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Tales of Trafficking: Performing Women's Narratives in a Sex Trafficking Rehabilitation Program in Florida

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Tales of Trafficking: Performing Women's Narratives in a Sex Trafficking Rehabilitation

Program in Florida

by

Jaine E. Danlag

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology
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ABSTRACT

By working with an anti-human trafficking organization in Sarasota, Florida, and sex-worker activists based in St. Petersburg, Florida, this research focuses on the process by which trafficking victims and sex workers are identified and dealt with by the criminal justice system and NGO rehabilitation programs. The study focused on understanding how stakeholders decide between identifying someone as a criminal or a victim of sex trafficking and how women identify themselves and subjectively experience their interaction with the criminal justice system and a faith-based rehabilitation program. By exploring the victims' process of going through the criminal justice system, this study problematizes the ideas of victim certification, diversion programming, and the idea that sex work is inherently exploitative and never agentic. Due to anti-prostitution laws in the United States (US), the lack of trauma-informed care within the criminal justice system, and the stigma surrounding sex work that stems from dominant American culture, sex workers and trafficking victims are often further harmed when they become involved with the criminal justice system. My findings reveal narratives produced around the "innocent victim" perpetuate an image of human trafficking that focuses on White women and children in forced prostitution. This image contributes to constructions of 'deservingness' for different populations involved in exchanging sex and alters whether or not individuals are identified as victims of sex trafficking depending on their adherence to this narrative. Common narratives surrounding trafficking can also harm sex workers who want to be recognized as agentic adults in the sex industry. I present the multiple realities that exist in the

criminal/legal systems surrounding sex trafficking and consensual sex work in Florida and how participants perceive their treatment by various organizations such as law enforcement, the court system, diversion programs, and NGOs by conducting interview analysis, participant observation, and performance ethnography through the production of a fictionalized scene written with research participants and stakeholders.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Objectives of Research

For this research, a trafficking victim is defined as a person forced into work “by means of the threat or use of force or other forms or coercion, abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a 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” (UN Protocol article 3a). This definition encompasses labor trafficking victims and sex trafficking victims. A sex worker, in contrast, is defined as “adults (aged 18 and older) of all genders who receive money or goods in exchange for the consensual provision of sexual services, either regularly or occasionally” (Amnesty International 2016, 4). This is in line with human rights feminists’ way of thinking that seeks to “de-link prostitution and human trafficking” to problematize the idea of sex worker’s inherent victimhood (Bertone 2000, 264). Demarcating the differences between the two attempts to alleviate the marginalization of sex workers’ voices due to the prominent human trafficking narrative in the United States and provides an opportunity for individuals to self-label or identify themselves, especially if seeking sex trafficking rehabilitation program services or engaging in sex work.

The questions guiding the research are:

- How do stakeholders identify whether someone is a victim of sex trafficking or a criminal ‘prostitute?’
- How does the stigma against prostitution harm both trafficking victims and sex workers?
- How are victim narratives used to privilege sex trafficking and target sex work?

- How do the participants, either as trafficking victims or as sex workers, perceive their treatment in the process by various organizations such as law enforcement, the court system, diversion programs and Non-Governmental Organizations?

Anti-trafficking sex work abolitionist advocates tend to construct evocative narratives and employ statistics, survivor stories, and religious/moral arguments to increase their funding and support the ideologies they want implemented into policy and rehabilitation¹. The other “side” of this narrative coin is that the labor rights of everyone, including sex-workers, are not developed enough and result in labor exploitation and trafficking situations. This ideological split plays out locally in Tampa Bay.

There are national organizations such as the Sex Workers Outreach Project that have a local chapter in Tampa. From their website, “Sex Workers Outreach Project-USA is a national social justice network dedicated to the fundamental human rights of people involved in the sex trade and their communities, focusing on ending violence and stigma through education and advocacy” (<http://swopusa.org/about-us/>). An anti-sex trafficking organization with a local chapter has a much different framing- “Selah Freedom is a national organization with the mission to end sex trafficking and bring freedom to the exploited through four strong programs...” (<https://www.selahfreedom.com/about>). Ideally, these organizations would be serving different populations, or at least not be seen as ideologically opposed to one another as they work in the overlap. One would deal with individuals that willfully engage in the sex trade, the other would engage with individuals that are coerced or forced into the sex trade, or they would work together to meet where the person is at in between. But control and consent look different in the eyes of the beholder. Since Selah Freedom (and organizations like it) takes the

¹ In the context of sex work abolitionist anti-trafficking organizations, rehabilitation means actively working with people to resolve their trauma and meet middle-class lifestyle goals such as getting education, obtaining a taxable & stable income, and housing.

stand point that all prostitution is sex trafficking, they often impose this belief on individuals that are choosing to engage in sex work. For example, within my field work some anti-trafficking sex work abolitionist advocates would refer to women who had worked independently exchanging sex as having, “trafficked themselves.” Because these advocates have very close ties with power players in the criminal justice system, their belief that all sex work is trafficking influences local law. In particular, Selah Freedom has partnered with the Sarasota police department as well as the Sarasota courts to create the Turn Your Life Around (TYLA) prostitution diversion program. As prostitution² is illegal in the United States, there is a dichotomy in the way that people exchanging sex are categorized in the criminal justice system; people are either criminalized as “prostitutes” or identified and “rescued” as victims. This is why organizations that create the language and discourse around sex trafficking are so influential in the lived experiences of those exchanging sex- who is perceived of deserving of rescue, versus who is perceived as a criminal and nuisance to society, irrevocably shapes the lives of those being perceived and how they perceive themselves.

While these organizations in Tampa Bay texture the lives of the women in this study, I created a study that puts in conversation different women identified by these organizations as sex trafficking victims to identify their own experiences of consent, agency, and being labeled.

Utilizing ethnographic data gathered at an anti-human trafficking organization that I refer to as “Recovery House” to protect the confidentiality of the organization and its participants, I focus on how women grapple with being labeled as human trafficking victims/survivors instead

² Not all sex work is illegal in the United States, such as stripping or pornography. Prostitution is illegal, and due to this criminalization, many that engage in full service sex work do not identify with the term ‘prostitute.’ Often the term prostitute likens one to a victim, while the term sex worker likens one to an agent. Interestingly, many of the participants that were Selah Freedom residents speak about identifying as prostitutes in different parts of their journeys. I use the terms sex work, sex worker, or even person engaged in exchanging sex to err on the side of agency which I will engage with in depth in that chapter.

of their experiences of exploitation. To balance those perspectives, this research also includes the voices of sex workers, so as to not recreate the destructive imbalance of power that trafficking narratives often produce by drowning out those voices. To do this I contacted the Sex Worker Outreach Project (SWOP) Tampa Bay and sent out my recruitment materials. Five interested people contacted me from there, as well as two police officers, one attorney, five residents from Recovery House, and four advocates from Recovery House. By integrating multiple perspectives, I hope to undermine the popularized narratives about trafficking and provide a more nuanced understanding of what domestic trafficking victims look like.

By uncovering the narrative that follows the women from the sex industry, to court, to jail/diversion program, and to the anti-human trafficking organization and into life beyond, I demonstrate the agency of the women throughout the process as well as the many social and cultural forces that often shape their experiences. As all individuals are influenced by the cultural, social, political, and economic landscapes in which they live, I delineate overarching structures that affect the lives the women led before the program, as well as how those factors come into play in their process of transition, such as Christianity³ and its prominence within the Recovery House program. Additionally, I explore how the program identifies participants as trafficking victims as opposed to sex workers or drug addicts and thereby negotiate the tricky subject of agency within restricted situations. Finally, I examine how laws impact these categories and how that affects the women and the services they are able to access.

As a volunteer, then intern, then advocate at Recovery House, I collected ethnographic data through participant observation conducted for 40 hours a week for over a year. The program

³ Many participants at Recovery House often point to Christian groups as some of their first points of contact either on the streets or in jail. Many participants have also interacted with Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous programs in the area, which, while welcoming of many religions, are very Christian textured.

has four different branches: Outreach, Awareness, Prevention, and Residential. As a Residential Advocate, I worked with the women in their everyday lives at the long-term residential home program where women can live from between eight months to two years. From this day-to-day contact working with the women, I gained rapport as well as an understanding for how the organization works with the women and how women come to live at Recovery House. From there, the scene was written from 25 interviews with different stakeholders engaged in the local human trafficking discourse and workshopped by focus groups of willing participants within the Recovery House program to see how it can further reflect and represent their journey of identifying as sex-trafficking survivors. This is meant to validate their experiences and engage with therapy and healing, as well as allow them to talk back to my interpretation of the narrative and give them power over the representation of their own experience.

This first chapter will explain the methodology used within the research to look at the effects of narrative on the lived experiences of people involved with human trafficking in the United States. Then, the analysis will be explained, as well as the ethical considerations of the research, and a reflexivity statement will end this chapter.

Methods

From working with the women at the assessment house, long term housing, and the street outreach program, I conducted participant observation with multiple women as they engaged in Recovery House. By engaging with them as an advocate that organizes art-therapy workshops, or in making dinner, or taking them to the doctor, I got to know the participants in over a year of working full time, for 40 hours a week or more at the residential facility. I interviewed from the population at the long term where the women are further along in the Recovery House program

and more likely farther along in their healing processes. I conducted ten interviews with women who identified as human trafficking victims, which included initial and follow-up interviews. I conducted five interviews with women who identify as adult consensual sex workers (all of whom did not reside at Recovery House). There were other interviews with people from various organizations such as Recovery House, and the 20th circuit court system and the Sarasota Police. Overall, I interviewed five human trafficking survivors, five self-identified sex workers, four Recovery House staff, one attorney, and two police officers. Interviews were an hour in length on average and all were transcribed by me. I analyzed the transcriptions using thematic analysis, and the data was organized around narratives and evaluations of deservingness (Boyatzis 1998). Deservingness evaluations can be measured through delineating the stakeholders, the evaluative context, and the evaluative criteria used to make deservingness judgements- therefore the interview data was interrogated to get to those evaluative standards (Willen & Cook, 2016; Willen, 2012; Willen, 2011). The sample was overwhelmingly White across populations, with only two Black women and one Hispanic woman participating in the interviews. One Black woman is a resident of Recovery House, and the other a Prevention Advocate for Recovery House. The Hispanic woman is also an advocate for the assessment phase of Recovery House. The sex workers, attorney, and police officers are all White. All participants are cisgender female, but sexual identities across the populations involved in exchanging sex were more fluid, with some identifying as bisexual or otherwise having sexual experiences outside of heterosexual norms. A table is provided in the appendix of the demographic breakdown of the study population.

Access was a difficult issue in the study, which limited the scope of data, especially with actors within the criminal justice system. Police interviews were difficult to obtain, resulting in

one full interview and one partial one, therefore a proper analysis of police perspectives is beyond the scope of this research. Sex workers were also difficult to contact, especially those most affected by anti-trafficking, abolitionist⁴ discourse, as they may not have the safety or financial security required to volunteer their time for an interview. Overall the sample size for a thesis study was relatively small, which limits the validity of the conclusions of this study. While the difficulties have been considerable, different methodologies were employed to otherwise maximize validity.

Integration performance ethnography methodology to this study contributes to anthropological work in human trafficking. While other researchers have adapted this creative-arts method to address violence against women (Sajnani & Nadeau 2006, 45), anthropologists have been more drawn to research social forces that cause human trafficking rather than new methodologies for working with trafficking victims. Performance ethnography, as outlined by Sajnani & Nadeau (2006) “can create disruptive art forms that challenge injustice, allow for diversity, move beyond narratives of victimization and otherness and thus create possibilities for collective action” (45). Pamela Snell (Goldstein et al 2014, 678) used this method with youth participants on the themes of substance abuse and mental health, which are highly stigmatized similar to work in the sex industry is. While a play was the original goal, many monologues, poetry, spoken word and song were worked out through collaboration between the researchers and the participants to engender ownership and pride within the participant and reflect the research goals of performing the youth’s experiences with and research of substance abuse and mental health. Tara Goldstein et al (2014, 679) drew from ethnographic research on “everyday

⁴ Abolitionist is used here to refer to anti-trafficking advocates that are also anti-sex work. Anti-trafficking advocates can be both sex workers and sex work abolitionists, but anti-trafficking discourse shaped with the presumption that all sex work is sex trafficking falls under the narrative umbrella of sex work abolitionists.

experiences of transnational/transracial adoptive lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families.” They utilized these multiple identities that were marginalized in spheres surrounding school and family and created two plays that explored the data and showed how powerful a play can be to inform others about multiple needs of multiple different types of people in an easy to understand format (679). Julia Gray’s performance ethnography “was initiated to critique the dominant discourse of tragedy around Alzheimer’s and related dementia and open up space for a new discourse of possibilities that recognizes embodied expression, agency, and relationality of people with dementia (Goldstein et al 2014, 682).” Her work shows how agency can be highlighted and encouraged through performance, and that the dissemination of the results to the right audience can shift cultural perceptions as well as the mentalities of those that engage with the research topic. These studies highlight why performance ethnography could be an effective method to overcome stigma, empower participants, represent multitudes of identities and needs existing, and open up agentive cultural discourse within human trafficking research and studies.

While the scene created from this research reflects the experiences of the women in the Recovery House program reckoning with the victim/survivor narrative within sex trafficking discourse, in my analysis I incorporated voices and experiences of sex workers so that the marginalization of that narrative is not reproduced within my research and also to highlight broader cultural understandings and experiences within the United States and Florida. This is meant to highlight the discrepancy between which women are able to get resources and which are not, even if both participate in survival sex within the punitive system.

As for the workshopping phase of the research, this process has many different names. Anderson calls it Validatory Preview Technique (2007, 87), while Goldstein calls it performed

ethnography (2008, 2). Either way, it is the process of the ethnographically-informed play being performed or otherwise distributed to the research participants for evaluation and critique. Based on the participants' feedback, changes are made in the play to make it more authentic. This not only creates an extra layer of collaborative analysis of the ethnographic data that the researcher gathered on their own (Goldstein et al 2014, 675), but it also works to decolonize the research (Goldstein 2008, 3). The hierarchy of power between the researcher and the researched can be flipped by this process, with corrective power and voice given to the population about how they are represented. To enact this, I first gave them a physical copy of the scene to read and digest; then, the scene was read out loud by a focus group of women and they critiqued it spatially and visually. This is critical to one's understanding of a play because "...changes in acting, intonation, lighting, blocking, and stage design... can shape or even transform meaning of the ethnographic text each time it is performed (Goldstein 2008, 3)." Utilizing this workshopping method not only gives the women an opportunity to "perform their world" which can be deeply therapeutic, but also an opportunity to create a collective story based on their lived experiences (Enria 2016, 327). Afterwards, how it is performed (by the women or by actors), who it is performed for (for the women, for the organization, for the public), and how the manuscript is used can be decided by the participants and Recovery House.

Analysis

In working through participatory theater, the participants did their own analysis of the scene and my ethnographic work through the workshopping experience I utilize the theory of health-related deservingness to achieve this end (Willen & Cook, 2016; Willen, 2012; Willen, 2011). The framework laid out to analyze health-related deservingness consists of three main

elements: stakeholders, contexts in which deservingness debates take place, and the evaluative criteria utilized to categorize whether a person is deserving... or not (Willen & Cook 2016, 96). Many aspects within the criminal justice system are plainly influenced by an individual's perceived "deservingness" of help. For example, a person's perceived "deservingness" by stakeholders irrevocably alters the way the system operates on those who have been within the sex industries, with obstacles such as proving a person is 'trafficked' in order to get criminal records expunged (Barnard 2014, 1474); encouraging arrests to entice the trafficked person to give information about their traffickers while in police custody (Barnard 2014, 1471); or the difficulty of attaining employment, housing, or residential status due to prior convictions because of these criminalizing practices (Barnard 2014, 1472). I focus on the experiences of the women to inform this analysis, creating a bottom-up approach to the study that can help inform this process in contrast to top down studies frequently conducted (Brennan 2005, 37).

During the workshopping section, thematic analysis was used to track how the reenactment of participants' decisions in the process of getting out of the sex trade and through the criminal justice system will develop a 'rehearsal for the revolution.' Rehearsal such as this is thought to affirm participants in their tools for resistance towards situations in their life that they want to break out of. Thematic analysis is looking at themes that recur throughout the research as salient influences throughout participant's experiences. Understanding what gives the women motivation to continue to change their lives can help affirm their experiences of working through and healing their trauma or their re-victimization within the criminal justice system and give them a blueprint for action that can inspire new forms of agency the next time they are confronting similar situations (Rymes et al 2008, 96).

Further, a narrative approach was utilized throughout the analysis process to look deeply into the storied versions of human trafficking that are culturally relevant and how those perspectives integrate into the lived experiences of the participants of the study (Kamler 2013; Cojocar 2015; Balgamwalla 2016). Specifically, how the “Madonna” versus “whore” stereotypical images of sex workers plays out in how participants feel they are treated and/or represented in the criminal justice system (Doezema 1998 47; Benoit et al 2015, 562). This goes along with analysis of how stigma is reinforced and replicated through the perpetuation of storied versions of trafficking. Through analyzing stigma, we can see how it influences the perceptions of the participants surrounding sex work and how that stigma works upon them in their interactions with the criminal justice system. Stigma is defined as “both negative attitudes and beliefs about an attribute (prejudice, stereotypes), as well as differential treatment based on an attribute (discrimination, exclusion)” (Benoit et al 2015, 562). Another specific example of how storied versions of trafficking impact the lives of participants are the “violent and degrading testimonies” required to earn validity through performance of survivor narratives to shape the recovery of sex trafficking victims (Cojocar 2015, 187). Coupling this analysis with a historical lens focused on the history of human trafficking in the Western world and law, attributes such as the race, gender, and age of the iconic trafficking victim will be problematized by engaging with the experiences of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

In working with a vulnerable population such as trafficking victims and sex workers, I have learned it is imperative to be sensitive to their trauma and respectful of their safety and boundaries. Learning this through much discussion, as well as trainings on the job as a full-time

employee and advocate at Recovery House, has shown me ways to be sensitive that I never would have considered from my privileged position of economic, physical, and emotional safety. From verbiage, approach, and even accidentally turning off a light in the bathroom or hearing the wrong song on the radio, there are many ways embarking on this research has taught me the impact of many remarks and actions that one can take for granted. This highlights the importance of this research to consider everyone and their needs equally, and how to create space for narratives that implicitly disagree to engage with each other and to weave a solution in the end. Through discussing my positionality within the context in which I conducted my ethnographic work, I show how my situatedness colors the conclusions of this study.

The process of writing the scene from my ethnographic data is an ethically loaded one as well. In writing the play, I as the playwright and researcher had to analyze how privilege works throughout the play. Not only if certain characters and narratives may get more lines than others (Goldstein 2008, 4), but how commitments (research, aesthetic, pedagogical) outplay one another within the enactment of the scene (Goldstein et al 2014, 678). To make sure there is truly a representative balance of all of them, I have to consciously work towards transparency with participants as well as transparency with my own biases that may shift the tides of the representation within the play.

As ethics pertain to forum theater, many “researchers of violent histories” have debated on the potential risk of re-traumatizing a participant versus the reenactment being a cleansing process (Enria 2016, 323). Ultimately, performance ethnography has been vetted as an impressive tool of therapy not only for individuals but also for communities. In addition, a trained team of advocates as well as clinical therapists support the participants at the site and therefore were a competent barrier to any research that could contribute to emotional harm to the

participants. The goal of the study was to be therapeutic, and participants remarked that it was, one remarking that it finally gave them a space to speak about these issues with the other survivors, where normally they would not be allowed to talk about their trafficking as Recovery House is afraid of the possibility of trauma bonding or staying stuck in the past trauma and not moving forward. Even so, some survivors had advantage of their narrative being represented more than others as the majority of participants willing to participate from Recovery House identified as trafficking survivors, Christian, and non-mothers (60% of the sample). Participants that I had recognized through my participant observation at Recovery House that did not think of themselves as sex trafficking survivors did not want to participate in the study, probably thinking that they did not want to explicitly discuss that with me, a staff member.

Positionality

My positionality as an employee (albeit a well-liked one) at a sex trafficking rehabilitation center definitively colored my experience with all populations involved in the study. Many assumed that I was in favor of the ideology of the anti-trafficking sex work abolitionist movement, because of my employment and networking through employees of Recovery House. Brie⁵, a sex worker I interviewed, even told me that she almost stopped speaking to me when I disclosed to her what I did for a living. Many residents at Recovery House thought of me as non-threatening due to many factors, such as my age (25), and my ability to hang out with them day to day in the house. Residents would joke with me that they

⁵ Each participant in this study chose the way that they would be referred to in this thesis. This was to give them power over their representation. Many of the sex workers used their working names or twitter handles so that this research could also serve their public persona. Many of the Selah residents opted to use their first names to show that they are not ashamed of what happened to them. Some Selah residents took this as an opportunity to give new life to their “street names” and therefore used those in the research instead. No participants full name is listed and at most only first names were used if that was their preference.

would not give straight answers about their feelings about Recovery House to another study team from USF's criminology department because they did not know them and Recovery House was giving them food, shelter, education, and therapy, and therefore they did not feel comfortable actually voicing all they wanted to say. I would say that interviewing Recovery House participants probably would have gone differently, and possibly better, if I had not worked at Recovery House, but being able to get the first hand understanding of what life is like within the organization as well as getting to know the participants and build trust with them was an invaluable experience that pressed me to be more critical in order to better the experience for other women who are caught within the web of criminalization and the anti-trafficking movement. Being situated within Recovery House gave me an 'insiders' position, allowing me to observe things that the general public does not see and earning trust easily because of my position.

This position also made conversations convoluted when it came to the women's identifying as sex trafficking victims or as sex workers. As I will get into in my analysis chapter, one of the evaluative criteria of being seen as a sex trafficking victim by other stakeholders is the presentation of identifying as a victim/survivor. So, because I worked for Recovery House, I believe that some residents did not participate in my study because they did not identify as trafficking victims and believed that I did not want to hear their stories. I am led to believe this because while working with their individual cases for over a year, both of them disclosed to me that they did not necessarily have a third party facilitator of their sex work. They did not use these words either—for women who have been involved in street sex work, there are an abundance of terms that I did not, and do not, find appropriate to use from my standpoint of describing them and their experiences. But from their standpoint the terms are appropriate. This

discrepancy between ethics as a researcher and respecting each individual's representation of themselves was difficult to navigate.

My positionality as not only a young woman, but a non-religious Filipina woman, also affected my research. As opposed to taking for granted the Whiteness of the many contexts that I came to find out much of anti-trafficking inhabits, it was often surprising for me, if not jarring. For example, at one point on shift a resident casually said the word “chink” and I had to explain to everyone that the term is a racial slur. At another point I was asked by a resident if my parents owned a nail salon. Beyond the racial difference, there was also the religious difference. The pervasive Christianity in these spaces was challenging. Although Recovery House is not a faith based organization on paper, it began as a Christian organization and is still deeply influenced by Christian beliefs. As someone who identifies as queer and lives with two men who are in a relationship, as well as being someone who was not raised Christian, the adjustment was sometimes difficult. Residents were invited to watch pastors on YouTube in the mornings by a founder of the organization. One morning, a pastor said that living a homosexual lifestyle is the same as a man cheating on his wife, a person being addicted to porn, or a man traveling to Thailand to have sex with children. After this instance, I was able to speak to the founder about how many of the women have had LGBTQ+ relationships and this material was inappropriate while they are processing their experiences, but in many instances, there was nothing I could do. Another resident identified as a transman, and we were instructed by our organization to call them by their birth name and use she/her pronouns, which was not what the resident had asked of us. While I spoke to many different employees and heads about this, this was the instruction until the person was ‘exited for violence,’ which one has to wonder if maybe this was due to the pressure they were experiencing in such an environment. Beyond these specific incidences, it

took me a long time to realize that the language of my job was co-opted from a nearby church until I went to church with the residents and heard the phrases, “on my heart,” and “my gifting,” which are often used at Recovery House. (Residents were not required to go to church, but religion as a point of analysis will be explored within my findings chapter.) Often, when staff was processing with Residents or wanted to speak to them about something they noticed, they would say “I’ve noticed this about you and it’s been on my heart to bring it to your attention.” These experiences colored the way that I experienced Recovery House, and anti-trafficking narratives at large, for those that they exclude are those that are, in many ways, like me.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction: What Does Anthropology Have to Say?

While billions of dollars have been spent globally on research, advocacy, and law enforcement efforts around anti-trafficking discourses, socio-legal institutions, and policy discussions during the last 15 years, there continues to be very little research that problematizes issues of agency, consent, identity, individual autonomy, and social governance, and even less that actually presents empirical realities and quotidian experience of those who are counted as “trafficking victims” (Marcus & Snajdr 2013 191).

Marcus and Snajdr underscore the need for research about the process that begins once one leaves the sex industry. The emphasis on agency, consent, who is *actually* being labeled a trafficking victim as to who is not, and how policy and social governance shape is lacking within anthropological analysis of human trafficking. These scholars also prioritize the voices of sex-worker scholar-activists who work towards “challenging disempowering discourses, laws, and practices related to the intersection of gender, sexuality, labor, and commerce (2013, 193).” Utilizing the voices of sex workers decreases their invisibility and stigmatization in research that directly affects how they are treated in policies and laws. Additionally, by intersecting sex-worker discourse with human trafficking discourse can reveal and perhaps explain overlaps in experiences. This quote also shows how the importance of future work focusing on the differing experiences within the sex industry, and the motivations that make women continue on the path towards a life in the sex trade, are critical to a fuller understanding within the discipline. Human trafficking literature within anthropology from over the past decade is also lacking in its analysis of domestic trends. While the ethnographers involved in the US Department of State’s (2011) “Trafficking in Persons Report” are applauded for their ethnographic work, many of the

anthropological studies of human trafficking during this time were based in other countries (Blanchette et. al; Cheng; Giordano; Dawson; Campbell; Cole; Garcia & González; Feldman). Exceptions are Brennan's work with foreign born trafficking victims rebuilding their lives in the U.S. (2014), Musto's (2013) study on minors and anti-trafficking policies, Thakor and Boyd's (2013) work with technology and trafficking surrounding Backpage and Craigslist websites, and Peters' (2013) analysis of trafficking law as it is written, perceived, and practiced. Peters illustrates a strong connection between social and cultural beliefs and responses to trafficking, which I wish to draw upon and further in this research.

While many studies of human trafficking within anthropology are based abroad, there are many salient themes that resonate with my research. Blanchette and Silva (2013) explore the moralistic anti-trafficking movements in Brazil and how their framing of the issue has created an image of an ideal victim dubbed "Maria." Snajdr (2013) looks at the operation of anti-trafficking discourse as a master narrative that also propagates a certain victim story, and how that shapes policy, activism, and development. Ideal or perfect victims are conceptualized within the United States as well, and for many this can have grave effects on their ability to access resources reserved for only certified⁶ victims.

Historical Overview: Where Have We been?

The intersection of abolitionist ideologies, sects of feminism, and religion in the United States has deeply shaped the anti-human trafficking movement at large, and these actors in turn have been influenced by historical events. Before anti-trafficking efforts were even born out in

⁶ There is no certification for trafficking victims at the local level. Often, police and NGOs working with victims of trafficking that do not require American citizenship do not need to utilize the federal certification. So, it is up to advocates and law enforcement to identify and refer victims to organizations where they can receive services.

the social-psyche, the fall of monarchs in Northern Europe gave rise to new pathways of power in European society that is the foundation that anti-trafficking work sits upon today (Agustín 2007). Once monarchs in northern Europe were no longer believed to have the divine right to rule, the bourgeoisie came into power in society. While nobility had been given right and respectability through their lineage and property, the bourgeoisie were building on the idea of ‘family’ as the foundation for respectability (Agustín 2007, 102). ‘Family’ here not only meant a way of life, domesticity, and ‘home,’ but also privacy and the concept of childhood. Before these concepts were solidified at this time, home and work were not considered so separate, couples and children lived within larger households, and even homes were not separated and used the way we know it today (Agustín 2007, 103). With the conception of childhood, or a long period of instruction, protection, and dependency, there had to be roles created to fill the needs of the child (Agustín 2007,103). With women perceived as the more virtuous and nurturing of the sexes, they were tasked with this role. ‘Maternal Instinct’ came to characterize women’s work just as work for the social welfare of society was proliferating in late-eighteenth to early twentieth centuries (Agustín 2007, 97, 103). The care-ers were not taking shape without the category of those that they would take care of—that task fell to the people of the lower classes, who were unable, or *unwilling*, with differing economic and social pressures to attain the same nuclear family dynamics (Agustín 2007, 104). “So, the social invented not only its objects by the necessity to do something about them, and thereby its own need to exist” (Agustín 2007,107). Social welfare, created and defined by the bourgeoisie to suit its gendered and family-centered ideals, othered those that did not live as they lived by seeing those lives as criminal, lacking, or full of sin and illness... which made those same people capable of being expunged, fulfilled, brought to Christ, and cured.

While this framing highlights class and gender dynamics clearly playing out in ideas of ‘helping’ and social welfare, there are other ways to frame the same phenomenon. There is substantial evidence that racial stereotypes coupled with laws that were born of those stereotypes shaped American sexuality in very specific ways. Through the after-effects of slavery and Jezebel stereotypes, Black women were more likely than White women to be predisposed to prostitution (Nelson Butler 2007, 6). Further, the forced assimilation and history of colonization of Native American women, as well as the history of racial subordination of Asian women, also predisposed them to sexual abuse and therefore prostitution (Nelson Butler 2007, 7-8). Yet at the same time that these forces were carefully constructed for the subordination of certain women, there was international outcry at the effects of growing consumer culture on White women (Peck 41). This could be attributed to the opposing image to the Black Jezebel; the White woman as the “True Woman” who “were white, pious, chaste, and domestic” (Nelson Butler 2007, 4). This meant that with the increased mobility, independence, and trends of women leaving the home to work deeply disturbed gendered and racial ways of thinking about who should be doing labor and who should be allowed to travel and have sex (Agustín 2007, 100). This also set the precedent that appropriate jobs for White women were in the care industry (Agustín 2007, 112).

Anti-trafficking efforts began in the 1880s over public fears of girls from Belgium, Germany, and Great Britain being taken to Western Europe to be forced into prostitution (Breuil et al 2011, 32). This birthed the concept of “White Slavery” which was dependent upon two iconic actors- the “innocent” girls and the “evil” traffickers (Breuil et al 2011, 32; Segrave et al 2009, 1). By 1904 this culminated in the International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic (Paris, 18 May 1904) which outlawed people from recruiting specifically women into sex work by force or deceit (Breuil et al 2011, 33). In 1949, the abolitionist-minded

UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others declared states should punish anyone who would be in a “pimp” role- even if this person were to have the consent of the “victim” (Breuil et al 2011, 33). While this convention worked to construe all sex workers as victims, it also acknowledged for the first time that men and boys could be victims of trafficking too (Breuil et al 2011, 33). In the 1990’s, Janie Chuang notes that economic sectors such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, and the sex industry experienced an influx of movement of men, women, and children into exploitation (2014, 614). This was simultaneously accompanied by trade liberalization as well as gender, race, and class discriminatory practices that limited opportunities for jobs and social services. This, combined with a widening demand for cheap labor and the perception of better job opportunities in wealthier countries due to the internet, resulted in a spike in migration and supply of vulnerable people that traffickers could prey upon (Chuang 2014, 614). Then, in 1999, the 1949 Convention was seen as being inadequate for modern times, and the U.S. led negotiations that shifted human trafficking from a human rights issue to an issue of criminal justice (Chuang, 2014, 614). This left the world to decide how they would police trafficking, instead of work to prevent it, a strategic point to avoid discussions of labor rights and migration policy reforms (Chuang 2014, 611).

Men and Women Race to Understanding: Who Is Being Trafficked?

This cultural context is integral to understanding the narratives shaping the experiences of those engaged in the sex industry- even between the years of 2012-2015, 85% of the people charged with ‘loitering for the purpose of prostitution’ were Black and Latino, which only make up 54% of New York City’s population (Mac & Smith 2018). Even as far back as 20 years ago,

it was published in a criminology paper that “... the police believe that blacks—especially low-income blacks—commit more crimes and therefore more often take action to arrest them. The general stereotype of Black people as “disreputable” and “dangerous” thus leads the police to watch and arrest minorities more frequently than warranted based on actual criminal behavior” (Sampson & Lauritsen 1997, 327). This points to unfair practices in policing of human trafficking just as other policing practices are under scrutiny in America. As the United States operates within a system of full criminalization of buying and selling sex, all parties such as the buyer, seller, and facilitator (such as a madam, a pimp⁷, a landlord, or even websites like Backpage) this creates a room for discrepancy in who is charged with prostitution and who is offered services as a trafficking victim.

Research that assumes migrating sex workers are always trafficked conflates the two very different populations, also inflating the number (Sanghera 2012, 12). Much of the data on populations affected by human trafficking are colored by bias or assumptions, creating misleading statistics that do not change for years and are pillars of anti-trafficking sex work abolitionist campaigns. It is often assumed that women who travel or leave town without telling others are “missing persons” while men in the same circumstances are more likely to be labeled “migrants,” which overestimates the number of women being trafficked and likely underestimates the amount of men being trafficked (Sanghera 2012, 12). Statistics suggest that the number of cases of trafficking are astronomical, often projected into the millions, whereas the 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report reports a global figure of 100,409 victims identified, with labor trafficking making up only 23,906 of those victims worldwide (43). These numbers reflect

⁷ “Pimp” is stereotypically understood as a man who forces a person to engage in exchanging sex for money or drugs, that is then shared with him. Often, relationships between workers and pimps are more complex and are borne of necessary protections against arrest and violence due to the illegality of their trade (McCracken 2000, 359).

the international hyperfocus on sex work and sex trafficking over labor trafficking, which is estimated to be affecting many more people worldwide. This not only points to the fact that awareness about the issue needs to be raised so that more cases are reported, but it also shows that there are many flaws within the criminal justice system that inhibit its ability to identify cases of trafficking. The International Labor Organization reports 40.3 million victims of human trafficking globally each year (2017). Their methodology was extensive, claiming 71,758 respondents across 48 survey countries, and the questions incorporated the persons' immediate family network, expanding the sample to include data on 575,310 people in all (58). Yet, in this same report they confess that, "estimation of forced sexual exploitation (and commercial exploitation of children) required a different methodological approach, as too few cases were reported across the 48 countries surveyed" (60). And even then, they estimated that 4.8 million people were sex trafficking victims, and more than 99 percent of that figure were women and girls (39). They also note that "these estimates have been derived from various sources, as no one source is considered sufficiently suitable or reliable" (57).

The United States influences the worldwide perception and policy of human trafficking. The development of the Trafficking in Persons Protection Act was enacted by the Bush administration in 2000 and imposed economic sanctions on countries deemed to be in tier 3 (not doing enough by U.S. standards to stop trafficking). Such discrepancies evidenced in the US understanding and policing of the issue influences all of the content related to human trafficking globally.

United States Context: Where Are We Now?

The United States does not have the most effective legislation with regard to human trafficking, despite its tier one placement in the 2017 Trafficking in Persons report. As pointed out by Jayne Huckerby (2007), the disproportionate attention to sex trafficking is rampant in the U.S., but by its own scale the U.S. has put countries in the lowest ranking of tier 3 for perpetuating this same issue (231). The two different perceptions influencing national law on trafficking in the United States lead me to assert that it does not deserve its tier one placement. One perception is that all sex work, or prostitution, is “inherently harmful and dehumanizing” (DOJ, Report on Activities to Combat Human Trafficking, Fiscal Years 2001-2005, 2006 (DOJ 2006b)). Seeing sex work as inherently harmful comes from an abolitionist standpoint, and their motivations “lie between a Christian faith-based rhetoric of saving (female) victims and a radical feminist politic that reads all prostitution as a systemic sexual coercion” (Thakor & Boyd 2013, 282-3). This perception of prostitution creates a fixation on sex trafficking as the criminalization of sex work that goes hand in hand with the identification of trafficking victims, leaving the greater population of 14.2 million (68%) of labor trafficking victims ignored by policy and law enforcement efforts (International Labor Organization).

The second perception that bars comprehensive legislation is the perception that every trafficking victim is a “Third World female, sexualized and disempowered ‘victim’ moved across international borders” (Huckerby 2007, 231). This makes it much more difficult to identify domestic victims of labor trafficking because it obscures the fact that 11.8 million victims (56%) are trafficked in their origin country (International Labor Organization). This focus can be seen even as recently as the 2013 TVPRA act in a provision to “promote the

protection of girls at risk for child marriage in developing countries” (H.R.898 - Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2013).

The TVPA, or the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, was passed in 2000. While it has been modified over the years, the main points are the same and create the backbone of America’s anti-trafficking efforts. It is different from the UN’s definition of “trafficking in persons” in that it concerns “severe forms of trafficking in persons,” which creates a hierarchy within trafficking victims pertaining to assistance and prosecutions that privileges victims of sex trafficking over victims of labor trafficking (Huckerby 2007, 232). The UN also directly addresses the issue of consent throughout the process, whereas the TVPA does not, creating a loophole that finds that initial consent given before the fraud and exploitation can negate the charges of trafficking (Huckerby 2007, 233). The TVPA 2003 also includes an anti-prostitution pledge requirement, meaning that any organization looking to receive federal funding to combat human trafficking not only cannot promote, support, or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution, but they also must have an explicit policy denouncing prostitution (Huckerby 2007, 237). This greatly limits the types of preventative policy such organizations can put through and what type of resources that they can offer victims of sex trafficking. The influence of this national level law can be seen playing out in the diversion programs available to willing trafficking survivors within Florida. Snajdr stated:

Anti-trafficking discourse operates as a master narrative, drawing on techniques of emotion and logic, as well as a specific type of victim story... despite an emerging counter discourse that questions the data and challenges current policy, human trafficking discourse continues to be retold in media and reproduced in popular culture... (2013, 192).

The dominant narrative created here is an issue for many marginalized communities within sex trafficking, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (GLBTIQ)

people (Campbell & Zimmerman 2014, 146). Because the narrative identifies the sexual exploitation of *women* as the critical issue, that creates a marginalizing of men and boys as well (Dennis 2008, 12). Further, because trafficking is constructed as a crime of violent males against women and children, as opposed a symptom of neoliberal and capitalist institutions that drive people into exploitative labor markets, this further alienates these populations from receiving help or recognizing themselves within the discourse (Campbell & Zimmerman 2014, 157). This perception also limits the amount of prevention and restoration programs can be implemented if the root causes of trafficking are misunderstood.

Since trafficking victims must be certified to receive any of the benefits or protections under this law, the distinction within the law of sex trafficking being a separate and more extreme case of trafficking allows for sex-trafficking victims to be identified more often by law enforcement as well as given more benefits as opposed to those who do not fit into the general sex trafficked victim narrative. The iconic trafficking victim of today that survivors need to compete with to get services was constructed during the “White Slavery” scare in the 1880’s- “She is female, trafficked for sex, and blameless for her plight because of her youth or lack of education; she is rescued by law enforcement instead of escaping on her own, is cooperative in the investigation, and is flawlessly credible as a witness for the prosecution” (Balgamwalla 2016, 16). Because of this culturally-entrenched perception, many victims of trafficking are held up to these time-honored standards and cannot qualify for services, as this perception encompasses not only demographic information and experience of sex trafficking, but also behavior with law enforcement. Andrea Ritchie (as cited by Mac & Smith 2018) has noted that Black women are far more likely than White women to be charged with a serious prostitution offence, and outlines a case where a young Black woman was holding another woman’s money for her and was

charged with felony pimping, when the comparable charge for the same incidence for White women was misdemeanor prostitution. A significant amount of human trafficking incarcerations consists of Black women in their twenties who were selling sex at the time of their arrests (Mac & Smith 2018).

Legislation about trafficking was first implemented in Florida in 2004. In 2006 state law cohered with national law with regard to cooperating with law enforcement, and in 2007 the Florida Department of Children and Families was designated as the agency responsible for allocating resources to human trafficking victims (Dyer et al 2012, 25). In 2013, the Safe Harbor Act was passed which made it so children under the age of 18 cannot be charged with prostitution because they cannot consent to sex because of their age (O'Steen 2016, iii). Florida's rates of human trafficking are the third largest in the country behind California and Texas (Samee Ali 2017), so it is no surprise that citizens of the sunshine state seem to be becoming more aware of the issue. While conclusive data about human trafficking in Florida is unavailable, this projection is based off of Florida's agriculture- and tourism-based economy, which allow for the camouflage of human trafficking (Dyer et al 2012, 24). 2009 saw the creation of the Statewide Task Force on Human Trafficking by former Governor Charlie Crist, and by August 2010 there were 274 certified victims of trafficking receiving federal benefits (Dyer et al 2012, 24). The top five nationalities receiving benefits were Haiti, the Philippines, Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras (Dyer et al 2012, 24). As is evident from these results, domestic victims were not as prominently served.

In 2010, Recovery House's founders created the organization in response to knowledge of local sex trafficking of American children on American soil (<https://www.selahfreedom.com/about-selah-freedom>). They became a four-part program

consisting of Awareness, Prevention, Outreach, and Residential. While their Residential and Outreach programs cater to adult women, their prevention program targets young girls ages 12-17 to stop the trafficking before it can begin in their lives. TYLA, or the Turn Your Life Around program, is another facet to Recovery House's operation.

TYLA is a Prostitution Diversion Program, which "exists to identify individuals/victims who are being sexually trafficked and provide them with resources and strategies to help them escape the sex trade industry" (Konstantopoulos, Pentecost 2015, 1). Within, they state that "anyone trapped in the sex trade industry are victims and should be treated accordingly" (Konstantopoulos, Pentecost 2015, 5). In this understanding of trafficking, pimps are street level traffickers and independent sex workers are not accounted for as agentive. Women considered eligible by police and NGO workers can opt into entering a diversionary program or serve jail time instead. Statistically, around 7-8 interventions with an individual must take place before they decide to receive assistance (Konstantopoulos, Pentecost, 2015 8). But at the same time, that means that they instead must go to jail and keep their criminal charges against them. Through the program, a participant has the ability to access many resources for getting off drugs, therapy, and ultimately the expungement of their charges, creating a very attractive alternative not only to trafficking survivors but also to penalized sex workers.

Recovery House, being a main player in getting TYLA passed, is also a diversion program as well as an NGO. Often through their Outreach jail program and through the courts system they receive women who have had run-ins with the law for prostitution.

Theoretical Framework: Making Sense of Identity, Stigma, and Deservingness

This stigma and marginalization of sex workers that can be observed today has roots as far back as 100 years ago, and possibly even further. As outlined earlier, the creation of care-ers created a need for those cared for- and within that creation were the seeds of stigmatization of women who did not adhere to the moral standards and behavior of the upper class. In the article ‘Sporting Girls, Streetwalkers, and Inmates of Houses of Ill Repute,’ the authors look at the way stigma was constructed in the newspapers in Victoria, Canada, from 1870-1910 as well as 1980-2004. The way they look at stigma is important to note: “We treat stigma as structurally mediated cultural objects that (a) are constructed and disseminated through discourse, (b) transcend the experience of particular labeled individuals, and (c) emerge from structures of social stratification” (author date:120). Stigma is defined by Erving Goffman as an “attribute that is deeply discrediting,” which reduces the bearer “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Cited from Hallgrimsdottir et al 120). Stigmatized identities can lead the individual labeled with such to many adverse effects, from abuse to internalized negative self-image. Shunning, avoidance, restraint and abuse are known as enacted stigma, while the internalization of societal judgement is known as felt stigma (Hallgrimsdottir et al 120). Stigmatized identities can create an identity dilemma in the individual, such as the conflicting sub-cultural pressure on young women to be at once sexually active as well as chaste (Dunn et al 2015, 264). This can be said of many women who are in survival-sex situations, which can easily lend themselves to being identified as sex trafficking situations. And, as pointed out by Jyoti Sanghera in Unpacking Trafficking Discourse (2012), “In being compelled to lead “illegal” lives, victims of trafficking are simultaneously converted into criminals. Their illegalization keeps them from accessing most of the freedoms and rights that are extended to us all as human

beings.” From my observations, the stigmatization of being a criminal, let alone committing the specific crime of prostitution, dehumanizes people to such an extent that multiple stake holders would rather put them in jail than give them access to resources. Since there is the stigmatized identity of ‘prostitute’ at play, many may choose to adopt or highlight the identity of being a “trafficking victim” to manage this stigma in their lives because that is the best “cultural repertoire” that they have in this societal period of flux of perception of sex workers in the criminal justice system from criminals to victims (Dunn et al 2015, 263). This may happen even if the woman was engaging in sex work independently; as Smith notes:

A sex worker who is living precariously or in poverty, who is at risk of criminalization or police violence, or who is being exploited by a manager or lacks negotiating power is not likely to be particularly ‘sex-positive’ at work. These factors are structural, not a function of the worker’s state of enlightenment (citation?).

As a person who is stigmatized, marginalized, and exploited due to stigma created by societal ideas of contagion, slavery, and culpability under the identity of ‘prostitute,’ taking on the more blended identity of sex trafficking victim/survivor explains how those who engage in survival sex work manage stigma in ‘recovery’ (Hallgrimsdottir et al 2006, 129). Sex work also may not be the women’s desired employment choice. As pointed out in Women of the Street: How the Criminal Justice-Social Service Alliance Fails Women in Prostitution, many women in this situation do not like the term sex work (774). As one sex worker put it to the authors: “Girl, we out here survivin’, this ain’t no damn job. As a matter of fact, I feel sorry for you if you think it is” (Dewey & Germain 2017, 779).

And yet, it is a very weighted decision to embrace the identity of “victim” in ones’ life and self-perception. As Amy Leisenring argues, women often feel alienated from victim discourses because of the lack of agency, the assumed weakness, and the debated culpability (date:307). One participant even stated in Leisenring’s article a sentiment that is mirrored in my

findings as well: “I hate to be called a victim. I feel like then it’s my fault. Then it’s like I’m this weak person that couldn’t do things right and get out [of an abusive relationship], you know?” Loseke outlines three characteristics that qualify someone as a deserving victim: 1) if they are not responsible for the harm; 2) if they are moral; and 3) if they have experienced exceptionally horrible conditions (date 78-79). These characteristics create pressure on victims to act in certain ways to get the assistance that they need, as specific services are only accessible to certain victims that adhere to that “institutional identity” (Gubrium and Holstien 2001). Therefore, if there are people living with enacted and felt stigma from participating in the sex trade, the institutional identity of sex trafficking victim/survivor may give them more material and social capital than rejecting the victim identity and owning the label of sex worker ever could.

The Nordic Model, a legislation and ideology that is currently in place in Sweden, currently stigmatizes all sex workers as victims whether they choose to adopt that narrative or not. This not only causes harm to sex workers, as the model criminalizes the client of sex workers or ‘Johns,’ but also diverts attention from cases of sex trafficking and broadens the issue to all people, regardless of their situation, who work in the erotic industries. The definition provided by Juno Mac and Molly Smith (2018) is: “The Swedish Model: A legal regime that criminalizes the purchase of sex and punishes third parties (such as managers, drivers, and landlords while ostensibly decriminalizing those who sell sex.” (140). Understandably, sex workers are against this model and say that it harms more than helps. Mac and Smith point to numerous issues with this type of reaction to sex work and trafficking: 1) this makes survival sex even more difficult than it was before because there are fewer clients; 2) now a worker cannot refuse clients they normally would not service because there is lower demand; 3) clients who are deterred are ‘nicer’ clients with more social capital to lose from an arrest; and 4) sex workers

may decide to work alone in order to be more discrete for the client, putting themselves at greater risk (143-145). Many do not point to sex work as inherently the issue causing them distress in their lives, but instead the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work that makes it impossible for them to report to the police if they are threatened, robbed, or raped on the job (Bazelon 2016). There are also no healthcare or protective agencies for sex workers that would greatly enhance the lives and livelihoods of these individuals.

This understanding of sex work as inherently exploitative which drives a lot of human trafficking law and policy in the United States further endangers sex workers and upholds the “whore” vs. “Madonna” archetypes that privilege those that can fit into the “Madonna” instead of the “whore.” As stated by Doezema, “the Madonna is the “forced prostitute”- the child, the victim of trafficking; she who, by virtue of her victim status, is exonerated from sexual wrongdoing. The “whore” is the voluntary prostitute: because of her transgression, she deserves what she gets” (1998, 47). It is argued that the “Madonna”, or iconic trafficking victim, also is White whereas the “whore” is a person of color. These narratives are enacted upon the women through a system built to punish the whore and rescue the Madonna, all through operating mostly on ‘open market prostitution’ that is easier for officers to investigate. Even the Madonnas may not be in a place to cooperate with law enforcement, or press charges against their traffickers, they may be treated like the whore (Srikantiah 199). And the whore, by virtue of choosing sex work, suddenly is in a place where many believe that she should be stripped of human rights, such as health or employment insurance, freedom to travel or immigrate, freedom to sexual self-determination and privacy, and she can be arrested regularly (Pheterson 43). Creating such a harsh dichotomy with these narrow narratives does not allow for the reality of people’s lived experiences and creates steep consequences by way of criminalizing sex work for victims of

trafficking that do not fit the ideal Madonna character. Additionally, sex workers are at heightened risk of criminalization because the police are prioritizing rescuing the lost Madonnas, and they are being pushed further to the margins where they are vulnerable to abuse. Criminal records make it much more difficult to find employment and housing and can further marginalize a person from legal means of survival. Even if a person is understood as a victim by the necessary parties, vacating prior charges can take years.

A Case for Performance Ethnography

While anthropological literature on human trafficking is rich in stories of exploitation (Garcia & González; Rieger; Sellers & Asbed; Cole; Bernstein), there are few stories of recovery (Brennan 2005, 2008, 2014, 2014). Many aftercare articles are available from other disciplines (Johnson; Baldwin et. al; Clawson & Dutch) detailing how to deal with, specifically a survivor of human trafficking's trauma, associated mental illness, and drug addiction. It is imperative to recognize the mental and physical health complications that a past life within trafficking can create in order to truly understand this population. "Aftercare" is understood as the services provided to victims of human trafficking (Johnson 370). Before any traumatized person can get to a point of self-actualization and healing, they must first achieve Maslow's basic needs.

Trafficking victims are subjected to a lot of the same conditions that are outlined in Biderman's theory of coercion; isolation, monopolization of perception, induced debility or exhaustion, threats, occasional indulgences, demonstration of omnipotence, degradation, and enforcing trivial demands (Baldwin et al date:2). Traffickers often will deny their captives basic human needs such as food, sleep, and health care. This treatment creates victims who are dependent upon the whims of the traffickers, with survival being the individual's main concern

day after day. Forced alcohol and drug use can also be involved in their experience, causing them even more physical dependency on their traffickers (Baldwin et al date 4). Not only does that trap them at the bottom levels of Maslow's pyramid, but it also creates chronic stress conditions as well as other mental health disorders that debilitate a victim's sense of self and hope (Johnson date 374). These people are at elevated risk for "acute and chronic health problems including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, headaches, gastrointestinal problems, back pain, pelvic pain, and a myriad of other issues" (Baldwin et al 8). It has even been reported to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by all service providers that every victim of trafficking has a mental-health need (Clawson & Dutch 2008, 3).

This is why a trauma-informed care perspective is so integral to working with this population. "Trauma-informed care is an approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in their lives" (National Center for Trauma-Informed Care). Despite acknowledging this within many service providers for human trafficking victims, the process of going through the penal system often is very re-traumatizing. The TVPA requires not only it's stricter definition to be matched by the trafficking victims' life experiences, but there is an additional caveat that "he or she must be willing to comply with all reasonable requests to assist law enforcement in the investigation of the trafficking case (Clawson & Dutch 2008, 4). This can be far too much to ask of a victim that may be experiencing Stockholm Syndrome⁸ effects towards their trafficker or be much too frightened or traumatized to cooperate with regulations that they may not understand. Within the criminal justice system, those working within it to enforce laws often abide by understandings of crimes with perpetrators and victims. When the crime was an ongoing abusive

⁸ Stockholm Syndrome is a psychological response where a person's relief at surviving captivity translates into identifying with their captors agenda (Lambert 2018, accessed June 26th 2019).

relationship with ongoing criminal activity from both parties, it can be very difficult not only for the law enforcement to delineate criminal from victim, but this can be difficult for the ‘criminals’ and ‘victims’ themselves, as the lived experience is always more convoluted than what is put into law. What complicates matters further for victims of trafficking is that there is a certification at the federal level for trafficking victims that would allow victims to receive government aid and even citizenship if the victim needs it. Without complying with the investigators, all forms of services available to “certified” trafficking victims are revoked and other services must be sought for them which may be more scattered (Clawson & Dutch 2008, 5).

This adds to the stigma that trafficking victims already face. Because some victims may not have been physically coerced as violently as the general public expects, due to the psychological coercion outlined in Biderman’s theory, many health professionals and service providers do not understand why a victim may have stayed and not cooperated with the police (Baldwin et al 8). A lack of understanding of what trafficking entails pervades not only health professionals but law enforcement, service providers, and even victims themselves. Sometimes this lack of understanding even coalesces into an attitude that victims are to blame, including those of the victims themselves (Clawson & Dutch 2008, 5). Domestic victims in particular face this stigma because of negative perceptions of sex work; “But for domestic victims of sex trafficking, the humiliation and isolation, according to service providers and some victims, is attributed to perceptions that domestic victims are “prostitutes,” or willing participants, rather than victims of abuse and crimes (Clawson & Dutch 2008, 7). This differentiation of perception towards domestic victims has real consequences on these victims’ lives, including services they are able to access. While foreign victims are given the same benefits as refugees when certified as victims, one provider said “If you just look at what domestic victims are eligible for on paper,

it looks promising. However, trying to access those services is another story” (Clawson & Dutch 2008, 6). Housing, welfare, transportation, and job assistance are just a few of the services that domestic trafficking victims are in dire need of but frequently can be denied access to because of a lack of understanding of their trauma (Clawson & Dutch 2008, 6).

There is a lack of survivor-led voices within the anti-trafficking narrative. Performance ethnography offers them a space to speak back to the existing narratives as well as connect with their experiences in a different medium than the traditional talk therapy, allowing them to connect as a group over issues as well as explore physical details that would normally not be discussed. It is important to give survivors space to create their own narratives about human trafficking, as “representations frame the problem, identify causes, and promote interventions and solutions, though often the analytic frame is submerged or hidden by the dramatic, colorful details...” (Vance 2012 200-201). Since the narratives shape the way that stakeholders conceptualize and attempt to find solutions to the problem, it is very important that survivors speak to these representations so they can speak to solutions to combat trafficking.

Performed ethnography is a rich methodology for engaging conversations through three sources: “the ethnographic research from which a play script is created; the reading or performance of the play; and the conversations that take place after reading the performance” (Goldstein 2008, 2). These all provide spaces where the normalcies of casual conversation are suspended, allowing for participants and researchers to shift beyond common narratives by really looking at the script—literally. Because the rhetoric of anti-human trafficking is so popularized and easily parroted, utilizing a methodology like this that analyzes and disrupts common narratives is extremely useful for getting rich information beyond the standard interview.

This methodology not only allows for thinking outside of the box when exploring and discussing research topics, but it also allows for interactive meaning making between the participants and the researcher. Whereas with an interview a researcher can take what a participant says and code and analyze it for meaning on their own, ethnographic theater is built around the collaboration of the participants and researcher to interpret the data together and create text together. “Theatrical performance of ethnographic playwriting and the reciprocity of meaning making that occurs between the performance of a play and its audience discourages the fixed, unchanging ethnographic representations of research subjects, which have contributed to the construction of our destructive ideas of Other people and their children” (Goldstein 2008, 3). It is integral that researchers look for different ways to integrate the traditional ‘other’ into the research process or research will continue to exclude them from their own narratives. Ethnographic theater “provides opportunity for collective analysis” and by its nature undermines the authority of the researcher in the research process, allowing for more egalitarian research outcomes (Goldstein et al 2014, 675). In Goldstein’s theatrical work with participants, by reworking the play in tandem with actors and researchers, the analysis of the play was altered to best engage audiences in the original goals of the research:

“With this feedback, discussions among the team (actors and health researchers) returned to what our pedagogical goals for the research project are, and how these might be best achieved through the aesthetic, interpretive process of developing the play. We agreed it was better to show the story and the struggle of Clay and the other characters, rather than tell about solutions to the “problem” (Goldstein et al 2014, 684).

This collaboration is important not only to best represent the communities that one is researching with, but also present research on a wider scale. Because of the collaboration within

this methodology, those that are not researchers are able to influence the write up of the research, allowing a broader audience to engage with the material through an evocative medium. If the play had instead ended on a soap-box of solutions, similarly to an academic article, then a public audience might feel more closed off to the information presented in the play because it would instead turn into a lecture. Opening up research to be interactive allows for the doors to the ivory towers to be open and can lead to refreshing new voices.

Not only does allowing people from other fields or walks of life influence the analysis of the research open up possibilities for the reach of the research, but it also opens up opportunities for marginalized populations to counter narratives through performance. In Louisa Enria's research with youth, it was observed that the young people were empowered through the performance of the theater that was produced and used that theater to actively disrupt the stigma that surrounded them. "... [By] translat[ing] collaborative knowledge production into action, as through performance these young people countered their stigmatization as idlers and brought their critique of the status quo to the streets (Enria 2016, 327). This is a unique outcome of performance ethnography, as participants are given a product after the research that they can utilize beyond academia.

An additional perk of performance ethnography is the possibility for therapeutic outcomes. As in the Medea Project's work with incarcerated women, there can be exercises that are therapeutic in nature, or exercises that foster new ways of being in the world (Warner 2001, 166). This allows participants opportunities to explore their traumatic experiences, but also reimagine them and exercise creativity and control with an experience where they may have been powerless. Participants may find community and relief in the vulnerability of exploring their narratives in a group, as noted by Anderson— "There is also an ability for the theatre to make

authentic and intimate connections that is beyond the capability of most written research” (Anderson 2007, 82). Through that vulnerability, it can reach out and impact audiences as well.

Another perk of ethnographic theater is that it challenges and sensitizes the researcher to power dynamics inherent in the writing up results of research— “Similarly, Goldstein (2008) states that writing a script can help ethnographers be deeply reflexive about their portrayal of participants, because while writing, they must ask questions like, “who gets the best lines?” “Who gets the final word?” “Who gets to speak and who doesn’t?” “How does my characters silence speak on stage in a way it cannot in a traditional ethnographic text?” (Cannon 2012 583). Because of the dynamics of character interaction and perspective, it puts in sharp relief the personalities and points of view presented on a stage versus in a book-length write up. Researchers engaged with this type of methodology necessarily must be cognizant of this, as their participants will react to the script as part of the research process, before it is published and put on the shelves.

All of these perks are very important when we consider problematizing the narrative of anti-human trafficking. As the script has been passed down to us, with very minor variations, from the White Slavery scare, researchers need to push the boundaries of how they are writing about this phenomenon. Not only that, but as narratives affect whether or not an individual is identified as a human trafficking victim, it is incredibly important to create more inclusive understandings of what human trafficking is and looks like in our context. Participants, especially participants that are marginalized by stigma and are often the topics of discourse and never the influencers of discourse, also need to be respected and looped into their own narratives. “After all, the participants’ stories were poignant, laden with subtext, emotion, struggle, ambivalence, and optimism, and in short, worthy of our full attention.” (Cannon 2012, 584). To

take the data from this methodology and analyze it systemically, theory looking at deservingness was used to pinpoint the ways in which people are evaluated according to narratives about human trafficking.

The theory of health-related deservingness can help to examine these narratives by breaking down the multiple layers that are involved in the decision-making process of one group with regard to another about their ‘deservingness’ of resources (Willen & Cook 2016). This theory breaks down into “three core elements: the stakeholders involved, the contexts in which such debates take place, and the evaluative criteria employed” (96). Health-related deservingness is also seen to be relational than other assessments: deservingness is assessed in the eye of the beholder by their own deservingness, and their presumed social connection to those whose deservingness is in question (Willen & Cook 2016, 97). Deservingness is always constructed within particular political and social context, they are grounded in multiple sources of moral insight and experience, they are infused with affect, and they are liable to shift in response to new knowledge (Willen & Cook 2016, 97). Prostitution and sex trafficking, handled in the Christian textured, American criminal justice system, approaches these cases in messy and often overlapping ways. If a victim is not a “victim” enough, is not emotional enough (without too much insanity), is not helpless enough (with agency just enough to accept the services of an institution), and is not moral enough (a young Madonna, a believer in Jesus Christ) then they are criminal, a whore. How people reckon with that harsh divide will be further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

First, the alliance ethos regards street-based sex trading and illicit drug use as the inherently harmful results of women's experiences with violent, grief-generating, or otherwise traumatic events. The second core aspect of this ethos maintains that street-involved women require sociological intervention through arrest, incarceration, court-mandated treatment, or, in some cases, all three, in order to stop these behaviors, irrespective of the women's own wishes or economic situation. Third, alliance professionals believe that women can only demonstrate progress toward ending their involvement in prostitution and illicit drug use by evincing readiness to change, expressing accountability for their individual actions, and complying with restrictions determined by alliance professionals. (Dewey & St. Germain 2016, 121).

Introduction

What makes someone deserving? According to the literature assessing medical deservingness, we can get closer to understanding deservingness evaluations by looking at the stakeholders, the context in which evaluations are made, and evaluative criteria employed. The stakeholders involved with trafficking are those who are considered victims/survivors, officers that identify them, NGO advocates that work with and sometimes train the officers, and attorneys that work to expunge charges. The context where this deservingness is evaluated is out on the streets, in jails, in courtrooms, and in residential programs. And what evaluative criteria are employed? Attorney at law, Brent White, who is sixty one and White, had this to say about human trafficking evaluations in Florida:

We have some experience with the certification side because it is helpful for expungements. Florida doesn't really have any formal way of certifying, there are a number of things that certify somebody like if law enforcement writes a letter that says we have identified this individual as a human trafficking victim that's gonna act as a certification for various purposes. On the federal level which is what the T-visa would be related to, the department of health and human services (HHS) does a certification of

an individual as a human trafficking victim. And that's honestly the only formal certification that I'm familiar with.

Since there are no formal evaluative criteria for identifying human trafficking victims, a multitude of factors are taken into account by stakeholders. Stakeholders define and shape the discourse, so it is important to outline each stakeholder population's core ideas. This first analysis chapter is dedicated to outlining different stakeholder populations beliefs, and the second analysis chapter is dedicated to examining the evaluative criteria employed by these stakeholders to identify victim of human trafficking. The narratives perpetuated by each stakeholder drastically alters the way that they view who human trafficking victims can be.

Stakeholders

The stakeholders in the anti-trafficking movement are as diverse as one can get. White cisgender women are presented as the main victims of trafficking and this was the guiding factor in participant recruitment. Therefore, the stakeholders here were those that were perceived to be creating and disseminating this narrative to tease out their perspectives of the issue. Stakeholders that I have interviewed had a breadth of understandings of the trafficking, ranging from those that are deeply entrenched believers in sex work abolitionism, such as the advocates of Recovery House, to those that are critical of sex work abolitionist narratives, like sex workers. Yet some had surprising deviations from these trends. Their positionality in the work of anti-trafficking shaped their opinions of solutions, demographic makeup of victims, and prevalence of trafficking. And, their beliefs ultimately changed the way that they defined who victims of trafficking were and what they looked like.

For police officers that have a partnership with Recovery House, what they were looking for and why was often looked at in terms of public good as well as along the lines of looking at women as victims.

Police & Attorney perspectives

The United States practices full criminalization in terms of sex work, meaning that all parties, the sellers, buyers, and third-party facilitators such as landlords or taxi cab drivers, can be penalized under the laws currently in place⁹. Not only that, but law enforcement is seen as a key component in anti-trafficking efforts, with arrests, prosecutions, and laws being measures of success within the TVPA and can change a countries tier ranking (US Department of Labor 2017). This creates law enforcement agents as stakeholders in anti-trafficking efforts, as much is judged based on their action or inaction against trafficking. Due to this, lots of funding for anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts is pushed globally, especially as more and more law enforcement personnel get involved in the issue. The officers that I was able to interview are officers involved in the training program and the jail diversion program in a county in the Tampa bay area in which Recovery House operates. These two officers were working in the area before the training really took hold, as well as after, and have worked in street crimes in their careers. Jeff, a 53-year-old White male, had this to say about enforcement before the Recovery House trainings.

So, there was a big operation and they could arrest these girls for these prostitution violations. But it was revolving door, you know, we would arrest them, and they would go to jail for a little bit and then they'd be out three or four days later. And no, it was frustrating on a certain level because you know cops like to be, we're on the enforcement side so we like to enforce the laws and like to get people off the streets and

⁹ Outside of a few counties in Nevada where brothels are legalized.

it's also like a public service because you're trying to clean up the streets right? So, you're trying to get the prostitutes and the pimps and everybody else off the streets.

Jeff points to an important issue for street level prostitution; the recidivism. Here he notes that while it was a necessary function of law enforcement to work on eradicating street crime, especially crime that occurs in the public eye as public service, it was not something officers found effective since people would not stay off of the streets long. Jessica, a White officer from the same area, notes a similar issue: "We were trying to arrest our way out of this problem. There was no help for the women, we would just do stings and arrest them."

Arresting the way out of the problem was not working, and so other solutions, such as providing assistance and other options for women engaged in street-level prostitution were beginning to be considered. Yet it is important to note that many areas of Florida and the U.S. still utilize the method of 'arresting their way out of the problem.' Brent, an attorney that works on expungements in cases of trafficking, also noted this.

My point is, when you're just arresting individuals who are being exploited through prostitution, you're missing the possibility that they're being exploited by a third party. I think that's a huge area that we need to really progress a lot. Virtually all of our sex trafficking clients were arrested while they were being trafficked and very few of them were identified as human trafficking victims in the context of their arrests. So, we have to make some progress there.

Brent notes here another issue in that the current status quo of law enforcement simply arresting people engaged in street level prostitution bars the possibility of looking for a third party or identifying the person as a victim since enforcement is coming at a person with the mindset that they are a perpetrator of a crime. From Jeff's statement earlier, the officers were concerned with cleaning up the streets, not concerned with saving or assisting those involved with street lifestyles. This led to frustration, and high rates of recidivism within the population

that they were trying to get off of the street. Jeff notes that this has changed with Recovery House's training.

So that, that was our mindset then, when Recovery House came in and started talking and changing our mindset about the way we view prostitution, especially the girls themselves and more as victims and not as suspects that was real-- it took a long time to get that ship changed in this direction. And for me personally, I was in street crimes and I really... I was really resistant to their philosophy, because I wanted to go out, I wanted to make arrests I wanted to put them in jail and get them off the street and then my job was done I could go home. The idea of arresting them or doing this big operation like undercover operation it takes a lot of manpower, and time, and money, and then we don't arrest them, we refer them to services and we hold the charges on them until they go through the services and hopefully take advantage of the services that was kind of frustrating for me. But, later on when I saw the results they were getting, it changed my mind because I could see that rather than this revolving door of arrest after arrest after arrest we would make this one arrest give them to Recovery House give them the services and give them the drug counseling, the career counseling, the emotional and mental health support that they needed, get them off the street and into a good household where they could go through the therapy and work the Recovery House system and then we would never see them again! You can't argue with the results, you know? Now we go out on the street and we have a hard time finding a girl working, it's because we've cleaned it up, cause Recovery House helped us clean it up so that's been the real change of the philosophy, I think.

Jeff notes many things about the scale of the policing within a full criminalization system. Because of this system, people involved in prostitution are criminals, and the law and law enforcement look at them as such. Then, there are a lot of resources that are poured into the investigation of such crimes, and so the idea of utilizing a lot of resources meant to be used on putting away bad guys instead for simply offering services to people that may or may not utilize them was very frustrating. These two forces together made it difficult for him to accept the shift in perspective and shift in policing at first, as the process was not as cut and dry as putting bad people away and going home. Instead, it was a longer and less aggressive method of giving, which does not normatively fit within the law enforcement model. But what ultimately won him over was the switch in recidivism rates. Brent notes that many law enforcement officers have yet to be won over by this way of thinking.

I think there's still a long way to go for law enforcement, to shift from, and I'm talking about sex trafficking right now not labor trafficking, to shift from looking at individuals that are clearly involved in prostitution from looking at them as perpetrators to looking at them as victims. And I think in order for law enforcement to properly identify somebody as a human trafficking victim they have to start with the assumption that they are a victim as opposed to a perpetrator and then try to figure out if maybe they are a victim, if that makes sense. And the reason for that in my opinion is that I believe that a majority of individuals involved in prostitution are being trafficked, so I think that assumption is actually appropriate.

Brent is intentional about answering questions in regard to both sex and labor trafficking as separate issues. Brent's first trafficking case was a case of labor trafficking, so he has experience in both although he notes that his sex trafficking cases far outnumber the labor trafficking cases. As for Jeff and Jessica, they work as city police officers, and so their jurisdiction does not cover agricultural areas and there have not been many cases of labor trafficking that they have been involved with or trained on because of the understanding of their demographics within their jurisdiction. As they are trained by Recovery House, which specializes in trafficking in domestic women and children, it would follow that labor trafficking in hotels is obscured in favor of targeting sex trafficking in hotels in the area. Brent mentions a perspective here that is very prevalent within anti-trafficking, which is the idea that he believes the majority of individuals involved in selling sex are being trafficked.

Brent also says here explicitly that women involved in selling sex should be seen as victims, which is a line of thinking that is becoming more and more popularized, as discussed earlier in regards to the Nordic or Swedish Model, which is different from the full criminalization system in the United States in that the policing is focused on third party sellers and the buyers of sex rather than the providers. Here Brent notes that there are some counties that are enacting this at the discretion of the officers even within a full criminalization system.

And I think some of the folks in Pasco county are now not arresting individuals who are being prostituted. They're more going after buyers and now looking at more what's

underneath a victim's situation. And I hope we begin to see that change in Tampa and other jurisdictions.

This shows the growing popularity of the Swedish/Nordic model in the United States, and the prevalence of the perspective that the majority of sex workers are victims of trafficking. The prevalence of these perspectives within law enforcement circles can be explained by the type of sex work that is the most often policed, namely street sex work. This sex work is the most visible, and therefore the easiest target of police involvement. This type of sex work is generally understood to be utilized by those with very little resources and support systems, such as homeless populations and those that struggle with substance abuse. Sex workers that are not within public view often have the resources to work online or from their homes, which affords them more discretion and safety from clients as well as law enforcement. Because of the extreme circumstances of social and material disparity prevalent in the population and their visibility, people see them as emblematic of all sex workers as well as engaged in a life of suffering, which puts them as victims in the eyes of law enforcement. Jeff, the police officer, has this to say.

One is because it's an easy target for us because we can see it and so when we're on patrol, or when we're going out as the street crimes unit or we're doing a big operation, prostitution operation those are the ones we're targeting, the girls are out walking the streets, because they're easy, also because it's a- it's a public crime so if we can clean up that cause we get complaints from who see the prostitutes out on the streets, they'll call the police department to complain about it so if we can get those girls off the street get them help with Recovery House or somebody else then we're solving a public problem, that community problem. So that really helps... And I think what has happened is these girls have gone to the internet now and they're beginning to, like they advertise everything on the internet and then make their connections on the internet and then they'll be picked up, arrange a meeting be there for two minutes and get picked up and disappear and then come back and get dropped off. So, it's really hard for us to target that so we're having to change our investigative tools a little bit about how to start targeting the girls that are working the internet and it's been difficult.

Here Jeff acknowledges that street sex work is easier to police than sex work that is negotiated on the internet, because much of the transaction is facilitated and enacted beyond the

scope of officers driving in neighborhoods and city streets. There is a struggle for law enforcement to mobilize an effective policing method against sex work that takes place online, and many efforts that have thus far been enacted have been double edged swords. Recently, at an anti-trafficking symposium hosted at USF Tampa, an officer noted that with Backpage being taken down, there was a huge scramble for law enforcement to relocate the women that they had been able to find on Backpage that were potentially trafficking victims. Law enforcement actually had a working relationship with Backpage, it was said, and losing that as well as having foreign websites now hosting the ads instead of domestic sites put many of the internet providers now hosting sex work negotiations outside of the scope of U.S. law enforcement. But that does not mean that law enforcement is completely useless in anti-trafficking efforts, as exemplified by Jeff's experience here.

Because what I would like to do is, I'd like to get the guys in the street the officers on the street the tools on how to conduct a human trafficking investigation. Cause when you do a stop on a vehicle unless you know what you're looking for some of the clues and the evidence that's associated with human trafficking, you can just let it go. And you lose a good opportunity to save somebody early on, if that's possible. When I was in street crimes officer, we did a traffic stop up on the north side of town and there was a guy with two girls in the car and something just didn't seem right. So, we were able to hold him because he had a bad license and we got the girls separated. We started talking to them and turned out that the one girl was his girlfriend that he was running as a prostitute and this other girl was her friend that came down from Ohio who she thought she was going to get a stripping job well it turned out that this boyfriend wanted to start turning her into a prostitute too. And so, we got her at the very, very beginning so we were able to take her from the situation. We went and sat with her at the airport for six hours until her family to get her a ticket and fly her back to Ohio. So, unless you're trained in that investigative approach you can miss a lot of that.

What is interesting about this quote goes beyond the policing tactics used here, which are to separate the women from the man, and to utilize traffic stops in order to conduct investigations that go beyond traffic violations, which women who identify as trafficking victims recognize as well as sex workers, but also the presentation of a woman that was tricked into entering

prostitution by a man. For law enforcement, this is a clear case of the fraud and coercion within a trafficking case. While consent is paramount in whether or not something is trafficking versus consensual sex work, in many situations, women travel for sex work knowing that they are going to be working in some kind of sex work, but not knowing exactly what kind until they get to their destination. Another thing to consider in a scenario like this one is whether this woman acted the part of victim because the extent of full criminalization is so stigmatizing and irrevocably changes the lives of those that cannot get expungements. Being identified by law enforcement as a person involved in the sex trade can be a double edged sword, as it can result in rescue as it has seemed to have done in this story, with the woman safely returned to her family in Ohio before engaging in exchanging sex, or it can be the restriction of the mobilization of women and the criminalization of women's sexuality. This branches out from first responding law enforcement as awareness bubbles out from the street-level interactions. Brent, the Attorney, speaks on how awareness at different levels of the criminal justice system can have an impact.

Our courts, or our judges, having knowledge from the bench to potentially see someone below the surface that nobody else is seeing, it's gonna take a village, we are seeing that in some of our Florida jurisdictions and it's really fantastic when it happens because when they do identify somebody as a potential victim they are able to contact a service provider or contact us and say hey we think we have somebody here who may be a trafficking victim do you have any services that may be available for them and they're able to route them into something that may be able to help them get out of the life instead of just prosecute, misdemeanor, conviction and they're right back with a trafficker, and if they're not being trafficked as we understand it they're at least right back out on the street. And I think that's a way of breaking the cycle for some of our survivors.

This quote speaks to the way in which the system at large can be better informed to provide resources as opposed to focusing on punishment. The line of thinking within the criminal justice system to focus more of justice on restoration and awareness of the situations of their

clients is an important move, and something that I hope grows in criminal justice circles as more about human trafficking is learned about and explored as it pertains to the United States.

The main perspectives of these actors within the criminal justice system were moving from seeing women exchanging sex as perpetrators of crimes to victims of crimes, focus on street sex work, and equivocation of all sex workers to sex trafficking victims. These formulations of who the victims are in human trafficking drastically change the enforcement solutions to human trafficking and influence other stakeholders' understandings of trafficking.

Advocate Perspectives

As was noted by Jeff in the last section, prostitution diversion programs are seen as highly effective partners of law enforcement to ultimately “clean up the streets.” Recovery House is the main residential program in the area for women that are identified as having experienced sexual exploitation, which is broadly defined by the organization (and in the play available in the appendix) like this: “Exploitation looks like stripping, pornography, phone sex, pole dancing, prostitution- any sex act in exchange for something of value. Money, shelter, food, drugs, safety¹⁰.” This broadens the understanding of what can be considered sex trafficking out from what law enforcement mainly identified as street level sex work to almost all areas of sex work, including legal ones like stripping. Recovery House utilizes this understanding of themselves as interveners in crime as well as providing resources and recovery for sexually exploited women. Vanessa, a White thirty-one year old advocate from the Awareness section of the program, had this to say about the program.

We're partnered with the state attorney's office the United States attorney's office the FBI so we have so many collaborations and partnerships going on but the court

¹⁰ This definition was provided by Amanda, who worked as an Outreach Advocate as well as an Assessment and Residential Advocate over a period of two years. She also was sent to speak in Washington, DC, at Human Trafficking Conferences held by policy makers.

diversion program survivors go through it and they are able to go through our outreach program or our residential program and at the end of that graduating that they are given a—their prostitution related arrests are expunged, so they are given a clean record, and that's the outcome of that so we have case managers that work with them, we have trauma therapy that they have access to, job placement counseling, all those different resources that are given to them throughout the diversion program. If they are court appointed to Recovery House, then to go through our outreach or residential and at the end of that that's what they receive is that their record is expunged of prostitution related arrests.

She highlights here the multitude of services available to women who go through the program, such as job placement, trauma therapy, housing, and expungement. These are the multitude of services that draw women into the program, which are very hard to access for those that have criminal records, substance abuse issues, and who are homeless. Not every woman fits these categories, but many do, as they facilitated most of their living and working through hotel rooms or lost the places they were renting when they went to jail and/or rehab. Vanessa also points to the connections that Recovery House has made with power players in law enforcement, such as state attorneys and the FBI. At the most recent graduation ceremony, where the women who have successfully completed the program are given recognition in front of the whole organization, these law enforcement partners were also applauded and celebrated. Vanessa speaks on Recovery House's impact:

Recently we trained the police in Connecticut they called us up to do their training and we had an officer say, "I walked in with one eye and I came out with two I just didn't know what I was looking at." So getting the training there to them to be able to equip them to be the advocates and the interveners with these girls because they are the ones encountering them on the streets many times so they'll call Recovery House in to do stings or to be that first point of contact when a girl is taken in and they suspect trafficking and if she is a survivor of trafficking. But if they don't know what they're looking at and how to assess a scene and what a brothel looks like and how to question a survivor because she's never gonna say, "hey I'm being trafficked!" Then they're not equipped to help these girls. But now we've seen through giving them our training and through sharing with them this is what sex trafficking looks like prostitution and sex trafficking are interwoven they're the same thing it's like a synonym for the same thing right?

Here, Vanessa speaks on the police training that Recovery House is currently expanding across the country. Recovery House encourages officers to look at street prostitution specifically as a site of trafficking, and to bring in anti-trafficking services such as Recovery House when prostitution stings are executed. They also specifically train officers on the fact that a survivor usually does not immediately identify as a survivor. And then, she finishes with the idea that prostitution and sex trafficking are the same thing. While teaching ‘harm reduction’ to officers when they are dealing with people in situations of violence and abuse is a good thing and training them to look for signs of exploitation and abuse instead of view people as criminals is a good thing, this conflation of sex trafficking and all sex work can be harmful to people. While many women are given different opportunities through this program and may exit the sex industry to pursue other things, other women may still want to remain in the sex industry, and that does not necessarily mean that they are not healthy or that they are being manipulated. But the narrative that anti-trafficking organizations push that women cannot choose to work in the sex industry ultimately limits the freedom of women to make choices over their occupations, bodies, and sexualities, and actively undermines women that do choose sex work. Amanda, a twenty nine year old White advocate from the Outreach team at Recovery House, has this to say about the Misty, the main advocate that networks with law enforcement.

Because never before in America has this idea been presented it’s a very new idea the idea of women wanting to sell their bodies to be raped every day for whatever reason people think that’s a normal thing so it’s super fun to train police and shift those mindsets and really have them see the person and not just the act. So, I think it’s bringing in a new wave of tolerance and empathy, and it’s not just like oh pushing over, you know police aren’t being push overs, they are pulling the laws but it’s giving them the opportunity to be more successful. So, I know that the police department here has said that we’ve reduced prostitution here by 40% since our inception which is insane. That’s a huge number. So the police training is like a C-SEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children], basically, our CSEC training but with a lot more case studies we pull in lots of pictures that we aren’t able to show the public and we’re able to talk about a brothel, which you were there for that, that we got to walk through and so they

talk about that they show those pictures. Just really train police officers what to look for and what all the little red flags are and how to start treating a victim like a victim instead of like someone who's broken the law. So, I think that's huge that's like one of the biggest things we do because we're redesigning and redefining justice and that's cool to me.

CSEC, or Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, is another course that Recovery House teaches to law enforcement as well as all volunteers and advocates that work with Recovery House. It is a training that they open to other interested parties as well, and it mostly discusses warning signs of children engaged in prostitution and how that leads to different outcomes as these children grow up. Amanda points to the fact that Recovery House is more focused in restorative justice in their lobbying with law enforcement, changing the framework from punishment and jailtime to recovery and growth. This is an exciting thing for anti-trafficking programs, that it points to a function in the criminal justice system and seeks to fix it with wrap around care that a person with little material, social, or economic capital could get otherwise. And the premise is radical: that any human being, no matter what they have done or have been through, can be a good person and live a happy and full life. The effort to look at the influences in one's life that would lead them into the criminal world, and to engage people's empathy when looking at a criminal instead of people's judgement is something very important that could be incredibly impactful to reshaping what justice looks like in America. Like Amanda said, this has reduced recidivism in street prostitution 40% since Recovery House's beginnings, and it could be because this is a shift in investing in people's lives instead of treating them like "throw-aways."

Yet, there's a dramatizing texture to this education that makes officers (and anyone who comes into contact with this rhetoric) more empathetic. To say that all women engaging in sex work is being 'raped' every day not only shocks the audience, but also makes a bold statement

about agency, sex, and gender violence in sex work. This negates any agency a sex worker could claim in a commercial sexual exchange, takes any possible neutrality out of discussing a commercial sexual exchange, and assumes that women in particular are being raped in sex work, even though people across the gender spectrum engage in sex work. Overall this is a moral statement, saying that sex work is wrong in the same way that rape is wrong. This dramatizing rhetoric branches out to more than just the law enforcement programs of Recovery House. Techeira, a Black twenty-four year old prevention advocate that mostly works with children in schools or in church groups, had this to say.

So, there's not really a way to overcome besides making everyone aware, of what can happen and what is happening in their area. I know from the prevention side we like to let everybody know that every 2 minutes somebody is being sexually exploited in every zip code. In Every zip code. Everywhere. So, with that reality, the kid across the street, the girl next door, anybody, boy or girl, anybody part of the LGBTQ community, everyone's at risk just be aware of what's happening. And be willing to speak up even if you're not 100% sure, at least you spoke up cause then something could've been done to help this person even if it's not sex trafficking. So just supporting everybody and being aware I think is just a start for overcoming it.

Put this way, one can see the way that equating sex work with sex trafficking obscures the true prevalence of the issue. Because we know that sexual exploitation, from Recovery House's perspective, is any sex act in exchange for money, regardless of whether or not there is consensual adults involved, this statement could simply be making the point that there is a lot of adult sex work taking place across the United States. But, following that statement, she makes comments about children, and everyone being at risk as if it is an epidemic disease mostly heading for kids. The original statistic is from UNICEF, and has been cited by multiple sources (Chawla, Allison 2016; Skies, Sula <http://www.sulaskiles.com/sex-trafficking-facts>). This statistic, although, was originally a statement about the global prevalence of child sexual exploitation and included forced marriages. There are many ways that statistics are taken beyond

their original context and utilized by domestic anti-sex trafficking groups to amplify (and maybe exaggerate) the issue. But even with this extremely emotionally-laden rhetoric, and expanding reach, not all law enforcement agencies are aware of anti-trafficking beliefs. Amanda speaks here to the injustices still prevalent in the criminal justice system due to criminalizing prostitution.

I mean it breaks my heart when I hear of cases that have not been educated, you know officials that have not been educated by us making these really, really sad sentences like recently the young woman who was sentenced for murder for jail for defending herself against a john, that's just mind blowing to me I don't even know how. So, even though I'm in outreach I'm desperately trying to work myself out of a job through awareness and prevention so the more people we can educate then we can shut down our safehouses we don't need outreach we just educate everybody, and everybody got it and we're good. That's the goal but it really gets under my skin when I hear of other places, even the chicken nugget incident in Bradenton before we educated them, and that making and you know the horrible news story and making fun of this young woman who traded sex for chicken nuggets and like, OH HO HO that's funny, but when you really think about it when someone is so desperately hungry that they're willing to be raped for chicken nuggets that's really messed up. That's what, I just think ignorance is the biggest obstacle in the criminal justice system. And I think you can overcome that by education.

From her perspective, and many anti-trafficking advocates' perspectives, the problem would be solved by everyone accepting that sex workers are sex trafficking victims. This would stop the stigmatizing that targets sex workers in situations like the one she describes of a woman getting sentenced for murder for defending herself, and also the mockery that the woman in Bradenton had to endure. Amanda goes on to discuss other failures she sees in Florida's system.

I mean my biggest obstacle as a social worker is finding detox beds at this point that's usually the initial huge hurdle to overcome is getting a woman to detox the frustrating part is if she's not an IV user she's not a priority, so I actually had one woman go shoot up, not under my direction but just like I've heard, women have told me that they've gone and become an IV user so that they could get to detox, or that they've slit their wrists so they can be Marchman Act-ed or Baker Act-ed so that they can get into a facility and that's just... and that's just a really huge sign of a broken system in my opinion so we don't have detox beds... I can't do my job. So that's really frustrating sometimes. So that's what I think is specific to Florida as well the state funding for detox facilities affects way more than just people with addictions. It affects, cause

we're interrupting so many cycles we're not just interrupting we're not just interrupting the cycle of sex trafficking we're interrupting the addiction cycle we're interrupting the homelessness cycle we're interrupting the broken families of foster care systems cycle, people that depend on social security we're interrupting that cycle, gang violence, domestic violence, so when you remove that one piece of the puzzle like oh we don't have a bed for detox all these things continue, whereas if you just click in that one piece I can interrupt all those cycles you know, save the state, you know for every million invested in us [Recovery House] we save the state 4.6 million in incarceration fees. But if I don't have that bed for detox, I can't bring her in and again I can't do my job. So, you know Florida cut funding last year I think, and we felt it. 100% we felt it. So, stop it Florida.

This quote is integral because it discusses something that frequently is swept under the rug in anti-trafficking advocacy but is a huge contributing factor to the reality of domestic trafficking. Substance abuse is often a part of residents of Recovery House's recoveries, and yet it is not something that Recovery House provides services for- all substance abuse issues are outsourced to Alcoholic Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. Amanda here says that without detox beds, women cannot get out of the life. When I volunteered with a domestic violence shelter while conducting this research, I went to a volunteer training where potential volunteers were learning the do's and don'ts of interacting with residents. We were going over the fact that while the women have engaged in sex work and substance abuse, they were encouraged to make their own decisions and seek their own help within the shelter. A man in the training became angry and accused the shelter of just housing "drug addicted prostitutes" for free and not making them change. This interaction shows the dangers of discussing the complex nature of sex trafficking with people from the general population, as there are many stigmatized ideas about how 'drug-addicted prostitutes' need to be controlled or they are leeches on society.

Another important anti-trafficking perspective this quote brings up is the idea that they are disrupting many generational cycles through affecting individual lives. This is the way in which anti-trafficking advocates see their larger impact, even though the amount of sex-

trafficking victims that the organization actually comes into contact with is far less than the estimated millions. When the program works for survivors, this rings true- there are survivors that I have met and watched their path from fresh out of detox to now working as nail technicians or watching them buy cars to drive to their college classes. Many women are empowered through the program with mental-health support and material resources that would have taken them years more to achieve on their own. In many ways, working on the front lines of the program, the individual is the only scope that one can work on, and all of these successes are major for the woman and her family. Techeira has this to add:

So, there's a lot of social obstacles and emotional obstacles and just thinking like I can't do anything. Um, and I know this is bad, but how do I get a job, how do I finish my education when I don't know, when I just don't know how to do any of that stuff. And then I've heard just through listening to different podcasts and things that some women choose to be in the life after getting out of being sex trafficked because they only know how to satisfy a person. Or because they can't find any means to getting the correct resources to get a GED, to get a home, to get a car whatever. So, they just go back to what they're used to. Because at that point it's their only means of survival, and at that point to them it's a job, it's no longer being exploited.

Techeira here exhibits another critical understanding of the issue that anti-trafficking advocates have, which is that there is a major self-esteem issue or ingrained hopelessness to women's situations that keep them in the life. What is interesting about her framing of the issue is that she recognizes, unlike Amanda or Vanessa, that this ends up being just a job to some women. She also recognizes that people may not have the social networks or financial resources to do anything but survival sex work, which she went more in depth with.

I don't know if the state itself would play into the obstacles, but maybe if it's a financial thing, like maybe this person only grew up on a lower income side, you know, you're only taught at that point to hustle and you have to make your way whatever that may be. So at that point if they can't get a job normally or legally then what else am I gonna do I mean I already know how to do this and I know I can make money off of this so it's what I'm gonna do, somebody may be middle class and up, not saying they're not at risk because everybody is at risk but there's more resources per se that has been educated to them or shown to them just on any scale or anything or any aspect

that they probably know of. I don't know about Florida and they're resource level on things because there's so many different types of people and different kinds of resources. For me I can speak on the education at schools on sex in general is not really there so trying education somebody on sex trafficking doesn't really equate because you already don't even know about sex.

Techeira here has an interesting perspective, because she points to segregation of economic classes to different neighborhoods and that raises the risk of being in exploitative situations. While this logic makes sense, since exploitation is more likely to occur when people are in desperate situations, this is often obscured by anti-trafficking rhetoric that trafficking can happen to anyone. Another important thing Techeira brings up here is Florida specific obstacles, such as poor public school education and poor sex education as a result. Since the education system is already a detriment to Florida's youth, it is hard for advocates to educate youth about sex trafficking because there is already a hesitancy to teach children about healthy sexual relationships and practices, let alone the bad ones. Techeira went out of her way to seek out the voices of sex workers through podcasts and was aware of the debate points on either side. But she still found herself firmly on the side of criminalization, along with all the other anti-trafficking advocates I interviewed. Amanda said it clearly:

And I know that the decriminalization question is... Do you think sex work should be decriminalized, and no, I don't. I think that that would be in favor of a minority instead of a majority and where we see decriminalization happen, we see childhood sex trafficking, CHILD sex trafficking, escalate.

Due to statistics being unreliable, with many studies counting sex workers as victims of trafficking or utilizing hotline calls to make estimates of numbers of victims, both sides can make this claim because there are no definite numbers. Anti-trafficking advocates also make the claim that decriminalization of sex work leads to a rise in child sex trafficking. The idea here is that decriminalized sex work only whets the appetite for more perverted and extreme sex acts,

leading to the exploitation of children. Victoria, a twenty six year old White/Hispanic Assessment advocate, spoke on it this way.

The prevalence of the sex industry, I know when I'm driving around in Tampa, I see strip club after strip club after strip club. A lot of times, the sex industry, strip clubs, pornography, those are a lot of places where traffickers recruit girls into the life so I think anywhere where you have more of a prevalent sex industry even if it's legal it'll often contribute to illicit factors and this is something I've heard from the women they'll say you know there's a strip club with a bar in the front and in the back of the room that's where they keep the 12 year old girls. I think a lot of people think of these things as innocent like "oh boys will be boys" and they're not doing anything illegal but they're catering to a certain clientele which is a similar clientele that is also looking for our women who is also looking for people below the age of 18 for having sex which is obviously a victim of trafficking under the trafficking victims protection act so I think all of those things overlap to create a community where human trafficking and sex trafficking is happening.

Victoria puts into words this 'slippery slope' type rhetoric where if one thing is legalized, such as stripping, people will demand more and more creating more avenues for exploitation. That even the smallest allowance for sexual deviancy/freedom will elicit sex acts that should never happen. Children also are always the focus of dramatic examples for how sex work can go wrong, which makes any arguing with any anti-trafficking advocate in favor of sex work sound like one is arguing on the side of pedophiles. This conflates not only sex work with sex trafficking, but with enabling or excusing pedophilia. Here Techeira explains the Nordic, or Swedish, model that most anti-trafficking advocates support over full-criminalization practices

So, I think that the criminal justice system criminalizing sex in general is a start to why the criminal justice role, probably a huge obstacle, but I do get from the other side that if it's not considered illegal than it can go anyway, it can sprout different arms and go left. Because there's no real way of knowing if a child is involved in sex trafficking because who's asking your age? They don't care. So that's basically the debate between women and men involved in the sex trade and those who are being exploited. So, in Seattle, with their CJ system, they are arresting the johns not the girls because they feel if they can stop the demand the people involved in the sex trade, they are not making any money because you're arresting the people that want to pay. So now they're business and their clientele is down they can't pay their bills they can't do whatever

they wanna do because they're cash flow is not coming in as consistent as it was before because you're arresting the people that are payin. So, there's two sides, for the CJ situations... so it's like who do you help? But, personally with me, I agree with criminalizing it because if you consider it completely a crime you just cut out all of the ways that this can go wrong, hence sex trafficking, and yes the girls aren't making any money from it, one person is, but it's more of kids are now involved it's not even adults, it's children who they're going after it's children. So, I feel like there shouldn't be any leeway even for those that are in the sex trade because there are other ways to make money you know? Yes, it is hard to get a job or whatever that reasoning may be, but there's other ways to make money that don't involve children being exploited.
Techeira

This allows the women to be victims, makes the buyers and sellers the criminals, and keeps sex work illegal to the extent that the buying of commercial sex acts is criminalized. She says that there should be no leeway, even for women that choose to be in the sex trade, because children are involved. This is the perspective that anti-trafficking advocates are lobbying for in the criminal justice system, as well as with legislation.

Resident Perspectives

Recovery House residents have many experiences that resonate with and rebel against the perspectives of the advocates, officers, and attorney discussed above. The Recovery House residents, by virtue of being within Recovery House, are certified victims of sex trafficking and have been recognized by the above stakeholders as deserving of the care that they are now receiving. As individuals who have been identified as criminals, victims, and survivors while engaging in exchanging sex and using illegal substances, their perspectives range across the board about trafficking, as they have often only known about domestic narratives for the duration that they have been involved with Recovery House. In some cases, they applied their more recent understanding of trafficking to their past interactions with getting involved with commercial sex work. Kayla, a twenty eight year old White resident at Recovery House, put it this way.

Um, okay when did I first learn about human trafficking... probably when I started dancing when I was like 19. You know? And people like... girls would warn me about like going home with guys and don't do that and um because if you started doing that that's all you're gonna wanna do and to watch out for guys that come in and you know try to um... say things that would get you to go and work for them and things like that so... it's like def—there's some girls you know... cause I started out dancing so there's some girls who literally like you don't wanna do that cause that's all you're gonna wanna do and you're gonna get trapped. So, I was like, informed about it but I never like, did anything so. Yeah.

Here, Kayla retroactively explains that she was introduced to 'trafficking' when she was nineteen, but the situation she describes is other exotic dancers warning her away from full service sex work. As it can be seen from the advocate perspectives above, which define exchange of anything sexual for anything of value as trafficking, it is understandable that she would identify these early warnings away from full service sex work as warnings away from trafficking. Ashley, a twenty eight year old White resident at Recovery House, said this:

It was kinda like a harsh reality. It was a hard reality check that like, that's what was going on with me and just like even you know, I didn't have a trafficker at one, you know, for a while but like there were times I like trafficked myself and I wasn't involved in that whole street relationship thing but yeah it was hard for me to swallow like when I figured out that what I was involved like it was finally... like I don't know maybe it was the label or something I don't know but it was like wow that's really what's... that's... just really.. but it helped me to be like wow, I really, I don't wanna be involved in this anymore, like, this is not an ok life to live so I think it helped me to realize it.

When asked what it was like to find out about trafficking and that she was technically a trafficking victim, Ashley identifies that according to this narrative she was trafficking herself at times. This phrase is something that seems to be unique to anti-trafficking circles that carry the definition of all sex work being trafficking. This creates a situation where even without a 'pimp' or another 3rd party seller, there is still a situation of trafficking even in independent, consensual sex work. Recovery House residents internalized this narrative and would acknowledge that in

different parts of their journey they were ‘trafficking’ themselves¹¹. Being in an anti-trafficking residential home and reckoning with the idea that they were ‘traffickers’ as well left them dealing with guilt and shame about engaging with sex work. The implication was that they took part in harming themselves by engaging in sex work independently. Kourtney, a thirty five year old resident at Recovery House, had this to say.

You know, I’ve known about human trafficking most of my life um my dad was a heroin addict, so he had a girlfriend who was prostituting I think he has a kid with her we still don’t know to this day if it’s his kid or not um... I always knew about like pimps because when I was 13, I was living with my dad’s ex-girlfriend she was a stripper we would count her money together and her sister had a baby Gino with a pimp named bobby hall in my town.

Kourtney here also retroactively applies the anti-trafficking narrative she learned to her upbringing, which was enmeshed with street sex work and pimp/prostitute relationships. This quote also recognizes the variety of experiences that women who are identified as victims of sex trafficking come from. While Kourtney had been adjacent to exchanging sex work from when she was really young until sixteen when she became an escort¹², Kayla had not been exposed to the life until she was nineteen. Because of this variety of experiences that lead them to being labeled under one term, sex trafficking victim/survivor, all of them experienced difficulty identifying. They also struggled with identifying because of the inherent lack of agency that is applied with the term. Kourtney recognizes with this quote the constrained agency that she had growing up in the context that she did.

You know, for a while... I still like struggle because it makes it seem like, I was like kidnapped and made to do it and that’s where I think the disconnect for me is because it was a choice but being here has made me realize that that’s all I knew I grew up and was like that’s what I wanna do because that’s what I seen women doing I just wrote that for my story for the court system cause man. I remember at 5 years old; I

¹¹ I am basing this on how residents and staff within Recovery House would address a person engaging in commercial sex work independently.

¹² While she was under 18, this is the word that she used to describe what she was involved with at that time, even though many that consider themselves ‘escorts’ are consenting adult sex workers.

remember being like whoa these women are so beautiful this stuff is so beautiful in here this stuff is awesome! You know? So, in my little mind I was like man that's what I wanna do like I obviously didn't know the impact like and what it really meant to do those things, but I really didn't have a chance. So yeah, I mean I am a human trafficking survivor it's just still hard for me to be like... it's just hard... for me to be like yeah! you know? It's still sometimes looking at it like wow, that was my life.

With a father that struggled with substance abuse and surrounded by women engaging in the sex industry, that understandably influenced the way that she looked at exotic dancing. She sees that this altered her course in life, but she still makes a claim that she does not want to think about her situation in terms of having no responsibility over her life or over the decisions that she made, even with her background and history. For her, she recognizes that there were influences outside of her control that lead her to her life, but it was still her life and she made decisions as an agentic being. That for her was the hardest part of accepting the human trafficking narrative, because she did not want to see herself as someone who did not have agency in her life. But this is a tricky line to tread as a survivor, because claiming one's agency while engaging in commercial sex acts could render someone underserving in the eyes of police or NGO actors.

Kayla spoke about stigma.

Looked at the same way I guess um... I do feel like there's a, if I'm using the right word, stigma? Is that the right word? That people see women who have been in a situation like me as, like um and there's also people that just have no clue whatsoever so I do feel like we're looked at in a certain way by some people and other people we're not like they don't even know that's something you know... that girls being trafficked is even going on in their neighborhood.

When asked if all women in similar situations to them were treated the same way by the criminal justice system, women said that there were differences depending on who was looking at them and what the individual woman's journey looked like. Kayla here points to that stigma that sex work carries, especially if people are not privy to the domestic sex trafficking narratives. So, this is similar to what Recovery House advocate Amanda was discussing, in terms of training

different law enforcement actors to look at women as victims so they will not be criminalized.

Ashley speaks about the different ways that women act that get them different treatment from the police.

Some girls keep to themselves, they're quiet and they go on to the streets and do what they need to do and go back, and then there other ones that are out there being like, you know, all like crazy and causing like scenes and stuff so it's like... I guess they are treated differently. But yeah, now that I think about it, there was a time where one of the girls I knew she came back and she was like crying, because she was so upset about how the police were making fun of her and this that and the other because of the way she was acting and dadada and I was sitting there thinking I've never had and she kept saying they keep doing this to me and dadada and I was like I've never had the cops do that to me, and I guess it's like, I don't wanna say carry yourself but just the way you act when you're out there you know?

Ashley here gives an example of her and another woman who were both engaged in street sex work that were treated very differently based on their level of public disruption. This aligns with Jeff, the police officer, view of getting people off the street as a public good and considered cleaning up the street. If a woman is discreet, then officers do not engage with her much or treat her unkindly. If a woman is loud and disruptive then that changes her alignment from victim to criminal and she is treated accordingly. Kourtney adds this:

Maybe we were looked at the same way by society but we all view ourselves differently, that's, it's so funny because it's just such a variety of ways of seeing us women identify ourselves in the way we justify it and the way we turn it and its not... you know it's just but I think as society as a whole they just make up their mind that we're trash you know even if you put human trafficking survivor people only assume that that's girls that are trafficked in another country and taken and kidnapped like there's no like us domestic trafficked girls are survivors of human trafficking which is not true but like I think even for me it took a long time to realize that and understand, um mind control, understand manipulation and how it's controlling without like being locked in a room or something you know?

Kourtney here also mentions the variety of ways that women in similar situations look at themselves. This is something that is also critical to the way that one is identified as deserving of services for trafficking victims, as those who do not take up the mantle of victim and survivor

narratives eventually are revoked of the services. Kourtney also recognizes that the stigma in society against being engaged with exchanging sex is extreme, and the only survivors of sex trafficking that seem to be free from that stigma are those that are kidnapped from other countries. The domestic anti-trafficking narrative is much more convoluted because there are discussions of agency, the influence of substance abuse, and requires people to look at the desperation and exploitation within the United States. There is also the complicated task of explaining abusive relationships to a broad audience. As Kourtney even says, even as someone who had lived through multiple abusive relationships it was difficult to grasp the level of manipulation that rooted itself in her psyche and life. For Kourtney to admit this shows how much therapy work and other resources she had received at that point in her journey. She admitted herself she used to own being a 'prostitute' because if she owned it, from her perspective no one could hurt her with it. As someone presenting as a fully in control, agentic and proud street sex worker, she had adverse experiences with stakeholders in the criminal justice system that did not recognize her as a victim.

I don't remember his name off the top of my head but there was an officer in St Pete, and you know he worked the streets like out off Surry and like you know took pictures of my tattoos, which I have to lift up my shirt. They're on my sides and stuff, and I was like shouldn't we call a woman cop to take these? And he was like, "oh not unless you want your purse searched." Well of course I'm not gonna want my purse searched, you know, cause there's dope in there. So, I do it for him and he lets me go but that's the kinda stuff I'm talking about. Like you're not supposed to do that!... and like I've had a cop trick with me and set me up to be charged. He tricked with me at the Rand hotel 34th street I will never forget. And then he took me, I said "Could you take me to get something?" And he drove me to south St Pete to the hood and then had me surrounded for possession of cocaine and I'm like that Fucker! So, them are some of my bad experiences with cops and like you're branded I've had em come back 2 hours later and say he looked through the car I was already in custody and he found cocaine in the car 2 hours later. And I could argue all day but my attorney's like "they're gonna get on the stand and say you were the last one in that car." It wasn't my cocaine, I have no reason to lie, but because I had prior cocaine charges... So, it's, it's my experience has been rough with the cops because I've been in the system all my life both my parents are in the system my step father is in the system so you, you get branded.

Kourtney acknowledges the layered stigma that she was facing, not only because she was engaged in sex work and substance use, but also because her family had been involved with the criminal justice system and therefore the system was already biased against her. Because of these layered stigmas, and the fact that she did not act like a victim, it was permissible and easy for different people within the criminal justice system to take advantage of her. Mia, a Black twenty three year old Recovery House resident, describes a similar situation.

One time I was on a call and the guy pulled a gun on me and had a knife and just raped me and left me there at this park, naked. And I was screaming, like I didn't know what to do, so I was screaming, and some people came down from their apartment that was across the street. Which I found out later that was actually the rehab that I ended up at. So, they come out and they give me some clothes and called the police. So, the police come, and the people leave and leave me with the police, and I tell the police what happened. And they're like, "okay, okay, and they're like what can we do for you ma'am?" And I'm like, "you can take me back to this hotel I'm staying at?" And they're like "oh, a hotel? So, you're a hoe." Basically. Yeah. And they said, "ma'am we're not a taxi cab service." And they left me. In the street. Didn't even acknowledge... it was maybe six minutes away, the hotel I was staying at, and they wouldn't take me.

While they all acknowledge that not all officers were cruel to them, and some were kind and wanted to get them help, many also had stories of extreme mistreatment at the hands of police because they were street sex workers that also were using illegal substances. In this situation, officers explicitly stopped treating her like a victim as soon as she exhibited signs of being a sex worker, namely living in a hotel. This was even after she had been violently raped, and her clothes were taken—leaving her very vulnerable to the same circumstance if she were to try to walk back to this hotel. The officers made the decision that crime enacted against a street sex worker was not worth their time preventing, and her life not worth their time protecting.

Kourtney also acknowledges this:

I coulda used some help probably! Not saying like man, I should help myself, like ok, but I didn't have a lot of tools necessary. And I feel like, you know as a criminal justice

system instead of taking them everybody and imprisoning them and sending us back right to the same life we came from. Change could be done. It could be... look at TYLA court look at the places out here like that they're... you know what I mean? Of course, a person's gotta want it, I don't know, it's sad, it's a sad, sad cycle... I've had my public defender even trick with me (laughs) I've really been through some funny things and again like you can't hold the whole system accountable for one person but like as a whole they've just failed me I've thought that since the very beginning even when I was young in the foster care system they've failed me as a whole and as a society you've failed the children you know it's not even just me and my brother... you know?

Kourtney acknowledges not only the systemic issues in the criminal justice system that discounted her, but also the foster care system that her and her brothers were put into that was inadequate. Throughout her journey as a part of a criminal family, she had been under the surveillance of state actors, and yet none of the many people involved in those systems offered her help. From her perspective, they had just been looking to control her rather than to offer her any means to a better life. Instead she encountered a cycle of punishment, from system to system, with many not recognizing her as someone in a situation of sex trafficking, even though she was engaged in exchanging sex since she was sixteen. Ashley said this on the topic:

Sometimes you run into cops that are like very rude and they're sometimes very nasty and I don't know they're like, they're out to just... you know it's like they don't care, and there's other police that do care so I don't know if I told you this so I had some clean time for like 20 or so months and it was like the difference from the police then to like then to when I relapsed like years later it was like really nice cause they had more understanding instead of pulling you over and being like what can we do to like attack this girl or take her to jail or this that and the other and just kinda you know looking for all these things and wanting to like... it was more of wanting to get to know you and wanting to help and what they could do and just kinda like know your backstory and like yeah there was a few before but not that many, so it was nice to see the difference in that.

Many residents went from being treated like criminals by the police to being treated like victims because of the training that Recovery House provides in the area and the growing prevalence of the anti-human trafficking narrative. Ashley was engaged in street sex work for seven years, and in that time Recovery House was founded and gained more and more influence

with local law enforcement. She saw the difference between the police force before and after the intervention of Recovery House, and for her that was very empowering. She acknowledges before it was as if law enforcement was trying to attack her, and after they approached her very differently, asking if she was alright and treating her like a human being. This speaks to the power of narratives that we tell about different groups of people and the influence they have over the way we treat others. Because officers were trained in a more humanizing and sympathetic narrative about this criminal activity, instead of generalizing these same people as “bad guys” they became people who became deserving of help. Mia noticed this in her experience:

I thought I was being harassed, I thought nothing but bad things about the court system about these cops that kept pulling me over and, you know I thought they were just trying to lock me up, but later when I was in rehab the detectives came to see me and what they were trying to do was that they were trying to separate me from my trafficker to get information they were trying to help me the whole time. But a few times they came to my hotel room and knocked on the door and they tried to extract me from the situation and I wasn't ready to talk and they told me that they were always there when I was ready and that was in Duval county, that's where I kept getting arrested. And every time I got in the car with them, cause every time they took me to jail for something, and they would talk to me, and there was an officer who would always talk to me and make conversation and I was so inebriated I thought he was flirting with me or something so I didn't know why he kept talking to me but he was trying to get information from me casually to help him build his case against my trafficker. When he came to be in rehab, he told me all this stuff that he had noted that I had said that proved that the relationship between me and him was like a prostitution, a pimp, a trafficker deal. So, I was amazed by that, I was just flapping my yap you know?

This quote is interesting because it highlights that often many women were actively engaged in illegal substance use when interacting with the police, which altered the way that they viewed interacting with the police. Not only this, but this highlights what it feels like to the women when officers use the multiple arrests tactic in order to get them away from their traffickers and to get information. Mia was disdainful and resentful of the police as it was happening, because they were harassing her. But in retrospect, from her new context within a rehabilitation program and with around ten months of sobriety under her belt, she sees what they

were trying to do and is grateful for it. The last time she got arrested she was able to use the bogus arrest to get away from her trafficker. This ended up being very fortuitous not only because she was able to get sober and get therapy and other resources, but also because he ended up killing a woman shortly after she left. With this kind of situation, it is easy to see how one can say that the arrest saved her life. Many of the women engaged with the diversion program often were very sympathetic and grateful towards law enforcement and Recovery House because of the change in labeling from criminal to victim that afforded them resources. Kourtney often raved about Recovery House:

Recovery House is different than anything you'll ever come into contact with in your life, um I've been in the system all my life since I was young I've been going to rehabs since I was 14 and so never do you feel like number one we live in a house and so it's not institutional like and it feels like a family here it feels like, like almost like, I can't explain it like a getaway in like your life and I like that we talk about like it's not um... a lot of rules, there is rules but like the way that they implement them it's like you have a choice you have an opinion about like the things going on because like when you make people do stuff yeah like I can do anything that you make me do for an extended period of time but if my heart doesn't change in the process I'm not gonna make it. And so with Recovery House you get to talk about your feelings and like oh I didn't like how you talked to me today and I still get to have a voice in that and like I've never got that before and I think that... and that they keep us away from guys because I've always in my other programs had a guy I was sleeping with and because of that I still couldn't look at what was broken inside of me because I was getting that void filled by that guy so I wasn't willing to look at it and here I had no choice but to look at it because I didn't have them outside distractions to fill that for me and I've never not had that since I was a little girl I had some kinda guy filling my cup so I think Recovery House is hard but it's worth it and your heart will change if you really want it.

Many of the women at Recovery House said that Recovery House was the first program that they encountered that actually felt like people cared about them and the variety of issues they face. Something that seems to be revolutionary about Recovery House's ethic is that it is very therapy based and loving. The women within the program are encouraged to feel their feelings, whether or not those feelings are in agreement with Recovery Houses rules or

individual advocates. This was very jarring for Kourtney, who had been in and out of programs almost her entire life.

I matter. I get to have a voice and like this is the thing about Recovery House is like my opinion matters, if nothing else just for like, the moment to just hear somebody say it's okay you can be angry. I've never had anybody tell me like I get to be angry, like whoa what?

Kourtney speaks to the freedom to feel that she had not encountered so openly before like she had at Recovery House. Recovery House also makes a point to make the program individualized for every woman that comes through the doors, which not only means adhering to each woman's case plan as dictated by different courts and state actors. It also means listening to what churches they want to go to, what volunteer activities they are interested in, what therapist they like the most, and what careers and schooling they are interested in pursuing. Therefore, the women's voices have sway over what opportunities and resources will be procured for them while they remain at Recovery House and following the rules of the program. Mia had this to say:

But I know to be a successful healthy human being I need the values and the principles and the discipline I've learned here, that I'm learning here, because they're not something that I had in my life. I never did a chore a day in my life before, that's just one example. I didn't know how to operate like as a part of a team, I was only concerned with my concerns and the concerns of others did not phase me I came in like a complete dog eat dog attitude, very aggressive. And getting the thing I wanted, you know, I've learned so much better ways to deal with people being here. Coming to Recovery House I didn't know what ya'll had to offer, but I knew ya'll had something better than I had. And I just remember that, on the days that are hard, and I don't wanna be here I just remember the complete desperation for better that I came into the program with, and how things went when I was doing it my way. And another thing, Recovery House is not just a dust you off send you back out there program. All the things I need to ensure success, with working with the team that I have here, I will leave with them. Like all the things that could become roadblocks on my own, here I overcome with a team.

Mia here recognizes the multiple needs that are met by adhering to the rules of Recovery House. She recognizes she needs discipline and collaboration skills that are taught at Recovery

House that are more internal, while at the same time acknowledging that she has a team of people that will get her material and social capital needs met before she leaves to give her a strong foundation to be a ‘successful’ person. While staying within the program means no contact with any friends and family until they are approved, no cigarettes, no movies or shows rated “PG” or above unless they are approved, dietary restrictions, and mandatory groups on self-esteem or daily chores, many women submit to these requirements. Mia, by staying within the guidelines of the program, has taken college courses, gotten a job, and gotten a car and housing. All of this, for the same person that was once branded a ‘hoe’ by police and left on the street. Her experiences being labeled as deserving of resources shows how powerful the label of sex trafficking survivor is for achieving a far different lifestyle. When the women were asked what they would tell a woman considering the Recovery House program, Kourtney had this to say.

I promise you; you will not leave here in the same way you walked in, not if you do the work. And pain has to be felt at some point you can run and run. And I’ve ran all my life, but at some point, all you’re doing is adding to it. But at some point, in order to get to the other side, you have to feel it. It’s okay, it won’t kill you, I promise. I never thought that I could feel the pain that was inside of me, and I’m like whoa it wasn’t even that bad what happened. I mean it wasn’t great, but I’m alive and I’m okay. And in that pain, I’ve found purpose for the rest of my life.

Many residents promoted the transition from victim to survivor as an integral transition that would be worth the pain of digging up old wounds and submitting to the requirements of the program. The perks of trauma therapy and adopting the perspective that one’s pain was for something or contributes to some larger scheme is very empowering for many women, while at the same time restrictive. Survivor narrative particulars will be explored further in the evaluative criteria section, but it is important to recognize that all residents fluctuate between identifying as survivors of sex trafficking and feeling troubled with the label even as they must submit to it for resources.

Sex Worker Perspectives

Sex workers are another stakeholder population within the nexus of anti-human trafficking. From law enforcement perspectives, they are either criminals or victims because of their engagement in the illegal activity of commercial sex acts. From advocate perspectives, they are all victims of trafficking or they cannot choose sex work from a place of health or true agentic choice. Because of these beliefs about sex workers, they are roped into the discourse of anti-trafficking as what is truly being debated is whether or not sex work is a morally acceptable occupation or if it is inherently exploitative. Of the sex workers I interviewed, many had different perspectives on these ideas. LDH is shorthand for Living Dead Hooker¹³, which is the twitter handle of this participant and how she wanted to be referred to within the research. LDH is White woman who is fifty seven years old.

I like my independence and I don't need someone telling me what to do. This is running your own business, so I am very, very capable of running my own business. I enjoy that. I, like Living Dead Hooker always says, I enjoy the freedom in between dick! It's that freedom in there. It's the modality of sex work that I love. It's just independence and the freedom to do what I want. I love it.

Contrary to ideas that sex work can never be agentic, or that there is no freedom in sex work, LDH states that sex work gives her an independence she would not have with other jobs. Kristen, a thirty four year old White woman, speaks to the inability to pay bills and survive even with two jobs

It pays my bills in a manner in which I have not been able to pay my bills working a regular job, working a civilian job, I just was not able to pay my bills in that manner. I was homeless, I worked two jobs I worked at a gas station and in a phone room, and I worked 62 hours a week and I was still homeless. And, sex work took me out of that. So, there's that benefit that I can pay my bills, and also it allows me to have a lot of time to... I wanna say free time, but I've found, I facilitate for a non-profit, so it's allowed me to volunteer a lot of my time to that non-profit.

¹³ This is her twitter handle and is part of her advertising and public persona.

. With the high earning rates and a smaller amount of time on the clock that sex work provides, she is able to found and work on a non-profit organization as well as pay her bills, which is leagues away from being homeless. Yet while sex work is perfect for some, it is not perfect for all. Annie, a twenty four year old White woman, had this to say.

So, I am a stripper, and I've engaged in survival... there's a research term for it right? Survival sex work, where it's like I don't want to be doing it, but I need to be doing it right now. So, I've done that since I was 18... 17, I guess.

Annie does not want to be doing sex work and feels disgusted by it, even though she is technically engaged in sex work that is legal, she classifies her experiences in the desire industry as survival based. She continued:

But I find that my life is very unpredictable, I was a graduate student and I was planning on getting a stipend this semester and because of some administrative shit that happened I'm not enrolled and I don't have any money coming through so it's like mmm... rents due, and the paycheck that I was counting on is not here, it's not coming. And I do not have a system of friends that I feel comfortable, or family, I do not feel comfortable asking anyone to pay my rent, whether it's because I don't want to feel indebted to them or because I know that they can't afford that shit either, they're taking care of themselves. Um, yeah, it's the money and the freedom, especially being an artist too.

Though Annie dislikes working at the strip club, she recognizes many reasons why it is the best fit for her life right now, and those reasons are the instability of her material, financial, and social situation. She does not have a support system that can help her financially, and her funding for graduate school fell through so she was unable to attend. Through working at the strip club, she is able to maintain her independence and pay her bills, as well as support her art through the free time and finances she maintains through her dancing. While Annie does not feel empowered by her work, others feel differently about their sex work. Kristen finds sex work empowering, and the other participants felt the same.

It's empowering. It's empowering, I went from being homeless to not only taking care of myself but taking care of my friends. I've grown an organization that in the past two

years is now getting media attention. It's allowed me to reach out to street based outreach, it's helped me reach out to individuals on the street as far as helping them get supplies and healthcare and it... it taught me a lot about myself and a lot about the values of those around me, and not just in a monetary sense.

Because of the freedom, they are able to do things that they normally would not be able to do. For Kristen, that is working on her NGO and giving back to others through street outreach. For LDH, it is being able to run her own business. For Brie, a forty nine year old White woman, she feels empowered by emotionally and physically affecting another human being. She was having issues dating before she entered the sex trade, and she found a lot of personal satisfaction in sex work. In her words,

And actually, with casual dating before I found sex work, I actually felt broken and was having problems with dating and I very much enjoyed the sex work because when someone leaves, I don't feel dumped I just go shopping. Where casual dating they don't call back you feel dumped, you feel hurt and you start overeating.

For Brie it was empowering in the sense that she was being fulfilled in her intimate relationships through this outlet instead of through dating, which was unsatisfying for her. Brie also has a retail job, so this job provides her with a free form second job that brings her extra spending money that allows her to do and buy more things that she normally would not be able to afford. Opal, a fifty eight year old White woman, has different reasons why sex work is empowering for her.

It really fits in with my life, in ways I'll go into in a moment, I would be very, very hard pressed to find any other occupation that had anything like the income potential that I have in this business, that would also accommodate my limitations which are actually many. Personally, I am disabled, I hate to talk about it like that but I struggle with hurdles, I've carried a bipolar diagnosis since my teens and when I was younger I was suicidally depressed a lot and when I was younger I attempted suicide several times in my twenties...

For Opal, sex work enables her to accommodate many obstacles in her life that would not be accommodated in a traditional work environment. Mental illness still has stigma around it in

the United States, despite advocates speaking out and many people being affected by mental illnesses. This is especially difficult for some to understand because it can be considered an invisible disability, where it is not blatantly obvious looking at the person what their obstacles are. For someone in the United States, asking for mental health days or understanding around surrounding suicide attempts is very detrimental to the worker, who is then looked at as not as competitive as someone who can endure the work environment and conditions without any accommodations for forty or more hours a week. Opal continues:

From a mental health perspective, from a physical health perspective I have a cluster of disabilities and you can sum them all up by saying my brain is mis-wired, so there's the mood disorder I also have pretty severe essential tremor that really hinders my ability to do all kinds of things that require motor dexterity and for the past... and it seems like longer but for the past 5 or 6 years I have been, and I will use the word suffering here, with fibromyalgia. The pain and the fatigue really knocks you out, that kind of relentless, bone deep pain really wears you down. And it hinders my mobility. A lot of job options that I would be willing to consider would be really difficult for me...

This is compounded for Opal because of her physical disabilities. Between fibromyalgia and her tremor, it would be near impossible for her to have a very physical job such as working in a warehouse or construction. The tremor also limits jobs that would require fine motor skills, like factory work or embroidery. Opal also had another area to address:

And there's one more thing in that third area, my family, I have two kids, one of whom is diagnosed autistic and the other of whom has had, well, we decided to take her out of public school when she was vomiting every day, and just random periods of nausea and vomiting, and it was becoming a nightmare to get accommodations for her from the school to deal with this. Her brother, the autistic one, we had taken out from public school 6 months prior because he had gotten to the point... where he would curl up and hide in his closet and pretend to be unresponsive because the whole situation stressed him out so much... It came to the point where we would need to make it our life's work to get him to school every day, and probably have to drug him and otherwise traumatize him in the process, or we just say fuck public school... On the other hand, that increases the responsibility on me because they are home and they need constant supervision and I need to make sure they get educational experiences of enough variety and quantity that they are gonna be able to survive as adults... I don't have the kind of freedom to pursue a career that would require the time of like, a nine to five job. I'm needed at home, to take care of them, that's my job! Which, nobody is paying me for.

Opal also is empowered by sex work to be the mother that she needs to be for her children. While many posit that those engaged in commercial sex work cannot be good mothers, there are many that choose sex work precisely because they want to be good mothers and offer their children opportunities that they themselves were never able to have. For Opal, sex work lets her be there to provide for her children financially as well as with her time. But even though sex work is so empowering for people and offers women facing adversity ways to overcome on their own, there is still stigma and detriments to exchanging sex. Living Dead Hooker explains some of the dangers of people finding out that one is engaged in sex work.

Stigma encompasses a lot of things. Stigma meaning- well, say the neighbors find out they could turn you in so you're pretty much at their disposal. I mean you pretty much have to be really nice to them or, or not, I mean cause once the neighbors find out they'll be coming over your house at 12 o'clock you know midnight wanting a blowjob that's just the way it works out stigma that will do that and we're not allowed to what, call the cops? We're not allowed to do anything I just have to have to be nice to all these people that're assholes towards me. Soon as they find out stigma kicks in you know if they find out about that sex work so it kicks in and let's see what else... what isn't beneficial if you're going out with someone and they find out they're going to get mad and then they're going to just wreak havoc upon you. So that's stigma and it is so I have no recourse it's like I have to take I have to take my beating. So that's not so beneficial.

She says that because the stigma on sex work is so great, it puts the sex workers at the mercy of anyone that finds out, because the information could ruin them if it is disseminated to the wrong people. People utilize the stigma to take advantage of sex workers, which leaves them vulnerable to whatever they may want. Similarly to the stories that residents from Recovery House told about incidences where they were identified as criminals, many sex workers live with the stigma of criminalization because they do not see themselves as victims of trafficking, nor do they want to do anything other than sex work because of the various ways it fills gaps of disparity in their lives. LDH spoke of it this way:

Well, typical experience with the cops they would treat me like garbage. They feel superior, they don't feel the need to treat me with respect. They don't feel any need for that. I'm at the mercy of their emotional state and they actually treat me like a murderer.

Because they are not victims in the eyes of law enforcement stakeholders, that puts them into the category of criminal. Criminals are treated accordingly, and Living Dead Hooker has felt the brunt of that in her life. As someone who was homeless and utilized survival sex to get the resources she needed to survive, she has been harassed and taken advantage of by police, and unlike Recovery House residents, has never seen an upside to this antagonism. If anything, she has only seen it evolve. Brie is also antagonized by criminalization:

I don't like the fact that it's illegal, I don't like the fact that I have to hide it, and I don't like the fact I can't rent out my spare room to someone else without fear that they will be arrested as a trafficker because they're living off the proceeds of prostitution or I can't rent out to another girl because then it becomes a brothel and that's against the law. So, I have to keep myself very emotionally and socially private for the fear of damaging them and incriminating them by association.

Brie discusses here other vulnerabilities that sex workers are prone to because of anti-trafficking laws and prostitution laws in the United States. It can be less dangerous for sex workers to work together in the sense that they are not so isolated if a violent buyer does come buy or an angry neighbor comes to the door, but it puts them in danger with state actors because they could be charged with trafficking or, like Brie mentions, operating a brothel. These further isolates sex workers from one another and potential social support networks that could keep their working environments safe. Many sex workers, like Living Dead Hooker, point out the hypocrisy in the domestic anti-trafficking movement as much of the efforts are targeting sexual labor over all kinds of labor exploitation.

OK human trafficking... I'm just gonna say the one definition you get off of the site human trafficking site it's modern day slavery, involves the use of force fraud or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act. The thing is 80+ percent of human trafficking is *labor* trafficking, so you got to think construction hospitality

and agriculture that's labor trafficking. Now sex trafficking gets all the attention, and you know why? Cause sex sells, and that's what gets them the attention and the money. It's attention and money. Now, in reality trafficking means whatever the speaker wants it to mean at that given moment. They like to use that sex trafficking thing it gets them money, and attention, and headlines. I'm just saying all those all those laborers, hospitality agriculture, construction, nail salons and all that it's just it's shame you know?

They often see this as a moralistic undertaking and judgements around society's perceptions of right/wrong ways of having sex and see the term 'trafficking' utilized in many crusades against vastly different things depending on the political agenda of the speaker. Brie notes how this umbrellas sex workers with sex trafficking victims:

Human trafficking is being swindled lied to taken advantage of lied to in order to put the person in a position where they are now vulnerable. Human trafficking is forced or coercion in some sort of method where the person feels like they have to. Human trafficking is not necessarily sex trafficking, human trafficking is a much wider issue than just sex. And I feel like that is overlooked because too many people conflate sex work with trafficking.

Sex workers are very cognizant of being conflated with sex trafficking victims, not only because of the consequences of laws and policies which treat them as such, but also because of the rhetoric of policy makers and anti-trafficking advocates. The false equivocation of all sex work as being inherently exploitative, as perpetuated by anti-trafficking advocates and some stakeholders within law enforcement, shows itself in the real-life consequences that sex workers navigate on the line between the criminal/victim dichotomy that the anti-trafficking narrative has placed sex work within. Brie asks an important question—who is being directly hurt by adult consensual sex work?

When in fact, I am challenging- why is it a crime? Who is being hurt by it? Who benefits from it being criminalized when all I see is negatives of it being criminalized? The criminalization itself removes power from the worker the criminalization itself puts fear in the worker, and it tells anyone else who may be considering getting violent that we are a throwaway person by society and so we are fair game to be attacked. So, if someone tells me that they don't feel it's a valid job they've got a preconceived idea and they're not really willing to listen to us. I get that all the time on twitter when I get

blocked by people who are running anti-trafficking organizations, people who promote anti-trafficking organizations, and they tell me that for me to be a supportive advocate of sex work I must actually be a pimp in disguise. Because no one would actually choose this.

Anti-trafficking advocates quoted above say that adult consensual sex work encourages trafficking in minors and other non-consenting parties, but is that not a separate crime that should be dealt with on a different scale? Brie is pointing out that bias towards all sex work as violence against women and children construct sex workers who consensually engage as part of a problem rather than a separate situation all together. This is how consensual sex workers are then cast as perpetrators or criminals that only further the agenda of exploiters. This also shows how casting women as non-agentic, individualized victims to sexual exploitation does not allow space for women's agency in sex work to be a neutral topic. As people must present or be interpreted as non-agentic and manipulated to be cast as victims, the same non-agentic and manipulated characteristics also explain people who choose sex work as deviant criminals. The idea that no one can choose sex work places victims of trafficking and 'prostitutes' as being too ignorant or too manipulated to understand the implications of what they are doing. This tension builds as we get into more aspects of the criminalization of sex work versus the expungement of crimes for sex trafficking. Kristen brings up an important Florida law in this quote:

Well number one cause Florida has the sunshine law and so everything is public record, so then her assault is public record but also her chosen profession becomes public record. And whatever location that assault happened at so god forbid that assault happened at her home, now her real name, her home, and her chosen profession of sex work is on public record. And that opens her up to stalkers and blackmail by both police and et cetera. That strengthens the inability to go get a job or move and not have your landlord kick you out and all those types of things.

Chapter 119 of the 2018 Florida Statutes outline the policy of government agencies, including the courts and their records, of being accessible to the public. While there are protections for people to request redaction of social security numbers and bank accounts that

may accidentally slip into court records for no fee, there is no such provision outlined for addresses or occupation. Even if court records could be redacted without paying a fee, there would still be a window of time that all of that information would be accessible to the public, making that sex worker extremely vulnerable to exploitation. It also threatens the security of their home and their jobs outside of sex work. All of these compounding factors make it extremely difficult for sex workers to seek protection after a crime is committed against them, in addition to making it difficult for them to report crimes that are committed against someone else. Brie brings up another important downside to the criminalization of sex work, which is that it criminalizes those that admit to being involved and therefore it makes it a lot harder for multiple stakeholders to get a grasp on whether or not sex work is happening consensually or non-consensually. Brie says this on the subject:

So much of the money is wasted chasing after consensual sex workers there's no money left to help people that truly do need it. And from what I've seen and read and the experiences I've had personally, the decriminalization of sex work would allow those who do spot it, see it, are aware of it, to report it without being criminalized themselves. And then you would allow the person in an anti-trafficking organization be able to freely ask someone and get an honest answer, but who is possibly going to give an honest answer when the answer will incriminate you. And you would be able to target people that need help so much faster if you could come out and ask them, "honey are you working for someone else? Is he forcing you to do this?" Do you need someplace to go are you okay? If you could actually ask these questions without someone having to hedge around the subject because for someone to even admit they're doing it is a criminal act, it hinders you as a rescuer and it is insulting to me as someone who doesn't need rescuing.

Because no one can talk about it outright without the threat of penalty and stigma, people must approach asking about involvement in the sex trade sideways and therefore may make arbitrary judgements about whether someone is a criminal or a victim in these circumstances. Many sex workers, because of this, are adverse to any law enforcement involvement even at the risk of themselves and others to violence, because the legal framework that is in place now is

much more violent towards sex workers. Living Dead Hooker points out that reporting can have graver consequences for the theoretical victim than not reporting:

They have them getting fucked at one joint and then fucked at another joint you toss them around especially like foster care. You gonna throw her in foster care? No. I'm not telling. I just wouldn't tell! Because you could be taking out of one situation and you could be throwing her into an even more fucked up situation. I don't know it's probably a screwed up way, but I wouldn't turn her in though I would see where she was headed. If she wanted to leave, I would help her. But report? I don't know. I'd help her out I wouldn't call the cops though.

When asked if they would report an instance of sex trafficking if they would report it to authorities, the participants that readily identified as sex workers said they would have to know for sure what would happen to themselves and the person who they were reporting the crime for before getting officers involved. This not only makes it more difficult to police crime, but it also keeps victims at risk for exploitation because those that would know best that there is someone practicing sex work against their will are too afraid to report it. This also puts sex workers at risk, as they feel strongly that they would want to investigate a situation themselves or try and help the woman themselves before getting the police involved. Brie says she would have to have full confidence before reporting:

I would have to have full confidence that the other person would be found at fault. And considering that the majority of police disregard a prostitute as a reliable witness, I have no confidence that even if I were to be beaten or stabbed that I would get justice through the police. So, I personally would not go to the police with anything if it was related in any way to my sex work... I also know many girls who are afraid that a police officer in the practice of arresting them could rape them. Because even in this state they are allowed to have sexual contact with someone who is in their custody and then they can claim it was consensual and they're covered. So, no I don't trust the police in any way when it comes to sexual activities of any kind. So, sending them in as rescuers is very problematic because in many cases they have been cited as being the aggressor, sexually, while the person is in custody. And this is because being as sex work has been made a crime, nobody has to listen to a sex worker as having a valid viewpoint or needing to be saved in any way from criminals and so it's okay to commit crimes against them.

Many sex workers in Florida believe that the police can have sexual contact with a person and then put that person in jail. While the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's Ethical Standards of conduct page lists "Police officers shall not knowingly make false accusations of any criminal ordinance, traffic or other law violation. This provision shall not prohibit the use of deception during criminal investigations or interrogations as permitted under law;" and, "Police officers shall not, in the course of performing their duties, engage in any sexual contact or conduct constituting lewd behavior, including but not limited to, showering or receiving a massage in the nude, exposing themselves or otherwise making physical contact with the nude or partially nude body of any person, except as pursuant to a written policy of the Department," it was exhibited in the interviews with Recovery House residents that they had experienced these behaviors at the hands of police and those officers never came to justice. Because of testimonies like the ones of Recovery House residents, who all spent time as street sex workers in the time that they were experiencing sex trafficking, makes it reasonable that sex workers would have such views of interacting with law enforcement despite law enforcements clear ethical code of conduct. Kristen also notes that reaching out to law enforcement is unsafe:

No, the police aren't safe. Reaching out to police just makes you more vulnerable to more crimes. Not to mention if you go to the cops and you say, "Hey, I'm a hooker and this guys just did this to me" more often than not they're just gonna arrest you too. Hey, did you know that Florida is one of the few states in this country that it is perfectly okay for a police officer to fuck a prostitute and then arrest her for prostitution? So not only doesn't she get paid, but she gets locked up in a cage and oh and to boot in order to put her in that cage the cop raped her. Because, going back to consent, she did not consent to any of that. It is perfectly ok for them to sleep with a prostitute and then arrest her for prostitution. And they call it, investigation.

This comment is in direct conflict with Jeff's, one of the police officers interviewed for this project, view of investigation of sex work. Jeff said that due to following the constitution and restrictive rules about nudity for police officers, it was extremely difficult to actually charge

someone with prostitution. But as is discussed later in regard to police behavior, many officers have very different styles in regard to enforcement. Annie feels the same way:

Well I have not been trafficked nor have I ever witnessed anyone who was being trafficked so that question doesn't apply. But I definitely would like if I thought my neighbors were doing some weird shit and I saw a bunch of girls leaving I would... na, not even then, like I would try and do shit by myself like I do not fuck with the police at all. I mean when someone stole my money, I called them up I told them what happened but like... eh... nnn... n n ('No' noise).

Even Annie, who does not enjoy sex work, nor wants to do it, feels that she would not report without investigating herself. The threat of criminalization and the repercussions of getting police officers involved is so pervasive that even people within the desire industries that do not want to be, or feel that exchanging sex is wrong, do not want to align themselves with the criminalizing practices that exist today. Brie brings up the point that the lasting effects of criminalization would hurt someone much more than the physical violence they may be experiencing today.

The fact that I would have to admit that I recognized human trafficking because I am a prostitute. That I might have found out about it due to my prostitution, that I would be afraid that the person would be arrested instead of just helped, because so often when the police respond the police's standard respond is just to arrest and the arrest can be more harmful to them in the future than just maybe a black eye today. The only experience I've ever had with somebody being arrested it has been more harmful to them than helpful in any way. And most of the times that the rescue industry reports an incidence of human trafficking an arrest is going to happen. And, standardly, it is the so called victim who is arrested. So, I don't see in most cases that anti-human trafficking networks are helpful, because their first line of defense is to send the cops. And the cops in my opinion are more harmful than good all across the spectrum when it comes to arresting a prostitute, especially responding to a human trafficking situation.

Because the practice of criminalization creates social and material hurdles that outlast a bruise, physical violence is outweighed. Neither should be acceptable, but in order to survive and act in solidarity with others engaged in the commercial exchange of sex, it is a decision that must be made. She also points out the carceral practices of the anti-trafficking movement, which

utilizes arrests in order to put pressure on victims to need their services in order to get expungements or otherwise help with charges after the arrests happen. For those that do not want to engage with anti-trafficking diversion programs, this only further puts them into a place where they do not have other viable economic options than sex work. Many sex workers are caught up in this because often they are profiled as being sex trafficked in larger stings. Kristen mentions this:

But then again Florida has those sunshine state laws so that can all be made public record. We see that in the Robert Craft case, where they touted that as human trafficking, human trafficking, human trafficking, and then when it comes down to it, it was all just prostitution and it was consensual prostitution. I've been speaking in Tallahassee about it and held a press conference in Orlando about it... yeah, it's ridiculous. There was not a single arrest for trafficking, not a single charge for human trafficking in those 300 something odd arrests and now there are 14 women sitting in cages. Because they were consensually doing things so that they could pay their bills.

The Robert Craft case Kristen referenced here is a case of a massage parlor sting that took place in February 2019. Robert Craft, the New England Patriots owner, was arrested for solicitation connected to the bust of the massage parlors under the banner of breaking up a sex trafficking ring. As the case progressed in court, no charges of sex trafficking were brought forth and it was stated that there was no evidence of sex trafficking (Dickson 2019). It has also been said that officers, by pushing the trafficking narrative, were able to persuade a judge for a warrant to install cameras within the massage parlors, which has since been deemed unconstitutional as there were no cases of sex trafficking within the premises (Dickson 2019). Many sex workers also fear video surveillance of officers, and where the footage of sexual transactions goes when it is no longer evidence. As people are charged, there is also the worry of being asked to engage in diversionary programs. Brie, while never having gone through a diversionary program herself, knows the party lines of the anti-trafficking movement and is well read with respect to these programs.

I have never been arrested or confronted by police so there has been no need for diversion, but the only ones that I have heard of are very religious oriented and that does not fall for me at all I would not respond well to a moralistic religious based diversionary program in anyway and diversion programs from what I've heard about them deal with a lot of shame and regret about someone choosing this and they refuse to acknowledge that someone could have chosen this from an intelligent and responsible viewpoint. Diversionary programs are designed to enlighten someone that they are being an idiot and to do something different and to get a regular job well I have a regular job, I've got a regular job that's supposed to be pretty decent but under that regular job the best I could do was rent from another person that also couldn't afford the rent of her two bedroom apartment.

Many critique diversionary programs for being based in shaming women for engaging in the sex trade and in 'rehabilitating' women from the sex trade, as if it is an illness one can recover from. This discounts any positive traits, such as intelligence or responsibility, that women could exhibit while trading sex. There is a very prevalent line of sexual moralism, or ideas about sex as spiritual, that many people within the United States at large feel differently about. Even within individuals that engage in commercial sex work there are different feelings and understandings about the meaning and importance of sex. Annie, the dancer that does stripping as survival sex work, does not feel like sex work is good or empowering because she believes sex should be 'real' (i.e. meaningful for both parties past an exchange of goods) and for her (i.e. for her satisfaction and pleasure, not to pay her bills).

You know there is a weird spiritual currency in experiencing pleasure and who you experience pleasure with, which I think a lot of people have denied recently or like we don't talk about it in those terms. But I think it's because we don't understand sexuality, really. We don't have a decent hold on it. We're just kind of figuring it out.

Her beliefs about sexuality color the way that she views her work, making her feel disgusted and pitying towards her customers and disgusted with the work. Living Dead Hooker, on the other hand, feels that sex is not spiritual at all. She feels that that understanding of sex is a belief system, and that we need to evolve as a species and get away from that thinking.

And people need to once again- the whole idea around sex, demystify it! Get away from the whole magical, mystically activity, slot a into tab b or tab b into slot a, quit making sex some huge fantastical event that happens, magical, religious event, bullshit! It isn't. There's a belief system that needs to be sorted through and changed and evolve. This. Species! And that's from the Living Dead Hooker! Go sex workers go!

Both LDH and Annie agree that we do not know enough about sex, and between who is 'right' who is to say? As anti-trafficking advocates pointed out earlier, there is a lack of quality sex education as it stands, and even with comprehensive sex education, there will always be faith-based and personal ways of engaging with sexuality which will create differences in perspective between all those that engage in sexual activity. It is important to recognize, although, that this may be something that can distinguish what anti-trafficking should be working against—namely, instead of targeting all those that use sex work to pay their bills, looking towards those that do not want to be doing sex work and giving them different resources and employment opportunities, and leaving the others alone. Annie acknowledges here that while she dislikes sex work and is morally opposed to it, she understands that her understanding is different than someone's who may love sex work and want to do it for the rest of their lives.

And that testimony is not supposed to negate another girl's testimony who's like I don't give a shit I love it blah blah blah because she probably has a really different take on sexuality than I do. And maybe she doesn't, and she's just been like... who's to say? And that's why rhetoric around sex work is so uncomfortable and invasive because everyone has to speak for themselves. And that's all I have to say about that.

It is true as well that many sex workers must speak for themselves, and that invasiveness and individualizes may make it easier for advocates against violence against women may be tempted to abolish sex work as a whole in the name of saving those that feel like Annie as well as those who are being sex trafficked. But, sex workers that do chose the work and love the work are just as much women in an oppressive system as those who do not want to do sex work, and they would argue for a solution to trafficking that respects their situations, safety, and needs

as much as other women who are in economically vulnerable situations. The problem is that the voices of women that agree with a morally condemning view of sex work are the ones most likely to be upheld and respected by stakeholders as individuals that see the truth of the issue, which undermines and dismisses the testimony of consensual adult sex workers.

Context

“So how have been treated at [Recovery House]?”

“Uh, amazing. Like I matter, like I’m loved, because I am. It’s like a family I’ve always wanted” (Breanna, Recovery House Graduate).

How is it that as soon as I entered my place of work, I was expected to love and be loved by my coworkers as well as the women we serve? I began work as a residential coach, which meant I worked as someone who would “do life” with female survivors of sex trafficking. This meant doing everything from chores, transportation to doctor’s appointments and school, to processing with them after they’ve been triggered or mediating a fight between women in the house. But before any of this, I frequently heard “aw, I love you” from the women and was very uncomfortable. I did not know them, and they did not know me – was this love perfunctory until it was meaningful? Or was there always an air of performance? This was my abrupt and confusing introduction to care work.

In theories of care work, pressures on care workers to commodify care and engage in public good for themselves and others because of disparities in society speak to the real emotional labor (Hochschild 1979) and love that these jobs entail. Caregiving is defined by Abel and Nelson as “encompassing both instrumental tasks and affective relations... Despite the Parsonian class distinction between these two modes of behavior, caregivers are expected to provide love as well as labor” (England 2005, 389). Often, people will express awe at my

occupation, as if I am some sort of angel for dealing with traumatized and exploited individuals in the public's eyes. This gives advocates boosted morale, that they are not only going to work every day but doing the spiritually taxing work of rectifying society's ills and placing themselves at the front lines of the battle against evil. It is even noted that caregiving can be so valued by the person performing it that it is used to justify paying caregivers less; in the theory of compensating differentials in neoclassical economic frameworks, it is understood that if care workers find satisfaction in their jobs, then they can be paid less than those in comparable occupations that are not helping professions (England 2005, 389). This is also true at Recovery House: many advocates share not only their time and hearts with the women served, but also their churches, spiritual beliefs, and time off the clock. No matter how much is poured into the job, from advocates with few responsibilities to those doing case management and house scheduling, all are paid the same rate. This shows how much the care work of the job is offset by the idea of the care work being privilege as well as a gifting: 'we' are lucky to be a part of the journey to recovery, and only 'we' can do this difficult job.

This understanding of love not only is utilized to reason with advocates within the organization as to meaning making around the work and creating a reasoning for the low amount of pay, it is also utilized to assimilate the women with the staff and with the ethos of the program. Ashley, a resident in the program, had this to say about the overwhelming love that she felt at Recovery House:

[Recovery House] just wants to help you in any way that they possibly can and I just, I've never been around that and the positivity... Like when I first got to Assessment one of the advocates there said all these nice positive things about me, and I literally just broke down crying because it's like I couldn't see that and for someone else to see that? It was the first time that someone else had said nice things about me and I was like wow someone can see that in me? And I was blown away and lost it. Anything they can do they go above and beyond and it's incredible to me.

This is the texture, and context, of Recovery House, a main player in anti-trafficking networking in the Tampa Bay area. They not only house survivors, but they do street outreach, train police officers in multiple districts, take prevention programs into churches and high schools, and conduct awareness campaigns with hotels and big businesses. This utilization of love is deeply engrained into the ethos and culture of the organization, and arguably part of the anti-trafficking advocacy brand. But what does it mean to utilize love to spread this specific understanding of sex trafficking? To use love to convince the vulnerable to change their whole lives and in some way devote their lives to the cause afterwards? It is not only a very gendered way for the almost exclusively female staff to relate to the women of the house, but it is also a branding that ties the organization to its Christian foundation to this day.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

Evaluative Criteria

In Willen and Cook's article on health-related deservingness, they explain that evaluative criteria of deservingness come out of stakeholders' presumptions about the population in question (2016, 105). Those presumptions are informed by "a mixture of collective "common sense," personal attitudes, and politicized forms of emotion" (2016, 105). These presumptions go on to form localized debates of deservingness, which I argue are based on these evaluative criteria; fitting the 'same story'; being uncritical of race; exhibiting a lack of agency; identifying as a survivor; and accepting religion.

Same story, different details

In the United States, there has been a long battle for different victim movements to establish that victims are not culpable for the crimes committed against them so they can then receive aid from the government and understanding from the public. As it pertains to trafficking, sex trafficking builds off of narratives established for victims of domestic violence and rape. These movements pushed the public to understand that women were not responsible for sexual responses towards them, and the reasons why some women may return to their abusers. As these movements were mainly based within the paradigm of violence against women, the discourse that is borne of it has been dominantly heteronormative, cis-normative, and white, as can also be seen in the discussion of anti-trafficking today. This prominently advocated for foundation may

also be why sex trafficking is able to gain much more lime-light over labor trafficking, even though labor trafficking makes up the majority of cases of trafficking globally.

Because these narratives were utilized to make cultural shifts in how we view domestic violence, they implicitly impact how victims of sexually-based offenses are judged to be valid or worthy of assistance. Innocence is a huge factor for establishing a blameless victim that can achieve salvation in terms of public opinion. Jennifer Dunn, author of *Judging Victims*, has written extensively about the treatment of victims over the past fifty years and the different victims' movements that have championed certain narratives.

Lacking sympathy, we may be disinclined to offer help, whether we are working in law enforcement or are simply friends of the person claiming victimization. In fact, we may even be reluctant to use the term victim for someone who does not meet our expectations of blamelessness. When we judge victims, we hold them up to a standard of innocence, and if they fall short, we treat them accordingly (Dunn 2010, 2).

This quote exemplifies why victims must adhere to ideals of innocence and victim narratives that make up the presumptions of stakeholders, for if they do not meet these culturally informed perceptions of 'good victims' then, in the case of sex trafficking, they are treated as criminals. Law enforcement and anti-trafficking NGOs are not the only ones that perpetuate victim narratives.

To establish (and reestablish) this necessary and fundamental claim of innocence, especially in the early stages of a survivor movement, activists and scholars and journalists portray victims as relatively helpless. Victims are trapped in their rape encounters by overwhelming physical force or in violent relationships by equally daunting sociological and psychological constraints. The images of powerlessness you will read are quite moving and continue to evoke strong emotions in audiences. As a result, we now have rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, therapists trained in dealing with the long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse, changes in the way criminal justice system deals with crime victims, and changes in religious institutions (Dunn 2010, 2-3)

Scholars and journalists also are responsible for perpetuating ideas of victimhood that become culturally pervasive and therefore affect victim identification by law enforcement. This

also discusses the construction of “politicized forms of emotion” and the power that holds over garnering material and social capital for victims in multiple arenas (Willen and Cook 2016, 105). To get these outcomes, multiple stakeholders have come up with an easily digestible, almost five minute elevator pitch of what the typical victim of sex trafficking is like. This not only is evocative but serves to create a cultural understanding of what a sex trafficking victim is so that they can access resources.

Due to this pressure to create a narrative that is evocative enough to capture the hearts and minds of the public, donors, and policy makers, there is a very set narrative perpetuated by advocates at Recovery House (Dunn 2010, 206). Working at the Outreach center and with Outreach advocates, I often heard about different cases that these advocates were working on from around Florida and within different contexts of the criminal justice system. Many of the women were coming from vastly different situations of trafficking or interacting with different penalties within the criminal justice system, but they were often all considered part of the same story with different details. When asked to elaborate on the ‘same story, different details’ of the women that enter Recovery House, advocates across Recovery House’s four programs had almost identical narratives. Amanda, a twenty nine year old White female Outreach Advocate, had the most detailed criteria of the ideal candidate for Recovery House.

Our residential services serve women, they must be born female, they must have- our grants specify that they must be born female, even though we have served a lot of different people so even me saying that, that’s not true! We’ve given referrals and intakes for gentlemen and we have had clients who were in the process of transitioning, transgender, so like we will help anyone to be honest. In that case I would make sure that that client would get connected to a program that could support them in that process. So that’s that. So, generally, female, must be an adult. So, if they want residential services, to come into our assessment house you have to be between 18-35, to come into our long term it’s 19-29. Must have a history of exploitation and sexual exploitation looks like any sex act in exchange for something of value whether that’s shelter or food, drugs, money, clothing, protection, things like that. That’s the basic. And we prefer that to be recent, I mean if it’s like 5 years ago and the woman still

needs therapy that's fine, but we're looking for the ones who are falling through the cracks, who are still on the street, who are in desperate need of something.

Amanda here emphasizes that Recovery House dominantly looks for and serves cisgender women, ages eighteen through thirty five, that have engaged in exchanging sex within the past five years. Those are the bottom line criteria for Recovery House to take an individual into their homes. Note that the exchange of sexual acts for anything of value is also the bottom line criteria to be considered a case of sex trafficking—which then makes any sex worker an identifiable trafficking victim, and also bypasses the need for any woman to prove coercion or exploitation as the exchange is seen to be inherently coercive.

In one case, there was an individual that identified as a trans man, and that person was encouraged to go by their birth name and utilize she/her pronouns until they went through their trauma therapy and the other requirements of the programming. They were ultimately exited from the program due to an incident where they kicked another resident off of their bed, but they were able to graduate the Outreach program (in a dress). As there are very few resources for trans people in general, let alone for trans individuals that have experienced sex trafficking, it creates a lot of pressure on those that desperately need help to conform to the expectations of organizations. Amanda goes on to detail dominant statistics here:

Yeah, so the most dominant statistics we have found is that the majority of our women are abused at age 3-5 and they hold that secret until they can't take it any longer and at around 12-14 when they run away from home or begin to act out women 48 hours from running away the client, the survivor, is made contact by a trafficker or a pedophile or whatever, who in turn becomes their trafficker and they are sold 14-40 times... 40?... 20-40 times a day and their survival is usually 7 years so our women 7 years. And that's happening, we know that 1 out of 3 girls and 1 out of 5 boys are being sexually abused and we've found that sexual childhood abuse to be the root of all of our clients, that we work with, or sex trafficking and we know that that happens every 2 minutes in every zip code in America. So, there's a child being sexually abused every 2 minutes in every zip code of America, 1 out of 3 girls 1 out of 5 boys, and then that develops into that 12 to 14 year old that runs away, within 48 hours is contacted by a trafficker and

sucked into the life of trafficking. And they have about 7 years, before either disease or the lifestyle, different things.

This story is saturated with numbers emphasizing the youth of the victims, the prominence of the issue, and the swiftness of victims' downfalls from running away, to trafficking, to death. Amanda typically works with officers or advertising at events for Recovery House's services, so it makes sense that her speech about sex trafficking is meant to shock and horrify the listener about the prevalence of sexual abuse of minors and how quickly that leads to death. The emphasis on numbers over emotion also is a way to present this information as direct and true, even when one asks for citations for where these figures came from there is nothing exact that comes to her mind¹⁴. Other advocates that work with different populations take very different approaches when explaining the stories. Vanessa, a 31 year old White Awareness Advocate that works primarily with potential donors and volunteers, utilizes layperson's terms.

Yeah! So typically what we see is the same textbook story over and over again so sexually abused as a child which typically starts between 2-4 years old by someone that they know and should be able to trust and then between the ages of 12-14 something snaps and many of these girls that we end up seeing at Recovery House they end up running away from home. So, they run away from the abuse, or so they think, and it doesn't take very long for them to realize they don't have any food, clothing, shelter, anyone to take care of them cause this is a child, right? This is an innocent child. And, um, within 48 hours of leaving home 80% of runaways are approached by a skilled predator, a trafficker, and they coerce them and groom them into the life without knowing what they're saying yes to they step right into it. You know? It's "you're too pretty to be out here, let me take care of you." And it's a slow fade, you know, many shades of gray but eventually it's "if you just dance in my friends—or not even dance! If you just bartend at my friends' club for a few nights" or, "if you go on a date with some of my buddies like I wanna build a life with you." and all those lies manipulate a child into eventually being sold 15 to 40 times over 24 hours for an average of 7 years. So that's the story that we see, and it can typically take 7-8 touch points with the survivor before they're ready to say yes to stepping into a program.

¹⁴ I did ask for references or citations, and no one knew where to refer me. These statistics were disembodied bits of script that Recovery House has advocates parrot because the stats are evocative and fit into anti-trafficking sex work abolitionist discourse.

Vanessa gets into what the manipulation looks like in the form of a series of lies a trafficker might tell a runaway child. This allows the average person that may not have any previous understandings of abusive or predatory relationships to be able to understand how someone could get swept up in the manipulation of a trafficker. Another persuasive tactic Vanessa uses is to put a lot of emphasis on the naiveté and innocence of a child in this situation. Recovery House's narrative of trafficking focuses heavily on child abuse, despite only working with adult women. Advertising the issue of trafficking as an issue concerning children makes the bid for innocence easier, as children are seen as less agentic and less culpable by virtue of their youth. This creates a clear narrative of exploitation that anyone could agree on, because to disagree automatically puts one on the side of someone who is complacent towards child sex abuse. To agree with this narrative, and support the organizations fighting this phenomenon, also easily puts one on the side of good. Victoria, the twenty six year old Assessment Advocate, said this:

The story that I hear from most of the women coming in the house is that they have been a victim of some type of sexual abuse when they were a child that either was done by a family member or someone who was very close to them oftentimes, but typically they're a victim of sexual abuse. This abuse and trauma leads them into poor coping skills, it often leads to sexual promiscuity and it often leads to drug use because of the pain that they've experienced. Just trying to basically numb that hurt from what was happening in their lives. And obviously all of these things create an at risk environment when where you're using drugs or when you're living a promiscuous lifestyle then they're often introduced to a trafficker at some point through that lifestyle or groomed by a trafficker who is looking for people who are vulnerable. So, I would just say it's a woman with a lot of different vulnerabilities and then those vulnerabilities are exploited and used against her.

Victoria is an advocate in the Assessment House, which is for women that are looking for a residential program that can fit their needs. Recovery House helps with this goal by getting to know the woman, giving her a safe and secure place to rest and recuperate from often either jail or detox, and network on her behalf to get a program that suits her personality, goals, and

medical/therapeutic needs. Her understanding of the narrative is very similar, with issues stemming from childhood abuse being the root cause of getting involved with sex trafficking. Her focus on behavioral outcomes and rationalizing lifestyles and coping mechanisms comes from the idea of trauma-informed care and normalizing that advocates within Recovery House's residential programs are trained to do for the women as they process their trauma. This is another way that advocates in part explain the decisions that women made while in trafficking situations or in the life at large, because the women were seen to have been plagued by trauma and not operating in health, and therefore not making decisions that fully honor who they were "created to be." Techeira, the Prevention program advocate, actually worked with children and in school systems raising awareness and teaching prevention curriculum in at risk areas.

Some way of getting into the life, whether that is forced, coerced, seduced, or recruited, whatever means that was to get them to the life but being in there and having all their freedom and voice stripped away, and then thinking, or knowing, that this is what I was born to do, this is all that I will ever do, there is no other option, I don't really have a life, I'm a tool. I'm an object. It's more dehumanizing of a story. And then when they come through Recovery House, they realize there are so many opportunities and options that they can make for themselves. They just never had the choice or the freedom to do so because somebody took that and decided that they were going to be what they wanted them to be, there's no other option. Boyfriend, or baby daddy, or husband, or best friend, or mom it could be anybody honestly. And they just kinda started out because they trusted this person, they loved this person, and somebody took control of those emotions and exploited it for their own benefit. It could be a child who can't really speak for themselves and doesn't really know what control and power and freedom are, they just know that this person is older than them and they should follow those rules or act on what the person is asking from them. It could be a woman who went in through consent, thinking this is what I should be doing to pay some bills, and then met somebody who's willing to help them manage that money and then got exploited. Of course, it's different ways of entering the life, but the story is that they entered and then they got out.

She is the only one that acknowledges that women can choose to pay bills with sex work without childhood sexual trauma. She also brings to light another piece of the sex trafficking victims' narrative—that freedom is something that can be stolen from a person a long time ago

and not returned until they meet certain requirements. Those requirements, from this perspective, include autonomous decision making, handling their own money, and loving themselves, and not utilizing their sexuality to survive. Living without those requirements, the woman's freedom is judged as restricted and therefore stolen, whether or not the woman herself feels that way about how much freedom she has in her life.

Race

However, rape cannot be seen merely as a manifestation of patriarchy and binary and unequal relations of subordination between men and women. It needs to be located in terms of the differentiated masculinities and femininities that are constructed through the syncretic working of interlocking power dimensions of gender, race and class and how subject take up identity positions, articulate and practice them (Anthias 2014, 161).

The anti-trafficking movement does not often address race. If it is brought up, it is more to make the point that race is not a factor in the prevalence of human trafficking. But the trends in criminalization as well as the interconnectivity of race, gender, and class, would beg to differ. Race informs how gender is shaped and vice versa, so to view sex trafficking as merely an issue of gender violence would exclude an entire context of analysis. Sexual violence such as sex trafficking cannot be simply boiled down to a matter of good versus evil, or as a matter of the violence of the patriarchy, and not interrogated further into the social vulnerabilities that contribute to individuals experiencing exploitation. While trafficking is considered a global phenomenon, the after-effects of colonization and imperialism naturally color the flows of access and exploitation. It follows that in the United States trafficking would also be affected by the racial hierarchy and understandings that historically built this country. Kemala Kempadoo explicitly interrogates the racial relations within sexuality and how that has been shaped by history:

In this and other studies a continuous theme is the unconditional sexual access that white men had to Black and Brown women's bodies and the force and coercion that

was involved. How such practices informed white women's identities, sexuality, and struggles in history remains for the most part unproblematized, yet complicities with an assumed racial superiority and the economic privileging that accompanied histories of Empire for white European women are an integral part of the narrative and require exploration (C. Hall 1995, Lewis 1996 as cited by Kempadoo 40).

There are underlying presumptions that individuals have towards others due to both parties' race and how their respective races have been constructed in the United States. It can still be seen that the trope of the Jezebel is still applied to Black women more often than White women. While there has been a lot of progress, with the first Black president being elected and many different conversations about race being encouraged when it comes to Hollywood representation or police brutality, this does not mean racism no longer exists. Often, while racism is not as structurally explicit as with Jim Crow Laws, there are ways that people are profiled due to their skin color that gets them much different treatment, especially in the criminal justice system.

Early on in the life course of women of color, prejudice takes affect and segregates them from their White peers in the criminal justice system. Because women of color have historically been seen as more sexually active and accessible than White women, this prejudice changes their access to resources once they are involved in the foster-care system as well as the criminal justice system (Nelson Butler 2017, 15). This profiling from youth only compounds as the women get older, losing that little bit of claim to purity that childhood can give them. And if these women are also poor, then the prejudice can be compounded even further.

Women who do not have economic stability and therefore turn to sex work are stigmatized and othered, because they do not have the feminine respectability afforded to the middle class (Anthias 2014, 160). Within the anti-trafficking movement, this is an especially driving factor as it is seen that economic pressures can force a woman to be someone she would

not have been if only she had access to economic opportunities other than sex work. Yet, why are there so few women of color that go to the long-term Recovery House? In the two years that I have worked at the house, there have only been two African American women that went to the long term Recovery House program. For anti-trafficking it could be because of the historical framework of ‘White Slavery’ that launched the movement that obscures Black victims.

The discourse of White Slavery was very problematic. It sought to dramatize the labor exploitation of White people as capitalism and industrialization took off to make a point for labor rights, but only for a certain subset of people, implying that it is still acceptable for racial minorities to be exploited for unfair labor practices (Peck 2004 62). It also sought to stigmatize the newly found freedom of White women to not only travel alone, but also to work for economic freedom from men. This was seen as deviant from the idea of the pure middle-class woman that should stay home and tend to the family. Additionally, it made a caricature of what slavery was for Black people, co-opting the language and the horror for White victims and a White audience.

As a kind of political oxymoron—white people were not supposed to be slaves, after all, as slavery and blackness remained commensurate in the minds of many—white slavery gained power precisely because of its contradictory political energies and meanings (Peck 2004 62).

This further pressed home the notion that it is socially acceptable to exploit certain kinds of people. For White people, and White women specifically, it was not alright for them to travel and participate in sex work. As for women of color, this was seen as acceptable because this was something that racial construction from times of slavery said they had always done and were by nature inclined to do.

As labor rights moved in a different direction, White Slavery moved towards stigmatizing White sex workers (Peck 2004 63). The racial construction of White women as pure as opposed

to women of color made White sex workers traitors to their race and their gender, making them deviant others that needed saving.’

Perhaps as a result of the white slave campaign, the mainstream media portrays the iconic prostituted youth as white and suburban, thereby rendering minority victims invisible. It is important to make the public aware that, indeed, sexual exploitation affects children of all races; yet one unintended consequence of doing so is that white kids have become the “iconic victims” of domestic trafficking (Nelson Butler 2017, 14).

This persists today as sex workers are still targeted by nature of their work, and mainly White women in the sex trade are identified as ‘victims of trafficking. Modern mainstream renditions no longer call trafficking ‘White Slavery’ but instead market it as ‘Modern Day Slavery’ and portray victims as of any racial or economic background. Yet this still carries the problematic nature of the original White Slavery discourse, as it erases economic instability and racial constructions as factors in trafficking in favor of inciting the interest of the broadest audience. This also makes White children the most easily identified victims of trafficking, because they are the ones most often portrayed with victim narratives.

The modern stereotyping of people of color as prostitutes undermines the ability of community stakeholders to identify people of color as victims of coerced prostitution and other forms of sex trafficking. In these ways, the anti-trafficking movement’s marginalization of the role of race and racism in sexual exploitation perpetuates sex trafficking (Nelson Butler 2017, 23).

Women of color are underserved by the simplistic anti-trafficking narrative that “it could happen to anyone.” By investigating who trafficking is more likely to affect and why, anti-trafficking efforts could have more of an impact in addressing the root vulnerabilities that expose people to exploitation. Race in America and globally needs to be problematized in anti-trafficking or the historical constructions of racial exploitation of the past will continue to persist into the future and put more people at risk, and more and more people of color will be criminalized when they really are deserving of resources just like their White counterparts.

In Table 8 in the Bureau of Justice Statistics' Prisoners in 2017 report shows that from ages 18 to 40, women who identify as Hispanic or Other (which includes Asians and Native Americans) are sentenced to prison at higher rates than White Women, even though White women are the larger prison population. Black women are sent to prison statistically less than White women from ages 30-49, but more so ages 18-24, and are tied in the age group 25-29, despite once again being a smaller total population than White women.

Table 1: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Statistics, 2017; Federal Justice Statistics Program, 2017 (preliminary); National Corrections Reporting Program, 2016; and Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016. Unless otherwise indicated, information on Department of Justice websites is in the public domain and may be copied and distributed without permission. Citation of the Department of Justice as source of the information is appreciated, as appropriate. The use of any Department of Justice seals, however, is protected and requires advance authorization, as described below.

TABLE 8
Percent of sentenced prisoners under jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities, by sex, race, Hispanic origin, and age, December 31, 2017

Age group	Total	Male					Female				
		All male	White ^a	Black ^a	Hispanic	Other ^{a,b}	All female	White ^a	Black ^a	Hispanic	Other ^{a,b}
Total ^c	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
18-19	0.8	0.8	0.4	1.1	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.2	1.0	0.5	0.6
20-24	9.4	9.5	6.4	11.1	10.5	9.9	8.2	6.5	10.2	10.3	9.4
25-29	15.8	15.7	13.1	16.8	17.1	16.2	17.8	17.3	17.3	19.6	17.6
30-34	16.1	15.8	15.2	15.4	17.6	17.5	19.2	19.3	16.8	20.6	20.6
35-39	15.5	15.4	15.1	15.0	16.9	15.8	17.0	17.5	15.3	18.0	18.2
40-44	11.8	11.8	11.7	11.7	12.7	12.6	11.9	12.2	11.2	11.3	11.8
45-49	10.2	10.2	11.4	9.9	9.4	9.8	10.1	10.6	10.2	8.8	9.4
50-54	8.4	8.5	10.1	8.3	6.7	7.5	7.5	7.7	8.7	5.7	6.5
55-59	5.9	6.0	7.6	5.8	4.2	4.9	4.4	4.7	5.1	3.1	4.1
60-64	3.2	3.3	4.3	3.0	2.3	2.5	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.5	1.8
65 or older	2.8	2.9	4.6	1.9	1.9	2.4	1.4	1.6	1.0	1.0	1.2
Number of sentenced prisoners ^d	1,439,800	1,334,800	387,400	456,300	317,100	173,900	105,000	49,100	19,600	19,400	17,000

Note: Jurisdiction refers to the legal authority of state or federal correctional officials over a prisoner, regardless of where the prisoner is held. Counts are based on prisoners with a sentence of more than one year under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional officials. Federal data include prisoners held in non-secure, privately operated community corrections facilities and juveniles held in contract facilities. Totals include imputed counts for New Mexico and North Dakota, which did not submit 2017 National Prisoner Statistics data. Details may not sum to totals. See *Methodology*.

^aExcludes persons of Hispanic/Latino origin (e.g., white refers to non-Hispanic white; black refers to non-Hispanic black). See *Methodology*.

^bIncludes Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Other Pacific Islanders; American Indians and Alaska Natives; and persons of two or more races.
^cIncludes persons of all ages.
^dEstimates are rounded to the nearest 100.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Statistics, 2017; Federal Justice Statistics Program, 2017 (preliminary); National Corrections Reporting Program, 2016; and Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

These statistics show how the racial construction of femininity has real consequences for women across the racial spectrum. Where one falls within the racial categories could earn one more or less prison time, or more or less access to resources that would allow them diversion or ways to combat a sentence. While this is an example across the board for sentencing, these same disparities also play out in victim identification of trafficking on a local scale. Jeff, the officer who worked street crimes, clearly states that most trafficking victims are just White females, from ages 22-40.

Yeah that's a very interesting question, and my daughter and I were just talking about this. They're usually White female, they're usually ranging anywhere from I would say anywhere for like 22 to 40. And I've very rarely if I come across a Black female prostitute. I've arrested one Black female prostitute in that federal case we talked about. I think that's been the only one. So, it's very interesting demographics. The majority is just White females.

This is in line with media representations of young White women that are usually portrayed as victims. Jessica, the other officer that worked street crimes, had a similar view of victims as White females between the ages of 18 to 35.

There's an open market for prostitution because there's a demand for it. The demographics of the people I encounter are White females between the ages of 18 and 35.

This may align with the anti-trafficking and White slavery narratives, but it is possible that it is a local pattern within the Tampa Bay area. Or, it may mean that the only areas that the officers patrolled for trafficking victims were areas with White street prostitution, and the areas where they would go for prostitution arrests were areas with Black or more colorful populations. Brent, the White sixty three year old Attorney, had a more colorblind perspective:

It's funny, I just was meeting with somebody this morning and we were talking about the demographics of our clients, many of whom who are pursuing expungements and we don't ask the question. So sometimes I will never know if they are White, or African American, or Hispanic, or whatever, we just don't know. We may see that on a arrest report or something, but honestly, we don't track those statistics, which is, maybe

we should, but it just doesn't matter to me. And so consequently, my sense is in terms of our own clients' demographics is that it's just an across the board mix. I couldn't honestly say that it's overwhelmingly any particular demographic, even socioeconomic in terms of their upbringing. We've had many clients that were trafficked as children and maybe came out of pretty poor situations, but we've also had clients whose parents were doctors.

Brent has more of a mixed-bag understanding of trafficking, but also admits that "it just doesn't matter to me." Because it is easy to do anti-trafficking work and sweep race under the rug as a non-factor, those with the most experience with trafficking victims in many parts of the process do not keep information on the racial or economic demographics of their clients, essentializing them to victims of trafficking as opposed to having more complex life courses that led into a life of trafficking. Vanessa had this to say:

In our prevention program its incredibly diverse as well, with serving kids from you know, upper socioeconomic private schools to children to are in more marginalized areas and different socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicities. You know our prevention program just spoke to over 800 kids in Compton like, it's very, very, diverse which I love. And it can be kids in the system or out of the system, so it really doesn't discriminate because sex trafficking doesn't discriminate. Uhm, so we have girls who have come from ya know, their parents who lived in a condo in siesta key, and we have girls who were homeless their whole life and who were in and out of the system. So, it doesn't discriminate, we have girls from all walks of life.

Advocates at Recovery House also promote the narrative that trafficking can happen to anyone, that race and economics do not matter. From my time working at Recovery House, I have found this to not be true. Generally, each woman that comes to Recovery House has a history of substance abuse, not only individually but within their families. In addition, someone in their family introduced them to sex work and also had at some point participated in sex work. Many of them came from families that were not that well off or had little access to resources. Yet some advocates as well as Recovery House as an organization push this narrative of sex trafficking happening to anyone at any time. Amanda, the Outreach Advocate, has a more

comprehensive view of the demographics being served and who is needing help based on her running the Outreach cell phone, that all those that need help can call.

So, I know this will roll into like, demographics of the women who come into our program. I mean there is no specific demographic unfortunately it touches everybody. So highly educated women, wealthy women, middle class women, poor women, uneducated women, women with master's degrees, with families, religious, not religious, like it's everybody. And same with those statistics 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys it has nothing to do with socioeconomical background or race. And we'll have people ask me what kind of races we'll come in contact with and we come in contact with all races, the most predominant you'll see watching which I think this is super interesting cause it shows how unsocial White people are. Cause you'll see the Caucasian women walking on the street that's the most, that's what you'll see. You will not, you will rarely, RARELY see Hispanic women or African American women walking the streets because their culture already has an infrastructure, a social infrastructure, so usually all their trafficking is inter-Familia, or within that group, that culture. Whereas White people we don't really have a strong culture or strong family dynamic per se, so we don't really care what our neighbors are doing. Whereas in these communities where there's a lot of African Americans and a lot of Hispanics they all will rely on each other and build off each other so then it makes it very difficult for us to break into these things and get these women out of these circumstances because it's so inter-webbed inside each other. But we have, I'm thinking of the women who are in our house right now, 3 different races right now in our assessment house. Yes, all different kinds, diversity. So yeah, we are serving, I mean I get a lot of calls from African American women, White women, Native American women, Alaskan women, Romanian women, interesting, like, the whole Romanian rush and kind of people group has picked up recently. So, I notice trends every now and then and I know Northport is becoming more active in that we're seeing more women come out of those Russian communities in Northport.

She acknowledges it is harder for law enforcement to get into Black and Hispanic communities. Whether or not this is because of keeping a tight knit cultural circle for sex trafficking or because these demographics are not being referred to services is unknown. What is interesting is that she says that Romanian women are calling the call line more and more often, and yet from my work as a Residential Advocate I have not seen or heard of a single Romanian woman receiving our services. While it may be the case that they are not 'domestic' victims, there would still be services that could be offered to them through Outreach within Recovery House's power. Techeira, the Black Prevention Advocate, said this:

So I guess that the average demographic would be middle aged, maybe upper 20's to 30's year old's, I've met a couple 18 year old's, those are of course our youngest, and I've seen women of color in the homes, there's not a whole lot but that doesn't go to say they didn't go through our assessment house. So yes, women of color are being served, just not as much as those who are not of color.

Techeira is the only advocate that admits that there are not as many women of color being served at Recovery House as there are White women. I argue that this phenomenon is because of the racialized narrative of anti-trafficking that constructs White, young women as the ideal victim, and therefore obscures women of color that are being trafficked and instead criminalizes them. While it may be a regional issue that White women are more likely to be involved in street level sex work, Recovery House has expanded to multiple states and has moved women from state to state in order to get them resources and recovery, so simply saying there are no Black or other racial categories participating in street sex work in Tampa Bay is not sufficient to explain the lack of diversity in the Residential program at Recovery House. Because of the historical construction of White femininity as opposed to the femininity and sexuality of women of color, White sexual exploitation is prioritized and biases stakeholders to identify White women as sex trafficking victims and women of color as 'prostitutes.' I believe that the study population is an example of this mentality at work in anti-human trafficking organizations and the criminal justice system—I worked with diversion programs and those certified as victims. And they were majority White. While my sample size was not extensive, my time in that space was, and beyond the sample there was very little spoken of or provided for women of color.

Agency

The cultural code of agency... is based on the assumption that all individuals do have free will. According to the cultural logic associated with this code, it follows that we are always accountable for our actions (Dunn 2010, 5).

In the United States, it is a cultural understanding that each individual is responsible for his or her own success. It is a ‘pull yourself up from your bootstraps’ mentality passed down from the protestant settlers. This mentality, while meant to be a hopeful call for all people to build the life they want, also puts a huge amount of responsibility on each and every individual for the way that his or her life turns out. Compounded by the mentality of the criminal justice system of, “innocent until proven guilty,” people are always looking for proof that an individual can be held accountable for his or her actions. Agency, which is the ability of an individual to choose a course in life, is an inherent ability of all human beings. Within the context of American culture, to frame someone as agentic can have the negative affect of framing them as culpable for outcomes in their lives. But I am arguing that the inherent ability to choose does not mean that all decisions are made equally and therefore can be judged on the same scale of culpability. Agency is not a ‘you have it, or you don’t’ scenario—agency is a negotiation of human beings free will with the material and social capital that they wield at any given time. Paul Kockelman explains agency in this way:

Agency might initially be understood as the relatively flexible wielding of means toward ends. For example, one can use a range of tools to achieve a specific goal, or one can use a specific tool to achieve a range of goals. In this way, flexibility may involve having lots of options open or having a strong say in which particular option will be acted on. And to say that one entity has more agency than another entity is to say that it has more flexibility—relatively more means and ends to choose from (in some given environment, or under some given conditions) ... Finally, with this flexibility usually comes accountability: the more agency one has over some process, the more one can be held responsible for its outcome and thereby be subject to praise or blame, reward or punishment, pride or shame (Kockelman 2007, 375).

Because some people wield more material and social capital, it can be said that they claim more flexibility in exercising their agency. Which is to say that some people have more options when making decisions. The more options one can be said to have, the more agentic one can be said to be. Yet another layer of this, beyond capital, is the intersectionality of one’s

identity, which gives each individual different abilities and limitations depending on their identity's interaction with society.

Drawing on Foucault's perspective, Mahmood (2005: 29) writes that agency is better thought of 'in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions' and as necessarily rooted in specific, socially situated disciplines of self (Kaye 2013, 228).

Each person has individual capacities and skills, and each society and each individual have different standards of morality, which are constantly in conversation with one another. These conversations inform the decisions each individual makes and inform how those decisions are in turn judged by society. Agency is thus a very important marker of whether or not an individual is judged as deserving of the title of victim, because if they are too agentic, they are too culpable, which also allows society to judge them as immoral. In terms of the false dichotomy of sex work vs. sex trafficking, perceptions of the amount of agency one wields while exchanging sex is critical to whether or not an individual is judged as one or the other.

This concept of agency also explains why when women adamantly declare that they choose to live life on the street as sex workers, many do not recognize that choice as a valid decision. The perception is that a woman is not making that decision with full agency because she is compelled by substance abuse issues, abusive relationships, a history of trauma, and a lack of material and social capital to engage in this work to survive. Because her choices are narrowed by her circumstance, even her enthusiastic defense of her choices or claims to agency are subverted by her quality of life.

This multidimensional concept of agency recognizes that autonomy and compulsion are seldom as simple as a sex worker identifying her labor as something she "wants" to do. In such a model, agency is recognized as mediated by the everyday realities of structural and systemic forces that bind the decision of marginalized groups. Some of these circumstances (such as criminal history or disability) may be at the individual level, while others (such as capitalism, transphobia, and racism) are social (Hail-Jares et al 2017, Part 2 On Agency).

To note this is important, because it gets at the core moral argument between sex worker activists and anti-sex trafficking advocates—is the decision to sell sex a decision that individuals have the right to make? Or, put another way, is that a decision that society can morally allow women to make? This moral question is often how it is framed by those that lobby to criminalize sex work. Because the structural realities that can lead women to choose sex work to support themselves, it is seen as not a fully agentic choice. The moral framing of sex also comes into play in individuals and society’s judgements of whether or not a person can practice agency in sex work.

In seeing the ways in which agency is itself socially constructed and variable across diverse social contexts, one can make sense of the various sorts of agentic capacities that arise within both ‘right living’ (self-discipline, emotional control, and at least some degree of allegiance to order and duty) and in the so-called ‘drugs lifestyle’ (which perhaps involves a more improvisational approach that relies upon the mobilization of many diverse emotionalities, sometimes using chemical technologies to achieve this). These diverse forms of agency help make different sorts of choices and actions possible—they enable particular sorts of ‘freedom’—but only within specific social contexts (one must have actual access to particular types of working-class jobs for ‘right living’ to truly function, for example) (Kaye 2013, 228).

By the stakeholders that hold power over policy, engaging in sex work is not a sign of ‘right living.’ Therefore, sex workers’ agency is not seen as the ideal agency or freedom and is considered less desirable or even non-agentic, similar to the view of agency within a ‘drugs lifestyle’ as quoted above. This perspective of discounting the agency of those with less privileged backgrounds can be potentially dehumanizing, as if saying that those with less capital are less capable of exercising their free will and humanity

Problematizing agency as more than an argument between the haves and the have nots is very important to do, so that marginalized people are not robbed of their decisions and control over their lives (Enria 2016, 326). While there are certainly many more obstacles to those that

are labeled with stigmatized identities such as criminals, the disabled, the mentally ill, and the impoverished, that does not mean that they are not agentic human beings. Yet, because of the pressure of the cultural code of agency, to take agency away from victims altogether is a powerful tool to deem them innocent and deserving of help. Jennifer Dunn looks at how victims navigate agency extensively:

Early activists believed that the culture they organized themselves to change was one in which most people believed that women could not be raped against their will. Or bystanders thought that a victim's actions encouraged the rapist, or even just that the victim should have known better than to make herself vulnerable. If this was the way about women who reported being raped, they would not have been very sympathetic or helpful toward them. They thought of them not as victims, but as agents of their own sexual downfall. To change this, activists set out to establish victim precipitation as a myth and redefine the rape victim as a true victim, not the instigator of her own undoing (Dunn 2010, 55).

Holding victims in part responsible for their crimes was the double edged sword of the cultural understanding of agency. They were acknowledged as having the capacity to affect their fate, but in all the wrong ways, and rendered responsible by society for their own victimization. To undermine this argument, true, non-agentic victimhood was established to combat victim blaming. Dunn also addresses the creation of ideal victims in order to further the movement:

One means of addressing the problem of victim-blaming is to create images of "ideal victims" that absolve them of responsibility for their victimization (Christie 1986). For this reason, much of the activist and scholarly literature on battered women has focused on explaining why battered women stay with their abusers (a behavior that implies agency) and has attempted to show that battered women are, in fact, constrained rather than free agents (Dunn 2010, 106).

The battered women's movement also had issues with perceptions of agency, as 'choosing to stay' with an abuser seems an act of free choice. This is why agency in terms of social and individual identities must be considered, because this choice can be made on the basis of survival, on a basis of traumatization, or on the basis of individual capacities, but this does not

mean they are to blame for the abuse. But, because it is hard to explain the complexities of constrained choice, and easier to market an inevitable victim based on childhood traumatization, often what happens is advocates for these causes promote blameless victims that do not exercise agency in their stories.

Anti-trafficking discourse built from this tradition and ran with it. While domestic violence and rape advocates still struggle to explain the choices and innocence of their victims, anti-trafficking movements have propelled themselves far off of narrative choices that render the trafficking victim as extraordinarily blameless and non-agentic (Chuang 2014, 622). Depicting trafficking victims as ‘modern-day slaves’ is one of those narrative devices.

Depicting women as sexual slaves not only brings up a strong emotional response (and perhaps some titillation) in the audience of such a testimony, but also casts the women as having no control over their own lives (Chuang 2014, 636). The term ‘slave,’ especially in an American context where the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a national institution one hundred sixty-four years ago, brings with it imagery of humans systemically and brutally treated like chattel. To align anti-trafficking with anti-slavery is also another persuasive choice, because to say that one is indifferent to trafficking with this perspective is to say that one is complacent to slavery, which is morally corrupt. In the effort to create a narrative that no one could sweep under the rug and ignore, victims were inadvertently rendered as hapless individuals, as Dunn illustrates in her book:

Thus, even as they attempt to explain that battered women are trapped, these activists cast them, or relate the stories of victims casting themselves, in terms that are potentially stigmatizing: unattractive, inadequate, incapable, stupid, and lacking “the will” to act as adults and free themselves (Dunn 2010, 122).

By creating a victim that is so deeply controlled, it creates an image of a person as a thoughtless puppet, manipulated without even knowing it and dancing to another's tune. No one wants to look at themselves in terms of having been duped, or as lacking in any way. Therefore, it makes it very difficult for people to identify with the label of victim, even if it is very clear to themselves and others that they have suffered at the hands of someone else. But, does this mean that advocating for victims should not be done? Certainly not. It is critical to recognize that as advocates, while intentions are all well and good, there can be darker implications to the work that is done on behalf of victims. While the end goal is empowerment and healing, it does not need to come at any means necessary and extreme paternalization of those harmed. Advocating for victims can be intentionally empowering by recognizing the common agency in us all and working from there to find the best solutions to restore victims.

Sex workers, domestic violence survivors, and rape survivors are not mutually exclusive categories. It must be recognized that sex trafficking can encompass all of these things, but one experience may be traumatic while another will not. If a sex trafficking victim is defined as anyone who has exchanged a sex act for something of value, then we run the risk of taking the individuals' right to decide if something was actually traumatic for them or not. A person that engages in sex work, is in an abusive relationship, and has been raped does not feel that sex work is the root cause of their trauma, then advocates could invalidate that individual's meaning making and agency in his or her own life by denying that this person could still choose sex work despite these adverse life experiences.

Despite this argument, there is something to be said for not pushing the idea of individual agency too far. Agency is negotiated not only within an individual, but also in the context of historical patterns, social understandings of identity, and material wealth. To dehistoricize

discussions of agency in favor of supporting the cultural idea that all people are created equal and all people have free will is to still make too simplistic of an argument. Victims needs will not be met until an understanding of the complexities of victimization is widespread. To have an understanding at an individual level that women can still come to an agentic choice to do sex work does not fix all the problems within international sex work. It is also important to problematize race and global inequality when considering agency, as Kemala Kempadoo notes:

For transnational or postcolonial feminists to speak about prostitution or sex work as involving not just historically shaped victimizations and abuses but also women of color's sexual agency, needs, and desires is indeed tricky ground, for it is constantly in danger of sliding into, and reinforcing, the sexualization of women of color. This approach runs into the dangers of obscuring state complicities in maintaining the subordination of Brown and Black women's bodies and sexuality and of masking the profits that are accrued by transnational and multinational corporations that rely on undocumented or cheap Brown and Black labor for a variety of industries. The focus on sexual agency, furthermore, can detract attention from the subjectivities and activities of the men in underground operations who engineer and benefit from the smuggling and trafficking of drugs, weapons, human organs, and human beings and who viciously and brutally handle women's and children's lives (Kempadoo 2001, 42).

While individual rights should be respected, and advocates should always be mindful to acknowledge the fellow humanity in whomever they are advocating for, this should not eclipse the importance of acknowledging and combatting the historic and unequal context in which many people globally come to engage in sex work. Because women may choose sex work because of substance abuse or historic racism and inequality does not mean that this decision should be left alone and these barriers to women engaging in other work should be ignored; on the contrary, barriers that limit anyone's flexibility in exercising their agency should be critically examined and combatted as fiercely as advocates retaliate against traffickers.

Yet, this is not the conceptualization of agency that many are working with when making decisions of deservingness. Often, stakeholders judge victims based on the victim's own perceptions of agency, which are necessarily very subjective. Jill McCracken speaks to the

subjectivity of agency that individuals reckon with within their own lives, beyond being labeled by others as agentic or non-agentic:

These levels of empowerment relate to the degree to which I feel like an agent in my life. I choose what I eat, where I live, where I work, and what I do for a living. And each of these choices are made continuously and add to my own power and feeling of power over and within my life. The more I make choices due to outside forces (what others may think, livelihood, a gun held to my head) the less of an agent I become. And as I continue to make those choices to achieve the desired outcome at the expense of my agency, the less powerful I feel (McCracken 2013, 147).

For marginalized populations, such as street sex workers, there is not an infinite amount of flexibility in their agency and there are many factors that could constrain decisions, such as a gun held to one's head. They may not feel empowered as a result and feel out of control of their lives. Because they may be working to survive on a day to day basis, these individuals are easy for other stakeholders to identify as victims. Jeff, the fifty-three year old White Police officer, spoke about it this way:

I haven't really thought about it. I mean, yeah, I don't know. I mean it's a difficult situation because first of all I don't think I've ever met anybody who does it on their own free will. I think a lot of people argue that they are doing on their own free will, but my counter argument is there's been such a long history of mental and physical and sexual abuse in this person's life I think that that free will was robbed a long time ago. So, they're not doing it out of their own free will, cause I think it's been so skewed. Yeah I know it's something that we run into though because we run into this problem with juries sometimes because we think if we do go to trial on prostitution arrest the juries consider these things not really a crime, a lot of people think that prostitution should be decriminalized and so it was very difficult sometimes to win a conviction because the jury looks it- "Well, they did it of their own free will, you know, it shouldn't be a crime." So yeah, it's an interesting question.

Agency, especially as it comes to the criminal justice system, can be a very fraught subject that harms victims and non-victims alike. If a person is truly a victim of sex-trafficking, and the jury does not identify her that way, then that victim may not get justice and instead will be sentenced to time. Or, if a woman is not a victim of sex-trafficking, but is perceived by others as lacking agency, she can be funneled into programs or rehabilitation that she does not want or

need.. But many push narratives of agency as robbed, or not present at all, because of the victim's context. Jessica, the female White police officer, was of this way of thinking:

The people who choose sex work for their own free will or under the influence of drugs. No one actually wants to be out there doing that, selling themselves for money. I have not met anyone who is doing that sober.

Many stakeholders within the criminal justice system as well as NGO workers do not see victims of trafficking being agentic. They believe that agency is absent by virtue of traumatic histories and substance abuse, and they are not entirely wrong. Many trafficking victims are made vulnerable to sexual exploitation because of those factors, and many would cite those reasons as the core issues that led to being trafficked. But whether or not they would identify as having a total lack of control over their lives, or as victims of sex trafficking, is not a factor in whether or not they are identified by others as victims of trafficking. This undermines a survivor's input of what constitutes a trafficking victim, and their control over the meaning making around their experiences. Brent, the sixty three year old White attorney, acknowledges that many sex workers get into exchanging sex because of responsible economic decision making for their families.

First of all, I don't personally judge them. I've seen so many cases where there's just tremendous vulnerability, economic vulnerability, individuals who've had children, or a special needs child and they needed to make more money than they could make at Burger King so that was a viable, in their mind viable, opportunity to make adequate money. So, I don't judge those decisions you know or anything like that cause I'm not in their shoes. However, I do feel that it is in its very nature exploitative and I have seen so many scenarios where it just was the portal to being trafficked, and so just like dancing in an adult club, which that activity is LEGAL, but it is a gateway to abuse is the way I would look at it. And I have never had a client tell me, and many of our clients work on their own at some point along the way, and they speak of being raped, of being robbed, of physical abuse all kinds of things. They'll talk about the Johns who were nice and some of them didn't even wanna have sex, but those stories are never by themselves, there's always stories of just horrible stuff.

Brent also believes that exchanging sex is inherently exploitative and dangerous. Again, this opinion is not necessarily wrong, but where one is coming from in explaining why this is so makes a world of difference in the solutions proposed. While Brent believes this more in the sense that exchanging sex is just by nature exploitative, sex workers would say that exchanging sex is dangerous and exploitative because of the stigma and criminalization present in our society. While Brent's understanding of these dangerous and exploitative conditions leads to support of the Nordic model, sex workers understandings of it lead to support decriminalization. While both sides are looking to make conditions less exploitative and less dangerous for people in vulnerable positions, the narratives and beliefs perpetuated about sex trafficking and sex work seemingly put them in opposition to each other. And one of those core arguments between both parties is agency. Brent would argue that sex workers in positions of economic vulnerability do not have agency, and therefore should be protected and barred from being forced into sex work due to economic disparity. Amanda also does not believe that anyone exercises agency in entering into sex work due to childhood sexual trauma.

Uhm I don't think it exists, I don't think anybody chooses to be raped multiple times a day, just out of the blue, and I don't think they choose that out of health. I think that um, that statistics show that women involved in sex trafficking have a history of childhood sexual abuse so somewhere along the line they're taught that's what they're worth and that's what they're good at. So, there's no free will or choice in that. They're conditioned and groomed for this and exploited. So, I completely disagree with that statement. Like there's no, any woman I've talked to wasn't like, this is what I chose to be at 7 years old. No one choose, no little girl dreams about this, no father dreams about their daughter being this, or being put in this situation. I know there's like some women who are in the sex work world that are in the sex work world that are like "I'm choosing this I'm doing this" but I guarantee you, if you sat down and had a real honest in depth conversation with them somewhere in their childhood there's some really messed up stuff that happened and secrets that were kept that led them down this route as opposed to becoming a nurse, becoming a lawyer, becoming a business woman. Something went off the rails somewhere to get them here. So that's what I believe about that.

This narrative infantilizes all women engaged in sex work to the age at which they may have been sexually abused and undermines the testimonies of sex workers that have not suffered from any sexual abuse. It also equates all sex work to rape, which has been strongly branded as not of the victims choosing. By stating that no little girl dreams about this, no father wants his daughter to engage in this, and comparing exchanging sex to being a nurse or lawyer, reinforces the stigma against sex work as degrading or less-than-desirable work. While it may be true in many cases that childhood sexual trauma pre-disposes some people to trafficking, reinforcing this narrative excludes victims of trafficking that may not have had this experience, or who were nurses but decided that sex work was something that worked better for them and then they were exploited. To enforce one narrative about the agency a victim can exercise in a trafficking experience excludes others and narrows the scope of the anti-trafficking movement. Victoria, the twenty six year old Assessment Advocate, put it this way:

I don't think anyone chooses sex work of their own free will, maybe they believe that they are choosing sex work of their own free will, I think that happens a lot of times, but there are often a lot of contributing factors that lead someone to enter into the sex industry, childhood sex or sexual abuse is probably the largest factor. There are others like poverty, homelessness, so things that are out of their control environmental factors that are basically impressing themselves upon them where they feel like I have no other option to take care of my children so I'm gonna work at a strip club, or I'm homeless and I want to eat so I'm gonna put an ad for myself online [...] I've had so many girls who've actually had incestual backgrounds with their family members as in like their fathers and brothers would rape them repetitively throughout their lives on many different occasions so when you're coming from that kind of a home life where your dad is raping you as a form of punishment and someone rescues you from that you think well I've chosen this this is what I wanted because at least I'm not at home, at least my dad's not raping me anymore, but I don't think that's really a choice, especially if someone is doing that as a child. And that's a story I've heard told to me multiple times from multiple different girls since I've been at Recovery House. Or, my mom's a drug addict and she was forcing me to sell myself for sex, but I wanted to help my mom because I love my mom so I'm choosing this life. Well are you really choosing it, is that something you really have a choice over? So that's why I answered the question that way because I think there's a lot of manipulation and force that goes along with any women that been trained to the sex industry particularly prostitution but

we have a lot of girls who are also dancers and we have a lot of overlap with the strip club industry which is considered legal, it is legal, so that's how I would answer that.

Even in cases this extreme as it pertains to sex trafficking, it can be said that the woman did exercise agency to ensure her survival. These women all exercise agency to provide for themselves and the people they love, and eventually to get help. While their decisions are situated in dire circumstances, to take away their agency as an outsider and to not respect their own self-understanding of agency only restricts women's agency even more because they are rendered in the public consciousness as un-agentic before they can make a case for themselves. While a woman may identify as non-agentic based on all the adverse experiences Victoria mentioned above, there were also plenty of survivors that boldly claimed their agency throughout their lives and experiences with exploitation. If stakeholders only look for people that identify as non-agentic, then they are limiting the impact that they can have on all those that are affected by human trafficking. Vanessa, the thirty one year old White Awareness Advocate,

So 100% of the thousands of women Recovery House has served have been survivors of childhood sexual abuse and, initially working with them many of them have said I chose this they believed I chose this I went into this because you know I wanted to or something and then after working with them for a period of time after going through the different trauma therapies and really getting to the root issue we've seen again and again and again 100% of them come from this root issue of childhood sexual abuse it led them down a path that otherwise they would not have gone. What that trauma has done to them physically/psychologically has set them down a path and it has caused them to make decisions and believe lies about themselves and I mean I've heard teenagers in our prevention groups say I really believed that was the only thing I was good for. And so even if it's not spoken because like I said no survivor typically is gonna self-identify they're gonna say no I want this no I chose this and you know after being in our program they're like, WOW I never really wanted that and so I can only speak to our experience of that 100% of survivors we have served.

As Vanessa notes, many women make claims to their agency and fight to have that understood within the system once identified. But, upon interacting with anti-trafficking sex work abolitionist movements and resources, the tune changes. This shows how different anti-

trafficking narratives can influence one's perception of their own agency. Agency, as defined by sex work abolitionist anti-trafficking groups, means making decisions out of complete 'health' and economic stability. While is a beautiful thing and a testament to sex work abolitionist anti-trafficking work that many women are able to unpack their sexual trauma, it also shows a reworking of the survivor's understanding of their agency and identity. But, the understanding of agency as colored by adverse experiences is not exclusive to sex work abolitionist anti-trafficking stakeholders; Annie, a twenty four year old exotic dancer, had this to say:

Bitches say this shit all the time like "ah I'll have sex with someone but like only for a million dollars" or "I would do it, but only for this much money" and it's like, I don't think you could, girlfriend! Like, you have to be really fucked up already I think to be able to consent to something like this. Like, we are consenting, but that consent comes from somewhere. Like, this is a very unpopular with a lot of sex workers cause they're like, "I'm not a victim I'm not traumatized I had a beautiful childhood I just do it for the money." And that's fine, like whatever is going on inside of that girl is her business, if she does it for the money only).

Annie feels as though the decision of women to engage in exchanging sexual acts in exchange for monetary compensation is informed by trauma. It is very pervasive to believe that non-monogamous, non-heterosexual behaviors come from abuse or trauma, and that can be seen for people that argue against the kink community as well as the LGBTQ+ community. Annie also has a much different understanding of agency in this statement, acknowledging that sex workers are consenting, but that was influenced by something in their past. While this still creates a narrative that all sex workers have been abused somewhere down the line to consent to sex work, it still provides a broader understanding of the agency of vulnerable women. If a woman is portrayed as not practicing agency until she engages with 'healthy' behaviors, then that constrains the level of empowerment a woman can claim over the tools she uses to survive when engaged in street sex work or in a sex trafficking situation. Vanessa exemplifies this way of thinking:

And if a woman goes through the program on her own free will, which they do go through on their own free will they have to choose to say yes to the court diversion program or to the... or to the... or to the residential program they are not forced into any of it they chose to go into it and they receive life skills a personalized education plan, trauma resolution treatment, horse therapy art therapy, mentorship uhm counseling, uhm, they are able to reconnect with their family or their children if that's safe and if that's possible, every resource we can give them if it can bring them into restoration and healing is what they receive.

It is a very common for anti-trafficking programs to downplay or outright deny the agency of a woman when she was engaged in sex work, but when she is court ordered to engage in a program then her agency is played up. The coercive mechanisms of the program are downplayed by emphasizing the survivor's willingness to choose to 'work the program' and get a better life. Many survivors must finish the program to get all the resources mentioned by Vanessa, as well as custody of their children, expungement of their felonies, and many other resources. Despite this enormous pressure to follow the rules to get these things, advocates frame choosing the program as an agentic choice made by the women who are in the program. Breanna, a twenty four year old resident at Recovery House, shows her change in thinking towards that:

Maybe at first, um, I don't really know I don't have first-hand experience obviously, I mean even though... No, I did voluntarily do it, I was court ordered but it was my decision, I wanted to come to the program even before I was court ordered but, uhm, I don't really know.

This type of re-framing of agency allows the survivors to take more ownership and accountability over their recovery and can be very empowering. But survivors are not framed to have the same agency when they were making choices for survival. So, it can be seen that the framing of their agency is conditional to how well it fits with ideas about being a rescued survivor, as opposed to a trafficking victim. Breanna does not consider herself as voluntarily going through the program at first, and then takes agency back, emphasizing that even if she is court ordered she did choose to go through the program, and that she chose this program before

being ordered there. And not recognizing survivors' choices to remain in the program for over a year can potentially minimize the agency that they are practicing, even within the constraints of the anti-trafficking narrative that configures their agency. When asked about the difference between being court ordered to Recovery House versus voluntarily residing at Recovery House, Kayla had this to say:

Yes, well I guess it's different for each of us but I do feel like when you're going through this voluntarily you it's hard here sometimes because decisions are made for you in the beginning because let's face it you weren't making the right decisions, like you know for a really long time so like we need that structure but girls who are here voluntarily who can't like leave it as soon as like something they don't like goes on I feel like they're like alright then I'm out of here I'm gonna leave and it doesn't give Recovery House the chance to actually like, um help you grow into a different person and... um. Yeah.

Kayla recognizes the pressure to stay within the program keeps women there for longer, even if they do not want to follow the rules of the program. She also recognizes the fact that there is a narrative perpetuated that victims were not making good decisions, and that they are taught to make good decisions through the program. While she is recognizing this as a necessary and needed teaching of life skills, this framing reconfigures the way the women relate to themselves as agentic beings, and many go through a crisis of self-doubt because they feel that they only make horrible decisions and they need someone else to help them make choices over their lives. Perpetuating the idea that women are making fully agentic, non-constrained decisions to engage with Recovery House also ignores the powerful testimonies to the contrary that many Residents offer willingly. She went on to state this:

This is life or death for me. Literally life or death. I could leave right now but I know that I'd... I'm going to go back out there, use, go back to jail, and I don't want that life I don't want that life at all or I'm gonna die before I even get picked back up so it's just the fact that I know that I need this more than anything that I've needed in a really long time. You know what I'm saying? I have to get this right because if I don't, it's death for me.

Kayla does not feel as if it is a choice to be at Recovery House, at least not totally. She feels as though it is life or death for her to complete this program. That too is coerced consent, as much as anti-trafficking organizations do not want to acknowledge it. The irony of framing sex work as coerced due to economic and social reasons, and then coercing these very same women into recovery programs through economic and social reasons, seems to be lost on most advocates. And this is due to the framing of health. Kourtney spoke to feeling as if she is being treated like a child at times:

It's a double edge sword but... no I dislike I wanna say you know it's been tough with my family and not getting to see them like I want but at the end of the day it's the best thing for me sometimes I dislike all the downtime but I think it's also more than them things it's like necessary so... as much as I don't wanna say cause anything I dislike is for my best benefit so there's nothing really that like... you know sometimes I hate like I'm treated like a child in some ways like oh you can't drink caffeine like really is that the worst thing that we ever you know but I guess... or like that we can only watch pg movies silly, silly things but in hindsight I'm sure it's all for a purpose there's really nothing that's I don't like enough that makes me not want to do it, if that makes sense.

As opposed to a life doing street sex work or being sex trafficked, this coercion is 'for the best' and enforced by advocates that believe that the individual can lead a 'better life.' While the coercion is definitely different in nature and meaning, it is interesting to see how agency and coercion are marketed in anti-trafficking movements versus how they are utilized in anti-trafficking programs. Breanna also speaks to feeling that this is "best for her" even if she does not like or agree with the guidelines:

You could say I dislike some of the rules, but I mean... rules are rules you know? They may be stupid to me like having a movie list and having to get shows and movies approved like that's stupid. But I get it you know they're just trying to do what's best for me, but still.

At Recovery House programs, women are cut off from the world and infantilized, made to watch only children's TV shows because anything else could be triggering to someone. There are also rules about wearing bras in the residential home at all times and wearing modest attire.

There are rules about how much sugar should be in the women's diet and when they can drink coffee. There is a soda ban unless it is brought for special occasions. Residents cannot go on the internet or make calls without an advocates' supervision until they near the end of the program.

But like, when you're in it you really don't know that you're a victim, if that makes sense. Like I had no idea that I was a victim to anything. I thought this is how what the life I want, you know? I didn't even know what anything, really, I didn't know there was life outside of it, that was my life! And, I had become, I guess, okay with it because that's all I knew you know? My stepdad, I've tricked for him, I've tricked for my whole—outside of my mother— my whole family, you know? For drugs and all that. So it was just such a norm in my life that it was like, okay... Um now, since being here and looking in hindsight it's like wow... because even in my other programs I would still trick with some of my customers that I've had for a long time because man I loved and cared about them, and we've had relationships for 5 and 6 years you get to really be like... you know these people become, ironically, they're not all bad. It's not always like that but there are a few that are like... I have like rapport with and really became emotionally involved as well and when you don't have anybody you hold onto the little... so it's a lot, it's a lot just looking at it like, wow, I was a victim through a lot of things, but still wanting to take responsibility for the part I played. Because I was a willing participant for a really long time. But now also looking at when you're young you don't... you're like molded into this without knowing. If I knew, if I had more information would I have made the same decisions probably not, but I didn't, and I did and so I still like to take responsibility for the role that I played. I have to do that for myself, I don't wanna always seem like I was forced. I think that I just grew up in a world that was very closed, and it seemed like the only option.

For Kourtney, she still makes a claim to agency even from her standpoint of having been groomed and exposed to working in sex work from a young age. Kourtney shows that many survivors battle with anti-trafficking's construction of agency. As mentioned before, the cultural code of agency in the United States is that everyone has it, and it is innate to be a human being. To say that one was not agentic throughout their lives is very alienating, because no matter where one was making decisions from, making decisions is a human practice and it is done no matter how much oppression someone is suffering under. This is not to say she is to blame. This is to recognize that she made decisions as best she could from within her circumstance, and that should be respected as much as the decisions she makes while she is within a program. Mia

discusses the alienation she felt from feeling as if she had to put all the responsibility with her trafficker:

It was hard at first because I carried a lot of guilt. I didn't feel comfortable putting all the blame on my trafficker at first, you know? I felt like saying that I was trafficked and that I was a survivor of trafficking you know in my head, it looked completely different, than what it did for me. I thought a human trafficking victim was somebody who had been locked away in a cage and men just came in and had their way with them I didn't think that trafficking was... At first, I did not think that I had been trafficked per se so to have somebody identify me as that it didn't feel right. It didn't feel like it fit until I came to [Recovery House] and really pulled apart some of the things that I had been through and saw how deep the manipulation really was in my brain like how deep my trafficker, he had gotten into my brain.

Residents have trouble identifying with trafficking narratives precisely because they are constructed as non-agentic, which is a precursor to being blameless. To put the agency and blame all on the trafficker is to render the woman the trafficking victim, and not two business partners. The iconic victim of sex trafficking is generally advertised to be a child that was captured to exchange sex and held against their will. Many women in domestic trafficking situations were not necessarily chained or locked away— but they were in abusive relationships with people that may have had control over their drugs, money, or their love and loyalty. To a certain extent, it is hard to say that acknowledging constrained agency will make it any easier to identify with the sex trafficking victim narrative, because, like Mia acknowledges here, the manipulation undergone in abusive situations runs deep and to the quick. But it is worth arguing for a more fluid understanding of agency to empower victims. The cultural code of agency needs to be undermined so those who make decisions regarding criminal culpability can make more informed choices. Many people who have traumatic experiences come to understand and reckon with their experiences differently, so to prescribe one understanding of agency to an entire group of people can alienate some as they try to understand their own recovery.

Many trafficking victims who get out of trafficking situations decide to stay engaged with sex work, and that choice is negated based on what is perpetuated about sex work and agency from anti-trafficking groups. And many victims, when caught up in stings and given two options—either jail time or a diversion program, would like more than just those two choices. Sex workers problematize the agency ‘given’ to survivors through rehabilitation programs as a necessary counter narrative to the idea of agency as something that can be taken away and gifted back to an individual. Kristen has this to say:

So, what they haven’t had, is the ability to make decisions for themselves, so what you gotta do is give them that ability first and foremost. And not tell them, this is what you need to do. So, I would find out from them, what they want, what their end goal is, and how they see that coming about. And do whatever it is I could in my power to help them achieve that goal. And If I can’t do something to try to find the people that can. Like if what they want is, you know, for their pimp or trafficker to be reported to the police and all that to come in then like I would do that. But if they just want a ride out cause they’ve got a plane ticket somewhere well I’ve done that. I’ve done that I got two black eyes and ripped out a whole track of my hair to get a girl out of a situation, but I’ve done that, but she didn’t want the police called so we didn’t call the police. I mean I called the police to report the assault on me afterwards, but we got her out of the situation and her situation didn’t go on any of the police reports. That wasn’t something that I mentioned because she didn’t want it mentioned.

Kristen’s statement about empowerment is almost word for word what an anti-trafficking agency would say that they do for women in trafficking situations: that these women need to be given the ability to make decisions for themselves. But what Kristen considers empowering a woman to make decisions is drastically different than what Recovery House would decide to do. Kristen helps the women not report to the police, has given them rides to wherever they needed, and even gotten in physical altercations to enable women to act on their decisions. Within the program of Recovery House, due to organizational liability, there is no way that these decisions would be able to be acted on by women engaged in the program or by advocates trying to ‘empower’ the women in the program. This idea of agency is not contingent on how much

‘health’ a decision is judged to have, but instead the woman’s choice is accepted at face value to be the most authoritative decision. Instead of having goals of ‘rehabilitation’ in mind while seeking to empower these women’s decisions, Kristen actually enables whatever action the woman seeks to pursue. Advocates at Recovery House would ultimately be encouraging the woman to make decisions that would lead to her no longer being a sex worker. Many people do practice agency in sex work, but this is not recognized by sex work abolitionist anti-trafficking organizations. And some sex workers, too, believe their agency is limited, such as Annie:

A lot of girls too, when they start, they get taken advantage of because if you haven’t been around the block you don’t know how to walk away from money, and that happens a lot. Cause a guy keeps giving you hundred dollar bills and you’re like, “Holy shit! I haven’t even seen this much money at one time! He wants to do this thing, and I’m already doing shit I don’t wanna do so...” it’s hard to reinforce boundaries.

For Annie, because so many women get into the work in order to make much needed money, it is difficult for the consent to be fully agentic because there is always a danger of exploiting this young women’s naiveté and need for cash. There is an added layer for her of perceiving this work as something she would never choose to do unless it was lucrative, so she already views this work as coerced consent. She went on to say this:

The idea that sex work, I don’t... it’s coerced consent, you know? And I know a lot of sex workers aren’t too keen on that sort of vocabulary but for me it’s the truth. Like I would never do that shit unless I was getting paid so it’s not for me it’s not real. And sex should only ever be that, real and for me....

For Annie, sex work is not a choice she would make because of her relationship to her sexuality. For her, her choices within her sexuality should always be serving her spiritual and sexual satisfaction, not utilized as a commodity for others. This makes her experiences in exotic dancing extremely alienating, as she does not enjoy or want to take part in the practice. This make her feel less agentic, as it is not a decision she would make if she had access to other

economic opportunities. Living Dead Hooker feels very differently about sex and sexuality, and this gives her a very different feeling about sex work.

This whole sex thing is... is a belief system that really holds people back, and I don't have the rigid, stiff and rigid belief system around sex. I can go beyond the borders of what most people can go beyond, and I like that. That's empowering because I have been violently raped twice, it builds a new neural pathway. I've been where other people have not been. I know what's there. I'm not scared! I don't have the fear around sex I do not have the fear around sex. I do not need religion to tell me what to do with my vagina. I like that I can do things other people can't do. I like that a lot (LDH).

For Living Dead Hooker, her sexual trauma gave her an innate ability to push the boundaries of her sexuality, and it is something that she chooses to enjoy today. If the understanding of agency in sex work is that it is always exploitative and never agentive because of sexual trauma shaping the decision making of some women, then what does Living Dead Hooker's testimony mean? Living Dead Hooker was raped, as mentioned above, as well as in two trafficking situations throughout her life, and yet she loves sex work and is adamant that she will do it for the rest of her life. She is enjoying her life and getting by just fine. If the anti-trafficking idea of agency in sex work is accepted, then Living Dead Hooker's testimony is undermined by ideas that she is just too abused to be thinking straight, which once again removes her agency in her own narrative. Some believe that economic need strips agency in sex work, which Brie disagrees with:

I understand that there can be a very close gray line from one to the other, but just because I ask for money does not mean I'm coerced. Just because I need the money does not mean I'm coerced any more than it is when I go to my retail job where I have to listen to them complain to me that I'm not making quotas and I could be fired for it, potentially far more dehumanizing and yet I put up with that with twelve other people on my sale team. Human trafficking is the force or coercion of someone in a vulnerable position to whatever ends.

As for the economic need that drives women into sex work, Brie feels strongly that it is the same economic need that all those that are economically vulnerable feel, and that she is not

“trafficked” just because she needs to pay her bills. This is something that many sex workers feel, that their economic instability does not inherently mean that they are exploited or making coerced decisions any more than any other person experiencing economic hardship. They feel that this assumption is extremely patronizing and creates a situation where they are constantly mis-identified as sex trafficking victims. Kristen has felt this acutely:

Oh, because I’ve attended human trafficking conferences as a full-service sex worker and I have been told, under no uncertain circumstances that I am a victim and I am not smart enough to know it. So, I mean that is the general view point of most of the end demand organizations, like the United States Institute Against Human Trafficking.

Kristen, even while being ‘out’ about her identification as a full-service sex worker, has been told by end demand advocates that she is a victim. She felt that their labeling of her as a sex trafficking victim despite her openly advocating for sex work showed that those advocates believed that her identification was invalid because she was ignorant. When a grown individual is forcibly told that they do not know what they are doing by virtual strangers, it is bound to be insulting and infantilizing. Brie feels very strongly about it:

I know what I wanna do, and every person I know has chosen what they wanna do, and yet we’re being told you couldn’t have chosen that because it’s so exploitative, honey you don’t know you’re being exploited you’re so exploited. It’s just really dehumanizing. And honestly what my experience is, is what the- and I understand that sex trafficking happens and I understand that there is slavery and I understand that there are plenty of people out there that have a man there who is coercing them in some manner to do this or they originally get started in it and then someone is coercing them in some manner to do this, but everyone that I know does this because it’s good work. It’s good work you can set your own hours you can choose your own schedule, I know people with health issues that can’t hold regular jobs I know people with anger issues that haven’t been able to hold regular jobs because they have some true anger or PTSD issues, but just in general it’s actually good work to have and when I read about the anti-trafficking network in general and how they expect us to be just purely exploited people that are too unaware to know that they are exploited, it’s criminal, it’s dehumanizing, and from my experience the only dehumanizing behavior is coming from the people who are saying they want to rescue. I have not encountered that from other people I don’t encounter that from my clients. My clients are very respectful and appreciative people who treat me with honor.

Brie feels that while anti-trafficking advocates are fighting against trafficking, but their methods in counteracting trafficking victimize sex workers by invalidating their agency. The same issues that Brent acknowledged brought women to sex work, Brie acknowledges here with a completely different framing. For Brent, it is understandable that women choose sex work but ultimately unconscionable for society to allow sex work. For Brie, it is understandable that women choose sex work and it is 'good work.' The moral overtone for each is fueled by different concerns, one concerned with sex work leading to violence against women and one concerned with sex work being a labor right and a question of women's agency. Anti-trafficking advocates ultimately, in their framing of sex work as violence, end up trying to protect women from their own choices and decisions that they are making for themselves and their families. The idea that women cannot consent to sex work, and therefore are all victims of trafficking, shows a vital disconnect on anti-trafficking advocates and sex workers understanding of agency in sex work. Brie also said:

Consent is when I know what the person is expecting and I'm agreeing with what's going to happen. In sex work, the entire action is consent from the moment of someone contacting you, and trying to find out from your code [because the acts are illegal] what it is what you're willing to do with them what you're willing to offer, and from beginning to end of the transaction they don't step out of line and you continue to provide what was agreed upon. So, it's not only consent on my part for them having a transaction with me, but consent on my part for my fulfilling the transaction that was agreed upon all through a code because we can't actually discuss what we agree upon. Consent would be a hell of a lot easier if it wasn't illegal. The criminalization of sex work really compounds the idea of consent, because just discussing the exchange of sex for money is against the law. And so, negotiating it from beginning to end is against the law, and yet you don't wanna be arrested for just making a living.

For many sex workers, consent is exactly what distinguishes sex work from sex trafficking. Anti-trafficking advocates denial of this factor not only obscures what they are actually looking at and looking for, but it also makes it much more difficult to ask those questions of individuals that may potentially be in coercive situations. Since choosing is a

marker of prostitution, it makes it much more difficult and dangerous for sex workers to negotiate. As agency within sex work is essentially criminalized, it compounds restrictions around sex work and can put women into more dangerous situations.

Identifying as a Victim/Survivor

The dominant discourse of sex trafficking shapes definitions of not only the problem of trafficking, but also the problem of victim identification. This narrative pervades and influences not only the average citizen, but those engaged with the issue on the ground as well as those engaged in the highest levels of government. (Peters 2013, 239). This creates structural pressure for victims to adhere to certain understandings of what a victim, or a survivor, looks like. Part of the ideal victim presentation is to show ones' self as lacking agency, because the above mentioned issues of arguing blame and culpability complicate their identification because of agency being understood as either one has it or they do not (Chuang 2014, 640). These expectations of trafficking victims are historically couched in the White Slavery scare.

The iconic trafficking victim of the present day bears a striking resemblance to the “white slave”—she is female, trafficked for sex, and blameless for her plight because of her youth or lack of education; she is rescued by law enforcement instead of escaping on her own, is cooperative in the investigation, and is flawlessly credible as a witness for the prosecution (Balgamwalla 2016, 16).

This victim narrative is not only for the purpose of investigators and prosecutors to be able to identify cases of trafficking, but also to create compliant victims. If victims are non-agentic, symbolic representations of female submission, then they are easier to control in the criminal justice system. If one does not cooperate, or act like a credible witness or victim, then they run the risk of being identified instead as a ‘prostitute’ which constitutes them a criminal instead of a victim. But, beyond victimhood, there is surviving. This concept must too be explored or otherwise there is no discursive moving on from victimhood.

In the late 1970s, Kathleen Barry (1979:39) was one of the first theorists to introduce the concept of female victims of abuse (in this case, rape) “surviving” by stating that “more than victims, women who have been raped or sexually enslaved are survivors. Surviving is the other side of being a victim. It involves will, action, initiative on the victim’s part.” While the label victim carries “negative connotations of being damaged, passive, and powerless” (Best 1997:13), the term survivor is viewed by many to be more positive, as it implies qualities such as agency, coping, resistance, decision making, recovery, and survival (Dunn 2005; McLeer 1998 as quoted in Leisenring 2006, 312).

The narrative construction of survivor is necessary for victims, as victims are so disempowered by victim narratives that there needs to be another side to that coin. It also acknowledges that victims do not live in their victimization constantly and forever—there is a way to move on from whatever had happened. The concept of the survivor also redeems the victim and regains respect for the victim in the public understanding.

This is the core of survivor discourse; it simultaneously normalizes deviance and elevates the moral standing of the deviant. Moreover, it does so by conferring agency on battered women even as it excuses them from responsibility for their deviance, thus balancing the tensions created by the helplessness and entrapment of victims. (Dunn 2010, 196)

For battered women, this means transferring agency back to the survivor from its lost state when that woman was a victim. It also rectifies any wrongs that the woman committed in the past by virtue of proving oneself to be different than before. For sex trafficking survivors, that becomes look like reclaiming agency in their lives, abstaining from sex, and following rules that they would have ceaselessly broken in their life prior to programming. With rules such as no cigarette smoking to no PG13 movies, it is easy for the women to prove that they are completely different in their behavior to where they were when they incurred whatever charges were set against them initially. It also reestablishes not only their agency, but their purity. Combined with accepting religious overtones at Recovery house, abstaining from any romantic or sexual

relationships for up to two years while they are in Recovery House's residential program re-establishes the victim's morality so she can become a respectable survivor.

These faith-based human rights organizations treat prostitution as an issue of conscience and morality rather than of income possibilities and labor, a stance that emphasizes protection over autonomy and empowerment (Soderlund 2005 81).

Rules like this are what make rehabilitation programs seem as if they are protecting their residents from themselves. They have stringent rules and structure and isolate in the name of protecting these women from further victimization and enabling them to take control of their lives past all the trauma and social pressures that they have endured, but they steeply limit autonomy. It also teaches a certain kind of respectability—one of modesty, chastity, monogamy, and heterosexuality. Since sex for money is thought to be the problem, and it is a moral issue, organizations and survivors that they serve tend to speak about those influences in trafficking over the issues of income, labor, and gender inequity because those are overlooked as the individual women are held tightly to these victim/survivor narratives. The victim in sex trafficking narratives is so deeply exploited and victimized by a third party that it creates an evocative good versus evil dichotomy that individualizes every plight isolated from structural factors, while at the same time homogenizing all victims story into one composite narrative. The following is a quote from a survivor of sex trafficking that became a researcher and was asked to speak about sex trafficking at a class at a law school. While she was trying to speak about her research on the subject and get to larger societal issues that enable trafficking, the law students and professors derailed her in favor of hearing a testimony that would adhere to the dominant narrative.

Apart from the thematic elements that assured the audience of my survivor's validity and that I met the criteria for modern day slave narrative, these violent and degrading testimonies were what they wanted to hear and know about, entirely to the exclusion of any serious analysis or discussion of what issues actually shape and maintain such

international sex work networks... I was the miserable wretched whore, whose success at making it out, trying to get an education and move on was an instantiation of their status as saved. In such an arena, even the most rescued victim will never be able to shed that cloak of victim completely and therefore is fit into the proper place: a victim whose value lies in how well she can serve the movement (Cojocarú 2015 187-188).

She felt that her validity as a survivor in that space depended on how well she could prove her victimization through gory anecdote. This is how victim status and survivor status are intertwined—one cannot claim one label without the other, and they provide necessary validity to those that are making deservingness evaluations. Being able to identify oneself as a victim, and then to transform into a survivor, is a mandatory metamorphosis residents at Recovery House have to make in order to graduate the program. Many women come into Recovery House never having heard of sex trafficking or human trafficking other than from popularized movies such as *Taken*, and so for them this narrative is something that they must adapt to and learn in order to make sense of the expectations of them within the program to be a successful survivor.

Jaine: Um... so when did you first experience that? Like being identified by somebody else?

Kayla: Coming into Recovery House.

Jaine: Yeah?

Kayla: I had never even thought of that or even heard that term before I came here to Recovery House.

Jaine: Yeah, so it wasn't called that when you were dancing.

Kayla: No...

Jaine: It was just like...

Kayla: Like what that I was a survivor?

Jaine: Well no like trafficking I guess...

Kayla: No, no. I called myself a dancer and when I was actually like, being trafficked. We didn't say that, we would say escort, you know?

Part of what makes victim/survivor discourse so coercive is that it is so exclusive. One has to present correctly in order to be identified, and then rendered deserving enough to receive resources. The subjects of anti-trafficking efforts generally have no access to this understanding or narrative until after they are identified by someone else as deserving, so those that are not judged to be deserving are not given access to this discourse to make claims of themselves. With the case of sex trafficking survivors, every resident in Recovery House said that they had no idea about human trafficking until they became involved with Recovery House. This puts an imperative on the identified victim/survivor to agree with the labeling of themselves and their experiences by others, or they could no longer receive the benefits and support from advocates that come from this identification. Victoria, the Assessment Advocate, had this to say about barriers to victims:

You know, I think the biggest obstacle is something that we say in our AA recovery meetings, is that it's very difficult for someone to recover who lacks the capacity to be honest with themselves and with others around them and I see that as a huge barrier because there are women who don't want to admit that they have a problem that don't want to admit that their families are unhealthy that even drugs are bad. I've had women come into the house that're like "I love drugs I don't see what's wrong with using drugs" and obviously if you have a mindset like that where you just lack the capacity to really see your life in an honest and clear way and to be able to see unhealth then it's going to be really hard for you to change your life. So I would say that is a huge barrier, I'm sure a lot of people would say their addiction or their abuse, but honestly I see if you're able to be honest about your addiction and just say, "I'm an Addict and this is the coping skill that I had," I see more women have so much success. Or even when they are willing to be honest about their trauma and really process it through with a trauma therapist and say, "hey this is what I've gone through as a child," but when we have people who are like, "oh I'm fine I don't have any trauma," or, "I don't have addiction problems" or, "I don't have codependency problems," that's what I see as the biggest obstacle to overcoming these challenges because you have to be willing to recognize that you have a challenge in order to overcome a challenge.

As shown here by Victoria, it is understood that people that do not acknowledge or identify their victimization are closed off to change. The individuals that do not admit to having

issues do not succeed—they fail. This means that if ones' self-perception of their lives, no matter what that looks like, is that they are fine, or they do not want to share it with others, then they are perceived by service workers as undeserving of victim/survivor status. Their 'denial' of other's perceived reality of their lives and situations creates a situation where they cannot claim their victimhood or change into a survivor, and so it is unsatisfying for those that are within the helping professions. Without the pivotal piece of claiming something as wrong within one's life, one cannot be a deserving victim. No one can witness agonizing and drastic growth and change from who the 'victim' once was if they are fine being who they are. Without that, they can never undergo the transformation from victim to survivor, which is pivotal to being seen as a deserving survivor. Kayla, a resident at Recovery House, had this to say about realizing she is a survivor:

Uhm, what was it like to realize I'm a survivor, um, empowering I guess, that I overcame something that a lot of girls you know don't have the strength or maybe the opportunity to like change their life, so like the fact that I'm sitting here right now talking about the fact that I survived that part of my journey is really empowering.

Those in the Recovery House program that have been identified as victims of sex trafficking recognize the importance of transforming into sex trafficking survivors. Without this transformation from 'victim thinking' to 'empowered survivor' residents could be denied phasing up through the program, which keeps them in the program longer. They have to show gratitude for their situation at Recovery House, exhibit problem solving and balance, be able to balance their social life, job, and education, and learn to manage their emotional state. They are judged as competent survivors when they become active, contributing citizens. It is also important that they recognize their worth as a survivor, not only to themselves, but out of gratitude for the organization and for the hope of other women in trafficking situations. This is emphasized so greatly in the program that residents actively struggle with the characterization,

feeling as if they are being branded. Kayla speaks on not liking the term survivor in the beginning:

In the beginning of this journey I didn't like that like that verbiage. I guess because it made me feel like I was going to be labeled like that for the rest of my life, but that's not true, that's not the case at all. The farther along I get on my journey and the more um... the more I change, I guess, I realize that even though you go from that victim to survivor to being empowered I believe that I'm like I'm on my way to being empowered. I feel different like I don't feel like a victim anymore. And um, being a survivor is actually something to be proud about and not something to be like, you know, ashamed of at all because you survived a really like tough situation that some girls don't survive at all and it's really empowering to realize that. So, I think that's like that bridge, when I realize, "wow I survived that and look where I'm at right now!" That's the empowerment.

Kayla recognizes her change in relationship to the labels of sex trafficking victim/survivor is in direct relationship to her journey through the program. While women in the program struggle with being outwardly identified in this way, they eventually learn to adopt this understanding and use it to find empowerment and purpose, or they think all of it is bologna and leave. Those that do not buy into the narrative generally do not stay, as it is so integral to how the journey of rehabilitation from sex trafficking is understood at Recovery House. This is not all insidious—it is supposed to show women that they are more than their adverse experiences and trauma, and impress upon them their resiliency, strength, and luck to be where they are now. It is a necessary reframing of the manipulated victim and is meant to give them positivity and control. But because it is such a marker of progress in rehabilitation programs, it can become a box to tick on a list of things that one must do as opposed to an organic identity that one is happy to embody. Kourtney discusses her perception of it here:

It's tough because you think of it like dang everybody knows that I'm like, a slut. (laughter) but a paid slut, you know what I mean? ... and that's something I still think about often because I still wanna be a voice for girls but how do I want to be branded for the rest of my life? Kourtney sex trafficking whatever... survivor... um, I don't I'm not sure where I'm at with that yet, I'm still feeling that out I don't have a concrete answer to that yet. I think it's always a journey but just knowing that I'm so much more

than that and like I do have information that's necessary to save lives that makes me wanna do it but I'm not just a sex... that's just a small part of who I am...

Kourtney addresses the fact that for many that do not understand what sex trafficking means, the meaning could just be a paid slut. She acknowledges the stigma towards promiscuity in women, as well as the stigma towards that exchange sex for money, and shows that she understands that identifying as a sex-trafficking survivor can bring the burden of misunderstanding down upon her. But also, Kourtney finds a lot of meaning in the label of survivor because she feels that she wants to speak to girls in vulnerable situations so that they may avoid the path she took. With experiences in the foster care system, family members experiencing substance abuse, and experiences from her youth with drugs and drinking, she feels that she has a very special testimony to share with kids. Yet, even while she recognizes the power of her experiences to speak to others, she struggles with the meaning and power behind the label of sex trafficking survivor, and she does not readily jump to the idea of carrying that around the rest of her life. Not only does it imply the responsibility to speak out to others, but it can overshadow other parts of her personality, reducing her to the popularized narratives that market the phenomenon to the public.

Kourtney also struggles with the victim/survivor narrative of sex trafficking because she strongly identified as an agentic sex worker in her life. The idea those that have experienced sex trafficking need to present as certain types of victims/survivors in order to be deserving erases the overlap between sex work and sex trafficking, and that many women can go through periods of both and find empowerment through sex work after their trafficking experiences. Living Dead Hooker is one such person that was able to exit trafficking situations due to her sex work. When she was homeless and seventeen in the seventies, she was taken in by a police officer that made her exchange sexual services in order to pay the rent of staying at his place. There were many

young runaway women that were in the same predicament, and many of them were servicing police officers and were unable to report to law enforcement. Another trafficking situation she was in, she was in Atlanta and went to work in a brothel. They did not allow her to leave and scheduled her with back to back clients, ten a day she said. Both of situations were mitigated by her sex work.

Jaine: You basically answered this earlier with a little sub section here, but do you feel like you were ever in a human trafficking situation?

LDH: Yes, yeah, that would be the one whore house that I want to and then also that the cops to pick me up at the bus station I had no choice. I mean, what was I gonna do? For god's sake, and I didn't want to go back home I had nowhere to go. So. Yeah, I was in a situation. And I had to give him some money and fuck him too for the place to stay so

LDH: Did you go to the police? It was the police! Oh, I laugh at that one. Did it seem like alerting the police was a safe option? No!

Jaine: If so, I mean this is kind of a dumb question... Well do you mind telling me how you got out of that experience?

LDH: I don't mind what I did was I was working sex work. I was starting to make money for the first time in my life my little 17-year-old life I was making and some CASH! So, I saved my money, I just put it in socks and hid it and I saved my money, my little bit of money. And it took a couple months, I got the money though, and I went out one of those days and I found me a little room, it was like little efficiency room, I mean that's how I got out and they let me go because I mean, they didn't put up a big stink they would come over once and a while and fuck that's it. I mean they didn't like, drag me back though, so I was pretty lucky that way. They had other girls. There's a fresh supply all the time.

This experience is not something that is acknowledged under the understanding of a 'true survivor' by many stakeholders. The headline of, 'agentic sex worker saves herself from sex-trafficking police' is not one that would be touted by media outlets or anti-trafficking advocates, because Living Dead Hooker's 'survivorship' is not identifiable within the narrative of the powerless, manipulated, and sex work forsaking victim/survivor. Even so, that does not stop her from identifying herself as a survivor of sex trafficking.

Jaine: Have you ever identified as someone who was trafficked? Why or why not?

LDH: Well I do because of... I remember how they got me and how vulnerable I was and how I was not able to say no. And in both cases the cops, and that one whore house that had me, there was no way to say no. That's... That's coerced. I had to. I didn't have a choice. Sex work, I have a choice? Then, sex trafficked, I did not have a choice. I mean I had no choice, I had to fuck the cops to stay there. I appreciate that they put me to work as a sex worker though because I took to it like a fish to water. I've never really had the fear around sex that a lot of people have.

For her, a survivor of sex trafficking is anyone that did not have a choice to participate in sex work. It is not mutually exclusive from being a sex worker, and it is not something that needs to be facilitated by others. Yet hers is not a voice traditionally heard when anti-trafficking groups highlight survivors. Brie spoke about feeling alienated by anti-trafficking organizations:

I only joined twitter just twelve or thirteen months ago just after I became a sex worker as a method to promote myself and I run across a lot of anti-trafficking groups that will constantly tell me that basically I'm stupid that I don't recognize that I'm being violated and dehumanized and degraded, and yet I find they're the only ones doing that to me. So, it's very sad that the people that insist that people need to be saved from sex work are the most verbally abusive people to the sex workers and their humanity. Brie

Sex workers are demonized for not identifying as victims/survivors of trafficking. It is perceived that if they do not identify as a victim or a survivor of sex trafficking, then they are on the side of the exploiters and traffickers. This compounds the stigma individuals are facing while exchanging sex. This also undermines those that come forward with different testimonies about sex trafficking and sex work. Kristen spoke about her friends' experiences with this:

Yes. Two of my very good friends that lobby with me are victims of human trafficking. And they have stood up there in Tallahassee and Pennsylvania and told legislators that they were also victims of human trafficking and that they do choose sex work consensually now and that they should listen to sex workers but the legislators have the one human trafficking victim that they listen to and then prance up on stage whenever they want to that they listen to. Because they don't, even the legislators don't, um, don't recognize the value, or the humanity of a sex worker. Right after I spoke in Tallahassee the last time representative Kisenhagen came up closing her bill and said, "sex worker, just in case you aren't aware, means prostitute and prostitution is criminal, is criminalized, and I'm not going to listen to criminals." That's pretty much verbatim what she said.

This validation of only certain kinds of victims/survivors shows the biases and evaluations of deservingness that stakeholders participate in that uphold their beliefs and agendas. Because these survivors were also sex workers, their status of ‘survivor’ was not valued by policy makers and anti-trafficking advocates because their sex work rendered them undeserving. By virtue of these survivors identifying as agents instead of victims within their sex work, they were no longer respected as valid survivors.

Religion

My coworkers often say, “these girls don’t know what love looks like.” This ties into conceptions of different types of love. In Christian theology, ‘eros’ is “a need love that appraises value, desires, and climbs to grasp that value and possess it.” This is seen as ‘natural,’ and sinful, human love, while agape is the divine version of love. Agape is defined as “spontaneous and unmotivated, does not regard the value of the loved object but bestows value upon it, and comes from abundance rather than need.” (81 Sacrificial models) I think that the reason love has such a prominent rhetorical power in such anti-trafficking, religious organizations because people are more apt to see it as an extension of God’s love, whether they are the instruments of God’s love or came to be saved because of God’s love.

This can be evidenced by another experience I had at work. A woman came into one of our homes and kept mentioning that one of the Outreach Advocates threatened to break her legs and that is why she was there. I asked her what she was talking about, because this seemed very bizarre and uncharacteristic of the outreach team. She told us that when she was riding in a car with the outreach worker, going to a doctor’s appointment, the outreach worker told her that she was the sheep that always strayed. When the woman asked her what she meant, the outreach

worker told her the story of the shepherd. The shepherd had a flock of sheep, but one sheep would always stray from the flock. The shepherd decided to break the sheep's legs and keep it in the barn to heal. While it was healing in the barn for months, the shepherd would talk to the sheep every day. Once the sheep was healed, it never strayed from the shepherd again. The woman, after hearing this story, asked if the outreach worker would break her legs, and the outreach worker said, "I would break your legs in a heartbeat." In this sacrificial model of Christian love ethics, it is believed that since human beings are needy by nature it is almost impossible for us to love agapically, unless God acts through us. "... in the life that is governed by Agape, the acting subject is not man himself; it is... God, the spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Agape of Christ." (Nygren, *Agape and Eros* 129) This justifies love that would normally be considered extreme, because it is explained and enacted through religious stories and reasoning.

Paul Ramsey, a Christian ethicist, states "the ideal of Christian love is measured by our unstinting response to a single needy neighbor." Other Christian ethicists, such as Kierkegaard and Outka, believe agape can only be practiced by certain individuals who have transcended the needs, conflicts, and obligations of this world. Who better to do that than the privileged of society? (83 *Sacrificial Models of Christian Love*) Many people at work say, "We love them when no one else will" and this is no exaggeration. Many women were contacted by our organization when they were at the hospital; one woman was admitted with a broken jaw, and our outreach workers visited her every day until she was allowed to leave the hospital. But as this is their job, and as this is an option for them as those who are privileged in society, this is agape practiced by those who are materially and socially able to practice such love. Many women say the outreach workers are often the only ones who visit them in the hospital or in jail, but also

many of the people that the women would know from “the life” are struggling with drug addiction, criminalized, low income, all of the above, or some mixture of these. This creates inaccessibility once the women enter these institutions due to the danger and obstacles posed by these pressures and stigmas to stay away from such places.

This is also an expression of individuals “loving on¹⁵” individuals. Only once the women are harmed, they are found and given love from individuals that have identified them. Unless there is a police sting of multiple areas of prostitution, or individuals find and seek the services of anti-trafficking NGOs, it is often difficult for people to get in touch with people who are in trafficking situations. Farrag, Flory, and Loskota got closest to my train of thought with their analysis of Evangelical beliefs about individual power. They identify the ideological notion that “trafficking is an individual moral issue” and I think this is correlated with the idea of love for many people working in the anti-trafficking industry (119). Seeing individuals’ love as the impetus for change, either from those that are able to love agapically or in women that learn to love themselves and therefore heal or avoid trafficking, justifies individual-based solutions as opposed to solutions where large groups are affected.

Individual thinking about love also gets into prevention methods against human trafficking. Often, we hear “traffickers target women and girls with low self-esteem” or “protect yourself by looking people in the eyes, saying no, and being confident.” These prevention methods are so focused on the individual, as well as self-love, that they ignore other vulnerabilities that lead to human trafficking such as economic inequality, drug addiction, unstable living situations, or otherwise facing oppressive forces because one’s gender identity,

¹⁵ “Loving on” was a term used frequently in the rhetoric of Recovery House. It was one of the terms that I did not realize was language from a local Christian church because it was so embedded in the ethos. Outreach Advocates described street outreach as “loving on” the women until they could love themselves and enter into a rehabilitation program from “the life.”

sexuality, immigration status, or race. To say a way to combat human trafficking is to teach women and girls self-love is short sighted and points to the strength of this narrative over systemic evaluations because it is such a shallow solution.

The argument that a lack of love of oneself leads to commercial sex acts also creates a false correlation between sex trafficking victims and sex workers. This comes out of radical feminist beliefs about healthy sexual relationships. This differs from the conception of eros from a Christian ethicists' perspective, with radical feminists outlining eros as a ““positive” expression in passionate love and its violent articulation in pornographic objectification” (Chapkis 13). Seeing commercial sex work as inherently negative, loveless, and objectifying, would lead people to believe that all people that partake in it have no respect or love of the self, because sex that happens within the sex industry is seen as the wrong kind of sex when looking with a lens of sexual morality. And this morality transcends lines drawn between feminism and religious sectors, as religion's desire to police sexual practices align with feminist's desires to prevent and eradicate the domination of women in a bizarre combination. In this way of thinking, radical feminist beliefs about the nature of sex as tainted by oppression of women and the patriarchy permeate ideas about human sexuality. Another belief is that all practices of sexuality are expressions of male dominance against women (Chapkis 12). Not only are these beliefs giving only a partial view of sexuality as being guided by love or heterosexual relations, but they permeate the way that anti-trafficking NGOs deal with prostitution. Seeing the sex industry as devoid of love, and only as an expression of male-dominance, “brothel owners, pimps, customers, and the prostitutes themselves become the targets” (Farrag et al 121). This contributes to the conflation of human trafficking survivors and all sex workers, as well as the justification for a militarized humanitarian approach to the sex industry that relies heavily on the criminal

justice system. Christianity's pervasiveness in morality making and outreach work to underserved populations often exposes people in vulnerable positions most often in the American context. How different individuals accept or reject Christian ideas about sexuality, morality, and purity affect evaluations of deservingness. The Assessment Advocate, Victoria, notes the systemic pervasiveness of Christianity.

A lot of them have some type of background with Christianity because they have been in and out of jails and there's a lot of Christian outreaches to jails. So typically women have experience with Christianity if they have experience with any type of organized religion just because of all the outreach work that churches do in the criminal justice system but beyond that I would say a lot of people are coming in as atheist or at least agnostic not knowing what they think about God or maybe believing that they are Christian and wanting to explore those things.

Their access to people that are incarcerated is more than other religions and may be the women's only experience with spirituality prior to entering the Recovery House program. The phenomenon of Christian influences within the criminal justice system extends past the women's immediate experiences with serving jail sentence after jail sentence. Many of the women's families have also been involved with jail or even prison sentences, and some have gained recovery through Christianity. Within families that have generations of people engaging in criminal activity, many of them will understand and lean on Christian rhetoric. For those that also struggle with substance abuse, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous also delve deeply into Christian rhetoric, and whether meetings intend to or not, they can often all become discussions of how Christianity and Jesus have specifically helped individuals in their sobriety.

Overcome or deal with... pray? Um... a lot... I went into the like recovery pod instead of general population because I knew that I needed more help than like just sitting in general population and listening to all the crap that everybody is saying. And so Port Manatee has this, and so does Sarasota jail, has this like recovery pod that you can go to, and um, the volunteers come in and have meetings and they um, Bayside comes in and has church with you and just different classes all day. So, you're not just sitting there like, "Oh my gosh what is going on!?" You know? Like you're doing something

all day like... it's good... that's how I dealt with it I just got out of general population and got into the recovery pod.

As Kayla says here, it was not necessarily a bad thing that jails, and churches work together to offer other resources to those incarcerated. This section is not to argue that religious resources and services should not be offered to those in jails and prisons; instead it is to recognize that because there are so few resources to those incarcerated, it can be coercive to only offer one religion, and only religion at that, to an isolated and vulnerable population. As Kayla notes here, she had the option of the recovery pod or general population, and between the two she chose the recovery pod. But as was discussed in the agency section, this choice was limited based on her circumstances, and it can be said it was not a fair one.

Religion and spirituality are a very big part of my journey god has gotten me through all of this. I mean, he gives me strength, hope, love, everything that I need that I was searching for in other places. I'm, you know, with him I'm learning who I am and how to love myself for me and um, I don't think I would be here if it wasn't for my spirituality.

For Kayla, her experiences stemming from the recovery pod all the way to the Christian texture of Recovery House have been a part of her growth and change as a person and are almost inseparable. Many women connect with Christianity because of these outreach services that made contact with them in really difficult parts of their lives.

I'm a Jesus freak, I say that all the time, and I just love Jesus. And I think he came to abolish religion, anyway I just love Jesus. It's grace, I just love grace and for me it's changed everything, because it's like this power greater than me that gave his life. While I was still prostituting man, he was chasing me. People would stop and pray for me, it's insane and it's just...makes me... like I've found purpose in that and giving that back, you know? I wanna go pray for people out in the streets and it means loving everybody, the ones that nobody thinks, and that's the kind of spirituality I believe in.

What sticks out to the women about these experiences is their vulnerability at these times, and feeling so low down, and having the kindness of someone reach out to them despite the stigma attached to everything that they were going through. Many of them were incarcerated,

engaging in substance abuse, or working as street sex workers and/or being actively trafficked at those times. And still, they were reached out to by religious people and services. The beauty in this is that there are people from many different walks of life that want to help those struggling and helping others that do not have much should be encouraged. The problem comes in when these services are conditional on participating in the religious activity, or when religion seems to prey on vulnerability more so than work actively to erase it. With Christian morality's emphasis on right types of love, generally there little chance the validity of a sex workers decisions would be acknowledged and respected. Being too overtly religious also can scare those that need services away.

I kinda agree, not too much. Cause this is my second time, this was my second time at the assessment house. My first time I wasn't even there twenty-four hours, I didn't really give it a chance, I made excuses as to why I was leaving, but I remember one of my excuses was it's too churchy! I can't do it! But it was because it was something unknown to me. I was kind of scared of it.

For Traci, it was distressing coming into a new place and feeling like Christianity was being pushed on her. While there were other considerations that went into her decision to exit the program, this experience illuminates dramatically that Recovery House is branded as a non-religious program for grant purposes, but it still is very Christian.

They brought in a meeting, it was on body image, and she's like explaining to me like you know Jesus, God's here and he sent Jesus down in human form, so we have something to see, to believe. And I'm like, oh my gosh, like a lightbulb went off like that so totally makes sense now. And like, feeling like you're alone and stuff and vulnerable, it's nice to have somebody that you can fill that void with. Even though you're not alone at the Assessment house, you have all the women, it's still fresh you know, it's still new.

Traci here not only discusses the meetings that are brought in by volunteers that utilize Christianity heavily, but also the extreme loneliness that the women experience at this point in the residential program with Recovery House. Women are taken to a secure location that they

may not even know where they are located. Most of their possessions, if they bring any, are taken from them. This includes notes from friends and family. And they may not contact anyone outside of that house for two months or so while it is decided if they will go on to the long term residential program, or to another recovery program. Within the house, many advocates and volunteers identify as Christian, and many of the other women will use learning about Christianity to distract themselves, connect with the other people in the house, or make meaning of their experiences. Victoria, the Assessment Advocate, admits that more often than not it is Christian material that is approved for the women to read and watch.

I would say that there's more access to Christian spirituality material than other religions in my experience, but if there is a girl that asks and advocates for herself, I've seen them approve other spirituality as well.

The schedule at Assessment has the women waking up around nine in the morning, having breakfast, then hours later having a snack. Lunch is at one o'clock, and then there is snack again at three, and then nothing again until dinner at five. After five, there is nothing until eight o'clock reflections and journaling. Then at ten o'clock they go to bed. Groups and time for exercise are usually only slotted for hour long slots, and otherwise there is only PG or G rated television and movies that they are allowed to watch. There's a therapist that comes in and speaks to them for hours, but that is only done one at a time. So, there is often a lot of time for just sitting at the Assessment house... and time to peruse the bookshelves filled with Christian literature. How women in the program react to the volunteers, the books, and the implicit Christianity alters the way they are perceived as deserving. The Assessment phase is named exactly because they are assessing what program is right for each different woman—and those that want more religious programming are sent to religious programs, and those who prefer none at all are hard pressed to find resources anywhere other than Recovery House, which is still fairly

religious. Even if all religious programming is optional, with so much free time and so many relationships created through religion, it is difficult for residents to avoid. If they do avoid it, they are excluded from many events and house outings.

I'll just be honest... it's not a faith based program and I think that's good, but there are a lot of women, advocates, residents, that are very strong about their faith and I feel like if you're coming into this house looking for something you have to be very intentional that the religion or spirituality journey that you choose is the one of your choosing and not influenced by the religion around you. And I, I had to be very intentional that whatever I chose to believe I chose to believe because it felt right in my heart. It can be very one sided, and that's not necessarily Recovery House's fault, that's just the culture. Some of the advocates are very strong in their faith and they relate to other girls based on it and women that are newer can see that and want that relationship and fall into the religious side just to get that connection with somebody. There are a lot of one-sided religious activities and if you want to be a part of, and I think all of us can struggle with being a part of, it's easy to fall into that, just for acceptance and not because of belief. And I've seen women since I've been in the house fall into that, just wanting to fit in and wanting to be a part of, just kinda monkey see monkey do, but the belief is not really there. I don't know if that's Recovery House's fault, since they are providing for the majority. I've only seen one resident so far that has different beliefs, and they just don't participate, and it's fine, there's no negative feelings or consequences.

Mia has seen and experienced the need to fit in and find relationships in the program and how that can tie into women's journey with spirituality. Especially when one of the founders was more active, it was a way to connect to a founder of the program and engage with additional programming, which helped the women build community as well as avoid the boredom of sitting around the same house with the same people for months and months. While religion and spirituality are not the enemy, these factors clearly have a hand in shaping the idea of what a sex trafficking survivor looks like, behaves like, and believes in because of the way that they partner with institutions.

CHAPTER 5: PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY

Even as this research was crafted to show how the narrative is constructed and reproduced by many stakeholders, there are many others whose lives are influenced by these narratives than are able to participate in constructing narratives about human trafficking. To combat this disparity in participation, participatory theater was utilized as a method within this research in order for women who are residents of Recovery House to speak back to the narrative I was creating as a researcher from their interviews with me. In the end, no matter my intentions, I am just another person (who is not a trafficking victim) that is creating a narrative about this social phenomenon. To combat the power imbalances that exist, the women had two different hour-long sessions to critique my work and strive for something that felt authentic to their group experience. Luisa Enria did similar work with economically-marginalized youth in Sierra Leone's capital, having them develop and direct communally theater that would facilitate discussion about violence within their community (Enria 2016, 322). This allowed the youth to confront issues within their community on their own terms, as they had experienced violence or committed it, and added nuance that is often excluded from outsider narratives. Similarly, my aim for this project was for participants to create collaborative knowledge of their experiences being identified and treated first as criminals and then as victims of sex trafficking, and how they negotiated their identification with the label of sex trafficking victim. This method is particularly effective for women involved in the criminal justice system, as they do not fit ideal victim narratives. As exemplified by this quote from Rena Fraden about this population:

Medea is full of rage, and so are the women in jail. Like Medea, these women are seen by society as outsiders, barbarians. Like Medea, they have committed crimes and crimes have been committed against them. They too have broken taboos, transgressed laws. They are women who are ruled by their passions, who are self-destructive, and who destroy others. Their lives, like that of Medea's, contain examples of courage and debasement intertwined. And, like Medea, many of the women are master storytellers. Storytelling can be a con game, a trick used against one's foes. It can also be the beginning of a different drama—a way to imagine, if not to live out, a new life (Quoted from Warner 2001 161).

The women living at Recovery House have myriad experiences with life on the streets, with some having experienced homelessness or had been involved with exchanging sex since they were five years old. All of them have struggled with substance abuse. And all of them will readily admit to themselves having been a criminal force at one point or another in their street involvement, from recruiting other women to street level sex work or holding people for hostage and transporting guns. Yet, despite having these checkered pasts and similar experiences with the law that ultimately led them to their shared residence at Recovery House, they are not allowed to discuss any of these experiences in a group setting. While there are groups that encourage them to discuss self-esteem, communication, leadership, collaboration, and addiction, there are no groups for trauma brought on by sexual victimization or groups that process their involvement with different crimes. Much of the time the women feel as if they are all here for the same reason, but that reason is taboo to talk about.

The scene acted as a safe focal point to conduct these discussions around, allowing for the women to connect in a way they were not permitted to in other aspects of the program. Just as women were able to interact through their complicated experiences and identity through the story of Medea in Warner's work, the women of Recovery House were able to collectively bring their understandings of sex trafficking to bear on the character of Michelle within the scene.

Additionally, they were able to speak to details within the scene that I did not uncover from interview data and would not know because I was not there. Many women identified in their interviews that the first time they ever heard of human trafficking was at Recovery House. Some of them even identified the car ride to the Assessment house as the first time they understood that they were considered human trafficking victims, as Ashley did in the first focus group.

So, Amanda picked me up from jail and we were on the way to Assessment and that's the first time it hit me that I was involved with anything like this. She asked me three different questions, I can't really remember them right now, but they were things like "oh well did he take your money" and I said yes to all of them and she was like "well..." and I was like okay MAYBE you're right. MAYBE! **Laughs** And through my genograms¹⁶ I can see now that I've been involved with it for 8 years now, it just looks different. It looks different than what I had seen in my mind.

Based on that information my initial draft of the scene with the advocate was weak because I simply did not understand their interaction. For example, the advocate in the original scene asked a series of leading questions that led Michelle to agree she was a victim of human trafficking (i.e. did you give your money to someone else? Could you have taken a vacation if you wanted?). These questions turned out to be too direct and the interaction too bare for what the actual conversations looked like. The advocate in version one almost comes across as lecturing and insensitive, whereas the advocate in version two is very aware of the trauma women have faced. It is a more natural and human interaction that, for me, was lost as I tried to get Michelle from point A to point B. From discussing that scene with the women, it also became apparent that there was a discrepancy between what they had understood trafficking to be before getting involved with Recovery House and after that needed to be captured. Traci, a twenty-nine

¹⁶ A genogram is a map of the relationships in one's life. Genograms were done at Recovery House to look at past relationships and look for patterns of behavior passed down by family and repeated in other relationships. This was done with counselors and the drawings of the relationships produced from the sessions were shared with staff so that everyone could know what a resident was working on/dealing with/coming from in interactions in the house.

year old White resident, identifies a time she first interacted with the anti-trafficking narrative outside of Recovery House.

I remember I was actually in a laundromat with a friend, and I remember... you know at laundromats they have the bulletin boards for the local lawn mowing and this and that and I remember grabbing one of the things off of it and on the back of it, it said are you a victim of human trafficking? Call... and I don't remember the number on it, but I remember grabbing it and being like what is this? It doesn't happen here. Maybe I was in denial, even though I fit all that criteria, you know? It makes me think of the movie *Hostel*, you know, honestly, that's what it makes me think of. It makes me think of somebody going to another country and being kidnapped. But when I grabbed the piece it said something like it happens here too, don't be misguided, something to those effects, but it didn't stick with me, but I do remember seeing it and that was the first time that I was like oh wow maybe this is going on here even then I still was like it's not me until I was with Amanda in the car, and it really sunk in. It sinks in more along the way, it's not something I really talk about a lot, but I'll get through that.

Women often reference *Hostel* or *Taken* to show their understanding of sex trafficking before they were involved with Recovery House. These movies are a huge part of public understandings of what human trafficking looks like, and each present a young, White woman kidnapped in foreign countries. Neither present a Medea figure as the victim in her own hometown. It would be a stretch for many of the women to identify with someone who was kidnapped into “the life¹⁷,” as many of them hold themselves responsible for engaging in commercial sex . Many of the women were born and raised in the same area that Recovery House resides, making the identification with sex trafficking that much more of a stretch. Even for women who do have more straightforward cases of non-consensual sex work, it is very hard for them to accept the label of sex trafficking victim, as Alex explains:

I didn't really look at it as human trafficking, I didn't even know what human trafficking was and I was telling her about how my mom used to sell me to get her drugs and stuff and she was like, well that's it, that's exactly what it is, she was doing that to get money and drugs that's what it is. And I was like no it's not, that's like the movie *Taken* you know there's no way. And she's like no I really want you to meet

¹⁷ “The life” is a euphemism for the sex trade that was utilized by my participants that lived in Recovery House. It also was used by people working for Recovery House. It is not a term that is correlated with sex worker rights language.

with Amanda and I was like ok. And so, Amanda came in and she was asking all the gory details of my story and stuff and she was like yeah, you meet every single criterion. And I was like no I don't!

Many of them address that it was harder for them to see their experiences in that life because the exchanging of sex had been normalized. Alex admits here that even though her mom was selling her as a young girl for drugs and money, she did not see herself as a victim of sex trafficking. Traci identifies a similar experience in her own journey with the label of human trafficking:

My mom, she was there too, and it was normal, maybe because of habits fog your mind, I guess. My mom was okay with it, and I never stepped back and looked at the whole picture.

For the women, what was labeled as trafficking by outsiders was a normalized facet of their lives, and they had never had the space or opportunity to view it outside of their habituated lens. Yet, the definitions they are provided to define their trafficking experience are not without their problems. I was guided by Amanda to define exploitation as this, which I brought up earlier in the chapter and also quote in the play. "Exploitation looks like stripping, pornography, phone sex, pole dancing, prostitution- any sex act in exchange for something of value. Money, shelter, food, drugs, safety." When I made the changes to the advocate scene to reflect this definition, and also humanize and make the advocate more loving, this is the response I got from Alex.

I'm really glad you describe what exploitation looks like, because I feel like a lot of people don't understand what exploitation looks like. So, I really like that part.

While Alex was the one who said this aloud, as she said it everyone was nodding along. Everyone in the focus group had come to understand exploitation as any work in the sex industry, including legal facets of it such as pole dancing and stripping. For them, exploitation had come to mean any involvement with exchanging anything sexual in nature for anything else. Branching from this, I asked them about how they felt about the verbiage of "paid whore" being

in the script. I had taken it from some interviews where women spoke openly about being misconstrued as sluts or being called whores. I wasn't sure if in a group setting this would come across as too harsh, or possibly even triggering. This was also the first time critical language and judgements were named outright in any group I had seen within Recovery House. Coping with society's judgements and ignorance was something that had been discussed broadly, but the terms had not been stated.

It's real. I'll be honest right now, when I read that I was like whoa. But it's real. Like even the men that I was sold to that's how I was treated. That's just how you're treated. You're treated that way in a lot of different aspects by people you come in contact with.

Ashley speaks here about her initial shock of seeing the phrase, as it is avoided and taboo within the house. After getting over her initial shock, she recognizes it as a reality that she has seen before with the men she was doing business with.

I think it's a harsh reality, unfortunately. It's just the way society thinks too. When people don't have an understanding of it, they put all sorts of different, and it sucks.

Traci also recognized it as a reality, one of society at large and how they view women in their situation. And there was that opportunity for naming, that they were able to name who was calling them what in plain terms, with no need to wonder if it was allowed within the program or if they had to quickly had to change the subject with a fear of being overheard. Traci also traced it back to specific tactics her trafficker/pimp would utilize to make her submissive by weaponizing the stigmatized label to dehumanize her.

And I think there some of the manipulation part in that. Like being trafficked or whatever, it was like he forgot that too so like if you got mad or whatever that was like a verbal abuse. Like oh that's all you are, like hey wait a second, I'm bringing everything back to you. Shows the manipulation.

She reflects here that she was not just a paid whore—she was engaging in exchanging sex out of her loyalty to another person and out of trying to take care of them as a unit. Often these

experiences are glossed over by society in making a caricature that can be easily ostracized, that the women are simply promiscuous and getting paid for it, when that is often not the case, especially in terms of abuse and trauma dating back to childhood. This stereotype marginalizes and dehumanizes women in situations of sexual exploitation, and they often have to fight against internalizing this understanding through therapy.

Back to the paid whore manipulation part, I think it sounds good, but like “I was a paid whore if people don’t understand or conceive the whole picture. Because it’s not just about being manipulated. It’s like, it’s a lot of different things. Even how, things that happened, like say in my genogram, things that happened to me as a child, and going further on how that got, this wouldn’t have happened here, and this wouldn’t have gone on over here, if this hadn’t happened here. You know? So, it’s not just about being manipulated.

Ashley points out here, and had it altered in the play to reflect this perspective more, that it is not only manipulation that gets women into exploitative situations, but also a domino effect of childhood experiences and relationships with family and their family’s histories of abuse and substance abuse that in turn formed their experiences. This is an acknowledgement of the handing down of trauma that is not encompassed in rendering a victim/survivor simply as a paid whore or as manipulated. Manipulation was something that the women were eager to discuss, as many had mixed feelings about naming what they had gone through as being manipulated. This was a conversation that happened acknowledging the shock and discomfort with it.

Ashley: Like when I first figured out the whole manipulation thing, I was just so upset, I was like what do you mean!?

Traci: It sounds like such a bad word, like oh you’re being manipulated.

Ashley: I, what? What going on? I let this happen?

Jaine: So, I’m hearing that you like the word manipulation, but it also gave you a feeling like you were letting this happen because you were being manipulated?

Ashley: Yeah. It was just something that was going on that I didn’t see so I was upset with myself, really, at first. But I like the use of it, are you taking it out?

Traci: Yeah don't take it out, but I was just thinking when it was said or when it was said to me or even when I thought about it myself after the fact clear minded, I was like how did I let somebody manipulate me like that? But I think I did some manipulating too, back then.

Here Traci and Ashley both bond over the fact that they were shocked and felt guilty over the idea of being manipulated in their experiences. They at once felt that it was good to name it, because often it is something that is left out especially when contending with the societal understanding of the "paid whore" as we had mentioned earlier. But they also felt that calling it manipulation also made them responsible for their manipulation, because it is a word that not only assumes there is one party that is taking advantage of another, but also the other party was easily taken advantage of and preyed on. Many women discussed in one on one discussions feeling stupid for being manipulated to such an extent, and often felt as if they could not trust their sense of reality. Traci also brings up at the end that she did not only play the role of the manipulated when she was being trafficked. She also played the role of the manipulator, as many other women have reported from this more nuanced experience of victimhood and crime. Some have spoken to me about robbing people, stealing cars, and lying to loved ones to get bonded out of jail. While this does not make their experiences less traumatic, or make the crimes against them justifiable, it does explain why women with their mixed experiences of law and order would find it difficult to acquiesce to the role of the non-consenting, manipulated, powerless trafficking victim. As Traci was a newer resident at this time, it was a great thing to see her be able to bond with the more established residents over these feelings through this medium. This went on from topic to topic, as she brought up the word choice of 'touched' and changing it to 'abused.'

Traci: I don't know about everybody else, but for me I like the word abuse, because it covers a whole lot of different things.

Jaine: So instead of touched explicitly?

Alex: It's like what Dr. Q says, where certain words that have stronger meanings, and if you have words that could pick up an entire thing it lets people just make up their own.

Jaine: Ok, make it broader so people can fill in the blank.

Ashley: So, we were asking about, "I know I was abused when I was really young and that just got escalated and got worse..." I think "I was abused when I was really young" and I think putting stuff about how it affected her in a lot of different areas of her life or something.

Traci: Like I built up, I was thinking about it too and I was thinking like, I built up a resentment because of it and carried it.

Ashley: Like for me, the abuse that I was, I was molested by my father when I was younger, and I didn't actually remember or realize that happened until I was 20 or something, like 17 or something. But it did affect me in different area where it looked like relationships or situations that I was in. Like I was just talking to Lea outside like these relationships and stuff it was like me, subconsciously, trying to make this relationship work that wasn't workable. I was finding these men and stuff that were like my dad and trying to like work through them and make it work because I wanted to make it work. But it affected decisions that I made, and relationships and I don't know. That's my personal perspective.

Traci: How about it impacted? It impacted my whole childhood, my adolescence...

Ashley: And it impacted my whole life.

Traci: As far as I remember, it impacted anything and everything I did from here on out.

Alex: And that just escalated and got worse.

This exchange shows the creation of collaborative knowledge, with all the residents utilizing what they know about story construction to make this play relatable to a broader span of women within human trafficking situations. Aware of not everyone being molested when they were younger, but usually most likely abused in some way, they changed that word as a way to open up the narrative to others. The also all were able to reflect again, as Ashley had pushed for, on how the cycle of abuse was something that they had experienced in their childhood and then

perpetuated into their adulthood into many different facets of their lives. All three of them worked on wording that would encompass their unique experiences in a way that would echo out beyond them so others could see themselves in a trafficking narrative that is different from the ones they railed against when they were first brought into the program.

Another subject they were able to explore fully in the group was the subject of law enforcement behavior and practices. While in the interviews, some women had horrific stories to tell of abuse by police officers, some had mixed opinions about their treatment at the hands of police. This is another subject not often spoken of in group settings within the house because it can be construed as war stories that can cause women to ‘trauma bond’ where they become far too close in a very short amount of time over traumatic experiences that happened in their past, and also because of Recovery House’s close relationship with law enforcement. Many advocates within Recovery House work very closely with law enforcement, and many of the women within the house may have open cases against their traffickers/pimps, and so to bad mouth the police would be to some like shooting themselves in the foot. And so, oftentimes police violence is not discussed in Recovery House, especially in terms of group discussion. This was the discussion that we had.

Traci: I feel like, when Officer One says you again in the beginning, he should call her by her name. From past experiences...

Kayla: Oh yeah like her last name?

Traci: Yeah, I feel like it would bring that relationship, well not really a relationship because it’s not a relationship I ever wanted in the past, was an officer knowing me by first name, but it was something that was like aww, fuck.

Jaine: You’re right it does establish the relationship more...

Traci: Almost like... Hey Michelle or whatever you want her last name to be.

Ashley: Yeah, they do do that, like Hi Miss [Smith]! I’m glad to see you again!

Traci: Yeah, they'll be like... Miss [Jones], what're you doing man? Like, nice to see you. And it's like sarcastic, like hey how's your night going? Your heart just sinks like man...

Ashley: Yeah, they do do that, I remember one time, like it's funny, well it's not funny. But I was going somewhere, and these cops were like hey Miss Kennedy, what're you doing? And I was like what does it look like I'm doing, I'm walking down the sidewalk!

Traci: Like am I going to jail or not?

Ashley: Yes, yes. Is there a reason you're driving two miles per hour in a fifty mile per hour speed limit right now?

Kayla, Ashley, and Traci here speak to the fact that they had interactions with the police enough to be on a first name basis, and the officers would often be sarcastic towards them.

Ashley even speaks to the fact that she was sassy and sarcastic back, which builds an idea of the relationship that the women would eventually cultivate through their multiple interactions with the police. Just as Jeff mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the recidivism with arresting people on the street was very high, with officers seeing the same woman four or five days after arresting her and putting her in jail. With that turnover in mind, and some women reporting seeing the same judge the day after the judge told her to go home, it is no wonder that the officers got to know the women by name and vice versa. With this much experience with police, the women went on to inform me of a lot more of their typical police encounters.

Jaine: I used the window tint because I couldn't imagine why someone would stop you randomly.

Ashley: Window tint is good; another one they like to use is your license plate is too dirty.

Traci: Or music's too loud, or you failed to yield.

Ashley: I've had cops tell me before, basically, if we want to pull you over, we will find a reason to pull you over. Like he told me straight up because he was like you didn't make a complete stop at this stop sign and I was like yes, I did but he was like if

I wanna pull you over I'll find a reason to pull you over. And I was like OK, I guess I respect that.

Traci: I think that like, to a certain extent, they knew I was going to do whatever I wanted to do anyway so it was like they were going to do whatever they wanted to do. I had one tell me like, I was like isn't this harassment and he was like if you wanna see harassment I'll show you harassment. I was like, WHOA. I was like open mouth insert foot, right? It's like, what do you say from that. Especially all this stuff on the news and stuff.

In this exchange, they acknowledge that police officers utilize any reason to engage someone in order to investigate a potential crime, as was noted in Jeff's story earlier about looking out for and preventing cases of sex trafficking. By looking at it from the women's perspective, one can see the power differential. As Ashley says, she did stop at the stop sign, but whether or not she did does not matter in this context because the cop readily admits that he can stop her for whatever he wants if he sees so fit. And she cannot argue with that, no matter how well she may know this particular cop or how stopped she was at the stop sign. Traci also points out the fact that while they may have joked with the officers, a joke too far on the women's part could result in physical consequences, such as assault. The women's relationship with the police was steeped in precarity, from one moment being laughs to the next moment going to jail. From this, I went on to question how to authentically capture this experience.

Jaine: So now I feel like I'm getting mixed signals about how I should write the officers here, I'm getting sarcastic, playful, but also threatening?

Ashley: That's basically it, like sarcastically, playfully, threatening you. It's true.

Kayla: In a very real way.

Jaine: So how should I write these cops? Like good cop, bad cop? Does that sound like it captures the whole experience?

Ashley: Cops, when they're partners, a lot of the times they are like the same. Yes, they are very similar. And like different squads, like there'll be A squad and B squad, and like the two squads are just completely different. Like A squad is very involved with Recovery House and they wanna help and B squad is just like grr they just find any

reason to take you to jail and they like plant things on you and they're like completely different.

This observation is very different than how the idea of a good cop/bad cop scenario is portrayed to play out on television. Instead of partners embodying different aspects, it can be different squads or different sets of people that all behave similarly. This is something as an outsider with much less experience with the police I would have never thought to encompass in my portrayal of police officers.

Traci: Yeah at the end of the day I feel like they're different on a personal level. I had one close the door on me at night in a hotel room and my heart dropped. I was like oh my gosh it's fair game now. And he was, he was more cocky, he was... and I wasn't perfect either, but like... "You better watch your mouth unless you wanna get charged again" or like "you know I could charge you" I think it sounds okay like that.

Ashley: Cause this has happened, I told you this has happened to me before. I've had em, the first possession charges I got they literally asked me "can we search your purse" and I was like "no you can't search my purse!" And they threw me against the cop car and threw me in handcuffs and put me in jail. Searched my purse, found something that wasn't mine in there, yes, granted, there was something in there, there was stuff they charged me with that wasn't my things. So, it just depends.

Traci and Ashley also acknowledge here the similarities in the fictional Michelle's experience to their own experiences with the cops, which was interesting because that scene was originally based off an interview with Mia, a completely different resident from another area of Florida. Their connection to this scene despite all having their trafficking take place in different geographic locations of Florida and none of them having spoken together about it within the constraints of the program showed that this was a very commonplace occurrence for those involved with street based sex work, and that it was something that was a relatable experience for women across Florida in these situations. And even though the scene was toned down so as to avoid unnecessarily triggering or retraumatizing language, each one brought their own much more threatening or violent stories to bear on the watered down scene, speaking to the scenes

ability to carry heavier loads for each individual viewer. Another valuable aspect of discussing interactions with the police in terms of a play was the idea of physical interaction. Traci had this to say:

I think, if you have a scene where people search her purse, as he says search her purse the other one should already be searching her purse.

This made all the women laugh in acknowledgement when she said this. All of them knew the forcefulness of officers, often agreeing without speaking or before speaking to them to search things or handcuff someone. This was another way that the unequal power dynamic was communicated to me as someone who has never been in that kind of situation. It was a physical detail that would not normally come up in verbally rehashing interactions, as the material and physical details of an event usually do not come up when telling a story audibly unless the object in question is used by a character to do something. Working within the context of a play to render these women's experiences opened up different ways of communicating their different interactions and how they were treated so it could be shown not only through language, but through physical action and material space as well.

Originally, in the scene with Michelle in a group within Recovery House for survivors, there was a scene with both survivors putting their hands on Michelle's knees to show support and the connectivity of the group around the struggle with the label of 'survivor.' Michelle in this version of the scene then puts her hands on top of their hands, meant to show her acknowledgment of their support, their shared struggle, and their close relationships within the house. Often in Recovery House physical interaction is very fraught between staff and residents as well as between residents for multiple reasons. Residents have experienced various levels of physical trauma, from sexual assaults to being shot with a gun, or locked in rooms. In addition to that, the nature of working in the sex industry and experiencing abusive relationships made the

body and sexuality a necessary tool for survival and manipulation on the street. Many women also had very sexually free lifestyles, having sex with people they were not romantically engaged with as well as people across the gender spectrum. Therefore, within the program there is a strict rule against physical contact with people without asking first for a hug or high-five, and there is definitely no sexual contact while the women are engaged with the program. While this rule is in place for all of those reasons, many women feel very physically isolated because touch is off limits at Recovery House. Therefore, this scene with physical touch between the residents within the group was disputed. Here was the conversation:

Alex: I kinda thought that when you were like “puts hand on leg” “puts other hand on leg” was super cheesy.

Ashley: I will say though, you can say whatever you want, but that is very good non-verbal communication.

Traci: I think one knee, that reminds me of my grandma for some reason. If she was sitting next to me, she would just like... and that was like a comfort like okay it’s gonna be alright. Or if somebody said something like she knew, like oh she’s not gonna like this part, that was like a reassurance like everything is going to be okay.

Alex: But then again, I feel like if I was one of the survivors talking to like this Michelle, I feel like I would’ve reached for her hand or something not so much a knee, but I get it if they’re sitting... I just can’t imagine one of us girls just being like... I just can’t.

Ashley: I can, me and Kayla do it all the time.

Jaine: I think it depends; I was worried about putting it in cause I know for a lot of people touch is kinda different.

Ashley: Like for example, when I went to get one of my teeth pulled and Kayla was with me, she asked “do you mind if I touch your leg?” And it as just the reassurance that someone was there.

Traci: I guess it depends on the relationship.

Jaine: Yeah that’s true, cause I’ve seen people we’re doing a group therapy thing and they have their arms around each other and we’re all talking so I think it can get from “no touchy” to all cuddly you know.

Traci: Yeah maybe you should make that a little more clarified, like it does say survivor and like we know that but would an outsider know that like you know watching it like oh they live together, they're all there for the same reasons, it's not like a survivor that has been out of the Recovery House for four years and comes back.

Alex's response reflected her experience of telling others that she does not want to be touched, as well as not having very many close friends within the program. Ashley felt differently, as she has a friend in the house, Kayla, that often offers her reassuring touch in different situations, such as the dentist. For Traci, it reminded her of another woman that was close to her, her grandmother, but not anyone at the house— she was new at the house at the time of this focus group, so understandably did not have many friends, but also struggles with seeing women as friends and not as saboteurs. The many different ways that the women related to each other as well as the physical touch at the time of this focus group altered the representation of the women in the play. From working at Recovery House for years, I have seen different groups of women who were much closer and much more at ease with physical touch, and this group happened to be a group that did not know each other well and did not relate to each other through touch very often. Because of this conversation, I altered the touch in this scene to reflect the different ways that women relate to each other in the program physically to make space for those who do not enjoy touch and for those that do, to try and reflect not only this current group's disagreement here but also what I have observed in the past. This shows how rich discussion of the physical aspects of theater can be, as it reveals the discussants feelings and comfort level with their physicality as well.

Religion

Religion was another category that was very interesting to discuss in a group relative to a play about their experience. Recovery House is not a religious program, but it did grow out of

three women in a Christian congregation who wanted to combat trafficking, and much of the optional religious programming and materials reflect these origins. Understandably, each woman had different experiences with religion and where that factored in her journey to recovery. This was interesting to compare each experience and see what they thought would best represent all of them in the play.

Traci: I found God once I was here. I told myself I used to praise a man, cause I'm like a see it to believe it kinda person so I praised him idolized him, then when I got here I'm like wait a second if I can idolize him why don't I have faith in someone healthy wants me to be healthy loves me for me you know? That was a big eye opener.

Alex: I too looked at a man like he was my God. And I really found God when I came to Recovery House. It wasn't like my faith brought me to Recovery House it was like once I got here, I found my faith. You just have to sit with yourself when you're in the assessment house and that's when I found God.

These two had similar things to say about religion, which was that it filled the gap that a man had filled in their lives before. They recognized they had deep capabilities for devotion and faith in looking at their relationships, and then by taking time to rest at the Assessment stage of Recovery House they were able to learn more about Christian faith through the volunteers and the reading materials available at the Assessment house. When asked if religion should be incorporated more into the play, Ashley had this to say.

I think you touched base on it, which is good, and, in my opinion, I started building my relationship with God when I was in Jail you know but for people who don't have that? Cause like if this is something we present to new people you know, this could help girls see oh my gosh this is what's going on you know and get help but that spirituality might freak them out a little bit so I might keep it where it's at.

This statement shows her awareness of different people's relationships to religion, and that downplaying the religious aspects of the program could help women see themselves in the play instead of scaring them away. This awareness was mirrored through many experiences I had working at Recovery House, where at one point the women were calling themselves the

Recovery House Cult and were hyper aware of explaining their prayer and behavior to advocates so that they would not scare them. Advocates are aware that some residents turn to religion in radical ways in the beginning of their recovery and then the fervor levels out, but Advocates were also advised to watch out for any obsessive or extreme bonding behaviors between the women. This type of vigilance towards ensuring residents had “balance” also translated into not allowing women to read fantasy literature or play the table top game Dungeons and Dragons. There is a fear of residents engaging in escapism and not dealing with their trauma and the present. Many women attributed their success and their lives to God, and yet it was something I needed to explain in the focus groups.

Traci: “I came out on the other side by the grace of God and it gives me, and it gives me some certainty in my meaning here” I don’t know...

Jaine: I left it vague, because I was uncertain of how to word it as well, because people were saying that they feel like they’ve survived for a reason, and it was very much connected to the idea that God has a purpose, or there’s some sort of higher power that has looked out for them for a reason, cause I think that with people having died going through the same situation, trying to figure out why I didn’t or things like that... I’m trying to get at that question.

Ashley: So... “and that gives me a purpose and a meaning to why I’m still here,” maybe... And it’s true you know, it’s something I haven’t looked at a lot. A lot of people, a lot of women that I know, are not alive anymore. Because of situations and stuff that they’ve been through.

Traci: Some of them are still struggling. It’s crazy the amount of girls.

Traci and Ashley initially didn’t understand the line about God and meaning, and when I explained it, they understood the feelings there. For me, it was a discussion that I was partially afraid of having because I think people need to make meaning of their experiences and survival themselves, and so sharing that many women were attributing their survival to having been chosen by God felt somewhat dangerous to me, because I did not want this information to influence or highjack the women’s relationships with God and their own survival. Instead, they

were able to lament how many women do not get to exit the life as they had. I think that the recognition as a group was something that was always unspoken and sometimes something forgotten in the midst of group living arguments and each individual's own struggles. But it gave them a moment to connect with religion from their particular positionality of being survivors of sex trafficking.

Unfortunately

Another word that was very fraught in discussion that I never would have guessed was the word *unfortunate*. Amanda, the Outreach Advocate, gave me lines for the scene with the advocate on the way to the Assessment house. Many of the women underwent that part of their journey after thirty days of detox and did not remember it well, but Amanda's experience of having done that drive many times with many different women fleshed out the scene with dialogue. Hearing the re-written scene that incorporated the definition of sex trafficking from the anti-trafficking organization perspective, as well as Amanda trying to let the new resident know they were not alone in their experiences, was very familiar to all the women in the focus group. Kayla thought this quote was funny because she feels this was actually said to her in her car ride to Assessment.

That's funny, she did tell me unfortunately your story isn't unique or basically in those words... It felt good, to know I wasn't alone, but I think I knew that.

She had mixed feelings about hearing it this way, although, because she was glad to hear she was not alone. I asked her if she felt negatively or positively hearing this.

Negative or positive? Um, both. Because it is unfortunate, but also, I think in that part in your journey, and I'm just being transparent, when you hear your situation isn't unique it's like, what? You don't know what I've been through! But coming from a place like, I know where she's coming from, I know she's trying to make me feel less alone.

Kayla, as someone who was further along in the program at this point, was understanding towards the advocate's point of view. But she also shows her resistance to the idea of homogenizing the experiences of every woman that comes into the house. Traci points to the fact that the unfortunately here comes off as making the person feel negative about whatever is being talked about, but for her it was a fortunate and positive thing that she was joining with people that had gone through a similar experience to herself.

So, everybody had their own story but some of the feelings are similar. For some reason when I hear unfortunately, I think negative. I think at that point I just wanted to feel like a part of. Like I felt like I wanted, like in the recovery rooms I feel like I'm a part of something, here I feel like I'm a part of something, and for some reason with unfortunate, I feel like you're saying sorry after you said, I'm really sorry for your experience, unfortunately... And really, at that time, that was almost a fortunate thing. Like it says, every woman you meet, and we bring to the house has a similar story. And that was a good thing, it didn't make me feel like I was unfortunate.

Feeling a part of is a very important thing in her journey, and so she felt strongly about changing that word to something that still let Michelle know that everyone there had gone through similar experiences, but that is not an unfortunate thing for her.

Conclusion

I am a woman, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a child of God. And above all I am a person, deserving of people's respect no matter what I've been through. And that's the thing no label can take away from me ever again (Excerpt from Tales of Identity¹⁸).

In Michelle's final monologue, she ends with this statement, that at the end of the day she is deserving of people's respect no matter what she's been through. This is not only a powerful statement coming from women that labor every day in order to see themselves and to be seen by others as respected and deserving against the stigmas that plague their experiences with substance abuse and sex work, but it was also a statement that I originally did not have in the

¹⁸ This was the name of the scene produced from this research.

script. I originally ended it with, “I am a person, deserving of people’s time no matter what I’ve been through.” It was important to the women to make this statement about respect, not about time, and about a sentimental ending (which was a much better choice). Through performance ethnography, not only were we able to explore the ways in which different people rendered others as deserving or undeserving, but those who are the subjects of those evaluations were able to assert their humanity beyond labels and claim their journey beyond narratives told about them.

If services are withheld from sex-trafficking victims based on their adherence to the ideal victim presented in the White Slavery scare of two hundred years ago, the modern nuances of the problem will never be acknowledged, and many affected by trafficking will be harmed. They will be harmed by not being identified, or there will be those falsely identified. The issue cannot be properly diagnosed if the stories told about it obscure the reality of its contours and contexts. The criteria of race, agency, identifying as a survivor, and religious affiliation all need to be problematized in the anti-trafficking movement so that trafficking can be clearly identified beyond historically constructed and culturally-informed biases.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND A NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

Anti-trafficking narratives work hand-in-hand with the criminalization of sex work and create the need to evaluate deservingness based on gendered Christian, middle-class, moral and lifestyle standards that many people are unable to achieve within their own means unless they are institutionalized and indoctrinated in order to gain enough social support and capital to access those resources. For this reason, deservingness evaluations are valuable in that they point to who is constructed as someone deserving of this “rescue” and who is constructed instead as criminal. From this work, it can be seen that law enforcement, the court system, and NGOs play a big hand in assessing who is worthy of the resources provided for victims of trafficking and who is deemed worthy of only more and more jail time until the individual eventually breaks under the pressures of criminalization and stigmatization to seek help. And from this fixation of condemnation and pathologizing of people who engage in commercial sex, larger issues that contribute to why many people end up in trafficking situations are ignored in favor of an individualized rescue narrative, which sidetracks policy makers and donors from the underlying and more controversial issues of economic inequality, the child welfare system, homelessness, and exploitative labor trafficking. Because of this fixation on sex work, labor trafficking is also obscured in favor of continued policing of the sexuality and bodies of women. From this work, it can be said that the anti-trafficking narrative needs a paradigm shift in order to truly be effective in anti-trafficking efforts and women’s empowerment. What follows are my recommendations based on my research.

First, anti-trafficking should begin from a rights based approach. Stakeholders such as sex work abolitionist anti-trafficking advocates, some police, one attorney, and even some sex workers and sex trafficking survivors argue moral arguments against trafficking. Saying things like ‘sex work is immoral’ is problematic because that rendering discounts others morality and distracts from the underlying issues of systemic vulnerability. This kind of discursive landscape will allow for religious majorities to dictate others’ lifestyles. Adhering instead to rights-based discussions and approaches will change the evaluative criteria of acceptance of religion as being an indicator of deservingness, as well as allow for agency to be seen in a different light. Instead of stakeholders asking if it is morally okay for society to allow people to make the decision to engage in sex work, it will be a conversation of how people’s decisions can be respected, and their rights protected.

Second, I suggest sex work should be decriminalized. Criminalization in the United States and within the Nordic model compounds vulnerability and stigma that those engaged in the sex trade already face, and it creates a situation where victims are treated as criminals until they are seen as deserving. If sex work is decriminalized, there would be more access for those in need for services before trafficking situations even occur in the sex industry since law enforcement and services would be more accessible. This could also work to decrease the criminalization of Black or other minorities involved in sex work and allow for more diverse accessibility to services for sex trafficking.

Third, anti-trafficking advocates should confront systemic vulnerability. At Recovery House and in sex work abolitionist anti-trafficking work, systemic issues are not addressed enough. While work with individuals is very important, and many people have been able to receive trauma care through this type of focus, the issue will never be eradicated if it is worked

on a case by case basis. Labor trafficking and sex trafficking are still just as horrific and still just as likely to harm people—anti-trafficking just needs to pinpoint poverty, lack of social support, systemic racism, and exploitative labor laws as ‘the bad guys’ instead of pimps and traffickers who are suffering under the same unequal systems.

As for findings from the performance ethnography, Recovery House in particular needs to incorporate groups where residents can openly speak about their trafficking experiences as well as sexual wellbeing. Residents who participated in the focus groups about the play all said it was one of the only places they could speak in a group about their time being trafficked without being censored, as well as discussions about religion, sex, and encounters with police officers. As Recovery House has such strong bonds with local law enforcement, it seems many residents keep their traumatic experiences with officers to themselves. Allowing residents to speak more openly about these issues with each other in a structured environment would be an important programming improvement.

Without these changes, deservingness evaluations for sex trafficking services will remain fraught with qualifications that will bar sex trafficking survivors from accessing what they need. While these solutions are not easy, the journey will not be complete until all roadblocks are addressed. If this is about ending sex trafficking in the United States and not about consolidating power over the vulnerable and condemning those deemed by the more privileged as ‘immoral’ then the conversation needs to change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Demographic Table

Table 2: Demographic breakdown of participants. I asked participants to identify themselves what race they are. Many participants identified themselves ethnically and instead of engaging in a conversation about the difference between racial and ethnic categorizations I let it go. In this table, I racially identified them to streamline the data and took out what participants identified themselves as.

Participant Populations	Participant name	Gender		Age(s)	Racial Identification
		Male	Female		
Selah Residents	Ashley	0	1	28	White
	Kourtney	0	1	35	White
	Kayla	0	1	28	White
	Mia	0	1	23	African American
	Breanna	0	1	24	White
Sex Workers	Brie	0	1	49	White
	Annie	0	1	24	White
	Living Dead Hooker	0	1	57	White
	Opal	0	1	58	White
	Kristen	0	1	34	White
Selah Staff	Vanessa	0	1	31	White
	Techeira	0	1	24	Black
	Amanda	0	1	29	White
	Victoria	0	1	26	White/Hispanic
Police Officers	Jeff	1	0	53	White
	Jessica	0	1	Age not provided	White
Attorney	Brent	1	0	63	White
Population Totals		2	15	Average: 32.5	White: 14 African American: 1 Hispanic: 1

Appendix B: Scene- Tales of Identity

Setting: There are two women sitting at a desk, with a laptop between them. *They both look like they are in their late 20s, and look healthy. The one on stage right is Michelle.*

INTERVIEWER

Okay, well if you're ready, let's begin! What was it like interacting with the police before you were seen as a survivor of human trafficking?

PRESENT MICHELLE

Well, it wasn't pretty...

The two women and the desk take back stage as a woman and two officers come to the front, the woman looking thin and bruised, the male officers on either side of her.

OFFICER 1

You again? I get tired of seeing you around here...

PAST MICHELLE

(With arms wrapped tightly around her sides)

That makes the two of us. Do us all a favor and just leave me alone!

OFFICER 2

You better watch your mouth unless you wanna take a ride in the back of our car. Again.

OFFICER 1

Search her purse.

PAST MICHELLE

No! If this is a stop for a window tint, why are you searching my purse?

The officers grab her purse and ~~the survivor~~ ^{past Michelle} grips it for a tense second and stares them down before she eventually lets it go. The officer 1 pulls something out of her bag while officer 2 holds her hands behind her back while they all exit the stage. Michelle and the interviewer are the focus again.

PRESENT MICHELLE

I was living a life with natural consequences, of course, and sometimes the officers were only treating me fairly for what I was involved with and what I was doing. Some even got to know me and were disappointed when they would see me out again, would check in on me and ask if I needed anything. But there were also

those who had taken an oath to make society better and they abused it. I was just a girl that was banged up half the time and they treated me more like an information bank or a nuisance than a human being.

INTERVIEWER

Mmm. So what was it like being identified as a victim of human trafficking for the first time?

PRESENT MICHELLE

Well, I think it might have been happening long before I realized it, but the first time it really hit me that that was happening was when I first came to Recovery House...

The interviewer and Michelle are eclipsed by two women, who carry two chairs with them towards the front of the stage and sit in them facing the audience. They are miming being in a car, with one taking the wheel and the other looking out the window. The one looking out the window is Michelle, and it picks up with her in mid-sentence.

PAST MICHELLE

Yeah, so I was really choosing to do it because I got the drugs I wanted, and I made a lot of money. It was a fair trade, you know?

ADVOCATE

Did you really get to keep a lot of the money?

Ask Amanda about 3 questions

PAST MICHELLE

Well, no, he held onto it, but it was for us.

ADVOCATE

So, if you wanted to take a break for a day or a week, you were able to do that?

PAST MICHELLE

No, not really...

ADVOCATE

A lot of what you're saying sounds like trafficking. It sounds like you were forced by this relationship and the addiction to sell sex.

Michelle looks at the advocate as they keep driving, then looks back out the window, letting that statement sit in the car with

them. The women pick up their chairs and exit the stage, leaving the interviewer and survivor on stage alone once more.

gaslighting

PRESENT MICHELLE

It was the first time I had understood it or heard of it in that way. I had always thought that trafficking victims were from other countries, were kidnapped and tied up and had no way out. It was really hard at first to see how deep the manipulation went and then to understand how that shaped my decisions and my life and how that fit with the idea of being "trafficked." There are still a lot of people who don't understand and that makes it hard too, because it still can seem like I was a paid whore if people don't understand ~~that manipulation part.~~

puts some blame on them for being manipulated

INTERVIEWER

Mhm... so how do you feel about being a survivor of human trafficking now?

or conceive the whole picture, even things that happened to me as a child.

Three women come out with chairs and place them in front of the interviewer and survivor. They sit in a semi-circle, mainly facing each other but also in view of the audience. Michelle (in the middle) begins to speak.

- clarify relationship add more to 233

PAST MICHELLE

1 count
y.

I don't like thinking of myself as a human trafficking survivor. I'm more than a victim or a survivor, I'm Michelle! I feel like I'm branded the rest of my life, that people can just look at me and see that I'm a survivor, that I'll always be different and never just me!

- one hand on one knee, two is too corny

Survivor 2 reaches out and touches Michelle's knee as she speaks.

SURVIVOR 2

You're not a victim anymore, you're a survivor. Letting that victim label affect you is victimizing yourself, because you don't have to take that into your heart.

~~Survivor 3 reaches out and touches Michelle's other knee as she speaks.~~

SURVIVOR 3

Only you can give that label power because that is how you perceive yourself- your identity is not just one thing, and while that will always be a part of your story it is not your whole life. But you have survived it and you will survive many other things as well.

And you don't have to allow that to define you

Michelle touches the ~~two~~ ^{women} women's hands on her knees, and looks at ~~one~~ them both and nods. They all pick up their chairs and exit, leaving the Interviewer and Michelle alone.

Present **Michelle**

past

It was really tough for me to see myself that way at first, because it felt like my identity was consumed by this label, that I was always going to be defined by the struggles of my life. As time goes on I still battle with it, and I can't say that I fully embrace it 100% of the time. As a survivor I can have a powerful voice to speak on my story and reach out to people who might be in trouble now like I was then, and that's something that's really meaningful to me. It can be really empowering to think that I have survived something that a lot of women don't survive, and I came out on the other side by the grace of god and that gives me some certainty in my meaning here. But at the same time, it is only a small part of who I am. I am a woman, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a child of God. And above all I am a person, deserving of people's ~~time~~ respect no matter what I've been through. And that's the thing no label can take away from me ever again.

a purpose
and
meaning
in why
I'm still
here.

Setting: There are two women sitting at a desk, with a laptop between them. They both look like they are in their late twenties and are dressed casually.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, well if you're ready, let's begin! What was it like interacting with the police before you were seen as a survivor of human trafficking?

PRESENT MICHELLE

It wasn't pretty...

The two women and the desk take back stage as a woman and two officers come to the front, the woman looking thin and bruised, the male officers on either side of her.

OFFICER 1

[Saying the lines overly cheerfully, so much so that it definitely reads as sarcastic.]

Oh Miss Michelle! How are you doing tonight? I *CANNOT BELIEVE* I'm seeing you around here...

PAST MICHELLE

With arms wrapped tightly around her sides

Trust me, I didn't want to see you either. Do us all a favor and just leave me alone!

OFFICER 2

You better watch your mouth unless you wanna take a ride in the back of our car. Again.

OFFICER 1

Search her purse.

Officer 2 is already shining a flashlight into Michelle's purse as Officer 1 says this. Michelle looks annoyed and tries to angle her body so that her bag is out of the spotlight.

PAST MICHELLE

No! If this is a stop for a window tint, why are you searching my purse?

The officers grab her purse as Michelle grips it for a tense second and stares them down before she eventually lets it go. Officer 1 pulls something out of her bag while Officer 2 holds her hands behind her back while they all exit the stage. Michelle and the interviewer are the focus again.

PRESENT MICHELLE

I was living a life with natural consequences, of course, and sometimes the officers were only treating me fairly for what I was involved with and what I was doing. Some even got to know me and were disappointed when they would see me out again, would check in on me and ask if I needed anything. But there were also those who had taken an oath to make society better and

they abused it. I was just a girl that was banged up half the time and they treated me more like an information bank or a nuisance than a human being.

INTERVIEWER

Mm. What was it like being identified as a victim of human trafficking for the first time?

PRESENT MICHELLE

I think it might have been happening long before I realized it, but the first time it really hit me that was happening was when I first came to Recovery House...

The Interviewer and Michelle are eclipsed by two women, who carry two chairs with them towards the front of the stage and sit in them facing the audience. They are miming being in a car, with one taking the wheel and the other looking out the window. The one looking out the window is Michelle. The advocate begins to speak while she's driving.

ADVOCATE

Recovery House is an organization that serves women with a history of exploitation. Do you know what that means?

PAST MICHELLE

[Somewhat sarcastically-] Yeah, pretty sure.

ADVOCATE

Okay, well I'm just going to say it anyway. Exploitation looks like stripping, pornography, phone sex, pole dancing, prostitution- any sex act in exchange for something of value. Money, shelter, food, drugs, safety.

Michelle looks surprised at the list of things that the advocate has said and turns from the window to look at her.

ADVOCATE

We've known each other a long time, but I've never asked... and you don't have to tell me if you're not comfortable, but what drove you into the life?

PAST MICHELLE

Well, I know I was abused when I was really young and growing up that impacted everything and anything in my life. It affected my relationships, how I felt about myself, and everything just escalated and got worse-

Michelle begins to tear up and get a waver in her voice, and the advocate steps in.

ADVOCATE

You know what, you don't have to tell me now. I value who you are and what you have to say so much that I want to protect you from being re-traumatized by telling your story. You don't have to *flap ya yaps* about this to me until you're ready.

Michelle laughs, wiping the tears off her face.

ADVOCATE

Do you feel better now?

Michelle nods.

ADVOCATE

Good. I'm really sorry for what you experienced. What happened to you was not right, and you didn't deserve it! Just to you let you know, every woman I meet and bring into the house has a similar story. You are not alone in this. How could you have known, going from that experience, how to cope with that or how to set boundaries? You couldn't have.

There's a pause as it seems the advocate makes a turn at an intersection, putting the blinker on and miming turning the wheel.

ADVOCATE

Life put you on an island with a pocket knife and you did what you had to do to survive. Now, we're going to give you so many more tools and resources, so you no longer have to survive, you can thrive.

Michelle looks at the advocate as they keep driving, then looks back out the window, letting that statement sit in the car with them. The women pick up their chairs and exit the stage, leaving the interviewer and survivor on stage alone once more.

PRESENT MICHELLE

It was the first time I had understood it or heard of it in that way. I had always thought that trafficking victims were from other countries, were kidnapped and tied up and had no way out. It was really hard at first to see how deep the manipulation went and then to understand how that shaped my decisions and my life and how that fit with the idea of being "trafficked." There are still a lot of people who don't understand and that makes it hard too, because it still can seem like I was a paid whore if people don't understand or conceive the whole picture, even things that happened to me as a child.

INTERVIEWER

Mhm... how do you feel about being a survivor of human trafficking now?

Three women come out with chairs and place them in front of the interviewer and Michelle. They sit in a semi-circle, mainly facing each other but also in view of the audience. They are all living at Recovery House and are at various phases in their own journeys. They are now sitting down for a group, and Michelle (in the middle) begins to speak.

PAST MICHELLE

I don't like thinking of myself as a human trafficking survivor. I'm more than a victim or a survivor, I'm Michelle! I feel like I'm branded the rest of my life, that people can just look at me and see that I'm a survivor, that I'll always be seen as different and never just me!

Survivor 1 reaches out and touches Michelle's knee as she speaks.

SURVIVOR 1

You're not a victim anymore, you're a survivor. Letting that victim label affect you is victimizing yourself, because you don't have to take that into your heart.

Survivor 2 nods and speaks animatedly, using her hands to emphasize her point.

SURVIVOR 2

Only you can give that label power because that is how you perceive yourself- your identity is not just one thing, and while that will always be a part of your story you don't have to let that define you. But you have survived it and you will survive many other things as well.

Michelle touches the Survivor 1's hand on her knee and looks at Survivor 3 and nods. They all pick up their chairs and exit, leaving the Interviewer and Michelle alone.

PRESENT MICHELLE

It was really tough for me to see myself that way at first, because it felt like my identity was consumed by this label, that I was always going to be defined by the struggles of my past. As time goes on, I still battle with it, and I can't say that I fully embrace it 100% of the time. As a survivor I can have a powerful voice to speak on my story and reach out to people who might be in trouble now like I was then, and that's something that's really meaningful to me. It can be really empowering to think that I have survived something that a lot of women don't survive, and I came out on the other side by the grace of god and that gives me certainty in my purpose and meaning, a reason I'm still here. But at the same time, it is only a small part of who I am. I am a woman, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a child of God. And above all I am a person, deserving of people's respect no matter what I've been through. And that's the thing no label can take away from me ever again.

Appendix C: Examples of Media within Recovery House

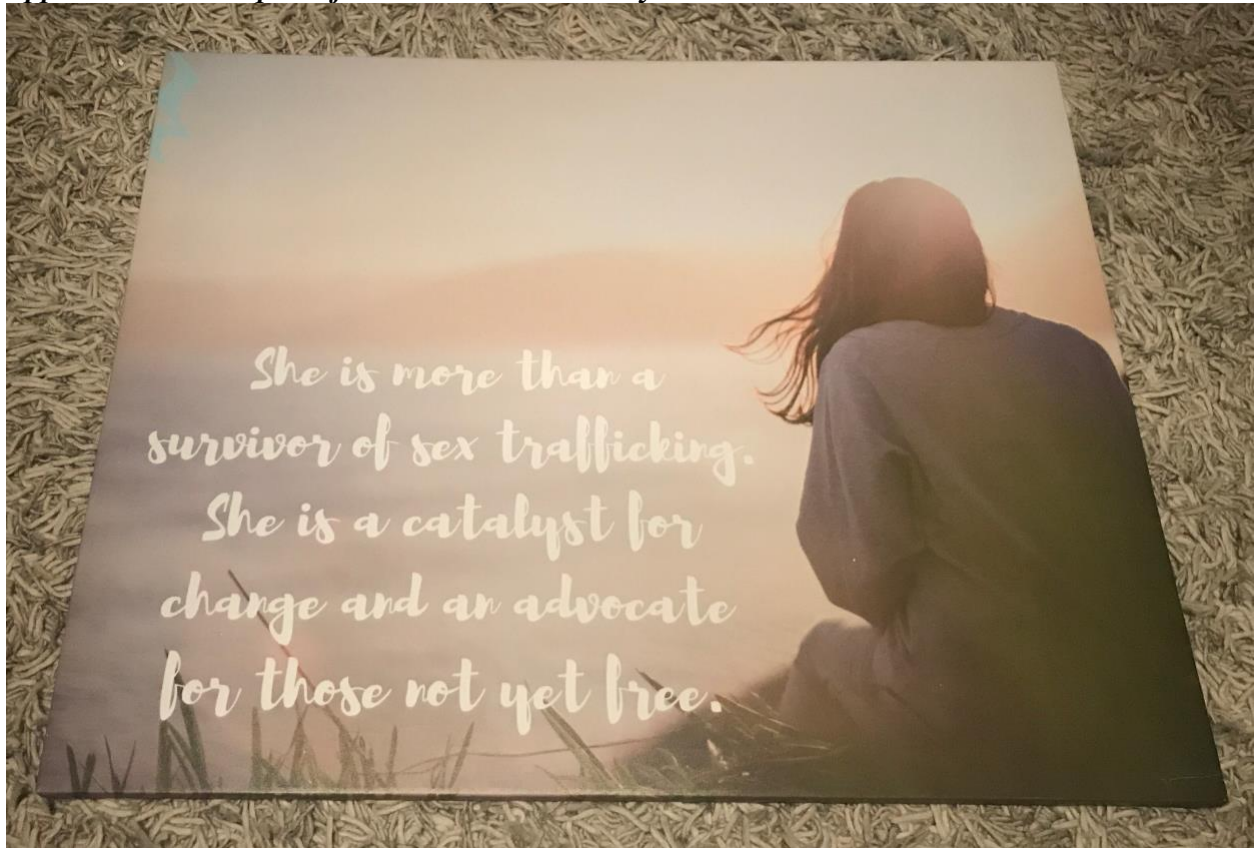


Image 1: A woman is pictured with her back facing the viewer looking out over a non-descript sunset or sunrise. The text on it reads: "She is more than a survivor of sex trafficking. She is a catalyst for change and an advocate for those not yet free." Contrary to the feelings of survivors for striving to be individuals, or normal, this image prescribes them multiple identities and responsibilities. She has the identity of survivor and advocate imposed upon her, and the onus for change and advocacy against human trafficking is put on her. This hangs in the front room of Recovery House, where guests come in and women wait by the door to go to meetings outside of the house.

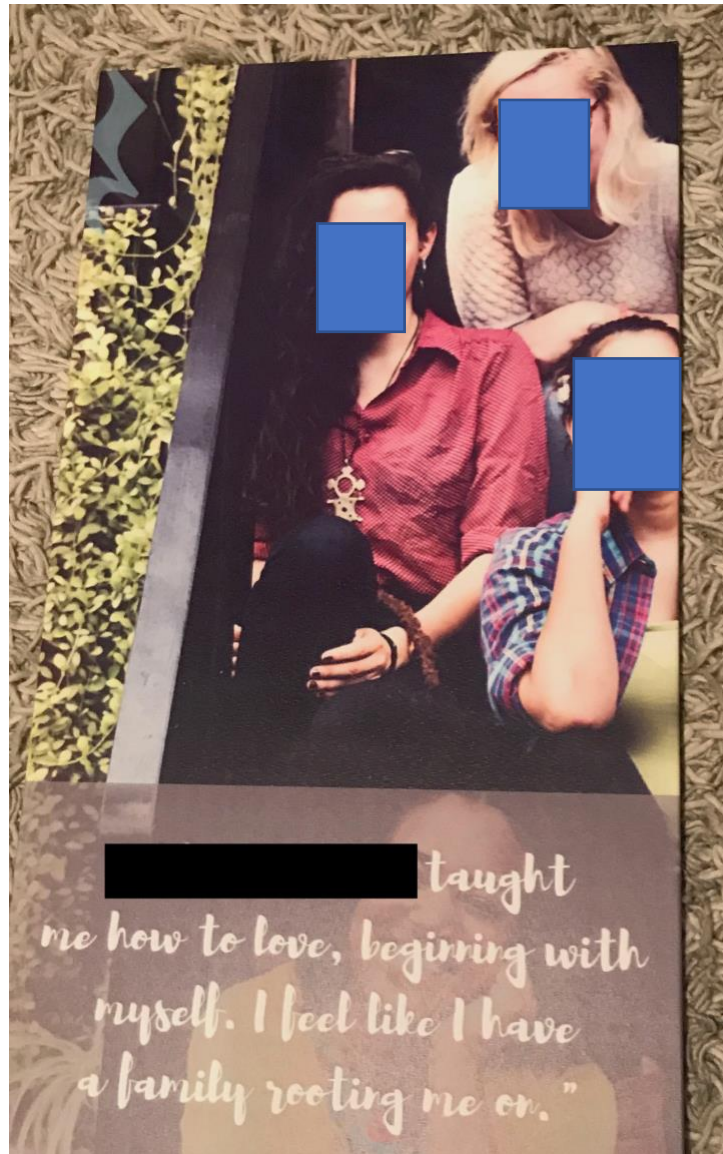


Image 2: There is an image of four pretty women, seemingly hanging out and posing on a stoop together. They are light skinned, with one White and two ethnically ambiguous, and there is a Black presenting woman obscured by the text, identifiable because of her darker skin tone and her afro-textured hair. The text reads: “[Recovery House] taught me how to love, beginning with myself. I feel like I have a family rooting me on.” This image in its entirety speaks to the White-washing of human trafficking, with it being a problem of all races but mainly White women, or White presenting women, being visible within the narrative. It also shows the idea that love is given to survivors and learned only once they are rescued, reinforcing the idea that NGOs practice agape love. This piece usually hung in the kitchen, where the women spend a substantial amount of time.

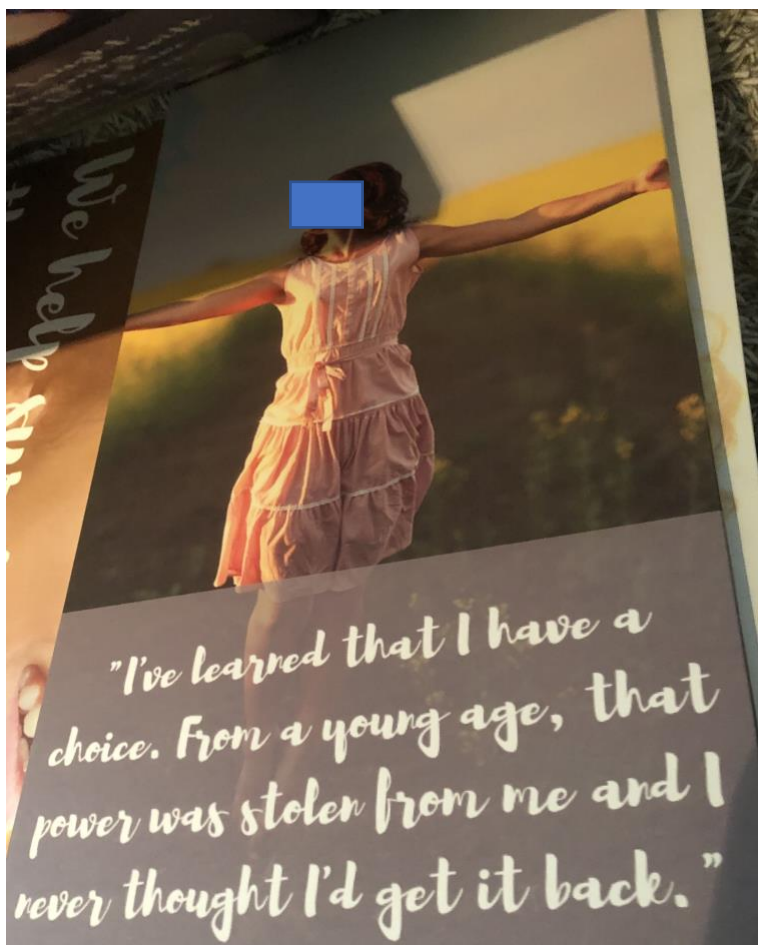


Image 3: This image depicts a young pretty woman in a pink dress with her arms outstretched with her body facing the camera but her face looking off to her right side into the sunlight and smiling. The text reads: "I've learned that I have a choice. From a young age, that power was stolen from me and I never thought I'd get it back." The image exudes youth and purity, with the very high neckline on a light pink dress which gives her a look of having just entered womanhood from girlhood, or still in the stage of girlhood. The text speaks to the idea that the women do not have agency, that agency was taken from them the first time they were traumatized or abused, and that only now through interacting with Recovery House and being rescued can they have their agency back. This piece is usually hung in the kitchen, where the women spend a substantial amount of time.



Image 4: The poster depicts a pretty young girl with long hair and light eyes staring directly at the camera smiling. The text says: “We teach girls that they are world changers!” It is interesting that this image is up in the residential home because children are not allowed in the program—so only women ages 18-32 see this image daily living in the house. The presence of this image could put more pressure on women to become advocates and help young vulnerable women, or it could speak to the infantilization of women that happens in these programs as their mental state and capacity is reduced to the age at which they were first abused or started using drugs.

Appendix D: Formal Interview Questions

Interview questions for Sex Workers:

1. Demographic information- What is your age? What is your ethnicity? What is your gender? Where are you from?
2. What type of sex work do you do?
3. What is beneficial to you about [sex work]? What isn't as beneficial? What do you like about [sex work]? What don't you like? What problems/challenges are associated with it?
4. What makes you feel empowered? Do you feel empowered by sex work?
5. How do you define consent? How is consent involved in sex work?
6. Have you ever been forced to engage in prostitution or something sexual in exchange for something of value (for example boyfriend/girlfriend said you had to, had to bring in a certain amount of money before coming home, etc.). And if so, can you tell me about that situation?
7. What would you say to people who believe that sex work is not a valid occupation?
8. Have you had run-ins with the police? How often? In what context?
9. Could you describe a typical experience with the police?
10. Would you reach out to police if you or another person was a victim of a crime? Why or why not?
11. If you had the opportunity to do a police training, what would you teach them?
12. Have you ever gone through a diversion program for any charges?
 - a. (If yes) What kind of program was it?
 - b. (If yes) What did you like/dislike about it?
13. Have you ever gone to court for a prostitution charge?
 - a. What was that like for you?
 - b. What changes would you recommend or suggest?
14. How do you define human trafficking?
 - a. Do you feel like you were ever in a human trafficking situation?
 - i. If so, did you go to the police? If not, what kept you from going to the police? Did alerting the police seem like a safe option?
 - ii. How did you get out of it? Do you mind telling me about this experience?
 - b. Have you ever felt like others were trying to classify you as a trafficked person?
 - i. Why do you think that was?
 - ii. Have you ever identified as someone who was trafficked? Why or why not?
 - c. Have you ever encountered someone who was forced to engage in prostitution or other human trafficking situation?
 - d. If you were to encounter a human trafficking situation, what obstacles would prevent you from reporting it?

Police Interviews

1. Demographic information- What is your age? What is your ethnicity? What is your gender? Where are you from?
2. What is your background working in this area?
3. What was it like within the police department before the trainings on Human Trafficking?
 - a. Was there any awareness of human trafficking?
 - b. What were the attitudes towards people charged with prostitution before this?
4. How has the police department changed now with the new training?
5. What is the training process like?
 - a. How often do trainings occur?
 - b. Is it the same or new information covered every new training?
6. What is covered in the trainings?
 - a. Is labor trafficking covered?
 - b. Why do you think this is?
7. How has that changed the processes investigation and charging?
 - a. Is there the same distinction in policing for labor trafficking victims as there is for sex trafficking victims?
8. Why do you think there is a focus on open market prostitution?
 - a. What are the average demographics of the people you encounter on the street?
9. What are the difficulties of investigating human trafficking online?
10. What are your thoughts about people who choose sex work of their own free will?
11. Do you think that anything else regarding human trafficking and the criminal justice system could be improved?

Attorney Interview

1. Demographic information- What is your age? What is your ethnicity? What is your gender? Where are you from?
2. What is your background in practicing law in the area of trafficking?
3. What are the average goals for prosecuting a human trafficking case?
4. Are people charged with prostitution or any charges related to their life in human trafficking able to get them revoked in Florida?
 - a. How is that done?
 - b. How long does that take?
 - c. Is this available to everyone who has been trafficked?
5. What do you think are the biggest obstacles to human trafficking victims in the criminal justice system?
6. How are people certified as human trafficking victims in Florida?
7. What do you think the awareness level of human trafficking is in Florida's criminal justice system?
8. What are the average demographics of people who take human trafficking cases to court?
9. Do you think sex trafficking and labor trafficking are treated the same in the criminal justice system?
 - a. What are the differences?
 - b. Why do you think that is?
 - c. Do you think it has anything to do with cultural influence?

10. Do you think that because sex work is criminalized, that this influences how human trafficking is policed?
11. How do you feel about people who choose sex work of their own free will?
12. If you could change anything pertaining to human trafficking and the criminal justice system, what would you change?

Interview Questions- Recovery House Residents

1. Demographic information- What is your age? What is your ethnicity? What is your gender? Where are you from?
2. How did you get to Selah Freedom?
3. What do you like about the Selah program?
 - i. What do you dislike?
4. When did you first learn about human trafficking?
 - a. Do you identify as a human trafficking survivor?
 - i. (If yes) What was it like to realize this?
 - ii. (If no) How do you see yourself?
5. Have you been identified by others as a human trafficking survivor?
 - a. What was that like for you?
 - b. When did you first experience that?
 - c. Do you feel like all women in similar situations to you were looked at the same way?
 - i. (If the answer is no) Why do you think they were treated differently?
6. (If sentenced) What county were you charged/prosecuted in?
 - a. Have you interacted with the law in other counties than Sarasota?
 - i. How was that experience different than in Sarasota?
 - b. What was your experience like with the criminal system? What was difficult about it for you?
 - c. How did you overcome the difficulty?
 - d. How do you feel you were treated by police?
 - e. How do you feel you were treated in court?
 - f. How have you been treated at Selah?
 - g. What were your goals going through the court process?
 - h. How have your goals changed since then?
 - i. What motivated that change?
 - j. Do you think women who voluntarily go through the Selah program experience it differently?
 - k. What has motivated you to continue with the Selah program?
 - l. Have you ever gone through other programs?
 - m. What, if anything, did you like about those programs? What did you not like?
7. (If not court ordered to Selah) How did you find out about Selah?
 - a. Were you considering other programs?
 - b. Why did you choose Selah?
 - c. Have your goals changed going through Selah's program?
 - d. What are your motivations to get through?
 - e. Do you think women court ordered to Selah experience it differently?
 - f. Have you ever had run-ins with the law?

- i. What was that experience like for you?
 - ii. If this happened in multiple counties, was there a noticeable difference across counties?
8. How has religion or spirituality factored into your journey?
 - a. If it hasn't, how do you feel about the religious aspects of Selah's program?
9. What would you tell other women who are starting Selah Freedom?
10. What do you wish you knew when you started the Selah program?
11. What has changed in you the most since beginning this program?

Interview Questions- Recovery House Advocates

1. Demographic information- What is your age? What is your ethnicity? What is your gender? Where are you from?
2. How did you become involved in working with Selah Freedom?
3. What is your background in this field?
4. What is the process like for women who go through Selah Freedom as a diversionary program?
5. If a woman elects to go through the program of her own free will, what is that process like?
6. What is the ideal candidate like for Selah's program?
7. There is often talk of participants of Selah's program having the same story, different details--- can you elaborate on what that story is?
8. What are the average demographics of women who go through the program? Are women of color being served?
9. What is the police training program like? What changes do you think the training has caused?
10. What do you see as the biggest obstacles to women who are trafficked to attaining a 'normal' life?
 - a. Do you think anything specific to Florida contributes to these obstacles?
11. What do you see as the biggest obstacles to them in the criminal justice system?
 - a. How do you think those obstacles can be overcome?
12. How is religion and spirituality utilized for healing in Selah's program?
 - a. Are all religions encouraged at Selah?
 - b. Has there ever been a participant that has had strong affinity for another religion than Christianity?
13. What different motivators have you seen drive the women through this process, or through the Selah program more specifically?
14. What are your thoughts about people who choose sex work of their own will?
 - a. Do you think that sex work should be decriminalized?
15. Has there ever been a case where a woman in Selah's program returned to sex work? How do you, or other Selah workers, deal with that?
16. Have any of the women Selah has worked with been certified as a human trafficking victim to receive federal benefits?
 - a. What was that process like?
 - b. Did they get the certification? If they didn't, why not?

17. If you could change one thing about the rehabilitation (from the criminal justice system, to NGO's, to federal aid) of human trafficking victims in the United States, what would you change?

Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX(813)974-7091

9/5/2018

Jaine Danlag
Anthropology



RE: Full Board Approval for Initial Review

IRB#: Pro00034202

Title: Tales of Trafficking: Performing Women's Narratives in a Sex Trafficking Rehabilitation Program in Florida

Study Approval Period: 5/18/2018 to 5/18/2019

Dear Ms. Danlag:

On 5/18/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):

Protocol Document(s):

[Tales of Trafficking IRB Protocol V1 5.9.18](#)

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:

[Focus Group Consent For Selah participants V1 5.9.18.docx.pdf](#)

[Law Enforcement Consent Form V1 5.9.18.pdf](#)

[Selah Freedom Resident Consent Form V1 5.9.18.pdf](#)

[Selah Freedom Workers Consent Form V1 5.9.18.pdf](#)

[Sex Worker Consent Form V1 5.9.18.pdf](#)

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

Research involving prisoners as participants (45 CFR 46, Subpart C)

This research involving prisoners as participants was approved under 45 CFR 46.305(a) and 46.306(a)(2): (i) Study of the possible causes, effects, and processes of incarceration, and of criminal behavior, provided that the study presents no more than minimal risk and no more than inconvenience to the subjects

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted

to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) business days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D.".

John Schinka, Ph.D.,
USF Institutional Review Board

Appendix F: Approved Consent Form



Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Pro # 00034202

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called: **Tales of Trafficking: Performing Women's Narratives in a Sex Trafficking Program in Florida.**

The person who is in charge of this research study is Jaine Danlag. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Tara Deubel.

The research will be conducted at Selah Freedom, and public locations where participants would like to be interviewed. These interviews will be **audio recorded**.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine what it is like for women in the sex industry to interact with the criminal justice system. This includes women who are being trafficked as well as women who identify as sex workers. Perceptions of people within the criminal justice system, and perceptions of people working in organizations that serve these women, will provide a more holistic look at the social terrain these women navigate. This study will put all of these voices together to paint a picture of what it is like for women in the sex industry to navigate the criminal justice system. This information will be used to write a play about these experiences.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have a connection to the sex industry in the United States.

Study Procedures:

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an **audio recorded** hour long interview conducted by Jaine Danlag. The interviews will be utilized to inform a play, written by the PI. In the final write up of the research, you could review the information that the PI has utilized from your interview and see if you like the presentation. The sections including you could be sent to your private

email from the PI's private email, or you could choose to meet up with the PI to go over the information.

Total Number of Participants

18 individuals will take part in this study at all sites.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

Benefits

This research creates a space for multiple stakeholders in the human trafficking narrative to voice their opinions and experiences dealing with national human trafficking discourse. There are no direct material benefits of this study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study. The recordings will be kept in a password protects and encrypted private laptop of the PI, and will not be attached to your full name or any personal information through the anonymization of research data.

Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are. We are using pseudonyms for referring to you in this study, and you can pick your preferred pseudonym. If you want to use your first name, last names will be omitted for safety reasons.

By law, as mandatory reporters, the study team must release certain information to the appropriate authorities if at any time during the study there is concern that child abuse or elder abuse has possibly occurred or you disclose a desire to harm yourself or others.

To help us protect your privacy, we obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health. With this Certificate, the researchers cannot be forced to disclose information that may identify you, even by a court subpoena, in any federal, state, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings. The researchers will use the Certificate to resist any demands for information that would identify you, except as explained below.

The Certificate cannot be used to resist a demand for information from personnel of the United States Government that is used for auditing or evaluation of federally funded projects or for information that must be disclosed in order to meet the requirements of the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

You should understand that a Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent you or a member of your family from voluntarily releasing information about yourself or your involvement in this research. If an insurer, employer, or other person obtains your written consent to receive research information, then the researchers may not use the Certificate to withhold that information.

The Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent the researchers from disclosing voluntarily, without your consent, information that would identify you as a participant in the research project under the following circumstances. Exceptions from protection: the investigative team will voluntarily comply with Florida Statutes and federal regulations, which may mandate or permit certain disclosures of protected information by the investigative team to appropriate individuals.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Jaine Danlag at [REDACTED]

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent