“Different Strolls, Different Worlds? Gentrification and its Impact on Outdoor Sex Work”

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Abstract: Research reveals mixed findings regarding gentrification's effects on longtime residents and legal small businesses. In contrast, there is minimal examination of the ways in which urban redevelopment impacts illicit outdoor marketplaces, and those that do rarely employ a comparative analysis or focus on individual perceptions regarding such changes. Using the case of street-based sex work, this study illuminates how workers in the outdoor trade assess changing work conditions and establishes that such evaluations color their decision-making. To this end, we draw on interviews with 51 sex workers of color with familiarity of two divergent sex work "strolls" in Washington D.C. Our findings suggest participants perceive gentrification as a multifaceted phenomenon that reconfigures their work by altering social support, environmental conditions, and competition, changes which ultimately inform where they ply their trade. This research shows that individuals in illicit outdoor markets consider the ramifications of urban redevelopment on their work, and make strategic decisions that have implications for their emotional, physical, and financial well-being.

Keywords: Gentrification; illicit markets; sex work; decision-making; agency

Ruth Glass (1964) originally conceptualized "gentrification" as a process through which the middle class "invad[ed]…the shabby modest mews" of Western London and replaced them with "costly flats or houselets" (p. xviii). Since that time, the concept of gentrification has expanded, encompassing not only the changing socioeconomic character of neighborhoods but the shifting racial, cultural and educational composition of residents brought about by state policies, corporate and private investment (Brown-Saracino 2017; Hackworth 2007; Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008; Smith 2014). The nature of gentrification, as a wholly positive or negative force, is still widely debated: Does gentrification dislocate poor and minority residents as they face higher rents, mortgages, taxes, and costs of living (Atkinson 2003; Newman and Wyly 2006; Smith 1996)? Or, is the link between gentrification and residential displacement exaggerated (Ding, Hwang, and Divringi 2016; Ellen and O'Regan 2011)?

In these ensuing discussions, the focus has been primarily on the potential negative consequences of gentrification for law-abiding residents and "legitimate" small businesses. Yet changes to a neighborhood's social, cultural, and physical features may alter the presence of illicit marketplaces as well and operations within them (Dickinson and Wright 2015). The displacement and disruption of these illicit marketplaces—such as drug sales, street vendors, and street-based sex work—has widely been accepted as a positive and purposeful consequence of gentrification (Lyons et al. 2017; Martucci 2013). Yet we know little about how individuals involved in such markets experience and respond to gentrification.

This article contributes to this gap by examining the experiences of street-based sex workers and their decisions to continue or desist selling sex in the midst of gentrification. We do so by comparing sex worker experiences across two "strolls" within Washington D.C. – City Vista, a gentrified stroll, and State Border Road (SBR), an ungentrified stroll. We interviewed

fifty-one sex workers of color along these strolls between 2014 and 2016. Our findings suggest that sex workers are aware of the urban redevelopment around them and attentive to how gentrification alters their work conditions, noting it both creates and diminishes business opportunities, which ultimately affects their decisions about where to operate.

GENTRIFICATION: A BENIGN, NEUTRAL OR MALIGNANT PHENOMENON?

Gentrification reconfigures public spaces and how actors use and access them. While long-term residents may see public spaces, such as sidewalks and streets, as "outdoor extensions of their living room," new residents instead classify the same spaces as "the setting […] for specific activities, like walking the dog or jogging [but not] sustained social interactions" (Levy and Cybriwsky, 2010: 288). When the two groups hold disparate beliefs about appropriate uses of public space, gentrifiers may start to stake exclusionary claims to them, denying access to members deemed "undesirable" or "deviant" (Crofts, Hubbard, and Prior 2013; Tissot 2011). Gentrifiers' fears of difference (Fyfe 2004) and crime (Zukin 1995) incite over-policing of minorities and other vulnerable people as gentrifiers utilize law enforcement to excise "otherness" from the neighborhood. This same expansion of social control can lead to falling crime rates and improved neighborhood safety (Kirk and Laub 2010). Longtime residents in gentrifying neighborhoods can attribute these changes to the arrival of new, middle- or upper-class residents, and consequently, may view gentrification with ambivalence rather than fear or anger (Pattillo 2007).

Formal and informal social responses to "crime" inevitably target neighborhood residents who participate in illicit and illegal economies, regardless of the relative threat posed by those marketplaces.[1] These "broken window" approaches gained significant popularity in the 1990s. Proponents suggested that "maintaining order," through the control and removal of "disorder"

crimes, such as turnstile jumping or graffiti, would improve the environmental character of the neighborhood and cultivate citizen investment (Wilson and Kelling 1982). Rather than strengthening existing communities, subsequent research argued that broken window policing can encourage gentrification that produces inequitable, divergent outcomes for community members (Harcourt and Ludwig 2006).

Moreover, the temporal precedence between visual signs of disorder and gentrification is not always clear; gentrification can usher in new understandings of disorder among community members. For example, Jou and colleagues (2016: 566) found that as neighborhoods in Taipei gentrified, residents' attitudes towards unlicensed street vendors changed, shifting from hard-working to a nuisance to eventually "malignant tumours" that needed to be excised from the community.

Such removal is accomplished through the development of "capable guardians" within gentrifying neighborhoods (Cohen and Felson 1979). A capable guardian is any person that "serves by simple presence to prevent crime and by absence to make crime more likely" (Felson 1995: 53). Rather than referring only to active agents who prevent crime, Felson's "guardian" also includes passive deterrents, including non-human entities (such as CCTV cameras, window sightlines, or building security signs), which effectively communicate that someone could be watching (Hollis-Peel et al. 2011). Together, these mechanisms of control—broken window policing and installation of capable guardians—that accompany or precede gentrification have a disproportionate effect on the operation of illicit marketplaces. Illicit markets are often disrupted and displaced, depriving operators of the potential benefits they may incur, such as an increased (and increasingly wealthy) customer base. Illicit operators, then, must weigh the potential

benefits gained by gentrification against personal costs (e.g., the potential for arrest or harassment) as they decide whether to continue their business in these settings.

GENTRIFICATION AND THE SEX TRADE

Outdoor sex work exemplifies the nexus of public space, criminality, and labor. By the nature of its "public-ness," street-based solicitation like other "perverted" spaces—including gay bathhouses, dungeons, peep shows, adult bookstores, even the "gayborhood"— is frequently portrayed as occurring within under-developed neighborhoods (Delany 1999; Ghaziani 2014). As these neighborhoods gentrify, legal brick-and-mortar sex-related businesses are shuttered in response to white, middle-class and heterosexual family values that frequently accompany the change (Hubbard 2001; Hubbard et al. 2008). Like the unlicensed street vendors in Taipei, these sexual marketplaces, regardless of their legality, are rebranded as undesirable public nuisances that breed other crimes and decrease property values (Keatinge and Martin 2016).

In response, city governments, licensing bodies and urban planners collaborate so that such marketplaces are less visible in gentrifying areas, either through enforcement or relocation (Crofts et al. 2013). In Washington D.C., such combined efforts led to the closure of gay sex clubs and spas in the city's Southwest quadrant (Lewin and Leap 2009) and the establishment of "Prostitution Free Zones" (Edelman et al. 2015). For street-based sex workers, these laws and policies are typically upheld via policing strategies that push workers to underdeveloped (and dangerous) locations (Argento et al. 2018; Matthews 2005; Sanders 2005). In a historical case study of gentrification-prompted policing in Vancouver, B.C., Becki Ross (2010) showed that cis and trans sex workers were driven from the city center to unpopulated warehouse districts. Over the next decade, the Vancouver sex worker community was the target of multiple serial murderers, resulting in the death of 65 street-based sex workers lured from these marginal

locations. In their contemporary assessment of Vancouver trans strolls, Lyons and colleagues (2017) reached a similar conclusion – that such intensive policing was putting street-based sex workers at greater risk for victimization and violence.

This body of literature largely concludes that the combination of informal (gentrifiers) and formal (police) social controls forced street-based sex workers from their historical strolls into alternative, more dangerous urban areas. At the same time, Canada-based studies highlight the ways in which street-based sex workers exerted agency as they resisted this displacement (Durisin et al. 2018; Ross 2012; Ross and Sullivan 2012). Street-based sex workers *could* benefit from measures to improve neighborhood safety within gentrifying neighborhoods, especially given they are more likely to experience violence, harassment, criminalization and stigmatization than indoor workers (Sanders 2005), but extant research rarely unearths this finding.

This study considers how street-based sex workers, as operators within an illicit marketplace ("the stroll"), make decisions about where to work in the midst of gentrification. While scholars overwhelmingly assert that gentrification is a negative force for this population, uniquely, we use a comparative approach to answer this question. We compare the experiences of sex workers who work in a heavily gentrified area to those who work in a neighborhood that has experienced very little, if any, gentrification to better understand what factors sex workers weigh when deciding where to operate. We ask: Does gentrification reduce sex workers' agency, as operators, in marketplace selection? Or is the decision of where to operate made for them by other entities, such as police or residents? What factors and conditions, spurred by gentrification, are most important to marketplace selection?

METHODS

Site Selection

In 2011, the District of Columbia lost its minority-majority status (Tavernise 2011). As Hyra (2017) observed, the racial shift of the city's composition from the nation's first majority Black city to a "cappuccino city," whereby historically Black neighborhoods were reshaped by an influx of white, well-educated, and wealthy middle-class residents, was fueled by the city's ongoing gentrification. While this "revitalization" has pumped money into certain neighborhoods, many historical and Black-owned businesses have closed and their client bases have been displaced. However, not all D.C. neighborhoods have experienced this intensified scale of gentrification. The city's predominantly Black communities, Wards 7 and 8 in the far southeast and northeast quadrants, show little evidence of gentrification. The D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute found that as the rest of the city gentrifies, poverty increased in Wards 7 and 8 (Zippel 2016). In turn, these areas become less desirable for investors, resulting in the further racial segregation and disenfranchisement of community members.

The Strolls

City Vista and SBR exemplify these disparities in racial and socioeconomic composition. Despite being less than 10 miles apart, the two strolls have experienced very different gentrification trajectories over the last two decades. City Vista, in Ward 5, is located near downtown, close to cultural amenities, public transit and main highways. Until the early-2000s, the neighborhood was mostly occupied by used car lots and abandoned industrial warehouses with some surrounding apartment buildings. Between 2000 and 2015, City Vista census tracts underwent considerable demographic changes indicative of gentrification as major new residential buildings sprouted. The neighborhoods bordering the stroll became whiter, wealthier, and more educated at a faster pace compared to the whole of the District (see Table 1), energizing further commercial and residential development. The former industrial sites are now

populated with condos, and the carry-outs replaced by high-end sit-down restaurants. Due to these changes, we consider City Vista an area with "advanced" gentrification (Brown-Saracino 2017).[2]

TABLE 1 HERE

Comparatively, SBR runs through Ward 7, a stroll that is also close to public transportation and a major highway yet has experienced almost no development or neighborhood-level change during the same period of time.[3] Similarly, the census tracts that comprise the SBR neighborhood are changing much slower than the rest of the city, presenting a sharp contrast to City Vista's rapid transformation (Table 1). Unlike City Vista, SBR has not been the site of any substantial new construction projects over the past eight years; instead most dwellings are single-family houses or older apartment buildings. Juxtaposed to the recent posh supermarkets and superfluous number of restaurants in City Vista, SBR meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture's definition of a food desert – the only local source for food is a single 24/7 convenience store situated at the far end of the stroll (Gallagher 2011). Therefore, we consider SBR to be a non-gentrified neighborhood.

Sex Work in Washington, D.C.

City Visa and SBR have been active strolls – outdoor sex markets—since the 1980s. The underground sexual economy is robust in Washington, D.C., valued at approximately $103 million, most of which stemmed from street-based sex work (Dank et al. 2014). As in other cities, street-based sex work in the District has likely decreased while Internet-based solicitation is on the rise. Relying on mobile phones to solicit and arrange dates even as they work the strolls, sex workers' practices increasingly challenge location-based binaries of indoor versus outdoor.

Still, this hybrid business model remains quite public, with curbside solicitations that typically result in sex in semi-visible outdoor spaces.

As online work becomes more common, some question whether street-based sex work is obsolete. Observationally, this does not appear true in Washington D.C., where three very different types of strolls exist to serve different purposes and clientele. Far from being a characteristic of low-income neighborhoods, strolls are found in a variety of neighborhoods regardless of socio-economic status (Ross 2012). In D.C., "high track" strolls run through wealthier neighborhoods and business districts; they are locations where workers are able to procure higher prices and pimping tends to be more prevalent (Lowman 2000). On the other end of the spectrum are drug-associated strolls, where sex work and drug markets intertwine (Hail-Jares 2016). Sex along these strolls is frequently exchanged directly or indirectly for drugs. However, both City Vista and SBR are identity-associated strolls, which are characterized by a shared racial, gender, and/or sexual identity among workers. They exist as a "safe social space" that is coupled with a work environment, like Chicago's Boystown (Hail-Jares 2016). These multiple purposes render Washington D.C. strolls quite active, even in the Internet age.

As identity-associated strolls, City Vista and SBR are frequented by trans and gender non-conforming people of color for cultural and financial reasons. More than simply a marketplace, the strolls are an integral part of "trans" Washington (Edelman 2011; Hail-Jares 2016). By controlling for stroll type, we believe the comparison will be richer and minimizes the likelihood that other confounding variables—such as sex workers' demographics or primary motivation for engaging in sex work—could serve as an alternative explanation for our findings instead of extent of gentrification.

Gaining Access

Since 1993, HIPS, a harm reduction program that provides safer sex and injection supplies (including those for hormones), serves sex workers throughout Washington D.C. They do so via an outreach van and brick-and-mortar location. HIPS' outreach van visits the city's strolls overnights from Thursday to Saturday each week. The second author spent six years volunteering with HIPS. In 2014, she, along with other HIPS staff and volunteers, started a community oral history project to better understand how gentrification impacted sex workers. On non-outreach nights, the HIPS van became a mobile "interview room." Sex workers could rest, chat, and talk, but were asked questions about how the city had changed, their personal and work-related experiences alongside gentrification, and what policies changes they desired. These histories informed HIPS advocacy efforts to decriminalize sex work in Washington D.C.

In 2016, the current authors used the same recruitment practices to meet with sex workers along City Vista and SBR. Eligible sex workers acknowledged exchanging sex for money, housing, or other goods, and were over 18. Interviewees were actively working along the stroll and met with the authors between clients or as a change of pace on a slow night. We stressed that participation was voluntary and did not impact their future ability to use HIPS services. To ensure the participants' identities remained confidential, we obtained only verbal consent.

Compared to the earlier oral history project, the authors used a more in-depth structured questionnaire focused on workers' perception of gentrification and its meaning, stroll preference, safety, use of the Internet, client and police interactions, and other topics. Each sex worker received $25 in cash for their participation. Although very rare, the most common reason for refusal to participate was being actively engaged in solicitation; in some cases, these workers met with us on a different night. We digitally recorded the interviews, which ranged in length from 45 minutes to 1 hour. Throughout the interviews both researchers asked questions for

clarification or probed for more details. We debriefed with participants afterwards in order to modify questions for clarity. Here, we only provide *partial spatial disclosure* (Contreras 2019) regarding strolls by assigning them pseudonyms and not disclosing their precise geographical locations within the city. We likewise use fictitious names for study participants.

The authors used DeDoose to broadly code interviews and independently coded the same two randomly selected interviews. We then subsequently discussed, modified, collapsed, and expunged codes after consultation. Each interview was coded by at least two people. In the second focused round of coding, we applied abductive analysis to identify causal patterns within the qualitative data, that is identifying a parsimonious explanation for how factors relate, then refining that causal pathway as we completed more coding (Hancock et al. 2018; Tavory and Timmermans 2013). For instance, as we explored the causal relationship between "gentrification" and "preferred work stroll," work conditions (e.g. "safety," "earnings," and "competition") emerged as an important factor. When such codes continued to remain salient, we were able to further refine our theory that sex workers selected their preferred stroll on the basis of work conditions, which they ultimately attributed to degree of neighborhood gentrification.

The Workers

Between 2014 and 2016, we interviewed 51 street-based sex workers along City Vista and SBR. The sample was almost entirely trans women (92%), with the remainder identifying as cis-men (8%) (see Table 2). Our average participant was a 28-years-old black trans woman who had been selling sex for 9 years. "Regular" (or repeat) clients comprised approximately 45% of their overall customers.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

For 61 percent of our interviewees, sex work was their sole source of income; the remainder relied heavily on sex work but supplemented that income with low-paid, service jobs (e.g., hair or makeup stylist, grocery store or fast food worker). Thirty participants provided residential information, and 77 percent lived in either D.C.'s eastern quadrants or Maryland's western suburbs, all of which were geographically closer to the SBR stroll than City Vista (see Table 3). Most indicated that their own neighborhoods had not experienced gentrification, and the majority commuted to City Vista to work.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

GENTRIFICATION, SOCIAL PROCESSES, AND STROLL SELECTION

Ninety-eight percent of the participants regularly worked along City Vista, and three-quarters labeled it the location where they "mostly" or "exclusively" worked (Table 2). In contrast, over half (51 percent) of our participants refused to work along SBR, and 31 percent stated they only did so "occasionally" or "rarely." Just seven individuals in the sample classified SBR as their primary work venue. Our observations similarly confirmed a more robust market along City Vista compared to SBR. This analysis reveals that gentrification altered the presence of guardians, which made City Vista a more desirable market-space to conduct sex transactions. Moreover, redevelopment impacted the extent of competition, another salient factor that influenced sex workers' decisions about where to operate.

Potential Guardians and the Persistence of Community

Environmental Changes and Social Support. Past research asserts neighborhood revitalization frequently results in intensive policing and heightened social controls, which implicitly or explicitly forces sex workers to relocate to undeveloped and more dangerous city

spaces (Sanders 2005). Once that occurs, Argento et al. (2018) argue that being in these new, high risk areas can further disrupt existing social networks, community, and social support.

Instead, we find that the sex worker community along City Vista was not displaced. Environmental improvements, such as upgraded street lighting and the proliferation of legal businesses that attracted greater numbers of people to the neighborhood, made the stroll a more desirable area to work. Such changes cultivated more foot traffic in the area overall, which enhanced workers' sense of safety. These environmental improvements led many sex workers to favorably appraise this work location and flock to it. For example, Diamond operated exclusively on City Vista partly because there was a low risk of victimization, which she attributed specifically to ecological modifications: "This is a safe area because there's more lights and attractions, there's not so many dark areas or old beat up old construction areas anymore … The fact [is] that someone is always watching. Nobody is ever alone out here by themselves." Likewise, 39-year old Zara, mostly worked here because of this upgrade: "They have more streetlights, and I just think when a girl is working the streets there needs to be light in certain areas … with them building [up] the area it kinda makes things better [for us]." Even the proliferation of security cameras and nighttime guards in entranceways of many condos contributed to this perception. Redevelopment spurred such changes to the broader environment, resulting in enhanced nighttime visibility due to streetlights and better sightlines. This led to greater neighborhood surveillance and increased the likelihood that a "potential guardian," human or otherwise, *could* be watching and able to disrupt potential crime. For many sex workers, environmental modifications made them feel safer and more secure.

These same ecological changes also made socializing between sex workers easier and contributed to high levels of social support. Even as high-rise condominiums, office buildings

and corporate businesses emerged around them over time, the atmosphere along City Vista frequently resembled a block party. Workers talked, joked, drank, and danced in the streets or sidewalks, activities that fostered a sex worker community that transcended business transactions. Indeed, sex workers described City Vista as a trans friendly social space where they could develop deep friendship and family connections. Twenty-one-year-old Sheree described this camaraderie as a significant advantage to working here: “Because most of them out here are trans, so you have the trans community. They talk about dates with each other … Yeah there’s definitely a specific community, where it’s like my sister is there waiting for me.” Bi-racial trans woman, Kareen, pointed to the large number of other sex workers outside at night, a congregation that bolstered her feelings of inclusion as well as support: “[Now] there are more girls out here, so it’s like a family. If you know people out here, you know friends, then it’s like you have protection.” Both Sheree and Kareen noted that members from the sex work community also served as “potential guardians,” protecting and monitoring one another. Their quotes indicate that the trans sex worker community is a family that sustains the emotional and physical well-being of its members. Although previous research finds gentrification typically erodes sex work community via displacement, our study suggests otherwise.

The working environment and lack of a social support system along SBR presented a stark contrast to City Vista. Almost all the sex workers described SBR as a risky, dangerous place to operate due to current social and ecological conditions. Sex workers described the frequency of violence and street crime in this area, acts that often targeted them specifically because they were trans people and/or sex workers. These attacks, perpetrated by younger men from the SBR neighborhood and their friends, emerged as one of the biggest threats of working along SBR: “I just don’t work over there anymore ‘cause it’s too dangerous. There’s too many

young guys around. You don't know if they're trying to rob you or have sex with you. It's too risky. I just avoid it," Fiona explained. Lorena no longer operated along SBR because of the elevated crime rates: "[i]t's a different atmosphere on SBR… I don't want to say the ghetto… but it's just more crime would happen over there than happens over in City Vista. That's the type of people it attracts, some of the younger guys go there [to do that]." Destiny's blunt advice: "Don't work outdoors in SBR. No, you just cannot be on the street over there selling ass or you asking to be beat up, robbed, raped. Anything is liable to happen."

SBR's violent reputation was exacerbated since the neighborhood lacked the human and non-human guardians found along City Vista that sex workers believed *could* mitigate such threats. Even though SBR is also a known trans stroll within D.C., not one sex worker labeled it a welcoming gathering space for trans sex workers; the community that persisted along City Vista was missing here, a fact which contributed to the inhospitable conditions. During our nightly outings, we observed very few sex workers in this area, no clusters of them along SBR, and those we encountered were solitary figures on the move while at work. As a result, fellow sex workers were rarely around to act as guardians for one another, and there was a general sex worker distrust of men in this space.

There was an exception to this pattern whereby a few sex workers were able to draw upon personal familial networks to shore up social support to improve their working conditions. Although a rare phenomenon, having a potential guardian near the stroll area tipped the scale for a few sex workers so they were willing to operate along SBR. This option existed for individuals who lived in this location or grew up here so they could rely upon the protection afforded from nearby family and friends. Possessing such personal networks limited which individuals considered SBR a safer marketplace and worth the risk of operating there, as illustrated by Dora:

“SBR it’s violent but I live in that area, I grew up in the area. I know people there, so I don’t work there unless I see my homeboys out on the block. If they’re not on the block, I don’t go out there.” Mercedes, a 32-year old with four years in the trade, sometimes solicited in this location but only under similar specific circumstances: “[t]here you have to honestly be an original girl from around the neighborhood. The [local] guys don't like just anybody to come there. It’s a hood so you have to really mind your P's and Q's out there. You can make good money, but then you can turn around and get robbed. I'm from the area so my cousin watches my back, I let him know when I’m there.” Both Dora and Mercedes relied upon the presence or reputation of their friends and family members to act as potential guardians while they worked in order to mitigate interpersonal violence.

SBR also lacked the beneficial ecological conditions found along City Vista. The stroll’s main thoroughfare had minimal streetlights so the streets were extremely dark and shadowy, which obscured visibility. Zara rarely solicited clients along SBR because of the dim surroundings that created unease for her: “You’re in a kinda dark area. Even if you walk past a girl you never know what she had on because you can’t really get a good eye of [a person] in case something happens.” In a particularly vivid example, Erika, who refused to work here, referred to the area as a “scary movie,” where “the lighting is really off and flickers all the time.” As such, “watching your back” was difficult in the low ambient lighting, and workers expressed concern over the potential for assault or robbery. For many, the lack of environmental development and upgrades contributed to SBR being inhospitable, and lessened the likelihood that crime would be witnessed and interrupted.

Policing. According to the literature, police are the formal mechanism that most often drives sex workers into dangerous, undeveloped neighborhoods, whereby their role as potential

guardians and crime deterrents is available for residents but with a targeted focus *on* sex workers (Lyons et al. 2017; Sanders 2005). Previous research contends police *presence* is nearly a universal negative phenomenon for sex workers, increasing the risk of incarceration and chasing away clients. Sex workers along City Vista, though, indicated a different experience.

In the mid-2000s, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) declared the City Vista neighborhood a prostitution free zone (PFZ), where solicitation was criminally punishable by enhanced fines and jail time (Edelman 2011, Arrington et al. 2008). The constitutionality of the law was almost immediately challenged, and, as a result, police ostensibly enforced them less frequently or inconsistently (Arrington et al. 2008). A new police chief then shifted to a different strategy referred to as "All Hands on Deck," which oversaturated particular areas with patrol officers to reduce violent crime in select neighborhoods during designated weekends. The "All Hands" weekends resulted in a disproportionate number of sex worker arrests through undercover stings but overall were relatively infrequent operations (Hail-Jares, Paquette, and LeNeveu 2016).

By the time of our 2016 interviews, police tolerated, if informally, the outdoor sex work along City Vista. A legacy of the PFZ era, officers continued to issue "move alongs," asking sex workers to relocate to different areas of the neighborhood (and coincidentally into a neighboring police district), in an effort to appease complaining residents. There was no coordination between police districts, therefore sex workers would move to another block of the stroll and continue their night without harassment or arrest.

Most street workers did not consider these move-alongs much more than a nuisance. Georgia, a 30-year old trans woman, was arrested on City Vista only once in six years. Her comments reflect general sex worker appraisal of policing: "I love working in this area. The

typical interaction with police is [they tell us] keep it moving… they don't want us hanging out too long in one spot. Here, the chances of arrests are much lower than in other areas."

City Vista sex workers also shared anecdotes about officers watching out for them. For example, Summer remarked: "Police can be helpful, by telling us: 'Someone just got robbed tonight. One of your friends was out and some guys was sayin' some negative things to her, so be careful. If y'all hear anything or see anything tell us." When asked about the City Vista police, Brianna replied, "A lot of the police tell us to be safe and they would give us a heads up like, 'Let me know if something happens, or tell us if somebody is out robbin'…" Nineteen-year-old Kareen, who worked approximately three days a week, echoed this sentiment: "Most interactions are good. They just try to make sure I'm safe or if I need anything. If I need to be watched or anything. That makes me feel safe."

Beyond just verbal communication, the visible police presence in this area contributed to perceptions that City Vista was a low-crime area. Lorena, a 39-year old black trans woman who worked exclusively along this stroll, claimed that gentrification cultivated this change: "[police are now] being prompt, they're always around, and it cuts down on a lot of stuff that people can come down here and do. So it's been a lot more safe." Dalia likewise highlighted City Vista's improvement in this regard: "It got better because now police starting to be around more and just watching out for people." As these quotes illustrate, City Vista sex workers described police officers in terms of Cohen and Felson's "potential guardians," available and ready to deter crime. It is surprising that sex workers expressed that they were benefitting, in some ways, from the presence of police.

Not all sex workers thought of police as a protective force; some identified particular officers as perpetrators of verbal harassment or even violence. For example, Latasha, a black

trans woman, stated “they are harassing and they’re not very nice.” Nia, with ten years sex work experience, characterized law enforcement as “rude” at times. She recalled one exchange that incensed her when an officer criticized her attire: “When Officer Johnson said I’m dressed inappropriate, I’m like, ‘I have on a skirt, a shirt, and some heels. Why am I dressed inappropriate? My ass is not out and my titties is not out…” Nia hypothesized that such treatment was transphobic. However, despite instances of discrimination and even hostile encounters tied to racism and transphobia, most City Vista sex workers still viewed officers as “potential guardians” that made their work environment safer.

Comparably, along SBR, sex workers’ concerns about arrests and police interactions were palpable. The SBR stroll traverses the geographical boundary between Washington D.C. and Maryland. Sex workers frequently crisscrossed the border between jurisdictions and had both Maryland and D.C. clients. The Maryland state law regarding prostitution does not differ substantially from the D.C. statute. Both outlaw the selling and purchasing of sex, and prescribe the same criminal punishments (Maryland Code, Criminal Law, §11-306 and District of Columbia Code, Criminal Offenses §22-2701). Yet, in practice, Maryland police along SBR were significantly more aggressive and punitive. Erika refused to work along SBR, in part because of the Maryland police: “Maryland police do not play. They’ll have police cars just parked along the street waiting for you…” Many sex workers similarly characterized the Maryland police as engaging in more punitive policing. For example, 32-year old Fiona, with ten years in the trade, noted it was the Maryland police that she feared in this setting: “[p]olice they will harass you way more there. They’ll run you back and forth from Maryland to D.C. side. You got police on both sides but you don’t wanna get caught on Maryland. They’ll lock your ass up.”

These experiences suggest disparate local level enforcement by jurisdiction, though the differences in policing strategies did not appear to be tightly coupled with degree of gentrification. Notably, D.C. police were conspicuously absent in sex workers' narratives, suggesting they maintained a hands-off approach or at least posed far less of a threat for sex workers along SBR. However, the potential for harassment and arrest did weigh heavily in shaping sex workers' decision-making about where to solicit. Whereas MPD officers patrolled and "moved-along" City Vista workers, their absence along SBR eliminated their ability to serve as potential guardians (a role that the Maryland police did not adopt) *for* sex workers.

Overall, we find that sex workers associated gentrification with changes to the stroll environment and an increase in police. Yet, these factors did not always produce the expected outcomes: sex workers benefited from the cosmetic improvements to City Vista and believed they improved their personal safety. Additionally, the experiences of sex workers along City Vista and SBR suggest that policing policy not presence was related to displacement and worksite selection, a departure from prior research findings. Gentrification elevated the number and types of guardians available to sex workers, while enhancing ecological features that minimized victimization. Our study indicates that the primary gentrification-related driver of sex worker displacement from City Vista was not alterations to the environment or increased policing, but rather an unintended consequence – increased competition.

Unintended Consequences: Competition and Quality of Clientele

In addition to available support, gentrification modified another key social process important to worksite selection – competition. Despite its advantages, the appeal of City Vista was starting to generate some collateral consequences for seasoned sex workers. Thirty-two-year-old Fiona, who only operated along City Vista, associated such changes directly with the

area's gentrification: "Back when this area was ghetto as hell, there was more money. Now its transgender friendly, you can walk around here [freely], but you can make no money because clients are [now] cheap." Serena, a black trans woman with nine years in the industry, echoed this evaluation: "Customers try to give me the run around… don't give me the money, or tell me one thing at the door and when we get in, it's a different thing. That's when I get irritated. The price ranges have went down [here]."

Experienced sex workers, such as Fiona and Serena, frequently blamed rate depreciation and trying customers on the influx of newer sex workers, drawn to this area because of the favorable work conditions that followed gentrification. Many of these newcomers were young or inexperienced workers who accepted lower prices and consequently drove down rates. Dora, a 35-year old trans sex worker who identified City Vista as her primary location, similarly lamented the shrinking earnings, which she attributed to novices: "I used to come out here and leave this block with $500 or $600 a night. The girls that come out here and do everything for free now [I can] hopefully get like $30." Likewise, Hattie, a 30-year old black trans woman, complained such behaviors helped create a "buyer's market," which emboldened customer demands: "[those who] do a lot of stuff for cheap prices make the working out here a little harder. It makes customers want to pay you less … they're more freaky now and like to do stuff that's like wow. Then they look at you different."

Our analysis suggests the increased competition, lower earnings, and new "buyer's market" encouraged a few participants to leave City Vista and work along SBR. Here, sex workers could command a higher pay rate and sex acts were expeditious. Though it was only a small number of the participants who were regularly willing to do so because of the risks and inhospitable conditions, the lack of urban redevelopment in SBR ultimately proved financially

advantageous for the brave. Raven, a black trans woman with fifteen years of experience in the trade, recently started to split her time across both strolls, due to the big potential payoffs in SBR: “This is where the money is at right now. Oh my gods. Right now [I want to work] here. I know it’s a risk, but guess what, when I’m out here on the streets, I’m making a risk.” Shayna, a 22-year old black trans woman whose primary stroll was SBR, reaffirmed this calculation when she compared locations: “I want to stop coming to City Vista altogether now because it’s not where the money’s at. More is happening on SBR so that’s my preference. I’m just trying to get more money.”

When making decisions about where to work, the participants noted that they weighed the risks to personal safety against ease of earnings. Summer, a trans sex worker with three years in the trade whose preferred stroll was SBR, valued such expedient sex acts: “On City Vista you work harder. Clients want you to do more work for your money… on SBR you’re not gonna give too much and get your money. You get on and get out.” When asked about client differences according to stroll, Shayna replied: “They about paying their money here. Down on City Vista they not – they just all about trying to get a nut off [for free] or something.” Hattie espoused a similar view, which convinced her to work here on occasion: “Clients are straightforward. Everybody know what they come for, they get in and they get out.”

The money was “happening” on SBR largely because the area was still considered too risky of a market, with increased chances of arrest or interpersonal victimization. Without the same market oversaturation along City Vista, SBR workers set their prices (relatively) high and received minimal hassle from customers. The bold sex workers who operated along SBR did so precisely because of the diminished competition and greater potential profits, despite the risks

they faced. “There are fewer workers over here on SBR and too many workers out on City Vista,” explained Kiana, a 28-year old trans worker.

Savvy workers strategically took advantage of the morning rush hour that brought Maryland residents into the District via SBR. Rosie, a 32-year old trans worker, split her time between the strolls, based upon traffic flows: “I work on City Vista for the earlier part of the night and then go during the earlier part of morning to SBR because it’s more of a rush here at that time. There are less girls, too.” Although most sex workers still primarily preferred City Vista for the literally brighter and safer work environment, the same factors had unintended consequences for the market – increasing competition and driving down prices. As a result, certain sex workers began to re-evaluate their worksite selection largely due to economics.

CONCLUSION

Gentrification, and sex workers’ perception of the phenomenon, alters street-based sex marketplaces (or strolls) in both beneficial and detrimental ways. Counterintuitively, we find that the highly gentrified stroll, City Vista, is the preferred work location for most sex workers in our study. This is largely due to environmental upgrades—which can improve safety conditions for sex workers and create more potential guardians—that enabled community members to actively support and protect one another. Unintentionally, these same upgrades led to an increase in competition, drove down prices for services, and created financial incentive that spurred some to work along the un-gentrified stroll, SBR, at both greater personal and professional risk. In a departure from previous literature, our findings suggest that when it occurs there is an indirect relationship between gentrification and displacement that is driven by perceptions about market share rather than increased or more aggressive policing. While these conclusions may be

surprising, they also expose the tensions that exist regarding personal versus professional decision-making for illicit operators.

On an individual basis, sex workers, and especially Black trans women, continue to face abuse and harassment from D.C. police; and such experiences are well-documented historically (Arrington et al. 2008; Hail-Jares, Paquette, LeNeveu 2016; Terrill and Reisig 2003). At the same time, increased police presence, a product of gentrification, discourages violent crime and contributes to a safer working environment for street-based sex workers in general. Police along City Vista served as potential guardians of the marketplace, not actively protecting sex workers as individuals per se but discouraging crime that could negatively affect them as workers (Cohen and Felson 1979).

During our study period, individual officers and sex workers along City Vista appeared to have reached an uneasy and tacit arrangement. To that end, officers may acknowledge sex workers in this setting as "regulars," whom they see routinely. Wilson and Kelling (1982: 30) note that "The people on the street […] were made up of 'regulars' and 'strangers.' Regulars included both 'decent folk' and some drunks and derelicts who were always there but who *knew their place*" (emphasis added). Officer-sex worker relationships along City Vista, at least in their current form, may not be so much about protection but rather about keeping order and maintaining the status quo.

We contend that the sex workers in our study exercised a "rational choice" and agency about where to work amidst gentrification (Wright and Decker 1994, 1997).[4] The risks they grappled with—facing greater police presence as Black trans sex workers versus reduced likelihood of experiencing violent crime and victimization—illustrate the complex constraints on rational choice for many operators in illicit marketplaces. Showden and Majic's (2018) matrix of

agency and vulnerability serves as one method by which to examine choice that is both rational and also constrained. The matrix is an intersectional, person-centered analytical lens that considers the overlapping influences of individual, structural, social, and locational factors over people's decision-making. To that end, agency is action "steeped in bargaining, accommodation, and compromise" vis-a-vis one's structural position (110). Within this analytical framework, agency and vulnerability are both variable and simultaneous. For trans women of color, who already experience a high degree of physical and sexual violence, employment discrimination, and widespread housing instability (Edelman et al. 2015; Nadal, Davidoff, and Fujii-Doe 2014), exercising agency as sole-traders does not negate that their choices are bound by social and carceral transphobia and racism within society. Mirroring the structural inequalities within conventional society, trans women of color and other stigmatized groups tend to be overrepresented in sex work, and specifically within the street sex trade vis-à-vis other sectors (Weitzer 2009).[5]

This matrix also explicates the risk-taking of other workers in our study. The paucity of workers along SBR elevated demand for sexual service in this setting, increasing their earning potential for more expeditious transactions. At the same time, between 2010 and 2019 four trans sex workers were murdered along SBR and at least five more were hospitalized following severe gun violence (there were no murders along City Vista during the same period).[6] For most of our participants, sex work was their sole or primary income generating source. Working a shorter duration of time along better-paying SBR may decrease overall engagement in illicit work and thereby limit the potential negative consequences one could incur. Trans sex workers may decide to take on increased (physical) risk in the short-term by operating along SBR in exchange for less (financial) risk long-term. Thus, what constitutes a "risky" choice must be examined within the

larger context of the decision-maker's lifespan. Additionally, while our findings suggest gentrification can benefit sex workers in particular ways as laborers, our study did not explore its impact on their personal lives as marginalized individuals. Urban redevelopment then does not necessarily provide broad benefits that extend to other aspects of their lives, including, but not limited to, housing affordability.

Although this project is among the first to apply a comparative lens to understand the impact of gentrification on street-based sex work, certain limitations exist. This project is cross-sectional, so our knowledge of how City Vista or SBR strolls operated before gentrification is minimal. Due to a lack of longitudinal data, we were also unable to examine sex workers' experiences of gentrification (e.g., work benefits and drawbacks) as they correspond to the various stages of gentrification. One alternative explanation is that arrests and potential dangers along City Vista were lower than SBR even before urban change commenced. We do not believe this to be the case since our interview data strongly suggest that sex workers associate degree of urban redevelopment with improved work conditions in City Vista, perceptions that weighed heavily on their subsequent decisions about stroll selection.

Moreover, certain scholars examine residents' influence on sex work practices and well-being in gentrifying neighborhoods but these are almost all in contexts outside of the U.S. (Kingston 2014; Lyons et al. 2017). Given the very little research on these dynamics within the U.S., we recommend greater scrutiny of resident and other community stakeholders' treatment of sex workers, and how they inform socio-legal practices and policy within U.S. cities. Finally, this study illustrates how gentrification impacts sex workers as illicit operators, yet it remains unclear how urban revitalization shapes other illegal marketplaces and the decision-making of

individuals within them. This could be an avenue for further investigation, applicable to drug-dealing, sales of pirated DVDs, and unlicensed food vendors.

It is important to acknowledge that the criminality of sex work in Washington D.C. is being challenged. After our data collection, in 2017 and 2019, certain members of the city council introduced the country's first bill to decriminalize street-based sex work. Both versions were eventually defeated when the city council refused to bring the bill to a vote. However, the 2019 bill in particular coalesced street-based sex workers in the city, and they formed a strong, vocal community advocating for its passage. The debate, and any future attempts to decriminalize sex work in the city, may change how police and residents view sex work and alter their actions. Future research should continue to explore how the introduction of such legislation impacts resident and policing practices.

This study associates urban redevelopment with specific factors that impact street sex work conditions – social support, safety, environmental features, competition, earnings, and quality of clientele. These findings can be leveraged for possible policy changes in order to promote harm reduction and safer working conditions for street workers that may potentially apply to other vulnerable, disenfranchised populations who engage in illicit outdoor work for their subsistence (e.g. the homeless or unlicensed street vendors). Building off this research, and given various city level policies that facilitate urban redevelopment—the demolition of public housing, tax incentives for investors and commercial development, and more (Smith 2014)—scholars must be ever attentive to the ways they disproportionately affect those with precarious or disadvantaged social positions.

ENDNOTES

1. Illicit suggests the marketplace deviates from traditional social norms, while illegal designates that criminal penalties exist for the sale or procurement of those goods or services. The selling of sex in Washington D.C. is both illicit and illegal.
2. Early stages of gentrification are characterized by racial and socioeconomic heterogeneity (variation within class, race, and education levels), high numbers of women-led households, and rejection of social norms. Whereas the final stages of gentrification are characterized by greater racial and socioeconomic homogeneity (e.g. high education levels and white-collar occupations), low numbers of women-led households, and adherence to social norms (Kerstein 1990).
3. We are unable to provide explanations for the disparate degree of redevelopment by location without examining historical and longitudinal data (on policy, investments, neighborhood ordinances, etc…). Yet Brown-Saracino (2017: 522) contends "that the likelihood of gentrification increases in neighborhoods proximate to cultural amenities, downtown, and public transportation," a description fitting City Vista much more so than SBR.
4. By rational choice, we do not mean the neo-classical theory that hinges on the notion of a "separative" self, but a feminist model that acknowledges society constrains choices of those who are most vulnerable even as they employ agency (England 1989: 15). This applies to debates surrounding sexuality and sexual conduct, which have persisted for decades among feminists. These perspectives are ever evolving, yet some argue that women's sexual agency and autonomy are linked (see Bracewell 2016 for overview).
5. To read more about the historical, persisting, and complex relationship between trans women and the sex industry see Namaste (2011).

6. Gun violence against street-based sex workers in D.C. is certainly more common based upon information collected from bad date reports (Hail-Jares 2016). The murders and assaults discussed here represent particularly horrific cases.

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Table 1. Demographic Changes in City Vista and State Border Road Surrounding Neighborhoods.

Factors	Washington, D.C.	City Vista	State Border Road
Net Change in Population per census tract (1990-2010)	*-29*	+204	*-599.5*
% Black Population (Net change 2000-2010)	*-10%*	*-32%*	*-1.5%*
% Black Population (2000)	61%	92.5%	98.0%
% Black Population (2010)	51%	60.5%	96.5%
% White Population (Net change 2000-2010)	+7%	+23.3%	*-0.2%*
% White Population (2000)	28%	3.7%	0.8%
%White Population (2015)	35%	27.0%	0.6%
% Teen Mothers (Net change 2001-2011)	-3.2%	-11.9%	+4.5%
Net change in % of residents living in poverty (2000-2015)	*-2.0%*	*-11.5%*	*-0.5%*
% Residents without a high school diploma (Net change 2000-2015)	*-11%*	*-27.0%*	*-15%*
% Change in average family income (1990-2000)	+9.7%	*-3.7%*	+2.5%
% Change in average family income (2011-2015)	+23%	+113.5%	+20.0%
Net change in number of residents on EBT (2005-2015)	+296	*-157.5*	+571.5
Net change of median borrower income (2001-2006)	$22,935	$53, 102	$41,962

Median borrower income (2001)	$90,173	$65,727.5	$41, 030
Median borrower income (2006)	$113, 108	$118,829.5	$82,992

Table 2. Sex Worker Characteristics by Stroll Preferences

Sex Worker Characteristics	Participants* (n=51)	Primary Stroll: City Vista (n=38)	Primary Stroll: SBR (n=7)
Average age	28	28	26
Gender			
Trans women	92% (47)	95% (36)	86% (6)
Cis men	8% (4)	5% (2)	14% (1)
Race/Ethnicity			
Black/African-American	86% (44)	84% (32)	86% (6)
Mixed or Biracial	14% (7)	15% (6)	14% (1)
Average age of first engaging in sex work (min-max) (n=47)	20 (11-37)	20 (18-39)	20 (11-27)
First engaged in sex work as a minor, %Yes (n=47)	40% (19)	42% (16)	43% (3)
Average number of years in sex work (min-max) (n=48)	9 (1-37)	9 (1-37)	6 (3-11)
Sex work is primary source of income	61% (31)	58% (22)	71% (5)

*Six participants did not designate either location as their primary stroll: Two split their time equally across the two strolls, and the remaining four worked along both "occasionally."

Table 3. Sex Worker Residences by Geographical Location

District of Columbia

Northwest		*Northeast*	
Individuals	%	Individuals	%
5	17%	9	30%
Southwest		*Southeast*	
Individuals	%	Individuals	%
2	7%	8	27%

Western Maryland

Individuals	%
6	20%