

Ask My Wife: A Feminist Interpretation of Fieldwork where the Women are Strong but the Men are Tough¹

Jo-Anne Fiske
Mount Saint Vincent University

Abstract

This paper explores the question of gender relations within the discipline of anthropology as they impact upon feminist fieldwork strategies. It calls for a critical reexamination of our taken-for-granted assumptions about gender in order that we might better understand the issue of gender in societies not demarcated by a strong bias towards male actions and cultural interpretation. By examining my own field experiences with the Carrier people, I provide one example of a fieldwork situation where being a female is advantageous. I also bring attention to the need for a feminist critique of the male fieldwork experience as we struggle to better define, and overcome, the underlying causes of "gender blind" ethnographic work previously conducted by our male colleagues.

Résumé

Cette communication explore la question des relations entre masculin et féminin en anthropologie, et la manière dont ces relations affectent les stratégies féministes de travail sur le terrain. Il y est suggéré que l'on réexamine de façon critique ce que l'on a considéré jusqu'ici comme acquis au sujet du sexe masculin ou féminin, de manière à ce que l'on puisse mieux comprendre la question des sexes dans les sociétés qui ne sont pas marquées par un fort parti pris envers les actions et l'interprétation culturelle masculines. En examinant mon propre terrain d'expériences menées avec les Carrier, j'ai été à même de fournir un exemple d'une situation sur le terrain où il s'avère avantageux d'être une femme. J'attire également l'attention sur le besoin qui existe de faire une critique féministe de l'expérience masculine sur le terrain, alors que nous luttons pour mieux définir les causes sous-jacentes du travail ethnographique "aveugle aux différences de sexe" préalablement mené par nos collègues masculins et pour y trouver remède.

Introduction

Feminist anthropology is committed to two important goals, to comprehend the nature of gender relations in past and comparative con-

texts and to confront sexism. However, the problems of conducting feminist enquiries in the time-honoured tradition of field research reveals that despite our best efforts to overcome anthropology's resistance to feminist interpretations,

we too may fall prey to the world view we seek to expose and return home from our fieldwork knowing that our observations have been shaped largely by the male biases surrounding us. In this paper I explore the difficulties encountered by anthropologists who seek to understand other gender systems while constrained by the androcentric biases of their discipline. I discuss ways in which the discipline inhibits creative, feminist research and report on the problems I faced during the course of one field study. The purpose of this study was to understand a culture whose gender system is not characterized by an essentially male dominant ideology. The paper argues that our ability to interpret women's actions in comparative gender systems, and have our interpretations accepted as valid, remains constrained by the fact that women in anthropology are without a central voice in the discipline.

This paper is organized in two sections: the first examines the reception of women's fieldwork within anthropology; the second concentrates on specific factors which shaped my fieldwork experience on an Indian reserve in central British Columbia and hence influenced my understanding of that gender system. Here I stress the constraints I felt were placed upon me by senior, male anthropologists as well as the unique dynamics of the subject culture which both aided and hindered my understanding. In conclusion, I connect the vital aspects of my personal experience to the broader problems of gender asymmetry within anthropology.

Women, Anthropology and the Fieldwork Experience

The unique contribution of fieldwork to the social scientific understanding of cultural phenomena rarely has been questioned. It is only within the past two decades, however, that anthropologists have paused and reflected on the role of fieldwork in shaping the discipline. Not surprisingly, fieldwork has been extolled as

essential, indeed the source "from which anthropology must have derived, [and] must derive, its direction at least in part" (Grueber 1966:18). We are told that we must look back to learn from the field methods and experiences of our "founding fathers" while we at the same time are advised to analyze those of our contemporaries in the hope of guiding the future of our discipline. The bottom line is that without fieldwork anthropology is not anthropology. Rather, fieldwork is the crucial factor in becoming an anthropologist, while anthropology is "the crystallization of that experience" (Weidman 1970:241).

The emergent and reflexive inquiry into the nature of fieldwork symbolizes the so-called "coming of age of a social anthropology which has begun to raise serious questions about its own activities" (Nash 1968:768 quoted by Golde 1970:2). These concerns have given rise to a "meta" level of discourse, defined by Ardener as the debate "which social anthropologists really depend upon to give convictions to their interpretations" (1972:135-36).

Given the significance attributed to the influence of field experience upon the course of the discipline, it follows that the specific configurations of individual experience, in addition to the ethnographic data generated, would be considered essential data from which to formulate the meta debate. It would also seem logical for anthropologists to be enthusiastic about innovative, imaginative and creative fieldwork approaches. Yet this is often not the case, for fieldwork experiences seem constrained by prior demands and expectations of the profession under-girthed by opinions, perspectives, and procedures which act *against* the creative side of fieldwork.

These professional restraints emerge very clearly when the issue of gender raises her troublesome head. Rather than anthropology obtaining its purpose in any direct and continu-

ous manner from women's field experiences, these experiences remain caught up within an anthropological debate where women are occasional and marginal participants: a situation remarkably unchanged over the past century. We cannot deny Ardener's prophetic statement: "We are for all practical purposes in a male world. For the truth is that women rarely speak in social anthropology" (1972:135-36). Contemporary women's symposia and colloquia remain a marginal discourse, the symbolic granddaughters of The Women's Anthropological Society, founded 1885, which similarly suffered exclusion². The fact is not that women do not "speak in social anthropology", but men do not listen. This situation persists despite warnings from leading nineteenth-century anthropologists like E.B. Tylor, Franz Boas, and Lewis Morgan that the unique field contributions of women should not be ignored. Yet it is probably because these and other "founding fathers" did not appreciate that women had a unique contribution to make to theory that anthropology remains a predominantly male discipline.

Underlying the ethnographer's enterprise are two common premises, the universality of female subordination and the primacy of female reproduction over women's sociopolitical participation. "Making babies and shaping culture are incompatible" (Sacks 1979:24).³ In consequence, male ethnographers confine their descriptions of women's lives almost entirely to the context of female-male relationships while they detail broader spectra of male orientated phenomena. Not surprisingly, female ethnographers are pressured to do the same. While men may admit that "women are not as peripheral to the mainstream of society" as they hitherto have been perceived, they continue to presume that overall women's lives provide less of ethnographic interest (Gregory 1984:325). Moreover, as with Gregory, this leads them to the conclusion that women work harder to obtain gender-balance in their research because they have more reason to do so. While women

find women elsewhere more accessible than do men, they argue, women also prefer to research male-centered public life (*ibid.*). It is in order to confront this androcentric bias in their own work and the disjuncture of this world view with both their own field experiences and their research findings that women anthropologists gather at women and fieldwork symposia and workshops.

Women in anthropology today are frustrated but not surprised to hear responses to their colloquia like: "Since I never spoke to women in the field why should I speak to them here?", or "A colloquia on women in the field? Who would come besides women?"⁴ This dismissive and altogether negative mind-set attempts to undermine the purpose and the style of women's self-presentations, their fieldwork accounts, and truly, the character of fieldwork itself.⁵ When Ardener stated, "the fact is that no one could come back from an ethnographic study of 'the X' having talked only to women about men, without professional comment and some self-doubt", he not only noted a problem, he perpetuated it (1972:138).

Thus today, as thirty years ago, women either avoid fieldwork in gender differentiated societies where they may be restricted to the women's sphere (Weidman 1970:240), or they worry about how they will report their data and thus *justify* an exclusively women's field experience in face of the prevailing tendencies either to view male centered ethnographies as holistic or to accept them as encompassing sufficient data of primary salience. Indeed, the current debate between "androcentric" versus "blatant feminist" position simplifies yet underscores and exacerbates the problem. The anxiety continues and the nagging question becomes a refrain: How will data acquired solely or primarily from women be received? Or, will they be accepted at all? Perhaps most frustrating of all tasks facing the feminist ethnographer is the need to justify

female-centered research in the face of criticism that to do so violates the ideal of holism.

This self-doubt haunted me before and during my field research with the Carrier Indians of central British Columbia. During my first experiences in 1978-1980, I sought resolutions to the problem of gaining access to male informants. In the end, I resorted to the tactic of having a man accompany me on some field trips. This worked because his presence allowed me to talk with men, or at least he would talk to the men in my presence. But it had a number of serious drawbacks. Most importantly, I never communicated to Carrier women my need for male informants. In absencing Carrier women from a consideration of male informants I missed key facets of gender relations within the community.

When I later went to live on a reserve as a divorced woman with no children, I discovered that my concern to validate my knowledge by obtaining information from men was not necessarily shared by Carrier women; it even amused and annoyed them. Furthermore my ethnographic concerns were viewed very differently by the men as well. To understand this and to assess its significance for interpreting gender roles within Carrier society, it is necessary to delineate the ideal categories ascribed to women and men, and to show how they work within Carrier society, and as a mediator between the Carrier and the dominant local society. What follows is a discussion of these differentiating categories as employed by two Carrier bands with an analysis of how these gender constructs both facilitated and hindered my fieldwork.

Inseparable from this dynamic were my own preconceptions concerning successful ethnographic procedures and the process of learning to analyze both my personal experiences and gathered data within the content of relevant ethnographic issues. Uppermost in my mind were the described difficulties encountered by women

fieldworkers, in particular those committed to a feminist based interpretation of gender.⁶

Strong Women and Tough Men: Gender Relations in a Carrier Community

First impressions of gender relations within a strange community are frequently different and in contradiction to those which are discovered as we become familiar with the society by working and living within it. A surface view of Carrier society gives the impression of strong, physical male dominance in all areas, yet familiarity with the internal relations of the Carrier leads one to conclude that the overall position of women is marked by ambiguity, where gender ideals and relations are not dichotomized systematically. What is valued for men is valued for women, and categories which differentiate *between* women are not in opposition to categories which differentiate *between* men.

Both women and men are expected to be "good", that is to behave with integrity, loyalty, and concern for others. As well, everyone ought to display certain elements of "toughness", a stoic endurance of physical and emotional pain, physical strength, and equanimity in social conflicts. However, exceptional elder women with these attributes who contribute considerably to the well-being of their families and communities are labelled "strong" while the men are not. On the other hand, men who combine the elements of toughness with an air of personal indifference to women while exercising an ability to attract women are "tough". These men elicit admiration and respect from male peers whereas women who are similarly tough do not earn the admiration of either sex.

The concepts strong and good differentiate elderly and middle-aged women from all other women. The former is used in reference to elders while the latter is ascribed to both. This is complemented with a notion of "becoming a good woman" which applies to all age groups, even

youngsters. The very elderly who show signs of reforming disapproved conduct may receive such comments as, "Even, ————, even her, she's becoming a good woman." Indeed, on occasions, I was told by women who provided me with instructions, "wisdom" and companionship, that they "were going to make a good woman out of [me]."

Of course these two labels, strong and good do not encompass all women. There is a third group which is neither strong nor good; however, this group is not labelled unequivocally. The Carrier studiously avoid public categorization through negative attributes. Rather, an individual is sometimes described as "a good woman, but ...", or "I pity her", or "she's not a real good woman because ... but she is pretty tough."

The category strong woman has neither an opposing nor a congruent male category. I never heard a man described as strong. When I specifically asked women about strong men I received lengthy, often impatient answers. They either dismissed the question and proceeded instead to praise noteworthy women or they implied my question was foolish: How could a man be strong? Nor is strong used to denote physical strength. When I once suggested to a man that he was physically strong, he replied: "My mother is strong but I am tough." Men however were described as good, usually as "good persons" and frequently qualified by terms like "he is a good person but he ————." As with women, men may become good persons at virtually any stage between adolescence and adulthood. Men are particularly known as tough and being tough is sought much more so than being good.

My stay in the field was shaped by these prevailing gender constructions. Because strong and good women were at the forefront of reserve life, I could gather information from them more readily than from men. Furthermore, the exist-

tence of tough men restricted my activities and limited the number of male informants. Since the notion of toughness overlaps with a dominant macho ideology which is bolstered by inter-racial contact, it complicated the difficulties of working with male informants. This macho ethos of the white community frequently results in sexist violence - especially against native women and white women who have associations with native people.

I noted earlier that initially I missed vital facets of Carrier gender system: most importantly, women did not understand my wish to interview men. The explanation for this resides in the role of the strong woman, head of a large extended family, and an example of industriousness, thrift, loyalty, circumspection and sobriety. Strong women are known for their domestic skills, expert handicraft work, fishing talents, and especially for their generosity in providing for family members and the needy. They are respected for their past accomplishments in the bush, as hunters and trappers, and for their business acumen in selling their crafted products, operating small ranches, and obtaining government grants for community service projects. They are recognized as members of elected councils, community advisory committees, and clan leaders, as well as for their involvement with the young.

Moreover, they are known in the white communities as representatives of their people. They mediate racial conflict, deal with drug and alcohol abuse, and address environmental issues (the current attempt to save the Nechako River from the Alcan Company of Canada's proposed damming and diversion scheme is a case in point). As community spokeswomen they are known best in connection with their negotiations with governments on native and women's rights. Strong women are acclaimed for their stoicism and for their persistent loyalty to their families. This last point is critical. A woman who has left marriage or shown disloyalty to her

husband or been “unfaithful”, regardless of his behaviour, is not characterized as strong. However, there are many good women who have divorced, remained single mothers, and been unfaithful. With time, the condemnation lessens and the transgressions are either rationalized or forgiven and forgotten.

Good women are also active in providing for family, friends and the community as a whole. They act as spokeswomen (they are usually subordinate to the strong elders) and they are involved as mediators in cross-cultural affairs. Not surprisingly, they are also said to be tough; they bear pain and emotional hurt with silence and dignity, bordering on the stoical. They are particularly involved in their cultural folkways, working alongside and learning from the elders. In short, to be a good woman is to have some of the abilities of the strong, and so to be courageous and sincere in working for the people.

Not all women achieve the status and prestige of a strong or a good woman, but those who display some of their character traits as well as a resolute toughness are looked upon with compassion in the hope that they may become good women.

As noted, the category strong woman has no male counterpart or a direct male opposite. Rather, within the male realm, the categories are marked by a male preference to be tough and a less common ability to be a good person. The latter label applies to few men, mainly elders who work hard, provide for others, and who were successful hunters and trappers and/or as labourers or petty entrepreneurs. They are respected for their knowledge of tradition and their leadership qualities. In addition to these elders, there are also middle-aged men who are said to be good. These men are known for their industriousness, sobriety, political involvement and spirituality (as evangelics rather than as traditionalists or Catholics) and for their continued employment in jobs off the reserve. It must be

emphasized that they are rarely described as good men, rather they are known as good persons, however qualified; “he is a good person but”. Equally important to note is that few of the male elders have *direct* involvement in the decision-making process of the community. Unlike their wives and sisters, they do not appear as regular participants at band meetings, advisory committees to the council, or in formal positions of linking native and white communities. It is perhaps not surprising then that when approached for interviews or information concerning community affairs, they frequently respond, “ask my wife,” “see ———— she is an elder, she can tell you.”

The fact that so few men achieve the status of a good person resides in the way they define and value toughness. To be a tough man requires bravado, physical strength, and bush skills, as well as an indifference to feelings and involvements in intimate relationships. To be tough means to have claimed a dominant position vis à vis weaker, soft men, and to have an established reputation as “a ladies’ man”. Indifference to women frequently becomes a form of sexual exploitation. In the strong macho ethos of the local community with its bars and country and western music praising the “hon’y tonk” man, and the “rambling” cowboy, sexual licence is the norm, and tied to it is a blatant sexism.

The double standard of sexual behaviour is the code of the bars. Here women, in particular native women, are sought by native and non-native men for casual sexual encounters. Likely prospects are plied with drinks, asked to dance and “treated to a good time”. But these affairs are brief and ultimately the women are scorned by the men who, proud of their conquests, seek new partners. Tough men routinely involve themselves in the bar life. They attract the women yet they remain easy in their ways. Although they may form long-term relationships with women, even marry, they insist on the right to sexual freedom outside the core relationships. Tough

men are idealized by the young who express a curious blend of envy and admiration. Weaker, less popular men also envy them and, when fuelled by alcohol, already tense gender relations easily burst into abuse, violence, and social disorder. Frequent bar fights engage members of both sexes. Attacks upon women and young girls (many of which go unreported, according to social service agents and elders) following heavy drinking at the bar or at private parties, are also common.

While the character values for women form a continuity sufficiently flexible to allow for relatively easy transitions from an unfavoured position to a respected one, the character values for men are marked by a disjuncture. Good and tough are contradictions in values and social action. Being good requires the rejection of toughness, indifference to women's feelings, heavy drinking, fighting, and the sexual double standard.

Tough men are reinforced in their attitudes by male members of the white community with whom they interact daily. It becomes very difficult for them to resolve the contradiction between the Carrier values of respect for women - in particular mothers and knowledgeable elders, and those of a white macho community which denigrates women - most particularly native women. Indian men who display deference and respect toward elder female leaders are treated with pity and contempt by white men. Among the many comments I heard were: "I pity them, they just let women push them around." "The women run that reserve, the men don't do nothing." "The old women are okay, but the men are a lost generation." "Their problem is they can't control the booze and can't hold onto the women. I [a white man] could go in there any day and take their women away."

Despite this contemptuous attitude, Indian men still seek the approval of white males and compete with each other to prove themselves

tough and indifferent to women. To break from this is difficult. Even middle-aged men cannot overcome the disjuncture between the life-style of toughness and the values exemplified by the good man.

Conducting anthropological research in a community where the ideology and practices of tough men are apparent to even a casual viewer presents particular problems for a woman on her own. First, it places her in an uneasy position. She may be viewed as a potential date or sexual partner — fair game — by many men and treated with a common contempt some white men hold for native women. She must move with care in both the native and nonnative communities. In the first it is necessary to avoid causing jealousy, while in the latter she must consider her safety. There is a strong resentment on the part of white men towards Indian men who have relationships with white women. Frequently this results in abusive, violent acts toward the women involved. When I was treated in this manner, spoken to crudely and pushed about by a transient white man, the response of other white people - men and women - was an indifferent "I guess he saw you hanging out with the [Indian women]".

Not surprisingly, there is a very real concern for a stranger's safety. Thus, when I arrived the reserve women of all ages helped me adjust, providing me with a caring and custodial companionship that protected me from difficult situations. In the white community, Indian women "showed me around" and warned me against harmful white men. Avoiding vulnerable situations, however, meant that most men on the reserve were not asked to be informants. I interviewed fewer than 15 of the 70 men I had targeted as possible informants. To prevent feelings of suspicion and jealousy, I interviewed the men in the presence of one other older woman. The only exception was a widowed elder who lived with his daughter and grandchildren. Young married men were approached through their wives and

single men through female kindred. Of the younger men I was advised to speak only to those involved in the community (i.e., as elected councillors, as social service workers, or as spiritual-gospel leaders).

Despite the concerns and advice of the women, I worried about my lack of male informants. Because the reserve population has more men than women (72 men, 44 women over the age of 30), I felt I needed a sample of informants in keeping with this ratio. I remained anxious about the potential academic criticism which awaited me when I returned to the university with data based extensively on women's perceptions. My pursuit of male informants was a struggle for me and a source of amusement and annoyance to the Indian women. I was asked, "Why do you want to talk to the men?" In reference to my wish to talk to young men, the elder women responded, "those young upstarts don't know beans". One university woman explained, "If I want to learn something I ask someone who knows — my mother and my aunties."

Ask My Wife

The view that elder women held the "truth" about most subjects seldom was disputed. Elder women compared and cross-checked their knowledge with one another. They considered also the knowledge of elder males but were quick to discount any point which did not accord with their own understanding. The women's attitude was criticized to some extent by two male elders. Yet their way of justifying their own memories was to refer disputed knowledge back to its origins, the "grandmothers" from whom the information had been obtained.

Younger men also justified their accounts of the truth as their grandmothers' teaching. In advance of formal scheduled interviews it was common for men to visit elder women to verify their understandings. When in doubt they would refer me to female kin. Most commonly

they said, "ask my wife", "ask my mother [or grandmother or auntie if they had no mother]" and "ask my sister". This was the practice even about business I perceived to be unequivocally male, for example the history of trapline ownership or male use of other resource areas.

My first fieldwork impression was that this deference to the knowledge of women was, in part, a response to me as a woman. However, I was repeatedly shaken from this ego assumption. For example, when a male archaeologist questioned two male elders about historic settlement and trapping patterns he too was dismissed with a simple "ask my wife". Government agents also met with a similar response. When a group arrived at the reserve to meet about problems having to do with fishing regulations, they found themselves facing a delegation of women. Men sat at the back and listened and young men who spoke were silenced by the strong women. When totally exasperated by the absence of appointed male spokespersons, the government agents finally asked, "Where is your chief?" "Where are the men, are they too lazy to be here?" Insulted and angry, the women sat silent, then one elder rose to explain that "fishing is women's business. Women speak for fish."

Other issues were treated in the same fashion. During my ten-month stay, no government official or social service worker was treated differently. Men did attend some meetings, but unless it was an elder with a specific statement, the men stayed silent while elder women spoke. The only exception to this pattern was a meeting called to discuss agriculture. Invitations were sent to men only, through a male elder. But even in their absence the women were not forgotten. After the meeting one man said, "My mother should have been there; she had the ranch which hired all these guys and she only just retired. It was the best ranch we ever had."

The position of women within the Carrier communities is recognized by most social service

agents with regular contact. Education, welfare and health authorities all preferred to deal directly with elder women known to be central to decision-making processes and influential in the community. When interviewed, these government workers said they found the strong women (social service agents use this term readily) to be “personable”, “easy to speak with”, and “ready to help”. One education official said, “They are the ones who know what to do and are likely to do it. They have everybody’s respect.” Symbolic of this acknowledgement by government workers was their attendance at an elder’s funeral at a neighbouring reserve. Approximately 1,700 persons crowded into a school gymnasium to honour this woman. Among them were government agents and workers, school trustees, health workers and numerous members of social service associations from the white community. In contrast when a male elder, a former clan leader, died some weeks later the large gathering of mourners was predominantly native. Absent were the high ranking government officials and representatives of the white community.

It was only near the end of my stay on the reserve that I let go of my anxiety over a lack of male informants. This was partly because I felt that they were not in the end necessary, and partly because I knew I was returning shortly and could try again if necessary. That is, if academic criticism raised again the troubling self-doubt. But, by the time of my departure I felt more secure. The established patterns of cultural transmission within the Carrier communities benefited me because I was a woman. I enjoyed the company of elder women, participating in some of their subsistence labour and community work. There was one major obstacle — my lack of children. For the elders, the purpose of instruction is to transmit knowledge to young children. Not surprisingly the women still hope to make a good woman of me by finding me a suitable father for future children, for they know that their wisdom would benefit all children. If I

had children, I am sure I would have been taught much more.

In sum, my fieldwork experiences were frustrated by an anxiety created within the gender dynamics of my discipline. Although I was in a rare and enviable situation for a female ethnographer, a culture which respects and idealizes women’s knowledge and community influence, I was preoccupied with a felt-need to verify and expand my information by seeking male informants. This preoccupation based on a concern about male academic criticism clouded my original perceptions of the studied gender system and directed me away from the best possible informants.

Conclusion

There are several points I wish to make in concluding this paper. First, the experiences described above are not unique. Rather they parallel experiences described in the symposia and colloquia women hold on their fieldwork. Second, my interpretations of Carrier gender systems are not substantiated by other researchers. To my knowledge, no other woman has undertaken research with the Carrier. Men who have done so have not worked with women. When I approached one on the subject of gender relations he admitted he rarely spoke to the women. His own research, an analysis of economic transformation, fails to include any discussion of female domestic labour or social production (Hudson 1983). Most surprising is his omission of women’s salmon fishing, a subsistence activity in which women are most visible; less so his failure to take into account women’s snaring, trapping and hunting, all bush activities of the traditional women. A second anthropologist has studied the Carrier clan system. This work also pays little attention to female roles (Kobrinisky 1973). Interestingly, both of these anthropologists have spent considerable energies analyzing the Carrier matrilineal social structure. In both instances, mention of women is confined to

reproductive roles and/or their symbolic representation, and a superficial acknowledgement of female clan membership and cultural identity. The dearth of data on and interest in women's lives extends to work on neighbouring people, work also undertaken by male researchers.⁷ This persistence of male-centered research requires the closest possible feminist scrutiny. And here, I would suggest, rather than focussing on content-based critiques, pointing out the extent to which a particular male ethnographer has been gender blind, we consider instead the nature of his field experience. Our perception of the influence of gender systems upon men in the field is distorted. Theories of understanding can be neither progressive nor honest without a sensitive critique of the self-conscious interpretations men have of their field experiences.

Sontang argues, and it seems men concur, that "[anthropology] is one of the rare intellectual vocations which do not demand a sacrifice of one's manhood. Courage, love of adventure, and physical hardiness - as well as brains - are called upon" (Sontang 1969:81). But is this truly the case? Are there not field situations which challenge the very essence of manliness as it is defined by our own gender system?

Perhaps nothing is as damaging to the male sense of identity as the discovery that adventure-related work (as we see it) and the suffering of physical deprivations are routine events in the lives of women - even elderly women. What sense do male ethnographers make of the hunting, trapping, and fishing that is carried on by native Indian women in subzero temperature? How do they reconcile this with their own sense of manhood and how do they rationalize the fact that this role is not taken up only by women in the absence of men, but is actually sought by women in the presence of men? Moreover, within this situation, how does the male adventurer/ethnographer come to terms with the discovery that strong women assume key political roles

through their deft rationalization of themselves as "good providers"?

Questions of this nature surely lie at the heart of cultural interpretation. The personal experiences of men in the field have and will continue to shape the direction of anthropology. This being the case, it is necessary for feminists to shift their critique of the discipline from a criticism of "gender blind" ethnography and from their concern to develop new paradigms and paradigm shifts, to the more subtle and unknown role of the "anthropologist as hero".

To return to my starting point, I wish to stress that the gender systems of other cultures are not understood well by anthropology. Their investigation is forged too sharply by prevailing male assumptions which grant priority and greater prestige to the words and perceptions of male informants. Within the process of theorizing and reflecting on the nature of fieldwork little if any direction is taken from the reported experiences of women or their interpretations of the influence of gender systems on the fieldwork process. While the bias of male-based ethnographies either continues to be ignored or accepted, the "I don't talk to women approach", women still struggle to have female cultural perceptions accepted as a valid base for community ethnographies under the pretext that just because male ethnography has been rooted in male informants it is no excuse to allow female ethnographers to make the same error. In this atmosphere, where men rarely listen to women in the field or in the meta debate, the unique directions which could develop from encouraging the ethnography of women, are ignored and stifled.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Atlantic Association of Sociologists and Anthropologists Annual Meeting 1986. I am grateful to Connie DeRoche, Kuldip Gill, Evelyn Legare, John McMullan, Joanne Richardson and Linda Christiansen-Ruffman for their comments.
2. The Women's Anthropological Society was formed in 1885 in response to the Anthropological Society of Washington's exclusion of women.

3. Sacks provides an excellent, insightful overview of the sexist biases of anthropology.
4. The ideas in this paper were developed in a graduate student colloquium at the University of British Columbia. The colloquia series was a well-established, well-attended annual event. However, when a series "Women in the Field" was scheduled male attendance dropped - and strong, angry criticism of a "women's series" was voiced by male graduate students.
The frustration felt then was similar to that expressed at the "Women in Anthropology Symposium" of the Sacramento Anthropological Society in 1977-78. See their *Women in Anthropology: Symposium Papers 1977 and 1978*. (Sacramento: Sacramento Anthropological Society, Publication 15, 1979).
5. For an excellent account of one woman's field experiences which provides a critique of the discipline see Manda Cesava, *Reflections of a Woman Anthropologist: No Hiding Place*. (London: Academic Press 1982).
6. Nancy Scheper-Hughes confronts these issues in *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press) and follows them through in "From anxiety to analysis: rethinking Irish sexuality and sex roles," *Women's Studies*, Special Issue "Confronting Problems of Bias in Feminist Anthropology", Vol. 10, No. 2. See also Janet Bujva, "Women and Fieldworld" in *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge*. (Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, ed. The Hague: Mouton, 1975).
7. The work of Robin Ridington is a notable exception to this trend.

REFERENCES

Ardener, Edwin "Belief and the Problem of Women" in Fontaine, J.S., editor *The Interpretation of Ritual*. Tavistock, London. 1972.

- Bujva, Janet "Women and Fieldwork" in Rohrlich-Leavitt, Ruby, editor *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge*. Mouton, The Hague. 1975.
- Cesava, Manda *Reflections of a Woman Anthropologist: No Hiding Place*. Academic Press, London. 1982.
- Golde, Peggy, editor "Introduction", *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experience*. Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago. 1970.
- Gregory, James "The Myth of the Male Ethnographer and the Male World" in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 86, No. 2. 1984.
- Grueber, Jacob "In Search of Experience" in Helm, June, editor *Pioneers of American Anthropology*. University of Washington Press, Seattle. 1966.
- Hudson, Douglas *Traptines and Timber*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta. 1983.
- Kobrinisky, Vernon *Ethnohistory and Ceremonial Representation of Carrier Social Structure*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia. Vancouver, British Columbia. 1973.
- Ridington, Robin "Stories of the Vision Quest Among Dunne-za Women" in *Atlantis*, Vol. 9, No. 1. 1983.
- Sacks, Karen *Sisters and Wives: The Past and Future of Sexual Equality*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut. 1979.
- Sacramento Anthropological Society *Women in Anthropology: Symposium Papers 1977 and 1978*. Sacramento Anthropological Society, Publication 15. Sacramento. 1979.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles. 1981.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy "From anxiety to analysis: Rethinking Irish Sexuality and Sex Roles" *Women's Studies*. Special Issue, Vol. 10, No. 2. 1983.
- Sontang, Susan "The Anthropologist as Hero", in Sontang, Susan, editor *Against Interpretation*. Dell, New York. 1969.
- Weidman, Hazel Hitson "On Ambivalence in the Field" in Golde, Peggy, editor *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences*. Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago. 1970.
- Women's Studies*, Special Issue "Confronting Bias in Feminist Anthropology" Vol. 10, No. 2. 1983.



Canadian Journal of Women and the Law

Revue juridique 'La femme et le droit'

- Canada's only legal journal providing in-depth analysis of legal issues concerning women
- Bilingual, multidisciplinary approach
- First issue — December 1985 — *Women and Equality*
- Upcoming — *Women and Reproduction*
— *Women and Work*
- 200-300 pages per issue
- Yearly subscription rates (2 issues):
 - \$60 — Institutions
 - \$35 — Individuals
 - \$25 — Members of National Association of Women and the Law
 - \$20 — Student/Low Income
 - (Outside Canada — add \$5)
- For further information, write CJWL/RJFD 323 Chapel St., Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2 (613) 238-1545