How Do You Like Me Now?: Exploring Subjectivities and Home/Field Boundaries in Research with Women in Sex Work

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Abstract: Anthropological analyses of blurred researcher–participant relationships and fieldwork boundaries in settings that double as the field and the researcher's home typically focus on the anthropologist's experiences, to the exclusion of how participants construct their own subjectivities in these fluid field sites. Using ethnographic vignettes from our research with women in sex work conducted in the neighbourhoods and services provision sites where we live and work, this article introduces the concept of "subjectivity work" as a means of exploring how we, alongside our participants, reconfigured our relationships to each other and the shifting boundaries of the field.

Keywords: sex work, subjectivity, anthropology at home, researcher–participant relationships, feminist ethnography

Résumé : Les analyses anthropologiques qui étudient les relations ambigües entre chercheur et participants, et ce, dans des lieux qui s'avèrent être aussi le domicile du chercheur, tendent à porter davantage sur l'expérience de l'anthropologue, que sur la manière dont les participants construisent leur propre subjectivité dans ces terrains fluides. À partir de vignettes ethnographiques – basées sur notre recherche de terrain auprès de travailleuses du sexe dans les quartiers et les sites de prestation de services où nous vivons et travaillons – cet article présente le concept de « travail subjectif » pour explorer comment nous reconfigurons, aux côtés de participants, nos relations et les frontières mouvantes du terrain.

Mots-clés : travail du sexe, subjectivité, anthropologie à domicile, relations chercheur-participants, ethnographie féministe.

Introduction

Ethnographic research requires strong bonds of rapport with research participants, which have historically unfolded symbiotically over the course of a project and within the well-defined parameters of the field. Anthropologists continue to engage with complex questions first raised nearly 40 years ago during the reflexive disciplinary turn that encouraged the critical examination of the representation of participants and the impact ethnographers have on the cultures with which they work. While most researchers recognise that the ethnographic enterprise is no longer exclusively situated in a fixed time or place, or always conducted with the same participants, certain tenets regarding the structural organisation of fieldwork continue to dominate the anthropological imagination (Geertz 1988). One of the most enduring is the idea that fieldwork is a three-act exercise of entry, immersion, and exit that occurs in a locale geographically and culturally distinct from the researcher's home, despite the decades-long shift "of anthropology off the reservation, and off the island" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, 147). Many anthropologists have noted how these hegemonic ideas emerge as powerful disciplining techniques that function to restrictively define the parameters of acceptable methodological practice, objects of study, and modes of analysis (Caputo 2000; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; McLean and Leibing 2007).

For anthropologists who do not conduct ethnographic research in settings characterised by singular exits, entries, or one-time immersions in a particular cultural milieu, finding ways to make sense of certain fieldwork experiences and relationships is challenging. Aspects of these issues have been explored by ethnographers engaged in research with participants who share aspects of their socio-economic, ethno-racial, and cultural identities, and these projects typically take place in urban transnational settings in which the researcher moves back and forth between the field and where they live.

Ethnographic researchers who do such work report emotional and ethical struggles associated with juggling dual categories such as insider/outsider or native/non-native while maintaining professional objectivity (Jahan 2014; Muhanna 2014; Narayan 1993). These studies shed important light on the lived experience of doing research in these field sites, often through the use of autobiographical and self-reflexive personal accounts that centre on the researcher's subjectivity (Berger 2015; Cobb and Hoang 2015; Muhanna 2014).

Yet accounts of conducting research close to home accord far less attention to the issue of subjectivity among anthropologists and participants who share a geographical definition of home despite otherwise limited socio-cultural, economic, and other affinities. In these settings, the spaces of everyday life and research collide frequently and unexpectedly in ways that highlight the unbounded nature of the "field" and relationships forged through research. These experiences can be uncomfortable for researchers and participants alike and can be difficult to interpret given the ethnographic canon's lack of substantive theoretical or methodological engagement with these issues.

Such encounters occurred frequently in our community-based research with women in sex work, which was conducted in the same neighbourhoods and services provision sites where we have lived. Both during and following the completion of our various projects, we would see former participants walking down the street or receive phone calls from women we had interviewed, observed, or otherwise known as researchers in these settings. Our work focuses on the ways that women in sex work navigate significant socio-legal and economic constraints on their overall well-being, and our interviews consequently involve matters that North American cultural norms generally regard as inappropriate subjects of discussion with casual acquaintances, such as sexuality, money, addiction, and health. We are effectively in the business of intimately engaging with relative strangers, and, like many of the women we know through our research, we struggle in the absence of a cultural roadmap to help us navigate these encounters.

In Canada as well as the United States, this work led us to independently ask ourselves the same questions when we encountered women who had previously shared these intimate aspects of their lives with us. Women routinely recounted painful experiences that included sexual or other forms of violent assault, losing custody of their children, arrest and incarceration, and disrespect meted out by health care, social services, and criminal justice professionals; in several instances, women we interviewed asserted some version of "I've never told anyone this before." Following these intense encounters, we often saw the women at unexpected times and places as we went about the daily business of living, which compounded the moral gravity of the questions we asked ourselves. Who were we seeing or talking to – former participants or "just" women we know? Would it be more respectful for us to greet them as peers who have tremendously assisted us or to protect their confidentiality by pretending not to notice them? And, because not all bonds of ethnographic and social rapport are created equal, how should we handle situations in which we do not want to engage with particular women?

Our pursuit of the constituent ideological and embodied elements of these amorphous feelings, as well as their implications for fieldwork praxis, aligns with recent calls from leading socio-cultural and medical anthropologists regarding the need to develop "more complex theories of the subject that are ethnographically grounded and that contemplate how individual singularity is retained and remade in local interactions" (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007, 14). It is also part of the larger feminist project of creating knowledge with, rather than about, our participants to provide more robust and respectful accounts of their experiences in the world. This is especially important when working with people facing various forms of socio-economic and political exclusion, including women in sex work whose lives are often represented through hollow tropes that highlight their vulnerability and socially devalued status to the exclusion of how they move through the world and exercise varying degrees of agency in their lives. Following Rosi Braidotti (2011, 7), we contend that it is critical to "neither to dismiss nor to glorify the status of marginal, alien, others, but to find a more accurate, complex location for a transformation of the very terms of their specification and of our political interaction."

This article explores the "subjectivity work" in which we and the women we have met, worked with, and bumped into on the street and other social venues over the past several years find ourselves jointly engaged within the field–home sites where we work and live. In these settings, the field is often a moving target, and, as we demonstrate in our ethnographic vignettes, the relationships between researchers and participants also emerge as mobile, spatially unbound subjective phenomena. We direct our analytical focus to how researchers and participants engage in variable subjectivity work and structure these different ways of being in relation to each other and the fluid borderlands of our field sites. We begin with a literature review of the relevant ethnographic research on doing anthropology "at home,"

researcher–subject relationships, and subjectivity. This is followed by overviews of our respective projects in Canada and the United States, which include ethnographic vignettes that highlight the different "subjectivity work" undertaken by ourselves and the women in our research. We conclude with a discussion of how findings presented here contribute to more diverse ways of understanding "the field" and research subjectivities in contemporary home–field settings.

Literature Review

Anthropology's reflexive turn in the 1980s prompted critical interrogation of the discipline's foundational theoretical and methodological tenets, including how we write about and represent culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Marcus and Fischer 1986). Anthropologists began to question how gender structures the lives and political realities of women and other "marginalised" groups globally (Abu-Lughod 1986; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991; Moore 1988; Staeheli and Lawson 1994; Strathern 1988), and feminist anthropologists, in particular, began to engage with the analytical room afforded by ethnographers' lived experience relative to those of participants (Behar 1996; Lawlor and Mattingly 2001; Lumsden 2009; Nencel 2005; Rosaldo 1980; Visweswaran 1994). Ideas about "the field" and the kinds of field sites available to anthropologists also changed given the dramatic shifts in global power relations in the post-colonial era (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003; John 1996; Said 1979). Doing fieldwork "over there" became increasingly problematic ethically and politically, and in the debates that followed about what could/should count as the field, many anthropologists turned to doing fieldwork "at home" (Tierney 2001).

Researchers approach and define doing anthropology at home in various ways, and, for some, it refers to fieldwork conducted in the urban settings where they live and among people with whom they share few sociocultural, ethno-racial, or neighbourhood affinities. While the focus of this research varies widely, it predominantly focuses on the experiences of vulnerable groups, particularly those suffering from structural and everyday violence as well as drug addictions, socio-political marginalisation, homelessness, and racism (Anderson 1999; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Singer and Page 2014). Several of these studies explore the lives of women in the sex trade, typically those in street-based work, often in relation to issues of criminalisation and other forms of state-mandated surveillance, stigma, HIV/AIDS, and the "sex workers' rights" movement (Caputo 2008; Sanders 2005; van der Meulen, Durisin, and Love 2013). Some of this literature discusses the challenges of doing

fieldwork in the researcher's geographical place of residence, including moving accounts of feeling burned out, guilty, and emotionally torn after leaving women and travelling home to a safer part of the city (Sterk 2000). However, these accounts are often couched within the familiar disciplinary narrative of entering and then leaving the field to return home, both of which are distinctive socio-spatial environments.

For other anthropologists, doing work at home refers to research in socio-cultural or geographical communities to which the anthropologist previously belonged in some capacity. This research often explores the tensions that stem from being both insider and outsider, native and non-native, and stranger and local, all of which may impair access to certain issues or venues, open up unique avenues of investigation that come from belonging, and render blurry the interpersonal relationships and power relations between researchers and the communities in which they work (Bunzl 2004; Munthali 2001; Narayan 1993; Scheper-Hughes 2000; Simmons 2007). These projects often occur in transnational contexts characterised by researchers' travel between, as well as to and from, "the field" and "home" and highlight how mobility shapes the production of knowledge across space/place as well as the hybrid identities they adopt in these dual settings (Amit 2000; Boccagni 2011; Henry 2003; Visweswaran 1994). The archetypical construct of "the field" as being somewhere distinct from "home" may cause some researchers to wonder whether they are doing "authentic" fieldwork if their research sites are in home-based settings (Caputo 2000; Gmelch and Gmelch 2009; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; McLean and Leibing 2007). These issues call into question the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of the ethnographic pursuit itself. As John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (2003, 151) contend, "if we are not sure where or what 'the field' is, or how to circumscribe the things in which we interest ourselves, wherein lie the ways and means by which we are to make the knowledges with which we vex ourselves?"

The uncertainty about what or where "the field" is has a direct bearing on how anthropologists construct and understand their relationships among the people with whom they work. In the post-colonial context, where "'natives' everywhere speak for themselves," the issue of subjectivity and research-related relationships researchers have become decidedly unstable (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, 156). This may explain the dramatic rise in auto-ethnography, self-reflexivity, and other forms of researcher-driven introspection used to interrogate field-related relationships and subjectivity in contemporary ethnographies (Berger 2015; Bott 2010; Jahan

2014). Sometimes referred to as "scholar-centered ethnography" (Cobb and Hoang 2015, 348) and described as "opening one's mind to the 'work of otherness' within oneself" (Lovell 2007, 254), these accounts of fieldwork and relating with research participants centre squarely on the experiences of the researcher.

The comparatively limited attention paid to the diverse, malleable lived subjective experience of participants raises enduring questions about representing "Others" (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007; Caputo 2000; Culhane 2011; Pink 2000), who may appear as little more than the relational foil of the anthropologist or as a resource used by the researcher to understand his or her own field experience (Ferdinand 2015). Some anthropologists do examine the agency and choice participants use to express themselves, resist the socio-systemic forces that impinge upon their lives, and shape research agendas, but specific considerations of how these processes unfold vis-à-vis the spatialised terrain of field sites that double as home to both researcher and participants remain rare (Biehl 2005; Kondo 1986; Nencel 2005; Robertson and Culhane 2005; Wardlow 2006).

Merging ethnographic considerations of culture's spatialisation (Low 2009, 2011) with analyses that tackle the co-construction of reflexive and embodied encounters between researcher and participants (Hopwood 2013; Pink 2008) offers new exciting ways to think about reconfiguring ideas of subjectivity and relationships in the field. Focusing on space helps to illuminate the ways in which the ambiguous, emotive characteristics of space lend themselves to the production of multiple subjectivities and embodied experiences that have both material and interpersonal outcomes (Anderson 2009). In the analysis that follows, we unite these theoretical and methodological approaches as a means to scrutinise the subjectivity work in which our participants and we have engaged while conducting research at home.

Methods: Canadian Case Study

The Canadian case study draws upon insights gathered from ongoing ethnographic research that the first author (Treena) has been conducting since 2010 with a local support agency for women called My Sister's Place (MSP) in London, Ontario, a medium-sized city of approximately 350,000. The initial project was an exploratory, baseline study of the organisation of sex work and the women's experiences. It was the first of its kind in London, and one of only a handful of studies with women living in smaller Canadian cities (Orchard et al. 2012, 2013, 2014). Subsequent studies have explored the issues of interpersonal and structural violence as well women's experiences with health care, social services, and criminal justice systems (Dewey, Zheng, and Orchard 2016; Orchard 2016).

Our most recent project in 2014–15 examined the interplay between space and violence in relation to criminalisation, and, along with individual interviews, we employed social mapping exercises (Orchard et al. 2016). The women in these projects identified as having current or former sex work experience, including both indoor (that is, stripping, Internet/phone, private arrangements) and outdoor work (that is, street-based). With respect to recruitment, we spread the word about our studies by putting up posters at MSP, passing around business cards with the project description and contact information of the researchers, and encouraging the women to tell each other about the different studies as they arose.

To date, we have conducted 104 interviews with 60 different women, 25 interviews with social service and health care providers, and social mapping exercises with 50 women. While we often used an interview guide designed to gather data related to the specific aims of each project, we contextualised these inquiries within a more open-ended, life-history interview format and included probe questions that followed the unique trajectories of the women's responses. This method allowed us to gather richly detailed accounts of their lives and permitted them a degree of control over the issues they wished to discuss and/or to not talk about. It also signalled our interest in all aspects of their lives, not just the particular issues that informed the different projects. The duration of the interviews, which were audio recorded, ranged from half an hour to over an hour and a half, and the women were each paid $20–$40, depending on the project budget, for taking part in an interview. Prior to each interview or mapping exercise, the project was discussed, and written and verbal consent to participate was provided by each of the women. These studies have all been approved by the Ethics Review Board at Western University where I work and were funded by Western University as well as by a grant jointly administered through the University of Wyoming, where Susan works.

In 2009, before beginning the first research study, I volunteered at MSP for three months, which was critical to understanding how the agency works and ensuring that the women and staff got to know me as a hands-on supporter of the agency before conducting research. My entry into MSP was predicated upon interactions between myself, the women, and the staff that established the parameters of acceptability and membership. Initially met with questions like "are you a student?" and sobering

comments like "you look too nice to be sitting here, in hell," the women's attempts at placing and assessing me were often rooted in the bodily practices we shared, including tattoos and the fact that I smoked. These shared practices served as powerful vehicles through which the women and I could communicate and were jointly employed to highlight what we had in common versus the power differentials between us.

I live just one block from MSP, and after a few weeks of volunteering I began to recognise women from the agency in the neighbourhood, often saying "hello" to them and sometimes getting a "hi" back. I did not think too much of these interactions beyond the combined nervousness and excitement of them, which were familiar feelings given my extensive experience with rapport building, participant observation, and becoming immersed in a range of different field settings (Orchard 2002, 2007; Orchard, Halas, and Stark 2006, Orchard et al. 2010). Due to my previous work in drop-ins and community agencies, where the policy of "duty to protect" is common, I thought to ask MSP staff if it was also their policy. Adopted in social work and community service provision circles, the "duty to protect" or "do no harm" are guiding ethical principles designed to protect the anonymity of clients/service recipients and provide legal and professional safeguards for social/community workers in cases of dangerous interactions with clients (Canadian Association of Social Workers 2005; Tapp and Payne 2011). When discussed among the volunteers at MSP, it was described as a rule stipulating that "we" are not to address a client until or unless she says "hello" or acknowledges first, particularly outside the bounds of the agency. The staff member I asked said that this is indeed one of MSP's policies and was a bit admonishing, raising her eyebrows and looking intently at me when discussing the issue. Knowing that I had transgressed this rule several times raised questions about the ways in which I could or should carry out my research within the agency and among the women, who I would likely continue to see in my daily movement through the spaces we shared.

I have both abided by, and broken, the "duty to protect" rule many times during my seven years of ongoing work with MSP and the women who go there. Determining which course of action to take is less about my allegiance to the house rules and more about where each woman is at, or seems to be at, when I meet her in the field–home landscape. Such dilemmas about how to behave are part of the entry process into a new field situation for many anthropologists, but they take on special significance for those working in the spaces where we also live because they are constantly in flux.

This is particularly true in the spaces beyond the confines of the formal research process (that is, public, outdoor spaces and telephone calls), which are (re)negotiated by both researcher and subject in various overt and subtle ways. These initial interactions with the women and thoughts about the implications of breaking the "duty to protect" rule – which were experiences shared by both authors – provided the conceptual seeds for this article.

A Note about Field Notes

Field notes occupy complex, ambiguous roles in ethnographic research as time consuming, but potentially revelatory, documents, as places in which to find solace, and as somewhere to express our wonderment and frustrations about the multitude of things learned during fieldwork (Jackson 1990). They transport us "there" – to the field – and serve, along with our embodied memories, as the bedrock for recording the innumerable things we see, hear, smell, and feel during participant observation. Our field notes are where we are able to think through the changing relationships with our participants within the context of the fuzzy boundaries of our field–home settings over time, and they contain unique kinds of tacit knowledge that did not, and really could not, surface in any other form of data collection (Spradley 1979). We make this point because field notes are sometimes relegated to the category of "uncooked" knowledge (Wolf 1990:343) versus the audio-recorded individual interview, which is often accorded "gold standard" status regarding issues of data validity and reliability (Punch 2012; Sanjek 1990).

Ethnographic Vignette 1: Inside Connections

This vignette captures a dilemma I experienced when seeing Fara, a former participant, in the neighbourhood where I lived and where MSP is located after the project that Fara took part in was over. When we would meet, we would nervously and fleetingly acknowledge, but then ultimately ignore, each other, which made me feel unsettled, and I wondered whether I should try and say "hello" or ignore her. I did not want Fara to feel as though I did not care about her beyond the confines of the project or that I did not want to acknowledge her. These uncomfortable encounters continued for some time, and when we met in person at MSP several years after the first project was done, Fara was friendly and resumed warm relations with me. Her "subjectivity work" answered my questions about how to behave in future interactions in ways that are respectful and align with the boundaries Fara wanted to uphold, as acquaintances inside MSP but as strangers outside its walls.

Staff were there and so was Fara, who I was kind of nervous about seeing because when we pass one another on the street we both seem to not know how to act. As a result we'd often pretend we didn't see each other or kind of ignore one another, both approaches felt weird and "off." As usual, she was cool. She smiled and we reconnected nicely, at least that's how I felt. It was so good to see her and it was really neat that of all the women she showed up for the meeting. (Field Notes, 3 April 2014)

Ethnographic Vignette 2: Karen and the Bus Stop

The second vignette describes a tense situation in my neighbourhood when I observed Karen, a woman who had participated in my first research project, in distress and behaving in ways that bordered on being out of control. In this post-project time and space, I felt torn about "who" I was seeing (a former participant or "just" a woman at the bus stop) and what, if anything, I should do to intervene. Karen's "subjectivity work" reflects the volatility of her life at that moment and was conducted independently of any interactions with me. Without any kind of mutual acknowledgement between us, I had no idea how to place myself, or my relationship, to this woman, and, thus, I observed the scene in confusion and with feelings of guilt as I left Karen and the unresolved situation behind.

> *I saw Karen at the bus stop. She seemed to be dope-sick or in a really bad mood. She swore and hurled abusive language to people next to the bus stop and the adjacent area, where she was rummaging through cardboard boxes. I saw her pick up and then put down a few dried red roses. She told some young girls who were leaning against the outside of the second hand clothing store to mind their own business. She seemed to offer, or tell, another woman, who half rode-half walked a bike past her, about some of the stuff she found in the boxes. But that turned into a shouting match with the other woman, which Karen took part in with great relish and ferocity, screaming obscenities and threats above the heads of those who stood in between her and the woman with the bike. I didn't want to intervene, except maybe to tell the young girls she was still swearing at to not bother responding, that it wasn't personal. But, I didn't. I got on the bus, watching and hearing Karen and listening to other people talk about her. A woman who was with her son and his girlfriend seemed to know of her and said "she'd fucking kill that little girl," referring to the likely outcome of a fight, if it happened, between Karen and the woman she was arguing with. I thought I*

would hear some mention of dope or maybe a "hooker" reference, but there wasn't any. The older woman sitting beside me just said "she's not all there." (Field Notes, September 2012).

Ethnographic Vignette 3: No Pills on Dundas Street

The scene featured in this vignette took place at the bus stop around the corner from where I live. It demonstrates yet another kind of subjectivity work engaged in by a former participant – that of indifference. Rose did not take much notice of me and was involved with her own business, which, for those few minutes while we waited for the bus together, involved yelling at a man on the street. What she was yelling about revealed additional aspects of who she was and how she expressed or presented herself, since she seemed to be defending herself against a stigmatising comment or question related to drug use in the area by hurling a counter-narrative about drugs at the man who angered her.

> *As I waited for the bus I saw a woman I've interviewed, Rose, who's said hi to me regularly when we see each other in the 'hood. She was with a guy and I noticed her hair was done nicely, she had small braids done in parts of her "side" hair and they were loosely pulled across the crown of her head. I thought of maybe saying "hi" to her, but decided not to. A guy walked by the bus stand and said something that got her really mad, maybe he was trying to sell pills. Rose yelled at him: "Not everybody on Dundas Street does fuckin' pills!!" He must have said something back because she turned and angrily yelled at him a couple of more times. The guy she was with didn't try to stop her or intervene, which made me wonder how "close" they are.* (Field Notes, 23 January 2016)

US Case Study

Our second North American case study was part of an ongoing study in Denver, Colorado, a US city with a population of 3 million, designed to assess occupation-specific norms and beliefs about transactional sex among women involved in sex trading, criminal justice professionals, and social services providers. This project began in the fall of 2012 and examined interactions between individuals who earn a living in one of these occupational categories. When building rapport with her participants, the second author (Susan) spent significant amounts of time in the neighbourhoods where street-based sex trading occurs and lived in a nearby transitional housing

facility for three or four days a week over the course of a year.

In anticipation of my research project, I became a familiar fixture at the facility a full year before asking any research-related questions of any kind. Sleeping at night on a futon in a back corner of the facility so as not to take a bed from a woman in need, I consciously sought to make myself an equal in the eyes of the women by participating in every aspect of their lives where I was welcome. I attended group meetings with the women, sat with them in hospital rooms when they were sick, travelled with them to social services offices to obtain precious and limited access to medical care, mental health services, and food stamps, and acted as a friend and confidante.

The facility staff and I communicated to clients that my presence was a means by which I could educate myself about the full spectrum of issues that street-involved women confronted in their everyday lives. It was only when women began to actively ask me questions about my interest in their lives, and, in quite a few cases, offered to share their stories with me, that I began to carry out the interviews that shape the research to date. I used my experiences living in the facility to design an open-ended interview guide consisting of 12 questions grouped into three thematic areas designed to ascertain normative practices surrounding street-based sex trading, perceptions of force, and help-seeking behaviours.

I supplemented this research in Denver through a series of 12 preliminary interviews and extensive participant observation in a second city, New Orleans, where I initially sought to explore the possibility of a comparative project. The project was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Wyoming and received funding from the university's Faculty Grant-in-Aid program. In both cities, I provided a USD $20 honorarium to women who participated in the interviews and offered women the opportunity to review the verbatim transcript that was subsequently produced. When working with these women, I included the statement "you or anyone you know" in the interviews so that respondents could choose to avoid implicating themselves in criminalised activities in an environment replete with both undercover and uniformed police. This approach allowed the most latitude for women's storytelling, such that each respondent often included a discussion of other women's experiences as well as her own, thus providing valuable contextual information on the women's life-worlds.

To date, I have conducted over 100 semi-structured interviews with street-involved women, dozens of inter-

views with the health care, social services, and criminal justice professionals with whom they regularly interact, and innumerable amounts of participant observation. In the project's fifth year, the transitional housing facility's director asked me to become its admissions coordinator, making me the first point of contact for women who wished to enter the program. This professional role provided me with a meaningful way to translate knowledge from research into practice, and, by putting me into daily contact with federal, state, county, and city law enforcement officials, correctional facility staff and social services providers also had the unexpected benefit of allowing me to further clarify my research findings.

As in the Canadian case study, the long-term nature of this work presented unique benefits and challenges. Shifting from facility resident to service provider over the course of five years, all while residing in relatively close proximity to the women and the professionals they regularly encountered, regularly sparked my critical reflection about these roles and their cultural meanings. This transition forced me to confront the restrictive terms under which US women struggling with addiction, homelessness, and compromised mental and physical health may access housing, health care, and other basic necessities. It also emphasised the stark differences between women involved in street-based transactional sexual exchanges in cars or motels and women who charge high prices for sexual services they provide selectively in more clandestine indoor venues. Despite the vast differences in class and other forms of privilege inherent in these different types of sexual labour, the following vignettes demonstrate how women from both groups engaged in subjectivity work as they asserted authority over me as a researcher. While Leah encouraged me to write a book about her experiences working the street to support her crack cocaine addiction, Chloe, who was writing a memoir about escorting in New Orleans, offered to introduce me to her literary agent. Despite these differences, as the following vignettes clearly illustrate, women in both of these US sex industry venues live in a cultural context that stigmatises and criminalises their ways of earning a living and imposes the ever-present threat of incarceration.

Ethnographic Vignette 1: The Phone Call

The first vignette, which straddles the university campus where I worked and the neighbourhoods and services provision sites where I carried out research, describes my evolving relationship with a former transitional housing facility client, who offered religious proselytisation alongside her valuable research assistance, with the goal of reaching out to her former peers involved in

illic drug use and street-based sex trading. Leah engaged in subjectivity work in my research, and in society more generally, since she actively constructed herself as an agent of assistance to women who remain street involved. Her desire to "help other people" by doing "the Lord's work," as she put it, seemed particularly poignant when considered in conjunction with her continuing struggles to find legal work, housing, and other necessary things as a result of her extensive record of criminal convictions. Yet these seeming contradictions were essential components of the subjectivity work she undertook with me by attempting to create a place for herself that she regarded as meaningful in the face of considerable exclusionary forces at work in her life. Meanwhile, I engaged in subjectivity work of my own as I attempted to balance my desire for ethnographic immersion with the knowledge I had gained about addiction's complex dynamics from the health care and social service providers who participated in my project.

> *I pick up the phone. Leah wants to tell me that it has been six months since she last used crack, and I congratulate her on achieving this goal she had set for herself. "Listen," she says, "I want you to write a book about my life, because it will help other people. We should go back to my old neighborhood, talk to people, and write about it." Part of me is thrilled, as Leah previously worked the streets in a part of the city where I desperately want to interview women due to the frequency with which addictions, homelessness, and other marginalising factors place them under close surveillance by law enforcement in ways that further impede their abilities to change their lives if they choose to do so. Burdened with criminal records, particularly prostitution charges, it can be impossible for the women to obtain a job or low-cost housing due to the background checks many employers and apartment complex managers require; Leah, who is in her fifties and has a very limited legal work history, faces all these challenges. I cringe as I hear myself saying, like a social worker, "Are you sure that you feel ready to go back there?" but, as a researcher, I also know that her chances of relapse will be higher if she returns to the place where she used drugs in the past.*

> *"I know I'm ready," Leah says without pause, "I want to change other women's lives like I've changed my own." Leah goes on to tell me how she has, as she puts it, "found Jesus," and how I need to also realise that I am doing what she calls "the Lord's work." I ask her what that means, and she says, "helping people, trying to make the world better for the girls still working out there." I shift uncomfortably in my seat as I listen to Leah, unsure how to respond to her*

> *proselytising and desire to go back to her old neighbourhood, especially when combined with a critical offer of research assistance. I wonder if perhaps the bonds of rapport and equality that I worked so hard to establish with her and others at the transitional housing facility now make it too difficult for me to set the course of my future relationship with her or, indeed, with any of the women. This feels both liberating and confusing: part of me feels proud of the way that Leah feels free to proselytise, as well as to tell me what I should do next in the research, yet I also wonder what my becoming a "research subject" of sort for Leah might mean.* (Field Notes, Spring 2013)

Ethnographic Vignette 2: A Chance Meeting in the Night

In the second vignette, my partner, who grew up near New Orleans, and I shared a moment of awkward and tense silence with a woman we had spent time with earlier that day after I interviewed her about her work as a highly paid independent escort who is free to structure most of her time as she chooses. Chloe, who has a graduate degree and is an accomplished creative writer, made a deep impact on me as she encouraged me to assert more control in my professional life, causing me to question her all-encompassing approach to work. Chloe and I both engaged in subjectivity work as we spent hours together, speaking openly about intimate aspects of our lives, only to later ignore one another when we passed each other on the street. Sharing a brief, silent moment of eye contact, both Chloe and I continued to walk with the men beside us, prompting me to consider what it means to know someone through research in a familiar context.

> *It's late at night, dark and raining softly as my partner and I walk through a part of the city famous for its ornate cottages. We are planning the route of our second line, the band-led parade of relatives and friends that follows marriage and death, the two major life events, and laughing, happy in the relative coolness of night. Another couple passes close to us and I immediately recognise Chloe, a woman I interviewed at length the day before. Chloe, who charges $400 an hour for her sexual services, spent several hours with me in a bar down the street from the small room we rented; at one point, my partner walked in and she teased him about his accent. "You're not really from [this city]," she immediately intoned in one of the city's distinctive speech patterns, and they bantered for several minutes. It had been raining hard that day, and our time together felt even more familiar and comfortable*

inside the dark warmth of the bar. Chloe had expressed a combination of shock and disdain when she learned that academic books typically earn their authors very little money and told me that for my next book I should contact a literary agent who previously asked her to write a memoir about her experiences as an escort. We laughed together as she told us intentionally funny stories about her clients, including the attorney who spent most of their sessions complaining about work and the politician who wanted to take her fishing. I left feeling envious of her life, with its loose structure and freedoms relative to my own; later that evening she texted me, complete with a winking emoji as if sensing my feelings, "life ain't over yet, honey, and work don't own you."

Chloe looks glamorous as she passes us in a red dress and matching lipstick, her arm casually linked through the arm of the much older man accompanying her. They are the same height and walk in syncopated step past us, quickly. Our eyes meet just for a moment, and she does not stop her conversation with the man or acknowledge us. I stop walking as soon as they are out of earshot. Should I have said something to her? If so, what? I feel troubled that I assumed that she was with a client, as surely she has other relationships with intimate partners. I know, though, that to have called out to her would have risked compromising a number of things, not least of which is the confidentiality of our research relationship, a phrase which seems like a pretentious and even artificial way to describe a three-hour bar conversation in which I disclosed as much about my own intimate life as she did. Standing there on the rainy street corner, I realise that I know more about Chloe than I do about any of my friends, and yet our conspiratorial silence as we passed each other without a greeting reminds me that our relationship, for which no words exist, is something other than friendship. (Field Notes, Summer 2012)

Discussion

In this article, we explore the blurring of relationships and subjectivities in our ongoing work with women in the sex trade, which occurred in the spaces we call both the field and home. We encountered many situations wherein prevailing ideologies and practices regarding fieldwork and interactions with our participants provided insufficient tools to help us make sense of our observations and our ways of engaging with the women. Enduring anthropological ideas about fieldwork dictate that one enters the field, does fieldwork, and then leaves the field to return home – a rather linear and static series of social activities and geographic locations. The

reality for many ethnographers is vastly different, which has been acknowledged for some time (Davies and Spencer 2010; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 2012; Westbrook 2008). This is particularly the case for anthropologists conducting fieldwork "at home" among people with whom they share certain affinities (Munthali 2001; Narayan 1993; Scheper-Hughes 2000; Simmons 2007) or those doing working in the urban settings where they live at the time of research (Amit 2000; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Caputo 2008; Sterk 2000). In such settings, what the "field" and "home" are and where they end are not as geographically bound or distinct from one another as the conventional fieldwork model implies. In these less bounded sites, the relationships between participants and researchers, along with their mutually constitutive and embodied subjectivities, are also messier and subject to ongoing (re)negotiation within shared socio-spatial domains of everyday life.

To examine these important and still unacknowledged – at least in the formal ethnographic methodological canon and classrooms in which many of us work – we did not conduct an introspective self-reflexive analysis that focused on locating the "Other" within ourselves (Lovell 2007), which is a growing trend among ethnographers who explore research subjectivities and relationships with participants (Berger 2015; Bott 2010; Jahan 2014). Instead, we looked outward to what we observed and heard among our participants at various points in time and in various places during our ongoing interactions with them, which produced insights that enrich current understandings of the subjectivities deployed by the people we work with as they navigate these shared spaces and moments with us.

The Canadian vignettes revealed diverse forms of "subjectivity work" undertaken by Treena and her former research participants, which were rooted in outdoor spaces beyond the context of the formal research project and spanned six years of participant observation (2010–16). The first vignette captures the moment when Treena, who had long been confused and feeling awkward about her interactions with Fara, was finally able to make sense of this woman's behaviour of ignoring her on the street. The moment occurred when they met once again in the formal research setting. At MSP, Fara easily rekindled their "subject" and "researcher" relationship, thus letting Treena know what and where her boundaries were: "inside" we are not strangers, but "outside" we need to maintain a distance.

The embodied tension Treena experienced in the second vignette was linked with her inability to place herself or Karen in the post-project landscape, where their former identities of researcher and subject did not

seem applicable. Although the kind of subjectivity work this former participant was engaged in could be described as "volatile" or "negative," it was also her own and where she was at for that moment in time. Treena's worries about whether or not to intervene or who she was seeing were not shared by Karen, and they reveal the seemingly ingrained need to know the "Other" to know ourselves. In the third vignette, Rose deployed additional examples of subjectivity work, those of indifference and self-assertion in the face of stigmatising assumptions made about her or about the people in the study area in relation to drug use.

Susan's vignettes capture similar ambiguities, including the thorny, emotive risks attached to silence, speaking, and the politics inherent in "giving an account of oneself" (Butler 2005). In the first vignette, Susan was torn between wanting to protect and respect Leah's request to visit a neighbourhood that could, in prevailing US addiction recovery discourse, "trigger" her to smoke crack cocaine again. Leah notably made this request in conjunction with her desire to have Susan write a book about her life as a means to help others, a frequently voiced refrain by Leah as well as other US women who have been street-involved. Excluded from so many other means of earning respect in the dominant culture that frames and constrains Leah's everyday life as a woman with multiple criminal convictions and a very limited legal work history, the offer of helping others fits neatly within the gendered cultural scripts available to her. The far more privileged Chloe, in sharp contrast, positions herself as a role model to Susan by freely offering career advice and encouragement, both verbally and via a text message. Yet despite the easy familiarity of their interactions, their mutual silence as they pass one another in the night underscores how she and Chloe remain keenly aware that it is Chloe, not Susan, who faces cultural stigmatisation and arrest and subsequent incarceration as a woman engaged in criminalised activities.

Taken together, these data highlight the seemingly non-partible relations between researchers and participants in fluid field settings and how these relationships, as well as the subjectivity work that both groups engage in, continue and change shape despite the dissolution of the parameters that once defined them (that is, the formal research contexts). Making sense of what is "leftover" after these relationships and mutual identities have lost their definitive and phenomenological bounds is challenging. Some ethnographers who explore the difficulties of leaving the field address aspects of these issues, namely not wanting to leave behind the people and meaningful relationships established during the transformative experience of doing ethnographic research

(Boynton 2002; Gair 2012; Wall 2011; Watts 2008). Others refer to "the residue" that is left over in certain fieldwork situations where the divisions between work and life are confounded, referring primarily to problems associated with dichotomised notions of the production of private and public knowledge (Goslinga and Frank 2007). However, these "leftover" feelings and relationships are different from those we encountered because we cannot, on account of living where we work, fully exit the physical spaces and subjective places that make up our field sites. Our interactions are even more complicated because we routinely speak with women about issues that dominant North American cultural norms depict as "private," intimate, and not-to-be-shared with casual acquaintances.

The variability that coloured these interactions sheds important light on the mutability of researcher and "subject" subjectivities and their co-construction by both groups, issues that remain somewhat under-problematised in the literature about doing fieldwork "at home." The porous geographic and socio-emotional borderlands that characterise fieldwork settings among those of us who work where we live produce research relationships that are uniquely shaped by spatial forces and ongoing subjective engagement with our participants (Hopwood 2013; Low 2009, 2011; Pink 2008). In these settings, clear recognition of, and attendant behaviours related to, what/where the "field" was, and who our "participants" were, was somewhat impossible to delineate.

These experiences are useful ways to think through the shifts taking place in contemporary ethnographic practice related to the "field" and attendant relationships, which for anthropologists like us do not end when we go home. Our data demonstrate that boundaries in and of the field, as an active site of human interaction, are not necessarily up to the research or researcher to impose. Just as the field is no longer consistently moored, neither are the researcher–participant relationships that constitute the flesh and bone of the ethnographic pursuit – they too are unfixed and mobile. This takes us beyond the "home" versus "field" dichotomy that is still reproduced in many projects undertaken by anthropologists working "at home" and is closer to the idea of the nomadic subject, which is many things at once and always active (Braidotti 2011).

The variable responses adopted by the women in our studies as they move with or around us in the field, including respectful indifference or ignoring each other on the "outside" but coming together again inside formal research spaces, demonstrate their multiple subjectivities – an area of ethnographic research that

remains under-problematised. Their "subjectivity work" answers many of the questions we posed at the outset of this article about how we should behave when we see each other on the street. Ultimately, what they have told and shown us is that "it depends," and there are no stable and unitary answers with which we can predict the dynamics or outcomes of future encounters. As unsettling as uncertainty is to sit with, as researchers and inhabitants of the same spaces the women move through, we are reminded that ethnographic meaning making is always in flux and never fully completed. As Paul Willis (2010, xv) notes, "this work is never 'done': only by expressing themselves over time do human beings continually reproduce themselves culturally." In many ways, the subjective and spatially informed engagement we discuss in this article is "just" another side or dimension of the long-standing feminist, interpretive, and critical ethnographic pursuit of uncovering or exploring the lived realities of our participants – the benchmark of anthropology.

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