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MI Diaries: ethical and practical challenges

Abstract: The Michigan Diaries (MI Diaries) project was developed from late March to early April of 2020, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. MI Diaries is a longitudinal sociolinguistic project, collecting "audio diaries" from participants throughout the pandemic and beyond. As a research project designed to obtain personal narratives from a time of deep anxiety and pain, and during a time where face-to-face data collection was not feasible, MI Diaries was confronted from the outset with a substantial set of both ethical and practical considerations. In this paper, we describe some of these challenges, and our false starts and eventual solutions in response. Throughout, we highlight decisions and methods that may be applicable for future researchers conducting remote fieldwork, navigating a speech community during a disaster, or both.

Keywords: COVID-era sociolinguistics; ethics; language variation and change; remote fieldwork; self-recording

1 Introduction

The Michigan Diaries (MI Diaries) project was developed very quickly, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Variation and change in language is normally driven primarily by face-to-face interaction with personal social networks (Labov 2001; Milroy 1980), so widespread lockdowns threatened to potentially disrupt this mechanism of transmission and diffusion (Labov 2007). As sociolinguists, we recognized that the pandemic presented an unusual opportunity to observe the linguistic effects of sudden social isolation. Yet few of us could guess how long lockdown conditions would prevail, making it imperative that we capture as much data as possible from the very start. We turned to audio self-recordings ("audio diaries") as a safe, remote method of collecting naturalistic speech rapidly from many people. Frequent changes to social distancing guidelines convinced us that only a longitudinal approach could do justice to the constantly changing reality on the ground. MI Diaries has therefore been guided from the beginning by two key aims: (1) collect audio recordings regularly and frequently and (2) document ongoing changes to Michiganders' social lives in real time.

In pursuit of these two aims, we met with a number of ethical and practical challenges. It was difficult to design and implement a major research project in a thoughtful way in the face of extreme pressures of time, budget, and external disruption. Inevitably, some initial ideas had to be abandoned. Other components of the project were implemented in whatever form was sufficient to meet the minimal needs of the research. Yet although our decisions have been driven by our overarching research goals, we also hold to the philosophy that practical issues are always ethical issues, and therefore that most challenges require both practical and ethical considerations.

In this paper, we highlight some of the challenges we faced, and the solutions we employed to address them. In doing so, we build on similar prior efforts (e.g., Clarke et al. 2016). We also acknowledge the ideas shared by sociolinguist colleagues in this special collection, to whom we have also looked for inspiration. Our hope is that this work may provide insights to future (socio)linguistic researchers responding to a crisis in their participants' community, especially if they are pivoting rapidly to remote data collection.

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1.1 The MI Diaries project

MI Diaries is a longitudinal panel study of Michigan English from April 2020 onwards, run by the Sociolinguistics Lab at Michigan State University (MSU). Participation is open to anyone aged 3 or older who is currently living in Michigan. Each week, diarists[1] receive 8–12 diary prompts, which differ by age group ("kids", ages 3–12, "teens" ages 13–17, and "adults" ages 18 and over). New questions are developed each week to keep diarists engaged, and are designed to elicit a range of speaking styles (Labov 1984).[2] Diarists self-record and submit entries via our mobile app. Each week, we select 2–5 anonymized snippets to feature on our website's ongoing archive. To date, we have received over 700 diary submissions from over 150 participants, adding up to over 9,000 min of audio diary. Data collection is ongoing.

Data collected from this project will enable us to track the retreat from the Northern Cities Shift occurring in Michigan English (see, e.g., Nesbitt et al. 2019; Wagner et al. 2016) and test existing hypotheses about sociolinguistic calibration and incrementation by pre-teen and teenage speakers (Holmes-Elliott 2021; Labov 2001), as well as post-adolescent life span change by adults (Buchstaller 2016; Sankoff and Wagner 2020).

Our focus in this manuscript, however, is on the ethical and practical challenges we faced in the development of this project. Where relevant, we refer the reader to the Supplementary Materials (SM) for more detail. Early in the fall of 2020, the project developed explicit mission, values, and vision statements (SM 1). We include our values in Table 1, as they have been critical in guiding our solutions to the challenges presented in this paper. In what follows, we begin with some technical challenges related to remote audio recording, before moving on to a variety of intertwined practical and ethical concerns.

2 Data collection challenges and solutions

The first set of challenges we faced was, on the surface, primarily technical: how could we obtain high-quality audio data remotely? But we quickly discovered that even very technical challenges, like building a mobile app, required thoughtful consideration of our project values. Here, we discuss the decisions we made regarding remote audio recording; recruitment, retention, and compensation of participants; and project funding, before reflecting on the opportunities that may be presented to researchers and communities in similar circumstances.

Table 1: MI Diaries core project values.

Authenticity:	To provide participants with a space to share their stories where they can be open and authentic and be heard for who they are.
Trustworthiness:	To incorporate a code of professionalism in our work that assures diarists, scholars, and the public of the high ethical and scholarly standards that we adhere to.
Mentorship:	To encourage students to further their professional development skills through research, project management, and engagement with the community state-wide.
Research longevity:	To recognize the historical value of this project by continuing to develop as a research opportunity for Michiganders by Michiganders.

1 We note that self-recording generally and diary collections specifically around COVID are not unique to MI Diaries; see, e.g., the Mass Observation Project (University of Sussex 2021), New York Public Library's Pandemic Diaries Project (New York Public Library 2021), and Akustisches Corona Tagebuch (Dokublog 2021). To our knowledge however, there are no COVID diary projects that send regular prompts to diarists or that regularly share carefully curated diary entries publicly, as the MI Diaries project does.
2 See SM 2 for more on prompt creation and example prompts.

2.1 Remote audio recordings

Sociolinguistic fieldwork typically involves the long-term immersion of the researcher in the speech community (Eckert 1989; Labov 1963; Rampton 2007). The challenges associated with approximating these conditions via remote means were significant. Practically, we needed to ensure sufficient acoustic quality, but social distancing prevented us from using high-end microphones. Participants also had to trust us enough to speak in an unmonitored style, despite it being impossible for us to build face-to-face rapport.

2.1.1 Acoustic quality

A number of very recent papers have addressed remote audio collection in great detail (e.g., Freeman and De Decker 2021; Hinskens et al. 2021; Leemann 2021; Miley et al. 2021), and we are reassured that our approach of employing the native lossless recording format from smartphones has been found to closely approximate a Zoom H4N recorder, particularly for normalized vowel measurements (De Decker and Nycz 2011). We refer the reader to Sanker et al. (2021) for a detailed breakdown of recording quality across devices for various phonetic features.

Originally, diarists self-recorded on their phones and uploaded recordings to the first author's non-MSU cloud account. Unfortunately, the cloud system at MSU prohibits "anyone access" uploads, meaning that diarists personally uploading recordings to a cloud server was not a viable long-term solution. Initial conversations with MSU's IT department turned us toward developing a web app. However, this had to be abandoned after a few weeks of work, when we discovered that long duration recordings (longer than 5 min) required a prohibitively long buffering time.

We ultimately turned to building a mobile app (Figure 1). Having an official app housed on Apple's and Google's app stores helped to lend legitimacy, promoting our project value of *trustworthiness*. But getting MSU to agree took some convincing: we had to demonstrate to our MSU Apple representative that a web app would be insufficient, and provide examples of other mobile research apps[3] along with a plan for app maintenance and updates. We were able to use MSU's nonprofit developer profiles, saving us several hundred dollars per year; this saving allowed us to hire a student developer to build the app itself. The app is very simple, but sufficient for our needs.[4]

### 2.1.2 Vernacularity of self-recordings

Although self-recording may seem less natural than chatting with a fieldworker, prior sociolinguistic research indicated that self-recordings can elicit highly vernacular speech (Boyd et al. 2015; Hall-Lew and Boyd 2020). This may be because they lessen the effects of the observer's paradox (Labov 1972) by removing the observer's physical presence.[5] Further, the changing relationship between interviewer and participant over time is a particular concern in longitudinal studies (Wagner and Tagliamonte 2018), which we are able to avoid with the self-recording method. Self-recordings additionally make participation in the project more accessible, as diarists can choose to contribute at any time that suits their own schedules.

Despite these methodological upsides to self-recording, the fact remains that participants must feel motivated to speak informally, and that they could share private thoughts with the eventual listener. This challenge was best met by presenting MI Diaries as *trustworthy* and as valuing diarist *authenticity*. Having an official app helps to signal these values, as does our project's visual branding (Section 3.3). We believe that

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3 Our list was as follows: Dialäkt Äpp (Kolly and Leemann 2015), Voice Äpp (Leemann et al. 2015), US dialect app, Grüezi Moin Servus (Leemann et al. 2018a), English Dialects (Leemann et al. 2018b), Stimmen (Hilton 2019), Sprekend NL (van Leeuwen et al. 2016).

4 For more on the app and its back end interface, see SM 3.

5 We note that diarists are unlikely to ever be talking to themselves alone. Some diarists begin their recordings with "Hi Michigan Diaries!". The question of who constitutes the addressee for self-recordings, and to what degree there are auditor or overhearer effects (Bell 1984), is a topic for future research.
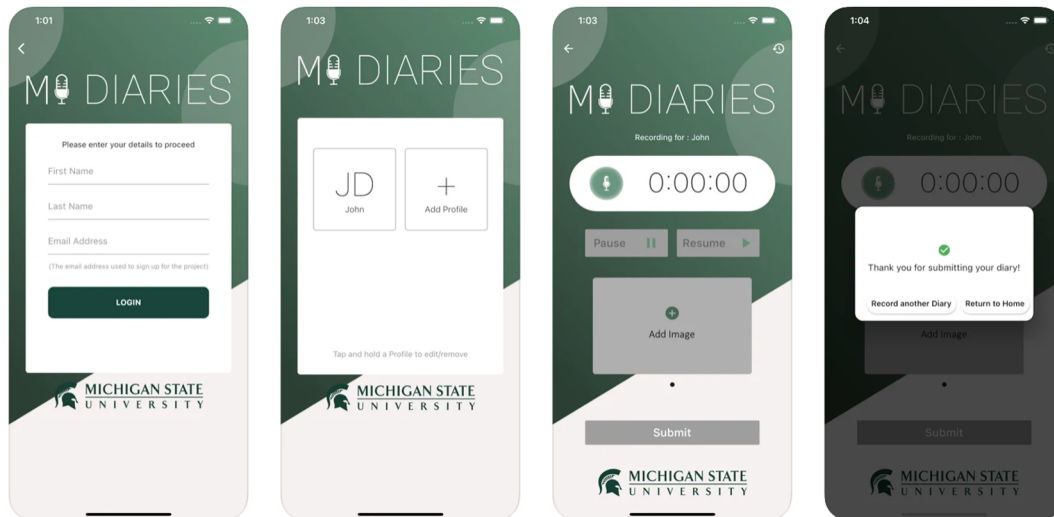
Figure 1: Screenshots showing the app interface for MI Diaries. Diarists can create multiple profiles on a single device, allowing parents to use the same device for multiple children. Diarist recordings are sent to our secure server; diarists may also optionally include images with their submission.

engaging question prompts (SM 2) and building a sense of virtual community (SM 4) also help to encourage vernacular speech from diarists.

2.2 Recruitment and retention

For a longitudinal study like MI Diaries, participants must be over-recruited (since many will be lost to attrition over time) and, wherever possible, retained. These imperatives have shaped our decisions regarding recruitment techniques. But they have also informed a myriad of efforts to make MI Diaries "sticky" for participants, from easy submission of diaries to the creation of a sense of community (SM 4). To date, the project has recruited nearly 700 diarists, and received audio diaries from just over 150. Of these, roughly half are regular contributors. Although comparisons are hard to draw, this is a good retention rate for a longitudinal sociolinguistic study; compare, for example, 50% for the Montreal French study (Sankoff and Wagner 2020) and 28% for the Springville study (Cukor-Avila and Bailey 2018).

2.2.1 Recruitment

From the beginning, we wanted MI Diaries to reflect the diversity of the state, but early recruitment was heavily skewed white, female, and millennial. To increase the diversity of our recruitment pool, we posted flyers that specifically invited Black Michiganders to include their stories as part of our corpus.[6] However, it is important to recognize that minoritized Michiganders were in a more acute crisis than white Michiganders. COVID disproportionately impacted Black communities (Michigan Department of Health & Human Services 2020). Simultaneously, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others, brought the fight for racial justice into an explosive and exhausting summer, particularly for those communities most directly impacted by structural racism. While we continue to actively recruit and include minoritized Michiganders, we also recognize that seeking both time and personal stories is a disproportionate ask, when those

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6 These were generously shared by friends and colleagues with personal ties to minoritized communities in Michigan, which helped diversify our participant base.

personal stories are more acutely traumatic. For our context, we felt the most ethical approach was to invite and compensate underrepresented participants, while leaving space to turn us down.

Remote recruitment also posed a challenge. A substantial amount of time was spent on a wide variety of recruitment techniques, which met with varying success. These are highlighted in Table 2.[7]

2.2.2 Informed consent for children

For in-person research, caregivers ordinarily sign a consent form on behalf of their child; the child also is presented with simplified information from the researcher, and the child provides their verbal or written assent. We needed a way to replicate this level of oversight for children in our remote context.

Our solution was to create a 3-min child-oriented informed consent video.[8] The video included B-roll footage of children doing everyday activities like playing Frisbee and putting on a mask. Children from a range of ages, ethnic backgrounds, and gender presentations were purposefully recruited as actors from our family and friendship networks, so that potential child diarists could see themselves reflected in the project. The final product was designed by a university videographer from a patchwork of clips sent to him from home devices. In some cases, devices did not record at sufficiently high-quality to be usable; in others, there were problems with lighting, angles, and composition.

Yet although our production values were not maximally high, we think that the video does a good job of conveying important information in an engaging and simple way, and particularly recommend video as a novel method for delivering study information to children. Videos should be captioned to ensure accessibility. They can be employed as an alternative or supplement to traditional methods, for both children and adults.

Table 2: Recruitment methods undertaken to date (April 2020–July 2021).

Source	Success	Comments
Reddit	Y	We submitted monthly posts to Michigan-specific subreddits (cities, universities, and sports teams), with our flyer attached and a clear subject line referencing MSU and compensation.
University listservs	Y	Family and youth program listservs at MSU were particularly good for recruiting child diarists.
Facebook groups	Y/N	We posted project flyers to community-based and parenting Facebook groups for each city in Michigan; this had limited success given the amount of time this requires.
Referrals	Y/N	We offered bonus gift cards to diarists if they would "tell a friend" about us. This was very successful for recruitment of new youth diarists, but not for retention.
Social media	N	Weekly Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram posts have been effective at generating news media interest, but not new diarists. Our one successful recruitment via social media happened when another university posted about our project in their story.
News media	N	The first and second authors have been interviewed on local and national radio, on local TV news, and in local and national print news. At the time of writing, these appearances have resulted in exactly two new diarist sign-ups.
Youth organizations	N	While many organizations expressed interest in the project and even met to discuss logistics, ultimately nearly every connection sputtered out. We decided to focus on building and solidifying just a few relationships instead (see Section 3.4.3), with the goal of developing successful techniques that we may eventually scale up in the future.

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7 See SM 5 for more details about recruitment success, broken down by technique and participant demographics.
8 See SM 6 for the script.

2.3 Compensation

From the beginning, we felt it was important to compensate participants (Charity Hudley et al. 2020). Compensation is both a participation incentive, and a recognition of diarists' contributions. This became even more important as the social disparities around COVID became evident early in the summer. While we were fortunate to have access to some internal funds, we could not know how long the pandemic might last, nor how long the funds would survive the dire loss of revenue that universities were suddenly facing. It was imperative that we find the right balance between appropriate participant compensation and sensible management of our funds. An early-abandoned idea was to run a periodic raffle for participants who submitted diary entries, and send a gift card to the single winner each period. Unfortunately, Michigan law put a stop to this; while running one raffle would be fine, running repeated raffles would have required us to apply for a state lottery license.

Our solution was to offer a small gift card ($5) as a thank-you to participants who submitted at least 15 min of audio diary in a given two-week period. This presented several benefits. First, we feel the relatively high hourly rate ($20 per hour) is fair compensation and can help attract diarists with limited time and resources. Second, regular bi-weekly compensation encourages longitudinal participation. Finally, diarists can freely submit longer entries if they wish, without negatively impacting our budget. Feedback from diarists in the early weeks showed that some diarists were intentionally ending their recordings just shy of 15 min, out of a desire to save the project money. This prompted us to incorporate an option during sign-up for diarists to "pay it forward" to another participant instead.

2.4 Funding

Like many rapidly developing research projects, MI Diaries began without directed funding.[9] Although we invested as much time as possible in applying for external awards, the grant application and announcement cycle was too long for a project that had to immediately compensate participants and personnel. We were fortunate to have some internal funds available. The first author was also awarded a Google Grant ($2,600) to support automated speech recognition (ASR). Our association with a major research university afforded us a financial safety net that is not available to everyone. But other cost-saving measures that we have employed are, we hope, transferable to other institutional environments. We briefly describe some of them here.

2.4.1 Give participants the option to "pay it forward"

The generosity of many of our diarists (to date around 65%) in opting to "pay it forward" has undoubtedly allowed us to enroll more participants. Provided it is not too difficult to keep track of, allowing individuals to opt out of compensation can stretch a limited budget. We recommend phrasing the option as "Please use my $5 to pay another participant" so that it is clear that opting out of payment helps fellow participants, and not just researchers.

2.4.2 Offer students a professional experience

Linguistics students have obvious incentives to volunteer with a research project in their field. But our project has also offered career-building experiences to students in fields such as computer science, user experience, design, and brand management. We recently started offering credit-bearing internships to advertising and

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9 As we finalized the present paper for publication, MI Diaries received award #BCS-2119975 from the National Science Foundation. This award has already allowed us to hire some of our student interns and volunteers for pay, and it will support our ongoing recruitment efforts.

public relations majors. We recommend asking your institution if similar unpaid but for-credit opportunities exist, as they are an especially good way of stretching a project budget while gaining highly motivated team members.

2.4.3 Synergistic curriculum opportunities

Undergraduates in a year-long iOS design course have taken on our project as a "client". They have been charged with making improvements to the MI Diaries app that will enhance diarists' experience, and keep them engaged through gamification. These kinds of enhancements would ordinarily cost hundreds of dollars in developer time. We were lucky to be directly invited to the course by the instructor, who had been a part of our early conversations about building an app. But these kinds of curricular synergies no doubt exist elsewhere, and it is worth proactively looking for them.

2.5 When project values conflict

We often need to navigate a conflict between our top project values of *authenticity* and *trustworthiness*. Many diarists share stories of loss and pain. One diarist shared how she broke down in unexpected tears over Halloween, longing for connection with her neighbors. Other diarists have shared stories about topics like infertility, mental health, and the death of family members. In keeping with *authenticity*, we do not want to paint a rosy view of the pandemic (or real life in general) by only sharing positive "feel-good" diary excerpts in our featured stories. However, we take care in the framing of these stories and prompts so they are less likely to be triggering to participants and listeners.

At minimum, this means making sure that featured stories do not expose diarists – however indirectly – to mockery or condemnation. We also anonymize all identifiable words, like family members' names. However, sometimes our desire to honor diarist entries creates a tension between project values. As an example, one week a diarist described the best gift he had ever given: a photo book for his girlfriend, full of pictures of her recently deceased cat, Rory. The diarist included the name and a picture of the cat. From a confidentiality standpoint, this made the diarist more identifiable, so we considered redacting both. But we ultimately decided to include both the picture and the name, because we felt the diarist had been very intentional about honoring Rory, and that anonymization could have been hurtful to the diarist. For other complicated cases, we adhere to existing protocols where possible. In December, we received a submission about participating in a vaccine trial, which included a photo of the injection. While the diarist's face was not included, we nevertheless opted not to feature this story out of an abundance of caution regarding US health privacy laws (HIPAA). We have likewise trodden carefully with diary entries about receiving vaccines.

Press interest in MI Diaries (Araneta 2021; Court and Querolo 2021; Goldberg 2020: inter alia; Herwick 2021; Jenkins 2021) has also presented ethical issues. Reporters, especially radio, TV, and podcast reporters, often ask to broadcast the featured diary excerpts from our website. Initially we resisted, since this went beyond our consent form's statement that featured stories might be shared with academic audiences. We have since decided that because featured stories are accessible on our website to anyone, providing high-quality versions of those audio files upon request is within our ethical boundaries. But we never give out diarist contact information – despite being regularly asked by reporters if we can connect them to diarists for interviews.

3 Opportunities and reflections

The present paper was written for inclusion in a special collection on helping other researchers navigate the ethical and practical considerations of remote sociolinguistic fieldwork during a crisis. In pursuit of that

goal, we turn here to some reflection. Looking back on a year of remote data collection, we identify some of the positive benefits to our team, our participants, the broader community, and the research itself. We note, where relevant, how these positive opportunities occasionally required team discussions about project ethics.

3.1 Geographic accessibility

Since diarists self-record their own diary entries, the geographic barrier to participate is effectively nullified.[10] Since team meetings also needed to be remote during COVID-related lockdowns, this meant that we were able to expand the team to include lab members who were living in other places, several students from other universities, and youth interns from across the state. We plan to continue running the project meetings remotely even after pandemic restrictions lift.

3.2 Interdisciplinarity

A big team, in turn, led to more opportunities for growth and connection with faculty, staff, and students in departments outside of Linguistics. This brought valuable nonlinguistic expertise to the core project team, as well as new interdisciplinary collaborations across departments at MSU. A September 2020 presentation of our remote data collection methods led to our app being adapted by a research team in Religious Studies that needed to pivot rapidly from in-person to remote ethnographic methods. We have plans to make our app fully open-source for research projects that may benefit from remote audio recordings. It has also been exciting to support colleagues in academia and in the community who are using the MI Diaries app, audio, transcriptions, and question prompts for a variety of aims across the digital humanities. At the time of writing we are actively encouraging creative uses of MI Diaries data and infrastructure via an upcoming symposium (MSU Digital Humanities Locus symposium, "Spin Offs: The MI Diaries Project as a starting Point"). Echoing Carmichael and colleagues (this collection), we strongly recommend to other linguists with publicly available audio collections that they consider proactively seeking "spin-off" users to achieve broader impact.

3.3 Improving on our foundation

Due to the rapid start of MI Diaries, and our lack of graphic design skills, we did not begin with a polished logo or website. Driven in part by the need to make an app logo easily visible, the student brand team led us in a complete visual overhaul of the project in the fall of 2020, which brought the project's visual elements more in line with our project values. This resulted in a new website (Figure 2b) and set of logos (Figure 3b and c) that more clearly embody project values. We highlight these visual rebranding efforts here in order to emphasize how for us, starting the project at all – even with low-quality elements – in turn enabled us to draw outside expertise and subsequently improve.

We have also benefited from hiring undergraduates from MSU's Experience Architecture major, who helped redesign the website and flyers (see SM 5). We are now developing collaborations (including for-credit internships) with other departments across MSU, including Digital Humanities and Advertising and Public Relations. We continue to look for collaborations that will enable our project to support student learning beyond the linguistic research.

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10 We do, however, restrict participation to Michiganders, to keep the research aims and cost manageable.

(a) Project website from April 2020; built using basic HTML and hosted on the first author's personal website.

(b) Current project website as of March 2021; built and hosted on Squarespace.

Figure 2: Updating to a Squarespace website (June 2020) resulted in a more attractive website and enabled a research assistant to update content without access to the first author's personal website.

(a) Project logo from April 2020.

(b) New logo variant; designed for the app to make MI highly visible on a phone home screen.

(c) New logo variant; designed for general use.

Figure 3: The brand team scrapped our old logo (a), and designed a set of related logos (b–c) to embody the project values *trustworthiness*, *authenticity*, and *"by Michiganders for Michiganders"*.

3.4 Giving back to diarists

Finally, we are conscious that diarists are more than just data sources. Monetary compensation in the form of gift cards goes some way to demonstrating our gratitude (Section 2.3). But just as we have thought carefully about providing non-tangible benefits to our student team, so we have done the same for our diarists. We recommend, particularly for researchers working in communities experiencing a crisis, thinking about ways that participation in the project may provide benefits to participants. In June 2021, we sent diarists a survey asking what motivates them to participate. Below we describe a few of the top-ranked benefits.

3.4.1 Being heard

As in any project where people are asked to tell their stories, a major potential benefit is the chance to be listened to. Diarists regularly tell us that they feel their contributions are valued. While MI Diaries has a policy

of not personally responding to individual diary entries, we do assure diarists in our weekly e-mails that team members listen through every diary entry that comes in. Selecting featured stories each week also helps to underscore that we are indeed continuously listening in an ongoing way.

Following research showing that gratitude can help reduce stress (Wood et al. 2008), we decided to include "What are you grateful for this week?" in every weekly e-mail. We also wanted to provide space for diarists to share difficult experiences, but made the presupposition asymmetrical: "Was anything particularly difficult this week?". Diarists regularly comment in their recordings or in their e-mails to the project that sitting down to answer these questions is "therapeutic" for them. This, however, raises related ethical concerns. We are not mental health professionals, nor is MI Diaries a suitable replacement for therapy. We also are not mandatory reporters, and our informed consent for children explicitly states that we will not share audio diary content with "teachers or parents". As a result, although we have received diary entries about difficult topics such as eating disorders, we do not take action.

3.4.2 Being part of something larger

Our initial impetus for featuring weekly stories on our website was the desire to build a sense of connection between diarists, the project team, and the broader community. This was especially important to us in the early days of the pandemic lockdowns, when people were suddenly cut off from family and friends, but it remains a key element of our project.[11] We suggest that the creation of virtual communities (see SM 4 for some specific strategies we have employed), even amongst participants who are anonymous to each other, is an important component of successful remote sociolinguistic work, and particularly longitudinal studies.

We also have developed a long-term community partnership with the Library of Michigan, and offer diarists an opportunity to share (if they wish) their anonymized recordings with the Library of Michigan. MI Diaries recordings will be entered in the Library's general archive LM Digital. Pandemic-era recordings from MI Diaries will additionally be incorporated into the Library's "COVID-19: Save Your Story" collection (Library of Michigan 2021).

3.4.3 Community partnerships

MI Diaries has been intentional about entering into brand-strengthening community partnerships, which help increase our participant pool while also allowing us to support organizations that align with our project values. Building effective partnerships requires a substantial amount of networking and some amount of luck. Early efforts to connect with youth organizations were met with enthusiasm, but neither youth workers (who were overburdened with pandemic-related adaptations) nor the principal investigators had enough time to build effective partnerships. Our successful partnerships to date include the Library of Michigan (see above), as well as one youth organization (MSU Extension 4-H), one school district (Plymouth-Canton Community Schools), one Michigan-based nonprofit organization (Great Lakes Business Women's Council), and one ice cream shop (Frosty Boy Grand Rapids). We are actively working with these partners on pilot collaboration efforts. We aim to refine successful techniques so we can implement them with future community partners.

In our early conversations with youth organizations, we realized that participation in university research was a value that we could offer to pre-college teens, in the form of a semester-long "youth internship". Youth interns are recommended to the project by teachers or program leaders with parent or guardian permission. Once they join, they are trained in human subjects research ethics and attend weekly team meetings. Our youth interns have been instrumental in generating interesting diary prompts for teens, and report enjoying being a part of our research group.

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11 Diarists often comment on weekly featured stories, and even suggest new diary prompts. In response to a featured story about a diarist's pandemic wedding, one community member asked for their address, so she send a congratulations card. We do not share diarist personal information, so could not send the card, but we were encouraged that this selected story had an impact.

3.5 Looking to the future

Restrictions on face-to-face human subjects research in early 2020 forced many linguists to adapt their pre-existing studies to remote methods (see, e.g., the papers by Hall-Lew et al. and Nesbitt and Watts in this collection). For MI Diaries, in contrast, the restrictions were a catalyst for creating a brand new project to meet the social moment (see also Abtahian et al. in this collection). We anticipate that the post-pandemic sociolinguistic research landscape will reflect both approaches. On the one hand, there is no substitute in sociolinguistics for the rapport that in-person fieldwork can build, and we eagerly look forward to resuming such fieldwork ourselves. On the other hand, we see a continuing place in the toolbox for both "face-to-face" remote interviews (e.g., via teleconferencing software) and self-recordings.

On balance, launching a new project rather than adapting an existing one has afforded us a lot of freedom to experiment methodologically. We have had to think in creative ways about how to gather vernacular speech data. This has involved adopting new-to-us technologies, establishing a branding and promotion team, collaborating with new partners, and mentoring new kinds of students. The lessons learned can be fruitfully applied to our own and other researchers' future projects as well.

As a research project that emerged in response to a developing crisis, MI Diaries strongly believes that it is critical that we do more than benefit personally from a time of collective trauma. We continue to actively pursue opportunities to empower and support diarists, both through diary prompts and through community partnerships. We strive to include mentees – including youth – in all parts of the project. We also recognize our own privilege in being employed at an institution like Michigan State University, which has provided support in a number of ways, including funding, IT assistance, and wide promotion of the project. This support has given us a critical foundation to build on, and we hope that our reflections here can contribute useful insights for other linguists who may not have this type of institutional support.

Finally, we reflect that the content of MI Diaries, as a research project designed to document an ongoing disaster, carries its own value beyond sociolinguistic analysis (see, e.g., Carmichael et al. in this collection, for a rich discussion). The inherent interest in documenting an unprecedented historical event has attracted connections with staff, researchers, community members, and media who we might not have otherwise worked with. We are hopeful that through these collaborations, the MI Diaries corpus can be used to benefit the Michigan community in ways that we have not yet thought of. We stress that this kind of interdisciplinary collaboration is a particularly ripe opportunity for (socio)linguists collecting data during a disaster, whose work may be more readily understood by the general public as socially meaningful research.

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