STUDENTS BY DAY, STRIPPERS BY NIGHT: TRANSACTIONAL SEXUALITY AMONG INDIANA COLLEGE STUDENTS[1]

Sociology

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In October 2007, BBC News reported that a student at Cambridge University had earned money during her first year working as a call girl (BBC News 2007). Despite denials from the university's administrators, other anecdotal media reports and subsequent research in the U.K. support the idea that students are turning to the sex industry to earn money while in school. With university tuition rates in the United States rising more rapidly than other goods and services, one wonders how students are bridging the affordability gap (Baum and Ma 2010). Are some students in the United States turning to commercial sex as one means to finance their educations? Such a phenomenon would be a paradox, as higher education is thought to be a path which should prevent individuals from entering this kind of work. However, as the cost of higher education skyrockets and financial sources dry up, students without the financial means to meet these demands must find other ways to pay for their college costs. Are the financial burdens of higher education driving American college and university students into the sex industry? And if so, what types of students are most likely to use commercial sex to finance their educations?

Several recent studies have addressed the involvement of college and university students in the commercial sex industry. Lantz (2005) found that student sex workers in Melbourne, Australia were driven into sex work primarily out of financial need to pay for school. A recent study on student participation in sex work in the UK found that 25.7% of undergraduate students reported knowing of other students participating in the sex industry (Roberts 2010). No study has yet investigated the occurrence or prevalence of student involvement in the sex industry in the U.S.

As an attempt to fill this gap in the literature, in this study, college and university students in Indianapolis were surveyed regarding their knowledge and perceptions of student involvement in the sex industry. A quantitative examination of student perceptions sheds light on whether or not this is taking place on college and university campuses in the U.S. This study also addresses how student awareness of and involvement in these activities is shaped by social class and gender. Although previous research has focused on economic need as a motivator for entering sex work, this study more holistically assesses how multiple aspects of social class shape students' experience with the sex industry. Given the variety of ways in which individuals, particularly students, exchange sex for resources, an additional aim is to highlight the commonalities of these behaviors with the term "transactional sexual behavior."

TOWARDS A DEFINITION: TRANSACTIONAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

As consumer capitalism tends to increasingly commodify every aspect of life, it is no surprise that sexuality has become a product to be marketed, sold and consumed. Sex is no exception to the forces of consumer capitalism; both the growth of the commercial sex industry and the use of sexuality in advertising attest to the commodification of sex (Seidman 2003). Baumeister and Vohs (2004) have theorized this commercialization on a more abstract level. They argue that sexuality is a principally female resource and that heterosexual sexual interaction is always comparable to an economic exchange, taking place within in a market where women act as the supply and men as the demand. From this perspective, sexuality can be exchanged for a myriad of other "goods," ranging from monetary and material compensation to intangible resources such as commitment, love, or affection. This definition of sex as a form of economic exchange leads one to an understanding of sexuality as "transactional," a term which has emerged in the literature on sexual relations in African countries (Luke 2003).

Luke (2003) explains that the commodification of sex includes both commercial transactions and more informal exchanges between partners. These informal exchanges, dubbed specifically "transactional

sex," have been cited as important factors in the spread of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa (Hunter 2002). The term transactional sex as it exists in the literature is already used to convey multiple things, as I will explore shortly. However, the concept embodied in this phrase is an important one which reaches beyond HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa. I propose that an adaptation of this term, namely "transactional sexual behavior," is a conceptual category into which subsets of commercially and informally exchanged sex can be usefully placed. It can function as an umbrella term, highlighting important commonalities that speak to the transactional nature of sexuality.

Transactional sex as it has been used thus far is not singularly defined. An important distinction is the connection between transactional sex and gifts; this term has largely come to mean an exchange of material goods other than money for sex (Hunter 2002). For instance, Luke (2003:67) defines transactional sex as "a transfer of money or gifts from one partner in exchange for sexual relations from the other." She broadens the understanding of what can be exchanged for sex, including rides to school, meals, and rent payments. Another important dimension of transactional sex is its informal nature. Hunter (2002) distinguishes transactional sex from prostitution, calling attention to transacting parties' construction as "boyfriends" and "girlfriends" rather than "prostitutes" and "clients," and he qualifies that transactional sex takes place within a broader set of obligations that does not always involve predetermined payments (Hunter 2002). A later study also differentiates between transactional sex and prostitution, arguing that transactional sex is different because gifts are often not exchanged at every sexual encounter (Chatterji *et al* 2006).

Choi (2006) extended the term transactional sex to the study of sex in China and altered its meaning. Unlike Hunter and Chatterji, Choi equates transactional sex with prostitution, identifying this behavior as the exchange of sexual favors for money. Conversely, a qualitative study of street prostitution in the US broadened the definition of prostitution (Belcher and Herr 2005). Belcher and Herr (2005), in describing the work of American street prostitutes, include transactions of sex for food, shelter, and drugs in addition to money in their description of the prostitution taking place. Although many other authors strictly think of prostitution in terms of a monetary exchange, these authors liken it to the aforementioned transactional sex by expanding the category of resources exchanged for sex.

Amidst the varying definitions of transactional sex, there is a common denominator: sexuality is exchanged for monetary or material resources, whether within a formalized relationship with a pre-determined price or within a looser context that seems to resemble partnership. This definition can be applied elsewhere. It is appropriate in describing industries within the formal sexual economy, including pornography, stripping, exotic dancing, escorting, and phone sex. It is also appropriate in describing the informal sexual economy, including prostitution and the more casual exchanges described in Africa. Thus, "transactional sexual behavior" (TSB) can be understood as any imitation or performance of a sexual act, including the removal of clothing for viewing, in exchange for a monetary or material resource. The resources transferred for sex include (but are not limited to) money, food, shelter or housing, gifts such as clothing or jewelry, and drugs.

The more casual exchanges described in studies of HIV transmission in Africa can also be extended elsewhere. Anecdotal references to this type of behavior have been made in the literature on American sex work. For instance, Kaye (2007) mentions a relationship between a male prostitute and his older "sugar daddy," who gives him gifts and seemingly has sex with him. Rich and Guidroz (2000) mention that the phone sex operators they studied would receive sporadic gifts from their clients, including candy and flowers. Lastly, Bernstein (2007) calls attention to how sex workers are not always simply paid a flat price for sexual acts—often, they are paid an hourly wage for more romantic services, including caresses and emotional attention. These references to more fluid TSB (as opposed to a flat,

fixed price on a one-time occasion) demonstrate the usefulness in extending this concept. Although traditionally employed in studies of Africa, it can be used to generically describe more informal TSB.

FORCES SHAPING TRANSACTIONAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Social Class

Understanding that TSB involves a transfer of monetary or material resources, it is naturally a phenomenon shaped by economic motivation. However, social class is understood as more than strictly economic need. In addition to differential access to hard economic resources, different social classes do different kinds of work, which are endowed with varying levels of occupational prestige. Thus, occupation is a common indicator of social class. People also tend to socialize, network, and gain access to certain occupational markets with and through others within their social class more than with individuals in other social classes. Lastly, the concept of social mobility presupposes that there are varying strata of groups within which individuals can move upward or downward. Thus, we can look at social class in terms of economic need, occupation and occupational prestige, social networking and social mobility. This multi-dimensional understanding of social class can be applied to TSB, demonstrating that it is an issue shaped holistically by social class.

Economic motivators.

TSB has long been recognized as motivated by poverty and depravity of opportunity (Brents *et al* 1996, Seidman 2003). During the Industrial Revolution, some women chose prostitution as the only alternative to either rough factory work or marriage (Bullough and Bullough 1987). Scott (1936) recognized that poor women in the early twentieth century were driven to choose prostitution in ways that upper class women could not comprehend. Belcher and Herr (2005) concluded in a study of Baltimore street prostitutes that prostitution was a natural pathway for these women because of their low-income backgrounds. They quote a respondent who states "you do what you got to do to make it and if that means sex, so be it" (Belcher and Herr 2005:119). Kaye (2007) makes a similar statement about male prostitutes in San Francisco, emphasizing that poverty played a significant role in several of his respondents' cases. He argues that poverty pushed his respondents toward prostitution both because of financial desperation and because of the lack of social support.

Other forms of TSB are also motivated by economic need. Abbott (2000) points out that women often go into porn for the money that they can earn in this profession. In the era of globalization, migrant sex workers are also motivated by economic necessity; migration for sex work is often a result of Third World poverty, and these sex workers often spend much of their earnings in remittances to support their families in their countries of origin (Pheterson 1989, Casas 2010, Chimienti 2010). The informal TSB described in sub-Saharan Africa is also often motivated by economic need, be it lack of opportunity for employment or food insufficiency (Hunter 2002, Weiser 2007). TSB is often motivated by economic need.

TSB can be understood as a broader class-based issue by understanding its often occupational nature. Although TSB does not always function as an occupation, it often does become a profession for the sex worker. For instance, prostitution today is often conceptualized as a legitimate profession, a "consumer service industry" in which laborers sell their sexual services (Brewis and Linstead 2000). Also, men and women featured in pornographic videos refer to themselves as "actors" and "actresses" and to their work as "performing," demonstrating their recognition of this activity as a profession (Abbott 2004). Exotic dancing is also considered a service job in which the dancer is a laborer selling his or her performance (Frank 1998). In the wake of the feminist movement, many sex workers began to recognize the validity of their TSB as work and their rights within this industry. In 1985, prostitutes and

ex-prostitutes gathered in Amsterdam for the First World Whores' Congress and drafted a "World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights" (Pheterson 1989). This effort to organize demonstrates sex workers' self-concept as professional in their TSB. People tend to choose occupations within a certain range respective to their social classes; thus, occupation is a standard indicator of social class. From this logic, it can be argued that TSB is a class-related phenomenon because it is so often constructed in terms of occupation.

TSB can function as an opportunity for social networking and social mobility. People tend to socialize with other members of the same social class. Abbott (2000) points out that talent often enter the porn industry through connections with friends, romantic partners, or co-workers; thus, people can engage in TSB through connections within their social classes. The opportunity for social mobility also draws some to TSB. Abbott (2000) also mentions how many of her respondents were drawn to the porn industry because of its potential for "fame and glamour." Hunter (2002) argues that TSB is an autonomous choice on the part of women within a patriarchal structure, perceived as granting them access to power and resources controlled by men. We conceptualize social networking and mobility in terms of social class; because of TSB's applications to these processes, TSB is further an issue shaped by social class.

Though TSB is partially shaped by economic motivation, it is a more complicated phenomenon. Bernstein (2007) says of middle class sex workers that their "sexual labour [sic] cannot be easily reduced to matters of socio-economic [sic] deprivation." The same can be argued for TSB altogether. It is more than sheer economic need that motivates individuals to choose to engage in TSB; rather, the decision is shaped more holistically by their social class. TSB's frequent construction as an occupation and its connections to social networking and mobility demonstrate dynamics of social class which include, but are larger than, basic economic motivations.

Gender Discrepancies

Much of the literature on TSB focuses on the transfer of resources from males to females, in which case the female sexuality is primarily endowed with an exchange value. Luke (2003) chose to focus exclusively on transactions from males to females in her review of literature on African transactional sex. Chatterji (2006) also focused on this direction of relationship, assuming that women always exchange sex for male gifts and resources. The literature on other forms of TSB also focuses on this gender direction. Abbott (2004) documented that there were approximately 20 male actors to every 200 female actresses in the pornographic production she witnessed throughout her field work. Brents *et al* (1996) took for granted that prostitution is a female-dominated field in their general overview. All of these findings support the theoretical work of Baumeister and Vohs (2004), who understand sexuality as a *female* resource.

The existing literature on TSB focuses on the exchange value of female sexuality for resources; researchers have documented the gender discrepancy among individuals who engage in TSB and theorized the normativity of this direction of interaction. However, it is crucial not to entirely overlook or dismiss male TSB, as many have done. As Kaye (2007) pointed out, male prostitutes are motivated by economic necessity just as females. The reality of socioeconomic motivation requires that we treat TSB as an issue grounded in class, despite the fact that its ramifications manifest differently for men and women.

Higher Education

Several studies to date have investigated student engagement in TSB. Lantz (2005) found that student sex workers in Melbourne, Australia were driven into sex work primarily out of financial need to pay for school. A recent study on student participation in sex work in the UK found that 25.7% of undergraduate students reported knowing of other students participating in the sex industry (Roberts 2010).

MOVING FORWARD

While social scientists have named and described various forms of TSB, a broader understanding of the commonalities between these behaviors is achieved through categorizing them with the term "transactional sexual behavior." Some have recognized the socioeconomic dimension to this phenomenon, but a more holistic understanding of social class and its relationship to TSB sheds new light. Some have pointed out the specific group of college and university students as a vulnerable population, but an exploration of this phenomenon among American college and university students is needed to test this idea. Gender has often been portrayed in such a way that males are left out of the conversation, which I find to be problematic. A quantitative surveying of American college and university students on social class and elements of TSB will add to our understanding of the definition of and pathways into TSB for American students today.

METHODS

Data

The data for this sample were collected by a self-administered survey (Appendix A) during April of 2011. 143 surveys were collected from both Marian University and Ivy Tech Community College students. Marian University is a small, Catholic, liberal arts university. Ivy Tech is a public community college. Both colleges are located in Indianapolis, Indiana. Marian University was chosen because the researcher had ready access to this population. Ivy Tech was chosen in an attempt to seek variety in social class among respondents; it was expected that students attending the community college would represent lower social classes than students attending a private university.

Sample

Permission was not granted to conduct a simple random sample in Marian University's dormitories. Therefore, the survey was administered using convenience sampling. The researcher and assistants approached respondents individually in public, common areas on Marian University's campus, including the student center, the library, the PE center, a dormitory lobby, and student lounges in an academic building. Due to both time constraints and lack of on-campus residence, convenience sampling was also used on Ivy Tech Community College's campus. The researcher approached respondents individually in the student center and cafeteria. Almost all of the students approached at Marian University and Ivy Tech Community College agreed to participate in the survey. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, each respondent was asked to read an informed consent form before completing the survey (Appendix B). Respondents were also asked to place their completed surveys in an envelope, so as to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The demographics of the sample are described in Table 1.

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MeasuresTSB.

A large portion of the survey was constructed to gauge the prevalence of TSB among the students surveyed. Specifically, questions asked about the respondent's knowledge of, likelihood to participate in, perceptions of others' participation in, and attitudes towards TSB. They also distinguished between commercial and informal TSB. Commercial TSB was measured in terms of the traditional dimensions of the commercial sex industry which can be categorized as taking place most often with strangers or individuals who are primarily clients and most often being exchanged for a formal cash price. For example, the survey gauged whether respondents were likely to participate in nine different activities of commercial TSB, including stripping, prostitution, and phone sex. Informal TSB was measured as the exchanges that take place between individuals with a pre-existing relationship, often for items beyond money. For example, the survey gauged knowledge of informal TSB by asking "Do you know of any

students who trade sexual favors more casually with friends, acquaintances, or romantic partners for money or other things (e.g. meals, shelter, gifts)?"

Social class.
The primary variable measured in this study is social class. A portion of the survey was constructed to assess respondents' social class through indicators of socioeconomic status. Specifically, questions asked about the education levels, occupations, and annual income levels of respondents' parents/guardians. Occupations were scored based on a standard seven-point scale, "1" being the highest occupational prestige score of "service class" and "7" being the lowest occupational prestige score of "employed farm laborers" (Weeden and Grusky 2005). Also, a portion of the survey questions were designed to assess financial need of the respondent. Though not necessarily representative of social class, financial need was thought to be a potential economic motivator for TSB and is thus class-related.

Gender. The secondary variable measured in this study is gender. The survey included one question which asked the respondents' sex.

Hypotheses

H1: TSB is taking place among university students in Indiana.

H2: The higher the social class of the respondent, the less likely he or she will be to know of or engage in TSB.

H3: Females will be more likely to know of and engage in TSB than males.

RESULTS

Descriptives of TSB

Frequencies run for indicators of TSB taking place among respondents or others within their social networks demonstrated that TSB is in fact occurring. As reported in Table 2a., 28.4% of respondents reported knowing at least one other student engaging in commercial TSB, while 16.4% of respondents reported knowing students who engage in informal TSB. Shown in Table 2b., more respondents reported knowledge of student participation in stripping and dancing than in any other category; taken together, these categories comprise 61.8% of reported knowledge of TSB. The least reported types of TSB were prostitution and offline pornography, which only 4.9% of respondents reported knowledge of. Out of the 16.4% of respondents who reported knowledge of informal TSB, 18 individual items were reported open-ended as being exchanged for sexual favors. Reported in Table 2c., 10 of these items represent basic necessities, including food, transit, and other living expenses. Also included are more luxury items, including drugs, alcohol, and gifts.

In addition to knowledge that TSB is taking place among other students, respondents reported some likelihood that they would engage in commercial TSB. As shown in Table 2d., 17.6% of respondents reported that they were likely to engage in at least one form of commercial TSB, and 7.7% of respondents reported that they were likely to engage in informal TSB. 50.7% of respondents reported that they perceived other students to be likely to engage in at least one form of commercial TSB, and 35% of respondents reported that they perceived other students to be likely to engage in informal TSB.

Respondents' attitudes towards TSB also reflect some likelihood for these behaviors to be seen as acceptable or normal among students. As shown in Table 2e., 27.4% of respondents reported that they felt TSB to be acceptable behavior, and 31.6% of respondents reported that they felt others to consider TSB acceptable.

TSB and Social Class Indicators
Bivariate analyses revealed certain trends between class indicators and indicators of TSB. As shown in Tables 3a. and 3b., higher levels of parents' education, when crosstabulated with indicators of TSB, revealed higher percentages of knowledge, likelihood, perceptions of others' likelihood, and favorable attitudes. For instance, for 6 out of 7 indicators of TSB, the highest percentages fell among respondents who reported mothers and fathers with bachelor's degrees or graduate degrees. Often, the lowest

percentages fell among education levels of less than high school or diploma/GED. While 35.7% of respondents whose mothers had graduate degrees reported being likely to engage in informal TSB, only 8.3% of respondents with mothers who had not completed high school reported the same likelihood. Thus, the higher the education level of the mother or father of the respondent, the more likely he or she was to report knowledge of, likelihood of, others' likelihood of, and favorable attitudes toward TSB.

Crosstabulations also revealed trends among parents' occupation and indicators of TSB. As shown in Tables 3c. and 3d., all of the highest percentages of knowledge, likelihood, perceptions of others' likelihood, and favorable attitudes fell in the occupational prestige category of "2" for both mother's occupation and father's occupation, which represented "petty bourgeoisie," "farmers," and "skilled workers and foremen" collapsed into one category. For instance, 57.1% of respondents with mothers in this occupational prestige category reported knowing at least one student engaged in both commercial and informal TSB. 65.5% of respondents with fathers in category "2" reported that they believed other students to be likely to engaged in at least one type of commercial TSB.

Furthermore, for mother's occupation, all of the lowest percentages fell in the category "3," which represented "nonskilled workers" and "employed farm labor" collapsed into one category. Thus, while 42.9% of respondents with mothers who were in the occupational prestige category of "2" said they were likely to engage in commercial TSB, only 8.3% of respondents with mothers who were in the occupational prestige category of "3" reported the same likelihood. The lowest percentages among father's occupation were not as homogenous, but they did fall within category "3" for 5 out of 7 indicators of TSB. Thus, respondents with parents from occupations within category "2" were most likely to report knowledge of, likelihood of, others' likelihood of, and favorable attitudes towards TSB.

Crosstabulations also revealed trends between parents' income and indicators of TSB. As shown in Table 3e., the highest percentages of likelihood, others' likelihood, and attitudes fell in the income range of $25,000-$50,000. For example, 44.8% of respondents whose parents made $25,000-$50,000 reported that TSB is acceptable. Thus, respondents whose parents made $25,000-$50,000 annually were most likely to report likelihood of, others' likelihood of, and favorable attitudes toward TSB.

TSB and Gender

Bivariate analysis revealed a clear trend in indicators of TSB based on the sex of the respondent. As shown in Table 3f., percentages of male knowledge, likelihood, perception of others' likelihood, and favorable attitudes consistently outweigh female percentages. Male percentages are higher than female percentages for every indicator except perceived likelihood of others' involvement in commercial TSB. Often, the male percentages significantly outweigh the female percentages, more than doubling or tripling them. For instance, 15.3% of males reported likelihood of engaging in informal TSB, while only 2.8% of females reported the same likelihood.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis expected that TSB would be taking place among students and that respondents would report knowledge, likelihood, and attitudes that reflect this occurrence. This hypothesis is supported by the data, which show that students are both knowledgeable and likely to engage in these behaviors. Though percentages reported were small, they reflect a general occurrence of these behaviors. They are in no way representative of Indiana university students, or even students of the specific institutions that were sampled. Convenience sampling and small sample size diminish representativeness. Furthermore, caution must be exercised in understanding what the percentages reported actually reflect. For instance, although 28.4% of respondents reported knowing at least one person who engages in commercial TSB, the reported

percentage cannot represent or arguably even suggest the actual amount of TSB that is taking place. There is no way to measure whether students from the same institution reported knowledge of the same individuals engaging in TSB. Validity may be compromised by these factors. Percentages reported cannot reflect how much TSB is taking place; only that some is taking place, and that it is generally acceptable for some students.

This is a foundation upon which further research can build. More quantitative analysis of larger samples drawn randomly would offer more definitive statistics on the prevalence of this phenomenon. Qualitative work exploring the lives of students who engage in TSB would offer a better understanding of the relationship between student status and TSB.

The second hypothesis expected that indicators of TSB would increase with the rank of the respondent's social class, as indicated by parents' education, occupation, and income. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. The highest indications of TSB taking place were reported among respondents with parents who had bachelor's and graduate degrees. The hypothesis would have expected this group to have the lowest indication of TSB, but the opposite was true. Furthermore, although the highest indications of TSB were not among the respondents whose parents had the highest occupational prestige, they were also not among the respondents whose parents had the lowest occupational prestige. The highest percentages fell in the middle, nullifying the expectation that indication of TSB would decrease with occupational prestige. Lastly, the highest indications of TSB were not among those with the lowest parents' income. The highest indications were actually reported among those in the income category of $25,000-$50,000. In terms of parents' education, occupation, and income, expectations of TSB were not actualized. However, trends in the data suggest that social class does play a role. The highest percentages fell homogenously among specific education levels, occupational prestige scores, and income. The two can hardly be described as disconnected in light of the homogeneity of these results. However, this grouping did not follow the direction expected (that is, the higher the education, occupational prestige, and income the lower the indication of TSB) and no clear relationship can be defined.

Future research is needed to more clearly define the relationship between these variables. The grouping of higher percentages among certain categories of class indicators suggests that class may play a role, but this data leaves unclear what that relationship might actually look like. A limitation of the data is sample size; a larger, more diverse sample might produce more telling results.

The third hypothesis expected that females would be more likely to know about
and engage in TSB than males. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. In fact, the opposite was true. Further research is needed to understand the disparity between the higher proportion of women who participate in the more well-researched dimensions of the sex industry and the lower reported knowledge, likelihood, and attitudes among women in this study.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that Indiana college and university students are aware of some TSB taking place among fellow students. Respondents reported levels of knowledge, likelihood, perceptions of others' likelihood, and attitudes that reflect an occurrence of TSB among university students. Social class indicators seem to play a role in indicators of TSB, but not the expected role. Further research is needed to more clearly define how TSB is taking place among college students and how it is related to social class and gender.

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