

# Not One of the Guys: The Female Researcher in a Male-Dominated Setting

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**ABSTRACT:** An important, but frequently overlooked, issue in qualitative research is how the status characteristics of the researcher affect the process of gaining access to, establishing, and maintaining rapport with respondents or informants in a setting. Some researchers may never succeed in achieving more than superficial acceptance from their respondents because of the status each researcher occupies. Female researchers studying male-dominated groups frequently find themselves in just such a position or do not attempt to gain entry in certain male-dominated settings. Sex-role expectations may hamper women's work in the field. Until recently, little attention was given to these issues.

This paper discusses the dilemmas faced by female researchers in male-dominated settings. It begins by examining how the instructional fieldwork literature addresses this issue and finds that it generally does not. In addition, the literature's advice to novice fieldworkers, while perhaps appropriate for males, may be inappropriate for females, given stereotypical sex-role expectations. Novice female researchers must turn to accounts of experienced female researchers for discussions of problems they may encounter in field settings. The paper then turns to my study of a prosecutor's office. Similarities between my experiences and those of other female researchers are noted, and suggestions are made about how women in the field can manage and even overcome these problems.

## Fieldwork Instruction for "Anyman"

Despite increasing evidence that fieldwork is not the same for women as it is for men, the instructional literature on qualitative research continues to overlook gender differences in fieldwork. The literature assumes that the fieldworker is "Anyman" and that his [sic] personal characteristics, such as gender, have no bearing upon the development of trust in the setting (Johnson, 1975: 91).

The instructional literature I reviewed contains little or no discussion of how the researcher's status characteristics affect the development and maintenance of rapport (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Douglas, 1976; Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979; Patton, 1980; Georges and Jones, 1980; Feldman, 1981; Lofland

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and Lofland, 1984). Some sources give advice which might be helpful if the researcher is *Anyman* but not *Anywoman*. For example, a frequent suggestion is that the beginning fieldworker adopt a passive, submissive, nonexpert, incompetent, nonthreatening, or nonassertive role vis à vis setting members (Scott, 1963; Lofland, 1971; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Douglas, 1976; Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979; Lofland and Lofland, 1984). However, this advice is accompanied by the admonition not to cultivate an image as incompetent or nonthreatening to the point of being seen as a bumbling idiot who is not to be taken seriously.

Once accepted and trusted by setting members, the researcher is advised to discard the naive incompetent role in favor of the competent, somewhat knowledgeable, professional role (Olesen and Whittaker, 1970). Failure to accomplish this transition can preclude observation of anything setting members consider too complex for the naive observer to understand, even with their expert assistance. While stereotypical attitudes toward females generally assure their acceptance in the naive incompetent role in a male-dominated setting (Lofland, 1971), those same attitudes hamper females' efforts to make the transition to the professional role. Female researchers must work especially hard to achieve an impression combining the attribute of being nonthreatening with that of being a credible, competent professional. By failing to acknowledge this problem, the fieldwork instructional literature does not offer realistic guidance to novice female researchers.

A similar set of issues arises in connection with the role of reciprocity in field relations. A number of experienced researchers of both genders suggest that rapport with respondents is maintained through exchange relationships (Wax, 1952; Golde, 1970; Lofland, 1971; Johnson, 1975; Danziger, 1979; Gray, 1980; Lofland and Lofland, 1984). Novice researchers are advised not to expect something for nothing. They may be asked to perform tasks or do favors for setting members in exchange for being allowed to conduct research. Many favors are small, such as running errands, babysitting, or providing rides, and pose no significant problems. However, the novice fieldworker is warned that some setting members may ask favors which involve illegal or immoral acts. For female fieldworkers reciprocity also may be problematic if powerful males in the setting expect sexual favors in return for research access. The fieldwork instructional literature does not provide any guidance about how one negotiates access and maintains rapport when reciprocity involves sex.

In addition, female researchers may be forced to tolerate, or at least

not openly object to, sexist remarks and behavior in order to maintain rapport. The female professional in a male-dominated organization is a token, and her continued presence in the setting may be contingent upon passing certain loyalty tests, including ignoring derogatory remarks or allowing her gender to provide a source of humor for the group (Kanter, 1977). Female researchers have reported sufficient instances of sexual hustling or sexist treatment to merit acknowledgement of this problem in the fieldwork instructional literature (Daniels, 1967; Mann, 1976; Rovner-Pieczenik, 1976; Warren and Rasmussen, 1977; Easterday et al., 1977). If fieldworkers are encouraged to view reciprocity as an expected part of the research situation, more attention should be given to how it may differ for males and females, and how females, in particular, can define the limits of exchange relationships with male informants.

Since the general fieldwork literature contains so little advice for female researchers, women must turn to the small, but growing, body of fieldwork reminiscences of female authors (See, for example, Papanek, 1964; Daniels, 1967, 1983; Golde, 1970; Wax, 1971; 1979; Mann, 1976; Rovner-Pieczenik, 1976; Easterday et al., 1977; Warren [with Rasmussen], 1977; Danziger, 1979; Thorne, 1979; McC. Pastner, 1982). Of course, not all female fieldworkers have discussed gender-related problems. Some older accounts, written before the era of the women's movement, are gender-neutral, discussing dilemmas and problems as if the researcher were indeed Anyman (Fox, 1964; Geer, 1964). However, some more recent accounts also fail to mention whether the researcher's gender was problematic. For example, Hoffman (1980) describes problems gaining access to hospital boards of directors, but does not indicate whether her gender was a factor. Remington (1981; 1983) studied problems faced by women entering the male-dominated occupation of policing, but does not mention problems she may have encountered as a female researcher. In fact, she claims she achieved the status of insider, completely accepted and treated with candor. Even Kanter (1977) does not indicate whether gender-related problems arose for her during a study which focused on gender roles inside a corporation.

A female researcher may not discuss the issue of gender in presenting her fieldwork experience for a variety of reasons. Gender-related problems may have been minimal during her study. However, a female researcher also may overlook or even deny difficulties she experiences in the field to avoid having her work appear unsound. Any lapse in rapport with setting members may cast doubt on the information she received from them. There is also the added embarrassment of acknowledging that one's status as a female overshadowed one's identity as a researcher.

During my field research I overlooked incidents which my colleagues regarded as sexist. I explained away my problems and believed they were related to something else, such as my youth. This oversight was not due, I believe, to an inability to recognize sexist statements or treatment. In other settings and contexts I am quick to recognize such biases and discrimination. However, the thought that my work as a researcher had been compromised by my gender was so discomforting that I persisted in denying this fact for many months after leaving the field. It was only after carefully examining the negative treatment accorded *other* women in the organization that I was able to recognize that I was being treated the same way.

Daniels (1983: 201) contends that the "frisson," infatuation, or gratitude researchers feel toward their informants casts a halo around them and makes it difficult to view setting members negatively. The female researcher who is convinced her informants are kind and generous people because they allow her to study them may find it hard to believe that these individuals are treating her as an inferior because she is a woman. I experienced a sense of gratitude toward my informants because they shared information with me, an outsider, to whom they had no obligations. Extensive self-reflection and debriefing with colleagues were required before I was able to acknowledge that my informants were not as kind as I had thought.

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. But other reactions to women, such as the tendency to view them as inferior and place them in devalued roles, may be expressed in more subtle or indirect ways. For example, the staff of the organization I studied regarded "sociologist" as an inferior status. They were disparaging in their remarks about the discipline and its practitioners. The director referred to sociological concepts as "bafflegab" and told me that most of the sociologists he previously had met were "cretins." Another attorney told me he found the perfect definition of sociology in a newspaper. "Sociology is a science which takes common sense that has been built up over thousands of years and translates it into a different language which then takes four to seven years to learn well enough to translate back into common sense."<sup>1</sup> Even though such comments were often made jokingly, they were frequent enough that I took them as indicators of prevalent attitudes.

Other female researchers have not discussed how to distinguish between difficulties unique to women in the field and those experienced by all fieldworkers, regardless of gender. Golde (1970), for example, discusses five recurring themes in female anthropologists' accounts of

fieldwork. As she indicates, two of these themes, protection and conformity, have special relevance for females, but the other three, initial suspicion, reciprocity, and culture shock, are common among anthropologists in general. Easterday et al. (1977) also offer a typology of difficulties women may experience in the field, including exclusion by an all-male fraternity, sexual hustling, being treated as a gofer, being treated as a mascot, and being treated with paternalism. It is possible that a male in a male-dominated setting could experience several of these difficulties as well, such as initial exclusion from a close-knit group of setting members, being used as a gofer, or being treated as a son by older male members. The young male researcher may also experience difficulties establishing and maintaining rapport (Johnson, 1975; Wax, 1979.)

The female fieldworker may want to know whether her problems stem from her gender or are part of the general difficulties experienced by all researchers. Understanding the source of the problem may suggest a way of coping with it. 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.

Gender-related problems female researchers have addressed can be divided into two categories: sexual hustling and sexist treatment. Experiences with sexual hustling range from flirtatious behavior and sexually suggestive remarks to overt sexual propositioning. Sexist treatment involves statements or actions which place the female researcher in an inferior or devalued position. Both types of problems arose during my field research in a county prosecutor's office.

### The Research Setting

My research was conducted in an economic crime unit (ECU) whose tasks were to investigate and prosecute cases involving theft by deception or fraud. Typical cases included embezzlement, public corruption, insurance fraud, welfare fraud, check fraud, and business opportunity fraud (Gurney, 1982). The unit was staffed by three full-time prosecutors, one full-time investigator, one part-time legal intern, and one secretary. The five staff members were men. The secretary was a woman.<sup>2</sup>

The prosecutor's office was located in the county court building of a medium-sized midwestern city. Each attorney had his/her own office. The investigators, legal interns, and secretarial/clerical staff shared of-

fice space. Most of the attorneys' out of court work, meetings and consultations, took place in their offices. A small library was available for conferences when more space was required.

I spent an average of 15-20 hours per week in the offices of the ECU during a six-month period. My goal was to understand how the unit selected, investigated, and prosecuted its cases. I was interested in how decisions were made to pursue some cases and drop others. In order to observe this process I attended meetings between prosecutors and victims and between prosecutors and defense attorneys. I observed staff meetings during which cases were discussed and decisions made about what to do next. I went to court with prosecutors to observe bond hearings, arraignments, preliminary hearings, hearings on defense motions, and trials. I also engaged the staff in informal conversations to learn more about particular cases and how they felt about their work. In addition, I examined and coded a sample of closed case files to determine the types of cases the unit had processed since it was established in 1972.

I gained access to the setting as a known observer by means of a preexisting contact (Lofland, 1971; Danziger, 1979; Hoffman, 1980). A former colleague had conducted research there on a major case of corporate fraud and had done an excellent job of preserving the research contact. The ECU director was quite receptive to the idea of someone else conducting further research on his unit.

In addition to this contact, my youthful appearance and the fact that I was a graduate student and a woman helped create the impression that I was nonthreatening and naive (Lofland, 1971; Wax, 1971; Rovner-Piecznik, 1976; Easterday, et al., 1977). This combination may have helped alleviate setting members' initial anxieties about having an observer in their midst. However, as previously indicated these attributes are a double-edged sword. In retrospect I believe my nonthreatening attributes, especially my gender, enabled my informants to place me in roles with which they were comfortable, but which made research more difficult for me.

### *Sexual Hustling*

Female field researchers sometimes have to contend with sexual advances from male setting members (Rovner-Piecznik, 1976; Easterday, et al., 1977; Warren and Rasmussen, 1977) whereas male researchers do not report this. Sexual hustling is more likely to occur when the female is perceived as single or unattached to a male. Warren reports wearing a ring on her "wedding finger" and using the title "Doctor" to keep her marital status ambiguous (with Rasmussen,

1977: 362). Being perceived as attached may reduce the amount of hustling, but it is unlikely to eliminate it.

During the ECU study, one attorney hustled me overtly. This man was in his early thirties and unmarried. When he asked me how I was going to analyze the data from the unit's case files, I told him I was coding it in preparation for computer-assisted analysis. He immediately offered me the use of his personal home computer in his apartment. I thanked him and told him I had access to a university computer system. He persisted by saying he thought it would be much easier to work on his computer than having to compete for time on a larger system. I thanked him again and assured him I would let him know if I ever felt the need to use his computer.<sup>3</sup>

He dropped the subject for about a week and then came to me once again with a different approach. He told me he had a task for me (as if I worked for him). He needed someone knowledgeable in computers to help him write a program which could be used to analyze bank accounts in suspected embezzlement cases. He said the person who helped him could use the computer in his apartment to construct the program. I told him I could post an advertisement on campus in the computer science department if he would compose the ad. He looked somewhat disappointed and said he did not want to find someone that way and asked if *I knew* anyone who might be interested. I said I could not think of anyone offhand, but I would be willing to post the ad for him if that was what he decided to do. He never mentioned this idea to me again.

Sexual references, jokes, and innuendos were frequently uttered in my presence while I studied the ECU. I don't know if this is simply standard for that workplace or if my being a *low-status* woman triggered these remarks. However, as Kanter (1977) observes, the presence of token women sometimes leads to an exaggerated display of dominant male culture, including instances of sexual innuendo and sexual teasing.

On one occasion when I entered a room where a staff meeting was about to take place, one staff member said to another:

Hey, Bob, what does a satisfied woman sound like?

I don't know.

I didn't think you would.

On a second occasion, I was the butt of a sexual joke. I was sitting in a courtroom behind the prosecution's table waiting for a trial to begin. The ECU director turned around and observed that I was writing notes. He commented:

They'll think you're a reporter with that notebook.

What happens if they think that?

The defense will come over and try to tell you their side of the story. If they do just tell them you're from a new radio station, W I U D.

No, I don't think so, how about W K R P.

Shortly after this exchange a young female reporter who had been sitting on the other side of the courtroom, came over to where I was sitting and sat down. The director said to her: "Do you two know each other? She (pointing to me) is from W I U D." The young woman replied without a smile, "Very funny, John."

Proof that I was perceived as a sexual object by at least one other staff member came as I was concluding my research. I was in the process of conducting a final summary interview with the director when his phone rang. He had an unusual habit of holding the phone away from his ear so that anyone else in the room could hear what the caller was saying. In this instance I recognized the voice on the line as that of the unit's investigator who started the conversation by asking, "Are you finished with Joan's c\_\_\_\_t yet?" The director stumbled a bit and said something to the effect that the interview was almost completed. Neither he nor I ever acknowledged what we had both just heard.

The female fieldworker who wishes to avoid sexual advances from her informants may want to avoid behavior which setting members could interpret as indicating she accepts the role of sexual object. Some female researchers, however, have reported using their sex and sexuality deliberately as effective research strategies (Mann, 1976; Rovner-Piecznik, 1976; Easterday, et al., 1977; Warren and Rasmussen, 1977). To some extent they played along with sexual teasing and adopted the coy, flirtatious role in their dealings with certain individuals. But, there is very little discussion of the implications for their research or the ethical questions raised. Specifically, how far can one accommodate before the research is compromised—a shy smile, a little laugh? Some respondents may test the researcher's limits and lose respect for her if she does not respond in a negative fashion to their more blatantly sexual remarks.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, if one responds with too much outrage, it may damage rapport and necessitate withdrawal from the field.

Unfortunately, there are no ready prescriptions for female researchers' coping with such situations. Obviously, a modicum of tolerance is necessary with respect to any behavior respondents may exhibit, otherwise very little field research would ever be accomplished. However, the question of where to draw the line is a dif-



difficult one. Perhaps the best strategy is to acknowledge the possible complications that could develop *before* one enters the setting. For example, the female researcher should consider how a sexual proposition might be declined without embarrassing a respondent and simultaneously fostering understanding of one's researcher role. Perhaps a good outcome would be if respondents saw the researcher as a person who has sexual feelings, but who cannot act on them in this setting. Many people can understand the complications that might arise in mixing professional and personal pursuits. An appeal to the old adage never to mix business with pleasure may be a good way of declining sexual invitations without causing a respondent to lose face.

### *Assignment to Traditional Female Roles*

In addition to sexual hustling, women report other difficulties establishing a role as researcher in settings where men predominate or exert control. For example, Easterday, et al. (1977) note that female researchers often find themselves assigned to play subordinate roles as "Gofers," mascots, or surrogate daughters of paternalistic male administrators. Warren reports being cast into the traditional female role in a courtroom setting—"lower status than male, harmless, helpless, and, as Golde notes, in need of protection while not very threatening (with Rasmussen, 1977: 361-2)." In another court study, Rovner-Piecznik "discovered the mutual exclusiveness of the statuses of female and serious researcher in the minds of court personnel (1976:759)." Mann (1976) experienced considerable pressure to conform to a male-imposed definition of femininity while conducting research in a bar. Daniels' discovered in a military setting that "certain behavior was considered inappropriate or even insulting from women (1967:275)." The worst insult was to act as if she were equal to the men.

From the beginning of my association with the ECU, I was assigned to a variety of traditionally subordinate female roles. One such role was that of "cheerleader." The staff seemed to desire someone to sing their praises to the public, pat them on the back, and tell them what a wonderful job they were doing. The director of the unit made sure I was aware of any media coverage the unit received by telling me to watch him on the local news or showing me mock-ups of newspaper stories about cases the ECU was prosecuting.

Other staff members encouraged me to examine the "bigger" cases they had prosecuted. In one instance the director informed me that an ECU prosecutor, Bill, was going to court for a guilty plea that afternoon. I assured him I would be in court to observe the process. Bill,

who was within earshot of the conversation, called out from his office that this was not a good case to "show off," since it was just a simple \$10,000 embezzlement.

The attorneys often told me "success stories;" cases they had won and of which they were particularly proud. I always felt obliged to listen to these stories with an expression of awe and wonder on my face, even though I did not always find the details fascinating or share their opinion of their own brilliance. I felt my response was necessary to maintain rapport and could be seen as a form of reciprocity—trading "admiration" for information.

Being placed in the role of "cheerleader" and being expected to root for the ECU were not entirely negative. I did gain insights into the ways the staff viewed themselves and the importance they attached to their work. While it is possible that any researcher, male or female, might have been called upon to perform the same type of function, it is likely that my being a woman facilitated assignment to the role. In male-dominated organizations, one of the stereotyped roles token women are expected to play is that of a "pet" who stands on the sidelines and serves as cheerleader for male displays of prowess or brilliance (Kanter, 1977.)

In addition to playing cheerleader, I also was quickly relegated to the position most of the women in the prosecutor's office occupied—clerk/secretary. This categorization probably occurred because I began the study by examining a sample of the unit's closed case files.<sup>5</sup> I chose this strategy because it allowed me to become familiar with the types of cases the unit handled and, at the same time, become known around the office before asking to observe ongoing cases. Unfortunately, this strategy had the disadvantage of placing me in a traditionally devalued female role with which the male staff were quite comfortable. They began asking me to make notes for them about whether the files contained certain types of information. For example, the director asked me to note any cases in which the grand theft statute seemed to have been misapplied "to some 'Joe Schmo' who was caught stealing hubcaps or something," in case he was asked to testify before the state legislature on a proposed new grand theft law.

Like the cheerleader role, being placed in a clerical role was not a totally negative experience. In fact, I even volunteered to help the staff in other ways. For example, I photocopied articles on economic crime for them as I was doing my own literature review. I also stood guard over their possessions when they had to leave a courtroom. Such acts of reciprocity are part of most field studies.

The major problem with the clerical role was that it impeded my efforts to observe the staff at work on current cases. They found it easy to identify me as someone who was going to do nothing but read

through files and take notes, because that is what the majority of the women who worked with them did. However, the examination of case files was only part of my study. My major focus was the decision-making process, and I needed to observe their deliberations about ongoing cases. The longer I was confined to the role of file-reader, the more difficult it would be to make the transition to the role of observer. After almost two months of looking through case files I finally approached the director to remind him that part of my research involved observing the staff at work.<sup>6</sup> I did so with some trepidation, because I was afraid I was so identified in the clerical role that he might deny me access to ongoing cases. To my great relief he granted my request, and I attended my first staff meeting the next day.

At first I was elated about overcoming a major obstacle, but I soon discovered that my position as observer was somewhat tenuous and would remain so throughout the study. I constantly had to remind the staff that I was interested in going to court and attending meetings. In spite of the fact that I was in the office at least every other day and often four days a week, I was frequently "forgotten" when something of importance arose. In one instance the director told me I could attend a meeting involving a defendant and his attorney during which a guilty plea would be discussed. I rearranged my schedule to spend the entire day in the prosecutor's office and made certain the director knew I was there for the day. After waiting all day to be called to the meeting I finally encountered him in the legal interns' office. He proceeded to tell me about the meeting which took place several hours earlier. He said he had forgotten to call me and that I would have found it quite interesting had I been there. On a number of other occasions I was invited to attend meetings or court proceedings and later found that the staff had "forgotten" to call me when the events took place.

In addition to being forgotten, I also was given the "brush-off" occasionally when I approached a staff member for informal conversation or to ask a question. I could accept statements that they were tied up or too busy to talk with me, but I did not appreciate receiving flippant replies to serious questions. For example, in one hallway encounter with the director, I asked him how a current case was going. He replied that he was going to introduce so much incriminating evidence that a conviction would be certain. When I asked him what kind of evidence he replied, "we're going to introduce everything but sperm cells on this one." Since the case involved economic crime rather than rape, I interpreted his answer as a "don't-bother-me-now-kid-I'm-busy" reply.

I believe being forgotten and being given the brush-off were related to my being a woman. I was assigned to a subordinate status which

allowed the staff to ignore my presence when they were busy. This notion is supported by my observations of how the staff treated other women in the setting. There were ample opportunities to see how the men interacted with other females, and their discussions of cases involving female participants illuminated their attitudes toward women in general.

There were two types of women in the setting. Some women occupied traditional sex roles, such as clerk-typist or secretary. These women were treated with very little respect by the ECU staff and were frequently the targets of harsh or sarcastic remarks when something went wrong. They were automatically blamed for misplaced documents and were expected to be immediately available. They were treated impolitely and inconsiderately as servants might be (Kanter, 1977).

Other women were more like peers—female lawyers, investigators, detectives, and legal interns. These women were treated somewhat better than the secretaries, but they were still the objects of sexist remarks and jokes. One example of this treatment occurred during a meeting between members of the ECU staff and the police department's white-collar crime unit. One of the detectives was a woman. The ECU attorney in charge of the meeting said he wanted some of the detectives to pose as interested buyers to catch the perpetrators of a fraudulent vending machine sales scheme. Someone else laughed and said, "Sheryl (the female detective) would be great for the part of the gullible buyer." The other men laughed heartily. Neither Sheryl nor I laughed, but neither of us said anything to challenge the statement either.

In addition to the derogatory treatment of female co-workers, the ECU staff expressed sexist attitudes toward females they encountered during the course of investigating and prosecuting cases. Female crime victims were often the butt of jokes. During one staff meeting the case involved a woman bilked out of \$20,000 by a man who said he loved her, a gigolo case. As he described the details of the case, the ECU investigator constantly referred to the victim as this "broad," "dame," "babe," or "scag." One of the first questions asked of him by one of the attorneys was "Is she (the victim) good looking?" His reply was "Oh, she's about average or maybe a little worse than average."

The attorneys did not regard gigolo cases as either important or sensitive cases. They used them to fill in their caseloads when they were light, and they put them on the shelf when more important cases, such as embezzlements from businesses, came along. The first staff meeting I attended focused on a gigolo case. The director announced my presence to the group by saying they were not going to discuss anything sensitive, so it was all right for me to observe.

Another gigolo case involved two women competing for the attentions of a man who defrauded both of them. During the staff meeting on this case Bill made the observation that both women latched on to the man in question because they thought he would make a million dollars with some secret formula he supposedly had. Then, Bill said, they would be able to quit work, stay home and do "womanly things." At this point, the investigator on the case stood up and, in an outburst of mock protest, accused Bill of chauvinism. Bill defended himself by saying he was just "telling it like it is."

An additional aspect of this incident was that the director initially felt the case against the suspect was weak. The major difficulty was the victim's love relationship with the suspect. After several minutes of discussion on this point, the investigator mentioned that the suspect had also written three fairly large bad checks, totaling approximately \$2600, to three different area businesses. The director immediately brightened his outlook on the case and said the bad checks could be used to convince a jury that the suspect was really a "flim-flam artist." The fact that a woman had been cheated of \$10,000 dollars by this man was not as good a case as the loss of \$2600 by three businesses.

A final example of the viewpoint of the ECU staff toward women and women's issues concerns a topic somewhat removed from economic crime. From time to time the ECU prosecutors were required to prosecute noneconomic criminal cases because of staff shortages in the prosecutor's office. On one occasion the ECU director handled a rape case. This prompted him to "entertain" some of us in the office one day with what he believed was a comic routine about a prosecutor's pre-trial questioning of a rape victim. While the written version lacks the full effect of his oral presentation, the excerpt below illustrates its content:

Now, I just want to ask you a few questions before we go into court and I want you to feel free to be open in your answers because I've heard it all before. Now, did you enjoy it? Come on, you can tell me. Did you like it? Now, you say that you were standing at the bus stop when this guy pulled over and grabbed you. What did you do to make him do that? What were you doing, huh? You must've done something to make him do that! Now, what was it?

The other staff members present were quite amused by this performance, but I was not. The director had cast me in the part of the victim; he was directing the questions to me since I was the only woman in the room. I did not say anything, but I was so uncomfortable that I made an excuse to leave shortly after the performance ended. At the

time I excused the director's actions as role distancing (Goffman, 1961). I believed he used humor as a way of preventing himself from becoming too involved in the case. Now, however, I believe I excused his lack of sensitivity too quickly. A certain degree of detachment may have been necessary in the performance of his job, but such a cavalier attitude toward victims may also have diminished his efforts in prosecuting such cases.

The overtly sexist nature of many of the staff's statements and actions suggests that their treatment of me was part of this framework. But, although their treatment of all women was sexist, it was more pronounced vis à vis clerks and secretaries than it was with respect to professional women in the office. Thus, the men were both sexist and classist. To avoid this double dose of prejudice, I attempted to identify myself with the professional women in the office. Early on in the fieldwork it became apparent that the professional women were distinguishable from the working class women by their mode of dress. The professional women wore masculine-style clothing—tailored suits and slacks; while the clerical and secretarial personnel wore more traditionally feminine styles—dresses, especially those of a clinging or flowing design.

As other researchers have noted (Olesen and Whittaker, 1970; Bodgan and Taylor, 1975; Johnson, 1975), where mode of dress distinguishes personnel at different levels of an organization, the researcher should adopt the style of those with whom he/she wishes to be identified. When I first began my fieldwork, I dressed in academic garb—neat but casual (see also, Daniels, 1983). Although I knew enough not to wear my favorite faded jeans to the prosecutor's office, I saw nothing wrong with wearing my favorite faded jean skirt. After about six weeks of this attire, I was feeling decidedly out of place and made the decision to change my appearance to conform more closely to the office attire of the professional women.<sup>7</sup> I invested some of my limited funds in more tailored clothes, began to wear makeup, and started carrying a briefcase.

It is difficult to assess the impact my changed appearance had on the conduct of the research. However, the greatest impact may have been to raise my self-confidence which prompted me to press harder for access to the decision-making process. Two weeks after altering my appearance, I requested and received permission to attend my first staff meeting.

### *Reactions to Sexism: Betraying One's Gender*

Other female researchers have discussed problems in male-dominated settings, but they have not discussed how they reacted to

the treatment they received, either outwardly or inwardly. We are told what certain respondents did or said that was sexually suggestive or sexist in nature, but we are rarely told how the researcher responded to the incident. We also are not told how the female researcher felt about her response to the incident, whether she was satisfied that she did the correct thing under the circumstances or was uncomfortable with her own actions. The consequence of this oversight is that we are given a picture of the setting that is very one-sided. The researcher comes to be seen as a passive recipient of actions by setting members rather than an active participant in the interaction. Therefore, although we are learning more about the types of difficulties female researchers encounter in the field, we are not learning much about how to respond to them.

As Kanter (1977) notes, it is often easier for tokens to accept the roles to which they are assigned than to fight them. It is easier to keep silent when one is offended or insulted than to confront the offender and risk an argument. In studying the ECU, I was offended by the sexual joking and innuendos, and by the sexist remarks made about other women in the setting.<sup>8</sup> I often wished I were a more militant feminist who could lecture the staff on their chauvinism and insensitivity and change their attitudes toward women. Instead, I was always the polite and courteous researcher who tolerated much and said little. I occasionally wondered if I was betraying my beliefs and values, but I allowed it to continue.

My tolerance of sexism was based upon my gratitude toward setting members (Daniels, 1983) and my concern with maintaining rapport. I was grateful to the ECU staff, especially the director, for allowing me to study the unit. They allowed me to see and do things and gave me access to information that they would not reveal or give to everyone. Much of the information I obtained was not public knowledge. I felt like a privileged person in many respects. I also was concerned throughout the study about staying in their good graces. I did not want to be kicked out of the setting, and I did not want to be frozen out either. In spite of the fact that they "forgot" to call me for some events, they did include me in many other events. Without their continued good will, my study of decision-making would have been impossible. At the time the risks of confrontation seemed to outweigh the benefits. I therefore tolerated things which made me uncomfortable, but convinced myself they were part of the sacrifices a researcher must make.

### *Coping with Marginality: The Silver Lining*

Being marginal to a setting is supposedly the researcher's greatest curse and greatest blessing. Marginality makes one feel awkward,

anxious, and uncomfortable, but it also allows the researcher to maintain some distance from setting members which may enhance the researcher's critical insight into the dynamics of the setting (Lofland, 1971; Wax, 1971; Lofland and Lofland, 1984).

As long as women continue to be marginal members of certain occupations or professions, female field researchers will continue to experience both the advantages and disadvantages of marginality when studying such groups. Other female researchers indicate that being a woman made them marginal within the groups they studied (Papanek, 1964; Easterday et al., 1977; Danziger, 1979; Thorne, 1979). They were able to turn their marginality into an asset by maintaining a degree of detachment from setting members. This detachment provided them with insights and opportunities they could not have attained had they "gone native."

In studying the ECU I was concerned about my marginal status throughout the study. My anxiety diminished somewhat after I started attending staff meetings and other events, but I was still plagued by frequent doubts about my acceptance. I also was barred from staff meetings concerning an extensive public corruption case which the unit prosecuted during my study. I attended the only trial which took place (most of the defendants plea bargained), but I could not gather much additional information about the case until it was officially closed. The director told me I was excluded from meetings about the case because it was extremely sensitive politically. It is possible that any outsider, regardless of gender, would have been excluded, but a male researcher might have been able to establish greater rapport with the staff, earn their trust more completely, and talk his way into those sensitive meetings.

On the other hand, my marginality enabled me to examine some of the ECU's procedures from a more detached, and therefore more critical, perspective. The fact that I was permitted to observe staff meetings regarding some types of cases but not others indicates how sensitive and therefore how important those cases were from the perspective of the ECU staff. Gigolo cases involving relatively powerless female victims were open to my inspection. A major political corruption case involving males in positions of power and authority was not. It seems that the sensitivity and the importance of cases depended to a large extent on the types of persons involved in them.

The link between the importance of cases and the types of persons involved in them is better understood within the larger political context of the prosecutor's office. The Chief Prosecutor, an elected official, appointed all members of the staff, including the ECU. Everyone was expected to help the Chief Prosecutor maintain his position by doing



whatever was necessary to enhance the Chief's image as an effective crime fighter. The expectation was not only to win cases, but also to win important cases, those which might have a positive impact on the Chief's political future. Political scandals are front-page news, while stories about women being cheated of their life savings are not. Gigolo cases, therefore, were not as important to the Chief's political future as were corruption cases. Gigolo cases could be laughed at and joked about; they could be used to fill in when caseloads were light; and they could be shared with a "low-caste stranger" (Daniels, 1967) conducting a study on economic crime. The information in gigolo cases and the persons involved in them were not deemed worthy of secrecy.

If I had been a male, I might have been able to establish greater rapport with the ECU staff and talk my way into meetings on the corruption case. However, I also might have been more likely to adopt the staff's perspective on the importance of cases without calling into question the assumptions on which it was based (Danziger, 1979; Broadhead, 1980). My marginal position as a woman in that male-dominated setting enabled me to experience the distinctions first-hand by being included in the gigolo cases and excluded from the corruption case.

### Conclusion

Whenever one begins a new study in a field setting, there are always obstacles to overcome. Gaining access to the setting and establishing and maintaining rapport with members are challenging tasks. Certain status characteristics of the researcher may facilitate gaining access to a setting by virtue of their nonthreatening nature. To be a young, female graduate student definitely has advantages in a male-dominated setting. However, the same characteristics which work to the researcher's advantage in terms of gaining access may become liabilities when the focus shifts to establishing and maintaining rapport with respondents. Even if overt sexual hustling is not extensive, a variety of more subtle forms of discrimination may make the situation uncomfortable or intolerable.

Since a good researcher is concerned with maximizing access to information and activities, the female researcher in a male-dominated setting will be concerned with how much her "femaleness" is hampering her research efforts, and whether a male researcher would be granted more complete access, especially to informal sessions among male respondents. If the researcher is a feminist, her exposure to sexism may challenge her values, since she must decide whether to

openly object to sexist remarks and treatment or try to ignore such insults and say nothing in order to maintain access to the setting.

The female researcher who turns to the fieldwork instructional literature for guidance on these problems will find very little. The instructional literature assumes that the fieldworker is "Anyman" and that the interaction between researcher and setting members takes place in a context devoid of gender and sexuality. Moreover, some of the general advice given to field workers may be inappropriate or even detrimental to the efforts of female researchers to establish themselves in a setting.

A better strategy is to examine the fieldwork accounts of women who have conducted research in male-dominated settings. From these accounts, one can gain insight into the kinds of difficulties which might arise and prepare some potential responses to them. Obviously, the female researcher cannot prepare for all eventualities, but at least she can enter the setting with some idea of how she might respond to sexist remarks, sexist behavior, and sexual hustling.

Upon entering the field setting, the female researcher should try to project a professional image. Initially, professionalism will be conveyed mostly by outer appearances, including clothing styles and other accoutrements, such as a briefcase. However, the researcher's professional style will also become evident through her ability to express herself articulately, her demonstration of research skills, and her ability to convey knowledge concerning her chosen field of specialization.

The female researcher should also observe how other women are treated in the setting. If male setting members treat all women as inferiors, continually make sexist statements, and sexually proposition female employees, chances are that the female researcher will be subjected to the same types of behavior. If, on the other hand, the men treat their female counterparts with respect or as equals, the female researcher is likely to be treated the same way.

If the female researcher does have to face the situation of not being one of the guys, the advantages of marginality should not be overlooked. Being marginal provides one with the distance that can lead to insights those more personally involved may not be able to achieve. The female researcher's sense of marginality may enhance her awareness of prejudice and discrimination in the setting.

Ultimately, fieldworkers cannot expect to control setting members' behavior. In spite of everything a female researcher does, gender issues may create insurmountable problems in the field. When this occurs a difficult decision must be made—whether to stick it out and salvage the study, if possible, or abandon the research site and begin

anew elsewhere. The researcher must weigh the importance of the study against her own integrity and dignity. Neither sacrifice is a pleasant one, but so long as women remain in subordinate positions within society, they will continue to face such difficult choices in the field.

### Reference Notes

1. After several months of such put-downs, I had a conversation with the director in which I politely, but firmly, pointed out that legal concepts are just as much jargon or "baffle-gab" to nonlawyers as sociological concepts are to nonsociologists. Although he did not accept my argument at the time, he told me several days later that he thought I had made a valid point. The disparaging comments about sociology persisted, but they became less serious and more like teasing.
2. At the time of the study the prosecutor's office was staffed by 45 attorneys, 9 investigators, 43 secretarial and clerical personnel and 6 legal interns. All secretarial and clerical positions were filled by women. Two attorneys and one legal intern were women; the rest were men. Administrative responsibility for the office was vested in the Chief Prosecutor and several assistants, all of whom were men.
3. Whereas the classic hustling line used to be "come over to my place and see my etchings," today it might be "come over to my place and see my computer."
4. Martin (1978) has discussed the dilemmas faced by female police officers who must respond to this type of sexual hustling from male colleagues.
5. Warren (with Rasmussen, 1977) reports that while conducting record searches at a police station, she was treated the same as the other secretarial staff—like a non-person.
6. I informed the director at the beginning of the study that I wanted to observe as many aspects of the unit's operations as possible. He agreed at the time that I would need to make such observations in order to understand their work.
7. As Golde (1970) has noted, female researchers may feel greater pressure to conform to the host culture's norms since most cultures tolerate less deviance from women.
8. The sexism I noticed was directed toward other women. As mentioned previously, I did not see the staff's treatment of me as sexist until after I left the setting.

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