Temporary Transience and Qualitative Research: Methodological Lessons from Fieldwork with Independent Travelers and Seasonal Workers

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Abstract: *Fieldwork with independent travelers and seasonal workers raises specific methodological considerations that result from the temporary transience of both communities. In this paper the authors bring together their experiences of the ways in which this transience both enabled and challenged various aspects of data collection, including integrating themselves into the participant network, locating participants and arranging interviews, adhering to ethical standards, and withdrawing from their data collection, as well as participants' perceptions of their research projects.*

Keywords: *ethnography, backpacking, tourism, sexual consent, casual sex, mobility*

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In 2005 the authors independently embarked on research in quite different substantive areas. In the summer Melanie headed to a small mountain resort community in the Canadian Rockies to conduct fieldwork with seasonal workers related to their understandings of sexual consent in the context of casual sex (see Beres, 2006). That fall Kristin spent time in India interviewing independent travelers (including backpackers) to find out how and if they think their travel is connected to colonial legacies and structural global inequality (see Lozanski, 2007). Whereas Kristin studied the consumers of tourist services, Melanie's research focused on the service providers. Together our projects represent the complementary sides of the tourism industry and highlight the significance of transience for qualitative fieldwork.

In addition to challenges faced by qualitative researchers in general and field researchers in particular, researching temporarily transient populations presents unique challenges, dilemmas, and opportunities. Our work with seasonal workers and with independent travelers begins to elaborate the implications of temporary transience for qualitative fieldwork. By bringing our experiences together with the relevant literature, we speak specifically to the methodological considerations that arise through work with temporarily transient groups. Through our analysis of entering these subcultures, we problematize the fixity of community structure that continues to underpin ethnographic research (Muir, 2004).

In contrast to traditional ethnographic approaches, transience limited the possibility of using gatekeepers as a means to enter transient networks. At the same time, that made it easier for us to pass as members of our respective groups because of less exclusive group boundaries. Transience also facilitated meeting participants through informal and porous social networks but complicated our abilities to arrange and conduct interviews as participants were hypermobile. We also reflect on how ethical procedures were complicated by public spaces and how participants' perceptions of anonymity both enabled and confused their discussions of delicate subjects. Finally, we briefly consider participants' perceptions of research projects that took place in desirable geographies away from home and unpack the ways in which our research projects were perceived as "scams," a perception that facilitated our research objectives at the same time as it undermined our status as competent researchers.

Ethnographic subjects and spaces

Although traditional ethnographic approaches assume stability of people and/or place, recent debates have challenged this presumption. As ethnographies of mobile participants, our research is entrenched in current, ongoing conversations about the active social construction of "the field" (see, for example, Amit, 2000; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). This dialogue has initiated a critique of traditional forms of participant observation, which begin from assumptions of distinct and cohesive communities set in apolitical, bounded spaces. Ethnographers who conduct research without such finite communities (see Caputo, 2000; Muir, 2004) or within their everyday geographies (see Caputo, 2000; Norman, 2000) continue to have to justify their research as legitimate because of the established tenets that define ethnographic fieldwork as research that takes place in culturally Other communities (Dirks, 2004; Lacy & Douglass, 2002) in distant, exotic places (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

In addition to disrupting the traditionalist notion of culture and space, contemporary debates have foregrounded the ethnographer as an active participant in his or her research. Turner (2000), for instance, has pointed to a researcher's authorship of events through her or his subject position as "an active, situated, participant in the construction of accounts and representations" (p. 51). Amit (2000) integrated her reflections on the researcher as an active participant with debates surrounding the constitution of the field. For Amit the researcher is central to the very construction of the field:

> The notion of immersion implies that the "field" which ethnographers enter exists as an independently bounded set of relationships and activities which is autonomous of the fieldwork through which it is discovered. Yet in a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts, the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be labouriously constructed, prised apart from all other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred. (p. 6)

Within such necessarily unstable fields, researchers must negotiate their own mobilities between and within their ethnographic spaces. These negotiations have significant impacts on the methodological practices of such research. The methodological decisions and practices of a researcher reflect their theoretical orientation towards their ethnographic subjects and spaces as well as the material implications of their transient selves.

Although both of us left our homes and entered communities or subcultures that our participants iden-

tified with to some extent (i.e., those of seasonal workers and independent travelers), transience and mobilities troubled the fields in which we conducted our research. Not only did our decisions about the types of people we sought out to include and our expectations about the spaces most useful to attracting those people direct our research, but the very nature of both independent travel and seasonal work meant that however we were able to constitute a field for our research, it was inherently volatile because of the ways in which seasonal workers and travelers are hypermobile. Thus, in our fieldwork contexts, the transience of both people and space was exaggerated, a quality that resulted in particular methodological considerations.

For both of our projects the transience of our participants was foundational to our research. In addition to creating social detachment from their typical activities and social networks, transience affected the behaviors of these groups in a way that was critical for our respective projects. For both seasonal workers and independent travelers, their time away from home often is a period of fun and lack of responsibilities (Harrison, 2003) prior to settling down into a more "mainstream" lifestyle (Huxley, 2004; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003). For many seasonal workers and tourists there is a major focus on experiencing new things (see Burrows & Olsen, 1998; Eiser & Ford, 1995; Noy, 2004) and participating in environments that promote hedonism, including drinking, drugs, and sex (Diken & Lausten, 2004). In such social contexts, Eiser and Ford have argued, individuals are likely to try out experimental behaviors. The situational disinhibition enabled by transience manifested itself as participation in casual sex in Jasper and as self-pleasure achieved through a cultural Other in India.

The similarities between our projects extended beyond the characteristics of the communities we studied. As we began to talk about our research experiences, we realized that the methodological implications of our work with transient groups overlapped significantly. Although the timelines for the transience of seasonal workers and independent travelers differed slightly—Melanie's participants were in her site for fieldwork for several weeks to a few months or more, whereas Kristin's moved through spaces within days or even hours—we found common methodological themes with interesting similarities and differences in how these problems both presented themselves and how we worked to resolve them. These themes turn on Sorenson's (2003) observation that backpackers (along with other independent travelers and seasonal workers) do not constitute a coherent group, nor do they occupy a stable space. As such, backpackers, independent travelers, and seasonal workers are exemplars of the issues troubling ethnographic fieldwork. Dissonances arise between the methodological demands of working with independent travelers and seasonal workers, which lack a cohesive group and a consistent locale, and more traditional ethnographic approaches, which are implicitly predicated on either stable communities (as in traditional anthropological ethnographies, such as those by Malinowski (1922) and Mead (1928/1971) or fixed spaces, such as Whyte's (1981) Street Corner Society.

Prior to embarking on our fieldwork and through our data analysis and write-up, both of us had explored methodological issues related to temporarily transient populations that other researchers had identified. Unfortunately, relatively few researchers have specifically addressed the pragmatic impacts of temporary transience on methodological considerations. Melanie uncovered a dissertation (Gallagher, 1997) that involved research with seasonal workers in the same mountain community, research that was not entirely successful because of an inability to locate and communicate with potential participants. These obstacles were due in considerable part to the transience of these workers. Other researchers on tourist experiences and casual sex among seasonal workers have used quantitative or other approaches that require significantly less time commitment from participants in the field (e.g., Eiser & Ford, 1995; Harrison, 2003). Researchers have also surveyed people before and after their travel experiences rather than trying to secure their participation while they were on vacation (Harrison, 2003; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997).

Transient methodologies

Despite the increasing literature on the instability of the field (e.g., Amit, 2000; Hume & Mulcock, 2004) and a researcher's relationship to it, there is little scholarship that speaks to implications of this theorizing for methodological considerations such as participant recruitment, the participant-research relationship, and the logistics of data collection. Kurotani (2004) has made an important contribution to these issues as she has taken up some of the difficulties she encountered in her multisited ethnographic research with the wives of Japanese corporate employees who were living as expatriates in the United States. In addition to the problem of obtaining funding for such research, Kurotani faced further obstacles because these women were only temporarily in the United States, a status that made them disinclined to build new relationships and establish social networks. Moreover, they did not occupy a geographical field as their social networks were not spatially defined: They lived in a variety of locales,

did not center their activities in any cluster of locations, and generally did not invite each other into their homes. Kurotani's work is significant, yet the tight boundaries of the Japanese expatriate community contrast with the relative porosity of the seasonal worker and independent travel subcultures.

Several authors who have conducted fieldwork with tourists have included short methodological sections to frame their substantive discussions. However, these methodological pieces are often superficial. For instance, Duffy's (2004) only reference to data collection is a footnote that indicates the number of ecotourists and locals interviewed. Kontogeorgopoulos (2003) provided a solid context for his choice of tourist sites, tourist companies, and the types of tourist he interviews in his analysis of alternative travel in Thailand, but he explained neither how he made contact with the organizations or individuals nor how the actual interviewing process took place. In her article on travelers' perceptions of authenticity and intimacy in Thailand, Conran (2006) did not refer to method at all.

Some tourism scholars have put greater emphasis on their methodological decisions and obstacles. Harrison (2003) found that her desire to interview tourists in Hawaii was limited by their reluctance to give up their leisure time, and instead she opted to focus on the integration of travel experiences into the daily lives of tourists who had returned home. Spreitzhofer (1998, 2002) used narrative interviews with backpackers in southeast Asia and pointed out that he did not use a recording device to maintain the casual atmosphere of backpacking travel. In his tellingly titled article "Backpacker Ethnography," Sorenson (2003) addressed the ways in which he identified participants and his self-reflexivity regarding his status as both a backpacker and a researcher. In spite of these further methodological elaborations, however, there remains a lack of in-depth attention to the implications of transience for their research.

Entering transient contexts

Entering "the field"

Novice researchers preparing for fieldwork are often given a plethora of advice from more seasoned researchers and instructional texts. Central to this advice is often the importance of "gaining entry" into a particular field.[1] To gain entry and access to people who can help researchers learn and explore research questions, students and researchers are taught to identify important informants in a setting, especially gatekeepers (Fontana & Frey, 1998; see also Bailey, 1996; Jorgensen, 1989). To this end, it is suggested that the

researcher either "start at the top" (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002; Jorgensen, 1989), working with a community member with high status, or develop a relationship with someone who is well networked within the community (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Thus, researchers are encouraged to contact key people in the field.

In contexts with stable group formations in which hierarchies and networks are established, this advice might serve researchers well. However, fieldwork with transient populations emphasizes the shortcomings of traditional ethnographic paradigms. For instance, is it possible to identify gatekeepers among a group of backpackers from various countries who have little or no connection to one another or among newly arrived seasonal workers with little connection to one another and the larger community? If gatekeepers do, in fact, exist within these communities, what is their role vis-à-vis other community members?

In the case of independent travelers, there is a social network that is constituted by shared travel experiences and narratives (Sorenson, 2003). However, this network is continuously disrupted by the ongoing mobility that underpins such travel. In this setting, there is no hierarchy, and there are no key informants. In any possible capacity as a gatekeeper, the best a participant can offer is introductions to other participants. By contrast, the community of seasonal workers in which Melanie was working had more structure than the backpacking community and, as a result, appeared to have more potential gatekeepers to facilitate access to the worker. By virtue of being workers who reside (albeit temporarily) in the community, they have employers and landlords. In her study of seasonal workers Gallagher (1997) contacted the management of one of the largest apartment complexes and seasonal employers to gain access to their tenants and employees; however, she still had many problems securing participants. Seasonal workers had little connection with their employers and landlords. Moreover, they did not feel connected with the community and thus had little vested interest in contributing to research about it, at least through the formal hierarchical structures of work and housing. The use of such formal avenues to access high-status individuals, with the assumption that they were, indeed, gatekeepers, as a means of gaining access to seasonal workers was not practical because of this dissociation, a likely hindrance for Gallagher's attempts to locate participants for her study.

This lack of social structure also complicates suggestions to ask permission to conduct research. Even scholars who do not assume that there are formal gatekeepers in every setting almost always suggest that researchers gain permission to access the setting

informally (see Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Yet among the temporarily transient populations with which we worked, there is no person or organization that represented the community and could thus be used as a contact point through which to request permission. Although gaining permission was not feasible and thus not a major undertaking for our research, Dewalt and Dewalt distinguished between gaining permission and gaining access. They suggested that permission is granted most often through formal gatekeepers, whereas access is a more informal and difficult process through which researchers are able to secure access to individuals or events.

In this sense the lack of gatekeepers and official community representatives facilitated research inasmuch as seasonal workers and independent travelers have loose social networks that were relatively easy to access. Participation in independent travel, and thus membership in the network of independent travelers, is open to anyone with appropriate dress, behavior, or associates (Sorenson, 2003). Membership also turns on geography as most cities have a "backpacker ghetto" (an area of high-density, low-budget accommodation, restaurants geared to travelers' tastes and budgets, and shops with souvenirs appealing to the aesthetic of independent travel; Hottola, 2005; Spreitzhofer, 2002; Suvantola, 2002) and participation in appropriate activities (Spreitzhofer, 2002). Given the decentered character of travel, there were no formal organizations or spaces that would have enabled contact with travelers. Within these places and because she presented a discernable traveler appearance, social networks were easily accessible to Kristin simply because of a shared "foreigner" identity. As Sorenson, Spreitzhofer, and Suvantola each experienced, simply being a backpacker provided Kristin with full and unmediated access to other backpackers as potential research participants.

Although there were no organizations representative of seasonal workers in Jasper, some organizations were tangentially related. To begin developing her connections with seasonal workers and integrating into their social networks, Melanie decided to approach these community organizations following Lofland and Lofland's (1995) suggestion that gaining entry to a research site is facilitated by connections in that location. The first organization she contacted provides a broad range of services and support to all members of the community, including seasonal workers. From there she was referred a local HIV/AIDS organization. Most of their programs are directed toward seasonal workers with a major goal of reducing HIV and other sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates among youth. These organizations specifically target the social activities of seasonal workers. For example, they distribute condoms in local bars twice each week, organize social events (including a volleyball tournament), provide tours to various local attractions for seasonal workers, and host a fashion show. Through these activities they help to cultivate a more cohesive social network of seasonal workers. The sponsored events, along with the community-building events, provided Melanie with better opportunities to integrate into the network of seasonal workers.

Melanie was also able to make her way into a less organized social network using her connection with the HIV/AIDS organization. The staff was particularly helpful in facilitating her entry into various social networks. In addition to several members of the staff agreeing to be interviewed and to talk about their experiences working with youth in Jasper, they invited her out to parties and to the bar, an entry point that proved invaluable. Unlike the travelers in India, who openly welcomed new people to their collectives, the seasonal workers tended to stick to themselves after they had established relationships with other workers. By the middle of the summer seasonal workers distinguished other workers from tourists, with whom, for the most part, they did not socialize. Without the initial introduction and contact from the HIV/AIDS organization and its staff, it would have been much more difficult for Melanie to distinguish herself from tourists and become accepted as part of the local young adult group.

Gaining acceptance

Because of their transient nature networks of independent travelers and seasonal workers (at least at the beginning of the summer) were open to newcomers. In addition, unlike research that tends to study "up" or "down" (Luff, 1999, and Fine, 1998, respectively), our respective research took place in communities that were not socially distanced from us. As a result, although there were variations between the researchers and individual participants, including the potential barriers of difference in sexual orientation, racialization, or social status (Reinharz, 1992), these dissimilarities were often overcome by other shared characteristics. Because of our assumed ages; our appearances, which to some extent involved taking on the specific dress practices of seasonal workers at the bar and of western independent travelers; our participation in appropriate social and recreational activities; and our presence and temporary transience in the same geographical space, we were able to move through the relatively weak exclusionary boundaries that defined our respective subcultures and pass as members of the group.

In India transience facilitated not only getting into a porous network but also bringing individuals into the study because travelers and Kristin (as both traveler and researcher; Sorenson, 2003; Spreitzhofer, 2002) were strangers eager to approach and engage with one another. Recognizing each other as foreigners, travelers shared both experience and advice away from ostensibly untrustworthy Indians affiliated with the tourism industry. Because people were moving quickly between locations and were often arriving in places of which they had no knowledge other than the sketch in their guidebook, trust in other travelers was quickly established regardless of whether the other travelers were actually able to provide useful information. Instead, this trust was founded on the basis of a perceived shared identity and against the assumed deception of locals working in the tourism industry.

Once initial contact had been made, which might have consisted of something as inconsequential as asking directions or whether the food at a given restaurant was palatable, rapport developed between travelers. Given the small populations of travelers and the relatively small geography of the tourist district, repeat encounters were likely, each of which contributed to an informal relationship. Moreover, because traveler routes were entrenched through available transportation routes and guidebooks (Spreitzhofer, 2002), it was not uncommon to meet the same person in multiple places along the way despite traveling separately. On these occasions subsequent meetings were strangely like reunions with close friends, and in interviews that took place during our second or third encounter, participants were far more candid in their discussions and reflections.

The one limiting factor to a fully open membership of travelers was that of road status (Sorenson, 2003). This status, Sorenson has argued, constitutes a hierarchy through which adherence to appropriate forms of travel are policed, and backpacking is reproduced as a relatively coherent institution despite its unstable population and ever-shifting field. Road status, as Sorenson defined it, "comprises hardship, experience, competence, cheap travel, along with the ability to communicate it properly" (p. 856); it is the evidence that for backpackers travel is not a vacation, as it is assumed to be for tourists. When approaching random travelers with the intention of proposing interviews, Kristin was frequently subject to a display of such traveling status to establish a hierarchy of travel practices. This hierarchy had the ability to facilitate or shutdown the possibilities for interviews. In one instance Kristin met and chatted with a few travelers while waiting for a train. While trying to find a place in the conversation to insert an interview request, the other travelers asked what class of train she was using. When she replied "second a/c [air conditioned]," the response of the travelers was one of poorly disguised distaste. Kristin's decision to use middle-class forms of travel rather than the least expensive (and highest road status) option terminated this conversation and any potential to propose an interview.

Whereas outside of specific challenges to her road status Kristin was essentially integrated into the activities by sitting and drinking chai in the courtyard of a guesthouse, Melanie had to make a much more deliberate effort to participate in the chosen activities of seasonal workers. Correctly assuming, based on Gallagher's (1997) experience, that many workers would be reluctant to spend their free time doing interviews, Melanie guessed that they would instead prefer to spend their time off socializing with friends, hiking, biking, climbing, or participating in some other activity facilitated by living in the mountains. Thus, she planned on participating in social activities with seasonal workers to get to know them and talk with them about casual sex. Envisioning herself with a plethora of hiking partners, discussing the intricacies of "hooking up" and heterosex while trudging up the picturesque mountain slopes, she assumed that these young workers were drawn to the mountains for the same reason she is: the sports and activities. It quickly became clear that this was not the case. The majority of seasonal workers in town were there for the social life of drinking and partying, not the tranquil mountain adventures that are the realm of the permanent residents and tourists. Thus, rather than having conversations while hiking up slopes, her social activities most often consisted of going to the bar and to house parties.

When workers arrived in Jasper, they tended to develop relationships with other seasonal workers and for the most part did not socialize with locals. This segregation was partly due to locals' reluctance to open up to seasonal workers or to build lasting friendships with people who would inevitably leave at the end of the summer. Given the lack of interaction of seasonal workers with both locals and tourists, it was important for Melanie to portray herself in ways similar to seasonal workers to be trusted by them and to be allowed access to their group. This self-representation was accomplished in part through connections with the local HIV/AIDS organization and through participation in various social activities. In addition, simply by being in town for a longer period, Melanie began to be recognized by workers as someone who had been around town for a while. Often when she met new people, they asked her where she worked, assuming that she, too, was a transient employee.

Although working and living with seasonal workers would have further facilitated Melanie's access to participants, these would also have posed barriers to her research. Prior to entering the field, Melanie contemplated working in Jasper at one of the local businesses. This employment would have provided her with greater access to seasonal workers and helped to establish rapport and social networks, as most young adults socialize with coworkers. However, most businesses required staff to work full-time hours. Such a commitment would have made it difficult to schedule interviews, participate in social activities, and find time to work with data.

It might also have been possible for Melanie to share accommodation with seasonal workers as another means through which to develop rapport and to participate in their social activities, including more opportunities to hear stories about their casual sex experiences. Instead she chose to live with a woman who ran a bed and breakfast. This decision provided her with a break from the active social lives of the workers and the space to write field notes and begin data analysis. It also provided a space in which she could ensure the security of her data and the anonymity of her participants.

Locating participants and arranging interviews

Many qualitative handbooks contain little commentary on the logistics of interviewing once researchers have established relationships by building trust (e.g., Dewalt & Dewalt, 1993; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). However, in settings in which participants are transient, there are further complications to the research process. Although it was quite easy for us to cross porous boundaries and subsequently meet seasonal workers or independent travelers and invite them to participate in interviews, arranging interviews and/or subsequent meetings with participants became a significant logistical difficulty and a major limitation to data collection.

Meeting and recruiting participants

Having established herself as part of the community of independent travelers, mostly by sharing their spaces, Kristin found it relatively easy to meet travelers and invite them into the study. In day-to-day public sites, such as guesthouse courtyards, restaurants, buses, trains, and shared taxis, as well as sites of tourist activities, it was ordinary to begin conversations with unknown travelers. Sorenson (2003) suggested that because backpackers have no shared culture beyond their travel, their conversations with one another generally draw on travel experiences. Thus, in such conversations a common question is "Why did you come to India?" Once conversations began, Kristin used this question as a launching point to tell the person about her research. In this way, the lack of shared culture of the backpackers beyond their travel experiences not only enabled introductory conversation but provided an easy means through which Kristin could disclose her social location as a researcher and make a formal request for an interview. These interviews were often conducted on the spot (see below) and took place in a variety of locales, including rickshaws, trains, beaches, and restaurants, similar to Spreitzhofer's (2002) experience:

> The interviews took place both in the urban backpacker centres…as well as along the guide-book-defined trails across the region: in traveler restaurants and on locals markets, at airports and bus stations, climbing Sumatra's volcanoes and relaxing in the shade of buddhist wats, sweating on Indonesia's crowded pelni ferries as well as freezing in Malaysia's air-conditioned coaches, even on Cambodia's "Killing Fields"—in short, wherever western-style backpacking was evident. (p. 119)

Melanie employed a variety of recruitment methods, including placing posters around town, handing out flyers, talking about her research at staff orientations and other events throughout the summer, and approaching staff at the local bars. She also met potential participants through snowball sampling and referrals from people she knew. Considering that the group in which she was interested was new to town, staff orientations were used to as a method to inform newcomers to Jasper about her study. However, the most successful recruitment strategy was talking with people in social settings and in bars. This success reinforced Melanie's understanding of the relationship that seasonal workers have with the town and the community: Social relationships were of utmost importance, and the spaces in which these relationships were enacted were the best places to identify and relate to the young seasonal workers. In these settings Melanie was viewed as a peer and thus more trustworthy than in the formal settings of staff orientations.

Arranging interviews with transient participants

The transient nature of the seasonal workers in Jasper created interesting challenges to arranging and maintaining appointments. Gallagher (1997) found it diffi-

cult to get in contact with participants because they had limited or no phone access. Unlike Gallagher, Melanie found that almost all seasonal workers had phone access at home or through a cell phone. She purchased a cell phone for her time there and, in a technological sense, found it was easy to keep in touch with potential participants. However, at times it became difficult to find people who were willing to give up some of their time to participate, the same problem confronted by Harrison (2003). The seasonal workers were more interested in being interviewed in their first couple of weeks in town, earlier on in the summer, when they did not know many other people and were looking for ways to fill their free time. Later in the summer recruitment was more difficult; seasonal workers had established social networks and were reluctant to schedule an interview because they would rather spend time with their friends. As their priority was having a good time, people were willing to sit down and have an interview with Melanie as long as it did not interfere with their social plans. Thus, interview scheduling became difficult when the weather was great and participants proposed going to the beach for the day or camping for the weekend, activities that resulted in some people "forgetting" about interviews. In one instance a participant told Melanie that his roommate had planned a party for the evening his interview was scheduled, so he could no longer do the arranged interview because he had to help prepare for the party.

Another difficulty was the seasonal workers' lack of stability. Very few people had firm plans about how long they would stay in town. One participant said she was staying into the fall and then left in mid-August. Melanie also received a phone call from a participant 5 minutes before her scheduled interview appointment saying that she had to pack because she decided to leave town the next morning and did not have time to participate. Thus, although their full-time employment suggested a more permanent and stable residency, seasonal workers were still somewhat unpredictable in their decisions to stay in town.

Volatility was similarly problematic for Kristin. With independent travelers, serendipitous timing was critical to arranging and conducting interviews within unpredictable travel schedules. At least four interviews were lost when travel plans changed on short notice. An older couple who Kristin had made arrangements to interview simply did not show up. As they had seemed very interested in the opportunity to talk about how their experience was much different than many other independent travelers given their age, it is possible that their no-show was due to participation in recreational activities that were more interesting and conflicted with the appointment (much like the social lives of sea-

sonal workers) or simply not being able to find the meeting place. In other instances, potential participants changed their minds about partaking in activities at the last minute or ended up indulging in too many intoxicants to conduct the interview to which they had agreed. These instances were exacerbated by Kristin's transience: The decision to move repeatedly and often on short notice was in keeping with the mobility practices of independent travelers, yet it often subverted research practices by moving Kristin away from participants who might have agreed to an interview after a slightly longer period.

Although a lack of free time was not an issue for Kristin's research in the same way that it was for Melanie's project, and a range of participants could be found participating in a range of activities, contact with participants was difficult in a more logistical way. Unlike the seasonal workers, few travelers had cell phones, and given that Kristin was one of the many without and that public phones were erratic in availability and functionality, phones were of little use to the project. E-mail was similarly frustrating, as Internet cafés were sometimes difficult to find, occasionally very expensive, and not infrequently marred by a poor (or absent) connection. Even if phones or e-mail had been useful, designating a place to meet in an area that is poorly known to both people was a complicated proposition. Even some "obvious" meeting places did not lend themselves to researcher and participant getting together. For example, Kristin made arrangements to meet a participant at his hotel in Bangalore, but the front desk of the hotel reported that not only did they not have a person by the participant's name, no such room number existed. Kristin subsequently learned that there are three hotels of the same name in the city.

The difficulties of meeting up with potential participants for both Melanie and Kristin underscored the need to be able to interview on the spot should an opportunity present itself, an orientation that resulted in multiple interviews in a single day if willing participants were present. Unlike ethnographic practices that emphasize a long-term engagement with a few people, the temporary presence of seasonal workers and independent travelers meant that "instead of prolonged interaction with the few, fieldwork has had to be structured around impromptu interactions with the many" (Sorenson, 2003, p. 850). For both Melanie and Kristin's projects, preparedness to conduct an interview on the spot was essential. Both traveled with information sheets, consent forms, recorders, microphones, and spare batteries, as well as interview schedules at all times, a strategy particularly useful for

those transient groups in which people are not in the habit of making appointments days in advance.

Ethical considerations

A taken-for-granted aspect of research ethics when using interviews is the maintenance of participants' confidentiality. Often the protection of participants' identities is accomplished by conducting interviews in neutral, private spaces (such as those offered by university offices and meeting rooms), locking data in safe locations, and using pseudonyms for any direct quotes drawn from the data. However, guarantees of confidentiality are much more complicated when working with temporarily transient populations: When conducting research outside of the university and away from infrastructure that provides private and safe spaces for conducting interviews, it is much more difficult to negotiate the ethical expectations of confidentiality and anonymity.

Confidential space

Conducting research outside of an area with a university meant a lack of suitable space to hold interviews for both researchers. For Melanie's study in particular, one of the key concerns on entering the field was to find a suitable place for interviewing that would protect both the confidentiality of participants and her safety. Sometimes spaces that were safe and private were complicated by their politics. Although it was necessary to use the office space offered to her by the HIV/AIDS organization, Melanie had concerns that participants would associate her with the organization and would change and color their stories. Fortunately, the organization is known predominantly for handing out condoms and does not seem stigmatized as an AIDS organization. When setting up interviews, Melanie made it clear that the organization was lending her office space but that she was not a part of their organization. Most participants interviewed in the office of the AIDS organization did not mention the space and seemed comfortable, although a couple of participants expressed interest and surprise at many of the items in the office, including condoms, female condoms, lube, and pamphlets related to many sexual and relationship health issues. Although many people were willing to be interviewed in the office, others preferred meeting elsewhere. Ultimately, Melanie conducted interviews in a variety of locations, including a yoga loft, coffee shops, participants' apartments,[2] two bars, and outdoor spaces in addition to the office space.

Melanie did not notice a difference in the depth or tone of interviews conducted in private spaces as compared to those done in public spaces. At first she was unsure about how interviews in coffee shops would go, considering that the space was public and, as such, she could not guarantee confidentiality or anonymity. However, the participants were generally quite open and willing to talk about their experiences in these public places. In some ways it seemed as though some participants felt that public locations were more anonymous than meeting in the office. If people saw them sitting with her in a coffee shop, they would assume that they were friends just "out for coffee," whereas if someone saw the interview taking place in the office, it would be more obvious that it was not just a casual conversation that was taking place.

For independent travelers, confidential space was much less of a consideration. While working through the consent form with participants, several brushed aside the issue of confidentiality and told Kristin that they did not care if she used their real names or that it did not matter if people knew who they were. Kristin conducted interviews in many public spaces, such as restaurants, trains, beaches, and guesthouse courtyards, as noted above. In many of these instances, English-speaking Indians and tourists were present and were often obviously listening to the interview. In fact, it was extremely difficult to arrange private interviews with individuals because of the social nature of independent travel as well as the lack of private space. In several instances the participant's traveling companion was present during the interview, an arrangement that seemed to bolster the confidence of the participant. One interview was conducted with a group of the participants' friends present. This participant chose to do the interview in front of an audience even though there was space with greater privacy available away from the courtyard. Furthermore, Kristin's traveling companion sat in on many of the interviews with the permission of the participant. Likely because they were speaking about the same kinds of topics and ideas they would have spoken about in a casual conversation, and because these topics were more global than personal in nature (as opposed to Melanie's work on sexual consent), independent travelers were very unconcerned with having their confidentiality protected in spite of Kristin's ethical obligations to do so.

Perceptions of anonymity

Because of the number of travelers in any given tourist district and the distance of travelers from one another on returning to their homes, travelers often had the sense that they were anonymous. Because of the transience of their time in India, their relationship with the researcher, and their lifestyle while overseas, few trav-

elers had reservations about participating or about speaking their mind during the interview, including making racist or sexist comments. Indeed, in some ways the perceived anonymity that enables travelers in general to take risks uncharacteristically (Gogia, 2006), violate prohibitions (Diken & Lausten, 2004), and reconstruct themselves (Noy, 2004) was reproduced in the interviews Kristin conducted.

For some participants, this sense of anonymity stemmed from the low likelihood of ever encountering the researcher again, an overt explanation that was likely complemented by the decreased presence of the social norms and filters of their own country on foreign geographies (see Diken & Lausten, 2004). Feeling anonymous, many participants spoke to issues related to colonialism using language that they might have been less likely to use in their own countries:

> This is India and baksheesh [roughly "bribe"] system is a very nice system if you have money and as a Westerner you have money so you always able to do whatever, to get to whatever you want to get, not always but most of the case. If you push harder enough they will in the end, they the Indian people will do whatever you want because you're the white man. I have no idea why it's like that, but I'm using it for me. As long as I don't screwing anybody else, why not? (Daniel)

Thus, a participant's sense of anonymity worked to overcome possible reluctance to speak about a potentially politically delicate subject (see below).

Similar to Kristin's field work, Melanie found that many seasonal workers were willing to talk with her and tell her about their experiences of casual sex. Their loose connections to the community and short duration of their time in town gave them a sense of anonymity that they might not have felt in their hometowns. The phrase "what happens in [town] stays in [town]" also applied to the interview situation: Like their sexual experiences, the interview would not follow them back to their home town. This attitude contrasted sharply with that of one of the interviewees who grew up in town and was quite concerned with ensuring his confidentiality. Prior to the interview he asked Melanie many questions regarding her qualifications and training, including the ethics procedure. He made several amendments to the consent form, including the removal of the statement allowing Melanie to use direct quotes in her dissertation and subsequent publications. As a local in Jasper he was acutely aware of the potential for rumors and wanted to make sure that his stories did not circulate around Jasper.

In light of his concerns, Melanie was shocked that he wanted to conduct an interview in one of the local pubs. She offered to use the office instead, but he said that he was more comfortable in the bar. Although he did not explain his choice, it could be that a bar gave him the cover of a date or going "out for a beer," given the inconspicuous recording device. On the other hand, if other locals saw him walking into the HIV/AIDS office with Melanie, they might have had some questions about what he was doing, and why. During the transcription of his interview, it also seemed that he might have intentionally picked a place with high levels of background noise so that it would be less likely for Melanie to catch what he was saying verbatim. Although the use of public space seemed to compromise his anonymity, the high level of background noise reinforced his confidentiality because it would have been difficult for anyone to overhear his interview.

Delicate subjects

Transience exacerbates the special considerations necessary when dealing with sensitive and potentially volatile topics (see Fontana & Frey, 1998). There were some important ethical concerns for Melanie regarding her project, considering that the topic is deeply personal. Although her research interest was exclusively about consensual sexual experiences, she was aware of the potential for some participants (especially women) to share potentially painful stories of sexual violence. In similar circumstances researchers often put together a reference sheet for resources and will refer participants to a counseling agency if required. In a small town there was very little in the way of support for survivors of sexual assault in the immediate community. In addition, the transient nature of seasonal workers meant that participants were from all over Canada and thus might need to seek support in other places across the country. To address this possibility, Melanie located some national resources to refer people to agencies outside of the immediate area if necessary.

Although not as sensitive a topic as sexual consent, the colonial legacies that frame their travel experiences was often an uncomfortable subject for independent travelers. The topic of the interviews made it easy to draw people into the study as well as to conduct the interviews. Asking travelers about their reflections on their travel experiences and the meaning of their travel was similar to discussions had by travelers generally. The interviews were conducted conversationally, so on finishing the interview, several people responded "That's it?" or "Come on, ask me some more questions!"

Although Kristin was interested in their experiences and the stories that they told—narratives that were likely to turn up in more general settings—she was also interested in aspects of travel that are less often discussed, such as perceptions of poverty, the relationship between their country and India in the context of poverty, and the significance of their travel in the context of colonial legacies. Compared to more superficial topics, such reflections required considerably more trust, something that was difficult to build during impromptu interviews or interviews with travelers with whom Kristin had no relationship. Moreover, the presence of other travelers typically made participants less willing to engage seriously with thornier issues and more likely to joke their way through such questions. Given the difficulty in arranging independent interviews, serious engagement with overtly political topics was tricky to build. Shifting the discussion from descriptive travel questions (e.g., "Where have you been so far?" and "What has been your favorite/least favorite experience?") to more critically reflective discussions resulted sometimes in satire of the research and sometimes in a defensive stance, both of which would not only make the interview uncomfortable but also shut down the very reflections Kristin was seeking.

Using commonly shared travel experiences to open the interview helped to build rapport and dialogue and often provided experiences or comments that Kristin could use to frame the more difficult questions as they arose. Furthermore, the informality of the interview and Kristin's questioning self-presentation (in contrast to critical frame of the study) reduced the threat of many difficult questions and made it possible for participants to have sufficient trust as to speak outside of filters of political correctness.

Another tactic involved participating in jest at the serious issues and turning it back on the participant. After one participant's intentionally bizarre response to the different experiences of men and women travelers, one of his friends told Kristin that she should have expected such a response. When Kristin replied jokingly that she was surprised by the remark because "he seemed intelligent all day," the participant laughed and continued the interview, taking the questions more seriously.

Withdrawing from data collection

Many feminist researchers advocate developing close, intimate relations with research participants (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992). Although these relations lead to a more meaningful and egalitarian research relationship, for some projects, withdrawing from relationships with participants can be a very difficult process for the researcher. In the context of temporary transience, by contrast, all community members enter the space of transience with the understanding that both they and other members will ultimately leave the shared space, and as a result the relationships formed within that space are themselves likely to be transient. Thus, unlike other ethnographic research that is troubled by leaving the field, the relationships developed between Melanie and the seasonal workers and Kristin and the independent travelers in India were inherently temporary.

For independent travelers with highly unpredictable movements, either party was able to terminate the relationship on short (or no) notice and with no sense of loss or resentment. Although Kristin contacted all participants following their interview to thank them and has maintained e-mail contact with some of them beyond that follow-up, the geographical distance between researcher and participants on return to their home countries, along with the dissociation of e-mail communication, has enabled participants who are no longer interested in participating in the study to withdraw simply by not responding to e-mails inviting them to participate further in the project. Once Melanie had completed her research, she stopped attending bar nights and house parties. Despite concern from a couple of participants that Melanie might be ill, given that she no longer wanted to go out to the bar, leaving the field setting was also quite easy. The seasonal workers were used to seeing many people enter and leave the town, even over the course of the summer, and many of the people with whom Melanie interacted over the course of the summer left town before she did.

Research project as scam

Given the locations in which we chose to do our research, scenic and exotic locations away from the mundane routines and responsibilities of home, it was often assumed that our research projects were secondary to our desire to spend a few months in the mountains or India. Many of the participants in the study understood our projects as "scams," in which we had fooled our committees and the university into approving and funding projects based entirely on our personal leisure. This perception of our research roles was likely also tainted by our gender, an iteration of the "daughter role" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 63). As young women in the field without a man present, we were understood not necessarily as daughters but certainly as women who were young and naïve.

Although most participants learned of Melanie's purpose for being in town quite quickly, they assumed that she went to the bar because she enjoyed hanging out and partying rather than as a means to recruit participants into the study. Many people mentioned that it was pretty "smart" of Melanie to manage to convince the university to pay for her to live in town for a summer and "conduct research." She was perceived primarily not as a researcher but, rather, as someone who went to the mountains to party and managed to do a little research on the side. This perception was useful to her as it enabled her to get into the scene of the seasonal workers and become accepted as part of the group. However, this perception also undermined perceptions of her qualifications and professionalism. Toward the end of the summer Melanie interviewed a woman with whom she had become acquainted through parties at the bars and other events. During the interview Melanie was asking many questions about hooking up and the bar scene in an effort to draw out this woman's reflections on casual sex. At one point the woman told Melanie that she should really start paying attention to this sort of behavior while she was at the bar. Melanie was shocked, thinking "What do you think I've been doing for the 6 weeks that I've been here already?" This incident was not the only time Melanie received comments that challenged her awareness of the processes of casual sex around her.

Similarly, many of the people Kristin spoke with about her project understood her project as the perfect scam: the university providing funding for her to go to India and sit on a beach/ ride around on a motorbike/ go hiking/ eat dinner on a rooftop patio, thereby hanging out and chatting with other travelers. This issue emerged almost immediately when taking up conversations with new people, conversations that almost always began with the question, "How did you end up in India?" Given the propensity of backpackers (and many independent travelers) to travel on a small budget, they inevitably asked whether the university was paying for the study. When Kristin revealed that the research was funded, most participants were envious and delighted to support what was perceived as the irresponsible and reckless use of university and government funds, clearly oblivious to the many funding applications that preceded the trip and the administrative review of claims on return. Participants were happy to give interviews for such informal and obviously frivolous (to their way of thinking) research, which was extremely helpful for recruitment. However, any efforts to provide greater context to her research or to rationalize the project were read as defensive, which only reinforced the original perceptions of many of the travelers. Kristin's inability to jus-

tify the research as a project firmly grounded in a broader critique of global political economy and mobilities and legacies of neocolonialism, a context that would necessarily have made the project seem much more serious and thus much less fun, undermined the research project.

Like Melanie, because of the perceived frivolous nature of the research, Kristin herself was perceived as unacademic and sometimes incapable. Most participants did not take Kristin seriously as a scholar, an identity that would have compromised her claim to a traveler identity because of the contradiction between the casualness of travel and the formal, elitist overtones of academia. Given this underestimation of her abilities, some participants understood her open questions as evidence that she did not really know what she was doing:

> *Kristin:* Do you think there is a relationship between wealth in [your country] and the west and poverty in India?
> *Daniel:* No, no, the, no. Just no. Your professor will explain it why [Kristin looks confused], you professor will explain why there isn't no relationship, between wealth and no wealth.

Although this perception of Kristin as naive and unknowing was in some ways helpful inasmuch as it contributed to recruitment and made it easy to get people to speak their opinions on sensitive issues, it also undermined the project. The purpose of Kristin's project is to complicate and problematize seemingly benign travel insofar as this travel is embedded in global practices of economic inequality, racism, and patterns of exploitation. Participants' suggestions that it was the "perfect scam" to get funding to do research in India reproduced notions of travel as unquestionably desirable and unproblematic. In these conversations, there was very limited space for Kristin to identify as an uneasy traveler—someone critical of travel practices—a representation that would have been a more honest portrayal of the project. By beginning the interview from the premise that the project was somewhat fraudulent, Kristin reproduced the assumption that travel is important at all costs. This starting point contradicted the overall rationale for the study and made the exploration of the complicated inegalitarian aspects of travel more difficult to fold into the interview.

For both of us, our choice of location—in each case a location that lent itself to the temporarily transient communities we were interested in for our studies—tainted people's perceptions of our research projects. This misperception simultaneously facilitated and complicated our research, enabling us to downplay

our professional status, which, Reinharz (1992) has suggested, might be helpful in contexts where participants might be distrustful of professional status but which also rendered us incapable of actually carrying out the project in the eyes of several participants.

Conclusion

Most often guides to qualitative fieldwork assume a fixed community and/or location in which that fieldwork is conducted. However, as an increasing number of ethnographers have pointed out, and as was evident in our work with seasonal workers and independent travelers, that both the spatial location and the people in it are in continuous flux. For us temporary transience raised interesting possibilities for and obstacles to our fieldwork. Particular issues that emerged in both of our studies, and that differed from fieldwork with more stable communities, involved the volatility of relationships with (potential) participants given their (and our) transience. At the same time that it facilitated integration into and withdrawal from communities that were not tightly knit and closed (at least at the beginning of the summer season for Melanie's project), this instability had significant consequences for communicating with participants and arranging interviews. Further issues pertained to the lack of stable spaces, which created obstacles to ensuring the confidentiality of participants, and the participants' perception of research projects that took place in highly desirable locations.

In spite of our different substantive areas of study and the different communities with which we conducted research, the shared methodological considerations that we experienced in our research with temporarily transient participants contribute to the recent calls to rethink approaches to and practices of ethnographic fieldwork (Amit, 2000; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Hume & Mulcock, 2004). This scholarship fundamentally challenges the fixity of societies and communities as well as the boundedness of geographical fields. These concepts represent a phantasmagoria in which social construction inheres, as evidenced through our fieldwork with transient people in transient spaces.

Notes

1. Recent discussion that problematize a bounded conceptualization of the field also problematize the rituals of "entry" and "exit," as these reproduce the dichotomy of home and the field (Caputo, 2000).
2. The two interviews conducted in apartments were with women whom Melanie knew and who were referred by a staff member of HWY.

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