. The following fieldnote demonstrates this very thing.

> Peter: Damn you look sweaty (loudly and in front of a class of nine men he’s teaching).
>
> Victoria: Yes…well… I’ve been working out.
>
> Peter: What you going to do now?
>
> Victoria: Umm…go home.
>
> Peter: You going to have a shower?
>
> Victoria: Well…yes (confused).
>
> Peter: Hmmmm…I bet…[laughs at me, as do some of the men in class] (Fieldnote, November, 28, 2018).

Although we cannot claim to know Peter's exact motivation here, the fact that this researcher was the only woman in the gym space and the interaction was public and loud enough to be heard across the space, it infers that it was intended to mock, humiliate, or tease. At the very least, the researcher did not experience it positively. It was also directed as much towards his trainees as it was the researcher suggesting Peter was indeed asserting his masculinity in a show of social dominance. Beyond creating a situation of discomfort and embarrassment signifying the researcher did not belong, Peter's actions could represent a public demarcation of the researcher as an insider/outsider, or even an outsider. Here, public mocking may have been intended to make the researcher uncomfortable, as well as communicates to other gymgoers that the researcher is not the same as all the other participants in the gym space. This interaction also demonstrates the power of the research participant as someone who can confirm group belonging, or who can casually revoke the insider status – or perhaps confront the researcher with the notion that they never truly were an outsider on the inside. Furthermore, the power that the researcher perceived Peter as having, is also muddied by the broader patriarchal gender-relations where men occupy structures and spaces of power and privilege over women. Women are aware of this dynamic and are socialized to take precautions against the potential of men's violence. What is interesting here, is that although this exchange could well have been intended as jest or humiliation, it could also be reflective of the researcher's own positionality and resultant gender socialization and heightened vigilance at being the only woman in a male-dominated gym space. Similarly, in a policing environment, one researcher and a female detective were asked if they have "slumber parties…where they have pillow fights and rub each other's backs" in front of a room full of male patrol officers and investigators (Fieldnote, n.d.). These comments made both the researcher and the other detective targeted feel targeted and

served to remind them that they are not like the other officers, nor are they accorded the same level of respect. This could also be construed as an attempt by the participants to delineate between the emic and the etic, but here the behavior of the research participant extends to sexual harassment. However, the inclusion of the woman detective in the harassment, suggests that the researcher's identity as a woman outweighed her identity as a researcher.

Gender Experienced as Sexual Threat: Feeling Unsafe

Furthermore, there was a tendency to compartmentalize our experiences, almost opposite of the embodiment discussed by Hahn (2006). When facing challenging situations, we often reverted to "Researcher Me," who is separate and distinct from the rest of me to navigate gendered situations and sexual threat in the research environment. In this, it is safer for "me" to not always tag along in the field. For example, while researching in BDSM/kink, one researcher experienced a consent violation at an event. It should be noted that, in many ways, the BDSM/kink community tends to be much more explicit and aware of consent and bodily autonomy. And yet, she was grabbed by an older man who would not let her go. Because of her role, as well as other manners and customs of the venue (she was near to two on-going scenes that, if causing a distraction, could result in injury), she also did not want to draw attention to herself. After extricating herself from this situation, she stated it was not a big deal and nothing really happened yet avoided this individual at all costs at future events. This decision, although subconscious at the time, was undoubtedly influenced by the tendency to individualize sexual violence, and larger societal responses that attribute blame to the victim. It was not until debriefing and reflecting on these experiences that the researcher realized she made a conscious decision to not consider this as assaultive or predatory in a sexually charged environment to try and protect herself emotionally. She compartmentalized her emotions and feelings to put the

research first, seeing this experience from that lens as fitting within Hanson and Richards' (2019) frameworks related to solitude and danger. Essentially, these things can happen to "Researcher Me" while working but ignore how they may impact the woman that lived through the experience of being groped and held without consent simultaneously. In effect, this means that embodied research only carries or applies to "safe" spaces and that there is not a holistic me that can safely exist in many places where this type of sexualized or taboo research is conducted—because it happened to "Researcher Me," not me as a woman.

Similarly, when in one of the fight gyms during a training session, a man entered the gym space from the street (he was not dressed for the gym and was accompanied by his dog, a large pit bull mix) and approached the researcher. He interrupted the researcher's workout session making suggestive comments and aggressively flirting. To begin with she politely answered the man's questions, but found herself becoming more and more uncomfortable, shortening her answers in an attempt to convey disinterest and even tried to continue on with her workout. This did not seem to deter the man, who continued to interrupt her session. This resulted in her male boxing coach telling the other man to "back off dude, she's married" (Fieldnote, July 15, 2017) and physically placing himself between the researcher and this man. This could have escalated into something more frightening but for the presence of the boxing coach. This brings again to the fore the issue of men not taking women at their word, and only respecting the women's wishes when they are communicated through another man – a behavior that is overtly sexist.

Conclusion

The #MeToo movement has brought greater public attention to the problem of sexual harassment in workplaces and there has been significant literature examining industry specific consequences. This increased public awareness of the problem has made its way to academe and

research spaces (Appert & Lawrence, 2020; King et al., 2020), with scholars from sociology and anthropology bringing the issue to the fore. Here, we have argued that criminology needs to follow-suit with the goal of improving the experiences of women researchers. This is especially important given that gender-based violence and the dangers posed by sexual harassment is the purview of the field. It is also important given the androcentric nature of the field, and the institutions and spaces that so oft emerge as sites of inquiry. This is of particular concern for feminist criminologists, where research topics and spaces might be predominantly male, deviant or "taboo." This increases feminist criminologists' chances of encountering these behaviors, as these spaces are a microcosm of larger society and women researchers' experiences represent women engaging in these activities. This is further compounded by traditional training in criminology and the field more generally, preferencing research methods, trainings and techniques that are androcentric in focus. Research methods courses need to include materials that better address the positionality of the researcher, and how that can impact not only their research experience but the knowledge production that results. This includes eradicating deep rooted practices that hold the researcher responsible for foreseeing and preventing harassing or abusive behaviors. This means developing safety training for individuals and institutions, not just as responses to vulnerabilities, but to normalize the uncertainties inherent to field research. This does not mean offering a course for women researchers. This would just shift the responsibility for women's safety to women, which would simply replicate existing social pressures for women to be responsible for their own safety in gendered or dangerous situations, such as bars, concerts, walking at night, etc. There needs to be a conscious effort to address intersectionality and relationships of power within research practice itself (Schneider, 2020). Criminology needs to protect the right of the researcher to engage in research as it pertains to academic freedom,

independent of their positionality and background (Phadke, 2005), and create space for the acknowledgement and inclusion of these experiences in the research record.

Furthermore, we found that in traversing gender in these spaces, and coping with the ramifications we employed different techniques – not all of them positive. In some of these instances, and others not detailed here, it was easier to divorce our identities as women from harmful occurrences. In practicing reflexivity, we have acknowledged that this allowed for some degree of disassociation or depersonalization. We were more readily able to say that the incident happened in the research environment to the researcher, not to me as a woman. This allowed us to disassociate from not only the incident but any negativity or harm that resulted. This granted us permission not to acknowledge or deal with how we felt in the moment (i.e., hurt, fear, humiliation, anger, frustration). This was further compounded by the dominance of the myth of the solitary researcher (Hanson & Richards, 2019), where only the best ethnographies emerge from solitude and danger.

This was particularly relevant in the spaces considered, as most are particularly physical or have the potential to be. As noted by Collins (2020), in boxing and fighting sports, as well as in other subcultures that require physical interactions, like the BDSM/kink community, the researcher must go beyond mental engagement with the environment and social setting to "think with the body" (Scheper-Hughes, 1994). This allows for autobiographical accounts that are inherently personal and political, but are also reflexive as the research is participatory, empathetic, and subjective. The retrospective reflexivity brought to the fore the dialectic between the research process being employed and our roles as researchers. And while this allows for the prioritization of the quality of research and the research relationships established, this emphasis

on quality can sometimes come at a cost, that of the researcher's emotional health, safety, and security.

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