'If You Had Balls, You'd Be One of Us!' Doing Gendered Research: Methodological Reflections on Being a Female Academic Researcher in the Hyper-Masculine Subculture of 'Football Hooliganism'

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Sociological Research Online, 17 (4) 4
<<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/17/4/4.html>>
10.5153/sro.2717

Received: 5 Mar 2012 Accepted: 13 Jun 2012 Published: 30 Nov 2012

Abstract

This article reflects upon being a female academic researcher in the hyper-masculine subculture of 'football hooliganism'. With this subculture being a male-dominated field of study, the article argues that gender blindness has prevailed in most studies conducted by male researchers, with a failure to consider the positioning, practices and performances of the gendered self in the gendered field. Nor has this been a consideration of the rare female researcher working on the phenomenon. This article breaks this gendered silence by drawing on my own fieldwork experiences with ('retired') football hooligans to identify the methodological challenges specifically (re)negotiated as a female academic throughout the gendered research process and offers some strategies and field tips to future researchers faced with gendered incongruence with their informers. The key concerns for me were: first, gaining access to a hyper-masculine subculture; second, entering and developing rapport within the subculture; and third, 'doing gendered research' in the hyper-masculine field. Central to negotiating these challenges was a very conscious and performative presentation of self, often for self-preservation, during the research process. In practice, this sometimes required demonstrating that I had the (metaphorical) 'balls' in terms of my (gendered) image management. The article argues for consideration of the performativity of social research with a need for wider disclosure of the complexities and 'messiness' of qualitative research practices and the emotional labour required.

Keywords: *Football Hooliganism, Gender, Hyper-Masculinity, Deviant/criminal Subcultures, Female Academic, Reflexivity, Presentation of Self, Performativity*

Introduction

1.1 One of the consequences of the hyper-masculine nature of 'football hooliganism'^[1] (see King 1997; Spaaij 2008; Pearson 2012) is that its field of study has become dominated by male researchers (for example, Dunning, Murphy and Williams 1987; Hobbs and Robins 1991; Giulianotti 1995a, 1995b; Armstrong 1998; Hughson 1998; Giulianotti and Armstrong 2002; Stott and Pearson 2007). Indeed, in the few studies conducted by women (see [Armstrong and] Harris 1991; O'Neill 2005; Tsoukala 2009; [Pearson and] Sale 2011; Ayres [and Treadwell] 2012) none of 'us' have mentioned our sex or gender, let alone addressed the methodological issues and concerns that arise as a female researcher working within the hyper-masculine subculture of football hooliganism. In this way, 'we' are perhaps as 'guilty' as our male counterparts of 'gender blindness': a charge made by Free and Hughson (2003) and again by Hughson, Inglis and Free (2005) in relation to most ethnographic studies of football hooliganism.

1.2 This article addresses this omission in the existing body of knowledge, both on the phenomenon itself and on methodology, by contributing my own (belated) reflections on being a female academic researcher on the subject of 'football hooliganism'. The principal aim is to identify and discuss the methodological challenges and concerns specifically (re-)negotiated as a female academic researching the hyper-masculine subculture of football hooliganism in order to provide some methodological strategies and field tips that fellow researchers may find useful regarding how to manage the performative presentation of self and navigate some of the complicated gender issues that can arise during the research process, often due to a gender incongruence between the researcher and the researched. This is sociologically important

because the sharing of good (and bad) practices and 'warts and all' admissions are all too often absent from the usual research methods textbooks and 'impact-driven' research papers, which usually present 'sanitised' accounts of methodological processes and practice. Notable exceptions include the feminist scholars: Bell and Newby (1977), Roberts (1981) and Clarke and Humberstone (1997). Yet there is a real need to candidly reflect (both professionally and personally) upon the 'impact' on the actual researcher and the experiences and emotions confronted with while 'doing research' – what strategies 'worked', which did not and, equally important, how it *felt* when it went well or went wrong – and to share and exchange accounts with colleagues through other academic forums to help facilitate future studies. We are doing the next generation of budding qualitative researchers a disservice if we are not more frank and honest in admitting that doing research is not always a neat and tidy process of data collection, interpretation and analysis. In practice, it can sometimes be 'messy', requiring the researcher to dig themselves out of a hole or deal with awkward, challenging situations, and engage in emotional labour.

1.3 This article discusses some of the methodological issues that have arisen during an on-going trajectory of qualitative research with 'retired' football hooligans involving a suite of data collection techniques to explore their autobiographical narratives and 'post-hooligan careers'. The key challenges and concerns for me were those that emerged from being a female academic: first, gaining access to the hyper-masculine subculture; second, entering and developing rapport within the subculture; and third, 'doing gendered research' in the hyper-masculine field. These issues will be looked at in turn. Drawing conceptually upon Butler (1990) and Goffman (1959) – and acknowledging previous studies by other female researchers working in male dominated fields (Sampson and Thomas 2005; Woodward 2008; Lumsden 2009, 2010; Palmer 2010) and with deviant social groups (Wiseman 1970; Jewkes 2005, 2012; Vaaranen 2004) – I offer my own contribution to this body of work by reflecting upon my experiences of doing gendered research within the hyper-masculine and deviant subculture of football hooliganism. Central to these experiences was a very conscious performative presentation of my gendered self for my self-preservation, both physically and emotionally, in the gender incongruent field. It is my contention that doing gendered research (especially with deviant subcultures) can sometimes require the researcher (male or indeed female) to demonstrate that they have the metaphorical 'balls'^[2] to negotiate certain situations and emotions.

Reflexivity in Gendered Social Research

2.1 Many social scientists conducting fieldwork experience dilemmas and difficulties in relating their own identity and personal culture to the field culture in which they are operating. The issue of gender arises because researchers undertake fieldwork by establishing relationships. This is done as a person with a repertoire of status markers – in terms of age, educational background, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation – together with their own physical appearance, beliefs, preferences and leisure interests. Socially constructed 'scripts' are attached to each of these respective physical and social characteristics, which contain messages about what individuals in particular groups are 'typically like' and therefore what is expected of them (Mazzei and O'Brien 2009). In particular, fieldwork is undertaken as men and women and so is a 'gendered project' (Lumsden 2009, 2010). That said, we must be careful to avoid the simplistic binary model of gender and appreciate the complexities of gender expression and identities. Gender should be recognised as a fluid variable, not the core aspect of our identity, but rather a performance: the way we act and present ourselves in different contexts and at different times (Butler 1990).

2.2 The researcher's gender then can affect both the fieldwork relationships and production of social research. Woodward (2008, p. 554-555), who conducted work in the male dominated research site of men's boxing gyms, emphasises 'the relevance of the gender specific experience of the researcher' and identifies 'both positive and negative gendered dimensions of ontological complicity which are linked to the debate about the relationship between objective and subjective experience of doing research and producing knowledge'. In her classic study of Brazilian male soccer, Lever (1984, p. xxxix) too acknowledged that there were both some 'advantages' as well as 'negative consequences of being a female investigator'. Negotiating access to gender-specific spaces can be a particular challenge (Gill and Maclean 2002; Woodward 2008; Horn 2009). According to Schilt and Williams (2008), facing the prospect of 'access denied' on the basis of gender can lead to a sense of frustration and often fatalism.

2.3 Mazzei and O'Brien (2009, p. 363) are more positive and 'see the field researcher as decidedly more active in determining how [gender] alignment between her field-relevant status group memberships and informants' influence access and rapport'. While acknowledging that gender can pose challenges for the researcher, Mazzei and O'Brien (2009) also recognise how one's gender can be used as a positive research 'tool'. For example, Ramsey's (2009) work on the police suggests that that rapport can be developed through negotiation of the gendered context of the interaction. This should be acknowledged, for as Brackenridge (1999, p. 400) notes: 'Part of the reflexive project of modern sociology is to acknowledge the influence of our gender and sexual identities within the research landscape and, in particular, to account for ways personal agendas map onto and shape scientific ones'.

2.4 Reflexivity in the social sciences has become recognised as an important research skill because it actively takes into account the effect of the social identity and social presentation of the researcher on whom and what is being investigated (Gerts-Pepin 2009). Moreover, reflexivity acknowledges and appreciates that the researcher and the researched are embedded within the research process. Thus, our personal biographies shape our research interests, access to the field, relationships with the researched, and our interpretation and representation of the culture under examination. This is arguably more pronounced when there is gender incongruence between the researcher and the informants. Feminist scholars have been particularly prominent and insightful regarding ways in which status group membership impedes or assists with access and rapport (Horn 2009; Mazzei and O'Brien 2009; Ramsey 2009). Female researchers tend to be more acutely aware of being situated within gendered spaces and

of the gendered performativity and interactions within them (see Gill and Maclean 2002; Woodward 2008), with male researchers prone to gender blindness.

2.5 This is not to accuse all male researchers of gender blindness; indeed there are some encouraging exceptions. Ortiz (2005) is keenly conscious of his gender and deployed a gender and impression management strategy, such was his concern for doing the 'right' masculinity with the wives of professional athletes. Similarly, the work of Hughson (1998, 2000) and Free and Hughson (2003) on football hooliganism can be read as 'pro-feminist'; for as Woodward (2008, p. 547) notes: 'Such work engages with masculinity in a way that makes men visible as men, rather than assuming men as the homogenous, non-gendered norm of humanity, moving beyond the female/male binary and putting women into the discursive regime of sport'.

2.6 The study of football hooliganism has been characterised by an acrimonious and antagonistic debate between male academics from conflicting schools of thought on the historical longevity and causes of such disorder, and the ethnographic integrity of the research into the phenomenon. But the gendered nature of these ethnographies – and indeed, their ethnographers – has rarely been considered. That is until their exposure by Free and Hughson (2003), echoed by Hughson et al. (2005). The focus of their critique is upon what Hughson (1998) terms the 'new ethnographies' on male football supporter cultures in the UK, principally the work of Giulianotti (1995a, 1995b) and Armstrong (1998) involving highly engaged participant observation over a number of years. Free and Hughson (2003, p. 136-7) argue that these 'new ethnographies' – underpinned by the tradition of the Chicago School – 'establish an intimacy with the subcultural groups they study yet simultaneously neglect crucial aspects of gender identity and relations within the groups'. Further to this, Hughson (2000, p. 10) contends: 'That women might be excluded from the ranks of football hooligan groups does not mean that they should be left out of related research'. Consequently, he gives particular consideration to the relationship between the young men and the women they associate with in his study of Australian/Croatian soccer supporters. Free and Hughson (2003, p. 152) advocate more research of this nature, stating: 'Hopefully, women's voices will be heard in future studies, for football support remains one of the coal faces at which research on youth masculinity can be most tellingly conducted'. This has been provided by Pearson (2012, p. 155-162), who discusses the experiences of 'female carnival fans' in his ethnography of English football fans.

2.7 This article provides a seldom raised or heard female academic's voice on the methodological issues involved when dealing with the subculture of football hooligans. This is because, to date, none of the few female researchers who have studied football hooliganism have acknowledged, let alone reflected upon our gendered selves in the gendered field, myself included. For my part, I have consciously opted *not* to highlight my gendered role in the research process (until now) because I wanted to be accepted first and foremost as a sociologist; I did not feel the *need* – nor did I *want* – to make an issue of the fact I was female, given it is such a male dominated field. This may be the same for my female colleagues (O'Neill 2005; Tsoukala 2009 and [Pearson and] Sale 2011; Ayres [and Treadwell] 2012). I certainly do not condemn them for their gendered silence. Yet I have been curious as to why they declined to consider their gendered self, none least because some reflective advice in their methods section would have been helpful to my own work.

2.8 That said, it is only after many candid conversations with colleagues and friends, who have pointed out the unique experiences, dilemmas and challenges that I have faced as a *female* researcher in the subculture (and a great deal of persuasion) that I have finally come to reflect at the level I am doing now. This has led me, retrospectively to some extent, to try to make sense of some of my experiences by consulting and applying fieldwork on 'deviant' and (quasi-) criminal subcultures more broadly, as well as those of other female researchers working in masculine subcultures. Consequently, these will be referred to, as appropriate, in my discussion of methodological issues that follows, and in the course of my reflexive discussion.

Methodological Issues and Approach

3.1 My fieldwork involved a suite of qualitative data collection methods (in-depth interviews; informal interviews; social networking; and observation-as-participant in field-settings) with a group of 'retired' hooligans, who were 'active' during the late 1970s to early 1990s. I had two main subjects, who acted as gatekeepers. For the purpose of anonymity, they will be given the pseudonyms of Chris and Dave, as will all other subjects mentioned. Chris and Dave were both in their late forties/early fifties and were recognised 'top boys' (leading figures) in their respective hooligan 'firms' (organised gangs). Both had also chronicled their life-stories in published autobiographies. The interviews with Dave were face-to-face in pubs and bars, whereas the interviews with Chris mainly took place over the phone. Observation-as-participant fieldwork was also undertaken with Chris' 'firm' (including hooligans active today and those retired) at a pre-screening of a hooligan-related film, in which they acted as extras.

3.2 The importance of reflexivity and analysing the research process is now ingrained within the social sciences and some researchers are demonstrating more candour by sharing autobiographical accounts and personal narratives in their reports from the field (Ferrell and Hamm 1998; Brackenridge 1999; Ward 2008; McKenzie 2009). Gersti-Pepin and Patrizio (2009) note how keeping a reflexive journal can serve as a much needed repository for a qualitative researcher's memories and reflections. I kept such a journal throughout my fieldwork from which I draw upon in what follows. As such, reflexivity, in this article, is taken to be a legitimate source of knowledge and to offer a useful means by which I can analyse and use my own experiences, alongside others, to explore practical strategies and field tips for self-management that fellow researchers may also find helpful. This is a beneficial exercise, since by reflecting on our experience of gendered interactions and emotions we can also attempt to shed greater light on the research process, as well as the internal dynamics of the social world in question. This is particularly pertinent when studying football hooliganism, for it is a subculture that facilitates the symbolic expression

and validation of hyper-masculinity.

3.3 As Giulianotti (1995a, p. 4) notes, 'Criminal subcultures are as proportionately difficult to research through participant observation as they are exotic and attractive to the student'. Reflections on the potential risks and dangers, ethical dilemmas and problems of such fieldwork are not new (see Hobbs 1988; Ferrell and Hamm 1998; Ward 2008; Wiseman 1970). Pearson (2009, p. 243; Pearson 2012), drawing upon his own experiences of carrying out covert participant observation within crowds of 'risk' football supporters, is critical of existing ethical guidelines for social research, which he argues are 'based around principles such as informed consent, anonymity of research subjects and an adherence to standards of conduct that will not damage the reputation of academia or endanger subsequent researchers', claiming they are restrictive and sometimes impractical. Stanley and Wise (2010) have also questioned whether the ESRC's 2010 Framework for Research Ethics is 'fit for purpose'. Pearson (2009) advocates further guidance is needed for researchers in the social sciences, *not* regulation, to help protect academics. Such guidance to date generally comes from candid researchers willing to share personal accounts of experiences faced in their reports from the field. So while I followed the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (2002) as far as was practical, the work of Woodward (2008) on men's boxing gyms, Lumsden (2009) on 'boy racers' and Palmer (2010) on the alcohol-based male sporting subculture of Australian Rules football supporters was much more useful in real terms.

3.4 Male-dominated subcultures can present particular issues for the female researcher whose access to backstage settings and masculine discourse is most likely to be limited (Lumsden 2009). Consequently, female researchers are often more aware of their sexual status and its impact on field research and relationships than their male colleagues (Ramsay 2009). Sampson and Thomas (2003) offer an insightful consideration of the 'dangers' faced by female researchers conducting fieldwork aboard a male-dominated cargo vessel. They developed a framework to differentiate between 'ambient' (those 'encountered in dangerous research settings') and 'situational' (those that 'are evoked by a researcher's presence in a specific research setting') risks (Sampson and Thomas 2003, p. 116).

3.5 While aware of the need for caution with regard to personal safety when working alone and conducting research with male participants, particularly those with an inclination for violence, I never felt endangered by either ambient or situational risks. This was probably due to two main factors. Firstly, the nature and location of my fieldwork, which was far removed from any actual football hooligan violence or disorder, ensured that there were no ambient risks. Secondly, my presence as a female academic in a masculine subculture could be recognised as a situational risk. However, I believe my age *vis-à-vis* my informants, coupled with my presentation of self and image management alleviated any such risk. I was in my mid-thirties when I began the research, while the informants were in their late forties/early fifties. Both of my gate-keepers were married. Since I am not (and so with no wedding ring as a symbolic marker), I ensured I referred in conversation to my boyfriend, thus communicating the 'committed' and/or 'taken' assumption of a monogamous relationship. Given all this, I felt very comfortable in their company and there was much less of a threat of unwanted sexual or romantic overtures, which was a concern of Lumsden (2009). Indeed, both Chris and Dave were very chivalrous and 'protective' in our exchanges and meetings; this was particularly noticeable at the film preview when there were many younger men present. When Chris invited me during a telephone conversation, I was keen to check how my presence would sit with the rest of the firm. He assured me: 'You will be my guest and the lads will respect that'. He added: 'Anyway, you won't be the only girl there. Some of the lads are bringing their wives and girlfriends'. Their presence is discussed below.

3.6 Despite the lack of risks involved in my research, Palmer (2010) advocates the use of a safety protocol, including measures for an 'emergency' situation. My own personal safety strategy when meeting with the football hooligans was generally informed by common sense precautions and practices usually employed when meeting strangers (especially men) including: meeting in busy, popular places such as pubs and bars; ensuring that several 'appointment monitors' knew where I was going, who I was meeting, the due meet time and expected time of completion; and keeping in regular contact with those monitors via SMS messages. While these strategies were useful, I still faced some challenges, which I will now reflect upon with a view to offering colleagues some insights and tips on how to negotiate similar issues that they make encounter.

Gaining Access to the (Gendered) Field

4.1 Particular problems of entrée into the subculture of football hooligans have been well documented (see for example, Giulianotti 1995a). Armstrong (1998) and Giulianotti (1995a) both advocate the use of snowballing to establish gatekeepers and engender further subjects. Both acknowledge they were at a distinct advantage in that they were natives of the cities where they conducted their ethnographies and knew some of the hooligan firm members as schoolmates, prior to their formal research, through their lifelong support of Aberdeen and Sheffield United football clubs respectively. What they did not explicitly acknowledge was that they were male. Despite this omission, Giulianotti (1995a, p. 13) does address gender issues, albeit briefly, when noting his scepticism 'on the viability of female sociologists undertaking participant observation with football hooligan groups'. This, he contends, is because:

... it is important to blend in (or pass) among the hooligans without exciting attention from rival casuals or police, to avoid significantly influencing the latter's actions toward the research subjects generally. The majority of the casuals studied share a culturally engrained, masculine deference toward women with regard to violence; the presence of a female researcher in confrontations would add an artificial degree of complexity to proceedings which the ostensible appearance of one more fellow/rival casual does not.

4.2 I fully respect these observations from an experienced researcher in the field and for many years was resigned to the fact that, as a female academic, the door to the subculture of football hooliganism would always remain closed to me. Yet, having studied media representations of football fan cultures, with a particular emphasis on football hooliganism (Poulton 2007, 2008a, 2008b), I had often felt a bit of a 'fraud'. How could I offer an informed analysis and interpretation of media representations of football supporter behaviour or the subculture of 'football hooliganism', without experiencing it, or at the very least meeting some of the participants? Like journalist and hooligan biographer, Caroline Gall (2005, p. 4): 'I wanted to make sense of these guys and find out what they did, how it all came about, who were the leaders, what was it all about?' And just like her, I found myself asking: 'But then where does a young, middle-class, female reporter [or, in my case, sociologist] from the Shires start when trying to gain entry into such an alien world?' (Gall 2005, p. 4). My gendered self and other status markers (such as my age, class and profession) were misaligned with their status group membership(s).

4.3 Researchers of different genders have donned (i.e. 'performed') gendered roles to help facilitate fieldwork (Mazzei and O'Brien 2009). In this connection, Woodward (2008, p. 549) advises the adoption of different gendered modes of 'research positioning' for the purpose of access and rapport. For example, given her maturity *vis-à-vis* her informants, Woodward presented herself as the 'maternal figure', which was 'unthreatening' to the natural gender order of the male dominated subculture in which she was working. As I have explained above, my informants were older than me, so this role was not suitable. Woodward (2008, p. 549) also suggests: 'Being associated with other agencies such as the news or television media for initial contact can be very useful' when embarking upon academic research, claiming that her media profile positioned her 'at a distinct advantage' when she went on to conduct the research. Giulianotti (1995a) and Armstrong (1998) have both cautioned about the mistrust of the media within the hooligan subculture. This is compounded by the subculture's general dislike of academic 'boffins', who they resent pontificating about them from their 'ivory towers' (see Pennant and King 2005, p. 4). Given prevailing misogynist ideas about women within the subculture of football hooliganism (Hughson 2000; Spaaij 2008; Pearson 2012), being a woman *and* an academic hardly boded well for pursuing my ambitions to progress my research interests. This confirmed my resignation that the hooligan subculture was a world that would always remain closed to me as a female researcher.

4.4 That was until I received what could be seen as a slice of 'plain luck', which Giulianotti (1995a, p. 8) suggests 'can have the greatest influence on who is prioritized for entrée'. This good fortune arrived via an email from a promoter of some 'retired' hooligans who were 'organising a series of events under the banner of 'The Real Football Factories LIVE', featuring some of the lads who appeared on the Bravo TV series'^[3] (personal correspondence, 7 February, 2008). The email outlined some basic details, suggesting the events might be 'a really useful experience for students studying Sociology and football-related violence'. I was invited to contact them if I was interested. My initial reaction upon receipt of the email was scepticism: I suspected it was a 'wind-up' in a similar vein to a crank phone call I had experienced in the past with a man, having seen my name commenting on football-related disorder in the local press, contacting me claiming to be a football hooligan and wanting to meet me. My cynicism was compounded by the sender's surname, which could have been read as having sexual connotations. Experienced colleagues warned me to be wary and not to respond. Nevertheless, my curiosity and the whiff of an opportunity got the better of me and I replied a week later expressing muted interest and requesting more details.

4.5 An email conversation ensued over the next few weeks, with the promoter seemingly very keen to sell themselves and attract my interest and/or 'business'; for example:

The content of the event evenings will be unique and not just the usual posturing and 'been there done this and that' type of content that has been so often done before. You would be most welcome to attend any of the events as our guest, and we would be delighted to meet you. So please consider this as a formal invite (personal correspondence, 17 March, 2008).

4.6 Our email exchange culminated in a telephone conversation, first with the promoter and then with Chris, one of the retired hooligans, who had conceived the idea. My conversation with him lasted about 45 minutes, which I took as testimony to how well it went. While I was trying to learn more about their project and ensure it was *bona fide* and would meet any ethics committee approval, it was evident that I was also being 'sounded out', both as a woman and an academic, and that I was being subtly tested, so I needed to 'impress' them. This was a fine line to tread. Indeed, part of our discussion centred upon and the 'relationship' between academics and hooligans. Chris explained how in addition to me, they had contacted about thirty other academics (all male) and with the exception of two positive responses had received roundly negative reactions (including arrogance, aloofness, and patronising). He said this was testimony to academics 'being up themselves' and there being 'no relationship between the two' (i.e. academics and hooligans). I suspected that this did not bode well, but reminded myself that *they* had contacted *me* after all.

4.7 Throughout the conversation, I was acutely conscious of my image management and keen to make a good impression, while striking a balance between being professional and personable: I did not want to come across as a being a 'naïve woman' nor 'stuck in my ivory tower'. Fortunately, my knowledge of hooliganism and football more broadly meant I was in my 'comfort zone' to some extent. This seemed to help my cause and we had an interesting, open and relaxed conversation. I was comfortable using some of the vocabulary of the hooligan subculture and able to demonstrate my awareness of recent incidents of football-related disorder. I was also familiar with Chris' autobiography, which I told him, genuinely, I had enjoyed for its candour and humility: a rare feature in hooligan memoirs often characterised by formulaic bragging and exaggeration (Poulton 2008a; Redhead 2010). This was well received: Chris struck me as someone who sought approval and thrived off praise. Shortly after the phone call, I received an email from the promoter saying that I had 'made a good impression on Chris', that he was 'even more

enthusiastic and driven to make the events as polished as possible' and 'It has been a pleasure to talk to you today for both myself and Chris' (personal correspondence, 27 March, 2008). My performative presentation of self appeared to have worked. It also seemed from these early exchanges that some subtle 'ego-messaging' was going to be a way forward in developing some form of rapport and maybe gaining further access. Consequently, while not always entirely at ease with modifying and managing my behaviour personally, I admit that I adopted 'ego-messaging' as a professional strategy to this end. This mainly involved praise, reassurance and endorsement and sometimes taking what was said with 'a pinch of salt'. I saw this as a necessary part of 'research bargaining'.

4.8 Research bargaining (either explicit or tacit *quid pro quo*) is crucial to gaining access to the field and requires skilful negotiation and re-negotiation (Hobbs 1988; Giulianotti 1995a; Lumsden 2009). It soon became apparent in my interactions with the hooligans that our 'relationship' was underpinned by an implicit 'bargaining' that could be mutually beneficial. First and foremost, they seemed to want endorsement from an academic institution to give their event series a form of integrity; they wanted to visit a university and present to undergraduate students, who they said frequently wrote to them for help with dissertations. In return, it appeared that the 'closed door' to the subculture of football hooliganism might be ajar. As with other research where gaining and maintaining access depends on good relations with gatekeepers and respondents (Sampson and Thomas 2003; Palmer 2010), I openly presented my interest in them and outlined my purpose as wanting to find out about their subculture to develop my research. They were happy with this and over the next few months I corresponded frequently with Chris via email, SMS and phone.

4.9 During this time, their project took a significant change of direction. Chris explained that one of his partners involved in the 'The Real Football Factories LIVE' events was more involved with the 'active' hooligan subculture and that his plans for a national tour glorifying their past exploits conflicted with Chris' 'reformed' principles. Chris decided to break from the project and instead sought to develop an anti-youth crime project to warn adolescent boys of the risks of becoming involved in gangs, including hooligan firms, through talks to schools, youth clubs and young offenders, while also pursuing his interest in giving presentations at academic institutions to give students his 'insider's view' of the hooligan subculture. During this 're-think' and the development of his new project, Chris would regularly contact me and I began to operate as a kind of unofficial consultant who they would bounce ideas off about website and presentation content, sources of funding, the barriers they faced given their criminal records, as well as appearing to seek assurance and endorsement. Upon reflection, I believe that my status group memberships as a *female* academic actually *helped* facilitate these interactions and the development of rapport, in ways that male academics may not have been able to do. I also think our age gap may have helped because I was not considered a 'threat', either as a sexual predator or 'groupie'. In this way, my gendered self was a useful tool, not a challenge to the research process.

4.10 In return – as part of our unspoken research bargain – I was sent DVDs containing documentaries about hooliganism and interviews with firm members, and of course, gained an exclusive insight into Chris and his firm through the regular conversations we were now having, which came to serve as informal interviews. Five months after their first speculative email, I was invited to attend the official launch of their anti-youth crime project, which coincided with a pre-screening of the hooligan film, in which some of Chris' firm had appeared. Finally I had my ticket, not just to the launch press conference and the cinema, but into the hooligan subculture. I have to admit to feeling excited at the prospect; to use the hooligan term, I was 'buzzing'. At last I was going to meet some hooligans. Chris was acting in the role of 'gate-keeper' and the door had been opened.

Entering and Developing Rapport in the Hyper-Masculine Subculture

5.1 While my research with 'retired' hooligans is ongoing, to date my fieldwork experiences are perhaps limited compared with the time spent by Lumsden (2009), Palmer (2010) or Woodward (2008) in their respective male subcultures. I am certainly *not* claiming to have gained full entrée as a covert participant observer (Pearson 2009, 2012) or the status of the 'marginal native' (Armstrong 1998) nor 'relative insider' (Giulianotti 1995a, 1995b), which reflect the former's immersed ethnography vis-à-vis the latter's more episodic ethnography. Nevertheless, I have still been confronted by a need to 'get on' (McKenzie 2009), without standing out, arousing suspicion, or antagonising those within the group in any way. This can pose a real challenge for a woman in 'man land' (Palmer 2010, p. 433): how do you look inconspicuous when so many physical and social status markers are incongruent? There are no explicit 'textbook' guidelines for this, but it is of course imperative to try to establish a level of trust and rapport, underpinned by mutual respect, with those being investigated. My five months of correspondence with Chris had established some groundwork in this regard, but my gendered self in particular marked me still very much as an 'outsider'.

5.2 Woodward (2008, p. 549) advocates that "'Outsider" status has to be negotiated and acknowledged explicitly'. She explains:

Distancing has to be embraced as my distinction as a researcher was constituted as outsider in terms of gender, class, generation, biography and locality, signified by comportment, appearance, manner of speaking, accent and dress, as well as how I positioned myself through personal disclosure (ibid.).

5.3 I can relate to this completely. My field diary records my anxieties about 'what to wear' when meeting the hooligan firm for the first time at the hooligan film pre-screening, demonstrate my acute consciousness of and concern about my presentation of self and performative expression of gender, as I attempted to navigate competing professional, fashion, feminine and feminist discourses (see Adams 2000 and Green 2001 for similar deliberations on the significance and meanings of our dress code):

What shall I wear? What do you wear to go and meet a firm of hooligans?! If I was a man, it would be so much easier: I could pick from any number of 'casual' designer labels and look to impress, or at least look inconspicuous! But what to wear as a woman? We're meeting at a pub and going to the cinema. Do I conform to 'emphasised femininity'? Do I power-dress? Neither suggestion comes naturally to me at the best of times and neither seemed appropriate today of all days with the prospect of my imminent company. I'm not a 'girly-girl'. Rarely had I laboured over what to wear – this was like going on a first date! – yet it seemed to really matter. I didn't want to attract any unwanted advances by dressing provocatively, but I was also aware of a need to look 'feminine', as I would be in the presence of men for whom that was important. 'Comfortable shoes' would almost certainly be associated with stereotypical ideas of being a feminist (lesbian) academic, which wouldn't go down well in these circles. I didn't want to dress too formally, but I wanted to look smart and at the same time feel comfortable and also assertive. So what's a girl to wear? I was annoyed with myself for dwelling over the issue, but I knew that how I presented myself was important. They'd be checking me out, in every sense. Finally, I opted for my fitted, short-sleeved, navy and white, gingham-check Ted Baker blouse, a pair of smart boot-cut jeans and a pair of mules, which revealed my painted toe-nails (16 July, 2008).

5.4 For Mazzei and O'Brien (2009), the female researcher is an active participant in how she is perceived and received by informants. They pose the question: 'You got it, when do you flaunt it?' and expound the concept of 'deploying gender' to build an intersectional thesis on the role of the researcher's status group membership for gaining access and rapport. They 'carefully select our attire, are conscious of our body language, and attune our behaviour so as to present ourselves as acceptable to the field' (Mazzei and O'Brien 2005, p. 379). While I deliberately opted to avoid 'flaunting it', my wardrobe choice inadvertently helped as an 'ice-breaker' from which I worked on developing a rapport with Dave at our first meeting, as my field-notes capture:

He was an immense guy, even bigger than the photos I had seen of him. His gold-framed dark glasses, gold chain, big gold watch and gold rings were also just like in the photos. Chris ushered Dave across and introduced me to him. We shook hands: a solid handshake if ever there was one! He remembered me: "You emailed me last year didn't you? About my books, the sales figures. Sorry, I took ages to get back". "No worries", I said, "Thanks for getting back to me, I know you're a busy man", I assured him, realising I had pronounced my southern accent, in a half-conscious attempt to 'fit in' with his Cockney accent. "I like your shirt", he said. Thinking his comment was a bit of an odd thing to say (was it a flirtatious remark?), I thanked him. At least my worrying about what to wear seemed to have worked. "It's like mine", he added, "You've got good taste". It was then I realised that we were both wearing navy and white gingham-checked shirts. We both laughed. My labouring over what to wear had worked: it had at least broken the ice. "Actually we've got something else in common", I ventured, "We've got a mutual friend: Barry 'Chicken Run', landlord of The Fox in Hertfordshire". "Chicken Run? You know 'Chicken Run'? Yeah, he's a good bloke him, gets up [stadium name], proper [football club name]. So how come you know him?" "My dad lives opposite The Fox; it's where I come from. That used to be my local. My brothers still drink there", I explained. Dave seemed really interested and animated. "What that cottage with the thatched roof?" he enquired. We were starting to establish something of a rapport. As we sat talking, I noticed we, or rather I, was getting a few funny looks from some of the hooligans who had come to see the guest of honour: as if to say, who's SHE commanding Dave's attention?

5.5 My labouring over what to wear is an example of active image management in the presentation of my [ethnographic] self (Coffey 1999; Goffman 1959), coupled with my performance of gender in a particular situation (Butler 1990). Further, while keen to establish a good impression and develop a good rapport with Dave, Chris and the other hooligan firm members, I was keenly aware of maintaining a balance in terms of the image I was wanting to project: knowledgeable and well informed, but not a 'prim and proper' University 'boffin'; willing and able to have a laugh, but also an academic researcher who was there to do a job. I believe I achieved this image management, though this was a constant challenge that I had to (re)negotiate and I always felt that I had to be 'on my toes' and 'keep my guard up'.

5.6 For example, after the hooligan film pre-screening, we returned to the pub, where Chris introduced to me to some of the 'faces' [reputed hooligans] from the firm: lads (men) I had read about and seen photos of in his autobiography. Though I was driving home later, I accepted the offer of a beer from one of them, which I read as a hospitable, friendly gesture. It was apparent Chris had briefed them on who I was; they referred to me variously as 'the researcher', 'the university woman', or (a name that stuck) 'the Doc'. One of the lads put me on the spot when he said: 'We've heard if you had balls, you'd be one of us!' I wasn't quite sure how to take this gendered remark. I still reflect on what this really meant/means about my character and how this sits with me, both personally and professionally. Something I must have said to Chris during our conversations must have struck a chord and given him the idea that, had I been a man, I would have the propensity to be a football hooligan like them. Such a comment certainly seemed at the time to be a kind of seal of 'approval' and 'acceptance'.

5.7 As Sampson and Thomas (2003, p. 174) note, 'being in a fieldwork setting and gaining initial access to a site is no guarantee of acceptance, much less trust or even popularity. Hard won trust and rapport can be quickly lost in the face of a perceived rejection or 'social snub'.' This is something I experienced several months later when a misunderstanding arose over Chris' scheduled trip to my institution to give an evening presentation to our students. There had been much discussion over payment for this, with Chris' promoter seeking an all-expenses-paid trip (including travel costs and an 'appearance fee', rather

than the standard visiting lecturer rate), which my institution was not prepared to pay. A compromise was finally reached, but then a week before the visit, I received an email cancelling the trip due to 'work commitments'. In my return email I expressed my disappointment given that I thought we had a 'gentleman's agreement'. This evidently caused great offence given the SMS text I then received from Chris, accusing me of 'selfish' motivations because I had 'not got [my] own way'. He signed off: 'It's been very interesting and at times hilarious whilst studying you studying us'.

5.8 It is here that I sympathise with the 'emotional labour' experienced by Coffey (1999), Hunt (2009), Lumsden (2009, 2010), and Jewkes (2012). This was the most challenging experience, mentally and emotionally, I have had during the research process to date. The SMS cut me to the quick. It made me question the 'rapport' that I *thought* we had developed. I felt naïve for thinking that as an academic, indeed as a *female* researcher, I could have believed that I had developed a 'rapport' with a hooligan. But wanting to set the record straight, I boldly decided to call Chris. My performative presentation of self was vital here for my self-preservation. Not only did I need to keep my key gatekeeper 'onside' for the future of my research, but I had genuinely begun to value his 'friendship' and wanted to resolve relations. This proved to be a very difficult conversation during which I was subjected to more insults and ridicule as Chris vented his mind. He was particularly agitated by my suggestion he had broken a 'gentleman's agreement'. I had used this gendered term blithely, but he had taken it as a personal affront, as if I was challenging his masculine values of valour and honesty. Finally, after taking the rap and perhaps helped by some further 'ego-massaging' through my consumption of 'humble pie' and apologetic manner, we resolved the situation. The conversation was emotionally exhausting and I had to compromise some of my personal principles and manage my normal expressive behaviour to preserve what I now knew was a very precarious professional relationship. Despite this, I took some solace and indeed pride from the fact Chris thanked me for 'having the balls' to call; an incongruous gendered phrase in the circumstances! I later received an email from the promoter:

I spoke to Chris following the phone conversation you had with him and he explained what was discussed. I think that you may have misunderstood some of what was said earlier. We have never laughed or disrespected you either as a woman or an academic. Indeed we acknowledge the fact that you may have had to go out on a limb in order to get us into your uni [university] and we appreciate your efforts. Most of the academics we have talked to have been far less open-minded about our concept and have appeared very protective of their domain. We have studied their reactions to us, and some of it has been quite amusing, but you have never been included in this category. We have always thought highly of you and will continue to do so... You have always given us the impression that you are an independent, intelligent, outgoing, happy and strong lady... We remain friends (personal correspondence, 28 November, 2008).

5.9 This email came as a great relief and was reassuring to some extent. It was also revealing about how my presentation of self was interpreted and a gauge of how I had been received, as a female academic, in 'doing gendered research', negotiating 'outsider' issues and in forging some form of 'rapport'. As Lumsden (2009, p. 498) notes, 'Reflecting upon gendered interactions in the field sheds light on the ways in which the researched relate to the [researcher]'. It can also help illuminate some of the internal gendered dynamics of the subculture under examination. Below I offer some further reflections on some other gendered interactions and experiences during my fieldwork.

'Doing Gender' in the Hyper-Masculine Field

6.1 As stated above, one of the issues I faced was a feeling of conspicuousness in being a female academic in the masculine subculture. This was acute when I attended the hooligan film screening. I had arranged with Chris to meet at a pub. My field-notes describe my initial observations of the meeting place, having arrived ahead of schedule:

I'd been told to meet at pub called the China Garden. The China Garden struck me a strange name for a pub – it sounded more like a Chinese restaurant – especially a pub supposedly frequented by a firm of hooligans. My Sat-Nav got me to the postcode I had been given – a leisure park – but there was no sign of an establishment called the China Garden. As I drove around I began having doubts that I was in the right place. Or worse, that this was all some kind of hoax: that I wasn't invited after all. Having stopped to ask for directions to the China Garden, I finally arrived at a Toby Carvery Inn, part of a national chain of 'family pubs' specialising in roasted meat dinners. This pub certainly didn't seem like a 'natural setting' for a hooligan firm. Again, doubts filled my mind. This is a wind-up. A family parked next to me, so I asked if they had heard of the China Garden. Yes, this was it, I was reliably informed. Apparently it was the establishment's former name and one that locals still used.

6.2 In terms of any situational risks as a female researcher, I could not have dreamt of a 'safer' place in which to meet a male dominated subculture, but at the same time, I could not help but feel disappointed by the 'inauthentic' field-setting. I entered the pub and bought a lime and soda. Since I was driving, I had the excuse of not drinking alcohol: another safety measure I usually adopt. I took a seat that gave me a good view of the entrance (and exit access) and main bar area. My field-notes record the gendered nature of the research site:

The demographic make-up of the pub gradually started to change. First a couple of lads in their mid-teens entered both wearing Stone Island jumpers and adidas trainers. This 'casual' attire, together with their short cropped hair, conformed to the 'hooligan look'. They appeared a little anxious, looking around as if they too were doubting they had come to the right place. A couple more arrived, dressed exactly the same, then three more. They seemed to know

each other and looked relieved. Then half a dozen older men, in their forties, arrived, some also sporting Stone Island jumpers, some in smart designer shirts. The younger lads looked at them with deference, evidently chuffed to bits to get a nod of the head in acknowledgement. More and more 'hooligans' started to arrive. Aged 16 and upwards into their twenties. All men. All white. And an older generation: late thirties to late forties. Again, all white, except one black guy, who was with a white woman. In fact there were a total of 4 women accompanying their partners. All the men were dressed similarly, with Stone Island being the designer label of choice. As they began to fill the bar area, the families with children who had been having an early evening meal started to leave, some looking a little concerned by the newly-arrived clientele. Finally, nearly an hour late, Chris breezed into the pub. His petite Thai wife [Alison] was with him; to my relief she spotted me and waved. It wasn't a wind-up after all.

6.3 This was a fascinating experience given the highly gendered situation. There must have been eighty, possibly a hundred apparent hooligans now filling the pub and less than a dozen women, including the female bar staff, five hooligan wives and girlfriends (WAGs), and myself. While I spent the majority of time in the company of the hooligans, there was a short time when we returned to the pub after the cinema when I was left talking with three of their partners. Taking the opportunity (and a bit of a risk) in the absence of the men, I remarked: 'So you're the hooligan WAGs?' Their response was positive; they laughed and appeared to like this term. Interestingly, they pointed out one of the other WAGs, of who Beth said: 'She doesn't think she's one of us. She's got no idea what her fella used to get up to!' They contrasted her with the one other WAG in the pub who they described as a 'hooligan groupie'. Charlotte explained: 'She's worse than Alex [her boyfriend]. She's always scrapping, fighting. He was on the straight and narrow, but she's got him back into it. She's bad news, always has been. Always been a groupie'. As this revealing conversation about the women's perceptions of themselves and others moved on, Alison mocked as she relayed how earlier she had overheard a couple (who were not part of the hooligan gathering) talking; the woman had remarked to her male partner: 'If I knew it was going to be full of this type, I'd never have come'. The woman's concerns were short-lived, as there was soon to be an exodus for the film screening.

6.4 Woodward (2008, p. 556) notes how: 'Being primarily an 'observing participant' and being immersed in a research site has the enormous advantage of the immediacy of 'being there' and in addressing the routine performance of masculinity'. I was able to do this during our walk from the pub to the cinema. My field-notes describe my emotions, which I had to keep in check, as I momentarily experienced being a 'relative insider':

Chris returned to where I was sitting talking to Alison, announcing, "Right, we're off". As we stood to go, he shouted out loud, "Right lads, remember what I said: orderly fashion. Keep it tight". With that the hooligans swiftly finished their drinks and filed out of the pub. I was just off the lead group of Dave, Chris and Alison talking to a couple of 'faces' Chris had introduced me to ... I glanced back and reviewed the spectacle we must have been to any passer-by. Almost a hundred strong, my guess was that the predominantly male group must look quite menacing, walking en masse, given the size, demographic make-up and 'look'. As for myself, I have to confess I felt excited, exhilarated. To use hooligan terminology, I was 'buzzing'. As ridiculous as it sounds, I somehow felt just fleetingly part of the firm. I suspected this was the nearest I would ever get to the experience of 'mobbing up', albeit just to walk to the cinema!

Conclusion

7.1 This article reflects upon the experiences of being a female academic researcher in a hyper-masculine subculture, specifically 'football hooliganism'. Applying existing ideas and experiences, together with my own, the article has addressed some of the omissions in the current body of work by contributing to methodological, sociological and anthropological debates on the gendered nature of research and the performativity of gender, along with other status markers, in the presentation of [ethnographic] self (Coffey, 1999). Consequently, this article is conceptually underpinned by the contrasting, yet I believe complimentary, work of Goffman (1959) and Butler (1990).

7.2 The article highlights some of the methodological challenges and concerns specifically (re)negotiated and managed as a female academic throughout the research process. For me, these were: first, those that emerged from first gaining access to a hyper-masculine subculture; second, entering and developing rapport in the subculture; and third, 'doing gender' in the hyper-masculine field. Central to negotiating these challenges was a very conscious performative presentation of self, sometimes for self-preservation, during the research process. In practice, this sometimes required demonstrating that I had the (metaphorical) 'balls' in terms of handling particular situations, the emotional labour it demands, and my overall (gendered) image management. However, being a female academic was not entirely problematic, as I had previously feared. Once I had gained access, these status markers were sometimes actually useful research tools that helped me develop a form of rapport with some of my hooligan subjects and encouraged more candid discussions, which male academics may not have been party to.

7.3 This article calls for a lifting of the blinkers in social research, not just regarding gender blindness, but also in terms of acknowledging the complexities and disclosing the 'untidiness' of qualitative research practices and the emotional labour it can require. This involves greater consideration of the *real* nature of the research process and more frank admissions about the challenging and awkward situations that can arise, often presenting the researcher with an emotional rollercoaster of 'highs' and 'lows'. Sharing 'what works' (and 'what doesn't') via 'warts and all' scholarship is of key importance for future sociological or anthropological fieldwork since this kind of advice and candid reflexivity tends to go unrecognised in the

sanitised accounts outlined in traditional methodology teaching and textbooks. Likewise in the vast majority of published research articles, which all too often present qualitative research as a clinical process with polished practices.

7.4 My intention is that reflecting upon and sharing my experiences and the emotional nature of my research will contribute to the existing body of methodological work by providing useful advice and guidance on the performative presentation of self – as well as support and encouragement – to other researchers, especially those doing gendered research, to help their self-preservation in the field. While the article is primarily concerned with (a) being a female academic researcher and (b) football hooliganism, the methodological issues it addresses readily transfer and can contribute to other field settings. These issues are of relevance to anyone faced with gender incongruence between them and their informers, as well as anyone engaged in qualitative research with deviant, (quasi-)criminal or male dominated subcultures more broadly. In other words, any field where the researcher may be required to reconsider and negotiate their positioning, practices and performativity in their presentation of self.

Notes

¹ 'Football hooliganism' is a generic, socially constructed term that is also used as a self-referent by some participants, especially those involved in British hooligan 'firms' (organised gangs). Their behaviour ranges from verbal abuse and aggressive posturing, through to more violent actions, such as fighting and rioting. British football hooliganism does not tend to have the political allegiances and affiliations often associated with European hooligan groups or 'Ultras'. While rare in Britain and most European countries, fatalities occur more often in South America and Sub-Saharan Africa, where there is more prevalent use of knives and guns. Despite polemic stances on the origins, causes and aetiology of football hooliganism, most sociologists, anthropologists and social psychologists at least agree that it is underscored by the psycho-social pleasures of violence that are experienced by the (predominantly) male perpetrators, territorial identification, a sense of solidarity and belonging, and especially 'hard' or 'aggressive' masculinity (Spaaij 2008). As such, the subculture of football hooliganism is a fertile site for the symbolic expression and validation of 'hyper-masculinity': an extreme form of masculine gender ideology, characterised by one or more of the following characteristics: insensitive attitudes toward women; violence as manly; danger as exciting; and toughness as emotional self-control (see Messerschmidt 1993; Connell 1995/2005; West and Zimmermann 1987).

² 'Having the balls' is an English/American colloquialism used to denote courage, a brave attitude, or 'nerve', rather like the Yiddish term 'chutzpah'. Contextually, its usage is similar to the Spanish and South American phrase 'tener cojones'.

³ *The Real Football Factories* (2006) was an entertainment-orientated British documentary television series profiling the most notorious British hooligan firms; a second series looked at international hooligan and Ultra groups. See Poulton (2008).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback in developing this article. I also wish to thank my colleagues Martin Roderick (for his honest comments on an early version of this article), Maggie O'Neill (for pushing me further) and especially Pete Millward (for his generous advice on numerous drafts); their support and encouragement are much appreciated. Finally, I wish to thank the 'lads' for 'letting me in'. I hope I showed you that I 'had some balls'. Big respect.

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