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Anthropology and #Metoo: Reimagining Fieldwork.

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Anthropology and #MeToo: Reimagining fieldwork

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ABSTRACT

#MeToo deals in the everyday ambiguous and intersectional, providing a space for discussion of the grey areas of sexual propriety. Since 2017, when the term was mobilised spectacularly in the US entertainment industry, other industries have undertaken an examination of their own practices and norms. In this paper we consider the implications of this political moment for the discipline of anthropology, and specifically the idea of 'the field' in the context of anthropological training in Australia. We argue that fieldwork is tacitly, and sometimes explicitly, fetishised by anthropologists as a transformative domain in which the normative rules of gendered interaction are temporarily suspended in favour of fruitfully engaging informants. Drawing on Bourdieu, we argue that 'the field' (the methodological and symbolic space) is a 'field' (a domain of recognition) that junior anthropologists enter with the expectation that they will suffer as a necessary part of their initiation, placing some PhD students at an enhanced risk of sexual violence. We reflect on the attitude of anthropologists to fieldwork as part of a professional illusio, a belief in the value of 'playing the game' that limits our capacity to modify our methodology to make it safer for neophytes and to reimagine a more just discipline.

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KEYWORDS #MeToo, fieldwork training, illusio, Bourdieu, Turner

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.

– Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, 1973, p. 5

Author #1

I sat in the pub, talking with a middle-aged local man about the commercial fishing industry. He was not a fisherman himself, but he was part of the community I had not long begun to research as part of my PhD in anthropology. It was Tuesday: locals' night. Everyone was several beers deep, or more, and the bubbles of conversation were beginning to be punctuated with sprays of laughter and splashes of enthusiastic expletives. Then my companion slid his arm around me.

I immediately stiffened but did not vocally object. I was trying to make a good impression, trying to fit in, as—I believed—a good anthropologist should. I feared that if I made a scene, or even objected politely or moved away, I might somehow be doing *'it'* wrong. By *'it',* I meant *'fieldwork'.* My gut reaction, as a feminist, was to unequivocally decline the *man's* advances. As an anthropologist, however, my understanding of the *'rules* of the *game'* decreed that I should be open to all experiences that occurred within the venerated space of *'the field'.* And so, paralysed by competing imperatives, I said nothing.

Two local women, obviously sensing my discomfort, came to my rescue by telling the man to 'bugger-off' and to proposition someone his own age. I *don't* think either were aware of the particular *'rules'* of anthropology, and if they were they certainly *didn't* fetishise them as I did. I wish I could say this was the last time I contorted my body to reflect the demands of *'the field'* even though they deviated from my—simultaneously held—beliefs about how men and women should interact in an Australian country town in 2001.

Nearly two decades later, the #MeToo movement has mainstreamed debates about sexual propriety and the ability of powerful cadre to subtly fortify behavioural norms that differ from those of mainstream society. It is with the benefit of hindsight, Bourdieu, the responsibility we feel to future anthropologists and, importantly, the licence granted by #MeToo, that we now reflect on 'the field' of 'fieldwork'.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Consider the unnerving picture Malinowski (1922, p. 4) paints of entering the field, and accept his invitation:

> Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. … Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you. … Imagine yourself then, making your first entry into the village, alone …

Now imagine you are a young woman.

Malinowski did not give his advice in the understanding that it would be taken up by women, let alone in large numbers. Emerging as a commonplace, institutionalised, academic pursuit in the last century, the practice of fieldwork developed as a methodology primarily undertaken (and overseen) by men. This has no doubt changed, and indeed both its goals and practices have been reinvented at crucial junctures by pioneering women, some of them Malinowski's contemporaries. However, the methodological characteristics of ethnographic fieldwork—which include isolating the initiate in an unfamiliar social environment in which they typically have limited social capital—emerged in a context where the vast majority of students were male and in which there was likely an uneven colonial (or postcolonial) relationship with the host community.

Bronisław Malinowski is often depicted as revolutionising the methodology of anthropology, as moving it off the armchair or verandah. Malinowski himself outlines the rules of successful ethnographic research, including 'cutting oneself off from the company of other white men, and remaining in as close contact with the natives as possible' (1922, p. 6). He gently chastises that although it may be tempting to seek 'refuge' in a 'white man's compound' (1922, p. 6) in times of illness or boredom, only full immersion in village life will result in rigorous ethnographic data. As his personal diaries show (more on that below), from the very beginning this field relation was always an idealised trope better realised in the recounting, but a powerful one nonetheless, particularly for its contribution to anthropologists' professional reputation. Malinowski describes fieldwork as unsettling, uncomfortable and hard, but a process to be endured in order to become a legitimate practitioner.

Done properly, fieldwork involves potential initiates being separated from the group, shedding their novice skin and transforming themselves (Goodman, 1996; Wengle, 1988). The liminal period of fieldwork is, according to anthropologist lore, do or die; failure to 'do' fieldwork successfully virtually extinguishes any chance they might have to become 'proper

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anthropologists' in the sense embodied within the professional habitus. Undergraduate classes are peppered with the identity-forging fieldwork tales of Malinowski, alone on the beach, Geertz (1973) (and his wife—if she is mentioned), running from the authorities after an illegal Balinese cockfight, and perhaps the thrilling experiences of misty-eyed educators. While generations of feminist, Indigenous and people of colour anthropologists have troubled this romance, it remains firmly embedded in disciplinary training. Graduate students of all genders are still encouraged to immerse themselves in their field site, making connections, securing informants and gaining confidences, so that they can both pierce the social veneer of their target community and be transformed. The imperative persists despite the emergence of new methods and sites, such as digital ethnographies, and new challenges to in-person fieldwork, such as travel bans and the global pandemic. 'Doing fieldwork,' write Gmelch and Gmelch, 'remains a rite of passage in anthropology, turning graduate students into professionals' (2018, p. 2).

In this paper we explore the idea of 'the field' in the context of anthropological training in Australia, in light of the #MeToo movement and other discussions that seek to challenge heteronormative sexism, sexual assault and rape. We argue that the liminal space of fieldwork is still tacitly regarded by those in the academy—and neophytes themselves—as one in which contemporary debates and developments around sexual and gendered propriety are sidelined. We argue that this places female, trans and non-binary PhD students in the field at an enhanced risk of sexual violence compared to their male counterparts. Our experiences as anthropologists at different stages of career inform and reinforce these points. We take the opportunity and courage provided by the #MeToo debates to challenge academic programs in Australia (and elsewhere) to explicitly address this potential risk to women (cis and trans) and LGBTQI students, who are also variously racialised (Berry et al., 2017), as part of their preparation for 'the field'.

The paper is not an exposé of poor, misguided, entitled or criminal behaviour. Certainly, misogyny pervades anthropology departments, conferences and classrooms, both in Australia and abroad (e.g., Dorn and Klein, 2018), though arguably no more or less than in other domains. Rather, in this paper we focus on the field and fieldwork as a domain that continues to be, as Gmelch and Gmelch suggest, 'symbolically and emotionally laden' (2018, p. 2) for anthropologists, and the implications of this disciplinary fetishism for neophytes that are relevant to the #MeToo narrative.

We are interested in the construction of the field as a discursive, symbolic terrain, with its own laws and norms. In Pierre Bourdieu's sense, fieldwork is part of the illusio of the profession, meaning that anthropologists are 'taken up in the game'; true believers in the self-evidence of the rules and in the necessity of not only the spoils—professional prestige,

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employment, money—but also the value of the pursuit (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 195).

Before we continue, let us be clear about this paper's place in a literature that is rich with productive, feminist critique of our discipline's assumptions about fieldwork. We write after decades of work inspiring so much more than the classic archetypal fieldworker, expressing so many more ways to be in the field (Behar, 1996; Boellstorff, 2008; Gibson, 2019; Walters, 2020, p. 34). We also write after a proliferation of work demonstrating the importance of training graduates to better anticipate the nuances of the field (Isidoros, 2015; Kloß, 2017; Sharp and Kremer, 2006; Schneider, 2020), and reflecting on negotiating fears of violence—both experienced and anticipated—in the field (Moreno, 1995; Morton, 1995; Williams, 2009; Clark and Grant, 2015; Krishnan, 2015; Huang, 2016; Gibbons and Culotta, 2016; Scheper-Hughes, 2016; Berry et al., 2017), and charting the culture of blame among anthropologists when a researcher is assaulted (Schmerler, 2017; Steffan, 2017). This literature is rich and instructive. However, these insightful and important reflections on fieldwork have been largely ghettoised within the cannon, unable to decentre nearly a century of Malinowskian romance about the field.

The problem, as we see it, is with the ongoing enchantment of anthropologists with the power of the field and what this belief convinces our discipline to sacrifice or excuse. While #MeToo has given voice to many who have experienced illegal or immoral behaviour by those in their faculty or field site, these same people are nonetheless beholden to a belief in fieldwork as the key to 'becoming' an anthropologist. What tends to be called for in vague or overly bureaucratic terms (Schneider, 2020) is fieldwork of a better, safer kind, rather than a questioning of fieldwork itself. We are not proposing to do away with our principal methodology. Rather, we suggest that the radical changes sought by feminist anthropologists, which have thus far eluded the discipline, may be beyond the capacity of those bewitched by the illusio of the field of anthropology, to the 'tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 117). This paper is an attempt to disrupt this illusio by challenging it at its source, using classical, canonical anthropology theory. What #MeToo allows for is the cordoning off of the micro-aggressions, behavioural transgression and criminal violations of everyday sexual violence, and for a clearer focus on the taken-for-granted disciplinary scaffolding that serves as a crucible for so much unspoken trauma.

In what follows, we outline the background of the #MeToo movement and the opportunity its traction in mainstream discussions affords anthropology to consider the nuances of vulnerability in our exclusive domain: the field. We explore relevant threads in the history of fieldwork; and we share more of our own personal experiences of sexualised discomfort while within the 'professional crucible' of the field (Gmelch and Gmelch, 2018, p. 2). We conclude by

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considering alternative sources of innovation in the discipline that do not rely on those already suspended in anthropology's own webs of significance.

Author #3

I met Joseph through Ella. Ella—one of those wonderfully connected, effortlessly efficient and helpful people, who introduced me to many people in my field site—got me invited to a lunch at Joseph and his wife, *Fifi's,* house with members of their church. I went, stayed in touch with my hosts, and some weeks later was invited for dinner again. A field friendship formed and I began to see Joseph and Fifi more regularly. Soon after that, meetings with Joseph went from being social and in company to exclusively with Joseph, often at *Joseph's* behest, and often for hours, with Joseph directing the conversation. He sought the audience-ship I provided in our meetings through daily phone calls and messages through texting apps. I did my best to keep up. I told myself I should be grateful for such a *'willing informant'* and even as our conversations angled off, seeming radically tangential to my research, I searched for the connections. I treated what felt like an unusual interpersonal dynamic (which now I consider somewhat coercive) as something to understand. My fieldnotes from these times are dotted with guilty admissions of strain.

Eventually, circumstances escalated and for a range of reasons, some complex, some straightforward, I grew too uneasy with *Joseph's* expectations of me to comfortably continue our contact. After discussing it with my supervisors, I told him I would no longer be replying to his messages or continuing to set interviews. It was a resolution I am still conflicted about. I do not regret the line I drew, but parts of me feel that drawing it at all was the act of an unkind, ungrateful, selfish, foolish anthropologist.

Below, we reflect on such vexed field encounters—gendered and coercive, yet ambiguous and fraught with interpretive latitude—and the light that our current political moment may shine upon them, and therefore the practice of fieldwork more broadly. We ask, in the wake of #MeToo, what formerly unarticulated things have become publicly legible? What does that articulation say about the field relation more broadly?

2. #METOO

Reflecting established themes in feminist and queer literature (Vakulenko, 2007; Davis, 2008; Rahman, 2010; Carastathis, 2016; Hill et al., 2016; Coombs, 2017; Lee, 2018; Johnston, 2018;

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Olson et al., 2018), the #MeToo movement deals in the ambiguous and the intersectional. The term, though coined in 2006 by US activist Tarana Burke, was popularised in October 2017 by actress Alyssa Milano, in response to widespread allegations of predatory sexual assault against high-profile film producer Harvey Weinstein. Milano posted on Twitter: 'If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write "me too" as a reply to this tweet' (Milano, 2018). In the coming days the hashtag was shared millions of times on social media, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram (CBS News, 2017). The #MeToo hashtag has been used to label, and eventually to represent, mostly women's experiences of inappropriate sexual conduct by mostly men, particularly in contexts where intersecting power dynamics undermine women's agency.

The movement includes but has tended not to focus on undisputed cases of rape, what Susan Estrich has ironically called 'real rape' (Estrich, 2007), defined as being perpetrated by a stranger, often a socially marginalised (e.g., homeless, drug-addicted) man, despite vocal and physical resistance by the person being raped, and using such violence as to leave lasting visible damage (see also di Leonardo, 2018). Assaults by marginalised strangers already have discursive traction, but #MeToo has opened a broad public space for discussion of the grey areas of behavioural propriety in sexual and sexualised engagements. For many, particularly women, this discussion has been liberating and empowering, allowing exploration of hitherto unspoken experiences ranging from uncomfortable exchanges, micro-aggressions, cat-calls and arse-grabs, to coerced, forced, transacted and unwanted sexual acts. It is this heterogeneity of struggles, and their newfound legibility within an emerging public heterodoxy, that allows us to in turn re-examine the orthodoxy of anthropological fieldwork.

One of the more controversial of these accounts, for example, was published on the website, babe.net, and described the experience of a (non-celebrity) woman called 'Grace' who went on a date with celebrity actor and comedian, Aziz Ansari (Way, 2018). The pair had dinner and, upon returning to Ansari's apartment, engaged in some sexual acts. Grace's experience was one of intense coercion, and she later came to view it as sexual assault. Ansari was apparently unaware of Grace's lack of enthusiasm, despite her giving him both non-verbal and verbal signs that she was feeling 'forced' into sexual activity she did not want (Way, 2018). When she confronted him about her experience of the evening he apologised, and later issued a public statement in which he claimed to be 'surprised and concerned', concluding, 'I continue to support the movement that is happening in our culture. It is necessary and long overdue' (Way, 2018).

This case highlighted the palest of grey areas of the #MeToo movement. The starkly different experiences of Grace and Aziz, one of assault and the other of 'completely consensual' (Way, 2018) sexual activity, fuelled already flickering pockets of backlash against the movement

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(ABC Australia, 2018; Cohen, 2018; Merkin, 2018; Pipyrou, 2018; Rubinoff, 2018), but also brought public scrutiny to bear on the nuances of consent, power and misunderstanding formerly submerged in mainstream discussions of assault and harassment. (Nuances all the more relevant in the context of anthropological fieldwork, as we will describe.)

In this way, the #MeToo movement has shifted the critique of dubious or ambiguous gendered interactions from feminist and queer circles and into the mainstream of public debate. The most recent iteration, beginning with the 'viral' hashtag launched in 2017, was prompted by events in the US entertainment industry. Since then, members of a range of industries have come forward to disclose incidences of sexual impropriety, primarily by senior men, and embarked on nuanced self-reflection about the institutionalised practices that support—or fail to challenge—these behaviours. Correlate hash-tags include #aidtoo, #churchtoo and #metoomilitary. Anthropology has not escaped some self-examination.

Another cognate hashtag, #hautalk, has become a metonym in some circles for anthropology's reckoning with these questions of power and impropriety, particularly between senior men and junior scholars. Referencing the publication of an open letter by former staff at HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, the controversy added anthropology as a discipline to the discussion (The Former HAU Staff 7 2018). The letter was primarily concerned with the behaviour of former HAU Editor in Chief, Giovanni Da Col (hereafter 'GDC'). Originally written in late 2017, the anonymous authors identified their 'precarious position as graduate students and early career scholars' as the reason they did not release the letter for some six months. They preface the eventual release of the letter:

> Things have changed since then. We are now in the era of the #Metoo movement. People are more aware than ever of the critical importance of believing survivors—survivors and victims of misconduct, harassment and abuse more generally. (The Former HAU Staff 7, 2018)

The accusations against GDC are not explicitly sexual in nature. But, as noted by the former employees of HAU, the #MeToo movement has given licence to 'survivors and victims … more generally'. The publication of a Shortcuts Section in HAU just months after the GDC scandal emerged, which framed the debate as '#MeToo: #MeToo is little more than mob rule // vs // #MeToo is a legitimate form of social justice' (Pipyrou, 2018) further tied the HAU scandal to broader discussions about power and precarity in contemporary anthropology, many of which occurred via online social media channels and whisper networks. While there is far from consensus in the discipline about how (or whether) to address allegations of impropriety or abuse, #MeToo and #hautalk have made waves and begun to bear fruit in the form of more robust

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policies with respect to sexual harassment and assault and the mobilisation of networks of solidarity and support (largely featuring ECR scholars) around those who do speak out against abuses of power. And yet, this discussion has yet to extend to our methodological training, despite the myriad relationships of power, misunderstanding, and vulnerability that crisscross the field.

Author #4

In 2017, when the Harvey Weinstein story broke, and every day more and more *'nice'* men were revealed as perpetrators, I found myself alone in Japan, wondering if I had just made a horrible mistake in securing my personal safety. A few days previously, I had moved to a new city and into the spare apartment of an informant who was high up in a company with which I was conducting research. This man had previously treated me to lavish meals at exclusive restaurants, concerts and train tickets. The penthouse apartment was owned by his company, but was now mine rent-free for three months, having previously been let to visiting international artists and researchers. An etic view on this generosity might sound immediate warning bells. But living and working in Japan, I had become used to acts of extreme hospitality, to people taking offence when I tried to pay, and making extraordinary efforts to welcome me to their city. This was part of Japanese business culture, part of the field that I was supposed to learn and understand. And Japan was supposed to be a *'safe field'*. As other PhD students went through first aid courses and war-zone safety briefings, I considered my luck at the promise of good food and high-speed internet, and escaping the street harassment I experienced in Australia. But the Weinstein allegations threw my situation into a new light. After hurried conversations with colleagues and friends, I moved into a new apartment, at the cost of $2000 a month. I continued working with the man during my research, and I now doubt that his intentions were anything but hospitality. I am still not sure I made the right decision to move, but this was the cost of being a woman and having to worry about the just-in-case. Crucially, it was the thing that I would be blamed for if something were to happen. Somewhere along the line in my anthropological training I learned that good fieldwork means *'saying yes'*. But *I'm* not sure I have forgiven myself, as a researcher, for choosing to say no.

At this point we delve deeper into what Author 4 means when she says, 'Somewhere along the line in my anthropological training I learned that good fieldwork means "saying yes"'. In the context of the revelations about Harvey Weinstein and the #MeToo movement, the potential implications of assumed consent contained within this 'yes', and the complex risks,

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social expectations and cultural capital that accrue from it, are viewed in a different light. Here we enlist the help of Bourdieu and Turner (whose influence on anthropological fieldwork persists) to better understand the cultural conditions of her ('our'?) learned 'disposition' that saying yes—even against gendered embodied knowledge—paves the way to better fieldwork and to being a better researcher, and a better anthropologist.

3. THE 'FIELD', AND OTHER TOOLS FROM BOURDIEU

> The habitus—embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 56)

Bourdieu describes the 'habitus' as a system of 'dispositions' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 72, original emphasis). These dispositions result in the tendency of individuals, or groups of individuals, to inhabit modes of thought or behaviour that occur with regularity within a given context, or 'field'. Bourdieu regarded a field as a delimited social domain characterised by particular norms of exchange and behaviour among actors. Actors acquire—to varying degrees of refinement—a 'feel for the game', a sense of 'how it is' or 'how it is done' (Shusterman, 1999, p. 22) that is very difficult to articulate. Accordingly, we need to consider the mind and body alike as being the repositories of knowledge. Bourdieu calls this embodiment of knowledge 'body hexis' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 87, original emphasis). Practice theorists like Bourdieu feel that many cultural (social) facts are evident in the manner in which individuals move through space. Or rather, how they intuit meaning from this practice and how this understanding informs subsequent practice plus a more general metaphysical understanding of their world.

The feel for the game requires that I consider not only my thoughts and actions but also the context or 'field' in which I am acting. Agents continually read the signs and are disposed to adjust the strategies with which they engage 'the specific logic of a given field' (Postone et al., 1993, p. 6). Each field is imbued with its own 'illusio' or an unspoken interest in the game, the anticipated behaviours and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 66). As Bourdieu explains, 'each field calls forth and gives life to a specific form of interest, a specific illusio, as tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game a practical mastery of its rules' (1992, p. 117).

Those who have no access to, interest in or recognition of a particular field may be baffled by the illusio of other groups of people, or may be completely unaware of the set of principles and norms they presume. Anthropologists spend their lives trying to extrapolate the rules of unfamiliar fields. Others pay little heed to the rules of outsiders and interlopers, sometimes interpreting those 'outsiders'' actions according to local conventions. Heidegren and Lundberg

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(2010, p. 12) explain that

> A philosopher's investment in the game—many years of study—may be incomprehensible to outsiders. Why invest time and effort in a project that does not guarantee any material returns whatsoever? However, this is a question of the uninitiated.

The investment in ethnographic fieldwork, as an essential component of the field of anthropology, is part of the professional habitus. To be an anthropologist is to be invested in fieldwork. 'Illusio is an illusion only to those outside the field' (Heidegren and Lundberg, 2010, p. 12).

When students undertake fieldwork they move into a new field or set of fields, and they attempt to extrapolate the rules by which others play the game. However, they bring with them, in their body hexis, in their habitus, their disciplinary illusio, a sense of the rules of doing fieldwork that are only recognised by others in their class—other anthropologists. But in the field, ideally far from other anthropologists, the social illusion—the illusio—is theirs alone; their ritualised liminality has little to no meaning at all within their host community.

In anthropology departments, those who have not yet gone to the field are regarded as uninitiated, untested, while those who return from 'successful' fieldwork are afforded (and often demand) a degree of seriousness, legitimacy and even authority. Anthropology PhD students go through a liminal stage in a temporal sense: pre-fieldwork students are generally found on campus; they are secluded in the field for a period of time, out of sight of the remaining academic community, engaged in something transformational; upon their return they are reincorporated into the group with some celebration, typically accompanied by wine and war stories (Gmelch and Gmelch, 2018). PhD students who have not yet gone 'to the field' are regarded, more or less, with affable indifference by all but their supervisors. In departments large enough to boast a cohort of graduate students there may be a culture of mutual support, or even 'intense comradeship and egalitarianism' (Turner, 1969, p. 121). However, even among those who perform the relative equality of all students vis-à-vis the departmental staff anthropologists, there is an awareness of those who are back from the field, and those who have not yet gone.

Before PhD students can come back from the field, there is the expectation that they will go through a period of suffering. 'War stories' require at least one battle. This is necessary, says Turner (1969, p. 97): 'Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low'. He says of the neophyte, 'Their behaviour is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint' (Turner, 1969, p. 121). But 'lowness' is experienced and anticipated differently by different individuals and classes of people. In the context of

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broader society, which is a patriarchal one, women expect, anticipate, tolerate and even internalise a degree of devaluation. The material reality is that women and non-binary people in all societies are far more likely to experience gendered and sexual violence than cis men. Students thus depart to experience 'lowness' as part of the sanctioned ritual that will transform them into someone who is 'high', with different expectations of what it is to be 'low'. Sending students into any fieldwork situation with the expectation that they must suffer to some extent, without carefully and explicitly exploring exactly what that might mean for some of them, should no longer be taken for granted as a 'rule of the game'.

PhD students arrive in the field with a box of blank notebooks and a huge amount of pressure on them to succeed. The only thing to do is to go out into the field and start building meaningful and trusting relationships with anyone who is willing (e.g., see Clark and Grant, 2015). In short, they are instructed to 'say yes' as much as possible. The various 'how to' guides to ethnography instruct students to 'do as their hosts do', ignoring the rules of their own society in which some behaviours may be regarded as illegal, immoral or simply disgusting (e.g., Hendry, 2008, p. 2; Strang, 2009, pp. 162–163; Gmelch and Gmelch, 2018, p. 15). They are mindful to listen, observe, learn, to model with their bodies and their language those they are seeking to understand. It is not hard to see how young, often unmarried and childless, sometimes foreign (or at least not 'local'), typically unaccompanied, friendly women, who are enthusiastic to hear all about local views on the world, may fall prey to individuals in that society who wish to do more than share their story. Most anthropologists' informants are not in a liminal period themselves, and nor do they have much (if any) appreciation of the symbolic importance of the ritual position of the neophyte, precisely because it is a ritual of anthropologists. The fieldworker who goes out into the field, on a keen quest to learn, may be met with more than they anticipated, including marriage proposals, invitations for sex, or hostility based in jealousy, rejection or resentment. They may also encounter more serious threats to their safety, particularly their sexual safety.

Our emphasis here is not on the behaviour of women, men, fieldworkers or field friends, strangers or acquaintances. Rather, our focus is on the relationship between the ritual status of fieldwork in anthropology, and the depressed levels of personal discomfort that PhD students are enculturated, in broader Australian society, to tolerate due to their gender (though, of course, class, sexual orientation and race complicate this further). Because critical understandings of power, taught and enculturated in anthropological training, engage so poorly with possibilities of gender-based violence in the field, male students, too, begin fieldwork ill-prepared to reckon with their positionality in encounters from everyday sexism to domestic violence. The final

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reflection from Author #2 opens these dimensions in the gendered blindspots in anthropological regard of fieldwork.

Author #2

It was Sunday afternoon in the park. I stood on one side of a folding table, ladling soup. As each person filed past the other side, I asked whether they wanted soup, salad, bread or dessert. Most of them were homeless. Some of them locals, like the army veterans with PTSD, or the out-of-work fishermen. Some of them migrants, like the Mexicans who work construction in the day and sleep under the viaduct at night. On my side were three or four members of our informal soup kitchen. On this particular night, we were all white, housed and university educated. This was in the first year of my fieldwork on homelessness in Seattle. I was twenty-six, and excited about *'backyard ethnography'*.

I asked one man what he wanted, and in broken English, with a cheeky grin, he pointed to Alicia, standing beside me. *'I'll* take her,*'* he said. Across the gulfs of class, race and nation that separated his side of the table from mine, this was ostensibly an olive branch: man to man, he assumed we both appreciated a pretty girl and a *'harmless'* joke—that reduced her to an object of exchange.

Awkwardly, I redirected the sexism. *'You'd* have to ask her about that,*'* I laughed, *'and I'm* pretty sure *she's* not on the *menu!'* Alicia *didn't* see the humour. *'You* do not talk to us that way,*'* she said. She paused, stood tall, and told him in her most withering tone that his behaviour was inappropriate. *'I'm* sorry *ma'am,'* he said, looking down and adopting the deference of so many of our diners. Alicia remained unsettled after he left. I *wasn't* prepared to respond to either of them.

Afterwards, I thought Alicia had been a jerk. I thought I knew who was vulnerable or privileged in that moment. I could only see a white, sheltered activist overreacting and putting a homeless person of colour in his place. She could only see—I thought—a generic man making a sexist joke. Needless to say, *it's* more complicated, although it took too long to realise: there were perhaps four us on one side of the table, and dozens of able-bodied men on the other, in an otherwise empty park, week in and week out. As a tall, relatively fit man, I had never experienced that as a threat. Nor catalogued the potential dangers that surround me in any public space, as so many women do. In that light, there was far more to *Alicia's* uncompromising assertion than self-righteousness. But I had taken only the most rudimentary heuristics with me to *'the field'* to understand the landscape of identity and power in which I was working. I had at no point been forced to think about vulnerability—neither mine, nor that of the people with whom I worked

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alongside—on a continuum of sexual harassment and assault: a blindspot, moreover, never covered in any of my ethnographic training.

The 'field' in play here is revealed to encompass a complex web of power relationships that are not captured by the 'field' of a young ethnographer's anthropological illusio. Of course, discovering these complexities is precisely the point of fieldwork. Yet the 'rudimentary heuristics' of his methods training risked masking them behind received assumptions about vulnerable and privileged research subjects (e.g., homeless, migrant versus white, housed, university educated), and failed to situate the fieldworker's own gendered privileges and blindspots in the scene. We close with the question of how and from where such inherited field-relations might be disrupted.

4. CONCLUSION

Beneath even the most gritty, wry, candid depictions of fieldwork lie the minutia of social exchange, contextualised within structural inequality. While Malinowski captured a methodologically innovative approach to fieldwork in his detailed and open account of participation in day-to-day village life, the posthumously published diaries of his time in Papua New Guinea reveal something more complex. A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term (Malinowski, 1967) depicts a darker, more vulnerable image of Malinowski negotiating the gendered complexities of being a young, privileged white man in a tropical paradise under colonial rule. The diaries refer casually to numerous sexual interactions with local women, and while all of these dalliances were seemingly consensual, we need only think back to the very different accounts of the date shared by Aziz Ansari and 'Grace'—one of a mutually enjoyable encounter, and one of sexual assault—to recognise that filters of power can produce wildly different images of the same event.

An ideal fieldworker, according to the guidelines developed and articulated in the first half of last century, should be immersed in the field, embrace new and perhaps uncomfortable practices, be malleable and deferent to local customs. In Malinowski's case his gender—his skin colour, his nationality, his political connections—put him at a relative advantage in gendered interactions in the field and made such openness a relatively safe option. Had he been a female fieldworker, however, he would have arrived just as inexperienced in the local customs, as well as being compelled to negotiate a version of patriarchy that disadvantaged him—perhaps dangerously so—in unknown ways.

The field vignettes threaded through this paper are not intended to shock. Indeed, it is
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their banality that makes them relevant in the context of other #MeToo-inspired discussions. These stories tell of everyday transgressions that are experienced by women, not only in the context of ethnographic fieldwork, but in all sorts of industries, environments and pursuits. Typically, these incidents remain unnamed. A middle-aged man hitting on a younger woman in a pub or a park and being turned down without incident is hardly a headline-grabbing story, and is certainly not a crime. There is a sense in which this generic story is unnameable; to articulate it would be to demand its importance in a way that is not easily reconciled with the stark legal definitions that accompany criminal sexual assault. It would be to 'make a mountain out of a molehill', to 'overreact', or even to draw the charge of intentionally misrepresenting the seriousness of the situation to launch an attack: playing the victim in order to act as the aggressor. Anything 'less than' 'real rape' (Estrich, 2007) may be open to interpretation, misunderstanding or denial. For example, in an email to an undergraduate student who had accused him of inappropriate conduct, an anthropology staff member formerly employed by an Australian sandstone university wrote, 'I wonder if you are making too much drama from 1 hour when an old guy hit on you and you politely turned him down' (Dorn and Klein, 2018).

In the story of Grace and Aziz, while she did not run screaming from his apartment to the nearest police station, she did cry all the way home. While she felt at some level that she had been assaulted, she sought insight from multiple friends in an attempt to articulate the event in a way that was both 'rational' and concurred with her feelings of violation. Likewise, while the former employees of HAU wrote their open letter in December of 2017, they did not publicise it for another six months because they feared they would not be taken seriously, that the complaints they had could be explained away within the dominant narrative in which they were structurally subordinate to GDC and expected to tolerate some level of discomfort in order to progress their careers. Similarly emboldened by the #MeToo movement, our reflections on the gendered dangers of fieldwork are not novel, but they are to be read in an emerging context where such reflections are taken more seriously than in the past.

In the introduction to the English edition of Masculine Domination, Bourdieu warns against the 'introverted revolt of small mutual support groups—however necessary these groups may be in the vicissitudes of everyday struggles' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. viii). His point is not to dismiss such mutual support groups, a category of political resistance in which he may have included #MeToo, but to expand the project to include a more politicised struggle that scrutinises the historical structures that make it seem like differences (and battles) between 'the' sexes are natural. Unpacking these historical structures, says Bourdieu, is a political act with the prospect of lasting change to those essentialising historical structures. Taking the very differences between

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men and women as his object, he explains, 'This detour through an exotic tradition is indispensable in order to break the relationship of deceptive familiarity that binds us to our own tradition' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 3).

Perhaps by reflecting on our tradition of fieldwork we can hope to disrupt the illusio which continues to hold anthropologists in thrall. It may be, however, that the decision to modify fieldwork to render it more sensitive to gendered risks will fall to those who are not enchanted by its disciplinary imperative, such as those sitting on ethics committees and other university panels that constrain anthropological research. Anthropologists, who are 'taken in' by the necessity of fieldwork, may not be capable of changing the current system precisely because we are enamoured with the status quo; fetishising fieldwork is part of our professional habitus..

It need not remain this way. Fields and their rules are not tangible or fixed. Rather, they are 'historical constellations that arise, grow, change shape, and sometimes wane or perish, over time' (Wacquant, 2007, p. 269). The strength of the field itself and the rules it can uphold are influenced by the field's autonomy, or 'the capacity it has gained, in the course of its development, to insulate itself from external influences and to uphold its own criteria of evaluation over and against those of neighbouring or intruding fields' (Wacquant, 2007, p. 269). In other words, the dominion of the field relates directly to the conviction of those who traverse its figurative space, and the recognition of those who move at its edges. We call attention to the 'deceptive familiarity that binds us to our own tradition' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 3) and urge a careful re-evaluation of our methodology, recognising that this methodology requires collaboration with those who do not share our illusio.

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