

I am applying for the Beck Research Initiative to support and expand the work that I have been doing with a Nairobi-based nonprofit organization called the Kenya Voluntary Women's Rehabilitation Centre (K-VOWRC). This non-profit organization focuses on minimizing the impact of HIV/AIDS on the lives of transitioning and former female sex workers and their children. In particular, I have spent the past year working on the NGO's communication materials and on a media advocacy plan to increase the quantity and quality of its media coverage. A key component of this project is to provide the women with a forum in which to tell their story¹. Toward that end, *My Story, Your Story* was developed. The project features both print profiles and videos of 20 women describing their daily lives both before and after they became K-VOWRC members. The Beck Research Initiative Fellowship will provide the resources to continue and expand this project. The following proposal provides the rationale and background for the project as well as details regarding the research aims and goals, theoretical foundation, methodology, and how it relates to the Beck Research Initiative mission.

Project rationale and background—The purpose of the proposed project is to move *My Story, Your Story*, to the next level by providing the participants with an opportunity to utilize their stories: 1) to continue their quest for economic self-reliance, and, 2) to encourage community conversations—among the general public and policymakers—that lead to a more informed awareness and understanding about sex work-related issues and policy changes that address employment options and quality of life issues for vulnerable Kenyan women who often turn to sex work because of extremely limited options.

In addition to the monumental challenges surrounding HIV/AIDS for sex workers, the role of religion in Kenyan society and that sex work is illegal places constraints on how sex work is discussed. Religion's powerful position in society and that sex work is illegal often results in sex work-related conversations focusing on either morality, criminality, or both as opposed to addressing societal factors that drive vulnerable Kenyan women to sex work. A primary focus on morality and criminality is misguided as it allows sex work-related conversations to take place in a manner that blames the individual as opposed to examining societal factors that make sex work a

¹ Life histories of the 20 women are in the process of being completed by **Tom Japanni, BBC East Africa Bureau**, and **Tom Otieno, BBC Media Action** (see two attached profiles, #1 Agnes Wangare Gaturu; #2) Evelyne Nafula). All text and video profiles are scheduled to be completed by the end of April 2010.

viable option for many vulnerable Kenyan women. In most cases, it is a catastrophic life event, e.g., a death in the family, a severe illness, a divorce, spousal abuse and or abandonment, which forces these women into sex work. In an effort to encourage members of Kenyan society to begin engaging with these women as their neighbors and fellow citizens, *My Story, Your Story* provides 20 K-VOWRC members with a venue to tell their story, thereby making their communities aware of their entrepreneurial efforts to exit sex work while also humanizing themselves to Kenyan society at large. Additionally, *My Story, Your Story* is designed to encourage society to welcome the women back into the family and community fold by creating community- and governmental-based safety net programs.

Research aims and goals—The project’s overall aim is to encourage Kenyan society at large to welcome the women back into their families and communities. The first goal is to create awareness and exposure (media advocacy) of *My Story, Your Story* in both the Nairobi, Kenya and Chicagoland media markets. The women’s profiles and videologs will be featured for the purpose of generating conversations about societal factors that make them vulnerable to sex work. Moreover, a future project may involve producing a *My Story, Your Story* program for Chicagoland women who experience domestic violence. Thus, featuring *My Story, Your Story* in the Chicagoland media market will serve as an example of self-reliance and encouragement for domestic violence victims while also providing an up-close-and-personal view of how the Beck Research Initiative and the DePaul University Vincentian missions in action.

The second goal is to provide the featured women with business-related technical assistance to help in the development of their business plans from a MBA-level consultant² via monthly group (and one-on-one meetings as needed) Skype meetings. The monthly sessions will consist of determining how well the participants’ existing business plans have met their stated goals and revising their existing goals to reflect the current business environment. Financial analysis will include utilizing profit and loss projections, income statements, balance sheets, capital budgets, business SWOT³ analyses, and establishing short-, mid-, and long-range goals. This component is necessary as most of the women have not had a business plan review/follow up since their initial

² The MBA consultant services will be pro bono

³ Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

business plan development workshop. Moreover, this component will: 1) formalize monitoring and evaluating; 2) encourage continued public conversations among Kenyans regarding sex work-related issues; 3) double as a media hook follow up; and 4) provide current results and success stories for media and community dialogues.

Theoretical and methodological foundations—The theoretical foundational development is built on lifespan research from a feminist perspective and media advocacy theory. *Life history research* is appropriate for this study as it allows for active participant involvement (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Roets & Goedgeluck, 1999) and for capturing a range of experiences—both positive and negative (Cary, 1999; Tierney, 1999). Grounded in Black feminist epistemology, this study assumes that the women’s lives are shaped by their culture and personal experiences, which results from the unique commingling of their gender, social class, and sex worker status (Collins, 2000).

From a political perspective, feminist life history methods provide an opportunity for participants to be active agents who “. . . negotiate openness, expose hegemonic power arrangement and inherent silences, highlight secrets of oppression and resistance, and revalue knowledge that risks being disqualified in current social sciences” (Roets & Goedgeluck, 1999, p. 85). Furthermore, utilizing life history methods and feminist narrative analysis in tandem “. . . provides a vehicle to reflect the women’s standpoints, but it does not lead to particular findings or predetermined outcomes based on the researchers’ frames of reference” (Sosulski, Buchanan, & Donnel, 2010, p. 37.)

In regard to *media advocacy theory*, existing research overwhelmingly supports that the media play an important role in both legitimizing and determining how issues are framed (Chapman, 1997; Edelman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). In fact, the manner in which any given issue is portrayed in the media can affect whether the issue is ignored, championed, or demonized. Media portrays also influence how various publics believe a problem should be remedied.

Media advocacy theory places the media in a dominant position to exact change through policy change (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996). Viewed from this perspective, media advocacy is a powerful tool that can be used to influence how a given issue is talked about and how problems associated with said issue are addressed in society

and provides direction regarding how to promote environmental, a.k.a., societal, strategies that address how sex workers can exit the sex industry from both an economic and health perspective.

The theory's conceptual framework includes six premises: 1) health is the presence of physical, social, and economic well-being; 2) health is associated with positive social and environmental conditions such as adequate housing, employment, health care, and personal security; 3) the nature and quality of these conditions can be controlled; 4) the key to control is broad-based participation, multi-sector planning, and political will; 5) interventions are best applied at the community and policy levels; and 6) healthy public policy choices add up to a healthy society (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996, p. 294).

Media advocacy theory upholds environmental-based (societal) options, as opposed to individual-based options, as the primary solution for societal problems. In regard to societal health issues, public health campaigns driven by media advocacy, result in a "more just and fair society" because a variety of health issues are discussed within a context of how the issues affect diverse groups within a given community. Simply, there is a "shift[s] from a primarily personal/individual view to a social/political understanding of health" (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996, p. 294), which focuses on power rather than just the information gap.

In the context of sex work, the way in which the issue is covered in the media greatly influences whether blame will be laid at the feet of individual sex workers, e.g., flawed character, not working hard enough to secure alternative employment; or at the feet of society, e.g., grinding poverty, low levels of education for female population, limited employment options, etc.

Brief description of how the project articulates with the mission of the Beck Research Initiative—

This project speaks to the Beck Research Initiative's commitment "to promote community-based programs and research that inform the prevention of, and intervention in, gender-related oppressions," by providing a group of vulnerable Kenyan women with an opportunity to continue telling their stories in a manner that may encourage their fellow Kenyans to broaden their knowledge and understanding of sex work-related issues, which in the long term may influence public policy. In particular, their stories of survival and self-reliance have the potential to: 1) discourage other vulnerable women from turning to sex work; 2) encourage Kenyan society to engage in conversations about why vulnerable women turn to sex work; and 3) encourage public policy changes that greatly

increases vulnerable women's educational and employment options thereby enhancing the quality of life of their children and themselves.

Classroom Integration—The project will be integrated into both my Fall 2012 and Winter 2013 classes. More specially, in the Fall I am scheduled to teach *Public Relations and Advertising Ethics* (PRAD 334) at the undergraduate level. Four weeks of this course will be co-taught by me and a professor at St. Paul University in Nairobi, Kenya. I will develop the four weeks in a manner that allows the students to examine how their ethical perspectives of sex work and sex workers are influenced by culture. We will also compare and contrast the Kenyan and American students' perspectives of the two countries sex work-related media coverage. At the graduate level, I will teach *Public Relations* (PRAD 555). In this class one assignment requires student to work in teams to provide public relations materials for a nonprofit organization. Instead of focusing on K-VOWRC the student teams will focus on *My Story, Your Story*. Two groups will prepare an electronic media kit for the project and two groups will prepare a self-guided entrepreneurial workbook that mirrors what the 20 featured women learn during their meetings with the MBA consultant.

In the Winter 2013 quarter, at the undergraduate level I am scheduled to teach *Research Methods for Public Relations and Advertising Professionals* (PRAD 291). The students' qualitative research project will be centered on the women's profiles and videologs. This assignment will provide them with an opportunity to hone their qualitative research skills while also learning about various aspects of Kenyan society. At the graduate level, I am scheduled to teach *Health Care Public Relations* (PRAD 535). In this course the students' term project will focus on some theoretical and methodological health aspect of *My Story, Your Story*. For example, they may explore how public relations can be used to educate Kenyan society at large about sex work-related issues. They might examine how the media cover sex work-related issues and sources they quote. They might explore the similarities and differences in the profiles and propose the most effect use of the women's narratives to position the women as change agents.

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