'Lasses are much easier to get on with': The gendered labour of a female ethnographer in an all-male group

Q

R

**$SAGE

Kate Haddow iD
Department of Sociology, Teesside University, UK

Abstract

This article addresses the complexities of being a female ethnographer studying an all-male group, as well as the advantages and the effects this had on the researcher. It draws on research undertaken for a doctoral research project, employing ethnography and semi-structured interviews to explore 'hidden' food insecurity in the town of Middlesbrough, with predominantly male participants. The existing literature surrounding research and gender addresses the problems associated with gender differences in the field such as fitting in, sexualisation and sexist treatment and confinement to traditional gender roles. This research highlighted many problems associated with being a female ethnographer but that ultimately gender was beneficial in gaining and maintaining access to the field. It concludes by arguing for academia to develop the notion of 'hidden ethnography', alongside a recognition that researchers should be supported emotionally in problems they face in the field.

Introduction

Existing literature has well documented the challenges faced by female researchers in male-dominated environments. For instance, accounts from female ethnographers such as Gurney (1985) who studied an office dominated by men and was assigned to tasks that were deemed suitable for women, as well as sexual hustling and sexist behaviour, and Lumsden (2009) who conducted ethnography with a group of boy racers and was also subject to hustling and devalued as a person in the group. The main issues in the literature are sexualisation, sexist behaviour and lack of respect. These behaviours can be challenging on ethnographers, meaning they may have to practice 'hidden ethnography'

Corresponding author:

Kate Haddow, Graduate Researcher, School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Law, Teesside University, Clarendon Building, Middlesbrough, TS1 3BA, UK.
Email: K.Haddow@tees.ac.uk

whereby data is considered too controversial to share (Blackman, 2007). The consequences of hidden ethnography, as this article will argue, can be damaging to researchers' well-being. Therefore, a wider change in how we deal with such problems in research is needed. Ultimately, the ethnographic experience is very different for women, yet the importance of gender is often overlooked in methodological textbooks (Poulton, 2012).

This article contributes to the reflexive stance in ethnography by emphasising the importance of personal attributes in the research process, particularly gender, and how the researcher co-creates the research dialogue with participants (Lumsden, 2009). The reflexive turn has allowed the researcher's feelings, appearance, and social position to become more central in ethnographic research. Moreover, the data we collect is not just founded but represents a dialogue between the researcher and participants, which help us understand issues of representation and legitimisation (Lumsden, 2009). Although researchers are still not encouraged to discuss the effects of both positive and negative impacts that research can have on researchers (Lisiak & Krzyzowski, 2018), rather the detached, objective approach is often preferred (Wakeman, 2014).

This article begins with an overview of the research project, including methodology, before my experiences of working with an all-male group. It will explore the range of problems that gender relations can have on the research process and what effect this had on me.

Research Setting and Methodology

This research stems from a doctoral research project exploring food insecurity in the town of Middlesbrough, situated in the North East of England, an area known for its industrial prowess. However, the consequences of deindustrialisation have left Middlesbrough as one of the most deprived areas of the UK. The top 10 wards of Middlesbrough are the most deprived areas of the UK (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2015). Unemployment in the area has been consistently above the national average for the past 30 years (Shildrick et al., 2012).

Food insecurity is considered to be a legacy of cuts to the welfare state and the increased use of sanctioning. This refers to the removal of financial support to an unemployed person if they fail to meet the criteria for seeking work (Loopstra et al., 2018). Other factors including the 'bedroom tax' and low paid, insecure employment have contributed to the rise in foodbank use (Garthwaite, 2016). Not only has the use of foodbanks been subject to much coverage in the mainstream media (Wells and Caraher, 2014), it has also been labelled as a public health emergency (cf. Garthwaite et al., 2015).

The rapid increase in foodbank use has also been subject to much academic research such as Loopstra and Lalor (2017) who conducted the first nationwide study using Trussell Trust data, Garthwaite's (2016) ethnographic study of a Trussell Trust foodbank and Lambie-Mumford's (2017) study of both a Trussell Trust foodbank and FareShare, two of the most well-known franchises in the UK food banking industry (Loopstra et al., 2018). However, these are not representative of all sources of food aid in the UK such as independent foodbanks, soup kitchens and community meals (Loopstra et al., 2018). In fact, Caraher and Furey (2018) estimate the Trussell Trust network only accounts for 50% of food aid in the UK. This gap in knowledge around 'hidden' food insecurity formed the rationale for this research.

The UK government in February 2019 has pledged to measure food insecurity by household (End Hunger UK, 2019). At present, we use statistics from the Trussell Trust, FareShare and the work of Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), which maps independent foodbanks across the UK. There is little existing research on localised forms of food aid. Middlesbrough was selected because of its socioeconomic makeup, home to some of the most deprived areas of the UK (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2015), meaning there would be a high possibility of finding other kinds food aid.

There were two phases to the research, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. I accompanied service users to different sites of food aid, sometimes up to five times a week. Participant observation began in December 2017 and continued until July 2018, and included waiting and sitting with service users while they received food aid. I took detailed notes based on my observations after I left the food aid sites. My identity and purposes were known to all, after the manager briefed everyone and consent was gained verbally by service users and volunteers during the ethnographic stage, along with written consent by the manager of the relevant organisation. All service users, volunteers and organisations' names were anonymised.

Alongside the ethnographic work, I conducted 28 semi-structured interviews with 16 service users and 12 volunteers. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 90 minutes and were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Interviews took place including a mixture of settings: in cafes, library rooms or often in a spare room in a charitable food site. Most of the interviews were digitally recorded using a dictaphone with the consent of the participants. Those who did not want to be recorded had their wishes respected, and instead, detailed notes were taken.

Entering the field: Shaun the gatekeeper

My initial plan for entering the field was to be a volunteer-researcher at a food aid site. However, this original plan did not work out for several reasons, such as lack of interest and concerns over the vulnerability of service users from gatekeepers. However, my ethnography changed based on an encounter with one service user. Shaun was a familiar face at any charitable food provision site. I had observed him from a distance and we had been informally introduced by another volunteer. He was not a character you would forget easily. He was loud, comical and dominant and was a popular person among other men. Shaun was the first to join me at the table in the breakfast club where one gatekeeper did allow me to talk to service users. Shaun remarked that he had seen me and he even asked in jest: '*are you fucking stalking me, you have been at every food place this week?*' I was a little embarrassed at his remark and laughed and replied by saying, '*well, kind of*'.

I had explained to Shaun how difficult it was to access service users and, I think out of sympathy, he agreed to be interviewed. We had built a good rapport, and I explained that more interviews were needed for the research. In an act of kindness, Shaun offered to let me join him at other places of food provision. Although, I would later learn that there was an element of research bargaining to be done and his offer came at a cost. From this point on, Shaun had let me into a marginalised group of men who were permanently food insecure and using sources of charitable food on an almost daily basis.

There was certainly a sense of membership and belonging amongst the service users at the free food places, which made the group an exclusive one of its own. New faces were always treated with suspicion as I had experienced first-hand. I describe 'the lads' as a group due to the membership and hierarchy amongst the men. The group never saw themselves as a gang and there was no official initiation into the group. The free food places were, at times, sites of simmering tension between the main male service users which occasionally spilled over into violent confrontations. There was a clear hierarchy in the group, which was based on multiple factors such as how physically capable the men were, family name, reputation and their own personal biographies.

The literature regarding groups often recognises key individuals who allow outsiders into the group. For example, Whyte (1943) conducted an ethnography based on his relationship with 'Doc', his gatekeeper to the world of 'Cornerville' (Hobbs, 2007). Similarly, Alice Goffman (2014) was also able to study a group of men because of her good rapport with Mike and Chuck, the more dominant men in the group. Generally, the key person is the leader, often being the one who determines who is allowed into the group. Shaun was clearly a key individual and gatekeeper. Therefore, essentially my gateway to becoming an insider: being where a person has privileged access or knowledge to those being studied (Merton, 1972).

The research by Goffman (2014) presents ethical problems. Goffman was a white middle-class woman studying a working-class group of black men, and it can be argued that in her book '*On the Run*' there is a lack of consideration of her positionality. Reflecting on my own position and how that affected my relations with the group, it is important to recognise I was relatively privileged. After all, I was a PhD student in higher education which is a position of privilege and will have affected how the group saw me. However, despite being different from the group, I was still seen as similar to them in terms of coming from a working-class background, something explored in more detail later in this article.

When I first joined the group, I felt vulnerable and nervous, although I tried not to let this show. I stayed glued to Shaun and Lee's sides whilst they took me to new free food sites, and I remember reflecting on how the power imbalance had completely shifted, as I was entering a new social world in which I did not belong too. It was evident that I did not fit in; not just in terms of gender, but other factors like my dress sense and my own personal biography. Shaun told me in his interview how he had this almost intrinsic sense of knowing I was not a service user and therefore not one of them:

> *Tell straight away that you're not. Can tell by your eyes, clean, nice smile well turned out.*

One factor that certainly influenced my belonging into the group was my social class. Although we never spoke about social class, it was evident that features like my broad accent and personal biography aided in forming relations within the group. My accent, in particular, was seen as a 'working-class accent' and where I lived was perceived as 'rough' (a term used to describe an area of high crime and antisocial behaviour) and the group often made references to territorial stigma about where I lived.

The group was centred on masculine heterosexual working-class identities, which was difficult for me to fit into. It was difficult to forge a rapport with the few women in

the group as their attendance tended to be more fluid. However, after a few months in the field, I learnt that not all of the women were happy with my persistent attendance and especially my close rapport with Shaun. Shaun was the most desirable bachelor in the group; he was the youngest and the most dominant, and some women saw me as a threat:

> Shaun: *The lasses really didn't like you being around (laughs)*
> Kate: *Really? Why?*
> Shaun: *Lucy, Caroline, Jess they were all like who is that girl and why you always with her*
> Lee: *Oh yeah they are jealous.*

I held an isolated position in the group. My membership in the group was weak, being unable to fit into the men's tight network because of my gender and being spurned by the women. My tenuous membership in the group was based on my close rapport with Shaun, my social class and gender.

Sexualisation and sexism

Initially, I did not anticipate working with an all-male group. Therefore, I did not expect sexualisation to be a feature in this research. This is often referred to as 'hustling' which can 'range from flirting to sexually suggestive comments and propositioning, which place a female researcher in an inferior and devalued position' (Gurney, 1985: 12).

Sexualisation was something I experienced constantly whilst conducting fieldwork. In fact, at one point, I considered leaving the field earlier than planned due to it becoming so problematic in various ways, such as comments regarding my appearance and questions over my personal and sex life. I made it clear at the start of my fieldwork when Shaun and others started showing a sexual interest in me, that I was in a long-term serious relationship and that I was 'unavailable'—this is something other female ethnographers have done such as Lumsden (2009) and Poulton (2012) to attempt to end hustling. Although, in this research, this did little to deter their behaviour. I decided to avoid talking about my relationship as I did not want it to become a regular topic of conversation and detract from the research.

The sexualisation I experienced was primarily through verbal comments and physical contact. Although how the sexualisation played out was interesting. Rarely did I experience being openly sexualised in front of the group. The sexualisation generally occurred on a one-to-one basis for numerous reasons. Mainly, the men found it embarrassing to openly sexualise me in front of others. More importantly, Shaun would not allow anyone to speak to me in a sexual manner because he was jealous and very much saw me as his possession. If anyone did attempt to sexualise me, it would often cause conflict from Shaun demonstrating his controlling and leader-like status.

The only person who would openly sexualise me was Shaun. He would never be challenged openly by other men or even by myself at times. How female ethnographers deal and cope with sexualisation very much depends on the individual ethnographer. There is little literature or guidance on how female researchers should deal with sexualisation. Many female ethnographers such as Arendell (1997) and Brunner (2013) report using

evasive action rather than challenging sexualisation (Warren and Hackney, 2000). I employed a mixture of tactics sometimes being evasive or challenging any sexual comments by laughing them off or attempting to change the subject. The chosen tactic depended on the context of who I was with and where we were. I questioned Shaun on why he felt that it was acceptable that he could to talk me in a sexual manner but not anyone else in the group.

Extract from fieldnotes
12th July 2018

Kate: *I have been hanging with you lot for seven months now*
Shaun: *God seven months I thought I would have had you by now like (meaning to engage in sexual intercourse)*
Kate: *I am not some sort of fucking prize to be won you know Shaun. Why do you speak to me like that?*
Shaun: *(laughs) Cause I will have you, I don't know when or where but I will.*

I ended this interaction with a cold and long disapproving stare, while Shaun smirked. At times, I had to walk a fine line with Shaun, something Lumsden (2009) also reported while working with an all-male group; whilst not wanting to let him sexualise me and be subject to sexist comments, I knew that if I challenged him, it could upset the rapport we had built and he could easily shut off my access to the group. I also felt an enormous amount of gratitude to the group, particularly Shaun, who had granted me unlimited access to his life and given me so much information. Fielding (1993) notes this problem of marginality, revolving around fears of acceptance and loneliness and ethnographers partake in activities or accept behaviour to show gratitude to participants for their patience.

Despite his problematic and sexist behaviour, I liked and respected Shaun, and we got on well. As noted in Skeggs (2001) work on feminist ethnography, it is not uncommon for ethnographers to feel like this when dealing with controversial behaviour and researchers should not generalise about ethical prescriptions; that is where the researcher uses honesty, reciprocity, equality and accountably to treat participants with respect (Skeggs, 2001). I was always naturally drawn to him and Lee because I felt safe with them, and I knew that no harm could come to me in the group because of this salient hierarchy in the group. Similar to Gurney (1985), I felt privileged to be a part of the group, but that privilege came at a personal cost. This is a common occurrence that some female ethnographers report, often putting the success of their research before their own personal beliefs (Gurney, 1985).

Surrogate relationships in ethnography

Essentially, I had agreed without realising it to be Shaun's mascot and to be his surrogate girlfriend in exchange for my membership in the group and information. Bargaining is a key skill in ethnography, and for the researcher to take on roles, for example, Lumsden (2009) was a chauffeur for a participant who was banned from driving and took him to car shows. I found the experience of being a surrogate girlfriend a surreal one. At times, I was thankful because it stopped hustling from other members of the group; Shaun offered me

protection, and because of him, I was well looked after in the group. In some respects, I was flattered that he viewed me as a girlfriend; I watched him turn down many romantic and sexual gestures down. I enjoyed being with him as he was excited to be with; he was comedic. However, there was a dark side to this. I felt immense guilt on my partner and frustrated at myself for allowing Shaun to treat me the way he did. I was also frightened about potential repercussions from my supervisionary team and the university.

This was a stressful situation in which I struggled to deal with. Lisiak and Kryzowski (2018) write about how when they found research to be particularly emotional or challenging they used face to face interactions and virtual interactions to unpack their feelings and decipher their positionality in the field. I did not confide in my colleagues as I was too scared too. I found my experiences in the field did not match the methodological literature or that of colleagues conducting ethnography. It was not until I started to read other accounts of female ethnographers such as Gurney (1985), Lumsden (2009) and Golde (1970) that I realised this was a common dilemma, but there was a lack of consensus on how to deal with hustling or how to write and reflect upon it. The position of women in western society is unequal to that of men, and yet, when we set out to conduct research, we rarely consider how this inequality can be played out in fieldwork and in our relations with participants. Hence, a stronger consideration of gender in fieldwork.

On closer evaluation, Shaun, in particular, thrived on my presence in the group. As Shaun had introduced me to the group, the other men saw me as his surrogate girlfriend, and it boosted his status in the group because none of the other men had any form of romantic relations. To Shaun, I was an object that he used to assert his dominance in the group. Any incidents where men would sexualise me, Shaun would use at any opportunity to assert his aggressive nature or to settle an ongoing conflict. Although Shaun would often state that he was protective of me because he perceived me as vulnerable and in need of protection from other service users and they felt responsible for me as a young female outsider.

Protected status

I sometimes questioned Shaun's motivations in particular for being so protective, and at times, I felt he used me to advance his own status. My first experience of being openly sexualised was around 1 month after being introduced to the group by Shaun. I was distributing food parcels and a participant turned to Shaun whilst looking at me and nudged Shaun with his arm and said: '*Hey she's alright like isn't she, she would be a good shag for you*'. Shaun nervously laughed the comment off and denied our relationship was a sexual one and quickly moved the conversation on. It was unusual and, in fact, it was the only time I saw Shaun nervous and slightly embarrassed. At the time, I was upset by this comment; it made me feel like an object rather than a person, and I started to question whether men would talk to me just because some perceived me as a good-looking woman and not because we built a rapport on trust and respect. This event clearly showed not only what some of the men thought of me but also highlighted my low position in the group, which was determined by my relationship with Shaun.

My body was also subject to heavy control and regulation. Shaun was the only person who could touch me apart from Lee but only to give me a hug to bid farewell to each other.

Shaun would often put his arm around me or touch my arm or leg to show ownership of me, often to articulate a point or demonstrate something to me. The level of interaction ranged from touching to more sexualised encounters such as smacking my bottom. Even when sitting together, I would always be sitting between Shaun and Lee. Whilst walking anywhere, Shaun would always walk by my side and we always walked at the back of the group of men or at the front, we rarely walked as part of the group. In the one incident when a male participant touched my knee, it was an action that carried consequences. This incident did not lead to any violence, but Lee told me that he and Shaun had words with the 'culprit' and that the incident would not be repeated. Similar to the findings of Richards (2015), I had developed a paternalistic style relationship with Lee.

Altering myself

My appearance and clothing were often subject to control and scrutiny. Any changes in my appearance such as a haircut or a new item of clothing would not go unnoticed and were always commented on, often the basis for hustling. My clothing was the most subject to regulation by Lee, one of the older members of the group, who saw me as a daughter-like figure. Comments would often be directed at my legs or chest, if I wore a skirt they would comment on how short it was or if I had a top on they would criticize me if it was deemed as revealing.

Bucerius (2013), in her own experiences of working with men, talks about deliberately altering her appearance to downplay her sexuality, such as wearing no makeup, tying her hair up and wearing loose-fitting clothing to break the outline of her feminine physique. Even after my first experiences of sexualisation, I decided not to alter my appearance, and I wore makeup, perfume and any clothes of my choice. This was my attempt at regaining some control in the field. Although at the start of my fieldwork, I was conscious not to draw attention to myself and agonised over what to wear, I also did not want my clothes to reinforce I was 'someone from the uni' similar to the experiences of Poulton (2012). It is not unheard of for ethnographers to dress differently in an attempt to fit in or not to stand out (Lumsden, 2009).

My position in the group was upheld by my close rapport with Shaun. It is evident he saw me as a possession rather than equal that he used me to maintain and boost his status in the group and that he enjoyed asserting control over me. What was apparent from my conversations with the men, on a one-to-one basis, was how desirable they found me as a long-term partner and I was offered several romantic advances during my time in the field.

Extract from fieldnotes
13 February 2018

Shaun had been drinking cheap wine and was quite merry by the time we reached the soup kitchen. We sat at a table together whilst he ate his soup, he was critiquing one of the lads for no reason and I said joking "God I hate to think what you call me when I am not here" he smirked at me and said: "ah you don't wanna know darl, proper dirty". We both laughed and I went a little red from embarrassment. He then turned to face me and said "I was proper gutted you know when I found out you had a lad" I asked why, although I knew, he said "I wanted to

get in with you and be with you". I found this quite overwhelming and nervously laughed it off and in jest "Eh well I am sorry for having a boyfriend" we both just laughed at left it that.

I rarely disclosed to anyone the issue of sexualisation or the romantic gestures I received in this research unlike other researchers such as Lisiak and Kryzowski (2018) who used their colleagues to vent any challenges they faced undertaking research. I felt it would cause people to question my integrity as a researcher. While writing up my field notes, I sometimes hesitated whether to include the examples of hustling as I was concerned that it could detract from the focus of the project. I often pondered over these incidents and felt a range of emotions from guilt, shame and stress, and they took a toll on me emotionally. Blackman (2007) refers to this dilemma as 'hidden ethnography'. I was fearful of what would happen to me if I told people about the incidents I faced. Blackman (2007) claims that 'hidden ethnography' is vital to our understanding of our relations with participants and the advancement of the reflexive stance.

Since leaving the field and allowing myself time to reflect on my hidden ethnography and explore the literature on ethnography, instead of ignoring these incidents and seeing them as a weakness and ethical dilemma, I use them as a tool to understand and theorise relations between the researcher and the researched. The issues I faced were more complex than flirting and physical touching but concern issues of power and exploitation. If we discourage accounts such as this, we are not offering a true account of our fieldwork; it also hinders the progression of reflexivity and does not reveal the immense stress hidden ethnography can have on the mental well-being of the researcher. Gurney (1985) notes that females in all-male settings can ascertain a great deal about their own position in the group by studying how other females are treated in that particular setting. Despite few women attending these sites of food aid, those who did were considered to be undesirable because of their addiction issues. The fact that I did not take any illegal drugs or even smoked cigarettes made me even more desirable. The other women in the group were often treated with contempt:

In comparison to the other women, I was treated differently. However, I was surprisingly treated better than other women in the group, although I recognise that I was subject to sexist treatment and still held a devalued position in the group. In some respects, I enjoyed a high status amongst the group because of my close rapport to Shaun. For example, at one charitable food site, the service users were allowed to make their own hot drinks. I had expected that when I joined the group I would be expected to take on domestic chores such as making tea and coffee but, to my surprise, I found members of the group making me a cup of coffee. I can never be certain why I was treated better than the other women in the group, whether it be because I was a visitor to the group or because I was viewed as Shaun's female associate and held a high status in the group when he was present; I suspect it was a combination of the two.

At times, I found it difficult to accept, but my appearance was clearly a strong factor for Shaun allowing me into the group. This reinforces the reflexive argument that the researcher's personal characteristics shape and influence the research (Poulton, 2012). The sexualisation I experienced caused rippling effects within the group dynamics and the hierarchy amongst them; clearly for Shaun, it was not just about being seen and associated with young women, which helped to boost his status- It was also about power and

control where he used me to assert his aggressive nature and retain power over the group. This issue of sexualisation was not a clear-cut issue, and there were other elements of power, tied into notions of masculinity that ran much deeper into the group, discussed in the following section.

Masculinity and ethnography: 'I wouldn't let a lad hang around with us'

In achieving 'insider status' is often attributed to occupying a position of proximity to participants (Hodkinson, 2005); gender is a crucial part of this similarity (Bucerius, 2013). However, I would argue that being a different gender to my participants was not a limitation in this research. I will accept that it did alter my relations with the men I studied but, I argue being a female in fact benefited my relationships with the group. Blackman (1998) has demonstrated that gender is not necessarily a barrier to research when he studied a group of young women with some measures put in place such as having female colleagues read his field notes.

In previous research and literature regarding male groups, particularly in criminology, male researchers are often regarded as a better fit (Bucerius, 2013). Therefore, being a female with male participants is often constructed as a disadvantage. Female researchers are at risk of sexual harassment or sexual attack (Warren and Hackney, 2011). It was suggested to me that perhaps I should have a male colleague accompany me whilst conducting my fieldwork; this is not uncommon. Lumsden (2009) had her partner accompany her during her ethnographic study of boy racers, which did put an end to hustling. I decided against a male chaperone for several reasons. I knew it would destroy any rapport I built with the group, and a male would always be considered as a threat to the group, and it was likely they would view this as a betrayal of our trust. I knew my strength lay in being a solo female researcher despite the problems associated with being a female ethnographer. This is similar to Richards (2015), in her study of men's football cultures where the males in her study reported negative experiences of working with male academics who they argued treated them poorly.

I often wondered if the men in the group would have preferred a male researcher to work with, would they share more in common, and would a male be able to join the 'banter' of the group. It was a question I put to Shaun and Lee and they held very definite views about gender:

Shaun:	*Naaa I wouldn't let a lad hang around with us the way you do, no way . . .I might have given him like an interview but I wouldn't let him come round with us*
Kate:	*Why though?*
Shaun:	*Lads are horrible man, lasses are much nicer to talk too. . . lasses are much easier to get on with*
Lee:	*Yea I mean I might have a quick chat with a lad, but if we saw him again we would have probably ignored him and kept away from him. Lads are dead uppity though. A lad doing what you have done just wouldn't work. I couldn't see a lad having any success doing what you do.*

It was clear that participants were not keen on the thought of working with a male researcher for a number of reasons. Although never explicitly stated, I interpreted a male researcher as a threat to the all-male group—someone who could disrupt or threaten the existing hierarchy. A male researcher was always seen to be a threat in terms of changing the group and trying to assert their own control over the group, whereas a female researcher could be considered to be more passive. The men had nothing to gain from a man joining the group; it was someone to compete against whereas with a woman joining the group they had something to gain. They had someone to desire, someone who would listen to their problems. From my experience, the existing relations the men had with other men were mainly negative. Males were also frequently associated with the police, probation and social services; in all the professions the men had very poor relations with.

A wife, mother, girlfriend and a daughter: gendered labour of ethnography

It was evident that the men had highly gendered expectations of a female researcher as Stacey (1988) states females have been considered better suited to ethnography because it plays to female strengths of such as empathy and human concern. I was almost assigned various roles depending on who I was with, similar to the work of Blackman (1998) where the girls he studied expected different relations between them. Gurney (1985) suggests that relations with participants are based on an exchange of relationships and that researchers can be asked to perform favours many of which form no problems. However, female researchers are warned over expecting sexual favours. In this research, the men asked very little of me in terms of favours except perhaps to give them my phone to use. Although I experienced sexualisation and challenging behaviour, the men never asked for sexual favours in return for their information. However, there were unseen emotional demands. This assignment of gendered roles is something Easterday et al. (1977) raises, for instance, women can play subordinate roles in the group such as surrogate daughters and 'gofers' where women are expected to carry out chores and to run errands. Mazzei and O'Brien (2009) argue that gender scripts in the field provide important opportunities for the researcher to negotiate and to forge rapports and gain access. I had unintentionally used various scripts to build relations with the group, although I would argue that men also determined these scripts. Whatever kind of relations I built with the men depended very much on my age and how close I was to them in terms of rapport. For example, Lee saw me as a daughter figure. When discussing our rapport, he immediately stated, '*Well I am old enough to be your dad*'. It is not uncommon for older males and younger females to forge this kind of relationship (Poulton, 2012). It offers both parties predefined comfortable relations (Gurney, 1985). Therefore, our relationship was defined by age and paternalism. Lee enacted a lot of care towards me, making me a cup of coffee and sitting next to me to ensure I was safe.

However, Lee expected me to listen to his, often difficult, situations, perhaps because I was a woman and because of the level of exclusion Lee faced, I was expected to be a good listener and to be caring and sympathetic. This raises discussions on feminist ethnography as Skeggs (2001) notes around debates in the 1980s about how females are predisposed to caring roles and translated into feminist research as prescriptive ethics of care. After a

while, I found this role to be emotionally exhausting, to the point where I avoided being left alone with Lee and in some cases avoided him completely. I then started to question whether I was a 'bad' researcher for avoiding him and feeling the way I did. Again, this highlights how a researcher's emotions and personality can influence and affect the research (Lumsden, 2009, 2010). However, these personal reflections are still not discussed in methodological texts. I found my identity and my personality had a substantial impact on this research and as such ethnographers should reflect on issues like these.

My relationship with Shaun was more complex and one that I struggled to understand and continued to question throughout my time in the field. Our relationship changed depending on various situations; at times, I felt like I was a mixture of his mother, sister and girlfriend. I found myself chastising Shaun for any bad behaviour and enacting care to any difficulties in which he found himself in. Yet, because of our similar ages and life experiences, I took on the role of adoptive sister. However, because of my gender, age and sexual identity, he often treated me primarily as a surrogate girlfriend, meaning I soon learnt that in the researcher-researched relationship, we as researchers rarely get something for nothing (Gurney, 1985). As an ethnographer, there is always an element of bargaining to be done between the researcher and the researched (Brewer, 2000).

I was expected to be submissive and to follow his lead and to be loyal to him in the group. It was a well-established joke in the group I was 'Shaun's wife'. If ever someone inquired about who I was he was happy to tell them I was 'our lass' or 'me wife'. Therefore, in return for his information and access, I was Shaun's mascot; the fact he had a young woman by his side helped boost his status in the group and fed his ego. This is an example of negotiation (Brewer, 2000). I found this constant change in relations quite stressful to cope with, alongside the guilt I felt on behalf of my partner. To other members of the group, I played various roles.

Easterday et al. (1977) highlight the perks of being a female researcher. Being a young female was clearly a factor in my access to the group because I was perceived as naive and harmless. I asked Shaun if he would have worked with an older researcher who had more experience:

> Kate: *Would you have let an older researcher hang around with you?*
> Shaun: *Like an older woman? Naa cause she would treat it like a job wouldn't she? Like professional, I couldn't see that happening, I just can't see it.*

An older researcher would be taken more seriously by the group. This sense of professionalism a more experienced researcher might present towards their career could have been a barrier. As there were only 8 years between me and Shaun, compared with other men who were sometimes more than double my age, meant we bonded over generational experiences. Being a young PhD student meant I was not taken very seriously by the group, similar to the work of Moore (2003) studying clubbing who found their own youth detracted from any authority with their own participants. In fact, the men had very little understanding about my position as a postgraduate student and the label of a student placed me as insignificant. This is interesting as they could have viewed my position very differently. I would argue that class played an important part in this, the fact they saw me as working class like them aided in building a rapport a swell as intersecting features like age and gender.

Conclusion

Being a young female ethnographer was clearly a strength for me in terms of access and maintaining a rapport amongst the group. It was the defining factor that let me into the group. However, what I did not expect was the effect that the research could have on my emotions and mental well-being. I never anticipated that the researcher-researched relationship could become so dark and complex. I felt at times I had to be cautious when expressing my emotions particularly as an early career researcher. Although it is growing increasingly popular for researchers to personalise their accounts, there is also a concern over emotions as a barrier to 'good' research, despite the emotions we experience during research being integral part of the research experience (van den Scott, 2018).

In terms of supporting ethnographers, this article proposes a number of interventions that institutions could put in place, although it is important to obtain a delicate balance to avoid normalising the expectation of inappropriate behaviour. First, we need to continue to push for a recognition of emotions in research and embrace the idea of hidden ethnography. The value of hidden ethnography is being able to truly understanding how studies are carried out and how knowledge is produced and the complex relations between the researcher and researched. Embracing reflexive accounts will also encourage inexperienced researchers to speak out about their encounters instead of creating a culture of fear, which was my primary reasons for not sharing my account sooner.

Second, developing research support groups in institutions is crucial. Many institutions do offer similar groups; however, this is not universal. Such groups should be available to all researchers, no matter what stage of their career. Institutions should consider their duty of care to staff involved in research and how research can affect their well-being. Finally, it is important to continue to argue for a reflexive approach when employing ethnography as a research method and to recognise the influence the researcher has on the researched particularly in regard to gender.

Overall, this article has aimed to advance our understanding of gender and ethnography and draw attention to other important aspects such as age and social class and the relations between the researcher and the researched. Furthermore, this article highlights how complicated the researcher-researched relationship can be and how different the research experience can be from initial expectations, particularly for those in the early stages of academic research.

ORCID iD

Kate Haddow https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4744-689X

References

Ardenell T (1997) Reflections on the researcher- researched relationship: a woman interviewing men. *Qualitative Sociology* 20(3): 341–368.

Atkinson P (2013) *The Ethnographic Imagination*. London: Routledge.

Blackman SJ (1998) "Poxy Cupid": an ethnographic and feminist account of a resistant female youth culture - the New Wave Girls. In: Skelton T and Valentine G (eds) *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*. London: Routledge, 207–228.

Blackman SJ (2007) Hidden ethnography: crossing emotional borders in qualitative accounts of young people's lives. *Sociology* 41(4): 699–716.

Brewer JD (2000) *Ethnography*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Burcerius SM (2013) Becoming a "Trusted outsider" gender, ethnicity, and inequality in ethnographic research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 42(6): 690–721.

Caraher M and Furey S (2018) *The Economics of Emergency Food Aid Provision: A financial, Social and Cultural Perspective*. London: Palgrave Pivot.

Dowler E, Turner S and Dobson B (2001) *Poverty Bites: Food, Health and Poor Families*. London: Child Poverty Action Group.

Easterday L, Papademas D, Schoor L, et al. (1977) The making of a female researcher: role problems in the field. *Urban Life* 6(3): 333–346.

End Hunger UK (2019) Campaign win UK government agrees to measure household food insecurity. Available at http://endhungeruk.org/campaign-win-uk-government-agrees-to-measure-household-food-insecurity/ (Accessed 28 March 2019).

Fielding N (1993) Ethnography. In: Gilbert N (ed.), *Researching Social Life*. London: SAGE publications, 154–171.

Garthwaite K (2016) *Hunger Pains: Life inside Foodbank Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Garthwaite K, Collins PJ and Bambra C (2015) Food for thought: an ethnographic study of negotiating ill health and food insecurity in a UK foodbank. *Social Science and Medicine* 132: 38–44.

Gill F and Maclean C (2002) Knowing your place: gender reflexivity in two ethnographies. *Sociological Research Online* 7(2): 1–11.

Goffman A (2014) *On the Run*. New York: Picador.

Golde P (ed.) (1970) *Women in the Field*. London: University California Press.

Gurney J (1985) Not one of the guys: the female researcher in a male dominated setting. *Qualitative Sociology* 8(1): 42–62.

Hobbs D (2007) Ethnography and the study of deviance. In: Atkinson P, Delamont S, Coffey A, et al. (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: SAGE publications, 204–220.

Hodkinson P (2005) Insider research in the study of youth cultures. *Journal of Youth Studies* 8(2): 131–149.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (2015) Estimated ward ranks. Available at: https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/open-data-foi-and-have-your-say/about-middlesbrough-and-local-statistics/index-multiple-deprivation (accessed 29 September 2020).

Lambie-Mumford H (2017) *Hungry Britain: The Rise of Food Charity*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Lisiak A and Krzyzowski L (2018) With a little help from my colleagues: emotional support in a qualitative longitudinal research project. In: Loughran T and Mannay D (eds) *Emoiton and the Researcher Sites, Subjectives and Relationships*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 33–47.

Loopstra R and Lalor D (2017) Financial insecurity, food insecurity and disability: the profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank network in Britain. Report, the Trussell Trust, UK, June.

Loopstra R, Fledderjohann J, Reeves A, et al. (2018) Impact of welfare benefit sanctioning on food insecurity. *Journal of Social Policy* 47(3): 437–457.

Lumsden K (2009) Don't ask a woman to do another woman's job: gendered interactions and the emotional ethnographer. *Sociology* 43(3): 497–513.

Lumsden K (2010) Gendered performances in a male- dominated subculture: 'girl racers, car modification and the quest for masculinity'. *Sociological Research Online* 15(3): 1–11.

Mazzei J and O'Brien EE (2009) You got it, so when do you flaunt it? Building rapport, intersectionality and the strategic deployment of gender in the field. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 38(3): 358–383.

Moore K (2003) E heads versus beer monsters: researching young people's music and drug consumption in dance club settings. In: Bennett A, Cieslik M and Miles S (eds) *Research Youth*: *Issues, Controveries and Dilemmas*. London: Palgrave McMillan, 138–156.

National Audit Office (2016) Benefit sanctions. Available: at https://www.nao.org.uk/report/benefit-sanctions/. (accessed 8 March 2019).

Poulton E (2012) 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'. *Sociological Research Online* 17(4): 1–13.

Richards J (2015) 'Which player do you fancy then?' Locating the female ethnographer in the field of Sociology and Sport. *Soccer and Society* 16(2–3): 393–404.

Riches G (2018) *Food Bank Nations*. Oxon: Routledge.

Sampson H and Thomas M (2003) Lone researchers at sea: gender, risk and responsibility. *Qualitative Research* 3(2): 165–189.

Skeggs B (2001) Feminist Ethnography. In: Aktinson P, Coffey A, Delamont S, et al. (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications, 426–443.

Shildrick T, MacDonald R, Webster C, et al. (2012) *Poverty and Insecurity Life in Low Pay No Pay Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Stacey J (1988) Can there be feminist ethnography? *Women's Studies* 11(1): 21–27.

Wakeman S (2014) Fieldwork, biography and emotion, doing criminological autoethnography. *British Journal of Criminology* 54(5): 705–721.

Warren C and Hackney J (2000) *Gender Issues in Ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications.

Wells R and Caraher M (2014) UK print media of the foodbank phenomenon: from food welfare to food charity. *British Food Journal* 116(9): 1426–1445.

Van den Scott L (2018) Role and transitions in the field and reflexivity: from friend to researcher. In: Loughran T and Mannay D (eds) *Emotion and the Researcher Sites, Subjectives and Relationships*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 19–33.

Author biography

Kate Haddow is a PhD student at Teesside University.