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COMMUNICATING WITH MUTED GROUPS: THE CASE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

by

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNICATING WITH MUTED GROUPS: THE CASE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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Old Dominion University, 2021
Director: Dr. Thomas Socha

The problem of human trafficking is global, affecting men and women, adults, and children, with exploitation of various forms including (but not limited to) sex work, hospitality and entertainment, labor, agriculture, soldiering, forced begging and organ removal. While it has been the focus of movies, news articles, documentaries, legislation and research, the discussion of the communication surrounding human trafficking is still in the formative stages. What is the messaging about human trafficking in legislation, both historically and in the present day, and how did news and popular media help to frame the discourse around trafficking in the United States? Using the framework of the Muted Groups Theory (Ardener, 1975), a series of interviews were conducted with anti-human trafficking advocates to discuss their organizational interactions with formerly trafficked people, including the barriers to effective communication, cultural understandings and misconceptions of human trafficking, and the way trafficking stories are told with respect to the empowerment and healing of the formerly trafficked. Through a discourse analysis, dominant themes were used to create a conceptual model of human trafficking communication to further the conversation to determine the next steps in combatting this worldwide problem in an effective and respectful way.

Dedicated to those who have lost their voice.
There are more chapters to your story.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly: to my husband and son, thank you for sharing me with this work for these past few years.

As my advisor, the ever-patient Dr. Thomas Socha, once said, "You're trying to make conceptual sense of a conceptual mess. This subject isn't tidy." It is not, but it also one that I could not ignore. There are many people working to end this problem – and most importantly, support those harmed by trafficking – and I am honored to add a small something to the body of work. Thank you, Dr. Tom, for your help navigating my re-entry into academia, and for helping me keep my ideas manageable. Without your guidance this work still wouldn't be finished!

Dr. Gary Beck, thank you for your wit, your thoughtful questions, and your ability to keep me from getting too far into the weeds.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The crime of human trafficking is global. The United Nations Office on Drugs and

Crime, which oversees the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

and Protocols (UNCTOC), states that almost every country in the world is affected by

trafficking, whether as country of origin, transit, or destination of victims (UNODC, n.d). Along

with guidance from the UN, trafficking is subcategorized into sex trafficking and labor

trafficking. In the United States, current trafficking legislation is defined in *The Victims of*

Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, passed in 2000, and the *Trafficking Victims Protection*

Reauthorization Act of 2003. Both have been updated and additional laws passed, but these laws

stand as the current markers of modern trafficking legislation. It is also difficult to find reliable

statistics on trafficking, with estimates as high as 25 million people worldwide (U.S. Department

of State, 2020) Whatever form human trafficking takes, like most crimes, by necessity it must

occur under a blanket of dark secrets (Goffman, 1959). That is, from a communication

perspective, if the crime of human trafficking is to be successfully perpetrated, victims must be

silenced, their voices muted, and must remain so throughout their bondage. If the world is to halt

and eradicate the global crime of human trafficking and successfully manage its aftermath,

restoring or unmuting the voices of the trafficked is essential. It is on this latter process that this

thesis will focus.

Awareness of crimes of human trafficking taking place across the globe and the urgency

to address the problem in the United States is growing, with media coverage on the subject rising

steadily since 2005 (Austin and Farrell, 2015). Human trafficking has been high-profile,

breaking news in the United States within the past few years, including the cases of financier

Jeffrey Epstein, charged with human trafficking and conspiracy to commit trafficking (Klepper & Mustian, 2019); Ghislane Maxwell, Epstein's former girlfriend who was also arrested on related charges of conspiracy and trafficking (Scannell, 2021); Keith Rainiere, leader of multi-level marketing self-help group NXIVM, sentenced to 120 years for sex trafficking Hong & Piccoli, 2020) and reports of a rise in trafficking and impacts on vulnerable populations due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNODC, 2020; Todres and Diaz, 2020). That is not to discount the problem in any other country, or the cooperation of other countries with each other and the United States, but to focus in on a problem that has both international and domestic implications.

While this thesis focuses on the United States, one country cannot separate itself from the global issue of trafficking. Discussions of the problem of human trafficking are complex, multi-faceted, and have involved many groups including law enforcement, advocacy groups, media, governmental organizations, health professionals, as well as school administrations and more. Although media coverage may have raised awareness of the problem of human trafficking for these groups and the world's citizenry, the crime of human trafficking persists in nearly every country (United Nations, 2021) This thesis argues that part of the difficulty in addressing the complex crime of human trafficking is how society approaches communicating about the topic of human trafficking itself. This thesis adopts a lifespan communication approach to the problem and argues that it is conceptually and pragmatically useful to conceptualize the trafficked as a muted group and extend Muted Group Theory (Ardener, 1975) to examine the inherent difficulties of communicating with, and about, the trafficked, including the critical problem of how to safely restore their voices while removing them victim-age.

Communication with muted groups is difficult because, by definition, the authentic voices of members of muted groups (their agency) are silenced by an outside power and must

remain so if the crime of human trafficking is to successfully continue. Indeed, outsiders to muted groups may have members' best interests at heart, but are forced to speak vaguely, indirectly, or not at all about the group. Although no group or situation is the same there are commonalities of the structural muting by a dominant group across many muted groups including women, children, sexual and ethnic minorities, as well as the trafficked (Ardener, 1975). Trafficking also removes agency from the trafficked people, resulting in advocations for what has been called an infantilized group (Chapkis, 2003; Farrell & Fahy, 2009;). Muting is essential to the trafficking process' success, as written by the Hon. Toko Serita, the presiding judge of New York City's Human Trafficking Intervention Court:

> The final reason why I believe that the HTIC was not considered a trafficking court in 2008 was that, even though there were many foreign-born defendants in my courtroom who may have been trafficking victims, they were impossible to identify at first because of several obstacles. Given the underground nature of trafficking, defendants would never disclose to law enforcement or any other governmental entity that they had been trafficked. Traffickers had indoctrinated their victims to keep silent under threat of retribution, death, or harm to their families back home. (2018, p. 635)

The many communication narratives addressing trafficking are also directed to governmental agencies, such as law enforcement, that prosecute traffickers (Gulati, 2010; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). In the United States, the Office on Trafficking in Persons in the Department of Health and Human Services subdivides trafficking into both labor and sex categories, but in both, lack of consent, coercion and fraud are key defining elements of the crime (The Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). Thus, there is an important warrant that agues for studying human trafficking from a communication perspective. In muting,

one's voice is taken. And in trafficking, one is coerced into silent victimage. In the case of trafficking, the dominant voices are those of the traffickers, and the muted voices are those of the trafficked people. By its very nature, trafficking is not only the process of taking bodies for profit but also voices, experiences, and agency. Again, in the case of trafficking, the dominant voices are those of the traffickers, and the muted voices are those of the trafficked.

A rise in human trafficking in a geographic area may be traceable to societal vulnerabilities, including conflict and war, low socio-economic standing, and disasters that force or encourage migration (Okech, Morreau, & Benson, 2011). Along with these vulnerabilities, extreme deprivation and inequality coupled with a lack of economic options may also compel individuals to give up their voices to gain what they perceive to be better, but silent lives (Mo, 2017). Consent may be given for supposed better economic consideration and then withdrawn, or given to a different set of circumstances, or not given at all, because the series of circumstances that lead to trafficking may fall into gray areas of hardship, compilated societal norms and pressures, and questionable consent. Economic coercion occurs when a person has no perceived viable options to earn a living and falls prey to traffickers out of necessity due to a lack of job options, social isolation, and/or a lack of awareness of other options across communities, blurring the lines between consent and nonconsent, fairness and unfairness, and a lack of knowledge of criminal justice (Koettl, 2009).

What is the Crime of Human Trafficking?

The UN's *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*—*United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto*, passed in 2000 and often referred to as the Palermo Protocol, is the widely accepted definition of trafficking, stating "recruitment, transportation or receiving of persons;

threatening or using coercion, abduction, or other abuses of power to gain control over another person, or exploitation of another person for sex, forced labor, or other similar practices" (United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocols Thereto, 2000, no page). Like the UN Trafficking Protocol, the Palermo Protocol acknowledged "more severe" forms of trafficking, which focuses on sex and underage persons, and in a departure from the Protocol, adds additional provisions for prosecution when using fraud and coercion (Coonan & Thompson, 2005). Additionally, *Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Acts* (TVPRA) with additional protections and support international cooperation starting in 2003 (U.S. Department of State, 2018). The reauthorizations were passed to bring further protections to trafficked persons, although it may lead to the punishment of victims as well as traffickers (Hodge, 2008). When passed, the TVPRA aimed to give a civil remedy to trafficked persons in the United States, allowing for some relief and compensation, despite its perceived underutilization (Nam, 2007). Specifically, the 2003 revision led to a rehabilitation campaign spearheaded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, encouraging the public to "look beneath the surface" and report suspected trafficking, and potentially even engage in anti-trafficking measures in their communities using toolkits and information provided by the department (Shih, 2016).

In the United States, law enforcement and governmental bodies are also taking notice at the state and local level. Every state now has criminal penalties for human trafficking, with the state of Washington's 2003 laws (National Conference on State Legislatures, n.d.) cited as some of the first. Furthermore, when passed, the TVPRA was meant to bring criminal prosecution to the traffickers but has in some cases lead also to the prosecution of the trafficked and pursuant criminal records that can follow people throughout the lifespan (Coonan & Thompson, 2005;

Nam, 2007). In 2012, an Executive Order called *Strengthening Protections Against Trafficking in Persons in Federal Contracts* was signed that disallowed questionable practices, such as confiscating worker's passports, charging recruitment fees, destroying identification of workers and submission of compliance plans for trafficking awareness by contractors doing federal work, building upon regulations that had been in place since 2008 in regards to the United States military's work in Iraq (Human Trafficking Center, 2021). To be clear, it is not the intent of this thesis to argue for more restrictive or less restrictive governmental and law enforcement policies with regards to trafficking. Rather the goal of this thesis is to be a heuristic document to help better understand the role of communication and lack thereof within the contexts of trafficking as well as communication's potential role in preventing as well as assisting people affected by trafficking.

Local and regional anti-trafficking task forces are also set up across the country with assistance from the Office of Justice Programs in the Bureau of Justice Assistance in the U.S. Department of Justice (United States Department of Justice, 2018). The growth of anti-trafficking measures and organizations has brought the problem of human trafficking into public focus and lead to: a rapid proliferation of globalized anti-trafficking groups, from international nongovernmental organizations, singular governments and the United Nations, to nonprofit and religious organizations, all of which have grown into the thousands since the 1980s (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Limoncelli, 2017). However, for meaningful data to be collected and used to reduce the numbers of people trafficked, agencies and governments must collect and share numbers and engage in long-term research projects that are adequately funded (Laczko & Gramegna, 2003).

Via both broad legislative strokes, such as federal laws and the creation of local anti-trafficking task forces, trafficking is now firmly embedded in the US legal system. The United States has created T-visas, which give specific immigration status to someone who "is or was a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons" as the first criterion, allows for victims to remain and work in the United States for four years (U and T Visa Law Enforcement Resource Guide, n.d.). The situation is complicated because of several interconnected communication issues, including that trafficking victims may not always identify as such, either due to fear, lack of understanding of what trafficking entails, or even embarrassment and shame (Brennan, 2008). Additionally, they may present for other issues or fear reprisal from other immigrants or deportation if not qualified as having experienced severe forms of human trafficking (Brennan, 2008). Specific types of visas, namely the H-2B visa, is tied to a particular employer, so a person who was in the United States legally may find themselves suddenly "illegal" if their work situation were to change, making trafficking and exploitation easier for employers (Hepburn & Simon, 2010).

In January 2020, to mark the 20th anniversary of the passing of the TVPA, an executive order was signed to strengthen the United States' efforts to combat the proliferation of exploitation online via the growth of internet use since the bill was first passed, with special attention on anti-child exploitation measures (https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-human-trafficking-online-child-exploitation-united-states/). The UN specifically distinguishes human trafficking as a white-collar crime, however, little research seems to be available on human trafficking as a specific subset of organized crime or white-collar crime, although it bears some similarities (Matzke-Fawcett, 2017.) These distinctions are important because it provides framework for policymaking as well as media

coverage (Austin & Farrell, 2017). The Federal Bureau of Investigation does not specifically name human trafficking as a white-collar crime; instead, laundering money received in payment for human trafficking services as the focus (fbi.gov, 2016). Additionally, debt bondage is a form of forced labor, the often-overlooked area of human trafficking, consisting of payments to a labor placement agency to hold a lucrative work spot that then put the worker into an unsustainable indebtedness, often in a foreign country (Lagon, 2009). Domestic servitude may be one of the hardest types of trafficking to detect, as it usually occurs in a private home and a worker may be recruited one-on-one with false promises of a good paying position that morphs into involuntary servitude (Vermeulen, Van Damme, & DeBondt, 2010).

Viewing trafficking as a criminal enterprise is another way of understanding its trajectory, because it is cloaked and hidden because of criminality and moral objections. Specialized types of offenses are highly likely when a person commits criminal acts over the life span; essentially, as an offender ages, each offense builds off previous criminal acts (Stander, Farrington, Hill, & Altham, 1989). In the Netherlands, "transit crimes" (including trafficking in people, drugs, arms, and stolen vehicles) differs from organized crime in the United States, often referred to as "Mafia-type" organizations (van Koppen, de Poot, Kleemans & Neiuwbeerta, 2009). However, according to van Koppen et al., organized crime in the United States and abroad mainly consists of:

1.strong social relations for organization to suppliers, co-offenders, and opportunity

2.the social ties needed for a transnational nature of the activities

3.crimes are logistically more complicated than high-volume, such as property or violent crime.

Increasing demands for labor, domestic workers and the sex industry, along with the market forces and restrictions on migrations, have allowed the crime of trafficking to become a profitable business opportunity for transnational criminal organizations (Aronowitz, 2001). The rise of globalization has helped lead to the transnationalization of the crime, and "[t]here is virtually no country in the world that is not affected by human trafficking to some extent. It might be a major source country, a transit or a destination country, but it cannot isolate itself from the impact of this crime" (Zhidkova, 2015, p. 11).

Communication and Human Trafficking

Communication and human trafficking are conceptually and pragmatically linked, but studies of human trafficking within the communication field are far fewer than in other academic areas such as law, social work and human services, anthropology, and sociology. However, I believe that communication can provide valuable frameworks through which anti-trafficking organizations educate the public and provide effective campaigns to reach people who may be vulnerable to trafficking. It is important to examine communication's role because it is multi-leveled, multi-faceted and foundational in: (a) the conceptualization of human trafficking, (b) victims' identity creation and management, (c) raising public awareness, (d) legislating human tracking laws, (e) managing human trafficking crimes, (f) criminal communication with potential and actual victims, (g) victims' communication with captors, fellow-trafficked, aid workers, family members and many others; and (h) managing post-trafficking trauma. Computer and mobile-mediated communication have implications for both the spread of trafficking and anti-trafficking efforts (Latonero et al, 2012). Geographical constraints and synchronous time frames hold less weight due to technological advances, allowing for communication across physical and social boundaries (Papacharissi, 2008). As computer-mediated communication has become more

widespread, the anonymity of interactions and antisocial or dangerous situations have moved online, with some factors of the bystander effect involved (Fischer et al., 2011; Hust et al., 2013). Media and public attention on trafficking, including questions on how to combat it, have been growing since the passage of the *Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act* in 2000, despite that it is not a new form of crime (Austin & Farrell, 2017).

There seems to be as many perspectives on human trafficking as there are organizations, research papers, and news coverage. I believe the entire human trafficking literature must be viewed through various lenses or as individual schools of thought that must be read concurrently to form a multidisciplinary perspective that most urgently should include communication. With most of the focus on the subject coming from the fields of criminal justice, sociology, law, and social work, communication theory not only may play an important part in helping to bridge gaps between disciplines, but to address difficulties in communication with and about the trafficked. A lack of awareness of what trafficking entails and trouble identifying the victims, even among law enforcement, will lead to further confusion in the public (Clawson & Dutch, 2008), and inhibit progress on halting the practice.

Narratives of Human Trafficking

Despite the recent legal and societal interest, human trafficking is not new, nor is it without racial, sociological and economic undertones; the history of slavery is as old as civilization and the discourse of human trafficking and anti-trafficking is multifaceted. Race, gender, human rights abuses, and even the name of the forced movement of people are under scrutiny (Coonan & Thompson, 2005; Thakor & boyd, 2013). Although different names may provide nuance and context, the common thread is the exploitation and movement of another

human for some kind of profit, whether monetary or in-kind and by deception or coercion (Koettl, 2009).

The history of human trafficking is long and also goes by many labels. One label in particular, "modern slavery," is used by the United States government and has its roots in the racial history, subjugation and stereotypes of the United States in the early 1900s while ignoring the disproportionate numbers of minority women engaged in human trafficking through to the present day (Butler, 2015). The *Mann Act*, passed in 1910, is secondarily known as "The White Slave Traffic Act" and states that the prostitution of any woman is unlawful, for the "suppression of the white-slave traffic" (https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/mann_act). The narratives of white slavery at the time, whereby foreign men kidnapped innocent white women and ensuant moral panics sexualized immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia especially, can be traced to today's links between trafficking and gender (Dunn, 2016). Trafficked people, especially young women and children are often divided into two groups by the American system: the internationally trafficked, who are considered "real" trafficking victims, and young Americans, especially women of color, who are considered "prostitutes" even when subjected to violent human rights violations (Serita, 2018).

While the words "slavery" and "slave trade" are often used interchangeably with human trafficking, narratives and legal questions have often shifted from the early definitions of the word, meaning ownership of a human, to the "nature of exploitation" and coercion of human beings without fair compensation and freedom (Kara, 2011). The 1949 *UN Convention for Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of Prostitution of Others* helped shape the focus of human trafficking to sexual servitude, stating "the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution is incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person." In 1979, the

linkages of sexual servitude and trafficking were further connected by the *Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,* which went into wide effect in 1981. These definitions were widely used until the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* was adopted internationally in 2000, and while the legal definitions, and those in the later *Palermo Protocol* were the work of advocacy groups attempting to widen what is legally referred to as trafficking "to include men, women, and children compelled to work in any labor industry," the United States government's focus on sex trafficking has meant that it is the most narrowly focused upon, and prostitution has muddled the perception of trafficking as only sexual (Cheng & Kim, 2007).). In 1999, legislation was introduced in the United States Congress (but not passed) called the *Freedom from Sexual Trafficking Act of 1999*, "to categorically distinguish sex trafficking from other, nonsexual forms of exploitation" and keep "low-wage sweatshop issues" from inclusion in most major anti-trafficking work, further showing the perceived public link between trafficking and sex work (Campbell & Zimmerman, 2014, p. 149)

Outside of the United States, the idea that trafficking is "another country's problem" can lead to a range of factors contributing to trafficking. This includes a phenomenon called "othering," in which citizens of developed nations view human trafficking as a problem of other people in developing nations with allegedly looser morals or a less developed sense of propriety, especially those who are not white (Todres, 2009). The interconnectedness of the narratives of trafficking, legal and illegal migration and consensual sex work lead to a confused discourse of illegal aliens and ideas of the third world which leads to confused narratives about women and does not encompass the complicated full picture of the issue (Kapur, 2005). Some studies have found an unwillingness by some police to investigate labor trafficking because of perceived

public perceptions and pushback that people engaged in labor are illegal male immigrants as "aliens taking jobs from citizens," whereas those trafficked for sex are "victims" (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014).

Migration and conflict, such as war, do provide particular opportunities for the trafficker: migrants may be targeted by traffickers with fake job opportunities or travel documents; refugee women are at risk of forced marriage and sex trafficking; and those looking for escape from conflict may be trafficked for sex, forced labor, in support of military operations and exploitation of child soldiers, and forced organ removal for medical treatment or sale (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019). The 'push' of migration, whether legal or illegal, and trafficking, can be traced often to the often-poorer countries in transition and the 'pull' to wealthier and more stable countries and the powerful promises they elicit (Aronowitz, 2001).

The narratives of trafficking have often been, traditionally, highly gendered, and despite recognition of the problem, gendering has persisted throughout literature:

> Gendered inequality remains a central feature that guides research and investigations, with situations of poor women and girls becoming a main concern for those involved with anti-trafficking work. Thus, although the issue of the trafficking of men and boys is gaining some significance in international debates and a broader notion of the trafficking in persons is now popular, we are still faced with little empirical research, particularly from Asia. (Kempadoo, 2005, p. ix)

Along with this race-based discrimination, gender, ethnicity, religion, social and class will also factor into the cultural othering of non-Western women and children. This will also be used justify, rationalize, and overlook the sale of people into trafficking because their culture is viewed, ethnocentrically, as less developed than those perpetrating human trafficking and sexual

tourism (Todres, 2009). The divide of the first world and third world narratives, with an overgeneralized and gendered lens, leads to what may be well-intentioned but ultimately imperialist interventions and victimization rhetoric (Kapur, 2002). The construction of these narratives of Western ideals of sexuality, gender and secular neoliberalism is the result of a sexual humanitarianism that completes the othering of those into victims without understanding that the interventions may increase vulnerability and decrease resilience (Mai, 2014).

Since the early 2000s, some groups in the United States, often including those backed by some evangelical Christian churches, have turned to "backyard abolitionism" and "vigilante rescue" to identify and intervene in human trafficking (Shih, 2016, p. 67). Within many of these groups, non-English speaking and immigrant communities are often the focus of surveillance and activism:

> Building on the prior efforts of concerned citizens, the language of "backyard" rescue establishes the boundaries of the U.S. community in opposition to the foreign figure of the trafficked" immigrant, or "other" woman. Although located within U.S. borders, the term "backyard abolitionism" is perhaps an incorrect moniker, as citizens police what is happening in other people's backyards, typically working-class immigrant neighborhoods (Shih, 2016, pp. 73 – 74).

These dominant narratives may often overlook the issues, of for example, the LGBTQ, immigrant, and communities of color that are often disproportionately affected by trafficking and the idea that any sex outside the boundaries of love is coerced or wrong, especially when done in exchange for money, and narratives are skewed to show such (Campbell & Zimmerman, 2014). The conflation of the prostitution and human trafficking is another lens through which trafficking narratives are told, combining the two as inextricable evils leading to recently higher incidences

of both, along with violence, exploitation, and loss of agency, with the goal of elimination of both as a solution (Weitzer, 2007). While labor trafficking has been identified as a larger problem, with more people moved for the purposes of non-sexual work, according to Dunn (2016):

> The scandalous nature of sex trafficking and the sex industry as a whole, that appears to energize the community and attract volunteers to local training events…the use of pimp-trafficker extracts language from prostitution and human trafficking and synthesizes the two, creating a vocabulary that further conflates the definition of human trafficking by mitting any possibility for an individual consent to sex work. (pp. 30 – 31)

Stigma is another issue facing trafficked people, with a multiplicity of factors complicating access to and quality of everyday interactions, such a follow up care, and further incidences of shaming, shunning, othering, mislabeling, and deep mistrust of systems once the person is no longer trafficked (Fukishima, et al., 2020). The resulting enmeshment of sexual trafficking with other forms, especially in the United States but in some cases internationally, has led to laws "neglect the broader reality of trafficking into farms, homes, restaurants and other sites" and reported negative outcomes from service providers working with the formerly trafficked (Chang & Kim, 2007, p. 320). Some of the focus on sexual servitude is strategic and reframed communication, as the term "trafficking" is a large concept with multiple implications across a wide variety of crime, while "sex trafficking" or "sexual slavery" are terms police and the public can understand more easily (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014).

Due to the wide range of trafficking situations—labor, sex, servitude, organ, and others, as explained previously—one narrative cannot speak for all trafficked persons, and generalization may be misleading or false (Brennan, 2005). Human trafficking is highly

complicated and has many faces. Although most are aware of sexual slavery and labor trafficking, a 2017 Polaris report called *The Typography of Modern Slavery* lists 25 types of trafficking most common in the United States, stating, "From sex trafficking within escort services to labor trafficking of farmworkers, the ways humans are exploited differ greatly. Each type has unique strategies for recruiting and controlling victims, and concealing the crime" (Anthony, Penrose, & Jakiel, 2017, p. 9). Challenges of these so-called hidden populations, which include the trafficked both domestically and internationally, are precisely that they are unknown and unspoken for, making data collection and policy making difficult due to the constraints on verifiable numbers (Hepburn & Simon, 2010; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005). Communication concerning human trafficking has largely consisted of narratives *about* trafficked people as a generalized and infantilized group (Chapkis, 2003; Farrell & Fahy, 2009) as well as stories from governmental agencies such as law enforcement that prosecute traffickers (Gulati, 2010; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 2003).

When further broken down by sex versus labor trafficking, the gender stratification becomes even clearer as those trafficked for prostitution are most often women and underage girls. However, the problem may be deeper than man/woman and sexual preference, but rather a relationship between gender roles, behaviors and expectationse and exploitations of women in poverty, lack of education for women, and other vulnerabilities associated with lack of empowerment, especially in the workplace (e.g., see Cameron, 2008). Parents who have been trafficked, upon return to their homes, may also face gendered stigmas and reactions. Mothers may be seen as subverting good parenting roles and abandoning their children while fathers are seen as "heroic" for taking chances (Brunosvkis & Surtees, 2012, p. 457). Additionally, those

who are not trafficked as sex workers or smuggled, especially men, are often absent from any kind of media narrative (Aradu, 2008).

   In summary, human trafficking is a complex global problem that has been studied by numerous academic fields with varying degrees of progress. However, to date, the field of communication has largely been absent from these academic discussions. This thesis brings the field of communication into discussions about human trafficking by framing the crime of human trafficking as creating a muted group and subsequently examines the inherent problems in communicating with members of the muted group as well as restoring voices of the trafficked. In chapter two, I will review the relevant communication literature about muted groups, as well as the literatures about human trafficking. In chapter three I outline statements of purpose and an exploratory and descriptive study of the communication of anti-trafficking aid workers in order to illustrate some of the difficulties in communicating with the trafficked as a muted group. In chapter four I report the results of a thematic analysis of these interviews and in chapter five conclude the thesis by using these findings to propose a new conceptual model of human trafficking communication for use in future research and policy development that is grounded in the protection and preservation of individuals' voices as essential in the prevention and management of human trafficking. Next, I turn to the literature of human trafficking with an eye to role of communication.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Muted Group Theory (Ardener, 1975) originally focused on the removal women's voices (agency) by means of their relationships with silencing masculinist power structures. However, the theory was quickly extended to any groups that are not part of the "dominant communicative system of the society – expressed as it must be through the dominant ideology…" (Ardener, p. 22, 1975). That is, extending Muted Group Theory to those who are trafficked views them as members of a human group whose voices have been silenced by means of their relationships with, in this case, criminal power structures (that may or may not be masculinist). Thus, going forward a primary focus of inquiry and advocacy should be on the communication between advocacy groups that specifically focus on the prevention of human trafficking by means of voice removal, and communication about and with those who are trafficked in service of restoring their voice. Muting can occur for anyone who is targeted for trafficking via the power structures in place across both physical places and cultural norms and the communication surrounding them.

Human Trafficking as a Clandestine Societal System

By controlling a trafficked person's geographic movement from place-to-place, for example, traffickers are asserting authority over victims' communication by severing or ensuring a lack social and community ties that may facilitate escape (Preble, 2016). Additionally, although actively muted as a result of their role as being trafficked, when in public trafficked people must put on a front that they are free and are using their voice (Goffman, 1959). That is, although they may receive healthcare, for example, the trafficked must do so by not revealing their situation or any concerns related to their role as a trafficked person, in particular, because the trafficker may

be in the room during appointments (Baldwin et al, 2011). Communication between the trafficked and the trafficker is also dark, that is, while the messages may vary in content and the words directly spoken may not always seem harmful, the underlying messaging and subtext may have a criminal intentionality or hidden meanings of questionable morality along a spectrum (Olson, 2012).

For traffickers, ties to others are necessary to make money by selling humans—even as the internet allows for less in-person interaction between sellers and buyers, or the luring of potential victims (Fischer et al., 2011; Hust et al., 2013; Laternero et al, 2012; Papacharissi, 2008)—it is necessary for some organizational ties to remain for successful trafficking (van Koppen, de Poot, Kleemans & Neiuwbeerta, 2009). This focus on structure may be evidenced by even the name of the UN's anti-trafficking office, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocols (UNCTOC), which oversees anti-trafficking measures in many forms, not the least of which focuses on combatting the trafficking of humans.

In terms of digital technologies, restricting access to mobile devices and the internet are another way that traffickers, especially those trafficking people for labor, may further mute people (Latonero et al., 2015). The ways a person can be muted are varied, but the muting is an essential factor in the success of trafficking of every kind. A number of systemic factors additionally contribute to human trafficking and the muting of voices: structurally, factors can include poverty, effects of globalization on demand while migration policies lag behind, gender and the attitudes toward women, demand for sex workers and conflict, while proximate factors include lack of legal and law enforcement structure nationally or internationally, corruption, organized crime and lack of education about trafficking situations (Cameron & Newman, 2008).

For males, a focus on traditional gender roles in some facets of American society and the focus in media on sex trafficking may discourage men from talking about their own sexual abuse and trafficking due to shame at not being able to protect themselves as have been conditioned to think a man should (Houston, Odahl-Ruan & Shattell, 2015). And ways of muting male voices may be unique to their trafficking situation. Even the phrases used to describe trafficking, and the laws, policies and strategies used to combat it vary widely by state and country, leading to a focus on migration and, spotty media coverage and inconsistent prosecution (Chacon, 2017). The term "trafficking" is also demeaning, reducing a person's humanity to a commodity similar to other goods such as arms, drugs, nuclear material, art and antiquities, animals, and plants in marketplaces that stay under the radar of law enforcement and are driven by impulse and trends (Williams, 2008).

This thesis would be incomplete without pointing out that stereotypical feminine discourse—both between females and about females—can contribute to perceptions of trafficking. Most public discussion about trafficking centers on the horrific practice of sex trafficking, and the idea that women are victims of male aggression. The Muted Groups Theory, when first proposed, specifically spoke to the dominance of men over women. While true, the other side of a narrative and problems—the predominately male perpetration of labor trafficking—female-on-female violence and coercion, and the lack of agency assigned to trafficked persons cannot go without mention. Legal language and victim protections are in theory equal for sexual and non-sexual trafficking, but sex trafficking is given more consideration and privilege, while all others are excluded into one "non-sex" trafficking category, leaving some trafficked people more authentic and mythologized (Peters, 2013).

Human Trafficking as a Clandestine Communication System

While human trafficking is first and foremost an issue with very real human collateral, it is also an issue of communication: relationships exist between the trafficked and the trafficker, and the trafficked person and others they may come in contact with, but also about the trafficked in the form of narratives told about them, the stories told by formerly trafficked people about their situation by media, law enforcement, and anti-trafficking advocacy groups, and the stigmas attached to both labor and sex trafficking and the victim's complacency in their situations. The lines between these groups are often blurred and the definitions used by each conceived of differently due to moral and cultural frameworks of victimization and personal experiences with various forms of trafficking (Peters, 2013). Trafficking ideation and public consciousness may go through a complex lifecycle, with much higher public interest in the subject during certain eras than others, including a surge starting around the turn of the 21st century that is ongoing today (Wylie, 2016). In the 19th and early 20th century, the work of saving defenseless women and children from sex trafficking was seen as a worthy cause (in some cases, more acceptable than women's suffrage) highlighting the moral fiber of the advocates and the vulnerability of women and creating a legacy of conflating trafficking with sex and women (Keck & Sukkinik, 1998).

Human Trafficking and the Media

News media are particularly important in telling the stories of trafficked people but can also marginalize and misrepresent the scope of the problem through a lack of training on the issue and education (Cooray, 2014). All communicators (including journalists) consciously or unconsciously frame or select aspects of a story to tell when creating a narrative, therefore unwittingly passing their interpretations of the issue on to the reader (Entman, 1993). Newspaper

coverage of human trafficking tends to favor four topics: "1) human trafficking victims; 2) police reaction to child trafficking; 3) government and charity response to human trafficking; and 4) human trafficking as modern slavery" (Papadouka, Evangelopoulos & Ignatow, 2016, p. 664). However, the same study found that commenters on the news stories less-preferred to discuss victims of human trafficking over the reasons and distinctions between paid sex and, prostitution and voluntary versus involuntary sex work, showing a difference in the agenda setting of journalists versus the activity of the readers. Ongoing discussion of sex in the media and in commentary, or the failure to distinguish between trafficking and sex work, may confuse readers and others about the nature of trafficking itself (Parreñas, Hwang, & Lee, 2012). In a review of more than 8,000 news articles spanning from 2000 to 2016, the stereotypical portrayal of trafficked people are sexualized, captive females characterized by vulnerability and desperation while hidden and abused, with little mention of the details of how they became a trafficked person or who trafficked them, or, put succinctly, "female, young, unwilling to perform the work she is doing, but coerced" (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018, pp. 44 – 45). Increasingly limited resources and short deadlines for journalists also pose an issue in telling complex stories of human trafficking in a meaningful way. A Danish study found that in 2008 a team of six journalists was given two months to report a story, while in 2019 one journalist was given two weeks for the same type of story due to decreases in resources (Plambech & Pedersen, 2019).

Media accounts from the 1990s often showed trafficking victims as being brutalized and kidnapped, while later reports often followed different narratives to show the vulnerability that can lead to trafficking, including voluntary migration that later becomes forced and/or coerced (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012). Debates in both governmental and non-governmental organizations about the legalization of prostitution have polarized the anti-trafficking community

in recent years, giving a larger part of the discussion to only the issue of sex trafficking instead of myriad forms of trafficking (Coonan & Thompson, 2005) and the journalism that is meant to expose the trafficking industry across the globe may be partially responsible for that sexualized narrative (Cheng, 2008). Campaigns that aim to reduce trafficking by showing young, brutalized women in a variety of uncomfortable and erotic poses, often at the hands of men, may actually feed the narrative of woman as a passive and sexualized being who could not be empowered to travel or look for work safely, but must stay at home for their own safety, and paint men as exploitative criminals (Andrijasevic, 2007).

Although it generally has a narrower reach, local media can play a role in trafficking narratives as much as the national media or entertainment industry in reaching the public and piquing interest. Human trafficking has been covered as a human rights issue, a forced labor issue, immigration issue, foreign issue, gendered and sex issue and security issue in the media via messaging strategies but the most influential stores come when it is framed and covered as a local issue (Bonilla & Mo, 2018). When news stories are published at a local level, curiosity plays a major factor in the most-viewed stories on news sites, but controversy is the defining factor in stories that receive a high number of comments (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015). As social and political issues are consistently commented upon, the interest in human trafficking-related stories may be high, leading to chances for education on the subject, as well as further study of opinions and anecdotes about public sentiment of laws. Stories about people crimes against people, as opposed to property crimes, are regarded as much more newsworthy and feeds into the sense of reinforcing moral convictions by reading news (Katz, 1987). A high interactivity on stories about recently passed legislation could also signal a turn in the mass media coverage of

human trafficking stories, where a full 54% of stories were shown not to include any information about legislation or solutions (Gulati, 2010).

Despite the focus of a news story on trafficking, comments on public platforms can influence a reader's perception of an article, as stories with close proximity to readers most often garner high participation and interactivity in comment sections, especially when a news event has an unambiguous effect on a defined group (Weber, 2013). Comments become less frequent when a faceless or highly powerful institution is affected, as opposed to a local or regional story. News consumption is now participatory, with as many as 25 percent of online news readers are now commenting on articles, (Purcell et al., 2010) leading to an area of study that differs from traditional knowledge about interaction with news.

Building upon the theory of newsworthiness proposed by Gatlung and Ruge in 1965, Weber (2013) hypothesized the higher the perceived relevance to a reader, the more likely they are to comment in an online comment section. Those users who are most likely to leave multiple comments are those that are again engaged and following the story by visiting a news website multiple times to track the development of a story. The same readers may post a reply to other's comments after reading, showing a level of interactivity driven by perceived relevance (Weber, 2013). Comments can be extremely beneficial to readers in these cases, allowing them to better understand the nuances of news, provided the comments are not factually incorrect or only representative of a small population (Sikorski & Hånlet, 2016). Regarding human trafficking, one may extrapolate that commentary could serve as an educational platform in a community where readers feel both proximity and a high level of human interest via personal descriptors and detailed storytelling in the news article.

News coverage may also be influenced by the government. In congressional hearings on the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* (TVPA) in the late 1990s, discussion focused on the narrative crime perpetrated against women as sex slaves, therefore influencing the framing of media at the time (Austin, 2016; Peters, 2013). Additionally, some news stories may use the journalistic premise of muckraking, the practice of departing from factually balanced reporting specifically to expose an injustice, leading to storylines portraying an imbalanced power structure with one-dimensional representations of heroes and victims, slaves and the lack of consent, and the reinforcement of common ethical narratives (Cheng, 2008). The prevalence of survivor narratives—what happened and how—in news is also higher than in the conversations on policy or ways to end trafficking, while also potentially ignoring the root causes and rendering some victims invisible (Bickford, 2012). Since discussions are focused primarily on the sale of sex many other facets and people involved are ignored, including the LGBTQ+ community, whose involvement in the sex industry is seen as a "moral issue" instead of a trafficking or stigmatization issue, derived from moral attitudes toward the sex industry in general (Agustin, 2005). News coverage of trafficking can be grouped into six areas: "Case stories," which tell the story of a specific person to show a problem; "crime stories" which detail the arrests and court cases of accused traffickers; "a night in the red light district" where a reporter visits areas where sex work is actively happening and interviews them; "investigative stories" which are long-term stories researched in-depth to reveal systemic issues; "background stories" that come after a court case to contextualize a story or give a counter-narrative, and "counter-narratives" that are meant to challenge public perceptions and "explore complex concepts of consent and force, economy and power through personal stories in feature-length articles" (Plambech & Pedersen, 2019, pp. 21 – 22).

However, as much as media can educate, it can lead to confusion and misinformation, too. Anti-trafficking campaigns may show the traffickers and buyers of trafficked services as nameless, faceless and hazy characters, erasing the humanity and reality of the people for the depiction of those needing to be saved who are generally female (Steele, 2011). A particular American campaign, "Real Men Don't Buy Girls" was spearheaded in the early 2000s by celebrities Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher. It was one of multiple campaigns by well-known celebrities and musicians to bring awareness of human trafficking to fans via the internet. However, the campaign, despite the best of intentions, reframed masculinity in terms of gendered discussions about men's behaviors through their participation in trafficking activities, specifically sex trafficking, and included distasteful high-profile selling elements and voyeuristic campaigns (Steele, 2015). While the work of celebrities can bring attention to the issue of human trafficking and anti-trafficking measures, the "celebritization" becomes problematic when uniformed narratives and lack of accountability for proposed campaigns and solutions overtake awareness and educational campaigns in the media (Haynes, 2014). The stories may also prove untrue and exploitative, as in the case of celebrity anti-trafficker Somaly Mam, who was found to have fabricated stories of sold sex in Cambodia, ignoring the systematic inequalities of poverty, gender, and circumstance of those highlighted without respect for their wishes and aforementioned issues via sexual humanitarianism (Hoefinger, 2014). Contrarily, these stories can bring the issue into context and raise awareness, however distorted or limited, allowing for further discussion and education in the media, if not in academia thus far (Parreñas, Hwang, Lee, 2012). Although their motives may be good, "[i]n their rush to react to human rights crises to which they have often only recently become attuned, celebrities—well-intentioned though they

may be—can simply distract from finding the right solutions for the real problems (Haynes, 2014, p. 28).

Films and television shows are also not immune to the narratives of trafficking in several genres. The popular online movie information site, imdb.com, lists 60 titles by search function of "sex trafficking" and "human trafficking" in order of popularity. The number one film is the 2008 movie "Taken" with Liam Neeson, followed by "The Girl Who Played with Fire" (2009), an adaptation of the book of the same name and second in the popular "Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" trilogy. The third most popular movie in the database is "Trafficked" (2017), described as "…inspired by real characters, three girls from American, Nigeria and India are trafficked through an elaborate global network and enslaved in a Texas brothel, and must together attempt a daring escape to reclaim their freedom" (IMDB, 2018). This is further evidenced by a 2015 study in Chicago by Houston, Odahl-Ruan and Shattell that found "[a]dvocates reference popular movies (i.e., *Taken, Pretty Woman*), television shows (i.e., *Toddlers and Tiaras*, *Pimp my Ride*), music styles (i.e., pimp culture, the American culture) as barriers to their work" (p. 10) because these areas of media may promote misinformation, stereotypes and normalize violence and the objectification of bodies while desensitizing youth.

Films that take a documentary-style approach to fictionalized stories of trafficking, or "docufictions" frame the problem as negative/criminal or rescue/charitable, while furthering the narrative of trafficked people as others by situating them as "removed from normal" but "closer than you think" (Sharapov & Mendel, 2018, p. 555). From the early days of film, such as 1913's *Traffic in Souls*, the dominant film narrative is that of (almost exclusively white) women as objects of sexual slavery and pity in need of rescue which then influences the dominant cultural narrative of gendered objectification of the trafficked as sex slaves (Skrodzka, 2018). The sub-

genre of "melomentaries" or documentaries with the intention of targeting emotion and urgency in viewers about sex trafficking have brought back a resurgence of the idea that whiteness and sexual purity are the markers of trafficked people's victimhood (deVilliers, 2016).

The expansion of media into virtual reality has also made its mark on trafficking awareness. Virtual humanitarianism is one of the newest forms of media in the awareness of trafficking and other social ills. By using digital technologies such as video games and virtual reality (VR)to help to broaden narratives of trafficking by taking agency from the trafficked person in the game as opposed to many of the current game narratives, which allow for players to act as the hero and rescuer (O'Brien & Berents, 2019). As noted by Fukishima et al. (2020), formerly trafficked people, "…illuminated how misperceptions and misidentification of trafficking meant that there were stereotypes and biases regarding people who participate in economies that facilitated trafficking (i.e., sexual economies). For survivors who were criminalized, it was best described by one interviewee as being "kicked in the face by my record all the time" where their criminalization haunts them even in a life after trafficking" (p. 136). The study further noted that when women were sexually trafficked by other women, the stigma and misunderstandings were even greater, with the trafficked facing barriers to safe housing, as the myth of "boyfriend-pimp" dominated the understanding of trafficking norms. The 'victim-survivor' narrative, while appealing to the general public's sympathies and moral outrage, confirm biases of gender-based violence and prostitution due in part to the narratives that position them as such and alongside "reformed" sex workers storylines in advocacy and media, which perpetuates the idea that the two are the same problem while still objectifying their bodies (Cojocaru, 2016).

Human Trafficking and Law Enforcement

Depending on the situation at hand, law enforcement are often the first responders and the agents of change for a trafficked person. Law enforcement's discourse sets tonality and rhetoric of awareness in the immediate time after arrests and intervention by officers, as stated by Taylor (2006), "First, a lack of definition, description and understanding of sex trafficking within law enforcement, leads to a lack of public understanding" (p. 22). The criminal-victim relationship is often further complicated by the law enforcement or state agency that will conduct raids on businesses or homes suspected to harbor trafficking while accompanied by media, painting a narrative of saving victims from exploitation while exposing the trafficked person to media photos or videos without their consent, further exposing the (usually women) to objectification (Hill, 2016). Additionally, perpetrators of trafficking were often accorded privacy while the women's photos may be carried online or in news stories internationally, causing further threat (Hill, 2016).

Once trafficking is identified and law enforcement becomes involved, it is not guaranteed that information will be shared across organizations, countries of origin and destination, or private sources such as NGOs. But, significant progress has come about with the introduction of technology and widespread databases to collect information on trafficked persons and the perpetrators of trafficking that allow sharing on larger levels (Lackzco & Gramenga, 2003). Sex trafficking, although treated equally on paper, is in practice enforced differently on paper than other types of trafficking, namely labor (Peters, 2013). The study of sex work often focuses along racialized terms, especially along the thinking that white women wouldn't do "that kind" of work voluntarily and have been "tricked" into performing sex (Thakor & boyd, 2013, p. 285).

The "moral panics" surrounding sex (Cohen, 1972) influence the idea that sex is the major issue involved in trafficking, to the detriment of others. As Peters described:

> In this way, a moral stance about the severity and "criminal" nature of defrauding individuals into commercial sex versus other forms of labor was incorporated into the law itself. On paper, these dichotomies appear largely symbolic, since the law is inclusive of all forms of trafficking and establishes federal benefits and immigration relief for all types and genders of victims. However, these definitional bifurcations, and the implicitly gendered and explicitly sexual marking of trafficking, created the conditions for an implementation that is highly exclusive (pp. 234 – 235).

Although the majority of cases prosecuted are for sexual trafficking, once identified, there may be pushback from the legal system because victims may be viewed as complacent in their crimes, including prostitution and illegal migration, while labor cases may not be prosecuted at all (Farrell, Owens, & McDevitt, 2013). The "push-down pop-up" phenomenon is yet another complication for law enforcement, with the dynamism of trafficking allowing it to be forced out of one place to "pop up" in another in various ways, as moving from one community or country to another, lack of strong deterrents against trafficking establishments or traffickers, and the focus by law enforcement of smaller-scale traffickers, many of whom are formerly trafficked people themselves (Marshall & Thatun, 2005).

Human trafficking, in all its forms, is changing in the face of the newly globalized communities; with migration and diasporas, offenders with ties to multiple places are able to link international demands and supplies of people (Turner & Kelly, 2009). Human trafficking and human smuggling are often also confused, with smuggling involves moving people who have consented to illegal transport while trafficked people have not consented or coerced and are not

able to move freely once taken to their destination (Shigekane, 2007). In the United States, trafficking legislation has been used in some states as migration control and as justification for stricter immigration enforcement and funding (Chacon, 2015). Old structures of a vertical criminal enterprise, where a strict power structure was enforced, are giving way to horizontal structures where each person is affiliated with a network and carries out a specific function with no hierarchical ranking for the sake of the key factor in trafficking – the highest profits (Vermulen, Van Damme, & De Bondt, 2010).

Before the days of widespread internet access, human trafficking networks were often run through brokers but with the more widespread use of media, engaging in the use of trafficking of all types without a broker, often over social media (Fraser, 2016). As technology and networks have advanced, it has been debated whether trafficking will facilitate or disrupt human trafficking, though the two are empirically linked. In response, the scholars developed the "4As":

> "The 4As denote heightened awareness and visibility of particular online sites assumed to promote trafficking, particularly sex trafficking, the amassment of data by law enforcement to pursue anti-trafficking investigations, the augmentation of traditional surveillance techniques and tools, and the advancement of collaborative arrangements and technological innovation in the form of automated or algorithmic techniques" (Musto & boyd, 2014, p. 465).

News coverage of specifically sex-related trafficking relies heavily on the official sources, often law enforcement, and treated the situations as breaking news (Johnston & Friedman, 2008). What that type of on-the-spot coverage lacks is a narrative on the trafficked person's perspective or the reasons for trafficking's existence (Johnston, Friedman, & Shafer, 2014). Looking through the lens of the muted groups theory, this is further evidence of the voice

taken from trafficked persons, even if it is inadvertent due to time constraints in the news cycle and victims privacy awareness that keep trafficked persons identities a secret. Due to police intervention, the story may be picked up by local media, leading to a further discourse on the trafficking situation.

Although news coverage of trafficking may raise societal awareness of the problem overall, such stories have resulted in distorted understandings of how and where trafficking is taking place, and that members of society are passive bystanders (Bellenger, 2016; Latane & Darley, 1970). The need to catch a bystander's attention in an increasingly divergent media world also leads to the use of celebrities as spokespeople for the trafficking issue and may have the unintended consequence of taking focus away from the complexities of human trafficking and other complicated human rights issues (Haynes, 2014).

Human Trafficking and Advocacy Groups

Advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations play a large part in the narratives of trafficking, with targeted messaging for the public, policymakers and news outlets (Bonilla and Mo, 2018). Case managers and advocates also need to protect clients from the risks of re-traumatization and further exploitation via processions in front of the media (Brennan, 2005). Advocates may also find it is easier to promote certain trafficking victims in the media due to status, background or typified stories, while others are found to be less than worthy as media figures because of prior offenses or assumptions of guilt (Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005). However, an advocate's work may seem less credible when oversimplified narratives of trafficking that only show "rescue" and do not include aftercare and process, a lack of contextualizing information, and misinformation via stereotypes in the media (Houston, Odahl-Ruan, & Shattell, 2015). And while awareness campaigns can be both noble and helpful, in order

to be truly successful, additional information about alternative and safe opportunities for jobs and migration and poverty alleviation because while many people understand the risks of many of the schemes that lead to trafficking, such as debt, which may lead to the trafficking situation of debt bondage, there are few or no other options for labor migration and moneymaking in their communities (Marshall & Thatun, 2005).

The amount of media discourse and definitions surrounding sex trafficking, while drawing attention to the issue, comes at the expense of those who are trafficked for labor or wage slavery (Zimmer & Gournelos, 2014). The earliest versions of the UN *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*, passed in 2000, only mentions female sex trafficking and ignores labor and male trafficked persons altogether, leading to complications of cultural narration on the "bigger" problems instead of encompassing the whole issue of trafficking. According to a 2008 analysis of articles on sex work (including trafficking) only one of 33 articles specified if the workers were male, and one other specified both male and female in the analysis while linguistically suggesting the normative gender to be female (Dennis, 2008). The premise may also exist among advocates that when laws are passed to combat trafficking, identification of trafficked people and prosecution of traffickers will come quickly when attitudes toward sex work, institutional barriers and division of labor of governmental agencies and law enforcement play a large part (Farrell, Owens and McDevitt, 2013).

All of these groups (media, law enforcement, trafficked persons, traffickers) exist in the same space, but with different versions of community, personal agency, and abilities to move and influence their worlds. Additionally, trafficking does not take place in a void. Building off Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model, the problem must be examined within larger frameworks and not as a single, isolated phenomenon (Barner, 2018; Rafferty, 2008).

Communicative behaviors of these "co-cultural groups" – influential factors, preferred outcomes, field of experience, abilities, situational context, perceived costs and rewards, and communication approach – may be unconscious and depend on the situational context of the conversation at hand (Orbe, 1998). Advocacy and nongovernmental organizations, while focused on helping or saving people who have been trafficked, engage in and creative narratives are influenced by cultural factors, personal values, policies and politics (Kamler, 2013). Due to the cloaked nature of their work, it can be hard to distinguish between the groups, it can be difficult to have current data on the numbers of people trafficked; the exploitation may be current or past, and some types of trafficking may be overrepresented due to lack of information or fear (Tyldum and Brunovskis, 2005).

It should be noted that is not the intention of this work at large to discuss consensual sex providers, but instead only tp focus on those who are, by definition of trafficking, forced into it by fraud or coercion. The 2018 law *FOSTA/SESTA*, which made changes to Act 230 of the *Communications Act of 1934*, has entangled the issues of sex trafficking with the consensual sex work. While the laws were meant to punish websites allowing trafficking, the laws may have made consensual sex work more unsafe (Blunt and Wolf, 2020).

Online trafficking is also more than websites. Social media play a factor in human trafficking partly due to the swift and pervasive rise of social media. In 2005, five percent of American adults used social media, while by June 2019, 72 percent of adults were using at least one social media site (Pew Research Center, 2019). Social media, meant to facilitate communication among friends, family and followers can also be used nefariously by traffickers looking to recruit due to the vast numbers of people on the sites and the built-in features that allow messaging, chatting, advertisement and other means of social networking (Dorton, 2019).

That closeness can be exploited through personally identifiable information that is easily given through hashtags, likes and posts on platforms such as Instagram via planned or expected behaviors of users, specifically women between the ages of 18 and 35 (Lacefield, 2018). Trafficked people, often having been socially isolated and marginalized, are in need of comprehensive services, which may range from emergency medical care to long-term supports such as housing, mental health, legal services, education, and job training or resources, all while dealing with a legal system that does not have a victim-centered approach (Farrell, Owens, & McDevitt, 2013). Research into resilience is common in fields concerned with children's development, but less research has been done in the realm of adults in challenging situations until fairly recently (e.g., see Beck, 2017). Using the Integrated Communication Resilience Model, stressors over the life course may be reframed in a reactive manner using reflective processes, leading to more positive outcomes for the person (Beck, 2017) in this case a formerly trafficked person dealing with the aftermath of the negative situations.

Human Trafficking and the Muted Groups Theory

The Muted Groups Theory was originally proposed to discuss the systemic issues in anthropological study that left women's voices secondary, or muted, to the male perspective that serves as default (E. Ardener, 1975). In studies of the time, researchers claimed to give women equal consideration while referring to them as a footnote (i.e., "the wife" or "and she", see Ardener, 1975). The lack of dominant communication on the part of the muted group works in concert with the idea of Standpoint Theory, as described in follow-up research: "Dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structure within it" (pp. 20, 195). Taken a step further by feminist researcher Cheris Kramarae, "neither muted group theory nor standpoint theory suggest that any individual or group has the only truth, but

both argue for the importance of challenging and providing alternatives to dominant explanations of the way the world works" (Kramarae, 2005, p. 58). These theories do not stand in opposition to a larger worldview, but help to give a voice to the nondominant, or co-cultural groups (Orbe, 1998). Language and labeling play a large part in communication theory through giving power to words, with descriptors and labels giving rise to the discussion around a particular topic. These ideas also have a distinct political assertion. In Muted Groups Theory, perspective is given by those in power, thereby suppressing other perspectives, while the specifically Feminist Standpoint Theory further recognizes the inequities of power structures and the social groups they create, and the way these power structures mean those worldviews are assumed true (Wood, 2005). Additionally, Co-Cultural Theory posits that while human trafficking victims are in a muted and minority position in the United States and worldwide, their view should not be construed as less than the dominant culture due to their invisibility (Orbe, 1998; Samovar & Porter, 1994).

Changes to the way men and women are viewed in many cultures and specific cases made general by the framework of the time of its writing do not change the basic dynamics of how dominant and subordinate groups communicate and restrict them only to gendered cases (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). A study of communication across groups of conflicting cultural status found that in interactions with unequal groups the less dominant group may also be muted, with the free expression of ideals from lower to higher status at least inhibited, if not fully muted, leading to the structural status quo staying in place from a lack of ideas at the grassroots level (Pierce Colfer, 1983). Another more recent study used Muted Groups Theory as a framework for the power dynamics of prison ministry volunteers and female prisoners, even as those PMVs primary purpose of bringing the women to Christ is viewed by the groups as a positive

commitment and not one of power structure and gender (Barkman, 2018). While the prisoners are muted by the system that incarcerates them, the inequality between the PMV and the prisoner is a micro-dynamic that affects both the dominant and sub-dominant group, as stated in the Priscilla Papers, the academic journal of the group Christian for Biblical Equality (Barkman, 2018). While this publication appeared in a non-peer reviewed source and written with specific goals in mind, the academic sources cited within, the research done, and the academic credentials of the author make it worth noting in the conversation about Muted Groups Theory.

The above is not an exhaustive list of studies applying Muted Groups Theory as a framework for power dynamic communication. And it is also not an exhaustive study of Kramarae's extensive body of work on the subject. Rather, it is used to help further explicate how Muted Group Theory can apply outside the gender dynamic and to other unequal power structures including human trafficking. Trafficking, by its definition, has an unequal power structure due to the "force, fraud and coercion" (TVPA, 2000; TVPRA, 2003) that are required for the cloaked activity to exist.

Statements of Purpose

Through the lens of the Muted Groups Theory (Ardener, 1975), this thesis attempts to unpack the communication issues surrounding the relationship between advocates and formerly trafficked people, and how human trafficking takes away both voice and the agency of the trafficked. Human trafficking may include (but is not limited to): sex trafficking, defined as "a commercial sex act…as the result of force, threats of force, fraud, coercion or any combination of such means" (p. 2, President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Progress in Combating Trafficking in Persons: The U.S. Government Response to Modern Slavery, 2016); child sex trafficking, which is a commercial sex act with a person under

18, which is its own category because sexual acts with anyone underage is considered coerced; and labor trafficking, which includes bonded labor, debt bondage, domestic servitude, forced child labor, and in some cases, the recruitment or use of child soldiers (United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking Annual Report 2017).

The study is exploratory and draws on Muted Groups Theory as a framework. Given this, a statement of research purpose for this thesis is given as follows: The thesis seeks to better understand how communication relates to human trafficking, particularly related to anti-human trafficking advocates and how their work gives them particular insight into the lived experiences of trafficked and formerly trafficked people. Some of the related questions the thesis considers include: When communicating with trafficked and formerly trafficked people, what are the barriers faced by anti-trafficking advocates, law enforcement and others? How have media depictions of trafficked people influence the communication about and with trafficked and formerly trafficked people? And, how do agencies and groups of people working against human trafficking communicate messages to the general public and potentially trafficked people?

Summary

This chapter created the start of a conceptual framework by identifying critical elements and then posing a series of questions upon which a qualitative interview study with people working in various anti-trafficking efforts in the United States was built. The use of celebrities as spokespeople against trafficking is indicative of how desperate the situation has become. Although this choice may have the unintended consequence of taking focus away from the complexities of human trafficking and other complicated human rights issues, it is still useful for anti-trafficking advocates, non-governmental organizations, news media and others to help catch the attention of the public in an increasingly divergent media landscape (Fischer et al., 2011;

Haynes, 2014; Hoefinger, 2014; Parreñas, Hwang, Lee, 2012; Hust et al., 2013). Communicative behaviors of these "co-cultural groups"—influential factors, preferred outcomes, field of experience, abilities, situational context, perceived costs and rewards, and communication approach—may be unconscious and depend on the situational context of the conversation at hand (Orbe, 1998). Additionally, due to the secrecy of criminal enterprises hard numbers on trafficking can be difficult to obtain (Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005). In the next two chapters I will discuss the methodology used to further the study of communication surrounding human trafficking.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Through a variety of communication efforts, from billboards to national media campaigns, human trafficking awareness continues to grow in the United States and abroad. The growing awareness has raised many questions including now that there is awareness, what is the path forward? This thesis argues that approaching the problem of human trafficking from a communication perspective using Muted Group Theory is not a panacea but does hold promise as a means to help prevent and better manage it.

The narrow focus of legislative and storytelling on sex trafficking of only the poor and vulnerable leads to distorted meanings of trafficking, leaving a large section of the trafficked unspoken for or completely misrepresented as a stereotypic representation of their culture, race, or nationality (Chang & Kim, 2007). Trafficking service providers and police can vary widely in their identification of cases, leading to ambiguity about the problem, misidentification, and prioritization of sex-related cases over labor cases or those involving males (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014). Along with the dominant narrative of sexual bondage as a main moral issue, contemporary communication efforts tend to lack viewpoints of the marginalized, including those of homosexual, queer, and non-gender conforming people, while finding common ground across other religious, political and ideological grounds that focused on a heterosexual conception of female rights (Campbell & Zimmerman, 2014). With a framework that focuses on the narrative, as opposed to a victim-centered approach, the intention of legislation as well as detecting all forms of trafficking may be lost (Ibrahim, 2016). Developing multidisciplinary approaches to legislation, advocacy and health outcomes by connecting workers across all fields

leads to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the full issue of trafficking and stronger movement for anti-trafficking work (Chang & Kim, 2007).

Studies of groups that are both muted and traditionally closed from the public eye, such as gangs or cults have previously been studied in academic research across various disciplines using interviews and qualitative analyses. Similarly, human trafficking, thought of as muted groups, can use similar methods (see Coates, 2014; Goldman, Giles & Hogg, 2014; Stein, 2017). Closed societies or groups can be defined as "the negation of social learning and innovative processes . . . in which emphasis is placed on an excessive valuation of internal memories and preferences so that external evaluation of internal memories and preferences is either not revived or it is distorted or ignored" (Knauss, 1967, p. iv). By adapting a muted group framework and applying it to human trafficking and the communication surrounding it, I seek to build new understandings of the issues unique to the problem.

Data Collection

Similar to previous studies of clandestine groups, this study will use qualitative methods, to develop a practical and understandable analysis of the communication surrounding human trafficking across agencies concerned with trafficked people. Qualitative research was chosen to provide context and interpretation to common perceptions from the problem's varied stakeholders (i.e., the trafficked; traffickers; law enforcement; government; media outlets; those aiding the trafficked including social workers, health-care professionals, school counselors, community workers, as well as the public) and place the issue within society at large (Tracy, 2013). However, there are legal, ethical, and practical limitations that will be discussed later in this chapter that severely constrain conducting research in this area. Thus, seeking to learn, understand, and do no harm, this thesis will focus on the communication of two stakeholders:

community workers with direct access to trafficked individuals and media reports. That is, grounded in Muted Group Theory (Ardener, 1975) this thesis seeks to add understanding about human trafficking communication by examining the communication of community workers charged to work with currently trafficked as well as media portrayals of human trafficking. More specifically, thematic analyses of interviews were conducted of in-person and over the phone interviews with community workers as well as analysis of media portrayals. This study fully followed the guidelines as approved by Old Dominion University's, College of Arts & Letters, Human Subjects Review Committee (see Appendix B).

It should be apparent to all that there are numerous legal and ethical constraints that limit the study of human trafficking. These include: (a) concern about the harm that may come to the formerly trafficked when asked about their lived experiences; (b) concern from the Institutional Research Board about questioning a vulnerable population; and (c) concern for the safety of all those involved (including law enforcement, researchers, and more). Because human trafficking is a clandestine societal system that deals in human bondage and illegal activity, there is the chance of bringing harm to someone by telling his/her/their story, even if his/her/their name is not used and their location not disclosed.

Participants

Participants were selected through a combination of internet searches on the subject, news articles about human trafficking, knowledge of the organizations in anti-human trafficking advocacy, and some limited snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961). When studying closed or muted groups, snowball sampling (a system of referrals) can be an effective way to find participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Potential interviewees were contacted by the researcher via email and given the option to participate in the process because of their direct knowledge and

working relationships with anti-human trafficking work as part of an advocacy group, shelter, legislation, or volunteerism. Further, only one informant from each organization was chosen for inclusion to provide as broad of a spectrum of answers as possible without the overlap that would come from advocates or workers from the same organization using the same framework. A small sample size was also deemed acceptable due to the limited number of people with direct knowledge of human trafficking, as well as the limited number of groups involved in this type of work (see Coates, 2014; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Following human subjects' protocols, the names, agencies and personal details of the interviewees have been kept confidential from everyone but the researcher, with transcripts and recording destroyed upon completion of this work. Each interviewee was given a copy of Old Dominion University's IRB policies and contact information twice – once electronically and once on paper – but the usual protocol was amended so the interviewee did not have to sign and return it to the researcher to maintain confidentiality.

Following human subjects' safety measures, no actively trafficked, nor formerly-trafficked people were interviewed for this study. Doing so could potentially damage these individuals' confidentiality and safety as a vulnerable research population as well as potentially endanger the researcher. Thus, the research fully respected actively and formerly trafficked people by adopting a victim-centered approach (e.g., see Brennan, 2015; Ibrahim, 2016; Shigekane, 2007; Weitzer, 2007). With this, I chose to interview individuals (i.e., professionals, community workers, and volunteers) who work directly with actively trafficked individuals as well as formerly trafficked individuals. Each of the interviewees included in this study have regular and working relationships with actively trafficked as well as formerly trafficked people. The data for the study are based on their viewpoints. However, because an understanding of the

narratives about and with formerly trafficked people are the focus of the study, it made sense to interview those who work closely with this population and help shape and communicate with the population discussed are a purposeful selection.

The interviews were semi-structured and asked open-ended questions about the general communication policies of the agency/group, the history of the interviewee, how they came into their work with anti-trafficking groups, general perceptions of trafficking both within the group, in the general public and among formerly trafficked people, and the interviewee's understanding of communication issues in human trafficking (see Appendix A for the list of the interview questions). The questions were structured to solicit answers while still being conversational and concise. Interviews were conducted in three places: in-person at Old Dominion University in either private conference rooms, a coffee shop, at organization's offices, or via phone due to being outside of the region of the researcher or scheduling conflicts that precluded in-person meetings. Four interviews were conducted face-to-face and two were conducted by phone, at the place of the interviewee's choosing. The interviewees were aged mid-20s to mid-60s, with between three and 30 years of experience. One interviewee founded their organization and another had been the first full-time employee of their organization.

In order to preserve the confidentiality of each interviewee, no specific information is included in the appendices or findings. Each interview was recorded, saved on a password-protected computer and uploaded to password-protected cloud storage for the duration of writing, then deleted upon the competition of the analysis.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded on a personal recorder and transcribed, and handwritten or typed notes were taken during the interview by the researcher. Each interview was coded using

inductive content analysis for themes, commonly used words, and systemic issues of human trafficking as found through reading of previous scholarly works on human trafficking, criminal enterprise, the Muted Groups Theory, and various forms of media including news, social networks, and popular culture representations. When themes began to emerge from the interviews, they were categorized as (1) an answer to a research question or (2) a separate finding outside of the statements of purpose. Each theme was analyzed multiple times over more than one sitting to ascertain nuance and proper representation of what the interviewee meant. Other themes and sub-themes emerged during analyes and were separately categorized to provide a thorough analysis of the information given in the interviews. Generic framing of the emerging themes was used to allow for broad analysis of issues that fit into more than one category of sub-category (Matthes, 2009).

Methodology Limitations

A limitation of the study is that there is a section of the formerly trafficked who this study does not account for, those who have not worked with law enforcement or advocacy groups, as their experiences leaving trafficking did not rely on these services or because of embarrassment of their situation (Langone, 1993). With proper preparation and approval from Institutional Research Boards and other research-governing bodies, future studies could interview formerly trafficked people or ask them to write about their experiences, which would allow for a look into these closed groups. There is also no representation of the trafficker due to the cloaked nature of their enterprise.

Additionally, no identifying information was collected on the formerly trafficked people working with the interviewees. While this helps ensure their stories are not being told without their consent, there is also no possibility of identifying particularly vulnerable populations to

human trafficking or furthering the literature on vulnerability as written by other researchers. Future studies could collect some generally identifying information, but without specifics such as names, to analyze for potential areas for anti-trafficking education or programs to combat vulnerabilities that may lead to the muting process.

Finally, the timing of the writing of this thesis may be seen as a limitation. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused worldwide shutdowns and social distancing. While interviews were conducted before the pandemic necessitated stay-at-home orders, the writing took place mostly during self-isolation. While there is some emerging anecdotal information on how the pandemic affected organizational structures and the need for advocacy services, we do not yet know the extent of the pandemic on the numbers of people trafficked. Moving forward researchers will not only have to look for accurate statistics but find out how the pandemic changed the way services are delivered, or the ways in which people were groomed into trafficking due to financial or social instability that comes from a worldwide event. Future research will undoubtedly be affected by the events and responses to the way we communicate both academically and socially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

With these factors in mind, in the next chapter I will summarize the specific findings from the interviews, and in chapter 5, discuss my findings and directions for future research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Interviews with anti-human trafficking workers and volunteers provided firsthand accounts of the work, barriers, and communication strategies that are used when communicating with and about formerly trafficked and actively trafficked people as a muted group. However, due to the inherent risks of communicating with and about trafficked individuals, besides masking, all identifying information or speech patterns may also be altered to preserve anonymity. Although the terms, "muted groups" or "muted groups theory" were not specifically referenced during interviews, the purpose of the analysis was to surface themes related to the systemic muting of groups that corresponds with the theory as well as seeking to identify insights that might facilitate (or inhibit) unmuting (i.e., voice restoration) as well as muting prevention processes.

To address the statement of purpose posed in the previous chapter, I conducted interviews with six individuals representing six different agencies, including nonprofit advocacy agencies, victim advocacy, law enforcement, and legal representation. Each interview lasted between 65 and 125 minutes. Although of the locations of interviews are not specific, generally interviews occurred in the Hampton Roads region, or via phone for those outside of the area. Some were conducted on campus and others at the places of the interviewee's choosing, but all were in non-public spaces to maintain confidentiality (offices, conferences rooms, and the like). Demographics of the subjects of the interviews are also masked, but in general included six females and no males who ranged in age from mid-20s to 60s. Two males were invited to participate in the study but did not respond or declined to participate. Each of the people

interviewed had at least a college education, with three having master's degrees, and one a juris

doctorate.

The manifest content of these interviews was transcribed resulting in 52 pages of

transcription. A discourse analysis was performed on transcriptions of each interview to identify

trends, concerns, and patterns. According to van Dijk (1997), discourse analysis is the study of

real language use by real speakers in real situations. Additionally, as interviews were transcribed,

identities were masked through a naming convention known only to the researcher. Then

following Bulmer (1979), analytical induction via multiple in-depth readings was used to look

for reoccurring themes and information that addressed the statements of purpose and/or shed new

light on communication of the trafficked as a muted group. Results are reported in conjunction

with statements unless a broader theme was found that required its own category. No formerly

trafficked people were interviewed for this thesis, due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the

potential for harms to a vulnerable population of doing so.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, language use is an important part of the

communicative process surrounding human trafficking. While the language and specific phrasing

preferred by each interviewee and their organization differed slightly, the most common term for

formerly trafficked people was "client." Therefore, I will be using that term interchangeably with

trafficked and formerly trafficked person depending on context throughout this section unless

otherwise noted for specific organizational terms or in quotes. Additionally, in this section, all of

the clients discussed are people who are no longer in an active trafficking situation due to either

a law enforcement intervention, leaving willingly by choice, or leaving unwillingly before

seeking assistance from groups. For safety and out of respect for the clients, no directly

identifying information was shared with the researcher, only generalities, such as a city or a

relevant descriptive factor such as age. Furthermore, parts of the following sections are kept intentionally vague to maintain trust and confidentiality of the interviewees and their organizations. It should be noted that one interviewee stated they felt the term trafficking was not sufficient as it did not convey the repeated trauma of what happened to the people their organization serves, but as it is common vernacular the organization uses it.

Organizational and Funding Structures

In each interview, a set of questions was asked about the organizational structure and funding mechanisms of each advocacy group (the list of question appears in Appendix A). This was done in part to (1) educate the researcher about the various mechanisms of anti-human trafficking advocacy work and (2) help the researcher to understand the structures in place and how they coexist with each other on a local, regional, and national level. While each group had a similar mission to help the trafficked and formerly trafficked, their specific outreach services were varied and included: job training and interview assistance, job creation, temporary and/or long-term housing, transitional housing services, legal and victim advocacy, clothing, and furniture were specifically stated by interviewees. Services at two organizations were also intersectional, meaning they served the actively trafficked or formerly trafficked as well as people escaping domestic violence, with some services grouped by age, and all but one grouped by gender. One organization made the distinction between being a "shelter" and long-term "restorative care." They specified the difference respectively to be long-term services provided such as the aforementioned, as opposed to a place to stay while receiving services elsewhere. Another interviewee said simply:

> Our mantra is to collaborate where you can collaborate and create where you have to. We only start a new program when we have to and it's something we can do . . . because

that's how we spread this goal of ending human trafficking in [city and region]. (Quote intentionally altered to protect confidentiality.)

Funding sources for the organizations included in these interviews are also highly variable. All agencies but one are nonprofit-organizations that used a combination of governmental grants, private foundation monetary awards, corporate donations, fundraisers, and private donations to fund their work. The one organization that is not a nonprofit is a governmental agency that did not provide shelter or housing services, only legal aid and victim advocacy. Groups also provided different services, that is, some emphasized housing (both safe houses and independent living situations); others provided career training and job opportunities; others offered legal representation and victim advocacy, and still others offered a combination of services including therapy, providing donated home goods (such as furniture), drug rehabilitation and general life skills. Age also factored into services. Some group homes were structured by age: in particular, one organization structured their homes in the 8 to 12 range, 13 to 17 range, and 18 to 21 range, with the last specifically being used as a "bridge" to adult services when some people may fall out from services in between the child/teen and adult service providers.

Two organizations specifically self-identified as Christian organizations, stating that while clients were not required to be practicing Christians to receive services, volunteers and staff would ask clients if the workers could pray with them over the course of receiving services and encourage the use of prayer and *Bible* reading as healing tools. Further, one interviewee stated that all staff and volunteer meetings included prayer as a tool for wellness and dealing with difficult situations they encountered during their work. An interviewee from the other Christian organization stated that they became involved when "the Lord impressed it on my heart" to help, and then became a volunteer and later, a paid employee of the organization. A

third organization was described as having been Christian but now did not affiliate with any one religion, adding that many of the workers still identify as Christian in their personal lives.

Training for volunteers working with trafficked people is dependent on organizational missions and structures. One interviewee described levels of training dependent on the volunteer's work area. For example, to be spokesperson, a volunteer must first attend a meeting, then take a human trafficking class that overviews services and policies related to human trafficking with others, while a more involved and one-on-one position such as victim advocate requires a 40-hour training class. I will next use the statements of purpose (see Chapter 3) to organize the remainder of the results.

Research Findings

Across interviews, clear findings became apparent: commonalities included communication barriers, both verbal and non-verbal and media influence and depictions in setting frameworks of trafficking, along with the organizational and funding structures stated above. In the next section I will discuss these findings in greater detail.

Communication Barriers

After repeated readings of the interview transcripts five communication barriers emerged across all the interviews. Two of the barriers (inconsistent terminology and negative nonverbal communication) are common in most all communication situations, whereas three barriers (managing trust, managing fear, managing shame) are uniquely discernable in the context of communicating with trafficked individuals. Although the following information is categorized separately to discuss impacts, they are often interlinked issues that do not stand alone and may overlap.

Barrier 1: Inconsistent Terminology.

One interviewee described the process of building a life post-trafficked life in four parts: intake, stabilization, client-centered work and medical, and finally, independent housing and work or vocational training. The interviewee stated that the phases can take anywhere from 30 days to 2 years, depending on the formerly trafficked person's needs, adding that those who have been trafficked for labor often do not have migration documents, which makes finding independent income difficult, keeping them dependent on private or governmental services longer. While the group will provide services for as long as needed, the goal is independence, both in work, home and decision-making, in the long-term.

Another interviewee stated that groups, even those that work in the same localities and often support each other, may disagree about terminology to use when talking about formerly trafficked people and the issues that come with escaping a trafficking situation:

For instance, there's substance use versus substance abuse. And even the terminology of 'rescuing.' We don't use that term, 'rescuing victims,' often. Law enforcement may help them move to safety, but what is safety? Can we change the trauma, or rescue them from the hell they live in their mind? . . . What I'm passionate about is education . . . and using language that's inclusive . . . to empower you to make the best decision for yourself. [Quote edited to preserve anonymity.]

Another organization made the distinction between survivor (a person who is receiving specific care services) and overcomer (those who have become more independent and often live on their own) but stated that it is dependent on what an individual prefers to be called. Still others are called "victims" in the very early stages of restorative care. The same person reported that in group homes the clients may choose the phrase they would like used for their cohort,

which has included "participant" and the specific "survivor leader" for those who may be moving into public spaces to tell their story. The term "participants" helped the formerly trafficked feel in control of their situation, as "victim" or "survivor" was too passive.

Yet another interviewee called the formerly trafficked people they serve "partners," expressing the need for agency of the people they work with after the lack of choice that marked their former situations. That group was also committed to the phrase "trafficking," stating that some of the formerly trafficked people did not realize the distinction of what was happening to them as more than prostitution or labor.

While the question was written to focus on internal communication, external communication with the public is another factor that came up in interviews. One interviewee noted that the public's use of language was turning away from derogatory terms like "prostitute" and toward "trafficked person", which they felt showed an understanding of the forced and cloaked nature of the work, even when the details of what made them different may not be widely understood. Similarly, the phrase "trafficked person" separated the issue of gender and is inclusive of those who were not performing sex work, further spreading awareness that trafficking is not only sexual.

Barrier 2: Negative Nonverbal Communication.

Additionally, nonverbal communication is an important part of helping formerly trafficked persons to trust and feel comfortable while working through the steps to move forward with their lives. One organization teaches workers and volunteers to not hover over the formerly trafficked person due to the feelings it may incur, rather they should remain composed and relaxed, as well as mirror the formerly trafficked person's body language, use non-judgmental tone of voice, and to de-escalate when emotions run high. Verbally, there may be language

barriers, a lack of reading comprehension due to varied or inadequate educational backgrounds, and the inability to regulate emotion due to trauma or from being outside of societal norms where social skills are gained. Workers must match the terminology and language with which the formerly trafficked are comfortable and understand, so there is no "language policing" that leads to animosity or "the feeling that they're just passing each other" instead of connecting. Any criticism, whether constructive, perceived, or real, may be difficult for a formerly trafficked person to take, because of former trauma and lack of positive role models or stable and healthy relationships where communication is valued. Additionally, letting survivors take the lead on things from treatment to language to what they prefer to be called, is a building block to empowerment and trauma-informed care.

Language differences may also pose a barrier until interpretation services can be secured, both when clients are arrested, and a victim advocate first makes contact all the way through long-term services such as housing and therapy. For example, for clients in jail, barriers may include slow forms of communication (letters) and lack of regular access to telephones. These nonverbal forms of communication, where a person cannot communicate as they choose and when they choose, poses a negative barrier to successful transition out of trafficking.

Barrier 3: Communicating Trust.

Communicating trust in the process of working with the client and in organized services is an ongoing problem. Due to the muting process and the coercion and abuse of clients, they are often unable to form bonds. Said one interviewee:

> Nobody's given them anything for free, ever, so why would they trust us until we build
> up the relationship? We want them to know we're legitimately just here to assist them,
> but overcoming that hurdle of trust enough for us to even tell us their story is a lot.

Shame is another barrier too. Some clients are more than willing to share all of their stuff, but shame and trauma keeps a lot of them from sharing some of the ugliest parts because it's so awful they can't even verbalize it. They say, "I won't share that part of my story because nobody should have to hear that."

Through advocacy training, volunteers who want to help but are not able to pursue social work as a full-time career can be trained to offer "kindness, mercy, love, and compassion" via their organizations to the formerly trafficked. Interviewees spoke of developing programs focused on trust local therapists or the United States Department of Education so the messages would build trust with both the audience receiving them and help the formerly trafficked with navigating the world in their post-trafficking life. Some clients have been trafficked for many years, or abused as children, or had encounters with the criminal justice system where charges and jail time was dealt but their stories of trafficking were dismissed or ignored. As an advocate said: "We're the first people or organization to say hey, you matter. That's a huge hurdle to overcome."

Statistics may also impact the trustworthiness of an advocacy group: the reports of the number of trafficked people vary greatly, but advocates find using hard numbers that correspond closely with lived experiences are trust-builders for both the client and the public. While the questions asked in the interviews were originally meant to discuss trust between advocate and client, the issue of trust within the community was also important to advocates. Organizations not only need to build trust in order to communicate with the client but also within the community to both continue their work and to receive funding via donations or grants.

Barrier 4: Managing Fear.

Fear is another factor in so far as the formerly trafficked have been conditioned to think that no one cares about their circumstances, and that those circumstances are their fault. As stated in the legal definition of trafficking, "force, fraud, and coercion" into the acts of trafficking are necessary, and traffickers use fear to exploit and groom the clients. Along with advocates, medical professionals' involvement can help to restore trust and empowerment in the clients by healing them medically and letting them make their own decisions about care. As one interviewee said, "We walk with them every step of the way, and let them know it's your body, your care."

Clients may have been arrested for crimes related to their trafficking (often sex work or migration), but due to the criminality of their work and the muting process, their trafficker may never be arrested. This leads to fear that one should not talk about a person who is still free, despite any crimes they may have committed. Additionally, if the trafficker is someone the client had a relationship with, they may fear the trafficker's wrath (physical or mental abuse and further exploitation) or abandonment if the client reveals information to the police.

There is also fear, real or perceived, that due to criminal activity or low self-esteem, that the formerly trafficked person will not be believed when they report their trafficker, especially in cases where the trafficker is someone that outsiders would assume would not harm the trafficked person, such as a spouse or parent. Victim-blaming and victim-shaming cases in the public eye do not create a structure where trafficked people feel comfortable sharing a story of victimization when it could be publicly picked apart or their name could be in the public sphere. As stated by an interviewee,

There is zero room for opinion and morals in our work. You can poke holes in opinions,

and people do want to poke holes in your morals, but everyone does not have the same

set of morals and experience to live by . . . so it's really important that our program be

fully factual so people will come to us and find help.

Barrier 5: Managing Shame.

The nuances of the messages are also important, and in the interviews that I conducted,

fear and shame are nearly always interlinked in the communication and healing processes. Each

case is different, and it takes time for each client to develop their own sense of agency and

definition of self, outside of "trafficking victim." Some clients may go back to their traffickers

because finding work with a criminal record is too hard, or they find too much stigma in the

community, or they have internalized the abuse and shame until they believe that no one else will

ever care for them. Well-trained advocates who can help manage different needs and

expectations, while reserving judgment and showing empathy is another step in managing trust

and helping clients with their specific needs. Additionally, creating spaces for affinity groups

may further help the formerly trafficked find their voice again: according to interviewees there

are needs for more shelters and safe houses overall, but specifically for boys, transgender people

and LGBTQ people, who may have additional and unmet needs in the care system.

Shame around sex work is nearly always cited as an issue for sexually trafficked people.

While sex can be empowering for those who choose it, interviewees stated that many of their

clients felt ashamed of what they had been "tricked into" or "reduced to" due to societal

viewpoints of sex. Buyers can also contribute to these negative feelings, as they may see what

they are doing as empowering the trafficked person by giving them work, when they are

contributing to the muting process and abuse, even unwittingly. The buyer may be under the

impression that the trafficked person is there of their own free will and not under coercion; coercion being a main factor in separating those who perform sex acts willingly (sex workers) and those who are unwilling (the trafficked).

The good intentions of many to "help" and "save" trafficked people may also contribute to shaming by inadvertently communicating to the client that there is something inherently wrong with them that must be "fixed." Non-sensationalized storytelling can be a way of managing shame: when a formerly trafficked person is ready to tell their story on their terms it is no longer their shameful secret but their chance to share their experiences for the benefit or healing of themselves and others. (The empowerment of a client via controlling their own narrative is discussed in the breakdown of statement of purpose 3 at length so I will reserve detailed discussion here.)

Role of Media Depictions

Based on repeated readings of the interview transcripts it is evident that media stories about human trafficking are successfully making their way into the conversations of those who communicate with trafficked individuals. However, what is also evident from the interviews is that success at increasing public awareness about human trafficking as well as the plight of victims of trafficking is coming at a cost of skewed coverage that distorts the process of trafficking as well as the plight of trafficked individuals.

Successfully Increasing Awareness

Media coverage and depictions serving to increase awareness in movies, social media, and news reporting that bring attention to trafficking as an ongoing issue in the United States, even if some depictions are erroneous or used to further specific narratives. As more people become aware of trafficking as an ongoing problem, steps can be taken to report potentially

harmful situations and work to eradicate the issue. News coverage of businesses that use forced labor or people who engage in sexual encounters with trafficked people also help consumers make responsible buying decisions. As stated by an interviewee: "If we have buying power with our dollar, are we going to buy from ethical or non-ethical sources?"

Much of the awareness process is educating against stereotypes of what trafficking looks like, how someone is trafficked (snatched off the street versus the more common exploited by someone they know) and providing an overview of the grooming process. Trafficking does not happen overnight; often, a trafficked person is groomed by their trafficker for long periods of time while a trusting and emotional relationship is built. Traffickers can be friends, acquaintances, family, spouses, sexual partners, employers, among others. One of the largest assumptions is that the sexually trafficked are making a choice to engage in sex work, despite the definition of trafficking including "force, fraud and coercion." As stated by an interviewee:

Spouse trafficking, or a boyfriend pimping out his girlfriend, and what we might call "survival trafficking", you don't see that really depicted in the media or you don't see that explained well, because it's such a complicated issue and it's really hard to portray the emotional underpinnings of somebody who's been victimized their entire life.

Law enforcement can also contribute to awareness: often, a large "bust" of criminal trafficking or other crimes leads to press conferences where a spokesperson or public information officer (PIO) will discuss number of people taken from trafficking situations and the number of traffickers arrested. While this brings public awareness to trafficking situations, negative stereotypes about certain businesses or the legal standing of the trafficked may be inserted into the story, either by the journalist or the news consumer. Law enforcement may also be a touchpoint for the advocates to connect with new clients in need of services: when law

enforcement come in and forcibly remove people from trafficking situations (as opposed to the person leaving voluntarily) they are often taken to hospitals and then connected with advocates both from the nonprofit organization and the courts systems.

However, it must be remembered that media reports are "about" the trafficked, and not from the perspective of the trafficked. From the standpoint of muted group theory such stories can only serve to point out that the trafficked are in fact continually "muted" and, at least so far, media stories about the trafficked have had little impact on the process of restoring the voices of the actively trafficked or preventing individuals from becoming muted in the first place. Part of the reason for this is of course the inherently nefarious activities of traffickers require the cooperative silence and muting of the trafficked. Stories may be sensationalized for higher viewership, at the cost of facts or information that, while helpful or educational, is not deemed interesting enough to be included.

High recidivism rates of the trafficked and lack of awareness of the issues leading to trafficking (poverty, housing instability, lack of gainful employment for people with criminal records) were concerns cited for barriers to informed awareness in the community. Reframing the issue, with partnerships to train media to tell stories in a trauma-informed way and fight stigmas, is one-way advocates felt they could change stigmatizing or skewed coverage. One advocate suggested framing trafficking as a commercial issue, or as a market meeting a demand for purchased sex or labor, to make people rethink choices that may contribute to trafficking. A focus on the hopeful parts of trafficking – that many survivors are making lives on their own terms, as opposed to being victims and objects of scorn or pity – and letting the community be a part of the healing process (at the appropriate times and in empowering ways) was another suggestion. One interviewee whose organization identified as Christian, said that clients who

developed relationships with God had lower rates of recidivism, "as they understand their worth is not based on what people paid for them . . . it's not exclusive, but just the people who have gone further down the road to healing often are those who have found God."

Cost of Skewed Coverage

All interviewees stated independently that sex trafficking is, in their experience, more widely covered by their respective local media and national media than labor trafficking, despite statistics and counts that show the inverse. Gender and race are also elements in news-coverage, leading to miseducation of the public about the problem. According to one anti-trafficking worker: "They pull at your heartstrings, telling stories about 13-year-old girls trapped in houses, but don't care about undocumented men working for $2. They're [labor trafficking victims are] viewed as less of a victim than sex trafficking . . . it's sensationalized, and I find it, as I find most news, racist in nature."

The language used in media portrayals can also impact the clients themselves, according to one interviewee:

> We like to say with hey, you're not a criminal, you're not a prostitute, you're not a whore, because they've internalized this idea that they are wrong and they've made choices to do what they did. It's the first hurdle of victims or survivors or overcomers, whatever you want to call them, because they've survived as long as they have and endured unimaginable trauma from childhood on and been told they're whores or something else.

Additionally, simplistic portrayals in the media (news, movies and television shows were specifically brought up by interviewees) cause the biggest challenges when communicating with and about trafficked individuals. A lack of representation of types of trafficking and people

affected may mean that the public does not recognize trafficking or the trafficked because it does not fit the narrow confines of the situations, they've been led to believe constitute trafficking. Representations of trafficked people are most commonly beautiful white women kidnapped by a dark and mysterious man in a foreign (non-United States) country. In five of the interviews, interviewees discussed that while trafficking in the western media may look homogenous, the people that their organizations have worked with include women trafficked by women for both sex and labor, and often include the "most vulnerable populations": children, displaced people, people of color and those in the LGBTQ+ community, transgender or gender non-conforming communities. As explained by an interviewee: "Clients may have held down 9 to 5 jobs, had their hair and nails done, and posted on websites or social media. That's not the majority of what we're seeing, but it happens. It can be nuanced, subtle."

The lack of stories about male sex trafficking and labor trafficking is also a concern of advocate while depictions of traffickers by the media are also missing context and nuance, both in popular media and on social media. While traffickers are often depicted by the trafficked as well as in media reports as a "boyfriend" or "stranger," they can often include spouses, parents, friends, family members, and other formerly trafficked people. The dynamics of human trafficking situations are complex relational situations and clients may have been groomed from an early age or promised financial opportunities that do not happen. As one interviewee said: "People are just more prone to prefer the evil stranger versus the people you know."

Agency-Public Communication

Based on repeated readings of interview transcripts, I learned that speaking engagements and volunteer advocacy training are the two most-mentioned areas of public communication trainings across all the organizations interviewed. In one organization, trained volunteers did the

bulk of the speaking engagements, with the interviewee stating that although the organization only had two full-time employees, in one year they were able to do more than 180 speaking engagements. In-person communication through case managers working with the jail systems and volunteers teaching life skills classes and offering re-entry planning (which may include finding housing, therapy for trauma and/or substance addiction) were ways one nonprofit organization specifically stated they communicated with clients.

The functions of public communication from agencies working with the trafficked is twofold: increase general awareness of the problem of human trafficking and inform audiences how to identify potential human trafficking situations that should be reported to authorities and events that share knowledge of risk indicators and red flags to avoid potential trafficking circumstances (i.e., muting avoidance and muting prevention). The second area of agency trafficking communication is making their services known, often via websites or social media, for those who may be experiencing or have experienced trafficking and are looking for organizations that can provide services (i.e., voice restoration). This may include numbers for texting or private messaging on social media apps where conversations can easily be deleted or hidden if the person is still in an active trafficking situation. The two can overlap when training on both indicators of trafficking and services provided are given to first-response organizations and mandated reporters including school staff, healthcare workers and law enforcement.

Preventative programs, which may focus on school-aged children and church youth groups, that give the students information on potential trafficking situations. Volunteers will be trained to speak to different groups about signs of trafficking, how to support someone who reports concerns or says they need help, and provide compassion and victim services to various age groups. Additionally, groups may leave cards or brochures in public spaces where trafficked

people may move through or give them to current clients to give to friends or acquaintances who may need services. Finally, referrals may be made through national and local Human Trafficking Hotlines and the Federal Bureau of Investigation Human Trafficking Task Force at the local level.

Word-of-mouth referrals are another way that clients may come to the organizations; people in similar situations will give recommendations to others who are newly out of trafficking or are in need of services after struggling to navigate post-trafficking life on their own. Schools, medical providers, and even Google or Facebook searches by those in need of services will connect new clients to organizations. Organizations will also refer clients to one another depending on the need for services; some organizations may provide services for those in jail while others provide housing, so groups will send clients to where they best fit at that time. Public speaking engagements or media requests may come with requests for a client to speak and tell their story to the group (i.e., how they were muted, how they coped with muting, and voice restoration). While some survivors may be comfortable telling their stories each organizational representative interviewed expressed discomfort at the idea of "offering up" clients. Stories may be shared with few identifying details if permission is given and intentionality of storytelling in a situation such as advocacy training versus a public fundraising or awareness event. Descriptions of the decision-making process included "restoring their choice and ownership of their stories," both of which could be part of the voice restoration process. However, interviewees reiterated that no client is made to tell their story if they are not interested in sharing, and some of the organizations to not share requests with clients so the client does not feel obligated to talk. Empowerment over one's story was an overarching theme of all the interviews – whether in medical care, work decisions, living arrangements or other aspects of often-everyday life, each

advocate stressed that it was up to the client what they did and did not share publicly. As stated by one interviewee:

> I think we should probably all stop talking about them, and for them, and probably stop talking to them like they're broken little birds. We have to recognize to get through what they've gotten to that they're probably stronger than anyone, and they're survivors, which creates a narrative of empowerment. Everyone thinks they're poor, literate, incapable and we don't know that we can hear them talking for themselves. I don't know if we hear what they say, there's so much dominant discourse, and to keep going down that same path isn't going to help the problem.

Summary

Each of these questions provide us a look into the larger communicative processes around human trafficking. The first question, developed around the barriers and perceived barriers around communication with trafficked and formerly trafficked people, led to five distinct subcategories: inconsistent terminology, negative nonverbal communication, communicating trust, managing shame, and managing fear. The first, inconsistent terminology, shows the distinct differences in the way the groups view their missions and the people they work with. While all seek to help the formerly trafficked find a stable post-trafficking life, the services they provide range across a spectrum, and the language they use is reflective of their missions and beliefs. The second, negative nonverbal communication, is twofold: service providers use it to show respect, comfort, and openness to the formerly trafficked client, while the formerly trafficked may use it to convey discomfort or a lack of trust due to traumas from past abuse. And while all the categories are interlinked, the last three—communicating trust, managing fear, and managing

shame—usually go together as communicative processes that are also steps in a healing or rebuilding process.

Media have contributed to both awareness of human trafficking and misunderstanding of the issue. While awareness of human trafficking and ethical buying can be traced to various news stories and social media campaigns, misconceptions about the ways people are coerced into trafficking, a focus on sex trafficking, and the misconception that it is almost exclusively happening to women have created new barriers the anti-human trafficking movement must work around to spread factual awareness of the problem. The most recognized portrayals of trafficking include young women locked in dark rooms in foreign countries and drugged. While these horrible situations are real and need to be stopped, trafficking is often happening unrecognized in everyday life. The processes of "force, fraud, and coercion," as trafficking is defined, are dependent on deception and the muting process.

Finally, awareness is a multi-faceted part of the work advocates do. Awareness is often framed as volunteers and workers talking to the public, but it can include communication with the trafficked about services available (both to a specific person and generally), communication with the media, law enforcement, healthcare workers, and each other. Social media and other electronic communication also provide new ways to advertise services or make contact with potential clients; coupled with older forms of communication, such as billboards, flyers and word-of-mouth, the communication processes surrounding trafficking has changed and expanded. The idea of empowerment is also pervasive; clients are encouraged to "own" their stories and only speak on them when it provides a healthy outlet for the client's growth. Giving the communication process back to the client is one step in allowing them to reclaim their

agency, or as I have discussed, unmute. I will discuss conclusions and future research directions

in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Human trafficking is a complex, multifaceted, global, criminal, tragic, and wicked (see Kolko, 2012) human problem that requires multidisciplinary approaches to not only understand it but also to reduce it, and one day eradicate it. Specifically, this thesis demonstrates, first, that although the field of communication has yet to investigate the role of communication in human trafficking in-depth, that communication does in fact, play a significant role in (1) the prevention of human trafficking, (2) the management of trafficked individuals, (3) their recovery, as well as in (4) associated criminal justice processes. Second, due to the criminal and clandestine nature of human trafficking this thesis serves as an exemplar for future communication studies of this topic insofar that it highlights the legal and ethical boundaries of investigating the process and the extensive measures that were taken and must be taken in order to manage many associated dangers. Third, this thesis has offered a new conceptualization of trafficked people as a muted group, and through the lens of Muted Group Theory (Ardener, 1975) the thesis demonstrated the theory's utility in understanding, managing, and moving toward one day eradicating the scourge of human trafficking. Fourth, using Muted Group Theory this thesis has also assembled the necessary elements to begin to build a conceptual model of human trafficking communication upon which future studies can be built. Finally, fifth, this thesis serves as a heuristic document – shining a new light on a very small portion of a much larger problem with an eye on managing misunderstandings and misconceptions and repairing the real and irreparable harms these have caused to people and communities around the world. Each of these conclusions are discussed at length next.

Human Trafficking Communication

Much of the past research on trafficking in the field of communication centers on media (television, newspapers, movies, and most recently, social media) and with good reason. Media are often the first reference for an issue of concern. That it, when a problem first arises, it is covered as a novelty and "breaking news," then it becomes a leading story with follow up interviews and periodic updates, and it eventually becomes a known quantity in the community and is combatted. Also, societal ills often make their way into movies. For example, the film *Taken* where Liam Neeson portrayed a father who must rescue his daughter from foreign traffickers who kidnap her while abroad, was mentioned repeatedly by advocates in interviews for this thesis – and also became the subject of documentary filmmaking for the consumption of horrified home audiences. While news has its uses, what are the primary goals of communicating about an issue without balance and work to combat said issue? It is easy to forget that at the center of it all, there are people involved.

Human trafficking means different things to different people. The community may have one definition and advocates have another, with further division between anti-trafficking organizations dependent on their mission. The prioritization of sex-related cases over labor cases or those involving males (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014) is further recognized among groups due to differing priorities. Along with the dominant narrative of sex trafficking, communication efforts tend to lack viewpoints of the marginalized, including homosexual, queer, and non-gender conforming people, while finding common ground across heteronormative conceptions of rights (Campbell & Zimmerman, 2014) and research is Western-centric (Steiner, Kynn, Stylianouc, & Postmus, 2018).

During interviews, empowerment and victim-centered narratives were mentioned by each advocate, stating that communication surrounding the formerly trafficked should allow them to have control over their story, and by extension, their new post-trafficking life, which may or may not include sharing their story. Each person's trauma is different and letting them control their stories is a step forward in the unmuting process.

Going forward, in order to advance the study of human trafficking communication the field of communication must: (1) fully support human subjects' protections such that to the extent possible the voices of the potentially trafficked (those in danger of becoming muted), the actually trafficked (those whose voices are muted), and the formerly trafficked (those who voices have been restored) need to be heard if they so choose; (2) write stories about the dangers of trafficking for an audience of early adolescents emphasizing that they should never give up their voices; (3) develop programs of relational communication research that focus on adult-adolescent and adult-to-adult communication about the dangers of clandestine criminal enterprises, (4) develop programs and campaigns for public consumption to recognize all types of trafficking, and (5) add to the research and develop pro-social programs that provide support for populations vulnerable to trafficking and other societal problems, locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally.

Methodological Problems when Studying Clandestine, Criminal Communication

In this thesis several barriers were encountered concerning human subjects' protections. First, the formerly trafficked can be considered a vulnerable population due to the often-traumatic nature of their situations. Additionally, some may still be incarcerated or underage, two groups that are specifically named in IRB protections. Secondly, much of the process of unmuting, healing, and empowerment includes victims telling a story on their own terms and in

their own time. A traditional research interview with pointed questions is not on their terms and as stated in chapter 4, many advocacy groups do not feel it appropriate to ask clients to share. Further, to fully discuss communication about the trafficked, research must first start with advocates as they occupy multiple areas of communication, interacting with the public, the client, and other related stakeholders such as law enforcement or healthcare workers. This argues for the necessity of ethnographic methods on the study of human trafficking communication. Thirdly, although these interviews were confidential, concerns were even expressed about the safety of those involved by some at the university: would it put the formerly trafficked or researcher in a potentially dangerous situation by sharing sensitive information? Great care has been taken to keep transcripts of interviews confidential, with pseudonyms assigned to each interviewee, password-protected notes and recordings, and permissions from the IRB to allow interviewees to refrain from signing their names to research agreements and returning them to the university. Interviews were conducted in non-public spaces including offices and conference rooms to keep the information confidential and all involved as safe as possible. Some advocacy spaces exist behind locked doors, with security cameras, and safehouses are kept secret because traffickers are those who profit from the exploitation and hurt of others. With the proper framework, however, it is possible to gather these kinds of data but only with the help of aid workers (as illustrated in this thesis) and in other first-responder and public-facing workers.

Consequences of Muting the Human Voice

A third conclusion of this thesis is that a critical communication element of human trafficking is the process of muting or silencing the voices of those who are its victims. Across all groups interviewed, instances of muted groups became evident during the discourse analysis of the interviews. In each case, the interviewees spoke in a different way about the way their

clients chose to self-identify; some knew they were trafficked while others did not, but all had a sense of something that was wrong that they could not speak publicly about nor control. The victims are a diverse group of people but as advocates spoke, it became clear both through their work and through their experiences that no one person is safe from trafficking, and some groups are at a higher risk than others.

Misconceptions can be a type of muting because not all stories are being told: some media sensationalize or use classic yellow journalism tactics to lure audiences in, while others simply no longer have the time to spend on tracking down the story due to the budget cuts in newsrooms. The state of recent U.S. journalism, with market contractions and layoffs due to declining revenue is a research direction of its own (see Bernat, 2016), while in authoritarian countries, journalists may be limited in the subjects they can safely write about (Applegren, Linden, & van Dalen, 2019) but both directions could be further research areas specifically related to storytelling related to human trafficking, and how the markets and political climates shape the narratives.

While the Muted Groups Theory was originally conceived to explain the lack of female representation in broader cultural conversations, the theory has been revisited since its initial publication to include wider application (see Ardener, 1975; Kramerae, 2005; Preble, 2016). By looking at the trafficked as a group that has been systematically muted regardless of gender, we can begin to see the natural next step of the communicative research conversation: how does one unmute, or hopefully, not become muted at all?

One of the biggest hurdles that advocates discussed was the fear and trauma faced by the trafficked. Outside forces such as stigmas about the trafficked lead to further trauma when it precludes people from seeking help (Fukishima, 2020). So, while a communicative process about

resilience (Socha & Beck, 2015) is only one small part of an unmuting process, finding ways to

dispel myths about the trafficked could further the anti-trafficking discourse at the grassroots

level. The trafficked need support and care and understanding of their situation from all,

including advocates, law enforcement and community must try to overcome biases about the

trafficked. Further research directions could find ways for interdisciplinary movements (for

example communication, social work, women's studies and criminal justice) allowing healing

without stigma. Stigma is not new, but it provides barriers to successful resilience for the
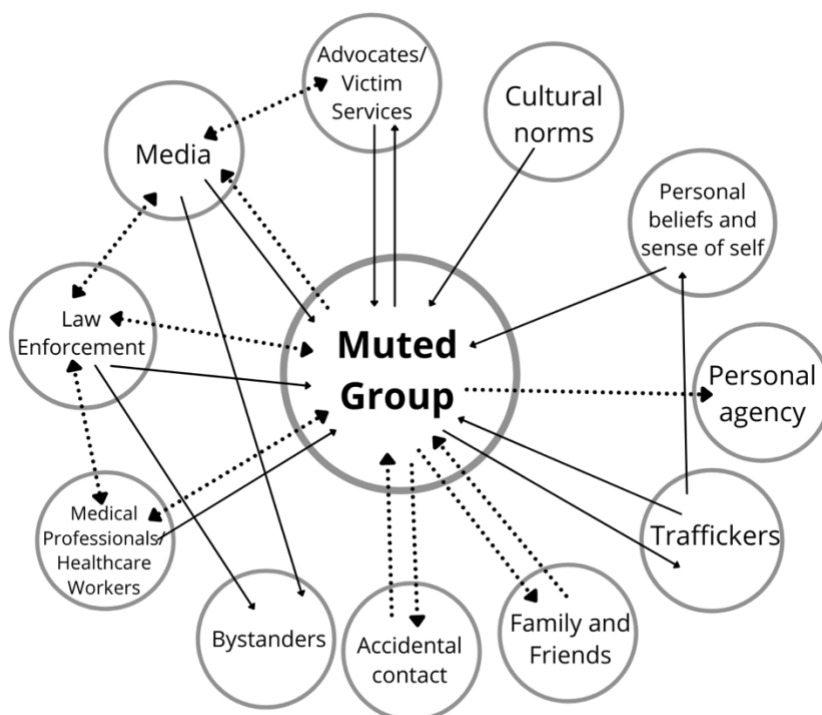
formerly trafficked person.

Conceptual Model of Human Trafficking Communication

Fourth, this thesis has made abundantly clear that the problem of human trafficking is

complex and not open to easy one-shot kinds of solutions. However, the interviews coupled with

Muted Group Theory do provide the essential elements for proposing a new conceptual

framework upon which future research studies as well as communication interventions can be

built. Specifically, based on my work in this thesis, I argue that there are at least four distinct

phases to human communication trafficking: (1) Pre-trafficking communication (the process of

muting), (2) communication during trafficking (maintaining muting), (3) communication and the

transition from trafficking (reclaiming voice), and (4) communication after-trafficking

(communication in recovery).

The communication processes of trafficked people are inherently complicated. The

muting process that enables trafficking can change the interpersonal and intrapersonal

communication of the trafficked person (see Fig.1). While in the trafficking situation, the

trafficked person's agency does not allow for open communication, as that would inherently

disallow the process of trafficking.

Fig. 1: Communicative Processes of Human Trafficking

Often, the Muted Group (in this case, the trafficked person) may not only engage in communicative with their trafficker (before, during, and after their trafficking situation), but with many other groups, both directly and indirectly. In Fig.1, direct contact is noted by solid lines, and indirect or occasional contact is noted by dotted lines. This model is also based only on interviews and literature readings and could look slightly different for every trafficked or formerly trafficked person. Additionally, post-trafficking many of these communication areas may change, with increasingly open communication as part of the unmuting and empowerment processes.

Advocacy groups, as the focus of the interviews of this thesis, have been the focus of much of this writing, but others including media, law enforcement and medical professionals

who also have contact with the trafficked and formerly trafficked. Depending on how the person leaves their trafficking situation, advocacy groups/victim services, law enforcement or medical professionals could be the first group to communicate openly with the trafficked person. These lines of communication could stay open for brief periods or long periods of time, depending on the needs of the now-formerly trafficked person. These lines may also not be constant; since a person may return to their trafficking situation multiple times, these areas of communication may open and break many times. The communication could at times also only go one way, with the formerly trafficked person receiving information but not reciprocating with law enforcement, healthcare workers, media or advocates, depending on their level of comfort and communication abilities at the time It is also important to note that some trafficked people may leave their trafficking situation without communicating with any of these groups, so their structure will not be represented in this model.

The media, advocacy groups, medical professionals and law enforcement may also have contact with each other in relation to trafficking situations. Media may interview law enforcement as sources for news stories on human trafficking arrests or trends. Healthcare professionals may report concerns to law enforcement or advocacy groups. Advocacy groups may speak to the media for awareness and education or communicate with law enforcement to obtain information on the formerly trafficked in need of services, both in and out of jail. Additionally, other factors should be considered such as cultural norms and stigmas, personal beliefs, and sense of self, and personal agency (or lack thereof) affective the communicative processes of the trafficked and formerly trafficked, as evidenced in the barriers 3, 4 and 5, "Communicating Trust," "Managing Fear," and "Managing Shame" as discussed in Chapter 4. However, it can be difficult to point to just one thing that contributed to the muting of a voice

and a person's trafficking; while the definition of trafficking is "force, fraud, and coercion," known stories range from intimate partner abuse to lack of opportunity for stable housing to false or exaggerated work opportunities to kidnapping to grooming. Traffickers, by the cloaked nature of their work, may have fewer connections to the rest of the community than any of the other stakeholders because it is impossible to do their work in the open. However, that does mean there is not a communication element to what they do – the selling of people does not happen in a void, and the communication processes that make it possible can involve in-person or online sales and criminal networks large and small. The consumers of the products of trafficking provide an additional communicative element, whether buying and selling people for labor, sex, or consuming goods made using unethical processes. Monetary investment can be a form of nonverbal communication as a way of supporting trafficking, even if the buyer has no idea that the supply chain includes trafficked people and would not support the practices if they were known.

There are groups that were not included in the interview questions but who emerged through discussion and analysis: bystanders, friends and family, and what I will call "accidental contacts". Bystanders, who may have a somewhat para-social interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with the trafficked or formerly trafficked via the consumption of news, television, other media, or by seeing a pamphlet or billboard with a phone number for a Human Trafficking Hotline or similar outreach information. They are often people who have no direct connection to the trafficked but are concerned about the group as a matter of civic interest or personal concern. Similarly, the "accidental contact" group could be someone who the trafficked meets once or under certain circumstances. This person may start out as a bystander but by recognizing the signs of trafficking or by interaction with a trafficked person who asks for help, they become

involved with the trafficked person. These kinds of stories can often be found in media as cautionary takes or advertisements for training and advocacy. Although the contacts may be random, they may represent a best-case scenario for public awareness: a person with no connection to trafficking recognizes the signs and helps a trafficked person begin to unmute.

Communication with family and friends were not specifically included in the interview questions but have been encompassed as a communication area for the Muted Group to represent the finding that some trafficked people may be leading normal-seeming lives and having everyday interactions. This area also represents the people who are trafficked by someone they have a relationship with, which may include a spouse or partner, parent, other family member, or friend. As with other types of relationships, these may change or break depending on the status of the trafficked or formerly trafficked person and their place in the unmuting journey. Personal agency is also a highly variable section of communication – although internal, it can be dependent on circumstance and range from none when a person is muted to high agency when leaving trafficking or post-trafficking.

The inclusion of the Muted Groups Theory into the communicative processes of and around human trafficking provides new areas for research and community engagement. As the problem is not just an academic or community one, any future directions should include both areas by utilizing community connections (advocacy, law enforcement training, mandatory reporters like healthcare workers) and qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (data gathering and surveys). Future qualitative research could include interviews with all the aforementioned groups, concerned community groups that ask for awareness training (churches, schools and parenting groups) as well as more advocates from outside the state of Virginia. Human

trafficking happens in the community and while much has been done in advocacy work, future advocacy should work to center trafficked people's stories in the public narrative. Quantitative research directions could include data gathering of actual trafficking numbers in the community, as well as a survey of bystanders to gather information on what media they educate themselves on trafficking, either passively or on purpose. Specifically, research can include questions about the efficacy of public awareness campaigns, such as billboards, advertisements, and social media campaigns, as forms of passive or active media consumption.

New Directions for Research

This thesis is intended to be a heuristic document and not a definitive work. That is, it seeks to raise awareness, argue for the utility of a new framework for future human trafficking communication studies, and to serve as a touchstone for future communication research seeking to understand clandestine, criminal communication. Human trafficking is a travesty. It is not new, and no one process will end it. However, modern media and advocacy campaigns have grown public awareness of the problem despite real or perceived shortcomings in the communication thereof. With the widespread use of electronic media there are new forms of recruitment, exploitation, but also opportunity for combatting the problem by opening new lines of communication with those in need of services. Future research directions should explore the way that social media apps with chat function, especially "disappearing" chats and videos, may be used in communication with trafficked people reaching out for services. The research could also go in another direction, with focus on the efficacy of trafficking awareness and what misconceptions exist at a community level.

Additionally, the LGBTQ+ community was mentioned in passing by some advocates whose work intersects with that community but was not explored in-depth due to a lack of

availability of advocates in that area. Future research studies could center on those communities, with attention on the need mentioned by advocates for housing and communicative issues specific to those groups. More specific research questions could center on the vulnerabilities specific to the LGBTQ+ community that allow for trafficking to take hold. Specifically, what kinds of support structures can be put in place to support this group?

The issue of race and cultural awareness is another area that should be explored in-depth in future research. As discussed in the literature review, anti-trafficking laws have roots in racist language and practices, and the depictions of trafficking as being done by "foreigners" or "in other places" causes real harm. While this thesis did not focus on any specific group, but the formerly trafficked as a whole, the discussion of racialized languages and media portrayals was addressed by advocates, with one stating inclusive language as particularly important and impactful in awareness campaigns. Future research should focus on how these racialized tropes are still played out in modern media, how the history of race relations contributes to our understanding of trafficking and crime today, what vulnerabilities contribute to the trafficking of people of color.

This work also only begins to explore the idea of Muted Groups Theory within human trafficking and communication; further courses of study could further combine interdisciplinary questions such as the muting process via socioeconomic vectors, systemic racial structures, and political ideologies that may contribute to human trafficking. In sociology and criminal justice, further research is needed into the organizations and criminal structures in place that aid or discourage traffickers; although it was touched on briefly in earlier chapters, more study is needed. Some sections, such as those on fear and shame, and managing nonverbal communication, can be further connected to the muting process and additional courses of study.

And finally, one of the most sensitive research areas is to directly communicate with the trafficked themselves. As advocates (who do have direct contact) pointed out, much of the time talking is done about the trafficked and around the trafficked, but until recently formerly trafficked people may not have been consulted about the messages surrounding them, and in some cases (often, popular entertainment media) they are still not included. This is not an area of research that should be taken lightly, but much can be gained from the empowerment and participant-centered approaches to combatting trafficking. The voices that have been muted should now be the loudest in combatting the problem when they are ready to speak.

By delving into the communication processes (or lack thereof) surrounding human trafficking, I hope we, as a global society, can move forward in problem-solving to discover effective solutions. It is my opinion that no one idea or law will ever fully eliminate the problem, but by understanding how human trafficking can gain footholds we can combat it further. Summarizing Foucault (1980) in the book "Rethinking Trafficking in Women" (2008) Claudia Aradau writes:

> The problematization of human trafficking refers to how human trafficking
>
> becomes an object of regulation, what elements constitute it and
>
> what 'ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution,
>
> circulation and operation of statements about human trafficking are
>
> given as truthful (p.3).

To successfully combat human trafficking, approaches need to be multifaceted and communication theory can provide the framework and contextualization for understanding the needs of all stakeholders who seek to make a difference.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please describe the mission of your organization/workplace.
2. How was it started?
3. What are your funding sources?
4. Please describe the day-to-day operations/services of your organization in general terms: Intake procedures? Appointments? Goals? Ending services? Average length of services?
5. How do clients come to your agency? Referrals (From)? Walk-ins? What role, if any, does law enforcement play in your agency acquiring clients? Does the medical community play a role?
6. How would you say that your agency compares with others that undertake similar work? Are their different kinds of agencies working with victims of trafficking?
7. Please describe your background/training/education.
8. How long have you been with the agency? With trafficking victims?
9. Do individuals working here receive additional and/or ongoing training (about trafficking)?
10. When communicating with your clients, how do you and your agency/organization refer to them?
11. What are some of the obstacles that your agency/organization faces when communicating with "trafficked individuals"?
12. What are some of the obstacles that you have encountered when communicating with "trafficked individuals"?
13. What do you perceive to be among the communication difficulties facing those who are trafficked?
14. How do you perceive the media coverage of trafficked people?
15. What do perceive is the biggest challenge when explaining/educating/discussing trafficking with the general public?
16. Does your group communicate with the general public? If so, how? Are trafficking stories told by formerly trafficked individuals?
17. What do you perceive is the biggest communication challenge currently regarding the problem of human trafficking?
18. Is there more awareness of human trafficking today than when your organization started, and if so, why/how?
19. What would you say are "successful" outcomes for your clients?
20. What percentage of clients would you say experience successful outcomes? And, do you think that your agency is typical in terms of successful outcomes?
21. What might agencies such as yours do more of in order to increase the resilience of victims of human trafficking?
22. Is there anything else you'd like to share about the role of communication in the problem of human trafficking and assisting trafficked people?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: Communication and anti-human-trafficking agencies

INTRODUCTION
The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The project focuses on communication within anti-human trafficking agencies by means of interviews with agency professionals.

RESEARCHERS
Amy Matzke-Fawcett, graduate student in the Lifespan and Digital Communication Master's Program at Old Dominion University (Thesis project)

Dr. Thomas J. Socha, Professor, Communication and Theatre Arts, Old Dominion University (Thesis Advisor)

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
Several studies have examined human trafficking and the criminal, sociological, economic and anthropological effects of the practice. None of them have studied the communication practices concerning trafficked people, including how trafficked people communicate with professional advocates, and the advocates' perceptions of discussion around human trafficking discussion both with formerly trafficked people, in the media, and by the general public.

If you decide to participate, then you will be interviewed about communication practices concerning human trafficking which will later be transcribed and analyzed for themes. Once this study and thesis is concluded, all notes and recordings will be destroyed. All participant names will be kept confidential. If you say YES, then your participation will last for the duration of the in-person interview at the private location of the participant's choosing. Approximately 10 trafficking advocates and trafficking-adjacent people will be participating in this study. Interviews should last approximately 60 minutes.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA
Only individuals working in advocacy agencies concerning human trafficking are included in this study.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
RISKS: No foreseeable risks.

BENEFITS: There are no direct benefits.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researcher is unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The researcher will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as names, workplaces, relationships with trafficked and formerly trafficked people, strictly confidential. The researcher will remove all identifiers of individuals, their organizations, as well as clients from transcriptions of the interviews that will be stored in a password protected files during processing. The file will be destroyed once the analysis is completed. The results of this study will be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you or your organization.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE
It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY
If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Thomas J. Socha at 757-683-3833, Dr. Tancy Vandecar-Burdin, the current IRB chair at 757-683-3802 at Old Dominion University, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT
By participating in this study, you are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Amy Matzke-Fawcett at 804-337-8860
Dr. Thomas J. Socha at 757-683-3833

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Tancy Vandecar-Burdin, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-3802, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

APPENDIX C

EXEMPT STATUS APPROVAL

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

Physical Address
4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508
Mailing Address
Office of Research
1 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone(757) 683-3460
Fax(757) 683-5902

DATE: October 29, 2018

TO: Thomas Socha, PhD
FROM: Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [1338583-1] Communication and Anti-Human Trafficking
REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 6.2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Randy Gainey at 757-683-4794 or rgainey@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

VITA

Amy Matzke-Fawcett
Old Dominion University Department of Communication and Theatre Arts
4401 Hampton Blvd., Norfolk, VA

Education

M.A., Lifespan and Digital Communication, Old Dominion University, expected August 2021

B.A., Communication, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), May 2006

Experience

Strategic Communication and Outreach Coordinator, College of Arts & Letters, June 2019 to present

Communications Coordinator, Office of Research at Old Dominion University, May 2014 to June 2019

Publications Manager, Hibu Community Magazines, July 2012 to April 2014

Reporter, The Roanoke Times, June 2008 to June 2012

Editorial Assistant, The Roanoke Times, January to June 2008

Reporter, The Independent Tribune, August 2006 to September 2007

Relevant Publications

Poster, Science Talks 2019

Graduate Research Achievement Day, ODU, 2019

Conference Paper, International Communication Association, 2018

Poster, NORDP 2018

Conference Paper, Southern Communication Association, 2017