



# Hear my screams: An auto-ethnographic account of the police

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## Abstract

Other writers, notably police researchers, infrequently discuss the problems and difficulties that they encounter in and outside of fieldwork when doing research on the police. In this article, I piece together some critical and personal reflections of researching the police to provide nuanced information that can help other writers to learn from my own experiences of researching the police and also help them to navigate their own experiences of working with the police for research purposes. These reflections of mine emanate from fieldwork notes and my research diary. I use Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* as a lens to theorise and make sense of such experiences, understanding how my presence gets in the way of the happiness of others because of my affiliation to sexual violence work. By naming a problem, rape as a problem, I became the problem. The article outlines some of the chief ethical, personal and pragmatic issues that can surface when researching the police. For example, I frequently encountered interrogative questions whereby officers questioned my sexuality, asking 'are you gay?' I became a nuisance for the police, a problem by highlighting the issue of male rape as a problem given that it challenges the status quo of normative heterosexuality. I argue that, doing research on the police, which can involve sensitive and challenging work that affects one emotionally, socially and physically, impacts not only the officers being interviewed, but also the researchers themselves. The latter group should be identified much more readily than seems to be the case in the social sciences.

## Keywords

Stigma, sexualities, masculinities, positionality, reflexivity

## Introduction

Issues within the police and policing have gained consistent and gradual interest by societies, medias and by many scholars over the decades (e.g. Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Holdaway, 1982, 1983; Jauregui, 2016; Javaid, 2016, 2017b; Loftus, 2009; Rumney, 2008, 2009). Academic interest in the police and policing is increasing. There seems to be a lacuna here, however, in that we know little of how it is like to, theoretically, conceptually, methodologically and pragmatically, research the police. The result is a lack of scholarship on the reflexivity of researching the police and policing, although there is a whole field that more broadly explores reflexivity and insider/outsider status in the research process. This article seeks to analyse and contextualise my own experiences of researching the police and to give a background to the growing trends, continuities and changes to the ways in which the police are studied and researched. This article recognises significant continuities and changes in the discourse that

surrounds police relations with researchers. This article shows why it is crucial to make sense of the researcher's positionality<sup>1</sup> when doing research on the police because, as Stebbins (1991), Walby (2010), and Westmarland and Bows (2019) question, do we ever truly leave the field particularly after undertaking an extended period of fieldwork that comprises highly sensitive research? I have become conscious regarding some of the problems, stigmas, pains and torments that I faced in and outside of the fieldwork. When I refer to 'in the field', I mean what is out there and what is not out there, and the meaning we derive from both. When I refer to 'outside of the field', I mean that I am no longer immersed in a social world that is foreign to me where social norms, values and

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customs are in some way dissimilar to mine. The boundaries of inside/outside ‘the field’ are not clear-cut, as there can be slippage between the two (Westmarland and Bows, 2019). For example, the social worlds between the researcher and the participants are closely similar or in line with each other.

This article is about the problems, challenges and issues associated with researching the police perspectives of male rape. Clark (2017) argues that, ‘as academics and researchers, we should not only present and analyze our data from the field. We should also write about our personal *experiences*’ (p. 425; emphasis in original). For Behar (2003), auto-ethnography has ‘proliferated as a method, an epistemology, a field practice, and a form of writing and performance across the social sciences and humanities’ (p. 16). Writing auto-ethnography can transform our lived experiences into memorable, even beautiful, writing. Doing auto-ethnography requires us to interpret the social world (Clifford, 1983). Auto-ethnographic accounts or ‘truths are thus inherently partial—committed and incomplete’ (Clifford, 1986: 7). There is no ‘complete’ or ‘final’ corpus of knowledge. The writer has different versions of the knowledge before him when doing auto-ethnography, so it is up to him to bring together for himself the version of an event that he, for the time being, accepts (Clifford, 1986). Story-telling, then, is subjective and it is a form of art. It can also be a way of reliving memories. Letherby (2015) usefully points out that auto/biography is a way of discovering one’s own sense of self; it is a method of inquiry used to ‘know’ about something in a fine-grained manner not only about a subject-matter at hand, but also about the writers themselves and their relationship with their subject in a deep and personal way. Letherby (2015) movingly reflects on statements directed towards her and her weight loss, writing that the ‘compliments’ are in some way tainted. For me, writing is a healing process whereby it is so profound that it can repair the broken self back together. Ahmed (2017), a lesbian Pakistani feminist, also draws on auto/biography when she talks poetically about her strict violent father beating her:

My father would often call me willful when he was being violent . . . There was one experience when I was beaten with my own ruler. The ruler had holes in it: intended as different shapes you could trace onto paper; squares, circles, triangles. Those shapes became shapes left on my own skin; squares, circles, triangles. I remember that feeling of being marked by violence in the very shapes of my childhood. This history enacted on our bodies is one that we carry with us . . . my own father’s blows were always accompanied by words. He would ask insistently punishing questions: Why do you want so much? Why are you never satisfied? . . . I began to scream really loudly when he went for me. (pp. 72–73)

The constant beatings by her violent Muslim father were a way of silencing her and her feminist voice. When Ahmed uses auto/biography, she explains that ‘stranger danger’ is

typically thought about as if it occurs outside of the family home, whereas and ironically so, your own family can be strangers or ‘intimate terrorists’. Elsewhere, as I too come from a Pakistani and Muslim background and am queer, sharing many similar identities as Ahmed, I use auto/ethnography elsewhere to discuss my own experiences of being beaten by my own Muslim father, too:

. . . my father of 6 foot who was sturdily built had beaten my slim body of 5’8 height, either with his belt or large hands, whilst my eyes filled with tears . . . His violence would also be accompanied by words: ‘Look what you make me do’; ‘Be a man’. . . My injury was seen as insignificant for a ‘real’ man is supposed to put up with it; handle it; tolerate it; deal with it. He would beat me whenever I would deviate from what entails to be a ‘real’ man. For example, when I came home after I had stayed at a male friend’s flat (we were both on the same undergraduate course) . . . my father [beat] me because I stayed out late so could not work at his corner shop filling up shelves with groceries . . . the echoes of scream inside my brown body were erupting until I could no longer take another fist from my father: I eventually left home to live out a queer life . . . (Javaid, in press)

Auto/biography has allowed for the access to difficult, emotive and challenging areas to research, assisting one to uncover the private realm in order to theorise and write about it (Brennan and Letherby, 2017). Brennan and Letherby (2017) make a useful distinction between *auto/biographically* (i.e. despite acknowledging others, the key focus is on the self) and *auto/biographically* (that is, despite identifying the writer’s own subjectivity, the main focus is on others) as approaches that consider meaningful reflexivity and introspection. Their argument is helpful because both approaches accommodate subjective and emotionally significant experiences. This present piece is on a continuum, in that it focuses on my biography while also considering other people’s influences on my history and past experiences, which I resurrect in this piece using hindsight.

Although using hindsight and drawing on reflexivity can be difficult, emotionally draining, dangerous and ‘full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails’ (Finlay, 2002: 12), they can induce potentiality for creativity, originality and nuances. Letherby et al. (2013) illustrate that research is always subjective, embodied and emotional and that identities are being negotiated in and outside the fieldwork; it is by recognising this process, in relation to the ‘other’, that brings us closer to research, making it more transparent. They highlight that we need to critically examine our own biases and subjectivities as writers if we are ever to produce original, creative and nuanced work.

Reflexivity serves multiple and beneficial purposes. First, drawing on reflexivity to discuss one’s own experiences and challenges within the fieldwork can benefit other writers. Second, although universities can provide training programmes on interviewing skills and qualitative methods, ‘they cannot fully prepare us for the realities of

undertaking fieldwork' (Clark, 2017: 425). They also provide little guidance in, and almost no critical reflection of, the selection of fieldwork sites and the considerations that deem some places but not others as suitable for the role of 'the field' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). By researching the police, not only can police researchers learn from 'doing' actual research, but also they can learn from other police researchers' experiences and challenges. I hope, therefore, that my own stories and experiences can shed light on some difficult issues that can surface with regard to conducting research on the police. I do not claim that my unique experiences of researching the police speak for all or most or even any other male rape victims. However, prior research has often documented male rape victims' negative interactions with the police (see Javaid, 2018c, 2018d). For example, Walker et al. (2005) found that five reported to the police in a study of 40 British male rape victims, stating that

[o]f those who did report, only one man said that the police were responsive and helpful. The other four found the police to be unsympathetic, disinterested, and homophobic. They felt that their complaint was not taken seriously and all four regretted their decision to tell the police.

I first contextualise my own multiple identities because we, as human creatures, forge identities in relation to the stories we tell and to the narratives we forge, but not losing sight of power as producing our identities (Plummer, 2019). Plummer (2019) writes that the stories we tell, the secrets we unfold to others, are what shape our lives: 'people resist and sometimes empower themselves through new stories' (p. 31). The untold stories inherent in this article are those that shape my identities and my sense of self as a gay Pakistani/Muslim writer who also embodies the identity of a rape survivor (more on this later), discarding heterosexuality and a heteronormative identity. The article's second section is contextual; it provides background information relating to the author's police studies, and it also contextualises reflexivity in greater depth. I also introduce Ahmed's (2010) *The Promise of Happiness* here to frame my position, arguing that one causes other people's unhappiness and discontents when he or she is not willing to make the other person's happiness their cause. Because of my naming problems and because of my embodiment of unique identity markers, I stop other people's happiness and contentment from becoming actualised. The third section focuses on experiences within the fieldwork, whereby I examine the problems of getting access to the police, stigma in the fieldwork, and personal challenges in the field. The fourth section addresses experiences outside of the fieldwork, since research is never just limited to the fieldwork and rarely do researchers do a 9 a.m.–5 p.m. job (Stebbins, 1991); in this section, I address personal challenges outside of the fieldwork that relate to my research on police and policing. The final section offers some concluding thoughts

and some recommendations/lessons learned for future researchers doing fieldwork.

## Who am I?

In 1989, I was born in Wales, in particular, in the city of Newport (an area in south east Wales). At the age of around 5, my family and I had moved to the North-East region, England. I have lived there until recently till I relocated to the West Midlands (United Kingdom). Rather than in rural areas, I feel comfortable in the city, especially as my family brought me up as a northerner. My family is Pakistani, Muslim, and sustains the Islamic faith. Although I am by training a sociologist and a criminologist, my faith is always there in the background, the faith in God. There has been a long-standing tension between my homosexuality and my identity as a Muslim, with the Muslim community at large generally viewing this as incompatible, which often results in me facing social exclusion (Javaid, 2019). Plummer (1981) shows that identities and who we are at a particular context and time are susceptible to frequent changes and modifications. What does it mean to be gay, for example? Identities are never fixed, but rather fluid, dynamic, vulnerable to change, and negotiated through social and power relations (Plummer, 2019). We, as human beings, have multiple memberships, including (though not limited to) religious, racial, ethnic, sexual and gendered identities, shaped by narrative power and stories (Plummer, 2019). Identities change over time; they are responsive to changes that we experience. People can go from identifying as bisexual to gay simply because labels may serve different purposes in different contexts. The identities that we lay claim to are also associated with particular norms, values and stereotypes, which can lead us to resist some identities and to take some on. According to Weeks (1985),

Identity is not a destiny but a choice. But in a culture where homosexual desires, female or male, are still execrated and denied, the adoption of lesbian or gay identities inevitably constitutes a political choice. These identities are not expressions of secret essences. They are self-creations, but they are creations on ground not freely chosen but laid out by history. So homosexual identities illustrate the play of constraint and opportunity, necessity and freedom, power and pleasure. Sexual identities seem necessary in the contemporary world as starting points for a politics around sexuality. The form they take, however, is not predetermined. In the end, therefore, they are not so much about who we really are, what our sex dictates. They are about what we want to be and could be. (p. 209)

Following Weeks, identity, including sexual identity, is negotiated through social and power relations. The body is still limited by what it can do, so we cannot 'ignore the limits set by the possibilities of the body' (Weeks, 1985: 248). Moulded by cultural and social forces, identity is a social process. While the body can set limits, reproducing sexual

identity induces categories that can offer us comfort and stability while also providing us with restrictions (Plummer, 1981). In the words of Cooley (1922: 208), '[w]e live in the minds of others without knowing it'. That is to say, others shape our identities, giving us definitions with which to negotiate. Others shaped my own identity as a gay Muslim since my everyday life was like a theatrical performance (Goffman, 1959) whereby I would enact different contradictory roles, depending on the context. For example, during family gatherings, I would take on the role of a heterosexual to ward off threats of stigma against my homosexual identity. In and outside the fieldwork, my identities were invariably tied up in a web of power and social relations. Aside from embodying a gay Muslim middle-class identity, I also embody the identity of a rape victim. In order to avoid shame as best as I can, I could engage in information control by way of hiding my identities as a homosexual and as a rape victim during social relations with my close and extended family (see Javaid, 2019). This was important to do because, as Goffman (1959) argues, the reason we spend much time and care managing our impressions (our identities, appearances, talks, lifestyles and so on) is to avoid embarrassment as best we can. To be a non-heterosexual is to deviate from a heterosexual path that others cultivated for you, a path that one was supposed to follow to reach the 'right' destination (Ahmed, 2017). My deviant status as a gay rape survivor is one that induces unhappiness for others, as we shall soon see.

My identity as a rape victim came to surface by disclosing it during research. Although being raped is quite private and invisible, I was labelled as a victim through social relations after having disclosed it in certain social contexts. For example, when asked by some officers why I had chosen to research male rape, I suggested that it was because of my own rape. This suggestion attempted to break down hierarchical relationships in the fieldwork. Yet, it is important for me to spend so much time and care managing my identities, appearances, talk, culture, lifestyle and so on, because of my complex and highly fraught positionality as myself (1) a rape victim, (2) a self-identifying gay man and (3) a Muslim of Pakistani extraction living and conducting research in the United Kingdom, all of which raise power asymmetries on multiple registers. I am constantly managing and preventing stigma from looming large because, if stigma were to develop through the revelation of my homosexual and rape victim identities, I would be disowned, neglected and constructed as the 'other'. Thus, when in a physical sense I was absent at family gatherings, I was still nonetheless threatened with the insidious possibility that I could be stigmatised within my network of close and extended family for '[p]eople's everyday lives are structured through social forces and in relation to social others who may not be physically present but whose social presence frames their worlds' (Lawler, 2017: 18). My family frames the world in which I am positioned. I become aware of the dangers of stigma. To risk running into stigma, I am aware that it can 'infect'

others because of my close association with a stigmatised entity; that is, the topic of male rape. As Goffman (1963) argues, when an individual closely aligns himself to a stigmatised human or entity, that individual symbolically and metaphorically becomes tainted with stigma. I am, then, afraid of extending my own stigma onto my family members (and to others), for to do so would bring about dishonour. I am often constructed as a blemished human with a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1959).

## **Understanding police studies, and contextualising reflexivity and *The Promise of Happiness***

### *Setting the backdrop*

In this section, I provide some background to the police studies that my reflexivity is based upon. I have researched police and policing for a decade – from completing a BSc (Hons), MSc, MRes, to completing a PhD on police and policing. Four comprehensive dissertation projects, therefore, emerged from these degrees. For the purposes of the discussions in this article, I focus only on two dissertation empirically based projects: one that emerged from the MRes degree, and the other emerged from the doctorate degree, each of which was based on interviews with the police. First, I conducted a piece of project that formed part of my MRes degree; the research aims were to explore the phenomenon of male rape and how the police recognise it, together with uncovering male rape myths in a local police force. While male rape research is expanding, it was found that the police have a lack of knowledge, understanding, awareness and specialised training of male rape. Police officers' attitudes and beliefs on specific topics pertinent to male rape were discussed. This project also sought to comprehend gender expectations and stereotypes of men to comprehend the prevalence of male rape, the negligence of male rape and the underreporting/recording of male rape. Feminist theory was used as a foundation for the project since feminism seeks gender equality. For example, radical feminism was drawn upon to argue that rape between men is carried out as a form of power and control (see Abdullah-Khan, 2008). The research found that there is a need for the police to adequately manage male rape victims and to take male rape seriously, without any negative attitudes and beliefs. This project drew on three in-depth, qualitative interviews, which lasted over 2 hours, with police officers.

The second, much larger, dissertation project formed part of my doctorate degree that was published into a book (see Javaid, 2018a). This qualitative project critically explored police officers' attitudes towards and responses to male rape victims in England. It critically examined the ways in which police officers (N=70) deal with male victims of rape. Of the 70 respondents who participated, the rough breakdown by rank can be seen as follows: about 47% were police

constables, about 13% were police sergeants, approximately 6% were specialist police officers, about another 6% were police detectives and about 3% were police response officers. This doctorate research paid close attention to how notions of sexualities and masculinities affect and shape their understanding of male rape and their views of men as victims of rape. Police cultures were examined to understand how male rape is policed in England. The data were grounded in sociological, cultural and post-structural theoretical frameworks, such as hegemonic masculinity, a form of masculinity that legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires. The qualitative data were analysed with the use of thematic analysis, drawing out important themes and concepts of the ways in which male rape was thought about, responded to and dealt with by the police. Transcribing the recordings were time-consuming, but it kept me 'close to the data', enabling me to identify themes and patterns in the data by fully immersing myself in it. On reflection of the

data while transcribing, there were times when I became tearful and emotional because I was made to relive those moments of pain, interrogative questions, and dubious attitudes and responses that positioned me in inferior categories. I made comprehensive notes both during and immediately after the interviews in relation to reflexivity.

For my doctorate research, the way in which I achieved my sample was by sending an email describing my study to Chief Superintendents in police forces across England. If they showed interest, they would normally forward my email to a police constable who would manage the research on their side, and I then sent my questions. I sent the questions ahead of time because the 'gatekeepers' asked to see them before approving and commencing the research. The questionnaires explored police experiences of handling male rape cases. They, in addition, identified gaps in existing services for male rape victims. I approached 13 police forces in Britain. Ultimately, five police forces participated in the research, but eight police forces declined to take part in this study. The police forces that participated in the research projects were somewhat different in terms of geography and size:

Police Force	Area	Size
Police force one	North of England	Around 3486 police officers, 1505 police staff, 245 special constables and 200 police community support officers
Police force two	North of England	Around 5671 officers
Police force three	North-west of England	Approximately 6318 police officers, 661 Volunteer Special Constables, 600 Police Community Support Officers, and 3087 members of police staff
Police force four	West of England	About 2013 police constables
Police force five	South of England	Around 699 police officers and 413 support staff

There is no reason to believe that I would have received a different treatment in any of the police forces that refused to engage in the research. When discussing my interactions with the police, I only refer to white police officers because I did not have interactions with non-white police officers; this is not to assume that all members of the police are inherently white, but it does mean that the attitudes and interactions with non-white officers are not discussed. For Ahmed (2017), the brown body can be what stops you from getting what you want: 'happiness becomes proximity to whiteness' (p. 52). Thus, my brown body can be seen as that which disrupts the prevailing force of whiteness in the police, creating further unhappiness since the brown body is what gets in the way, as disruptive.

I did not work with victims of male rape in this research due to the specific aims of it, but I did work with male rape victims on a different research project (Javaid, 2017a). In the interviews and questionnaires, the questions that I asked included, 'Do you think that male rape is a problem in the UK? If so, why is this the case?'; 'Do you think the likelihood of man being a victim of rape is associated with his sexual

orientation?'; 'Is there any reason why OR are there any situations under which you would treat a male rape victim differently compared with a female rape victim?'; and 'Would you say you adequately accommodate the needs of male rape victims? If so, how?' In order to elicit valid and reliable responses, I ensured that the findings were kept anonymous and confidential. The officers could have an interview whenever was most fitting for them and could fill out and return the questionnaires to me at any time they liked.

I was aware that my access to the officers was in flux, and at the mercy of forces that was often beyond my control, considering that some officers were conveying 'mixed signals' in respect to participating. Thus, I needed to ensure that I executed a detached and objective view to prevent unleashing my personal opinions, not only to prevent immersion, but also to become aware of my status as a professional researcher. Goffman (2014) discusses her experience of immersion in the field in a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Philadelphia with African American young men who were subject to a high level of police surveillance and police activity. She describes her participation in gang life and her own experience as

becoming ‘one of the boys’. She had admitted to committing conspiracy to commit murder and involved herself as an accomplice in committing a major felony (Goffman, 2014).

Before I carried out the fieldwork, I did literature searches that helped me to identify any potential threats and conundrums that I could have experienced in a particular field. Throughout the research process, I was financially constricted, which made it difficult at times to get to the places in which fieldwork was conducted. Holding down a part-time job, therefore, was necessary for me to financially support myself throughout the research project. Finding the balance of conducting research and part-time teaching to financially support the research project proved very difficult at times, in that the social aspect of my life drastically deteriorated.

A further issue to consider is the effect that the publishing of my research may have on the officers’ credibility. This is especially important in relation to the officers who may hold ideas about other people in society that are inflammatory or potentially dangerous. In these cases, I need to be prepared to justify my position and to explain the utility of my work to the development of knowledge on such groups, but, at the same time, this may put me in risk of being accused of misrepresenting the officers who I was researching. To prevent this from happening, I ensured that I provided the finished transcripts for those officers who asked to see them and, where possible, gave them an opportunity to amend the transcripts. The officers did not request their transcripts to be amended. They were also offered the opportunity, where appropriate, to see the results of the research. They generally believed that male rape victims face strong prejudice and were, therefore, more inclined to participate to help raise awareness of male rape and to help tackle the myths, shame and stigma attached to the issue of male rape. Rumney (2009) argues that male rape myths, such as male rape is solely a homosexual issue, and victims of male rape ‘asked for it’ by frequenting gay venues or by not showing physical resistance are, thus, blameworthy, are all-important considerations when doing sensitive research. Those who are doing sensitive research are also vulnerable to harassment and negative responses. For example, during her time working on a Home Office funded project on prostitution, feminist Westmarland had suffered harassment (Westmarland and Bows, 2019). When doing my own sensitive research, I felt that male rape myths and the very nature of male rape being a taboo could potentially contribute to the reluctance of officers to take part in my police research. Therefore, I made it essential to make sure that the research was carefully worded in a sensitive fashion when I sent the letter of introduction to potential officers and the letter of request to police organisations that could facilitate my research. For example, it was made clear to the officers that the purpose of my doctorate research was only to understand more about male rape and to improve understanding of how the police respond to male victims of rape while stressing that all information given would be kept entirely confidential and anonymous and would not be shared in a format that could identify participants.

I presented my police research to my department and it was well received because it was considered important and timely, due to the general lack of academic scholarship on the issue of male rape. The research highlighted that it would help shape better policy and practice, contributing to policy and practice developments to help support male rape victims. The research would inform the police forces researched of the ways in which officers construct and think about male rape, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in how the police respond to male rape victims. The research found some male rape myths, which are incorrect, inaccurate or misleading views about male rape, such as ‘men cannot be raped’ or ‘male rape is solely a homosexual issue’ (see Javaid, 2018a, 2018d). The research attempted to address such myths. By doing so, this helped to produce forthcoming discourses about male rape that stress to the police that all types of men can be raped, not just homosexual men. I would research the police again in the future, but I would need to be emotionally stronger to do this. I would research them again because there were positive experiences in a few interviews in terms of data collection, despite generally having negative experiences with the police. I suspect that the few positive experiences emerged because they were typically with female specially trained police officers, who were trained to look after rape victims’ needs to ensure that they receive care and understanding.

### *Reflexivity of researching the police and policing*

Reflexivity emanates from the qualitative theoretical paradigm. It allows one to have internal dialogues or internal conversations with oneself about the research process and about one’s own surroundings and contexts to decide then how to act. For Messerschmidt (2012), ‘it is through reflexive internal deliberations about the constraints and enabling aspects of social structures that people ultimately develop characteristic strategies for handling situations’ (p. 34). Therefore, agency, social action and social structures (defined as patterned and regular forms of interaction over time, allowing us to channel conduct but can also hinder such conduct in certain fashions) are intertwined. In the same social interaction, social actors maintain and alter social structures (Messerschmidt, 2012). While social structures can limit us, they can at the same time ‘free’ us. Social structures shape social action and internal dialogues. Over time, reflexivity enables us to recognise and to think through dilemmas, problems and issues that might arise during research and how best to solve them. Researchers’ identities, then, are embedded in research projects and reflexivity can help uncover the different ways in which their identities shape or influence the research process, either consciously or subconsciously.

In all research encounters to varying degrees, reflexivity provides a platform that can help one to recognise the inherent power relationships that exist in police research. An absence of reflexivity would not provide us with the tools

with which to make sense of such power imbalances. Power relations are complex and shifting, not simply one-sided or unidirectional, but the police are essentially an arm of the state. Reflexivity assumes a pivotal role in feminist research (Oakley, 1981; Riessman, 1987). Stanley and Wise (1993: 66) state that 'western industrial scientific approach values the orderly, rational, quantifiable, predictable, abstract and theoretical: feminism spat in its eye'. Feminism encourages researchers to break down hierarchical barriers between the researcher and the researched, but doing so can make the researcher vulnerable in the research process. I shed light on the different ways in which I was vulnerable in and outside of the research process, as a queer feminist, using what Behar (2003) calls 'the voice of the broken-hearted ethnographer' (p. 35). As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) state, 'this idea of 'the field', although central to our intellectual and professional identities, remains a largely unexamined one' (p. 2). Shedding light on my own experiences that arouse during my police research can alert others and allow other researchers to become more aware of similar experiences that may arise during their own research. Reflexivity is frequently misconstrued as 'a confession to salacious indiscretions', 'mere navel gazing', and even 'narcissistic and egoistic', so the result is that the researcher is constructed as being non-objective and non-neutral (Oakley, 1992). According to Stanley (1992), the auto/biographical can shed light on the dichotomies between public and private, self and other, in a way that does not ignore power relations. By theorising and paying attention to the personal, the writer can make links between the personal and the political with wider social structures (Stanley, 1992). Reflexivity is making a researcher critical of oneself, so the self as researcher is under analysis and scrutiny since we cannot study the external world without having a relationship with it nor can the research project completely exclude the researcher's identities, histories and biographies (Letherby et al., 2013). Behar (1996) argues that one can never be fully detached. We need to become, what she calls, a 'vulnerable observer', someone who works through their own emotional involvement with their own subject under study and being part of the research process more openly and honestly.

Reflexivity can reveal the nuances in a research project. It can uncover issues, problems and dilemmas that the 'naked eye' cannot first witness, so that other writers can become better aware of these in their own work. Because reflexivity can be useful to highlight the dynamics and cultural differences between the researcher and the officers, it is important to give some background to the literature relating to police reflexivity before contextualising the sociological and cultural theoretical framework. Auto-ethnography of the police allows us to experience another social world, consequential of social encounters with the police who are generally 'different' from us (Fassin, 2017). Fassin (2017) highlights that, despite such differences, which may make it difficult to access the police, auto-ethnography of the police offers a

way to understanding their everyday lives, which may include wrongdoing, to decipher their many justifications and interpretations:

In the end, not only does ethnography render visible practices of abuse, violence, discrimination, and provocation that are usually denied by the institution and overlooked by other methods, but it also makes it possible to account for the police's view on these practices while embedding them in a larger picture. (p. 6)

Maanen (1988) argues that one of the only ways to truly understand another culture is to submerge oneself in the life, norms and activities of that culture. I attempted to do this by deeply interacting, socialising and immersing myself with the police. The literature relating to police ethnography is limited, but those that are accessible provide important insights into the ways wherein reflexivity and ethnography can manifest in police research. For example, while working as a police officer himself, Holdaway's work on police cultures was conducted when Holdaway was an 'insider' rather than an 'outsider'. The terms 'insider' and 'outsider' often refer to individuals' relation to certain socio-cultural spaces. An insider is generally a person who 'belongs' and is bodily and mentally attuned to a particular socio-cultural space; his body feels 'at home' in such a space. His body has historically evolved in relation to that space. Furthermore, an insider is a person who closely aligns himself with the 'order of things' in this space; this 'order' takes the shape of an informal 'way things are done around here' or a procedural set of laws. Generally, the outsider is a person who does not undergo political or socio-cultural belonging; his bodily and mental dispositions stem from somewhere else, so he feels culturally and socially 'out of place'. Holdaway conducted his everyday policing activities and duties while keeping enough 'distance' so as to have internal conversations with oneself about his role in the research process and to reflect on his colleagues' roles, who were also police officers of mainly junior ranks. Holdaway had easy access to his police force since he was attached to it. Holdaway (1983) used participant observation as his data collection method making it easier for him to build rapport with his colleagues via covert research, stating that

[the] problem is encountered during research of many organisations; however, the case for covert research is strengthened by the central and powerful situation of the police within our social structure. The police are said to be accountable to the rule of law, a constitutional constraint which restricts their right to privacy but which they can neutralize by maintaining a protective occupational culture. When such an institution is over-protective, its members restrict the right to privacy that they possess. It is important that they be researched. (p. 49)

As an insider researcher, serving as a police sergeant and working in a busy inner city policing area, Holdaway (1983) easily gained access to the police while deviating

from common overt research practices, but a covert methodology was necessary to penetrate the police's 'protective shield' (p. 5). However, as Holdaway (1983: 9) confesses, 'there were times when research suffered because I was engrossed in police work and times when police work took second place to the recording of evidence. The resulting tension was demanding and wearing'. Although affiliated with the police force he researched, his research suffered due to the balancing of police duties with police research. Holdaway's study showed how racism and other forms of discrimination had become firmly embedded into the police culture. In her own ethnographic documentation of police cultures in a British police force, Loftus (2009: 17) argues that, regardless of many researchers' and writers' attempt to relativise and erode police cultures, 'the orthodox account of police culture continues to hold considerable value. In the context of reform it is significant that the renowned features remain virtually untouched by initiatives aimed at changing everyday assumptions and behaviours'. She suggests that the negative components of police cultures, such as racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination, remain strongly intact in current British police forces.

Furthermore, being seen by officers who he researched as an insider, Maanen (2002 [1983]) was counted on to not go against the cultures and interests of the police force, finding himself facing a moral dilemma. For example, during his research, he witnessed some officers using unnecessary force, hearing 'the very distinct smack of wood meeting flesh and bone' (p. 366). The victim, after being beaten, was 'thoroughly dazed and maybe unconscious, is pulled from the wagon, bounced to the pavement, handcuffed and tossed back into the van' (p. 366). At least in theory, police work is 'team work' that may or may not include the sharing of secrets, cover-ups and secret acts (Manning, 2014). Manning (2014) argues that the core of police work is subject to little active supervision, taking low visibility and unreviewed decisions. He goes on to comment that, 'Even though the educational level of police officers has risen appreciably in the last forty years, the police organization still presents itself as a "lean, mean, crime-fighting machine"' (p. 534). For Punch (1986), doing research with the police can be like a theatrical play given that 'continued involvement in the field can be likened to being constantly on stage' (p. 17). Punch suggests that a researcher's conduct is always scrutinised, evaluated and commented upon. This scrutinisation can be seen in Grisar-Kasse's (2004) research when she encountered some aggressive officers who were suspicious about her presence as a researcher. Westmarland (2011) documents that, because researchers are human beings, and the participants they research are human beings too, researchers inevitably run into ethics and emotions. These prior police studies using auto-ethnography have helped to contextualise my own work by their highlighting prior issues in the police.

They have shared similar experiences as my own while we navigate through the challenges of doing police research.

### The Promise of Happiness, *the gift of unhappiness*

To elucidate, make sense of and frame my experiences within and outside of fieldwork, I draw on Ahmed's work. In *The Promise of Happiness* (Ahmed, 2010), she states that '[h]appiness is consistently described as the object of human desire, as being what we aim for, as being what gives purpose, meaning and order to human life . . . do we consent to happiness? And what are we consenting to[?]' (p. 1). *The Promise of Happiness* suggests that happiness is never guaranteed nor promised. Promises can be made, yet broken. What replaces happiness, then? Pain, torment and unhappiness are what replace happiness when it cannot be embodied. In and outside of the fieldwork, I was made to embody unhappiness, even though there is a ubiquitous assumption that we all want to be happy (Ahmed, 2010). For example,

During the course of my research, dating partners would see me as 'just a bit of fun' because of the topic that I research. I feel they would see me as kinky, slutty, and only available for sex. Whilst I tried to refute such allegations from men, I was simply seen as undateable. One guy, for example, mocked me because of the type of researcher I am: 'you must love sex'. (Research Diary)

Such allegations brought about my unhappiness because I was undateable. Being walked out on dates because I would not supply men with sex was a recurring issue given their misunderstandings about my research, resulting in my being made to feel unhappiness. For Ahmed, happiness is not simply a social good, but rather happiness is based on selecting the 'right' options and following particular 'happiness scripts'. Choosing to research the issue of male rape went against such scripts. We are not free to choose what makes us happy because happiness is directive. As Ahmed demonstrates, the promise of happiness operates as a tool with which to oppress, discipline and govern bodies, creating inequality and oppression. It can be useful, therefore, to focus on those who become or are made to become unhappy. Ahmed refers to the 'unhappy queer' to denote the 'thing' who is seen to be producing unhappiness. In and outside of the fieldwork, pertaining to the policing of male rape, I was constructed as this 'unhappy queer' for dismantling the status quo of hegemonic masculinity and the normalisation of heterosexuality, speaking out about the unspoken, about the taboo, naming a problem. For instance, as my fieldwork notes show,

I was warned about my research being a threat to some of the macho, masculine and heterosexual men in the police force. When interviewing some of my participants, they strongly suggested that I would have a hard time getting access to them



and getting them to reveal their stories: ‘they will not open up to *someone like you*’. In fact, this was true. The macho officers would often give only ‘yes and no’ answers, waiting for me to leave like I was non-human.

Becoming constructed as a queer and being made to feel unwanted in this way brought about backlash, disgust and disdain being directed towards my research and me, since it was seen as unwelcome, rooted in queer politics and grounded in homophobia. Therefore, in effect, I was made to embody unhappiness through social relations and interactions. ‘Someone like you’ as someone who is alien, who is ‘foreign’ but foreign in the sense of ‘other’ as if to suggest I do not belong here, even though I am British born. Deviating from their expectation of ‘normal’ and ordinary meant that their happiness and contentment were destabilised: ‘To disappoint an expectation is to become a disappointment’ (Ahmed, 2017: 52). Being made unhappy was produced and re-produced through a dialectical relationship with others who were aware of my work on male rape, as a way in which to discipline and govern my body, feelings and emotions. As Ahmed (2010) argues, ‘[the] very promise that happiness is what you get for having the right associations might be how we are directed toward certain things’ (p. 2) suggests that when one is associated with a stigmatised topic, such as male rape, which may not be a ‘right’ association, then one becomes stigmatised resulting in the loss of happiness for others. Ahmed goes on to argue that a queer is forced to enact unhappiness when exposing and challenging the normalisation of heterosexuality, ‘to explore the unhappiness of what gets counted as normal’ (Ahmed, 2010: 117). My encounters with ‘the world that is unhappy with queer love’ (Ahmed, 2010), as my fieldwork notes and notes from my research diary document, through my ‘queer’ research and through my identification as homosexual positioned others as unhappy and as discontent.

## Within the fieldwork

### *Suspicion and the problems of getting access to the police*

In England, many of the police agencies that I contacted to negotiate access with were cautious of my research, especially in terms of why I was doing research on a stigmatised topic, that is, male rape. They often enquired, ‘Why is such a nice boy doing research on such a distasteful topic?’ (Chief Constable 1, male). In some cases, these ‘gatekeepers’ were uncooperative and sometimes hostile, so certain police forces automatically assumed that my research would be detrimental to their forces, denying access to their stories about male rape. They were suspicious of my identity as a ‘real’ researcher because of my association with the topic of male rape. As I argued in prior work, because male rape is embedded in stigma, that stigma ended up metaphorically and

symbolically transposing itself onto me, the researcher, the queer writer (Javaid, 2018a). Therefore, I became someone who disrupted other people’s happiness (Ahmed, 2010) for doing research on male rape: ‘the one who gets in the way of the happiness of others by the way [he] appears’ (Ahmed, 2017: 184). Thus, it was difficult to get access to the police to recruit police officers. Many of the police agencies and officers that I attempted to negotiate access with either disengaged with my research or through total silence. That is, many of the agencies and officers simply ignored my requests to recruit participants for my projects by not replying to my emails. Silence speaks volumes. For those police officers who did reply to my emails, some would say that ‘[male rape] is not an issue in our police force’ (Police Constable, 24, male), even though ‘[w]hen victims do decide to report rape, the police are very often the first agency that they contact’ (Abdullah-Khan, 2008: 96).

The ‘gatekeepers’ were aware of my identity as a Muslim and Pakistani male. When negotiating access with the police, my name would symbolise such identities. I was, then, arguably constructed as ‘foreign’ even though I am British born; but foreign in the sense of ‘other’. Assuming my brown body as curious and foreign positioned me in a stigmatised category that ‘spreads unhappiness’ (Ahmed, 2010). Questions sprayed at me like bullets in a machine gun: ‘Why are you here? How are you here?’ Consequently, there was a strong sense that the police wanted to ‘forget’ me, to forget my research and to ‘close the lid’ on something that barely reached the surface. I felt that none of the police really cared about my work on male rape. One of the chief aims of my projects was precisely to ensure that male rape victims are neither overlooked nor forgotten, and this aim was explicitly highlighted to the research interlocutors. However many police forces were cautious and suspicious of how I was going to represent their organisation, as exemplified in the following extract from my research diary:

Although I clearly communicated my research aims to the ‘gatekeeper’, i.e. to learn more about the policing of male rape, and gave them examples of the kinds of questions that I would be asking, I was met with sheer repulsion and disgust towards my research when I was booked in for an appointment to meet with the ‘gatekeeper’ [senior police officer]. He shouted: ‘Why are you doing this research!? Why are you really here’. It was as if he thought that I was going to represent their police force badly. Clearly, other officers in the same department had heard about me and my research because, when I was walking past officers on the same floor to go to the room where the meeting was taking place, I could see so many of them glaring at me, piercing my body with their eyes, sniggering, mocking, and stigmatising. I just wanted the floor to swallow me up.

Since many of the police forces were cautious of how I was going to represent their organisations with my research, such as ruining the police’s reputation, I was strongly discouraged from pursuing research on the policing of male rape. This is an issue

that frequently emerges within the context of policing research of most kinds, since officers tend to be suspicious and cautious about most forms of academic research that could potentially impact upon their reputation. I wondered why so many officers wanted to silence me. Reiner and Newburn (2008) argue that, when a researcher interviews a sample of officers of dissimilar ranks, particular information cannot be collected from the police since some interviewers are sometimes prevented or silenced from asking questions relating to political opinions. This silencing works to reinforce the officers' hierarchical positions, that of cultural and symbolical power. Officers are the 'arm of the state', they represent the state (Reiner and Newburn, 2008). Therefore, some officers were cautious and suspicious of my presence and were wary of what I was going to do with the data collected from the interviews. How was I going to represent their police force, for example? Although the aims of the research were provided to officers, where I outlined that I am interested to learn more about the subject of male rape, the officers' level of suspicion was present all through my time within the field. According to Reiner and Newburn (2008), researchers experiencing police suspicion is not an uncommon experience. The police were quick to make negative assumptions about me due to my association with a taboo and stigmatising topic. I often felt under attack:

I'm in the interview room with a senior police officer. She looks at me with suspicion. I am asking her questions, but she answers whilst regularly getting defensive. At one point, she says: 'If my boss was here, she would *not put up with you*'. This made me feel as if I did not belong here, that I was somehow an outsider, a 'foreigner'. (Research Diary)

I was constructed as an 'outsider'. I felt as if I was symbolically 'attacked' for my identities. I felt embarrassed, humiliated, 'not wanted' and I questioned whether I was really accepted in this country as a British gay Muslim. Being a visible ethnic minority, I felt ashamed for my Muslim identity. In the research process, I saw no diversity. I felt like a stranger. For Ahmed (2010), a figure of a stranger – the body out of place – is a source of danger or the cause of bad feeling. Ahmed (2017: 60) elsewhere goes on to comment, 'when you recognize yourself as the stranger, you become estranged not only from happiness but from yourself. You might be the one whose arrival causes a disturbance'. By highlighting a problem, one becomes the problem (Ahmed, 2010). I became a nuisance, a problem by highlighting the issue of male rape as a problem, which was an alienating and painful experience for me. The officer compartmentalised me as unimportant as the issue of male rape, constructing me as the 'other' (a dehumanised object) in a dialectical relationship. I was assigned de facto to this position. Social identities are relational; officers typically define themselves as 'normal' in relation to others because identity has no meaning without the 'other'. Positioning me in the 'other' category allows the officer to sustain special cultural authority and symbolic power.

Consequently, on some occasions, officers would 'stand me up'. That is, after they agreed to do an interview, they would not carry out the interview without informing me of their reasons. I was, therefore, left 'hanging around', waiting for them and marked as unimportant. Westmarland (2011) establishes that researchers are often made to spend considerable time 'hanging around', waiting to sort out, arrange and carry out interviews with the police. The feeling of being 'messed around' by the police was something that was frequent during the fieldwork, which suggests that some officers were not 'bothered' about the importance of the research. This experience of being 'messed around' was a signal that I was spreading unhappiness for other police officers, being a nuisance and extracting any contentment from them.

### *Stigma within the fieldwork*

The persistence of male rape stigma (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Javaid, 2018a, 2018c; Rumney, 2008, 2009), and the threat that male rape poses to men's hegemonic masculinity (Javaid, 2018e), made it difficult for officers to tell their stories in-depth during the interviews. This stigma contributed to a 'culture of silence' in the interviews. However, this silence could also be an expression of the officers' own vulnerabilities or potential sympathies rather than sheer dismissal and disgust. Men often find it difficult to consider the possibility that they can be vulnerable and powerless (Javaid, 2018b). Some police officers have never spoken about their experiences of dealing with male rape victims because of the stigma attached to male rape, making it difficult to build a rapport with the officers. Ahmed (2010) argues that stigma manifests itself when a 'normal' reaction to something is out of step, non-conforming, and not expected. The stigmatised entity, therefore, is isolated and placed at the periphery of normality; it becomes alien to some police officers because they do not know how to compartmentalise it. My fieldwork notes demonstrate these concerns of stigma:

In every single interview that I did with the police, the issue of stigma cropped up. I could see the officers getting uncomfortable talking about the issue of male rape. They looked uneasy, shameful and embarrassed. As a sociologist, I knew that, in every single social encounter, we all run the risk of running into stigma. These interviews were no exception. I am struggling to connect with the officers because of this stigma. What do I do?

In the interviews, I became stigmatised; I felt ashamed for asking questions about the policing of male rape. Atkinson and Silverman (1997: 305) articulated, 'For the qualitatively minded researcher, the open-ended interview offers the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another, or even for a politically correct dialogue where researcher and researched offer mutual understanding and support'. This could not be further from the truth since the researched did not offer mutual understanding and support; instead, the interviews were a process and reinforcement of stigmatisation. In

the interviews, the lack of mutual support and understanding contributed to the silencing of male rape. I attempted to employ other tactics that could help overcome the challenges of building rapport with the police officers. For example, when asked by some officers as to why I had chosen to research this topic, the following excerpt highlights my responses to these officers:

At some stages in the research process, such as at the start of some interviews or at the negotiation of access stage, I got asked by some officers, ‘Why are you doing research on male rape?’ I felt really uneasy about this dreaded/expected question, but I knew that I could not lie to my (potential) research participants; so I told them the truth. That is, I chose to study and research male rape because of my own rape. I was raped. (Research Diary)

It was difficult to reveal the truth to the (potential) participants, as it created angst, anxiety and shame. Burawoy (2003) documents that we cannot study the external world without having a relationship with it, so the researcher always has some form of identity, history, past experience or biography embedded in his research project. My research projects proved to be no exception, as I research male rape due to my own sexual victimisation. It was important to try to develop a rapport with the officers, since they were giving me the ‘gift’ of their time (Oakley, 2016) and because ‘the relationships that develop between ethnographic researchers and the people they are studying are critical to the success of their research’ (Kornblum, 1996: 4). The officers were like my ‘extended family’,<sup>2</sup> feeling free to prod, pry and pontificate. However, the disclosure of my rape broke down hierarchical barriers that were there between the researched and the researcher in some interviews, contributing to developing trust. The relationships between the officers and me gradually developed, and they were enduring and fulfilling. Meanwhile, not only during the interviews, but also at the negotiation stages, there was a clear noticeable power imbalance between the officers and myself. Earlier on in the research process, I quickly recognised my positionality. For example,

Throughout the research procedures, I rapidly gathered that officers were placing me in a subordinate position at regular intervals. For example, the officers controlled when to reply to me, when I can talk, when I can conduct the interview, when I can speak to them, and even controlled the types of questions that I might ask. I basically had no control – no voice – in this research process. The absence of control reminded me of my personal life where control was also absent [e.g. being frequently interrupted], my voice also ignored, and my existence on this world questioned. Funnily enough, I was so used to being in this subordinate position in the research, because that’s the only position I know how to live in within my everyday life, being ‘invisible’ and denied a voice at home, at work, at family gatherings, at weddings, etc. I am often marked as the invisible because I feel I cannot be seen or heard. When I am seen, I am unnoticeable, echoing my experiences with the police during the fieldwork. (Fieldwork notes)

I was placed in subordinate positions throughout the research process. For example, the officers were in a position not only to control the type of information they provided during the interviews, but also controlled my emotions and shaped the ethics of the research, reinforcing my non-hegemonic position. This was especially the case when the police constantly interrupted me during fieldwork, holding dominance over me and reminding me of who was in control. Ahmed (2010) acknowledges that happiness, not necessarily as an emotion, but as something that is imposed on us, as a demand in order to remain content in our subordinate position, is relevant here. In other words, by not challenging officers, by not questioning them, I was content in my subordinate position so as to secure and reinforce the officers’ continuity – happiness – with their common norms and values unthreatened and unchallenged. To challenge officers during the research process, including in the interviews, would ruin the relationship of trust in that rapport would have broken, resulting in a loss of data and a potential exclusion from their police force, which could induce stigma.

### *Personal challenges within the field*

It can be difficult to broach the delicate issue of rape and sexual assault against men in police forces that are ‘masculine’ environments. Similar to Clark (2017), ‘[t]he challenge . . . was to create a space for interviewees to speak about the past in a way that they felt comfortable with’ (p. 430). However, police officers can embody hegemonic masculinity to legitimate unequal gender relations among different men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Police forces are hierarchical institutions (Messerschmidt, 1993). Therefore, I undoubtedly encountered many aggressive, domineering and hostile police officers, particularly male police officers, in the fieldwork. Many acted as my ‘extended family’, whereby they were condescending and ordering me around as if they ‘owned’ me. For example,

Some interviews with the police were awful, uncomfortable, and I hated doing them. This is because some police officers would talk down to me in an arrogant, hostile, and condescending fashion; for instance, looking at me as if I was stupid in the interview, one officer lamented, ‘That is a ridiculous question . . . are you stupid?’ *Made to feel frightened, subordinate, weak and powerless, I froze with fear.* My throat closed in terror. Trying to keep it together, I just kept moving on by trying to ask the next question, waiting for this to be over. (Fieldwork notes; emphasis added)

Although I disseminated my interview questions to the police prior to conducting the interviews, some officers would react distastefully, and were hostile and aggressive to some of the questions, which in turn positioned me in a subordinate masculinity at that particular time and context, legitimating unequal gender relations during the interviews. According to Connell (2005), given that hegemonic masculinity

'relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole', 'there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men [such as] the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men . . . [g]ay men are subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices'. (p. 78)

Because of the sexual activity that male rape is equated to, that is, penile-anal penetration, the police often assumed that male rape is solely a gay problem and, therefore, I must be gay for researching a 'gay problem'. Although I identify as gay, my circulation of gay material practices, such as dressing 'pretty' and wearing make-up, reinforced my subordination in the interviews, coupled with the fact that I was linked with a 'homosexual research topic'. I was, thus, quickly presumed as gay and made subordinate through different mechanisms; for example, '[t]hey include political and cultural exclusion . . . [and] personal boycotts' (Connell, 2005) and being called 'darling' and other feminine epithets to oppress and subordinate me while the officers' hegemonic masculinity was reinforced and enhanced. Connell (2005: 78) argues, 'Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity . . . gayness is easily assimilated to femininity'. It was easy for the officers to construct me as feminine given my homosexuality, my identity as a male rape victim, and my feminine presentation and manner in style, all of which placed me in a powerless and weak position that made it difficult (if not impossible) to challenge gender inequality and oppression in the fieldwork. My experience of oppression inside fieldwork echoes outside of fieldwork.

## Outside the fieldwork

### *'You fancy a threesome?'*

One of the biggest personal challenges that I faced outside of the fieldwork was dealing with the sexual overtures that I received after some people became aware of my research on male rape. Consider the following research diary extract as an example of such personal challenges:

Researching, writing about, and thinking of my research topic every single day was exhausting, and it can take a toll on oneself. Therefore, I found that drinking on the gay scene was distracting and enjoyable. Little did I know that I would be so wrong: one night on the gay scene, I ended up chatting to two very macho, hegemonic, masculine male police officers. They seemed very friendly, approachable and talkative. We spoke about all sorts, including whether I was having a good night, and whether I'd be up for a threesome! I was shocked. After telling the two police officers about my research on male rape, saying that, 'Oh, I'm doing a PhD on the policing of male rape', one of the officers looked at me with sheer disgust and disdain, and physically touched me with his finger and said, 'That's rape', mocking the

issue of male rape. Then, they moved on to the sexual proposal, threatening [me:] 'If you don't have a threesome with us, we are going to arrest you for something and we can use that CCTV camera as evidence'. Burning with fear inside, I declined and left the situation – nothing ever did happen to me (I was lucky).

This incident occurred near the start of my research project, though it was not a part of the research study at all. Rather, it was a personal encounter with the police, but it had affected my interactions with other officers who I interviewed for my research during fieldwork, in that I assumed that I would receive sexual overtures or sexual innuendoes. The way I felt about the fieldwork, then, was that it was a place for men to impose certain personal characteristics onto my persona as a result of their own framing of sexuality research. As the extract suggests, research is never just limited to the fieldwork. Rather, it goes home with you given that researchers rarely do a 9 a.m.–5 p.m. job. I spoke of my research outside of the fieldwork and was met with backlash by some officers. The stigma that is ingrained in the subject-matter of male rape did not just manifest in the fieldwork, but also outside of it. As a result, I was made to handle negative emotions from others: I was seen as 'kinky'. Ely et al. (1991) establish that, '[i]f we undertake to study human lives, we have to be ready to face human feelings' (p. 49), but this usually comes at a personal cost to qualitative researchers. For example, outside of fieldwork, facing human feelings was inevitable but being expected to tolerate backlash from some police officers was unexpected. I felt angry for my degrading, humiliating and objectifying treatment, which resonates with Clark's (2017) feelings, in that '[e]arly in [her] research, the predominant emotion that [she] felt was anger. [She] was working with men and women who had been subjected to brutal and degrading human rights violations' (p. 432). As qualitative researchers, we are expected to just put up with these negative emotions and backlash without discussing them. My personal experience with the police show that police corruption exists. Jauregui (2013) indicates that the police are continually subject to – and subjects in – ongoing negotiations over social boundaries. They decide when, where and how to cross social boundaries, to go over the line, leaving some to question their professionalism.

Because I was associated with a research topic that included sex and sexuality, I was subsequently seen as 'up for it', or as sexually promiscuous, which could not be further from the truth. Managing sexual overtures outside of fieldwork was hard work and 'emotional labor' (Hochschild, 1983). Being sexualised in this way supports other qualitative researchers' experience of being sexualised by their participants. For example, in interviews with online male escorts who have sex with male clients, Walby (2010) became the object of sexualisation in his encounters with the interviewees. As Walby discusses, '[t]he first question often posed to [him] at the start of interviews was *are you gay?*' (p. 641; emphasis in original). Outside of fieldwork, I too frequently encountered such questions whereby people, such as the

officers in the above extract, questioned my sexuality, asking 'are you gay?' There was an inherent assumption that I was homosexual given the research topic that I address deals with anal-penile penetration. This assumption of my sexuality, consequently, produced assumptions about my personal life in that I was assumed to be a 'slut', 'whore' and 'slag' and so suggesting that I 'sleep around'. I feared those who assumed my sexuality on the basis of my research topic given that '[s]ome things more than others are encountered as 'to-be-feared' in the event of proximity' (Ahmed, 2010: 28), producing a judgement towards me. People outside of the fieldwork who became aware of my research, including the officers mentioned above, invited me to confess something about myself such as confirming whether I was actually a 'slag' given that '[as]s much as the researcher positions as a sociologist, [people] may position the researcher as a sex object' (Walby, 2010: 649). The officers controlled the type of response that I could give – 'Yes, I am gay' – as if to suggest that 'gay' connotes sexual promiscuity. I was positioned in a way that encouraged me to sacrifice my integrity and dignity: 'queers, by doing what they want, expose the unhappiness of having to sacrifice personal [integrity], in the perversity of their twists and turns, for the happiness of others' (Ahmed, 2017: 229).

## Conclusion

Policing is frequently filled with corruption, unprofessionalism, violence and criminalisation (Jauregui, 2016). Researchers continue to research the police without any examination of how the researcher is impacted. As Dickson-Swift et al. (2009: 328) comment, 'Researchers undertaking qualitative research, and particularly qualitative research on sensitive topics, need to be able to make an assessment of the impact of the research on both the participants and themselves'. This article sought to focus on the latter. That is, I examined the different ways in which my research on police and policing, which I have been involved in for a decade, impacted me emotionally, socially, personally and professionally in and outside of fieldwork. This was important to do because the criminological and sociological literature often overlooks how research affects the researcher inside and outside of fieldwork, yet this is a vital lacuna in the social science literature that ought to be filled, since research invariably affects the researcher in some way (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009).

One of the biggest personal challenges that I faced in and outside of the fieldwork was managing my emotions: 'It is about finding ways to exist in a world that makes it difficult to exist' (Ahmed, 2017: 239). I exercised what Hochschild (1983) calls 'emotional labour' as a way of suppressing my emotions so as to portray myself in a particular light that would, consequently, create a wanted state of mind in police officers. My stigma was exacerbated due to many people, including police officers, constructing male rape as solely a gay problem and hence I must be gay. This

assumption of my sexuality as queer brought about implications, such as I was considered as 'dirty', sexually promiscuous and tainted, since queer threatens to expose the unhappiness of the duties and scripts of happiness and can only be seen as the cause of bad feeling for others (Ahmed, 2010). My presence as a male rape researcher doing work on the policing of male rape was met with scorn, because I was seen as disrupting the status quo, challenging the ideal assumption that rape only affects women. All of this aroused in me a deep sense of injustice and anger, but the use of writing up fieldwork notes and research diary notes was therapeutic and cathartic for me, healing some wounds of injustice and anger.

Moreover, I came to auto-ethnography not to self-indulge or to tell on others, but to become a storyteller who 'told stories about real people in real places. I was seduced by the notion of field-work, the idea of going some place to find a story I wasn't looking for' (Behar, 2003: 16). The unexpected stories found me, even when I was not looking for them. These stories I tell here penetrate into my consciousness to remind me that these stories are real. However, I must caution that we cannot generalise in how the police serve male rape victims solely on the basis of my own experiences with the police. We are expected, as auto-ethnographers, to travel somewhere with the commitment to bring back a story (Behar, 2003). I brought back stories of pain, darkness and disappointment. It was as if my heart was screaming, yelling out and yearning for my stories to be heard. Comfort came in writing, the only thing that never leaves me. I suggest others to share their stories of researching the police because writing can serve as a way to 'kill out' any sort of ill feeling or emotional turmoil that manifested from their own research.

I would suggest other researchers to undertake some training about how to conduct fieldwork with the police to become aware of the potential dangers and hazards of researching the police. Such training, though, needs to be broad in scope to examine not only ethics and participants' safety, but also the researchers' own safety in and outside of the fieldwork. There was no such inclusive training that I could find during the inception of my research, so there was a lack of support available for me to conduct sensitive research. It is difficult to make the police more accepting of male rape as an important issue. If I were to do things differently, I would have included more questions about female rape to stress the equal gravity of both male and female rape, as some officers may believe that only women are 'real' rape victims, not men. Thus, this approach could highlight that both men and women can be rape victims.

Throughout my research projects, there was a clear structural imbalance between the police and I. For example, during interviews with the police, my identity as a Pakistani/Muslim, who always fought for justice and would challenge inequalities and injustices, was concealed so as to remain silent and powerless. By doing so, I would not

challenge the officers' negative views and attitudes about male rape as this would ruin the relationship of trust, which would mean that the police would not provide data or would withdraw from the research. By remaining silent, I was reinforcing their hegemonic status as men and as police officers, which in turn was strengthening my subordinate status as a gay Pakistani/Muslim male rape victim. I became constructed as the 'other', the deviant, and the one whom ought to be silenced and oppressed. Remaining silent worked as a form of impression management. Goffman (1959) coined the term impression management to refer to our desire to manipulate others' impressions of us on the front stage. We use various mechanisms, called sign vehicles, to present ourselves to others (Goffman, 1959). One sign vehicle is remaining silent, which 'speaks' volumes. Being silent in this way acted as a way of resistance and courage, because it performed an illusion of stability. It functioned as a site for coping in that it successfully got me through all the interviews. Although incredibly difficult, I suggest other police researchers to avoid challenging officers' views during fieldwork, because to do so would upset the relationship of trust, potentially resulting in their withdrawal from your own study. This could mean you would have a lack of or no data. Getting data shows that you performed an illusion of stability and that your silence acted as a way of resistance, which, in turn, enables you to reclaim back your power and voice when you eventually have the 'required data'. In addition, through writing, one is able to reclaim back their voice.

I felt I was made to keep quiet and to not contest gender inequalities in police institutions and outside them when interacting with the police. The police are the arm of the state and signify symbolic power in so far as that they insidiously instilled fear in me, which resulted in my feeling like I was walking on eggshells. The police are able to take away one's own freedom and liberty, and this pervasive threat worked to silence me. I was tied up in a web of power relations with the police, creating an unstable and chaotic research process for me. Nonetheless, the research aims were fulfilled and I was successfully able to make sense of the ways in which the police respond to male rape victims and how they discursively construct the issue of male sexual victimisation. Although I was oppressed during fieldwork, I reclaimed back some form of power since I gained the 'required data' and have since published many journal articles and books. Power, then, is constantly shifting, changeable and contextual. I remained positive in and outside of fieldwork, despite being positioned in subordinate positions and despite my losing faith. Writing in my own personal diary was therapeutic for me because it made me 'visible' and 'heard', even to myself, since during fieldwork I would be made to feel 'invisible' and 'voiceless'. I suggest other writers to consider this approach, because a personal diary 'opens up another world' in which you are able to tell your secrets and confessions to yourself and,

potentially, to the whole world, which I have done here in my own writing. My reflections in this article and in my personal diary helped me to gain closure for when, inside and outside of fieldwork, I found it discouraging when people, including police officers, questioned my motives for doing research on male rape. While they tried to silence my painful screams, I screamed louder in the hope that they benefit other writers, not least those with little research experience. My screams continue.

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### Notes

1. Positionality indicates how one is positioned (by others, by ourselves, by particular discourses) in connection with many relational social processes of difference (such as, though not limited to, gender, ethnicity, class and age), and also indicates that one is dissimilarly positioned in hierarchies of privilege and power (Westmarland and Bows, 2019).
2. As an analytical concept, the 'extended family' refers to the idea that the participants resemble attributes similar to my own family members (immediate and extended family). These attributes are wide ranging, but they include arrogance, hostility, pontification, conservatism and dominance.

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