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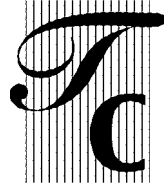
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Women studying violent male institutions:

Cross-gendered dynamics in police research on secrecy and danger

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Abstract

To promote discussions of methodological issues associated with cross-gender research in criminology, we focus on two women's studies of Latin American police. This uncovered five working propositions about women studying organizations dominated numerically and structurally by men. First, feminist scholarship provides some guidelines for such research, but its applicability is neither direct nor immediate. Second, for example, much cross-gender research requires negotiating and maintaining power differentials between researcher and researched. Third, particularly in cross-gender research on secrecy and danger, inter-gender dynamics can thwart some research objectives and promote others. Fourth, inter-gender dynamics can complicate the ethical dilemmas associated with research on powerful agents and agencies of the state. Finally, the emotional reflexivity associated with such inter-gender research is epistemologically relevant for understanding research outcomes.

Key Words

emotions • gender • police • power • secrecy • violence

Feminist methodology provides useful guidelines for women researching women, a case of intra-gender research. One important objective of such research methodology is to eliminate or reduce power differentials between researcher and interviewee. In Pamela Cotterill's words, 'This model aims to produce non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships which have the potential to overcome the separation between the researcher and the researched' (1992: 594). Stanley and Wise (1983) find unjustifiable women researchers treating their interviewees as 'object'. Yet Stanley and Wise (in Cotterill, 1992: 603) suggest that a respondent is always vulnerable—whether a woman or a man—suggesting limits to reducing power differentials between researcher and researched.

In response, many feminists argue that the only honest approach is for a researcher to make herself just as vulnerable. The goal for some feminist researchers is to develop a 'friendship' with female interviewees, because as Diane Reay argues, 'Distancing of the researcher from the researched results in their inscription as "other"' (1996: 64–5). This can presumably be eliminated by an interviewer's investing her own identity in the research relationship and 'by answering respondents' questions, sharing knowledge and experience [with them], and giving [them] support when asked' (Cotterill, 1992: 594). In her study of 'motherhood', Ann Oakley (1981), for example, was open to interviewees taking the initiative in defining her relationship with them; she encouraged and was asked personal questions, a process that established 'a relatively intimate and non-hierarchical relationship'. Oakley argues that this fostered the success of her study (1981: 47). For Oakley, therefore, the goal of feminist research is 'progression to friendship . . . [because] . . . the pretense of neutrality on the interviewer's part is counterproductive: participation demands alignment' (1981: 46).

For Rapoport and Rapoport (1976: 9), this alignment can be accomplished through 'collaborative research . . . [that] engages both the interviewer and respondent in a joint enterprise' of forming a relationship with one another such that research methods are jointly chosen, objectives are identified and the researched assists in interpreting data. Some feminist critics of such a 'collaborative progression toward friendship' have pointed out that women's relationships are structured by more than gender-class, ethnic/racial and age differences may in fact complicate a 'progression toward friendship'. There are a number of other drawbacks for the researcher in becoming an interviewee's friend, for friendships too can be exploitive and manipulative on both sides. And the interviewer-as-friend can be pulled into the interviewee's discursive universe in a way that hinders going beyond surface presentations and appearances (see Cain, 1986; Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1990; Cotterill, 1992; Phoenix, 1994; Reay, 1996).

But while it may be valuable in research 'by, on, and . . . for women' (Stanley and Wise, 1983: 17) to reduce power differentials between researcher and researched, is this strategy practicable, productive or safe in women's research on men? Lorraine Gelsthorpe (1990: 92) maintains that

it is quite one thing to break down power differentials between women researchers and their female interviewees and quite another to do this when a female investigator's interviewees are men. Developing this critique, Maureen Cain (1986: 262) argues that while some people are "entitled" to become research subjects, others should legitimately remain 'objects' of research. Cain explains that if she were to interview members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) about their organization and its activities, it would be neither productive nor useful to engage these men in feminist 'collaborative research'. As Martha Huggins (1998) found in several interviews with IACP members, allowing these police officials to guide the subject and course of her research and structure how their involvement in Latin American police training was to be written (something that they very much wanted to do), would have produced a version of IACP police assistance to Latin America that privileged their keeping their secrets over Huggins' discovering them. Cain is correct that some interviewees must remain objects of study, with hierarchy in such cases being necessary and legitimate.

But does hierarchy shift in the process of conducting research? Many feminists (see Oakley, 1981; Gelsthorpe, 1990; Cotterill, 1992; Phoenix, 1994; Reay, 1996) have pointed out that over the course of a research project, power relations between researcher and researched may change such that at some points the researcher has more power over the researched, whereas the interviewee has more power at other points. This is as true for intra-gender (Cotterill, 1992; Reay, 1996) research as for cross-gender research (Cunningham-Burley, 1984; Gelsthorpe, 1990), as some scholarship has already demonstrated and to which this analysis may contribute as well. Leveling power relations between researcher and researched could in fact disguise power as interactive and negotiated and as shifting throughout an interview.

The ways in which cross-gender interviewer/interviewee power negotiation can complicate ethical and safety issues and affect a woman's conducting research have seldom been explicitly elaborated for cross-gender research. Some aspects of this were considered in Lorna McKee and Margaret O'Brien's (1983) research on fatherhood and in Gelsthorpe's (1990) study of men's prisons. However, neither of these explicitly elaborated the implications of gender and gendered power for research ethics and for a researcher's affective relationship to interviewees, to herself and to the research project. Reflexivity that combines subjective emotional feelings with 'objective' data is often seen as unscientific—a premise of positivism roundly criticized by many feminist methodologists.

Feminist critics of positivism (Reinharz, 1979; Jaggar, 1989; Krieger, 1991; Campbell, 2001) maintain that 'feelings, . . . beliefs, and values . . . shape . . . research and are a natural part of inquiry': 'Emotions influence our research, and our research can affect us emotionally' (Campbell, 2001: 15). Consequently, feminist researchers explore their own research experience, including feelings and emotions, rather than dismissing these as

unscientific and irrelevant. Their objective is to 'record the impact of the research on themselves' (Gelsthorpe, 1990: 94), a strategy used by Rebecca Campbell in an analysis of women interviewing female rape victims. Recognizing that scholarship on some 'topics—trauma, abuse, death, illness, health problems, violence, crime [can touch] . . . emotional nerves within the researcher', Campbell (2001: 33) argues that these subjective responses are legitimate aspects of research, as our analysis here hopes to demonstrate through its discussions of inter-gender power, struggles over secrecy, management of danger and negotiated ethics.

Women researching men

Within the context of a study about danger, violence and secrecy, Martha Huggins, Mika Haritos-Fatouros and Philip Zimbardo (2002) began, in 1993, interviews with Brazilian police who had been torturers or assassins during Brazil's 21-year military period (1964–85). A middle-aged US academic and principal and primary interviewer for the team's study, Huggins had already explored violence and crime in Brazil for 18 years.

In 1998, Marie-Louise Glebbeek (2000, 2001, 2003) launched her study of Guatemala's newly organized Civil Police force. As a young female doctoral student from the Netherlands, her objective was to examine the impact of democratization on political state police organizational climate and operations. When Glebbeek's research began, her exposure to Guatemala and its police was primarily academic.

Setting aside the obvious differences between the two researchers—e.g. age, experience, length of time previously in the particular field—they actually shared a number of important status characteristics in common: both of us were academic women and Caucasoid foreign nationals within our Latin American research settings. We were either primarily (Glebbeek) or exclusively (Huggins) interviewing men. We sought information on things held secret and therefore had to overcome difficult research hurdles before our study could even begin. The most central of these hurdles was discovering how to penetrate the sheath of secrecy that stood between ourselves and our research objectives. Along these lines, before entering the field, we each prepared, as far as we could predict or imagine them, for the problems associated with securing interviewees and getting them to tell their stories. However, once in the field, our problems expanded far beyond our initial expectations.

As research complications mounted, we each tended to personalize our data collection problems, assuming that they were unique to place, situation, interview technique and specific interviewer/interviewee dynamics. It was only after our research had ended—as a result of exchanging information about each other's research experiences—that we recognized that a number of problems which we had considered purely personal stumbling blocks or advantages were very likely general correlates of secrecy, com-

pounded by gender and its intersection with age, nationality, class and race/ethnicity. While we still recognize that the impact of gender on research and research outcomes cannot be established outside a comparative analysis of male and female researchers (see Gelsthorpe, 1990), our initial discoveries suggest the role of various socio-cultural constructions of female gender on research processes—a subject that certainly deserves future comparative analyses and incorporation into methodologies about cross-gender research.

Contextual backgrounds

In 1993, when Mika Haritos-Fatouros, Phil Zimbardo and Huggins met in São Paulo to seek interviews with police who had tortured or murdered during Brazil's military period, several unexpected realities of the field made it clear that their sample 'wish list' would be exceedingly difficult to obtain and pursue. Not only were they and others reluctant to identify former 'violence workers', as we labeled our prospective police interviewees, but when we did find them, these police did not want to be interviewed. Trying to be as invisible as possible, the violence worker perpetrators sought to put that part of their lives behind them.

Facing a set of similar challenges, in 1998, Marie-Louise Glebbeek began a four-year study (1998–2002) of the newly established Guatemalan Civil Police (PNC), created after the December 1996 peace accord¹ between the Guatemalan government and the former guerrilla group, *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG). In Glebbeek's words, 'I was launching my anthropological investigation at a historic moment of democratization in Guatemala, with the goal of documenting the objectives, implementation and consequences of Guatemalan police reform from a variety of perspectives.' It complicated Glebbeek's research that, besides needing to penetrate a police wall of silence, she had to interview police and non-police groups with conflicting ideologies and practices.

One set of interviewees, the Civil Police, had members who had violated or were currently violating human rights. Another set, the non-governmental human rights organizations along with MINUGUA, the United Nations Verification Commission supervising the Guatemalan peace process, were documenting and denouncing these and other Civil Police illegalities. A third set of interviewees, the Spanish Civil Guard (*Guardia Civil Espanola*) that was training Guatemala's new Civil Police force, was professionally beholden to a fourth set of interviewees, the European Union officials who were funding and monitoring *Guardia* training. A final group of interviewees, the general population, could be or might have been victims of police violence.

One result of interviewing such potentially disparate and incompatible groups, organizations and interests was that, on any given day, Glebbeek would hear accounts that severely clashed with one another. One day, for

instance, she interviewed a representative from MINUGUA who described democratic policing as demonstrating respect for human rights—e.g. using dialogue and mediation to solve conflict rather than violence and repression. Later that same day, a Spanish *Guardia* police trainer explained that contemporary democratic Spain was ‘worse off’ than it had been under Franco’s dictatorship—when criminality was repressed by hard-handed authoritarianism. The police trainer considered this old-style policing as positive, an attitude that he may have communicated to his Guatemalan trainees. Because of the necessity to give each group’s position equal time, Glebbeek always felt pressured to choose between each group’s different world view, with each believing that its version of ‘reality’ was correct and that the other groups’ were distorted.

Power and gender in the field

Before her first research trip to Guatemala, doubting that officials of the new Civil Police force would let her study their institution, Glebbeek secured what seemed a valuable research contact, set up through the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, where she was preparing her doctoral dissertation proposal. However, she learned very quickly that this Guatemala City contact was useless: because the Guatemalan research institute had not studied the Civil Police organization, it asserted that it could not help. Left with no advance contacts, Glebbeek had to develop a list of interviewees on her own, with an eye to locating someone who could arrange a meeting with a Civil Police official. However, one of her first contacts was with MINUGUA, an organization unlikely to provide any introductions to a Civil Police official: the Civil Police were as critical of MINUGUA, as MINUGUA was of Civil Police reform.

The first big break came from Dutch Embassy officials who were in contact with Spanish *Guardia* officials. Through the Embassy’s local associates at the European Union, an interview was granted with a Spanish *Guardia* official. But, perhaps because this official had been ‘strongly encouraged’ to facilitate Glebbeek’s research, he initially resisted doing anything for her: a man feared by most NGOs, the *Guardia* Colonel let Glebbeek know that her Spanish was terrible, that she was naive and ignorant and that the project would be a disaster. Yet despite the Colonel’s uncooperative bluntness, he eventually facilitated research at the Civil Police Academy and at a Civil Police precinct.

At her first meeting with the Spanish *Guardia* Colonel, Glebbeek had explained that she hoped to conduct research at the Guatemalan Civil Police Academy. She wanted to start her Civil Police ‘career’ where every Guatemalan policeman begins it:

The Spanish *Guardia* Colonel introduced me to Police Academy staff, who then introduced me to the Academy’s Director. With everything apparently in order, I went to the Civil Police Academy for my first day of field work:

I was to become a 'student' in the Academy's Fifth Class of new recruits. Arriving at the Academy's gate—bolstered by the confidence that I had properly prepared for this day—I was stopped and told that I could not enter. After some minutes of talking and explaining, I was escorted to an education department official who solved the misunderstanding by providing a letter authorizing my research. This experience drove home to me once again the power of others over my research.

In theory, at the Academy, Glebbeek had ample opportunities to observe and interview recruits. In fact, fitting interviews into her and the recruits' daily schedules was difficult. As a full participant in many Academy training activities—marching to breakfast, lunch and dinner, and attending the theoretical, practical and self-defense classes—Glebbeek had trouble fitting interviewing and observation into her and other students' schedules.

Interviewing the female recruits² was much easier than obtaining and conducting interviews with male recruits, instructors and officers. During the afternoon siesta, Glebbeek rested in the female barracks and chatted informally with the women, reducing formal differences between herself and them as they styled each other's hair and talked about common interests, an example of Oakley's (1981) 'progression to friendship'. From these informal conversations, Glebbeek then segued into formal interviews—asking about the women's motives for joining the Civil Police, their experiences at the Academy and their professional aspirations.

Getting these same questions answered by male recruits, instructors and officers was much more difficult because the Academy's inter-gender interaction rules prohibited men and women from getting to know one another outside official learning settings. Since Glebbeek did not want to break Academy rules, it was only possible to build rapport with the males when such interaction was officially permitted—at a formal meeting outside of class. But such meetings did not lend themselves to establishing the kind of rapport that she had with the female recruits.

As a result, most interviews with the males that Glebbeek had known at the Academy had to be carried out after her Police Academy field work had ended. It was then that she learned that, as inhibiting as the inter-gender interaction rules had been for establishing the rapport necessary to carry out her Police Academy research, these rules had shielded her from unwanted personal advances by male police and officials. Such advances would seriously complicate her post-Academy police precinct research, a gender-related problem exacerbated by Glebbeek's need to penetrate a police wall of silence about abuses.

Indeed, the road to further research was far from clear. Being foreign, young and a woman made Glebbeek feel extremely vulnerable at the predominately male Police Academy and precinct. Likewise, Gelsthorpe (1990: 95) and her female research associate remember feeling 'quite out of place' at a Birmingham (England) men's prison. It magnified Glebbeek's

own feelings of vulnerability that she was unable to think of any way to protect herself if a research situation got out of hand. One idea was to hire a male research assistant, but she thought that the police would be more trusting, and tell more confidences, if she worked alone. In the end, the main precaution that she took was to enroll in self-defense classes and purchase a mobile phone—apart from trusting luck.

While physical danger was ubiquitous during Glebbeek's field work, the most pervasive daily challenge was simply having prospective interviewees take her seriously.

It was extremely difficult to get the Director of Civil Police to give me an interview; it took several weeks just to get in to see him. It took months to make appointments for interviews with government and political and police officials, only to find these canceled or the official failing to show up.

Male researchers have recounted similar experiences, but certain routes for getting interviews may be more available to men than to women. For example, several male researchers have confided to Huggins that they get interviews with police and political officials by inviting them out for a drink. As one scholar explained, 'I just get a few drinks under a man's belt and he tells me all that I need to know.' This option was not available to Glebbeek and Huggins, without risking an increase in the problems that could threaten their professional status and personal safety.

Yet, one problem that Glebbeek struggled with constantly, the lack of seriousness accorded to her and her study, actually opened some avenues to information. In her words,

I could just show up at officials' offices without an appointment—something that presumably a naive young foreign woman 'would do'—take them by surprise, use a little charm—something that they expected a young woman to do—and get an interview on the spot. Somewhat later, after I had gained access to a police precinct, I was allowed to navigate relatively freely, perhaps because, as a young woman with imperfect Spanish, I was considered unthreatening.

Still, at the same time, a series of on-going complications were associated with Glebbeek's being young and a woman. Most interviews had to be held, for privacy reasons, during a policeman's off-duty hours, often resulting in an evening appointment. Such meetings were frequently misunderstood as a 'date'. Especially the middle-rank police officers made remarks about Glebbeek's personal appearance or 'availability': 'What is the color of your eyes?' 'Are you a natural blonde?' 'What are you doing later today?' 'Do you like to dance?' Glebbeek was unprepared for such comments in her professional role:

Over and over again, I had to explain that I was not 'available' and that I was solely interested in the interviewee as a Civil Policeman. Yet because my study also dealt with the person behind the uniform, I had to ask personal questions—resulting in my having to balance a thin line between an

interviewee's personal and strictly professional interests. Nonetheless, police interviewees construed my personal questions as wanting to be romantic.

Huggins had a different experience with male torturers and assassins.

The most challenging aspect of my research was not associated with interviewees' interpreting my behavior as an opportunity for romantic contact, probably due to my being middle-aged in an extremely youth-oriented culture, or a combination of this and my having secured some key interviewees either because they attended a university course that I was teaching on comparative policing, or because I was referred to a policeman by another interviewee who was his trusted friend. Perhaps, as an academic known to have studied Brazil for decades, and my being in a position of authority, leveled the power differences that might have otherwise contributed to male police taking less seriously my scholarly status as an interviewer—a distribution of power that I was not willing to abandon for a 'collaborative research' agenda with these men.

The most demanding aspects of Huggins' research³ on torturers and murderers were locating, interviewing and listening to torturers and killers. Before entering the field, Huggins and her research colleagues had worked out a method for indirectly finding serially violent police. It was assumed that there was no direct way of securing police interviewees who had tortured and murdered. Huggins' team's indirect strategy for netting possible violence workers was to limit the sample to police who had been in units known to have carried out the heaviest repression during Brazil's military period.⁴ It was reasoned that a policeman who had been in such a unit, in a country dominated by a National Security ideology, would have either himself committed extreme violence or been present when violence was taking place.

But the police whose names were actually already on human rights groups' published lists of known torturers and murderers were simply unwilling to be interviewed, exercising their unchallengeable power over a researcher wanting to learn about them and their misdeeds. Most of these men, successfully retired, certainly had good reasons to feel abandoned by a police institution that had failed to come to their defense against human rights groups' and journalists' 'persecution' of them. But by self-censoring their disclosures about violence they seemed to protect the very police institution that had 'abandoned' them. Having already experienced public exposure and socially and sometimes even professionally negative censure for their violence, these former police feared new problems if their interview somehow became public, even though they were assured that any reference to their interview would maintain their anonymity.

Suspecting that those who did not identify as strongly with their police organization might talk more openly about their violence, Huggins also sought interviews at a prison for incarcerated police—even though such police had not been incarcerated for having tortured or murdered during Brazil's military period:

It was my initial assumption that those no longer in policing would talk more openly about their own and others' atrocities. In fact, an interviewee's openness did depend upon how he had left his last police position—successfully retired or humiliatingly expelled.⁵ However, overall, there was equally great reluctance among interviewees—whether in the police, retired from policing or in prison—to disclose their own and their organization's secrets.

Police who talked most openly tended to have moved farthest away from their prior police identities. For example, Jorge, an imprisoned 'born-again' former executioner, wanted to be interviewed about his past because he now saw himself as 'a different person under the Lord'. In contrast, Vinnie, although expelled from his Militarized Police force and also incarcerated but not a Pentecostal, was very guarded about his participation in hundreds of death squad executions.

While the need to maintain secrecy clearly had a great impact upon interviewees' willingness to disclose secret information, Huggins also wondered if her being a woman, along with other related status characteristics, might be interacting with secrecy to simultaneously grease some tongues and silence other ones. Huggins discovered that a combination of her gender, 'insider knowledge', professional status, class, color and temporary residence in Brazil—the latter making her a cultural 'outsider'—very likely combined to help secure some interviewees and to produce among them some greater openness and some silences. For example, it very likely contributed to interviewees' openness that Huggins was not Brazilian and therefore would presumably be taking their interview disclosures away to the United States.

While the interviewees were assured that I would not use their real names in any research report, it could have increased interviewees' confidence that before any book could be written, I had to spend a good deal of time in my own country, rather than staying in Brazil where I could come into contact with Brazilian journalists or human rights activists who would want my information immediately. In other words, my status as a cultural outsider may have made interviewees more willing to open up to me. Yet some interviewee information very likely came more slowly because of concern for my 'feminine sensibilities', as defined in Brazil, than if I had been a man.

It is possible that the relative absence of graphic descriptions of scenes of torture or murder resulted from the male policemen's belief that a woman should not hear such things. At least one interviewee said so explicitly. However, at the same time, being a woman may have led to Huggins' being seen as more 'forgiving' and 'nurturing', possibly inviting some interviewees to express stronger emotions about their violence (e.g. crying) that they might not have shared with a male interviewer. This seems to have been one of Gelsthorpe's (1990: 97–8) experiences in her study of male prisoners.

By contrast, Huggins' non-gendered academic 'insider knowledge' about

policing, both in Brazil and elsewhere, may have led to her acceptance into interviewees' work worlds as a partial professional 'insider'. In a variety of cultural settings it has been found that, if those interviewing police are recognized as 'insiders' (with police of course considering themselves the most legitimate insiders), the interviewer will be more readily accepted by prospective police interviewees. While an academic specialist on the police may not ever be a 'real' insider, having any kind of respectable insider knowledge was perceived by Brazilian interviewees as preferable to being a total 'outsider'. Just the same, whatever academic knowledge of policing Huggins could demonstrate to her police interviewees, a woman researching a predominantly male institution may still have been limited in how much she could ever be considered a full occupational insider.

Nevertheless, the fact that Huggins was primarily an academic, rather than a human rights activist or a journalist, clearly opened some doors: at least half of the interviewees remarked that they would accept being interviewed by Huggins because, as an academic, she was 'objective', while journalists and human rights activists 'are not'. This greater trust in university academic interviewers was also found in Payne's (2000) research on men in Latin American 'uncivil movements'. However, if an academic is willing to use journalistic exposé methods that confront interviewees with talking or suffering even greater stigma in an article that they have not had a chance to influence, some information might be gained that 'value-free' academic research would not be able to secure. Of course, this is precisely why interviewees said that they did not trust journalists (see Huggins et al., 2002: ch. 4). Therefore, Huggins did not employ such methods with her interviewees, selecting instead presumably more ethical and subtle interview strategies.

Color differences and Brazilian definitions of color 'respectability' very likely structured Huggins' acceptability and nurtured interviewee openness. But while much of Brazil's population is 'Black' by US definitions of racial descent and generally accorded lower social status, in fact, of Huggins' interviewees all but two (neither of them atrocity perpetrators) were white or light-to-medium brown. Therefore, it is not clear how the color differences between interviewees and interviewer might have affected interview outcomes. But it is probable that Huggins' own pale Anglo-whiteness—in a socio-cultural system that values light skin and associated physical characteristics above the darker ones—may have reinforced Huggins' presumed higher status relative to that of the interviewees. The impact of such a color difference in and of itself on interviewees' willingness to participate in the study, and their openness during the interview itself, is clearly a matter of speculation at this point, though certainly of great interest.

In the end, it is Huggins' assumption that a combination of characteristics associated with her status—being female, foreign, an academic whose work was known to some prospective interviewees, of a higher social class than most interviewees and of a socially valued skin color—helped her secure interviewees and promoted somewhat greater willingness among

them to disclose valued secrets about theirs and others' police atrocities: 'Much like a bartender or beautician, I was in the role of a "friendly stranger"—a relatively unthreatening outsider to whom interviewees felt they could disclose their feelings, complaints, and deepest secrets.' Whether their assumptions were correct or not, believing them apparently led interviewees to open up to a 'friendly stranger' in ways that they might not do otherwise. While in the end Huggins could not assess precisely how gender, insider occupational knowledge, status as an academic and the combined variables of class and color, along with her position as a cultural outsider, influenced interviewees' willingness to be interviewed and shaped the amount and types of disclosures they made, the combination of these factors mostly affected interview outcomes positively.

Coping with secrecy

Entering the Guatemala City police precinct where Glebbeek was to conduct interviews filled her with doubts and ominous questions. Would police be open about things normally held secret? How could she be objective with police whose organization had been responsible for great atrocities—murders, mutilations, torture, disappearances? Would the police be objective? She recognized that entering secret police worlds would require strategy, stealth, perseverance, and focus:

I would have to be keenly aware of interview atmosphere and the timing of questions. Whether an interview was formal and structured, or informal and ad hoc, would depend upon the situation. On several occasions, I had prepared a formal interview, but discovered that informality was more appropriate: A few jokes and 'chit chat' offered a greater possibility of getting my questions answered. When an interviewee felt at ease, he opened up more and this contributed to a successful interview.

These extensive preliminaries were just one more reminder of the interviewees' power over an interviewer.

In order to ensure the success of an interview, at the beginning, Glebbeek tried to avoid asking sensitive questions, and concentrated instead on the technical aspects of police work. When she later turned to questions about corruption or human rights violations, Glebbeek was careful not to coax statements that an interviewee would later regret or might make Glebbeek uneasy about knowing something that she was 'not supposed to know' at that time (Sluka, 1995). An important interview strategy was being sensitive to what she was 'supposed' to know and when she was 'supposed' to know it.

Of course, Glebbeek wanted such information eventually, but at a time 'appropriate' for both interviewer and interviewee. This seemed to buy Glebbeek the opportunity to ask more sensitive questions later, when her discretion had time to be established. Within this implicit power negotiation, Glebbeek kept her eyes and ears open and made mental notes of any

illegal things that she witnessed or learned about in interviews or casual conversations.

Most of Glebbeek's information about police irregularities came from a group of male police cadets whom she had known at the Academy. At regular meetings with them after their academy graduation, these confidential informants spoke freely about abusive colleagues and police corruption, including, but not limited to, the purchase of ranks and paying to pass Academy exams. One student, in particular, provided Glebbeek with a wealth of such information; he had been transferred from precinct to precinct because of his refusal to participate in extortion and bribery—disaffection greased this interviewee's tongue.

In all interviews, Glebbeek tried to be as honest as possible about her study, but she still felt manipulative. For example,

to gain an interviewee's trust and establish rapport, I had to be sensitive to the interviewee's expectations. When I noticed that an interviewee liked to display his knowledge, as if he were a teacher speaking to a young student, I became an eager pupil. When I recognized that an interviewee was probing my academic knowledge of policing, I adopted the role of an expert, showing that I had good academic knowledge about police institutions. When an interviewee was authoritarian, I became subordinate. When I discovered that someone was sensitive to 'female charms', I used them.

In other words, in order to secure cooperation from the men Glebbeek was interviewing, she had to adhere to their patriarchal notions about women, something discovered by Gelsthorpe (1990) in her study of men in prison and by McKee and O'Brien (1983) in their examination of 'fatherhood'.

Yet, just the same, as time passed, Glebbeek was amazed at how freely some policemen came to speak about the sensitive topics that they had considered taboo at an earlier point in her research. After a long research association, and up to 50 cups of coffee together, interviewees had apparently ceased to be concerned about Glebbeek's writing a book about their Civil Police institution, perhaps, one of the benefits of spending years in the field. However, one drawback is that the more time spent with an interviewee, the greater the probability of his making inappropriate sexual advances toward Glebbeek, an outcome that increased that interviewee's relative power over her.

Huggins, who spent only three months conducting interviews, and only carried out one interview with each interviewee, tended not to experience problems with sexual harassment.

My biggest initial problem was finding Brazilian torturers and murderers who would grant an interview. Knowing that the majority of prospective interviewees would not grant an interview if I were to begin by informing them that the team was studying police torture and murder, I told them that we were conducting a comparative study about policemen's lives in times of conflict and crisis, which was indeed the case. I then explained that our team was examining the careers of Brazilian police who had been in service

between the 1950s and the 1980s. This too was correct because the study required information from the periods before, during and after Brazil's military regime. Only after I had established rapport with a police interviewee, usually some two hours into a three-to-four-hour interview, did I ask about a policeman's involvement in brutality, torture and murder. Even then, these issues had to be handled with great care or the interviewee would refuse to proceed further.

Recognizing that an interviewee's memory about atrocity could not be probed until the dynamic of silence that was controlling both researcher and interviewee had been penetrated, Huggins became part of a secrecy interaction that contained four elements: security measures, espionage, entrusted disclosures and post-hoc security precautions (see Tefft, 1980a, 1980b). The interviewees used 'security measures' throughout an interview to protect sensitive information and personal identity and to guard against Huggins' efforts to secure their secrets. A common 'security strategy' employed by the police denounced by human rights groups was to flatly refuse to be interviewed and then to suggest another policeman who had supposedly carried out definitively evil deeds. Throughout the process, Huggins,

had a nagging feeling that these police assumed that I was so gullible, perhaps as a woman, that I believed their story. They may have assumed that as a foreigner, I had not read Brazilian press accounts of their public exposure by human rights groups. In fact, I had read such accounts but naturally assumed it would be counter-productive to disclose this. By contradicting a potential interviewee, I might encourage his exercising his power to pull out of the interview.

A common security strategy that enhanced an interviewee's power relative to Huggins' was for him to delay revealing secrets until her *bona fides* had been established:

They would ask me about my family—'Are you married?' 'Do you have children?'—about my interest in studying the police and about my plans for publishing the study. Once the interview began to progress past this point, I used 'espionage' to penetrate an interviewee's defenses. Espionage involves finding what a secret-holder will exchange for partial or complete revelation of his information.

Because money or other material goods were not going to be offered in exchange for information, Huggins had to come up with ethical forms of what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) terms 'symbolic capital'. This included continually reminding interviewees about the importance of their insider knowledge of policing and their unique opportunity to contribute to an understanding of Brazilian police. A more subtle form of symbolic capital was for Huggins to acquiesce in interviewees' digressions, including listening to long autobiographies and unfocused self-analyses. She learned very quickly that cutting off an interviewee in the middle of one of his seeming

digressions resulted in a flash of anger and threats to cease the interview, something that is possibly more common when a woman takes charge of redirecting an interview than when a male interviewee does so. In any case, by allowing an interviewee to adorn some part of his answer—usually in response to questions about violence—in a way seemingly off the subject, Huggins could ‘purchase’ the trust necessary for securing other secrets later on.

At first Huggins was concerned that interviewees’ long digressions would never get back to the policeman’s hidden stories. Indeed, Simmel (1950) argues that the function of ‘symbolic adornment’ is to distract from the hidden. However, rather than an interviewee’s adornments wasting Huggins’ time, they signaled that she had come close to his most precious secrets:

It became clear that interviewees’ digressions were really a form of ‘entrusted disclosure’, a process of the interviewee himself setting up his account in a way that provided a favorable background for what was to follow. Sounding like pure and simple prevarication, ‘entrusted disclosure’ was used to influence my view of an interviewee as a ‘professional’ who had ‘appropriately’ carried out torture and murder. The interviewees’ ‘entrusted disclosures’ were used to neutralize the possible negative image of their past conduct and to maintain or even enhance their power relative to me. In the process, I learned what interviewees considered a culturally acceptable explanation for atrocity (see Cohen, 1993; Crelinsten, 1993; Huggins et al., 2002: ch. 11).

Interviewees used ‘post-hoc security’ measures to neutralize shame, guilt or punishment, or to incorporate Huggins into the secrecy process. For example, after one torture trainee-turned-murderer had spoken openly about the killings that he had committed in a notorious state-organized murder squad, he began looking for some poetry he had written. After presenting it as a gift to Huggins and Haritos-Fatouros, the two females in our research team, this former policeman continued to explain the violence that he had committed. He had briefly deflected attention from his bad side and used gift-giving and the social reciprocity associated with it to introduce Huggins and her colleague to his more positive side, an illustration of Robben’s (1995) ‘ethnographic seduction’, defined as employing ‘personal defenses and social strategies . . . [that lead the researcher] astray from an intended course’ (1995: 83).

Dancing with the enemy: ethical dilemmas

Personal and social memory about atrocity cannot be constructed until the dynamic of silence that controls both researcher and interviewee has been neutralized. For the researcher, this requires becoming conscious of the interviewee and interviewer identities that can reinforce certain kinds of silences. For example, if a violence worker is to speak truthfully about his

career, he must be willing to become open and public, at least to the interviewer, about his past deeds. This often means squaring past violence with the current socio-political climate and the interviewee's own, usually changed, status (Huggins 2000; Huggins et al., 2002).

At the same time, the interviewer must be conscious of bearing witness to atrocity and recognize the ways that in working to expose atrocity, an interviewer can inadvertently promote an atmosphere of silence and secrecy. For example, moral sensitivity to difficult topics can keep researchers from pursuing or probing atrocity testimonies in the first place; Glebbeek, however, strategically delayed exploring sensitive information in order to secure such information later. Furthermore, the pain of listening to violent histories can lead interviewers to distance themselves emotionally from disturbing material, something that Inga Clendinnen (1998) argues hampered research on Nazi atrocity perpetrators. And 'hierarchies of credibility' can make the assertions of violence perpetrators appear illegitimate, as Howard Becker (1967) has argued for deviants in general, and Reay (1996) discovered for race, gender and class hierarchies. Together, the factors identified by Clendinnen and Becker could lead an interviewer to fail to solicit atrocity perpetrators' stories or to mis-read and interpret their silences and responses.

But of course even soliciting violence workers' accounts far from guarantees their disclosing past atrocities. One strategy for breaking the secrecy surrounding state-linked violence, a method Huggins et al. (2002) label 'deposing atrocity',⁶ involves an intentional play on words. It suggests simultaneously the two meanings of *depose*—in legal terminology, 'to testify', and in political terms, 'to remove from a position of authority'. Accomplishing the first version of deposition leads the interviewer to solicit deponents' explanations, justifications and accounts of atrocity—getting them to testify about what they have done, how they did it and why they carried it out.

To accomplish these goals, deposing atrocity also requires overthrowing the authority of secrecy that silences interviewer and interviewee. For the interviewer, this is facilitated by taking the role of an 'onlooker witness', a phrase coined to indicate that the researcher is simultaneously inside and outside the interviewee's account. Thus, as A. Robben (1995: 84; see also Nordstrom and Robben, 1995) argues, ethnographic researchers 'need to analyze [violence perpetrators'] accounts and be attentive to [the ethnographers'] own inhibitions, weaknesses, and biases [in order to] better understand . . . both victim and victimizer'. This is essentially Rebecca Campbell's (2001) argument in *Emotionally Involved*: to understand painful subjects, a researcher needs to recognize and understand the unpleasant emotions and self-doubts generated by soliciting unsettling accounts. An onlooker witness deposing atrocity must mediate between each of two pairs of research approaches—listening without moral acceptance, empathizing without condoning—a process that begins when an interviewee account raises questions about the interviewer's own values and identity.

For example, Glebbeek received permission from a high-level Guatemalan police official to move on to another phase of her research and departed from his office feeling positively about this man.

Then, later that day, I read in a newspaper that in the 1980s the man had headed a death squad. I was stunned: how could I have had any positive feelings for such a man? These painful doubts were exacerbated when, just a few hours later, I interviewed a person whose family member had been killed in the 1980s—either by that policeman himself or by a man just like him.

Such conflicting situations and feelings made it sometimes difficult for Glebbeek to ignore her anger and remain impartial. For example, on her way to a location near her Guatemala City police precinct, the car in which Glebbeek was traveling stopped for villagers protesting along and across the road. In the dirt at the side of the road was the body of a man shot and killed by a policeman unwilling to yield to protestors; he was on his way to the same police conference that Glebbeek was to attend:

Thoughts raced through my mind: could I still go to the conference? Would it be possible for me to pull myself together and be a ‘professional’? Could I backstage my negative feelings about such police long enough to conduct interviews with them?

These challenges to Glebbeek’s research ethics were everyday occurrences. During a surprise visit to a police precinct building, a man rushed up to her and began screaming in her face. Initially assuming that this was an angry policeman challenging Glebbeek’s unannounced visit, she suddenly noticed that the man’s hands were cuffed at his back—an arrestee who had escaped from the precinct’s makeshift detention area. When a precinct policeman saw what was going on, he grabbed the arrestee and hit him violently in the face with the butt of his revolver. This shocked and disturbed Glebbeek profoundly, but there was little that she could do about it:

I felt that ethically I should have taken the side of the mistreated prisoner, but also recognized that this would harm my research relationship with precinct police. I thus ignored the situation, left the building, but resolved to incorporate this incident into my assessment of Guatemalan Civil Police reform.

On another day, sitting in the same precinct building near two police who were laughing and boasting about their work, one of these policemen, cleaning his gun, put his revolver to Glebbeek’s head, proclaiming: ‘This is how we kill’:

I remember that for a moment everyone in the room was silent, then the police exploded with laughter. I laughed sheepishly as I shook with fear, but did not condemn the policeman’s outrageous behavior—I just made a mental note to record the incident in my research diary.

Annabel Faraday and Kenneth Plummer (1986) had similar ethical dilemmas in their interviews with a pedophile. Clearly, in studies of people who may commit, or who have actually carried out crimes, the researchers must struggle with how to handle the illegalities that they observe or learn about in an interview.

Glebbeck constantly felt that she had to betray her own personal and research ethics to carry out her research. Even far away in the Netherlands, writing about Guatemalan police illegalities, she felt as if she were betraying police informants' trust—an irrational way of thinking that illustrates the conflicts inherent in adopting 'progression to friendship' in research on violence perpetrators. She had to continually ask herself how someone studying a police institution with a long history of violence and repression could become in any way partial to that institution? She had not anticipated that objectivity itself—e.g. seeing interviewees as people first and listening openly to their accounts—would pull her into the interviewee's point of view. If, as researchers, we could simply objectify and demonize the violent police we study—as they have done to their victims—this would certainly provide a check on developing feelings of humanity toward them. But, of course, demonizing and objectifying those we study would violate the most basic rules of research and ethical practice.

In the end, the most important check on Glebbeck's becoming either too partial or too negative about any of the groups that she was studying, was to engage in reflexive introspection. She questioned herself about the correct moral or ethical research course in each given situation. Such questioning was often nurtured by Glebbeck's own silences during interviewee testimonies that she found morally repugnant. During such silences that such repugnance generated, 'I would ask myself what my silences meant ethically? Did they suggest approval of an interviewee's disclosures? What did my role switching during an interview imply about my own positions relative to an interviewee's testimony?'

If researchers work alone, such personal self-examinations are frequently the only way to overcome the anxieties associated with emotionally charged interviewing, whereas researchers in a team can meet and discuss interviews and explore their feelings and reactions to interviews, as Campbell (2001) did in her research on rape victims. However, even within such a supportive group context, Campbell's team of female researchers still felt a great deal of fear and anger about rape perpetrators—emotions that Campbell describes as rooted in the experience of being a woman in a 'rape culture' where all women are rendered vulnerable to violence.

One of the most difficult things about hearing painful and anger-producing accounts is that the interviewer must find ways of keeping her own anger out of the research setting. As Huggins recounts:

I discovered in my interviews with Brazilian violence workers that these feelings could not be allowed to creep into the interview situation if the

interviewees were to continue their disclosures. I had to push negative feelings about interviewees to the back stage and deal with them later—alone in my hotel room.

One way of coping with her anger and paranoia was for Huggins to become analytical about interviewees, her role with them and their accounts about violence. By becoming analytical, Huggins could more effectively process what she was hearing:

I learned to see an interview as including real-but-shifting, as well as fictional, identities on the part of both interviewer and interviewee. I recognized that an interviewer cannot express all that she really feels and expect an interviewee to give up what she needs. Likewise, interviewees cannot disclose everything that they are and still protect their hidden identities and secrets.

Yet knowing all this academically did not completely shield Huggins from feelings of moral and ethical compromise.

For example, in an interview with Bruno, who was on a human rights group's list of known torturers, he maintained that he had never tortured anyone: 'I could not have done so because I was then warden of a prison outside the urban areas'; Bruno alleged that most torture had occurred in urban areas. Huggins knew that this claim was unlikely, because many facilities for political prisoners were in hard-to-reach locations precisely because their isolation afforded protection against exposure. Yet she did not feel it within her research role to contradict Bruno. However, by not challenging Bruno's positive presentation of himself, was Huggins validating his positive presentation of self? Was this torturer's testimony sufficiently important to warrant Huggins' becoming part of, and therefore promoting at least to some degree, albeit temporarily, Bruno's fictional identity? Was Huggins compromising her research ethics because she knew that a failure to support Bruno's identity narrative could suspend the interview itself?

These nagging ethical questions pointed to an even more formidable one: What is the appropriate role for an interviewer who deposes atrocity—'objective' observer, maintaining distance from subjects and subject-matter, or 'subjective' participant in the ethnographic world view of an atrocity perpetrator? By encouraging Bruno to continue, Huggins had allowed herself to be incorporated into what Erving Goffman (1961) would call Bruno's 'face maintenance'. This established a dynamic that moved the interview toward Huggins discovering more of Bruno's secrets through a new collaborative synthesis between herself and Bruno, an example of what Habenstein (1970) labels 'research bargaining' and an illustration of how power is negotiated in the course of an interview. It is quite clear that once the new interview equilibrium with Bruno had been established—with this troubled torturer's identity implicitly validated—Bruno was able to talk more openly about his past (see Huggins et al., 2002).

But Bruno did not get off without his own turmoil: the day after Huggins' interview with him, Bruno arrived midmorning, two hours late, to drive her to the Civil Police Academy. In a sweat on a cool day, highly agitated, smelling of alcohol, and on the verge of tears, Bruno stated that the interview had left him nervous, upset and depressed. He said that his life was falling apart: his marriage was failing, his job was boring and he had no reason to live. When Huggins asked what had happened, Bruno said that looking at his present life through the eyes of the past had made him wonder who he is today. This created an ethical dilemma for Huggins:

Bruno needed help, but I could not tell his colleagues at the Police Academy all that he had shared with me the day before to explain his present condition. However, the problem was resolved when one of Bruno's colleagues confided that Bruno had 'been very upset and troubled' for some time. Bruno's colleague had already intervened to get his friend psychological help. It was not the interview disclosure that had precipitated the emotional turmoil; it had merely refocused it.

Just the same, when Huggins recounts this interview to criminal justice scholars and students in the United States there is often moral outrage about the ethics of conducting research that so deeply upset an interviewee—even if he is a torturer. Conversely, when Huggins describes Bruno's breakdown to Latin American faculty and students—whether or not they have been, or have had a family member, victimized by security force abuse—their response is exactly the opposite: 'Such a man gave so much misery to others that he deserves whatever he gets.' This polemic notwithstanding, just looking at how Bruno's grief structured Huggins' interview with him, by sharing his discomfort with her—something that this very strictly masculine policeman would not likely do with a male interviewer—Bruno incorporated Huggins into his on-going disclosures.

Listening to atrocity

In the end, nagging questions remain about whether an interviewer can trust the accounts of police, especially those guarding secrets about their own and other police abuses of power. Does skepticism about the ability of perpetrators to be honest, along with real fear of them personally, influence what scholars research and write about them? How does the emotionally devastating impact of atrocity stories shape research narratives about state violence? Yet while seeking answers to these important questions, the researcher must carefully and persistently chip away the wall of secrecy surrounding illegal police activities.

In sharp contrast to the permissibility of research on survivors of atrocity—where an interviewer can morally accept taking simultaneously the role of interviewer, observer and victim (see Gunn, 1997; Campbell, 2001) and be morally transformed by such 'embodied' involvement in atrocity survivors' accounts (Frank, 1995; Gunn, 1997: 3)—the researcher

who deposes atrocity must solicit the accounts of morally indefensible violence perpetrators. Campbell found in her study of rape survivors, that the interviewers ‘got through’ unsettling accounts about rape by ‘checking out for a moment, filtering, selecting . . . regulating pain by limiting what you take in’ (2001: 72–3). In fact, Huggins actively engaged in this process while interviewing Brazilian torturers and assassins—shutting down emotionally during an interview in order to protect herself from what she was hearing. However, this is not without dilemmas of its own:

Was I engaging in the same kind of numbing that had made it possible for violence workers to maim and kill their victims? Did such ‘checking out’ make me into an emotionless machine capable of glossing over the objectionable content I was hearing?

A researcher’s choices in studies of violence can create as many ethical and emotional problems as they resolve. Whether the researcher is male or female may not change the moral choices, but we suggest that gender may influence which kinds of moral choices surface and how they are experienced and handled. This question can only be answered by comparative reports from male and from other female researchers.

Conclusion

This analysis has raised as many questions as it has answered. We have discovered a number of gender-related problems and possibilities associated with women researching male-dominated police institutions, especially where penetrating secrecy is a necessary outcome of such research. We have argued that, in some cases, gender-related factors interacted in our cases with such associated status characteristics as age, professional status, nationality and class/ethnicity, without being able to do more than speculate about the general consequences of such factors for all research processes and outcomes. Yet the very fact that some gender-associated and -interacting factors have been discovered in two women’s studies of Latin American police institutions suggests the importance of exploring gendered research dynamics further.

A comparative study might investigate whether male researchers have as many problems being taken seriously by male police interviewees as women researchers do. Perhaps young males who are not police themselves and who are unaffiliated with a university at the time of their research would experience many of the same problems as Glebbeek. However, it is unlikely that many male police interviewees would construe an interview appointment as the male interviewer’s desire to ‘date’ them—a dynamic that very seriously complicated Glebbeek’s research.

Perhaps, the greatest impediment to both overcoming and examining gender dynamics in criminological research is that much published scholarship does not explicitly consider cross-gender research dynamics. However, as our research has illustrated, the gendered complications faced by women

studying male-dominated and -structured institutions need not keep a researcher from obtaining a wealth of useful information. Yet for such research to be successful the researcher must recognize the gendered stumbling-blocks and develop conscious strategies for overcoming them.

Notes

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1. The 1996 Peace Accord formally ended the 36-year civil conflict and laid a foundation for extensive civil society reforms, including creating a single National Civilian Police (Policia Nacional Civil, PNC), increasing community involvement in police recruitment and creating a more multiethnic police force (Glebbeek, 2001: 437–8). These proposed changes were potentially monumental in a country that had operated for almost 40 years through a military-enforced national security doctrine.
2. While female recruits were included in Glebbeek's larger study, there were too few to include in this analysis.
3. Huggins interviewed 24 of the 27 police; Haritos-Fatouros and Zimbardo interviewed three through a male translator. Among the 27 interviewees, 14 were torturers and/or executioners, the 'violence workers' who were the focus of the study.
4. Such units included the Social and Political Police (DOPS), Civil Police criminal investigations units (e.g. the DEIC in São Paulo), the Civil Police homicide and property crimes divisions, Civil and Militarized Police motorized patrols and SWAT and riot teams and the Militarized Police intelligence division (P-2). Police were also sought from the special operations and intelligence squads that combined Civil Police, Militarized Police and the military itself (e.g. GOE, OBAN, DOI/CODI).
5. Among the 'violence worker' torturers and murderers, the largest sub-set—nine—still defined themselves within the police institution, even though in three of these cases they had long since retired from policing. Among the 14 atrocity-perpetrating 'violence worker' policemen, eight were no longer in the police force: three had retired, one was in prison but had not been stripped of his police badge, three others were in prison and expelled from their force and one, having been expelled from his police organization (but

- not in prison), was petitioning to re-enter his police force. The other six atrocity perpetrators were still working policemen.
6. Huggins wishes to thank Tom McGee for suggesting this useful concept.

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