SHARING SECRETS SLOWLY: ISSUES OF CLASSROOM SELF-DISCLOSURE RAISED BY STUDENT SEX WORKERS*

Many teachers find experiential teaching methods useful for discussing emotional and controversial topics such as sexual identity or family violence. These methods, many of which include self-disclosure in the classroom, can break down the barriers between students and the social world. We explore the classroom management of student self-disclosure of sensitive topics drawing on our experiences teaching sociology at a large, urban university in which a number of students used their employment in the sex industry as springboards into class projects. Students' concerns with peer disapproval and the processes through which they disclosed their involvement in the sex industry raised several pedagogical and ethical issues that have not yet been addressed in the self-disclosure literature. We examine a number of difficulties with students disclosing information partially, either to teachers or to a few classmates, on classroom dynamics and teacher-student interactions. Finally, we evaluate a number of strategies, such as hidden involvement, fictitious informant, and full disclosure, for managing self-disclosure in the sociology classroom, and we discuss additional steps that teachers can take to address sensitive topics in class.

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THE DISCIPLINE OF SOCIOLOGY has a rich history marked by moments in which social prejudices are challenged and taboo topics are brought into the spotlight. Sociologists have studied suicide (Durkheim 1951), mental illness (Goffman 1961), and interracial marriage (Merton 1941). In this vein, the undergraduate sociology classroom can be an opportunity to challenge students' deeply held beliefs and, at times, for students to experience personal transformations. As teachers, some of our goals include encouraging our students to examine their prejudices and to consider the privileges and inequalities associated with class, race, gender, and sexual identity. Sociologists have demonstrated their commitment to drawing out the connections between individuals and social context, and have developed teaching practices that heighten students' awareness of their own personal histories as part of a larger social landscape (Allen 1995; DeLamater, Hyde, and Allgeier 1994; Grauerholz and Scuteri 1989; Jacobs 1998).

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Feminist pedagogy in particular advocates experiential teaching methods as one way to create a positive learning environment for students (see, e.g., Atwater 1987; Eichstedt 1996; Freedman 1990; Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994; Greenberg 1989). In experiential education, students reflect on their own life experiences to understand sociological concepts and are often encouraged to disclose personal information to the teacher or classmates. Experiential education methods can include autobiographical journals, small group discussions, role play, and field research projects. These methods can minimize the divide between people who practice research and those who are subjects of research, blurring the distinctions between "us" and "them" (Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994:320). Experiential education personalizes the learning experience by connecting students' experiences with concepts and theories discussed in the classroom. These methods can mitigate the imbalance of power between teacher and student (Freire 1970), and can help students to make connections between learning and social change (hooks 1994). Teaching that accentuates the student's role in learning may create a stimulating educational experience by promoting critical thinking skills and increasing confidence in producing and analyzing social data (Hamlin and Janssen 1987; Wright 1993).

These methods have been found to be quite helpful in sociology courses "dealing with sensitive and controversial topics such as family violence, gender roles, or race and ethnic relations" (Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994:319). Emotional topics that may elicit strong reactions from students are exactly those in which experiential education can be the most useful for moving past initial discomfort to sociological analysis (Lusk and Weinberg 1994). Sexual topics have been considered conducive to experiential education for this reason (Allen 1995; Cain 1996; DeLamater, Hyde, and Allgeier 1994; Eichstedt 1996). For issues of sexual identity in particular, self-disclosure has been found to enrich sociological discussions, foster teacher-student relationships, and enhance student learning. Not all sexual topics, however, are treated equally in the classroom. Changing social norms and academic activism have resulted in the introduction of previously taboo topics such as rape, homosexuality, abortion, and pornography while other topics such as fetishes, bondage, and non-monogamy have not yet found their way into the typical sociology undergraduate curriculum. Our classroom experiences with the controversial topic of sex work raised several pedagogical questions that we discuss in this paper.

Sexuality is a well established topic of sociological inquiry, and sex work in particular has received much attention from sociologists in the last decade (see, e.g., Calhoun, Cannon, and Fisher 1998; Chancer 1998; Chapkis 1997; Edwards 1987; Jenness 1990; Reid, Epstein, and Benson 1994). One might gather that discussions of sex work in the undergraduate classroom are quite commonplace and unproblematic, and our own successful experiences indicate that this is often the case. However, these discussions may pose concerns for students who work in the sex industry, whose particular insights in classroom discussions may expose them to ridicule by fellow classmates. While some students will choose to keep their sex work to themselves, those students who want to share their experiences with the class will have varied levels of comfort. Some of this may depend on the student's comfort level with speaking in class, or what type of job the student has had; for example, phone sex operators may be more inclined to share their experiences than prostitutes. In any case, the students' perceptions of how the teacher and their classmates will receive the disclosure is critical to their decisions whether to keep their work a secret or to share it with the class. In the cases we present below, our students wanted to incorporate their sex work into their course assignments, but were also concerned with whether their classmates would stigmatize them if they shared their roles in the sex industry during class discussions.

The intersection of experiential education

methods with the controversial topic of sex work brings to light new questions about the guidelines for implementing experiential education, and in particular highlights the problems and benefits of the use of self-disclosure in the classroom. Several of our students who worked in the sex industry before taking our class had a host of different experiences in the sex industry, and challenged our pedagogical values by choosing their work as topics for field research. Helping them complete these projects successfully and avoid their classmates' harsh judgments raised issues for us regarding the integrity of classroom discussion, equal treatment for all students, respect for student diversity, and the balance of our multiple pedagogical goals. While the literature on experiential education effectively describes the benefits of using self-disclosure in the classroom and discusses the ethics of creating assignments in which students are expected to self-disclose personal information, it does not address the additional problems posed for classroom interaction when disclosures are partial or drawn out over time. Furthermore, the literature does not weigh students' interest in sensitive topics with the risk of being stigmatized by classmates.

In this paper, we analyze our students' experiences with choosing to study their sex work for field research. We discuss the strategies employed to manage the negative opinions that students anticipated from their peers. Sex work highlights several pedagogical dilemmas that may arise when discussing sensitive topics or challenging deeply held beliefs. As the sociology classroom continues to uncover understudied topics and challenge social norms, students who find themselves at the margins of social acceptability will face many of these same issues. Our cases suggest that under greater fear of stigmatization, students are more likely to strategize limited and controlled self-disclosures, which introduce new questions for the use of experiential education methods. We discuss the strategies our students chose and weigh their benefits and problems. We then discuss the implications for the use of student self-disclosure in the classroom as a pedagogical tool.

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN THE CLASSROOM

There has been discussion recently among educators about students' and teachers' personal self-disclosures in the classroom (Allen 1995; Atwater 1987; Auster and MacRone 1994; DeLamater, Hyde, and Allgeier 1994; Freedman 1990; Goldstein and Benassi 1994; Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994; Jacobs 1998; Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler 1993; Wambach and Brothen 1997; Wright 1993). This discourse weighs the benefits of the students' experiences of empowerment and emotional connection with class material against the risks of exposing personal information to teachers, grading complications, and silencing those who have been victimized (DeLamater, Hyde, and Allgeier 1994; Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994; Konradi 1993; Lusk and Weinberg 1994; Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler 1993). These articles primarily focus on two types of personal disclosures: students' and teachers' sexual identities (Allen 1995; Cain 1996; DeLamater, Hyde and Allgeier 1994; Eichstedt 1996), and personal experiences of family violence and sexual assault (Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994; Phillips 1988; Yllo 1988). Grauerholz and Copenhaver (1994), for example, offer an excellent account of self-disclosure of family violence on students' mental health and their readiness to make connections between the "personal and political" without feeling threatened or coerced. They frame the problem as follows: "How can we balance the need to personalize sociology and encourage students to develop their sociological imaginations with students' rights not to be required to make inappropriate revelations?" (Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994:321). Highlighting the teacher-student relationship and the relevance of trust and power imbalances in their interactions, several authors question the ethics of requiring self-disclosure in the classroom (Philips 1988;

Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994; Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler 1993).

The existing work on classroom self-disclosure, however, does not address some of the issues that we encountered. Thus far, work on this subject tends to be concerned with issues of students' emotional anguish at being required to uncover painful past experiences, the ethics of grading students' personal histories, or the impact of teacher-student power dynamics on self-disclosures (Grauerholz and Copenhaver 1994; Konradi 1993; Phillips 1988; Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler 1993). These approaches rest on the assumptions that 1) self-disclosures are required assignments handed to students, and 2) students are uncomfortable with the secrets they disclose. While these are valid concerns, they do not address the important issues we faced, where students were more uneasy about the disapproval of their fellow students than with our opinions as teachers. Our students asked us to become partners with them in managing their privacy while they carried out this research.

In the case studies we offer below, our students came to us with voluntary self-disclosures. Although sex work was not a scheduled topic of discussion, students chose it for field research projects, which had few restrictions on topics other than requirements that the research be limited to legal activities that would not pose safety risks for our students or their subjects. Given the opportunity to study other topics, students chose to research their work in the sex industry. These students' choices to disclose their involvement in the sex industry to us as teachers were an expression of trust that we took seriously. We wanted to respond by encouraging their interests and offering our support. In the experiences described below, our students implemented strategies to manage their self-disclosures to the class, which occurred over time to teachers alone or to small groups in the classroom. The process of self-disclosure, both as a revelation of personal information in the classroom or between teacher and student is a social matter that affects classroom dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

The case studies occurred in a large, private urban university where both authors worked as graduate students and teachers. The majority of the students attending this school are white and middle class, although there are substantial populations of students of color and working class students as well. At the time of the research projects, the local sex industry was undergoing major changes due to new government regulations.

The three cases we present below were chosen from a total of five cases of student sex workers who researched sex work between Spring 1998 and Spring 2000. These three cases represent a range of the types of cases experienced in our classes over this period of time. (Some students in our classes also disclosed involvement in sex work during class discussion while not researching sex work). Three of the four students described in the case studies were working or had worked in the sex industry prior to class. All four students in the cases described are white. All students agreed to allow their stories to be used in this paper. Several of the students also read and discussed the paper with the authors prior to publication.[1] One student, Jamie, who is not included in the case studies, was interviewed for this paper.

In each case, course assignments included field research in which students were to observe a social setting and collect information on emergent social norms and behaviors more or less unique to the setting. Following Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Smith (1987), we encouraged students to make the project as convenient as possible by choosing a field site with which they were already familiar, and to "make problematic" topics that are parts of their lived experience. Through discussion sections, the projects were nurtured using group discussion, peer feedback, and instructor review. In these

[1]Pseudonyms are used for all students, and the details of the stories and locations have been altered to maintain students' anonymity.

three cases, field projects were the impetus for student self-disclosure of sex work.

One of the elements of the field projects for all of our students is a project proposal in which students describe their research site and their own role as participant observer. Our policy is to reject proposals that involve any illegal activity. We also consider practical matters such as how difficult we think it will be for the student to gain access to the proposed group in one semester. Finally, we ask students to modify their proposals to avoid putting themselves in risky situations. Many of these decisions turn out to be tough choices. For example, we might consider a study of teen runaways living on the street to be too dangerous to allow a student to choose it as a field project, but what if that student already spent lots of time with runaway friends? Similarly, a student who wants to study unwritten dress code norms in her workplace might propose that she wear tighter or more revealing clothing to work in order to gauge responses from her coworkers and supervisors; should we allow her to put herself at risk of being reprimanded, even if she is willing to do so?

We addressed the ethics of approving some project proposals and denying others by establishing some ground rules. We arrived at these guidelines through discussions with peers and faculty, and through discussions in the pedagogical seminars in which we participate. We decided that we should first be concerned with students' safety and we should not allow students to participate, even voluntarily, in activities for class projects that would put them at increased risk. However, we recognize that risk is not evenly distributed among our students; some students live in neighborhoods with high crime rates, women students are at increased risk of personal attack over men students, and so on. In order to respect the diversity of our students, we decided that our role in approving projects was to ensure that the field work for class projects would not pose any more risk to our students than they encounter in their daily routines. Rather than rely on an absolute conception of risk, we focus on the potential increase in risk during field research relative to their everyday lives. By this measure, we reject proposals that we judge to require any discernible increase in risk over the students' daily routines as they present them to us. In this way, we find a balance within the ethical principles of sociologists both to act responsibly to our students, while respecting their dignity and diversity (ASA 1997: Principles B, D, and E).

According to these guidelines, we would approve the hypothetical proposal for the teen runaways who are friends of our student. By the same stroke, however, we would require that the study of dress codes be modified such that the student does not alter her own behavior in her work place, and simply gather what data she can from observing the clothing choices of her coworkers. While this ethic makes sure that we do not allow students to take personal risks in the name of field research, it also allows us to be open to differences in students' lives as well as in their topical interests.

When we encountered the various proposals for study of their work environments in various sectors of the sex industry that we describe below, we applied the same criteria for these as for all our other student proposals. First, we confirmed that the work our students were engaged in was legal. We considered whether the proposed research sites were locations in which the students were comfortable and where they had already spent time. Upon questioning, each student assured us that performing the rigorous observations and note-taking required for field research would not jeopardize their jobs, and like all of our students who used their workplaces as research sites, they obtained permission from their supervisors before beginning research. The only remaining consideration we faced was how to deal with our students' special requests to keep their work in the sex industry—now their field research sites—a secret from their classmates. In dialogue with each other, faculty, and colleagues, we decided to go

forward with our students' proposals, and work with them to devise strategies to manage their classroom discussions of fieldwork.

We maintained communication with our students throughout the semester as they conducted their research, meeting with them regularly outside the classroom to supervise their progress, to answer their questions, and to be available for any problems that may arise. All of the students reported that they enjoyed working on their projects and that they considered their field research to be positive learning experiences. We offer our cases as a starting point for discussion on the nature of classroom self-disclosure and the consequences of protecting students' privacy by concealing information from classmates.

CASE STUDIES

The first two cases of students researching the sex industry arose in an introduction to sociology course in which we were teaching assistants and were responsible for three discussion sections. Each of us led one section, and we co-taught the third. The third case occurred in a course about social change, taught by Susan. The first of these projects involved our student Beth's participant observation at a gentleman's club. Beth danced at the gentleman's club, which is a high-priced social club where women workers split their time between dancing and stripping on stage, mingling with customers on the floor of the club, and selling one-on-one dances to customers in semi-private rooms. Beth spoke with us privately to discuss her interest in studying sex work, and to strategize how she could study this topic. She also revealed her past and present participation in the sex industry. She chose not to disclose her sex work to the class, but instead disclosed only to us as co-teachers of the discussion section. The professor approved her proposal. Given that class involved small group discussions, we were concerned about Beth's class participation. We discussed several options including inventing a parallel project that did not involve sex work, discussing her actual project but concealing her role in the club, and listening to class discussion and not sharing her own stories with the class. Beth chose the last option, and sat silently through class and small group discussions. On the last day of class in an informal, small group meeting, Beth chose to disclose her research project and her own participation in sex work. Afterwards, she reported that she had judged that the risk of stigmatization was low since it was the end of the semester. Her discussion group responded to her self-disclosure positively, with curiosity and respect.

However, this partial self-disclosure to the co-teachers, combined with a total silence of the sex work issue during class discussion, caused problems for our management of the discussion section. While we actively called on other students who were shy about sharing their progress with the class, we overlooked Beth, who would receive feedback from us on her research project privately. This practice was particularly awkward during small group discussions of field projects. Small groups were organized with the expectation that all students in the group would have a chance to talk. Beth, however, held firm with her silence, and was the only student in class who did not share progress on her project. Our lack of prodding could have been interpreted by students as special treatment when in fact it was an attempt to help conceal her stigmatized occupation.

This classroom silence went against our pedagogical goal of equal treatment of all students. Although no student commented on the special treatment to us directly or through anonymous evaluation, it had the potential for alienating students who noticed the disparity. We were also concerned that special treatment might lead students to wonder about or question the subject of Beth's project, and put her or us in the uncomfortable position of actively concealing the project by telling students that we could not discuss it. Our efforts to create a classroom that was comfortable for Beth and that allowed her to pursue her studies also

had the potential to make other students uncomfortable, a tradeoff that was less than ideal.

The second instance of self-disclosure was a study of an S & M dungeon, a club for bondage, domination/submission, and other sexual role play. Nina and Spencer chose each other as research partners and were highly motivated to study this site, where Nina already worked as a professional dominatrix. Nina did not work for the dungeon directly; the dungeon charged a substantial entry fee to men and no fee to women, acting as a site where clients could locate freelancing dominatrices to perform scenes (which could not legally include any sexual penetration), with the expectation that the client would pay the dominatrix a tip. The students researched this site by going to the club together, with Spencer observing and taking notes while Nina went about her regular work routine.

The management of the self-disclosure of this pair was particularly awkward, as the students were enrolled in different discussion sections (Nina was enrolled in Tina's section, and Spencer in Susan's). Nina chose not to disclose her research project to either her class or to Tina. Instead, she discussed her project in abstract terms that blurred her role in the participant observation. As the pair was only required to turn in a single project proposal, Nina avoided the topic with Tina by having Spencer turn in their proposal to Susan. Spencer, perhaps unaware of Nina's discomfort, disclosed all of the details of their study to his discussion section, including Nina's professional role-play. Spencer's classmates shared these details with others, and many students in the class knew of Nina's sex work, though she herself had not told anyone. Tina was put in the uncomfortable position of knowing more about the class project than Nina had revealed.

While the potential for harm in this situation was quite high, the two students remained amicable partners throughout the semester. Following Nina's lead, Tina negotiated this situation by discussing the research without reference to Nina's role as a participant observer. In an attempt to convey a message of support to Nina, and to set an example for the other students regarding the appropriate way to discuss this topic, which when first announced encountered a heavy silence, Tina discussed the topic straightforwardly, in the same manner as the other student projects. As the semester progressed, Nina began to discuss her project frankly with Tina outside of class, while remaining vague during class discussions. Finally, on the last day of class, Nina shared her project and disclosed her sex work to the discussion section. Her classmates responded enthusiastically and asked her for extensive details about the hidden world in which she worked.

Once again, self-disclosure was not a single act that was carried out straightforwardly. The disclosure was a process in which information was leaked slowly, and passed along from one partner, through gossip chains, until Nina made an "official" announcement at the end of class. This process, however awkward, was not entirely unsuccessful, as the semester-long time period, in which some of Nina's classmates learned about Nina's work, gave them time to digest the news and to consider their opinions on the topic. This process was also aided by class discussion of Nina and Spencer's research site, in which sexual role play was discussed and legitimated as an appropriate and interesting site for participant observation. The potential for harm was greatest for Nina not at the point of self-disclosure, when she took the opportunity to explain her work and its interesting sociological aspects, but rather while she was unaware that some classmates knew more than she had told them. Her secret was uncovered in a way that did not allow her control over her classmates' knowledge. Fortunately, no one used this information to harass or to ostracize her, but this could have happened.

The third case arose from an ethnographic requirement in a class about social change that Susan taught. One student, Maria,

wanted to participate in a prostitutes' rights organization because of several personal experiences. Maria, an articulate and outspoken student, chose sex work because she had been studying feminist theory and was curious about sex-positive feminism. Even though Susan was concerned that this organization might be difficult to study, Maria was enthusiastic to learn more about this social movement because she had briefly worked in the sex industry prior to taking the class.

At first, Maria had problems accessing the group. They never returned phone calls or e-mail, they only met once a month, and they were vague about the details of meeting locations. In class, she mentioned the distinct feeling that they were keeping her out of the group because they did not know her. In private, she disclosed to Susan that in order to join this organization, a person must convey to others in the group that she has worked in the sex industry. She gained access to the group by using the name of a contact, and legitimated her participation in the group by using the coded language and veiled references to the sex industry that she knew from her own experience. The social movement's requirement of legitimization as an "insider" became the topic of Maria's study. Maria, however, wanted to keep her own history in the sex industry a secret from the class. She managed this secret by discussing her project in terms of the social movement's lack of organization and political activities, amorphous hierarchy and leadership, and their apathy toward recruiting new members.

Susan, who had supported Maria's interest in prostitutes' rights, agreed to keep her secret and to privately discuss the development of her project, her access to the group, and her ideas for a final paper. Once again, this case of self-disclosure was partial. The student self-disclosed to the instructor, a safe and supportive audience, but chose not to risk disclosing to her classmates. Like the other cases of partial self-disclosure, this case caused some problems during class discussion. Susan and Maria met regularly to discuss how to access the group and present her research. Susan's collusion with Maria created a strong teacher-student bond, but also prevented Susan from having an open dialogue with other students about Maria's project, and about studying underground or stigmatized social movements. For instance, during a class discussion of Maria's paper, one male student questioned how Maria got access to these private, "insider" meetings, and how group members accepted her if she did not know the hidden codes that they used. He laughed and made a joke about Maria, saying that she could not have been accepted into the group because she was not a sex worker. Another male made a joke to the same effect, making Maria obviously uncomfortable. By default, the belief was perpetuated that white, middle-class college females in our class could not be involved in sex work. Susan's promise to keep Maria's secret prevented her from engaging directly with this student's misconceptions and stereotypes, and from addressing an insightful question and teachable moment.[2] In this case, even though Maria's secret was kept intact, the teacher-student collusion also failed to protect Maria from being the target of jokes and innuendo.

SELF-DISCLOSURE STRATEGIES

The control of personal information is a common strategy in the management of stigma (Goffman 1963). The strategy of "dividing the social world" involves keeping people who know potentially stigmatizing information separate from those who do not. Several studies find that this is a common strategy among various types of sex workers

[2]We use teachable moment to refer to instances when the teacher uses spontaneous examples that arise in class. For example, Susan could have used the student's joke and giggling to show how societal norms about the stigmatization of sex workers are maintained. This comment could also be used to discuss the belief that mostly white, middle class college females would not be in involved in sex work.

to avoid being stigmatized by families, coworkers, and other people in their lives (Calhoun 1992; Skipper and McCaghy 1970; Thompson and Harred 1992). Other research finds that sex workers have a wide range of responses to their profession beyond feeling stigma (e.g., Bell, Sloan, and Strickling 1998; Browne and Minichiello 1996; Chapkis 1997; McClintock 1993). These studies demonstrate that keeping information to oneself is an efficient way to avoid being harshly judged by acquaintances. Thus, it is not surprising that some of our students relied on this strategy with their peers, and attempted to incorporate it into the management of their self-disclosures during class discussions.

In two of our cases, the students strategized not to disclose involvement in the sex industry to the whole class at first, but only to the teacher. This can be seen as a middling step that allows students to research and write about a topic they have personally experienced without notifying the whole class. The student is still taking a risk, but it is perhaps a more prudent risk because it relies on trusting the teacher as opposed to the whole class. All discussions about the topic occur in private where the student can choose how much to reveal.[3] Under such conditions, the teacher is able to get to know one student well and to attend to any concerns that the student may have. The teacher is also afforded the opportunity to discuss issues of harm to the student or anyone else who may be involved in the case. However, the rest of the class does not benefit from her learning experience.

Splitting the classroom between the teacher who knows and peers who do not know about the students' involvement in sex work can also be problematic because it creates a *collusion of silence* between the teacher and the student sex worker. The teacher agrees to allow the student to research sex work, but cannot use the students' research as an example to be discussed in class. By agreeing to keep these students' sex work a secret, we made the decision to privilege their research on sensitized topics over the authenticity of our relationship with the rest of the class. We were willing to keep secrets from the class and at times to hold back information about sex work in a tradeoff that promoted research on a topic that is rarely explored in the undergraduate classroom. In these cases our multiple pedagogical goals were in conflict, and although we felt positive about supporting research in sex work, there were hidden costs in our agreement to the collusion of silence; if we were not trying to protect the student sex worker, we would have been more likely to discuss the subject in class. However, since we knew that the student trusted us not to reveal her secret, we silenced discussion on the topic.

To address the limitations of the aforementioned strategy, we asked our students to discuss the classroom conditions under which self-disclosure to peers is likely to occur. Students' primary concerns were to manage the disclosure of information in a way that would minimize stigma while researching their employment as sex workers. Jamie, a former student, sex worker, and ardent political activist, was asked to describe the optimal conditions in class that could lead to self-disclosure. She responded saying:

> [I]f I told people...in the class, and they had the opportunity to sort of ask me questions about it...that would be fine. But, if the people in the class were to just find out, and they didn't know me or have a chance to talk to me about it...they might make judgments that aren't necessarily true, and that's why, you know, I don't like people knowing without me telling them or having a chance to talk to them about it after I tell them.

Not surprisingly, student sex workers wanted to avoid being teased, dismissed, or labeled by their classmates without having

[3]During private discussions with students about their participation in sex work, we did not act as psychological advisers. The discussions concerned only topics connected to the research project and class.

the opportunity to talk about their work. In an effort to address this concern, we outline several other strategies that students can use to manage the conflict between researching a sensitive topic and maintaining control over the self-disclosure of personal information.

Each of the following strategies allows the student to pursue research about sex work while managing the social consequences of self-disclosure to the class. The strategies attempt to balance the diversity of students' research interests with the need to protect students from being stigmatized by peers. None of these strategies accomplishes all of our pedagogical goals, and instead we find that we have to choose between tradeoffs of encouraging student interest in sensitive topics, providing a welcoming environment for a wide range of research interests, conducting an open and honest classroom discussion, and treating all students fairly and equally.

Hidden Involvement

The strategy of hidden involvement calls for the students to participate in field research while masking their connection to research during class discussions or presentations. In a case of hidden involvement, students may not participate in class discussion, or may participate in class discussion without revealing their connection to the sex industry. In the cases described above, Beth chose hidden involvement without participating in classroom discussion. This choice allowed Beth to study sex work, but limited her involvement in classroom interaction, conversation, and participation. While she never used deception in the presentation of her research to the class, she was not a full participant in class discussion.

Maria also chose to use hidden involvement. Her experience highlights some of the potential problems of this strategy when the student chooses to participate in class discussion while not revealing her or his relationship to sex work. Rather than educating the class about the sex industry and deconstructing myths about who is a sex worker, this strategy did not confront some of her peers' stereotypes about sex workers. It also limited Maria's ability to discuss those elements of her research that interested her most. She could not openly discuss the requirements for joining the prostitutes' rights organization, or analyze why an organization would have such requirements. While this strategy allows students to research sex work, it limits class exposure to new ideas that have the potential to challenge their conceptions of sex workers. However, there were benefits for Maria, who felt personally fulfilled by her research.

The strategy of hidden involvement can potentially create a climate of deception in the classroom both for the teacher and student. The teacher has to remember to maintain this secret during class discussions. Innuendo among classmates may surface, making both the student and the teacher uncomfortable. The student's hidden involvement requires collusion with the teacher who may feel protective of the student sex worker's identity. The student may eventually feel uncomfortable with the idea of hiding her involvement from the class. Hiding one's identity has been discussed in terms of Jews passing among Christians (Kantrowitz in Wright 1993:193) and gay men and lesbians passing in the academy (Wright 1993). The problems associated with passing and deceiving others about one's identity may encourage feelings of inadequacy, fear, shame, and invisibility: "[s]ecrets tend to foster feelings of shame. Openness can dissipate these feelings" (Wright 1993:198).

Several possible outcomes can then occur with hidden involvement: 1) the student may feel re-victimized by hiding, 2) the student may decide upon full or partial disclosure or, 3) the student may keep the secret and finish the research. Hidden involvement is complex because it involves collusion between teacher and student in deceiving the class while containing the potential for the secret to be disclosed. The most troublesome aspect about hidden involvement concerns the practice of deception in the presentation

of research to peers. Students need to be aware that deception is problematic and should only be utilized in special cases.

Fictitious Informant

A second strategy is the creation of a fictitious informant. This strategy requires students to construct a fictitious contact to mask their link to the sex industry. The students would deny their sex work either explicitly or by inference rather than conceal it, by talking from the informants' perspective. Although we have not had experience utilizing this strategy, informants are often used in gathering data in ethnographic traditions in sociology and anthropology. Through claiming to utilize a legitimate data gathering method, students can distance themselves in class from the stigma of being a sex worker while still researching sex work. While the hidden involvement strategy leaves classmates' potential questions unanswered, the use of a fictitious informant creates a plausible alternative to full self-disclosure. Both student and teacher can talk about the informant in class as an avenue to introduce sex work as a topic for sociological analysis.

Still, students and teachers may feel uncomfortable with the dishonesty involved in using a fictitious informant. This strategy does not minimize the collusion of silence between teachers and students, and both would need to be careful about what they say in class, how they defend what they know, and which pronouns they use. This strategy is problematic on a number of issues, specifically, the sex workers in the students' research will still be discussed as outsiders in class discussion, and classroom integrity will still be compromised.

Full Disclosure

A third option is full disclosure of student involvement in the sex industry to the class. This option would resolve the problems of collusion of silence as well as any other compromises to personal integrity and honesty in class discussions. Although full disclosure resolves questions of deception and allows an open and honest classroom discussion, this strategy sacrifices the comfort of the individual student, who must choose between potential ridicule by classmates and abandoning research of the sensitive topic. Full disclosure minimizes the complications of students' research of sensitive topics. However, requiring or encouraging full disclosure may lead to students revealing information about sex work that could jeopardize their well-being. We are cautious in encouraging this option when students clearly ask to keep their work secret.

The use of full disclosure, which students may feel is a requirement for undertaking research on the sensitive topic, does not address students' fear of stigmatization by classmates. The students in these cases had significant reservations about full disclosure. While we may be able to manage the class discussion of this topic, as teachers we have no control over the disclosure as it travels beyond the classroom into the dorms, students' friendship circles, and to other teachers and administrators. We can request that class discussions remain confidential (Konradi 1993), we can prepare the class for self-disclosure by initiating a discussion about sex work and stigma, and we can respond to negative comments directly. However, we cannot control the disclosure once it is uttered, and we cannot protect the student sex worker outside the classroom.

Further Approaches to Sensitive Topics

We see our role as one of assessing the students' commitment to studying sex work, discussing the various strategies, and the potential impact and problems of each strategy. Through in-depth, private conversation with the student, consultations with peers and consideration of the ASA Code of Ethics, we began a process that required re-evaluation throughout the semester. Like others who have disclosed sexual identity or experiences with family violence, we expect that full disclosure of sex work may have powerful consequences for all involved. Previous literature (e.g., Freedman 1990) indicates that self-disclosure encourages others

to share personal information. We expect that in some cases others would also self-disclose information, and that this process would foster classmates' understanding of each other, as well as clarify sociological concepts.

Topics that students introduce which present problems for self-disclosure can be incorporated into the course as learning opportunities for the whole class. The teacher can prepare a short lecture or lead a brief class discussion on the topic, invite a guest lecturer, suggest additional readings for the class, or simply offer to take questions on the topic from students. We recommend that teachers discuss these classroom strategies in detail with students who have chosen sensitive topics, and respect their wishes about which of these strategies, if any, to adopt. These strategies, which do not directly intervene in the management of students' sensitive self-disclosures, nevertheless have the potential to turn an uncomfortable situation for one student into a positive learning experience for the entire class. Because the teacher, guest lecturer, or author of the reading becomes the point of expertise on the topic, this strategy can relieve pressure on one student to use her experience to educate the class, while serving to undermine stereotypes and break silences on topics that some students may feel are taboo. Teachers can respond to any harsh statements with continued discussion or further information, and the tenor of this discussion can provide essential information to the student considering self-disclosure about the climate of the classroom. Creating these teachable moments may produce a more comfortable classroom environment in which students can self-disclose, and even when students remain silent about their own relationship with the topic, these exercises can impact the class positively by providing a learning opportunity for all of the students.

DISCUSSION

The practice of self-disclosure in the classroom can be useful for students and teachers in nurturing the sociological imagination, personalizing abstract concepts, and reducing the gap between sociological issues and students' lived experience. Self-disclosure can also engage student interest and enrich classroom discussion. As practitioners of feminist and liberation pedagogy, we believe that students' active discovery of knowledge is a more powerful experience than the passive absorption of facts from the teacher. For these reasons, experiential education continues to be an important practice in many sociology classrooms. However, the self-disclosure that is often tied closely to experiential education methods can sometimes be problematic. The practice of classroom self-disclosure is not exclusive to experiential education techniques, and the issues we address may arise in the classroom through any teaching strategy that permits student input, especially those that actively foster student participation in discussion. As we mention above, others have pointed out that power differentials between teacher and student create unequal terrain in which self-disclosure can be risky for the student, and that the grading of self-disclosures and assignments requiring self-disclosure have the potential to harm students who may not feel comfortable sharing personal information. We argue that caution must also be exercised in situations where students are more concerned with stigmatization by peers than with grading or teacher-student relations.

Current accounts of classroom self-disclosure do not address variations in the ways self-disclosures occur. The implicit assumption is that self-disclosure is always contained within a single statement or piece of writing. Our cases demonstrate that self-disclosures can also unfold over time, between teacher and student, to some classmates and not others, or in other ways. From the various strategies used by our students, we observe how the process of self-disclosure evolves, including partial revelations that reverberate back and forth between the teacher and student throughout the semester. These self-disclosures were negotiated thoughtfully and cautiously over

the course of the semester. One student maintained a semester-long secret between teachers and student that was guardedly revealed on the last day of class when the student felt that negative repercussions would be minimized. Another student remained silent for the whole semester, while another disclosure happened due to the failed communications between student research partners. Students will vary in terms of when they disclose information, how much of their experiences they will disclose, and with whom they will share their secrets.

Students are likely to carefully manage their self-disclosure of sensitive topics. Sex work is one of many topics involving sensitive self-disclosures. As social norms change, the content of sensitive self-disclosures is likely to shift; however, the experience of being a student with a secret will surely endure. As teachers and researchers, we want to better understand the conditions under which people choose to share personal experiences. We still grapple with questions such as, how can we nurture students' research interests and encourage them to be honest and daring, while at the same time protect them from potentially harmful situations? And, which strategies do we use to help manage and encourage student self-disclosures?

The management of identity is clearly an important constant of social life, inside the classroom as well as out (Goffman 1959). The students in these three cases were aware of this as they strategized ways to pursue their research interests without facing stigmatization. None of the strategies we offer fully resolves the pedagogical issues surrounding the self-disclosure of sensitive information in the sociology classroom. Rather, each strategy combines a set of benefits with some tradeoffs. The relative advantages and disadvantages of each strategy should be evaluated by the comfort of the individual student and teacher, classroom discussion, peer interactions, and our pedagogical goals of honesty, integrity, and equality for all of our students. Simply helping the student to negotiate her or his self-disclosure cannot completely satisfy all of these criteria. However, teachers can go beyond these strategies to address the sensitive topics in the classroom themselves. They can turn an uncomfortable topic for one student into a lesson that educates the entire class. Stepping forward as a teacher to introduce a sensitive topic can relieve pressure from the individual student, redirect inquiries to the teacher, and reduce the possibility that the class will stigmatize an individual student who may decide to self-disclose.

In studying self-disclosure of sensitive topics, it is clear to us that sex work is only one of many issues that confront teachers in the sociology classroom. The purpose of teaching and learning includes intellectual development, building community in the classroom, and improving awareness of self. We want to challenge students to use their knowledge of the world as a springboard into sociology, and in so doing we hope that students discover their relationship to the structural and conceptual frameworks that many find difficult to comprehend. We see self-disclosure as a link to sociological concepts; however, to responsibly create a safe environment for self-disclosure in the classroom, we must remain alert to the students' relationships with their classmates, our responsibilities to the class as a whole, and our obligation to the brave students who bring controversial topics into the classroom via their lived experience.

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