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## **‘Don’t Ask a Woman to Do Another Woman’s Job’: Gendered Interactions and the Emotional Ethnographer**

### **Abstract**

This article contributes to the reflexive turn within the social sciences by arguing for enhanced recognition of the role of gender and emotions in the research process. The chief instrument of research, the ethnographer herself, may alter that which is being studied and may be changed in turn (Golde, 1970). Women may trigger off specific behaviours in male-dominated settings such as the ‘boy racer’ culture. This includes the gender-related behaviours of ‘sexual hustling’ and ‘sexist treatment’ (Gurney, 1985). Ethnographers must adopt a reflexive approach and locate themselves within the ethnography while recognising the influence of their social position on interactions with the researched and the research itself. An awareness of these interactions does not undermine the data but instead acknowledges that the researcher and the researched are embedded within the research. Hence, they shape the ethnography while also being shaped in turn.

### **Keywords**

autobiography/ emotions/ ethnography/ gender/ reflexivity

### **Introduction**

The response to the post-modernist critique of ethnography rests on the premise that ethnographers must be reflexive when using ethnographic methods (Brewer, 2000). Some writers attempt to move beyond the critical moment to reclaim some authority for the ethnographer, while retaining what was beneficial, intelligent and insightful

from the reflexive turn; ‘that is, an awareness that ethnographies are constructed by human beings who make choices about what to research, how to interpret what they find, and that they do this all in the context of their own personal biographies’ (O’Reilly, 2005: 211). Ethnographers must be aware of the effect of contingent processes on fieldwork, arising from the fact that they are part of the social world being studied (Brewer, 1994). Adopting a reflexive approach helps to overcome the problems associated with the representation and legitimation of ethnographic data and the literary or interpretive turn has made it easier to utilize (auto)biographical and personal narrative genres. Thus, the researcher’s feelings, values, beliefs and social position are central to the creation of the ethnographic narrative.

The aim of this article is to contribute to the reflexive turn by acknowledging that the researcher’s social position shapes their experiences in the field. To do so, the article focuses on ways in which the researcher’s gender, sexuality and emotions impact upon access to the field, relationships with the researched and the research process. Reflecting upon gendered interactions in the field sheds light on the ways in which the researched relate to the ethnographer. This article focuses on the experiences of a young, female ethnographer, researching the male-dominated culture of ‘boy racers’ in the city of Aberdeen. Male-dominated settings such as these can present particular issues for the female researcher whose access to backstage regions and masculine discourse will almost certainly be limited (Bell, 1999). The main behaviours which were encountered in the ‘boy racer’ culture include ‘sexist treatment’ and ‘sexual hustling’ (Gurney, 1985).

The paper begins with a description of the area of study and the methods utilised. It then proceeds to outline the reflexive turn within the social sciences. This includes the recognition of realism as problematic where it fails to account for the role

of interpretation and interaction between the researcher and the researched. As part of the reflexive turn, feminist researchers and ethnographers have situated themselves within the ethnographic text through autobiographical accounts and personal narratives. These accounts recognise that the researcher's social position shapes the research process, relationships with informants, and their representation and interpretation of the social world in question. However, as Adkins (2002) and Skeggs (1997, 2004) point out, reflexivity tends to inscribe a 'hierarchy of speaking positions' in social research and the 'narration of the self' is given authority in the research practice rather than reflexivity. The latter half of the paper discusses the researcher's experience of gendered interactions in the male-dominated culture of 'boy racers'. It is argued that the status of young, female ethnographer triggered off these particular behaviours. These examples illustrate that certain research participants related to the ethnographer first and foremost in terms of her gendered identity and sexuality. Through identification of these behaviours it is possible to note the impact they have on relationships with research participants and on the research itself. In addition, the emotional effect of these behaviours on the ethnographer is discussed. By reflecting on our experience of gendered interactions and emotions we can shed light on the internal dynamics of the social world in question. An awareness of these does not undermine the data but instead acknowledges that the ethnographer and the researched are embedded within the research, and thus shape the ethnography while also being shaped in turn.

### **The Study**

In contemporary Western society car cultures are an increasingly popular leisure pursuit amongst adolescents (Best, 2006). Known in the UK as 'boy racer' culture, the

image of a young male driving a modified car with a spoiler, alloys, lowered suspension, and a loud exhaust and stereo system, has permeated the public imagination. As a collective cultural practice, the 'cruising scene' developed out of unauthorised cultural gatherings of young people in modified cars, that occurred in retail parks and industrial estates late at night during the 1990s (Bengry-Howell, 2005). These gatherings provide an outlet for youths who wish to socialise with like-minded car enthusiasts. Although this is a largely male-dominated culture, a growing number of females now participate and are as passionate about their cars as the boys.

These gatherings and the car modifier have been presented as a social problem by the authorities and the media. 'Boy racers' are one of the early twenty-first century's 'folk devils' (Cohen, 2002). Fuelled by media coverage of reckless, irresponsible, and antisocial driving, young motorists are an area of concern for politicians, police, and citizens more generally. Many environmental nuisances condemned as antisocial – and increasingly subject to special punitive measures – illustrate how changing technology and commerce help to create new challenges to tolerance (Burney, 2005: 78). The urban space in Aberdeen, like many other seafront towns across the UK, has been presented as a 'contested arena' in which adults are asked to assume that young people have lesser rights (Burney, 2005: 72; see Aitken, 2001). The term 'boy racer' has come to signify 'male adolescent selfishness' and 'hedonism' and, 'irrespective of whether or not the activities of boy racers are purposefully subversive, groups in power introduce policies and management plans that restrict the activities of the subculture' (Falconer and Kingham, 2007: 183).

The 'boy racer' culture in Aberdeen, known locally as the 'Bouley Bashers', has only recently become an object of political concern and scrutiny, however such groups have occupied Aberdeen's seafront since the early 1970s. The Beach

Boulevard, a quarter-mile stretch of road, is the main thorough-fare from the seafront to the centre of Aberdeen, and forms part of the drivers' 'cruising' circuit. In the past decade, the area has undergone vast redevelopment, a result of which is contestation over the use of this urban space by the drivers. From 2000 onwards, concern over illegal street racing and antisocial behaviour resulted in a proliferation of media articles centred on the detrimental effects the 'boy racers' had on the environment, and the lives of local residents. As one local newspaper wrote:

For more than 30 years they've been at it – speeding recklessly up and down the Beach Boulevard...The leisure complex has grown massively and become a magnet for families. But that hasn't stopped the madness of the boy racers – or led to the authorities driving them off the road.<sup>1</sup>

A number of measures were introduced in order to control and regulate their use of the urban environment. This included altering the road layout and traffic system, installing CCTV cameras, enforcing parking restrictions and proposing to close the Beach Boulevard at night. New powers were also introduced under the *Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act (2004)*.<sup>2</sup> However the efforts of various 'outside' groups have proved largely unsuccessful in deterring the drivers from Aberdeen's seafront.

The city of Aberdeen formed the setting for a doctoral study into 'boy racer' culture, and the societal reaction to their behaviour, from September 2005 to September 2008. Access to the subculture was aided by Grampian Police who regularly met with a group of drivers from the beach area of the city. These Drivers' Group meetings took place every three months and were attended by an officer from

Grampian Police and a small group of drivers from the subculture. The main representative for the drivers became my initial gatekeeper to the setting and this type of 'informal sponsorship' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) became crucial for successfully negotiating access.

Gaining access through the Drivers' Group ensured that I was not placing myself at risk, since members of the group were more willing to accept outsiders and disclose sensitive information relating to the wider subculture. Gaining access into partially or wholly deviant groups can be fraught with difficulties (Hobbs, 2001). However, most members of the so-called 'Bouley Bashers' reacted positively to my introduction by the initial gatekeeper, Debbie. Other members of the group appeared indifferent or unconcerned about my presence at Drivers' Group meetings and Aberdeen's seafront. One particular member of the group, Robert, was enthusiastic about my participation due to the fact that he hosted a website centred on Fiats, and I owned a Fiat Punto. Therefore I was willingly accepted into his group of friends and invited to events across Scotland which were organised through the Fiat website. My car became the focus of a project by Robert, who wanted to 'clean it up' and proposed various aesthetic modifications. Bargaining is a crucial part of the access career with 'skillful negotiation and renegotiation' being required and 'the more sensitive the research, the greater are these compromises likely to be' (Brewer, 2000: 83). For instance Robert had his driving license revoked for a year due to a road traffic offence. During this period I provided him with transportation to Fiat events. This type of research bargaining was advantageous since it placed me at the centre of the group's activities.

In total, 150 hours were spent with the group from September 2006 to August 2007. The role of overt participant observer was adopted in order to gain an insight

into the internal workings of the subculture. During the fieldwork period I spent evenings in the main setting – Aberdeen Beach, and attended Drivers’ Group meetings, and car shows and informal meetings (known as ‘cruises’ or ‘meets’) across Scotland.<sup>3</sup> I also accompanied members of the group to scrap yards, garages and shops, to search for car parts and accessories. The research combined both offline and online ethnography and thus Internet sites established by research participants were also a source of data collection.<sup>4</sup> Fieldwork also consisted of semi-structured interviews with members of the subculture and various outside groups (which were recorded and transcribed). Ethnographic interviews were conducted with members of the subculture throughout the duration of the fieldwork. Local and national media articles and official documentation, such as council reports, were also analysed.

For the young, female, heterosexual, middle-class, researcher, fitting into this male-dominated culture proved difficult. The way in which the researcher manages their presentation of self in the field is important (Goffman, 1971). In this case, the mannerisms, dialect, accents and modes of dress all differed from my own. Their accents were broad Aberdonian, and the mannerisms and style of dress were masculine. Although the class composition of the subculture is varied, those car enthusiasts who belonged to the core of the group were from a working-class background. Heterosexuality and traditional working-class masculinity were emphasised. Female members of the group who were active participants in the culture also adopted these masculine traits. Therefore not only was I distanced from the male members of the group in terms of gender and social class, but I had nothing in common with the so-called ‘girl racers’. I thus found myself in an isolated position. Attempts were made to follow their style of dress; however, I was conscious that in doing so, I may have drawn further attention to myself. I was not viewed by the group



as a serious car enthusiast since I did not fit the prescribed role of a female car enthusiast. I was reduced to the periphery status of passenger or girlfriend. Thus, I differed from the majority of subcultural participants in terms of my gender, social class and commitment to car modification.

It could be argued that ethnographers should not be concerned with fitting in with the culture or group under study. However, conducting participant observation would be difficult for a researcher who was unable to build positive relationships with the researched. This necessity to form relationships with the researched is often ignored in research textbooks or training. According to Bell and Newby (1977) there had always been considerable divergence between how sociological research had actually been done and what was found in textbooks. They claim that:

It is not only that the normative textbooks on fieldwork do not tell their readers something to the effect that 'to observe you need to be adopted in some on-going pattern of social relationships'...but also that data in the final monograph are published about which we have no idea how or why they were collected (Bell and Newby, 1977: 14-15).

Methods texts still remain relatively silent on the way in which fieldwork affects the ethnographer, and the ways in which the ethnographer affects the field. Although there is increased awareness of the personal nature of fieldwork, the self is still neglected in methods texts or referred to in 'tangential and semi-detached ways' (Coffey, 1999: 1). Textbooks are unable to capture the personal and emotional nature of fieldwork. The experience and reality of participant observation is far different from 'textbook recipes' (Oakley, 1981: 30) or the 'smooth accounts' that appear in

methods chapters (Newby, 1977: 108). Instead, the researcher's 'own experience and biography are more relevant to the problems to be encountered while participantly observing' (Newby, 1977: 120). I was not prepared to face issues that arose as a result of my social identity and location (such as the gender-related behaviours and 'emotional labour' discussed in this article). Hence, as ethnographers, it is important to reflect upon our social background since it directly impacts upon our position in the field and thus, our relationships with the researched. The reflexive turn within the social sciences enables the ethnographer to do just this.

### **The Reflexive Turn**

Since the 1970s, feminist writers and ethnographers have challenged the authority of ethnographic data, claiming that 'the view from nowhere was always in fact a view from somewhere' (Spencer, 2001: 444). In response to the post-modernist critique of ethnography, the reflexive turn within the social sciences has highlighted the influence of the ethnographer on the research process. It draws attention to the researcher as part of the world being studied and to the ways in which the research process constitutes what it investigates (Taylor, 2001). This has led to a 'double crisis of representation and legitimation' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The crisis of representation arises when the research text is no longer assumed to capture the world which was studied; instead, the world presented in the text is accepted as the construction of the author. The crisis of legitimation arises when it is no longer assumed that research can be evaluated by checking it against the reality which it supposedly represents; this undermines conventional criteria for evaluation such as validity (Taylor, 2001: 4). Denzin (1997) also identifies a third crisis, of 'praxis' which concerns the application of findings.

The crisis of representation in ethnography focuses on a rejection of its realist underpinning. This includes whether or not ethnographic accounts can legitimately claim to represent an independent social reality (Hammersley, 1992). The anti-realist challenge to the nature of knowledge undermines the traditional criteria to evaluate ethnographic data since they are based on realist assumptions. Hence there is disillusionment surrounding the ethnographer's claim to provide privileged and special access to 'reality' by means of 'thick description' (Brewer, 2000). Some have adopted critical realism, as an underlabouring philosophy for ethnographic research (Porter, 2002). Recognition that critical realist ethnography is not written in a neutral, descriptive language, does not lead to the relativist view that regards each ethnography as a creation of its author. Instead, an awareness of the processes by which our understandings are fashioned, can only strengthen our critical reflection (Atkinson, 1990). Critical realists argue that the perceptual criterion of reality is not the only criterion, and add to it the causal criterion, which turns on the capacity of an entity to bring about changes in material things. Thus, to be is not to be perceived, but to be able to do (Bhaskar, 1989). However, a result of the reflexive turn has been to recognise realism as problematic where it fails to account for the role of interpretation and interaction between researcher and researched (O'Reilly, 2005: 55).

Social researchers have acknowledged the relationship between the researcher and researched through autobiographical accounts and personal narratives, which help to show how others relate to the researcher, and convey the 'ethnographic content' (Okely, 1992). The journal, memoir, autobiography, and life history, have all featured in ethnographic accounts, and have opened the door to, and enriched understandings of, autobiographical writing and practices (Cosslett *et al.* 2000, see Broughton, 2006). The growing trend in ethnographic writing which foregrounds self-narratives has been

referred to as 'autoethnography' (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography is a form of writing that makes the researcher's experience a topic of investigation. It is 'an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739). Stanley (1993) refers to the feminist sociological agent who is concerned with constructing, rather than 'discovering', social reality and sociological knowledge, as the 'auto/biographical I'. The use of 'I' acknowledges that 'such knowledge is contextual, situational and specific, and that it will differ systematically according to the social location (as a gendered, raced, classed, sexualised, person) of the particular knowledge-producer' (Stanley, 1993: 49).

Therefore social researchers 'cannot be divorced from their autobiographies and will bring their own values to the research and their interpretation of the data' (Devine and Heath, 1999: 27). Research itself is a political exercise – what we choose to investigate is determined by the way in which we perceive the world (Green, 1993). In order to practise the 'sociological imagination' we must be aware that values are involved in the selection of the problems we study and in certain of the key conceptions we use in our formulation of these problems (Wright Mills, 2002[1959]: 78). Brewer (2000: 48) has referred to this as 'post postmodern ethnography' and suggests that reflexivity requires us to adopt the 'ethnographic imagination'. This involves 'an openness in people's attitude toward ethnographic data in which their reliability, usefulness and import is not immediately dismissed out of hand; that readers accept that ethnographic data have strengths rather than focusing entirely on their limitations' (Brewer, 1994: 236).

However Adkins (2002: 340-42) argues that the current turn to reflexivity in social research concerns a configuration of the relation between subjectivity and

knowledge, or knower and known, which allows only certain subjects to speak and to be viewed as correct via a 'particular figuring of identity'. Reflexivity inscribes a 'hierarchy of speaking positions' in social research, the inscription of which is disguised through claims that reflexivity is 'good' and 'progressive' with regard to the gender politics of social research (Adkins, 2002: 345). The narration of the self is given authority in the research practice, rather than reflexivity. Thus authority becomes 'located in the researcher, rather than the research participants; in the textual resourcing of the self, not the practice' (Skeggs, 2004: 152). It is not re-authorizing ourselves through telling and confession which is needed, but practice which 'understands the relations of production and is aware of the possibilities for appropriation; a practice with an awareness of the constraints of disciplinary techniques and the power relations of location and position' (Skeggs, 2004: 131). The researcher must be located in his or her social position and reflexivity should be dislocated from 'narrating the self, as a property of persons' (Skeggs, 2004: 133). Experience is central to the construction of subjectivity and theory since it produces 'a knowing subject whose identity is continually being produced, rather than fixed'. This stance recognises that 'knowledge is situated, is produced from social subjects with varying amounts of capital, located in a nexus of power relations' (Skeggs, 1997: 28).

Thus, the positioning of the researcher as a person who is gendered and has their own particular origins is an important component in the research process (Moran-Ellis, 1995). The researcher carries an identity with her and how the researched respond to the researcher, both in terms of what they believe she will understand, and in their presentation of self, will be dependent upon what role they assign to the researcher' (Walker, 1998: 283). For a female researcher, gender identity plays a critical role in ethnographic research (along with other identities such as social

class, age and ethnicity). In Western society the position of men and women is not equal, and thus a 'female researcher retains the inferior status of women even while doing a job which in social class terms is structurally superior to that of her male informants' (Walker, 1998: 283). Moreover, female ethnographers often appear to be more aware of their sexual status and its impact on field research and relationships than their male colleagues (Okely, 1992). The latter half of this paper contributes to reflexive and autobiographical accounts of ethnographic research by discussing gendered interactions within the male-dominated culture of 'boy racers'. This includes the gender-related behaviours of 'sexual hustling' and 'sexist treatment'. The impact of these behaviours on the researcher and the research is reflected upon.

### **Gendered Interactions in the 'Boy Racer' Culture**

Women may trigger off specific behaviours in research. Included here is the stereotyped view of women as vulnerable in terms of their relative weakness and openness to sexual advances (Golde, 1970). Easterday *et al.* (1982) call this sex-role of the female researcher, 'hustling,' and claim that the young female researcher is most likely to encounter this in a male-dominated setting. 'Hustling' can range from 'flirtatious behaviour and sexually suggestive remarks to overt sexual propositioning' and 'involves statements or actions which place the female researcher in an inferior or devalued position' (Gurney, 1985: 12). Conducting ethnography in a masculine setting highlights the tendency for women to be treated as sex objects and subjected to sexual advances. If the female researcher is sexually propositioned or harassed, then it is clear that people in the setting are relating to her partially in terms of her sexual identity (Gurney, 1985).

Within this male-dominated setting, 'hustling' did occur. This can be seen in my successful attempts to gain access to the subculture. Prior to gaining access through Grampian Police, attempts were made in the summer of 2005 while I was employed at a home improvement store. A colleague who had heard about my research informed me that he was a regular participant in the subculture. I accompanied him to 'cruises' in Aberdeen and we attended a modified car show. However as the research progressed, this gatekeeper began to show sexual interest in me, which resulted in feelings of discomfort on my part. As a result it was necessary to explore other means by which I could access the group. However choosing not to access the group this way could have seriously jeopardised the research had another suitable avenue of access not been identified and successfully negotiated. It was evident that the first gatekeeper related to me in terms of my gendered identity.

Attempts were made to avoid 'sexual hustling' through attending some events with my partner, James, thus conveying to research informants that I was 'unavailable'. James was accepted by members of the subculture and in particular by Robert, who would always invite him along to events or shows. Therefore the use of this tactic to create space for myself in a male-dominated setting proved successful. James helped form a bridge between me and the 'boy racers'. I was also able to reflect upon my interpretations of the culture and vent my frustrations with regards to their behaviour. I also found that research participants reacted differently towards me while in his presence. For instance they were less likely to criticise or make fun of me. I believed that James was more easily accepted into the group because of his gender.

Gill and Maclean (2002) also reflect on experiences of 'sexual hustling' in their research projects. For Gill, interactions with men in the research 'ranged from mild flirting, and sexual banter to explicit offers the most memorable of which was an

offer of a direct trade – an interview granted in return for sex’ (Gill and Maclean, 2002: para 2.6). They further describe how this impacted on her relationship with the female research subjects who did not spend a great deal of time in public with men, in contrast to those who did and were ‘known to be sexually available and promiscuous’ (Gill and Maclean, 2002: para 2.6). Hatton’s (2007) study of ‘boy racer’ culture highlights other issues encountered by the ethnographer. During her research she was constantly aware of the risks associated with being a passenger in speeding cars. During their performances in public spaces, Hatton (2007: 262) observed what she describes as ‘their occasional alarming disregard for personal safety’. Hence, researching this subculture throws up personal, ethical and moral dilemmas and risks which must be negotiated.

Another example of ‘sexual hustling’ occurred at a meeting for the Fiat website when a female participant called Laura was asked to lie across the bonnet of a car and pose for a photograph. Laura was happy to do so and joked with the guys that she wanted a cut of any money they might receive from a magazine. This incident highlighted the portrayal of women in the culture as sexual objects. Car magazines and Internet sites feature images of scantily-clad women draped over cars and they are used to advertise various car-related products and events. For instance *Fast and Modified* magazine features a section called ‘babes of the month’ and pictures of these models can be downloaded from their website. At car shows, models are used to draw attention to certain cars and thus their bodies are used to sexualise the car. In this way, the car becomes charged with symbolic meaning and retains a central place in this male culture (see Wajcman, 1991). These examples highlight the need for the ethnographer to be aware of the influence of gender and sexuality on relationships with informants and the research itself.



In addition to 'sexual hustling', gender-related behaviours encountered by the female researcher in a male-dominated setting can take the form of 'sexist treatment' (Gurney, 1985). Within the subculture, there was a tendency for women to become the subject of jokes and comments in relation to their driving abilities. Their treatment of female members was also projected towards me as a female researcher and a 'woman driver'. My driving skills were the subject of numerous jokes throughout the research process. An example of this can be found at a 'meet' for the Fiat website:

Before everyone headed home Robert decided that he would take a photograph of the cars lined up together. Once we found a suitable location, Robert explained how he wanted the cars arranged. One after the other, they each parked their cars. When it came to my turn, he shouted: 'No, you're too far over, you need to be closer to his car'. I reversed again with Robert guiding. 'I can't believe this' he said, 'it's not that difficult, look how all the other cars are lined up'. I couldn't see what was wrong with my parking but thought it best not to challenge him. 'I'll do it if it's ok to drive your car?' asked Laura, the only other female there. I agreed and watched feeling defeated. Laura reversed but revved the engine too much. 'Oh God...' one of the other drivers exclaimed, '...don't ask a woman to do another woman's job!' (Fieldwork Diary, April 2007).

On reflection, this incident incites feelings of a 'loss of control' over how the researcher is perceived by the researched. As Gill and Maclean (2002: para 4.5) write: 'A woman entering a male dominated setting is often the target of innuendo, rumour and boasting. A female ethnographer, though, is expected to deal with this situation

such that the research does not suffer.’ Challenging this behaviour may have affected relationships with key informants and/or jeopardised the research. For my partner who also came along to certain events, my reaction to this gender-related behaviour seemed unjustified:

Tonight I decided to meet Robert at Aberdeen Beach since we hadn’t seen each other for a while. My partner James agreed to accompany me. I drove towards Robert who was already parked at the seafront waiting for us. I reversed alongside his car and James rolled down the window. ‘You better call a taxi’ remarked Robert, referring to the distance between our cars. He then muttered a comment under his breath about ‘women drivers’. James agreed with Robert and after some persuading I positioned the car closer to Robert’s. After we left I complained to James about Robert’s reaction, which I believed was sexist. He responded by claiming that I had ‘blown the whole thing out of proportion and should just let it go’ (Fieldwork Diary, October 2007).

Dealing with sexism and sexual hustling can be stressful for researchers and ignoring behaviours that conflict with our own values is not something which is undertaken without a sense of moral cost (Keith, 1992). Sampson and Thomas (2003: 180) argue that failing to challenge sexist behaviour is not a betrayal of our beliefs but can be the only practical and safe way to conduct research in a male-dominated setting. In this instance ‘sexual hustling’ was tolerated while ‘sexist treatment’ was not. It could be argued that while ‘sexist treatment’ is a symbolic violation of the researcher’s gendered identity, ‘sexual hustling’ is also a physical violation. I was aware of the risks posed by ‘sexual advances’ since a majority of the fieldwork was spent alone

with males in their cars. Furthermore, 'sexist treatment' may have been tolerated because it is symptomatic of myths in wider society concerning women and their driving abilities.

As Gill and Maclean (2002) note, a female ethnographer can have certain limitations placed on her in terms of behaviour. A woman who engages in the public realm in such a way may be perceived as stepping out of line, and in many instances, though this is not always verbalised, the behaviour of those around her serves to make her aware of her uneasy social position. This is evident in another incident which occurred while I helped Robert to distribute flyers advertising his website:

Robert decided he wanted to recruit more members ahead of the Scottish Italian Car Show that weekend, so the website would have stronger representation on the day. This involved driving around Aberdeen looking for cars to join the site. While I placed a flyer on a yellow Fiat Punto, Robert drove around the block to look for more cars. As I walked over to his car he stalled the engine. 'What happened there?' I light-heartedly asked. 'Ha, ha' he replied as he started the engine. 'What's with the half-masts?' he asked sarcastically as I sat back in the passenger seat. He was referring to my jeans. By the tone of his voice I realised it was an attempt to get his own back for making fun of his driving skills. I learned my lesson here. I had been put in my place (Fieldwork Diary, May 2007).

In response to my attempt to make light of his engine stalling, Robert responded by making light of something he believed I valued, my style of dress. This highlights my inability to 'fit in' with the other female members of the group who were serious

participants, since my style of dress and mannerisms were more feminine. Middleton (1986: 129) discusses the importance of not stepping out of line as a female researcher in a male setting:

Through violating cultural norms I had discovered that the boundaries between men's space and women's space are strongly marked and that if I wanted to continue my fieldwork I must do so in a culturally acceptable manner – I must keep in my place.

I found Robert's comments difficult to tolerate at times. I chose not to challenge him as I believed this might jeopardise the research. However, as a result of this, I was required to practise 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) in an attempt to continue my relationships with the researched and thus the research itself. The following section reflects upon my emotional experiences during research with the 'boy racer' culture.

### **The Emotional Ethnographer**

Treatment such as the above can have an effect on the well-being and emotions of the ethnographer (see Blackman, 2007). For instance towards the end of the fieldwork I found myself disliking certain members of the group and in some cases avoiding them completely. This influenced the events I attended and those whom I chose to interview. Therefore these behaviours can jeopardise the research itself, since we may find them difficult to tolerate. Personal preferences and dislikes play an important part in fieldwork and it can be difficult for the ethnographer to collect and analyse data on those individuals whom they dislike (Payne, 1996):

The researcher's preconceptions and personality are...much more 'on the line'...we cannot escape our personal likes and dislikes among the cast of social actors with whom we must interact...there is no insulation between researcher and researched. The ethnographer has to be there with a wide range of people (Payne, 1996: 30).

Thus, although researchers have started to personalize their accounts of fieldwork, there have been few systematic attempts to reflect upon the emotions and experiences that are reported (Coffey, 1999). Any discussion of the negative sentiments associated with fieldwork is viewed as a violation of the 'pleasure principle so often associated with model practice' (Van Maanen *et al.* 1993: vii). As a result: 'This curious policing of socially correct feeling within the fieldwork community can lead to a rather bizarre slanting of research reports wherein the fieldworker is represented as wallowing in an almost unmitigated delight while engaged in the research process' (Van Maanen *et al.* 1993: viii). 'Emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) or 'emotional craftwork' forms an integral part of the philosophy and practice of ethnographic work (Coffey, 1999: 57). Throughout the fieldwork I experienced a kind of emotion shock whereby the sentiments I felt differed from those communicated in textbooks and methods courses. This included feeling guilty because I disliked those I was researching and did not always look forward to spending time with them. At times I was required to bite my lip rather than make explicit my disagreements with the masculinist culture for fear of alienating my respondents. Moreover, I believed that I should be grateful to them for permitting me access into their social world.

As ethnographers, we learn how to ‘think, feel and act through our teachers, texts and colleagues’ and classic ethnographies either omit researchers’ emotions or relegate them to a preface or an appendix (Kleinmann and Copp, 1993: 2). On the one hand, we are told that emotions can hinder good research and on the other, we are told that we will not understand participants unless we form attachments to them (Kleinmann and Copp, 1993: 2). However until negative feelings become part of field research, fieldworkers will not talk openly about them. By understanding and acknowledging our feelings we can gain an insight into how others feel and why. This, in turn, helps to shed light on the group we are studying. Our feelings, even the ones we consider inappropriate, should be seen as ‘tools of analysis’ (Kleinmann and Copp, 1993: 52). Only then will readers come to expect authors to present themselves as ‘emotional agents’ in their accounts (Kleinmann and Copp, 1993: 54). ‘Emotional connectedness to the processes and practices of fieldwork, to analysis and writing ...should not be denied, nor stifled. It should be acknowledged, reflected upon, and seen as a fundamental feature of well-executed research’ (Coffey, 1999: 158-59).

Throughout the fieldwork I chose to ‘keep in my place’ however it can also be said that violating or transgressing cultural norms is a necessary and valuable part of social research (Gill and Maclean, 2002: para 4.14). Gurney (1985) claims that the female fieldworker may need to know whether her treatment stems from her gender, or is part of the general difficulties experienced by all researchers. She argues that one way to determine whether gender is the primary issue is to observe how other women in the setting are treated by the dominant males: ‘If they are treated as inferiors and placed in devalued roles, chances are that the female researcher’s difficulties are indeed partially a consequence of her being a woman’ (Gurney, 1985: 46). Examination of field notes reveals that this is the case, with there being instances of

sexism towards female members of the subculture. The example from my field notes, where one of the group remarks, 'don't ask a woman to do another woman's job', indicates that sexist treatment was not only aimed at me as a female researcher, but on a wider scale to female members of the subculture and, perhaps, women in general. Hence it could also be argued that I was accepted into the group, since they treated me in a similar way.

Not being taken seriously in the research setting can also act in one's favour. For instance people may confide or let the female researcher hear things because she is portrayed as powerless and less threatening (Easterday *et al.* 1982: 66). This proved advantageous when asking questions relating to cars since, being female, I was not expected to know much about them. I was able and sometimes expected to ask 'simple' questions about cars simply because of my gender. Thus, gender will influence the dynamics of fieldwork but not always in ways which exclude female researchers (Bell, 1999). Being female may in some situations enable greater access since certain sorts of data are more readily attained by 'personable young women' (Dingwall, 1980). The ethnographer can play upon the role of naïve researcher or 'acceptable incompetent' to their advantage (Daniels cited in Fielding, 1993: 158).

## **Conclusion**

This article highlights the influence of the ethnographer's social position on the research and on relationships with the researched. It does so by reflecting on gender-related behaviours experienced by the young, female researcher and the related requirement to practise 'emotional labour'. The reflexive turn within the social sciences, and the growing emphasis on autobiography and personal narratives, allows the researcher to locate themselves within the research. As Adkins (2002) points out,

the current turn to reflexivity tends to inscribe a 'hierarchy of speaking positions' whereby the 'narration of the self' (Skeggs, 2004) is given authority, rather than reflexivity. The researcher must attempt to locate themselves within their social position and recognise that experience and knowledge are also produced from our interactions with research participants. The autobiographical turn and personal narratives have made it easier for ethnographers to write themselves into their accounts. It is acknowledged that gender, alongside sexuality, age, ethnicity, religion, our biography, and our personal likes and dislikes, shapes our research interests, access to the field, relationships with the researched, and our interpretation and representation of the culture.

Examples from ethnographic research with the 'boy racer' culture illustrate the ways in which the researcher's locatedness via gender and sexuality can influence the research process. Women may encounter specific behaviours in research and in a male-dominated setting, such as the 'boy racer' culture, these can take the form of 'sexual hustling' and 'sexist treatment' (Gurney, 1985). In this research, the young female ethnographer was treated by research participants in terms of her gender and sexuality. At times these behaviours were difficult to tolerate and the ethnographer was required to perform 'emotional labour' as part of the fieldwork. The 'emotional labour' required by fieldworkers is still neglected in textbooks and methods courses and thus can come as a shock to the ethnographer. Understanding and acknowledging our feelings, whether they be positive or negative, is necessary in order to understand the culture we are studying and our interpretation of their world. By ignoring our emotions we are denying that they exist and denying that they do have an impact on the knowledge we produce (Coffey, 1999: 95). An awareness of these is also beneficial since in this case, they could have endangered the research itself. Gendered



interactions and emotional experiences also help to shed light on the internal dynamics of the social world in question. Thus, possibilities unfold when researchers attempt to understand the social, emotional, and thus autobiographical sources of their academic insights.

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<sup>1</sup> Press & Journal 'The 80mph madness of the Bouley Boys, but the council has not done a thing about it' (21 August 2002).

<sup>2</sup> The Dispersal of Groups power was used twice in the summer of 2005, to tackle Aberdeen's 'boy racers'. The Seizure of Vehicles power has been used across Scotland since 2005.

<sup>3</sup> These 'cruises' or 'meets' were organized through Internet sites.

<sup>4</sup> The names of participants have been changed in order to protect their identity.