

Negotiating Power and Narrative in Research: Implications for Feminist Methodology

Feminist research begins with women's own perspectives and experiences. Insofar as women's perspectives and experiences are subordinated in scientific inquiries and the larger culture, feminist researchers seek to eliminate hierarchies of knowledge construction.¹ We are sensitive to our place in such hierarchies, so we disclose the multiple, historically specific positions we hold in relation to both study questions and participants. That is, we attempt to "write ourselves into the analysis" (Gilgun and McLeod 1999, 185).² In this article, I maintain that we have not written ourselves in nearly enough.

I conducted qualitative interviews with men who had committed serious violent crimes, including crimes against women—rape of girls and women and assault and murder of female partners. My aim was to understand the men's self-presentations and accounts of violence. Men's vantage on their violence against women is a relatively new feminist topic (Anderson and Umberson 2001, 359). Such research tends to probe the justifications and excuses (e.g., victim blaming) of men who violate women.³ Their violence is seen as embedded in broader discursive power relations. Yet the influence of the power relations of the *research* on men's accounts is largely ignored. Studies of accounts of male violators typically do not focus attention on the contexts in which men present these accounts. As a result, the humanity of the men, including their own prob-

This research was supported by funding from the Office of Research and Advanced Studies at the University of Cincinnati. An earlier draft of the article was presented at the 2003 Society for the Study of Social Problems annual meeting in Chicago. Sincere thanks go to Kip Williams, Javier Treviño, Emily Gaarder, Russ Immarigeon, and Kimberly Cook for inspired recommendations and to Mary Walker for editorial assistance.

¹ For example, Ann Oakley (1981), Judith Stacey (1988), Pamela Cotterill (1992), and Diane L. Wolf (1996) have engaged with this issue.

² See also Harding 1987, 1991; Reinharz 1992; and Norum 2000.

³ See Scully and Marolla 1985; Dobash and Dobash 1998; Gilgun and McLeod 1999; Anderson and Umberson 2001.

lematic position vis-à-vis certain masculinities, is neglected (Jackson 1991; Connell 1995).

Consider Jane F. Gilgun and Laura McLeod's (1999) sensitive report on the accounts they heard during interviews with rapists. They reveal their emotional reactions to these accounts and the limits of their empathy. They were "horrified" (185); the men's "way of thinking was for the most part outside [their] frames of reference" (175). In conceptualizing their informants' accounts as ways of thinking, Gilgun and McLeod treat them as having an existence independent of the interview. In other words, the men are reporting on past gendered action. For example, Gilgun and McLeod comment that an informant known as Tim used contradictory discourses in describing his sexual seduction of boys. He "trained" his victims but also convinced himself that the relations were "mutual" (180). Gilgun and McLeod presume that Tim "believed his own constructions" (181). But Tim is plainly presenting an analysis of his *past* thoughts (even if they are also his current thoughts) when he relates: "That further reinforced my belief that they wanted to be doing it" (180). This remark clearly displays a "consciousness of narrativity" (Polonoff 1987, 53). However deviant or abhorrent his past actions, Tim is conforming to the contemporary demands we make of offenders—demands of self-disclosure and self-critique (Fox 1999; McKendy 2004).

The sort of reflexivity evident in Gilgun and McLeod's analysis is of the weak variety, where the analyst eschews the pretense of neutral observation yet fails to situate the research within "larger social, economic, and political currents" (Harding 1991, 162). Consequently, the men in Gilgun and McLeod's study appear simply as conduits for oppressive discourses. Not surprisingly, Tim's power strikes the first author as "diabolical" (181). In qualitative studies of female offenders, feminist criminologists tend to emphasize marginalization in past and present contexts (e.g., Chesney-Lind 1997; Girshick 1999; Gaarder and Belknap 2002). It is my observation that feminist researchers are not "doing feminist methodology" when it comes to studying violent men.

Should they? I am convinced that we should also expose the marginalization of those violent male subjects who speak to us. We should assimilate into our observations their current social situation, which necessarily includes the present research interaction (Schiffrin 1996; Chanfrault-Duchet 2000). But then we can no longer say that we are "collecting" stories from our informants (Miles and Crush 1993; Atkinson and Silverman 1997). And so, whereas feminist criminologists have protested depictions and stories of female offenders that are told in words that are not those of the offenders (Farr 2000; Belknap 2001), I question the possibility of eliciting

the offenders' own constructions of events. A context of discursive control shapes the accounts that offenders give.

Criminologists access the power of the state to identify violent persons. Political and economic interests shape definitions of violence. The physical harm caused by, say, corporate actors is typically not called violence (Barak 2003, 25). If criminalized at all, such actions tend to be treated with leniency (Reiman 2001). Research on violence is thus already patterned along class lines. The researcher is implicated in a system of selective classification of and punishment for "violence."

Those who perpetrate interpersonal violence, such as sexual assault and murder, are predominantly men (U.S. Department of Justice 1999). Women researchers, myself included, are unlikely to feel at ease interviewing men who have raped and murdered who are *not* under state-derived control. We rely on such control for our safety. The fact that we most often speak with captives has ramifications that remain unexplored. For example, incapacitated offenders may be more apt to rationalize how and why they came to inhabit this social (i.e., stigmatized) and geographical (i.e., institutional) space. The deprivation of male autonomy, given cultural definitions of masculinity, may result in insistent efforts to control the other during the interview, a matter I will explore presently.

Whereas the social status and location of the informant convey macrolevel effects on his or her speech, there are also microlevel features of talk with which we wield power. As instigator and director of the interview—with any subjects—the researcher sets the agenda, even if it is one of apparently unstructured talk. The "point" of the interview is conveyed to subjects through apparently extraneous features of the study, such as the informed consent form. The researcher's interest in certain topics affects his/her listening responses, which indicate whether and when enough has been said for the goal of addressing the research question (Schegloff 1982). The specific purpose of the interview—whether conveyed directly or indirectly—influences narrators in the selection of "facts" about "what happened."⁴

In this article I consider these various influences as I argue for strong reflexivity in studies of gender relations. We should include as data the context of the interview, including the resources that allow the interview to take place at all. The interviews I conducted with "violent men" acted as settings for the constructing of narratives. I was a collaborator in these constructions. Hence in this article, I critique the possibility of an eman-

⁴ Further, we tell our stories in terms of socially available categories of personhood and behavior (Wiersma 1988; Cruikshank 1990; Gergen 1992; Chanfaut-Duchet 2000). These are only partly transmitted at the level of local exchange.

cipatory methodology as I analyze the situated, collaborative negotiation of narrated identities in research interviews with men. I conclude with a call for a reflexivity that attends to dynamic relations of power within the research setting.

Accounts are situated

People's accounts of their behavior are always responses to being held to account (Scott and Lyman 1968). Thus, when offenders tell us why they offended, they are not just voicing an internal attitude about their prerogatives. They are also responding to those circumstances that allow us to ask why.

Typically, academics who wish to interview "violent offenders" have access to persons who have been sanctioned and incapacitated. After all, it is difficult to locate, obtain institutional approval to interview, and secure a sense of safety with "violent offenders" any other way. Those labeled violent are marginalized along race and class lines to begin with (Reiman 2001); criminal justice processing further marginalizes them. Having been defeated—held accountable, as it were—by "society" and the justice system, they resist defeat through their accounts.

The power abuses that make the interview possible (e.g., incarceration) are implicated in the abuses of men during the interview (e.g., sexualizing the encounter), which are implicated in the abuses they report on—that is, their stories of violence. In attempting to understand men's violence, researchers have focused mainly on the latter sort of abuse—men's neutralizations of violence. They have not attended to the active use and flow of power through research. In the following pages I approach the context within which I encountered violent men as essential grounds for understanding the men's self-reports.

Cross-gender studies of men generate unique concerns about research practice. But these concerns articulate a familiar theme in feminist scholarship—that we study people's actual life experiences (Smith 1987). The actual life experiences I investigate in this article are those of the research encounter. The men I interviewed used the interview, an event regulated by the state in every case, to present themselves as masculine and to contest subjugation by the state.

Theorizing masculinity in the interview

In the Western context, hegemonic masculinity "emphasizes practices toward authority, control, independence, competitive individualism, ag-

gressiveness, and the capacity for violence” (Messerschmidt 2000, 10). According to James Messerschmidt’s structured action theory, masculine resources and situational opportunities affect how one may present oneself as manly. Messerschmidt defines masculine resources as follows: “Masculine resources are contextually available practices (e.g., bullying, fighting, engaging in sexuality, and acting like a ‘gentleman’) that can be drawn upon so that men and boys can demonstrate to others they are ‘manly.’ Resources appropriate for masculine construction change situationally” (12).

Constraints on masculine resources are various. Messerschmidt (1993) emphasizes economic marginalization due to the social relevancies of race and class. Physical control is another constraint. For individuals under physical control, such as prison inmates, regulation extends to the most basic aspects of social life (Goffman 1961; Ross and Richards 2002). Deprivation of autonomy blocks resources—for example, the ability to spend time as one wishes—for doing hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, the deprivation of autonomy is a direct “masculinity challenge” (Messerschmidt 2000, 13) in that it contests a key characteristic of masculinity—self-determination.

Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman observe that “any social encounter can be pressed into service in the interests of doing gender” (1987, 138). Accordingly, a research interview may serve as a site of gender activity. Michael L. Schwalbe and Michelle Wolkowicz explicate the multiple meanings of the research interview for masculinity in particular: “An interview situation . . . is an opportunity to signify masculinity inasmuch as men are allowed to portray themselves as in control, autonomous, rational, and so on. It is a threat inasmuch as an interviewer controls the interaction, asks questions that put these elements of manly self-portrayal into doubt, and does not simply affirm a man’s masculinity displays” (2002, 205–6). Most of the men in my study were under a high degree of criminal justice control. Whereas criminal justice control thwarted some resources for signifying masculinity, the interview offered others, such as my need for their assistance with the study.

Cross-gender research

Enactments of presentably male or female behavior occur in all research. Cross-gender studies simply bring the processes of gender accomplishment into plain view. Much as anthropologists are better able to discern cultures not their own, gender dynamics are clearer when research interviews are cross-gender. The literature is replete with discussions of how doing cross-gender research affects the amount and type of data one can obtain. One’s

gender and other social statuses influence esteem, trust, and rapport, which facilitate or thwart access to data.⁵ The effects of research-situated gender relations on the data themselves are not widely researched.

Christine L. Williams and E. Joel Heikes (1993) observed that male nurses said different things about job discrimination depending on the interviewer's gender. The nurses framed issues concerning gender and work differently to Williams (a woman) and Heikes (a man). For example, the men "interviewed by a woman tended to suggest that male-female differences were not inevitable" (Williams and Heikes 1993, 284). In contrast, "the men interviewed by the man tended to speak categorically about men and women, using an us-versus-them framework" (285). That is, the male subjects conveyed a more profeminist viewpoint with the female researcher—a sort of social desirability bias (Babbie 2001).

Where the research questions concern identity and self-presentation, gender relations in research more obviously shape data. Terry Arendell's (1997) interviews with divorced fathers confirm that male research participants use the female interviewer's gender to make particular claims about themselves. Arendell notes that participants "were both presenting themselves as masculine persons—defined by them as being competent, assertive, controlling and rational—and working on proving their manhood during their conversations with me" (347). Through concrete verbal and physical gestures, such as ordering for Arendell in restaurants, the men reestablished their identities—under siege due to the divorce experience—as responsible and in control.

Harold Garfinkel (1967) considered how Agnes, a transsexual, actively achieved a feminine identity. Agnes accomplished hegemonic femininity, including deference to men, through Garfinkel's research encounters with her. Garfinkel's masculine conduct plainly facilitated that accomplishment: "There were many occasions where my attentions flattered her with respect to her femininity; for example, holding her arm while I guided her across the street; having lunch with her at the Medical Center; offering to hang up her coat; relieving her of her handbag; holding the automobile door for her while she entered; being solicitous for her comfort before I closed the auto door and took my own seat behind the wheel" (133). Garfinkel held Agnes accountable for accomplishing femininity to the extent that he expected her to take his chivalrous moves for granted. Garfinkel did

⁵ Lois Easterday et al. (1977), Carol Warren and Paul Rasmussen (1977), Neil McKeganey and Michael Bloor (1991), Javier Treviño (1992), Rebecca Horn (1997), Sally Brown (2001), and Martha Huggins and Marie-Louise Glebbeek (2003) consider how gender has influenced their access as researchers.

not highlight his own gender as consequential; the study assumes the traditional standpoint on gender as female gender. It provides a rare illustration of researcher-subject collaboration in gender accomplishment, and the influence this collaboration has on study findings. Informants and researchers use their gender relations with each other to affirm an appropriately gendered self.

Methods

Sample

Social service organizations working with convicts and ex-convicts in New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania referred research participants to me. Over a period of nearly three years I interviewed twenty-seven men. They had committed assault (eighteen men), manslaughter or homicide (nine), attempted murder (two), robbery (eleven), rape (four), and attempted rape (one). The majority of the men were convicted of one or more of these crimes; two had been arrested but not convicted. Most had committed more than one of these offenses in their lifetimes. Seven of the men said they had assaulted their female partners. In addition, one murder and one attempted murder were perpetrated against female partners. Based on self-description, twelve of the men were African American, nine were white, three were Latino, two were biracial (one black-white and one black-Latino), and one was of East Indian descent. Most of the men told me that they had grown up in poverty.

Getting to the data

All but one of the research participants were interviewed on one to four separate occasions. I tape-recorded most of the interviews. An important exception concerned Kevin, who was on death row during the study period.⁶ Kevin was allowed to place collect phone calls, each as long as fifteen minutes, at times designated by prison administrators. I took careful notes on these phone interviews. In addition to nine phone calls, I sent Kevin three letters with questions, and he replied with four letters.

Each interview tended to last from one to three hours. Most of the interviews included only the participant and myself.⁷ However, agency

⁶ All names of research participants are pseudonyms. I sometimes go by the name Lo.

⁷ There were three exceptions. The telephone interviews with Kevin were supposedly monitored by the prison administration. Wayne, a deaf man, was interviewed three times in the presence (i.e., with the assistance) of a sign language interpreter. James spoke to my class, which included nine other people.

personnel were usually close at hand, beyond the doors of the rooms where interviews took place. The interviews were for the most part unstructured. Prior to conducting any interviews, I developed a limited number of standard questions, such as “Do you see yourself as a criminal?” These were designed to prompt talk of how the men perceived themselves, their lives, and their offending behavior. I did not tell research participants that I was interviewing men only, nor did I tell them that I was interested in male gender.

The informed consent form stated that the purpose of the research was to “learn more about people who had been involved in violent crime.” It also stated that the informant may be asked about experiences he had as a child and as an adult, related to crime and other life events. I disclosed that I was a graduate student and that the study was part of my graduate work. Informally, I told each informant to share whatever he would like to with me. My analysis of my transcripts revealed that I tended to question informants about their current status (e.g., how much time he had left to serve) or most recent offense to begin the conversation. Later in the interviews I was more apt to use prompts that directly addressed identity. I also questioned many of the informants on their reasons for and feelings about their crimes.

Data analysis

My analysis proceeded in several steps. My overall method was one of grounding theory in the data—that is, coding qualitative data in terms of emergent categories and, as coding proceeded, making theory out of the most widely applicable categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I imported the transcribed narrative data from Microsoft Word into N5 (NUD*IST), a software package for analyzing qualitative data.

The first step of the analysis involved coding all of the data according to any themes that seemed sociologically interesting. This was a first pass, and it helped to familiarize me with the men’s stories. In time I restructured the themes to reflect progress in my thinking about the narratives. I began thinking about comparisons and contrasts—between people and between selves (over time)—as essential to the coherence of the narratives and thus to identity. The new structure consisted of eight branches, including social distinctions that the men drew, the men’s talk about their true selves, talk about the self over time, ways in which the men evidently used the interview, and ways in which I evidently shaped the interview. These branched into talk about their moral reform, their moral stability over time, and their ongoing struggles against some internal or external

entity. In time, this second generation of themes emerged as the most important for determining what their stories were about.

First, I saw the men's stories as about either change or stability in the moral self. That is, the protagonist of the stories had been reformed since the most recent crime or had stayed the same basic person over the life course. Whether one claimed moral reform or moral stability, as I came to call this schism, the protagonist was cast as a hero in his own life, battling adversaries in an ongoing struggle. Particular adversaries varied. They were internal (e.g., drug addiction) and external (e.g., the criminal justice system). The criminal justice system was by far the most common adversary identified.

A more general theme was the accounting for one's deviance (or for having been labeled as deviant). Marvin Scott and Stanford Lyman (1968) propose that accounts of deviance are fundamental to human social life. Every other theme I identified could be seen as a contribution to such an account. Here, then, was an elementary effect that I had on the narratives: the presence of an audience prompted the delivery of an account.

My coding to this point had failed to capture fully the interaction between researcher and participant. I was missing a sense of the flow of the interview, including the texture of interaction. The next step in my analysis was to create memos on each research participant based on the original narrative. In each memo I documented the progression of all interviews with that participant. The memos read like a running summary of, first, how the man's narrative was unfolding and, second, what was, apparently, going on between us. The memo also contained rudimentary analyses of the interaction. An excerpt from a memo based on my interview with Hector follows. Abbreviated words and references have been spelled out; otherwise no changes have been made to the memo as recorded.

Of record of violence, Hector says "I just defended myself—when I had to," giving a clear statement of victim identity. Interruption, someone enters to check on whether I'm "all right," I say yes "we're all right" but thank the visitor. Change pronoun to "we"—suggesting that I am aligned with Hector, also that I need no protection from him? I continue questioning: has he had felonies. He answers that he doesn't even know what felony is, thus presenting as an innocent in regard to the criminal justice system. I empathize, bridging social distance: neither am I clear (what a felony is), but I try to explain.

These memos helped me to study communicative exchanges in context.

Here I backed Hector's claim of being a noncriminal, denying the blatant message disseminated within the institution—that its inmates pose a constant threat to others' safety. Thus I discovered that the men's narratives were co-constructed in the interview. A focus on two research participants—Dwight and Kevin—allows a close demonstration of this finding.

Dwight: "I was the man of the house"

As of our first interview in July 1999, Dwight had recently been released from prison. Dwight described a lengthy and serious criminal history. He started using alcohol at age ten. By age thirteen he had committed burglary, car theft, and robbery and was using cocaine and heroin. At fourteen he was arrested and incarcerated for larceny. His case was transferred to adult court, and he served a year and a half in adult prison. Not long after, at age sixteen, he was arrested for armed robbery. This case was also waived to adult court, and he was sentenced to prison for ten years. While incarcerated, he stabbed a fellow inmate who had allegedly thrown hot water on him.

Dwight's recent prison sentence reflected two distinct criminal charges. The first charge was for his rape of a female acquaintance. Ironically and tragically, while the court case for the rape was pending and Dwight was at home awaiting trial, his girlfriend's teenage daughter was raped. Dwight shot the neighbor who had raped her. The man survived, and Dwight was charged with aggravated assault. Dwight pled guilty to both the rape and the aggravated assault and served fifteen years in prison. I met Dwight following his release. He was on a two-year parole term.

Dwight described his childhood as difficult. His father abandoned the family when Dwight was five. His mother and nine siblings were left with little income. Poverty led to alienation at school; he discussed the shame of not having new clothes to wear like his peers. Truancy and drug and alcohol abuse were, he said, the result.

Dwight's mother had a boyfriend who was verbally abusive toward her and the children. During one altercation, his mother swung an axe at her boyfriend. Dwight said that his own aggressiveness evolved from exposure to such brutality: "That's what trigger my anger towards a lot of situations." Hostility and low self-esteem led him to exploit others. He thought only about how he could manipulate others, "cause I didn't care nothin' about myself. . . . I was screwed up inside." In time, he proudly adopted a criminal identity ("think I'm bad"), such that delinquency had positive appeal. He got "pleasure just doin' somethin' wrong."

In describing the crimes he had committed over the years, Dwight

tended to focus on his past sexual assaults. He said that he frequently bought women alcohol until they were inebriated and then had sex with them; he admitted that the women often did not know what they were doing. Dwight recounted his recent rape as perpetrated against a female acquaintance who, earlier the same evening, wanted to have sex with Dwight. He had declined but later raped her forcibly. He described the rape as a power struggle. He was “playin’ her game,” something he attributed to socialization into a certain subculture: “When a person live out in the street, they play so many games.” Dwight caused his victim serious physical injury. Assessing the consequences, he reported that “the hospital bill they say was \$10,000” and “they say I bruised her up. They say her face an’ her body.” He added: “I screwed her life up.”

Dwight also caused great harm to the man—a neighbor—who had raped his girlfriend’s daughter. After finding the teenage girl bleeding, he left the apartment to purchase drugs, get high, and then force his way into the man’s apartment, where he shot the man in the groin. On leaving the apartment, he handed \$2,000 to the rapist’s “old lady” for hospital bills. He explained to me that he knew that the shooting would cause financial loss to the family. Dwight was also mindful of its negative consequences for him—he would “never step foot back on the ground”—which was reportedly why he got high just before perpetrating this violence. He was steeling himself for what he “had to do.” I asked if he felt he had a choice regarding the shooting, and he answered that he very much loved his girlfriend, whose daughter had been victimized. He also stated: “I was the man of the house, so I had to do what I had to do.” Dwight depicted himself as having lacked personal agency in the past. His decisions to offend were the result of social expectations as well as his own inner demons.

Dwight’s recent prison sentence—his longest ever—was initially very difficult for him. He was frequently placed in punitive segregation for selling drugs, refusing to work, and for what he termed “disrespect.” A turning point came after a parole board hearing at which he was refused release. He realized that he needed to make dramatic life changes. He started attending prison-based Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He shared with me autobiographical writings from prison treatment programs, in which his Muslim name is recorded. Dwight commented that many men knew him in prison and that they assigned him a name that suggested sensitivity. Offering an example of his humane prison persona, he said that he would often advise a new young inmate on how “to keep his manhood.” Dwight also participated in treatment programs for sex offenders. He spoke of sustained dedication to his twelve-

step program and the lessons he learned in sex offender treatment. He came to believe that rapists are “sick” but also that men generally need to respect women’s wishes and feelings.

Dwight’s story was one of essential goodness that had been corrupted early by the social and psychological consequences of economic hardship. Low self-esteem turned to anger and a criminal identity. He became exploitative in all his relations with other people. In particular, he was brutal and unfeeling toward the women he sexually assaulted. In recounting specific crimes, Dwight explicitly condemned his sexual assaults on women. He condemned other past crimes more vaguely, sometimes neutralizing acts of aggression as mandated by a manly role. When I asked why he participated in riots at two different prisons, he explained that during a riot the behavioral code is “every man for himself.”

Now directed by new understandings about how to behave, Dwight’s moral life is not without conflict. Dwight asserted his moral rectitude in current struggles against authority figures. Specifically, he took issue with parole conditions and house rules. When recent urine tests were positive, he claimed that he did not know why. He was sanctioned with an earlier curfew time. In trying to explain why the tests were positive, he told me: “I got heated up. An’ me an’ the house guy—we got [into] a confusion, you know, misunderstanding, almost argument.” Dwight also mentioned that his parole officer “wrote him up” for lateness to an appointment. Dwight focused on the officer’s ill will: “He was trying to—ya know—cross me up an’ send me back [to prison]—but I didn’t let it happen.” In both examples Dwight focused on his struggle for freedom and not on his troublesome conduct.

Dwight’s story is gendered. The early impetus to delinquency was due to his father’s abandonment and his mother’s victimization. His offenses were, to his mind, accomplishments of masculinity. Before, he obtained gratification in living up to a tough image and in dominating women. Noteworthy is how Dwight channeled a certain liberal feminist discourse on gender. In Dwight’s narrative, he has been socialized to withhold feelings and to disrespect women. Both emotional repression and disrespect for women led to offending.

Dwight’s reform is also gendered. Lessons in changing his “thinking errors” and reconnecting with his feelings have purportedly instilled in him a more respectful attitude toward women. Dwight now lives peacefully with people, women in particular. He provided several examples of coming to women’s assistance. He advised one woman to leave a neglectful boyfriend; he advised another to pursue a college degree in defiance of her husband’s wishes and family demands. He enjoyed nothing more than to

talk to women about his new sensitivity. He told a woman he recently met at a social service agency: “When I went in, ya know, I thought all females was a sex object. Yeah I say, now no woman out here on the street got to worry about me puttin’ a hand on ’em.” These days Dwight struggles to be recognized as a good man.

Dwight’s storytelling: “I don’t take away what y’all got between your legs”

The interview and I were tangibly assimilated into this story of who Dwight is today. Dwight verbally positioned me as female “other,” whom he had formerly abused and whom he now assists: “[Now] I don’t take away what y’all got between your legs.” Dwight enacted a helpful, peaceful self with me in the interview. For example, he repeatedly encouraged me to use his personal documents for my study: “Because, see, it’s a lot of stuff in here—will help you analyze.” He was also one of several men who seized an opportunity to advise me about something, where the advice was specifically related to their criminal pasts. Helping me was an active reversal of past exploitation—a redemptive act (see Maruna 2001). Dwight’s advice was directed toward me as a woman unschooled in the ways of men. He advised me about holding onto personal power and satisfaction in romantic relationships with men:

Dwight: Ya know, you a good person. So, I’m hopin’ that you don’t get—you’re stuck with some (unclear) guy—you know wha’m sayin’ . . .

Lois Presser (LP): [Chuckle.]

Dwight: . . . [who] don’t want you for—don’t want you for you.

Dwight’s protectiveness may be seen as the accomplishment of a chivalrous masculinity—“acting like a ‘gentleman’” (Messerschmidt 2000, 12). Interviews with all twenty-seven of the research participants suggest that chivalry was a popular way of “doing” gender in the interview (Presser 2004). Such chivalry positions the female other in terms of hegemonic femininity, encompassing vulnerability and heterosexuality.

But the darker reality of chivalry is its assertion of authority. Not surprisingly, Dwight struggled for control during our interaction. He instructed me on helping him to violate the rule against smoking inside the house.

Dwight: See? Then I started uh—understandin’—under. . . Did he [halfway house director] come back? Did he come back?

LP: No. Why?

Dwight: Did he come back?

LP: No.

Dwight: S' anyway, 'scuse me, I got to have a cigarette.
LP: Oh.
Dwight: You see a car comes, just say: "Y'all put it out!"
LP: Oh, 'cause you're not supposed to smoke?
Dwight: Not here.
LP: Oh, y-you don't want to go out there?
Dwight: No, it's t-too wet out there.
LP: It's too what?
Dwight: Too wet.
LP: Oh.
Dwight: Been rainin'! You been in here all—it been rainin'!
LP: Oh, it has been raining. Are you sure? Maybe you should . . .
Dwight: No! I'm straight!
LP: Really? 'Cause if it's a rule, you know, and you just finished saying how you like people to keep you on the straight track.
Dwight: Mm-mm!
LP: All right. I'm gonna let you do what you want to do. [Looking out the door at a sickly looking cat in the small backyard.] You know what, that kitty has got to go to a vet!

I have presented this lengthy exchange to demonstrate the interactional nature of the power dynamic. It is nothing short of a struggle for control. Dwight enlisted me as his accomplice in breaking a house rule. I took up the position of the halfway-house administration, advocating their rules ("Maybe you should . . ."). After he resisted, I tried to convince him to change his mind by presenting myself as someone who might help to keep him out of trouble. When I could not gain his compliance in this way, I gave in by agreeing not to contest the rule violation ("I'm gonna let you do what you want to do") while reasserting myself as an authority figure: *I am the one to let him do as he wishes.*

Upon data analysis, to my chagrin, I found that the men were not the only ones to position me in gendered ways. I did so myself. To ease tension after the power struggle, I accomplished femininity by conveying empathy for a small animal ("You know what, that kitty has got to go to a vet!").

Kevin: "I'm under constant attack"

My contacts with Kevin—phone calls and letters—lasted a period of eight months. Kevin had been on death row for eighteen-and-a-half years as of our first phone interview. In the course of robbing a convenience store, he was alleged to have fatally stabbed the clerk. Unlike Dwight, Kevin

denied having committed any violence. He maintained that an accomplice stabbed the store clerk.

In the interviews, Kevin confided far less about his life and his criminal history than Dwight had. He did reveal that he had grown up poor, with a violent father. He reflected on his mother's experience: "I was six months old when my father used to beat my mother real bad. She had a hard life." Kevin tended not to emphasize the difficulty of his own upbringing, however. Instead, he romanticized the tough world in which he grew up. Whereas Kevin alluded vaguely to past misconduct, including involvement in serious crime, he depicted himself as consistently decent. He spoke of abiding by largely undefined "codes of honor" all his life.

During our first interview, Kevin presented himself as an advocate for other death row inmates. Nonetheless, he said he considered only a few "brothers." He presented himself as braver and stronger than other people. He remarked that he has "always dealt with things, faced them head-on." Given his unique character, he looked out for others. For example, he refused to let his family visit as often as they wished because he believed the prison visits upset them.

Kevin depicted himself as embattled—an enemy of corrupt authority. There was a tangible basis for this identity. Kevin's federal appeals had repeatedly proven unsuccessful in overturning his murder conviction. He bristled at being treated like "a mad animal" in prison (first interview). He resented that the media had depicted him as "this monster" (second interview). He mentioned his intent to file a slander suit against the local newspaper for "calling [him] a punk and a coward for eighteen-and-a-half years," thus "attacking [his] character." In a letter Kevin sent me in month seven, he described himself as being "under constant attack."

The coherence of Kevin's self-identification as an upstanding person was served by sparse detail of what he had done to harm other people. Offering few specifics, he paid tribute to a nonconformist past enjoyed with male companions. Kevin conveyed pride in his past involvement in a macho subculture. He wrote me in month seven: "I can remember cruising around getting high listening to *Rumors* [record album]. Back in those days a guy could womanize and really not worry about catching anything. Unless he had someone at home [line drawing of frazzled-looking face]. I've never played the cheating game, but some of my old partners used to."

In the world Kevin evoked, risky misconduct was a game. Neal Shover's (1996) study of persistent male property offenders suggests that the phenomenological rewards of offending ("life as party") include its role in

crafting a certain identity. Shover explains: “Prospective actions are evaluated not only in terms of the amount of trouble they may bring but also for what success at them would suggest to others about one’s identity or character. These matters can be extremely important, particularly for men whose investments in legitimate identities and lines of action are shallow and unrewarding” (109). Jack Katz makes a similar but less materialist argument—that violence gives action “a seductively glorious, rather than a mundane, indifferent, significance” (1988, 128). Indeed, Kevin was nostalgic about the weighty trouble he and his partners had caused. It signified masculinity to him, then and now. The following extract is from our eighth phone interview (month nine):

LP: What were you like before you went in?

Kevin: Typical boy. I did stupid stuff. [Laugh.] The more something would make my heart pound, the more I wanted to do it. Yeah. Just a typical guy. . . . As I think I told you, I was used to living a certain lifestyle. I grew up in a certain kind of world. Petty crimes just wasn’t what I was involved in.

Kevin stressed the fact of having been consistently maligned and misunderstood by others. Being misunderstood was for him a gendered phenomenon. Men stigmatize him in a play for power, while women marvel at his steadfast morality. In the aforementioned letter of month seven, he wrote:

As I have always said, I am more innocent than what people believe. However those that have placed me here know I am innocent, but they along with their followers need to keep the dirt flying to conceal the truth. Because of my codes of honor my hands have always been tied. Not to [*sic*] long ago a precious woman I know got on my case about my principles and said things along these lines, what have my codes gotten me, have they kept me warm at night? My principles have gotten me nothing. I have thrown my life away and have hurt everyone I have ever loved and cared for, that have loved and cared for me. I live with this guilt of hurting them. I can not put this sorrow into words, other than it’s been killing me. I’ve even been getting flack from some because I knew how those in this case were trying to save themselves and placing me in the hot seat and yet I still wouldn’t say anything. I couldn’t. I wouldn’t be saying what little I have said, if these clowns hadn’t of come forward with what they have. I know it doesn’t make sense. I’m a educated man, I speak a couple of languages, bla, bla, bla. But logic doesn’t apply

to principles. Principles apply to the man. Well Lo honey, I have gone on enough.

Those who “conceal the truth” about Kevin for their own advantage—accomplices, prosecutors, judges, and journalists—are mainly men. Female intimates recognize his principled nature but worry that it does him harm. “Principles apply to the man” indeed.

As I show in the next section, Kevin positioned me as just such a female intimate, a witness to his ultimately tragic integrity. Kevin inferred this attitude on my part; I did not articulate it. I abstained completely from challenging Kevin on all that was missing from his narrative, including an adequate account of the robbery-turned-murder that led to his execution. It seemed cruel to disrupt the fragile coherence achieved by a man so close to death. I also refrained from challenging him on patently sexual comments. Notes that I took after our third phone interview (month two) read as follows:

He talks about his innocence and a noncontextualized effort by Somers County prosecutor’s office to “characterize” him a certain way. He continues to make the point that he is being “mischaracterized” by saying he is actually “a nice guy” whose large size and tattoos make him appear to be “a terrible person.” Kevin emphasizes his intelligence (“Hell, I’m better educated than most of them”) as part of who he is. Collaboration between us is evident, and implicit references are made to where I stand. Flirtatious/gendered reference to his having been good-looking when he first got to prison 18 1/2 years ago. The flirting accelerates after I return with an autobiographical reference to being not much older, after which he says: “Oh you’re a baby. You’re a minor gettin’ old guys arrested.” (Hence, over time, there is an increasing daring on his part with his flirting.) There is, I notice, an effort by Kevin to ask me about myself, and a corresponding effort by me to change topic back to him. Kevin asks me if I’m working on my doctorate and then if he is “my thesis.” I ask Kevin about his writing.

Kevin’s writing was the site of a different sort of masculinity, one involving intellectual competence.

Kevin: So I guess you didn’t like what I wrote in that letter?

LP: Why? No, I liked your letter. Did you get the letter I wrote back?

Kevin: No.

LP: Oh. I wrote you back. Are you saying that because you didn’t get

my letter back? No, I liked what you wrote. You're very provocative and you write very well.

Kevin: Hey [with glee]—you're a college professor, right? Ay!

Kevin was gratified by my supposed approval of his written work, given my social status as a professor. Kevin resented being cast as a stupid person and distinguished himself from others in terms of intelligence. In his letter of month seven, he wrote: “You know I'm not the average bone-head in prison.” The clearest indication of Kevin's ideal persona came during our last conversation (month nine), when I asked Kevin how he wanted to be remembered. He replied: “I think you've known me long enough and spoken with me long enough to know that I'm not some kind of uneducated monster like they make me out to be.”

Kevin's story is one of being miscast as a lesser person—even a non-person. He constructs himself as an exceptional man. His alleged innocence of the murder for which he was condemned is a platform for presenting himself as misunderstood and heroic. Yet Kevin claims to have once participated in a highly masculine world of misconduct. That world was regulated by moral principles that Kevin commends but does not detail.

Kevin's storytelling: “It's part of life, baby girl”

Kevin incorporated the interview and me as the interviewer—features of storytelling—into his narrative. For example, Kevin used my middle-class credentials to resist the stigma of being uneducated (“You're a college professor, right?”). More generally, Kevin cast me as a partner in his struggle against a corrupt justice system. In fact, Kevin knew me to be an anti-death penalty activist. At the start of our third interview (month two), Kevin asked, “Did you go to the meeting last night?” taking for granted that I knew about a meeting concerning the status of his appeals. In month eight, Kevin's mother phoned me to relay a message from him: “Pass the documents that I mailed to you around campus. Have people write or e-mail the governor to order a federal investigation into my conviction and the Somers County prosecutor's office.” Clearly, Kevin spoke of the battle for his life as one I waged with him. The interview was a forum for maintaining his innocence and reflecting on it with a supporter.

In addition, the interview was a forum for his being a good man by helping a woman in need. First, Kevin helped me by participating in my research. After amending my informed consent form (adding a particular disclaimer) before signing it, Kevin wrote: “This way I can still assist you

with your study, and protect myself.” Second, Kevin helped me emotionally, by protecting me in the battle against his executioners. At the close of most of our phone conversations and in his letters to me, he urged me to “stay strong.” During our penultimate phone conversation in month nine Kevin commented that I sounded sad on the phone. He then comforted me, saying, “It’s part of life, baby girl.” During the next phone call he raised the topic of my ordeal: “Lo, now the last time I spoke with you it was kind of hard on you.” Concerning his impending death, Kevin disowned his own feelings, a typically masculine feat. Kevin positioned me as sensitive and assigned himself the complementary masculine role as my hero (see Connell 1995, 213). This assignment also enabled Kevin to enact a “good self” as opposed to the “monster” he was in the criminal justice system and in the media.

Kevin consistently referred to me in gendered terms, and frequently in sexual ones. Like female researchers before me, I was subjected to “hustling” (Easterday et al. 1977, 339; Warren and Rasmussen 1977, 362; Huggins and Glebbeek 2003, 371–72). Beginning in our fourth phone interview (month three), Kevin bid me goodbye with terms of endearment—“honey” or “sweetheart.” These indicated a familiarity that belied a formal research relationship. In his letter of month seven Kevin addressed me as “Dearest Lois” and wrote: “I enjoyed talking with you the other day. I enjoy the conversation of a intelligent woman.”

Our seventh interview (month eight) had Kevin comforting me about the near prospect of his execution: “Don’t worry. I’ll be out there stalking you before too long! I like you college girls.” He joked in the same way during our very last talk: “I’ll come back and stalk you. I’d make a good stalker. Then you’ll say ‘Mommy, Daddy!’” (mimicking a young female voice). Accustomed to thinking about the men’s claims to moral decency, I was unsure how to evaluate Kevin’s stalking threat. Was he playing with—resisting—his categorization as evil? Since he had already established himself with me as righteous, it seemed unlikely that he would feel the need, now, to assert that claim ironically. Instead, I believe that Kevin was conveying a message of power over me. The state, Kevin’s master for more than eighteen years, was to control his life even to the point of terminating it. Denied his freedom to the end, Kevin constructed a fantasy of hegemonic masculinity through posthumous aggression.

Like Dwight, Kevin laid claim to a masculinity that both protects women and rules them. I did not call Kevin on his sexual remarks. I may have been concerned that he would terminate our contacts if I challenged him—a risk Andrew Herod (1993, 314) acknowledges with regard to researchers contesting subjects’ sexist attitudes. I also pitied him. For the

most part, though, I was responding to my training in qualitative methods to be tolerant and to let Kevin say what he would without intervention (Schatzman and Strauss 1973). I was beholden to Kevin's executioners—to state power—for this “passive” stance.

Conclusion

Increasingly, women are studying violent men to understand their “vocabulary of motives” (Mills 1940) for controlling women. Like other female and feminist researchers (e.g., Scully and Marolla 1985; Gilgun and McLeod 1999; Anderson and Umberson 2001), I heard justifications and excuses for violence, including avowals of one's innocence, depictions of a provocative victim, and minimizations of the effects of violence. These accounts served a general presentation of self as both decent and masculine, though, as in Kevin's case, not so masculine as to authenticate one's dehumanization.

The accounts were situated within the particular power relations of the research. The interview provided participants with certain resources for presenting themselves as good and manly. Dwight and Kevin enacted their decent selves with me. In doing so, they positioned me as a heterosexual female. For Dwight this meant that I needed his strength and guidance concerning relations with men. Kevin positioned me as an object of fantasies of domination. The fact that Kevin and I were both white may have contributed to his intimacy with me.

I was also subject to mild coercion and threats. Dwight and Kevin used the research interview to “have their way” despite control by the criminal justice system. I propose that such behavior be considered as defiance of the justice system supported by the general acceptability of men ruling women. The female interviewer of male informants, who wields discursive power and whose research is permitted if not authorized by the state, is seen to be stepping out of place.

The interview was the site of behavior consequential to the men's narratives of self, including my responses to the men's power plays. Therefore, in the ongoing project of understanding gender relations, we must go beyond simply writing ourselves into research interviews to writing our *exchanges* into them (Tedlock 1991; Twyman, Morrison, and Sporton 1999). Missing from qualitative studies of men by women is a systematic investigation of how relations of power between interviewer and participant become part of interview data. Feminist researchers in particular ought to consider these “research effects.” Concrete settings of interaction

provide and withhold opportunities for and challenges to gendering behavior. The research interview is one such setting.

Stories are constructed situationally. The stories Dwight and Kevin told were structured to elicit both my affirmation of their accounts of deviance and my need for their protection, advice, or consolation. Kevin's story was also fitted to me as an anti-death penalty activist and as a woman; both locate me as a source of understanding and empathy. I agree with Judith Stacey on the need for "a feminist research that is rigorously self-aware and therefore humble about the partiality of its ethnographic vision and its capacity to represent self and other" (1988, 26). For me this translates into a specific methodological process—a close and deep (multilevel) examination of the "how" of talk, and not just the "what" (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). If methods are to cohere with critical theories of power, we must integrate research-situated dynamics into data analysis. This sort of strong reflexivity will better illuminate how gender is "continually being forged, contested, reworked and reaffirmed" (Jackson 1991, 210). The researcher's goal is not to emancipate *the* authentic story of the narrator—none exists—but rather to expose as much as she can of the relations that influence the construction of the story that is told.

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