Sex and the Fieldwork: Gender, Sexuality, Nationality, and Social Class in Research on European (Heterosexual) Men

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Abstract
The overall goal of this article is to make a contribution to the developing, but not yet sufficiently explored, issue of methodology in research on men and masculinities performed by female researchers. This article is based on my professional experience gained during a research project on the European fathers’ rights movements. This was conducted between 2011 and 2016 with members of fathers’ rights groups in Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The central issue here is the process of carrying out interviews with men by a female researcher and the variety of gender dynamics produced through this particular type of interaction. This process is connected to multiple issues arising from gender inequalities and power relations. This article provides an intersectional analysis of the relations between the researcher and the researched since social factors such as gender, sexuality, nationality, and social class have a tremendous impact on the interview process in different sociopolitical contexts in Europe.

Keywords
gender, intersectionality, fieldwork, power relations, men and masculinities

Introduction

Example #1—2011
I am in what I understand to be the office of one of the fathers’ rights movement organizations in Poland. I have discovered, however, that it is in fact a room in a private apartment, belonging to the chair of the organization. I am wearing some light makeup, a midi skirt, low-heeled shoes, and my hair is down. We are talking about the main goals of my research project. At some point, he says:

OK, let’s have this interview, why not. I am not entirely sure what your intentions are, but you are pretty enough to spend some time with you, and only while looking at you: your skirt, your shoes, I’m pretty sure you are not a dyke feminist. (Boguslaw, Poland)

Example #2—2015
I have an interview scheduled with a man who self-identifies as an ally to the fathers’ rights movement, based in Stockholm, Sweden. The interview will be held in a coffee shop, as following my previous experiences in Poland, I always make sure I meet men in public places. I am wearing a sweatshirt, mom-jeans, and sport shoes, in other words clothes that do not emphasize my female shape. I also removed my makeup on the train before I arrived at the coffee shop as I wanted to minimize the process of being sexualized, as despite of the claims of some authors that inclusion of the researcher’s erotic subjectivities might be beneficial to researchers (Kaspar & Landold, 2016), I decided not to take this strategy, being aware at the same time that I cannot avoid it completely and need to acknowledge its existence (Rodríguez-Dorans, 2018). Apparently, I did not remove my makeup carefully enough because during the meeting the respondent remarks to me:

Hi, nice to meet you. You are Jen’s friend from Poland, right? So cool to see you, you look so nice! It’s ok to give a complement, right? By the way, you your lipstick is a bit smeared, but don’t worry, it looks very sexy to me. (Bo, Sweden)

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Example # 3—2016

I am sitting in an office belonging to a British men’s rights charity. I am wearing a gender-neutral outfit (no skirts/dresses, high heels that can be associated with traditional cis-femininity), no makeup, and my hair tied back in a ponytail. During the interview, I am asked several times about the university I represent, the research project itself, and the topic of my PhD thesis. At some point, the respondent commented:

It is amazing how sophisticated your English is! Did you learn it at the university? To be fair, you speak better language than the majority of British people here in this city. But I guess that’s normal for people like you. (Brian, UK)

All presented examples are taken from ongoing fieldwork, conducted since 2011 in several European countries with actors of fathers’ rights movements. All the activists were cis-heterosexual White men, usually older than me, representing working and middle social classes without a migratory background, and this is the particular group I am referring to in this article. During fieldwork, I have experienced specific types of interactions that might be seen as common in the research context when a female sociologist interviews male research participants (Arendell, 1997; Broom et al., 2009; Pini, 2005). I managed to identify several common traits, especially with regard to power relations, that have been already discussed in literature, where not only gender (Harding, 1991; Vanderbeck, 2005; Warren & Hackney, 2000; Ward, 2016), but also race and ethnicity (Andersen, 1993) as well as social class (Allan, 2016; Ward, 2014) are taken under consideration. Having said this, my transnational research project allowed me to experience fieldwork in different sociocultural contexts and gender regimes (Sumner, 2009) and, therefore, led me to a new conclusion, namely, that gender, sexuality, nationality, and social class intersect differently in specific countries, and hence, this results in a different researcher–research participant power dynamic. The aim of this article is to show the implications for the research process that arise from my fieldwork experience in my homeland of Poland as well as in Sweden and the United Kingdom.

It should be noted that all the investigated countries are still patriarchal societies, where men hold a privileged position and their relations with women are based on domination and subordination (Connell, 2005), although their range differs in each of them. This does, however, still have consequences for the research process, especially in projects conducted by women on men. Yet research on men and masculinities poses multiple challenges for the female researcher on the practical, analytical, and theoretical levels (Arendell, 1997; Campbell, 2003; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Goody, 1998; Gurney, 1985; Lee, 1997; Pini, 2005). The issue is broad and can be analyzed from different perspectives, also taking into account other dimensions of social relations such as social class, race/ethnicity, nationality, age, sexual orientation, and disability. Thus, this article is not and cannot be exhaustive, as I focus only on a few dimensions connected to the fieldwork dynamic I have experienced, and therefore, the results cannot be generalized. Moreover, I am fully aware that there are a growing number of publications from feminist and critical men and masculinities scholarship concerning interviewing men and the power relations that arise between female researchers and male research participants (Cupples, 2002, Easterday et al., 1977; England, 1994; Grenz, 2005; Kaspar & Landolf, 2016) as well as male researchers interviewing men, which creates different power dynamics (Rodriguez-Dorans, 2018; Vanderbeck, 2005). Moreover, there is a growing number of works that focus on masculinity and sexual desire that can occur during qualitative research, which, as shown above, was also part of my experience (Diprose et al., 2013; Kaspar & Landolf, 2016; Møgge, 2013; Rodriguez-Dorans, 2018; Thomas & Williams, 2016; Vanderbeck, 2005). Having said this, there is still a lack of discussion about the variety of intersectionalities between gender, sexuality, nationality, and social class in transnational feminist studies, particularly when the female researcher comes from a country of perceived lower status, and how such factors influence the data collection process, especially touching upon questions like “(...) who asked the interview questions, to whom. In which contexts, what interview style(s) was used; and what dynamics emerged within (and across) interviews” (Broom et al., 2009, p. 63). In the transnational context, it is important to add that many feminist scholars analyze the power relations among female researchers coming from Western-based academia, usually with a middle-class background and researching women from non-Western countries, with the main conclusion that there are strong power imbalances in the field, where the researcher usually, but not always, occupies the dominant position (Henry, 2003; Miraftab, 2004; Townsend-Bell, 2009; Wolf, 1996). Not many analyses have been dedicated to the issue of the nexus of power, positionality, and locality (Thapar-Björkert & Henry, 2007) where the researcher is a woman coming from a more peripheral country and the research participants are men, living in countries usually considered to be more developed, even if they all belong to a European context. The main goal of further analyses is therefore to add to the ongoing debate on power relations (re)produced during fieldwork, contributing examples based on field research carried out by the author.

Data, Methodology, and Resultant Challenges

Despite my ongoing engagement in research on men and masculinities during the last 10 years, the data for this particular paper came from a research project on the European fathers’ rights movements, which was conducted between 2011 and 2016 in Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. This project is an analysis of fathers’ rights movements from national, comparative, and transnational perspectives. It focuses on both discourses of gender (in)equality produced by activists and on the movements’ practices with regard to combating (self-identified) gender-based discrimination against men in general and fathers in particular. The aim of the project is to understand
activists’ motivations, political goals and strategies, the character of their claims, and their methods of acting. Moreover, the project’s ambition is to investigate how and why fathers’ rights movements vary across gender regimes and how activists frame debates on gender equality, discrimination against men, fatherhood, and the position of men and women in the societies of the selected European countries. Drawing on the critical men and masculinities scholarship (Hearn, 2013), in particular theories of the terrain of men’s politics (Messner, 1997), as well as concepts such as caring masculinity (Elliott, 2015) versus protective masculinity (Wojnicka & Nowicka, in press), the aim of the project is to shed light on discourses produced and disseminated by fathers’ rights activists concerning gender (in)equality, discrimination against men and fathers, fatherhood, and masculinities. The project began by mapping fathers’ rights groups in the selected countries. This has been followed by in-depth semistructured interviews with activists representing Polish, Swedish, and British national movements. Additionally, I conducted participant observations during activist meetings, protest actions, and other relevant events. During the fieldwork analytical phase, I applied the main assumptions of feminist methodology (Lee, 1997; Pini, 2005; Pini & Pease, 2013; Ramazanoglu, 1992; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Between 2011 and 2016, 34 activists from the abovementioned countries (Poland, n = 16; Sweden, n = 10; and the United Kingdom, n = 8) were interviewed in a 6-year time frame. The interviews were mainly conducted by me, although two were conducted by a Swedish native speaker, who served as my research assistant. These two interviews, however, are excluded from the sample as the experiences of the research assistant belong to her and cannot be analyzed as a part of my autoethnographic paper. All participants were White, Polish, Swedish, or British citizens living, for the most part, in medium size to large cities. Depending on the country, participants’ ages varied from 30 to 62 years. At the time of the interviews, the responders were remarried, were in relationships, or defined themselves as single. However, all of them were, at some point, single fathers who felt that their custody rights were limited. Directly after separation from the female partner, none of them were ever primarily childcare providers. Some of them did not have any custody rights, while others’ rights were limited. The majority of them, at least at some point, were involved in lawsuits in order to augment their custody rights, ranging from seeking more time to spend with their children to attempting to win either shared custody or full custody of their children. The majority of the research participants have not succeeded with their claims so far. The interviewees worked out in various occupations including as entrepreneurs, managers, clerks, salesmen, teachers, journalists, social workers, drivers, and chefs. Some of them were unemployed or retired. The research participants were recruited by contacting activists from groups located through internet research and afterward through the snowball method of contacting other activists that these initial interviewees referred me to.

The methodological picture would not be complete without a description of my own profile and position in the analyzed societies, as “the individual biography of the qualitative researcher is recognized to have a major impact on a research project” (Broom et al., 2009, p. 51). I am a cisgender, heterosexual woman in my 30s, born and raised in Poland. At the beginning of the research process, I was still working on my PhD dissertation investigating Polish men’s social movements. By the end of the project, I was an experienced postdoctoral researcher. I remained child-free during the research process. It is also worthy of note that my attitude to gender performance has evolved during the overall research process. When I started my research in 2011, I was not fully aware of the implications of gender and sexuality on the recruitment and interview processes. Reflecting on the variety of situations I have experienced in fieldwork afterward, I am strongly persuaded to state that the combination of my gender, ascribed sexuality, and physical appearance, along with my nationality and social class, had a tremendous influence on the interview dynamic. Such reflection, however, along with other issues connected to the gender dynamic of interviews, did not come to me immediately. It is now clear to me now, that on the practical level, the positioning of the female investigator seems to be most complex and this raises a set of challenges such as: How does she plan to conduct her studies? How does her gender, and other social categories, influence her research? How does she plan to dress? How does she react to attempts at flirtation or sexist comments? Will she be exposed to sexual harassment?

When I commenced the Polish phase of the fathers’ rights movement research, I considered only some of these questions. I was prepared to do research on this particular topic, and I knew what I planned to achieve, but I was not entirely sure how I should proceed. Obviously, I was aware of the basic safety issues and planned to meet research participants in safe spaces, certainly not their private apartments. This did not, however, work out as I had intended. Like many other young researchers at the very first stage of the research process (Diprose et al., 2013), I did not pay sufficient attention to the implications of my cis-femininity or my style of dress, either during recruitment or interview phases. As I pointed out already, and will elaborate on in the following sections of this article, in many cases, they had significant impact on the dynamics of the interviews.

On the Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, Nationality, and Social Class in Fieldwork

Poland: Gender and Sexuality

During the research on fathers’ rights movements, I had a chance to observe and, inevitably, cocreate a variety of peculiar (power) relations with male interviewees, in which social categories such as gender and sexuality played a crucial role. It should be mentioned that not all fieldwork interactions had the same dynamic, as in many cases the research process was neither (strongly) influenced by my gender nor the type of sexuality I might be prescribed by interviewees. However, I am able to cite examples of where these attributes did in fact
influence the research process. These were most prevalent during interviews with fathers’ rights activists representing the hard-line wing of the movement. The majority of such men were 45+, representing either middle or working social class, and they presented rather conservative views on gender roles. There were often instances of these interviewees attempting to exercise power over the interview dynamic and to subordinate the researcher, which are not utypical behaviors of interviewed men (Arendell, 1997; Broom et al., 2009; Goodey, 1998; Pini, 2005). This was attempted specifically through their self-perceived chivalry or being patronizing, in order to underline or prove their traditionally defined masculinity. Before I present individual cases, let me start with the coffee issue. Even at the beginning of my fieldwork, I usually tried to meet interviewees in public places such as coffee shops or restaurants. I always inform them that the interview will take around 1–2 hr, but in reality, it can change depending on the research participant, so time is flexible. Usually, I offered them a coffee and inform them this is a compensation for their time and willingness to talk to me. The majority of them usually refused my invitation and instead offered to pay, not only for themselves but also for my drink. Such behavior is deeply rooted in the traditional conviction that during dates and similar types of social interactions, it should be a man who pays for a woman. The fact that the interview situation was of a purely professional nature did not change their attitudes in any way. The majority of interviewees who refused me buying them coffee referred to a chivalry code and even made comments that being paid for by a woman would simply offend their sense of masculinity. It was suggested that I should have known this. In order to retain a professional relationship with these research participants, I did insist on paying, although in some circumstances, when I saw there was no other option, I accepted their offers. This then had significant implications for the interview dynamic, which suddenly transformed from strictly professional into the gray area between a casual meeting of a man and a woman and the sort of situation which could be defined as a quasi-date. An example of this is that following an interest, informative, and smooth interview, during which the interviewee asked me many questions about my personal opinions regarding current political affairs and so on, I was offered a lift home. I refused politely. My refusal did not end the discussion. The research participant continued to insist on giving me a lift, arguing that I should not travel home alone. As I continued to insist that I would stay on my own, he became increasingly irritated and accused me of not appreciating his kind offer. I concluded, as a result of this encounter, that by accepting one traditional gender script, I opened the space for more. I offended the man by refusing to acquiesce to his insistence on my further acceptance of traditional gender roles. Having promised to deliver additional information to me during the interview, he would not then answer my emails requesting this following the interview.

I have already mentioned, at the beginning of this article, another situation in which my cis-femininity and ascribed heterosexuality influenced the interview dynamic. I conducted an interview with a man who, at the time, was the head of one of the most prominent fathers’ rights organizations in Poland. His office, however, did not reflect the prominence of the organization, as it was in fact located in his private apartment. His behavior also seemed more like an affable host than that of the CEO of a public charity. The atmosphere he created was intended to be laid-back. He joked a lot and introduced me to his young daughter (his partner was outside the house), who was at the apartment at the same time. Finally, he used language (verbal and non-verbal) that could easily be defined as flirtatious, and he made many complimentary comments about my appearance. He praised my style of clothing, and the fact that unlike so many women and all feminists, I wear a skirt and am not afraid of showing my legs. My compliance to the traditionally constructed feminine role paid dividends in this particular situation, which somehow confirms the findings of some scholars, that sexuality can be used as a way of collecting material (Hawkins, 2010; Kaspar & Landolt, 2016). The research participant shared with me his insider knowledge of the character of the movement, the nature of this type of activism, and internal conflicts present within different wings of the movement. He also connected me with other significant actors, positively influencing the research process. This situation shows that playing “patriarchal games” can be beneficial to the female researcher, enabling improved access, data, and contacts. It also however raises questions regarding the limits of personal sacrifice in the name of fieldwork. Following this situation, I have been asking myself whether I would ever play this game in other professional or life situations. If I would not, what is the difference when it comes to interviewing people for research purposes? This situation made me realize that the issue of complicity is one of the problems that need to be reflected upon in this type of social research. On the one hand, as a feminist, I would like to avoid reproducing patriarchal gender power dynamic, as such an approach may lead to maintenance of the system that I want to impair, especially that it may create “(…) the potential for the interview context to reinforce social expectations of women as passive listeners, whose role in conversation is to draw out male narratives” (Broom et al., 2009, p. 58). On the other hand, strong reactions to sexist comments will lead to situations when my research participants refuse to talk to me, and as a result, feminist scholarship will be lacking knowledge about this particular type of activism. Without this knowledge, we will not be able to build good strategies aimed at dealing with this type of ideologies and activism. Therefore, for the sake of the project and the greater cause, I decided to be more compliant than reactionary, also taking into account the fact that lecturing research participants during interviews, pointing out their misconceptions can be deeply patronizing, and my task as a researcher is not to confront them immediately but rather through critical analysis of the whole material.
Sweden: Gender, Sexuality, and Nationality

My gender influenced interviews also during fieldwork in Sweden. The (unusual) dynamic of these interviews was connected to my Polishness and the fact that I come from Central-Eastern Europe, which is still perceived as less developed and peripheral in relation to Western and Nordic European countries. However, in these particular cases, I discovered that my Central-Eastern European origin was seen as an asset. Some men expressed positive feelings regarding Poland, a country with a conservative society “not infected by feminism” and they became more open during the interview process, telling me that they would not say certain things in the presence of a Swedish researcher. This was the case during a meeting with one of the so-called lone wolves, unaffiliated fathers’ rights activists. He was in fact rather careful during the recruitment process as he did not want to talk to a feminist representing a “Swedish way of doing feminism.” Having said that, after I disclosed that I also self-identify as a feminist, he did not refuse to continue the interview. He noted that Poland is not infected by the anti-male rhetoric yet and that even the Polish feminist standpoint differs from the Swedish one, which gave him hope that my analysis would not be biased.

Polishness was definitely an important factor during the meeting with the research participant I discussed at the beginning of this article. The man felt free to share with me his opinion about my appearance and commented on my lipstick in a way which could be interpreted somewhere between flirty and sexist. He justified such behavior, even though we were in a strictly professional situation, with the fact that I am Polish and, unlike my Swedish (female) colleagues, I would not find this comment either offensive or inappropriate. He was open about his perception of my attitude to this way of communication and was not afraid that his approach would result in a negative reaction from me. He was in fact right about this. Despite feeling very uncomfortable, I did not react strongly and responded with laughter. Such a response gave rise to a particular atmosphere, which was rather flirty, enjoyable for the interviewee, and much less comfortable for the researcher; as despite some scholars suggest that such a situation may benefit the data collection process (Hawkins, 2010; Kaspar & Landolt, 2016), I did not feel comfortable with it. On the other hand, again, I managed to gain much new information, which positively influenced my whole investigation. In this particular case, however, I decided that next time I would avoid creating situations where my appearance may cause such an atmosphere.

Another incident I faced during my fieldwork in Sweden was also connected to the flirting issue. The person I was to meet greeted me with a hug, which was rather unusual since the code of conduct in Sweden, especially in the case of social interactions involving persons who do not know each other, is limited to verbal forms of greeting only. The fact that my interviewee hugged me and later, during the interview, did not hesitate to touch my arm from time to time, suggests that he assumed it was a normal way to interact with a person coming from a different cultural context. A similar dynamic was present during the fourth interview. Before the meeting, we exchanged many emails in which the research participant said he would assist me in the recruitment of new research participants. He promised to send me relevant materials and expressed a deep interest in my research project. The interview itself was rather fruitful and did not differ from many other interactions of this kind that I have conducted in my previous projects, both with male and female interviewees. The significant difference occurred following the interview, when I was asked about extending our meeting. I replied that I would contact him in order to remind him about material he said he would send to me, and in general, perhaps, we would have a chance to meet during one of the weekly meetings organized by his group. This was where I planned to conduct my participant observation. This, however, was not the answer he expected. Instead, he was hoping that we would continue our meeting in a more laid-back atmosphere. My impression was that he thought the interview was only some sort of foreplay before an actual date, to which he thought I had invited him. I explained to him that our meeting was of a strictly professional nature, which caused him disappointment. After explaining to him the actual nature of our interaction, he left and never replied to any of my emails sent during the next few weeks. This particular situation could be seen as identical to that which took place in Poland, as described above. It could be concluded that only gender and ascribed sexuality played an important role in shaping the interaction. The difference, however, was significant because, unlike during the Polish fieldwork, I took considerable care to present myself without makeup, and I was wearing what I considered to be a gender-neutral outfit. This was in order to ensure I did not present as attractive but as a professional scholar. Yet as Lee (1997) notices, such a way of thinking is based on the simplistic assumption that women can avoid sexual inducements by “dressing in a sack” (p. 558) which often does not guarantee the expected result. This particular case is an example of presenting oneself in a certain way and not being successful in limiting unwanted attention or reducing the male gaze. In my opinion, my gender and sexuality, combined with the fact that I come from Poland, resulted in this particular interviewee’s reaction. A certain type of power relationship was created between a man who is a native of a Western European country interacting with a woman from the east of Europe, who may be perceived to be a migrant. My conclusion is based not only on my experiences with the interviewees above, who were more direct with regard to their perception of the situation, but also on conversations with Swedish female colleagues who had never experienced such situations when interviewing Swedish men.

United Kingdom: Social Class

Fieldwork conducted in the United Kingdom was of a character rather different from the investigations of fathers’ rights movements in Poland and Sweden. This was perhaps because I was already an established scholar and at the time of the fieldwork...
had significant experience in conducting interviews with men from more highly ranked societies than my own. I was also much more aware of different shades of power dynamics that can be (re)produced during interviews. Having said this, I still feel that gender and sexuality continued to have an impact on the dynamic of interviews. In fact, gender played a significant role as it, again, influenced the (mostly masculine) performances of interviewees. In two cases, this created a slightly flirtatious atmosphere during the meetings. However, compared to the Swedish and Polish cases, it is worth noting that gender and sexuality seemed to be secondary factors in the United Kingdom. The category that shaped the fieldwork dynamic the most was social class. The majority of the British research participants described themselves as either working or lower middle class and half of them had a university degree. The first interviewee to direct my attention to the significance of social class was the head of a men’s counseling center in England. He defined himself as a working-class self-made man who had learned everything he knew from practice rather than study. Having introduced myself, I gave him my business card. He said that he was impressed by the fact that I have a PhD, and during the interview, he emphasized the proficiency of my English language skills, claiming that these two factors prove my high social status. The whole interview was very fruitful. I was able to access much relevant information, and the atmosphere created during the meeting was highly professional. This was mirrored in another interview carried out a few days later in Scotland. This was with the head of one of the biggest charities dealing with fathers’ issues in the country. Again, after introducing myself, I participated in an interesting dialogue between not a man and a woman but two experts interested in similar problems. After the interview, I not only received contact information of other activists but was recommended to them by the interviewee personally. Moreover, as an expert in the field, I was invited to participate in a conference co-organized by the charity and was asked to present my project results to the delegates. In these particular cases, my gender and sexuality seem to have been rendered insignificant due to my social class, especially in terms of my cultural and social capital. These seem to have been attributed to me as being not only equal but higher than those shared by the research participants. Unlike in Sweden and Poland, my gender did not significantly influence the interview dynamic.

**Discussion**

This article has argued that gender and sexuality, of both the researcher and research participants, play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamic and power relations during individual interviews conducted as a part of qualitative research projects. However, the character and results of such dynamics and power distribution, as well as the balance of their costs and benefits for the (female) researcher, are of a complex nature and differ significantly in specific cultural and social settings. This is especially the case when both categories intersect with other social factors, namely, nationality (or citizenship status) and social class, which confirms Phoenix’s (1994) suggestion that within the course of fieldwork, different aspects of social identity can shape the power dynamic in a variety of forms. It has been shown that gender and ascribed sexuality shaped the interview dynamic in all settings. It did not seem to make a difference whether the fieldwork was conducted in the home country of the researcher (where the nationality was of no significance, while class, potentially could have been) or in Sweden or the United Kingdom, where all factors interplayed with each other.

Gender and sexuality played a pivotal role during the fieldwork carried out in Poland. This was because nationality was not problematized, as all the participants were native Polish people. Having said this, I do not claim that nationality was a neutral factor, as my Polishness was important and influenced the interview dynamic in unspoken way and I am convinced that if I were a foreigner, the dynamic would have been different. Regarding social class, it seems to have been overlooked by the research participants, even though many represented working classes. They either did not value it as an important factor shaping the interactions with others or they did not perceive it as a category that might supersede differences in gender. This might result from the fact that in Poland many people still share the common belief that social class is an irrelevant factor that was “invented” during the communist period (Slomczynski & Krauze, 2017) and is no longer applicable. Obviously, Poland is not a homogenous country to the extent that social class does not matter in shaping social relationships and gender and sexuality do not operate in isolation from other social hierarchies. But in this particular case, I did not notice a strong influence of the social class. Hence, since (heterosexual) men still hold privileged positions in society, gendering and underlining (traditionally perceived) masculinity and femininity in all types of social interactions is used as a strategy to enable the upholding of masculine power. This did in fact happen during the interviews described above, where regular attempts at disempowering the researcher were based on the usage of gender categories. Such attempts were also connected to the type of masculinity and fatherhood performed by the research participants. Men with more patriarchal attitudes exemplified in the comments and types of interactions described above can be defined as those representing protective masculinity (Wojnicka & Nowicka, in press). The concept of protective masculinity is defined as a particular form of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) and can be seen as being in direct opposition to caring masculinity (Elliott, 2015). Protective masculinity is linked to physical power and defines the male role mostly in terms of providing financial and physical protection to dependent women and children. This protection, however, is connected to power and control, as the protected individuals need to recognize and accept the authority of the protector. Protective masculinity is reflected in a type of performed fatherhood where, unlike in caring masculinity (Elliott, 2015), daily caring activities are less pivotal than providing widely defined protection over dependent persons in the family. On the contrary, men whose performances were closer to the ideal model of caring masculinity did not show sexist
attitudes toward the researcher, and the power relations during interviews were more horizontal and equal. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that in this particular case, the age difference between research participants and the researcher may also have shaped the interviews’ dynamic. It is possible that the intersection of gender and young age made the case stronger, although the references to these factors were never explicit, unlike in the case of gender. Therefore, I do not have enough evidence to make such strong conclusion. The situation differs in societies that are defined as less conservative and where social relations are shaped by pro-gender equality discourses and policies. This is the case in Sweden, which, unlike Poland, is thought of as one of the most feminist countries in the world (World Economic Forum, 2018). This label is very much internalized among Swedish citizens themselves, even if they represent more conservative views with regard to gender roles and gender hierarchies, as was the case with some of my research participants. Nevertheless, “Swedish national feminism” (Holmren & Hearn, 2009) implies certain types of social behaviors that limit the sexualization of the public sphere, mostly, but not exclusively, connected to professional, work-related social interactions. This particular attitude, however, seems to be limited only to Swedish citizens, as migrants and other nationalities are subjected to different types of treatment. This was especially visible in the context of interactions where the female subject (in this case, the researcher) comes from a country of peripheral status, at least in relation to Sweden. It is rooted in the perception of some people (in this case, some of my research participants) that only Swedish women are highly devoted to the feminist ideology and that gender equality is an important category shaping their position in society. Meanwhile, foreign women, coming from countries perceived as less progressive, are more easygoing, and accept a more “flexible” attitude toward male–female public interactions. Therefore, in this particular case, gender and sexuality were important factors influencing the dynamic of interviews, but only when supported by different citizenship status. Moreover, just like in the Polish case, the type of masculinity and fatherhood performances and age difference may have added to the situation, while social class seemed to be a neutral factor, even though the majority of the Swedish interviewees defined themselves as working class.

The peripheral character of the country of the researchers’ origin does not always situate her in a subordinated position during interactions with male research participants. This was presented in British fieldwork’s dynamic analyses. Because the United Kingdom is still a highly social class–oriented society (Heath et al., 2009), other factors, including gender, sexuality, and nationality, seem to play a less crucial role in the process of shaping power relationships during fieldwork. My ascribed social class, defined on the basis of my level of education and language skills, covered other less “prestigious” factors such as gender, age, and country of origin. This resulted in a situation where power relationships during interviews were of (almost) equal nature. Moreover, my gender, even if not irrelevant in general, did not give rise to a situation in which my position during interactions with research participants was lower(ed). This was different from the several interviews in Poland and Sweden described above. In the United Kingdom, the fieldwork dynamic was the most equal, and none of the interview participants had more power than the other. Or at least, it may have seemed like this. The question of power in the research process is extremely complex, because the definition of power itself is of a rather ambiguous nature. On the one hand, it can be said that there is a hidden assumption that the researcher always has power. He or she is, after all, the one who controls the process of data collection, the one who knows the overall goal of the research process and is an expert in the field. On the other hand, research participants are also subjects with agency and can influence the dynamic of interviews by deciding what and how much they want to tell (Rodríguez-Dorans, 2018) or by using different types of strategies, often taking advantage of the interplay between different societal factors, such as gender, to customize power relations to their own needs. Finally, the researcher, aware of the hierarchies existing in particular societies, can consciously participate in a game imposed by the research participant and, by doing so, can gain even more in-depth knowledge and, hence, more (subversive) power. Moreover, the researcher can (consciously or not) benefit from the power of (harmless) sexual desire and exploit it in the process of data collection (Kaspar & Landolt, 2016). Therefore, in the context of researchers’ and interviewees’ gender relations, one cannot omit the analysis of the cost and benefits of being a (heterosexual) female scholar conducting research with (heterosexual) men. It has to be mentioned however that regardless of the researcher’s gender, the problem of gender impacting on qualitative interviews cannot be avoided. Men being interviewed by women has its benefits and drawbacks, just as men being interviewed by other men does (Rodríguez-Dorans, 2018; Scourfield & Coffey, 2006; Vanderbeck, 2005). One of the recurring issues is gender performance and the way men present themselves in front of researchers, depending on their (perceived) gender. In fact, this problem is usually presented in a comparative perspective of interviews with men conducted either by male or female researchers (Diprose et al., 2013). Such comparisons allow for the discovery of the impact of the researcher’s gender on male participants’ behaviors and how the participants exhibit their masculinity in front of the researcher and in an interview situation, especially when the topic of the conversation is connected to sensitive issues. Accepted gender norms not only prescribe the way men and women feel they are expected to behave in particular settings but are also the basis for expectations we formulate toward other people. This has implications for what male interviewees say in front of researchers, depending on their gender. Yet this does not necessarily mean that it is better when men interview men. In fact, examples from my own fieldwork prove that certain types of assumptions of research participants, my reaction to their behaviors, and an environment in which the researcher is neither being seen as competitor nor someone who might threaten their masculinity may lead to a situation where collected material is of high quality, meaning that it is rich and
includes a variety of information (see Diprose et al., 2013; Kaspar & Landolt, 2016). Having said this, these benefits can come with a number of drawbacks, such as the need to deal with situations in which interviewees try to flirt with the researcher and treat the interview as an opportunity to express their masculine desires. In such cases, continuation of a professional interview might be challenging and the researcher might have difficulties in bringing the relationship back to the professional level (Mügge, 2013).

**Conclusions**

The findings of this article show that gender and sexuality in the researcher–researched relationship have implications for the whole research process. In this article, I was particularly interested in the relationship between a female interviewer and male interviewees, in which gender and sexuality intersect with other societal factors such as nationality and social class and how, in three different social contexts, this affects the dynamic of the interview. Analysis has shown that depending on the type of society, as well as the different positioning of the researcher in relation to this (and her or his responses to certain behaviors), that the interplay of these social factors results in a number of variant power relationships. According to Townsend-Bell, an American researcher who analyzed her experiences during fieldwork in Uruguay, her social class and national privilege protected her from undesirable reactions during interviews. She claimed that these two factors covered her gender, age, and race (2009). In the above-described investigations, the interplay of a variety of societal categories exhibited by both the researcher and research participants resulted in different outcomes, depending on the country. It is worth adding that in none of the cases did the research topic influence the dynamic of interviews, and it was seemingly seen as neutral for all research participants. In Poland, the researcher was not protected by any factor and her gender and sexuality were used by some interviewees to take power during the interview. In Sweden, the dynamic was similar, but the issues of gender and sexuality were given more prominence by the lack of privilege attached to her nationality, and this acted against her. Only in the United Kingdom did she seem to be “protected” by her social class, which negated all other categories. Having said this, different positioning in power hierarchies (re)produced during the interviews resulted in different outcomes that, in general, were a result of the level of engagement of the researcher in the “patriarchal power play.” The level of such engagement is, however, a personal decision of every researcher, who should be aware not only of the impact of their gender and sexuality (and sexual desire) on the research process but also the different social factors they bring with them to the fieldwork. This type of awareness enables a researcher to make conscious decisions about their performances and the borders they are able to accept (or create) regarding engagement in such patriarchal/sexual power plays.

It must be noted, however, that the results of this particular paper are neither universal nor typical for all the researcher participants engaged in this particular investigation. This study is limited, as the analysis was based on only four societal factors and did not refer to race or nongender normative or nonheterosexual identities. Moreover, the whole analysis concerns three European Union countries, all the engaged subjects are White and, seen from a more global perspective, hold rather privileged positions compared to the majority of the world’s citizens.

Last but not least, there is a need for more analysis of the gender dynamic during interviews, and the issue of compliance especially in the context of projects, where conservative and patriarchal ideologies and perceptions are investigated. There is a gap in the discussion on the level of compliance accepted for (feminist) researchers and the ratio of perks and drawbacks that are caused by certain decisions.

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**Notes**

1. All interviews are anonymized and all names are pseudonyms.
2. Forty-six years old, employed, married.
3. While the three direct quotations come from interview’s transcripts, the vast majority of my analysis is based on my research dairy as majority of the presented situations and comments happened when the interactions weren’t audiorecorded.
4. Fifty-four years old, employed, in a relationship.
5. Fifty-two years old, employed, single.
6. The current phase of the project concerns German and Spanish activists, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the fieldwork has been postponed.
7. **Hard-line** wing actors are usually mobilized by negative emotions such as anger, fear, and jealousy and focus on the struggling against fathers’ discrimination in the family courts, social services, and society more broadly. They profess highly conservative values and are characterized by antifeminist approach and ambivalent attitude to women as a social category (Wojnicka, 2016). In terms of masculinities and fatherhood definitions, they represent their hegemonic (Connell, 2005) and patriarchal faces.
8. Forty-three years old, employed, single.
9. Forty-six years old, employed, married.
10. Forty-eight years old, unemployed, single.
11. Forty-nine years old, employed, single.
12. Forty-three years old, employed, single.
13. Fifty-one years old, employed, single.
14. Fifty-two years old, employed, married.

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