

NEWS MEDIA AND VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A CONTENT  
ANALYSIS

by

Erinne R. Smith

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Sociology

Middle Tennessee State University

May 2019

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Jackie Eller, Chair

Dr. Meredith Dye

Dr. Ashleigh McKinzie

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee for guiding me and pushing me to do my best. To my thesis chair, Dr. Eller, I would like to thank you for helping me become a better writer and sociologist. Thank you for pushing me to do my best and understanding what I was trying to say, even when I could not find the right words. I truly could not have done this without your guidance, patience, and wisdom.

To Dr. McKinzie and Dr. Dye, thank you both for being on my committee, I greatly appreciate your support and encouragement. Thank you for your assistance in expanding my thesis proposal to what it is today, your insights have always been helpful and supportive. And thank you both for believing in me and the work I have created, I cannot fully express my gratitude in words.

I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me and believing in me when I did not think I would succeed. I would not have made it this far without your love and words of encouragement, and for that I am truly grateful. I would like to say thank you to my mom for not letting me give up when I wanted to quit and for believing in me. To my sister, even though this was never a competition, your successes have always encouraged me to do better.

## ABSTRACT

Human trafficking is a pervasive crime that affects thousands, if not millions, of people worldwide. I start my thesis by reviewing sociological literature on human trafficking, as well as on framing, media, and emotions. I provide an overview on the basics of human trafficking and a discussion of current U.S. legislation. Additionally, I discuss the social construction of victims, the social consequences of being labeled a victim, why cases of human trafficking are sensationalized, the influence journalism has on society and emotion management. I then discuss the steps I took to conduct a qualitative content analysis of 94 articles from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. In my thematic discussion I argue that journalists have framed the issue of human trafficking as a modern form of slavery, a crime that disproportionately targets women for the sale of sex, prioritizes the reporting of details on traffickers over the experience of trafficked persons, and language used in the framing human trafficking. Finally, I discuss the differences and similarities between my study and the current literature as well as offer my suggestions for the future of human trafficking research.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	2
<i>Background Information</i> .....	2
<i>Trafficking Victims Protection Act</i> .....	6
<i>Constructing a Victim</i> .....	7
<i>Social Consequences of Victimization</i> .....	12
<i>Newsworthy Stories</i> .....	13
<i>Creating Victims in the Media</i> .....	14
<i>Constructing Emotions and Victims</i> .....	16
METHODS .....	17
THEMATIC DISCUSSION .....	21
<i>Modern Day Slavery</i> .....	22
<i>Preoccupation with Human Trafficking as Sex Trafficking</i> .....	25
<i>Preoccupation with Traffickers</i> .....	28
<i>Luring Victims</i> .....	30
DISCUSSION .....	32
FINAL REMARKS .....	35
REFERENCES .....	38

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Number of Articles by Gender.....	20
Table 2	Coding Schema (Number of Articles Mentioning).....	20

## INTRODUCTION

Newspapers portray human trafficking as a serious violation of human rights, but it is important to ask how and why this is. Newspapers construct human trafficking in this way so as to provide readers with interesting and important stories and because sensational news is more entertaining than statistics. In this thesis, I look at the ways in which *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* constructs victims of human trafficking. Using social constructionist perspectives as well as the concepts of emotion work, and media framing, I examine how the news media use different methods to construct images of victims of human trafficking.

I conceptualize human trafficking following the definition set forth by the United Nations:

Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercions, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of the position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs (United Nations, as cited in Roby et al. 2008:509-510).

I have chosen to use the definition above because the United Nations does not dichotomize human trafficking into sex trafficking and labor trafficking, unlike the definition provided by the United States government. The United States government has formally defined:

victims of severe forms of trafficking as those persons subject to (1) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such acts is under age 18 or (2) the

recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (Human Trafficking 2006:18).

The differences between the Palermo Protocol and the TVPA's definitions, above, are subtle, yet important. The United Nations believes that human trafficking is a matter of transnational crime and thus movement across country lines is necessary, while the United States does not require movement of a victim. On the other hand, the United States requires victims to provide proof of force, fraud, or coercion while the United Nations does not require this proof. In fact, the United Nations states that the threat of force, fraud, or coercion is enough to be a victim.

In my thesis, I discuss how the news media construct the image of a victim of human trafficking as well as why this image is potentially damaging to the fight against human trafficking. In the following sections, I review the current literature on the following three subtopics: what is a victim, how victims are constructed, and the social consequences of being deemed a victim. Subsequently I discuss the role news media plays in the construction of trafficked persons.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Background Information*

Before discussing the ways victims are constructed, I argue it is pertinent to discuss human trafficking, in general, and why many perceive it to be a social problem. Human trafficking affects countless individuals on a global scale. Due to the underground nature, exact statistics are not available for how many individuals are

trafficked each year but estimates range between 14,000 to 800,000 people globally (Grubb and Bennett 2012:488; Hodge 2008:144; Renzetti et al. 2015:334). However, the United States Department of State, as cited in Doran, Jenkins, and Mahoney, suggests “27 million people are estimated to be trafficked worldwide at any given time” (2014: 131). As previously stated, it is difficult to know the exact number of people who are trafficked. This, in turn, makes it difficult to know who the trafficked persons are. The United States Department of State estimates that 50% of people who are trafficked are children, and between 70 and 80% of all trafficked individuals are females (Hodge 2008:143; Roby et al. 2008:510). Additionally, some characteristics can increase the likelihood of being trafficked. For example, people who live in poverty, are illiterate, or live in a region with a corrupt government are vulnerable to being trafficked (Hodge 2008:145; Logan, Walker, and Hunt 2009:10-12). Nichols and Heil argue that this is true because “traffickers look for victims... who are less likely to be looked for” (2015 12). Immigrants and migrants are also vulnerable to being trafficked (Jani 2010:30-31; Noyori-Corbett and Moxley 2016:890). The aforementioned groups of people have a higher chance of being trafficked due to their lack of social bonds and connections to their new communities.

Human trafficking occurs in nearly every country (Human Trafficking 2006:17). Hodge suggests that a large majority of trafficked persons come from Asia, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Africa, and South America (2008: 45). In support of this idea, Jani suggests that human trafficking has been noted most to occur in Russia and Eastern Europe (2010:30). On the other hand, Okech et al. argues that 56% of trafficked

persons originate from Asia and the Pacific Islands (2012:490). However, Okech et al. does agree that the second most common area of origin is Eastern Europe (2012:490). Conversely, Boxill and Richardson, as cited in Rand, suggest that trafficked persons are not limited to a certain ethnic background or region (Rand 2009:141). Human trafficking victims are often trafficked to nations where the sex industry is in high demand such as the Netherlands or to more industrialized areas such as the United States (Hodge 2008:145; Johnson 2012:617; Schauer and Wheaton 2006:146). Thus, we can infer that trafficked persons are part of a composition of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Scholars suggest that human trafficking occurs because of globalization, lack of opportunities, poverty, and organized crime (Okech et al. 2012:489-490; Logan et al. 2009:10-12; Wooditch, DuPont-Morales, and Hummer 2009:238). While these are simply a few causes of human trafficking, a myriad of other causes intersect with these main causes. For example, migration connects to both globalization and lack of opportunities. Many people who live in rural or formerly agriculture-based regions are unable to find work where they live due to the increase in industrialization (Jani 2010:30-31). Thus, in order to find employment, people will migrate to different countries. Migration also connects to lack of opportunities because, as industrialization and globalization increase, there are fewer employment opportunities in rural areas. This lack of opportunity leaves people vulnerable to being trafficked. For instance, Okech et al., suggests that some victims are convinced that if they leave their homes, they will find better paying jobs or a chance at a better life; unfortunately, this rarely comes to fruition (2012:490). Zimmerman, Hossain, and Watts support this statement by stating

Recruiters may be individuals or agencies (e.g., travel or employment) that are formally (criminal gangs) or informally (local opportunistic agent) linked to a trafficking network. It is common for people to be recruited by someone known to them, such as a friend of the family or family members themselves, including parents (2011:328).

Thus, traffickers are able to convince trafficked persons to accept illegitimate jobs or educational opportunities abroad, all with the intention of trafficking that person.

Organized crime is also a factor that can support the occurrence of human trafficking, specifically when organized crime has led to the corruption of a government or law enforcement (Doran et al. 2014:132; Logan et al. 2009:11; Okech et al. 2012:489-90; Wooditch et al. 2009:238). Corruption of government or law enforcement is important because it can allow for human trafficking to occur more easily. Additionally, some scholars argue that because human trafficking is a profitable venture with low risks, human trafficking is growing in popularity among organized crime syndicates (Hodge 2008:144; Logan et al. 2009:11). Roby et al. support this claim in that human trafficking is an industry worth over nine billion dollars and is “the third most lucrative underground business, next to arms and drugs” (2008:510). More recent data, from the International Labour Office, suggest that the human trafficking industry is rising and is worth at least 150 billion dollars, with 99 billion dollars coming from sex trafficking and 51 billion dollars from labor trafficking (International Labour Office 2014). Consequently, if the goal is to eradicate human trafficking, the issues that make human trafficking a possibility must also be addressed.

### *Trafficking Victims Protection Act*

In order to protect trafficked persons, the United States government enacted the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, hereafter TVPA, in 2000. The TVPA takes on a “three pronged approach,” in that it focuses on preventing human trafficking, prosecuting facilitators of human trafficking, and providing services to trafficked persons. However, scholars have noted that the act is not sufficient or, at times, even practical (Logan et al. 2009; Roby et al. 2008:512; Wooditch et al. 2009:236-7). The act does not focus on the prevention of human trafficking or the welfare and protection of trafficked persons. Instead, the TVPA benefits the judicial department and law enforcement in that trafficked persons must cooperate with law enforcement in order to receive services.

The work done by the United States government in terms of prosecuting traffickers while still protecting victims is not sufficient. To begin, it is hard to identify traffickers because there are difficulties in identifying those affected by trafficking. Further, trafficked persons are often afraid of retaliation from their traffickers. If trafficked persons are foreign nationals, they might be cautious about trusting the government or police and are afraid of what might happen to their families (Logan et al. 2009:13; Roby et al. 2008:520; Wooditch et al. 2009 237). Furthermore, if a trafficked person came from a corrupt government, where the police do not promise to protect the citizens, it makes sense that in a foreign land, a trafficked person might be apprehensive when talking to officials (Logan et al. 2009:13; Roby et al. 2008:511, 515). Additionally, victimization is an issue because the United States government will not allow trafficked persons the same, equal rights as other victims, if they do not cooperate with law

enforcement (Doherty and Harris 2015:26; Jones and Kingshott 2016:7-8; Roby et al. 2008:512-3). Thus, if the trafficked person's scenario does not confer explicitly with the definition set forth by the TVPA, the victim or victims will not receive the services needed. Thus, in order for a trafficked person to receive protection, the individual must benefit the government.

### *Constructing a Victim*

In this thesis, I conceptualize a victim as someone affected by a crime. In choosing to conceptualize "victim" this way, I attempt to include unidentified victims, criminalized victims, and survivors. I have chosen to use victim over survivor because not all people affected by crime are survivors. This conceptualization is purposefully general and broad to encompass all possible interpretations of the word victim because many differing designations of "victim" exist. Moreover, the differing understandings of the term victim are because society constructs the label of victim within particular situations and for particular goals. I have chosen to look at differing perspectives to understand their implications.

The term victim is constructed through the ways in which society has come to understand, define, and illustrate the image of a victim. Many aspects of society help to define what it means to be a victim, for example the ways in which law enforcement report and treat people who have been affected by crime help to shape the way society perceives victims. As will be discussed below, the news media has a strong impact on how society views victims of human trafficking.

We can understand how society constructs the term victim in many ways. For instance, one can follow Loseke's argument that "narratives create identity at all levels of human social life" (2007:661). These narratives are part of what she calls formula stories. Loseke uses formula stories to "label narratives producing such cultural identities" that "refer to narratives of typical actors engaging in typical behaviors within typical plots leading to expectable moral evaluations" (2007:664). Yet, these narratives occur at the micro, meso, and macro levels, and society assigns different identities to people in order to categorize one another.

At the micro-level of narrative, identities exist as "personal identities," which are "the self-understandings of unique, embodied selves about their selves" (Loseke 2007:662). People create personal identities that exist within the realm of plausibility; the identities must fit in with what is culturally acceptable. Additionally, individuals create their identities by utilizing their knowledge of meso and macro-level narrative identities (Loseke 2007). Loseke includes two narrative identities within the meso-level of society; the "institutional identities" and the "organizational identities" (2007:661-2). Policymakers create these institutional identities that connect with symbolic codes shared by society and "shape the social world and its inhabitants' life chances" (Loseke 2007:667). For example, the narrative of welfare queens created an institutional identity that has negative social consequences for poor women while trafficked persons often have positive social consequences. Trafficked persons are not looked down upon in the same way as poor women, because it is believed that people are poor due to their own actions (Loseke 2007:664). Similar to institutional identities, "[organizational] narratives

of identity are created by the organizers and workers in ongoing organizations, programs, and groups designed for people who evaluate themselves, or who have been evaluated by others, as having troubled identities in need of repair” (Loseke 2007:670). To put it another way, organizational narratives work to create an image of people who need help; however, these identities can be restrictive and not all people will fit into that image (Loseke 2007:671). Therefore, in terms of human trafficking, organizations that work with trafficked persons will provide society with images of what a victim, a victim who needs help, looks like.

Finally, Loseke argues that at the macro-level of narrative identities exists “cultural identities” (2007:661). Cultural narrative identities “describe types of people and prescribe social relationships among types of people” and can help “shape the symbolic world” (Loseke 2007:666-667). In other words, cultural narrative identities are general identities that are applicable to many people and influence how we understand the identity. Loseke also notes that cultural identities are dialectical in nature, meaning that an identity has an opposing identity that provides meaning (2007:674). Hence, sympathetic victims of human trafficking are often set in opposition to deviant victimizers. Overall, the different narratives work together to create formula stories, which in turn, inform the way we make sense of different identities and thus, victims.

In order to explain these identities and how they work, Loseke looks at “woman-as-victim narratives” (2007:678). She notes that “woman-as-victim narratives” have specific characteristics, such as enduring “extreme harm and victim characters constructed as morally pure and most clearly and certainly not responsible for the harm

they experience” (2007:679). In this narrative, Loseke argues that macro and meso level narratives construct a specific image of a victim, which leads to “[individual] women experiencing violence sometimes refuse to identify themselves as a “victim” because they perceive that victim characters are not socially respected” (2007:679). Moreover, Loseke notes that “women victims... sometimes find their unique stories and selves evaluated by physicians, police, court workers, or social service providers as not meeting the standards of extreme harm and absolute moral purity set in the formula story” (2007:679). In other words, macro and meso-level structures and institutions construct society’s understandings of a victim, and thus lead to repercussions for individuals who use those identity narratives to construct a personal identity that is not consistent with societal level constructions.

Alternatively, one could subscribe to Best’s conceptualization of victimization, which argues, “seven central tenets underpin most contemporary claims about victims” (1997:10). These seven tenets include: “victimization is widespread, victimization is consequential, relationships between victims and their victimizers are relatively straightforward and unambiguous, victimization goes unrecognized, individuals must be taught to recognize others’ and their own victimization, claims of victimization must be respected, and the term “victim” has undesirable connotations” (Best 1997:10-3). In making this argument, Best is essentially saying that victims are created in all acts of crime, this crime has an effect on the life of the constructed victim, and thus “[the] victimizer is exploitative, the victim is innocent” (1997:11). Best argues that at times “[society] may be simply unaware of victimization,” but people must recognize that they

are victims of a crime and that this must not be questioned by society, and, as will be discussed below, the term victim has negative attributes (1997:11). The key elements of Best's argument are that victims differ explicitly from criminals, but the term victim is not a positive label. This is important to human trafficking victims in that in some situations, members of society overlook the division between victim and criminal and the term victim can be damaging to a survivor's personal identity.

While well formed, Best's argument does not examine the ways in which society works to create the term victim, but rather the ways in which society creates victimization. By contrast, Johnson takes a Marxian approach in that she bases her argument on the idea that those with the power to define are in control of how society makes sense of the world. For example, Johnson argues that:

It is through the dynamics of representation—of rendering certain constructions visible and legible in the public sphere—that the categories that shape our social world are made meaningful. Categorisations of people and events, social relationships and institutions form the content of the social and political structures that shape our lives. They form the foundational understandings that are the basis upon which we engage with the world— even if that engagement is to contest these categories. They have meaning, and it is through the collective process of meaning making that knowledges and understandings are developed (2011:1017).

The influence of Marx and post-modernism/structuralism is evident in that Johnson looks to the power dynamic of meaning making and who has the power to create and perpetuate knowledge. Reich offers another possibility, regarding labeling a person as a victim, by arguing that “[language] does not merely represent an individual's identity because how we define individuals prescribes a particular set of behaviors, thoughts, and emotions” (2002:293). Essentially what Reich argues is that a label goes beyond assigning a person

to a category; rather, a label also assigns meaning and defining characteristics for what it means to be a victim.

Whether society constructs the term as an identity, label, or categorization, one thing remains constant: the term “victim” implies particular, defining characteristics. To determine how the term victim is constructed, it is crucial to understanding how society consequently views victims. As mentioned above, the definition requires trafficked persons to show that the victim endured “force, fraud, or coercion” and must be victims of severe forms of trafficking. Yet, not all trafficked persons can fit within this narrow definition and are thus not seen as legitimate victims (Copley-Sabon 2016:2). Moreover, legislation might define a victim in one way, but the media will often focus on the ideal, sensational victim (Davies, Francis, and Greer 2017; Loseke 2010). In the following section I explain the importance of the construction of a trafficked person.

### *Social Consequences of Victimization*

While the term victim might be beneficial in terms of legislation, the term has negative connotations (Reich 2002:294). Society often portrays victims, of many crimes, as lacking agency, or as “damaged, passive, and powerless” (Best 1997:13; Dunn 2004; Reich 2002). If the victim chooses to show their agency, and thus does not fit within this construction, then society is apt to blame not only the victim for their situation, but also to ignore the victim (Dunn 2004:236-7). In other words, victims who appear to be deserving of society’s sympathy will receive more attention, as they are deemed more worthy, a distinction I discuss in detail below. This is crucial when discussing human

trafficking, because society often ignores the claims of victim status, and hence the victims themselves, for those who willingly participated in trafficking. Both society and the judicial system expect victims of human trafficking to fit within the narrow mold that society, and the government, has constructed; however, this definition is not always feasible because trafficked persons have different paths into the world of trafficking, they can be forced or they can enter with some amount of foresight into their future.

### *Newsworthy Stories*

Often times when one sees an article regarding human trafficking, it focuses mainly on sex trafficking. This is because, as Greer argues, crimes involving “sex and violence are presented more frequently” and are considered more “newsworthy” (2017:55). Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the construction of victims in the media because our society relies on the media to inform and guide our epistemology and worldview (Sobel 2016:154). Loseke argues “that claims presented through the mass media will influence audience members’ understandings of social problems” because mass media “is now our primary source of information about the world around us” (2010:41). Davies et al. support this claim by stating, “[media] representations contribute to shaping what the issues of crime, criminal victimization, and social harm ‘mean’ to people” (2017:3). Moreover, Loseke also notes “stories featuring graphic violence and pure victims remain the most popular in the public realm” (2007:279). Therefore, if news sources are producing images of trafficked persons as lacking agency and having suffered the most extreme forms of violence, then the media is choosing to portray human

trafficking this way leading the public to believe that human trafficking can only be violent and sensational.

### *Creating Victims in the Media*

As mentioned above, the media plays a role in constructing victims. To begin with, it is important to discuss the concept of framing as framing provides an insight into how we expect people to think and respond to a social phenomenon. This is particularly important because frames present a specific image that can inform policy and societal reaction towards trafficked persons. Therefore, this section will discuss different framing methods. To start, Entman notes that frames have four purposes, frames

*define problems*—determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes*—identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments*—evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies*—offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects (1993:52).

Essentially, framing is a particularly useful tool in explaining how society understands issues. While this may seem superfluous, frames are key to understanding how the news media construct victims of human trafficking. Journalists use frames to inform readers about what is most important about a topic; however, this information is not always the most accurate and is instead more interesting to readers. When writing about a topic, journalists use frames, existing assumptions, or informants that are available to them to create additional frames that are consumed by readers (Bruggemann 2014:68; Reichert et al. 2018:16; Sanford, Martinez, and Weitzer 2016:141). Bruggemann refers to the frames and information available to journalists as frame repositories, indicating that journalists have the ability to use different epistemologies and sources to frame their writing.

Therefore, when journalists write about human trafficking they are using pre-existing frames and information gathered from stakeholders, such as politicians, law enforcement, and non-governmental organizations.

Stakeholders provide journalists with information that they believe is pertinent to the topic of human trafficking. However, this information is often influenced by the stakeholder's personal beliefs or the beliefs of the group they work for and is thus not without bias. Therefore, journalists and stakeholders work together to create frames regarding the appearance/experience of trafficked persons. Gamson and Modigliani support this claim by stating, "media discourse is part of the process by which individuals construct meaning, and public opinion is part of the process by which journalists and other cultural entrepreneurs develop and crystallize meaning in public discourse" (1989:2). In other words, there is a cyclical codependence between the media and consumers of the media. When writing about trafficked persons in general, journalists typically use information they have gained from stakeholders rather than actual trafficked persons. While this could be due to security reasons, the use of biased information helps to further shape the idea of what a trafficked person looks like or has experienced. This refers back to Gamson and Modigliani's point that journalists essentially officiate the meaning of what human trafficking means for the public. The news that readers consume is not as unbiased as might be claimed; rather stakeholders provide information that shapes the view of readers.

*Constructing Emotions and Victims*

In constructing the victim, the media is using framing techniques to manage the emotions of readers to view trafficked persons as people who have had their agency taken away (Aradau 2003:56; Dunn 2004:237; Johnson 2011:1017). Johnson argues that images “provoke an immediate and complex reaction that engages with and builds upon all our assumptions and understandings of the world, reinforcing (or challenging) them” (2011:1017). This implies that images elicit emotions that shape our epistemologies and how we interpret the world around us. Therefore, when discussing victims of human trafficking, the images provided by news media shape how we view victims. Furthering this theory, Loseke argues that mass media constructs victims as either being worthy or unworthy of sympathy (2010:78). Loseke notes that in order for society to feel sympathy for victims, the victims must fit a few criteria. For example, the victims must not be responsible for their status as a victim and victims must fit into “higher moral categories” (Loseke 2010:78-9). Loseke does not explicitly state the boundaries for moral categories, but she illustrates that a “nun’ often is much higher on a hierarchy of social morality than a category such as ‘prostitution’” (2010:79). To clarify, Loseke was trying to demonstrate that a nun is morally acceptable and others hold nuns in high regard, while society is more likely to hold a prostitute in moral contempt. In connection to trafficked persons, those forced into a situation have a perceived higher social morality and worth than does a victim who shares responsibility for their situation.

Although Greer, in *Victims, Crime and Society*, does not use moral categories, he does argue that “the attribution or otherwise of ideal or legitimate victim status and

related levels of media interest are clearly influenced by demographic characteristics” (Greer 2017:51). In making this statement, Greer is arguing that the media tends to focus on young, white, middle class women (2017:50). Furthermore, in *Victims, Crime and Society*, Walklate notes that “being victims (of crime) carries with it culturally constructed values and meanings that render individuals’ responses to their misfortunes more or less acceptable” (2017:34). In other words, society and the media use victims as objects to elicit feelings of sympathy (Dunn 2004: 236; Loseke 2010:79; Sobel 2016:155; Walklate 2017:34). Clark defines sympathy as “feeling sorry for or with another person” and it is “basic to human society” (1987:291). Clark argues, “sympathizers should adhere to the relatively socialistic tenet of the strong supporting the ‘deserving’ weak” (1987:297). Thus, the way journalists portray victims is done so to elicit sympathy for deserving victims, specifically victims who are young, defenseless, and have suffered the most.

Trafficked persons must do more than just benefit the government; they must fit the image of the moral, innocent victim. Without fitting the image of the ideal victim, trafficked persons may face further victimization from law enforcement. It is paramount to understand how the news media construct images of victims of human trafficking.

## METHODS

In order to both efficiently and effectively study the ways in which the news media constructs victims of human trafficking, I conducted a content analysis of newspaper articles from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published between the years

2000 and 2018. I chose to analyze articles from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* because the paper serves a major metropolitan area that is a hub for human trafficking (Polaris Project 2017). I selected this period to reflect the potential changes in the ways the media constructs victims in accordance with the emergence of federal legislation. Specifically, I looked at the potential influence of the passage of the aforementioned Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act of 2018, hereafter SESTA.

I conducted a Boolean search using the terms *human trafficking*, *trafficking*, and *sex trafficking*. I used InfoTrac Newsstand to collect articles for analysis from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The initial search yielded 1,749 articles which I narrowed down by examining full articles, articles that directly discussed human trafficking, and articles that included cases in the United States. I chose to further eliminate articles that were opinion pieces as well as question-and-answer articles. I did this because non-news personnel who wrote the pieces would be more involved with human trafficking than a journalist would be and because the interviewee would use the space to talk less about human trafficking as a whole. Thus, I ended with a total of 94 articles from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

In my study, I built upon Sobel's coding scheme, listed below, to analyze the articles:

gender(s) of the author(s), gender(s) of any victims of sex trafficking, gender(s) of any identified sex traffickers, gender(s) of any identified buyers of services from sex-trafficked individuals (also referred to as 'Johns'), age of the trafficking victim(s) and whether the article referenced an international aspect of sex trafficking, meaning, trafficking across borders, in multiple countries or in a country other than that of the publication (2016:156).

However, I expanded Sobel's schema by analyzing how the newspaper articles make gender relevant. In other words, I looked to see if the articles include women and children together or separate, and if the mention of gender is simply a designation of sex categorization. In addition to the aforementioned themes, I examined how the newspaper portrays victims of human trafficking, the experience of victims, the type of trafficking focus, and the construction of victim's agency. Information regarding the gendered aspects of the aforementioned coding scheme can be found in Table 1. Articles were written by one author (woman or man), co-written by two men, two women, or a man and a woman, of which there was only one case.. Relevant to the table below, the one article written by both a woman and man was counted in each column leading to an overall article count of 95. As for the gender of the trafficked person I chose to count articles that mentioned women/girls, men/boys, and/or children under both categories of women and men because the term "children" does not indicate a single gender. Double counting these lead to a total of 97 articles.. For the gender of traffickers, the total adds to 97 as couples were counted as women and men. In Table 2, additional coding schemes have been organized so as to display the number of times articles mentioned the chosen schemes. For many articles there were times where vague terms were used to identify the age, number, gender, and location of trafficked persons, traffickers, and buyers.

<b>Table 1. Number of Articles by Gender</b>			
Gender of...	Women	Men	Not Identified
Author *	55	39	1
Trafficked Persons *	69	8	20
Trafficker*	17	49	31
Buyer	0	28	66

\*Per discussion above, not all rows add to 94.

<b>Table 2. Coding Schema (Number of Articles Mentioning)</b>			
Age of Trafficked Person	Under 18: 28	Actual age: 28	Not Mentioned: 38
Number of Trafficked Persons	Mentioned: 49		Not Mentioned: 45
Cross Border Trafficking	International: 35	US based: 21	Not Specified: 38
Focus on Trafficking Type	Sex Only: 39	Sex and Labor: 30	No Specification: 25

Furthermore, I looked at the length of the articles to determine if the article was long enough to depict human trafficking in more than just a phrase. The typical length for articles was one to two pages. Additionally, I discarded any articles that were news briefs because those often mentioned human trafficking only in a sentence or two. The inclusion of these coding schemes allowed me to better understand the level of importance the newspapers assign to human trafficking and therefore, how “victims” are constructed.

The following question guided my analysis: How does news media, as represented by *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, construct images of persons who are trafficked, particularly as victims of trafficking?

## THEMATIC DISCUSSION

In conducting my content analysis, I identified a number of themes such as implying buyers of sex are always men, focusing on women as victims, and focusing on underage trafficked persons. Because they were more prevalent, I have chosen to focus on the following select themes for my thesis: modern day slavery, a preoccupation with human trafficking as sex trafficking, focus on traffickers, and the luring of victims into their situations. Additional themes I found that illustrated important points for my analysis are included in the following section as well. Further, while I expected to see a change in the writing with the passage of the TVPA and SESTA, this did not exist. In fact, I did not find a political discussion about the passages of the TVPA or SESTA, and when articles did mention the TVPA it was used as a reference rather than discussing the act.

Other findings, in regard to the coding scheme, include the use of gender as simply a designation of sex categorization. In the articles I analyzed I did not find any mention of transgender individuals. There was an implied notion of the “Johns” being men, ignoring the possibility of women purchasing people for sex. This implies that as a society we do not view women as being capable of sex crimes, which could be connected back to society’s shock and disbelief when hearing about female rapists or female teachers who engage in sexual activities with their students. Moreover, this reifies gender because when men commit crime their gender is rarely brought up, as if to say men are inherently aggressive and women are not (Walklate 2017:33). When discussing the ages of victims often times the articles did not mention their exact ages or simply

used the words “young” or “underage” to categorize the victims. The lack of exact ages coupled with the implied notion that the trafficked persons are female leads to forgetting about male victims.

Furthermore, articles often focused either on victims who were from the region or were trafficked into the United States from a foreign country. It is important to note that human trafficking occurs in any country, and in metropolitan and rural areas, because often times we, as a society, tend to think that human trafficking is something separate from us. As a society, we like to think that the people picking our fruit, sewing our clothes, or selling their bodies are doing so out of their own free will, yet this is not always the case.

### *Modern Day Slavery*

When we think of slavery, we often think of the historical trade of Africans to America and Europe. How has the image of forcibly taking African people from their homelands been replaced with images of young, white women being abducted? The shift in focus on victims of slavery began with the Mann Act of 1910. The United States government developed the Mann Act in order to control prostitution and, what they considered, immorality (Conant 1996, Doezema 2002). The purpose of the Mann Act was to criminalize the “transport [of] women or girls in interstate or foreign commerce for the purpose of prostitution, debauchery, or any other immoral purpose” (Conant 1996:99). While Conant notes that an amendment in 1986 changed the wording, the Mann Act harkened back to “an era of moral panic” (1996:99). Yet this fear still exists as

evident in many newspaper articles. For example, the headline for one article in 2004 reads, “Slavery Persists, Senate is Told/Panel Addresses Trafficking in U.S.” (Mollison 2004). This headline, and the article, shows that a fear still exists, specifically surrounding women’s sexuality.

The purpose of the Mann Act was to do more than criminalize trafficking, it was to enforce gender norms and further perpetuate the notion that women’s sexuality is controlled by patriarchy. Abolitionists of the time believed that a woman’s morality would never allow for a woman to willingly enter prostitution and risk her “purity” and “innocence” (Doezema 2002). This notion has lasted into the current era with the division of feminists on whether or not prostitution is a woman’s choice. However, more importantly, this focus on women’s purity and moral brigade against prostitution has resurfaced in what the media calls modern day slavery. For example, one victim of human trafficking expressed to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that she “is worried the arrest of her bosses will shame her parents and brother in Mumbai, India, even though she and the other dancers didn't participate in prostitution or stripping” (Simmons 2009B). This admittance of worry, even though the woman did not engage in sexual activity, shows the pervasive effects of patriarchal beliefs in monitoring and policing women’s sexuality. In another case, when a Senator spoke to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* about a bill she wanted to create, the journalist wrote that

“This bill decreases the age of prostitution,” Unterman said. “Sixteen years old is the age of consent in Georgia, and anyone who is less than 16 will not be charged with prostitution. We consider them a victim, not a prostitute. They need care and counseling” (Suggs 2010).

And that

Unterman said her bill would help create a “system of care” for the girls “while educating the public and those who come in contact” with the young girls. It would affect girls being pimped out on the streets, as well as girls working in massage parlors (Suggs 2010).

These excerpts show that there is still a preoccupation with maintaining women’s purity and innocence. A similar article noted that opponents of Unterman argued that the passage of her bill to treat underage trafficked persons as victims rather than criminals “would amount to the decriminalization --- nay, the legalization --- of prostitution.

Predators will swarm to the state” (Galloway 2010). This further shows that politicians are still concerned with policing the morality and sexuality of women. While this debate occurred nearly ten years ago, the discussion about sex worker’s rights is still relevant today. The fear and outrage expressed by other state officials connects back to the Mann Act and the concern over women’s “purity.” This is evident in the dissonance between the classification between “real” victims and women who do not fit the narrative of victims as put forth by Loseke (2007). In other words, victims must retain their moral purity in order to be considered victims by the public.

Throughout my content analysis, I found that *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* referred to human trafficking as modern-day slavery. While human trafficking is very similar to slavery, the journalists use the concept modern day slavery to set a frame of reference for the reader back to “white slavery” of the twentieth century. Often times when discussing modern day slavery it is in conjunction with prostitution and sex trafficking. While this is not to say that the journalists failed to equate labor trafficking with slavery, they did in fact note that some victims were “paid slave wages” (Simmons

2009A). Rather, the conflation of prostitution and sex trafficking with modern-day slavery harkens back to the Mann Act and the attempts to control women's sexuality. In doing this, journalists are erasing the fact that slavery was a way to force millions of African people into peonage in order to establish the dominance of white men. Furthermore, while the usage of the term slavery might be an effective way to promote understanding of human trafficking to the average citizen, slavery has a historical connection to a time where people were property. I argue that we should avoid using the term modern-day slavery in discussing human trafficking as it is devaluing to the historical trauma experienced by millions of people.

#### *Preoccupation with Human Trafficking as Sex Trafficking*

As discussed above, a preoccupation with sex trafficking began early in the twentieth century and this focus on sex trafficking has lasted well into the current era of policy and public discourse. In conducting my content analysis, I found that articles overwhelmingly focused on sex trafficking, and with it, prostitution. As mentioned above, our society has a fascination with sex and sex-based crimes. There were numerous articles on the case against Harrison Norris, and the sex trafficking ring he ran in his home, while there were fewer articles in regard to the case of a woman from Swaziland being held captive and forced to do housework. This could be because the women in Norris's ring were from the region and forced into their situation and the woman from Swaziland had come to the United States with the intention of catering a wedding and was not forced into sexual servitude. Essentially the newspapers are

framing the issue so that the women involved in the sex trafficking ring are more worthy of sympathy than victims of labor trafficking. Not only are persons trafficked for sex more deserving of sympathy; the implication is that they are deserving of more attention because they are portrayed as white women. Admittedly, the women's ethnicities are never directly mentioned, the articles implied that some of the women are white. This aligns with framing concepts because, as noted above, society is more likely to be sympathetic to a white victim than to a victim of color (Walklate 2017:36). The focus on sex trafficking is also due to the fact that trafficked persons can be rescued. The trafficked persons have most likely endured rape and rape victims are more deserving of sympathy than someone who works in a field. This is because persons who have been trafficked for the purpose of sex are seen as passive victims while those persons trafficked for labor are seen as more active in their situation (Walklate 2017: 33).

The fixation on sex trafficking does not stop there, in fact the majority of articles I analyzed conflated sex trafficking with prostitution. The articles spoke of how traffickers forced victims to work in brothels, spas, strip clubs, hotels, and on the street. Articles spoke of politicians, non-profits, and churches working together to end the blight of prostitution in the city of Atlanta. For example, in a 2014 article, prostitution and human trafficking were conflated, "Police have charged the owners and operators of Atlanta Fantasies and Ashley's of Atlanta with human trafficking for sexual servitude, keeping a place of prostitution and racketeering" (Visser 2014). Admittedly, connecting prostitution to sex trafficking might seem logical it is damaging to the fight against human trafficking. By conflating prostitution and sex trafficking, we ignore the option of

choice and agency in choosing to engage in sex work as a means for economic survival. Additionally, there is a focus on viewing underage prostitutes as victims of human trafficking, which is correct in accordance with the TVPA. However, this focus on underage victims ignores those who are legal adults. For example, when proposing a new law that would require human traffickers to register as sex offenders, an article quoted Senator Unterman saying ““No child grows up and says, ‘I want to be a prostitute, I want to live on the street, I want to be hungry,’” (Gould-Sheinin and Torres 2015). While this is quoted material, the utilization of this quote further perpetuates the idea that trafficked children are of more importance. Once again, this is due to how the news media frames the issue of human trafficking. As mentioned above, to gain sympathy and “victim” status, victims must be morally pure and innocent in their situations. Thus, because it is assumed that underage women cannot make their own choices, trafficked persons who are not legal adults are more likely to receive sympathy and support from society. In contrast, trafficked persons who are legal adults and participate in prostitution are more likely to be viewed as having played a knowing role in their situations. To put it another way, when individuals are trafficked for the purpose of sex and are underage, they are assigned the label of ideal victim, yet when trafficked persons are legal adults then they are assumed to have had some hand in being in their situation. This ignores the possibility that trafficked persons who are now legal adults could have been victimized when they were underage, but were not identified until adulthood. The lack of attention to trafficked persons who are over the age of eighteen implies that they are not victims, that they are simply prostitutes.

*Preoccupation with Traffickers*

While crime and punishment are important aspects of human trafficking, it appeared that the articles I analyzed had a focus on the traffickers rather than the trafficked persons. Admittedly, this could be because legal charges for traffickers are easier to obtain and that contacting victims of human trafficking is difficult and could potentially endanger or harm the victims, it does not allow the victims to have a voice (Reichert et al. 2018:14). When newspapers focus on the traffickers, it sends the message that criminalizing the trafficker is more important than the victim. It sends the message that victims and their trauma are not the true focus of human trafficking, but rather the trafficker is more important. For example, one article mentions “[federal authorities] have been aggressively hunting and prosecuting those who trade in human beings” implying that law enforcement officers care more about arresting traffickers rather than trafficked persons (Cook 2012). Admittedly, the TVPA has a focus on prosecution of traffickers and the attention to traffickers in the articles is aligns with federal legislation. Indeed, it was a rare phenomenon to see information or quotes from actual trafficked persons. While, this could be due to the need to protect those who have been trafficked, the lack of hearing their voices narrows society’s understanding of a trafficked person’s experience. Readers are exposed to gruesome details about the experiences of trafficked persons, but these details do not fully encompass the lived experiences. The complete story is not told when the news prints details about the charges a “pimp” faces for prostitution, or illustrates the ways the pimp started his deviant lifestyle in the ninth grade, or how he lived with other pimps and forced other prostitutes to beat one another if

they did not behave, or by saying that he “ordered a prostitute beaten and then forced the wounded woman to sleep in a dog's travel cage” (Visser 2011). Readers see that a man “bound victims with duct tape to hold them captive” (Stevens 2012), but they do not see all that the trafficked persons endured. Readers do not have the opportunity to ask how trafficked persons enter their situations, if the trafficked person decided this was their only option to feed their families, or if the trafficked person was promised love and a better life. By not focusing on the lived realities of trafficked persons, newspapers create their own stories to sell to the public.

Furthermore, when discussing traffickers, and specifically “Johns,” the newspaper articles tend to imply that they are always men. While this detail might seem superfluous, it is critical in understanding how readers will view human trafficking. In one article, a city councilwoman was quoted saying “Johns from as far away as Cobb County know that they can troll Metropolitan Parkway for women and even young girls” (McWilliams 2013). The focus on male traffickers limits the ability to have a fuller understanding of what human trafficking looks like. Human trafficking does not have to involve male traffickers, women can be the victimizer and by ignoring this, readers, and journalists, are further limiting the societal construction of human trafficking. Additionally, the articles I analyzed align with Sobel’s study in that information on buyers of sex is never discussed, thus *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, like the newspapers in Sobel’s study, “omits these men from blame or responsibility” (2016:162). In other words, if human trafficking is to be eradicated, we must also look at how to stop the demand for human trafficking.

*Luring Victims*

The articles I analyzed frequently mentioned the concept of luring victims. Pimps would lure women into forced prostitution, traffickers would promise women they would have a better life and job in America, people are enticed with the opportunity to have a better paying job here. Yet, these words make it seem as if trafficked persons are fish lured to the bait. This imagery makes it seem as if trafficked persons do not have a voice, that they do not have agency in making choices. Newspapers often use this language in the case of female persons, implying that it would not be so easy for traffickers to fool male persons into the entrapment of sex trafficking. However, this language is what continues to perpetuate the idea that the ideal victim of human trafficking is a weak, powerless, young woman who is susceptible to being enslaved. When discussing the case of a sex trafficking ring in 2012, a journalist wrote that the traffickers “enticed young women through websites and lured them into prostitution in the Atlanta area” (Stevens 2012). The case being discussed by Stevens also used descriptions of the violence and abuse the women endured, further attempting to show that human trafficking is not something a person would willingly enter. The way in which Stevens frames his article makes it clear that the ideal victim of human trafficking is one who had to be forced into their situation.

Consider the following excerpt from a 2004 article. Here the journalist describes the ways in which trafficked persons are initiated into a life of human trafficking “Women, children and men are brought in from places as far apart as Uzbekistan and Mexico, enticed with false promises of glamour, education or, in some cases, simply the

prospect of a steady pink- or blue-collar job” (Mollison 2004). Admittedly, while this example does discuss men as trafficked persons, it is more important to note the usage of enticement. Language is important because it is how we make sense of the world and what we read shapes our understanding of human trafficking. Throughout the nearly two decades of articles the language of enticement and luring is prevalent. One journalist depicts how a trafficker used coercion and violence to make money from women’s bodies, “he had lured eight young women --- including two minors --- into prostitution, ferrying them state to state and using violence to force them to have sex and pay him hundreds of dollars weekly” (Ahmed 2007). In this specific case, the journalist does not describe how the trafficker had lured the women, but the fact remains that the journalist is adding to the frame that trafficked persons must be lured. A case from 2008, involving five men, noted that “Prosecutors accuse the men of conspiring to seduce, entice and recruit the women ages 14-28 to travel here from Mexico with promises of legitimate jobs, then force them into prostitution in metro Atlanta and elsewhere after their arrival” (Pomerance and Reid 2008). I argue, then, that journalists use a particular framing mechanism to substantiate the idea of the innocent victim. Moreover, the use of the words such as “enticing” and “luring” make it seem as if victims must always be coerced into human trafficking. Although those who support the TVPA would say that this is one distinction of human trafficking, I believe that the focus on luring persons narrows the chances to see others as trafficked persons. While the concept of coercion is important, the way the media portrays it narrows the way people comprehend human trafficking.

Furthermore, the way the news media portrays human trafficking is done so as to enact sympathy from the readers in hopes to garner further understanding about the topic.

## DISCUSSION

In this section, I discuss the implications of my findings, what this might mean for labeling and understanding victims, and how my findings relate to existing literature. To begin, content analyses on human trafficking have focused primarily on a quantitative approach to the issue see Gulati (2011), Johnston, Friedman, and Sobel (2015), and Sanford et al. (2016); with only a few using qualitative or mixed methods formats, see Pajnik (2010) and Sobel (2016), and have drawn their study from an examination of a national news source, typically the *New York Times* or other more international news sources. Considering the absence of a thoroughly qualitative approach, I decided that a qualitative analysis is needed and, given the depth of such analyses, would allow me to better understand the ways in which the news media construct trafficked persons.

My study differs also in that I focus on a regional newspaper rather than one that is read globally. As Sanford et al. note most content analyses focus on major newspapers (2016:141). Moreover, Sanford et al. remark that “this literature consistently finds that reporting in major newspapers serves to *reinforce* official trafficking frames, as a result of a heavy reliance on government sources” (2016:142). My findings support this statement in that the overabundance of attention on human traffickers aligns with the current U.S. legislation that prioritizes the prosecution of traffickers over the protection of trafficked persons (Sanford et al. 2016:142). Similar to Sanford et al., I found that

activists and government officials were the primary sources quoted in articles from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (2016:146-147). The reliance on these sources leads journalists in their shaping of human trafficking discourse.

While my study was similar to the one conducted by Sanford et al., my study offers a deeper qualitative look into the construction of trafficked persons. By relying solely on quantitative data, Gulati (2011), Johnston et al. (2015), and Sanford et al. (2016) miss the nuanced language that occurs when conducting qualitative analysis. My study echoes that of Pajnik in pointing out that the focus on sex trafficking and women as the ideal victim neglects other forms of trafficking and male victims (2010:56-57). Pajnik's 2010 qualitative study examined the ways in which Slovene media outlets used specific frames to construct human trafficking. Additionally, while my study examines the influence of the Mann Act on how we interpret human trafficking today, Pajnik does note "[the] 'whiteness' of trafficked women in the 'white slave trade' in media depictions connotes their innocence and naivety" (2010:56). In other words, in a study of Slovene news media and not the US, the focus on women's innocence and purity is the most prominent issue in regards to human trafficking. Similarly, my study echoes that of Sobel's in our attention to journalists' lack of attention and quotes from trafficked persons (2016:161). For example, Sobel noted that "the clear absence of the voices of victims" led to the loss of agency for trafficked persons (2016:161).

As I have emphasized earlier, the news media focus on sensational cases of human trafficking, from portraying trafficked persons as having been brutally beaten to sleeping in a dog kennel (Visser 2011). My findings of sensationalism echo those of

Sanford et al. (2015), Pajnik (2010), and Sobel (2016). For instance, Pajnik used excerpts from Slovene media outlets to explore the ways in which the media use frames to construct human trafficking. Sobel (2016), who also used Eastern European newspapers to study the way in which the media constructs trafficked persons, found that newspapers used similar words, such as luring victims with promises of employment, to indicate that trafficked persons are coerced into their situations (2016:160). My study parallels Sobel's in that we both focus our attention on the lack of power and agency given to trafficked persons. As with my attention to the Mann Act's focus on preserving a woman's purity, Sobel noted that news media depicted women as powerless and in need of protection (2016:160). However, my study differs from Sobel's because I did not focus on women as the sole victims, rather, I chose to consider human trafficking as a problem that affects people of all genders.

Finally, my study differs from those already published in that I chose to frame it between two significant pieces of human trafficking legislation in the United States. While some studies have examined the influence of time on the reporting of human trafficking, I chose to ask whether legislation had any influence on how the news media constructs trafficked persons. Although evidence of this influence was not found, my study is still pertinent to understanding how victims are constructed, rather than simply providing an overview of how reporting has evolved over time.

## FINAL REMARKS

While my study is in no way representative of all newspapers, it is an insight into how one regional newspaper portrays victims of human trafficking and human trafficking as a whole. I set out on this project to better understand how society becomes informed on the topic of human trafficking and to see how the news media portray victims of human trafficking. My findings support the literature on human trafficking. As the literature suggests, the emphasis is on women and children, specifically the focus on protecting women's purity and morality from sexual deviants. Further, I found that news media portray victims, overwhelmingly, as defenseless and having gone through intensely traumatic experiences. This is consistent with the findings of Sobel's 2016 study, in which she notes that one particular newspaper "featured more instances of dramatizing or sensationalizing the women" (2016:161). This is not to say that having one's body and labor sold without their permission is not a traumatic experience, but the way in which the news depicts the experience of trafficked persons implies that all cases of human trafficking must involve severe abuse and loss of agency. While this does relate back to the definition provided by the TVPA, the fact that trafficked persons must show that they have suffered "severe" forms of force, fraud, or coercion does not allow for those whose experiences do not match to those depicted in the media to come forward.

The media is a powerful force when it comes to developing our understanding of the world, and human trafficking is not exempt. While different forms of news transmittance are being utilized, newspapers are still important in shaping what we, as a

society, understand about social issues. Therefore, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* is just one more cog in the machine that churns out information that can inform and transform what we know and what we think about trafficked persons and human trafficking as a whole. And, unfortunately the information being produced does not reflect a holistic view of human trafficking. The articles printed by *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* are producing a narrative that perpetuates the ideal, morally pure victim, which in turn restricts the ability for trafficked persons to identify as victims. By overlooking the experiences of trafficked persons, journalists further perpetuate the notion of the ideal victim as someone who is completely innocent, voiceless, and lacking autonomy. I must also be clear that when I say that victims must be completely innocent, I do not mean that any victim is at fault for their experiences, but rather that the news media has worked to create a framework for who can identify, or be identified, as a victim. Rather, if the news media were to include backgrounds of trafficked persons it would counter the construction of a trafficked person. Therefore, by not including more background information on trafficked persons, we lose the ability to understand their lives prior to being trafficked; we lose the chance to provide trafficked persons with voices and the chance to have power again; we lose the humanity and are left with empty vessels to sell and be consumed by readers.

Human trafficking has been divided into sex trafficking and labor trafficking, and the articles I analyzed continue to dichotomize human trafficking. The overwhelming focus on sex trafficking and the moral judgments against sex work has left society with the belief that human trafficking can only be sex trafficking. The few articles that

discussed labor trafficking were brief and did not contain the same amount of fervor that the articles on sex trafficking seemed to produce. This is because society has deemed that stories about women who are forced into a life of rape and drug use are more thrilling than reading about a woman who felt shame for being paid slave wages for dancing in a restaurant (Simmons 2009A).

Journalists use framing techniques and narratives to connect to readers, yet these narratives are harmful to the study of human trafficking. The narratives produced by journalists are being adopted by politicians and are informing policies. Moreover, these narratives are reinforcing the idea of who can be a true victim and thus informing the work of law enforcement. Therefore, I suggest that journalists must make an active effort to provide readers with a more holistic view of human trafficking. This effort should avoid conflating human trafficking with slavery and prostitution, as well as provide readers with a better understanding of the lived reality of trafficked persons.

While my study is not generalizable, it can be used to guide future research. Further insight could be garnered by looking at the construction of victims through a feminist lens, specifically the importance of gender in the media. Additionally, while my original plan for this study was to look at multiple newspapers in the Southeastern United States, I was unable to complete this work due to unforeseen complications with databases. Thus, it could prove to be interesting to see if there was any overlap between cases covered by several regional and national newspapers. Or, it could prove to be interesting to see if there is any difference between how journalists approach the issue in different media outlets.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Saeed. 2007. "Man Admits Luring Women into Prostitution." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 29, pp. B5.
- Aradau, Claudia. 2003. "Trafficking in Women: Human Rights or Human Risks?" *Canadian Woman Studies* 22(3/4): 55-59.
- Best, Joel. 1997. "Victimization and the Victim Industry." *Society*. 34(4): 9-17.
- Bruggemann, Michael. 2014. "Between Frame Setting and Frame Sending: How Journalists Contribute to News Frames." *Communication Theory* 24:61-82.
- Clark, Candace. 1987. "Sympathy Biography and Sympathy Margin." *American Journal of Sociology* 93(2): 290-321.
- Conant, Michael. 1996. "Federalism, the Mann Act, and the Imperative to Decriminalize Prostitution." *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* 5(2): 99-118.
- Cook, Rhonda. 2012. "Man who drugged, sold girl for sex gets 17 years: Cobb case given to feds in order to secure tough sentence sans parole." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 22, pp. B2.
- Copley Sabon, Lauren. 2016. "Force, Fraud, and Coercion—What Do They Mean? A Study of Victimization Experiences in a New Destination Latino Sex Trafficking Network." *Feminist Criminology* 1-21.
- Davies, Pamela, Peter Francis, and Chris Greer. 2017. *Victims, Crime and Society: An Introduction*. London: Sage.
- Doezema, Jo. 2002. "Who gets to choose? Coercion, Consent, and the UN Trafficking Protocol." *Gender and Development* 10(1): 20-27.

- Doherty, Yuka K. and Angelique Harris. 2015. "The Social Construction of Trafficked Persons: An Analysis of the UN Protocol and the TVPA Definitions." *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 26(1): 22-45.
- Doran, Liza, Darci Jenkins and Megan Mahoney. 2014. "Addressing the Gaps in Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking: An Opportunity for Human Service Providers." *Journal of Human Services* 34(1): 131-136.
- Dunn, Jennifer L. 2004. "The Politics of Empathy: Social Movements and Victim Repertoires." *Sociological Focus* 37(3): 235-250.
- Galloway, Jim. 2010. "Child Sex Trade Bill's Age Limit Under Fire." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 4, pp. B1.
- Gamson, William A., and Andre Modigliani. 1989. "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach." *American Journal of Sociology* 95(1): 1-37.
- Gould-Sheinin, Aaron and Kristina Torres. 2015. "Trafficking Victims May Find State Help: Lawmakers Pursue Stronger Punishment for Child Sex Trade." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 5, pp. A1.
- Greer, Chris. 2017. "News Media, Victims and Crime." Pp. 48-65 in *Victims, Crime and Society: An Introduction*, edited by P. Davies, P. Francis, and C. Greer. London: Sage.
- Grubb, Deborah and Katherine Bennett. 2012. "The readiness of local law enforcement to engage in US anti-trafficking efforts: an assessment of human trafficking training

- and awareness of local, county, and state law enforcement agencies in the State of Georgia.” *Police Practice and Research* 13(6): 487-500.
- Gulati, Girish J. 2010. “News Frames and Story Triggers in the Media’s Coverage of Human Trafficking.” *Human Rights Review* 12(3): 363-379.
- Hodge, David R. 2008. "Sexual Trafficking in the United States: A Domestic Problem with Transnational Dimensions." *Social Work* 53(2): 143-152.
- "Human Trafficking: Better Data, Strategy, and Reporting Needed to Enhance U.S. Anti-Trafficking Efforts Abroad." 2006. *Trends in Organized Crime* 10(1): 16-38.
- International Labour Office. 2014. “Economics of Forced Labor.” Retrieved March 8, 2019. ([https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_243201/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_243201/lang--en/index.htm)).
- Jani, Nairruti. 2010. "Analyzing Legal Paradoxes in Anti-Trafficking Policies." *Journal of Comparative Social Welfare* 26(1): 27-42.
- Johnson, Heather L. 2011. “Click to Donate: visual images, constructing victims and imagining the female refugee.” *Third World Quarterly* 32(6): 1015-1037.
- Johnston, Anne, Barbara Friedman, Meghan Sobel. 2015. “Framing an Emerging Issue: How U.S. Print and Broadcast News Media Covered Sex Trafficking, 2008-2012.” *Journal of Human Trafficking* 1(3); 235-254.
- Jones, Tonisha R. and Brian F. Kingshott. 2016. "A Feminist Analysis of the American Criminal Justice system’s Response to Human Trafficking." *Criminal Justice Studies* 29(3): 272-287.

- Logan, T. K., Robert Walker And Gretchen Hunt. 2009. "Understanding Human Trafficking in the United States." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 10(1): 3-30.
- Loseke, Donileen R. 2007. "The Study of Identity as Cultural, Institutional, Organizational, and Personal Narratives: Theoretical and Empirical Integrations." *The Sociological Quarterly* 48: 661-688.
- Loseke, Donileen R. 2010. *Thinking about Social Problems*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- McWilliams, Jeremiah. 2013. "Prostitute Ban Called a 'Band-Aid' Fix: Proposal to Banish Those Convicted Gets Opposition." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 12, pp. B2.
- Mollison, Andrew. 2004. "Slavery Persists, Senate is Told/Panel Addresses Trafficking in U.S." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 8, pp. A12.
- Nichols, Andrea J. and Erin C. Heil. 2015. "Challenges to Identifying and Prosecuting Sex Trafficking Cases in the Midwest United States." *Feminist Criminology* 10(1): 7-35.
- Noyori-Corbett, Chie and David P. Moxley. 2016. "Inequality of Women as a Factor Influencing Migration from Countries of Origin to the United States and its Implications for Understanding Human Trafficking." *International Social Work* 59(6): 890-903.
- Okech, David, Whitney Morreau, Kathleen Benson. 2011. "Human Trafficking: Improving Victim Identification and Service Provision." *International Social Work* 55(4): 488-503.

- Pajnik, Mojca. 2010. "Media Framing of Trafficking." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12(1): 45-64.
- Polaris Project. 2017. "2017 Hotline Statistics." Retrieved November 20, 2018. (<https://polarisproject.org/2017statistics>).
- Pomerance, Rachel and S.A. Reid. 2008. "5 Deny Enticing Women for Sex: Defendants Accused of Trying to Force Young Mexican Women to Become Prostitutes in Metro Atlanta." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 8, pp. J1.
- Rand, April. 2009. "It can't Happen in My Backyard: The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls in the United States." *Child & Youth Services* 31(3): 138-156.
- Reich, Nina M. 2002. "Towards a Rearticulation of Women-as-Victims: A Thematic Analysis of the Construction of Women's Identities Surrounding Gendered Violence." *Communication Quarterly* 50(3/4): 292-311.
- Reichert, Jessica, Jaclyn Houston-Kolnik, Amanda L. Vasquez, and Emma Peterson. 2018. "News Reporting on Human Trafficking: Exploratory Qualitative Interviews with Illinois News Journalists." *Journal of Human Trafficking* 4(1): 6-20.
- Renzetti, Claire M., Amy Bush, Marissa Castellanos, and Gretchen Hunt. 2015. "Does training make a difference? An evaluation of a specialized human trafficking training module for law enforcement officers" *Journal of Crime and Justice* 38(3): 334-350

- Roby, Jini L., Jennifer Turley and JoAnna G. Cloward. 2008. "U.S. Response to Human Trafficking: Is it enough?" *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 6(4): 508-525.
- Sanford, Rachealle, Daniel E. Martinez, and Ronald Weitzer. 2016. "Framing Human Trafficking: A Content Analysis of Recent U.S. Newspaper Articles." *Journal of Human Trafficking* 2(2): 139-155.
- Schauer, Edward J. and Elizabeth M. Wheaton. 2006. "Sex Trafficking Into The United States: A Literature Review." *Criminal Justice Review* 31(2): 146-169.
- Simmons, Andria. 2009A. "Lillburn Police: Dancers Paid Slave Wages." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 16, pp. C1.
- Simmons, Andria. 2009B. "Dancer From India Fears for Family's Honor." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 17, pp. C8.
- Sobel, Meghan R. 2016. "Confronting sex trafficking: Gender depictions in newspaper coverage from the Former Soviet Republics and the Baltic states." *European Journal of Communication* 31(2): 152-168.
- Stevens, Alexis. 2012. "Running Sex Trafficking Ring Nets Life Sentence." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 20, pp. B6.
- Suggs, Ernie. 2010. "Prostitution Bill Stresses Rehabilitation: Those Under Age 16 Are Considered Victims and Would Not Be Charged." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 21, pp. B4.
- Visser, Steve. 2011. "Pimp Sentenced to Prison: Prosecutors Say He Had Prostitute Beaten, Caged." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 20, pp. B3.

- Visser, Steve. 2014. "Prostitution Ring Busted, Police Say: Clients Reportedly Paid \$300 an Hour or More at Dunwoody Venues." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 1, pp. B5.
- Walklate, Sandra. 2017. "Defining Victims and Victimisation." Pp. 30-47 in *Victims, Crime and Society: An Introduction*, edited by P. Davies, P. Francis, and C. Greer. London: Sage.
- Wooditch, Alese, M. DuPont-Morales and Don Hummer. 2009. "Traffick Jam: A Policy Review of the United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000." *Trends in Organized Crime* 12(3): 235-250.
- Zimmerman, Cathy, Mazedra Hossain, Charlotte Watts. 2011. "Human Trafficking and Health: A conceptual model to inform policy, intervention and research." *Social Science and Medicine* 73 (2011): 327-335.