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A Proposal for Public Sociology as Localized Intervention and Collective Enterprise: The Makings and Impact of *Invisible in Austin*

Caitlyn Collins[1] · **Katherine Jensen**[2] · **Javier Auyero**[2]

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Abstract What can local public sociology look like, and what does it accomplish? This essay tracks the origins, makings and impacts of the book *Invisible in Austin* to evaluate its model of public sociology: as a collective enterprise with a local aim. *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City*, the culmination of a three-year collaborative qualitative research project between a professor and twelve graduate students, depicts social suffering as lived for 11 individuals in Austin, Texas—a booming, highly segregated city with one of the country's highest levels of income inequality. In its design, production, and effects, it envisions public sociology in a two-fold sense—in its joint, horizontal making, and in its intent to intervene in the local public sphere to make visible the daily lived experience of social marginality for those whose labor allows Austin to survive and thrive as a hip, creative technopolis—house cleaners, office machine repairers, cab drivers, restaurant cooks and dish washers, exotic dancers, musicians, and roofers, among them. Reflecting on the origins of the book, its joint assembling, and its outcomes thus far, we take stock of the lessons learned. In so doing, we provide a rubric for evaluating the wide spectrum of possible impacts of a public sociological intervention: through direct and indirect audience engagements, on the project's subjects, and on local public policy. This reflection concludes with three suggestions: to approach public sociology as collective enterprise, to take narrative seriously, and to seek wide exposure.

Keywords Public sociology · Social suffering · Collective qualitative research · Bourdieu

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✉ Javier Auyero
auyero@austin.utexas.edu

[1] Washington University in St. Louis, Campus Box 1112, 1 Brookings Drive, St. Louis, MO 63130-4899, USA

[2] The University of Texas at Austin, 305 E 23rd St. A1700, Austin, TX 78712-1086, USA

"I figure I probably won't retire. I mean, just the way things are now. I don't know how that's going to work out," says Chip (57). Despite working for decades as a copy machine technician for Copy Co., his hard work has not translated into a secure financial future. He was priced out of Austin more than a decade ago. Chip and his wife of 30 years now live in a 17-year-old doublewide trailer in the town of Cowboy Ridge just south of the city limits, and he now drives more than 80 miles a day in a city rated as having the third worst traffic in the nation.

Cowboy Ridge lacks city services for sewage, gas, and trash. Residents have septic tanks and gas is provided through large propane tanks. Clogging and overflows of tanks and poor heating are major problems in their settlement. Predictably, do-it-yourself home maintenance is the rule. Chip has hundreds of stories about "something I have to fix," as well as the mounting costs these fixes require not only in his house (a water line that snapped within his wall that flooded his home, his refrigerator, etc.), but also on his and his wife's timeworn 200,000-mile cars, which they need to commute to work. He recalls spending "an entire weekend and $1,500 in parts" doing a "mini-rebuild" of one car engine recently.

Photo by Julia Robinson

But having to constantly fix the things in his life never seems to overwhelm or surprise Chip; for him, it is "just one of those things that happen[s]."

Long commutes take a toll on Chip's dilapidated van. Decades of long walks from office to office, and countless hours spent kneeling to repair copy machines slowly but inexorably injure his body. "They hurt. They pop," he says about his aching knees, which have required three operations so far. "Getting up and down you can actually hear it, 'Pop, pop!' Or if I squat down, all of a sudden it'll catch and it's like, 'Oh no,' and then all of a sudden, 'Snap!' [He snaps his fingers] And then it's like having a knife stabbed in your knee. And then you stand up, stretch out," he says. "It's ok, and then you go on." Despite decades of dedicated work, retirement remains a financial impossibility: "I don't know, I think, when they close the lid on that box and put me into the ground," he says, "that's when I'm retired. That's the way I feel sometimes."

Photo by Julia Robinson

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"There's a joke: What's the difference between a cocktail waitress and a stripper? Two weeks." Raven (23) laughs loudly. "I literally went two weeks, it was my two week mark after my new cocktailing job that I first showed my tits for money. And man, do you make a lot more money than being a waitress." Raven began stripping in Austin, Texas when she was 19 because she couldn't pay her bills. An aspiring chef, Raven had been working determinedly in two to three waitressing jobs at a time in some of Austin's most iconic restaurants. And yet, earning between $5.15 and $10 an hour made it almost impossible to stay afloat financially.

In this booming city, she hopped from apartment to apartment, chasing lower rent, and from job to job, chasing more hours, income, and bearable working conditions. Raven endured back-to-back shifts, unreliable schedules, sexual harassment from bosses and coworkers, and promises of raises and promotions she never saw. Exhausted and desperate, a man she'd been dating suggested she apply for a cocktailing job at a strip club, where tips were much better. Facing an uncertain future with low wages and little autonomy, she applied and was hired on the spot.

Cocktail waitressing boosted Raven's wages, but not substantially. Her joke unfolded like a prophecy: Fourteen days after she began cocktailing, the allure of greater pay fueled Raven to step onstage and strip for the first time. "Once you show your tits to everybody, you're done It's the rule: You can't be a waitress anymore…Then you're on the dark side." Work on the "dark side" came with huge financial gain. Dancing four days a week meant she took home $1000 weekly. Suddenly Raven was her own boss, setting her own schedule and working when she pleased. Some days, she loves this job; other days, she's horrified by it. She enjoys stripping for a married couple who tip generously and treat her well, for example, but cringes recalling the demands for oral sex, groping, and rampant drug use in the clubs.

Although dancing gave her enough to live on, Raven is adamant that this work is temporary. She applied for new jobs on the "reputable" side of the service sector weekly. In 2013, Raven was hired as a secretary at a luxury spa: "My first really stable job!" She was thrilled about the new position: "I get my own desk, and my own computer, and my own phone! I am like a real fuckin' adult!" But Raven stayed at that job for less than a

year, chasing employment that offered benefits and some modicum of control over her work schedule. These have proven elusive.

Despite her best efforts, Raven occasionally returns to dancing because she needs the money. One night stripping can mean the difference between making rent or being evicted, or being able to afford gas to drive to her temporary jobs. In Austin, Raven survives on the perilous edge between low-paid but morally respectable work with little independence, and what some might consider immoral but highly paid work with considerable autonomy.

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"I was eligible last Saturday to go back," says Clarissa (in her 50s). She is referring to the Salvation Army. She continues: "I don't want to go back. I don't want to have to walk in a stinky, smelly alley to get in there. It's like walking a gauntlet. The men just won't leave you alone." Clarissa is one of roughly 2300 Austinites with no place to call home. A member of the "chronic homeless," Clarissa has spent roughly the past five years bouncing between the worker's dorm at the Salvation Army, her storage unit, couches or guest beds, and during the best of times, her own room at an extended-stay motel—none of which provide the creature comforts, safety, and stability Clarissa desperately craves.

Although Clarissa has spent most of her adult life living on the edge, the extent of her vulnerability wasn't revealed until a car accident in 2009. With no money or health insurance to pay for pricey rehabilitation sessions, Clarissa was on her own after she left the hospital. Unable to walk unassisted and, thus, unable to hold down a job for multiple months post-accident, this decades-long veteran of the food service industry quickly drained her small savings account. In mid-2010 she found herself guarding her belongings on the lawn of her apartment building before abandoning them to travel around the city looking for a shelter that could house her for the night.

Clarissa's story reveals the lack of a "safety net" for those at the bottom of the economic pyramid. Meanwhile, Clarissa herself reveals a remarkable optimism in the face of what—to most people—seem like insurmountable barriers. "I'm still trying very hard to do what I do," she says, avoiding government assistance programs in favor of the small, inconsistent paychecks she receives from short-term jobs and occasional support from a local nonprofit. In the meantime, she dreams about a different, brighter future: "My dream job would be to be independently wealthy and to be able to run around and do things for people. Like I want to get people to donate houses for the homeless. For $10,000 you can get a mobile home for a homeless person. I would love to set up a trailer park that could house people. Cause a lot of people complain about [the homeless] coming into your neighborhood but they need a place to live."

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"The way of life is not like a straight line," Kumar says one day. "It is like the way a snake moves." In 2006, after attending a rally for multi-party democracy in Nepal, a cadre chased him down and beat him with bamboo sticks. One ordered him killed. He escaped but with lacerations and swelling all over his body. "It was really a very hard time for me." In his home country, Kumar had endured torture and three years in prison for his political activism. That year he fled to the United States.

In Nepal, Kumar was an attorney and a political science professor. In Austin, now in his early 50s, he works as a taxi driver. He works the 12-hour nightshift, from 7 pm to 7 am.

Photo by Julia Robinson

Kumar deals with a particularly "uncivilized"—a term he uses frequently—version of Austin by working at night. His passengers are so drunk, he says, that they forget their names and addresses. They also vomit. When a customer vomits in his cab Kumar loses the rest of the night's earnings because he can't pick up new passengers. Once when he asked for $50 to cover the cost of cleaning, the passenger yelled back, "But this is your job! You can clean it up, why should I pay for that?"

Taxi work also offers Kumar up as an object of intrigue and inquisition to his passengers. Kumar is always ducking and dodging questions. Sometimes he asks if they're going to pay him to answer their questions. Far more than any other, passengers ask: "Where are you from?" Kumar makes a game of it, giving hints after each wrong guess of his nationality. Why does Kumar play the game? "Throw some piece of bone to the dog so that it cannot come to bite you," he says.

Photo by Julia Robinson

Not all of Kumar's experiences as a taxi driver are so innocuous. He has been punched in the face while driving. He has been strangled with his seatbelt during a robbery. While

Kumar's life in Nepal was marked by torture because of his belief in democracy, now in the U.S. violence is an unresolvable occupational risk. In spite of the tricks he has learned on the job—to not pick up passengers that make him feel uneasy, to ask for the fare at the beginning, to get an exact address—there are no sure tricks to protect him from the mental and physical abuses of driving at night.

"That is a part of our life." "It happens in the nighttime. Mostly in the nighttime."

Making Suffering Visible in the "Creative" City

The city of Austin, Texas conjures two parallel images in America's popular imagination: Glowing descriptions of a "cool," fast-growing city for the "young and creative" (the city was used as a model in Richard Florida's book [2002] on the "creative class"), known for internationally famous music events and Formula 1 racing, compete with portrayals of increasing socio-economic inequality and residential class, racial, and ethnic segregation (Tang and Ren 2014). Like many U.S. cities and metropolitan areas, wealth and poverty are booming alongside one another in contemporary Austin—a thriving, highly unequal *technopolis*—magnifying the effects of social insecurity and reconfiguring the cityscape. Austin now enjoys the worrisome privilege of having the highest level of economic segregation of any large metro city in America (Straubhaar 2013; Tretter 2016). New exclusive areas of prosperity emerge, while deprivation forces others to the urban margins where environmental risks and poor quality housing, schools, and public services prevail.

When someone like Chip moves out of the city center because he cannot pay the increasing rent or property taxes, or someone like Clarissa dwells with her few belongings in a storage unit or is pushed into homelessness, the increasingly exclusionary features of a city's housing market are made visible. When someone's job submits them to unwanted advances, physical insecurity, and seemingly innocuous but demeaning and degrading behaviors, from which no amount of savvy or skill can protect or shield them, the unseen exploitative particularities of those jobs deemed most unprestigious and undesirable are felt acutely. Our book, *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City* (2015), relies on roughly 18 months of life history interviews and ethnographic observation to portray the predicament of those working at the bottom of Austin's social structure: house cleaners, office machine repairers, cab drivers, restaurant cooks and dish washers, exotic dancers, musicians, and roofers, among them.

The social sciences, and sociology in particular, are on relatively secure grounds when it comes to describing and explaining objective inequalities of class, race, and gender, and the mechanisms that generate them (Lareau 2003; Massey and Denton 1998; Pager 2003; Tilly 1999). They are on less certain terrain when it comes to understanding the many ways in which individuals, alone or in groups, make sense of and cope with these inequalities (Cooper 2014; Lamont 2002). These experiences matter because they oftentimes do the cultural work necessary to perpetuate the social order, but at other times serve as the basis for challenging it. *Invisible in Austin* scrutinizes this more subjective dimension of inequality by zooming in on the lives of eleven individuals—folks like Chip, Raven, Clarissa, and Kumar—who dwell on the "other side" of a prosperous, increasingly inequitable, and segregated urban area.

The study of social suffering takes a particular relevance (and urgency) in the context of neoliberal governance in the United States under which most previous forms of protection are being swiftly dismantled (e.g., welfare benefits, employer-provided health care coverage,

traditionally defined retirement pensions) and where the penal state has expanded exponentially in order to manage the effects of growing inequality at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Cooper 2014; Wacquant 2009). In neoliberal times, socially produced forms of suffering take on exceptionally alarming features. Our collective work seeks to bring these experiences to light so that they can be the subject of public debate.

Conceived as a horizontal pedagogical experience, a collective research project, and a narrative experiment, the book sought to intervene in the local public sphere by shedding sociological light on the sources and forms of affliction and on the manifold ways in which inequalities are lived and experienced on a daily basis.

Reflecting upon the collaborative journey that took us from the nascent discussions between a professor and a group of graduate students in a seminar room to the many conversations we, now as authors, have had with various publics (from high school students to radio audiences and community organizations), this essay describes the book's general themes, origins, initial purpose, collective making, and impact thus far. In its design, production, and effects, *Invisible in Austin* was intended as localized public social science (Burawoy 2004a; Clawson and Zussman 2007; Pfohl 2004; Vaughan 2004)—in our minds one of the possible forms that "scholarship with commitment" (Bourdieu 2000a) can (and should) take. How did we as a collective and the book as a joint product fare? What lessons can other public sociologists learn from our experience?

Origins: The Sociology of Poverty, Bourdieu, and the "Chicago School"

The seeds of our book were planted five years ago in a seminar room in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. There a group of graduate students, many of them future members of the newly established Urban Ethnography Lab, first expressed their discomfort with portrayals of the urban poor dominant in social science literature. Although in agreement with diagnoses about the economic and political sources of dispossession, students of the seminar "Poverty and Marginality in the Americas" were uncomfortable—distrustful and, on more than one occasion, angry—with the ways in which many a text represents the lives of those living at the bottom of the socio-symbolic ladder, including their daily plight, their beliefs, their hopes. Oftentimes entire, and quite diverse, categories (the urban poor, young poor men, poor women) are reduced to one or two salient portrayals (single mother, welfare recipient, sex worker, drug dealer, gang member)—or to what Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) would call the shrinking to a "single story." Other times the complex and changing character of their lives is truncated in order to make (more or less sophisticated) social-scientific arguments. As Patricia Fernandez-Kelly (2015, 10) puts it: "Impoverished people in general and African Americans in particular have been reduced to flattened representations of social problems" (for two recent exceptions to this trend, see Desmond 2016; Fernandez-Kelly 2015). That general discomfort slowly became an incredible, expansive energy that lies at the root of our joint intellectual enterprise.

Our main source of inspiration (and the model for our collective inquiry) was *The Weight of the World*, Bourdieu et al.'s (2000) now classic study of social suffering in contemporary France. That book was the product of many years of collaborative work under the direction of France's best-known sociologist. A group of twenty or so researchers examined the social, political, and economic forces producing novel forms of suffering mostly in contemporary France (with two chapters devoted to the United States) and the many ways in which

individuals—a teacher, a social worker, a factory worker, a migrant, an artisan, among others—deal and cope with the external forces that deprive them not only of their means of economic subsistence but also, and just as importantly, of the recognition and respect they once enjoyed. In France, its publication was a major event and an instant bestseller because, among other things, it depicts the suffering caused by a shrinking labor market and a retrenching welfare state through a series of lively, eye-opening (and oftentimes, heartbreaking) one-on-one interviews with ordinary folks. Usually silenced in public debates, the stories these people told speak to larger, pressing problems. They talked in highly personal terms about the social, economic, and political sources of their troubles—and about their unceasing struggles to regain control over their lives and a sense of dignity in their existence. As such, *The Weight of the World* served as a crucial early model for us in imagining other narrative forms that could be sociologically informed while also being taken up as relevant contributions to public debates about increasing inequality.

Robert Park's (cited in Prus 1996, 119) famous dictum also became one of our early guiding mottos: "Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and the slum shakedowns; sit in the orchestra hall and in the Star and Garter burlesque. In short, gentlemen, *go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research*" (our emphasis). In our insistence on "getting out" to areas and places of the city with which many students are unfamiliar (a trailer park, a strip club, a boutique hotel, etc.) and on "knowing their inhabitants well," on recording their actions and thoughts and on reporting back, we were implicitly following some of the footsteps of the sociologists connected to what has been called—to some wrongly (Becker 1999)—the "Chicago School."

The Chicago School loosely inspired the design and ambitions of our collaboration in two key ways. Along with this animating impulse to leave the confines of the university, we were also compelled to recognize the city of Austin as a space in which things were happening that mattered—to explore the city's social and geographical "worlds" and the "distances" between them, its "contrasts" and "extremes" (Zorbaugh 1929; see also Shaw 1930). In this sense, we similarly insisted on *location*, that "one cannot understand social life without understanding the arrangements of particular social actors in particular social times and places" (Abbott 1997, 1152). For us, then, individual stories of life and labor could not be meaningfully disentangled or extracted from the booming and unequal *technopolis*. This drove us to take seriously the city of Austin—and particularly the specific locales in which individuals live and toil—as a major element of the ensuing project.

While similarly driven to investigate life as lived within the local urban milieu, we nonetheless sought to avoid the conceptual and narrative pitfalls of the Chicago School. We took no interest in its "conceptual armamentarium" (Abbott 1997), recognizing, as Morris (2015) asserts, that Park purported "a unique social Darwinism that combined evolutionary principles with social interaction analyses" (112). While immigrants fill the pages of *Invisible in Austin*, for example, Park's race relations paradigm—racial competition, accommodation, assimilation—certainly does not (Park and Burgess 1921; for a thorough critique, see Steinberg 2007). Moreover, reading some Chicago School scholars we encounter disparaging views on poor and black communities that are hard to stomach; Zorbaugh (1929) writes of the urban poor as "types of submerged humanity" (129), for example, while Park called blacks a "simple minded," "savage people" (see Morris 2015). Such forms of writing were the opposite of what we hoped to emulate.

While the legacies of the Chicago School are then certainly varied and highly contested (Abbott 1997, 1999; Braude 1970; Morris 2015; Steinberg 2007), Park's motto enthusiastically

reminded us of the importance of observation in investigating the lived experiences of city life. Thus, along with conducting interviews, our enterprise was to include firsthand observation. Hearing how a musician hustles to make a living in the "Live Music Capital of the World" was to go hand in hand with time at that musician's shows, seeing him quietly read over his set list backstage and, especially, seeing that hustling *in action* as he meets and greets the audience to buy time while waiting for a drummer whose car wouldn't start, or as he incessantly plugs the merchandise table during his set. We would sit in fancy cocktail lounges we couldn't afford, scrub houses with eco-friendly cleaning products, spend time in gentleman's clubs, and join in protests against construction companies that failed to pay.

The sociological literature that we took up in trying to imagine such an enterprise—how to do it and how to write it—was also imbued with a belief in the potential impact of sociology on public discourse, what Emerson (1983) calls the "reformist impulse" present in early U.S. sociology. In this sense, we did not seek to investigate social suffering as, in Park's poignant framing, "the zoologist dissects a potato bug" (Short 1971, xix). To this public "impulse" we now turn.

Intent: A Two-Fold Public Sociology

Invisible in Austin was envisioned as an exercise in public sociology in a two-fold sense of the term—in its joint, horizontal making, and in its overall political intent.

From its inception, the crafting of *Invisible* was a collective enterprise—the graduate students who authored the chapters did not work as "research assistants" for a "principal investigator." Democratic decision making characterized our project: from the individuals we would interview and the questions we asked to the style of writing, down to the title of the book and the pictures that accompanied it. Teaching, as Burawoy (2016, 391) writes, could be conducted as public sociology:

> [S]tudents are themselves constituted as a public. In this mode, teaching is a three-level dialogue: a first dialogue between teacher and students that takes that very pedagogical relationship as point of departure with a view to exploring the lived experience of students, enriching it with sociological studies; a second dialogue among students in which they learn about themselves through engaging one another; and a third dialogue of students with publics beyond the university.

Invisible began in this way, but then moved outside the students' own experiences to document the lives of others. Informed by some of the students' interests in theories of standpoint epistemology and situated knowledges, and in heeding the concerns such scholarship has raised, discussions (and, sometimes, heated debates) about the possibilities of inquiring into, understanding, and representing other (subordinated) people's lives dominated our early conversations. For the students, these were formative moments in their graduate education for developing an understanding, both individually and as a group, of how and why we conduct social research. Further readings from *The Weight of the World* (particularly Bourdieu's chapter on "Understanding") and Weiss's *Learning from Strangers* (1994), and conversations informed by Bourdieu's *Pascalian Meditations* (2000b) and Terkel's *Working* (1974), provided guidance on how to document individuals' social and occupational lives through oral history and interview methods. Burawoy et al.'s (1991) *Ethnography Unbound*—a project with similar origins (a graduate seminar that left participants with a persisting drive to

continue engaging each other on the issues at hand) and an analogous collegial vision—made us hopeful that our collaboration could be sustained (rather than fizzle) and be fruitful pedagogically and empirically.

Importantly, such work also helped us to move forward first by reminding us that

> social science cannot be reduced to an objectification incapable of giving its due place to the effort of agents to construct their subjective representation of themselves and the world, sometimes against all the objective data; and it cannot be reduced to a recording of spontaneous sociologies and folk theories—which are already too present in scientific discourse, smuggling themselves in. (Bourdieu 2000b, 188–9)

And second, by delineating the challenges of (always partial) understanding, the main (and often overlooked) one being the tendency to forget that the individuals we study "do not at all have the project of understanding and explaining which is [ours] as researcher[s]" (Bourdieu 2003, 288). True, folks like Kumar and Raven do have theories to comprehend and often justify their actions. But these should be differentiated from the kind of sociological understanding we tried to accomplish in the book (and subjected to critical scrutiny). As Bourdieu (2003, 288) puts it:

> Whether I want to understand a woman from Kabylia or a peasant from the Béarn, a Turkish migrant worker or a German office worker, a schoolteacher or a businessman, or a writer like Flaubert, a painter like Manet, a philosopher like Heidegger, the most difficult thing, paradoxically, is never to forget that they are all people like me, at least inasmuch as they do not stand before their action—performing an agrarian rite, following a funeral procession, negotiating a contract, taking part in a literary ceremony, painting a picture, giving a conference, attending a birthday party—in the posture of an observer; and that one can say about them that, strictly speaking, they do not know what they are doing (at least in the sense in which I, as observer and analyst, am trying to know it). They do not have in their heads the scientific truth of their practice which I am trying to extract from observation of their practice. What is more, they normally never ask themselves the questions that I would ask myself if I acted towards them as an anthropologist: Why such a ceremony? Why the candles? Why the cake? Why the presents? Why these invitations and these guests, and not others? And so on.

Conversations proceeded not only on the "how" to do things, but also about the "what" we would try to accomplish. "Raising awareness," "making inequality, suffering visible," these phrases permeated our initial discussions. In its aim then, *Invisible* was from the outset defined as localized public social science. In other words, we wanted to produce "accessible, theoretically informed, and empirically grounded stories" (Pfohl 2004, 113) that were both relevant for and intelligible to extra-academic publics (Agger 2000; Burawoy 2004b, 2005; Royce 1996).

Together we understood the objective of the project in quite an optimistic manner: We wanted to write something (we did not yet dream it would become a book) that people outside the restricted and restricting confines of academia would enjoy reading and that would make them think and reflect about the place where they live and the people they live alongside. Although we thought our main intervention would be local, we did not want the product of our enterprise to be circumscribed solely to Austinites. We sought to construct narratives in a way that could also speak to the manifold ways in which inequality and social exclusion are lived and experienced in cities across the United States. Perhaps naively sharing the "illusory optimism in the power of ideas" characteristic of those who *lived for* sociology in the 1960s and 1970s (Burawoy 2016,

387), we thought of ourselves as a collective who would try to use well-researched and well-written narratives (the power of ideas *and* words) to persuade readers to acknowledge the suffering they normally do not see. And in so doing, we hoped to do our part to counter the dominant neoliberal *doxa*, the pervasive commonsensical representations and explanations that legitimate that very suffering (Bourdieu 2000a). We thus conceived ourselves as a group seeking to engage in "a conversation between sociologists and publics about the direction of society" (Burawoy 2016, 390)—precisely the goal of public social science.

Thus our purpose was documenting "life as it is lived" (Zorbaugh 1929, 271) at the bottom of the socio-symbolic order of a rapidly changing city. We wanted to first understand (and then write about) these lives as complex products of individual and social forces, scrutinizing the intersection of biography and history (the task of what C. Wright Mills (1959) famously called "the sociological imagination") at a particular moment in time, focusing on a few poignant examples. *Know people well*, we agreed, meant trying to imagine ourselves in their place, to strive to take (to dare to take) their point of view—which is nothing other than a view of the social world from a particular position in the social structure.

Before the writing was to begin we all agreed that the imperative was to spend time with them, to immerse ourselves, as much as we could, in their lives, to figure out—in Clifford Geertz's (1973) famous phrasing—what the devil they thought they were up to. We visited and helped our subjects at work and spent time with their families. We gave them rides, went to movies and concerts, and ate meals at their homes. We participated alongside them in rallies and at neighborhood meetings, bore witness to their legal woes, celebrated major life events and mourned tragic ones. We, in other words, returning to Park's motto, got the seat of our pants dirty in real ethnographic research—observing actors in real time and space.

Only then, after many hours talking with them and following them around over a span of roughly a year and a half, did we begin to write up each story. After the many one-on-one interviews were transcribed by each author, the writing of each chapter involved a trying balancing act. In *The Weight of the World*, contributors edited their interviews and wrote a brief opening narrative to situate the particular transcript. Departing from the book that served us as model and inspiration, and encouraged by current nonfiction writing in "new journalism" in Latin America (see, for example, Alarcón 2010; Hacher 2011; Licitra 2011) and the U.S. (Boo 2012), we agreed to undertake a different (at the beginning, quite daunting) task. Instead of simply transcribing and editing the most important, luminous parts of the many hours of interviews, we would attempt to construct a narrative out of the interview material and our fieldnotes. Contributors would then become not only "researchers" reporting their findings but writers, *authors*, of a story. Subjects or informants then became *characters* in a story whose construction was the intellectual responsibility of each author.

Thus, in the attempt to see the ways in which the social order imposes the material and symbolic circumstances under which women and men live their lives and make history, our intellectual effort was not different from the one made by contributors to *The Weight of the World*. The difference lies in the way in which the material produced jointly by researchers and subjects is presented. "*Know them well*" was complemented by "*write them well*." We hoped to produce compelling and revealing snapshots of individuals, echoing Terkel (1974, xi), in their "search for daily meaning as well as daily bread."

In the many presentations and conversations we had about the book after its publication (discussed below), one particular set of questions kept arising: How did we choose the subjects? Why these and not other people? We did not select the subjects because they represent the entirety of daily life at the socio-symbolic margins. No single subject—nor a

dozen subjects—can do that. We chose each subject because she or he sheds light on particularly relevant features of the daily life of the dispossessed in a growing, increasingly unequal city: the lack of affordable housing, the meager safety net, the disciplinary and punishing state, the poverty generated by a highly polarized labor market, etc. But each chapter seeks not only to illustrate the operation of larger forces behind the backs and above the minds of the destitute but also, and as importantly, their engagement with those forces and their more or less sustained resilience in the face of oftentimes overwhelming odds. Neither Chip, nor Clarissa, Raven, Kumar, nor the other characters portrayed in *Invisible* "represent" city life; they are not Austin writ small. They do, however, vividly incarnate the lived experiences of inequality and social marginalization, the ways in which inequality and exclusion intertwine with individual lives and become embedded in intricate seams of biographical issues.

The agreed-upon task, then, was to write a story that would delve into individual, idiosyncratic trajectories but would also illuminate the economic, social, and political forces that mold them. Some of these forces are particular to Austin, some others are more general to the United States or operate in all contemporary capitalist societies. To accomplish this, we planted interpretive keys throughout each story—these keys, or "angles" as we called them, predominated our group discussions as we began to read each other's drafts—that sometimes appear in the form of an absent welfare state or a present punitive one, other times in the form of a particularly exploitative job or a particular piece of legislation. These interpretive keys would, we hoped, push readers to realize that the text they were reading was, say, about a young woman's pernicious addiction but also about a malignant and violent patriarchal order; about the misfortunes of one particular manual laborer or a house cleaner or a musician but also about the bifurcated nature of a labor market with extremely low material and symbolic rewards, and a high physical toll, at its bottom; about a poor single mother's plight but also about a disciplinary state; or about a woman's downward mobility and search for some sense of control but also about an almost nonexistent safety net for the most vulnerable.

Impact: Who is Listening to Our Public Sociology?

According to Patrick Champagne (2005, 112), *The Weight of the World*

> was explicitly conceived to help sociology achieve the widest possible entry into current political debate, the ambitious object of this work being to contribute to the greatest possible democratization of the discoveries of sociology itself, so that everyone could defend himself or herself against the symbolic violence that is at the heart of processes of social domination.

To reiterate, a similar objective lies at the root of our book. Indeed, making suffering visible (and deciphering its social origins, assigned meanings, and ways of coping with it) has been a central concern in the social sciences since their early beginnings (Wilkinson 2005). We wanted to make publicly visible the roots and experiences of social suffering in a particular place at a particular time.

Did we succeed? Were we able to spark a debate about the sources and forms that socially and politically produced suffering take in our city? Oftentimes conversations about public sociology assume—but never quite discuss—that someone is listening to what we (sociologists) have to say about a particular social phenomenon (for exceptions, see Gamson

2004; Vaughan 2004). "Most sociologists," as Beck (2005, 336) writes, "seem to have both very straightforward and very illusionary expectations."

Such questions are particularly pertinent because many have questioned the effectiveness of public sociology. Some have shown how public sociological interventions, because of their very dialogic nature, can live unintended lives, taken up by extra-academic actors and reinterpreted through their own frames of references and for their own practical purposes (Beck 2005; Stacey 2004; Vaughan 2004). These misgivings urge sober, critical reflections upon our public sociological work.

How do we assess the impact of attempts at public sociology? Traditional measures of success in academic publishing rely primarily on citation counts and the relative prestige of the journal or press. Because the goals of public sociology differ from the goals of "professional sociology" (Burawoy 2005), the rubric for evaluating the impact of our work needs to shift accordingly.

Here we offer some thoughts about ways in which we might evaluate the impact of public sociology. Public sociology can include a wide spectrum of activities and types of engagement. We attempted to engage a multiplicity of publics in varied ways. These ranged, in Burawoy's (2004a, 2000b) illuminative formula, from *traditional* forms seen in thin engagements with invisible publics (e.g., op-eds in mainstream news outlets) to more *organic* forms of engagement with local and visible publics, i.e. those public connections "not mediated by publication" (Calhoun 2005). Here we group the forms of impact loosely into three categories—the book's various audiences (both indirect and direct), the book's subjects, and local public policy—to more carefully assess the impact of our public sociology.

Indirect Audience Engagement

Book Sales

Like citation counts, one measure of success might be reflected in readership. If we know that a fair number of people bought and presumably read our book, this suggests some level of engagement with our ideas. In its first year, *Invisible in Austin* sold roughly 2300 copies. This figure feels like a weak measure of success though, since there's no telling how many of those people actually read the book, or how many people read the same copy. Looking at the number of copies sold also does nothing to help us assess if we achieved our aim to shift how publics see those suffering in Texas' capital city.

Media Coverage

We could also evaluate impact through book reviews and media coverage. We may note how widely this circulation occurs, evaluating whether coverage happens at the local, state, national, and international levels. Two national book review magazines, *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews*, favorably reviewed *Invisible*. Articles on the book appeared in *The Guardian* and *Bloomberg Business*. But the vast majority of media coverage occurred at the local level; we were pleased with this outcome given that intervention in Austin itself was a primary interest. The book was featured, for example, in the University of Texas' school newspaper *The Daily Texan*, city newspapers *Austin American-Statesman* and *Austin Chronicle*, and *Austin Monthly* and *Texas Observer* magazines.

We also employed other written forms to reach folks who might not have the interest and the time (or the means) to purchase and read a book. Some are more likely to read a newspaper

article, while others read blogs. Recognizing this, authors of *Invisible* published an op-ed entitled "Exposing the Underbelly of Austin's Economic Segregation" in the city's newspaper, the *Austin American-Statesman*.

Online Visibility

Public sociology has much to gain from online platforms as opportunities to disseminate scholarly work; in this vein, we asked a local web developer to build us a website. There, we posted excerpts from the book, the photos that accompanied each chapter, biographies of the authors, reviews, press coverage, upcoming events, and—importantly—a contact form, through which we heard from many readers. We also created a list of discussion questions for teachers to employ in the classroom and an annotated bibliography with dozens of readings grouped by topic (On the State of Work and Economic Mobility in the Contemporary United States, On Disciplining the Poor, On Immigration, On Workforce Discrimination, On Community Organizing and Activism, etc.). These efforts were meant to connect our local intervention both with broader fields of research and similar phenomena across time and space. To engage digital readers beyond our website, co-authors published pieces in the online peer-reviewed journal *Metropolitiques* and on the blog of our home department, the UT Austin Sociology Department Blog. While we know people visited these sites, we cannot presume how they engaged with our ideas, or what their opinions and responses were. Future scholars might consider adding more direct, collaborative digital features like discussion boards, mailing lists, and/or Q&A forums on their sites to enhance engagement with online readers (although these are time-consuming endeavors, and pose other difficulties, like trolling). In sum, engaging publics indirectly provides for the possible benefit of wide dissemination, but the very mediated nature of such engagements also makes conclusive understandings of the quality and nature of that circulation difficult.

Direct Audience Engagement

Publication is certainly not the only (or best) way to engage or be "accessed" by publics outside of academia (Royce 1996). In extending our public sociology beyond the written word to interact with our audiences face-to-face, in a "public sociology of close encounters" (Burawoy 2014, 145), the authors (and, on a few occasions, the subjects) of *Invisible in Austin* made a point to speak at various venues and to varied audiences (see more on this below under "Exposure").

With Other Scholars

In academic spaces, we presented the book as a way to advocate for the importance of public scholarship, and sought to provide a model for other scholars on how to produce sociologically rich yet accessible work that communicates the lived experiences of social suffering. Authors presented the book at a local research institute, a community college, and an activist scholarship conference. It has been adopted for courses at colleges and universities in Austin and beyond.

With Students

Again, we conceived of students as a potential public (Burawoy 2005, 9), "starting from where they are, not from where we are" (see also Derber 2004; Pfohl 2004). Knowing that public

lectures and book presentations are often unlikely to attract students, we went directly to high school, undergraduate, and graduate classrooms in departments such as Sociology, American Studies, Communication, and Spanish and Portuguese. We presented *Invisible in Austin* at "Sociology in Action," a student-run organization on our campus. A high school sociology class located in a rural town near Austin used the book as their sole text for the semester. Their teacher organized a fieldtrip for the students to come visit the authors at the University of Texas at Austin, and later, several authors visited the high school.

With Community Members

Another barometer for success might be sociologists' ability to engage publics beyond the confines of academia (Burawoy 2004a). We may consider the breadth of scholars' impact on community members across the spectra of race, social class, and political beliefs. We launched *Invisible in Austin* not on our campus or at an academic conference, but at a local independent bookstore, where 350 people attended. We presented at the Texas Book Festival to a crowd of 200. We spoke wherever they would have us: bookstores (MonkeyWrench Books, BookPeople); book fairs (Texas Book Festival, Humanities Texas Book Fair); educational centers (Austin History Society, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute); religious sites (Trinity United Methodist Church); civil society organizations (League of Women Voters of the Austin Area) and board meetings (UT Press Advisory Council Meeting). We spoke on local radio shows (KUT Radio, KOOP Radio) and recorded a podcast with the University of Texas Press. We were welcomed into the homes of Austin community members for book club meetings where their groups had recently read and discussed our book.

Community members wrote to tell us how, after attending our presentations, they were "completely enthralled," and "felt very well informed of the major issues." Someone wrote that the book "demonstrates how it is possible to move in informed, positive directions." Another wrote that, as a native East Austinite, "*Invisible in Austin* has given me a sense of urgency." One person thanked us for our "forward thinking" and "continued determination to connect the dots between the challenges and issues facing our families and children." Another, after reading our op-ed in the *Austin American-Statesman*, told us they were "intrigued and fascinated by the possibilities of sharing what we see and live on a daily basis."

We have no clear way to know the backgrounds of all our audience members. Some of the groups who contacted us to speak occupied positions of relative privilege, while others did not. Some readers expressed overtly leftist political views during Q&A sessions, while other audience members asked questions or made comments that reflected more conservative beliefs. Some readers told us that the forms of social suffering documented in *Invisible* felt deeply familiar and personal. We received the following comments, for instance: "Thank you for shedding light on matters in my hometown that too often go unheard, if they are ever said at all," "Your book is saying many of the things I have been feeling for a long time," and "Knowing that others are taking notice helps me through the day." Still other readers expressed shock and surprise: "I had no idea this was going on here in Austin," "These stories really opened my eyes," "How is this possible?" and "What can we do about it?" were common refrains.

This feedback suggests that we did not speak to only a likeminded portion of Austin's population (a benefit we discuss below). But we find it difficult to assess the impact of these conversations beyond the interactions we had with audience members. We are not alone in this regard. As Vaughan (2004, 118) similarly found, "[E]ngaging in dialogue about issues of

public concern can make change by altering the perspective of individuals or giving support to what they already think—but the full effects of such change are not always measurable or even knowable." Did our dialogue translate into changed attitudes? Different behaviors? In other words, was the impact durable? We engaged with thousands of Austin residents about our book in the past year. At the very least, this showed that contrary to some pessimists, there are indeed still publics with which to dialogue. Now, what are the results? A cynical take would be that such public engagement was merely an opportunity for those more advantageously situated on the city's socioeconomic ladder to feign concern without any consequential transformation in their beliefs or actions as they relate to Austin's marginalized laborers. This is possible. Our goal in making *Invisible* was to spark interest and conversations regarding the dire realities and lived experiences of inequality at a particular place in a particular time. We had many of these conversations with a wide variety of readers and listeners. In this regard, we feel the endeavor has been a success. A fruitful topic for further dialogue amongst public sociologists would be to discuss other concrete ways in which we might assess the impact of our work on the communities we study.

Impact on Book's Subjects

The impact and importance of public sociology resonated most deeply for us when we bore witness to the reactions of the book's characters themselves, and from Austin residents who felt the book resonated deeply with them or told their life stories, too. Much has changed in the lives of the men and women we wrote about in *Invisible* since we met them in 2012. We don't presume that these changes—some for the better, others for the worse—stemmed in any direct way from their involvement in this project or the book's publication in 2015. To evaluate the success of our project by a metric of how much their circumstances have changed feels problematic and presumptuous, and it wasn't our intent from the outset. We do sense, though, that we accomplished the goal of representing people's lives in a way that brings them some measure of recognition: recognition that their struggles stem from forces outside themselves; recognition that they deserve better; recognition that others see and acknowledge their plight. We sense that the process of telling us their stories, having these accounts woven into narrative, printed in ink on paper, and bound as books that were purchased and read by others did have a positive impact on the book's subjects. A few examples surrounding the book launch come to mind.

Prior to the launch, one of the book's contributors recounted to us that his fourteen-year-old son had picked *Invisible* up from their coffee table and found himself engrossed with the text on their sofa late one evening. He told his father afterward that he wanted to attend the opening party in order to get an autograph. His dad asked which author's signature he wanted to request. He corrected him: "No, I want Santos' autograph!" Santos, the subject of Chapter Two, is old enough to be this boy's grandfather—a wizened, weathered immigrant from central Mexico, he has crossed the border seventeen times in pursuit of better wages to support his family. Santos has spent the last four decades doing hard manual labor: cutting wood at a factory, installing pipes, carrying telecommunication cables, defeathering carcasses at a chicken processing plant, and jackhammering cement for a new freeway being only a few of these jobs. This soccer-obsessed, Pokémon Go-playing teenage boy admired Santos so much that he wanted to meet him and ask him to sign his book.

One man currently struggling with homelessness, who attended the launch and our panel at the Texas Book Festival, reached out beforehand to write us the following: "I am just perusing

Invisible in Austin. These are timely and necessary narratives. I have worked with these people as a recreation therapist in Austin for twenty years. And now I am one of these people who has fallen on hard times. Thank you, professor, and thank your students, for this seminal work. I will be at your book signing Friday night at BookPeople if I can get a pass from the shelter."

At the book launch, attendance far exceeded expectations. People poured out of the meeting area and stood shoulder to shoulder in the bookstore's aisles when seats ran out. Kumar beamed with his wife at his side as he observed the crowd who had come to hear about a book of his life story and others like him.

The night of the launch, Raven showed up resplendent in a crimson silk dress, her dark brown hair beautifully curled, makeup impeccably applied. We will never forget the look of quiet joy—the wide, wide smile on her face—when eager audience members asked her to autograph their copies of the book. It seemed, to us, the joy that stems from a moment of interpersonal recognition. To ask for an autograph from Raven, or Santos, is to say: "I see you. I recognize you." Raven inhaled it. She had gone without this basic feeling much of her life, as so many of those on society's margins often do. Interactions like these lead us to believe that there is an audience for this form of public sociology, and that, if nothing else, the book served to affirm and bear witness to the struggles of those folks we wrote about.

These anecdotes remind us about the potential effects that social science might have on those who help us produce it. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992, 28) once put it: "Seeing, listening, touching, recording, can be, if done with care and sensitivity, acts of fraternity and sisterhood, acts of solidarity. Above all, they are the work of recognition. Not to look, not to touch, not to record, can be the hostile act, the act of indifference and of turning away."

Impact on Policy

This third area of impact is one we feel least able to gauge. Public sociology certainly can play a role in influencing the implementation of more humane public policy. We wouldn't call our impact successful in this regard; to our knowledge, the book hasn't had a measurable influence on the passage of new policy in Austin or elsewhere. We have heard from city council members, and others have written how *Invisible in Austin* has provided a tool for them as they participate in local government. For instance, one Austinite attended a Regional Affordability Committee meeting and held up a copy of the book, encouraging committee members "to remember the real people whose lives are impacted" by issues of affordability. The Policy Director for a Texas Senator also reached out to express interest in the book and wanted to discuss issues of affordability and inequality.

But, ours was a public not a policy sociology (Burawoy 2005), and thus our aims and desired impacts did not necessarily include policy reform. We are not trained policymakers nor feign to be such. Nonetheless, we were commonly asked during Q&As to provide policy suggestions, and on more than one occasion we sensed that our responses seemed insufficient for audience members. In such moments, we felt audience pressures pulling us into a policy realm—where audience members become "less concerned with a conversation" and more with the sociologist delivering tangible policy suggestions (Burawoy 2014). But the objective of *Invisible* was to frame problems not propose solutions. As such expectations are not unique to our experience (Vaughan 2004), future debates among public sociologists about the role we can or should play in policy formulation and implementation seem warranted.

Suggestions for Public Sociology

In conclusion, let us turn to discuss a few key lessons learned during our experiences with *Invisible in Austin,* and important elements for public sociologies as localized interventions.

Approach Public Sociology as Collective Enterprise

The process of producing public sociological interventions is just as vital as the final product itself; we found that the process benefitted from engaging horizontally as much as possible with all the actors involved. In the case of *Invisible in Austin*, this meant not only among the group of co-authors, but also in our relationships with the subjects we got to know and wrote about. With regard to the former, this involved making collective decisions about the direction of the project: from the possible cast of characters to the book's title. Because ethnography is so often a lonely enterprise, we learned profound pedagogical lessons by working alongside one another on a collective project. As one of us wrote in the book's Introduction:

> Whatever ultimately happened with the stories the authors constructed…each contributor was learning to listen, to interpret, to put himself or herself in someone else's shoes, to write, to collaborate, to criticize and be criticized… encouraging and facilitating a cooperative way of learning from, and writing about, folks living under difficult, taxing circumstances. (9).

But, and this we cannot overemphasize, it also meant the graduate student authors decided very early on that whatever stories we produced would be read and approved by those we wrote about before going to press. Sharing the chapters with their protagonists (while making the professor working with them more than a little anxious and apprehensive, and an idea to which he was certainly not originally inclined), beyond the logical consequence of such a public sociology coming to its full fruition, also impacted the way that we wrote.

As we crafted our stories, this fact forced us all to take deliberate care and to treat those we wrote about with respect and consideration—making it all the more difficult to reduce them to flattened portrayals. There are certain liberties (exaggerations, etc.) that you will not take when you know, not you or your editor, but the main character, has the final approval. This, in practice, forced us even more to dare to take seriously their own perspectives and points of view, even if we as sociologists saw the mechanisms and forces at play somewhat differently.

Two additional aspects of collaboration warrant mentioning here for their impact on the book's outcome: First, we were joined by two professional photographers whose photographs added untold power to the text. Julia Robinson and Eva Hershaw volunteered to join our team, and spent hours getting to know the book's subjects, visiting their homes and places of work, and visually documenting their stories in a way that both complemented and expanded the narrative force and moral weight of each chapter. Audiences told us repeatedly that the inclusion of photographs deeply shaped their reading of the stories—they recognized the photo of the Whole Foods grocery store where Raven worked, they visualized the cab drivers like Kumar with whom they had ridden around Austin late at night, they were forced to bear witness to the pain etched into the tired faces of manual laborers like Chip and Santos, whose bodies daily deteriorate from the labor they expend to keep Austin thriving. Sociology has a long history with photography, and we want to encourage public scholars to continue to fuse the visual with the written in an effort to multiply the reach and impact of our work in the communities we study. As a small aside, one practical benefit to having Eva's and Julia's

photos was that we avoided the pairing of our stories with stock photos for the dozens of reviews and articles that came out in the months after the book's publication. In an era where the nuance of sociologists' arguments is often lost when paired with less-than-ideal titles and imagery in popular media, being able to offer up our own photos proved a useful antidote.

Secondly, we were honored to have leading scholar of urban inequality and marginality Loïc Wacquant write the afterword for *Invisible*. Professor Wacquant brought the analytical eye of a senior sociologist to bear on our narratives and discerned threads of commonality between characters that extend beyond these accounts to the "urban precariat" more generally—"that irregular but steadily growing human stream…the precarious fractions of the post-industrial proletariat…struggling to make a home in the shadows, cracks, and ditches of the polarizing city after the dismantling of the Fordist-Keynesian social compact" (265). Wacquant strengthened the intervention of the book as public sociology by distilling the book's underlying issues of public and political concern—devising a vocabulary that others can employ to capture corollary experiences of urban suffering across the United States. If public sociology is "mirror and conscience of society"—if it reminds us "that the world could be different" (Burawoy 2004a)—Wacquant shined that mirror on the most troubling features of our characters' everyday lives: rampant economic instability and abiding social insecurity, the crushing combination of underwork and overwork, the banality of periodic downward mobility, the pervasiveness of horizontal abuse and lateral animosity, a suffusive sentiment of indignity among the dispossessed, injurious and humiliating interactions with personal service customers, and the void left by the organized atrophy of the protective and supportive wings of the state. We can only hope that other public sociologists find senior scholars interested and willing to lend their critical voice to the conclusions of future books. It feels both refreshing and valuable to arrive at the end of a text to have its key points summarized with new diction.

Finally, public intellectual pursuits are often critiqued as leading to the further individualization of our disciplines, through the cult of personality of individual celebrity (Holmwood 2007). Such concerns can be successfully circumvented by approaching public sociology as collective enterprise (Bourdieu 2000a; Royce 1996). In the next section, we expand our discussion of the book's writing, which more generally serves as another key regarding how to do public sociological intervention.

Take Narrative Seriously

To transform sociology we must take seriously "the literary activities" that underlie the discipline and realize that "good sociological writing admits that it tells a story" (Agger 2000:246). We wanted to communicate, and we wanted—we should admit—to be read. And for that, we needed to write in engaging ways. This meant breaking away from our usual forms of writing in the social sciences, which can alienate larger, broader publics. As Abbott (1997, 1151) attests, "sociology has degenerated into formulas—empirical, theoretical, historical…We have given up writing about the real world, hiding in stylized worlds of survey variables, historical forces, and theoretical abstractions." The different authors found inspiration in different places—some looked to *This American Life* as a narrative model, while others reread long-form articles in the *New Yorker*, while others still found themselves looking to the recent work of the new generation of *cronistas* [journalists] in Latin America.

Despite our interest, we admit to struggling with exactly how to write in an engaging narrative style ourselves. While we agreed with Burawoy (2004b) that working in the "concrete and particular" helps make public sociology "accessible," it does not ensure that

it is *engaging*. In other words, being readable does not mean you are read. We were concerned with, echoing Terkel (1974), how to captivate so that the stories are heard. Many of us came to this project with an eagerness to return to the sort of writing that inspired our interest in attending graduate school in sociology in the first place—a style, we admitted to one another, that somehow got trained out of us in our first few years of graduate education. We might encourage other students interested in the craft of narrative prose to seek out courses (like Long-form Feature Writing or Creative Writing) in other departments at their universities (journalism, communication, English, etc.), and for sociology departments to consider offering courses in writing—as vital a part of our training as sociologists as the craft of research methodologies, yet strangely missing from the departments with which we're familiar. Incorporating writing courses into the standard curriculum would increase not only the odds but also the ability of sociologists to communicate their findings with those outside the confines of academia.

Another valuable takeaway from this experience is the unparalleled treasure that is a peer-writing group—particularly one familiar with a project from its inception. Building on our last point about the value of collaboration, we found that writing as a collective enterprise was immensely rewarding and enriching. *Invisible* is a bit unusual in that it is not an edited volume, per se: Although each graduate student wrote one chapter, we workshopped each chapter between two and five times for sessions lasting one to three hours each over the course of roughly a year. These chapters were discussed after we had spent many hours over many months reporting back to one another about our time spent with the subjects we were getting to know. Each of us felt deeply invested in the stories that would unfold in the other chapters because we had helped them take shape. Every co-author conducted extensive line-by-line edits of all chapters—we massaged, prodded, chopped, streamlined, and reworded one another's prose until all of us were satisfied with the book from beginning to end (and not without considerable disagreement along the way). This collective process helped us fill in each other's blind spots (Raven's chapter, for instance, lacked thick description of the strip club until co-authors encouraged Caitlyn to provide greater detail; others questioned Katherine about whether Kumar was always as saintly as she described him in early drafts). And, importantly, this collective writing process helped give the book a unified voice despite having 13 authors. This unity, we believe, is vital in achieving the goal of the book, that is, to render visible the roots and lived experiences of those who labor in the heart of Austin yet occupy only its social and symbolic margins. None of us could have written this book alone: it required us working as a collective to write this piece of public sociology.

We might propose, then, that public sociologists consider this alternative writing model. Two models seem to prevail in our discipline currently. First, sole-authored books (or occasionally those with two or three writers), whose writers largely oversee their project from beginning to end on their own and perhaps ask several generous colleagues and relatives to provide feedback on drafts before the book goes to press. Second, edited volumes, whereby authors write their chapters independently (sometimes with feedback from an editor) and an editor writes an introduction and conclusion to tie the threads together. A third model might resemble the way we wrote *Invisible*, which we call "*collective ethnography*": Public sociologists with overlapping interest or expertise (cooperatives and alternative work arrangements, women and poverty, homelessness, racism in urban policing, and so on) (1) convene prior to their data collection to share ideas, then (2) meet regularly (whether virtually or in person) while scholars conduct their fieldwork, and subsequently (3) continue to meet to discuss preliminary findings, and eventually to (4) workshop chapters that contribute to one co-

authored volume. Undoubtedly, this model is time-intensive. But we agreed unanimously that not only was this writing process more educational and enjoyable, but it was also less lonely, and ultimately, the end product much more impactful than our individual endeavors.

On "the virtues of team studies," Loïc Wacquant wrote in the book's Afterword: "*Invisible in Austin* shows how mutual support and crisscrossing control at multiple stages help each contributor to fashion a better research object than would have been possible on one's own and to craft a text that is seamlessly integrated into a collective book that is more than the mere sum of its individual chapters" (269). If public sociology can function as localized intervention, then surely collectivizing the skills and efforts of a small group of scholars by working on a shared project in their community would be a more effective intervention than the "lone wolf" approach that tends to dominate our discipline at present.

Seek Wide Exposure

Public sociology, as we have practiced it, demands multiplicity. As Michael Burawoy (2005, 4) wrote in his 2004 Presidential Address "For Public Sociology" to the American Sociological Association, "Responding to the growing gap between the sociological ethos and the world we study, the challenge of public sociology is to engage multiple publics in multiple ways." We did not shy away from any forum—we accepted invitations from left and right, from progressive and not so progressive groups, from big groups to small. In sociology circles—in classrooms, at conferences, in the pages of journals—we tend to take it as given that our audience (other sociologists) may disagree with fine points of our argument but in a broad sense, tends to understand our social world in somewhat similar ways. If public sociology is carried out as localized intervention, we believe it is necessary to preach not only to the converted. This act required exposing our ideas to the widest possible audience.

These experiences of exposure were key learning moments for the graduate student co-authors. Standing in front of an audience and being asked to defend our claims and conclusions differed from, say, a dissertation defense or an oral examination in an academic setting because the audience members were stakeholders with skin in the game. They were non-profit workers, tenants facing eviction from their homes, city council members, voters, victims of abuse, business owners, and refugees, to name a few. We learned a great deal from bearing witness to their varying interpretations of the book, and from being held accountable for our writing—not by journal reviewers, but by the fellow residents of our city.

This exposure was often uncomfortable. At one event, audience members were frustrated that the book didn't take a stand on a number of local legislative initiatives like affordable housing. Others voiced that non-native Austinites have no place writing this book. Non-profit employees and churchgoers chastised us for not connecting our subjects with the panoply of support services available in Austin (namely, through their churches or organizations). Quite a few event attendants expressed disappointment that we hadn't profiled workers in their fields (gardening, pedicab operations, etc.) or with their particular social background (e.g., wheelchair bound) in order to highlight and document those particular permutations of disenfranchisement and marginalization. Yet others communicated that our entire endeavor was oppressive by its very nature—graduate students and a professor "studying down" and exploiting the tribulations of the poor for our own academic gain. Engaging with the expectations, critiques and commentaries of such publics further solidified and clarified our understandings of public sociology in action. Serious public sociology involves such critical reflexivity, submitting ourselves to critiques from multiple publics and to constantly

questioning our own intellectualist biases (Bourdieu 2000a, 2000b). Moreover, these critiques are themselves evidence of the benefit of exposure for public sociologists: By putting our ideas and ourselves in direct dialogue with city inhabitants—whether likeminded or censorious—we accomplished a major goal of the book, which was to render the stories and the social suffering of our participants visible to the city's denizens who often do not see (do not choose to see) them.

In the book's Introduction, one of us wrote that *Invisible* is about the politics of sight: What we see and what we don't see about a city has a politics, and is involved in a power struggle. Siloing ourselves to audiences who agreed with our claims ran counter to our motivation for embarking on this project in the first place. Exposure for us was therefore part of this politics. We hope that other public sociologists interested in engaging with local audiences similarly seek out the broadest possible venues in which to share their work. Public social science has its risks—and needs new ways of producing and circulating. Public intellectual work is still a precarious pursuit with both internal and external pressures not necessarily rewarded within academia (Vaughan 2004), though it can be (see Schor 2004). The public engagement can be jading and unsettling (Stacey 2004). But, the alternative—of withdrawing "into the 'small world' of academe, where it marvels at itself and engages in internecine campus wars that threaten no one on any front" (Bourdieu 2000a, 42)—we find untenable.

As a final summary remark, let us reassert that public sociology as localized intervention involves using every possible platform available. It involves imagining new ways of writing that those outside the ivory tower find not only accessible but also relevant, eye opening, and thought provoking. It means having a wide and expansive communicative toolkit that looks for inspirational guides in public sociological classics like *The Weight of the World* but also in nonfiction journalism. It means seeking out a plethora of spaces to produce encounters between sociology and those that also inhabit the cities in which we live, work and teach—and which we write about.

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Caitlyn Collins is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Washington University in St. Louis. Her research examines gender inequality at work and in family life, and appears in *Gender & Society*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Michigan Family Review*, *the Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, and several edited books (including *Invisible in Austin*). She has a book under contract titled *Impossible Ideals: How Women Work and Care in Europe and America* (Princeton University Press).

Katherine Jensen is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her work has appeared in such journals as *City & Community* and *Contexts,* and she is one of the authors of *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City* (University of Texas Press). She is a P.E.O. Scholar and former Fulbright Fellow.

Javier Auyero is the Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Professor in Latin American Sociology at the University of Texas-Austin, where he directs the Urban Ethnography Lab. He is the author of *Poor People's Politic*s, *Contentious Lives*, *Routine Politics and Violence in* Argentina, and *Patients of the State.* Together with Débora Swistun, he co-authored *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*. His latest book, *In Harm's Way*: *The Dynamics of Urban Violence,* co-authored with María Fernanda Berti, was published by Princeton University Press. He is also the editor of *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City* (University of Texas Press), and co-editor – with Philippe Bourgois and Nancy Scheper-Hughes – of *Violence at the Urban Margins* (Oxford University Press).