Paying to Listen: Notes from a Survey of Sexual Commerce

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Paying to Listen: Notes from a Survey of Sexual Commerce

Rachel C. Snow, Angela Williams, Curtis Collins, Jessica Moorman, Tomas Rangel, Audrey Barick, Crystal Clay, Armando Matiz Reyes

As the study of sexual commerce has grown dramatically in recent decades due to in-
terest in HIV/AIDS, an expanded literature has scrutinized how research teams man-
age the operational challenges of accessing spaces that typically resist scrutiny. This
paper ventures a combination of both scholarly reflections on the utility of ethical lis-
tening and specific methodologies for working with hard-to-reach populations, and
selective use of field notes to illustrate the ethical and operational challenges of data
collection with marginalized youth. The paper highlights several pivotal commitments
and procedures for generating an effective community-based research project, the ex-
tent of time demanded for such research, and collective reflections on the potential
for both harm and good in such projects. Efforts to understand the social context in
which young adults engage in sexual exchange—both on the street and in erotic dance
clubs—requires a commitment to ethical listening, and to progressive learning.

Background: Detroit Youth Passages (DYP)

The survey described in these notes is part of a larger project designed to explore the
structural factors affecting the sexual health and well-being of Detroit youth. The De-
troit Youth Passages (DYP) study is a four-year, mixed-methods project that utilizes
a human rights framework, and uses research to design and develop new interven-
tions for empowering communities of young people in Detroit. The primary meth-
ods of the study have been described elsewhere (Lopez et al.), but included more than
300 hours of participant observation; 60 semi-structured interviews; more than 30
life histories with residentially unstable youth and former sex workers; and a survey
of 278 young people working in a variety of venues for sexual commerce, including
street-based sex work and erotic and lap dancing in strip clubs. The project lever-
ages a partnership between the University of Michigan and three community-based
organizations (CBOs) in Detroit that provide social services to residentially unstable
youth: the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation (DHDC), which serves Lati-
no/as at risk of gang violence; Alternatives for Girls (AFG), which serves young wom-
en engaged in erotic dancing and commercial sex; and the Ruth Ellis Center (REC),
which serves homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans youth.

The venue-based survey described in this paper built on more than a year of
ethnographic study, including outreach volunteering with community partner agen-

cies, six months of planning with a community-academic research team, and three months of preliminary work conducting informal discussions with dancers and managers in clubs offering various combinations of erotic dancing, lap dancing, and prostitution. The study also included data-gathering in clubs not offering any explicit forms of sexual commerce. While other segments of the overall project include the design of new interventions and outreach, the goal for this segment of the project was explicitly research-focused, aiming for between 200-300 on-site interviews with young people over six to eight weeks.

This manuscript, in content and overall design, aims to elaborate the "progressive learning" of the overall study team, illustrating the essential nature of long-term partnering (in this case, over four years), which we believe should both precede and follow such a survey effort. Such situated engagement facilitates access to spaces that are routinely protected and off-limits to scholarly scrutiny. Building on a growing scholarship concerning how to address the ethical and methodological challenges of research with marginalized, hard-to-access persons (Couch, Durant and Hill; Elias et al.; Holloway and Jefferson; Remple et al.; Shaver; Wahab; Wietzer), we reflect on challenges of otherness and access, debates over compensation, the risks of doing harm, the potential for good, and the cultivation of equality through ethical listening. Grounded in feminist research commitments to make the social position of the researcher visible and encourage those engaged in research to reflect on their own experiences (Harding), we include field notes and quotes from a selection of team members. By including these documented reflections, we attempt to "flip the lens" and examine the project from the experience of project members, highlighting some of the emotional and ethical challenges encountered by project members who bridge the often disparate domains of community, academia, and activism.

Progressive Learning[1]: Long-term Partnerships and Ethnographic Research

Five members of the survey research team had spent much of the preceding 18 months conducting ethnographic research in many of the venues that were planned for this survey. The goal of the ethnography was to explore and document the social and structural conditions of residentially unstable youth, and the implications of those circumstances for their sexual health and well-being. Ethnography was facilitated through the guidance of CBO staff liaisons, and included more than 300 hours of participant observation (with extensive development of shared field notes), 60 semi-structured interviews and 30 life histories with residentially unstable youth and adults associated with the partner agencies.

Much of the ethnographic research highlighted the economic stress that youth were facing in circumstances of chronic under-employment, weak education systems, fragile families, and limited public services. Interviews also highlighted the extent to which residentially unstable youth were coping economically through various forms of sexual commerce, but with quite distinct experiences of distress and violence depending on the venues where they worked: these included the street, strip clubs, and more expensive erotic dancing clubs. We therefore included participant observation in youths' employment spaces such as strip clubs and bars, recruiting youth for in-

depth interviews from these spaces, as well as from street-based sex work. Contact with street-based sex workers was made possible because DYP team members were volunteering for weekly nighttime street outreach to sex workers, a service carried out by one of our partner CBOs for more than a decade. Through these outreach activities, our team members gained familiarity with the locales and schedules of street-based sexual commerce, and became acquainted with individual sex workers.

The ethnography, therefore, posed a range of questions regarding how youth become located in one space or another for sexual commerce, and the extent to which work in these different venues is associated with greater or lesser mental distress and exposure to violence—all questions we decided to explore in a follow-up survey. The ethnographic protocols, their primary findings, and the protocol for the follow-up survey were each designed by a Project Steering Committee that included two directors; one outreach director; three staff liaisons from the partner CBOs; four senior researchers; and research staff that included more than six graduate students.

The difficulties of gathering valid data among research participants engaged in illegal activities such as sex work have been extensively addressed (Remple et al., Weitzer, Hubbard, Flowers, Bolton). Most of this literature underscores the challenges of securing access to, and establishing trust and rapport with, such populations. These challenges affect, in turn, the validity of responses. Sex work is generally not available for observation, and therefore demands an exceptionally sensitive appreciation for the complexity of the "field site," which remains partly obscured.[2] Indeed, these challenges have been addressed by some researchers by temporarily inhabiting the work life they seek to study—i.e. becoming strippers (Seymour) or phone sex providers (Flowers). An alternative approach is to recruit sex workers in health or service settings (Dalla et al., Dalla); through existing outreach services that already make routine visits to brothels, strip clubs, or workers on the street; or in designated "safe houses" for counseling, prevention or drug support (Jeal and Salisbury, Wahab).

Our goal was to explore the structural life circumstances that shaped the exchange of sex for resources among Detroit youth, and to compare these conditions across a range of different venues within which sex was exchanged. We were recruiting a comparatively young population of respondents, and wanted to avoid over-selection of clients already connected (directly or indirectly) to the CBOs who were our central partners in the overall four-year project. The CBOs were also keen to better understand the needs of youth who *were not* availing themselves of CBO services, adding to our shared motivation to recruit outside the network of peer contacts who staff the CBOs. We were also wary of the selection bias that could result from either recruitment in service settings or the use of intermediaries with established contact networks. The DYP ethnography of the prior year had highlighted the extent to which many youth in these settings emphasized their social isolation and articulated a climate of distrust among sex workers, leaving us concerned that respondent driven sampling (RDS) would lead us into select, closed networks (for which it was designed). We feared that this would work against our intention to access and compare the life conditions of youth across different sexual commerce venues. Thus, while we initially considered RDS, for the above reasons we ultimately chose a venue-based survey with direct, face-to-face recruitment. Direct contact recruitment was possible because of the preceding ethnographic work (including volunteer work) that had been

carried out by a core of the survey team members and who had by now established rapport with managers, dancers, and individuals engaged in sex work on the street.

Team Composition

The survey team included 11 members in total. Five members from the ethnographic research team were joined by two staff recommended from our partner CBOs, two community members, one new DYP project staff member from Detroit with extensive field outreach in the community, and one local graduate student who was already a volunteer at one of our CBOs. Most team members bridged more than one category of academic researcher, activist, or community member, blurring distinctions in ways that facilitated team-building. For example, all but one member had worked or volunteered with at least one of the partner CBOs prior to the survey, and many of the researchers had a history of direct activist work in similar communities. A majority lived in, or were from, Detroit, and community members were themselves graduate students at other universities. The three senior research staff had more than 40 years of field research between them, most with marginalized populations, including male and female sex workers, and long histories of activist work.

Preliminary Work

While many of the team members had gained familiarity with the proposed recruitment sites for the survey, we had not attempted to conduct interviews in these locations, where lights were low, music was loud, alcohol and weed were in use, and lap dancing was underway. Once the team was established, therefore, we spent almost ten weeks before administering the survey conducting preliminary visits to potential recruitment locations (clubs and the street). The primary purpose of these preliminary visits was talking with club managers about potential recruitment, learning when shift changes occurred, getting familiar with bartenders and bouncers, discussing our plans with youth in the business, and gradually learning the times when dancers or street youth might be less encumbered by clients. In several cases, managers recommended preferred hours, but some also told us not to bother coming to their club for research.

Preliminary visits were carried out in teams of two or three members, and guided by weekly team meetings that also served secondary goals, such as internally piloting and refining the survey instrument. The extended preliminary research period also provided an opportunity for the team to discuss the ethics of compensation, methods for creating equality with participants, methods of active and ethical listening, and rapport-building within the team itself. The newer team members amongst us also had time to gradually gain their footing within the project and to enrich our collective knowledge with new perspectives on the proposed venues. The new members also heightened our ambitions for the survey, and were among our strongest advocates for the value of this survey research *for youth themselves*.

Rickard describes a circumstance in which community members with close social access to sex workers became the strongest advocates for conducting formal research on sex work. In the course of conducting AIDS-related research in a London community, Rickard found that it was sex workers and the maids with whom she was living who were most enthusiastic about the prospect of having the personal stories of women who sold sex recorded and shared: "[Prospective participants]… marveled at how wonderful it might be if people in the future could understand history from the actual words and phrases of women who lived the life" (355). Team members with longstanding experience in both research *and* activism in similar communities are often most able to recognize the potential for empowerment through participation, and ensure that such a spirit is effectively included in recruitment language, with phrasing such as: "you are powerful in telling your story, in bearing witness to your own life"; "only you know what this lifestyle is really like, and only you can tell the true story"; "others imagine, but only you really know, so your story is valuable." This sentiment prevailed in our preliminary work, and the recruitment text gained a tone of invitation, participatory ownership and empowerment.

Such empowering language was valuable not only among potential survey participants, but was instrumental in preparing team members for what Beard calls "ethical listening." Elaborating an approach to listening that extends beyond a socio-cognitive model of "skills and schemas" deployed to understand messages, Beard argues that "ethical listening" recognizes that good listening is utterly receptive, non-judgmental, silent, and bodily still, and in so being frees the speaker to establish her/his own subjective presence for the listener. Beard highlights the choices we all make in listening, including choices to listen selectively (i.e. for only the precise answers to questioned asked, rather than the fullness of responses) or to not listen, versus listening together, and at best, truly listening to one another. Ethical listening is a prerequisite for progressive learning, and for community-based research that seeks to bridge social marginalization and promote justice.

Three DYP survey research team members—one who had "worked the scene" (participated/ worked in sex work in these same spaces at an earlier phase of life) himself for several years, another who routinely styled hair for erotic dancers, and one acquainted with local sex workers from previous ethnography—discussed the intended research protocol with dancers, sex workers and young people working on the street. Consistent with principles of Community-Based Participatory Research (Israel, Lantz) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (Berardi), those conversations with youth most embedded in the community further sharpened our eventual choice of language and sequence in the survey instrument, as well as plans for recruitment. Creating space for embedded community experts to refine the local adaptation of a protocol is an approach characterizing several of the most in-depth studies among sex workers (Rickard, Wahab).

Validity

Referring to Kinsey's pioneering mid-century sexual behavior surveys, which concluded that people tend to lie about sexual matters, and in unpredictable ways, Elias et al. argue that validity must always be in question in survey research on sex. They predict, "if the researcher encounters problems with gathering [sex] data from the ordinary person, the difficulties with sex workers are much greater." We found this to be not necessarily so. An early conclusion of our team, derived from the first year of ethnographic work, was that for many people engaged in sexual commerce, sex has become *mundane*—not important enough to lie about. Overall, respondents were graphic but matter-of-fact in describing sex and the sexual transactions they offered, and

there were few of the behavioral cues identified with intentional misreporting, such as hesitation, skipping questions, vague answers or laughter. These initial observations were borne out early in the survey's pilot-test: those with active engagement with sexual commerce—particularly those selling on the street—were pragmatic and detailed in discussing sexual details. Sex workers did display signs of distress and trauma during interviews, but not in discussing the bodily details of sexual exchange; rather, in response to a range of issues that included childhood experience of trauma, loss of children or parental death, despair over addiction, current crises over a place to stay, and recent exposure to violent clients. The survey team had clear IRB-approved procedural protocols for handling such cases, including use of professional referrals.

Generalizations about what constitutes a "sensitive question" in public health surveys (Groves et al.), hence, may require adjustment when working with sex workers, for whom standard sensitivities about sexual behavior may not apply—at least not when their work is acknowledged *a priori* (by the recruitment setting itself, or by the screening questions). At the same time, other common "sensitive questions" may indeed be universally sensitive, such as questions about early or recent trauma, loss, violence, or even topics such as earnings or income—issues routinely regarded as challenging for survey researchers (Groves et al.). While a majority of our participants were willing to talk about the prices they charged for different sexual acts, there was considerably more avoidance, or vague responses, when reporting the total earnings per night, or earnings per week. There were also numerous cases of possibly inflated responses on total earnings relative to our estimations based on the reported price per act and number of acts per night.

Gaining Access: Working with Managers, Owners, and Gatekeepers

Accessing strip clubs or after-hours clubs is especially challenging when a combination of illegal activities (sex, drugs, possibly underage or undocumented dancers) encourage heightened vigilance on the part of bouncers and managers. When the team was without a male team member on a recruitment outing, we were sometimes unable to enter high-end clubs. The formal or informal rule of many "gentlemen's clubs" is that women are only admitted if they are accompanied by a man. But managers were occasionally suspicious even with men along, while in other clubs—high-end or low—our teams were welcomed without hesitation. With time, we grew better able to predict to which clubs we would gain access—but not without numerous frustrated outings. The following two field note excerpts illustrate our range of experience gaining entry:

> August 4th 2012: Inside [club] our team member and the woman floor manager from last summer meet like friends. Her name is M, and she remembers us from last summer's ethnographic visits—and she's hugging [team member] and me, and making me feel she is so glad we came back. Her warmth is deep and heartfelt.

> August 19th, 2012: We start at [club], but they aren't ready to open, so we sit around outside in deck chairs with a host of feral cats. The dancers are dropped off or brought in by their boyfriends. The group is tight and easy with one another, but we mis-time our discussion. By the time the

bouncer wants to chat with me they've grown suspicious of us, and he says no—"the manager isn't around tonight and I can't agree to this on my own."

While in most clubs we gained initial entry through discussions with owners and managers, it was dancers who frequently helped us to expand our recruitment by serving as ambassadors to other dancers, and sometimes to the club management. Dancers provided us with tips about other clubs, the best times to recruit girls leaving the club, and ideas for getting "in the door" of other locations. On an outing mid-way through data collection, we realized that we could now "read" a club's potential for research within about five minutes—we simply knew the formula. In the field notes below, one can discern our progressive learning about strip club accessibility at the height of data collection:

> August 19th: [The two bouncers] ... are bored because the space feels so empty and they have lots of girls working. The customers are loosely scattered at the bar—there's almost no one at tables. This is good for us. The bouncers agree we can go back to the dressing room and run interviews, so we sit back there and churn out 11 interviews. We know the formula by now—it's quasi empty clubs that work best—slow on business, too many girls for the clientele.

Compensation: Inducement or Respect?

Payment to research subjects raises inevitable ethical concerns over subject agency and possible coercion (Couch et al., Holloway and Jefferson, Martinez-Ebers), especially among subjects who may be extremely poor—as was the case for many of our young participants. We regarded payment as a critical means of recognizing the value of their time. For those who are economically marginalized, payment can offer economic empowerment, and it can establish the message that there is value in sharing their experience as a contribution to public knowledge (Couch et al., Liamputtong). Indeed, many of the participants wanted detailed elaboration about the research objectives, the team, the CBO partners with whom we were working, and our own roles and hopes for the project. Some may have agreed to participate without payment, but Holloway and Jefferson suggest that payment for participation time is also a means of "equalizing the relationship," and is thereby crucial to the balance of power within the partnership of a research interview.

Research participation time also has the potential to compromise earnings for the worker, as the time spent with a researcher may compromise time spent with clients, and therefore can be construed as "taking from" subjects (see Liamputtong 25-28). Efforts to minimize such compromises can only be undertaken when researchers are embedded enough within the social context of sex-work venues to recognize "slow," or "down," times for sexual commerce in these sites, so that "paying to listen" adds income, rather than presenting an earning conflict for the dancer or sex worker. Compensation in our study—$30 per approximately 30-minute interview—was close to market price for comparable time spent lap-dancing in low-end strip clubs, but did not compensate as would a lap dance in wealthier establishments, and

was below market price for more involved sex work. It was for these reasons that we sought to locate times and spaces when "paying to listen" enhanced, and never compromised, earnings.

Managing Team Distress

The research team included several highly experienced researchers, the ethnographic partnership had provided more than a year of preparatory engagement in sex-work settings, and preliminary survey work had been lengthy. Nonetheless, the early weeks of recruitment were characterized by various degrees of anxiety and distress in team members. One team member, very enthusiastic during the planning phase, resigned after his first data collection outing. Even team members with life experiences similar to those of the study participants, and those most accustomed to research with high-risk, marginalized persons, found the extent of violence, hopelessness and despair very high in these interviews. Typically, either little reference is made to the phenomenon of researcher distress in standard research manuals, or it's treated as a simple matter of adequate interviewer training (see Grove et al.). Disciplines outside of public health much more frequently address the "burnout" that comes with working among highly marginalized and distressed populations (for example, see Arrington for coping with stress in social work, and Fearon and Nicol for prevention of burnout among nurses). Despite following the detailed protocols for referring distressed subjects for follow-up support, a team-member pondered the limitations of his role as a researcher:

> July 30th: I surveyed two people. Second scored sky high on all the mental health issues. Said he saw someone get killed, and was clearly very broken up about it...made reportedly a lot of money for his sex work. He was super depressed at his bleak life, not knowing when he was going to die. [...] He was visibly shaken, depressed, and there was this distinct feeling that he was just frustrated and wanted to give up. He was or at least had been suicidal in the past, though now he said he was ok. I went to pay him [his participant fee] and had [the study co-investigator] talk to him, who followed up with him and referred him to [referral] and contacted people at [CSO] about what was going on.... But why do I think that my ability to refer him to someone specific will really do anything useful?

Younger, less experienced team members were paired with senior members, and joked about our check-ins being a little too frequent, perhaps unnecessary. Yet in the course of the ethnographic research during the preceding year, we had learned that distress in junior researchers can build unknowingly; several months into the ethnography, we had recruited a trauma expert from the University Health Services to meet with the team, and the expertise was helpful to all. Despite those lessons, in the course of reviewing our survey process, one young CSO staff team member reflected on moments in which he'd not known how, or whether, he should really interrupt an outing to a venue after gang members had entered the club. This raised for us the recognition that outing leaders needed to routinely review communication strategies for

exiting a research venue quickly in the event that any team member recognized signs of potential threat.

Collective Skills, Collective Difficulties

We planned to collect data in groups of two to five team members. Much discussion and reflection (including with the University Ethical Review Board), had gone into a decision to avoid single-person data collection; the University required that no students would undertake research outings alone, but would always work in the company of more experienced researchers. However, there was also an element of "methodological carryover," as we drew upon the positive experience of conducting team ethnography the year before. Bourgois and Schonberg describe the benefits of collaborative ethnography: "[p]articipant-observation is by definition an intensely subjective process ... Collaborators have the advantage of being able to scrutinize one another's contrasting interpretations and insights" (11). We too had begun to understand the value of differing perspectives and differing interpersonal skill sets and demographic categorizations during our year of collaborative ethnography. Given the range of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender presentation, age, Spanish or English fluency, and pre-existing contacts within our team, the heterogeneity of our survey team meant that we were able to access spaces and people that would otherwise have proven difficult.

However, while this diversity proved invaluable, it also provided a unique set of challenges in the field, with researchers occasionally gauging the accessibility of venues differently based on their distinct backgrounds. On a few occasions, such differences made for tense outings. For example, in a venue with known gang affiliation, a team member with experience working with gang members entered only at the behest of another team member. While inside, he proposed a very specific set of behaviors couched in respect for the power dynamic he believed to be at play, and felt that the other team partner was too light-hearted in his approach. Later, both expressed some frustration with the other's chosen style, and the team members were paired off with other members for subsequent outings.

Robins et al. describe such team challenges when bringing together researchers of different epistemological backgrounds, stating "...many difficulties in mixed-methods research are not the result of misunderstandings or points of confusion, but rather emerge from different worldviews that are deeply rooted in the philosophies of knowledge that researchers bring to their work" (728). Many researchers solve such dilemmas by consistently working alone, or in small teams. But heterogeneity within a research team serves an important function in venue-based survey research if those venues differ to the extent that they did in the present project. Our team size, 11 members, worked mostly to our advantage, and was large enough to accommodate many different researcher combinations on different outings. Despite occasional differences (as described above), over the course of the survey, team members learned one another's styles, made some adjustments, and paired off with those with whom they felt most effective.

Potential for Harm

Extensive preparation and team-building reduces the risks of human error and harm, but the process is not foolproof. Soliciting information from participants whose behaviors put them at legal risk, or at risk for public disapproval and stigma, raises multiple opportunities for researchers to cause harm to participants and to themselves. Moral challenges abound in the nature of questions asked, and whether or not such questions contribute to what Goffman describes as the "spoiled identity" or the "mortification of self." As mentioned earlier, young people occasionally displayed signs of distress during an interview, particularly in response to questions regarding childhood, for which there was much evidence of fragile families and personal loss. While the survey team had clear lines of procedure and protocols for referral in such cases, the extent and effectiveness of follow-up was usually not known to the researchers.

There was also a possible risk of association for a participant—in other words, potential risk for simply talking to a research team member and/or completing the survey. These risks might include interrogation or exploitation by club managers or hostility from fellow dancers. For instance, while in most clubs we worked *through* owners and managers to gain entry, on several occasions we had prior alliances with women working a club, and planned *with them* how to recruit others. This was possible because club managers don't typically employ dancers (dancers have permission to dance in a given club, and provide the owner some portion of their tips), meaning the dancers are freelance workers. The risk this latter method of sampling incurred, however, was that the manager may have questioned the dancers about the interviews after we left the venue, or may have required each dancer to hand over some fraction of the extra $30 they knew she had earned for participating in the survey. Hostility between dancers could also have been heightened due to variations in eligibility for the survey, especially given that many of the women reported existing tensions between themselves and other dancers during the interview. Other sources of stress or hostility might include bouncers and others. Yet, our gauge was always the participants themselves—if they wanted to take part in the study, and could make it work for them, we assumed they knew it could work to their advantage.

Relying on that gauge, however, may be problematic when dealing with drug-addicted participants. Crack- or heroin-addicted sex workers have a different threshold of risk brought on by their addiction, raising unique ethical questions. In the course of interviewing a group of 15-20 women selling sex on the street over a few days near a fast-food restaurant, we gradually realized that most of them were daily users of heroin and/or cocaine. We also gradually learned, in the course of our interviews, that they were shunned not only by the restaurant where we were parked, but by most of the merchants on that stretch of road. Yet this was their beat, and without transport or the means to ride buses, this was the extent of their geographic reach. This research site raised the delicate question of where street venues start and end (at the edge of parking lots? adjacent public parks?), and whether sex workers working the street are the "community" to approve recruitment in public spaces, or whether the geographic scope of permissions sought should extend more widely into neighboring businesses.

Potential harm to team members also includes "courtesy stigma," or the stigma by association (Phillips et al.) of being seen in select clubs, or with sex workers or known addicts. Goffman suggests that stigmas of the "spoiled self" affect those working closely with stigmatized individuals or groups. In the latter cases, these associations can be so automatic that they are not moderated by one's attitude about the stigma (Pryor, Reeder and Monroe). That is, no matter one's specific attitude about sex workers and drug users, the stigma applied to those seen associating with them may be automatic. In the narrative below, three women passed by as we chatted with a sex worker who had just completed a transaction in a parked truck across the block. In sidelong glances and glares of disapproval, they communicated to us the courtesy stigma of being seen alongside a woman whose presentation spoke of drug use and sex work:

> August 15, 2012: While we sat on the curb with [her], a group of about three women came out of a car from the parking lot behind us and looked at [the other team-member] and me. They said, "you know she is a girl right?". Clear as day, they were trying to tell us […] that we were talking with someone that sells sex.

Indeed, in the course of reviewing our process for this paper, one of our team members who lives in Detroit discussed his concerns over courtesy stigma from anyone who may have seen him conducting interviews:

> People who you may know from other settings may not be able to appreciate or understand the reason you are there... with a person who is obviously identifiable in the community as a sex worker, and in a context where explaining one's reasoning for sitting with such a person is unallowable.

This reaction underscores the challenge of courtesy stigma in research that reaches across multiple social and geographic locations and responds, in real time, to new opportunities on the street: such approaches heighten the chance that boundaries may overlap.

We likewise had to navigate outright prejudice directed towards participants, often while simultaneously needing the assistance of those perpetrating the discrimination. We frequently made small talk with employees in venues in which we interviewed. In one instance, two team members were having a discussion with the parking lot attendant outside a local bar:

> August 15th: [Name], the guy watching the parking lot, kept referring to [the women selling outside of the bar] as drug users, his exact words escape me, but I think it was "crack whores," and he...doesn't give them a light. It is odd to pay him more [money] than I would otherwise pay a parking lot guy because I need him to watch my car, when he so clearly discriminates with vitriol against the very group we are trying to empower.

Sustaining Relationships

While the DYP research project is designed to improve services in Detroit and else-where, and new spin-off projects may indeed serve the populations that were repre-sented by the participants in this research, the friendships with participants cannot be easily sustained, given that we operate in a research culture of protected identities and confidentiality. Protecting participant identity is an essential element of behavioral re-search ethics, yet such requirements foster relationships that can seem inhumanely aborted at the end of an interview. Our shared team-briefings have highlighted the distress among team members over having no approved means to re-connect, or sus-tain the relationships, with specific participants who shared so much. This has height-ened motivations for spin-off projects that have potential good, but it also places in stark relief the distinct goals of the community partner agencies (CBOs), and the re-search university. While partner agencies are building rapport and looking for sus-tained *personal* relationships of service, the researchers—having agreed to protocols of non-contact—are left wondering about participants they cannot re-locate, or with whom they cannot check in.

Potential for Good

Possibly the most significant, overarching challenge is what good the research can of-fer to participants, and to community partners actively engaged in direct services to communities of young people. Titling this article "Paying to Listen" marks our ex-plicit effort to centralize ethical listening as a bridge across degrees of social separa-tion between not only young participants and researchers, but also between the mem-bers of a heterogeneous survey team that represent academia, community outreach, and activism. Ethical listening (Beard) is a prerequisite for progressive learning, and is an essential dimension of critical race and ethnic studies, feminist research, queer studies, and cultural or public health research that pursues scholarship as a vehicle for social justice. As Dewey wrote in his early arguments for progressive education, "…communication is educative. One shares in what another has thought and felt, and in so doing … has his own attitude modified" (10).

"Paying to listen" appeared to offer social value to participants. The value of simply having someone "hear my story" was a theme that emerged repeatedly from participants in the course of our interviews, and the more stigmatized a particular participant's circumstance, the more s/he valued the conversation. Often, being paid $30 to talk rather than perform sexual services was a welcome change for participants, and many relaxed into the exchange, sharing more of their personal narrative than the survey questions required. The following field notes capture this kind of exchange:

> August 13th: Each of the first three subjects fall asleep during the inter-view—at first I think it's a manifestation of drug use, but I think it's that plus something else—they're letting down for the first time in a while... a message on the stress in their lives… to sit here, in a safe space with a kindly middle-age woman who wants to hear their story… they begin to unwind, they laugh a bit, but each of them cry at times and I cry with them, they breathe deeper, drift off. I give them a few minutes and then

gently ask another question… we go on. They seem so grateful for the interview—not the money, but yes that too—but the talk, the chance to be with anyone who's safe; they don't want to get out of the car when [the interview] is over.

Despite the potential immediate benefits of "safe" conversation, however, many of the team members who were accustomed to participating in direct community outreach for clinical care felt that the long-term benefits to participants seemed remote. There is certainly the potential for programs and services to be developed from information gained in the survey, but there is no way to ensure that the individuals interviewed will receive these services, or even know that they exist, once developed.

True to the intention of our community collaboration, however, all research les-sons learned feed back directly into the work of the three community partner agen-cies, and are designed to enrich their activities. Thanks to the project's sponsor, the Ford Foundation, Detroit Youth Passages also has an explicit emphasis on follow-up and communication, and several new partnerships have allowed us to concretize ways that the team can "give back" to the communities we've been researching. Fore-most among these is a new spin-off project on social enterprise—reviewing success-ful social and micro-enterprise projects in the city and in the US broadly, to design a project of this type to serve residentially unstable youth, especially those engaged in sexual commerce. A national conference is planned in Detroit in 2013, during which keynote speakers from US projects will share their successes, DYP survey data on needs and potential skills will be featured, and youth will participate. The goal of the conference is to design a model for job creation among those served by our respective partner organizations. Donor responses to the proposed project have been encourag-ing to date, and we are additionally proposing to a local philanthropist the creation of housing for drug-addicted youth.

The research itself contains potential for both direct and indirect good both for participant populations and team members. Data generated on the social vulnerabil-ities, employment circumstances, and aspirations of Detroit youth provide publish-able, empirical evidence of circumstances long-understood by our partner organiza-tions, generating data that can strengthen advocacy among public and private sector opinion-leaders, policy-makers and donors. As a venue-based survey that reached across numerous diverse neighborhoods, the survey highlights geographic patterns of heightened self-reported stress, violence and drug use, affirming areas of greater vul-nerability for youth within the sexual commerce and entertainment industry.

While we were troubled by our inability to sustain contact with individual par-ticipants, we were encouraged by the opportunity provided by the survey to promote linkages between participants and the community organizations, tailored to needs reported within the survey itself; e.g. needs for services addressing mental health, housing, or drug use. At the close of each interview, we shared a referral sheet with the contact information of our three partner organizations, and could speak to the specific needs identified in the survey. One team member reflected that he saw many participants pursue HIV testing and health services as a result of participating in the interview. He also noted that the interviews and the listening exchange provided him with "educational opportunities" in which he was able to discuss how to transition

from exchanging sex on the street to safer work. That this came from a young man who had himself transitioned from exchanging sex to a student employed as a public health researcher serves as a powerful example of the potentially transformative power of ethical listening and shared progressive learning in academic and community-based collaborations.

Endnotes

1. "Progressive Learning" references the values inherent in the Progressive Education movement, i.e. the promotion of learning that emphasizes the development of critical thinking, respect for diversity, and the democratic ideals of social and political inclusiveness. See Westbrook, R.B. (1991) for a discussion of John Dewey's (1916) philosophy of progressive education for engaged citizenship and social justice.

2. See Bolton: "Because of the restrictions surrounding sex, [a] 'feel' for the phenomenon may be of exceptional importance when studying sexual behavior" (148).

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