

SEXUALITY AND DANGER IN THE FIELD:
STARTING AN UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATION

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Introduction

This special issue on ‘Sexuality and Danger in the Field’ is intended to start an uncomfortable conversation. It attempts to discuss, in a frank and honest manner, how fieldwork can involve a number of unexpected dangers and risks for the inexperienced fieldworker, especially if that fieldworker is female. As first-year anthropology undergraduates quickly learn, fieldwork involves immersing oneself in an unfamiliar social, cultural and political environment. What often goes unacknowledged, however, is how fieldwork equally involves entering into a new gender and sexual economy in which different understandings of reciprocity and exchange may be at play. It is to highlight this latter aspect that this special issue of *JASO* emphasizes fieldwork as a *gendered* experience. We ask: How does one’s gender and/or sexuality influence fieldwork? Where exactly are ‘danger’ and ‘risk’ located? And, most importantly, how can we better prepare (female) fieldworkers to cope with and negotiate these realities?

The idea for this special issue was born when Clark and Grant realized that their own experiences of sexual harassment and gendered danger in the field were not unique. Although they had both attended various forms of pre-fieldwork training and had completed detailed risk-assessment and ethical-clearance forms, they had not anticipated the extent to which their status as unmarried, foreign, female researchers would impact on their everyday fieldwork experiences. They had naively believed – and no pre-fieldwork training course had led them to think otherwise – that they would be perceived in their respective field sites as ‘professionals’. Building trust with informants, they thought, would entail working hard to close the power differential between ‘us’ and ‘them’; authority was something to be deconstructed rather than embraced. Yet they soon learned that their position within local (gendered) hierarchies was more complicated – and much less privileged – than they had expected. They often felt unprepared to cope with the ‘emotional and ethical challenges’ (Thomson et al. 2013) they experienced, in particular those associated with sexual harassment and assault.

Working in the authoritarian political context of Rwanda, Grant spent a fair amount of time in young peoples’ homes. Although this generated important fieldwork data and allowed

her to access young peoples' 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990), it also put her at risk not only of acquiring a 'loose' local reputation but also of assault. On several occasions she had to physically fight off male informants who had ignored her verbal refusals. Her reaction after these incidents was ambivalent. She often felt not outrage but guilt: surely a 'good anthropologist' would not have gotten herself into such situations in the first place. This guilt was often accompanied by an acute sense of failure and even despair. How would she ever gather the data she needed to complete her thesis? Should she continue speaking to and meeting with potential (or, indeed, confirmed) assailants? Fieldwork, as contributors to this volume point out, often involves cultivating and maintaining relationships with individuals we would actively avoid in our everyday lives at home (see also Pollard 2009: 7). In the field, however, these very same individuals can be important 'gatekeepers', able to make or break our research (or so it seems at the time). This point became all too real for Grant when she returned home and later learned that one of her key informants had been imprisoned in Rwanda following allegations of rape.

Clark departed the UK to conduct fieldwork in India with Tibetan refugee communities in the northwest of the country. Armed with warnings from travel guides and fieldwork safety trainers about so-called 'Eve-teasing'¹ – verbal harassment and groping of women in public – she was braced to expect and deflect attention from Indian men in the towns and cities she planned to pass through *en route* to her field sites in the Himalayas. She had been given the usual advice: dress conservatively (i.e. in 'local' dress); don't arrive on a late flight; only stay in smart, expensive hotels; pre-book a taxi from the airport; don't stay out after dark; and, laughably, given she was planning to conduct solo ethnographic fieldwork, don't travel alone. Whilst groping (but also street harassment generally) proved a very real threat, she was completely unprepared for the attention she drew as a result of her research activities. She

¹ 'Eve-teasing' (some claim 'Eve' refers to the original, biblical 'temptress') has become a popular term used throughout India to refer to street-based sexual harassment of women. This can extend from explicit verbal abuse to groping, but falls short of actual rape. 'Eve-teasing' is inflicted upon both Indian and foreign women, and regularly makes it into travel guides (the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's advice for women travellers in India refers to 'sexual attacks' and 'harassment', but does not use the term 'Eve-teasing'). In anthropology, 'Eve-teasing' by Indian men of Indian women has been analysed as a subaltern expression of masculinity, enacted in a climate of unequal access to opportunities for members of the Scheduled Castes. To an extent, therefore, 'Eve-teasing' is seen as an outcome of processes of uneven modernization and socio-economic change in India (Rogers 2008). At the other end of the spectrum, Osella and Osella (1998) have discussed street harassment as situated on a continuum with 'aggressive' (by British standards) flirting. Osella and Osella capture the ambiguity and high stakes involved in these interactions, describing the fine line men and women negotiate between acceptably 'masculine', welcome flirtation and harassment. Their article points out the difficulties and risks involved in (mis)judging such sexual and romantic cues, which are all the more difficult to read for the outsider anthropologist (cf. Johansson, this issue).

had assumed that, as an academic researcher with the kudos of a British institution behind her, she would be approached on a professional level within the fieldwork context, or, at the very least, be seen as a student completing a study project. Whilst to an extent this was the case, this did nothing to deter would-be lovers: her requests for conversation, voluntarily given English lessons, visits to locals' houses to conduct interviews and general 'loitering' for data (see Krishnan, this issue; cf. Ackers 1993) were too frequently met with sexual comments, unwanted touching and seemingly never-ending streams of romantic SMS messages. Like Grant, she reacted with feelings of guilt and inadequacy. How, if after every interview she had to drop contacts who began soliciting her romantically, was she ever to build up the kind of deep, affective (but platonic!) relationships seemingly so abundant in the ethnographic record? Was her research invalidated by the fact that those who participated were interested not in her research topic, but a more sordid outcome? Would she, in fact, have to use her sexuality (cf. Ackers 1993: 215; Lee 1995: 58) in order to gain access and data, and thereby finish her DPhil? Was this ethical, and would it produce valid research?

It is exactly these forms of gendered dangers that Clark and Grant had not considered – or been *made* to consider – prior to fieldwork. Instead, they had to improvise strategies to cope *in situ*, which often caused additional stress and anxiety. Clark, for example, adopted a much more formal attitude to research than she had originally intended. After several months in her first field site, she was lucky enough to have acquired a group of trusted friends her own age, some whom she later employed as formal research assistants and translators for the remainder of her stay. Although translation was not always required, she often asked these friends to accompany her, introduce her and be present during meetings. She found that introductions by these friends (who themselves were well-respected locally) resulted not only in fewer romantic propositions and attempts to shift discussion into less salubrious territory (cf. Lee 1995: 58), but also resulted in better quality data. Having found this to be a useful strategy, she began research in her second field site by making inquiries for research assistants. Lucky to engage the services of two excellent individuals (one a relative of a friend made in the first field site), research proceeded rapidly.

Tired of constant unwanted sexual attention, Grant turned her attention to female informants and focused on building relationships with them. This methodological shift resulted in a focus on gender in her written work, even though her original research plan had not included gender in any significant way. Yet cultivating these relationships with female friends did not always have the outcomes she expected, as they often introduced her to male friends and encouraged her to enter into intimate relationships with them. Her refusal to agree

to these arrangements often resulted in disappointment and even a sense of betrayal among some of her female friends. It was only later that she learned that some of these potential ‘suitors’ had paid her female friends for introductions.

A matter of urgency

There is an urgent need to discuss sexuality and danger in fieldwork. When Clark and Grant began organizing workshops on this theme, there was an overwhelming response. Many female students came forward with their own stories and a strong desire to share their experiences. Although they had conducted fieldwork in a wide array of cultural, social, linguistic and political contexts, these students had all encountered challenges and difficulties in the field that were directly related to their gender and/or sexuality. Many felt that they had been unprepared to deal with such fieldwork realities. There was a sense that the social anthropology department at Oxford, where women account for over seventy percent of graduate students, needed to be doing more to prepare young women for fieldwork.² A turning point came for Grant when she was approached by a female student who had recently returned from the field. The student in question had experienced sexual harassment and assault during her fieldwork and had returned to Oxford upset and angry that she had not been adequately prepared for dealing with or anticipating these kinds of issues. If anthropology departments want to prevent this kind of reaction – and we sincerely believe they do – then opening up space for thinking about fieldwork as a gendered, sexed experience before students leave for the field is of the utmost importance.

While departmental fieldwork training courses form the bulk of pre-fieldwork preparation, another potential source of fieldwork knowledge is the supervisor–student relationship. Yet discussing the possibility of sexual harassment with students is no doubt an uncomfortable exercise, perhaps particularly so for male supervisors. Indeed, male colleagues often seem unaware of the difficulties female fieldworkers may face in their research (both the existing literature on this topic and our experiences in raising this issue attest to this). They often do not seem to realize the long-term emotional and psychological effects that sexual assault and prolonged exposure to sexual harassment in the field can have. Indeed, they often fail to recognize fieldwork as a gendered and sexed experience as they themselves may not have experienced fieldwork in this way. To cite one unfortunate example, male supervisors do not always realize the complications that may arise when they pass on

² At the time of publication (March 2015), women make up 71.2% of all graduate students in the School of Anthropology: 75% at master’s level and 67.4% of doctoral students (School of Anthropology statistics).

contacts – informants they made during their own fieldwork – to their female students. It is not uncommon to hear that informants glowingly recommended to female students by their supervisors went on to harass and/or assault them. (Male) supervisors need to be aware that (male) informants or research assistants with whom they worked without incident may behave differently towards female students. Female students in turn have to be conscious that contacts, even those recommended by trusted supervisors, are not necessarily ‘safe’.

Let us be clear. Our intention is not to suggest that sexuality and danger exist only in ‘the field’. We are in no way attempting to sexualize the fieldwork ‘other’,³ or to suggest that field sites are rampant hotbeds of licentious sexuality (though, of course, some may be). Sexual harassment and sexual violence occur everywhere, and recent debates about rape culture and the coining of the terms ‘mansplaining’⁴, ‘manspreading’⁵ and ‘manterruption’⁶ have demonstrated how public culture in the West is far from egalitarian. Indeed, this issue comes at a topical time. 2014 saw the denial of a UK visa to American ‘pick-up artist’ Julien Blanc, whose ‘dating’ advice includes techniques to trick and pressurize women into sexual acts. In May of the same year, the Isla Vista killings⁷ spawned the hashtag #YesAllWomen⁸, and one year earlier Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, reminded her readers of the continued pervasiveness of sexism in work and private life in the Western world in *Lean In* (2013).

³ Post-colonial scholarship has critiqued orientalist notions of ‘the exotic’ which sexualize ‘the Other’ (e.g. Said 1978). See Isidoros, this issue, for further discussion.

⁴ When a man explains something to a woman in a condescending/patronizing manner and disregards her greater knowledge about the topic under discussion – a form of silencing. The term began to gain media popularity in 2010.

⁵ Campaigns against ‘manspreading’ (when a man takes up extra seat-space on crowded public transport by spreading his legs) began to gain ground in New York in 2014. After the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) unveiled plans to start an advertising campaign against ‘manspreading’, there were calls from Londoners for Transport for London to follow suit.

⁶ ‘Manterruption’ (like ‘mansplaining’) is another form of silencing, and refers to the greater tendency for women speakers to be interrupted whilst speaking compared to their male counterparts (often they are interrupted by men, hence ‘manterruption’). ‘Manterruption’ featured in a *Time* magazine article by Jessica Bennett who cites Sheryl Sandberg’s and Adam Grant’s *Sunday Review* article ‘Speaking While Female’ (2015), which discusses the challenges women face speaking up in the workplace.

⁷ The attacks, which resulted in six deaths and thirteen injured, were perpetrated by 22-year-old Elliot Rodger on 23 May 2014. In a video uploaded to YouTube and another document published on the internet (which subsequently became known as his ‘manifesto’), Rodger described how he had been motivated by a desire to punish women whom he felt had rejected him throughout his adult life (Valenti 2014).

⁸ #YesAllWomen was created after the Isla Vista killings in response to #NotAllMen, a pre-existing hashtag which gained traction in the wake of Rodger’s killing spree. Whilst #NotAllMen was used to counter perceived negative generalizations of men by women, it was interpreted by many women as an attempt to derail the debate. #YesAllWomen was created to express how all women are affected by sexism even though not all men are sexist.

Yet ironically, despite the growing prevalence of feminism in mainstream Euro-American culture and the advent of feminist anthropology more than three decades ago, a feminist approach has not been applied to fieldwork methodology.⁹ As Johansson cogently points out in her piece in this issue (see also MacDougall, this issue), risk in fieldwork training courses is always constructed ‘out there’. We are trained to think about risk in terms of strangers: the mugger or rapist lurking down a dark alley, on a public street, or in the driver’s seat of a taxi. As feminists and gender activists have been pointing out for decades, however, rape and sexual assault are most likely to be perpetrated by a woman’s acquaintance or ‘friend’.¹⁰ Despite this reality, fieldwork training continues to define risk erroneously as ‘out there’, with dramatic and dangerous consequences for young women’s safety.

Attending to the gendered reality of fieldwork is thus of crucial importance. Besides increasing the safety of female fieldworkers, paying greater attention to gender and sexuality sheds light on the often precarious position of young women in our field sites. While we have the opportunity to leave after successfully – or unsuccessfully – navigating our relationships with men, local women are not able to do so. Having a ‘loose’ reputation can have real-world effects on their futures, as was dramatically brought home during Clark’s fieldwork by the brutal gang rape of Jyoti Singh in Delhi, news of which made international headlines at the time. The attacks on Singh and her male friend on 16 December 2012 launched a wave of protests throughout India and prompted calls for the laws against sexual violence to be strengthened.¹¹

⁹ In a recent article, Clancy et al. (2014) highlighted harassment and assault in ‘scientific’ fieldwork (including the subfields of anthropology – applied, biological, linguistic, medical, physical, psychological and socio-cultural). Their report concentrates on harassment within research teams, especially of ‘trainees’ (e.g. graduate students), by senior staff and peers. Since this issue of *JASO* concentrates on the experiences of solo ethnographic researchers, we have not commented further on their research findings here.

¹⁰ E.g. Rape Crisis England & Wales (www.rapecrisis.org.uk). Official government statistics on ‘sexual offending’ in England and Wales report that 90% of women who were raped or sexually assaulted knew their attacker prior to the attack: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/an-overview-of-sexual-offending-in-england-and-wales [Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2013, accessed 3 March 2015].

¹¹ At the time of writing (March 2015), this incident is again making international headlines due to the release on 4 March 2015 of the BBC 4 documentary *India’s Daughter* (part of the *Storyville* series), which features an interview with one of those convicted, Mukesh Singh. Although banned in India, many have been able to watch it, streaming it via the internet. Reactions to the film in the UK, and among many Indians, have been ones of shock and disgust, particularly at Singh’s defiant and misogynist attitude, which is also reflected in statements by his lawyers. However, the film, statements by director Leslee Udwin and related media coverage have also been criticized by Indian women’s rights activists for their paternalistic tone and their failure to recognize the broader structural context of gender violence in India (e.g. K. Krishnan 2015, Nag 2015). Other commentators have called the film sensationalist, criticizing it for lapsing into the genre of ‘true crime’ (Ramnath 2015).

Sexuality as absence: existing literature on sexuality in fieldwork

This issue of *JASO* contributes to an emergent literature that recognizes the role of sexuality (in addition to gender) in anthropological research. As Rose Jones (1999: 25) and the editors of *Sex, sexuality and the anthropologist* point out, it is impossible to divorce the sexuality of the ethnographer from the research process (Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999). ‘Participant observation’, they note, is based upon two key yet paradoxical concepts: first, ‘the epistemology of positivist empiricism’ (which advocates distancing the self from ‘data’ to avoid ‘contaminating’ it; see Isidoros this issue); and secondly, the diametrically opposed assumption ‘that (a) culture can be known by sensual experience’ (ibid.: 2). This is, of course, the same conundrum highlighted by Clifford and Marcus in *Writing culture* (1986). However, while this volume generated substantial self-reflection and concern among anthropologists about the power differentials inherent in ethnographic research (much of which has since been dubbed ‘navel-gazing’), the same reflexivity has not been extended to the sexual sphere (cf. Newton 1993: 5). Perhaps this is because revelations in this arena carry a greater risk to the scholarly credibility of the ethnographer, especially female ethnographers (cf. Kulick and Willson 1995a: xiii). Indeed, as the lesbian anthropologist Esther Newton has noted: ‘If straight men choose not to explore how their sexuality and gender may affect their perspective, privilege, and power in the field, women and gays, less credible by definition, are suspended between our urgent sense of difference and our justifiable fear of revealing it’ (1993: 4). This issue, like the authors just mentioned, attempts to lift the lid on this discussion. Like Ashkenazi and Markowitz, the contributors to this issue recognize that ethnographers, whether they like it or not, are always approached from a gendered, sexual perspective by their informants. The asexual pose (Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999: 2), which seems to be the ethical default of (at least) first-time ethnographers, is now revealed as an unattainable ideal.

Whilst the topic of sexuality in fieldwork has been broached (e.g. Markowitz and Ashkenazi 1999, Kulick and Willson 1995b, Whitehead and Conaway 1986), much less has been published about the dangerous consequences that all too often arise in its negotiation

Menon (2015) adequately sums up the many debates on this issue in her argument that, while there may be a case to delay the screening of the documentary, given that judicial process is still underway, the film’s main failing is perhaps mostly that it neglects to point out the ordinary banality of the sensational facts it represents: that defence lawyers routinely blame the victim and invoke notions of women’s responsibility; that shame has long been used to silence women; and that rapists often believe they will get away with their crimes because their victims will be too ashamed to speak out. I am grateful to Sneha Krishnan (this issue) for this insight.

and articulation (although see Ackers 1993, Lee 1995). This journal issue addresses this absence by focusing specifically on how ethnographers' sexualit(ies) impact not only on their research but also on their safety during fieldwork. The contributors to *Writing culture* and those who published in its wake described the ethnographer as a powerful, pen-wielding individual, whose actions and publications had the potential to threaten and disempower already disadvantaged ex-colonial subjects. As Johansson and MacDougall (this issue) point out, however, what these authors failed to acknowledge is the on-the-ground vulnerability experienced by (especially female) ethnographers (see also Behar 1996). Whilst she may be in a more powerful position back 'home', cloistered within the protective confines of her academic institution and busily engaged in writing the lives of 'others', the female ethnographer (and other ethnographers of 'non-normative' sexualities/genders¹²) rarely occupies a position of power and privilege in the field. As Johansson writes, for our generation of ethnographers schooled in a post-colonial anthropology that encourages us to deconstruct our own power and privilege, fieldwork can be a precarious undertaking. Paralysed by self-doubt, unable to read cultural (sexual) cues and methodologically programmed to give 'the benefit of the doubt', first-time, female ethnographers are rendered especially vulnerable. This vulnerability, accentuated in the early stages of fieldwork, is a theme that runs through almost all the contributions to this issue.

Whilst heightened for female ethnographers (and those of 'non-normative' sexual/gender orientations), vulnerability also characterizes the experience of first-time, (heteronormative) male ethnographers. Indeed, in an article exploring the difficulties that a mixed gendered group of PhD students experienced during fieldwork, Pollard (2009) records the following range of emotions: 'alone, ashamed, bereaved, betrayed, depressed, desperate, disappointed, disturbed, embarrassed, fearful, frustrated, guilty, harassed, homeless, paranoid, regretful, silenced, stressed, trapped, uncomfortable, unprepared, unsupported, and unwell'. These are hardly the emotions pre-fieldwork students expect to experience in the field. Like many contributors to this volume, Pollard's interviewees felt that their pre-fieldwork training had been 'inadequate' (2009: 1). She concludes her piece by recommending that anthropology departments introduce a '*mentoring scheme*, where post-fieldwork students act as mentors for pre-fieldwork students' (ibid.: 23). Clearly, better fieldwork preparation across genders is needed.

¹² Here we mean 'non-normative' by local standards, i.e. those of the field site in question.

Post-fieldwork integration, furthermore, also requires further attention by departments. Returning home can be a difficult experience, especially for researchers who worked in politically fraught contexts. In certain cases, researchers have developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) upon their return home (Begley 2013). Departments need to become better at informing post-fieldwork students of the possibilities of care – in the form of university counselling services, for example – that are available. Although none of the contributors to this volume deal with this issue directly, frank and honest discussions of the difficulties of return should also factor into any pre-fieldwork training.

Rites of passage: the doctoral fieldwork experience

As Wengle (1987) has pointed out, anthropologists have long examined and analysed the ‘rites of passage’ of ethnographic others, but have rarely subjected their own rite of academic passage, namely ethnographic fieldwork, to the same kind of scrutiny. In this issue, we offer a window into this experience. The contributors to this issue are all doctoral students at the University of Oxford who have either recently completed or are currently completing their DPhil theses. Their papers focus on sexual danger, exploring how it arose and how they negotiated it in their fieldwork. Beginning in western Europe, Congdon discusses her experiences as a ‘Lone Female Researcher’ in the Catalonian towns of Barcelona and Vic. Far from the ‘easy ride’ she anticipated, at least as far as sexual danger is concerned, Congdon describes how experiences of harassment coloured the early weeks and months of her research. This left her feeling vulnerable, distressed and inadequate. She hones in on the lack of a support network as the primary reason why these experiences, which were not so far out of a British ordinary, affected her so acutely in the initial stages of her research. She also discusses how stereotypes of female, British students positioned her in her field site and caused difficulties. She advises first-time fieldworkers to research such stereotypes prior to their departure in order that they can guard against their adverse effects.

Moving east, MacDougall offers us insight into her experiences of negotiating marriage proposals during her field research in Amman, Jordan. Drawing on Jenkins (1994), she argues that female ethnographers would be well served to approach fieldwork as a ‘gender apprenticeship’, wherein they must learn ‘by doing’ how to perform their own gender appropriately, and hence safely, according to the norms of the new environment. As she points out, however, such a learning process is made all the more difficult by the fact that female anthropologists do not inhabit the same gender or sexual categories as their research

participants, but instead must negotiate a 'third gender' (Schwedler 2006) with their informants.

Using Mary Douglas's 'purity' and 'danger' framework (Douglas 1966), Isidoros explores the tension between scientific research 'purity' and the 'danger' inherent in sexual interactions in the context of her own ethnographic research in the Sahara. Having provided a useful overview of the existing methodological literature on sexuality, in the second half of her paper she offers methodological examples from her own work to discuss how her attention to local practices of movement, protection and legitimacy not only helped to preserve her safety in the field, but also afforded her insight and access to realms of Sahrāwī nomadic culture which would otherwise have been closed to her.

Moving further south, Johansson discusses her field experiences in the Bakassi peninsula on the Nigeria–Cameroon border. Through examples drawn from her own fieldwork, Johansson shows how risk, rather than being 'out there', an 'other' to be encountered and deflected, is socially constructed in the interpersonal relationships which are part and parcel of the ethnographic process. She talks about the economies of exchange and reciprocity which she, as a foreign, white, female ethnographer, was inexorably and unavoidably drawn into, as well as the role of 'Big Men' gatekeepers in controlling her access to research opportunities. Significantly, she takes issue with the male-centric assumption of the powerful, privileged ethnographer in the *Writing culture* collection (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Instead, it is vulnerability that emerges as the key theme.

Krishnan describes her own experience of vulnerability as a lesbian researcher returning 'home' to Chennai, south India. Krishnan's research, on discourses of sexual danger and 'youth' as a period of sexual precarity, not only forced her back (at least partially) into 'the closet', but brought her into close contact with homophobic narratives and associated dangers. She recounts her 'night of madness' when, fearing that her informants might find her field notes and expose her as 'one of those "lesbos"', she cuddled her notes to sleep in her dormitory bed. As a fieldworker who had returned 'home', Krishnan's position in the field differed from those of our other contributors. Whilst her research has clearly benefited from an unparalleled level of access, this came at a high personal cost. As a returnee, Krishnan was expected to conform to existing societal norms and roles; by not conforming (e.g. smoking, still being unmarried) she attracted censure and suspicion. At the same time, however, Krishnan was able to act as an important source of support for local queer women who felt equally isolated.

Lastly, Miller recounts her experiences as a female ethnographer working in rural Amazonia, in the Canela indigenous village of Escalvado (northeast Brazil). As Miller notes, the usual advice dispensed to ‘lone female researchers’ was largely inapplicable (irrelevant or inactionable) in the context of her research. Instead, she developed alternative practices to ensure her safety, some of which she offers to her readers. Like Johansson, she highlights the importance of understanding the ethnographer’s shifting position(s) within local hierarchies of power and inequality, since these impact not only ethnographers’ safety, but also on their opportunities for research.

Conclusion

Discussing sexuality and danger in fieldwork is uncomfortable, but this should not dissuade us from speaking openly about these topics. Fieldwork can be one of the most rewarding and enjoyable academic experiences, but it would be foolish to ignore the risks it entails. Indeed, doing so does a disservice to future generations of (female) anthropologists. Yet these kinds of uncomfortable discussions are not always welcome. Indeed, when Clark and Grant facilitated a workshop in Oxford on sexuality and danger, one participant criticized them for being ‘alarmist’ and ‘offensive’. This, it should go without saying, was not our intention. Our goal is not to turn young women off doing fieldwork or to scare them into thinking that they will be raped and assaulted – although this, it must be stressed, is a very real danger in some fieldwork settings (Mahmood 2008). Rather, we encourage them to reflect on their own positionality before they enter the field. Conducting fieldwork means entering into a new gender and sex economy, one often involving different understandings of reciprocity and exchange. It is for this reason that we hope this special issue of *JASO* will be a useful teaching tool in pre-fieldwork courses, prompting students to think about the various risks that they may (or may not) encounter *before* entering the field. Not every female researcher will experience the same difficulties, of course, but being prepared means having seriously thought through how one might cope with and avoid gendered dangers and risks.

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