Sexual politics in the field: gendered research spaces in tourism geographies

Abstract

Sexual violence and harassment in field research is an uncomfortable and under-discussed phenomenon in the social sciences. Tourism geographies, being cross-cultural, often require solo fieldwork that exposes one's gender in geographically remote locations. There is a pressing need to normalise the discussion of sexual politics in the field, specifically concerning occurrences of gender-associated risks in fieldwork and report on the unexpected physical and mental health risks for women researchers. This study takes a feminist theoretical lens to unpack the hidden dimensions of women engaged in 'voluntary' risk taking by conducting field research in male-dominated research environments. Taking an exploratory approach within an interpretivist paradigm, this study is based on the fieldwork experiences of 13 women from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds with the participants sharing their subjective realities of researching in tourism geographies. A thematic analysis revealed the two key themes of risk/perceived vulnerabilities and wellbeing/care in the field as paramount for field research spaces for women, along with 11 subthemes. Findings reaffirmed the political nature of tourism geographies fieldwork and the need to challenge sexual politics and patriarchal domination, including for LGBTQ researchers. Further, the results highlighted the intersectionality of race and gender of women's experiences of sexual violence and other risks in the field. Thus, the findings suggest an urgent need to provide an imperative for fieldworker safety, wellbeing considerations, and alternative ways of researching.

Introduction

Despite the realities of sexual harassment, racism, homophobia, and gendered violence in the domain of research fieldwork being well documented (e.g., Easterday et al., 1977; Gibbons, 2014), little has been done to mitigate such encounters or acknowledge them in higher education institutions. The lack of attention given to addressing these issues in fieldwork is surprising given that sexual harassment in higher education has been referred to as an epidemic (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Previous studies suggest that between 64-68% of respondents experience sexual misconduct during fieldwork in anthropology (Bradford & Crema, 2022). However, universities often take the stance that since fieldwork exists in real

world settings and often in other cultures, students and staffs' experiences are beyond their purview. Although research fieldwork forms an integral component of various degrees and staff responsibilities, issues associated with sexual violence (e.g., mental health) (Kloß, 2017), become a researcher's own responsibility, meant to be managed privately. The World Health Organization (2002: 149) defines sexual violence as: 'any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion' which includes forced kissing, kidnapping and rape.

For many tourism geographies researchers, fieldwork involves immersing oneself in an unfamiliar social, cultural, and political environment. Fundamentally, fieldwork potentially 'involves entering into a new gender and sexual economy in which different understandings of reciprocity and exchange may be at play' (Clark & Grant, 2015, p.1). As a result of these nuanced exchanges, the broader socio-political aspects of fieldwork, such as sexual politics (Huang, 2016), highlight fieldwork as a gendered experience in heterosexual male-dominated research spaces (Cai, 2019; Porter & Schänzel, 2018; Porter, Schänzel & Cheer, 2021). Sexual politics was defined by the radical feminist Kate Millett in 1970 as 'encompassing the contestation of power-structured relationships with respect to sex, gender, and sexuality, and in relation to the social system of patriarchy' (cited in Waites, 2017, p.1). Despite more recent developments of pro-sex feminist politics in the academy (Jeffreys, 2011) and clearer understandings of the ways that sexual violence and women's experiences of sex are 'complexly interwoven with local, national, and international axes of power, privilege, and oppression' (Rosenberg & Duffy, 2010, p.161), Millet's (1970) description remains at the core of current feminist concerns (Bergfalk, 2017). Essentially, sexual politics is about the ubiquity of heterosexual male domination in culture. While this has been previously discussed in tourism with regards to gay tourism (e.g., Waitt & Markwell, 2014) and sex tourism (e.g., Pettman, 1997), studies fail to encompass research spaces. While the impacts of gender on fieldwork have been acknowledged and debated in subjects, such as anthropology and archaeology (e.g., Bradford & Crema, 2022), ethnography (e.g., Kloß, 2017), geography (e.g., Ross, 2015), and conservation (e.g., Rinkus, et al., 2018), there has been little attention given in tourism geography studies.

'The field' emerged as a masculine space, and 'the fieldworker' as a lone heterosexual male figure who needed to go alone and endure hardship and discomfort (Cooke, 2018). This 'lone male' archetype is still pervasive when it comes to field research (Sharp, 2005), including in

tourism geographies studies. Much of what is considered as field research in other cultures is based on Malinowski's (1922) construction of the site, and 'fieldwork' as a foundational practice of 'doing' research. Tourism geographies, being cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary, often requires solo fieldwork, sometimes in more geographically remote locations. Such exposures can put researchers at risk, especially women. While some fieldwork experiences are without issue, traumatising experiences in the field are deliberately omitted by women not only from their doctoral theses but also, by more experienced researchers, from the academic literature (Porter & Schänzel, 2018). Recent publications have acknowledged that gendered violence in human geography and tourism is embedded within wider social structures and sexual politics of gender inequalities and discrimination (e.g., Brickell & Maddrell, 2016; Eger, 2021; Vizcaino-Suárez, Jeffrey, & Eger, 2020) and gets 'down-played' in travel guidebooks (Thornhill, 2021), thus, normalising sexual harassment.

Perhaps, without too much attention, women move through and use spaces differently from their male counterparts -- geography and gender are intertwined, highlighting gendered mobility patterns (Gauvin, et al., 2020). These differences become particularly apparent in unfamiliar settings, when moving through spaces alone or at night, or when identifying options to increase personal safety. The same holds true for research spaces which can be considered as multi-faceted, male-dominated institutions, determining the legitimacy of certain research topics and methodologies (e.g., Pritchard, 2018) or the sexual harassment by supervisors (e.g., Lee, 1998), as well as the necessary fieldwork to complete higher degrees and research responsibilities for staff. This paper focuses on the previously neglected entire female research experiences in the field as a theoretical discussion of the sexual politics of gendered research spaces in the tourism geographies literature. In addition to exploring the gendered risks, such as physical and mental wellbeing, in field research, we must also consider how these experiences impact gaining access in the field. To do this we first unpack the literature on gendered field research, voluntary risk taking and sexual harassment in the field, before outlining the qualitative methodology used to contribute to the theoretical understanding of sexual politics in the field as experienced by women conducting tourism geographies research.

Literature review

Decades ago, Warren (1988) opened the discussion of what would be the start of 'sexual politics' in the field; however, this discussion has stagnated over the past few decades. The

lack of attention seems surprising given that sexual politics provide a theoretical framework of how patriarchal power is evident in all areas of women's lives (Bergfalk, 2017), including field research. We acknowledge that all researchers are potentially vulnerable to gender-based violence (Green et al., 1993), ingrained gender inequalities (Eger, 2021), and sexual politics; however, considering the traditional 'fieldworker' as a lone male figure makes the field space a largely hetero-masculine construct (Cooke, 2018; Sharp, 2005), that exposes female researchers to greater risks. While previous tourism geographies studies have revealed that gender/sexuality is socially constructed through various power relationships (Xu, 2018), the sexual politics of field research in tourism geographies remains underexplored.

Past research has shown that female researchers have refrained from speaking out about sexual harassment encountered during field research for fear that it may undermine both their academic credibility and professional standing (Huang, 2016; Moreno, 1995), and for fear of victim shaming. As Sundberg (2003, p. 188) notes, this silence implies academia, 'fails to provide adequate guidance for students preparing for research, leading many to individualise and therefore conceal the challenges they encounter'. Huang (2016, p.3) points out when reflecting on her experience of being raped during fieldwork that the researcher's body is institutionally recognised as 'merely a liability', with institutional concern for researcher safety largely revolving 'around the university not wanting to be held responsible if something grave were to happen'.

To date, safety guidelines of university ethic committees focus on the potential physical risks (e.g., mental health) to research participants, paying less attention to the pervasive structural and sexual political norms that female researchers must negotiate (Huang, 2016). Despite gendered violence during fieldwork being quite common (Gibbons, 2014), it has yet to lead to the institutionalisation of pre-fieldwork training, budget considerations or post-trauma mental support. In 2019, Cai's experiences based in geography led her to call for a more open dialogue on gendered threats and risks faced by field researchers and to better prepare research students 'to anticipate and negotiate sexual politics in hetero-patriarchal settings' (p.2). Similar sentiments on the risks for sexual harassment and assaults in the field, as well as the need for measures to ensure personal safety and emotional wellbeing were found amongst the contributions from tourism scholars to Porter and Schänzel's (2018) book compilation, thus, indicating that gender-associated risk in the field is a broad phenomenon affecting social research.

Unfortunately, an open dialogue on fieldwork risk is not a straightforward solution as managing the professional distance between the researcher and the research subject is often tricky (Cai, 2019). In the field, the researcher is expected to cultivate a comfortable and encouraging atmosphere to facilitate data collection (Kaspar & Landolt, 2016). Previous research has reported that perpetrators of gendered violence are often key informants or gatekeepers making it challenging for researchers to navigate (or end) field-relationships with powerful participants (Clark & Grant, 2015; Műgge, 2013). Efforts to engage participants, often referred to as care ethics, is a normative ethical theory that holds that moral action centres on interpersonal relationships and care as a virtue, especially for women (Gilligan, 1993). For women, creating a comfortable research environment may be misinterpreted by some as sexual bargaining.as the common view of 'researchers as cultural penetrators exercising power over their subjects' is framed in the masculine. Instead, female researchers are often left vulnerable due to their 'subordinate position as a woman in sexist-patriarchal settings' (Cai, 2019, p. 3).

Spaces and places are increasingly regarded as socio-cultural constructions (in this case tourism geographies research landscapes) that are gendered and subject to the 'male' gaze (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000) and its inherent power differential. To date the gendered experiences of tourism geographies researchers have largely been ignored, and academia has proceeded as if the male body and its attendant life experience are the gender-neutral default. It is only through more reflective and exploratory exercises that the gendered nature and risk of field research is beginning to emerge in tourism debate for female and male researchers (see Porter & Schänzel, 2018; Porter et al., 2021). It became obvious from the reflections of multiple female researchers (see Porter & Schänzel, 2018) that these often-confronting experiences in the field were enshrouded in silence. From un-solicited marriage proposals, verbal harassments, incidents of sexual harassment and assault, to increased research costs due to safety concerns, gender has a significant influence on the field experience (Porter & Schänzel, 2018), or what Frohlick (2002, p.50) as a geographer refers to as 'the embodied entanglements that play out between our selves or subjectivities and our research sites'.

The lack of formal institutional preparation of female researchers for fieldwork, does not mean women are surprised to encounter gendered risks in the field. There are guides to issues facing new fieldworkers (e.g., Scheyvens, 2014). Also, discreet conversations occur amongst women (both researchers and gatekeepers) on who to avoid in the field, or what one should wear to avoid unwanted advances (see Porter, & Schänzel, 2018). Similarly, concerns with

attire extend beyond female researchers to female travellers. For example, participants in Yang, Khoo-Lattimore and Acrodia's (2017) study on Asian-female solo travellers found that women were attempting to dress more masculine, or 'butch', or gender-neutral, to minimise sexual harassment and manage physical and mental health risks. With most, if not all, of these absent from the male researcher's radar, it becomes obvious that these 'preventative strategies' are essentially victim-blaming and body disciplining through which female researchers 'internalise the male gaze and patriarchal logic' (Cai, 2019, p. 4). Such defensive strategies are not without cost; they are often time-, energy-, and emotionally- consuming and, in addition, defence strategies may come at an increased financial cost (Porter, & Schänzel, 2018).

There is no longer a question whether gender matters in human geography (Sharp, 2005) or tourism research because as Eger, Munar and Hsu (2021, p.1) state, 'there is no humanity (or human phenomenon) without gender dimensions'. Instead, the question we pose is: why are gender dimensions not openly acknowledged when it comes to field research spaces? This paper aims to respond by challenging knowledge production in tourism geographies from the perspective of feminist theories and questioning the continued dominance of patriarchal value systems in academia.

Methodology

To gain a deeper understanding of women's gendered fieldwork experiences, including gender-based risk and safety aspects, and care and wellbeing considerations, participants were invited to share their research stories as qualitative research methods are more suited in deeply understanding the mental and social processes behind perceived risks in spaces (Koskela, 1999). Utilising an interpretivist paradigm and explorative research approach, smaller samples can be used to generate theories from the results, with both the researcher and the participants involved within the study (Carson, 2001). Epistemologically, this study was conducted through a constructivist frame where the individual seeks to construct their meanings through experiences of interactions with others and society (Neuman, 2014). This process is subjective and based on personal opinions, interpretations, judgements, and emotions, with data collection occurring from the perspective of an insider, rather than an outsider perspective (Holstein et al., 2013). Both authors are active researchers who have reflected on their own fieldwork experiences making them insiders, further elaborated below.

Semi-structured interviews with 13 female tourism researchers were conducted in-person and virtually between 2019 to 2020. These interviews encouraged participants to express rich, descriptive narratives related to the enquiries of the study (Jordan & Gibson, 2004) providing them with an opportunity to share subjective and multiple realities. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling with the intent to interview researchers from diverse ethnic backgrounds and at various career stages. Many of the participant researchers were also working and living in a second culture. The sampling involved contacting colleagues known to us and through participant referral of scholars who conducted field research that might have exposed them to gendered risks. We note that the LGBTQ community was represented in our sample and that all participants identified as cisgender. As a result of an academically diverse sample, some participants reflected on their doctoral research while others reflected upon professional research and supervisorial experiences. To ensure anonymity of the participants no further demographic details, affiliations, or career stages are provided to prevent identification and out of respect for the intimate nature of the participant experiences.

Our research deliberately invited reflections on the epistemic value of attending to one's emotions in the process of knowledge creation (Jaggar, 1989) along with considerations for bodily functions and self-care in the field. Other topics addressed included personal safety, sexual harassment, access, wellbeing, and female responsibilities when conducting research in the field. This study, thus, provides shared perspectives about femininities as performed by female bodies, exploring the socio-political factors that impact on the female researcher, scrutinising the ways in which we construct knowledge in the male-dominated world of academia. Together these perspectives lay down a theoretical baseline for future tourism research experiences.

In terms of ethical considerations given that this a sensitive topic, we trust that creating a supportive space to share fieldwork experiences was ethical and potentially cathartic. Given that most women have experienced harassment, as female researchers we believe that we could provide a sense of security and common understanding. We were also considerate about what details would/would not be revealed as to protect identity.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. Transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis by the first author, an approach compatible with interpretivist research, following the conventions of Braun and Clarke (2006). This

involved familiarisation with the data, coding, identification, organisation, and development of themes from the data manually until key themes emerged. Coding was thus inductive/ data-driven rather than theoretically driven. The emergent themes were then scrutinised by the co-author for consistency and resulted in the thematic framework (see Figure 1). The authors are both women of European descent who have reflected on their own positionality regarding field research. Schänzel (2018), as someone who has entered academia in mid-life and with children, has not experienced sexual violence in the field but has had to modify research practices to keep herself safe. Porter (2018) entered academia in her early thirties and had children shortly thereafter. She experienced sexual harassment (even while pregnant), though through accompanied research with children, such encounters have been drastically reduced.

This is an explorative study that sought out participants who might have encountered risks, or have had significant research experience in the field, including in different cultures, and as such is not representative of female academics as a single group. Most of the participants were Western women conducting research in Western countries as well as developing countries in Asia/Pacific, Africa, and South America, along with three participants of Asian descent. Despite our aim to recruit participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the 'whiteness' of our sample is likely a reflection of our own white ethnicities and what Thomas (2018) describes as structurally induced homophily. There is scope to expand this study to include a more ethnically diverse pool of participants to get further insights into the sexual politics of female field experiences in tourism geographies research.

Findings

The thematic analysis on the overall theme of *field research spaces for women* resulted in two key themes: Risks/perceived vulnerabilities and wellbeing/care in the field as well as 11 sub-themes as discussed below (see Figure 1).

Risks/Perceived vulnerabilities in the field

The key theme of level of risk as a perception of vulnerabilities that female researchers must deal with and the lack of acknowledgement is summed up by one participant: "*I think that part of the problem with being a female on your own doing research out in the field, is that you are very vulnerable. You can be perceived by other people to be vulnerable, and I guess you are to a certain extent … I don't think the academy fully appreciates the qualitative*

differences, shall we say, of being a female researcher and having to do fieldwork. You are vulnerable. At the end of the day, nobody really cares if you do get sexually assaulted. Who's going to care?" Such disregard for potential risks in the field can lead to real safety issues.

Safety

Numerous incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault were recounted by the participants. These included incidents of unwanted attention, catcalling, groping of genitals, forced kissing, marriage proposals, and attempted kidnapping. Often the perpetrators were known to the women, sometimes playing gatekeeper roles in the research, further complicating the situations. These examples of sexual harassment that the participants reported were often compartmentalised as part of their field experience; most had not recounted these experiences prior to the interviews. For example, multiple incidents related to accommodations are surprisingly similar despite happening in different parts of the world (South Pacific, Asia, and North Africa):

> *I had one guy in the community who took a shine to me, and he showed up where I was staying one night really quite drunk and being quite demanding around wanting to marry me … I actually felt quite threatened by it because I was on my own. He knew where I lived, and I didn't really know him*.

Other participants reported issues of sexual assault at or in their accommodations, all remarkable similar, for example:

> *One (local) approached me, hit on me and the guy barged into my room, yanked my face over and started kissing me out of nowhere.*

Another participant was out at a bar one night when the security guy advised her to not walk home but take a taxi instead and then got kidnapped by the taxi driver:

> *So, I took a taxi, and the taxi driver took me back to his house. I kind of got my phone out and pretended to call people but I didn't know anyone. There wasn't really anyone that I could call and eventually the guy kind of freaked out and drove me home.*

These participant experiences are demonstrative of the sexual harassment women encounter in the field when being exposed to the 'male gaze'. There was also a sense that as field

researchers' women may be entering 'prohibited spaces', for example one participant researching in North Africa related:
"*I began to learn that I couldn't, I wasn't allowed to, these spaces weren't for me as a woman and if I tried to be in those spaces then local men would harass me, try to touch me*".

Safety risks can translate into an increased finance costs for female researchers, such as choosing to stay at a more expensive and more secure accommodation or the need to call a taxi rather than walk alone. This is the advice from one respondent: "*You have to do what you have to do to feel safe because it you don't feel safe you can't work and that completely makes being in the field moot if you can't work. It's a waste of time and resources*."

Unfortunately, while perceived 'safer' choices may mitigate the risk of being sexually harassed, they do not eliminate it. These examples highlight that there is no respite for a woman in the field and that safety concerns are omnipresent leading to a kind of resignation as expressed by a participant, *'It really shaped my behaviour and I kind of stopped doing a lot of things that I would've done otherwise'*, such as not going out after dark.

Race

Some of the participants noted that while there is increasing attention to the gendered violence in the media (e.g., #Metoo movement), this momentum glosses over the intersection of race and gender as it relates to fieldwork. For example, one participant reflected on her Asian ethnicity:

> *It is my race; my skin colour does make a difference. I feel like especially coming from Southeast Asia, we do not have a lot of western white women backpacking in our country … they might look at them, but it's more in admiration. It's like a star from the sky you can never reach but you can only see but whereas being an Asian in Asia … I feel more vulnerable… I always get street harassment.*

This same participant reported difficulties with research in her native culture describing her failure to recruit participants because of mistaken identity and stereotyping:

> *If I approached a local or Asian, people would just like wave to me [dismissively], like trying to avoid me because we have so many … there are so many scams in Asia by Asians … Why I was a failure was because I was seen as a scam.*

Another issue of mistaken identity was described by another Asian participant conducting research in a remote part of Australia:

> *As I was about to leave, they [two Asian men] started talking, saying – hey, look, I didn't know this type of thing is actually legal in Australia. What's the price we have to pay? … and also, the weird grinning on their face at that moment, the way they put it, it's in Mandarin … immediately I thought – Oh my god, they thought I was soliciting.*

This participant fled instinctively as it was getting dark. Upon arrival at her accommodation, she described the impact of the incident:

> *I was just literally frightened with my hands shaking. There's no other research assistant, just myself in the field so, that was one of the most extreme cases.*

The impact of race on research did not go unnoticed by other participants. For example, an experienced Western researcher commented about the intersection of race and gender in the field:

> *I think that nationality trumps gender when working in Asia. I think that the influence that I had, the fact that people wanted to listen to me, the fact that people would answer my questions, the fact that I had access to whoever I wanted to speak to was trumped by my white skin over my gender.*

It is obvious from participant responses that, apart from already reported general issues of sexual harassment, race and ethnicity can produce added physical and verbal risks for females conducting fieldwork, such as racial profiling and stereotyping. In addition, it can complicate fieldwork making some locations unsuitable or requiring researchers to adapt to online data collection. The findings revealed that the experience of being mistakenly identified as a prostitute or scammer is a reality for female Asian researchers. This differs vastly from the field experiences of Western women and is deserving of more attention.

Cultural norms

Depending on the field situation, adhering to local customs and traditions which involve modifying one's attire and conduct can be challenging. For the female participants,

appropriateness of attire and proper conduct was a repetitive concern. Many reported putting forth significant efforts to 'blend in' and trying *"to dress appropriately to fit the norms*". This effort in going unnoticed often took the form of conservative dress and restrained conduct in fieldwork. For example, one participant conducting research on a Pacific Island stated that: "*I had to swim in my clothing"*. For this same participant, blending in included the consumption of unwanted (or possibly spoiled) food and drink from the local community because she was reliant on them for her research:

> *The food sat out in the sun all day and it was fish and seafood and things like that, but I had to eat it … I was really sick [afterwards] but I had to do it because otherwise I risked being excluded from the community.*

A participant, who has conducted several research studies in Asia, spoke about the specificity of having a fieldwork attire: "*I have a wardrobe full of clothes to wear doing fieldwork that I don't wear generally"*. Further, this participant remarked about the modifications to her dietary choices while in the field:

> *I drink coffee without sugar in it. I didn't know only witches drink with no sugar … But I realised that actually you get a very different acceptance, like the closeness, the initial making of the relationship is very different when you've refused sugar. It's like you can sense it, whereas if you accept it with the sugar then you're just normal.*

These stories from participants detail some of the resignations female researchers make to ensure success in the field. Opting to accept getting food poisoning rather than offending the food customs of the local community or accepting sugary drinks to avoid the label of a witch are extreme examples of trying to adhere to cultural norms and playing by the 'rules.' They also signify potential health risks and dangers for the participants that need to be acknowledged. Similarly, the steps taken by many of the women regarding their attire confirm the body-disciplining taking place when negotiating the 'male gaze' in these foreign countries further highlighting the sexual politics of field research.

Beyond general issues of adhering to local cultural norms, our data also revealed complexities associated with non-heteronormative sexual identities. Despite the inappropriateness of any unwanted sexual advances, a lesbian participant recounted the difficulties with an unwanted advance from a male acquaintance:

> *I wasn't out in that culture. So, that added another layer of complexity of not being able to identify my own sexuality in that space because that would've been an easy out for me, but I was more worried about upholding cultural values I thought [lesser-developed region] might have against gays.*

Loneliness

The inherent loneliness and feelings of isolation commonly experienced during fieldwork in foreign environments can be exacerbated by the risks encountered which can lead to depression and added stress for women:

> "*It's loneliness and emotions and all that sort of… depressive thoughts that you have when you do fieldwork in a different cultural context far away from home for quite a while*".

The risks of unaccompanied research and trying to adhere to cultural norms by, for example, not going out alone, and the lack of a safety net or support system are largely unacknowledged by the academy.

Access

There was consensus that as a woman it is easier to gain access and talk to other women, including access to more private and behind the scenes spaces. Women researchers were perceived as less threatening and more inviting, especially when not single (married or even pregnant) which took away some of the stigma of being culturally different. The respondents, however, mentioned that they were more formal when recruiting male participants, generally conducting research in public spaces, and trying to avoid after-hours. One respondent relived with shudders the moment of an interview she conducted "*after hours and I was led to a back workshop. I mean the guy was lovely and it was fine, but it might not have been*." There was a sense of being more guarded when conducting research with male participants because of the perceived extra risk.

Care ethics

Some participants mentioned the tendency of trying to be 'nice' and 'pleasing' so as not to offend anyone, including suitors and harassers. Women are often described as having, and are possibly more conditioned to have, a nice and approachable demeanour which forms part of an ethics of care. The responsibility of being 'nice' enough to recruit participants and, thus,

conduct successful research while being 'tough enough to fend off harassment falls upon the female researcher. This is what one participant labelled is the biggest problem of women: "*terminal niceness*" and gave the blunt advice:

> *"Don't get raped because you're too polite to get out of the way*".

For women to conduct research, thus, involves a constant careful navigation of the sexual politics of the field site.

Wellbeing/Care in the field

The second key theme emerged as vital for the emotional sanity and wellbeing of the women in the field.

Self-care

Several participants related special practices and rituals they engage in to take care of themselves when in the field, such as yoga, meditation, journal writing, or reading as solace. One participant mentioned carrying a resilience toolbox for emotional care, whereas another participant brings a particular lotion smelling of frangipani:

> "*I always carry a bottle of it when I'm travelling anywhere, and I always put it on before I go to bed and within a couple of nights the room starts to smell of it and it becomes my space*."

Instead, lack of 'own time' because the researcher was constantly surrounded by members of the host family led to feelings of disempowerment for one participant: "*I think there is a real lack of time for yourself and for your mental health*". This highlights the need for women researchers to create a space in the field that becomes their own and feels safe.

Safety protocols

A recurrent concern for all the women interviewed was self-defence and maintaining physical and emotional safety in the field. Participant responses indicated that it was commonplace to carry something for protection, such as a safety kit, folded knife, or pepper spray. Some participants had trained in martial arts and self-defence partly to protect themselves should the need arise. Most mentioned that they adopted a certain demeanour or never '*let their guards down*' to keep themselves safe. Exemplary comments of various methods related to field safety preparations from different participants included:

I've always got a degree of reserve, a sort of professional veneer which in some ways gives me a safety bubble.

I've got some pretty strong [local] language that I can throw at [men] if they overstep a line.

The participant responses demonstrated the thought, energy (both physical and emotional), and preparation required for a successful and safe field experience.

Home connection

All the participants mentioned the vital importance of being able to feel connected to home through phone reception and the internet which was not always guaranteed in remote locations as exemplified here: "*I would try and be in touch with friends at home but that was difficult because there wasn't really a proper internet connection*." This could then lead to isolation and depression as reported earlier by a participant.

Accompanied/Assisted

There was no consensus whether researching alone or accompanied by loved ones or with a research assistant was preferable. Those who did bring a partner or children along generally welcomed the intimacy, shared experiences, and added perspectives and safety it brought. This is from one participant having conducted research with her family in tow:

"*It means that I'm sharing this part of my life that's otherwise hidden from them and they really understand what I'm doing, and they've enjoyed meeting the people and going to places*."

There was an overall perception that accompanied research provided more inclusive and safer spaces within communities, opening doors to research participants, and allowing additional relevant insights. For example, this is what one participant had to say: "*Children make friends, children ask questions you wouldn't dare to ask. They're great field workers*." Conducting research with the family was generally considered as more 'normal' than when a single woman conducts research in a community. However, there were also responses describing the structural difficulties of bringing children along because of school holiday and research budget restrictions.

Others were more conflicted about the benefits of accompanied research and stated that care ethics would get in the way, for example:

"*I think then I would feel really responsible for the other person and how they're feeling and then I would be trying to care for them*."

Other respondents questioned whether they could still fully focus on and ensure the '*honesty*' of their research when accompanied but none of them had experienced it. In general, despite some objection there was a sense that accompanied/assisted research is preferable for most field research because of the extra layer of safety and emotional wellbeing it can provide.

Bodily functions

Lack of access to water and sanitation facilities can provide major challenges when it comes to menstruation or pregnancy along with issues of physical discomfort and having to bring enough supply of sanitary products, as one participant stated: "*changing a tampon at the altitude of 5,000 or 6,000 m isn't lots of fun*". Another participant bluntly retorted: "*Men don't have to think about these types of sanitation challenges, right?*" expressing a sense of the unfairness and anger of all the extra care taking which women must consider.

Discussion

Female researchers continuously must deal with unexpected politically, culturally, and sexually risky situations by themselves in often geographically remote research places which is not something they are trained for (Chiswell & Wheeler 2016). In addition to the risk of sexual violence, adhering to local cultural norms, exposure to the male gaze (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000), the isolation, and concerns about mental wellbeing, there are many other risk factors and extra challenges that come to the fore when women conduct research that are generally dismissed in academia. Our findings supported these occurrences, as one respondent stated: "*we do the same job but run more risks*." More pressing attention is needed for the vulnerable positions female researchers are entering when embarking on field research (Cai, 2019; Porter & Schänzel, 2018) and what it 'costs' (not just financially, but also physically and emotionally) to balance fieldwork progress and reduce these risks. Added financial costs but also significant benefits were reported in relation to accompanied research with children confirming previous studies (e.g., Drozdzewski & Robinson, 2015; Frohlick, 2002; Porter & Schänzel, 2018). This includes the motherhood capital which can facilitate privileged access to the field and change the perceived status from an outsider to an equal-status mother (Kerr & Stewart, 2019), thus, normalising and supporting accompanied field

research. Additionally, a case has been made recently for strong collaborative fieldwork in human geography to provide critical social support to women researchers (Gray et al., 2020).

There is a continued lack of acknowledgement of the body and its bodily functions in fieldwork despite obvious differences in women's bodies impacting the field experience. This confirms what Veijola and Jokinen stated in 1994 (p.149): 'Only the mind, free from bodily and social subjectivity, is presented as having been at work when analysing field experiences, which has taken place from the distance required by the so-called scientific objectivity, from the position-in-general.' The heterosexual male default is still the general position taken and little has changed since Malinowski's (1922) 'sole male fieldworker' role model. This confirms that fieldwork is often defined as an arduous liminal stage, and the traditional regard for its difficulty as a 'rite of passage' overlooks the racialised or gender specific risks that exist by normalising hetero-patriarchal field experiences as a benchmark norm (Kloß, 2017); it encourages female field researchers to keep silent about their experiences, further exacerbating existing trauma and frustration.

The hetero-patriarchal field spaces the women participants worked in contributed to the shifting identities they adopted, whether it was 'trying to fit in', adopting care ethics (Gilligan, 1993), shunning places leading to spatial exclusions (Koskela, 1999), or taking on certain demeanours. These subordinate positions (Cai, 2019) often translated to increased responsibilities in the field where women balanced fieldwork progress while maintaining a hyper focus on their personal safety. Shifting identities could also mean pretending to be straight. Recent explorations on normative masculinities have revealed similar issues of male researchers hiding non-heteronormative sexual identities (see Aquino, 2021; Ooi, 2021). Aspects of sexual politics are lesbians and gay men seeking 'tolerance form mainstream society, equality with straight citizens, and to subvert heterosexual hegemony' (Valentine, 2003, p. 416); however, the sexual politics of lesbian researchers is seemingly absent from the literature.

A case for being unable to be oneself when in the field was made which then required self-care rituals and practices to create safe space for the 'care of the self' (Sharp, 2005) or 'own spaces', as previously reported for mothers as a form of resistance in tourism (Schänzel, 2017). Another form of adaptation to the field is through a 'resilience toolbox', which includes steps for processing unpleasant events, reframing focus, and adjusting to a dynamic situation. The women participants acknowledged all the extra work, financial and emotional

costs, and resilience required to manage the risks noting that it also presented them with a feminist dilemma (see Wolf, 2018) full of contradictions. Given the inherent sexual politics in the field and the inability to disrupt the hierarchies of power, participants were sometimes frustrated with this dissonance:

> "*Wouldn't it be nice not to have to be more resilient? It's almost like I regret the notion that women have to get stronger to deal with it and the men get away with it. But the reality is that no-one's going to confront those men. They're not going to change, so you do have to become more resilient."*

In answer to the question posed earlier, gender matters when it comes to field research spaces. For more practical recommendations or immediate actions refer to Schänzel and Porter (2022) and for more general advice, The Fieldwork Initiative (http://fieldworkinitiative.org/) provides further resources. However, to protect fieldwork as a key area of knowledge production, policies and protocols that are evidence-based and aimed at mitigating the risk of sexual violence and other gendered risks must be implemented and communicated clearly before any field research. This includes graduate research programmes providing trainings for researchers and supervisors, encouragement of cross-cultural collaborative research opportunities and accompanied research, and increased budget to ensure health and safety, and wellbeing issues can be addressed. Once successfully implemented, researchers would then have to take responsibilities to prepare themselves sufficiently before entering the field.

Conclusions

This study affirms that when women enter field research spaces they actively engage in risk-taking. While at the surface, this risk-taking may be considered 'voluntary', for some female researchers, the pressures of conforming to the expectations of academia make these engagements less than voluntary. The findings add to the growing body of literature on the obvious impact of sexual politics in hetero-patriarchal research field spaces and assert the imperative of a fundamental culture change or paradigm shift needed in academia. Sexual politics matter and women deserve to be able to develop their professional careers free from fear of abuse, sexual harassment, added risks, and discrimination when it comes to field research (McKie, 2021). This requires involving men in the conversation as change is only possible when every researcher is required to reflect on their potential privileges and power relationships (see Porter et al., 2021), including what it means for LGBTQ researchers.

Findings reiterated the political nature of fieldwork in tourism geographies and the need to challenge sexual politics and patriarchal domination (Cai, 2019; Warren, 1988). Although, the tourism agenda has long considered gender equality an area in need of attention (UNWTO, 2011), to achieve this, the academy must be able to safely support women researchers involved in tourism geographies research. As researchers we are expected to disclose our ontological and epistemological views. We are also expected to follow a code of ethics aimed at reducing risk or harm to both the participants and the researcher. As demonstrated in this study, these are intimately influenced by gender identities. Thus, there remains an urgent need to normalise gender positionality in research (Chiswell & Wheeler, 2016; Porter & Schänzel, 2018; Porter et al., 2021), to continue the discussion of fieldworker safety and wellbeing, including taking children into the field (Drozdzewski & Robinson, 2015), and to actively support safer ways of researching. As the field of tourism geographies research evolves and global connectivity advances (perhaps, more rapidly because of the COVID-19 pandemic), our adaptability as researchers must also transform.

Despite criticisms of Millett's work and recent developments in feminist politics, it becomes clear that sexual politics as a theoretical framework of hetero-male patriarchal values dominating in research spaces remain valid, especially since much fieldwork in tourism geographies is conducted in other cultures. The intersectionality of race and gender, and issues with cross-cultural researcher identities and power relations (Ladino, 2002), need urgent acknowledgement when it comes to women's experiences of sexual violence and other risks in the field, backing away from more universalising tendencies based on Western feminism (Bergfalk, 2017). As a result, the discussion surrounding sexual politics in research spaces must continuously evolve addressing interrelated issues such as colonialism, globalisation, imperialism, heterosexism, and racism.

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